

ECMS Theory Program Overview

Introduction

Welcome to music theory at the Eastman Community Music School! This document serves to get students and parents acquainted with our offerings and a recommended course of study.

ECMS is proud to offer a comprehensive array of theory classes for all ages. **Our offerings are split into two categories: Theory in Motion and the core Music Theory and Aural Skills program.**

Theory in Motion and Fundamental Musicianship are offered to students beginning in 1st grade and continue through 7th grade. These courses teach theory fundamentals using kinesthetic learning and aural skills.

Students who start with Theory in Motion or Fundamental Musicianship are encouraged to continue to our core theory program.

Our Core Music Theory and Aural Skills classes are offered to students in 8th grade and above. These classes begin with fundamental theory topics and progress through style composition, AP exam preparation, and college preparation. Students can expect to cover most if not all topics discussed in any reputable undergraduate curriculum.

Getting Started with Music Theory

ECMS has a theory class for every age. On the next page, you will find general starting points for getting into music theory at ECMS!

Theory in Motion and Fundamental Musicianship

Students beginning theory with ECMS in **1st – 7th grade** should start here.

1st – 5th grade should ALL go to Theory in Motion. **5th graders** go to Theory in Motion D.

6th graders must take a placement exam with Dr. Foley and will be placed in D or E. Students who finish Theory in Motion level E in 5th or 6th grade are encouraged to take Fundamental Musicianship.

New 7th graders can take Fundamental Musicianship or [this theory placement exam](#) and email the completed test to Daniel Sawler (dsawler@esm.rochester.edu) and Adam Foley (afoley@esm.rochester.edu).

Core MTAS Curriculum

Students beginning or continuing their theory journey with ECMS in **8th grade and up** should start here.

8th graders and above are advised to begin with Music Theory and Aural Skills 1 (MTAS1). There are four levels that they can progress through to acquire diplomas. Please see course descriptions on the next page.

Adults will want to begin with Theory and Aural Skills I, especially if they have no prior theory knowledge. There are four levels that they can progress through to acquire diplomas. Please see course descriptions on the next page.

If a student wishes to place out of a class, they should take [this theory placement exam](#) and either email the completed test to Daniel Sawler at dsawler@esm.rochester.edu or drop it off at the ECMS office in Messinger Hall, room 321.

Diploma Requirements

Students are encouraged to complete the **core theory curriculum** in order (MTAS1, 2, 3, and 4) if they are looking to get a [diploma](#). MTAS1 and 2 count towards a basic diploma, MTAS3 counts towards the advanced diploma, and MTAS4 counts towards the pre-collegiate diploma.

Description of ECMS Theory Courses:

Theory in Motion is a five-level program focusing on aural and kinesthetic musical understanding, basic music literacy, and musicianship. Terminology and musical analysis are also introduced. Students grow in their ability to: internalize melody, rhythm, and meter; sing with independence, good intonation and expression; improvise melodically, rhythmically, and through movement; move with expression; and communicate through music.

Fundamental Musicianship is an introductory theory and aural skills class covering fundamental rhythm and pitch reading and writing. Students will understand duple and triple rhythm as well as major and minor reading, dictation, and composition. Students will focus on scales, keys, pitch labeling (treble and bass clef), and foundational aural and kinesthetic understanding with all concepts. We will also explore basic harmonic progression.

Music Theory and Aural Skills 1 is a foundational course that builds theory knowledge and fills gaps in fundamental music understanding. Beginning with clef reading (treble, alto, tenor, bass), students progress through a study of pitch, rhythm, keys, modes, intervals, and chords. Students will also learn to match pitch, perform basic rhythms, and sing major and minor key melodies.

Music Theory and Aural Skills 2 focuses on the traditional discipline of two and four-voice part writing. After completing harmonic species counterpoint, students learn cadence formulas and basic tonic expansions. Relevant repertoire is examined throughout the course. Students will also learn to compose and sing their own melodies, dictate melodies and chord qualities, and perform more advanced rhythms.

Music Theory and Aural Skills 3 covers more advanced diatonic harmony as well as chromatic harmony and voice leading, including harmonic sequences, more contrapuntal expansions, applied chords and modulation, leading to the Advanced Placement Examination at the end of the school year. Relevant Aural Skills are used to introduce each topic. Students will learn to sing diatonic and chromatic melodies at sight, dictate harmonic progressions, and improvise melodies over a harmonic progression.

Music Theory and Aural Skills 4 covers advanced chromatic harmony (mixture, the Neapolitan chord, augmented sixth chords, and common tone chords), form (binary, ternary, rondo, sonata) and 19th-century practices (ambiguity, German Lieder, text-painting, and Impressionism). The course also aims to give students the final tools necessary to write about music.

Counterpoint explores Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and/or Modern contrapuntal topics – the specific course information varies with the specialties of the instructor. **Prerequisite: MTAS3**

The Theory Project is an independent study, in which the student will meet with an instructor for one hour a week for a full academic year. The student will select a piece (or a movement from a piece) that he/she is studying in lessons. Following a detailed analysis, the student will write up his/her findings in a paper and then present the paper in the form of a lecture recital in May of that year. **Prerequisite: MTAS3 or instructor permission.**

The Honors Theory Project is a more advanced theory project in which the students will meet with an instructor for an hour a week for two full academic years. The student will present his/her findings in front of a jury. **Prerequisites: MTAS4 or instructor permission.**

Contact Information:

For Theory in Motion: Adam Foley, afoley@esm.rochester.edu

For all other theory courses: Daniel Sawler, dsawler@esm.rochester.edu