

**TEXTBOOK EXAM**  
**on Fundamentals and Aural Skills Textbooks**

**Q1a) Which aural skills books contain 20th-century materials?**

#1. Edlund, *Modus Novus* (1963): According to the author's preface, the book was created specifically "to tackle the problems connected with the reading of 20th-century music that is not major/minor-tonal." The book progresses from contrived melodies composed specifically to train the student on particular intervals to further chapters that include melodies from 20th-century composers such as Hindemeth, Berg, Webern, Schoenberg, etc. as well as the old Swedish favorites Blomdahl, Larsson, Lidholm, etc.

#2. Benward & Carr, *Sightsinging Complete* (1991): While most of the textbook is devoted to tonal pieces, the last two units (1/8th of the book) deal with 20th-century pieces. Not only are monophonic atonal melodies included by composers such as Webern, Hindemeth, Barber, but also large ensemble pieces such as *Wozzeck*, *Firebird*, and Varèse's 37-part *Ionisation*!

#3. Karpinski & Kram, *Anthology for Sight Singing* (2007): Again, although most of the anthology comes from tonal and common-practice periods, a good amount of 20th-century pieces are included, such as those by Britten, Honegger, and Barber.

**Q1d) Which aural skills books contain popular, folk, and/or jazz examples?**

#1. Ottman, *Music for Sight Singing* (2001): While this little manual does not include any popular or jazz examples, the bulk of the sight-singing exercises seem to be drawn from folk tunes from around the globe. Tunes from England, Tennessee, Russia, Mexico, Pomerania (?), and Canada can be found on almost any page where one finds a melody to sing.

#2. Phillips, Clendinning, & Marvin, *The Musician's Guide to Aural Skills* (2005): The authors of this ear-training book have devoted an entire chapter to "Popular Song and Art Song" in which melodies from Charlie Parker to Harold Arlen fill the pages. Despite the apparent confinement that this chapter title implies, however, other popular music, such as Scott Joplin's Rags, are found scattered throughout.

#3. Karpinski & Kram, *Anthology for Sight Singing* (2007): While not devoting much space to popular sources, this textbook does try to cover all the bases by including music by Billy Joel, Willie Nelson, Buddy Holly, Dave Brubeck, and even the theme to TV's *Jeopardy*!

**Q1g) Which aural skills books actually teach the students?**

#1. Hindemeth, *Elementary Training for Musicians* (1946): In this supposed sight-singing book, Hindemeth will launch into long paragraphs that make it appear more like a textbook than a sight-singing book. For example, at one point he goes into describing the difference between the tritone and the diminished fifth, invoking the term *comma* nonetheless.

#2. Damschroder, *Listen and Sing* (1995): The beginning of chapters in this book review theoretical concepts before going into their application in sight-singing and ear-training.

#3. Phillips, Clendinning, & Marvin, *The Musician's Guide to Aural Skills* (2005): Ostensibly working in parallel with their equivalent harmony textbook, a lot of written theory is reviewed in each chapter of this book, both in the way the book is structured as well as the content. Key theory terms, such as "pivot chord" or "common tones" are written in bold and redefined.

**Q2) Discuss segregation versus integration of skills in the aural skills textbooks.**

A very easy way to organize an aural skills textbook is to separate each type of skill from another. Ottman & Dworak's *Basic Ear Training Skills* (1991) is a prime example, in which a bank of six chapters at the beginning of the book is devoted to rhythmic issues alone; melodic content does not even appear until almost half-way through the text. Similarly, Adler's *Sight-Singing* (1997) makes a clean break between exercises to develop intervallic skills and those to develop rhythmic skills, each sectioned into its own half of the book. Even when rhythm and pitch coexist within a chapter of a book, however, it does not mean that the text integrates the two topics. For example, Yasui & Trubitt's *Basic Sight Singing* (1989) is content to provide rhythm-only exercises directly followed by pitched melodies that, while they include rhythmic elements, do so at a far lower level than the previous rhythmic exercises.

As opposed to this segregated method, the Karpinski & Kram *Anthology for Sight Singing* (2007) and the Wittlich & Humphries *Ear Training: An Approach through Music Literature* (1974) both take pieces of music as the starting point for teaching aural skills. The former textbook accomplishes this task through over 1,200 examples in a variety of settings whereas the latter takes the opposite approach by closely analyzing solely 14 pieces representative of the history of classical music.

A benefit of segregation are, of course, focusing exclusively on specific skills without the potential pitfall or distraction of other skills getting in the way of the student's ability to learn. As well, segregation makes the pedagogy of aural skills potentially easier for the instructor, both in teaching and in grading, since only certain skills are being tested. The main disadvantages of such an approach is obviously its disconnect from actual music making. If the point of aural skills is to increase musicianship, then only truly musical contexts provide an accurate test of a student's musicianship. If one can tap a complex rhythm or sing a diminished fifth from any note, such skills do not necessarily or directly (in any patent way) help the performance of a large piece of music, particularly since a segregated approach usually only includes short musical snippets.

For the most part, a integrated approach flips the advantages and disadvantages of the segregated approach. By having musical contexts for aural skills, students can probably more clearly see the purpose of an aural skills class. On the downside, students who have specific deficiencies in a certain area, such as a misunderstanding of a fourth-tuplet in a triple meter, may never have this shortcoming directly addressed as it becomes covered up or never even addressed through the musical fabric of a piece of music.

One textbook that I think particularly effectively straddles the line of both integrating as well as segregating aural skills is Damschroder, *Listen and Sing* (1995). There are a broad variety of exercises in this large book. Some are directly related to specific skills, such as "Meter and Rhythm" or the "Workshops" on intervals and arpeggiations. But the textbook/workbook also has a lot of creative exercises and melodies from the literature, albeit confined to only about 200 years of music, that continuously give students contexts for the more abstract exercises.

**Q3) Discuss organizational flexibility versus consistency in aural skills textbooks.**

Adler's *Sight-Singing* (1997) provides a good example of an aural skills text organized by interval with identical exercise types in each chapter. As well, Benward & Carr's *Sight-Singing Complete* (1991) follows a similar organization, although the Benward & Carr introduces certain fundamental intervals such as the perfect intervals and thirds all at once. Finally, the Phillips, Clendinning, & Marvin text *The Musician's Guide to Aural Skills* (2005), while not organized by

interval, does include a similar pattern of exercises in each chapter to discuss whatever the topic at hand may be.

In contrast to this approach, Berkowitz, Fontrier, and Kraft's *A New Approach to Sight-Singing* (1997) tries to get the student to progress from simple monophonic melodies to duets to singing while playing keyboard and finally singing real music (!). An even more creative (and musical) approach is taken by Karpinski & Kram in their *Anthology for Sight Singing* (2007) where a variety of theoretical topics are addressed from both harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic aspects.

A boilerplate organization in each chapter may have certain advantages. For one, even if the textbook is focused on tonal materials, it may ease the way into atonal or twelve-tone melodies since the intervals themselves will be emphasized instead of their tonal environments. Even though Adler and the Benward & Carr texts have a predictable succession of exercises in each chapter, they have thought carefully about the many ways to approach each concept. The repetitive structure of the Phillips, Clendinning, & Marvin text makes sure that every facet (both passive and active) of each concept is internalized by the student.

The disadvantage to an organization such as Adler's and Benward & Carr's do exist, however. For example, the student may become bored with the repetitive nature of the tasks. Moreover, devoting a similar amount of space and time to each interval or each theoretical concept does not necessarily allocate appropriate time and effort in a way that correlates or matches the difficulty or rarity of the interval or concept in real music. Finally, many exercises in such a situation are necessarily divorced from musical context and may leave the student wondering what applicability these exercises have on musicianship.

One of the great strengths of Karpinski & Kram's *Anthology* is that the student is encountering musical pieces much like he or she would encounter as a practicing performer. The real pieces, able to be organized in a variety of ways with the software or index, can bring meaning to aural skills. Even the Berkowitz, Fontrier, & Kraft text, while perhaps overly simple in its organization, moves towards more music-making type activities. The disadvantage of such flexible approaches, though, may be that the lack of hierarchy leads to confusion on behalf of the student as to what exactly is supposed to be learned through the exercise.

#### **Q5) Discuss the availability of aural skills components in fundamentals texts.**

Steve! Trick question! All of the fundamentals texts, aside from the wretched Harder *Basic Materials in Music Theory* (1982), contain some elements of both singing diatonic melodies and performing simple rhythms throughout their pages. The real question is quality and quantity of those singing and rhythm (and other aural skills) exercises.

One poor choice would be the Lynn *Introductory Musicianship Workbook* (1997), despite the plethora of aural skills exercises. Perhaps this textbook would be many people's first choice for the quantity of exercises it contains. The text has what it calls "coordinated" skill exercises, both rhythmic only and "melodic-rhythmic." The rhythms are OK but the melodies are fairly bland and seemingly contrived, so it would not seem too exciting for non-majors. Furthermore, the keyboard harmonizations are so hackneyed and clichéd that I cannot imagine anyone wanting to use them in an actual piece of music. Finally, the written theory teaching is bland and does not make up for the other faults.

Another poor choice would be the Ottman and Mainous *Rudiments of Music* (1995) for a similar reason. Again, the keyboard harmonization exercises at the end are derivative and formulaic. Despite the integration of dictation, singing scales, and conducting and tapping

rhythms, all of the skills seem to be on too basic of a level. Perhaps the more interesting exercises have been left out so that the student would buy the Ottman *Music for Sight Singing* (2001) book to which the text of *Rudiments of Music* (1995) alludes often. In this case, they would make a better pair of books than standing on their own.

A better option would be the Damschroder *Foundations of Music and Musicianship* (1995), which includes "Laboratory" sections that has students complete singing and clapping exercises as well as keyboard exercises. The Damschroder is a pretty thick book, though, and gets into fairly complex topics such as harmony and voice-leading. In the preface, it states that the text "parallels the training first-term music majors receive" but geared towards folks without any prior knowledge of music. For this reason, it may be more appropriate as a boot-camp book for aspiring majors without much training, i.e. a sort of equivalent to Eastman's "intensive" program.

An excellent choice would probably be Straus's *Elements of Music* (2003). Not only does Straus include singing and rhythmic exercises, but he includes composition and improvisation, topics sorely lacking from Damschroder. Although the breadth of music-making in Straus's book is extremely wide (the widest!), it certainly provides an integrated written theory and aural skills program that would allow teaching fundamentals without feeling the need to resort to using a separate aural skills textbook.