

The boundary between art and science may appear a fixed border, the objective focus of science standing opposite the subjective aspect of art. Yet science and art share much in common, both functioning as human efforts to imitate, recreate, or understand the natural world. The term “art” can imply a pragmatic approach to a discipline, an approach attained through study, observation, and practice—methods strikingly similar to those of science. Thus science and art are inexorably linked, a connection especially evinced through music theory.

This inherent overlap between art and science in the study of music has consistently acted as an underlying motive in my academic pursuits. At Cornell, I concentrated on theory and composition in the hope of comprehending the art of writing music. My senior thesis—a symphonic composition—left me feeling that, while I could work through complicated structures and counterpoint, most of my compositional process was still trial and error. Such mysteries of musical creation vexed my scientific side, so I enrolled in NYU's graduate program for music technology. My focus at NYU was tonmeister studies, a discipline interweaving science and art through the coordination of technical demands and musical skills in audio engineering.

While my education has been a balance of art and science, a purely academic track often emphasizes theory over practice. My work as a technical engineer at Right Track Recording and the New School has augmented my NYU degree with real-world elements. My artistic side mimics this technical seasoning via a similar pragmatism, as I have composed music for a variety of theater productions, films, and radio stories, as well as written hundreds of songs. Coupled with a classical training in cello and piano, my agility on guitar and bass allows me to directly tackle composition and analysis in a multitude of genres.

Through advanced studies in music theory, I hope to continue my attempts at unraveling the undocumented techniques of music composition. I am an adherent to the spirit of Schenkerian reductions, but feel the graphical notation could be streamlined somewhat to better elucidate compositional processes across large bodies of work. Lerdahl's work on generative grammar is an excellent example of one scientifically-based extension of Schenker's work. Specifically, I am interested in more closely tracing the harmonic and contrapuntal tools used in Baroque dance suites, chorales, and other forms from that era.

As the duality of art and science drives my interest in music theory, a duality of genres underpins my musical focus. Years of songwriting have led me to see patterns in song structures, especially how different types of phrases engender particular formal constructions. Songwriting also provides a compelling analytical situation in that thousands of examples exist, all attempting to resolve the same basic compositional issues. Much as Riemann saw professional musicians necessarily overtaking music history from “philologists and lawyers”, the study of songwriting is branching out from mere social and cultural commentary to encompass all aspects of analysis.

Combined with my expertise in music technology, a terminal degree in music theory would make me a strong applicant for a collegiate teaching position. At the same time, a PhD program would cultivate the large-scale analytical research needed to resolve my theoretical interests. So, like the equilibrium between pedagogy and research, practice and theory, or art and science, doctoral study in music theory would create a unique intersection at which I could further navigate towards understanding and explaining the mechanics of musical creation.