

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 this grade you will be asked about:

- Dynamic levels (varying levels of volume and changes between them)
- Articulation (legato and varying forms of staccato or detached notes)
- Tonality (major or minor)
- Tempo (speed and changes of speed)
- Character
- Style and period

The new feature to learn to listen to and understand is identifying the *style and period* of a piece of music. If you listen intelligently to a wide range of music you will inevitably improve your powers of deduction with time (and the previous *Improve your aural!* books have already introduced this feature).

Here are some useful features to help you identify the four main musical periods:

Baroque

- Use of ornaments
- Two or more independent melodic lines (also known as contrapuntal writing)
- Use of imitation between the parts
- Limited dynamic range or use of 'terraced' dynamics, which means a sudden change from loud to soft, with no crescendo or decrescendo

Classical

- Regular (often four-bar) phrase-lengths
- Use of tune and accompaniment texture (often with arpeggio-like patterns in the accompaniment)
- Symmetrical structure
- Often including simple scale and arpeggio melodic patterns
- Often uses predominantly tonic/dominant harmony

Romantic

- Expressive and vivid use of dynamic levels and other expression markings
- More intricate melodic patterns
- Colourful harmonies
- May be atmospheric, moody or virtuosic in character and style.
- Thicker and more varied textures (for example thicker chords contrasted with single musical lines)

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.

track
35

... with instruments

Each of the following four examples are duets. Write down which instruments are playing in each duet.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

track
36

On this track you'll hear two trios. Which instruments are playing in each one?

1 _____

2 _____

... with transposition

Play the first four bars of *Twinkle, twinkle, little star* in C major. Now play the same phrase in F, G, D and B \flat majors.

Now make up your own four-bar phrase in C major. Transpose it (by ear) to the keys of F, G, D and B \flat majors.

track
37

... with improvisation

On this track you'll hear a cheerful and lively piece. After each two-bar phrase, improvise your own response. 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.)