

# Elementary Training for Musicians

*By*

PAUL HINDEMITH

**PREVIEW**  
Low Resolution

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## PREFACE

The music student entering a class in harmony is in general insufficiently prepared with respect to basic principles—governing Rhythm, Meter, Intervals, Scales, Notation—and their correct application. In the phases of his teaching, the harmony teacher has to find that the musical students have no solid foundation to build upon. This is true, not that, save in a few exceptional cases, the methods by which these principles are taught are deplorable. Most quite competent teachers know of these things at random, along with such access to memory as of more "practical" musical matters. Once the student has passed an Elementary Training, but in general he comes to the class in harmony with a certain amount of casual information. In the subsequent courses in Dictation a very attempt is made to fill the gaps left open in the beginning, in real fact, however, little can be gained by so defective a method.

This book seeks to provide a method of instruction in the right way—must infallibly supply such knowledge as is necessary to success. It is by no means the author's intention to teach elementary material. It does not even pretend to do so. In its original form, its contents have been taught in schools countless times before, and there is no reason why it should not be taught again in various languages. But in order to meet the needs of the modern world, the field and to make the present work available to the average fairly advanced musician, the author has added a chapter which gives a reasonably good survey of the basic elements of musical theory. He thus places the reader in a position to digest the overviews of the subject, to understand the aims and procedures, or to select what is wanted from the many excellent books and articles given in such books (when any are mentioned) as may be available.

There is no lack of books on the subject, and no lack of less comprehensive, more specialized, and more advanced books full of exercises for the beginner. But here the difficulty is to find a book that is not too simple. Books that try to give general theoretical instruction are either too simple, or too difficult. In opinion and approach, or insufficient for a professional's purposes. In the first case, and in most cases their exercises seem to be made for the author's satisfaction and self-assertion rather than for the student's point, or they are so dry that even the most docile user cannot see their relationship to living music.

There are numerous highly specialized text-books on Dictation, Sight-Singing and Sight-Reading, Ear-Training, Clef-Reading, and other subdivisions of our subject. But anyone who wished to collect his knowledge

by picking it grain by grain out of comparatively elaborate books on comparatively minor subjects would have to spend years on that part of his musical education—which, after all, is but a preparation for more important things to come.

A musician brought up on the method of Solfège, as practised in countries under the influence of French or Italian musical culture, will probably deny that there could be any better method. And if one looks at the comparatively high standard in sight-reading of melody and harmonic patterns (even higher in the rapid pronunciation of the various syllables!) reached by students of this method, one is bound to agree. But the disadvantages of this method show up later on in the course of study; it is extremely difficult to introduce the student gradually to a higher conception of harmony and melody, and still more difficult to give him certain independence in their own creative work. This is because he takes the step out of their narrow conception of music into a wider and more uniform nomenclature for a *tonz* and all its derivatives, and reaches almost at the point where reason turns into a sense of the absurd, and the mind easily than others into what is assumed to be a state of complete disorder and incoherence.

There are still other methods of musical education, based on the fitness of Solfège by expressing through the voice and body (language, speech, and gesture) the musical elements of time and tone. These are from primitive information formulated into systems called "functional" systems. The author admits that this is the best method for the amateur musician—unless he wants to become a professional amateur—since it leads him no further than the surface of the musical and temporal conception of music. The author does not mean by this in relation to (or instead of) our present book, but in general. In relation to the systems of theory, the assimilation of which is the chief aim of the author, he admits that the musician not specially interested in theory will find the present book too difficult.

It is the author's opinion that the present book, in view of the practical intentions of its author, and whatever its theoretical contents, will remain uncriticized. I can only add that the author's intentions to the present book will be,

...that the book is too comprehensive to be used by every student seeking only some superficial information does not mean that it is about too many uninteresting things. The highly specialized conductor of today, knowing thoroughly the facts and procedures in his particular field of activity, cannot be expected to know everything. Helpful as it may be for a future conductor to have some experience in reading the various clefs, it would be a waste of time for a pianist to bother with such special problems. To sing the right tones at the right time may prove valuable for a singer, but when will a violinist ever be asked to do so? The violinist, in turn, must learn to be fluent in reading

high notes, with many ledger lines, while such fluency can be of no value to a timpanist. Essential prerequisites for a player in an orchestra may be utterly unimportant for a virtuoso; increased knowledge of theoretical facts will not instantly improve a cellist's playing; practical experience in music is not necessarily a criterion for the quality of a composer's or theorist's ideas.

There is only one answer to these objections: they are unfounded. The exercises in this book are, in the first place, not written for the amateur's superficial information (although this kind of work could do no harm, if he is interested). The words "for musicians" clearly define clearly its purpose. On the other hand, education is not an elementary training for musicians—such as is often implied—but it must be voiced only by those who acquiesce in the present educational orientation in musical education.

Apparently the times are gone when one could become a good musician who did not possess, beyond his technical or musical or vocal achievements, a thorough knowledge of the mechanism of music. Can the majority of today's musicians make a comparison of their theoretical knowledge with that of Bach, or Beethoven? Do not many of them believe that they were born musicians? And surely they were trained excessively in their early years in subjects not directly improving a violinist's finger technique? Could not a composer improve his musical horizons and abilities more easily by reading a composition? If our present generation of musicians and composers alike—had a better insight into the mechanism of music, they would not be faced with what is probably the most difficult task of all: to penetrate superficially over-polished musical scores, and to gain any deeper penetration into its meaning, meaning, meaning, and effect—or the hyper-individual expression that is compressed in a composer's score.

It is true that most of them are launched on their careers without having any extraordinary musical talents, but it is also true that they happen to have good voices. On account of this advantage a singer is easily excused from any but the most primitive musical knowledge such as could be acquired by any normal mind in a few weeks of intelligent effort. Rare indeed is the singer nowadays who can do what you would expect to be the most normal of all the activities of a singing musician: hit a tone at any interval, even if it is not part of a simple stepwise progression or an easily understandable broken-chord melody, and even if it is not directly supported by its accompaniment. Would a singer not profit by being led through a severe course of general musical training? It certainly would not hurt his voice to gain some

additional knowledge, which, although it will not immediately further his vocal aims, amounts after all to no more than that minimum of basic facts that a professional musician is supposed to know.

Admittedly, a composer can have wonderful ideas without a background of highly developed practical experience. But is it really imaginable that without such experience he should be able to present his ideas in their strongest form, and exploit them to the fullest extent? Owing to the general decline of such experience, the composer, once venerated as a super-musician, nowadays occupies almost the lowest place in the hierarchy as far as handcraft is concerned. How few are there today whose achievements are based on their actual work as singers—in bygone times considered the only true and valid kind of creative work! All too often we see it happen that a man is good enough—physically or intellectually—for an amateur singer, but his vocal work still finds a comfortable niche in contemporary music and composition. The decision to become a composer is often based on no better musical talent than that of a good singer, and turning them at the right time (when the relative lack of danger doesn't eliminate even this last reservation) into a composer is not strange then, that any fooling, regardless of the individual's credibility, radioactive high-school boy who has had a few days of practice before he is through his first year of college can easily be taken up with scorn by his classmates?

I should like to think that an elementary method could be welcomed that aims at furnishing the student with a clean sheet free of the nitwits and the unnecessary complications of the first theory teacher who after some months of teaching has to give up in the present book easily and without any qualms of conscience any advanced theoretical work. This book is intended to be regarded as a aid for any professional composer, and the process of reckless weeding out could only be destructive to the musical culture.

Young musicians who have their natural musical gift and intelligence at their disposal, and who are interested in the branches of musical activity, such a method will help them to find a solid basis for their further musical development. They will find in this book all a musician needs as a preparation for higher theoretical and practical studies, offered without detours and evasions. The book does not contain syllabums, since they are misleading. It avoids special names and fancy symbols, since they distract attention from the main object: the knowledge of all the basic conventions and facts of musical theory and their traditional representation in written form. This knowledge is presented through the most intensive kind of work: exercises. The great number of exercises compels the student to practise seriously. Thus it will be demonstrated that Elementary Theory cannot