

# Why is aural important?

track  
1

You may wonder why you have to do aural at all. The answer is, that aural will really help you improve as a musician. And this may surprise you – it will help perhaps more than *any other* single musical skill.

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, your music reading will improve, you will be able to 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 (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

So, good luck and enjoy improving your aural skills!

*Paul Harris and John Lenehan*

## Section 4

# Learning to listen to music

In addition to the areas already introduced, in Grade 4 you will be asked to talk about the *character* or *mood* of a short piece of music.

On the next tracks you'll hear three TV-like themes:

- a** A comedy
- b** A drama
- c** A news bulletin

Listen to the track two or three times. Then answer the following questions to discover which is which and whether the theme music really does reflect the character of the programme.



- 1** Describe the tempo (speed).

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- 2** Was the tune mainly *legato* (smooth) or detached in style?

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- 3** Was the music in a major or minor key?

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- 4** Was it in simple or compound time?

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- 5** Name the two main instruments that play at the start.

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- 6** Name the instrument that plays the tune.

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- 7** What features in the music give this piece its character?

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- 8** Was it a comedy, drama or news bulletin?

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# Making connections

These fun activities show you how aural connects with all the other aspects of music. Choose one or two each time you practise.

## ... with memory

Think about a piece that you've recently learnt and then try to 'replay' the whole piece in your head from memory. Now try playing as much as you can from memory on your instrument.

## ... with tone quality

Choose a four-bar phrase from a piece you are currently learning and play it from memory, concentrating on producing your best tone quality.

## ... with perceiving errors

track  
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On this track the musicians are less than perfect in their performances. One player can't keep the pulse steady (out of time), another has learnt some wrong notes (wrong notes), one can't keep together with his fellow players (bad ensemble), and another can't play in tune (out of tune). Using the words in brackets, write down which is which.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

## ... with improvisation

track  
47

On this track you'll find a piece in a dreamy style. After each two-bar phrase, improvise your own dreamy response to the flute playing. The key is F major – just use the notes: F G A C D (For B $\flat$  instruments, improvise in G major using the notes: G A B D E. E $\flat$  instruments improvise in D major, using the notes: D E F $\sharp$  A B)

## ... with sight-reading

Choose a sight-reading piece\* and try to hear it first in your head. Then play it.

## ... with intervals

Play a note and then, in your head, hear the note a perfect 4th above (e.g. play C and then hear F). Sing the note and then play it to see how accurate you were. Can you find any perfect 4ths in the pieces you are currently studying?

\*From *Improve your sight-reading!* Grade 4, for example