MUS 502, Proseminar in Tonal Analysis: Analysis of Tonal Music
Instructor: August Sheehy
Wednesday, 10am – 12:50pm

This course concerns the analysis of tonal music. Accordingly, a principal aim will be to understand exactly what we mean when we refer to a musical work as tonal or say that it exemplifies "tonality." To that end, we will study tonality both as a musical phenomenon (something you can hear—or learn to hear—in music) and as discourse (a way of talking and thinking about music). These two ideas are related to one another, but they are not the same. Tonal phenomena can be perceived in many kinds of music. Tonal discourses emerged in nineteenth-century Europe as a means of organizing music history and elevating particular musical repertoires above others.

Our inquiries will be focused through analyses of two different sets of musical works, Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartets 1–6 (Op. 18) published in Vienna in 1801, and selected songs by Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and Juan Tizol as performed on the 1957 album Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook. We will analyze these pieces from various perspectives, including harmony, form, rhythm and meter, counterpoint, improvisation, and timbre. Throughout the course, we will work to develop the means for communicating analytic insights to others clearly, elegantly, and persuasively.

Coursework involves weekly readings and analyses, one presentation on an assigned piece, and a final paper (with formal presentation).

This course is suitable for all graduate students, but please note that this section is a "refresher" course recommended based on the music theory assessments taken during Orientation (for students who entered in Fall 2022) or early in Fall Semester (for students entering Fall 2023); such refresher/review courses are offered at most once a year. If you are unsure if this course is appropriate for you, please contact the Graduate Program Director. For MM and DMA students, it fulfills the Elective Group 2 requirement.

3 credits