

Introduction:

WHAT IS MUSIC THEORY?



Music is an extremely important part of our modern lives, but how many times have you tried to describe exactly what music is? See if you can put it into words.



ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

Write a short paragraph describing what music is, as you perceive it.

Music is all around us in the world today. Music serves many purposes and is used in many important ways in our society. Music is not only used for personal entertainment and enjoyment, it also serves a social function. Music is used to inspire people to worship in church. It is used to excite and energize crowds and teams at athletic events and parades. It is used to comfort people at funerals and to heighten the celebration at birthday parties, weddings, and anniversaries.

Music is used to evoke feelings of patriotism and loyalty to one's country; to unite people in common political causes. It has been used to recall and remember events that are important to that society. For example, what would a Fourth of July parade be without a band playing a Sousa march? Or a *Cinco de Mayo* celebration without a mariachi band? Or a Martin Luther King Day remembrance without the singing of, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"?

Music is used for occupying the listener when their phone calls are placed on hold. It is used in doctor's waiting rooms, hotel lobbies, and elevators.

Music also has a great commercial value. Researchers have discovered that soft background music can make people linger longer in restaurants and stores, creating the possibility that they will spend more money while they are there. Retail stores use holiday music to pump up sales during the Christmas season. Commercials on radio and television use music to sell everything from baby aspirin to mobile homes. Television shows (even cartoons) and movies are accompanied by music.

These are a few ways in which music plays a major role in our society. **Music theory** answers the question of how music is put together. It examines the elements of specific pieces and/or styles of music, and shows how they are different or similar to other pieces and/or styles. It answers questions such as:

What is it that makes "western music," (music of Europe and the Americas) different from the music of Asia?

What gives mariachi music its distinctive sound?

What makes rock music sound different from Dixieland jazz?

It needs to be understood that music theory is not really "theoretical" in the technical sense of the word. Music theory is not a hypothesis to be tested and "proven." It is, rather, an examination of music pieces and musical styles based upon what has actually been put into practice by composers in the past. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, "traditionalist" composers, such as Tchaikowsky and Rachmaninoff, adhered closely to techniques and styles that had been generally used throughout the 19th century. More adventurous composers, like Stravinsky and Schoenberg, pushed the parameters of musical composition in new directions and thus altered music "theory" through their compositions.

So what is a working definition of music theory? For practical purposes, **music theory is the study of how music is constructed**. It includes, but is not limited to, an examination of the pitch, rhythm, melody, harmony, form, chord analysis, chord progression, cadences, style, and structure of musical pieces. You as a developing music theorist will become familiar with these terms over this course of study. To start you off, here are some initial definitions of these terms. You will be discussing them in detail in later chapters of this book:



OCABULARY:

1. **Cadence**--The final chords at the end of a phrase of music
2. **Chord**--Two or more more different musical tones sounding simultaneously
3. **Chord analysis**--Labeling chords according to the tones contained therein
4. **Chord progression**--How chords are arranged in sequence
5. **Form**--The pattern formed by similar and unlike phrases and sections in a musical work
6. **Harmony**--A. Musical material that supports the melody of a piece of music
B. Two or more lines of music that sound simultaneously
7. **Melody**--The predominate thought or line in a musical piece
8. **Pitch**--The highness or lowness of a musical sound, determined by its frequency
9. **Rhythm**--The way that notes of various durations are combined in a piece of music
10. **Style**--The techniques used by a composer to give a piece of music its individual sound
11. **Structure**--The techniques and building blocks used to create a piece of music



ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

Write a sentence for each of the vocabulary words, above, using them correctly as they relate to music theory.

