



Music Theory Lessons

Private, long-distance instruction in jazz & classical harmony

I teach jazz and classical harmony and composition to a small number of private, long-distance students. Instruction is one-on-one, and person-to-person – only the means of communication is long-distance. My students and I use video calling, email, and telephone to create intimate, one-on-one teacher-student relationships, that are surprisingly superior – in many ways – to on-site instruction. Because I limit my teaching to a small number of students, each student receives my complete attention and individual care.

Benefits of Long-Distance Instruction

Finding the right teacher

Depending on where you live, it may be difficult to find a teacher who specializes in harmony and composition – or whose teaching approach addresses your needs, goals and philosophy. Long-distance instruction answers those needs, *by bringing the right teacher to you.*

A permanent record of each lesson

Video and telephone lessons can easily be recorded, leaving you with a permanent record that can be replayed and studied at any time – as frequently as you wish. As text-based files, email lessons are naturally permanent; because they contain explanations, corrections, and illustrations that are specific to your individual studies, they become your own, unique textbook. They chronicle every step of your progress, and are always available for review and study.

☞ Check out *thinkingHarmony: conversations along the way*, for samples of student email lessons.

Flexible timetable

With zero travel time and the instant connectivity of current technologies, long-distance lessons are easily and quickly scheduled. Email lessons are even more flexible, allowing you to study when the time is right *for you* – whether that's first thing in the morning or the middle of the night.

Courses and lessons tailored to your unique needs

Successful teaching respects and addresses the differing experiences, training, and abilities that each student brings to his or her studies. I therefore begin each new teaching relationship with an in-depth 'interview', that covers the student's previous training and experience, explores his or her abilities, and identifies goals. We then discuss the specific steps necessary to achieve those goals, and plan a course of study particular to that student. My approach is the antithesis of the kind of one-size-fits-all instruction one can sometimes find on the internet and DVDs: not only is each lesson unique to the student, but so is the entire course of study.

How I Work

Harmony

For all harmony students, I use a combination of exercises in analysis and composition as a means of first developing awareness and then building practical skills – but the details of how we proceed depend a great deal on the skills, experience and requirements of the individual student.

Classical

For students with sufficient preparatory skills and experience, I like to use *Harmony & Voice Leading*, by Aldwell & Schachter, as a main text, with side-references to other texts as necessary. Widely used in university-level harmony courses, *Harmony & Voice Leading* is difficult, but I've found it to be far more thorough and reliable – and thus much kinder to the student's long-term progress – than other major harmony texts currently available.

- ☞ Google "*Harmony & Voice Leading Aldwell Schachter*" to learn more about this text. You can find its table of contents online, [here](#), at Amazon.com.
- ☞ Check out *thinkingHarmony: conversations along the way*, for an example of **email lessons involving Harmony & Voice Leading**.

For students requiring preparatory training, I use many of my own materials (which I give, free of charge, to my students) in combination with any of a number of widely available texts. Should the student's experience and aptitude require it, I may also *create* courses to address particular weaknesses (eg, a survey of chord progressions found in the student's favourite music, followed by their reduction to *root movement*, and the harmonic patterns made observable by that reduction).

- ☞ Check out *thinkingHarmony: conversations along the way*, for an example of **email lessons involving preparatory training**.

For more advanced students, and students interested in cross-referencing jazz harmony with classical harmony, I generally proceed from the specific to the general: we might, for instance, analyse a work of interest (be it from classical, romantic, Impressionist, or jazz repertoire), locate areas that require specific, in-depth exploration, and then devise a short- or long-term course of study to address that need.

- ☞ Check out *thinkingHarmony: conversations along the way*, for an example of **email lessons that discuss more advanced harmonic techniques**.

Jazz

Jazz is both the modern-day heir to the tonal harmony of classical, romantic and Impressionist traditions, and the master of its own intensely sophisticated harmonic language. That this language is relatively new — and ever-evolving — naturally means that it is less codified, and open to a wide and diverse number of theoretical perspectives.

While jazz musicians necessarily focus on chord-scale relationships, I believe that a solid grounding in harmony — one that spans both its roots in the classical heritage and its modern evolution -- is also important. This should include a study of longer-term harmonic relationships -- and the often very sophisticated techniques at work behind them.

Using actual leadsheets and recordings as a starting point, I learn how my student conceives of harmony. This helps me trace the student's previous training and experience, and identify areas that may need strengthening. We then discuss various ways of developing those strengths, and devise appropriate course plans. Those courses may involve texts (e.g., Mark Levine's *The Jazz Theory Book*), a possible review or tour of classical harmony (see *Classical*, above), or consist of chart analysis and discussion. If my student is already in fine shape, our tools will typically be the deep analysis of relevant tunes — via both recordings and leadsheets — followed by compositional exercises that seek to synthesize the new discoveries.

- ☞ Check out *thinkingHarmony: conversations along the way*, for an example of **email lessons involving jazz harmony**.
- ☞ Check out "*Giant Steps, Central Park West, and Modulatory Cycles*", and "*Danny Grissett: invention, design, and technique*", at the *Analyses* page of *thinkingMusic.ca*.

Necessary Gear

Here is the equipment and software required for each of the different lesson formats:

For Video Calling

- ☞ Webcam — either built-in (as in most laptops), or stand-alone. High quality webcams produce clearer, more reliable video and audio.
- ☞ Video calling software — *Skype, Google Voice and Video Chat*, etc., are free, and easy to use.
- ☞ A reliable, high-speed, internet connection.

For Phone Lessons

- ☞ Telephone, with headset, that is within reach of your musical instrument and computer.

For Email Lessons

- ☞ Scanner — so that you can scan and email:
 - your hand-written musical exercises/compositions (if you prefer to notate them manually)
 - charts/leadsheets, for study or comparison
 - textbook or article excerpts, for study or comparison
- ☞ Word Processing Program (eg, *Word*, or any *Word*-compatible program) — so that you can:
 - create, edit, and respond to email lessons. I normally write email lessons in *Word*, which easily accommodates text, hidden text, expandable font sizes, and images of all types. Students can easily edit incoming email lessons – to answer questions, correct musical exercises, and ask further questions – if they, too, have *Word*, or an application that accepts *Word* files (*Open Office Writer* can read and create *Word* files, and is downloadable, for free, [here](#)).
- ☞ Graphics Program — so that you can:
 - convert large-sized images to smaller formats. Email lessons can contain quite a few scanned musical illustrations and excerpts – all in the form of images. To keep the final email size light, it helps to convert any large-sized images to smaller file-types (eg, .gif, .png). Graphics programs like *Photoshop* do this easily.
 - edit incoming or outgoing image files: for example, I sometimes use a very simple graphics program – like *MS Paint* – to correct or add comments to students' exercises.

Optional Gear

The following is useful, but not essential:

- ☞ Music Notation Program (optional) — so that you can:
 - write your musical exercises and compositions without having to use music manuscript and scanner. (I actually find it faster and more convenient to use a pencil, music manuscript and a scanner, but many of my students do their work via music notation programs or the scoring features of sequencers/DAWs.) *Note*: You may still have to convert your notated score into an image file, in order to export it within an email lesson.
- ☞ Screen Capture Program (optional):
 - Screen capture programs afford one of the fastest and simplest ways of turning anything on your computer screen into an image – an image that you can then easily insert into an email lesson. Free screen capture programs can easily be found on the net.
- ☞ Digital Audio Recording/Editing Software (optional) — so that you can:
 - record, edit and email excerpts of specific tunes to be used for analysis, etc.

Lesson Frequency & Duration

While I'm open to the occasional ad hoc lesson, I prefer to work with students who are committed to hard work and a very active inter-relationship. The teacher-student relationship takes time and care, and I'm most interested in working with students who are keen to use the benefits of that relationship fully.

I usually spend one to two hours a week on each student's lessons, depending on the student's pace and requirements, and my own workload. However, each student's situation is unique, so let's talk. . .

About Me

I've been a professional musician for over forty years, as a performer (guitar and keyboards), arranger, composer, music consultant, and music educator.

I've been teaching music theory (rudiments, harmony, analysis and counterpoint), musicianship and composition for over twenty-five years -- mostly privately, but also at various institutions, seminars and workshops in Canada. (See [about Michael Leibson](#), for further details.)

Since the 1980's, I've also worked as a music consultant, acting as a forensic musicologist and music analyst/transcriber for many Canadian music publishers. The *Clients* and *References* pages, at my forensic musicology website, give details on some of the work I've done over the years.

My first loves are composing and thinking about music, and I do as much of both as I can. I get to think about music with my students, too, and I hope they also benefit from the exchange.

“I've known Michael Leibson for about twenty years, and can attest, without hesitation, that Michael is one of the finest musicians and is endowed with one of the keenest intellects I have ever known.”

— Dr. Alexander Rapoport, professor of composition,
University of Toronto, Canada

What My Students (and others) Have To Say. . .

“Michael, your emails are so clear, and your generosity in sharing your knowledge really strikes me. I guess that this generosity comes from your love of all good music, which I share. There is no teacher here with your qualifications for approaching harmony the way you have done in our emails. I would consider it a privilege if you were to accept me as a student.”

— Gustave M.
jazz pianist and classical composer, Lausanne, Switzerland

. . . Two years later:

To: justjazz@yahoogroups.com

“I have been following justjazz discussions for a good number of years. Yes, there are many excellent books and CD's at Aebersold's shop. The Berklee on-line courses are also helpful because they imply some feed-back, and lively communications with fellow students and an instructor. However the best experience I have had thus far in studying harmony is through an e-mail personalized course with one of the members of this group — Michael Leibson, who can be found at thinkingmusic.ca”

— Gustave M.
Lausanne, Switzerland

“I've been studying with Michael Leibson for five years now and he's taken me from almost zero musical education to being well ahead of the game in first year theory in a world-renowned jazz degree program. The things he has shown me have not only served as a theoretical basis but have also directed my understanding in all musical avenues and have inspired much creative thought.

“Having gone through several music teachers now, I find that Michael's approach is definitely the best. Before you start anything, he finds out exactly what it is that you know, what you don't know and what you want to know. The lessons are very detailed and you constantly get a sense that, in Michael, you are dealing with a tremendous wealth of musical knowledge, along with a lifetime of experience that keeps it alive and real. I never cease to be impressed with him.

“Michael and I have weekly lessons, which are conducted over the phone — we both set up with a phone at our instruments and computers. Everybody asks how such an arrangement could possibly work out, but it does! In fact, in some ways it's better than being in the same place physically: there are no distractions, we get a tremendous amount of work done, and I have complete access to everything I need.

“I highly recommend him to ANYBODY who wants to know ANYTHING about music.”

— Marty
jazz student, Toronto, Canada

“As owner and President of Victory Drive Music Inc., I've been scoring and producing music for film and television for over a decade, and have produced and arranged for many Canadian artists, including The Tea Party, Richard Underhill, Kim Stockwood, Jaymz Bee, Big Rude Jake, and many others.

“I first met Michael Leibson in the 1990's, when I studied music theory and composition with him. He was a great teacher — not only really knowledgeable about classical composition, but very hip about all kinds of music. He understood and appreciated where I was coming from (and where I wanted to go), and was able to present detailed compositional concepts and procedures in a clear way, in a context that was very meaningful to me, and relevant to the styles of music in which I was interested. He was very personable, articulate and helpful.

“I've stayed in touch with Michael, over the years, and I've yet to find anything in music that he either doesn't already know, or can't quickly grasp on a deep and detailed level. No matter what the style of music, Michael's musical knowledge and insight is very deep, and his analyses are rock solid.”

— Jono Grant

President, Victory Drive Music, Inc., Toronto, Canada

“Michael, your descriptive and musical analysis of Jobim's Wave is one of the best introductions to Jobim's “Music Magic”, in both the Geometry. . . AND . . . the Spirit. . . that I have read. Thanks!”

— Craig

jazz musician, Texas, U.S.A.

“I revived my interest in writing music late in life, and was fortunate to find Michael Leibson and study with him for about five years. Michael has an encyclopedic knowledge of musical composition and a sympathy for the needs of his students. The foundation he gave me enabled me to develop musically – I now arrange for a choral group and am writing a chamber opera.”

— Peter Morgan

composer, Canada

“Whenever I need a truly informed and insightful musical mind with whom to discuss aesthetic or technical matters, I get in touch with Michael Leibson.”

— Menon Dwarka

President, Director, School of Music, Harlem School of the Arts, New York, U.S.A.














I hope I can do the same for you.

Email me, at michael@thinkingmusic.ca, for further information.



Michael Leibson is a composer, music consultant, and music educator, who specializes in jazz and classical harmony.

Links:

-  [thinkingmusic.ca](#)
-  analyses
 -  [Giant Steps, Central Park West, and Modulatory Cycles](#)
 -  [Just Friends](#) - detailed harmonic analysis of John Klenner's jazz classic
 -  [Danny Grissett: invention, design, and technique](#)
-  [thinkingharmony](#)
 -  [Figured Bass – what it is, and how it works](#)
 -  [Common-tone Modulation](#)
 -  [Classical Harmony - using Aldwell & Schachter's *"Harmony and Voice Leading"*](#)
-  [Music Theory Lessons](#) - private, long-distance instruction in jazz & classical harmony
-  [Discussion page](#)
-  [About Michael Leibson](#)
-  [Contact Michael Leibson](#)

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