

**LEARNING SEQUENCES IN MUSIC**

**Skill, Content, and Patterns**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### APPRECIATION AND UNDERSTANDING IN MUSIC

Appreciation and understanding are concepts which have particular relevance to the psychology of music learning. Appreciation has been largely associated with music education in the past, whereas understanding, because of enlightened educational theory, commands current attention. In "Webster's Third New International Dictionary", the following definitions are found: "Appreciate - to evaluate highly or approve warmly often with expressions or tokens of liking"; "Understand - to grasp the meaning of". It would seem that appreciation suggests a favorable emotional response and understanding is based upon comprehension.

There is art in nature of which mankind is a unique type. Man is able to express aesthetic feeling through song and dance. Written music is one extension of man's body that serves as a substitute in the form of symbols for song and dance when the body itself is not directly represented in expressing aesthetic feeling. The purpose of music education is to provide students with music understanding so that they can learn to perform and to respond aesthetically and to use symbolic representations of their and others' aesthetic feelings to the extent that their music aptitudes will allow. Through performance, students learn to understand and aesthetically respond to their own art and the art of others. Appreciation in the form of aesthetic response provides a student with insight into himself and into the nature of his relationship to the environment around him.

Understanding as the primary purpose of music education is gaining acceptance, and appreciation is being placed in its proper perspective. Understanding is the basis for appreciation; all but possibly the purely

emotional reactions to music depend upon understanding. A student who appreciates music without understanding it demonstrates an emotional reaction, whereas a student who appreciates music and understands it demonstrates an aesthetic reaction. For a student to say that he appreciates a piece of music without understanding that music is to admit that he is prejudice.

The more a student understands music, the more he is able to appreciate music, although he may not necessarily like all that he understands. Without denying the aesthetic qualities of music, students should learn to understand what they hear in music of all styles, forms, and eras, and then choose for themselves the music they appreciate and will listen to, perform, and compose. The assumption that to expose a student to music, with supplementary historical information and testimonials, will produce music appreciation which will endure throughout his life is becoming increasingly suspect. Through intimidation students are made to think that they like or love music; on the other hand, through understanding students learn to be tolerant of and appreciative of many types of music. When taught to perform music with understanding, a student learns music. When told to appreciate music, a student develops overall positive and negative attitudes, and simply learns about music.

The question of what constitutes an understanding of music must be considered. In order to formally understand music, one must be aware of its basic aural elements, which are a sense of tonality and a sense of meter. That is true for even contemporary music, in which timbre, dynamics, texture, pitch, duration, noise and silence, and aural illusion may be dominant over tonality and meter. In order to be able appropriately to understand the new, one must understand the traditional, and how the new embraces innovations.

Audiation, a coined word, takes place when one hears music silently through recall. The sound is not physically present in audiation but it is present in

aural perception. A student must perceive tonality to develop a sense of tonality so that he may eventually learn to audiate tonality. Similarly, a student must perceive meter to develop a sense of meter so that he may eventually learn to audiate meter. A more sophisticated listener is capable of also audiating style, form, phrasing, harmonic progressions, timbre, and dynamics. Audiation is fundamental to music learning theory. Additional types and hierarchical stages of audiation are discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Consider the importance of modulation to an understanding and appreciation of music. A modulation that is being aurally perceived can be understood and appreciated only as a result of immediately comparing that modulation through audiation to other modulations which have been heard at a previous time in different music. When verbal descriptions, such as "expected", "unexpected", "weak", "strong", "thick", and "thin", are used by a teacher as substitutes for a student's ability to audiate a modulation, at best only superficial explanations are implied. Moreover, such descriptions, because they bear so indirectly on the elements of music, are almost useless for a student's further development of an understanding of music. Audiation of the elements of music should precede, though it is further developed in conjunction with, verbal descriptions of music. The development of audiation skill must be learned not only before verbal descriptions are taught, but also before the definitions of music symbols and structures are taught. That is, the ability to audiate tonality and meter provides the readiness for the use of verbal descriptions and for the theoretical understanding of music symbols and structures. To define music symbols and to describe music abstractly is to avoid the music itself, but to interpret music in sound is to learn to audiate the elements of music. That is, to define mechanically a key signature, measure signature, or music form, or to describe music metaphorically or programmatically suggests one's literary

proress or theoretical knowledge, but to audiate how key signatures and measure signatures interact with tonality and meter and how tonality and meter interact with music form attest to one's musicianship.

Audiation provides the immediate readiness for intelligent listening to music. Further, whether a student is performing music from memory or creatively, he is at the same time also audiating what is to be performed next. Audiation, as described, also provides the immediate readiness for the development of notational audiation, that is, music literacy. In order to read and write music in a meaningful way, a student must be able to audiate music seen in notational form without it being performed, and to audiate what he is composing. The mere ability to name and define mechanically individual notes and other music symbols does not provide for the readiness for music literacy. A student does not read names or definitions when reading music. On the contrary, as when listening to and performing music, a student audiates patterns, groupings of notes, as he reads and writes music. Only when a student is able to audiate tonal patterns and rhythm patterns seen in notation can the names and definitions of music symbols become musically relevant. An analogy may clarify the foregoing explanation. Linguists suggest that knowing the alphabet, or even reading phonetically by recognizing letters in print, has little to do with reading comprehension. The alphabet serves only as an explanation of aspects of the basic theoretical structure of a language to a student who can already read that language with meaning. We read words, not the names of letters or a definition of the alphabet. When a student reads, he gives meaning to the words as a result of experience with the objects or ideas that the words symbolize. A student cannot give meaning to letters, because letters do not generally symbolize meaningful objects or ideas. A student can only take meaning from letters to explain aspects of the theoretical structure of the language. To complicate



matters, it is possible to give different meaning to the same words.

The situation is not so complex in music reading, but the analogy is apt. The letter names and time value names of notes are the alphabet of the music language. To be able to recite or recognize the letter names and time value names of notes does not indicate a readiness or an ability to read music. Individual notes have no meaning except as a student takes meaning from them to explain part of the theoretical structure of the music language which he can already read. And, as a student cannot take theoretical meaning from individual letters in a language until he can understand and read words in that language, so he cannot take theoretical meaning from individual letter names and time value names in music until he can audiate and read patterns of notes. Just as a student reads words, groupings of letters, in a language, so he reads patterns, groupings of notes, both tonally and rhythmically, in music. A student gives meaning to the patterns he reads in music because he can audiate notation. As a result of being familiar with the sound of the pattern in audiation, as he is familiar with the sight of the object which the word symbolizes in a language, a student can read that pattern with meaning in notational audiation. We can read a pattern of notes, but we can only name an individual note. Only possibly in the case of absolute pitch might it be imagined that musical meaning can be given to an individual note.

To be able to audiate melody a student has to be able to sing, because when he engages in tonal audiation, he is actually singing silently. Similarly, to be able to audiate rhythm a student has to be able to move rhythmically, because when he engages in rhythm audiation, covert, if not overt, rhythmic movement is also taking place. Some persons mistakenly believe that they are reading tonally, that is, giving meaning to the notation, when they perform at the keyboard, even though they are not capable of audiating tonal notation, that is,

even though they cannot mentally hear what is seen in notational form before it is performed. Actually, they are not giving musical meaning to the notation; rather, they are fallaciously taking whatever they can from the notation by using the keyboard as an inadequate substitute for their singing voices. They are merely distinguishing among individual letters, parts of a pattern, of the music alphabet in the same way that a child might phonetically distinguish among individual letters which comprise a word before he can read that word. It is futile to try to precede audiation with theoretical understanding; to do so either prevents or at best does not contribute to giving musical meaning to the pattern. The error is evident, for example, in the wind instrument performer who cannot tonally audiate what is seen in notational form but nevertheless manipulates keys or valves on a music instrument as dictated by the letter names of the notes. Because a wind instrument does not have fixed pitches as compared to a keyboard instrument, the limitations of the performer who indulges in such musically meaningless activity become obvious when he is unable to adjust pitches for purposes of good intonation. To read music on a wind instrument in that way is similar to copying a text on a typewriter which is designed for a language which the typist does not understand. Further, a keyboard or wind instrument performer who cannot audiate rhythm notation associates note value names with symbols instead of giving musical meaning to the notation; therefore tempo is inconsistent and meter is imprecise. The limitations in audiating rhythm notation of such performers are more obvious than their limitations in audiating tonal notation, because there is no key or valve to associate with the time value name of a note in the reading process. If a stringed instrument performer cannot audiate tonal and rhythm notation, such limitations become even more evident, because there are neither keys nor valves on the instrument which might be associated with notation. An instrumental performer gives good



intonation, precise meter, and consistent tempo to a music instrument. These qualities are not built into a music instrument; therefore they cannot be taken from an instrument.

It may be wondered why music literacy is considered important. Some general music teachers consider the ability to read and write music to be unimportant. They reason that the majority of students in the schools will take music as an avocation and not as a profession and thus need not be musically literate to listen to music, to perform music by rote, or to improvise or create music instrumentally or vocally. That, of course, is true. If for some reason a choice had to be made between the teaching of literacy and the teaching of improvisation and creative skills, literacy would appear to be of less importance. If, however, a student is to listen to and to perform music with meaning, he must develop audiation as a readiness for music appreciation. And if audiation has been developed to serve as a readiness for appreciation, it automatically serves equally well as a readiness for music literacy. Because of the extent to which music literacy serves as a readiness for the development of more complex dimensions of music appreciation, it would seem a waste of time not to teach students to become musically literate. After audiation has been developed, learning to read and to write music is relatively simple. Just as students learn to read and to write a language after they have acquired a functional vocabulary of words, so students learn to read music and write music after they have acquired a functional vocabulary of tonal patterns and rhythm patterns. There is little doubt that music can be appreciated in more ways than by merely listening or singing by rote on special occasions. To audiate what is soon to be performed, to study the score of music which is being heard, to study the score of music that has been heard before, and to compose music represent

equally desirable forms of music appreciation not unlike those derived from improvisation.

It is possible that some music educators question the importance of music literacy because of frustrating experiences in attempting to teach the reading and writing of music. If they tried to teach students to become musically literate when their students did not have the necessary readiness to develop music literacy skills, the outcome was doomed to failure. The ability to audiate patterns in given tonalities and meters must precede music reading. A student cannot learn to read and to write music with meaning by dealing with individual notes on a theoretical basis or by memorizing definitions of music symbols. When audiation skill is not developed before an attempt is made to teach music literacy, teachers are thwarted in their attempt to teach music reading and writing and may infer that their students are uninterested, uncooperative, or untalented. It is true that a minority of students have low music aptitude. A student's lack of interest which is likely to result in low achievement, is, however, primarily due to poor pedagogical practices which do not take into consideration music aptitude differences among students. Teachers who are opposed to music literacy claim that it takes too much time to teach. They damn music literacy instead of damning the inappropriate process that they use to attempt to teach music literacy. Even with unlimited time, students will not learn to be musically literate if they are taught to define symbols before they are taught to audiate the sounds that the symbols represent. The development of music literacy should be considered important, if for no other reason, because it can serve as an objective and efficient means for evaluating the extent to which students have developed the ability to audiate. When a student can read and write music with meaning, it is obvious that he possesses not only the ability to appreciate music as a result of being able to listen to it

intelligently, but also the readiness to perform, to create, and to improvise music.