Prelude

This book, with its two compact discs, is intended for students rather than teachers. It aims to demonstrate fundamental techniques of aural perception which can be applied, not only in the examination but also [illegible] general approach to a variety of styles ranging [illegible] and from British folk music to Indonesian gamelan. [illegible] importance of aural perception in musical education is [illegible] every type of syllabus, from those designed primarily [illegible] to those used in universities and colleges of [illegible] them are to enable students to [illegible] to broaden their knowledge of musical styles. Ultimately they aim to increase delight in the never-ending variety of musical sound [illegible] for a deeper understanding of the relevance of [illegible] the ultimate aims of this book.

Although *Aural Matters* has been [illegible] candidates, it begins where the earlier [illegible] level. More able candidates [illegible] the teaching and [illegible] of the book will be [illegible] of a GCSE course. [illegible] gap between GCSE [illegible] can be [illegible] undergraduates [illegible] difficult [illegible] provide the [illegible] bridge the gap [illegible] and higher education [illegible] learning. Although the tests in this book reflect Advanced [illegible] aural perception, you would be well advised to check the [illegible] examining [illegible] those examinations you intend to sit since [illegible] substantially under [illegible] You should also know that tests in operational [illegible] are subjected to rigorous scrutiny and moderation in order to [illegible] that they cover the extent and depth of the skills required in the time [illegible] for the particular [illegible] *Aural Matters* is meant to be a progressive self-help [illegible] textbook, the [illegible] tests will be much easier than those you will encounter in the examination [illegible] room, while some of the later ones include questions that may require more [illegible] time to answer, along with extra playings of the recordings. You will need to supplement the tests in this book with additional material, particularly for the dictation and discrimination exercises in Part I. There is, fortunately, already a copious supply of these latter tests in the past papers that are available from the various examining bodies. Towards the end of your course you will need experience in working tests in the exact format and in the precise time allowed in the examination you intend to sit. If you have worked conscientiously through *Aural Matters* these tests should provide few problems.

Finally, you should recognize that all activities in music are interconnected. When you compose you should try to hear the sounds you are writing before testing them out on an instrument. When you analyse someone else's composition your analysis should be based upon what you can hear and not upon a fanciful idea derived from the written notation alone. When you play an instrument you should listen to yourself critically as well as noting how your performance relates to others when playing in ensemble. Singing is perhaps the most useful ally of aural perception, since it most accurately represents the sounds which you have imagined with your inner ear. So it is with song that we will begin.

Melody Dictation

The ability to write the sounds you hear in accurate musical notation is one of the most useful of musical skills because notation is the principal means by which music is presented for interpretation by performers. It is, therefore, the link between composing and performing. Skill in writing down music you hear will also help you to understand better the relationship between the written symbols of music and the actual sounds they represent. This in turn will help the accuracy of your performing (especially sight-reading and sight-singing) and improve your ability to recognize precisely what you are listening to in music.

A few people can manage pitch identification with surprising effortlessness—probably because, in earlier years, they have learned to associate the sounds of music directly with the individual sounds they represent—whether, for example, with, say, a certain fingering. This can become such a precise skill that it is possible to hear a note and instantly name it as an A or a B or whatever. Those who can do this are said to have 'absolute pitch'. Although this may seem an extraordinary gift, it is little different to identifying colours as 'red', 'orange' and so forth, and involves precisely the same process of associating a label to a frequency of vibrations.

Whatever the starting point, it is possible to improve your level of aural perception and, especially, to realize that you are starting from a rather basic position. You can find the first satisfaction in making very considerable progress in an extremely short time. Like all things worthwhile, though, this will only happen with regular and continuous application. Appreciation of the need to be aware of what is going on in the routines of everyday life need take little more than a minute or so of your time, but they do need to be practised frequently (preferably at least once a day) if you are to benefit. You will almost certainly not be aware of any day-to-day improvement, but we are happy to challenge you now to note down what you can and cannot do in aural tests, and then to compare this with your assessment of your abilities in a year's time.

Self-Help Ideas

Aural perception is the opposite of sight-singing. When singing, you see the written symbols and have to turn them into sounds. In aural tests, you hear sounds and have to turn them into symbols. Singing and aural work are inextricably linked. One of the most enjoyable ways of practising sight-singing is to join a choir, especially one that rehearses a wide variety of music. It is particularly useful if you can manage one of the lower parts, as these will need greater sight-reading ability, being less easy to pick up 'by ear' than the often more predictable top line. However, joining a choir will only improve your aural ability if you concentrate on reading your part from the score—just tagging along with the others will not produce the desired improvement!

Just as useful as choral singing is practising individual vocal exercises in private. For aural purposes, vocal quality is not important: don't worry if you think the tone sounds horrible—you can always whistle or hum if you wish—but do concentrate on accurate pitch and rhythm. The following exercises can be practised while waiting for the bus, or in the bath (the acoustics of bathrooms always seem to make singing easier) or anywhere you have a minute or two on your own. They are particularly useful as warm-up exercises for sharpening-up the ear before an aural lesson or test. It is important that you understand the purpose of each exercise—don't go into auto-pilot mode and rattle through them as if you were practising scales. Make a conscious note of what you are singing (the difference between tones and semitones, for example). In the early stages, it is important to have a reference point to check accuracy: a piano or other instrument for pitch, and a metronome or loudly ticking clock for rhythm.

Use your voice and ear first and then check your results against this chosen source of reference. Frequent short bursts of practice should enable you to dispense with such aids after a time, especially in the easier exercises.

The secret of success in dictation tests is the accurate recognition of intervals. Some people use the starting notes of well-known songs to remind them of each interval. We don't recommend this: it is all too easy to get the titles confused, and the same interval can actually sound quite different in some new context—F up to A in the key of F, for example, may well not sound to you as being quite the same major third as F up to A in the key of D major.

A more reliable method is to develop the ability to sing the scale accurately and without accompaniment, using either note numbers or, if you prefer, 'doh–ray–me', etc. The exercises below begin with the basics. Choose where you start at whichever level suits you best. You will make mistakes—remember that it's OK to make mistakes. If any exercise defeats you, try the following tips:

- ❒ Singing is easier if you stand up.
- ❒ Try not to let the muscles around your throat get tight: make a conscious effort to keep your whole body relaxed.
- ❒ Let your jaw drop down as a loose, gormless expression and keep your teeth well apart.
- ❒ Sing to the sound 'ah' or 'oh'. The nasal sound of the latter will help any tendency to sing flat. If you prefer humming, use the sound '-ng' (like the end of the word 'sing') to help your teeth stay apart.
- ❒ Take a much bigger breath than you think you will need and concentrate on filling the lowest parts of the lungs—but don't tense your shoulders.
- ❒ Make sure you hear the note and then sing the phantom as loudly as you dare: if you can feel the roof of your mouth vibrating, you will know you are singing really well.

Pitch Warm-Up Schedule

Develop your own warming-up schedule using the exercises below and later in this chapter. Remember to observe the following points:

- ❒ Practise for no more than two or three minutes.
- ❒ Practise at least twice every day.
- ❒ Choose very slowly.
- ❒ Mentally recognize the relative pitch of each note as you sing, using note numbers or solfa syllables.
- ❒ Check your accuracy against an instrument frequently in the early stages.

Choose a comfortably low starting note. Sing up to the third note of a major scale, pause, and sing back down again. Once you feel confident, miss out the middle note on the descent, jumping a third to the tonic. Finally, miss out the middle note on the ascent as well, so that you are now singing rising and falling major thirds:

Repeat the entire exercise, starting on various different key notes. Be careful that you keep to the same pattern of major thirds—don't let the top note slip down to a minor third.

When you are satisfied that you can sing and recognize this pattern, extend the exercise to cover the first *four* notes of the major scale. The distance between the third and fourth notes is a semitone: keep these two notes close in pitch,

and repeat the semitone, noticing how different it is to the intervals of a tone in the first part of the scale:

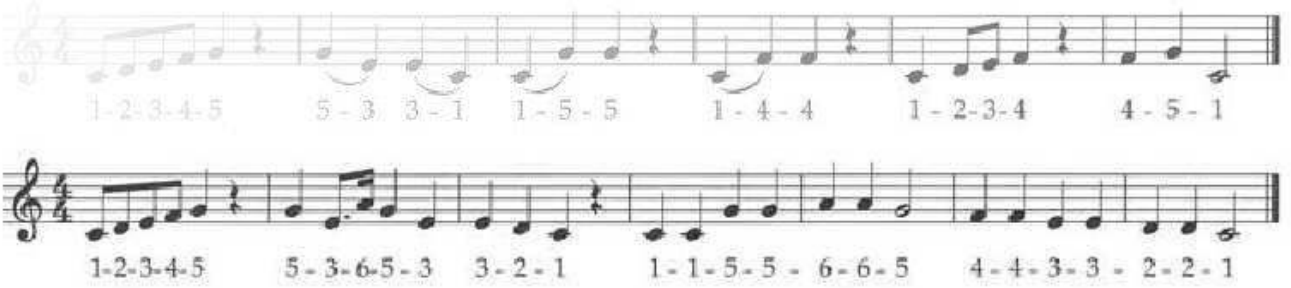
The interval of a semitone between the third and fourth notes of the scale means that there are always two different sizes of third in [illegible] group of notes. The interval from the first to the third of the scale is a major [illegible] (two tones), while the interval from the second to the fourth [illegible] minor [illegible] (one and a half tones). Try singing these first four notes in [illegible] following, making sure that you are aware of the [illegible] between these two types of third (the descending minor third is [illegible] on the distinctive sound that young children [illegible] when playing 'cuckoo' and 'mummy').

Continue making up [illegible] own permutations of these four notes: the important thing is to know where you are in the scale at all times, either using sol-fa, note numbers or letter names. It is also helpful to relate the notes to the tonic in order to check that you have not lost your position and to feel secure. Use the following routine, which adds a second tetrachord (four-note scale fragment) to the first, thus completing the full [illegible] scale pattern. Essential [illegible]

The two tetrachords have identically spaced intervals: tone–tone–semitone. Because it is semitone [illegible] diatonic major melody, the two notes must be either third and fourth [illegible] of the scale, or the leading note and tonic.

[illegible] major scales in a variety of keys descending and ascending—vocally, the [illegible] version is a better exercise, since it will stop you pushing your 'singing voice' up [illegible]. As you sing, make a conscious effort to notice the [illegible] sound of each degree of the scale in relation to its neighbours. Most importantly, [illegible] the different feel of the *subdominant* (the note on which the first tetrachord comes to rest when singing up the scale) and the *dominant* (on which the second then starts).

Finally, try different permutations of these notes. Again, concentrate on knowing precisely where you are in the scale at all times. We suggest that you start by exploring how the notes of the tonic triad are formed from notes 1, 3 and 5 of the major scale and on the difference between the dominant and the subdominant. The second stave below suggests some ways of then using familiar fragments to extend the exercise to include the the sixth degree of the scale:



Most tonal melodies consist largely of simple scale-based patterns and triadic shapes like these, so it is important that this type of exercise is practised until you feel fully confident in naming the notes of the major scale and would no more mistake the fifth degree of the scale for the fourth than you would identify the colour of grass as purple.

Working the Tests

Throughout this book all parts played by transposing instruments (such as the clarinet, horn and trumpet) are always written at their sounding pitch, so you need not worry about transposition.

In an examination it is likely that you will be given two melodies, either of which may be played with or without accompaniment. The first may be chosen (using only the notes of its key), may be played [illegible] times, and will probably have at least half of the notes given. The second [illegible] may be played four times, and is likely to have little [illegible] included. In this chapter we have graded the melodies by [illegible] moving from the first type to the second. Listen [illegible] as many times as you need, but aim for a maximum of three to [illegible] as you can.

In each test you will hear the [illegible] chord and [illegible] played on the piano before the test begins, along [illegible] an indication of [illegible] the pulse.

A simple musical 'shorthand' will help [illegible] Try using just a dot on the correct line or space [illegible] to a single movement of the pencil and don't waste time [illegible] Also indicate rhythms with single strokes: [illegible] for a quaver and no stroke at all [illegible] minim. [illegible] between each playing of the test, during which [illegible] confirmed shorthand into proper notation. Try to memorize [illegible] at least the start of it, so that you can continue to [illegible] during these [illegible]

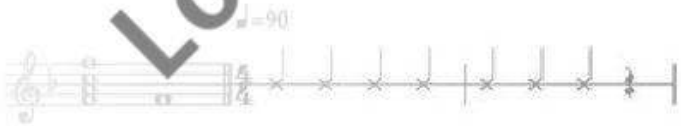
When working [illegible] key note in the back of your mind as a [illegible] (although [illegible] is not recommended, since [illegible] difficult to [illegible] on other pitches). It is also a good idea [illegible] pulse going. For example, by wriggling your toes inside your shoes. [illegible] audible foot-tapping is likely to be too distracting. If you find rhythm particularly difficult, make sure that this pulse is as regular [illegible] it will [illegible] tapping along with the varying note-[illegible] likely unless you are careful about this.

Tracks 1–2

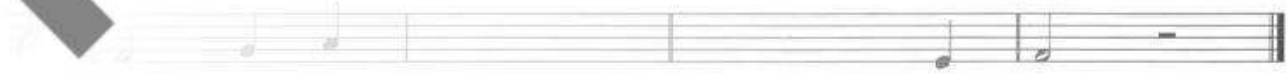
Test 1

These melodies [illegible] They move mainly by step but include an occasional [illegible] of a major [illegible] The rhythms use only crotchets, quavers and minims.

♩=90



Geneva Psalter (c.1552)



Trumpet

♩=116

Track 2

Susato (c.1544)

Oboe