

THE APPROACH OF TEACHING EAR TRAINING FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENT: IN A CASE OF PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN THAILAND

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Abstract: *The study presents a brief summary for the approach in teaching ear training for university student. The study reveals methodology and steps in teaching ear training for student who have different level of musical experience, knowledge, and background. The study also mentions other approaches in which ear training are taught outside the university and why other approaches are not taught in the case of private international university in Thailand.*

Keywords: *Music, Ear Training, Teaching Ear Training*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ear training is one of the most important fundamental subjects in music education. Along with understanding theory of music, history of music, and instrument instruction, music students need to develop their inner ears. Every musician in all music fields needs to have certain skills that can sing out the pitch, notate the melody, and perform the rhythmic pattern from either reading the score or listening to the music. In order to do so, music students must undergo through intensive training involving all mentioned skills with accessibility ear training approach.

1.1 Background

The study is focused on an approach in teaching ear training used at a private international university in Thailand where there are many nationalities of student enrolled such as Thai, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, American, Canadian, and many more. There are four ear training courses in a curriculum ranging from ear training 1 to ear training 4 in which the author has been teaching all courses for the past six years. These four courses are core courses that every music students must enroll. The courses are aimed for freshman and sophomore students. Each class is a two-hours a week class in a total of 15 classes for a semester.

Each student has different musical background and training before entering the university. Some students were trained in classical, while some were trained in jazz. However, since the university offers four study fields in a music performance program which are classical music performance, jazz music performance, classical composition, and songwriting, it is very important that the students are able to reach the same level as they have to communicate and perform each other's music.

The goals of ear training must be composed of four main elements: Interval, Rhythm, Melody, and Harmony. These are basic skills that every music student and every musician must be able to perform. Student should be able to recognize the interval of each pair. They should be able to perform variety of rhythmic pattern at different tempo. They should be able to read and sing the music without hearing it at first. They should also be able to notate the melody correctly according to what they hear. They should be able to hear the different of each harmonic progression from each mode.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

1. To investigate different approaches in teaching ear training of other schools.
2. To summarize an approach and methodology used in teaching ear training in private international university.

1.3 Other Approaches of Teaching Ear Training

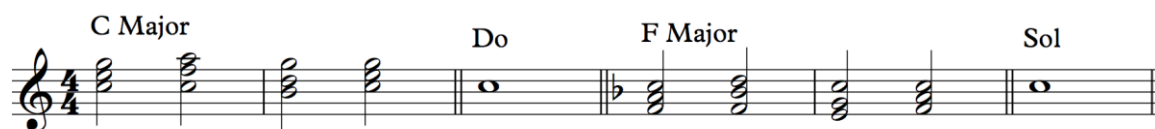
There are many approaches in teaching ear training. Each approach has its own pros and cons depending on the teacher who teaches the subject and depending on student whose background may not be on the same level. Some students have more years of experience in music than others. Some students have properly music lesson while some are self-taught musicians. The objective of studying music that each school and each student have aimed for is the main factor in choosing the most suitable teaching approach.

2. LEARNING THE SOUND OF EACH NOTE METHOD

In a book *“A Fanatic’s Guide to Ear Training and Sight Singing Volume 1”* by Bruce Arnold (2001), Learning the Sound of Each Note Method is introduced. He suggests that the student need to memorize the sound of all 12 notes against a key center which can be done in two ways.¹ All exercises should be sung in movable Do.

1. The cadence of I IV V I is given, then playing a note and trying to identify it. This way the practitioner will be able to hear a note and know what that note is. It takes time and requires repeated listening. At first, the practitioner may not get the correct answer. He/she is allowed to guess the answer. Bruce also suggests that listening to the sounds and guessing the notes four or five times a day for 15 minutes is better than doing a one-hour session because listening to the sounds at many different times will keep the sounds fresh in a practitioner’s short-term memory.²
2. Singing pitches against a tonal center of a chord such as a major chord. The practitioner may start by listening and singing the tonic of the chord then move to another pitch. Before singing another pitch, the practitioner should be able to hear the pitch in their head before singing it.

In the first way, the ear training process starts with knowing the difference in sound of one note. The I IV V I cadence of C major is given. The practitioner then sings the note C as it is the tonic of C major chord. The I IV V I cadence of F major is given, the practitioner sings the note C which is a fifth in the key of F major. Then repeat this step to all 12 keys and notice how the C sounds in each key.



Ex. 1 shows the cadence of C and F Major and the function of C in both keys.

Next step is to hear and sing the tonic of each key. When start singing any key, the I IV V I cadence should be given. If it is in the key of C major, listen to the cadence and then sing C. If it is in the key of F major, listen to the cadence of F major and then sing F. This process should be continued to all 12 keys.

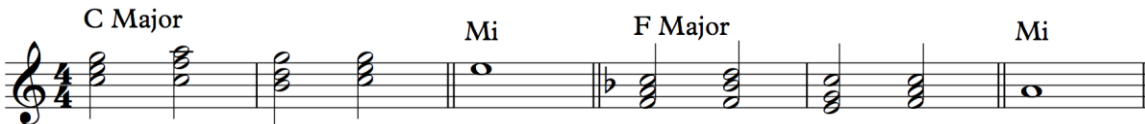
¹ Bruce Arnold, *A fanatic’s Guide to Ear Training and Sight Singing Volume 1* (New York, NY: Muse Eek Publishing Company, 2001), 11.

² Arnold, *A Fanatic’s Guide to Ear Training and Sight Singing Volume 1*, 11.



Ex. 2 shows the cadence of C and F major and the tonic of both keys.

Once the practitioner has established the sound of tonic of each key in their head. They may now continue with other degrees such as 3rd, 5th, and so on as seen in Ex. 3.



Ex. 3 shows the cadence of C and F major and the third of both keys.

In the second way, the exercise starts in the same way as previous paragraph. An additional note that is not part of chord-tone should be added to each exercise. The practitioner should hear the pitch in their head before singing an additional note.



Ex. 4 shows the cadence of C and F major and the tonic with the additional note.

This method can work effectively, but it requires a vast amount of time and continuously practice. Based from the teaching experience of the author, this method may not be effective for less skilled student as it can confuse them and taking far longer time to practice than it takes on the higher skilled student. It might not be the best method to teach in classes, but rather as self-practice for those who wish to gain more ear training skills.

3. SINGING BY IMITATION METHOD

Singing by imitation method is widely used in Yamaha Music School in Thailand. This approach is very simple in both teaching and learning as the teacher can begin the lesson by singing and playing a passage on piano to the student, then the student imitates the passage while the teacher plays an accompaniment. In the end result, the student has developed the ability to be able to sing, hear, and identify the note correctly. This method is also supported by Michael L. Friedmann (1990), the author of *"Ear Training for Twentieth-Century Music"*. He mentions that when using highly structured approach to ear training, it will be a handicap rather than an aid.³ This method can include more exercises of other aspects in ear training by having the student focuses on pairs of interval or focuses of rhythmic pattern used in each passage.

This method works very well for younger student as it does not heavily focus much on four main elements of ear training as it does in other approaches. This method does not focus on sight-singing nor rhythmic practice: however, the four main elements can still be added using different sets of exercises. In conclusion, the author believes that this method is an effective way to motivate younger student to practice ear training as it provides fun with basic necessary ear training skills which can be further developed into higher level of ear training practice.

³ Michael L. Friedmann, *Ear Training for Twentieth-Century Music* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

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The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is for a student, and the piano accompaniment is for a teacher or piano.

System 1: The student's vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The lyrics are: (Student) Do Do Do Ti Do Re Mi Re.

System 2: The student's vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The lyrics are: (Teacher) Do Do Do Ti Do Re Mi Re.

System 3: The student's vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The lyrics are: (Que) Re Re Re Mi Re Mi Fa Mi.

System 4: The student's vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The lyrics are: (Que) Sol Sol Sol Fa Sol La Sol Fa.

System 5: The student's vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The piano accompaniment starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4. The lyrics are: (Que) Sol Fa Mi Fa Mi Re Do Re Do.

Ex. 5 shows an excerpt of the exercise for singing by imitation method.

3.1 Approach of Teaching Ear Training for University Student

In a university level of music classes, it is very important to start each lesson with the basic as the lesson can later be very complex; therefore, it would be wise if the lesson start from very basic principle. The system that is used in the private international university in Thailand is heavily based on Berklee College of Music system. The movable Do solfege is used in which the tonic of each key is always considered as Do.

The very first lesson should start with warm-up exercises. The concept of melody warm-ups as mentioned in the *"Beginning Ear Training"* book by Gilson Schachnik (2007), he states that the "Sol Fa" exercise is used to help the student become familiar with note relationship

and to develop relative pitch.⁴ Each melody warm-ups consists of solfege syllables followed by a breath mark (/) as seen in following example.

Do Re Mi / Mi Re Do / Re Mi Re / Mi Do Re / Mi Re Mi / Re Mi Do /

Ex. 6 shows the melody warm-up exercise.

The melody warm-ups exercises can be practiced with any key. From time to time, student can check their singing pitches against a keyboard by playing Do. This will ensure the student in keeping in tune and reinforce the relationship of the notes with the tonal center.

In rhythm warm-ups exercises, the student should use a metronome when they practice. While the student sings “Tah” in each rhythmic pattern, the conducting is required as it helps the student in keeping their place within a measure. The warm-ups can start with simple meter such as 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 and simple notation such as half note, quarter note, and eighth note.

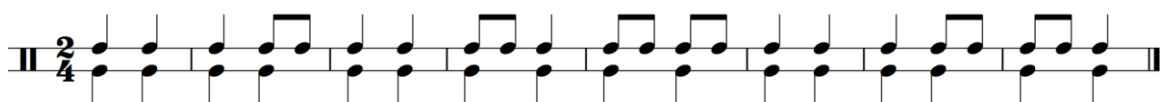


Ex. 7 shows the sample of rhythm warm-up exercise

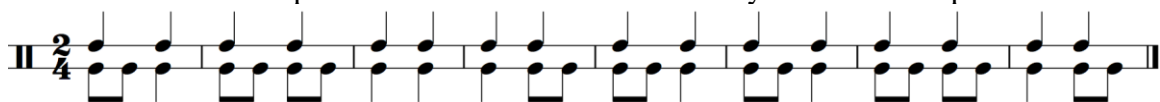
The lesson can start right after the warm-ups exercises are completed. Each lesson should be divided into three sessions: rhythmic, melodic, and dictation exercises.

During the rhythmic exercises, the metronome should be set to around 60 bpm (beat per minute). Each student is given sets of exercise which can be done as solo, as in pairs, or as in groups. The first set of exercise is a two-part rhythm in which the student can choose to tap the rhythm with both hands or tap the rhythmic with one hand and sing “Tah” at the same time.

In Ex. 8a, 8b, and 8c, the top notes are played by right hand or sing “tah”, while the bottom notes are played by left hand. In Ex. 8a, the left hand keeps the steady beat in straight quarter notes, while the right hand performs the pattern consisted of quarter notes and eighth notes. In Ex. 8b, the top notes are performed in straight quarter notes as to keep the steady beat, while the bottom notes are performed in patterns. In Ex. 8c, more complex rhythmic patterns are introduced. It is consisted of patterns seen in Ex. 8a and Ex. 8b in combination. These exercises are not limited to only 2/4 time signature, other time signature such as 3/4, 4/4, or 6/8 can be introduced as well.

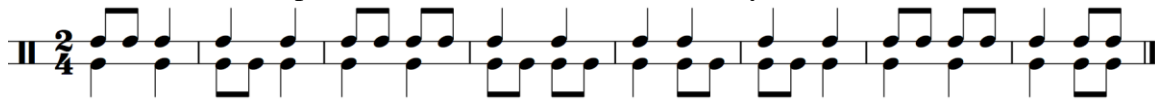


Ex. 8a shows an excerpt of exercise that focuses on the rhythmic of the top notes



⁴ Gilson Schachnik, *Beginning Ear Training* (Boston, MA, Berklee Press, 2007), vii.

Ex. 8b shows an excerpt of exercise that focuses on the rhythmic of the bottom notes



Ex. 8c shows an excerpt of exercise in rhythmic combination

The second set of exercise is a one-part rhythm which the student has to sing “Tah” while conducting. The student who are eligible to practice the second set should complete all first set of exercises. The tempo marking is still in 60 bpm. More complicated patterns are introduced during this set such as eighth-note triplet, sixteenth note, and syncopation.



Ex. 9 shows an excerpt of the second set of rhythmic exercise

The third set of exercise is an ensemble rhythmic practice in which the students are separate into pairs or groups and sing “Tah” in separate parts. The rhythmic patterns used in this set of exercise are a combination of rhythmic patterns from the first and the second sets. Dynamics can also be introduced during this set.

In melodic exercises, student can begin by singing only three pitches at a time. It can be started with Do Re Mi of each major key. Once they get used to the pitches and relationship between each pitch, they can continue with another set of three pitches: Sol La Do of each major key. The student should be very familiar to the sound of these five pitches before moving on to Fa and Ti of each key.



Ex. 10 shows an excerpt of the third set of rhythmic exercise

The rhythm on these exercises should not be too complicated as the objective of this exercise is to make the student recognize these five pitches. Intervals of major/minor 2nd and major/minor 3rd may be introduced in this session.





Ex. 11 shows samples of the melodic exercises focusing the student on Do Re Mi and Sol la Do on various keys

Once the student is familiar and understand the pitches and relationship of these three pitches, they can combine two sets of three pitches together such as Sol La Do Re Mi or Do Re Mi Sol La Do. In this process, the other pairs of interval may be introduced as the melody can leap from one note to another in greater distant than 2nd or 3rd such as from Do to Sol or Do to La in which the distant are perfect 5th and major 6th.

For more complex melodic exercises as seen in Ex. 12, the student can follow these steps in order to sing the melody effectively. Each step should be started with slow tempo, then the tempo can be faster by 10 bpm in each repeat or at desirable tempo depending on the student's ability.

1. Saying the syllables without pitches nor rhythm in monotone.
2. Tap the rhythm along with metronome.
3. Saying the syllables with rhythmic. Pitches are not required at this step.
4. Once the student is able to complete step on No. 3, they can add pitches to the melody.



Ex. 12 shows the more complex melodic exercise

The dictation is an exercise that aim to practice the student's ability to recognize the melody and rhythmic pattern. They must be able to recognize the pitches and their intervallic relationship. The teacher can start by telling clef, time, and key to the student and then plays the scale of the chosen key. Then the teacher plays the melody along with metronome. After the melody is played, the student must listen and write the melody on a piece of staff paper. It is very important that the level of difficulty can begin with treble clef, 2/4 time signature, and in C major on the first ear training lesson. As the lesson moves on into more complex melodic and rhythmic exercises, the dictation exercises can be more challenging.

4. CONCLUSION

This approach is used to teach the student at private international university for the past six years. In ear training 1, the course introduces major keys and variety of rhythmic patterns

consisted of whole note, half note, quarter note, eighth note, and sixteenth note. In ear training 2, the course focuses on major and minor keys and more complex rhythmic exercises including swing, funk, bossa, and etc. In ear training 3, modes such as mixolydian, lydian, and dorian are introduced. The rhythmic practice in ear training 3 aims for 2/8, 3/8, and 2/2 time signature, while the conducting pattern should be conducted in 1 or in 2 depending on each exercise. In ear training 4, mode mixtures and chromatic notes are being practiced in melodic singing exercises. As for rhythmic practice, different type of triplet is being taught such as quarter-note triplet and half-note triplet.

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