

TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING SIGHT SINGING, AND MELODIC AND HARMONIC DICTATION

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Identifying intervals is as easy as being able to sing a major scale. Beginning on the tonic and singing to any other note of the scale produces eight intervals of which four are Perfect and four are Major. Spread over the scale, they form a symmetrical pattern:

P1 M2 M3 P4 P5 M6 M7 P8

The other interval qualities are made by altering these intervals by half steps. Perfect intervals are Augmented if made a half step larger and are Diminished if made a half step smaller. Major intervals are made Augmented by making them a half step larger. They are Minor if made a half step smaller and Diminished if made another half step smaller. Singing the major scale between two notes will identify the numeric classification (unison, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, octave) of the interval. Perfect and Major intervals fit exactly into the major scales while Augmented, Diminished, and Minor intervals are produced or identified by making the alterations described above.

Sight Singing

Before trying to sing a passage at sight it is important to learn how to remember the tonic pitch. Practice this in the following way. Establish the key center by playing an extended authentic cadence (I-IV-V7-I) in the key of the example to be sung at sight. Then sing the tonic in your own voice range. Play a melody or chord pattern in the same key stopping on any note except the tonic or dominant and sing the tonic. Do this repeatedly making the pauses for singing as random as possible to show that you are remembering the tonic.

When you are ready to sing the melodic example:

- 1) Visually identify all the tonic and dominant notes in the melody to be sung at sight. Notice whether they are approached and left by stepwise scale patterns or by chord outlines.
- 2) Notice whether any notes are chromatically altered from the key signature requiring an alteration of a half step up or down.
- 3) Establish a pulse that can be steadily maintained while singing. Use either scale degree numbers (tonic = 1, supertonic = 2, etc.) or solfège syllables and sing at a steady pace. Use tonic notes as landmarks being sure you are always remembering the tonic pitch.

Melodic Dictation

After hearing the progression I-IV-V7-I played to establish a key center, sing the tonic and keep it in mind throughout. When first hearing a melody to be notated, write the rhythm above the empty measures, and fill in any obvious tonic pitches. Concentrate on memorizing the sound of the melody or a section of the melody so that you can repeat it in your mind as often as needed. On subsequent hearings memorize the sound of sections of which you feel unsure and fill in pitches to fit the rhythm you initially notated.

Harmonic Dictation

Practice vocally outlining triads of all four qualities using a single pitch as the root, third, or fifth of a triad (1-3-5-3-1, 3-1-3-5-3-, 5-3-1-3-5) For example, C-E-G-E-C, C-Ab-C-Eb-C, C-A-F-A-C. Do this exercise for all four qualities of triads (Major, Minor, Augmented, Diminished) and for Major-minor 7th (V7) chords (adding the extra inversion 7-5-3-1-3-5-7).

When notating a series of chords, use the following steps on sequential playings after establishing the key center in the usual way.

- 1) Under the Grand Staff, notate the quality and inversion of each chord using a letter (M, m, A, d) to show the quality and figured bass (5/3, 6, 6/4, 7, 6/5, 4/3, 2) to show the inversion.
- 2) Notate the Bass line using Melodic Dictation techniques and add Roman numerals using the information gleaned in Step 1.
- 3) Notate the Soprano line.
- 4) Identify the starting pitches for the Alto and Tenor and fill in these voices. Knowledge of common part-writing practices for the Common Practice Period will make these voices obvious much of the time.