



Directed Listening

Directed Listening is simply the idea of directing your ears to concentrate on one particular element of music at a time. Directed Listening is the process you should go through when playing your instrument at home, in class, or in performance. This process will help to address issues of timing and pulse, note lengths, articulations, balance, blend, and style, as well as others – on an individual level and in ensemble settings. It is broken here into three levels; individual, section, and ensemble listening.

LEVEL ONE – Individual

Here you must concentrate on hearing yourself when you play. Pick one issue and focus on only that. It could be anything – tone, articulation, note length, rhythm, pulse, musicality – the list is endless. Let's use pulse for example. In Level One listening, you would concentrate solely on pulse when you play. You would first strip away all pitch information from the music and play only the rhythms on a common pitch making certain that you hear what you are actually performing – Using a metronome always when you practice. Concentrate on starting each note perfectly in time with the met and executing every rhythm perfectly. Once this is mastered, you can add the pitch material back in and go through the same process. Level One Listening is all about actually hearing what you are playing.

LEVEL TWO – Section

Here you must add listening to your section while listening to your own performance. Your section might be people playing like instruments (all the trumpets) or it might be all people playing a like part (all woodwinds when they have a tutti rhythm). Again, you address one single musical issue at a time but now rather than trying to execute it perfectly on an individual level you are trying to match the other instruments in your section. Let's use note length for this example. In Level Two listening you would listen to the other members of your section and compare their note length to yours. Then you would adjust to make them the same. Level Two is about moving away from yourself and into your section.

LEVEL THREE – Ensemble

Here you do what you did in Level Two but on a grander scale – the whole ensemble. Now you not only have to listen to your own execution and compare it to your section, but you have to figure out how it works with the rest of the ensemble you are playing in. Let's use balance this time. After you have gone through Level One and addressed personal issues and Level Two to address balance within your section (all the 1st clarinets are playing at the same volume and they are in proportion to the 2nd clarinet parts) you direct your ears to listen across the ensemble to figure out if your section is in balance with the rest of the ensemble. Can you still hear the other parts? The bass line? The harmony under the melody you are playing? Level Three is about the big picture – listening across the ensemble.

By using Directed Listening every time you play, you will start to see improvement in your performance as an individual and your ensemble will start to move into a higher level of performance. This process works with all musical ensembles (band/orchestra/choir/chamber groups/etc.) and the principles can be applied to non-musical activities everyday as well.