

EAR TRAINING

When a person tries to develop his capacity to better hear the sounds going on around him, he is faced with several problems which aren't necessarily present when reading music or chord symbols from the written page.

Having "good ears" means having the ability to hear the roots to the various chords or scales that are being played; having the ability to hear the quality of the chord or scale ... major, minor (what kind of minor?), pentatonic, dim. whole tone, etc.; it means having the ability to tell what tone of the scale or chord is being played at any point in the solo ... "ah, that note was the #4 resolving to the 6th resolving to the 5th!"; it means hearing the piano, bass, soloist, drums, etc. individually as well as collectively.

I have found that there are many levels of hearing. Some people hear. Some people can really hear! And some people can seem to hear and identify almost anything that is being played. They can seem to sing or play back portions of solos right after the performer has played. How can they HEAR, and we can't seem to find the roots, scale, qualities, or what time signature the piece is in?

I'm firmly convinced that if all students from the first grade (even kindergarten) through their last year in college were exposed to simple ear training exercises that allowed them the opportunity to identify what they were hearing on the radio, TV, records, jazz, opera, orchestra, chorus, band, etc., our music scene in general would be much different! In my opinion, if simple ear training exercises, coupled with simple music theory, were carried out in public school, the public would demand music of a much higher calibre than they are presently consuming. Why would they demand "better" music? Because they would HEAR that the music they are being fed is too repetitious, trite, and banal to warrant our attention, much less our money on the sales of records or concert attendance.

One of the reasons jazz music, especially the music from Bebop to the present, has never had a big audience is due to the amount of thinking required to actually get to the essence of the music. The average person today doesn't want to think about music, he just wants to enjoy it. And he usually will settle for the same thing day after day. He feels life is too difficult to have to think about the music he is listening to. Hence the gap between the performer and the listener in the world today. I do not mean to imply that listening to music intellectually is not enjoyable.

This would be an excellent time to read Jerry Coker's *Listening to Jazz*, published by Prentice-Hall. This is a great book on how to listen to jazz and is accessible to the layman.

For ear training purposes, Volume 21 "Gettin' It Together" (2 CDs/Bk) of the Aebersold Play-along series will give you much to work with:

I suggest beginning by simply putting the first track on and sing the roots. After singing the roots, sing the first five notes of the scale. Then, try singing the triad, 1, 3, and 5 of the scales. By this time you can probably sing the entire scale. Don't forget to sing the 7th chord and the 9th chord, just like you are doing with your instrument. Also, don't forget to isolate individual pitches and sing them, such as the 5th or the 9th or the 3rd, etc.

Try starting in the middle of any of the tracks (begin with major) and see how long it takes you to find the root. You may want to sit at the piano while doing this in order to occasionally check yourself. After you find the root, can you sing the scale or even improvise?

All the time you are singing, be aware that each tone in the scale or chord has a number assigned to it. Be thinking these various numbers whenever possible.

Put the CDs on cassettes if you need to so you can play them in your car. Sing exercises, patterns, and improvise. While doing so, be aware of the pitch you are singing. You may want to buy a pitch pipe and keep it in your car to help identify the roots, 3rd's, 5th's, etc.

Being able to sing and identify intervals is a key part of ear training.

Experiment with singing or playing with the left channel of the recording only. Listen carefully to the bass.

I have found it helpful to memorize a song title that begins with a certain interval. For instance, the interval of a perfect 4th is the first two notes of *Here Comes the Bride*. By singing the first two notes of *Here Comes the Bride* and realizing it outlines a perfect 4th interval you can begin to center in on perfect 4th's whenever they are sounded. Or, it may help you to actually sing, or play on your instrument, in tune, the interval of a perfect 4th.

I like to use an Interval Chart as a guide to identify correctly whatever interval is being played. I made my chart by listing intervals and some songs that begin with that particular interval. Remember, intervals ascend and descend.