

Colloquium September 25, 2026
Daniel Chang, Dissertation Proposal Defense

Title: “The Generation of Imitative Counterpoint: An Algebraic Synthesis of Western and Russo-Soviet Theories of Polyphony”

Abstract:

Building upon Russo-Soviet music theory, this dissertation offers a comprehensive compendium of formalized contrapuntal procedures that can both generate and analyze a diverse array of polyphonic textures, including finite and infinite canons, vertical and horizontal shifting counterpoint, retrograde structures, mirror transformations, and complex polyphony of up to eight voices (including multi-canonic configurations). Furthermore, the framework accommodates late-medieval techniques from the *ars nova* and *ars subtilior* traditions, such as talea and color in isorhythmic compositions. The primary objective of this compendium is to establish the theoretical prerequisites for a non-brute-force computational model, which can be used to demonstrate several core theorems. Chapters 6 and 7 broaden the inquiry to address historical perspectives and analytical applications using the technical insights from previous chapters. Chapter 6 examines the historical transmission of contrapuntal methodologies over five centuries (1477–1939) to evaluate hypotheses formulated by Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg in *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (1753-54) and Sergei Taneyev in *Convertible Counterpoint* (1909), who both posited that sophisticated contrapuntal methods fell into disuse due to past esoteric traditions and oral transmission, resulting in a loss of technical ability in later generations. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with an analytical case study of Taneyev’s cantata *John of Damascus* alongside large polyphonic works by J. S. Bach in order to demonstrate how technical and stylistic constraints dictate the limits of fugal composition within tonal paradigms.