EAR TRAINING FOR THE RESONATOR

Abstract

The purpose of this workshop and related content is as a primer to ear training with the resonator/dobro using tactile connection of the fretboard with the amazing capabilities of the inner ear. The ultimate outcome is to listen to a piece of music and then replay it on your instrument, or transcribe it into sheet music, note for note, in precisely the way it was played. With that said, this is a beginning Solfege system workshop. Skills and expertise are developed over time, with intentional practice, frequent use and expanded learning materials. This workshop is not a comprehensive look into the Solfege language. I have listed some excellent resources in the Reference section for those who want to explore this area in more detail.

For now, we will take a simple look at Solfege on the dobro using the Key of C. The solfege language is the musical language used to identify the names of notes. This system is particularly useful in developing the pitch recognition of notes, but does not describe the why. That much is left to music theory courses. Solfege is also used in developing sight reading and vocal skills which are also beyond the scope of this workshop.

We will be using *moveable* solfege syllables; meaning the same syllables can be applied to any key with the tonic note being “Do”. However, we will focus on the key of C given the consistent tonal and intervallic relationships between notes and the tonic and the simplicity of the scale structure.

In a nut-shell, the “Sol-fa” system is a generic way of hearing how each note or solfege syllable relates back to the tonic note Do.

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How it Works

How does your favorite song get from your ears to your brain? Here are the basics:

- Sound waves from an instrument or a sound system reach the **outer ear**.
- In the **middle ear**, the sound waves cause the **eardrum** and **tiny bones** to vibrate.
- The middle ear passes these vibrations to the **inner ear**.
- The inner ear includes the snail-shaped **cochlea**. Inside the fluid-filled cochlea are 20,000–30,000 tiny hair cells. These hair cells are of different sizes that react to different tones and pitches.
- The **inner ear** translates vibrations into electrical signals.
- The electronic signals are carried into the brain by nerve cells called neurons via the **cochlear nerve** system.
- The signals travel along the cochlear nerve system to the brain's *cerebral cortex*. This part of the brain is like a super-computer,.
- Other areas of the brain add their power to analyze different elements within the music, such as rhythm, pitch, and dynamics.

  Source: Your Brain on Music, The Trump Kennedy Center.

Summary

Notes played on a dobro are vibrations. There is more to it of course. Nevertheless, we will leave it at that for purposes of the tasks ahead. Ludwig Beethoven, composed Moonlight Sonata, and many other pieces when he was completely deaf. Historians wrote that he cut the legs off his piano so when he played he could feel the vibrations of the notes.

1 in 10,000 or 0.01% of people have perfect pitch. Individuals with perfect pitch or really well developed relative pitch do not have to worry about anything written here and would be well advised to ignore it all. Or, "don't fix what ain't broke". I would venture a bet, the perfect pitch ratio (0.01%) is much higher in Nashville,Tennessee. For the rest of us, you can never get enough practice internalizing sounds/pitches.

The following exercises are the basis and beginning of developing a working relationship with the fretboard's tactile activities with the "inner ear".

Summary cont.

And finally, the objective is to learn a tune by ear, rather than from reading. Then you've "earned it" and you understand the music much more deeply. Notwithstanding, reading musical notation is perfectly acceptable and encouraged as a way to acquire a piece of music. Especially, if its melodic structure is not registering with your inner ear.

REFERENCES AND WORKS CITED

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Solfege, Ear Training, Rhythm, Dictation, and Music Theory: A Comprehensive Course by Marta Arkossy Ghezzo. ISBN: 0817351477

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Outliers © 2008. Malcolm Gladwell

Your Brain on Music, The Trump Kennedy Center.

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