



Integration, Diversity, and Creativity: Reflections on the “Manifesto” from the College Music Society

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Webinar: Monday 6 June at 2pm EDT

[1] In November 2014, the College Music Society (CMS) released a preliminary version of [“Transforming Music Study from its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors,”](#) a report compiled by the society’s Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major; this document will hereafter be called the *Manifesto* for short. The 2012–14 president of CMS, Patricia Shehan Campbell, appointed the task force, comprising eight scholars from different U.S. universities and colleges that represented various disciplines within the music academy: music education, jazz, ethnomusicology, music theory and musicianship, music history, composition, orchestral conducting, and instrumental performance. The purpose of the task force was to articulate “what it means to be an educated musician in the twenty-first century and, in turn, what recommendations may follow for progressive change in the undergraduate music-major curriculum” (*Manifesto*, i). A final version of the report, approved by the CMS Board of Directors, is expected to be published in the society’s journal, *College Music Symposium*. However, the introductory material that precedes the report includes the disclaimer that the report represents only the opinions of the members of the task force, and not those of the CMS or its Board of Directors.

[2] This document encourages faculty and administrators to embrace fundamental curricular change, not only bottom-up but also top-down, originating from a high level of the administrative structure if needed. At its heart, the *Manifesto* “takes the position that improvisation and composition provide a stronger basis for educating musicians today than the prevailing model of training performers in the interpretation of older works” (2). More generally, the recommendations in the report are based on the principles of creativity in music-making (improvisation and composition as well as interpretive performance and analysis), diversity of repertoire (music from different cultures, times, and social contexts), and curricular integration (of music theory, performance, and music history with musicianship, improvisation, and composition), which are described as “three key pillars necessary to ensure the relevance, quality, and rigor of the undergraduate music curriculum” (2). These are not new ideas: they are strongly reminiscent of the Comprehensive Musicianship movement that began in the late 1960s, and have been espoused in more recent work by Lucy Green on pre-college music education and in many of the articles in [Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy](#) and the [Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy](#). The *Manifesto* also calls for teaching to reflect new research in cognition, for student engagement in curricular planning, and a broader conception of the skills needed for professional development (3–4). Some general suggestions for approaches, courses, and degree programs are included, but the specifics of their deployment are left up to the individual institutions. (It is worth noting here that while it is not a response to the *Manifesto*, [the integrated undergraduate music curriculum outlined by John Covach](#) fulfills many of the same objectives, and could serve as a useful point of departure for curricular change.)

[3] While the *Manifesto* encourages discussion among all instructors of music, many within the music-theory community have

felt a polarization between those who support it and those who do not. Some members of the field also felt that the *Manifesto* mischaracterized actual teaching practices in the field as more uniform and tradition-bound than they actually are—in the words of the report, “isolated, resistant to change, and too frequently regressive rather than progressive in its approach to undergraduate education” (2). The lack of evidence-based research supporting the claims made in the *Manifesto*, and its minimal consideration of the increasingly important role of technology in music creation, consumption, and education, have also been viewed as problematic omissions.

[4] In one respect, the *Manifesto* has already succeeded, in that it has spurred quite a bit of discussion about the nature and design of the undergraduate music curriculums from the perspective of various music-academic disciplines. To cite just a few examples, public responses to the *Manifesto* are found in a [blog post by L. Poundie Burstein](#), then-president of the Society for Music Theory; in a [series of blog posts by Andrew Balio](#), principal trumpet for the Baltimore Symphony; and in a [recent Society for Ethnomusicology newsletter](#), which included commentaries by six SEM members, including the task-force convener Patricia Shehan Campbell. The *Manifesto* is cited in a (paywalled) [article by John Covach](#), “Rock Me, Maestro,” published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Feb. 2, 2015), and in [an essay by musicologist Douglass Seaton](#), reflecting on the broader issues raised as part of an AMS roundtable on the future of the music-history sequence, published in the *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 5/2 (2015). At the November 2015 national meeting of the SMT in St. Louis, a panel of seven scholars from SMT and CMS, including one member of the original task force, assessed the *Manifesto* and its relation to contemporary music-theory pedagogy. Expanded versions of their presentations will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *College Music Symposium*.

[5] While acknowledging the need to embrace curricular renovation to address the changing needs of the 21st-century music student, the panel critically examined the central tenets put forth in the *Manifesto*. The presentations focused on the following topics:

1. an overview of the context and content of the *Manifesto*
2. an overview of the state of music theory pedagogy and practice, including the results of a national survey sent out to theorists regarding current pedagogical approaches
3. an overview of the current research in music theory pedagogy, especially with respect to the three pillars of change as outlined in the manifesto: diversity, integration, and creativity
4. a preliminary critical evaluation of the central tenets of the manifesto in the context of current music theory teaching, including the outline of a broader, more flexible vision for curricular renovation
5. an evaluation of current pressure points in the theory curriculum, including internal and external pressures from administrators, students, and parents
6. an examination of how we, as a community of theorists, can engage non-theorists in a productive dialogue about these issues

[6] The upcoming webinar hosted by *Music Theory Online* will continue the discussion, encouraging all instructors of music theory to participate in a consideration of how curriculums may be altered, if needed, in a pedagogically sound manner, in order to better serve the needs of twenty-first-century learners. This re-visioning will allow individual institutions to pursue their own unique missions by offering additions or alternatives to the *Manifesto*’s “three pillars,” including curricular focuses on such areas as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, collaboration, information fluency, music technology, and the preservation of past practices.

[7] The webinar will include an introduction and overview, followed by a question-and-answer session centered on the following key elements pertaining to the manifesto:

1. The formation of the task force and the initial response from task-force members (Juan Chattah)
2. Assumptions regarding the teaching of music theory made within the *Manifesto* and a response based on a recent survey of theory teaching (Jennifer Snodgrass)
3. Assumptions regarding research within the field of music theory pedagogy, and a response based on a survey of relevant literature (Melissa Hoag)
4. Discussion of the definitions of creativity, integration, and diversity used in the manifesto, and a response based on current practices (Elizabeth Sayrs)
5. Realistic career expectations for students enrolled in music theory sequences, and how the most students can be best-served with our limited resources (Jena Root)
6. Curricular pressures from points of view of both faculty and administrators (Matt Shaftel)

[8] Participants of the webinar include several members of the original panel, all leaders in the College Music Society, the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, and/or the Society for Music Theory. Short biographies are given below.

Juan Chattah is Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the University of Miami–Frost School of Music, where he coordinates the Experiential Music Curriculum. He co-authored *Aural Skills in Context* (Oxford University Press), along with Evan Jones and Matthew Shaftel

Melissa Hoag is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Music Theory at Oakland University. She is a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy Online* and *Music Theory Online*, and has been a member of the music theory advisory board for the College Music Society since 2012.

Jena Root is Associate Professor and Music Theory Coordinator for the Dana School of Music at Youngstown State University. She is the author of *Applied Music Fundamentals: Writing, Singing, and Listening* (Oxford University Press) and the website *eartrainingpractice.com*, and currently serves as co-chair of the Editorial Review Board for the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy Online*.

Elizabeth Sayrs is Interim Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University. Her interactive multimedia e-text *MFun: Music Fundamentals* was published by MacGAMUT Music Software International in 2012. She currently serves as the editor of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*.

Matthew Shaftel is currently Dean of the Westminster College of the Arts at Rider University. He previously served as Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and Distinguished Professor of Music Theory at Florida State University. Dr. Shaftel has served as editor for two journals, *Music Theory Online* and *College Music Symposium* and is currently the SMT Publications Committee Chair.

Jennifer Snodgrass is Coordinator of Music Theory and Associate Professor at Appalachian State University. She is the co-chair of the Editorial Review Board for *Music Theory Pedagogy Online* and Vice-President of the College Music Society. Her textbook *Contemporary Musicianship* is published by Oxford University Press.

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