MUS 775
Discussion 5 - Gordon Chapter 2 (MLT) and 5 - 8
Jim Novak
2.11.21

Discuss Music Learning Theory and the ideas of sequencing as presented in these chapters. (whole/part/whole; repetition; sequencing; audiation; sound before sight, etc.)

Music Learning Theory (MLT) explains how music is learned. It is not a method, as methods tend to focus on teaching techniques and materials. MLT designates a sequence of learning, describing what a student should know at a given level in order to move to the next level. As such, MLT is referred to as a music learning sequence in practical use.

Audiation is the key to student motivation at all levels of music learning, yet many methods present it out of order or omit it entirely. Instrumental methods fall into this category as well, many of which are based on reading, memorization, and imitation first. Methods like this can catch a student's interest at first, but it will quickly wane if that student does not experience success in learning. Audiation allows students to appreciate music through understanding. It helps them give meaning to music, and to better understand themselves and their environment.

I appreciated Gordon's comparison of reading music notation to language structure. While letters of the alphabet are important, we don't tend to look at them individually when reading a passage, as each one individually has little meaning. The words have meaning and provide context when we read. In music, individual pitches and rhythmic values are important, but are by themselves meaningless and have no context. We get meaning from tonal patterns and rhythmic patterns. Just as we read words (groups of letters) to gain meaning and intent, we read tonal patterns and rhythmic patterns (groups of pitch and rhythm values) to find meaning in musical passages.

Just as spoken language existed before written language, so did the aural tradition of music exist before it was written down in notational form. It is important for students to learn audiation, read music notation and study music in the proper sequence, in order to give meaning to what they are hearing and reading. Gordon had a good example of this, in the wind player who doesn't audiate, and so while they are able to push down the appropriate keys on their instrument in response to seeing a note on the staff, they have no idea if what they are playing is correct. They also will be unable to tune their instrument, let alone play in tune throughout the range of their instrument, if they are unable to audiate. Students who do not audiate

rhythm patterns and beat functions will resort to counting, usually unsteadily and imprecisely, leading to performance of incorrect rhythms.

Sequencing & Repetition

Chapters 5 through 8 focus on sequencing from the aspects of skill learning, tonal learning, rhythm learning, and pattern learning. Seeing sequencing through these lenses helps me to incorporate it into my curriculum easier.

Skill learning sequencing includes two general types of learning: discrimination learning and inference learning. **Discrimination Learning** provides fundamentals necessary for inference learning. Students are taught, and they learn, even though they might not know why they are learning the material. Being taught to sing by imitation is an example of discrimination learning, as is learning to sing a passage by memorizing it. **Inference Learning**, the accomplishment of audiation, occurs when students are not as aware that they are learning, and are guiding themselves in the learning process.

Discrimination and Inference Learning are divided into five sequential levels, some of which are divided further into sub-levels. The levels of Discrimination Learning, from most basic to most advanced, are Aural/Oral (listening, imitation and developing audiation skills), Verbal Association (adding meaning through tonal and rhythm solfege), Partial Synthesis (incorporating tonal patterns and rhythm patterns into a series), Symbolic Association (adding reading and writing notation), and Composite Synthesis (audiate tonality or meter while reading and writing patterns).

Inference Learning consists of the following levels from most basic to most advanced: Generalization (establishes tonality using a neutral syllable and then performing two sets of familiar and unfamiliar tonal patterns; if repetition is not achieved after one hearing, teacher returns to lower level of discrimination learning), Creativity/Improvisation (represents ability of student to exhibit their basis of discrimination where creativity is premeditated and improvisation is an immediate reaction), and Theoretical Understanding (application of music theory to performance in relation to how and why they audiate).

Tonal Learning Sequence emphasizes the importance of having a tonality sense to understand and appreciate Western music, allowing students to understand, appreciate, and interpret all world music as well as polytonal and multitonal music more easily. Levels of tonal content learning sequence include major and harmonic minor tonalities (tonic, dominant, and subdominant functions), mixolydian tonality, Dorian, Lydian, Phrygian, Aeolian, Locrian, multitonal and mutikeyal, monotonal and monokeyal, and polytonal and polykeyal.

Rhythm Learning Sequence explains how rhythm organizes tonal patterns and enhances style and form in music. Form includes beats, rhythm patterns, phrases, sections, and movements. Rhythm works in tandem with tone quality, melodic and harmonic implications, dynamics, and tempo to define style in music. Rhythm is defined by macrobeats, microbeats, and rhythm patterns, which are applied differently in usual and unusual meter.

In usual meter, macrobeats are larger and can be subjective. Microbeats are shorter and a division of macrobeats. Macrobeats and microbeats underlie rhythm patterns and, when all three are utilized together, they cannot be individually distinguished and create a holistic approach to the piece.

Unusual meter occurs when macrobeats are of different lengths with a single measure. Microbeats are divided unevenly into macrobeats in unusual meter, sometimes into two, three, or none. Rhythm patterns in unusual paired meter include two macrobeats, while rhythm patterns in unusual unpaired meter include three macrobeats.

Pattern Learning Sequence describes how students will acquire a vocabulary of tonal patterns and rhythm patterns built from their basic knowledge of aural/oral and verbal association. Because the syllables used have clear connections to the patterns, they provide a foundation for audiating notes and rhythms.

Whole/Parts/Whole

In a MLT curriculum, students learn music in three stages: whole, parts, and whole. The first stage introduces students to the whole, which takes a broader view or scope of the unit and includes context, tonality, and meter. In a musical rehearsal, this might involve an initial run-through of a piece or section. In the second, students focus in on specific parts or components including content, patterns, and skills. In the third and final stage, students incorporate components of the second stage into the whole, which includes context, tonality/meter, content, patterns, and skills.