

Contextual Listening: Developing Aural Analysis Skills

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What is contextual listening?

The aural analysis of real music played by live musicians

- ▶ The bulk of multiple choice listening section
- ▶ May include world music, pop music, jazz
- ▶ Bass is important. Use:
 - ▶ Large speakers in class
 - ▶ Headphones or earbuds for individuals
 - ▶ NOT laptop, phone or tablet's speakers

What contextual listening is NOT

Contextual listening is NOT listening to *discrete problems* or *inductive listening*

- ▶ NOT short non-musical listening tasks
- ▶ MC listening section begins and ends with discrete problems
- ▶ Discrete problems are a good foundation for contextual listening.
- ▶ Easier to teach
- ▶ Many resources: Auralia, musictheory.net or the piano

Emphasis on Skill Development

College Board provides resources for **testing** this skill at the end of the year. See [AP Central](#)

- ▶ Released exams from 2003, 2008
- ▶ Practice Exams available to registered teachers

I will emphasize resources to help **develop** the skill throughout the course

- ▶ Share best practices or “Teaching Tips”

For the following problems read the instructions carefully

- ▶ Students often miss how many times sections are played

An example from 2008 Exam



Questions 25-29 are based on an excerpt consisting of four long phrases from a string sextet. The first two phrases of the excerpt will be played twice. Then the third and fourth phrases will be played once. Finally, the entire excerpt will be played once. Before listening to the first two phrases for the first time, please read **Questions 25-27**.

25. The opening motive is represented by scale degrees


- (A) 1 5 6 7 6
- (B) 1 5 7 1 7
- (C) 5 1 2 3 2
- (D) 5 1 3 4 3


26. Compared to the first phrase, the melody of the second phrase is

- (A) an octave higher
- (B) an octave lower
- (C) a fifth higher
- (D) a fifth lower

27. The second phrase ends with what kind of cadence?

- (A) Plagal
- (B) Deceptive
- (C) Imperfect authentic
- (D) Phrygian half

Now listen to the first two phrases for the first time and answer **Questions 25-27**. 

The first two phrases will now be played again. 

Before listening to phrases three and four, please read **Question 28**.

Resources for Teaching

Two Books

- ▶ Joel Phillips et al: *The Musician's Guide to Aural Skills, Volume 2*
 - ▶ Part of Clendinning & Marvin: *The Musician's Guide to Theory & Analysis*
- ▶ Nancy Scoggin: *Barron's AP Music Theory*

Two Websites

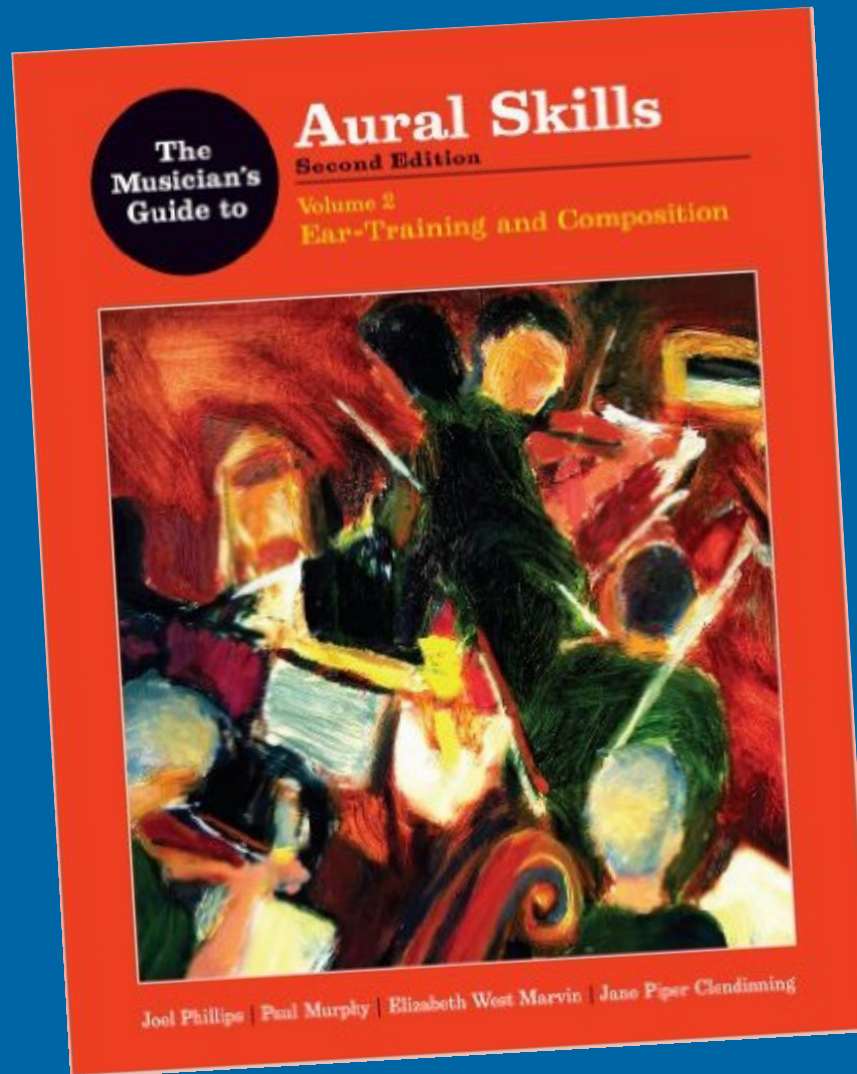
- ▶ www.gmajormusictheory.org
- ▶ www.musictheoryexamples.com

Two Apps

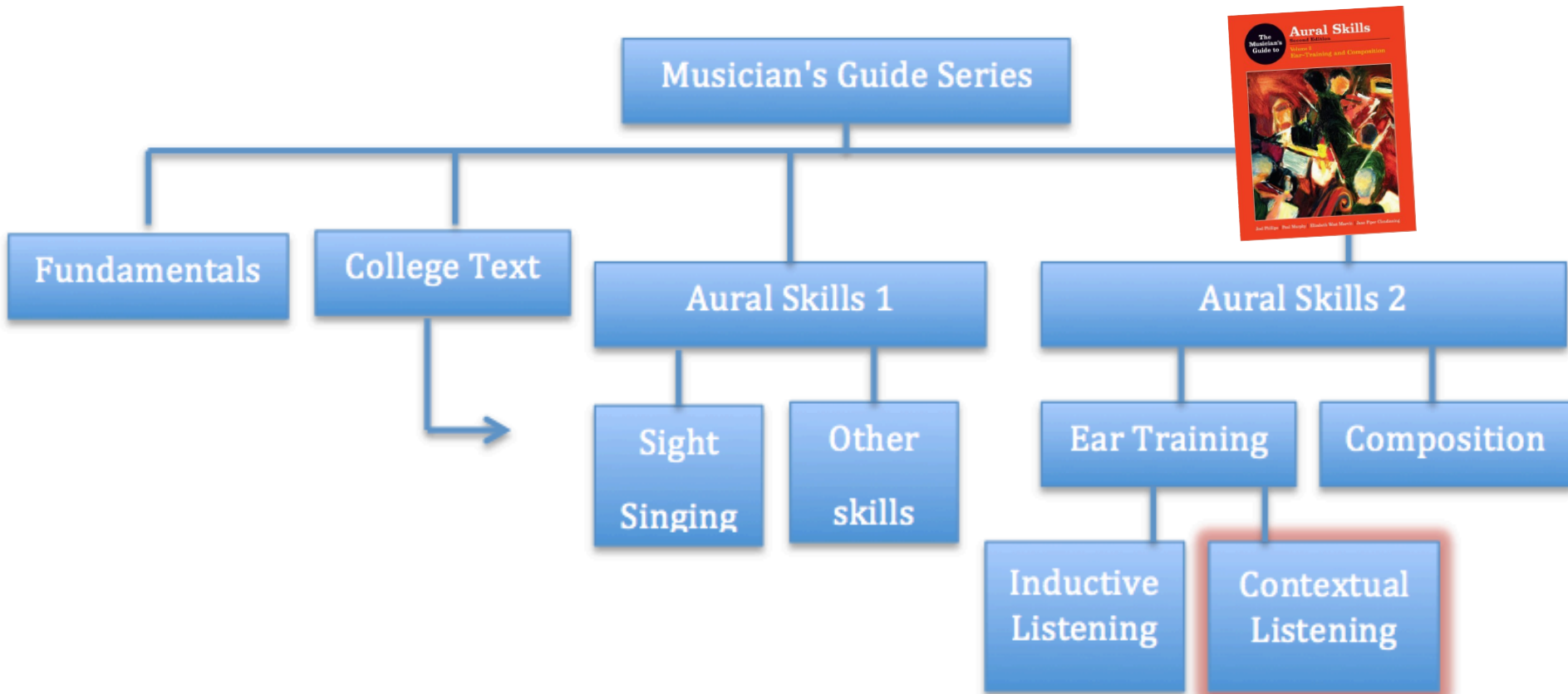
- ▶ Sing That Note!
- ▶ Hear That Music!

BOOK 1

The Musician's Guide to Aural Skills, Vol. 2



The Musician's Guide, overview



How to use the Musician's Guide

Cost is considerable; Aural Skills Vol 2 is consumable

- ▶ Aural Skills Vol 2 with Contextual Listening costs \$80 on Amazon
- ▶ Aural Skills Vol 1 with Sight Singing costs ~\$70 on Amazon
 - ▶ Sight singing is tested on the exam
- ▶ Music Theory text not needed for aural skills; 3rd Ed. hardback costs \$153

Options

- ▶ Buy enough for a typical class
 - ▶ Reuse from year to year. Students write answers on separate sheets
 - ▶ Either assign as homework or use in class
- ▶ Buy one copy for the teacher only
 - ▶ Teacher projects or reads questions

The Musician's Guide, CL 1.1



1. Listen to the beginning. Which of the following best describes segment 1's contour (shape)?

- (a) flat, then ascending (up - up)
- (b) flat, then descending (down - down)
- (c) arch (up - down)
- (d) V-shape (down - up)

2. Which of the following best describes segment 2's contour (shape)?

- (a) ascending (up - up)
- (b) descending (down - down)
- (c) arch (up - down)
- (d) V-shape (down - up)

3. Which of the following best describes how the segments are organized?

- | Segment 1 | Segment 2 |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| (a) idea 1 | idea 1 repeated exactly |
| (b) idea 1 | idea 1 repeated, but higher in pitch |
| (c) idea 1 | idea 1 repeated, but lower in pitch |
| (d) idea 1 | idea 2 |

Teaching Tips

Answers (and more) are in an instructor's edition

These questions are followed by guided melodic dictation.

A good goal is to: “Take dictation in your head”

- ▶ Write solfege syllables and scale degree numbers
 - ▶ No syllables on test; numbers only
- ▶ Write in standard notation in two keys

The Musician's Guide, CL 14.1, slide 1



- Which of the following best represents the meter of the example?
 - simple triple
 - simple quadruple
 - compound duple
 - compound triple
- At the first cadence (before the highest pitch of the melody), the bass line ends on which scale degree?
 - $\hat{1}$
 - $\hat{2}$
 - $\hat{3}$
 - $\hat{5}$
 - $\hat{6}$
- The bass line ends with which scale degree?
 - $\hat{1}$
 - $\hat{2}$
 - $\hat{3}$
 - $\hat{5}$
 - $\hat{6}$
- At the first cadence, the melody ends on which scale degree?
 - $\hat{1}$
 - $\hat{2}$
 - $\hat{3}$
 - $\hat{5}$
 - $\hat{6}$
- The melody ends on which scale degree?
 - $\hat{1}$
 - $\hat{2}$
 - $\hat{3}$
 - $\hat{5}$
 - $\hat{6}$

The Musician's Guide, CL 14.1, slide 2



6. Which of the following pairs best describes the order of the cadences of this excerpt?
- (a) inconclusive; inconclusive (c) conclusive; conclusive
(b) inconclusive; conclusive (d) conclusive; inconclusive
7. Phrase 1 concludes with which type of cadence?
- (a) half (b) imperfect authentic (c) perfect authentic
8. Phrase 2 concludes with which type of cadence?
- (a) half (b) imperfect authentic (c) perfect authentic

Teaching Tips, 1

Teach conducting patterns for meter questions

- ▶ Begin with walking the beat
- ▶ Nonsense syllables for divisions of the beat
- ▶ Stamping on the first beat

Assumes recognition of tonic

- ▶ More to come!

Play as many times as necessary

- ▶ Excerpt is longer than previous example
- ▶ Use for skill development, not as test
- ▶ After a certain number of repetitions, more hearings do not help

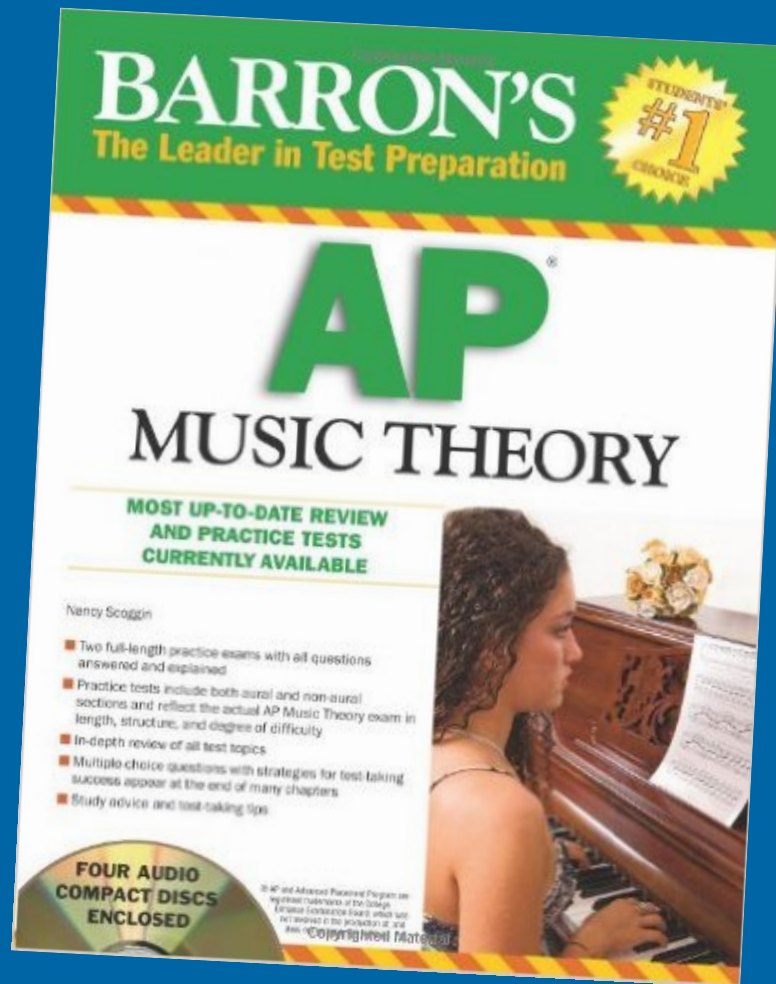
Teaching Tips, 2

Includes suggested use as a harmonic dictation problem

- ▶ Write rhythms of highest and lowest notes
- ▶ Write scale degrees of highest and lowest notes
- ▶ Write in traditional notation on grand staff
- ▶ Write Roman numerals
- ▶ Write harmonic intervals between highest and lowest parts

BOOK 2

Barron's AP Music Theory



How to use Barron's AP Music Theory

Cost is very reasonable; Book is consumable

- ▶ \$26. on Amazon
- ▶ Has been used as the basic text for a class
- ▶ Does not qualify as required sight singing text
 - ▶ Does not include practice melodies , only those comparable to those on exam

Options

- ▶ Buy enough for a typical class
 - ▶ Reuse from year to year. Students write answers on separate sheets
 - ▶ Either assign as homework or use in class
- ▶ School buys as a consumable text each year, supplement with outside material
- ▶ Students buy as a consumable text, supplement with outside material

Barron's AP Music Theory

Aural Unit 1, problems 13 - 15



13. The first note of the melody is what scale degree?

- (A) $\hat{1}$
- (B) $\hat{3}$
- (C) $\hat{5}$
- (D) $\hat{7}$

14. The modality of this excerpt is best described as being in

- (A) major
- (B) melodic minor
- (C) Dorian mode
- (D) natural minor

15. The meter of this excerpt is

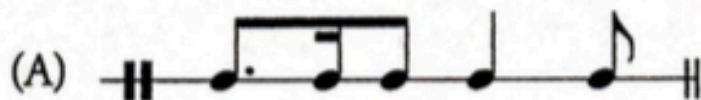
- (A) simple duple
- (B) simple triple
- (C) compound duple
- (D) compound simple

Barron's AP Music Theory

Aural Unit 1, problem 16



16. The predominant one-measure rhythmic pattern of this excerpt is



Barron's AP Music Theory

Aural Unit 1, problems 17 - 18



17. The first section ends with what scale degree pattern in the melody?

- (A) $\hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1}$
- (B) $\hat{1} \hat{7} \hat{1}$
- (C) $\hat{1} \hat{2} \hat{1}$
- (D) $\hat{5} \hat{7} \hat{1}$

18. The first section ends with what scale degree pattern in the bass?

- (A) $\hat{4} \hat{5} \hat{1}$
- (B) $\hat{5} \hat{5} \hat{1}$
- (C) $\hat{1} \hat{7} \hat{1}$
- (D) $\hat{5} \hat{1} \hat{1}$

Teaching Tips

First problems cover more material than The Musician's Guide

- ▶ Assumes recognition of tonic and calculation of scale degree
- ▶ More rhythmic sophistication
- ▶ Hearing multiple voices

Be creative in explanations

- ▶ Discuss nuances of problems
- ▶ Guide the students through relevant dictations

Conduct for problem 15

- ▶ There are two good answers

Barron's AP Music Theory

Aural Unit 2, problems 21 - 23



21. The meter type is

- (A) compound duple
- (B) simple triple
- (C) compound triple
- (D) simple quadruple

22. The cadence at the end of the first section is

- (A) imperfect authentic
- (B) perfect authentic
- (C) half
- (D) Phrygian half

23. This excerpt is based on which of the following scales?

- (A) Pentatonic
- (B) Whole tone
- (C) Major
- (D) Minor

Teaching Tips Summary

You can anticipate certain kinds of problems

- ▶ Kind of meter
- ▶ Form
- ▶ Scale or mode used

Many depend on recognition of tonic

- ▶ Scale degree of last note
- ▶ Kind of cadence
- ▶ Interval at beginning or end of excerpt

WEBSITE 1

G Major MusicTheory

www.gmajormusictheory.org

G MAJOR MUSIC THEORY

SHEET MUSIC

MUSIC THEORY RESOURCES

How to use G Major Music Theory, slide 1

Short excerpts illustrating contextual listening concepts

Membership based

- ▶ \$45 per year or \$4.50 per month
- ▶ Yours FREE for one year. Please put email address on sign-in sheet

Intended primarily for teachers

- ▶ Students may use teacher's password and be included in the same fee
- ▶ Teachers without wi-fi in class may download mp3's

Options: Use excerpts to

- ▶ Illustrate an introduction to a concept
- ▶ Informally quiz a class
- ▶ Test recognition of a concept

How to use G Major Music Theory, slide 2

Part of a larger site which includes

- ▶ Free fundamentals worksheets
- ▶ Free harmonic dictations
- ▶ New harmonic expansions pages
- ▶ Free piano sheet music for beginners

Web address is

www.gmajormusictheory.org

Teaching Tips

www.gmajormusictheory.org

Multiple short excerpts are mostly for the teacher

- ▶ To illustrate a concept in the course of a lecture
- ▶ To drill the class on aural analysis
- ▶ To quiz the class

Can also be used by the student for practice, especially with a fellow student

WEBSITE 2

Music Theory Examples

www.musictheoryexamples.com

Internet Music Theory Database

A Collection of Scores and Sound Files
Prof. Timothy Cutler
Cleveland Institute of Music

Welcome to the Internet Music Theory Database!



The goal of this project is to provide the music community with an online database of tonal music theory examples from the classical repertoire. Presently, we have little access to well-organized examples of theoretical techniques beyond the few excerpts contained in textbooks (often without recordings). Researchers, teachers, and students spend countless hours searching for appropriate examples of theoretical techniques. The purpose of our project is to help remedy this situation.

For each example there is a printable file of the score, an audio excerpt, and a single page that includes both the score and audio recording. For a couple of reasons few of the examples contain analysis. First, I wish to impart my own analytical philosophy as little as possible; it is not important that we all interpret these passages similarly. And second, unannotated scores allow teachers to create assignments directly from the database. Some of you have combined the database with Blackboard to create homework and online quizzes. We have included a link for "suggested ways to use the database" and welcome your ideas.

How to use Music Theory Examples

Another website with short excerpts illustrating some contextual listening concepts

- ▶ Excerpts are free
- ▶ There are lots of them!
- ▶ Intended primarily for teachers
- ▶ Scores are available

How to use Music Theory Examples

Options: Use in same way as G major

- ▶ Illustrate an introduction to a concept
- ▶ Informally quiz a class
- ▶ Test recognition of a concept

and also...

- ▶ Study scores

Web address is

www.musictheoryexamples.com

Teaching Tips

See how a concept was produced by studying the score

- ▶ Insights can reinforce other tasks—Harmonic dictation
- ▶ Can help focus the listening
- ▶ However, Can also **distract** from listening. Can easily become a game of “Can you hear this buried note in the violas?”
- ▶ Different purpose than G Major Music Theory

Concepts don't reflect AP vocabulary as well as G Major Music...

Some concepts are difficult to hear

No easy examples (scale degree, meter, intervals)

APP 1

Sing That Note!



Relevance and Downloading

Many students cannot recognize tonic

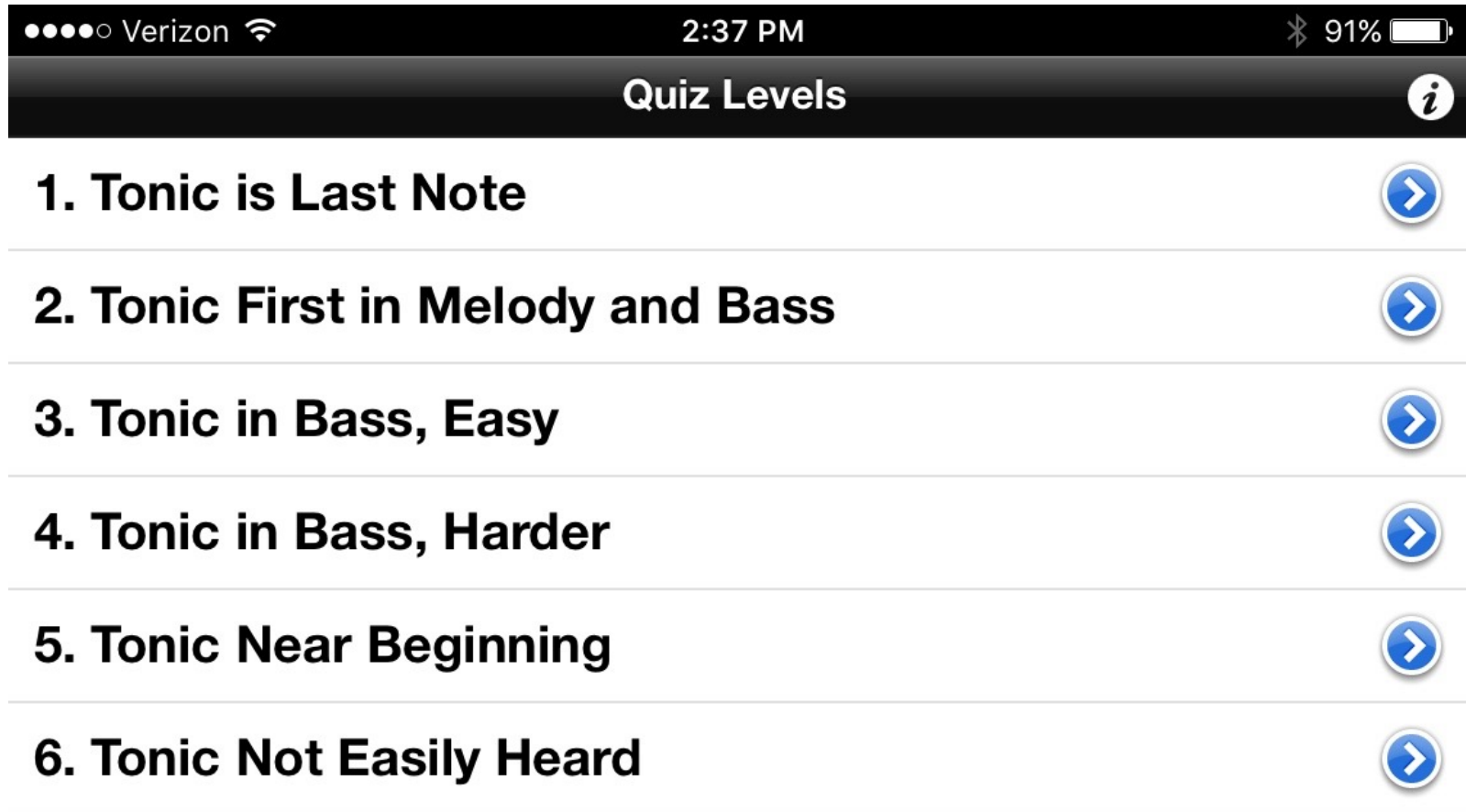
- ▶ Some cannot match pitch!

This skill is basic to many Contextual Listening problems

Available on iPhone only

App is Free

Screen 1: Choose your level



Screen 2: Play your music

Teaching tip: Sing tonic throughout excerpt



Screen 3: Mike button

- ▶ Grey if waiting
- ▶ Red if pressed and listening
- ▶ Green if a pitch is detected



Screen 4: Answer

Correct!



Good job! You sang the tonic.

**That was Vivaldi's Spring, Movement 1 from *The Four Seasons*
Its tonic was E.**

Correct: 1 / 4

Reset



APP 2

Hear That Music!



Purpose

For student (or class) practice

- ▶ Importance of frequent practice of aural skills

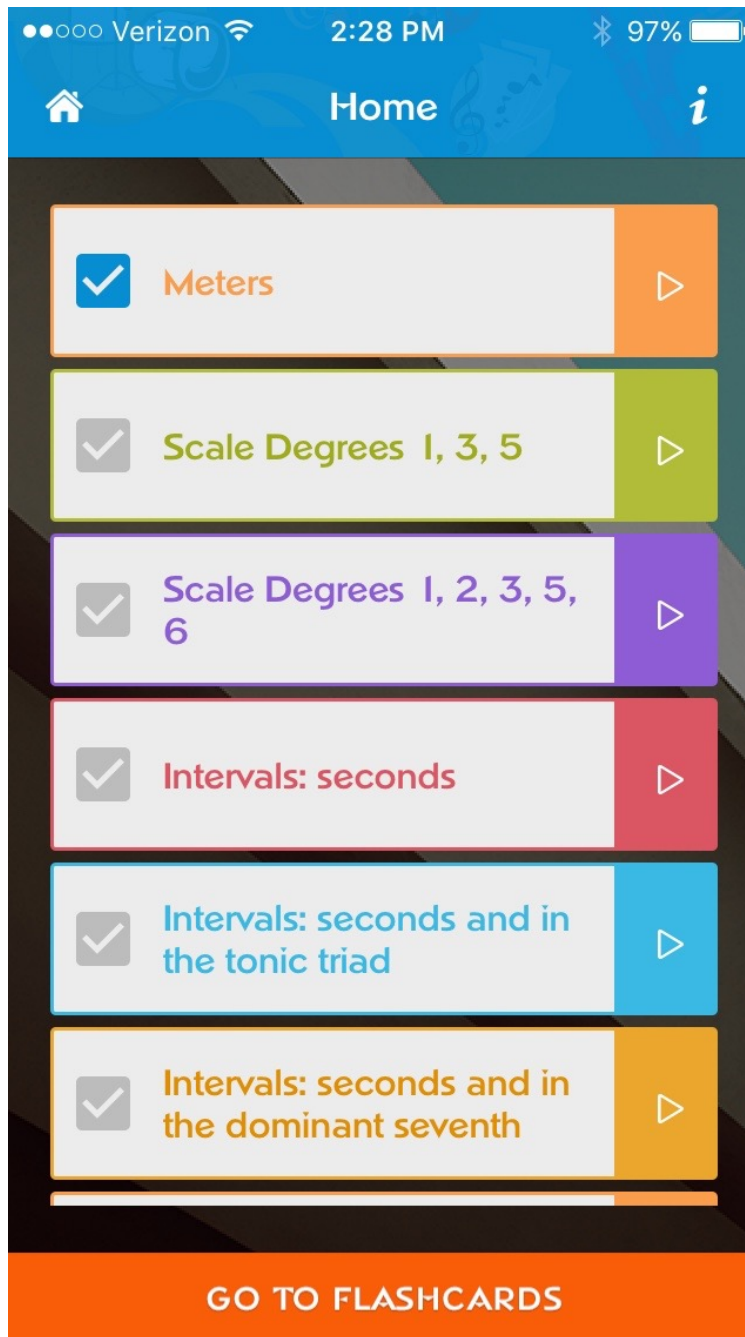
For both iPhone and Android

Assumes that recognition of tonic is mastered

App is Free

Screen 1: Choose the concept

You can choose
any combination
of concepts



Screen 2: Problem

The screenshot shows a mobile application interface. At the top, the status bar displays 'Verizon', signal strength, Wi-Fi, the time '3:13 PM', and battery level '87%'. Below this is a blue header with a back arrow, the title 'Flash Card', and an information icon 'i'. The main content area has a white background with a blue border. It features a dark green rounded rectangle containing a question: 'Q Is the meter for this excerpt simple or compound? Is it duple/quadruple or is it triple?'. Below the question is a red button with a white play icon, labeled 'TURN MUSIC ON /OFF'. Underneath the button is the text 'Tap to flip the card.' At the bottom of the main area, it says '0 of 15'. A blue footer bar contains a white circular arrow icon and the word 'RESET'.

Verizon 3:13 PM 87%

Flash Card

Meters

Q

Is the meter for this excerpt simple or compound?
Is it duple/quadruple or is it triple?

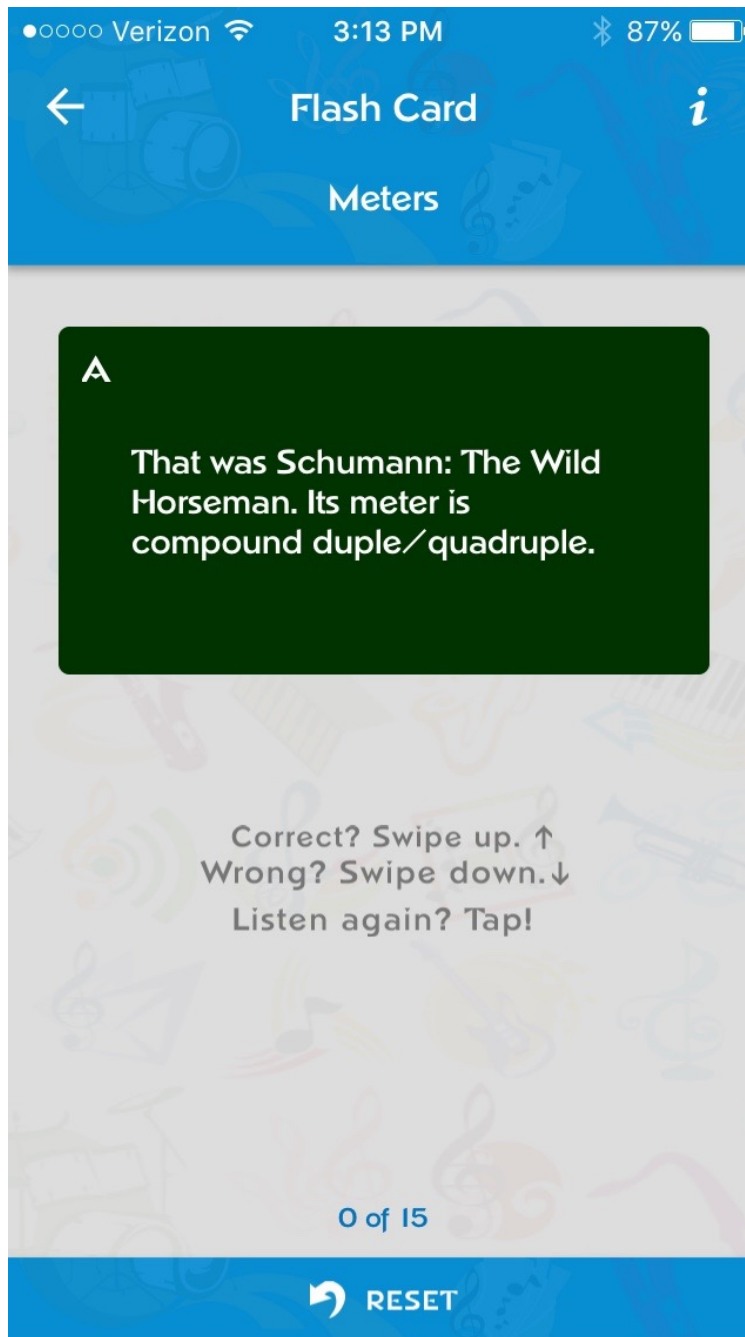
TURN MUSIC ON /OFF

Tap to flip the card.

0 of 15

RESET

Screen 3: Answer



Hear that Music! Pros and Cons

Cons

- ▶ Not everybody has phones; teachers can't require it.
- ▶ No record of time spent or how well student performed

Pros

- ▶ It's free
- ▶ Students can practice on their own on a convenient device

THANK YOU!

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