

Preface

The simplest way to describe this book is to say that I have tried to put into it the main things I wish someone had told me when I was starting to compose music. Although the book has been written primarily to help would-be composers develop in their art, there is more to the process of producing music than putting notes on paper or the electronic equivalent thereof, so what I say here should be relevant to improvisers in all fields of music, and most of it is relevant to other performers too. This book is not meant to teach a composer basic music theory, counterpoint, figured bass, harmony, musical form, and orchestration, all of which should be part of the education of a composer. Instead, I attempt to give here in what I consider to be the important general foundational musical principles behind these subjects. In general, the majority of these principles are not taught in standard text books. My goal here is to make readily available, in as consistent and obvious a way as possible, an explanation of what I believe are the underlying principles of music that a composer should know.

Because I am attempting to cover in a single book the underlying principles of each of the many areas a composer needs to know something about, the discussion of each topic is necessarily brief in many cases. I have not gone in detail into theoretical controversies, nor do I expect a great knowledge of music theory. Much of what I say should in fact be accessible to a reader with no musical training at all, but I do assume in some places that he or she has at least a modest familiarity with some of the basics of music. Should a reader encounter unfamiliar musical terms, my hope is that he or she will be inspired to learn more about music. The serious would-be composer certainly needs to thoroughly study basic music theory, counterpoint, figured bass, harmony, musical form, and orchestration, and I give some comments on studying these in the Appendix.

Some of the things I *have* often gone into are the reasons, or possible reasons, behind the various musical principles I dis-

cuss. Even though discussion of these reasons often leads into realms of philosophy, physics, psychology, and physiology, I have included this discussion because I think a musician is more likely to understand the importance of the principles enunciated if he or she sees the underlying reasons for them.

No work is written in a vacuum. The works of many authors have influenced me, but I must acknowledge here two authors in particular whose writings have greatly stimulated and helped clarify my thoughts on music and other subjects. Foremost among these is Professor Leonard B. Meyer who in his landmark 1956 book¹ stressed the importance of the role of the brain with expectations and perception of structure in music. A second is the published doctoral thesis of Robert G. Hopkins² that was especially helpful in giving an excellent presentation on the issues of closure in music. Other books that have influence me to varying degrees are referenced in the footnotes to the text.

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¹ Meyer, L. B. (1956) *Meaning and Emotion in Music*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

² Hopkins, R. G. (1990) *Closure and Mahler's Music: the Role of Secondary Parameters*. (University of Pennsylvania Press)