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Intonation in Music

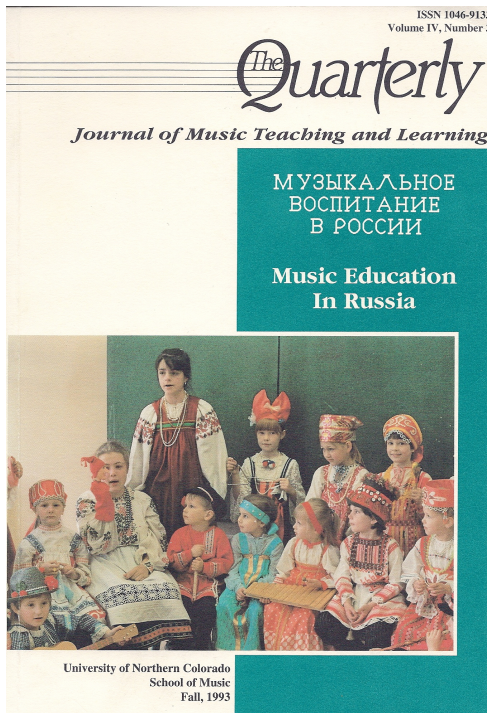
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Intonation in Music

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Understanding topics such as intonation in music, development of music, form in music, music image, and music forms is rather difficult for some teachers and consequently for their students as well. Experience shows that one of the most important and most complicated topics in the elementary school music classes is intonation in music, or what is generally called “elements of music” in the West. This article is intended to assist teachers to gain a broader understanding of questions asked in connection with intonation.*

Definitions of Intonation

What are the musicological bases of intonation in music, and why was it expedient to include it in the music curriculum of the primary school? Many experts in music, past

Why is it necessary to introduce the concept of intonation during the first stages of music education? Children must develop some reliable standards of judgment that they can use to understand any composition—from a short piece to fragments to even whole movements of larger works.

and present, have addressed the specificity of music intonations in their research. In particular, they have dealt with connections between music and colloquial speech. Asafiev, a prominent Russian scholar, musician, and educator, addressed the problems of intonation and meaning in music. In his book, *Music Form as a Process* (Vol. 2, *Intonation*) and in his works on Glinka and Tchaikovsky, Asafiev focused on perception of music, which he called “the art of intoned meaning.” In particular, he said that the writer, researcher, or critic should help listeners realize the process of their perception of music and in this way come to an understanding of music as a great cultural force.

Many teachers have noted that Kabalevsky’s syllabus seems to respond to Asafiev’s directive. The aim of the syllabus is to show students the regularities of music perception and to demonstrate how important it is to hear the main body of a composition, to follow its development, experience the collisions of contrasting groups of notes, and to feel and comprehend the process of the consolidation of a music form of different intonations or musical elements. All this serves to make the students’ contacts with music purposeful and congruent with the nature of the art of music.

Teachers need not be afraid of these challenges, provided they understand clearly that interpretations of the term “intonation” are

* The Russian word *intonazia* has little relationship to the English word “intonation,” which is commonly used to refer to accuracy of pitch or ensemble tuning. *Intonazia* is similar in meaning to the English word “phrasing,” though the Russian word seems far broader. As used in this article, “intonation” broadly refers to components or elements of music including musical material, style, intervals, and melodic meaning. Apparently, “intonation” can also refer to music as a form of public consciousness.

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Comparing pieces comprised of similar pitches and melodic shapes allows students to feel and perceive more deeply the expressive role of other elements of music.

interrelated. Instead of the traditional treatment of intonation as accuracy of vocal and instrumental pitch, Asafiev set forth a much broader idea of intonation as the base of both music and speech. In colloquial speech, it is often difficult to grasp the meaning of sentences if they are devoid of intonation. In music, the sphere of intonation that comprises pitch, tempo, rhythm and timbre modifications seems to be the principal base of the real meaning of a music image. Intonation allows us to make sense out of music, and it helps music to reflect life. Thus, Asafiev called music "the art of intoned meaning."

A narrower understanding of intonation concerns only the quality of musical sound—whether the music makes sense from the point of view of intonation. Another definition is that intonation is the shortest sequence of tones having any expressive meaning. Finally, in its narrowest and most common definition, the term means acoustic accuracy of vocal sounds and sounds of instruments. Accurate pitch is needed because the slightest inaccuracy may change the meaning of a phrase. Thus, the study of music notation and performing the notes on a page are connected within the various meanings of intonation in the new syllabus.

Can different teaching tasks rely upon different meanings of the term "intonation?" Yes for example, to teach students about the alliance between intonation in music and in speech (using the broadest sense of intonation) the syllabus compares colloquial intonations with intonations of music in order to develop students' perceptions of music as a kind of "live speech."

How can the teacher bring students to the conclusion that fine, expressive human speech seems to approach music; and music, in its turn, strives to draw nearer to colloquial speech and become understandable without words? In the introductory lessons to intonation, the syllabus encourages children to realize the musical qualities of speech and understand the role of live, ex-

pressive intonation in communicating understanding. If intonation is missing, speech cannot be understood properly.

Here is an example of one teacher's method of presenting this concept. The teacher asked students to recall the way robots speak and to think about these peculiarities of articulation. By way of comparison, with guidance from the teacher, the children come to the conclusion that monotonous speech, devoid of expressiveness, cannot really show the robot's attitude toward what it is saying. The robot pronounces the words distinctly and properly, but human intonation is absent. It is from a person's intonation that we judge the attitude of that person, because any word can be said in many different ways. Therefore, interaction with the surrounding world is severely limited without a personal sphere of intonation.

A teacher can also show students how music sometimes converts colloquial intonations into music sounds by examples selected from familiar music. The teacher may point out the intonations in the song "First Grade," which are very close to those of questions and answers in colloquial speech; colloquial intonations in "My Stubborn Little Brother" by Kabalevsky; and the theme of the grandfather from Prokofiev's symphonic tale, *Peter and the Wolf*. Kabalevsky's vocal piece, "A Chatterbox," is a witty example of how speech intonations are used in music. Lida, a young girl who is the main character of the piece, persistently assures us that she has no time to chatter, but her non-stop patter betrays her desire to talk constantly.

Why is it necessary to introduce the concept of intonation during the first stages of music education? Children must develop some reliable standards of judgment that they can use to understand any composition—from a short piece to fragments to even whole movements of larger works. The standards should correspond to the essence of music and never lead away from it.

Becoming aware of intonation in music

helps students develop their ability to perceive the expressiveness in music texture in its entirety and in its detail. The latter is particularly important because it is intonation that links music with reality, reflecting both the outside world and the inner life of a person in music images. Therefore, the topic chosen for the second quarter of the second grade ("Intonation in Music") goes along with the general theme and goal of the whole syllabus ("Music in Life") and deepens it. At the same time, this is a new step for school children on the way to understanding all possible connections between music and life. The notions of "three spheres of music," "expressiveness and descriptiveness", and "songness, danceness, and marchness" all paint connections between music and life with wide strokes of the brush.

While covering the topic of intonation, children's attention is drawn to a more delicate area, where they observe the expressive qualities of individual intonation. Here, the teacher must avoid abstract theorizing in regard to intonation or simply identifying the main intonation in a fragment and instead bring students to the most important points: the expressive qualities of a particular intonation, its "pictorialness" and meaning.

Seed-Intonation

How should the teacher teach children about "seed-intonation?" Earlier, students learned about intonation as the base of both music and speech, using the broadest sense of the term. Now students must learn to understand a new aspect of intonation.

As usual in introducing a new concept, the teacher should proceed from music already familiar to the children. The approach conforms to Asafiev's point that a definition must not precede an auditory experience; it generalizes and sums up what has been accumulated in the process of music perception. As a rule, even first-graders can recognize familiar music from the first notes of a melody, and this can be used by the teacher to introduce the concept of a "seed-intonation." To begin, the teacher plays the initial notes of some familiar pieces and asks the children to name the pieces. Usually, children can do this without making mistakes. Then, the teacher can ask: How is it possible to recog-

nize a piece by hearing only two or three notes? This can be done because a piece's most characteristic features can be heard and recognized in just a few sounds, and this is a seed-intonation.

The curricular guides on the topic of intonation frequently suggest that the teacher ask children to find the main intonation of a piece. Second-graders who are asked to do this often are not experienced enough in music notation to indicate the intonation in written music. How can the teacher check their perception and know if they can really hear the seed-intonation?

First, it should be stressed that the teacher ought not assign the task of finding the main intonation in every composition, for in many compositions picking out one main intonation is very difficult. Instead, the teacher can assess how pupils identify intonations by asking them to compare intonations and state whether they are the same or different. For example, if children are able to discern the persistent intonation of march sounds in the exposition of the third movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* at the end of all three sections (but not at the beginning of them), they have rightly identified the important intonations that play an essential role in the design of the symphony.

It does not matter that just a fragment from the symphony is played in the classroom at this time. Later, pupils will hear other movements from the work. (They will hear the first movement in the fifth grade, and in the seventh they will get acquainted with the whole symphony or with all the movements in fragments, as supplemental material). During these early lessons, the teacher's task is to show how a rhythm intonation sustains long and tense symphonic development.

What teaching techniques can help the teacher make the topic of intonation really effective? How can the teacher help students make connections between music and life through the study of intonation?

Many varied strategies can serve this purpose. The principal way is through collective meditation and discussions in which students and the teacher discuss the expressive and descriptive functions of intonation and how a seed-intonation contains the nature of

In another example, a teacher who works according to the new syllabus shows the students how rhythm patterns that are turned into rhythm-intonations consolidate music images and make music meaningful. The teacher writes on the blackboard a pattern that consists of notes at the same pitch level and without time values. Then the teacher begins to “grow” familiar intonations by keeping the same pitch level and changing the rhythmic patterns. The teacher may present the beginning of the march theme from the third movement of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* and a familiar song, then wonderful “transformations” take place before the children’s eyes. They try to determine what other familiar music is made of the same pitches as those used by Beethoven. It is helpful for children to think of the results obtained by a composer who changes the initial intonation of a piece and then completely creates a different means of expression. For instance, the teacher may ask students how the music develops in the piece “In the Hall of the Mountain King” from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suite* and, correspondingly, how the character of the fantastic procession changes.

a whole composition.

Children can understand this topic more clearly by improvising a melody from an intonation. The intonation may be invented by the students or given by the teacher. For example the teacher presents a seed-intonation to the class, or alternatively, the students choose a seed-intonation close in character to a given poetic line. Then the students “grow” complete melodic phrases from the small “seed,” trying to preserve the character of the initial intonation. Comparing pieces comprised of similar pitches and melodic shapes allows students to feel and perceive more deeply the expressive role of other elements of music. (See box above.)

What does the contrast in intonations bring about in “Solveig’s Song”? Here, the children’s attention should be drawn to the use of the two-part form that helps listeners understand how the girl’s feelings change. In the beginning, Solveig is very sad, longing to see her beloved. The dance-like character of the song’s second part suggests that Solveig has not lost hope for a future meeting.

Thus, by demonstrating the role of different elements of music in transforming intonation into a music image, the teacher directs the students’ perception and develops their musical ear. When the topic of intonation has been completed, how should the teacher retain and extend children’s knowledge of this important component of music while covering further topics, particularly in secondary school?

Although this question is frequently asked, it is not good to say “has been completed” when talking about intonation or many other subjects covered in elemen-

tary school. Getting acquainted with intonation in the second quarter of the second grade is just a first step on the long road to mastery of the art of music. The study of intonation will go on for many years.

To master the subjects of the third grade, children should begin to understand unique intonations of music originating in different cultures. The principal method used to teach these differences is the comparison of intonations based on differences and similarities. For example, comparing the rhythm-intonations of the melodic shape in the first movement of Rachmaninov’s *Third Concerto for Piano* with those of certain Russian folk songs confirms the idea that the composer’s

music originates in folk sources. Children are fascinated to hear the intonations of other Russian songs in the music of Beethoven and hear for themselves the familiar intonations presented not the Russian way, but with a German “accent.”

Comparing the intonations of the Russian folk songs with a composition by Guseinli, a composer from Azerbaijan, school children perceive some features of Transcaucasian music, such as an abundance of decorations, fanciful rhythmic patterns, and the typical intonation of the major second.

In the fourth grade, children’s attention is focused on the connection between music and words (“Music and Literature”). In the first half of the year, students observe music intonations as supplements to poetic ones and conversely notice the inherent musical intonations of poetic lines.

While hearing “Rondo of Farlaf” from Glinka’s opera, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, children react vividly to the intonations of breathless patter that portray a boastful coward in a strikingly funny manner. Rachmaninov’s “Vocalise” is an example of music that reflects the expressiveness of human speech (a “speaking” melody). Hearing and analyzing the romances by Varlamov and Rubinstein (the words by Lermontov from J. W. Goethe’s “*Wanderers nachtlied*”) show how the two composers, in their own manner and at the same time, reproduced poetic images in their music and showed how they felt the music intonation of the lyric.

In the second half of the fourth grade (“Music and Fine Arts”), students compare music intonations with other expressive fine arts. For example, some powerful intonations in Borodin’s *Second Symphony* are related to an epic painting by Vasnetsov.

Truthfulness in intonation, its capability to express the truth of life, and the natural character of the intonation system of a composition are the problems considered during lessons in the fifth grade in connection with the topics “Transforming Power of Music” and “What Makes Music Powerful?” At the very first lesson in this series, children experience the influence of music intonation while hearing dramatic Russian songs and Brel’s fiery “Valse.” First, these fifth graders consider

serious questions such as these:

- Why can music intonation produce a sequence of contrasting feelings in a person?
- What is there in music that promotes various feelings?
- Why did Yudin, an outstanding surgeon, study the score of Tchaikovsky’s *Sixth Symphony* before performing his most complicated operations?
- Why were Theodorakis’s songs banned in Fascist Greece?
- Why was J. S. Bach accused of “preventing believers from concentrating in a religious mood” with his music?

In seeking answers to such questions, children come to understand how music intonation can truthfully reproduce all the riches of life. A broad world outlook typical of genuine artists helps them choose appropriate intonations for each specific goal. J. S. Bach’s powerful fugues and unpretentious “Badin-ery” from *Suite No. 2*, W. A. Mozart’s brilliant festive “Rondo” from *Eine klein Nachtmusik*, and the mournful “Lacrimosa” are examples of the range of phenomena of life reflected by music intonation.

In the fifth grade, the marching intonation from Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* is used once again. Now children hear the entire first movement of this dramatic symphony and observe the impetuous, agitated flow of the main theme originating from “the tune of fate.” They notice some fragments of the intonation sounding in the second theme, which is quieter and more lyrical. The last section sounds sharp and imperious. The changing combinations of variants of the main theme produces a picture of inner struggle of a strong person that is the essence of the symphony. That is why Beethoven’s intonation was used as a code for mutual encouragement by prisoners during the time of Fascism.

The subjects in the sixth grade, “Musical Image” and “Music Forms,” reach a new level of perception and understanding of intonation. In fact, this is a more detailed approach to the subjects first presented in the second grade. In the sixth grade, great attention is paid to comparing interacting intonations within the framework of one or several images of a given composition. Such music is found in Schubert’s “Erlkönig,” where the

As usual, the most important thing is to approach music from the point of view of its content. It is not the sonata form that children should feel when they listen to Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, Grieg's *Sonata* for cello and piano, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, or a fragment from Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 7*. They should feel, first of all, different intonations conflicting and struggling. These musical conflicts reflect the serious contradictions in life, the ever-lasting struggles between life and death, between love and suffering, and between the forces wishing to enslave humanity and the human drive for freedom—in short, good and evil in many manifestations. In music, one can hear and feel real collisions of life only through intonations and their development, which is the real basis of any musical form.

characters' sharp conflict takes place against the background of intonations imitating a furious gallop. In the topic "Music Forms," examples of the sonata form are analyzed for the first time. They can serve as material for comparison, too. (See box above.)

At last, in the seventh grade, students enter the complicated and heterogeneous world of contemporary music. How can they understand this mixed realm and distinguish pieces of genuine art from imitations transient fashion? Adolescents should be guided mainly by their experiences with the intonations of works of genuine art that they studied in school music lessons. They will also be influenced by their understanding of the high spiritual value of music intonation. This makes a reliable base for a serious discussion of the vitality of great works of the past. Although new intonations are available, the intonation system of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* remains in keeping with the thoughts and aspirations of people who live in the modern world. Children's experience of intonation helps them to speak intelligently

about the good and the bad in "light" music, to judge the quality of concert or music-hall arrangements of folk songs, and to distinguish genuine innovations from the results of idle searches for new expressions.

A picture of permanent renewal of intonations in the process of historical development unfolds before the eyes of children. They consider new intonations of the twentieth century, such as jazz intonation, and the world of Gershwin, and observe how the new intonation system is fused with intonations and forms of European classical music.

Another object of student's observations is the interaction of "serious" and "light" music. Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* may be a good example. When the song of

the Duke, a "light" tune, bursts into the dramatic and tense finale, it presents not only a dash of different intonation and a contrast of music images, but also a collision of characters and a conflict of different world outlooks. The Duke and his lax morals, which ultimately lead to tragedy, can be seen through the "light" intonations of his memorable song.

In this way, a talk on "light" and "serious" music and one's preferences among different types and layers of intonations (e. g. art music, jazz, pop) leads children to deliberations concerning one's attitude toward life, one's position in life (light or serious, careless and confined to entertainment, or meaningful and highly spiritual) and to understanding whether one's outlook on art and life is broad or narrow. These are the main "landmarks" on the way to perceiving intonation as one of the principal components of music.

Summary


It should be stressed here that the topic of intonation cannot be put aside after the second grade. On the contrary, it should be deepened and enriched year by year. If we

take into consideration that the topic appears in the syllabus for the second grade for the purpose of preparing students for life and further music experiences, we can see that intonation, along with the “song, dance and march” precept, is one of the fundamental concepts of the new syllabus. Keeping these ideas in mind is an important task for teachers during music training in school.

Finally, what benefits does the school get from the pedagogical interpretation of the term “intonation?” The term is used in musicology to define some essential components of music and to reveal the specificity of music as a form of public consciousness. Kabalevsky applied another pedagogical term to the word. He used it to demonstrate to school children the specificity of music and to develop their ability to perceive music images. As shown above, this goal is achieved by solving three interrelated pedagogical problems:

1. to promote children’s perception of music as “live speech” through comparisons of colloquial and music intonations;
2. to gain understanding of intonation in music performance by perceiving the differ-

- ent nuances of intonation; and
3. to develop their ability to perceive the distinguishing features of different musics and recognize its main expressive elements through “seed-intonations” as meaningful components of music images.

These tasks are fulfilled using music notation, “growing” tunes from “seed-intonations” in the process of improvisation; comparing and contrasting intonations in one or several pieces; and changing the sense of music images by altering the intonations. These teaching techniques will be effective if teachers realize the main pedagogical goal of covering the topic of intonation in the general educational schools: To draw children’s attention to the content of music on the level of even the smallest components of music images, and to train their ears and minds to consciously observe these meaningful “seeds” in the process of intonation development of music and consolidation of a music form. As Asafiev once said, this means that we teach children to hear the “tides of the sea of life” in music in general, and the intonations in particular. 

Council for Research in Music Education

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Four copies of the complete paper and a 2- to 3-page abstract must be postmarked by **January 15, 1994**. Papers should be no more than 25 double-spaced pages. A separate cover page should include author's name, institutional affiliation, telephone number, mailing address, and an indication of whether the paper is to be considered for reading or for a poster session. Authors will be notified of the screening committee's decision by **March 1, 1994**.

Submissions and inquiries: John Grashel, Conference Co-Chair; CRME, School of Music; University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign; 1114 West Nevada; Urbana, IL 61801. Phone (217) 244-7398 or (217) 333-1027; FAX 217-244-4585.