

Listener's Guide to Musical Understanding

Leon Dallin

中央音乐学院图书馆藏书

书号 800.320

总记号 XCB 0150323



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Listener's Guide to Musical Understanding

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Fifth Edition

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Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers
Dubuque, Iowa

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 81-67090

ISBN 0-697-03487-9

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Fourth Printing, 1983

Printed in the United States of America

2-03487-02

The listening experiences suggested for the combined units of study are planned to acquaint students during the course with the principal materials, mediums, forms, periods, styles, and composers of music. In selecting the examples four criteria were considered: musical value, appeal, suitability, and availability. The specified examples or equivalents can be found in most institutional record collections. Except as noted, the composers and works are listed in the current *Schwann-1 Record & Tape Guide* or are included in the *Listener's Guide* record album.¹ The seventy-one selections in the record album are keyed to the text, and many of them appear more than once to encourage repeated hearings with attention focused on different aspects of the works. Throughout the text dates are given for composers and works to place them in the proper time frame and historical perspective. When the exact date is unknown or disputed, an authoritative approximation is given.

Listening to the examples included in the record album and/or a representative selection from those cited in the text assures a balanced and varied exposure to music in a wide range of styles, but the intent is not to prescribe an inflexible listening program. When listening examples are omitted or substitute examples are used, or the book is read without interspersed listening, the material relating to specific examples (separated from the body of the text and set in different type) can be skipped without interrupting the continuity or diminishing the completeness of the general information.

The amount and kind of listening can be adapted to the available time, resources, and facilities. Listening can be done in or out of the classroom, individually or in groups, and from the *Listener's Guide* record album, commercial recordings, or specially prepared tapes. More listening examples are listed than can ordinarily be heard in a typical course for the following reasons: (1) to suggest a wide range of listening experiences, (2) to provide alternate selections when all are not available, (3) to allow latitude for individual preferences, (4) to include adequate material for more comprehensive courses, and (5) to provide multiple examples for teachers who prefer to use excerpts. Performance times are given as an aid in planning classroom listening and outside assignments. The timings (in minutes:seconds) are accurate for a specific recording and approximate for other performances. Elapsed time is also used as an aid in the perception of musical form.

The organization of the book, starting with the materials of music (part 1), makes it possible to begin the course with music that is immediately appealing and for students to focus their attention initially on elements which they can perceive without difficulty. In part 2 the forms of music are discussed, and descriptive outlines provided for the listening examples enable students to follow the various plans of musical organization without recourse to notation. The periods and styles of music are introduced chronologically in part

1. A set of five stereo LP records available from Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 2460 Kerper Boulevard, Dubuque, Iowa 52001.

3, but the preceding sections contain extensive background information pertaining to style. The relative emphasis on each area of study and the order of presentation can be adjusted to individual requirements. Modern music, which sometimes receives short shrift, is abundantly represented throughout the book and is the subject of special chapters, as are folk and popular music, jazz, and the music of other cultures.

The information presented in the text combined with the recommended listening stimulates the formation of broad and discriminating musical tastes. With its emphasis on general principles that can be remembered and listening experiences that can be relished, the *Listener's Guide* launches readers on a program of enduring pleasure and personal enrichment.

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Listener's Guide to Musical Understanding

Fifth Edition



Chapter 1

Introduction

Music has been an integral part of human culture since the dawn of civilization. Human beings have used rhythms and pitches for expressive purposes throughout recorded history and for thousands of years before. There is speculation that primitive music even antedates speech. Through the ages music has figured prominently in a wide range of human activities—in rituals, religions, ceremonies, and amusements.

There is no completely satisfactory explanation for the universality of music. It is not essential for life, yet life without it is unimaginable. It does not provide basic requirements or satisfy obvious instincts, but it has flourished with all peoples in all times and places.

Developing an appreciation of music and the arts is more important now than ever before. Modern efficiency is making more leisure time available. If it is to be utilized for more abundant living, worthwhile and enduring sources of pleasure must be cultivated. One of the most rewarding is music, and unlike many recreational activities, it is accessible throughout one's lifetime.

As a starting point, everyone likes some kind of music. The purposes of systematic listening and study are to heighten the pleasure derived from the music one already likes and to develop one's ability to appreciate additional types and styles of music. This book pursues both objectives, the relative emphasis depending upon one's perspective and previous exposure to music. Reading the book should prove of value in achieving the

twin goals of greater understanding and broader taste, but reading alone assures little progress. The reading must be followed by listening. A perusal of a travel folder is no substitute for a trip, and reading about music is no substitute for hearing it. Music must be given an opportunity to speak for itself.

For practical reasons, most of the listening will be done by means of recordings. Modern recording and playback equipment has reached an unprecedented degree of perfection, with digital and direct-to-disc recording the latest developments. Still, there is an elusive quality in a live performance that a microphone cannot capture. More important, the empathy between performers and audiences is possible only when the two come together. Recordings are a wonderful convenience and provide repeated hearings on demand, but only in live performance situations is the full impact of the listening experience achieved. Record listening should be supplemented by concert attendance whenever possible. The performances do not have to be by professionals. Living presence compensates for the technical limitations of students and amateurs.

The electronic age has revolutionized the listening habits of the world's peoples. Gone is the time when music was available only to the privileged and on special occasions, when audiences were limited to the capacity of a concert hall, and when sound could be preserved only as long as an instrument continued to vibrate. Treasures of music now await the entire population at the turn of a dial or the push of a button. The inventions which make this possible are so much a part of twentieth-century life that it is difficult to realize that they have come into general use within the memory of senior citizens.

Sound recording has not been enlisted exclusively in the cause of art. It also serves the purposes of commerce and industry. Our ears are bombarded with sounds from loudspeakers while we shop, eat, work, and travel. Neither music nor advertising has been quite the same since the advent of the singing commercial, and now that music's efficacy in increasing production has been recognized, it competes regularly with the din of factories. When we seek diversion, music is generally in the background, if not in the foreground. We are engulfed in sound during our waking hours. In this situation a distinction must be made between *hearing* and *listening*.

A person hears music playing in the background but listens to the person with whom one is speaking. A person hears a room full of people talking but listens to one conversation. The ears and mind are capable of concentrating on one sound source to the exclusion of others. This is attentive listening, the first requirement if one is to appreciate music. Persons whose exposure to music is limited to random encounters in the course of other activities are bypassing opportunities for pleasure every day.

In the chain of musical expression there are three mutually dependent links – the composer, the performer, and the listener. Composers and performers are among the most ardent listeners, and it is not uncommon for musicians to be active in all three roles. Most people, however, are content

to be listeners most of the time. Just to learn the craft of the composer or to acquire the technical proficiency of an artist performer requires years of arduous study and hours of daily practice, not to mention talent. Fortunately, the pathway to becoming a perceptive listener is considerably less demanding. Only the inclination and a modest amount of conditioning are required. Appreciation inevitably follows sufficient acquaintance with good music. The process is hastened perhaps by acquiring knowledge about music, but most important is a judicious selection of listening experiences.

Music which has only transient appeal, which is already assimilated in our culture, or which functions primarily on a subconscious level will receive only passing notice in this study. The field is thus limited to music of enduring value which has achieved or which merits wide recognition and which sustains interest under scrutiny. Musical works which qualify are legion. The problem is not one of finding worthy examples but of making choices from the infinite possibilities. Limitations of time and space suggest a search for prototypes in various forms and styles and for various mediums which will serve as touchstones to the vast treasury of music.

To open the doors to this treasury, it is not necessary to study the rudiments of music or to play an instrument. These activities provide a source of pleasure and accomplishment for some, but for others they are drudgery. If a person has outgrown a youthful enthusiasm for such things and has reached maturity without coping with them, chances are he never will. Fortunately, this is no barrier to the joy of music listening. If one has a particular interest in music fundamentals or in learning to play an instrument, that is another matter, but it is going the long way if the objective is to become an informed listener. There are more direct and pleasant routes.

One such course is charted here. It consists mostly of listening—listening to sounds of inherent beauty organized with consummate skill and brought to life by incomparable artists. This is not to say that nothing is required but to bathe in sound. On the contrary, total concentration on the listening experience is essential. Specific features of the music must be sought out, learned, remembered, and recognized. Music, even a familiar piece, becomes more understandable and more meaningful in the process. There may be no obvious logic for liking music, but there is high correlation between preferences and the amount and kind of listening. It follows naturally that the person with the broadest and most extensive experience possesses the greatest potential for enjoyment. It is never too late, or too early, to begin acquiring this experience.

