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Für die Violine
L. VAN BEETHOVEN.
Sonata Nr. 10, Op. 47
Für die Violine

Violino solo
Vivace con allegro. Sempre legato.

SONATE N. 10



Understanding MUSIC

E I G H T H E D I T I O N

JEREMY YUDKIN

Understanding Music

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Understanding Music

Eighth Edition

Jeremy Yudkin

Boston University

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**For M and D,
and
K, d, and s.**

Foreword

This book is as engaging as it is informative. I particularly like Jeremy Yudkin's lively presentation of an extraordinary amount of fascinating musical information within a broader historical and cultural context. Through this book Professor Yudkin conveys not only a wealth of knowledge, but also the message that music can be a uniquely rewarding medium of personal expression. It will surely encourage readers, students, and music lovers alike to become active participants in their musical experiences, whether as performers or listeners.

Yo-Yo Ma

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About the Author

Jeremy Yudkin was born in England and educated in England and the United States. He received his BA and MA in Classical and Modern Languages from Cambridge University and his PhD in Historical Musicology from Stanford University. He has taught at San Francisco State University, the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, Harvard University, Oxford University, and (since 1982) at Boston University, where he is Professor of Music and associated faculty of the Department of Judaic Studies and the Center for African American Studies. From 2006 to 2010 he also served as visiting professor of music at Oxford University.

A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Boston University's Society of Fellows, the Camargo Foundation, and the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation, he has written articles for the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, the *Journal of Musicology*, the *Musical Quarterly*, *Musica Disciplina*, *American Music*, and *Music and Letters*, and contributed to several volumes of essays. His research specialties include the Middle Ages, early Beethoven, jazz, and the music of the Beatles. A noted lecturer, Professor Yudkin has given talks and presented papers across the United States and in Europe and Russia. He is the author of eight books on various aspects of music and music history, including *Music in Medieval Europe* (1989), *The Lenox School of Jazz* (2006), and *Miles Davis: Miles Smiles and the Invention of Post Bop* (2008).

Preface

Welcome, Students!

Welcome to *Understanding Music*, the eighth edition of my book about listening to music. Everyone listens to music, but this book will help you listen with more depth, more focus, and more knowledge. You will enjoy music you have never heard before, and you will even start listening to music you know in a completely new way. This book helps you to improve your understanding of all kinds of music with a lively text, clear and interesting Listening Guides, recordings, videos, and many Web-based activities. Here is a list of some of the special features of this book.

The Art of Listening

This book approaches listening as an active and engaging experience. Throughout the book, the text invites you to listen carefully and helps you with ideas and vocabulary to deepen your listening experience.

Listening Guides

The Listening Guides are clear and easy to follow. They guide you step-by-step through all kinds of different pieces, explaining details of what is going on. Special moments are highlighted, so that you can read about the things that are happening *as they happen and as you hear them*.

Ways to Listen

Understanding Music offers students access to a variety of exciting performances with world renowned artists:

- A three-CD set of recordings
- Streaming audio for all selections

“Need to Know” Lists

These little summary lists appear every so often in each chapter, just to remind you of the main points that have been covered and that you will need to remember.

Three Ways to Remember!

At the end of each chapter, I have added three features to help you remember the principal points made during the chapter:

1. **Style Summaries:** Each Style Summary encapsulates the musical style of each historical period and summarizes the musical elements central to each style.

2. **Fundamentals:** This is a brief chart that lists the basic elements of each historical style.
3. **Think About It:** The chapter ends with a list of questions to think about and discuss with your friends. These will engage you directly in the material under discussion.

New Features of This Edition

1. Each chapter begins with a list of Learning Objectives, so that you can keep your learning goals in mind as you read.
2. The Listening Guides have been streamlined and clarified even further, so that you can more easily learn as you listen.
3. Each chapter is now presented in a completely integrated form, from the Learning Objectives at the beginning, to the organized sections within, to the Think About It questions at the end.
4. The popular music chapter at the end of the book has been brought up-to-date with the latest artists and performers.
5. Each chapter is easy to read and full of exciting insights into music you don't know—as well as music you do!
6. MyMusic Lab is newly available with the text. Among its wealth of assets, MyMusicLab includes streaming audio, state-of-the-art listening guides, and *Inside the Orchestra* Video.
7. The book is now also available in a new digital format, known as REVEL, that is exciting and interactive.

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Welcome, Professors and Instructors!

This new eighth edition of *Understanding Music* is the result of a great deal of consultation with teachers just like you, who have taught music appreciation and have used earlier editions of this book to help them with the task of teaching students how to listen. I have made some changes in this new edition, while keeping those features that professors and instructors have found so helpful over the years. There are also a significant number of new ways of intriguing students through technology-based listening and learning techniques.

Features of the Eighth Edition

These features have proven the worth, accessibility, and pedagogical value of *Understanding Music* over the years.

Focus on Listening

Understanding Music is focused throughout on the importance of active listening. It has a complete and independent chapter on the Art of Listening, which guides students moment by moment through three short works, each of which illuminates different musical elements, techniques, and vocabulary for the listening experience. These activities lay a solid foundation for the students’ listening work throughout the remainder of the book. *The Elements chapter is carefully coordinated with the Listening chapter.*

The first three chapters work together. From the beginning students will hear music from around the world, which will open their ears to new sounds. The second chapter gives them the vocabulary to think and talk about the building blocks of music, with audio examples they can hear on REVEL or MyMusicLab. Then a unique and independent chapter on listening leads them moment by moment through three short and very diverse works, each one of which illuminates different musical elements, techniques, and vocabulary. These activities lay a solid foundation for careful and knowledgeable listening throughout the remainder of the book.

Clear and Informative Listening Guides

The Listening Guides are clear, easy to follow, and illuminating. Form and structure, texture, instrumentation, and musical motives are explained, and special moments, such as surprising gestures, unexpected key changes, or departures from conventional form are highlighted. Students can follow the automated Listening Guides on REVEL and MyMusicLab as the music plays.

Cultural and Social Context

Music does not occur in a vacuum. Throughout the book, music is presented in the context of its social and historical milieu. In addition, each chapter contains a special box that discusses the changing role of patrons and audiences in the history of music.

Serious Consideration of Music as a Worldwide Phenomenon

The book opens with a short chapter entitled *Music Around the World*. The main focus of the book is music of the European tradition, but this focus is both rationalized and put into context by a look at music as a global phenomenon.

Proper Consideration of Popular Music

Popular music is treated not just as a token but as a cultural phenomenon in its own right. The history of popular music is surveyed from its beginning until the present, and due weight is given to musical, cultural, and commercial considerations.

Unique *Inside the Orchestra* Interactive Video

An interactive video program called *Inside the Orchestra* may be accessed via REVEL or MyMusicLab. You can screen this to the whole class in short sections over the course of the semester, or you can give portions of it as assignments for the students to view by themselves. The first segment introduces students to the sections of the orchestra and then features student-age young people playing orchestral instruments one at a time with an explanatory voice-over and with demonstrations of how each instrument is played and what it sounds like. The second segment displays a chart of the seating arrangement of a classical orchestra, and then swoops over the orchestra with a bird’s-eye view of that arrangement with a real (student) orchestra, explaining how the various sections work, what they play, and how they interact. Finally, the video features a student orchestra

performing five different orchestral works that progress through the history of the orchestra from Handel’s time to the twentieth century. (The first piece performed is the same one used throughout Chapter 2, “The Elements of Music.”) These video performances are very carefully edited so that each instrument or orchestral section is in close-up as they play. On-screen information guides the viewer through each work. This unique video was produced especially for *Understanding Music*.

Details of the *Inside the Orchestra* Interactive Video

SEGMENT 1: Instruments of the Orchestra.

- I. Introduction to the Instrument Families: String, Woodwind, Brass, Percussion, and Keyboard.
- II. Introduction to the Instruments within the Instrument Families.

SEGMENT 2: How an Orchestra Works.

- I. A Tour of an Orchestra. How Instruments Sound Performing in Unison.
- II. Video of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto and the Classical Orchestra. Video of Various Combinations of Instruments.

SEGMENT 3: The Orchestra through History.

- I. Examine the Orchestra through Various Periods in History: The Baroque Era. The Classical Era. Beethoven. The Nineteenth Century. The Twentieth Century.
- II. Watch the Orchestra Playing Pieces from Five Different Periods in Music History.
 - Handel, *Water Music*, Suite No. 2
 - Mozart, Clarinet Concerto in A Major, Second Movement
 - Beethoven, Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68, “Pastoral,” First Movement
 - Smetana, *The Moldau* (opening)
 - Foss, Renaissance Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Third Movement

Three Ways to Remember!

Each chapter concludes with three features that help students remember the principal points made during the chapter:

1. **Style Summaries:** These summarize the key elements of a particular style period. Each Style Summary describes the essence of the musical style of each historical period.
2. **Fundamentals:** This is a brief chart that lists the basic elements of each historical style.
3. **Think About It:** Each chapter ends with a list of questions for students to think about or write short papers about.

“Need to Know” Lists

These little summary lists appear every so often in each chapter, just to remind the students of the main points that have been covered and that they will need to remember.

Flexibility

This book lends itself to great flexibility. It has been used very effectively in courses of one quarter, one semester, and two semesters. Sample syllabi for all of these applications are given in an instructor’s manual, available for download from www.pearsonhighereducation.com.

New Features of This Edition

1. Each chapter begins with a list of Learning Objectives, so that students can keep your teaching goals in mind as they read.
2. The Listening Guides have been streamlined and clarified even further, so that students can learn as they listen.
3. Each chapter is now presented in a completely integrated form, from the Learning Objectives at the beginning, to the organized sections within, to the Think About It questions at the end.
4. The popular music chapter at the end of the book has been brought up-to-date with the latest artists and performers.
5. Each chapter is easy to read and full of exciting insights into music students don’t know—as well as music they do.
6. MyMusic Lab is newly available with the text. Among its wealth of assets, MyMusicLab includes streaming audio, state of the art listening guides, and *Inside the Orchestra* Video.
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A Note from the Author

Nowadays there is more music in our lives than at any previous time in history. Music surrounds us as we buy food or clothes, drive our cars, sit in the park, or jog down the street. Much of this is our own choice: We have radios in our cars and portable MP3 players in our pockets. Some of it may be unwanted: our neighbor's stereo, for example, or a "boom box" on the beach. Some of it we actually do not notice. There is so much noise in our daily environment that the music playing in elevators or stores sometimes simply merges with the surroundings.

In addition to the sheer *quantity* of music around us, there is a wider range of music available than ever before. We can listen to jazz, reggae, Vivaldi, alternative rock, or country

ballads. Twenty-first-century technology has presented us with an unparalleled wealth of musical possibilities. The very idea that a symphony orchestra can be heard in our ears as we walk down the street would have startled most of the composers in this book.

The consequences of this situation are (like the consequences of most technological advances) both good and bad. It is a wonderful thing to be able to go online and buy a recording of a piece of music composed hundreds of years ago or thousands of miles away. But the ubiquitous nature of music today has also had negative consequences on the role that music plays in our society. For most of our history, music was rare; it therefore had more importance in people's lives. The composition and performance of music required deliberation and effort. Whether it was the commissioning of a symphony by an aristocratic patron or the playing of a country dance by peasants, music was performed with care and listened to with attention—it was never without significance.

The result of all this is that we have lost the art of listening.

Music is the only one of the three great arts—literature, the visual arts, and music—that can be absorbed without attention, passively. Music can surround us while we concentrate on other things; it can even be there in the background, entirely unnoticed.

This is not true of painting. To appreciate a painting we have to give it some of our attention. We have to study the forms and colors, the balance and proportions of its overall design. We may admire its style and technique—its humor, vigor, or despair. A good painting shows us objects or people or *life* in a new light. A great painting affects us profoundly and leaves us changed. Few people have seen Picasso's *Guernica* and not been deeply moved.

Literature has the same demands and the same rewards. We must pay attention to a book or a play. They cannot merely fill the room while we vacuum or accompany us while we jog or shop. And the effort of attention is repaid. A good book resonates in our own lives; a great book changes us forever.

Music, too, is the expression of the deepest part of our souls. It expresses what words and paintings cannot. And for true understanding, music requires careful attention and the engagement of the intellect, just as painting and literature do.

But even careful listening is not enough. Music is the expression of people in society. And, like the other arts, music is formed in a historical and social context. In the eighteenth century, for example, European music was the reflection of a hierarchical and orderly society, influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment. Much eighteenth-century music, therefore, is carefully ordered and balanced, organized in a framework of fixed and widely accepted formal patterns. How can we truly understand

this music if we do not know the forms used by composers of the time? It would be like reading Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* without understanding the attitude of seventeenth-century New England Puritans toward adultery, or reading Shakespeare without knowing the meaning of blank verse.

Like literature, music has its rules of grammar and its rhetorical effects. Without understanding the grammar and rhetoric of music, we experience it as a sensation and little else. By learning about the social context and the structural language of music, we can experience it to its fullest. We can hear the passion of Beethoven, the brilliance of Bach, the wit and genius of Mozart. We can understand how a jazz musician can weave compelling improvisations, seemingly out of thin air. We can engage with music at its deepest level. And like a great painting or a great book, it will change us forever. It will fill our lives with beauty and joy. It will deepen our understanding of what it means to be human.

It is with this philosophy in mind that I have come to write *Understanding Music*. I believe that today's college students taking music appreciation courses want to learn how to listen to music more deeply. To this end, I have written a book that will be sensitive to the needs of today's students, a book that will guide them carefully and methodically through the art of listening itself, as well as one that will teach them the power of music as a form of human communication, and in doing so will transform them from passive recipients to active participants. Unique in its design, approach, and content, *Understanding Music* offers students a global approach, an explanation of the richness and diversity of the European tradition, a focus on listening, a thoughtful selection of works for study, a discussion of patrons and audiences, careful consideration of the role of women in creating music, and an enlightening treatment of the history of popular music. Listening to music is one of the great pleasures of human existence. I believe strongly that it is our vital task to demonstrate to our students that with a little effort, knowledge, and concentration, that pleasure can be immeasurably enriched.

Reviewers for the Eighth Edition

- Jocelyn Nelson, East Carolina University
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- Cecilia Smith, South Texas College
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J.Y.

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Understanding Music

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Chapter 1

Music Around the World



Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Explain why it is important to understand music as a part of its social context.
- 1.2** Compare the role of music in American society to its role in other cultures.
- 1.3** Describe the differences among different kinds of music around the world, taking cultural context into account.

Introduction to the Study of Music

Although much of this book focuses on American and European music, music is an art that appears in all cultures around the world. Each nation or ethnic group develops

its own music and preserves its *own* musical traditions. Our study of the rich and ancient store of European music is made possible by the existence of written records that stretch back over a thousand years. Other classical traditions around the world—such as Indian raga and some forms of Chinese music—have similarly lengthy traditions that can be studied through documentary evidence and



Market in the Old City of Jerusalem.

performances. But in much of the world music is not written down; it is transferred from one person to another, and from one generation to the next simply by ear. One person learns the music by hearing someone else perform it; an older person teaches it to a younger person.

In most cases, in cultures around the world, it is very difficult to determine how old a musical tradition may be. And there is no way of knowing how the music may have changed over the generations. Some cultures regard their musical heritage as sacrosanct and try to keep the music of the past more or less intact. Others continuously adapt their music to modern tastes: this kind of music will be in a constant state of change.

It would be a mistake to assume that the music of an unfamiliar small group is “purer” or more “natural” than our own. The music of the European tradition was also kept alive for centuries without being written down.

Nor should we imagine that music of other cultures is nothing but a pristine representation of the soul of those people since “time began.” Representative it may be, because music reflects the society that performs it, but certainly not since “time began.” There is very little



Decorated manuscript of written music from medieval Europe.

music in the world that has not undergone change and influence from outside forces. Native American music continues to bear traces of its people’s origin across the Bering Strait in East Asia, and since the arrival of Europeans in North America, this music has interacted with many other traditions. Music in Africa has for centuries been affected by outside influences from Indonesia, India, and Europe. In Brazil, one hears a mixture of music from West Africa and Portugal. In the Philippines, traditional dance is accompanied by music of Spanish origin. And in western Nigeria, the Yoruba people have mingled a native singing style with guitar music borrowed from Ghana. We may wish that the situation were simpler and more “authentic,” but life—and the history of the world—is not like that. People adapt their music to their own ideas of what they like, not to other people’s views of what they “should” like.

Today, the greatest influence on music around the world is that exerted by Western classical and popular music. Throughout Asia, orchestras play symphonic music of the European tradition, and young Asian musicians are trained in the styles and techniques of Western classical



Mariachi band.



Young girl learning to play the violin.

music. In West Africa, the music is influenced by American country music, soul, reggae, and disco. In France, cafés and restaurants in the smallest villages are filled with the recorded sounds of English and American rock. In the Middle East, modern popular songs merge the sounds of Western pop with local rhythms and singing styles.

One of the richest tapestries of musical culture is found in Israel, where the music of native-born Jews and Arabs mingles with that of Jews from Iraq, Latvia, Romania, Holland, Ethiopia, and Yemen, as well as with the music of Christian Arabs and Christians from Armenia and Russia. In addition to this colorful tangle of music from all over the world, Israeli Arabs and Jews have created a modern Israeli music: dance songs or pop songs with a Western beat and melodies sung in an ornamented, intense, Middle Eastern style.

It has often been said that music is a universal language—that it transcends boundaries of nation and race. This is true, but only in a very specific sense. The fact that there is music seems to be universal: every known human group has music. But for each culture, music has a different meaning. It takes different forms in different cultural groups. Even the definition of music differs from culture to culture. Some cultures don't even have a word for "music," because it is integral to their experience of the world, whereas others use different words to distinguish among several types of music.

Music reflects the society that creates it, and each society creates the music that it wants. This statement sounds obvious, yet it is important, because it reminds us that in order to understand a culture's music, we need to understand the culture itself.

Perhaps we could say that even if music is *not* a universal language, it is universal *like* language. Music, like language, is an accomplishment that distinguishes us as humans. Linguists tell us that there are more than 5,000 languages spoken in our world. It would not be surprising to discover that there are just as many types of music. And learning to understand the music of another culture is not very different from learning to understand the language of another culture.

NEED TO KNOW

- Music is a reflection of the society that makes it.
- Music is not a universal language; it is universal *like* language, in that it distinguishes us as humans.

Music as a Reflection of Society

1.1 Explain why it is important to understand music as a part of its social context.

Each culture possesses its own musical language that reflects its own traditions, concerns, and activities, and to begin to understand the music of another culture, we need to understand something of the nature of that culture's systems and the role that music plays in them. This is just as true of Western culture. To begin to understand the music of the Middle Ages, or eighteenth-century opera, we will need to understand something of the cultural background of the West.

In other cultures, music plays many different roles. Among the Mandinka of Gambia and Senegal, for instance, there is a highly specialized type of professional musician known as the *jali*. The *jali* is both the historian of the tribe and the official singer of praises. The significance of these two roles will not become clear to us until we understand how Mandinka society operates.



African musical instruments.

Mandinka society is based upon a rigid class system in which class is determined by lineage (or family history). A person from the “right” family background enjoys considerable social status and may choose among a variety of professional jobs. However, someone from a working-class family is obliged to take a job as an artisan, a carpenter, or a metalworker. Members of the working class are looked down upon by other members of the tribe.

Because family background is so important in determining people’s lives, family history is entrusted to the male *jali*, who specializes in historical knowledge. (Women are not allowed to be *jalis*.) The *jali*’s job as historian and singer of praises, therefore, is of paramount importance. When hired to perform, the *jali* can evoke the noble ancestry of a patron, thereby enhancing that person’s standing in society. Or he can turn praise into insult and innuendo, thus damaging a person’s social status. The *jali* is even called upon to determine questions of inheritance, because he alone is familiar with the intricacies of genealogy.

This brief description, though by no means complete, gives us a deeper appreciation of Mandinka music. It explains the central role of solo singing in the society, the declamatory nature of the texts, the repetitive but highly flexible style of accompaniment (to accommodate the varying texts), and the formal nature of the performances. A full analysis of the music would go into far more detail than this, but it could not even legitimately begin without a basic understanding of the social context in which the music is made. In turn, understanding the music can provide significant insights into the culture of which it is a part.

The United States: A Test Case

Let’s take a look at music in the United States today as a reflection of American culture. We’ll describe the situation as though we were anthropologists looking at an unfamiliar

people. This will help us focus on the kinds of questions we might ask about music in the rest of this book.

Let’s start with classical music. In the United States, we note that classical music is treated as an elitist activity. Performances are very formal: members of the audience sit listening very quietly until the end of each piece. Most of the music that is performed in classical-music concerts was composed in past centuries. The society treats the music of the past with great reverence. There is a written musical tradition stretching back over a thousand years, although most of the music that is performed is between 100 and 250 years old. Concerts often feature the same pieces by a relatively small roster of composers, from one concert to another and from one year to the next.

In addition to classical music, people in the United States listen to many other types of music. There seems to be a distinction by class and age among these different types. Listeners of different age groups and social classes prefer different styles of music. Most young people listen to popular music, although some may also be interested in classical music. Popular music is mostly heard on recordings, though there are also public performances in small clubs, in outdoor locations, and sometimes in concert halls. Our anthropological survey would also note that there is another type of music making that often occurs in cafés, bars, and nightclubs, as well as in outdoor venues. This music is called jazz. Like classical music, jazz attracts attentive listeners who attend concerts, study certain musicians and their compositions, and follow closely the development of the music. Like popular music, jazz is experienced through recordings as much as through live performance.

Women are becoming more and more accepted by society as music makers. For many years—apart from roles as singers—women were rarely seen performing music in public, but today there are many female performers. In popular music and jazz, women used to have restricted roles. Today, however, female instrumentalists, entrepreneurs, songwriters, producers, and recording executives are much more common.

Many other types of music occur in the United States. Each ethnic group has a distinctive traditional music that helps to foster its separate identity (polkas, square dancing, the blues). Religious groups are often distinguished by the kind of music they perform (gospel, Orthodox chant). Some large public events are marked by the singing of nationally known songs (“Take Me Out to the Ball Game”).

What does this “anthropological” description tell us about the society? It tells us that American culture is extremely diverse, divided as it is by age, class, and ethnicity. Divisions by gender role are gradually being erased. We learn that a very ancient musical tradition has been carefully preserved and that new music is constantly being

produced. It is clear that the society is undergoing rapid change: popular artists can change from year to year or week to week! And popular music has become a highly lucrative and competitive branch of the country's commerce. Change is also evident in the way each of the many different subgroups of the society—defined by ethnicity, age, social class, and the like—uses a very small segment of the total musical culture to reinforce its own identity. This seems to suggest a sense of anxiety within the society as a whole and a fragmentation of the society into a multiplicity of separate groups. There are, however, some national songs that help all the people feel unified, at least for brief moments.

NEED TO KNOW

- The way music functions in a society is an important indicator of how that society is formed and operates.
- While our society may regard music in a particular way, another society may regard its music very differently.



Woman playing the cello.

The accepted notions about music in American society—the use of music primarily for entertainment, the separation of popular and classical music, the existence of a fixed repertory of ancient masterworks, and the use of music to divide groups as well as to reinforce the sense of membership within a group—are not necessarily found in other cultures. Even such a deeply ingrained concept as the idea that music should be enjoyable to hear may not form a part of another culture's views. *We must realize that every society views music in its own way—and that way may be very different from our own.*

World Music: A View from a Satellite

1.2 Compare the role of music in American society to its role in other cultures.

For the purposes of our discussion, it is possible to divide the world into five large areas, each encompassing a large array of different musical cultures, yet each containing certain unifying features. These areas are (1) North America and Europe, (2) Latin America and the Caribbean, (3) sub-Saharan Africa, (4) the Middle East and North Africa, and (5) Asia and the Pacific Islands. These five large areas have some things in common. They all contain cultures that have developed a sophisticated, *classical* repertory of music, played primarily by professional musicians. And they also contain non-literate cultures whose music is not written down or regulated by theory but is generally performed by most of the members of the society. We can call this music *traditional*.

There are also two types of music that lie somewhere between these two extremes. These we may call *folk* and *popular* music. Folk music exists in sophisticated societies alongside classical music and continues to be performed in rural areas away from the educated, usually urban, *élite*. It is often several generations old. Examples occur from China to Peru to Wales. In addition to folk music, most cultures that have a classical system of music also have a flourishing popular-music industry. This music tends to be short-lived (a hit may last only a few weeks), commercial (designed to sell), and aimed at a broad, generally urban, audience. This is as true in India, for example, as it is in Finland or Argentina or in any number of other countries.

NEED TO KNOW

- Much traditional music around the world is part of an oral tradition; it is not written down but is passed along the generations by memory.
- Most cultures use both voices and instruments in musical performance.
- Music is a reflection of a culture. To understand the music, we need to understand the role it plays in that culture.

What to Listen for in World Music

There are some more detailed observations we can make about music that lies outside the European American classical tradition. These concern the nature of the music itself, its various melodic and rhythmic structures, as well as the various sounds produced by the different singing styles and instruments in use around the world. We will also consider the context in which music appears in different cultures, the participants involved, and the length of musical events. But let us first look at attitudes toward the music of the past. In the following pages, we will take the music of the European American tradition as a point of comparison, not to make value judgments but simply because for many of us it is the most familiar.

ATTITUDE TOWARD MUSIC OF THE PAST We have already noted that in the United States, much of the music played in concerts dates from hundreds of years ago. In those cultures around the world where music is not written down, a different attitude exists with regard to the music of the past. In some cultures, there are a number of works from the past that serve as a basis for improvisation. In India and Japan, for instance, although there is a repertory of classical music that is fairly fixed, there are also some traditional pieces that serve as the framework for learned improvisations by highly trained master musicians. In other countries, music is regarded as a living, flexible artifact, constantly open to change. In these cultures, the music is constantly being reinvented, so that, in a

sense, music of the past doesn't really exist: it is constantly turning into music of the present.

TEXTURE The sound of most of the world's music is very different from that of European classical music. Starting in the twelfth century, European music became more and more focused on **polyphony**—music that contains two or more musical lines performed at the same time. As a result, harmony—the chords formed by these lines—also became a central concern. Polyphony and harmony have become the underlying principles for most European and American concert music.

In other cultures music has focused on different musical elements. With significant exceptions, particularly in Africa, most other music has only one tune sounding at a time (**monophony**), often supported by a rhythmic accompaniment of considerable interest. The essence of monophonic music is very different from that of polyphonic music, and our way of listening to it must therefore be consciously modified. In some cultures, several different performers play the same melody, but each in his own way. The result is simultaneous, slightly varying, interweaving strands of a single tune.

MELODY Although a great deal of European American classical music contains beautiful melodies, melody is not the only focus of the music. During the Middle Ages, European music was primarily text and melody. However for most of Western classical music since the Middle Ages, melody has become a secondary concern to harmony.

The two broad musical areas of the world.



In many musical styles around the world, melody is of paramount interest. In Iran, a trained singer will improvise on a melodic pattern, exploring all of its possible aspects in high and low notes, varying the quality of her voice and using a wide range of ornamental flourishes. An Indian player of the sitar—a long-necked, resonant lute—weaves sinuous melodic lines above and around a constant, fixed drone, exploring different scales. A Japanese master of the *shakuhachi* (an end-blown, bamboo flute) bends pitches, plays notes “between the notes,” and generally utilizes every melodic possibility available to him.

RHYTHM Rhythmically, Western music—classical and popular alike—is rather simple. Most pieces use the same beat or meter throughout. It is only fairly recently that classical composers have begun to explore more intricate approaches to rhythm in their music.

By contrast many musical styles around the world are extremely intricate in their rhythm. African drummers frequently produce several complex rhythms simultaneously. In the dance musics of Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina, three-beat and two-beat meters alternate in catchy, irregular patterns. In India, rhythm is raised to the level of a special art, and rhythmic patterns are explored in Indian music theory. There are hundreds of these patterns; an Indian drummer has to study for years to learn them all.

TONE COLOR: VOICES AND INSTRUMENTS European American classical music encompasses a wide range of instrumental and vocal sounds. A symphony orchestra boasts dozens of different instruments, which can play singly or in large numbers of different combinations. Music of other cultures, however, often displays tone colors, vocal and instrumental, that are very different from anything heard in a symphony orchestra.

In many cultures, the ideal vocal sound is not smooth, flowing, and relaxed, as it is in the cultivated European tradition. Singers often use a very tense, strained technique. This is true of many Native American tribes. Or they may be able to produce two tones at once (in Tibet, Mongolia, Siberia) or sing in an extremely florid manner, with incredibly fast, clean runs, trills, and ornaments (in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan). The singers of some areas practice a yodeling technique, in which the voice



An Indian master of the *tabla* or drums.

moves rapidly between a regular singing voice and a high falsetto. This technique is practiced by the Swiss, the Pygmies of central Africa, and the Berbers of the Sahara. And voice ranges can defy gender expectations. Brazilian cowboys sing in harmony at the very top of their range, whereas female folk singers in Turkey sing in a low, throaty voice.

Instruments around the world produce a wide variety of tone colors. The type of instruments a culture develops often depends on the raw materials available. In Africa, instruments are made of wood, animal skins, and animal horns, sometimes even of ivory. In China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia—where metalworking has been a part of the culture for thousands of years—bronze instruments, such as gongs and chimes, are favored.

na ga dhet ta ka ra dha ti ra ki ta dha ti ra ki ta ta ka ta ti ra ki ta ta ka

ti ra ki ta ta ka dha tit dha ta ka ta dha tit dha ta ka ta dha tit dha

Excerpt from a *majara*, a type of North Indian drumming pattern that often occurs at the close of a phrase or entire work. The syllables below the notes refer to specific drum strokes.



Alphorn players in Switzerland.



Tiny clay ocarina.

NEED TO KNOW

Types of Musical Instruments

Chordophones (strings)

Aerophones (winds)

Membranophones (drums)

Idiophones (scrapers, gongs, etc.)

Musical instruments around the world can be classified into four groups: stringed instruments, including those that are plucked and those that are bowed; wind instruments, which are blown; and two types of percussion instruments, those whose sound is produced by hitting some material stretched over a hollow object (drums) and those whose sound is made by hitting, shaking, or waving a solid object (gongs, chimes, rattles, scrapers, etc.). Ethnomusicologists—specialists who study music around the world—have developed special names for each of these categories:



Indian musician.

chordophones (strings); aerophones (winds); membranophones (drums); and idiophones (scrapers, gongs, etc.).

Each of these categories includes an enormous variety of instruments. Stringed instruments can be long or short, have one or many strings, and range in sound from very loud to exceedingly soft and delicate. Wind instruments range from the gigantic alphorn, designed to be heard over mountain ranges, to the small clay ocarina, which produces gentle dovelike tones. Percussion instruments represent the largest class of instruments in the world. Some can be pitched—that is, they can produce a definite note rather than just a “bonk” or a “clunk” (un-pitched). Drums are available in pitched and un-pitched varieties. Many percussion instruments are pitched: xylophones, chimes, bells, and gongs can all produce specific pitches.

In many cultures, percussion is produced without instruments. Rhythmic sounds and complex rhythmic patterns are made by hands clapping, slapping thighs, and foot stamping.



Xylophone.

Some Western instruments, such as the violin, have been adapted to local use by various cultural traditions. The violin, sometimes with modifications, is a central instrument in the traditional musics of India, Iran, and the Apache and Navajo tribes of the southwestern United States.

And even when the instrument is familiar, the sounds produced in different cultures are unusual to Western ears. In South India, a violinist plays on an instrument that is indistinguishable from that used in a symphony orchestra, but the sound he or she produces is totally unlike that of symphonic music. The player sits cross-legged on the floor, and the violin is supported between the chest and the ankle. This allows the fingers of the left hand complete freedom to slide up and down the strings. Pitches are not clean and distinct but flexible, loose, and joined by slides. The *hardingfele*, or Norwegian fiddle, is a violin that has been adapted to folk culture. It has extra strings that are not bowed, but vibrate when the fiddle is played. (They are placed under the fingerboard, parallel to and below the four melody strings.) The sound is highly resonant and penetrating.

Many instruments are completely independent of any Western equivalent, and their tone colors are distinctive. An instrument in widespread use in Africa is the *mbira* (pronounced “em-beera”), often translated as “thumb piano.” The *mbira* has thin metal strips or tongues fastened to a small wooden box or gourd. The box is held in both hands while the thumbs pluck the strips. The sound is soft, buzzy, watery, and plunky. Players often enhance the buzz by attaching metal bottle tops to the wood or by wrapping small pieces of metal around the tongues. In Eastern Europe, a short woodwind instrument known as a *shawm* is played in public places such as the marketplace or the town square. It is extremely loud and piercing and can be heard at a considerable distance.

The most dramatic illustration of the importance of tone color in instrumental playing is given by the didjeridoo of the Australian aboriginal people. It is a long hollowed-out eucalyptus branch, played like a trumpet. It can produce only a small number of notes, but the subtlety



Dancers in Mali.



Hong Kong, actors performing Chinese Opera on stage.

of the instrument lies in its tonal qualities. A skilled player can produce upward of nine or ten different tone colors on his instrument. For the didjeridoo player, a wide range of tone color is more important than a wide pitch range.

SOCIAL CONTEXT In many regions of the world, music is an integral part of a ceremony or a group activity. Studying the music without considering its context can provide only half the picture, if that. The most common context for music around the world is dance. Think, for example, of the ubiquity of the samba and the tango both as dance and as musical genres in the Caribbean and South America. In some African cultures, music is regarded as primarily an accompaniment to dance.

But there are many other contexts in which music plays a role. In Africa, rhythmic group singing is widely used to facilitate work. In Japan, music is a central part of traditional theater and a vital component of spiritual rituals known as Shinto. Japanese girls perform music to demonstrate a refined upbringing. Native American tribes use music to accompany gambling games, contact guardian spirits, conduct the medicine-bundle ceremony, cure illnesses, and distinguish among age and gender groups.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

The place of women is closely defined, and often severely restricted, in most cultures around the globe. In particular, the role of women in music making is often carefully delineated. In a great many traditional societies, women do not take part in musical activities, these being reserved for men. In Japanese Kabuki theater and Chinese traditional opera, for example, female roles are sung by men.

In other communities, singing and dancing are considered to be appropriate for women, but playing instruments is not. South Indian classical dances are danced by women, but only men play in the accompanying instrumental group. In Islamic countries, where women’s roles are strictly defined, women traditionally sing only wedding songs. In Korea, however, both women and men sing the