

RONALD SMITH

*Aural Training
in Practice*

BOOK I · Grades 1 to 3

The Associated Board of
the Royal Schools of Music

Aural Training in Practice

Book I: Grades 1-3

This material has been prepared primarily to offer guidance for the Aural Tests in the Associated Board's practical examinations.

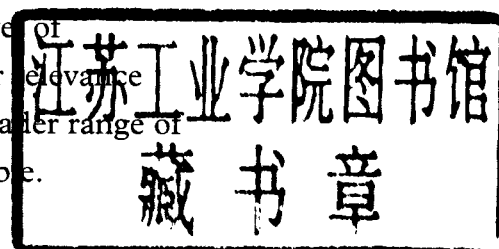
Where appropriate a background note has been given showing the purpose of the test, and in some cases a preliminary exercise has been suggested before attempting the practice tests.

It should be noted that in most cases ample practice material will be found in the music pupils are currently learning.

This should be used whenever possible to emphasise the relevance of aural training as an integral part of learning to play an instrument or to sing.

However, it should be noted that the examples chosen for this publication are not necessarily of the technical level of the specific grade, but have been selected for their relevance to pupils' aural development and to provide a broader range of music for listening than would otherwise be possible.

RONALD SMITH



THE ASSOCIATED BOARD OF
THE ROYAL SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

Test 1A: Responding to the pulse of the music

GRADE 1

Following on from the first steps in aural training found in the Associated Board's Preparatory Test, the candidate is required:

'To tap the pulse of a passage of music in 2 or 3 time played by the examiner. The examiner will commence playing the passage, and the candidate will be expected to join in as soon as possible by tapping the beat, stressing where the strong beat falls. The candidate will then be asked to state the time.'

It will be noticed that all the following pieces have a strong rhythmic character and, except for Nos.15 and 20, begin on the first beat of the bar. The ability to feel the pulse in music is an essential step towards playing rhythmically and being able to repeat rhythm accurately.

Every lesson in the early stages of learning an instrument should include practice in this skill. Occasionally the teacher should stop playing, having warned the pupil to continue tapping, so as to find out whether a steady pulse can be maintained.

Pupils should make clear what time the piece is in through the regular stress within their tapping, but it is good practice always to ask them to state whether it is in 2 or 3 time to ensure that they have taken in what they are doing. There is no need to continue playing the piece once the beat has been clearly established. Likewise the piece can be repeated if necessary. Tapping, using two or three fingers of one hand on to the palm of the other, will be found to be more satisfactory than clapping. Some teachers may find the use of a wood block or other percussion instrument effective.

Many suitable examples will be found in the Associated Board's 'Easier Piano Pieces' series, notably Nos.2, 14, 21, 34, 52, 64, 70.

In the early days of learning an instrument, pupils should always experience the pulse of the music before attempting to play the notes. Their pieces will therefore provide the best possible material for this important element of musicianship.

N.B. The candidate, in the examination, is required to tap the *pulse*, not the rhythm. It is a good principle to start tapping the pulse as soon as that is felt and then to introduce the regular stress, becoming more confident in the indication of the 'down-beat' stress as the piece progresses.

PRACTICE TESTS

Introduce this test by saying: 'Tap the pulse for this music, joining in as soon as you can. Stress where the strong beat falls.'

With spirit Swinstead

1 *f* *p*

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Andante Dunhill

2 *p legato* *mf*


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Andantino Burgmüller

3 *p religioso*

Munter und straff Schumann

4 *f*

N.B. Careful attention to the rhythmical playing of this piece is necessary, otherwise pupils may suspect that the pulse is stressed
 etc. This, of course, could apply to many other pieces.

Allegretto grazioso Gurlitt

5 *p*

Moderato Haydn

6 *f*

Allegretto quasi andante Heller

7

(♩ = 144) Rory Boyle

8

© The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

Grandioso (♩ = 160) Alan Haughton

9

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Throughout this book examples are given primarily from keyboard music. These will provide practice material in preparation for examinations, but teachers of singing or of instruments other than keyboard will find many suitable examples in their own teaching resources and in the music their pupils are playing. This applies to all grades, but here as a guide to the possibilities are a few examples taken from recent Associated Board syllabuses.

VIOLIN

Moderato

Haydn (arranged)

10

Vigorously

Arbeau (arranged)

11

Allegro

Bartók (arranged)

12

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DOUBLE BASS **Joyfully**

Caroline Emery/Jonathan Harvey

13

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* ♩ = 60

Caroline Emery/Howard Ferguson

14

* originally written in 4/4 time

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VOICE

Moderato

Traditional

15

How far is it to Beth - le-hem? Not ve - ry far. Shall we find the
sta - ble - room Lit by a star?

Test 1A (cont.)

FLUTE

Moderato

Diabelli



Allegro

Traditional



Fine



D.C. al Fine

CLARINET

Animato

Folk Dance



Stomping

Folk Dance



BASSOON

Jauntily

Anon.



TRUMPET in Bb

Allegretto

Hook



In addition, endless examples will be found in song books, especially those designed for young children.

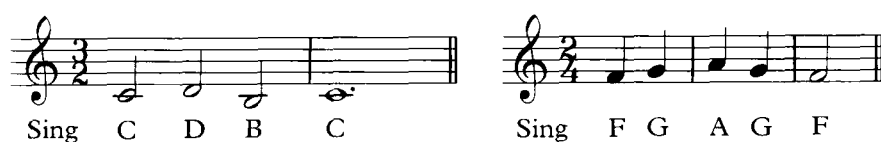
Test 1B: Echo singing

'To sing, as an echo, three short phrases limited to a range of three notes in a major key played by the examiner. The echoes should follow each phrase in strict time without an intervening pause. The key-chord and tonic will first be sounded and the pulse indicated.'

The aim of this test is to develop a good sense of pitch as well as a rhythmical response. A limited number of notes is used, but, before attempting these, pupils should be secure in the pitching of single notes as required in the Associated Board's Preparatory Test.

If pupils find difficulty in pitching a note, it may be that the note is outside their vocal range, and so a suitable adjustment to the teacher's choice of notes will be necessary. Where a pupil experiences greater difficulty and appears not to have any concept of pitch, extreme patience and regular help will be required starting with the apparent single pitch (monotone) the pupil is using.

In all sung tests, pupils should be encouraged to use a strong voice (but not necessarily loud), preferably using a vowel preceded by a consonant. Do not just use 'lah'. Vary the diet with, for example, 'low', 'may', 'mee', etc. and use pitch names which will help them associate names with note sounds: e.g.



Where pupils lack confidence to sing out, let them hum first, gradually opening the mouth until a clear vowel sound emerges: e.g. mm ~~~~~ ma mm ~~~~~ me mm ~~~~~ mo.

N.B. If the piano is used to give the pitch, it will probably be necessary to repeat the note several times in quick succession before the pupil picks up the vibration and attempts to reproduce the pitch, but do not 'hammer' the notes. Playing louder does not help.

Practise other groups of notes of equal length before proceeding to the following practice tests.

PRACTICE TESTS

Introduce each test by saying: 'I shall play three short phrases. After I play each phrase, I want you to sing it like an echo and in time. Here is the key-chord and the tonic Here is the pulse

'Count in' by giving two bars, e.g. in 2-time the pulse should be given as 1,2,1,2, with the test beginning on the next down-beat. This principle should be adopted in all tests in 1B, 1C, 2B, 2C, 3B and 3C.

1 response 1 response 2 response 3

2 response 1 response 2 response 3

3 response 1 response 2 response 3

4 response 1 response 2 response 3

Test 1B (cont.)

5 

6 

7 

8 

9 

10 

11 


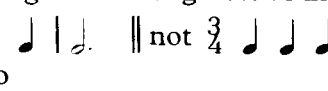
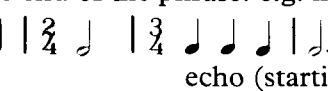
12 

13 

14 

15 

In all the above tests ensure that pupils sing the echo with a strong sense of rhythm, particularly being careful that the response is not cutting short a long note at the end of the phrase: e.g. in No.12 –

$\frac{3}{4}$  || not $\frac{3}{4}$  || $\frac{3}{4}$  ||

echo

echo (starting incorrectly one beat early)

Test 1C: Noticing differences

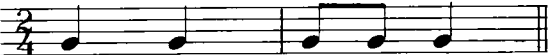

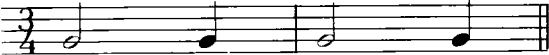
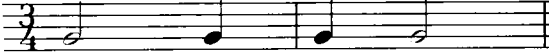
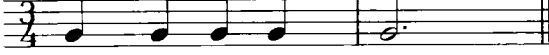
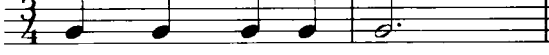
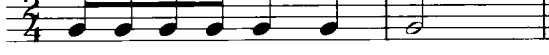





‘To recognise a rhythmic change to a two-bar phrase played twice by the examiner, with the change being made in the second playing. Candidates will be required to recognise and tap or describe the change. The pulse will first be indicated. The examiner will be prepared to play both versions of the phrase a second time if necessary.’

Training to notice differences in performances helps musical concentration and develops the critical ear. In similar tests in the Associated Board’s Practical Musicianship examinations, the candidate is required to spot differences which occur between what is printed and what is played. That can be an aid to sight reading and pupils becoming more aware of mistakes in their own performances.

In this test the candidate listens for the differences between two melodies played by the examiner. In Grade 1 this is limited to a rhythmic change.

Some preliminary practice will help using a tapped rhythm.

At first the answer might be restricted to tapping the two versions. For example, the pupil might say, ‘The first time it went’ ♩ ♩ ♩ (tapping the rhythm); ‘and the second time it went’ ♩. ♩ ♩ (again tapping the rhythm). Later the pupil should be encouraged to describe the difference, saying, for example, ‘The first time the notes were even; the second time there was a dotted rhythm.’ Or simply, ‘It was uneven,’ leading to, ‘The first time there were three even crotchets (quarter notes); and the second time the rhythm was dotted crotchet, quaver, crotchet (dotted quarter note, eighth note, quarter note).’ In the Associated Board examinations the examiner will play the original phrase once and then the changed version once, after which candidates should respond either by illustration or explanation to show that they have noticed the difference. The examiner will play both phrases again if necessary.

	Tap rhythm	repeated as
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Teachers should improvise further examples for regular practice using the procedure described above.

PRACTICE TESTS

Introduce the test by saying: 'I shall play a short phrase twice and will change the rhythm in the second playing. I would like you to tell me what the difference was. Here is the pulse' (See note in Test 1B, referring to the giving of the pulse.)

1	<p>Andante Mozart</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
2	<p>Alla breve Tchaikovsky</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
3	<p>Sostenuto Mendelssohn</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
4	<p>Allegro moderato John Stanley</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
5	<p>Allegro Schubert</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
6	<p>[♩ = 116] J.S. Bach</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
7	<p>Allegro non troppo Franck</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
8	<p>Moderato Ravel</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
9	<p>Giocoso Holst</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>
10	<p>Allegro Haydn</p>	<p>rhythmic change</p>

11 **Andante maestoso** J.S. Bach
mf

rhythmic change
mf

12 **Vivement** Sandré
pp

rhythmic change
pp

13 **Moderato** Dunhill
mf

rhythmic change
mf

14 **Moderato** Reinecke
p con grazia

rhythmic change
p con grazia

15 **Allegro** Kabalevsky
f

rhythmic change
f

16 **Allegro** Scarlatti
p

rhythmic change
p

17 **Allegro moderato** Parry
p

rhythmic change
p

18 **Comodo** Mahler
p espress.

rhythmic change
p espress.

19 **Larghetto** Mozart
mp

rhythmic change
mp

20 **Moderato** Scottish traditional
p

rhythmic change
p

Test 1D: Identifying expressive qualities in performance

'To identify certain features of a piece played by the examiner. The features will be confined to contrasted dynamics (*p/f*), gradation of tone (*crescendo/diminuendo*) and articulation (*staccato/legato*), of which the examiner will select one or two and advise the candidate accordingly before playing the piece. Questions on the selected features will then follow. Candidates will be expected to use Italian terms in their answers where appropriate.'

When listening to music pupils will, if given regular practice, recognise the expressive qualities which make a musical and stylistic performance and thus become more sensitive themselves as performers.

In the following practice exercises, each of the three features is treated separately. Use of the Italian terms should be encouraged, starting with *piano* and *forte*.

PRACTICE EXERCISES: Contrast of dynamics (*p/f*)

There is no need for an exaggerated dynamic difference, but a clear differentiation between the two is obviously required in the performance if aural confidence is to be nurtured.

Exercise 1: Vivace (Türk)

Exercise 2: Andantino (Krug)

Exercise 3: Andantino (Krug)

Andante Fibich

3

mf *p* *pp* *mf* *p*

PRACTICE EXERCISES: Gradation of tone (*crescendo/diminuendo*)

4 Gounod

pp *cresc.* *f* *pp*

pp *pp*

Scherzando Schumann

5

p *cresc.* *f* *cresc.*

f *f*

Allegro moderato H. Hofmann

6

PRACTICE EXERCISES: Articulation (*staccato/legato* or *detached/smooth*)

Allegretto T.F. Kirchner

7

Minuet Haydn

8

Allegro moderato (♩ = c.138) Alan Haughton

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In each of the practice exercises, ask pupils to describe the order of events and play their music as further examples. Then introduce music with each of these features included. Burgmüller's *25 Easy and Progressive Studies* (Associated Board 'Easier Piano Pieces' No.19) will provide excellent additional practice material.

It should be noted that although (for obvious reasons) the tests in the examinations will be given on the piano – pupils should therefore be acquainted with that medium – in the instrumental lesson teachers should constantly develop the aural aspect through the instrument being learnt.

The message must be: 'Don't just practise aural tests when an exam draws near. Each lesson should be a development of an alert and perceptive ear.'

Here are some examples taken from recent Associated Board syllabuses.

VIOLIN
(♩ = 144)

Weber (arranged)

CELLO
Allegretto grazioso

Grechaninov

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FLUTE

Allegretto

12

mf

mp

Alan Ridout

© Novello & Co. Ltd
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TRUMPET in B♭

Lively

13

mf

f

Christopher Gunning

© Faber Music Ltd
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Teachers may prefer to use the words 'smooth' and 'detached' or 'tongued' (as appropriate), and these will be acceptable in the examination.

To keep a lively approach to aural training, play pieces pupils have learnt, but include deliberate mistakes in dynamics, articulation, note lengths and pitch – but not all at once! This will increase their awareness, and their performance will thereby improve significantly. It also combines preparation for Tests C and D in a relevant and practical way.

PRACTICE TESTS

Here it is helpful to remember that candidates will be asked to identify only one or two features in examination tests, and examiners will tell them, before playing the piece, which feature(s) they should listen for in particular.

Introduce the test by saying: 'Listen carefully while I play this short piece, and I shall then ask you about and

Let it be a dialogue and, when necessary, play the whole of the piece again (or as much as is appropriate) as the examiner will in the examination.

Allegro giusto

1

p

Dorothy Pilling