
LISTEN
BRIEF EDITION

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WITH VIVIAN KERMAN

WORTH PUBLISHERS, INC.

Listen: Brief Edition

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 86-51597

ISBN: 0-87901-364-8 (Paper edition)
ISBN: 0-87901-373-7 (Cloth edition)

Third printing, July 1988

Editors: Linda Baron Davis, Gunder Hefta

Picture editor: Elaine Bernstein

Production: George Touloumes, Margie Brassil

Designed by Malcolm Grear Designers

Type set by New England Typographic Service, Inc.

Music set by Musica Vera

Printed and bound by R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company

Cover: Assemblage by Starr Ockenga

Worth Publishers, Inc.

33 Irving Place

New York, New York 10003

Preface

LISTEN: BRIEF EDITION has been designed to meet the needs of one-semester and one-quarter courses for students with no training in "classical" music and with minimal previous exposure to it. If asked to characterize our approach briefly, we would stress first and foremost the emphasis on music, rather than on theory, history, or listening techniques in the abstract. As far as possible, theoretical and historical materials are introduced not for their own sake, and not merely to be memorized, but in order to help convey the aesthetic qualities of actual pieces of music to which students *listen*.

We see no contradiction between this principle and the book's historical organization. In practical terms, history provides beginning students with an easily comprehended framework in which to place a good deal of unfamiliar musical experience. And the opportunity to experience a good deal of music, from various historical periods, is one of the lasting rewards of an introductory course.

This book also attempts to place music in its cultural context—again, at least partly for practical reasons. People who find careful listening difficult or abstract often get excited by the concept of music in relation to history, painting, literature, and ideas. Learning about such relationships can lead them to listen more intently and fruitfully. With this in mind, we precede our main coverage of Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and twentieth-century music with chapters summarizing the culture of the times, especially as this involves music. These introductory chapters (Chapters 8, 11, 15, and 19) also include concise accounts of the musical style of the era, so that they furnish background of two kinds—cultural and stylistic—for listening to specific pieces of music in the chapters that follow.

These principles also underlie our text LISTEN (now in its third edition), for which this Brief Edition serves as a shorter and less detailed alternative. Otherwise, though, the prose, coverage, organization, level, and design of the two books are quite different.

Coverage is often the hardest question facing the instructors of introductory music courses. Should the focus be on music of the "common practice" period—on the standard concert repertory? (A strong argument can be made that beginning courses in music should introduce students to the good music they are most likely to hear.) Or, given the successes of the "early music" movement and the commitment of many musicians to it, should one try for a more even-handed historical survey? Or should one concentrate on the music that is closest to the students' own time frame, music of the twentieth century?

Such questions point to just a few of the many diverse attitudes—often reflected in diverse agendas—found among musicians and teachers today. As authors, we feel real sympathy for each of these three positions and believe that our text will work for the adherents of each. Our main emphasis is indeed on the standard repertory—once again, on practical grounds: only so much can be accomplished in a short time, and we believe that students learn more from the presentation of basic material with some reinforcement than from ambitious surveys without it. But much careful thought has also gone into the chapters on early music and twentieth-century music, chapters that many instructors will wish to use in whole or in part. Concise as it is, our Unit II, *Early Music: An Overview*, is as coherent as a lifetime's (JK's) immersion in music history can make it. And in an era of widespread uncertainty about musical values, we have done our best to respond seriously to changing perceptions of the music of the early, middle, and late twentieth century.

Since many instructors will start with Unit III, later Baroque music, it is important to stress that the material in Unit II is *strictly optional* in the book's sequence, and nothing else in the book depends on assigning it. For those who wish to treat early music selectively, the fairly modest amount of prose in Unit II should prove manageable as a general orientation for the music chosen.

With twentieth-century music, we have focused on avant-garde music of the pre-World War I period, given attention to several more conservative composers, and shown how both avant-garde and conservative tendencies have manifested themselves in the music of America. Here as elsewhere, of course, instructors can assign for reading and listening as much as they prefer. Popular music, we concluded, is best skipped in a concise textbook. Unquestionably, popular music can be a powerful teaching tool, drawing students to music of other kinds, but in this area so much depends on the individual instructor that we personally doubt that a brief text can really be very helpful.

Between the short chapters of Unit I, *Fundamentals*, there are optional "interludes" covering special material (*The Science of Sound, Musical Notation,* and a 15-page discussion-portfolio, *Musical Instruments*). Instructors can assign the chapters and interludes of this unit or not as they prefer, perhaps even covering some at the start of the course and some later.

LISTEN: BRIEF EDITION includes several new pedagogical features:

- Rather than starting directly with the elements of music, we open the book with an Overture—an immediate listening experience that instructors can use at the very beginning of the course. Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is traced through simply, in what is now sometimes called a "phenomenological" fashion. The emphasis is on direct impressions rather than terminology—though en route we unobtrusively slip in some basic technical terms, terms that will be presented more formally in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

  Imaginative teachers often work out special introductory presentations to break the ice and interest students in the subject matter (and to keep them from wandering off in the direction of other courses). Our Overture is a specific suggestion for such an ice-breaker.

- We have developed our own improved format for tabular listening charts, with timings based on the recordings in our set of eight records or cassettes. When these recordings are used with the book, students can use digital stopwatches to help orient themselves at once with the lines on the

charts. However, the verbal material in the charts—along with the short music excerpts, for those with some reading knowledge of music—make the charts quite easy to use without the timings (and hence usable with any records that students may have or that instructors may prefer).

Another feature is that the main recordings in the set are digital and are also available on compact discs. Instructors who have programmable CD equipment may want to obtain the CD version of certain pieces, since it is a special pleasure to be able to lecture with instant-access audio examples. And students who have access to CD players, with their big digital timers, will find the listening charts particularly easy to follow.

- Biographical sketches of the main composers are included before their music is discussed. (The days have passed, fortunately, when it was fashionable to dismiss information about composers' lives as irrelevant to their music.) Once again, the format developed here is distinctive: the way the biographies and portraits are clearly set off from the main text, and the inclusion of easy-to-read lists of chief works for further listening or reference.

- Of the 70 compositions discussed in the text, 62 appear on the accompanying set of records/cassettes, in whole or in part (for example, only one movement of a symphony is included). Much effort has been spent in an attempt to find the very best possible recordings for this set. While items that we judged "best" could not always be included (alas, many record companies are now refusing to license material for educational use), we think that as a totality our set of records/cassettes features striking, attractive performances—performances that have a good chance to interest, excite, and captivate listeners. Much depends on chemistry beyond anyone's control, of course, but, once captivated, students will keep listening to these recordings long after the course is over.

We are grateful to the many instructors who have taken the time to review draft chapters of the book and give us the benefit of their advice. Their responses have ranged from brisk red-pencilings to detailed arguments about matters of pedagogical and historical principle, and there wasn't one from which we did not derive something to improve the text. In addition to users of our longer text, LISTEN, who over the years have given us suggestions for abbreviating it, we wish to thank:

Tharald Borgir, *Oregon State University*
Andrew D. Brown, *Central Missouri State University*
Steve Brown, *University of Northern Iowa*
David DeBolt, *Kent State University*
G. Daniel Fairchild, *University of Wisconsin, Platteville*
William B. George, *San Jose State University*
Richard H. von Grabow, *Iowa State University*
Richard D. Green, *Northwestern University*
Phyllis Juszczyk, *St. Francis College*
Leo Kreter, *California State University, Fullerton*
B. G. McCloud, *Appalachian State University*
Robert C. Mann, *Stephen F. Austin State University*
Earl B. Miller, *University of Tennessee at Chattanooga*
Raymond D. Moore, *University of Georgia*
Arthur Motycka, *University of Rhode Island*
R. C. Nelson, *Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania*

Patricia Root, *Washington State University*
Terence S. Small, *University of Florida*
Jane B. Weidensal, *Manhattan School of Music*
Robert L. Weiss, *Southern Illinois University at Carbondale*
William T. Whitener, *University of Alaska, Anchorage*
Thomas Wright, *Florida State University*

Thanks also to David Breckbill, Professor Scott Deveaux, Dr. Robert M. Greenberg, and Nanette McGuinness for specific editorial assistance. Philip Brett, a friend in need, interrupted a crowded rehearsal schedule to make the Dufay recording for Chapter 6.

However imperfectly, words written about music try to evoke the quality of an art, music—and therefore we feel they should be read from pages that are artistic, too. Pat Appleton of Malcolm Grear Designers has made this book beautiful in itself, and also functionally beautiful: the use of two colors works wonders to clarify diagrams, music examples, and listening charts, and the design for the artwork allows this to be integrated vividly into the text, rather than applied to it cosmetically. To George Touloumes, the miracle man who implemented this design, and to our support system at Worth Publishers—Elaine Bernstein, Natalie Bowen, Margie Brassil, Gunder Hefta, and especially our devoted, patient editor Linda Baron Davis—warm thanks.

Berkeley, California
January 1987

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Unit I

Fundamentals

The introductory unit of this book, Unit I covers musical fundamentals and their standard terminology. Chapter 1 of this unit will introduce us at once to a piece of music, the Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream *by Felix Mendelssohn. Chapter 2, "The Elements of Music," takes up pitch, dynamics, tone color, beats, meter, and rhythm. Chapter 3, "The Structures of Music," deals with melody, harmony, and other combinations of the basic elements already discussed. Chapter 4 carries the discussion one stage further, to a consideration of musical style and musical form.*

Listening

The basic activity that leads to the love of music and to its understanding—to what is sometimes called "music appreciation"—is listening to particular pieces of music again and again. Such, at least, is the premise underlying this book. The following pages are filled mostly with discussions of musical compositions—symphonies, concertos, songs, and operas—that people have found more and more rewarding as they have listened to them repeatedly. These discussions are intended to clarify the contents of the works and their aesthetic qualities: what goes on in the music and how it affects us.

It should be apparent that the kind of understanding involved here is not the same required in, say, the study of physics. We do not need to understand concepts such as velocity, force, and energy in the same way we would if we were going to use them in working out problems or conducting lab experiments. That kind of hands-on knowledge of music is necessary only for a music professional—for a composer or a performer; it is not necessary for a nonprofessional listener.

Our goals here are different. Listeners need to understand musical concepts and know musical terms in order to grasp more clearly what they already hear in music. Analyzing things, pinpointing things, even simply using the right names for things, makes us more sharply aware of them. Sometimes, too, this process of analysis, pinpointing, and naming can actually assist listening. We become aware of some aspects of the music only after they have been pointed out. And sharper awareness contributes to greater appreciation of music as well as all the other arts.

Since our emphasis is on listening to music, that is where we start. Before defining such concepts as pitch, meter, and so on, we will get to know a major piece of music—our Overture. Starting with an actual work of art, rather than a set of definitions, may also help us get through the fundamentals more smoothly. The work will exemplify concepts that will be explained later.

Some readers will already know many of the terms that will be mentioned in Chapter 1 as they listen to this music; those who do not should not attempt to memorize them at this point. The terminology will all be explained more fully in the later chapters. Even short of complete understanding, a reader with some basic familiarity with musical terms, gained directly from an interesting, attractive musical composition, should find the terminology of music less abstract and mysterious, more immediate and alive.

Chapter 1

Overture

Listen, then, to the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, composed in 1826 by Felix Mendelssohn when he was seventeen years old. He and his sister, Fanny, who was also a very talented musician and to whom he was very close, had loved this Shakespeare play since their childhood. This overture is a remarkably mature work, and it has a fresh and imaginative quality that Mendelssohn did not always match in his later years.

The overture lasts for about twelve minutes. One reason why we stay interested for this rather long time—why we can become engrossed—is that the music breaks into clear sections that contrast with their neighbors in quite striking ways. The following paragraphs, which direct attention to what we are hearing, use the letters A–G to refer to each section.

The indented paragraphs can be skipped over at first and left until a second listening. Included in these paragraphs are technical terms for the effects and features mentioned in the main text, terms that will be explained in more detail in coming chapters. The idea is not to learn these terms at the present stage, but simply to get some idea about them in the context of an actual piece of music, Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Four Chords The music begins with four slow, quiet, peaceful, and slightly mysterious chords. What makes them mysterious is that they are *just* four

The young Felix Mendelssohn, and a later drawing of his sister, Fanny, who was also a composer