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Revisiting Tonal Hierarchies: An Analytical Review of Shifting Paradigms in Music Theory Pedagogy from the 20th Century to the Present

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Abstract

Western music theory has been based on tonal hierarchies for a long time. Frameworks like Schenkerian analysis and functional harmony give us an organised way to understand pitch relationships and musical form. As music changed in the 20th and 21st centuries, though, these models started to show that they weren't able to cover the wide range of global and modern musical practices. The growth of popular music styles and non-Western practices, along with atonality, serialism, and modal systems, made tonal-centric analysis less applicable to all situations. Cognitive study showed that how people hear tones is not fixed for everyone, but depends on their cultural background and how they listen. Including popular music in school studies has made it easier to have flexible ideas about how tones work and how they are put together, showing how tonal centres and harmonic meaning change when music styles change. Modern teaching methods stress learner-centered approaches, comparative analysis, and the use of interactive tools that make theoretical ideas easier to understand and grasp. These changes are part of a larger trend in music education towards diversity, inclusion, and relevance to the real world. Instead of getting rid of tonal hierarchies, teachers are rethinking them as one analytical lens among many. This helps students manage a world of different kinds of music with more ease, critical insight, and creative engagement.

Keywords: Tonal Hierarchies, Music Theory Pedagogy, Schenkerian Analysis, Post-Tonal Theory, Cognitive Science, Cultural Diversity, Music Education

1. Introduction

In Western music theory, the idea of tonal hierarchy, that some sounds and chords are more structurally important than others in a piece of music has been around for a long time [1]. The tonic, or "home" pitch, is the most important part of this scheme [2]. It controls how the other tones and harmonies are organised. This idea is deeply rooted in the tonal practices of the 18th and 19th centuries [3, 4]. It has shaped not only compositional norms but also the ways that

conservatories and university institutions teach. This way of thinking about things in a hierarchy was written down in systems like functional harmony and Schenkerian analysis [5]. These systems supported a view of music in which pitch relationships follow a logic of stress and resolution controlled by tonal centres. These theories were not only used for analysis, but also as ideological models. They often said that tonal hierarchy was a natural or universal part of music [6, 7].

Tonal order has been used as a teaching tool for a long time, especially to show how Western classical music fits together structurally [8]. It helps students understand different levels of musical structure, from the most basic details to the overall structure of the background [9]. This is similar to how syntax works in language and gives music a sense of consistency that has always interested both scholars and teachers [10, 11]. But the fact that this model is so popular in schools also shows how cultural elitism and a narrow view of what "art music" is have shaped history as a whole [12]. Visualisations of tonal hierarchies, like the ones in Figure 1, support this way of teaching by showing pitch relationships and formal organisation in a clear, organised way [13]. The Generative Theory of Tonal Music (GTTM) diagrams, tonal tension profiles, and hierarchical breakdowns of compositions help make academic ideas that are hard to grasp more concrete. These pictures not only help students understand how to analyse music better, but they also show how the conversation about tonal hierarchy is changing. This is especially true as music theory classes start to include global, popular, and cognitive views in their main methods [13].

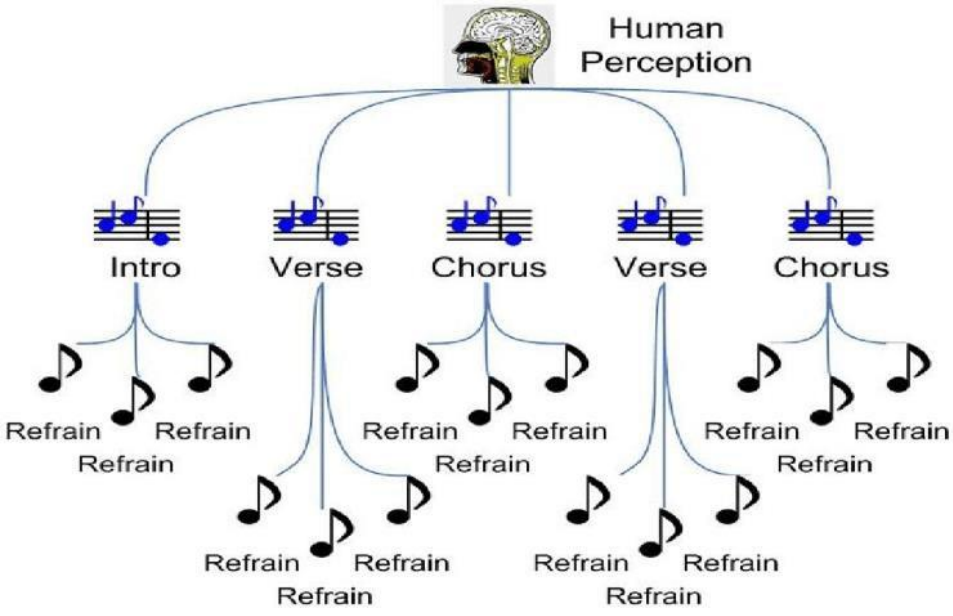

Figure 1: Hierarchical breakdown of a song in western tonal format [13]

But in the 20th century, there were big changes in music and new ideas in theory that showed how limited a paedagogy that was only based on hierarchy and tones was [14]. Traditional tonal structures were broken down by composers like Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Cage. This led thinkers to create new frameworks that didn't depend on the tonic-dominant axis, such as serialism, set theory, and post-tonal analysis [15, 16]. At the same time, the growth of ethnomusicology and popular music studies has made people more aware of global and local music practices that don't follow Western tonal logic [17]. Many of these musical cultures use modal systems, complicated rhythms, or timbral variation as organising principles, which gives us a lot of options besides pitch hierarchy [18].

These changes in music and analysis happened at the same time as larger academic movements like postcolonial theory, critical paedagogy, and cognitive musicology [19]. Scholars started to question the Eurocentrism that was built into standard theory courses [20]. They said that putting Western tonal hierarchy first not only pushes other musical systems to the side, but it also gives the wrong picture of the wide range of musical experiences people have [21]. Globalisation and advances in technology have made the musical settings that students experience even more varied. This makes it more and more impossible to teach a single theory curriculum [22, 23].

2. Traditional Tonal Hierarchies: Foundations in Western Pedagogy

2.1 Schenkerian Analysis and Functional Harmony

Heinrich Schenker created an analytical framework in the early 1900s [6, 24]. It is still one of the most important tools used to teach music theory in the West. Schenkerian analysis sorts tonal music into three levels: foreground, middleground, and background (figure 2). The goal is to find the deep structural unity of tonal music [5, 25, 26]. The Ursatz is the background level which is a basic structure that usually has a falling melodic line (Urlinie) and a tonic–dominant–tonic harmonic progression (Bass brechung). Details on the surface, like flourishes, counterpoint, and rhythm, are seen as additions to this main structure [27, 28].

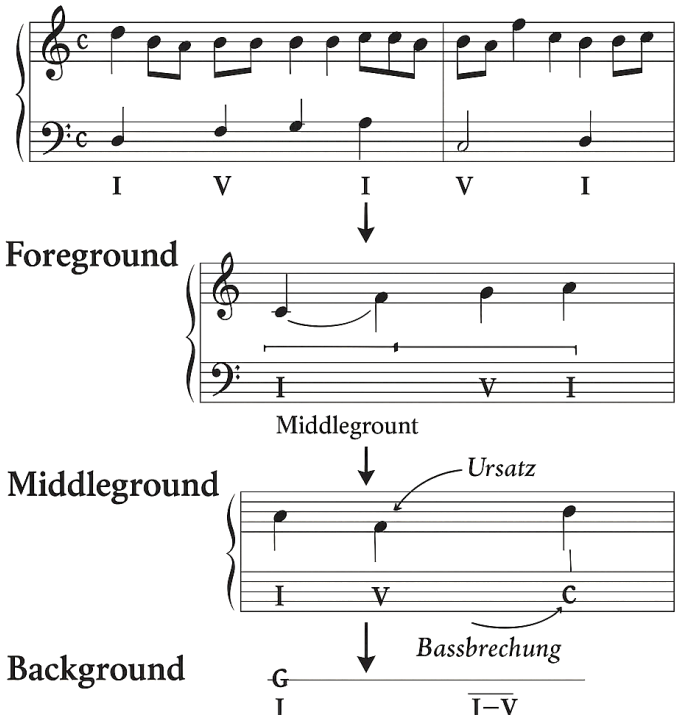

Figure 2: Hierarchical Levels in Schenkerian Analysis (*created with the help of OpenAI*)

The idea of functional harmony, which was created by thinkers like Rameau, Riemann, and Piston, is very similar to Schenkerian theory [29]. Based on what they do in a key, functional harmony divides chords into tonic, dominant, and subdominant parts. Roman numeral analysis, figured bass realisation, and harmonic dictation are all ways that these syntactic connections are taught [6]. This makes functional theory an important part of teaching classical music [30]. Schenkerian analysis and functional harmony were the main ideas behind tonal paedagogy in the 20th century, especially in schools in Europe and North America [7, 31]. They not only made it easier to understand music from the common practice period, especially Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, but they also changed how writing and voice leading were taught, focusing on ideas of tonal architecture and structural coherence [32].

Even though these models are good for teaching, they have gotten a lot of bad press for their flaws and cultural bias [33, 34]. Schenkerian analysis has been criticised for being rigid and based on Eurocentric ideas, especially when used with music that isn't from the Western traditional canon [35]. Its methods can seem overly simple or out of place in popular, non-Western, or non-tonal music, and they can hide a work's inner logic instead of showing it. Because of these criticisms, hierarchical models are being looked at again in modern theory

classes, and there are calls for more inclusive and situation-sensitive ways to analyse things [36, 37].

2.2 Pedagogical Applications and Limitations

Schenkerian analysis and functional harmony were the main ways that Western music theory was taught for most of the 20th century, especially in college and school settings [38]. These models helped teachers create lessons that focused on tasks like harmonic reduction, figured bass realisation, species counterpoint, and Roman numeral analysis [39]. These all helped students understand how pitches are organised in a diatonic, hierarchical way. These models' structured logic gave both analysts and actors clear, useful skills that they could use in other situations. It helped students understand voice leading, harmonic syntax, and structural unity [40]. They worked especially well when teaching canonical Western art music, since the theory tools were very similar to how music is composed. Because of this, these models were important for more than just analysis; they were also used to understand performance and train musicians to compose [41, 42].

But these models are still used a lot in theory classes, and they are getting more and more criticism for being culturally narrow and exclusive [43]. These ways of thinking are very connected to Western common-practice tonality, so they tend to push aside musical practices that don't put a lot of emphasis on harmonic function or pitch organisation that is based on levels [43, 44]. Because of this, it's been hard to teach, especially for students whose musical identities are shaped by jazz, popular music, or world traditions [45, 46]. Some people say that relying too much on tonal order can make these students feel uncomfortable and spread a set of values that sees non-tonal or non-Western systems as less important or wrong [47]. Concerns like these have led to a lot of changes in the curriculum that aim to make theoretical material more diverse, include different ways of analysing music, and encourage a more open and culturally aware understanding of music theory [48, 49]. While Schenkerian analysis emphasizes structural reduction and tonic-dominant relationships, contemporary approaches often engage with a wider array of harmonic functions, chromatic chords, and stylistic variations, reflecting a more inclusive and diversified theoretical landscape (figure 3) [9].

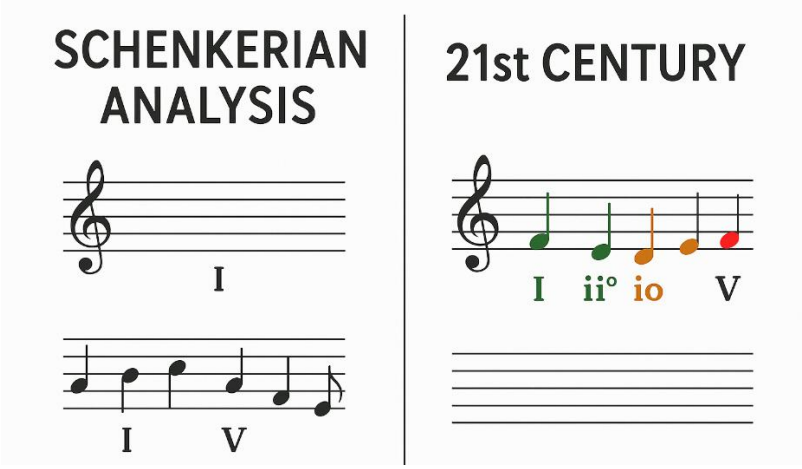

Figure 3: A comparison between traditional Schenkerian analysis and expanded 21st-century harmonic pedagogy [9].

3. Cognitive Science and the Empirical Turn

At the end of the 20th century, music theory and cognitive psychology came together to create new research methods that changed the way we think about how tones are perceived [50]. Carol Krumhansl's probe-tone experiments were one of the most important contributions because they showed that people always think of certain pitches, especially those linked to the tonic, as more stable and central in a key [51]. Her work supported academic ideas like tonal hierarchy with scientific evidence, showing that these are not just vague concepts but actually show how enculturated listeners experience sound. This data backed up traditional ways of teaching that were based on tonic-dominant relationships. It also gave teachers a way to keep teaching hierarchical models in listening, analysis, and composition [52, 53].

Later studies, though, showed that cultural background and musical exposure have a big effect on how tones are perceived [54]. Cross-cultural studies have shown that people from non-Western cultures may understand pitch relationships in different ways, putting more importance on modal, rhythmic, or timbral traits than harmonic function [55]. These results called Western tonal systems into question and showed how important learned listening habits are [56]. As a result, teachers started using culturally sensitive teaching methods that value different kinds of musical knowledge [57]. Experiential listening, improvisation, and analysing context have become important methods that help students understand musical patterns by looking at the systems that make them [58]. Also, tools from neuroscience, linguistics, and information theory have broadened the scope of teaching music theory. These have led to more perceptually

grounded methods like schema theory and embodied cognition that are more in line with how people understand and experience music in real life. [59]

4. Set Theory and Serialism

Atonality first appeared in the early 1900s, mostly in the works of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg from the Second Viennese School [60]. It was a big change from functional harmony to motivic development, chromaticism, and structure innovation [61]. Traditional tonal analysis didn't work well with these new ways of composing, so thinkers like Milton Babbitt and Allen Forte came up with pitch-class set theory, which says that all twelve pitch classes are structurally equal [62]. This method sorts pitch collections that aren't in order based on intervallic content, normal order, and prime form [63]. This lets music analysts find patterns and transformational relationships in music that doesn't have tonal centres [64].

For example, Schoenberg's use of repeated trichords or tetrachords could now be studied by looking at how they were structured instead of how they worked tonally [65]. In the same way, Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique [66](Figure 4 shows a twelve-tone row (P1) and its inversional form (I6), which are split into three trichordal cells that match (A, B, C, and A1, B1, C1). The arrows show that the original row and its reversal are structurally and relationally identical) organised all twelve pitches into a tone row and its permutations (inversion, retrograde, etc.) laid the groundwork for serialism [67-69]. Later, composers like Boulez and Babbitt expanded serialism to include rhythm, dynamics, and articulation.

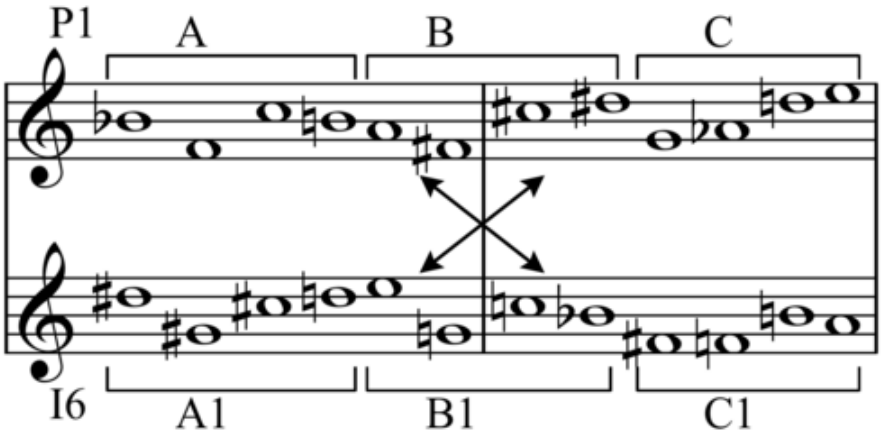

Figure 4: Twelve-Tone Row Matrix Illustrating Serial Transformations [70]

When set theory and serialism were added to the teaching of music theory, it made the analysis more rigors [71]. Instead of teaching natural tonal listening, the focus shifted to logical reasoning and formal abstraction [72]. These methods taught students how to think

mathematically and formally, which made them very useful for analysing modernist and post-tonal music [73]. But their difficulty and what some people think is a problem with the way they sound make them hard to use in the classroom, especially for kids who aren't good at math [74]. These abstract systems are now balanced with listening-based strategies that help students understand the expressive purpose behind atonal works while also learning the technical tools they need to understand how they were made [75].

5. Decentering the Western Canon

5.1 Global Music Traditions

The continued decentering of the Western canon in music theory education has led to a necessary reevaluation of what is valid musical knowledge and analysis [76]. Teachers are adding more and more world music styles to theory classes, like Indian raga, Arabic maqam, Balinese gamelan, and West African polyrhythms [77]. Most of the time, these systems don't work like the pitch-centered, hierarchical models that are common in Western harmonic theory [76, 78]. For instance, in Indian classical music, pitch is organised into ragas that focus on expressive decoration and microtonal intervals [79]. In Arabic maqam theory, on the other hand, there are unique scalar modes and modulations that have culturally specific emotional connections [80]. In West African music, on the other hand, rhythm, cyclical patterns, and polyrhythmic interaction are more important than harmonic development [81]. These methods go against many strongly held Western beliefs about the structure, form, and meaning of music [82]. They require a shift in the focus of analysis from models that focus on pitch to multidimensional frameworks that take into account modality, rhythm, texture, and timbre [83]. It takes more than just including these traditions on purpose to teach them in a useful way. It requires a change in how we teach and think about the goals of teaching music theory [84]. Teachers shouldn't focus on voice leading, functional harmony, or reductionist analysis, instead, they should stress skills like recognising modalities, improvising fluently, and perceiving rhythms [85, 86]. For example, they could practice vocal transmission, learn through call-and-response, or look into traditional instruments and performance settings [87]. These kinds of teaching methods not only help students understand music from different cultures, but they also get them to think critically about the cultural ideas that are built into standard Western theory [45, 49]. Incorporating world traditions into the curriculum is important because it shows that there are different ways to understand and value music. When

these systems are looked at in depth and with respect, they add to the academic discussion and help students become more globally aware and musically versatile in the future [82, 84].

5.2 Popular Music and Modal Fluidity

Blues, jazz, rock, hip-hop, and electronic music are all popular types of music that often go against or skip over the tonal systems that support classical Western music [65, 88]. These styles don't use clear tonic-dominant relationships or useful harmonic progressions [89]. Instead, they use modal mixes, unclear tonal centres, non-functional chord movements, and extended harmonies [90]. For example, blues and rock may go back and forth around a single tonic-like chord without ending according to classical voice-leading rules. Jazz, on the other hand, explores a wide range of harmonic colours by changing, substituting, and improvising in modal ways [91]. These idioms also put a lot of weight on expressive elements like timbre, groove, and phrasing, which are often ignored or simplified in standard tonal analysis [92]. Because of this, these types of music need a theory that doesn't just look at pitch relationships in a strict hierarchical way, but also takes into account musical fluidity, contextual tonality, and stylistic subtlety [93]. In Table 2, it shows how important elements of popular music, like modal mixing, groove-based form, and timbral expression, change the way we think about things and make music theory lessons more useful.

Table 1: Analytical Characteristics and Pedagogical Benefits of Popular Music in Theory Education [94-96]

Aspect	***Popular Music Practices***	***Implications for Theory Pedagogy***
Harmonic Function	Modal mixture, extended harmonies, non-functional progressions	Encourages exploration of functional elasticity and reinterpretation of harmonic roles
Tonal Center	Ambiguous or fluid tonal centers; established through repetition/emphasis	Promotes understanding of contextual and emergent tonality
Form and Structure	Loops, sections based on groove or texture, non-standard forms	Expands formal analysis beyond sonata or binary/ternary forms

Expressive Features	Emphasis on timbre, groove, phrasing, and rhythmic interaction	Highlights the role of production, dynamics, and phrasing in musical meaning
Student Engagement	Familiar musical content and styles	Increases motivation, cultural relevance, and personal connection to the material
Analytical Skills Developed	Critical listening, stylistic comparison, production analysis	Fosters creativity, listening acuity, and real-world musical interpretation
Curricular Role	Complements traditional repertoire, challenges tonal hierarchies	Supports inclusive, contemporary, and stylistically diverse music theory instruction

6. Innovations in Music Theory Pedagogy

6.1 Learner-Centered and Experiential Approaches

Learner-centered educational views that value active participation, critical enquiry, and learning in context are becoming more and more important in modern music theory teaching [97]. This change is away from strict lesson plans based on a single theoretical standard, usually Western tonal theory, and towards open-ended, exploratory methods that let students explore different types of music [98, 99]. Students are not told to memorise rules and steps, and instead, they are told to interact with music as analysts, producers, and listeners, learning by discovering, working together, and trying new things [47]. Comparative analysis jobs might include looking at how a harmonic progression works in different musical styles, like classical, jazz, and pop, or how rhythmic structure is thought of in West African and Latin American traditions [100].

By encouraging analytical adaptability and international musical awareness, these methods help students learn more deeply and in a more complete way [101]. Multiple theoretical models help students learn skills that can be used in a wide range of genres and countries, such as recognising patterns, understanding shapes, and figuring out what they mean in the context of other things they have seen [102]. Aside from that, they learn how to question common ideas about what makes music valuable or structured [103]. Composition, improvisation, recording, and real-time analysis are all experiential methods that connect theory with practice and help

students learn even more [104]. This way of teaching fits well with modern educational goals because it prepares students not only to understand music, but also to take part in a world that is becoming more global and artistically diverse [49]. A brief comparison of traditional and learner-centered music theory pedagogies is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Traditional vs. Learner-Centered Music Theory Pedagogies [31, 105, 106]

Feature	***Traditional Pedagogy***	***Learner-Centered Pedagogy***
Primary Focus	Western tonal theory and canonical repertoire	Multiple tonal systems and diverse musical styles
Learning Approach	Rule-based, deductive	Exploratory, comparative, inductive
Student Role	Passive receiver of knowledge	Active participant and co-creator of knowledge
Assessment Methods	Written exams, part-writing, harmonic analysis	Projects, transcriptions, improvisation, reflections
Engagement with Non-Western/Popular Styles	Minimal or supplemental	Integrated and critically examined
Tools Emphasized	Roman numeral analysis, figured bass	Listening, transcription, performance, aural skills

6.2 Technological Enhancements and Accessibility

Incorporating digital technology into the teaching of music theory has completely changed how ideas are taught, learned, and used [107]. Audio workstations (like Ableton Live, Logic Pro) [108], aural skills training apps (like Tenuto, Auralia, and EarMaster) [109], and music notation software (like Sibelius, Finale, and MuseScore) [110] have all made learning more interactive and multimodal. These tools go far beyond what traditional lecture-based instruction can do [111]. Students can not only see and hear academic ideas, but they can also play around with them by changing rhythm, form, harmony, and voice leading in real time [112]. These technologies can also include different kinds of music, like Western classical music, jazz transcriptions, electronic production, and folk music from around the world. This can help make the curriculum more open and varied [113].

It's also important to note that these tools make music theory schooling more open and fair for everyone [107]. They help students who may have trouble with standard, notation-heavy methods understand difficult topics by catering to different learning styles, such as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic [111]. For instance, a student who hasn't had much formal training might understand rhythmic structure better by playing around with loops in a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), than by looking at Roman numerals [114]. Technology also lets you learn at your own pace and at different times, which is helpful in classes with lots of different people or when you are learning from home [113]. This openness not only gets more students involved, but it also makes things fair for students with different musical and educational experiences. When used wisely, digital tools help connect theory and practice, old and new ideas, and make music theory a more interesting, important, and open field [115].

7. Discussion

The changes in tonal orders in music theory teaching are similar to bigger changes in how people think about music, how aware they are of other cultures, and how they teach [74]. Schenkerian analysis and functional harmony have been the mainstays of Western music education for a long time, but their flaws are becoming more clear in a world where music is linked and has a lot of different styles [25, 26]. Based on the way tones were used in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, these models stress the hierarchical links between pitches and chords [116]. They give students a structured way to look at the works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. But because they are so rigid and based on Eurocentric ideas, they have been criticised for leaving out many musical traditions that don't follow Western tonal reasoning [117].

Adding empirical study from cognitive science has been one of the most important steps towards ending this exclusivity [118]. Tonal orders were backed up by research from scholars like Carol Krumhansl, who showed how listeners think of certain pitches as more stable within a key [40, 119]. However, these results also showed how culture conditioning can change how people hear pitches [26]. Cross-cultural study showed that listeners from different musical backgrounds don't always value tonal relationships in the same way [120]. This shows that Western theory's claims to universality are false. Because of this proof, teachers have had to rethink how they teach, which has led to a shift towards teaching that is culturally responsive and based on perception [121].

Adding global music practices to music theory classes has also changed things in big ways. In some systems, like Indian raga, Arabic maqam, and West African polyrhythm, modes, timbre, and rhythm are more important than harmony and functional development [111-113]. These traditions challenge basic ideas in Western thought and need new ways of teaching and analysing them [122]. Teachers can't just teach voice leading and chord functions anymore; they also need to get students to use listening-based, improvisational, and context-sensitive methods that show how music works in different cultural situations [123]. This change not only makes people better at reading music, but it also helps them understand different musical systems more deeply and think critically about them [124].

Many schools have adopted learner-centered approaches that stress discovery, creativity, and critical thinking in reaction to these educational needs. Students are not forced to use a single analytical model [106]. Instead, they are encouraged to compare different theoretical systems, try out writing and improvisation, and use analytical methods that make sense in the styles they study [125]. The use of technology in the classroom makes this paradigm shift even stronger. Students can see, change, and hear how theoretical ideas work with software like digital audio workstations, aural training apps, and interactive writing platforms [126, 127]. These tools make abstract ideas more real and easy to understand. They also support different ways of learning and increase the number of people who can get a theory education [128]. This combining of theoretical, cognitive, and cultural aspects is well shown in Table 3, which brings together important models such as Schenkerian Ursatz, schema theory, and functional elasticity. This shows how different ways of looking at things can lead to a more open and cross-disciplinary approach to teaching music theory.

Table 3: Advanced Conceptual Matrix of Tonal Hierarchies and Music Theory Pedagogy [53, 74, 129-134]

Dimension	***Subdomain***	***Technical Term / Model***	***Definition / Function***	***Relevance to Pedagogy***
Tonal Structure	Hierarchical Theory	*Ursatz* (Schenker)	The deep structural framework in Schenkerian analysis, typically involving a descent	Forms the foundation of hierarchical tonal understanding in

			from scale degree 3 or 5 to 1 over a I–V–I progression.	traditional analysis education.
	Functional Harmony	T–PD–D Function (Riemannian)	The tonic, predominant, and dominant functional model categorizing harmonic roles within tonal syntax.	Central to voice-leading instruction, Roman numeral analysis, and harmonic reduction.
Post-Tonal Extension	Atonality	Pitch-Class Set Theory (Forte)	A method for categorizing and analyzing unordered sets of pitch classes based on intervallic content and prime form.	Facilitates analysis of post-tonal and 20th-century repertoire; supplements functional tonality.
	Serialism	Twelve-Tone Matrix / Row Transformations	Organizational structure in serial music involving manipulations of ordered tone rows (P, R, I, RI).	Teaches students analytical tools for modernist and avant-garde repertoire.
Cognitive Psychology	Tonal Perception	Probe-Tone Profile (Krumhansl & Kessler)	An empirical method used to assess perceived tonal stability of pitches within a key context.	Empirically supports traditional tonal hierarchies; bridges perception and analysis.
	Tonal Schema Learning	Schema Theory	A cognitive model suggesting listeners internalize and apply schematic	Supports context-sensitive learning and encourages

			patterns (cadences, sequences, modulations).	pattern recognition.
	Embodied Cognition	Sensorimotor Integration	Theorizes that music is processed and understood partly through physical interaction (e.g., tapping, gesturing, performing).	Encourages pedagogies involving movement, improvisation, and embodied listening.
Cultural Context	Global Systems	Modal Hierarchy	Non-functional systems (e.g., raga, maqam) organized by scalar prominence, melodic gravity, and cultural syntax.	Promotes cultural inclusivity and alternative analytical frameworks.
	Timbral Logic	Spectralism / Timbre-based Analysis	Systems prioritizing timbre and overtone content (e.g., Grisey, Saariaho) over pitch class and harmony.	Expands focus beyond pitch; integrates contemporary music and sound-based analysis.
Popular Music Pedagogy	Harmonic Fluidity	Functional Elasticity	The context-dependent, often non-linear use of functional chords in genres like jazz, rock, and pop.	Teaches students to analyze harmony in non-classical genres without rigid function expectations.
	Groove and Form	Cyclical / Sectional Form	Use of looped progressions and	Enhances student engagement;

			formal structures driven by rhythm, texture, and production aesthetics.	requires listening-based, production-aware analytical strategies.
Pedagogical Innovation	Student-Centered Learning	Comparative Tonal Models	A framework in which multiple tonal systems (Western, non-Western, modal, atonal) are studied comparatively.	Develops analytical versatility and intercultural competence.
	Technology Integration	DAWs / Interactive Notation / AI Tools	Use of software like Ableton Live, Noteflight, or AI-based transcription tools for theory instruction and sonic experimentation.	Enhances accessibility, experimentation, and real-time tonal manipulation in music learning.
	Assessment & Skills	Multimodal Aural-Cognitive Assessment	Blends written, aural, improvisational, and analytical tasks to assess theoretical understanding.	Supports diverse learning styles and provides a holistic view of student comprehension.

The new way of thinking about tonal systems in music theory and teaching shows a dedication to including everyone, using facts to help our ideas, and coming up with new ways to teach [132]. Tonal frameworks from the past are still useful, but they aren't seen as generally useful anymore. They are now seen as just one way to understand music, not the only way [91]. Music teachers can give their students the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century's rich and

complicated musical world by encouraging diversity, cultural understanding, and the ability to use technology in new ways [43].

8. Conclusion

The way tonal hierarchies have changed over time in music theory paedagogy shows how music is understood, taught, and respected in school and college settings. Frameworks like Schenkerian analysis and functional harmony were based on Western classical practices and were very useful for understanding tonal music. However, they had problems when used with different musical styles and cultures. In the 20th and 21st centuries, classical styles like atonal, popular, and global traditions grew, and so did the need for teaching methods that could adapt to these differences. Cognitive science study has both supported and questioned the basic ideas of tonal hierarchy. This shows how cultural background affects how we understand music. More and more, global music systems and common phrases are being taught as part of theory classes. This shows a commitment to a more open and thoughtful way of teaching. These changes force teachers to stop using a model that works for everyone and start using a pluralistic method that values different ways of hearing and understanding music.

Also, improvements in technology have made music theory more participatory, open, and flexible to different ways of learning. This highlights the need for rigors and adaptable teaching methods. Modern theory classes use learner-centered, exploratory, and cross-disciplinary methods that give students the tools to think critically, artistically, and contextually about music. Music theory paedagogy is not giving up on tradition when it rethinks tonal structures; instead, it is adding to it. Teachers can get students ready for a world where musical meaning is complex and changes over time by using a variety of theoretical models, cultural views, and cognitive insights. This change not only brings theory into line with the real world of music today, but it also proves that music education is still important and alive in the 21st century.

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