

Elementary Training for Musicians

By
PAUL HINDEMITH

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Composed by
Hindemith

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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 all phases of his teaching, the harmony teacher has to find the fact that his students have no solid foundation to build upon. This is the sad fact that, save in a few exceptional cases, the methods by which these basic principles are taught are deplorable. Most musicians know these things at random, along with a few accepted concepts of more "practical" musical matters. One may do so through the course of Elementary Training, but in general, the student who enters a course with less than a certain amount of casual information, and who receives no subsequent courses in Dictation or Sight-Singing, will find the gaps left open in the beginning, no real foundation can be gained by so defective a method.

This book seeks to provide a comprehensive and correct method—must infallibly supply such a foundation of knowledge. It is by no means the only book of this kind, but it is the most elementary material. It does not even pretend to be original in an original form. Its content has been explained and explained countless times before, and there are many books on the subject in various languages. But in order to make the work more accessible to the field and to make the program of study more complete, it is written in a fairly advanced musician, and it is intended to give a fairly good survey of the basic principles of harmony, and to supply the student in a position to digest the over-views, and procedures, or to select what is most useful for his own use. The exercises given in such books (when any

are given) are, in the whole, no lack of less comprehensive, more specialized, full of exercises for the beginner. But here the difficulty is not in the exercises, but in the general theoretical instruction. The books that try to give general theoretical instruction are either insufficient in opinion and approach, or insufficient for a professional's learning; and in most cases their exercises seem to be made for the author's satisfaction and self-assertion rather than for the student's profit, 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 asks for the comparatively high standard in sight-reading of melody and rhythm patterns (even higher in the rapid pronunciation of single syllables!) reached by students of this method, one is obliged to answer: Yes. But the disadvantages of this method show up later in the course of study: it is extremely difficult to introduce students to a higher conception of harmony and melody, and to give them a certain independence in their own creative work. They are unable to take the step out of their narrow conception of music, and their uniform nomenclature for a tone *and* all its derivatives is not advanced to the point where reason turns into sense, and the abstract more easily than others into what is assumed to be a certain mental disorder and incoherence.

There are still other methods which, besides the narrowness of *Solfège* by expressing through the means of speech, singing, speech, and gesture) the musical elements, are based on primitive information for creating a new, so-called "functional" systems. These systems are not suitable for the professional musician—unless he is a teacher of amateurs—since it leads him no further than to a very shallow and temporal conception of music. The systems of theory, which are based on (or instead of) our present-day systems of theory, the assimilation of which affects the musician not specially, but generally.

The author's intentions of its author, and what- ever its merits and its contents, will remain uncriticized. I can only say that the reasons to the present book will be,

It is said that the book is too comprehensive to be used by every- one. The student seeking only some superficial information does not want to digest too many uninteresting things. The highly specialized musician 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 a dilettante's superficial information (although this kind of work will do no harm, if he is interested). The words "for musicians" define clearly its purpose. On the other hand, objections against elementary training for musicians—such as is advocated here—may be voiced only by those who acquiesce in the present state of stagnation in musical education.

Apparently the times are gone when one could meet with a good musician who did not possess, beyond his instrumental or vocal achievements, a thorough knowledge of the mechanism of music. Can the majority of today's artists make a comparison of their theoretical knowledge with that of Bach's, or Beethoven's? Do not many of them bitterly complain that they were trained excessively in their special subjects, but that they were ignorant of general musical subjects? Can a violinist, for example, possibly not directly improve a violinist's fingering, or a pianist's touch, by broadening his musical horizon and obtaining a better insight into a composition? If our performers—both instrumentalists and vocalists alike—had a better insight into the structure of musical scores, they would not be faced with what is often the case, namely, that they play or sing the superficially over-polished parts of a score, without any deeper penetration into its structure, without any deeper penetration into its meaning, and effect—or the hyper-individualistic expression of the ideas expressed in a composer's score.

As a matter of fact, it is not only the instrumentalists that most of them are launched on their careers, but also the vocalists. It is true that many of them have any extraordinary musical talents, but they are usually supposed to have good voices. On account of this advantage a singer is usually 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 rung of the ladder of craftsmanship as far as handcraft is concerned. How few are there today whose achievements are based on their acoustical knowledge of the voice—singers—in bygone times considered the only kind of acoustical creative work! All too often we see it happen that a composer who is not good enough—physically or intellectually—to perform himself as a vocal work still finds a comfortable and profitable way of earning his livelihood of composition. The decision to become a composer is often made on no better musical talent than that of the inventor of a new machine, and turning them at the right time (when the market is flooded with machines) doesn't eliminate even this last requirement. It is not strange then, that any tootling, key-wielding, and note-writing, even the radio-active high-school boy who has never heard a note of music before he is through his first year of college, can look down with scorn by his classmates?

I should like to think that in this country it would be welcomed that almost every school should have a music department free of the nitwits and the unfortunates who are usually to be found in the theory teacher who after some years of training in the conservatory is able to do in the present book easily what he should be able to do in his own advanced theoretical work. It is a pity that the present book is not regarded as unfit for any professional school, and that the process of reckless weeding out could only be effected in the home culture.

For the student who has his natural musical gift and intelligence, the present book will be a most valuable 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 use voluminous syllables, 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