

Music Theory and Composition

Course Description

Music Theory and Composition is designed for those students who wish to study the language and inner workings of music. Students learn and expand their knowledge of music notation, symbols, expression markings, scales, key signatures, chords, and overall musicianship. They read, write, and analyze music at varying levels of difficulty, and they compose their own arrangements and original works using music technology, keyboards, and digital software. Coursework emphasizes the importance of personal wellness, creativity, and feeding the soul and spirit through artistic endeavors. In alignment with the school's *Portrait of the Crusader*, students are taught and encouraged to take personal initiative, responsibility, and show resilience with a collaborative spirit. Being actively engaged in the pursuit of music with others fosters relationships built on loyalty, compassion, and empathy that extend beyond the classroom experience.

Essential Questions for the Course

- How do musicians interact with, manipulate, and express ideas through music notation?
- How do musicians generate creative ideas? How do they communicate original ideas through music composition?
- How do musicians refine and improve the quality of their creative work?
- What are the characteristics of a quality presentation?
- How do we judge the quality of musical work(s) and performance(s)?
- How do context and the manner in which a musical work is presented influence audience response?
- How does understanding the structure and context of the music influence a response?
- How do musicians effectively evaluate and critique their own compositions and those of others?
- How does the process of creating and presenting music contribute to personal wellness and fulfillment?

Course Curriculum

Quarter 1

Theory: Foundations of Music Theory and Composition

Content:

- Pitch and Pitch Class
- Beat, Rhythm, and Meter - Simple Meter
- Selected corresponding ear-training tasks

Skills:

- Identify foundations of music notation, including rhythm, pitch, tempo, expression symbols, and scales.
- Create new files using department software platforms.
- Enter/refine music notation and audio files within the software platforms.

Assessments:

- Canvas and MusicFirst Digital Classroom platform login information and basic guide
- Creative Process Checklist and Reflection
- Quizzes 1 and 2
- Foundations of Music Theory Test #1

Composition: Percussion Feature

Content:

- Rhythmic Notation review – duration relationships given focus; beats/patterns and varied rhythmic motifs discussed and demonstrated by students. Connection to beats/patterns of words and common phrases. DM Task – layering of specific rhythmic patterns into 2 “voices” in both notation and digital audio form.
- Active Listening – world drumming/percussion examples; includes samples from Celtic, Native American, African, and Pacific Islands cultures. Ideas and concepts introduced, highlighted, and discussed as students listen to the audio examples. Samples of notation provided. Students given an 8 measure rhythmic example in notated form. Task – create a rhythmic pattern to complement the given rhythmic line. Includes choice of percussion instrument(s) and varied duration of rhythms used.
- Extension – review rhythmic “tools” and value changes that can be made to develop variety and contrast. Students extend their compositions to be a minimum of 12 measures in length, and can add a 3rd “voice” with another percussion instrument of their choice. Clear choice of 2-part or 3-part finished composition must be made by the end of this class.
- Peer/teacher check-in; share work completed to this point, gather feedback. Continue to compose, refine, and edit, using feedback and recommendations to bolster the creative process. Begin to share student presentations as ready during the 6th class of this unit. Once notation tasks are completed, students may transfer their work into the digital audio platform for further variety and extension of learning.
- Work completed. All students conclude by presenting their compositions for the class. Completed work submitted; includes critique (rubric) of their own work and that of one peer, and self-reflection.

Skills:

- Apply a variety of rhythmic techniques in composing for percussion instruments using digital music platforms.
- Plan and make creative decisions based on provided examples of world percussion
- Compose an original 2-part or 3-part percussion piece
- Enter/refine music notation and audio files within the software platforms.
- Identify musical characteristics of percussion/rhythms.
- Apply evaluative criteria in responding to their own work and the work of others.

Assessments:

- Canvas and MusicFirst Digital Classroom platform login information and basic guide
- Progress Check-In
- Creative Process Checklist and Reflection
- Practical Evaluation - Composition Task #1 Percussion Feature

Quarter 2

Theory: Developing Musicianship and Creativity

Content:

- Beat, Meter, Rhythm - Compound Meters
- Pitch Intervals - diatonic and specific
- Pitch Collections, Scales, and Major Keys - modes and pentatonic scales
- Minor Keys and the Diatonic Modes
- Triads - building blocks of harmony

Skills:

- Create new files using software available to them for this course.
- Enter/refine music notation and audio files within the software platforms.
- Identify foundations of music notation, including rhythm, pitch, tempo, expression symbols, and scales.

Assessments:

- MusicTheory.net tasks and assessments
- Weekly quizzes
- Daily ear-training
- Foundations of Theory Test #2

Composition: Use of digital music software in creating a theme and variation.

Content:

- Introduction to digital music software and hardware devices. Includes teacher demonstration of the programs, samples of work/compositions. Student login information provided to individuals; initial login for students, troubleshooting and hardware/software overview. Notation review – basics of rhythm and pitch (Treble Clef only)
- Theme and Variation – Mozart’s “Twinkle, Twinkle” variations introduced as an example of this musical technique. Ideas and concepts introduced, highlighted, and discussed as students listen to the stated theme and subsequent variations. Students are given the melodic line of “A” section in notation form; task – transcribe the simple melody line into Noteflight notation software.
- Rhythmic variations – present rhythmic “tools” and value changes that can be made to alter the stated theme. Collaborative effort to create a whole class variation that includes a variety of rhythmic devices and changes. Students then apply these techniques in creating rhythmic variations to their simple form. Students share their examples with peers and discuss their creative choices.
- Listening – “Variations on America” by Charles Ives. Active listening as a whole class; 2nd selected repertoire as an example of *Theme and Variation*. Class discussion and reflection on the listening. Refine and edit the previously created rhythmic variation. Students create a 2nd rhythmic variation, further changes to duration of the notes, with characteristics contrary to the 1st variation.
- Students are given the full A(A)BA melody of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”. Task – transcribe the remainder of the melody line in original form. Students expand on their 1st and 2nd rhythmic variations to be used across the full melody. Once notation tasks are completed, students will transfer their work into the digital audio platform. Refine and edit, teacher feedback and recommendations during the creative process. Begin to share student presentations as ready during the 6th class of this unit.
- Work completed. All students conclude by presenting their compositions for the class. Completed work submitted; includes critique (rubric) of their own work and that of one peer, and self-reflection.

Skills:

- Plan and create an original “Theme and Variation” within specific criteria/guidelines.
- Identify musical characteristics within a *Theme and Variation*.
- Apply evaluative criteria in responding to their own work and the work of others.

Assessments:

- Canvas and MusicFirst Digital Classroom platform login information and basic guide
- Progress Check-In
- Creative Process Checklist and Reflection
- Practical Evaluation - Composition Task #2 Theme and Variations

Quarter 3

Theory: Deeper Musical Connections

Content:

- Major/Minor Scales review and analysis
- Triads and Seventh Chords
- Foundations of Counterpoint
- Melodic and Rhythmic Embellishment

Skills:

- Create new files using software available to them for this course.
- Enter/refine music notation and audio files within the software platforms.
- Identify foundations of music notation, including rhythm, pitch, tempo, expression symbols, and scales.
- Continue to develop their aural skills through regular ear-training and aural response exercises.

Assessments:

- MusicTheory.net tasks and assessments
- Weekly quizzes
- Daily ear-training
- Foundations of Theory Test #3

Composition: Major and minor scale patterns within an original digital music composition, featuring an original melody and accompaniment.

Content:

- Pitch Notation review – pitch/melody identification. Discussion and overview of scale patterns of whole and half steps. Skill/drill using customized exercises on MusicTheory website; visual and aural pattern recognition. Task – transcribe selected major (and relative minor) scale patterns in the key of C, G and F into notation software. Play these major scales on keyboards in developing pattern recognition and understanding.
- Active Listening – selected examples that demonstrate major and minor tonality; includes samples from a variety of styles including folk, rock, pop, jazz and classical. Ideas and concepts introduced, highlighted, and discussed as students listen to the audio examples. Samples of notation provided; simple analysis of pitches with focus on tonality and key signatures. Assessment – listening quiz, aural recognition of major/minor tonality.
- Composition Task – create an original composition with a melody that is mostly based in scale/step movement. Major and minor chords and progression will be provided; student melody will be layered above the accompaniment, within specific criteria.
- Final composition work and editing. Completed work submitted; includes critique (rubric) of their own work and self-reflection.

Skills:

- Plan and make creative decisions based on provided examples of major and minor scales within selected repertoire
- Compose an original melody for selected that demonstrates understanding of major/minor tonality
- Identify characteristics of major and minor scales
- Apply evaluative criteria in responding to their own work and the work of others.

Assessments:

- Canvas and MusicFirst Digital Classroom
- Progress Check-In
- Creative Process Checklist and Reflection
- Practical Evaluation - Composition Task #3 Original Composition

Quarter 4

Theory: Communicating and Expressing Original Ideas

Content:

- 3 and 4 part harmonic techniques - foundations of voice-leading
- Phrasing and Cadences
- Chords and Progressions
- Creating the Score - Italian terms and symbols (expression and musical details)

Skills:

- Create new files using software available to them for this course.
- Enter/refine music notation and audio files within the software platforms.
- Identify foundations of music notation, including rhythm, pitch, tempo, expression symbols, and scales.
- Continue to develop their aural skills through regular ear-training and aural response exercises.

Assessments:

- MusicTheory.net tasks and assessments
- Weekly quizzes
- Daily ear-training
- Foundations of Theory Test #4

Composition: Digital music software in applying musical expression

Content:

- Introduction to Musical Expression – review of expression symbols and their meanings/definitions. Aural and notation examples of each provided during discussion and review. Details of the variety of expression markings demonstrated in class. Practice sheet to be completed using expression symbol entry tools with digital notation software.
- Composition Task – Using a previously created composition, plan for the addition of expression markings to the notation, within specific guidelines of the task. Explore the range of possibilities and how the expression markings will impact the overall character and style of the original composition. Teacher feedback and recommendations provided during the creative process; discussion of how each can be used for varied styles of music.
- Continue to explore and develop musical expression options, with focus on refining and editing. Finalize changes and accuracy of expression markings. Peer collaboration and feedback, comparing the original to the version that includes musical expression markings.
- Work completed. All students conclude by presenting their compositions for the class. Completed work submitted; includes critique (rubric) of their work, with comparison of the 2 versions of the composition.

Skills:

- Plan and make creative decisions based on provided examples of musical expression.
- Edit and refine previous work to include expressive musical qualities and dynamics.
- Identify musical expression symbols and markings by sight and sound.
- Apply evaluative criteria in responding to their own work and the work of others.

Assessments:

- Canvas and MusicFirst Digital Classroom
- Progress Check-In
- Creative Process Checklist and Reflection
- Practical Evaluation - Composition Task #4 Musical Expression

Resources

- Selected repertoire of varying styles and levels
- MusicTheory.net
- Holy Cross MusicFirst Classroom
- Selected ear-training methods materials
- Individual Presentation Criteria
- *Alfred's Music Theory Complete* - Books 1, 2, and 3

Grading Policy

Performances/Content Mastery	50%
Engagement/Rehearsals	20%
Growth/Development	30%