A Fanatic's Guide to Ear Training and Sight Singing

Volume One

by

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2. Here’s another scenario: the teacher plays you a cadence I IV V I in the key of C which will put your “ear” into the key of C. Now the instructor plays an F#. You hear that this note exists outside of the key you have been set up to hear. (We say this note has tension.) When people encounter notes with these tensions, the common response is to resolve them, make them fit into the key (in this case, C) and then backtrack to name the note. F# commonly resolves up a half step to G so you now resolve the F# up in your mind to G which is the fifth. At that point you may be able to identify the G because you know the sound of the 5th of the key, or you may resolve the 5th down to the tonic or maybe you sing from the G note down the scale to C to get your answer. You may have finally gotten the correct answer but your method is flawed. First, you can’t rely on resolution tendencies of notes because they don’t always resolve the way you think they should when you place them in real music. Believe me, this resolution tendency will come back to haunt you later when you move on to two note ear training. And again, the time it takes for you to resolve this pitch in your mind is too long; you are in the dust once more.

So we are back to the fact that **You don’t want to relate one pitch to another. You just want to know what each pitch sounds like in a key.**

### Learning the Sound of Each Note

So how do we properly learn the sounds of all notes in a key? **Simply put, you need to memorize the sound of all 12 notes against a key center.** You can use no tricks. You must just listen to these notes over and over again until you start to internalize the unique sound of all 12 pitches against a key center. This is done two ways:

1. Listening to an Ear Training tape that gives you a cadence typically I IV V I in a key, then playing a note and trying to identify it. Remember that you must listen to each note with the proper mind set. First realize that the only way this ear training will work in real time is for it to become instantaneous. You must hear a note and just know what that note is. When you start don’t be afraid to guess if you don’t know the answer. It is much better to guess than to try to use some trick or relate it to something extraneous in your mind. Eventually you will memorize the sounds of each of these notes, but it takes time and repeated listening before this happens. You will memorize these sounds more quickly if you listen to your Ear Training CD 4 or 5 times a day for 15 minutes rather than doing a one hour session. This is because by listening to the CD at many different times throughout a day you will keep the sounds fresh in your short term memory and this will help to entrench the information in your long term memory.
2. Singing pitches against a recurring tonal center such as a repeating major chord; that is, the tonic of the key. Notice I did not say singing *melodies*, I said singing *pitches*. One of the first errors a student makes when sight singing is that he or she will memorize the melody that a group of notes creates rather than learning what these notes sound like in the key. The human ear/mind has this ability to memorize a melody while having no idea what the pitches are or how they relate to a key. For the beginning student it is crucial to concentrate more on the sounds of each pitch rather than to memorize a melody. This will help develop an affinity with the sound of that pitch. When you sing an exercise you shouldn’t just blindly move from one pitch to another, you should try to hear the pitch in your head before you sing it. If you find you aren’t hearing it at first, don’t worry, this will come with practice. If you don’t hear the pitch you need in your head, just play it on an instrument so you can hear it. Always try to hear the pitch in your head first though, because this will start to develop the sound in your mind. Eventually you should be able to wean yourself away from the instrument. Many times students will also try to identify a pitch by the way it resonates in the throat. This is not recommended; you just have to learn what the pitch sounds like in your mind’s ear and then sing it. I recommend "A Fanatic's Guide to Ear Training and Sight Reading" ISBN #189094419X for your singing exercises. The important thing is to have a recurring tonal center i.e. a repeating "one" chord sounding as you sing your pitches. The aforementioned book includes a CD for this purpose.

Hopefully this background information has helped you to understand how this type of ear training is different from others. The following pages will present you with many exercise, it is very important to follow the directions closely and pay attention to the cautionary descriptions of the different problems and pitfalls that you may encounter.