

## -----Introduction----- Framing the Questions

This app is a workplace in which to play with and develop the already powerful musical know-how that you use everyday in listening and making sense of the music all around you. It seems like the music is “just there” and we “just do it,” but in fact we are actively ***making the sense that we seem just to find***. It is a kind of “conversation” between performer, composer, and listener

If this suggestion seems plausible, it also suggests more: Imagine a person who only pays attention to melody? What happens when listening to a song where all the action is in the lower instruments playing interesting harmony? With attention still fixed on the inactive melody, that person would most likely say that the song is simply boring.

It's a little like a person watching a baseball game who only pays attention to the pitcher . Not yet noticing what's going on in other parts of the game, the person doesn't shift attention to where the action is. That person would most likely say that baseball is a very boring sport. But gradually learning to notice what's happening where, and learning appropriately to shift attention to where the action is, the game will obviously become more exciting.

Similarly, in learning how to move freely among the multiple dimensions of music, and also learning how to shift attention to wherever the action might be in a piece--melody, rhythm, harmony, instrumentation --your hearing of the same piece and your feeling about it will probably change, too: What was initially a boring piece that you didn't like, could become a piece that you find quite exciting.

But how can you learn to do that? One way is to be guided by musical analyses that help to differentiate among the various dimensions, highlighting those that are important at different moments in a given piece. Another way is to play with designing and building small compositions where you ask the listener to shift focus—melody, rhythm, harmony, and eventually larger and more complex pieces. For in actually making musical structures, as in

learning to actually play baseball, or in learning to build a sandcastle or a bridge that will stand up, you need to solve problems, and confront practical questions. In doing so, features and relations are liberated that may otherwise remain hidden within the undifferentiated total meld of a piece as it unfolds continuously in time.

Think of the process of learning as a conversation with the materials of music. By "conversation" I mean the usually silent conversations we have with materials as we are building, fixing, or inventing. As we handle these materials, arranging and rearranging them, watching them take shape even as we shape them, we are learning. The stuff "talks back" to us remaking our ideas of what is possible. The back-talk leads to new actions on our material objects in a spiral of inner and outer activity: our inner intentions are reflected back by the results of our actions, leading to new outer actions and often to changing of our intentions. It is a kind of "re-search"--one that is as familiar to the scientist designing a theory as to the painter or composer designing an artifact.

Arnold Schoenberg, juxtaposing the "technique of musical composition" with "carpentry," puts it this way:<sup>1</sup>

For if the carpenter knows how to join pieces of wood securely, this knowledge is based no less on fruitful observation and experience than is the knowledge of the [composer] who understands how to join chords effectively. And if the carpenter knows which types of wood are required by a particular job and selects accordingly, he is thus taking natural relationships and materials into account, just as does the [composer] when, appraising the possibilities of themes, he recognizes how long a piece may be.

Thus, I have designed the projects that you will be working on as a workplace in which to explore, experiment, and question the materials and relations that help to give music its coherence and its power. The projects begin with the most familiar, common tunes. These tunes actually include the basic organizing principles, the generative primitives from which the greatest musical complexity grows.

As you work you will also be making explicit what you know how to do already—your everyday know-how in making sense of the shared structures at work in our most familiar music. At the same time you will be expanding your

"hearings" to include the multiple intersecting dimensions that characterize more complex compositions. Beginning with melody and relatively easy, composition-like projects, each subsequent projects builds on the previous ones. Putting all of that to work, you will also learn music notation and listen and closely follow larger and more elaborate compositions to discover and enjoy how composers are continuously developing the generative musical primitives that you have already become intimate with.

---

<sup>1</sup>

Arnold Schoenberg (1874 -1951) was one of the composers who had the greatest influence on the music of this century. He is best known for his formulation of the principle, "composition with 12-notes related only one to the other." Schoenberg also wrote "Harmony," and a collection of essays, "Style and Idea" from which this is taken.