

# Why is aural important?



You may wonder why you have to do aural at all. It's because it will help you – perhaps more than *any other* single musical skill – to improve as an all-round musician.

Aural is all about understanding and processing music that you hear and see, *in your head*. By doing so, you will find that your own playing improves enormously. You will be able to play more expressively and stylistically, be more sensitive to quality and control of tone, improve your sight-reading, spot your own mistakes, be more sensitive to others when playing or singing in an ensemble, be more aware of intonation, improve your ability to memorise music and improve your ability to improvise and compose.

All the many elements of musical training are of course connected. So, when working through the activities in this book you will be connecting with many of them. You'll be listening, singing, clapping, playing your instrument, writing music down, improvising and composing – as well as developing that vital ability to do well at the aural tests in your grade exams!

Aural is not an occasional optional extra – just to be taken off a dusty shelf a few days (or even hours) before a music exam. It's something you can be developing and thinking about all the time. And as you go through the enjoyable and fun activities in these books you'll realise how important and useful having a good musical ear or being 'good at aural' really is.

## How to use this book

When you have a few minutes to spare (perhaps at the beginning or end of a practice session), sit down with your instrument, by your CD player, and open this book. Choose a section and then work through the activities – you needn't do much each time. But whatever you do, do it carefully, repeating any activity if you feel it will help. In fact many of the activities will be fun to do again and again. And make sure that you come back to the book on a regular basis.

### For U.S. readers:

Bar = Measure  
Note = Tone  
Tone = Whole step  
Semitone = Half step

**The answers to all the questions in this book are available to download in PDF format from [fabermusic.com](http://fabermusic.com)**

So, good luck and enjoy improving your aural skills!

*Paul Harris*

**Singing (or playing) the lower part of a two-part phrase**

This is really no more difficult than singing the *upper* part of a two-part phrase! But you do need to concentrate your listening carefully.

**Listening activities**CD1 track  
2

- 1** In this first set of examples you will hear a short three-note phrase in two parts. Each part is played by a different instrument. After you've heard each example, sing the lower part. Use your pause control between examples if you need more time.

CD1 track  
3

- 2** In the next six examples the two parts are again played by contrasting instruments – after you've heard each one twice, sing the lower part. The lower line will then be played for you to check.

CD1 track  
4

- 3** You will hear the six examples again, just once this time. Write down on which degree of the scale the lower part ends.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_

CD1 track  
5

- 4** The next set of examples is played on the piano – as in the exam. Listen carefully to each one and then sing the lower part. Again the lower line will then be repeated for you to check your answer.

CD1 track  
6

- 5** In Grade 8 you have to sing back the lowest of three parts. Here's some early practice for you! You'll hear the examples on two different instruments (the upper two lines will be played by the same instrument) which will help you to hear the lowest part more easily. Sing after you've heard the phrase twice.

# Making connections

Here are some musical activities that show you how aural connects with all the other areas of music. Choose one or two each time you practice.

## ... with theory

Find a hymn book and, choosing a few bars, analyse the chords using roman numerals. Here is an example:

I      V<sup>b</sup>    I      V      VI      IV      V<sup>7</sup>    I

Now try to hear the chords in your head. Finally play them (or get a friend to play them) on the piano.

## ...with sight-reading

Choose a sight-reading piece (from *Improve your sight-reading! Grade 8* for example) and try to hear the piece in your head. Then play it.

## ...with intervals

Play a note and then, in your head, hear the note a Minor 7th above (e.g. play C and then hear B flat). Sing the note and then play it to see how accurate you were. Can you find any Minor 7ths in the pieces you are currently studying?

## ...with pastiche

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers often use styles from the past and dress them in contemporary clothes. Stravinsky, for example, often borrowed features from the baroque style – this kind of writing is termed *neo-baroque*, *neo-classical* or *neo-romantic*.