

Music Theory Textbook Review

Textbook 1

Roig-Francolí, Miguel A. *Harmony in Context*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

Designed for undergraduate music majors, *Harmony in Context* provides the richest possible musical context for the study of harmony, constantly encouraging students to translate what they are learning into better performances and better listening. The musical examples and anthology encompass a wide variety of different composers and repertoires. A clear and visually attractive layout, as well as the use of section and subsection headings and lists where appropriate, are essential aspects that contribute to the effective organization of this book. Recordings for all the musical examples from the literature included in both the book and the anthology are provided as MP3 files available on this Web page.

Roig-Francolí, *Harmony in Context*

PROS

Aesthetics

- Aesthetically pleasing layout.
- Compact and lightweight.
(for a theory textbook)
- Available in an eBook format

Content

- Excellent musical examples.
- Textbook offers a supplementary set of exercises at the end of every chapter.
- Online support with additional exercises and mp3 recordings for students.
- Workbook and Anthology are combined.
- Workbook uses recycled paper. Easy to write on.
- Post-Tonal textbook by same author, student gets to really understand the author's writing style.

CONS

Aesthetics

- Expensive
- The eBook is non-interactive.

Content

- Too wordy. Can detract from the student's ability to focus on the material.
- Some topics seem out of order.
- Not all the mp3's are available on the website, despite their claim to the contrary.

Textbook 2

Clendinning, Jane Piper, and Elizabeth West Marvin. *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis*. New York: W.W. Norton,, 2011.

Emphasizing real music and music-making, *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* gives students the hands-on tools they need to learn how music works. Theoretically current and pedagogically innovative, the *Musician's Guide* series uses the phrase model approach to show students how music works in context. With a focus on real music literature that students know and play, it shows how music theory relates directly to practice and performance. *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* includes all topics essential to first- and second-year theory for music majors, from fundamentals to post-tonal theory and analysis.

Clendinning/Marvin, *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis*

PROS

Aesthetics

Content

- Outlines topics and highlights repertoire used at beginning of each chapter.
- Topics flow smoothly.
- Juxtaposes popular and folk musical examples with western art music.
- Includes content on Post-Tonal topics.
- Online support with additional resources for study.
- Companion DVD with music examples.

CONS

Aesthetics

Content

- Textbook layout is not visually appealing. Text is too large. Inconsistent formatting.
 - Music in the Anthology is inconsistently sized, unevenly spaced, and poorly copied.
 - Expensive
 - Separate Workbook and Anthology
 - Workbook paper quality is poor, text is too large, and shading is a distraction.
- Terms in glossary are misleading.

Conclusion

The Roig-Francolí, *Harmony in Context* and Clendinning/Marvin *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* contain the appropriate information to use as textbooks for a standard undergraduate sequence in music theory. Both sets of course books are expensive, although the *Harmony in Context* Workbook and Anthology are combined, which spares the student the expense of purchasing them separately. Moreover, both textbooks supply the student with recordings of musical examples, online support, and additional materials to supplement their studies. However, the significant inequalities between textbooks are in their aesthetic values. All three course books of Clendinning/Marvin *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* have clear weaknesses in layout, font, and design. Furthermore, these unappealing flaws are so distracting as to hinder the student's ability to focus on the material or even comprehend an exercise. Roig-Francolí's, *Harmony in Context*, on the other hand, is streamlined, lightweight, and consistently formatted throughout. Although explanations of musical concepts often appear more complex than they should, directions and musical examples are always clear and concise. The clarity of directions and musical examples, along with the instructor's ability to use them, promotes a successful learning environment. Having taught several courses from *Harmony in Context*, it is my feeling Roig-Francolí errs on the side of caution with conceptual explanations rather than deliberately complicating the material. In conclusion, while Roig-Francolí's, *Harmony in Context* may at times sound far too wordy or theoretical than necessary, its inviting layout and ample content more than make up for the inevitable eyebrow raising and head scratching from even the brightest students.