

Discussion of Aural Skills Methodologies

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1. The fundamental questions are:
 - a. What is the primary objective in the teaching of MUMP skills?
 - i. If the primary objective is to teach pedagogical methods, then using multiple systems is the logical choice. Each employed with numbers, letters, and solfeggio, the following systems should be included:
 - (1) *Moveable do*
 - (a) *do-based* minor
 - (b) *la-based* minor
 - (2) *Fixed do*
 - (3) Non-chromatic systems
 - ii. If the primary objective of sight singing is to efficiently and effectively teach the hearing and singing of notation, then a **set of methodologies** should be chosen which best accomplishes this objective.
 - b. If we agree that the primary objective is “to efficiently and effectively teach the hearing and singing of notation,” then what set of methodologies best achieves this goal?
2. The answer is: The set that has evolved over the last 15 years of experimentation at the Conservatory of Music.
 - a. Chromatic solfeggio
 - i. Tonal Music: *Moveable do*
 - (1) Default *la-based* minor but with *do-based* minor when movement is to parallel key
 - (2) Modes: *do* is set according to the key signature so that *re* is the first degree of Dorian, etc.
 - ii. Atonal Music: Fixed Do
 - b. Chromatic letter names
 - i. Alto & Tenor clefs: first with letter names to enforce learning of lines and spaces, then solfeggio for facility and practicality
3. Apology for current set of methodologies in use at the Conservatory of Music
 - a. Solfege is easily more singable than numbers or letter names and effectively accommodates chromatics.
 - b. *Moveable do* teaches thinking in a key which is vital to competent reading in tonal music and contributes to the improvement of intonation.
 - c. *Fixed do* is superior for atonal music when trying to think in a key is actually a distraction (and beside the point)
 - d. First using letter names, then applying solfege to alto and tenor clefs teaches the lines and spaces and then teaches solfege as the preferred choice in practical application.
 - e. *La-based* minor is preferred to *do-based* minor with one exception.

4. Why is *la-based* minor preferable to *do-based* minor?
- a. *La-based* is preferable because
 - i. *La-based* minor teaches the concepts of chromaticism/diatonicism clearly and without ambiguity (whereas *do-based* minor leads to confusion)
 - (1) *La-based* minor. When a chromatic sign is applied to a pitch, the pitch always carries a chromatic syllable (except when cautionary or when restoring the diatonic following a chromatic change within a measure).
 - (2) *Do-based* minor. When a chromatic sign is applied to a pitch, the pitch may or may not carry a chromatic syllable. Additionally, a pitch may have no chromatic sign and yet require a chromatic syllable. Thus *do-based* minor creates a diatonic/chromatic mismatch between syllable and pitch which makes it inherently more complex than *la-based* minor.
 - (3) Test this thesis by singing the first phrase of the bass part to Bach chorale #18, *O Christ, Who Art the Light and Day*

O Christ, Who Art the Light of Day

J.S. Bach

♩ = 60

Chromatic/Diatonic mismatches C/D D/C C/D D/C D/C D/C D/C

Do-based minor syllables: La Te Ti Te Le Te Me

- (a) with *do-based* minor, seven pitches carry a syllable which is in conflict with its chromatic/diatonic function. The additional question for the reader: Is the correct syllable chromatic or diatonic?
- (b) with *la-based* minor, all pitches carry a syllable which is consistent with its function.
- (c) with *la-based* minor, the question of modality is mute and thus the placement of *do* is not in question or subject to shifts with change of modality.

ii. In practice, *la-based* minor does not require relocating *do* with a change to the relative mode (whereas with *do-based* minor, *do* must be relocated). The stability of *do* is a practical consideration: stability maintains the relationship between related keys/modes while relocation of *do* tends to break those relationships.

(1) Test this thesis by singing melody #427 (Introduction to Sight Singing, page 96).

#427. *Tempo di marcia*

Berkowitz, Fontrier, Kraft

♩ = 60

Voice

3

4

mp

7

3

3

3

3

f

mp

10

3

ff

13

p

3

- (a) with *do-based* minor, *do* is relocated at measure 3 on beat one with a possible return to the original *do* at an undetermined location. This breaks the tonal relationship and creates diatonic/chromatic mismatches between syllables and pitches making the reading an onerous task.
- (b) with *la-based* minor, *do* is not relocated which maintains tonal relationships and creates no diatonic/chromatic mismatches.

iv. *Do-based* minor is preferred with harmonic movement between parallel modes. (Since movement between parallel modes is much less frequent than movement between relative modes, use of *do-based* minor is applied more as a “special case” than as defacto method.)

(1) Test this thesis by singing melody #433 (Introduction to Sight Singing, page 97).

#433 *Allegro non tanto*

Berkowitz, Fontrier, Kraft

Voice

The musical score for voice, #433 *Allegro non tanto*, is presented in two staves. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 60 and a dynamic of *mf*. The second staff begins with a dynamic of *p*. The melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamics and articulations such as *mf*, *f*, and *p*, along with fermatas and slurs.

- (2) with *do-based* minor, *do* is not relocated and no diatonic/chromatic mismatches occur—this makes the task *less* complicated than with *la-based* minor.
- (3) with *la-based* minor, *do* is relocated and diatonic/chromatic mismatches occur—this makes the task *more* complicated than with *do-based* minor.

5. Conclusion:

- a. The current set of methodologies for Sight Singing should be continued because they have proven successful over the past decade or so. This success is felt and can be measured in subsequent Conservatory courses, ensemble performance and private studies. Our students uniformly meet minimal expectations and frequently excel as teachers and in competitive situations such as graduate school and professional performance auditions.
- b. Uniform use of a set of methodologies is essential because aural skills themselves are fundamental and because non-uniformity will contribute to problems in the aural skills sequence. It is the weak students who will not survive non-conformity of methodology.
- c. Continued refinement of aural skill methodology should be sought and expected as music itself changes, technology provides more tools and as thoughtful innovation is presented by faculty.