

Aural Skills at the Academy – an Introduction

Aural Skills training in the core modules at the Academy stems from the fundamental premise that you make music by using your instrumental or vocal craft to convert internally heard structures – notes, melodies, chords, textures, whole pieces – into physical sound, rather than simply, and unmusically, converting symbols on a score into muscle movements. These modules therefore develop the skills necessary to receive, register, recognise, form, remember, understand, and use musical components, from the basic elements to larger structures and ultimately whole pieces, in your inner ear.

We recognise that there is a wide range of aural ability and experience amongst our incoming students, but the modules are designed to be both accessible and challenging to students at all levels of ability. However, you will be better placed to make the most of the course if you have or can achieve a secure ability to:

1. Sight-sing and dictate diatonic melodies with some occasional chromaticism
2. Sing and recognise intervals up to a compound major third
3. Recognise primary chords in relation to a given tonic (labelling them I, IV, V, etc.)
4. Recognise major, minor triadic chords, dominant and diminished 7ths
5. Recognise perfect, imperfect, plagal and interrupted cadences
6. Recognise modulations to dominant, sub-dominant or relative major/minor
7. Sight-sing and dictate rhythms involving whole to sixteenth notes (including triplets) in irregular (including dotted and syncopated) combinations, while demonstrating a feel for regular pulse and meter.

The two exercises starting on the next page cover many of the above. You can extend your practice further by devising similar studies for yourself using other pieces or movements by Bach (further Goldberg Variations, Two-part Inventions, Three-part Sinfonias, movements from Keyboard Suites), Haydn and Mozart (slower movements of sonatas or string quartets). Explore on YouTube/Spotify/iTunes/Naxos online etc. to find recordings. Scores can usually be found on IMSLP.

- Start by looking at the score and sight-singing a line or two from the opening few bars. Check your accuracy with a keyboard or tuning app on your phone.
- Then copy out the opening of the score and a continuation of about 4 to 8 bars of maybe one or two of the lines/parts/voices (see if you can do this by memorising the melody having sung it).
- Then try and fill in the rest of your score by listening to the recording.
- and/or identify chords/harmonies (label with Roman numerals), cadences and modulations.
- Check against the full score, but challenge yourself not to look too much too soon – see how much you can do by listening alone.

We recognise that some people find these tasks intimidating in classroom or assessment conditions, but experience has proved that you can improve with practice and if you do something like this regularly you will not only get to know quite a lot of music (you can branch out from Bach, Haydn and Mozart after a while) but also develop your own tactics and strategies for tackling these tasks and reduce your anxiety about them.

Bach: Goldberg Variations BWV 988, Variation 9

- a) Sight-sing the bass line from the first four bars below (transpose up an octave or two if necessary).
- b) Listen to the first four bars. How does the top voice in bar 3 relate to the top voice in bar 1? Fill this in on the score.
- c) How does the middle voice from bar 2 relate to the top voice throughout the variation? Fill in the middle voice on the score (bars 2-4).
- d) What is the main key of this piece? To which key do we move very briefly at the start of bar 3?
- e) Where in the first four bars do you hear a dominant 7th?
- f) Listen on after these first four bars. What word would you use to describe bars 5-6? (This would be very useful to know if you wanted to continue your dictation further.
- g) To what key has the music modulated by the end of the first repeated section (bar 8)?

The image displays a musical score for Variation 9 of the Goldberg Variations by J.S. Bach. The score is written for piano in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#), indicating G major. The notation is presented in two systems. The first system contains the first four bars of the variation. The second system begins at bar 4 and shows a continuation of the musical material, with the word "etc." written to the right of the staff, indicating that the pattern repeats. The score includes both treble and bass staves, with various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

Completed score for Goldberg Variation 9, bars 1-8

The musical score for Goldberg Variation 9, bars 1-8, is presented in two systems. The first system contains bars 1-3, and the second system contains bars 4-6. The third system contains bars 7-8. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 3/4. The melody in the treble staff is characterized by a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is divided into three systems: bars 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8. The final bar (bar 8) ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Answers as applicable:

- b) Bar 3 in the top voice is the same as bar 1, a sixth higher.
- c) The middle voice imitates the top voice a bar later and a third lower.
- d) The main key is G major. We move briefly to E minor at bar 3.
- e) There is a dominant 7th on the second quaver of beat 2, bar 4.
- f) Bars 5-6 form a 'sequence'.
- g) After the first 8 bars, the music has modulated to the dominant: D major.

Haydn: String Quartet Op.55, No.2 in F minor ('Razor'), i) *Andante più tosto Allegretto*

- Sight-sing the Violin 1 line below (transpose down an octave or two where necessary).
- Listen to the first eight bars and fill in the Cello line.
- Depending on the audibility of the Violin 2 and Viola lines in the recording you are using, you could try filling in these lines as well.
- What kind of cadence occurs in bars 3-4? What kind of cadence occurs in bars 7-8?
- What key have we arrived at in bar 8?
- Mark the points on your score where we hear any dominant 7th and diminished 7th chords.
- Label these eight bars with Roman numerals.
(NB. The Academy uses a particular system for Roman-numeral labelling. You will learn about this in Analytical Skills after you arrive. For now, it is OK to use whatever system you are familiar with, but see the score on the next page for how we might do it at the Academy).

You don't need to do these questions in the order above. The answers to d) e) f) g) might help you to answer b) and c)

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

5

Completed score for Haydn Op.55/2, bars 1-8

F min: i vii[°]6/4/2 i V V⁷/V suspV vii[°] i iv⁶ V⁷/III susp III

Answers as applicable:

d) Bars 3-4 form an imperfect cadence (or, arguably, a perfect cadence on V). Bars 7-8 form a perfect cadence . . .

e) . . . in Ab.

f) The dominant 7th and diminished 7th chords are shown in the labellings above as V⁷ and vii[°] respectively.