

Ideas For Further Exploring Aural Skills

Many students think that ear training is something that can only be practiced in a classroom situation, with a computer or with another student. The truth is we can learn to train our ears in many different ways. We have listed several techniques here which you can try for yourself. There are also techniques here which you will be able to employ during “down time” thereby managing your time in a more effective fashion. A little self-motivation and any amount of imagination is all it really takes

- Think of tunes you’re familiar with. Play them over in your head and try to dictate them on a piece of staff paper or in solfege. Check your finished work against your instrument or the piano.
- If you hear a new tune, on the radio, on a CD, or at a concert, try to memorize it and dictate it at a later time.
- Think about different kinds of scales and scale patterns and the intervals contained therein while you’re walking, showering, eating, exercising or engaged in any activity which leaves you mentally free.
- There is rhythm all around us. We don’t always notice it if there is no musical structure in which rhythms are defined. Try this: as you walk across campus keep your steps as steady as possible. In between steps, design rhythmic patterns in your mind (in a systematic simple way at first, then becoming more complex and free). Imagining your steps as a quarter note, for example, divide the beat into 2, 4 and 8 first and then into more complex patterns such as 3, 5 or 7 all the while envisioning your rhythms on a staff.
- Construction sites and machinery can offer opportunities for impromptu rhythmic dictation/interaction. The next time you hear a machine in use, try to listen to and mentally dictate the rhythm it creates. Most times this rhythm will be monotonous and can serve as an “ostinato” allowing you to create your own rhythmic patterns around it.
- Go to the local music store and buy a set of drumsticks and a practice pad (these items can be purchased for around \$20). Play the exercises in your rhythm text as well as realizing them vocally. Practice these separately or together. Also, play the rhythms of the melodies you’re singing for class as you sing them. This is especially helpful for vocalists as it helps you to get your hands on the rhythm and establish a more kinetic relationship with it.

- Make sure you play your theory part-writing exercises at the piano. Even if your keyboard skills are minimal you need to do this. You should block out each chord and sing through it from the bottom up. Next, play through the chords singing each individual line (SATB). This will greatly enhance your understanding of harmonic progression, help you detect errors and develop your keyboard skills.
- Listen to your “inner sound system” as much as possible. In our gadget oriented society we neglect the resources of our minds all too often. Turn off your Discman, hang up your cell phone and play your favorite songs or pieces in your head. As you do this, try to recreate every nuance of the piece. You will become more skilled at this the more you do it...and think of the money you’ll save on batteries and minutes!
- Compose.
- Make music every day and find music wherever you can. All it takes is imagination.