MUS 104A, Theory and Musicianship Lab II: Part I

Instructor: Eric Elder (ericelder@brandeis.edu)  
Office hours: Friday, 10:00 am–12:00 pm, Slosberg 211, or by appointment  
Course schedule: Monday and Wednesday, 9:00–9:50 am

Prerequisite: Successful completion of MUS 101 and 102, or demonstrated skill equivalency  
Corequisite: MUS 103A, Theory and Musicianship II: Part I

Required Text: None. A course packet will be distributed in class and/or through LATTE throughout the semester, but any one of the many anthologies for sight singing would be helpful for additional practice.

Required Supplies: Please bring your course packet to every class. You will also need blank manuscript paper, pencils, and a good eraser. You will need a laptop and well-soundproofed headphones for the midterm and final exams.

Course Description: The aural skills lab portion of the Theory and Musicianship sequence will provide guided practice in progressively and strategically linking the sensory experience of music with the student’s intellectual understanding. Drawing on the repertoire of the common-practice period (17th–19th centuries) in Western music, our work in MUS 104A will focus on developing aural recognition and retention of basic rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic patterns common in tonal music.

Learning Objectives: Through singing and dictation exercises, we will learn to associate common aspects of tonal music with the representation of those elements on paper. This will be done in two directions: 1) we will learn to recognize and notate what we hear, and 2) we will better hone our realization of musical notation in performance and in our inner ears. To do so, we seek to develop these specific skills:

1. musical memory,  
2. recognition of common musical patterns,  
3. sight reading notated music, and  
4. musical analysis.

Class Policies:

Grade weighting:  
Assignments 70%  
Midterm 15%  
Final Exam 15%

Preparation: DAILY PRACTICE is the most important factor for success in this course. According to Brandeis policy, “Success in this 2 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 4.5 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).” 4.5 hours per week equates to just over 30 minutes of practice each day, and a disciplined
approach to meeting this goal will carry you a long way toward achieving our learning objectives. Singing the exercises and examples from the course packet DAILY will be its own reward; wherever possible, I will draw the material for exams directly from it. We must all travel individual paths to arrive at musical success, but there is no problem that dedicated practice cannot solve.

Units and weekly assignments: Our work will be divided into units, each lasting two weeks. Units are divided into two parts: In the first week, we will focus on formulaic abstractions of musical concepts. In the second, we will concentrate on examples from the repertoire. I will distribute a handout containing background information, solfege exercises, singing examples to prepare, and strategies for mastering the material. I will also distribute a worksheet made up of several progressive activities every Wednesday. These will be due in class one week later. A short transcription project will be part of each weekly assignment. These will again be broken into two phases. All necessary audio files will be available on LATTE. If you are conscientious in your daily practice, the weekly assignments should take you approximately half-an-hour to complete.

In-class worksheets: The best way to monitor your individual progress in skill development is through regular, low-stakes, real-time check-ins. These will occur roughly every other Monday and will involve little more than me providing feedback on your routine, in-class work.

Attendance: Like individual practice, attendance is necessary to achieve success in this course. Accordingly, after three unexcused absences, each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the automatic lowering of 1% from your final semester grade.

Readiness: Class will begin and end on time, and I expect you to be at your desk, with the necessary in-class materials, and ready to begin before 9:00. Aural skills work requires active concentration, and we will move at a quick pace; disruptions caused by tardiness or lack of preparation are distracting to your fellow students. Also, the use of any electronic device (cell phones, laptops, etc.) during class is not permitted. Any two instances of lateness, unpreparedness, or the use of electronic devices during class will equal one unexcused absence.

Brandeis Policy Statements:

Students with disabilities: “If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.”

Academic integrity: “You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS – Library guides.”