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Preface

The manner in which music theory has been traditionally taught is now in a state of flux. Originally, the study of music theory was designed to acquaint the music student or knowledgeable amateur with the composer's working materials in "Classical" music roughly spanning the 17th- through the 19th Centuries.

The role of music theory has expanded far beyond this mandate: theory training now incorporates greater or lesser explanations of music after 1900, music before 1600, idiomatic Jazz practices, elements of World Music, and Popular Song idioms.

Such an expansion of means and methods in learning and teaching the fundamental language of music presents a formidable and almost daunting challenge: what to teach, how to teach it, and in what sequence?

Additionally, music theory has become a favored required Arts elective in College and University curricula, and most music programs have a developmental music theory class to address the needs of under-prepared music majors. Often, music theory is required companion material for private instruction as well.

This textbook seeks to address these multiple needs: to serve as a basic to moderate text for the typical fundamentals of music course and to serve as an introductory text for those interested in acquiring a rudimentary knowledge of the language of music.

The text also provides supplemental information, such as chord symbolization, aspects of Jazz harmony, vernacular song form and its attributes, and so on. Usually when this material is added to existing texts, it is incomplete and delivered in a manner that reflects only limited real-world experience.

This author is fortunate to have had extensive experience as a teacher of music theory at the college and university level, as a teacher of AP music theory in an Arts Magnet high school, as a teacher of the Jazz idiom, as a practicing Classical and Jazz musician, and as a composer in many styles.

Therefore the scope of this text is to:

- Provide clear and concise explanations regarding the basic language of music;
- Address appropriate subject matter for use by the instructor of college-level introductory/developmental theory courses, as well as typical Music Theory I courses;
- Add other relevant information, usually acquired informally by the student outside the classroom;
- Support each learning objective or skill set with reinforcement in the form of exercises;
- Prepare the student for a continuing study of music theory at intermediate to advanced levels.

The format of the text and its scope will easily adapt itself to any of these circumstances for the instructor or for the student. The modular approach and the complete flexibility in terms of the online access and individualized customization enhance the facility with which the text may be employed.

For example, a typical Fundamentals class may not require an examination of the SATB style and part-writing procedures. In contrast, these would be critical skills for a Music Theory I course. The Instructor can freely choose what material suits a given need without resorting to an additional text. The multiple methods of access, electronically and in print, offer both instructor and student an elastic approach to the subject matter.

Introduction

A Definition of Music

In its broadest possible sense, music is defined as “organized sound.” This open-ended and safe definition is coherent regardless of era, style, culture, or the mechanics of musical organization. Each successive historical era produces musically artistic expressions of its own time, its own musical aura. The study of Music Theory is the means by which we investigate this.

A Definition of Music Theory

Music Theory is the study of music and its organizational characteristics. We define and examine aspects of music:

- How do we perceive music aurally?
- How do we experience music aesthetically and?
- How do we symbolize music visually?

We learn to associate sound with symbol (or notation), so to increase our ability to perceive music at levels of increasing depth and comprehension, both experientially and analytically.

The Purpose of Music Theory

The study of the language of music yields three unshakeable tenets:

- We learn to analyze music in order to gain an understanding of the how great composers create. We use it as a “window” into their minds, if you will;
- We learn to analyze music in order to deepen our own understanding, either as musicians or consumers of this form of artistic expression.
- We employ the knowledge gained in the study of music to stimulate and enhance our own creativity.

Among the community of musicians, the greater our comprehension, the more sublime our interpretation. This creates a more meaningful experience for our audience. This is the ultimate focus of the study of music.

As consumers, the more we understand about music, the more refined is our ability to intelligently evaluate what we enjoy. It is the intelligent consumer of Art who is the greatest supporter of Art.

The Means by which We Investigate Music

Examining music involves evaluation. At any level of experience, this begins with personal taste and preference. As we learn more, our method of evaluation evolves, becoming both more fluent and more critical. Clearly, over time and study, this shapes our perceptions and our tastes, regardless of what general direction these may take.

Any study begins with an examination of fundamental precepts or principles. Music is no different. The nature of perception, the basic constructs, craftsmanship in musical construction: all must be mastered in the study of music.

Two broad approaches are employed in the study of music:

- **Analysis:** we learn to employ commonly accepted techniques and specialized language to describe musical organization. These

techniques are a shared analytical language throughout the community of musicians. This is conceptual knowledge and evaluation.

- Composition: either by actively creating our own works, or (more likely for the beginner), imitating or emulating the works of earlier composers. This is active knowledge and procedure.

Both of these approaches will evolve as the student acquires more knowledge, skill, and greater understanding.

How We Perceive Music

At the most primary level, we experience music by five principal distinctive characteristics.

- Pitch: we perceive the sensation of sound (or tone) as relatively high or low.
- Duration: we perceive how much time sound (or silence) occupies.
- Timbre: we perceive various qualities or “colors” of sound.
- Intensity: we perceive differences in volume or sound pressure levels.
- Events in time: we perceive pitch collections (events) in the context of musical space (time).

These broad generalized definitions and concepts serve us well as a departure point. We can now progress from the general to the specific in our study.

Epigraph

“The man that hath no music in himself,

Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.”

- The Merchant of Venice (V, i)