THE MANNES INSTITUTE
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN MUSIC THEORY

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INSTITUTE ON MUSIC AND THE MIND

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OPENING SPEECH

Welcome friends and colleagues to the ninth annual Mannes Institute on Music and the Mind. Kicking off this event each summer is always an exciting experience for me. To quote Shakespeare, it’s the one time of year I’m dressed in a little, brief authority. In between, I have, as Thoreau said of himself, a real genius for staying at home. Over the next 4 days, huddled together in this intimate conservatory, I hope we will discover a refreshingly different vision of who we are, and what our profession might be.

The Mannes Institute is an experiment in humanistic learning. We’re a community in a constant state of flux and realignment, with new members coming and going, all of whom think and care deeply about music and seek a forum to share their insights, doubts, and discoveries. This is a place where we can discuss ideas among peers who appreciate and challenge us in a respectful way. We are invited to examine our own thinking out loud before others of similar mind in a safe and supportive context.

The purpose of the Institute is to air our views, not on the silent pages of scholarly journals or spot lit stages of hotel halls, but in the dynamic give and take of interactive workshops, where good spirited haggling, trial balloons, half-baked truths, sudden intuitions, and speculative rebuttals are all fair game. We welcome dissent and debate rather than the uniformity of groupthink or the pitfalls of intellectual insularity. We affirm a noble tradition of humanistic inquiry, premised on the rigorous testing of ideas through collegial interrogation, rooted in venerable disciplines of independent thought, critical examination, and free-ranging discourse. We thrive on what Virginia Woolf calls the stimulus of contradiction.

The next 4 days will present myriad opportunities for impromptu conversations both in our workshops and the social breaks in between. Within our cadre of 45, there are innumerable subsets and combinations for collaboration. I invite you to drop your inhibitions, take your intellectual shoes off, let your academic hair down, and approach one another as friends. Reach out in a cordial and receptive way, particularly to those who you don’t know yet or whose expertise lays elsewhere. Be curious and inclusive. Share yourself. There’s no hierarchy here, not a whole lot of structure, no one who doesn’t belong, and no one who doesn’t have something worthwhile to contribute.
Look around you. The people in this room are extraordinary. They embody the current state of music cognition as a field. You’re intelligent, talented, and interesting. Starting now until Monday afternoon, we’re going to all be together in intense interaction in close quarters. We’ll become a band of musicological brothers and sisters in a posture of monastic retreat, cloistered within the walls of an historic conservatory in Manhattan, the Lenape island of many hills, and the birthplace of the kosher pickle.

This cognitive congress is a landmark in the emergence of a rapidly changing and revolutionary field of study. It’s a knock on the doors of our profession that bold new ways of thinking are in the air. The linguistic turn has taken a cognitive twist. You are on the frontline of this revolution, imparting greater stature to your own cause through our collective endeavor.

There hasn’t been a Mannes Institute about something this shiny since we took on transformational theory back in 2003. That was as cutting edge then as this is now. Leonard Meyer is our patron saint today, as David Lewin was back then. But while there’s something fresh about cognition, there’s also something fairly old about it too. In fact, if I were to supplement our six brilliant workshops, I’d suggest one on the history of cognition itself. Either that, or the role of cognitive studies in sleep inducement.

Aside from its familiar 19th- and early 20th-century Germanic roots, see Ebbinghaus, et al., how about that overlooked classic of Renaissance psychology, Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* back in 1621? “We can understand all things by the mind,” Burton surmised, “but what she is, we can’t apprehend.” Or even better, what about Montaigne, who declared, “I am myself the matter of my book,” and created the personal essay as a map of his own mind. And if we bracket out methodology, the study of cognition dates all the way back to Aristotle, or perhaps even Homer. Name me a greater study of the human mind than the *Iliad* twenty-four centuries before *Hamlet*.

Anyway, before these heady proceedings get too far out of hand into realms I’m an entire encyclopedia behind the rest of you, to quote Charles Lamb, let me do what I can and point out as a former student of jurisprudence a few interesting connections between music, cognition, and law. I apologize for this and other digressions, but if I didn’t write this speech, my entire time would be devoted to hotel reservations, disgruntled applicants, audiovisual snafus, and cream cheese.

The law has a lot to do with cognition. One of the articles Bob assigned for his workshop says, “imagine that a rat is frozen during its travels.” Having practiced law for 17 years, this wasn’t hard for me to do. Now as you may know, the Greek word for melody, *nomos*, also means law. It’s related to *noumenon*, or that which is conceived, as opposed to *phenomenon*, that which is perceived, and in turn with *nous*, Greek for the mind itself.

This etymology suggests a nexus between music and the cognitive function of law, as a means of structuring and shaping reality. *Nomos* simultaneously connotes both a musical practice and a social practice imparting rational form to inchoate phenomenal reality. Music and law are thus parallel manifestations of the configurative propensities of the human mind. The law-like operations of cognition define the categorical structure of music and society as well. Both music and law, to borrow Emerson’s description of nature, are metaphors of the human mind.
The English word law is of Viking origin, entering Old English from Old Norse around 1000 A.D. as *lahg*, or something laid down, just like a log or piece of wood as a boundary marker between two adjacent fields of property. I don’t need to tell you that boundaries play a crucial role of demarcation in the chucking of perceptual data. To perceive something is to establish borders or divisions that differentiate it from something next door.

The common expression “to lay down the law” implies this same creation of boundaries to impart cognitive meaning and social stability in the world of law. The German word for law, *Gesetz*, also means that which is put or set down, paralleling an associated English derivation of law from lay. The Greek word for law, *dike*, carries the same connotation of a marker of boundaries, as Kant put it, distinguishing what is mine from what is thine.

Law then, both as explicit legislation and implicit norms of conduct, constitutes a boundaried grid or cognitive blueprint for the collective chucking of our reciprocal rights, duties, and expectations into shared social schemas, or schemata per Frederic Bartlett. A sophisticated conception of law recognizes that it retains the latitude of a system of constraints that preserve, indeed safeguard, individual liberty of flexible navigation, nuanced interpretation, and autonomous decision-making within its structural frame.

Now you can’t come to Mannes without encountering Schenker. Can’t be done. He’s the elephant at the door around here, so I might as well lead him into the ring. This juridical notion of structured freedom *Stufen* that I’m describing resonates in the musical synthesis between and prolongation in Schenkerian analysis. Schenker studied law at a time when blazing a special German path or *Sonderweg* between democracy and autocracy was a central jurisprudential theme. Schenker’s notes are actual law-abiding citizens within a tonal society, a meritocracy governed by a jurisprudence of musical behavior. The pillars of the Ursatz function as intermittent boundaries of legal structure and formal differentiation, demarking prolongational fields of contrapuntal freedom within a larger constitutional harmonic framework.

Just as music is a microcosm of schematic expectation and a cognitive map of aural reality, law is a macrocosm of schematic expectation and a cognitive map of social reality. As music is a grammar that structures time, law is a grammar that structures space. They mirror one other, as Schenker himself observed, as conceptual fractals on parallel Schichten manifesting recurrent categories of the mind.

Now in addition to these jurisprudential dimensions, cognition has obvious anthropological ones as well. We’re talking about people in societies, not brains in a bowl. However physiological, cognitive functions are necessarily filtered though the refractory lens of a particular culture. Borrowing Stephen Tyler’s definition, cultures are themselves cognitive organizations of material phenomena.

I’d like to briefly share two anecdotes Morton Feldman told me, or I think he told me, over 30 years ago. If cognition stakes out the musically normative, then as Bob Snyder might agree, Feldman is the Che Guevara of cognition. You all know his music, or anti-music if you must, but just how it fits into your schema of schemas is a question I’ll defer. I’ll presume he basically falls into your memory sabotage, nuance overload, anti-categorical category. In any
event, Feldman once told a story about Claude Levi-Strauss, illustrating the cultural relativity of music that he evidently felt justified his own promiscuous aesthetic license.

Levi-Strauss apparently went to some remote island in the Pacific, sat a half-naked native down on a rock, and played a Beethoven symphony on a concealed tape recorder. When he asked the native what he thought of it, the guy replied, “thought about what?” The point is he didn’t even hear the music as organized, meaningful sound. I guess he didn’t even hear it as noise. I’ve never been able to verify Feldman’s report in an original source, but you get the drift. What we call normal, biological, or cognitive doesn’t necessarily mean absolute, or more importantly, aesthetic. That’s what Meyer calls that the error of universalism. We’re dealing in cognitive constraints, not commands, and even those can be stretched or broken. As Lenny cautioned, “some of the greatest music is great precisely because the composer hasn’t feared to let his music tremble on the brink of chaos.”

The other Feldman story’s a little more graphic. Morty—that’s what we called him—was strolling through a garden on a hot summer day when someone criticized him for violating the natural laws of music. Feldman said nothing. A few minutes later, he reached out, grabbed a beautiful butterfly, admired it for a second, and then smashed the bug on his leg. “That’s what I think of nature!” he yelled. So music and biology may be antithetical. As Woody Allen put it, “I am two with nature.”

What’s new about music cognition, of course, is its methodology. It’s a paradigm shift from the traditional business of music theory. And there’s the connection with the Institute. Our methodology is new too. The Institute represents a similar paradigm shift within our profession away from traditional modes of scholarship. We’re more participatory and less formal, more candid and less programmatic. We’re more personal, more penetrating, and frankly, more fun. We roll up our sleeves and consider things in depth. We’re more spontaneous than structured, and more about process than results. We’re improvisational rather than compositional. Mannes is a safe haven where we can drop our titles become students once again.

Our job as scholars is to think, but the cognitive process of thinking, our intuitions and embryonic conceptions, have little place in our professional conduct. The rich shadows of speculation are rarely cast in our finished products. We’re not allowed to feel our way, hover on the borderland of truth, or wander in the maze of a probable argument. Conventional scholarly discourse is more orthodox—there’s little room for doubt.

Here we have a different agenda. The Institute offers a site for the construction and deconstruction of paradigms, and a locus for active self-critique. Polished arguments and nascent hypotheses confront and cross-fertilize each another. We plant seeds to bear the fruit of further research. We’ve come together to teach each other socratically. Each of you is here not just to take, but also to give. Our ideas are subjected to instant scrutiny and supplementation, tested and improved in the crucible of collaboration. Ours is not a solitary endeavor. It’s too easy, as someone said of Emerson, to be a sage in one’s own study.

Let me get a little bolder now and say straight up what I think is missing in our regular conferences. I know we’ve got 3 incumbent SMT presidents on board. The sitting one is coming unfashionably late and will be dealt with accordingly. I even spot a few AMS card carriers as
well. I’m glad you’re all here and I won’t pull any punches. Now I realize these big organizations and this humble Institute serve different functions. If they’re our gatherings of rank and file—and we need that too—then you folks are the equivalent of Navy seals. And please don’t get me wrong. I’ll party on with the best of you in Montreal, just like Washington Irving, who said, “those who drink beer, think beer.”

But I’m not talking about that here. I’m addressing the subjective experience and intellectual return on paper presentations. You know, where we take turns standing up in front of the class and recite our homework, word for word, bookended by an abstract and a few token questions. I don’t want to overstate my case, as some claim I’m prone to do, but what’s missing at these horse and pony shows is dialogue. The speakers, or shall I say readers, are all soloists. The logistics are staged, and a bit too heroic.

Papers are soliloquies. We converse with no one, and encounter no otherness. No interlocutor intrudes on the insularity of our conception or experience. The platform is too static and the format too fragmented. There’s no sustained debate or discourse, no thread of continuity, and no instruction or interaction. The conference paper rarely hints or suggests anything, but to pickpocket Charles Lamb again, it unloads its cargo in perfect order. Surmises, misgivings, detours, and blind alleys have no place in its vocabulary. It claims, or at least pretends, that everything is perfectly clear, impeccably worked out long ago. It’s distilled as a narrative, bolstered with evidentiary diagrams, its argument unassailable, purged of soggy patches, illicit inferences, and tenuous connections.

Imitating its rich uncle, the journal article, the conference paper comes dressed in jacket and tie, clicks open its briefcase, pulls out a typed manuscript, and speaks authoritatively in an oratorical voice, rather than casually in a conversational one. All in all, it just sounds like read writing, a trial run for a hopefully expanded publication in the chart-infested pages of some weighty tome on a librarian’s shelf.

These are generally delivered in a ploddingly dull tone, eyes downcast without vocal cadence, at a hasty reading pace rather than a slower listening one. The spectators consist of a shotgun scatter of colleagues inattentively rifling through your handout, probably in search of a mistake, many of whom you don’t know and don’t want to meet. These ritual incantations often take on a trance-like quality, reenacting some professional rite of passage that we collectively endure, out of inertia, indifference, or mutual respect, at least long enough to get us through to the plush buffets we surreptitiously crash upon parole.

Once the recitation is complete, the liturgical response intoned from the chair is a benedictory “thank you, X, for that most interesting presentation,” followed then by a chorus of perfunctory amens posing as questions, to create the illusion of denominational belief through feigned audience participation. There’re a number of recurrent schemata here, although not, Bob, of Italian extract.

For instance, there’s the didactic schema, pedantically suggesting some plausible avenue of research about something you most likely ignored because you weren’t interested in it in the first place. Next there’s the waste of time schema, from someone who has absolutely no idea what they’re talking about, but figures it’s worth a long shot to at least stand up in front of their
peers and just pretend. We all know the pseudo schema, inevitably launched by someone, usually junior, seeking to demonstrate their own clever acuity by delivering a brilliant speech disguised as a question. You might also encounter the grumpy landlord schema from someone, most often senior, who has proprietary worries that you’re trespassing to close to their theoretical tenement, and deserve a cautionary shot across the bow.

Finally, if you’re lucky, you just might come away with one modestly useful tidbit to incorporate into your revision, if you ever get around to it, so it won’t be a total wash. On the other hand, you’re just as likely to elicit no comments or questions at all. Then your only satisfaction comes when the blister of indifference at best, irrelevance at worst, lanced only by the momentary pity of the panel chair, finally bursts and you can graciously sit down again.

In the end though, none of this really matters. The show goes on, and before you know it, the next reader’s up there muttering their own script on a totally unrelated topic with a entirely new set of formulas and acronyms we’re all expected to somehow learn, use, and teach all over again. After a few minutes, no one can remember what you said anyway. Your pile of handouts in the rear of the room become instant pieces of musicological archaeology, relics for vandals to plunder, before they’re sacked and burned by the hotel porter ten stories below.

But, hey, during those 15 minutes of fame, who cares? You own the stage. Besides, your lecture comes with scholarly guarantees and a seal of approval by the program committee. Another notch in the old resume. Oh sure, there’ll be a few good talks to twitter about later, but even those are enshrined and embalmed with collegial eulogies, like impressive, brilliant, or something else that smacks of performativity rather than persuasion.

Sorry, my friends, to quote McCain, but for me our conferences are at best diversions, and at worst, alienating, anachronistic, and downright lonely. Durkheim would have a field day. As intellectual experiences for the most part they are, alas, unwieldy, unfocused, unsatisfying, and quite unfashionable. They’re the intellectual equivalent of Walmart’s or street fairs, sort of busy-fun, but glutted with too many kids and too many fruit stands to do some serious shopping.

Call me elitist or just romantic, but I’m looking for an intimate coffee house, a quiet tavern, or maybe a country inn, some vestige of an earlier, simpler age, where I where I can sit serenely, warmed by the fire of friends, savor ideas, and converse with cognoscenti. I’m searching for a more congenial court to serve and return the volley of playful disputation. Like Rip Van Winkle, I long for what Washington Irving called “a kind of perpetual club of the sages, philosophers, and other idle personages of the village.” Well, this Institute is what I managed to come up with, and I built it myself.

The modern format of a soloist unilaterally spewing predigested verities from the pulpit above to a passive audience of patient receptors silently below has become a rather musty mode of scholarly communication. Here we’re more postmodern in that sense, and paradoxically more ancient, and hence more contemporary. At Mannes we’re busy throwing pots, not polishing well-wrought urns. Our trade is thought in process, the narrative of thinking, thinking in its unfolding, rather than the finished products of thought. We deal in discussion not pontification, in dialogues rather than declamations. Our workshops are suggestive rather than comprehensive. They’re pluralistically filled with hints, glimpses, and germs of imagination.
Our mutual discoveries are imparted as they extemporaneously arise, without codification into scripts or waiting full development. Like Socrates himself, we rarely speak with certitude. Our focus is on what Montesquieu called “man thinking” as opposed to “man writing,” and on what Alain portrays as the “dance of thoughts.” Our conversations are open-ended and open-minded. Ideas are immediately greeted by their own refraction through the spectrum of the group. We can test drive a theory and look an assumption in the eye. We get along just fine not reaching a definitive conclusion. As was said of La Rouchefoucauld, if you’ll pardon my French, we ply the aesthetics of the unfinished. We’re concerned, in short, with the cognition of cognition itself.

Here at Mannes we discover ideas out loud and try them on for size. We’re into sharing rather than showing, teaching instead of telling. Our reflections are less premeditated, and more the spontaneous reaction to circumstance. Our discussions gradually evolve through accrementition (that was on the spelling bee). We allow ourselves the luxury to browse, thumb through things, and propose possibilities. We pass from one comment to another like food at a picnic. We afford ourselves the leisure to stroll and discover. Like superannuated men and women, we “walk about, not to and from.”

Even our term “workshop” announces “work in progress here, hardhats required.” This is work, not a product, and it’s a shop, not a stage. We’re a verb not a noun; a kitchen, not a restaurant; a carpenter bench, not a furniture store. Our discussions aren’t rehearsed soliloquies before an audience of spectators, but messy family affairs, like some pot roast dinner around a big kitchen table, with overlapping thoughts, simultaneous sidebars, detours and dead ends, retractions and digressions, jokes and interrupts, misunderstandings and the frustration of dangling threads. Our food and drink, books and scores, papers and pens are all scattered about, just like our own desks at home.

So here’s what I propose. Let’s drop our pretenses and protocols, and get more real. Let’s walk up and introduce ourselves, teach ourselves, and learn from ourselves. Let’s toss ideas around, have a wastebasket handy, and not mind using it. Let’s not get miffed by being questioned or challenged, or try to impress each other, or pretend we’re always right. Let’s forget about our ranks and resumes, and just be ourselves. Here’s a relevant quotation I came across from an essay on talk and talking by Robert Louis Stevenson. “Talk is fluid, tentative, and continually in further search and progress, while written words remain fixed, become idols even to the writer, found wooden dogmatisms, and preserve flies of obvious error in the amber of the truth. In talk a jest intervenes, the solemn humbug is dissolved in laughter, and speech runs forth out of the grooves into the open fields of nature. Conclusions are not often reached by talk any more than by private thinking. The profit is in the exercise, and above all, the experience.”

“The sense of joint discovery is nonetheless giddy and inspiring. We mustn’t be pontiffs holding doctrine, but huntsmen questing after elements of truth. Neither must we be students to be instructed, but fellow teachers with whom each may wrangle and agree on equal terms. We must reach some solution, some shadow of consent, for without that, eager talk becomes a torture. But we don’t wish to reach it cheaply or quickly, or without the pleasures of tussle and effort. True talk comes only with the brethren of our spirits. It’s a thing to relish with all our energy, while we still have it, and to be grateful for forever.”
Now the Institute only has a few actual guidelines, and as I recently discovered these the same as Jurgen Habermas’ rules of ethical discourse. His first rule is that everyone’s allowed to take part. Here we’ll crank that up a notch so that everyone’s not only allowed to participate, but expected to do so. Try not to just sit back here and soak it all in. Our modality is one of active engagement not passive observation, with a premium on participation.

Each of us has not only the right to listen, but also the responsibility to talk, whether it’s an insight or a question. So if you came here expecting to fly low under the radar, because you either are or think you are unschooled, unprepared, unacquainted, uncertain, unwilling, or whatever else may be holding you back from jumping into the fray, please leave that strategy at the door, put on an apron, come on into the kitchen, and pick up a spoon like the rest of us.

Habermas’ second rule of discourse is that any idea may be examined and questioned. Nothing’s automatically immune from critical evaluation here. No one should be so devoted to some sacred cow, even one they’ve nurtured from a calf, that they’re unwilling to appraise it at current market value. As Stevenson says, we’re not clergy preaching gospel, but inquisitors of truth. The scrutiny of our peers can be intimidating, but it’s in good faith, it’s why we’re here, and it shouldn’t evoke unwarranted pride or defensiveness. Please don’t be so overly enamored with a particular thought that you can no longer continue to think. We’ve all come here to learn from each other, and from our experts above all. But let’s not be preaching to the choir. There’s a healthy diversity of perspectives here, and our discussions should exploit rather than suppress that pluralism. There’s also a helluva lot of brainpower on tap. We want to maximize our cognitive capacity in a constructive and challenging way.

Habermas’ third rule of discourse is that any new idea can be tossed into the mix. As long as you’re sincere, there’s no prohibited assertions and no dogmas to offend. We all bring different backgrounds and that’s exactly what we want. If you didn’t belong here, you wouldn’t be here. So be prudent, but don’t censor yourself or think what you have to add is irrelevant. The Institute works through the cumulative effect of conversation. The dynamism the group and its best ideas are discovered through an incremental process of trial and error, by thinking and speaking aloud. One could argue along with Kleist, who wrote on the gradual fabrication of thoughts while speaking, that speech itself often creates thoughts rather than vice versa. If some ideas are censored, we’re less likely to generate much that’s new. Let’s stick with the First Amendment. As long as no one cries fire, anything goes.

These guidelines need to be complemented by a sense of group solidarity and ethical conduct. This means unflagging sensitivity to our 6 distinguished faculty members, to all of our fellow participants, and to the overall mission and spirit of Institute itself. In terms of me, I’m used to insensitivity. Our communication requires a degree of debate, dialogue, and airing of differences. But we must always do this in a mutually respectful way. I find the study of cognition has a humanizing impact on music theory by focusing more on the human listener rather than the inanimate score, on the subject instead of the object. Likewise in our own deliberations, we have a golden rule of discourse. There’s etiquette of interaction. Holding the attitude of the other, as Meyer says, will foster a we-perspective that gradually displaces the I-perspective each of us brings to the table. Eventually we’ll merge into a thinking whole, a single mind with multiple voices, or what Habermas calls a discursive democracy collaborating as one.
Here’s the caveat: the task before you is rigorous. This Institute is not a stroll in Central Park or a vacation in the Big Apple. If you don’t know by now, it’s hard work. You’ve signed onto a cognitive chain gang. I’m summoning you to be front and center, body and soul, at all our events, both cognitive and social. We’re here to think together and play together. Unless so stated, nothing is optional, except perhaps sleep—and only then with proper medical authorization, or at least a note from home.

The pace and intensity here at the Mannes compound, for which in certain left-wing quarters, hotbeds like Chicago and NYU, or perhaps our slumbering neighbor to the north, where I’m covertly maligned as a musicological Dick Cheney (or is it Lon Cheney?), well this necessary rigor will inevitably induce scholarly fatigue, a sort of dizziness that Derrida calls intellectual vertigo. This is good. By eroding our resistance, we’ll lower our barriers, bond with comrades, and loosen our certitude in habit-forming and habitual habits of thought. You’ll become exhausted, yet exhilarated. And if you work particularly hard, you may even experience a kind of euphoria, a conceptual brainwashing, or at least a good bath, all as a predicate for reflection and reconstruction in the recovery room at home. You come to Mannes as well-researched recruits—you’ll leave as musical marines.

The profit, as Stevenson says, is in the exercise, and above all, the experience. Once this is over, you’ll carry away a backpack of ideas, but also an indelible memory of achievement, of having been through something demanding yet worthwhile, and of having done it together. You’ll earn your badges, your pins, and your discharge diploma—and be proud of them.

So in conclusion, I detect to your relief, what is the Mannes Institute? It’s both a physical place and a conceptual space. It’s a nursery for reflections, a theatre of interaction, where we think aloud and build camaraderie in a deeper and more meaningful way. It’s a musical think tank of postmodern pluralism, trading the narrative of monologue for the give and take of dialogue. It’s an activity of imagination, a transformation in communication, and a humanistic mode of noncompetitive scholarship. If SMT versus AMS are the national conventions of our two major musical parties, electing presidents, vice presidents, and executive boards, with staged floorshows of prepackaged speeches to hotel halls of delegates, then we at Mannes are a nonpartisan town hall meeting of good musical friends and neighbors.

As scholars secluded in our studies, entrenched in our teaching, chained to our committees, immersed in our families, what opportunities do these 4 special days present? Now, I would say is our time for ourselves, and our chance to think together. Now is our time to teach not just our students, but each other too. Now is our time to take stock of our field, assess where it is, and consider where it ought to go. Now is our time to ask questions without answers, and suggest answers yet to be tested. Now is our time to be Ricouer’s masters of suspicion, and examine our own assumptions of thought. Now is our time to welcome fresh views from colleagues, to cherish the diversity of multiple perspectives, and celebrate the richness of who we are.

You’ve done a lot of work, come a long way, and you’re finally here. As ship’s captain, about to join the crew, I’m inviting you now to grasp our mission, seize this moment, and maximize its meaning. I’m asking you to come together as a community of scholars, a team of thinkers, and a cadre of cognitivists. Welcome to Mannes, and to your Institute, as much as mine,
on Music and the Mind. For these next few days, let’s take down our fences, and yoke ourselves more closely to one another in a fraternity of discourse, so we may come to think and feel as one. Only then can we emerge, in sweet anticipation, our own cognition revitalized, through a genuine meeting of the minds.

Now let’s get busy.

**PERSONAL INTRODUCTIONS**

An innovative program like the Institute couldn’t exist without a creative institution to provide it a home. And that institution in turn couldn’t exist without a leader with a sense of purpose and vision. We’re lucky to have someone like this at Mannes, and in our profession. So please let introduce my boss, my colleague, and my good friend, our Dean of Mannes, Joel Lester, who’ll present our musical performance.

Before I turn this over to Bob Gjerdingen, who’ll introduce Gene Narmour, our special guest, I’d just like to share briefly a parable of how I came to know Gene.

I’m a Schenkerian by birth. During my baptism by Cardinal Schachter and Bishop Burkhardt many years ago, I stumbled upon Gene’s heretical tract, *Beyond Schenkerism*. I was like a young churchman clutching Copernicus, staring into the sun. The book singed my eyes, yet I simply couldn’t turn away. I will deny any repetition of this at Mannes, but I was enamored by Narmour. I surreptitiously wrote its courageous author a cryptic note in private admiration. Not necessarily because I believed him—I didn’t know what I believed—but rather for his brilliant iconoclasm.

And then, my prolonged period of Ursatzian indoctrination began. I renounced the temptation of heresies and Pharisees, and began my Anstieg to structural salvation. I transcribed the Scrolls of Oster—and chanted the Psalms of Salzer. I studied the *Five Line* of the Heinrichian *Pentateuch*—and prophetic book of Yonas and the whale—or was it a big fish? I pilgrimed to the Ringstrasse—and the Lower East Side. I davened with Rothstein—and sedered with Burstein. I received communion from Padre Samarotto—and disputed the blasphemous Tymoczko. My soul was purged through reduction.

After years of ritual incantation and flagellation, I eventually donned the robe and entered Our Sacred Shrine of The Holy Kopfton, as you see me standing humbly before you here today. I delivered the geocentric good news to others. The name of Narmour did not pass my lips. My early epistle of infidelity remained hidden in the musical closet as a youthful indiscretion, atoned through an abundance of good papers and faith alone. I’m only now disclosing its skeletal remains to you, in confidence and trepidation, within the confines of these hallowed walls.

It was finally several years later, actually last spring, that I came face to face with the man who had rocked my world with his analytic heliocentrism. And that, in a most beautiful way, was at the funeral of Lenny Meyer. I was honored to be there and celebrate one of the most revolutionary musical thinkers of our time, a man I had never met, who just passed away.
But I will confess, I was more honored to meet another equally revolutionary thinker, my musical Copernicus, who is very much alive—and more so, to be privileged to invite him as our special emissary of honor—to this Institute, in this sanctuary, to preach of unutterable dualisms, and enlighten us, even further today.

**Jokes**

I’m sorry the session last night went on too long. I guess I was sleeping at the wheel. I got lost in thought, and it was unfamiliar territory.

But I just couldn’t cut Gene off. Near the end there, where he had those tiny print, medieval charts of the universe, I think he succumbed to that old adage, if you can’t convince them, confuse them.

I was looking around at everyone last night during that thunderstorm and I noticed that you all were wearing short sleeves. I concluded it’s because we have the right to bare arms.

The first day of the Institute took a lot out of me. I hate to admit this, but I went home an tried sniffing some coke. But the ice cubes got stuck in my nose.

**Closing Speech**

Appreciation to our faculty: David, Larry, Eric, Bob, Fred, and Betsy. Appreciation to Troy Etter. Appreciation to Joel and Mannes. Appreciation to members.

The 2010 Mannes Institute is on the Aesthetics of Music, and will be hosted by the University of Chicago. Our distinguished faculty will be chaired by Alex Rehding and Berthold Hoeckner, along with Fred Maus, Daniel Chua, and three others who are here, Susan McClary, Steve Rings, and Martin Scherzinger, plus Lawrence Kramer as special guest. The following year, 2011, we’ll be back in New York celebrating a decade of the Mannes Institute with a special program on the State of the Discipline. I’m working to convene at the elegant Morgan Library and Museum, with an opportunity to inspect its extraordinary collection of original music manuscripts.

After that everything’s up in the air. There’re a number of options. We’re constantly in need of new topics with broad professional appeal and a core faculty that can attract others. One idea might be to downsize to get a little leaner and meaner, with maybe 4 workshops instead of 6, and 30 participants instead of 45. This way we could hone in on more specialized topics. Another idea might be to go to every other year so that people stop taking this for granted.

One colleague even suggested I call it a day and just quit while I’m ahead. A lot depends, of course, on what happens with me personally. As you can imagine, with the notoriety of the Institute, I constantly receive several speaking engagements and offers of employment. Not to toot my own horn, but later this month I’ve been asked to speak to the women’s auxiliary pancake lunch at my temple on “Schenker, Cognition, and God.” And next month I’m lecturing...
at the Kalamazoo Fireman’s Annual Pig Roast on “Music Theory and Fire.” On a more long-term basis, which would require a sabbatical from Mannes, which they don’t give, I’ve been invited to organize and run a rehab center for swine flu patients and cartel lords in Tijuana.

David Huron over there tells me that the basis of humor is fear. It’s the fear that no one will laugh at your jokes. Well, finally, I guess this is as good a time as any to announce that a major university has offered to commit serious funding to the Institute, which would completely cover the annual costs of all members’ transportation, hotel, and food costs. Unfortunately, the location is quite far away and inaccessible, so I don’t think any of you would really want to go there—Hawaii.

Just as a final matter of housekeeping, I trust you noticed at some point that I put a personal card addressed each of you inside your conference materials. I’d like to think you read it. What I’m asking is that everyone, faculty included, please send me a letter on your university letterhead, preferably a hard copy—I’ll accept pdf with letterhead, but not an email—explaining what these past 4 days meant to you personally and professionally, as well as your larger thoughts about the Institute’s mission and its role in our field. I’m also asking that you do this within a week or two at most, while the coals are still hot and our short-term memories in tact. The longer you wait as the summer proceeds, the less it will mean to you, and the less I’m afraid your letter will mean to me too.

Now I’m not asking for just a polite thank you note, though that’s nice to get too. I’m not asking for some superficial platitudes for promotional purposes either. We don’t need that. In fact, that’s the exact opposite of what I’m looking for. I’ve tried to create a meaningful personal experience for all of you here. It took a huge amount of work, care, and money. Now I’m asking each of you in return for a timely and genuine expression of how you reacted, and what it’s making you think and feel right now. This will also give you a chance to formulate your own thoughts about the significance of this experience. Since the Institute began in 2001, I’ve collected over 350 of these personal letters from people representing schools around the globe. I say this no matter where you teach, whether it’s the hippocampus or any other campus—rhino campus, crocodile . . .

Since all our deliberations are spontaneous and undocumented, other than the little guestbook most of you signed at my house, these letters are the only historical records of the Institute. So please do this one last thing and contribute to this archive as a favor to me without waiting too long. We’re all busy, I know, me too. But I don’t think I’m asking too much. I’d be grateful if you make this your final act of participation in the Institute.

As a segue, I’d like to share something I received in one of these letters from our insightful young colleague, Sumanth Gopinath at University of Minnesota, about the larger significance of this unusual gathering. He writes: “Abjuring the instrumental reason that characterizes the neoliberal academy today, the Mannes Institute is not merely a courageous intellectual project, one that benefits the field of music theory and indeed the entirety of music studies. It is also a political act.”

I agree with Sumanth. The Institute is a political critique of enshrined professional practices. It’s a vehicle of conscious collaborative learning that cuts against the increasing
rationalization of our academic institutions, in Max Weber’s sense of bureaucratic
depersonalization. At the same time, it cuts against the increasing democratization of our
scholarly conferences, in de Tocqueville’s sense of egalitarian mediocrification. The Institute
proposes a radically different conception of who we are and what we do, by combining the spirit
of collegiality with the rigor of excellence. We reject the corporatization of college and
conference by reviving more humanistic precedents in the Platonic Academy, the Stoic porch,
the Florentine Camerata, the Parisian salon, and the London coffeehouse. We infuse the
professional with the personal, and return the ingredient of character to cognition. We ally
thinking more closely with being, and add to head, a little heart.

The Institute at Mannes is precisely intended to blur, or better, transcend, the traditional
boundaries between conventional schemata. This is what makes it different, and gives it its
political and moral edge. Sumanth quotes C. Wright Mills in describing the utopian nature of the
Institute’s humanistic agenda. Mills wrote in the sixties, in an era of greater idealism, in words,
however, that are equally applicable today. “What needs to be understood and changed,” Mills
said, “is not merely first this and then that detail of some institution or policy. What needs to be
analyzed is the structure of institutions and the foundation of policies. In this sense, both in its
criticism and in its proposals, our work is necessarily utopian.”

Yet our primary mission here is not political, but musical. We’ve gathered here to think
about music, to be precise, to think about thinking about music. We’re a think tank on thinking.
There’s something circular about cognitive studies, like a snake biting its own tail. We are what
we eat, and we are what we study. It’s a play within a play, suggesting infinite regression,
without as Archimedes said, a place to stand. I’m reminded of George Carlin’s Cartesian double
take, “I think, therefore I am . . . I think.” Yet as Emerson reminds us, the mind doesn’t create
what it perceives, any more than the eye creates the rose.

As we conclude, let’s think for just a moment beyond the cognitive effect of music, and
reflect upon the cognitive effect of the Institute itself. There’re schemas and exemplars afoot
here too. The Institute is its own subculture, a social schema of shared norms and expectations. It
has its own alchemy, and injects its own chemistry. Applying for admission to an exclusive
enterprise like this, and gathering in small groups of smart people, in an intimate conservatory in
a bustling metropolis, all have a cognitive valence of their own.

More significantly, sitting in round circles rather than rows, with open floor discussions,
communal meals and peer group interaction, nomenclature like “workshops” and “members,”
visual symbols like pins, badges and rosters, and the rituals of receptions and diploma
ceremonies, all trigger cognitive categories that shape our own process of expectation and
concept formation.

Together this cognitive input induces affirmative feelings of confirmation, achievement,
belonging, and a larger perception of the meaning and value of working cooperatively together.
It’s not just learning about cognition, but cognition about learning that will stick with us in the
afterglow. As this experience is internalized, it becomes a stored exemplar, a humanistic
archetype embedded in the long-term memory of our collective hippocampus—maintained in a
lab somewhere by Vicky Long and Bob Judd. In time it may exert a beneficial ethical and
perhaps utopian effect, a la Mills, upon our behavior and profession as a whole, and hopefully elevate how we treat our students and each other as colleagues as well.

The Institute is deliberately designed to bridge our isolation and the inevitable gaps that exist between us all. Our focus is on what Maurice Blanchot calls “plural speech,” and what Edward Hoagland calls “mind speaking to mind.” In this sense, our experience replicates the cognitive effect of rhythm described by the neurobiologist Walter Freeman. Freeman is less concerned about how we are all neurologically the same, and more about how we neurologically differ. He starts by postulating what he calls our “epistemological solipsism” or innate condition of solitude. As we age and become more individuated, our neural pathways become increasingly unique. Our brains grow progressively apart, because of the particularity of our experiences, selective learning, and the subjective knowledge we each thereby create. In a word, as we become ourselves, we become cognitively eccentric.

For human society and a communal reality to exist at all, this psychological gulf must somehow be bridged. Freeman contends that rhythm evolved as a social mechanism to span this interpersonal gap, by inducing a sense of barrier dissolution and oneness with others and the world around us. We hook up through the mutual act of synchronization, by singing, playing, and working together. The hypnotic effect of a steady beat alters the chemistry of our cortex just like alcohol, sex, or mystical practices, causing a release of oxytocin, creating an altered state of consciousness in which our normal sense of individuality dissolves. It lowers our boundaries, weakens our inhibitions, and promotes mutual sympathy, trust, and understanding.

Rhythm is social glue. We overcome our separation and achieve communion by acting together through a synchronous pulse. We become more receptive and attuned to one other, and to the group and its goals. By performing in unison we relieve our isolation and feel part of something larger than merely ourselves. We identify with each other and feel one with the school, the sports team, the nation, or the deity. It’s the synchrony of the beat that turns soloists into an ensemble, and the commonality of schemas that fosters communication through the recognition of style.

Music, in short, is audible liquor. It’s our antidote to autonomy, a tool discovered by our early ancestors as a natural means of barrier dissolution, originating through the evolution of brain chemistry to transcend our epistemological solitude. Its biological value lies less perhaps in prediction, and more in connection. The evolutionary leg up may be less psychological, and more sociological. Music is less about you or me, and more about us. It may not express our desire to anticipate as much as our need to communicate. By forging a sense of collaboration and allegiance with each other, music facilitates coherent collective action, the process of socialization, and the formation of human institutions. It affirms our existence by temporarily releasing us from the isolation that is otherwise a fundamental concomitant of consciousness, and of life itself.

Now I would argue that in its own modest way, the Institute they represent does exactly the same thing. I’m not perverse enough to equate what we’ve done together with sex, though after my sessions I occasionally felt the urge to smoke. A nice wine might be a better choice. I don’t know if any oxytocin flowed for any of you, but the steady rhythm of the Institute, the collective beat of the thing, has the impact, I feel, of at least a good chardonnay.
I have the same fuzzy sensation of boundary dissipation and ego dissolution, identifying and merging with something a little bigger than my own mind. I don’t know, until I read your letters, but maybe you too experienced some communal bridging of your own sense of isolation, through the synchrony of thinking together, in a way I miss at our regular conferences, at least before day’s end, when wine time actually begins.

As scholars, after all, we are by nature solitary beings. Our best ideas, and our most cherished and important ones, only visit when we, and they, are alone. And though I love this Institute for what it is, and value each of you as peers, I would never trade my intellectual privacy, my epistemological solipsism, for anything in the world. Our real workshops, as we all know, lie between our own two ears. That’s my sanctuary, as it’s surely yours.

But as thinkers who must ultimately think alone, in the solitary communion of music and mind, we need all the more a congenial and nurturing place to come up for air and compare notes. In this age of increasing economic and social instability, fraught with tension, when our own profession seems unsure of its path, within an academy threatened by institutional dehumanization, perhaps the Institute’s affirmation of camaraderie, excellence, and embodied engagement in an authentic community of inquiry may offer a small beam of sunlight, even after its magic, like the magic of music, transpires itself.

It’s this utopian vision of the Institute that makes it unique, no matter which subject matter we consider each year. As the author of Treasure Island says, the gold is buried in the experience, or maybe the adventure itself. X marks the spot. Our voyage was about cognition in more ways that one. We’re not just studying music and the mind, but music and our minds. It’s about our state of mind, and the collective consciousness of our field. It’s about us—our own selves.

And though being with you has convinced me that even artificial intelligence is better than being stupid, I’m still not sure I buy Marvin Minsky’s claim that minds—if by that he means us—are merely what brains do. After four days of thinking hard about minds, I’m still perplexed by the mystery of my own, let alone yours. I’m still mystified what make music meaningful, let alone great. And I’m still stuck in the mud with Virginia Woolf, who confesses, “My own brain is to me the most unaccountable of machinery—always buzzing, humming, soaring, roaring, diving—and then buried in mud.” And so I’m still wondering, along with Virginia, “Why? What is this passion for?”

As theorists we believe, or are taught, that there’s something more to music than music itself can inculcate. But it may be that we shall never know more about the mind than we already know by thinking, and our study of cognition teaches us only this—that we’re destined to live in awe of music, and of our own mind—and more we may not know. Nothing puzzles me more than how the mind works; yet nothing troubles me less. Psychologists can test this or tally that, but it’s the unquantifiable subjectivity of the mind, the unfathomable experience of consciousness, that intrigues me most. To give T.S. Eliot a twist, it’s the subjective correlate of cognition I wish to explore. It’s the journey in rather than out, the sense of I-ness rather than me-ness, where the magic lies. There’s a difference, after all, between having sex, and describing it.
And in the end, I’m more interested in experiencing music than examining it. I’m less invested in how it works, than how it feels. And nobody can quantify that. Maybe that’s why I prefer poetry to psychology, and Montaigne over Meyer. Maybe that’s why I write essays instead of articles, and believe in institutes more than conferences. Perhaps it’s why I’m not a marquis theorist, and why I teach in a small conservatory with a big staircase. Maybe so. Yet I’ll never forget when Carl Schachter told me, “I love Schenker, but I love Mozart more.” And how many of you know that Schenker once said, “where there’s no wonder, there can be no art?”

For me, it’s wondering about music, asking questions about something we love but can’t know, that this Institute is all about. As Charles Lamb said, it’s good to love the unknown. The love of the unknown, or maybe the unknowable, is why I do this. It’s also why I think we’re in our 9th year, and maybe why each of you, in your private way, has joined me too.

That’s the cognition of the Mannes Institute. The Institute’s a vessel. How you fill it is up to you. But it’s not just the quality of the wine. It’s the shape of the cup. It’s something we want to grasp and hold on to, even after we’ve consumed what’s inside. Lord knows, it’s not the Grail. I’m no Parsifal, and you’re no Holy Order. It’s just that I can’t find a better pub. Its worth can be measured by the homage of those who imitate it, by the words of those who praise it, and by the faces of those, like you, who drink with me and share it.

Diploma Ceremony


Next year in Chicago!