Welcome Lecture
Music Fundamentals 14-119-T

What is music? You have most likely asked yourself this question many times. As you become more serious about the study of music and developing your musicianship, you probably find yourself asking this question more and more. Asking this question is similar to asking, "Who/what/how is God?" There is no definitive answer. Instead the answer is too subjective – the definition of music is different for everyone. However, a good start is to define music as "sound organized by humans." Obviously, this is also an argumentative statement in and of itself, but it can serve as a springboard for our class as we discuss *why* we study music.

In high school, I once questioned a math teacher why it was important whether or not I could solve some algebraic equation. The answer she gave surprised me, and today I think it is relevant to our discussion of *why* we study traditional music. The teacher simply told me that it was important for me to be able to solve the math problem because other people had solved it, and if they thought it was important enough to solve, I should at least investigate it. Of course this was a great way to get an annoying student (me!) to shut up, but I still find meaning in her answer. With a little creativity, I later realized that she was echoing the statement of a famous 20th century composer, Hans Werne Henze, who paraphrased, said that we are only the sum of what has come before us. For an analogy, consider planning a great meal for a loved one. Is it possible to plan the meal, go to the grocery store to buy ingredients, and cook a fabulous meal without some sort of reference? Would you need a recipe? More simply, would you even know how to plan the meal without some point of reference? Without a point of reference of what a good meal is, you may end up producing a dinner that consisted of seven different dishes of hamburger (don't get me wrong, I like hamburger). In music, we can't become better musicians unless we understand music or the practices of musicians adopted by other musicians. If you think about all of the musicians, and all of the music written for all of humanity (see definition above), you can see what a daunting task this could be. Luckily we have developed systems to show common practices found in music. It doesn't explain all there is to know about music, but it helps us begin to understand certain aspects of music. We call these systems developed to explain music, *music theory*.

A necessary skill a musician can learn is the ability to read music. This skill transcends into so many other areas of music from creating music through composition and performance to explaining existing music. It allows us to share and communicate, although in a minimal way, our musical experiences with others. This skill is so basic it seems we should simply take it for granted. Of course we all know people who "play by ear." Many of them can play a great tune that we can all tap our toes to, or a tune that solicits an emotional response. However, these people are very limited in their expression by their own ignorance of the subject. They have a limited number of musical formulas they can master, and learning new formulas becomes increasing difficult for them. Don't misunderstand me – I know that there are people who can really enjoy a musical life without this basic knowledge. Additionally, there are people who enjoy standing on an assembly line in a manufacturing plant pushing the same button millions of times for their entire professional life. By learning to read music, you will be opening your musical life to press more buttons. More importantly, by learning this very basic skill and studying music theory you will be able to find other buttons, and even develop your own.

Music notation has been around since the ancient Greek civilization. During the middle ages, the dawn of Gregorian chant, music was hand written on big table size sheets of paper. These sheets had to be big enough for the entire choir to see simply because it was too costly to produce several

copies of the same music (Medieval Powerpoint maybe?). Churches and royal courts had their own unique collections of music. During this time, if you lived in France you would most likely not know the music from a church in Italy. Simply it was too costly to mass-produce music for distribution. Notated music was so cherished that manuscripts were often copied out by hand and given as expensive gifts. It wasn't until the 15th century when Johan Gutenberg printed the Gutenberg bible, the first printed book produced using movable types, did music notation really start flourish. Printed in 1473, this work not only contained biblical scripture, but also included Gregorian chant. With his invention, people, institutions, and churches were finally able to share music. The first collection of printed polyphonic music, or music with more than one voice, is attributed to Ottaviano de' Petrucci in a 1501 publication. Petrucci published 59 volumes using movable type by 1523! As you can see, the invention of movable type was a mechanism that helped distribute, and more importantly, *standardize* music notation.

Music notation (as well as music itself) is very similar language. It takes practice to become fluent in a language, and music is no different. This course is dedicated to developing your ability to understand basic music theory (identifying musical structures). Unlike many other tasks however, understanding the *how* is very easy (you won't have to conjugate any verbs in this class). Since music is realized in real-time, implementing this knowledge and becoming proficient is more difficult. The modules I've created are intended to help you practice your newly found knowledge.