THE PROFESSIONAL MUSIC THEORIST — HIS HABITS AND TRAINING: A FORUM

The following paper and the panelists' comments which follow it were the substance of a session at the Bienniel Convention of the Music Teachers National Association held in Kansas City in February, 1959. The editorial committee of the Journal of Music Theory is presenting this material in the hope that it will constitute the beginning of a fruitful debate which will center the attention of many interested persons on the question of music theory as a professional pursuit and as a part of the education of professional musicians of all kinds. Our readers are invited to submit their own comments with regard to the points of view presented here. We feel certain that such an exchange of ideas among our readership will be of great benefit to the profession of music theory.

Paper by David Kraehenbuehl, read in the author's absence by Dr. Roy Will.

It is not without reason that we refer to professional theorists here in terms that are usually reserved to the more exceptional creatures of the zoological sciences. A truly professional theorist is indeed a "rare bird," and it is becoming increasingly evident that very few musicians are properly acquainted with his nature. Still fewer understand how he should be trained. This is because he is not often distinguished from his domesticated and more common distant relative, the theory pedagogue, who, as we shall demonstrate later, seldom possesses the identifying features of a true professional theorist.

The average musician has received most of his theoretical training at the hands of a theory pedagogue. The student's usual conception of music theory, then, is precisely that of the theory pedagogue who taught him music theory. He may come to regard music theory as a method of transmitting traditional but no longer vital knowledge of music. He may accept music theory as a form of mental discipline. He is quite certain that music theory includes little more than harmony (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) and counterpoint (strict and free). In reality, music theory may have little or nothing to do with any of these popular conceptions of it; and, if we are to understand the proper work of a professional music theorist, we must first understand the nature of his working area, music theory itself.

The expression "music theory" is compounded of two words about which a surprising amount of confusion exists. It seems best to attack our problem by first making it quite clear what we intend to mean by the terms "music" and "theory."

To begin with, we will regard music as an artistic mode of communication, one of many media by which the experience of one individual — reduced to concepts, ideas, emotional responses, what you will — is transmitted to another individual by means of a formalized

system of signs and symbols. In the creation of a musical composition, the process of abstraction, carried out by the composer, consists in three stages. Beginning with the manifold detail of his personal experience, the composer formulates for himself (perhaps not consciously) various concepts of reality in all its levels of complexity — simple sensation, physical reality, emotional reality, spiritual reality. Whether the composer knows it or not, each level of concept regarding reality is a carefully structured abstraction. Again, consciously or not, the composer seeks to construct out of his medium — that is, out of acoustical phenomena — similarly structured abstractions that will represent for him — and, he believes, for others — his concepts of reality. As a final stage of abstraction, he seeks to represent this imagined acoustical structure in the visual terms which musical notation provides. This notation is very likely to be the least exact account of the composer's initial artistic conception.

The notated music is then taken up by its first and most important listener, the performer, who translates it again into sound, relating it, in so far as he can, to his own conception of reality. Since his conception of reality, together with that of any other listener, will not be identical to that of the composer, a variety of slightly different notions of the "meaning of the music" will develop.

We will take the term "music" to represent this entire process of artistic communication, beginning with the composer's translation of his conception of reality. It is with the process of translation and retranslation that the music theorist should be concerned. He studies the relationship between general reality and musical reality. He devises various tools and techniques by which to demonstrate and describe this relationship in the case of any given composition or group of compositions. Every successful effort on the part of a theorist to describe this relationship will assist all listeners, particularly performers, to a better understanding of the communicative intent of a composition. If a composition by a significant composer is a hint at truth — a reference to unmistakable reality — then it is obviously worth the trouble of all to understand its communicative intent. The theorist of music is only one of the many skilled observers in every field of human endeavor who seek to draw our attention ever more closely to reality, to truth in the most general sense.

If the theorist seeks to demonstrate the processes by which the composer relates general reality and musical reality to create an effective and artistic musical communication, he must devote himself to three different problems. He must understand the process of concept-formation, that is, mankind's technique for organizing the manifold details of experience into useful generalities. He must understand the properties of the acoustical medium in which the composer intends to represent these concepts. He must understand the ways in which acoustical materials may be arranged to represent various concepts of reality.

Now, as a matter of fact, the theorist's present manner of dealing with all these problems has resulted in his almost complete self-abrogation. The humane scientists, particularly the philosophers and psychologists, develop principles of concept formation. The wise music theorist learns to evaluate and make use of the knowledge provided by

these scholars. The natural scientists, specifically the acousticians, develop methods for measuring and describing the nature of acoustical materials. Again, the wise theorist learns to evaluate and make use of the knowledge provided by these specialists. It is specifically the business of the music theorist to discover how creative musicians organize acoustical materials to represent human reasoning and feeling. It is evident that many modern music theorists have not discovered that this is their business. The modern theorist relies largely upon musical tradition to advise him what arrangements of musical materials are effective. The only proof of the merits of any particular arrangement seems to be that, once upon a time, under some set of undetermined conditions, the arrangements in question effectively expressed the creative intention of the moment. The music theorists of today have left the problem of relating extra-musical and musical experience entirely to the ever burgeoning corps of aestheticians who, as theorists, are only surpassed in their lack of professional rigor by the music theorists themselves.

And there it is. There is nothing left for the music theorist to do. For the problems that fall legitimately into his domain, he has accepted as eternal the traditional solutions of the past. But there are still many who call themselves music theorists. What do they do? Finding their proper line of investigation apparently closed and certainly devoid of interest, they become careless acoustical theorists, guileless philosophers, unskilled psychologists, almost anything which they have neither the background nor the rigorous training to be. They are regarded with bitter amusement by both musicians and the legitimate scientists in the fields they have unjustifiably invaded. Unless they come to their senses, they will render the remnant of properly trained professional music theorists suspect and ultimately extinct.

As an aside, I should point out that many musicians feel that a similar unwarranted incursion into their domain has been accomplished by the humane and natural scientists who are seeking to analyze human experience and find the experience of music a useful testing ground. Under the present conditions, this incursion is fully justified. The average psychologist, logician, aesthetician, or acoustician, well-trained in scientific method and descriptive technique, finds himself unable to get a straight or useful answer regarding any theoretical point from most music theorists. He finds the music theory that is recorded in text-books so irrational that it disintegrates under the most casual tests of validity which he applies to his own procedures every day. In many cases, he is given explanations of musical phenomena whose only claim to veracity is their hoary antiquity. Faced with this situation, he should be excused if he goes to the music himself and tries to find out what he needs to know. If music theorists do not soon discover the true nature of their professional responsibilities, music theory will probably be more effectively carried on by persons whose primary interest is not music.

And what is the specific responsibility of the music theorist? His legitimate work area, and it is vast, is the problem of how composers, past and present, succeed in representing the world of concept in the world of sound. His work will require him to describe with meticulous care and illuminating clarity the manner in which musical materials

are organized. He must then demonstrate the relationship between these organizations and the world of non-musical realities. The first step, although useful, is meaningless without the second. He must not only answer the question: "How are the sound materials organized?" but also the question: "Why are they organized in this manner?" or, "To what do the organized sounds refer?" It seems probable that he will never account for the effectiveness of any particular arrangement of sounds in purely musical terms. He must always demonstrate that the musical arrangement is effective only in the degree that it successfully represents some non-musical reality. The theories which he "creates" will answer the general question: "How does the organized pattern of sound represent what it does?" It is in the nature of "theory" that each new body of musical literature, indeed, each significant new composition, will require a revised or altogether new answer to this question.

This brings us directly to the definition of "theory" itself. A popular misconception in our times makes no distinction whatsoever between "theory" and "fact." Musicians are almost universally the victims of this misconception. "Facts" and "the knowledge of facts" cannot be supposed to be identical. That reality is ultimately a complex of facts goes without question. However, our conception of reality, our grasp of reality, remains always tenuous. Knowledge exists for us in four stages of increasing certainty: hypothesis, theory, natural law, and revealed truth. For those who accept the last-named, revealed truths are indeed facts; they constitute specific and sure knowledge of reality. Unfortunately, there are none with regard to music. However, even those who do not accept revealed truths as sensible knowledge, are forced to admit that theories, at their best, represent human knowledge in a relatively uncertain state.

Any thinker begins his approach to reality with an hypothesis, the elements of which he defines with considerable care. He works out the rational implications of his hypothesis in the form of various more elaborate concepts called theories. These theories are usually designed so that they may be tested empirically. If a number of these tests seem to substantiate his theories and their source, his original hypothesis, the theory is considered a workable explanation for some set of observed facts. In problems of the natural world, further substantiation through the centuries may give the theory the status of a natural law. But, even then, there may be reasonable grounds for extensive uncertainty.

To illustrate this, we need only consider the Ptolemaic theory of planetary motion, based, as it was, on an elaborate system of epicycles computed from the utterly false assumption that the earth was the center of the solar system. What is remarkable about this theory (which was considered a natural law and virtually unassailable) is that, although its first premise was false, it provided results for centuries which were substantiated by observation. Ultimately, of course, this so-called natural law began to err. The planets no longer actually occupied the positions predicted by the law. The natural law needed revision if it was to account further for observed reality. Copernicus and others returned to the hypothesis itself, replacing it with the new assumption that the sun was the center of the solar system. Despite

this striking example of the uncertainty of even natural law, persons today assume that the "law of gravity," for example, is fact. It is not. The law of gravity is the currently acceptable principle of attraction which accounts reasonably well for the interactions of free objects in space. Already a number of revisions have been made in this law as a result of the recent observations of theoretical physicists; it may become imperative in the not-too-distant future to cast out our law of gravity altogether in favor of some new and presently unimaginable hypothesis.

Now, if the knowledge of natural scientists is so uncertain, what can we say of the knowledge of music theorists? Music is not part of the natural universe. It is an artifact of mankind. It may, in some philosophical view, be an imitation of nature or an image of the universe, but it remains, at best, an artifice of man, designed to explain nature or the universe to himself. Music lacks even the modicum of constancy that we observe in the universe. It alters its manner of representing reality as frequently as we alter our views of reality. This change of viewpoint occurs demonstrably with each generation. It is, in fact, continuous. Therefore, the music theorist approaches a highly mutable substance with his techniques of description. He invents theories that should be recognized always as tentative, even under the best of circumstances. This does not impair their usefulness, unless, of course, some theorist attempts to apply theories invented to account for one musical situation to some other totally irrelevant situation or, still worse, mistakes a theory for a fact.

As an example of this last mistake in our own time, we might cite the theories of harmony founded on the overtone or partial series. That such a series exists in nature is an observed fact. That it can serve as the basis for a theory of harmony is a debatable hypothesis. It is true that many useful theories of harmony have been developed out of the assumption that harmonic practice derives in some way from the nature of the partial series. Even this does not make this assumption a fact. Only the partial series is a fact; its relevance to harmonic practice is an assumption which is becoming increasingly dubious.

I am acquainted with a theorist who is considering the possibility of replacing this assumption with a totally new one, much as Copernicus replaced the Ptolemaic assumption of an earth-centered solar system. I can well imagine that many would regard the actions of this theorist as presumptuous in the light of the "facts of harmony." By the facts of harmony most persons mean the obvious derivation of harmonic practice from the properties of the partial series. This is an error. The only facts of harmony are that, at various times, various composers put chords one after the other in a certain order. These created chord arrangements of composers are the only facts of harmony. The theory of harmony based on derivations from the partial series is an attempt to explain the actions of these composers, to account logically for their harmonic preferences. That this theory of harmony is unsatisfactory to a high degree is evidenced by the continuing disputes over its veracity. This theorist is merely beginning again with the true facts of harmonic practice — the successions of chords that composers actually used — seeking to explain the reasonableness of these progressions on some basis other than the partial series. To date,

there seems to be a remarkable amount of evidence to substantiate his new assumption. The theory which is developing out of this new hypothesis has the advantages that any new theory should have over an old one: it is more consistent with reality; it is more consistent with itself; its basic premises are less complex but provide explanations for many more complexities in the reality of harmonic practice. This is "creative theory" in the best sense of the word, and it is the creation of theories that is the most important business of the professional music theorist.

We can now see what a professional music theorist must be. He is first and foremost a musician. His knowledge of music, through the first-hand experience of composing and performing music, should be greater than that of any other musician. Secondly, he is a skilled thinker, versed in the techniques of logical demonstration, rational proof, and verbal argument. Thirdly, he is a professional, that is, he spends the major portion of his time thinking about music, searching out the clues which will lead to the development of new and useful theoretical systems. As is always the case, the creation of new things requires thorough knowledge of the old. The professional theorist, then, is also an expert on theoretical systems of the past.

With this summary definition, it becomes evident that a professional theorist is, of course, a rarity. It is also clear that many who might aspire to being professional theorists would fall short in one or another of the requirements set forth. This is understandable. Such persons would still be professional theorists, merely of lesser standing. What is shocking is that most of our so-called "music theorists" fall short in every respect and often by a considerable degree. They are what I would call amateur theorists, if, indeed, they are theorists at all. They are all too often persons who have failed in practical music altogether. Their sole acquaintance with argument is in the form of ill-mannered polemics turning around some trivial point of nomenclature in an already ossified area of theoretical investigation. Their command of the verbal requirements of the English language is superficial. Indeed, I often feel that much of the heat generated in theoretical debates is created by the inability of any of the parties involved to put together one single crystal-clear sentence regarding his or her viewpoint. And, finally, the mere thought of anybody's being so presumptuous as to "create" a theory appals them. Are not "the facts of music theory" virtually God-given? It is almost useless to explain to them that there cannot be any such thing as the "facts of theory."

With the definition of a professional theorist proposed here before us, it is not difficult to determine the nature of his training. To begin with, the professional theorist, like the professional lawyer, doctor, theoretical physicist, is the product of a graduate school. He cannot be anything else. His undergraduate training must include extensive practical experience with music, either as composer or performer, and he must have shown a high degree of skill in his practical work. It is unlikely that a medical school would accept a candidate who had done poorly in chemistry, biology, and bacteriology, although none of these specific skills may be required of a doctor of medicine. Likewise, no graduate school should accept as a theory major a student who has not already demonstrated a high degree of practical musical

skill. The current practice of dumping practical failures into theory programs is reprehensible. If you can't make music, you certainly can't talk about it.

Once the student is definitely aimed at the ultimate goal of becoming a professional theorist, his course work should include, in addition to further practical work in music, serious work in techniques of scientific procedure. How many students of our graduate schools are required to take studies in symbolic logic, methods of psychological research, or related subjects? How many, indeed take any courses in theoretical method, even in music. To come right down to it, how many music schools offer a course in the techniques of theoretical investigation? Yet, such study is essential if the music theorist is to stand in the company of his colleagues in other areas of humane research. Also, with regard to the knowledge of past methods of theoretical investigation, how many schools offer a course in the history of theory where the main stream of theoretical thought through the centuries is laid out systematically? And, finally, how many schools can develop creative theoretical activities? To direct work of this kind, the services of a skilled and enthusiastic creative theorist are essential. The number of such persons is so small that it seems unlikely that more than a handful of schools in the world could be in a position to encourage this last stage in the development of a really fine professional music theorist.

It remains to consider what the professional theorist actually does for the musical world. First of all, he would make an excellent theory pedagogue. But this is the least of his contributions. His main efforts are bent toward the continuing development of theoretical knowledge. He is constantly concerned with the question of musical description. In this capacity, he serves to reduce the area of unavoidable misunderstanding between composer and performer. Precisely because the composer and the performer are distinct individuals, each will have his own view of reality and his own understanding of how musical reality and general reality may be related. Although similar cultural backgrounds may insure that the composer and performer have a lot in common, the composer will generally develop a still more advanced concept of reality than the performer and his techniques of recreating that reality in sound will always be ahead of the performer's experience. The theorist operates as a go-between, an agent, whose function is to keep the performer as close behind the composer as possible. That the modern theorist is not doing this very well is evidenced by the general lack of understanding that the majority of performers bring to music written since 1910.

Through the process of musical description, the creative theorist ultimately arrives at general principles of musical procedure. These are of value both to composer and performer. No composer can make from scratch all the decisions required to create a composition. He needs systematic procedures which will provide a basis for a large proportion of his decisions. The theorist develops these. He generalizes regarding the procedures of previous musical styles and these generalizations serve as the basis upon which the composer makes the less significant decisions in his own style. Most musicians forget that every note in a composition requires a decision by the composer. If

tradition, efficiently summarized in effective theoretical terms, provides the composer with many ready-made decisions, the composer is then freed to expend his creative effort on those decisions that he regards as essential to his specific communicative intentions. In short, he is free to transmit his own personal artistry without rivetting his attention to every single note of the composition as it comes. We neglected to mention what constitutes tradition for a composer. It is the activity of the immediately preceding generation, perhaps even little more than the music of the past few years. I might ask where the young composer of today will find the effective theoretical summaries of recent practice that would help him so much in developing rapidly toward a style of his own? Due to the almost total absence of any creative theory in our time, they barely exist.

This is a tragedy that can be laid directly at the doorstep of the theory pedagogues. I can speak from my own experience which included, I might say, work with some excellent theory pedagogues. I received good training in the traditional substance of species counterpoint, tonal counterpoint, harmony (intermediate and advanced), form and analysis (mostly Mendelssohn and Beethoven), and music literature. During this time, only my piano teacher encouraged me to open any musical book other than the rather tiresome method-books created by various worthies for the courses mentioned. When I finished college, I assumed, indeed, was encouraged to assume, that I had learned theory. That was that. It was a distinct awakening to discover that there was more to theory. I have reason to believe that my experience of some twenty years ago is not radically different from that of the average music student today. It did not occur to me at the time, nor would it occur to one of them, that there might be any such thing as full-time professional work in music theory, an alive and exciting profession that might be said to be younger (because of its long dormancy) than almost any of the new sciences of our century.

To my mind, the recognition of music theory as a real professional activity with the highest professional standards is essential. I do not expect a landslide of enthusiasm for such a notion. Very few persons are in a practical position to be enthusiastic. Nor do I anticipate the realization of such a goal in any less than 30, or perhaps 50, years. The status of music theory is currently too low, the number of really professional music theorists too few, to establish any more than the beginnings of a renaissance of musical theoretical activity with its attendant benefits to musical composition and performance. However, I would like to recommend a few first steps that are reasonable and possible.

My principal recommendation would be to the deans of music schools and the chairmen of music departments. If the staff is to include more than four members, one of these should be a professional theorist, that is, someone whose graduate training was in the field of professional theory as we have described it. I realize that, in many faculties financial conditions require that every faculty member teach a variety of musical subjects. However, I am not sure that this circumstance requires that the faculty consist entirely of instrumental and vocal teachers who also teach some music theory. Could not such a faculty include one professional theorist who takes on some instru-

mental instruction as part of his duty? This would have the advantage that any student really interested in theory would find on the faculty one member who could discuss music theory with him at a somewhat higher level than Kitson and Goetschius. There would be one faculty member who could provide the beginnings of an interest and a skill in theoretical method for a student whose talents seemed to lie in this direction. There would be one faculty member who could demonstrate to the performers the liveliness and usefulness of theoretical knowledge regarding the music of our own century. And, most important of all, we would gradually dissolve a vicious circle which makes each generation of theory teachers the pupils of a previous generation of amateur theorists. No dean would want his professional students in piano to go to their first teaching position without a single minute of instruction from a professional pianist. And yet, many deans send students out to teach theory who have never made the passing acquaintance of a professional theorist.

It is more difficult to make a recommendation regarding the present corps of theory teachers, most of whom are clearly amateur theorists, many of whom would certainly claim to be nothing more. They represent a deeply entrenched vested interest. They must admit both privately and publicly that, whatever it is they teach, it is more in the manner of a musicianship skill than a knowledge of the nature of music. If they understand this and carry out their teaching function with enthusiasm, they can be of great assistance to the majority of musicians. It is when they seek to demonstrate that all discoverable truth about music is contained in their own narrow understanding that they cause dismay among true theorists and discredit the profession of music theory in the eyes of composers and performers alike. We can only ask that they do not make themselves into stumbling-blocks. Theoretical development has already been retarded for two generations by sloth and the firm conviction of many that the theories of the 19th century are the true facts of music, that any departure from them could only be a degradation.

And, finally, a recommendation regarding curricula. With the help of professional theorists, we should begin to examine the emptiness of our current curricula in theory. Is basic musicianship — that is, sight-singing, ear-training, etc. — theory? Of course not. It can be taught as well by any musician as by another. The professional theorists must devise teaching methods that are both efficient and effective, but then these skills can be taught by any of the musicians on the faculty. If these skills must be partitioned off into separate courses, they should be taught as efficiently as possible, perhaps without reference to theoretical principles at all. One does not need to know the theory of scales to play scales at the keyboard. Likewise, one does not need to know the theory of harmony to take down a series of harmonies correctly by dictation. Much too much theoretical claptrap gets thrown at students on the assumption that it will improve their hearing. It rarely does.

Continuing along this line, is species counterpoint an explanation of any actual body of music? Of course not. It was invented by J. J. Fux to teach the control of harmonic progressions in a late baroque style. Why do we use it as the basis for understanding the style of the

Renaissance? It is clearly without any point in the curriculum of the average musician and serves only to convince him of the utter futility of theoretical study.

Is there any point in a performing musician learning to write specific examples of a styleless sort of harmony derived from a melting together of a number of tonal harmonic practices of the past? Of course not. It is equally unimportant that he should learn to imitate, in writing, every mannerism of some very specialized harmonic procedure of the past. The performing musician, and probably the composer as well, would do better to learn the general principles of harmonic motion that underlie all the details of various tonal harmonic styles. He could then observe these forces at work in a great many traditional and modern styles. It is by this procedure that the modern student of physics is freed to spend the major portion of his study time with physics as it has developed in our own century. The past is summed up for him in a few general principles which he can observe in action in a series of carefully selected laboratory experiments. Why not teach harmonic tradition in the same way? Present a few general principles which can then be shown to operate in musical reality. This will free the student to tackle in detail the nature of the music of his own century, the only music that will be of any great significance to him within 20 or 30 years.

Is there some reason why the analysis of musical form should rest largely upon Beethoven? Is no other composer capable of formal intelligence? Why must anyone learn to write a fugue? Is there something of special significance about the fugue that makes it the finest musical communication? Or is it rather that its simple structural procedures are readily teachable, making it possible for the uninspired pedagogue to muddle through with a semblance of self-respect? In short, are our curricula a collection of items that are still somehow teachable whether they are especially significant or not? Do we teach certain items as theory merely because lots of textbooks are available whether their content is relevant to current practice or not?

We could go on and on, raising ever more embarrassing questions regarding the utterly stultified organization and content of our present theory curricula. We should not teach anything merely because it is good discipline. We should not teach anything because it has always been taught. The needs of a culture change and what was once taught may no longer be relevant. How long would public funds be made available to a high-school whose driving course was discovered to be concerned entirely with the problems of driving horses? How long can public and private funds be provided for theory instruction that is similarly antiquated? Our present programs only convince any musician who harbored any doubts about the matter that theoretical study is a thoroughgoing waste of time. At the undergraduate level, certainly, only that which helps the student to a better understanding of musical forces and musical communication, particularly in our own time, should be taught. An increasing and carefully trained corps of professional music theorists would provide the content, the format, and the teachers for a curriculum that would make possible a really effective education in the understanding of music for all competent musicians. And we should not forget that no curriculum is better than the individual

teachers that carry it out. If we are to have effective theory curricula, the teachers in these curricula must be professional music theorists.

Discussion by Norman Phelps

Mr. Kraehenbuehl is very concerned about the status of music theorists as scholars and about the state of music theory as a discipline. These concerns, I believe, are felt by many of us. Few of us, however, are as forthright or as vocal in attempting to bring the problem into focus. We are indebted to Mr. Kraehenbuehl for his attempt to do so.

At the recent Kansas City meeting of MTNA, where his paper was originally read, time would not allow each panelist to respond to the full content of the paper. We agreed that each would concern himself with a particular part of the total statement. I was assigned that portion which is devoted to the understanding of "music theory itself." I have been requested to concern myself with that same portion here.

The term "theory" has such a variety of meanings and applications that it is impossible to proceed without detailed definition. The stem of theory, theorist, theorem, theoretic and similar derivatives is the Greek word for "sight." In Greek antiquity, theor designated an ambassador or envoy sent by a state to consult an oracle or to perform a religious rite. Theorus (in Greek and in Latin) means "spectator." Theory (L. theoria) = viewing, a sight, spectacle. Plato's use of the word "theory" described "a contemplated truth." Aristotle elaborated this to mean "pure knowledge as opposed to practical knowledge."

The S.O.E.D. includes five definitions of theory. The first of these is obsolete. The fourth and fifth definitions are non-specific and not applicable here even though number five, which describes theory as "a hypothesis proposed as an explanation; hence a mere hypothesis, . . . an individual view or notion," states a quite common conception of theory. Definitions 2 and 3 (especially 3b.) are more clearly applicable to music theory. They are:

2. A conception or mental scheme of something to be done, or of the method of doing it; a systematic statement of rules or principles to be followed.

3a. A scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena; a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment, and is propounded or accepted as accounting for the known facts; a statement of what are held to be the general laws, principles, or causes of something known or observed.

3b. That department of an art or technical subject which consists in the knowledge or statement of the facts on which it depends, or of its principles or methods, as distinguished from the practice of it.