

AURAL HARMONY, PART I

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649107896

Aural harmony, Part I by Franklin W. Robinson

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FRANKLIN W. ROBINSON

**AURAL
HARMONY, PART I**

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AURAL HARMONY

BY

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PART I



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NEW YORK

BOSTON

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WHO HAS BEEN A CONSTANT SOURCE

OF INSPIRATION WHILE WRITING

THIS TREATISE ON AURAL

HARMONY.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

After many years of experience in the teaching of harmony along the lines usually followed in presenting the subject, the author has come to feel an intense need for a presentation that would meet the demands of the lesser talent as well as the great talent — a presentation which would seek to edify the student by appealing to his musical consciousness through the ear, and by means of that experience to equip him with the power to hear what he writes.

The opportunity presented itself when the Institute of Musical Art, in New York City, came into existence; it is, therefore, with warmest gratitude that the author acknowledges, not only the kindness, but the unqualified trust which the director of the Institute, Dr. Frank Damrosch, has shown in permitting the initial presentation of aural harmony. The high standard of musical study, as carried on at the Institute of Musical Art, has been a great stimulus in working out and in bringing to fruition this new subject.

The author also wishes to extend his thanks to Mr. Thomas Tapper for his kindness in reviewing and criticising the subject-matter and the form of presentation of this book.

It is hoped that the treatise will be accepted in the spirit in which it has been written, namely, a sincere effort to present the subject of harmony in a more useful and tangible form and, thereby, to make it more applicable and adaptable to all the fields of musical experience.

FRANKLIN W. ROBINSON.

New York, June, 1917.

PREFACE

A treatise on "harmony" should include three large divisions or "aspects":

(1) **PHYSICS** — laws governing the vibration of any sounding bodies, i.e., the science of acoustics.

(2) **PHYSIOLOGY** — an inquiry into the action of the ear in discerning sounds — the use of the ear in music.

(3) **PSYCHOLOGY** — the mental effects that resounding bodies have upon the mind — to impress the mind with the emotional qualities which chords and keys possess.

I. Physics

Concerning the first of these divisions, *viz.*, physics; much has been done in this field of tonal relationships. To this source the theorist of music should revert in order not to resort to arbitrary and didactic statements with regard to the relationship of chords or the formation of scales. There is much in the science of acoustics which is irrelevant to the task of writing a treatise on harmony. Discussions have arisen with regard to the tempered scale versus the natural scale, — with regard to the size of intervals as constant or varying, etc. Such discussions are irrelevant to the subject of harmony. The wisest course to pursue is to take that which is useful, and discard that which does not apply. Acoustical law should be utilized to prove the formation of the scale and to establish certain basic laws and principles of tonal relationship, thereby avoiding arbitrary rules and laws.

Music, as an art-form, is science idealized, not a tonal exposition of exact acoustical law. It is at this point that the ear, in its inconsistency in apprehending tonal relationship, determines that all intervals shall not necessarily be exactly (acoustically) perfect, and that the tempered fifth shall be the

idealized interval which will make possible the interrelation of the fifteen different scales through the process of modulation.

All art takes into account the instability of the sense to which it appeals. If the art of music did not take into account the universal instability present in every human ear which hears all perfect fifth intervals as a little less than absolutely acoustically perfect fifths, then music would simply be the tonal exposition of a branch of physics called acoustics. The idealization of the perfect fifth does not affect the accuracy of the acoustical law in determining the relationship of tones or the construction of scales; no interval of a fifth is heard as *absolutely* perfect in music; if such a fifth in music were produced absolutely perfect, to satisfy the value of x in the following equation

$$2 : 3 :: 256 : x$$

all normal musical ears would determine such an interval of a fifth as being out of tune, the upper tone of the perfect fifth becoming a little sharp in sound.

Therefore, the science of acoustics will be used to determine basic laws for all tonal relationships relating to scale-construction and chord-construction; beyond these limits it will not be employed.

2. Physiology

Concerning the second of the divisions, *viz.*, physiology as it relates to the action of the ear in discerning sounds. The human ear is so constituted as to take in many sounds at the same moment; it was meant to hear in the multiple, not singly, therefore in listening to music the ear should apprehend large masses of sound; the ear should act, in other words, in the ensemble. If a certain instrument is to be discerned by the ear when played in an orchestra, a definite mental state is necessary in order that the ear shall act to discern that particular instrument; allowed to follow its own normal trend, the ear will always act in the ensemble; it will act generically and not specifically. This fact makes for a basis of all method in presenting aural harmony.

Tones in music are never listened to as isolated tones (in