Connexions module: m34482

HEARING HARMONY: WHAT IS HARMONY?*

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NOTE: Please note that you must have the most recent copy of Macromedia's Flash plugin installed to play the musical examples.

In **monophonic music**, only one note is played at a time. Much indigenous music consists of solo or group voices or one-note-at-time instruments, such as the flute, often accompanied by drums or a drone.

Example 1

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Navajo

Example 2

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Shakuhachi

The earliest notated Western music—from the Middle Ages—consists of unaccompanied singing, called **chant.**Example 3

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at <http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Gregorian>

In harmonic music, more than one note is played at a time.

In the last movement of his **Symphonie Fantastique**, Hector Berlioz adds harmony to the "Dies Irae" melody.

Example 4

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Berlioz02>

The melody of the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 is introduced by the cellos alone.

Example 5

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Beethoven43>

Eventually, the full orchestra joins in triumphantly in harmony.

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Example 6

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Beethoven44

The opening theme of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's **Piano Concerto No. 24** is presented first alone by the strings, then in full harmony by the orchestra.

Example 7

This media object is an audio file. Please view or download it at http://cnx.org/content/m34482/1.3/Mozart27

Harmony can shade a melody and recast it with a new affect; it can anchor the music or propel it forward; it can create a sense of intimate scale or grand architecture; it can make music seem to shine or darken, charm, soothe or startle. The goal of **Hearing Harmony** is to enable you to have a greater understanding of harmony by ear.

Most often, harmonic ear training involves learning to recognize the individual chords of Western tonal music. There are several limitations to this approach: First, even for musicians, it takes a lot of exposure and practice to aurally follow harmonic progressions. Second, ear training exercises are usually short and are typically repeated several times. Keeping up with the harmony in an actual performance is much more challenging. Third, while details matter, the chord-based approach often neglects to train students to hear the larger structure of a classical piece. Finally, conventional ear training leaves listeners poorly prepared for the harmonic avant-garde of music since 1900.

Hearing Harmony takes an innovative top down approach: Its goal is not to recognize individual chords but to develop an understanding of harmonic structure. Hearing Harmony is compatible with standard courses in harmony and ear training: Very little of the material introduced here is idiosyncratic; it is how it is organized and presented that is new. After completing these modules, you will be well equipped for conventional training, either in school or from the many fine resources on the web. Hearing Harmony can also be used to build on prior training.

Ear training classes are typically taught from the keyboard. In **Hearing Harmony**, you will be listening to actual music, faciliating the transition from **classroom to concert hall**.

We speak of colors and flavors being in **harmony** or **clashing**, but our ears are particularly discriminating: Music gains a great deal of variety and vibrancy from the nuances of harmony. Working through the modules of **Hearing Harmony** will enable you to follow **harmonic structure** more confidently and make your experience of music richer, more alert, sensitive and complete.