

Music  
Aptitude  
and  
Related  
Tests

An Introduction



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# Music Aptitude and Related Tests: An Introduction by Edwin E. Gordon

The purpose of this booklet is to introduce you to music aptitude tests and other tests that are related to music aptitude. It describes the various tests and explains how they can be used with students in different age groups as well as students with special needs. The outcome of these tests can assist you in better understanding the individual musical strengths and weaknesses of your students. As a result, you will be able to customize your instruction to fit students' differences and needs.

The extensive technical aspects of the test will not be discussed, however, because all information pertaining to means, standard deviations, reliabilities, various types of validities, standardization programs, derived norms, and so on, may be found along with other detailed information in the manual that accompanies each test.

The following is a list of the nine music tests that are explained in this booklet:

## Audie

- Primary Measures of Music Audiation (PMMA)
- Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation (IMMA)
- Musical Aptitude Profile (MAP)
- Advanced Measures of Music Audiation (AMMA)
- Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record (HIRR)
- Rhythm Improvisation Readiness Record (RIRR)
- Instrument Timbre Preference Test (ITPT)
- Iowa Tests of Music Literacy (ITML)

The main reason for administering tests is to improve instruction. By testing students, teachers can effectively analyze individual student's test results and compare them to those of other students within the same peer group.

When administering music aptitude and music achievement tests, however, teachers should first understand the differences between the following three important concepts: Music aptitude and music achievement, developmental and stabilized music aptitudes, and measurement and evaluation.

## MUSIC APTITUDE AND MUSIC ACHIEVEMENT

Music aptitude is a measure of a student's *potential* to learn music.

Music achievement is a measure of what a student has *already* learned in music. For example, people are not born knowing how to compose music in a given style. That must be learned. Once it has been learned, it is considered to be music achievement.

Students who have a high level of music achievement must also have a high level of music aptitude. However, students who have a low level of music achievement do not necessarily have a low level of music aptitude. There are students with high music aptitude who never reach their full potential due to a lack of appropriate musical instruction. Given proper instruction, however, these same students could be just as successful as those who already have a high level of both music aptitude and music achievement. At the same time, students with low music aptitude who receive proper instruction may achieve more success than students with average music aptitude who receive improper instruction.

Everyone has some level of music aptitude, is musical, and can learn to listen to and perform music with some degree of success. More than two-thirds of us are average and have average music aptitude. The rest of us have either above or below average music aptitude. Very few of us have exceptionally high or low music aptitude. The results of valid music aptitude tests suggest that approximately one or two in one hundred have exceptionally high music aptitude, and only one in one thousand has the potential to achieve as a genius.

A child's genetic makeup is a determining factor of his or her

music aptitude. While heredity does *influence* music aptitude, it does not *determine* it.

## DEVELOPMENTAL AND STABILIZED MUSIC APTITUDES

Although children are born with a particular level of music aptitude, that level changes with the quality of their music environment until age nine. After age nine, children's level of music aptitude stabilizes and will not change for the rest of their lives, regardless of the quality of their music environment.

During those first nine years, a child's music aptitude level is constantly fluctuating, which is why it is called the *developmental* music aptitude stage. It is very important that children receive the highest quality of informal music guidance and formal music instruction during the developmental music aptitude stage because it will increase their immediate level of achievement, overall level of music aptitude, and lifetime potential for music achievement. The younger children are, the faster they may profit from a high-quality music environment. With inappropriate instruction or no exposure to music whatsoever, a child's developmental music aptitude usually decreases.

A developmental music aptitude test should be administered to young children periodically, at least once per year. This will help identify those with high developmental music aptitude who will require constant attention if that level is to be maintained, as well as settle any discrepancies between a child's score and the score a parent or teacher thinks the child deserves. The process of discovering the source of the discrepancy adds enormous value to the child's educational process. It helps parents and teachers to better understand a child's performance and establish reasonable goals based on each individual child's musical needs.

Approximately half the number of students with high stabilized music aptitude are not identified as such throughout their school careers. Those who are known identify themselves because they are motivated to achieve. Typically, they are later recognized by their

teachers as a result of their music performance skills. Unfortunately, young children rarely identify themselves as having high music aptitude, and only in rare instances do they have the opportunity to distinguish themselves through music performance skills. This is another reason why it is very important to administer developmental music aptitude tests to young students frequently.

Students' stabilized music aptitude need be measured only once during their school career in order to diagnose their music potential and establish levels of expectations for music achievement.

## MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Measurement is represented by a student's objective score on a test. All tests are measures, and these measures are objective standards.

Evaluation is represented by a teacher's interpretation of a student's test score. Although all tests are measures, all measures are not tests. Therefore, a teacher's interpretation of a student's test score is subjective.

Because evaluation can be only subjective, it should be based on objective measurement. For example, a test score of 85% may be interpreted by a teacher based on a pre-determined standard that makes it worthy of receiving a B grade. But suppose that 85% were the highest score received in the class. Should it be considered worthy of an A grade? What if the lowest score in the class was an 80%. Would that 85% be interpreted differently than it would be if the lowest test score was a 40%? Questions like these can be answered with the use of objective measurement techniques that support and lead to credible subjective evaluation procedures.

Although objective music aptitude scores are more valid than parents' and teachers' simple observations, neither is perfectly free of error. In most cases, however, parents and teachers can expect that the unique knowledge test scores provide will help them stay informed of students' educational progress with a far greater degree of objectivity, intelligence, and sensitivity.

Students' music achievement and developmental music aptitude should be measured continuously at various times during the year and in summary terms at the end of each semester or year. This system enables instructors to diagnose and record students' academic progress.

## Test Descriptions

### AUDIE

Audie is a developmental music aptitude test specifically designed for children ages three to four who are in the developmental music aptitude stage. The purpose of the test is to provide teachers and parents with both standard and distinct information that will help them give children the most appropriate informal and formal musical guidance as early as possible.

Audie is actually the name of a character who talks and sings short songs, including one special short song. Audie consists of two subtests, Tonal and Rhythm, and each should be administered to children individually on different days. Each test includes ten questions, which was found to be the maximum number a child could answer before becoming distracted. How the test works is that when Audie's special song is played, the child says *yes*. If a different song is played, the child says *no*. During the Tonal subtest, if Audie's special song is not played, it is because a pitch is changed in the melodic pattern even though the rhythmic pattern remains the same. During the Rhythm subtest, if Audie's special song is not played, it is because a duration is changed in the melodic pattern while the tonal pattern remains the same. A parent or teacher marks the answer sheet according to the child's response.



## PRIMARY MEASURES OF MUSIC AUDIATION

The Primary Measures of Music Audiation consists of a recording of short musical phrases. It should be administered to children in grades kindergarten through three, including those with special needs. The test can be administered on either an individual basis or within groups as large as a typical classroom.

PMMA consists of two subtests, Tonal and Rhythm. The Tonal subtest is given on one day and the Rhythm subtest on another, with the two days preferably being within one week but no more than two weeks apart. Each subtest is recorded separately, and each recording includes practice examples and 40 test questions. The purpose of the test is to measure a child's ability to give syntactical meaning to music. To do well, the child must organize isolated pitches into tonal patterns, which are then audiated in relation to a pitch center in a keyality and/or tonality. Similarly, the child must organize isolated durations into rhythm patterns, which are audiated in relation to macrobeats, in a consistent tempo and/or meter.

The teacher reads the directions to the children and administers the test. The music used on the test was recorded with a synthesizer because young children are more attentive when listening to electronic instruments as opposed to actual musical instruments. Plus the reliability of both subtests increases significantly when a synthesizer is used in place of a standard musical instrument.

A child does not need to know how to read, read music notations, or recognize numbers in order to use the answer sheet for either subtest, nor is prior music achievement required. Children simply answer questions by drawing circles around pictures of faces on an answer sheet. In order to make it clear to children how to mark their answer sheets, the name of an object is announced on the recording before a set of patterns is heard. The children look to that object and find the pairs of faces underneath it. If the two tonal patterns or rhythm patterns heard on the recording sound the same, the child draws a circle around the pair of faces that look the same. If the two patterns sound different, the child draws a circle around the pair of faces that look different.

Because many young children do not know what is meant by the words *pattern* or *phrase*, the word *song* is used in the directions read to them. The word *first* is announced on the recording before the first pattern of each pair is performed, and the word *second* is announced before the second pattern of each pair is performed. The recording for each subtest includes approximately 12 minutes of listening time, and each subtest requires approximately 20 minutes to administer.

Each question on the Tonal subtest includes two tonal patterns, and each question on the Rhythm subtest includes two rhythm patterns. The pitches in the tonal patterns are performed on the same pitch. All of the tonal patterns, which are from two to five pitches long, are performed at the same tempo. At least one tonal pattern in every pair includes the tonic. Through the audiation of the tonic, the child is guided in inferring syntax for each tonal pattern.

In the rhythm questions, each pattern includes the same number of durations, which prevents the child from counting his or her way to the correct answer. The macrobeats may or may not be systematic in number or length, because an eighth note remains constant among different meters as well as in the same meter. When each macrobeat is performed on the synthesizer as part of a rhythm pattern, it is reinforced at a relatively low dynamic level with a click performed on the rhythm programmer. The click has a different timbre than the rhythm pattern itself. Because macrobeats are emphasized, the child is guided in inferring syntax for each rhythm pattern in relation to meter or macrobeats. That is particularly important for questions in which the patterns are different but include the same number of macrobeats.

The overall test yields a Tonal score, a Rhythm score, and a total score. While it is common for many children to score average on both the Tonal and Rhythm subtests, it is rare that a child scores high or low on both subtests. When administering the test to exceptional students, the grade norms provided in the test manual should not be used strictly for interpreting test results, nor should a child's chronological age be substituted for a grade level. In such cases, it is recommended that local norms be developed to accommodate specific educational needs.

## **INTERMEDIATE MEASURES OF MUSIC AUDIATION**

The Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation was created because of a need for a more advanced version of the Primary Measures of Music Audiation test. The two tests are designed and organized in the same manner. The directions for taking the tests are alike, both include Tonal and Rhythm subtests, and both measure developmental music aptitude rather than music achievement. The only difference between the two is the difficulty level of the questions.

The purposes of IMMA are to identify children with high overall music aptitude so that they can be encouraged to participate in special music activities, and to diagnose children's musical strengths and weaknesses. The test may be used with children ages six through nine, as well as ten through eleven, even though these children's music aptitudes have stabilized.

IMMA is intended to be used in a group where half or more of the children scored 80% or above on the Tonal subtest, Rhythm subtest, or both on the PMMA. IMMA is most precise for children with above-average and high developmental music aptitudes, whereas PMMA is most precise for children with average and low developmental music aptitudes.

Changes in developmental music aptitude, in terms of either raw scores or percentile ranks, cannot be evaluated by comparing students' scores on PMMA with their scores on IMMA. Differences that occur in students' developmental music aptitude must be interpreted by comparing students' scores on two or more administrations of the same test.

## **MUSICAL APTITUDE PROFILE**

The Musical Aptitude Profile is a valid test of stabilized music aptitude. It is an eclectic test battery, designed to measure seven separate dimensions of stabilized music aptitude. MAP is for students in grades four through twelve, and may be administered either individually or within groups. Because it is a stabilized music aptitude test, it needs to be given only once throughout a student's school career. No formal music training is required in order to receive a high score. If a student

has in fact received formal music instruction, this will not affect his or her scores positively or negatively.

MAP consists of three main divisions: Tonal Imagery, Rhythm Imagery, and Musical Sensitivity. The Tonal Imagery division contains two non-preference subtests, which are called Melody and Harmony. The Rhythm Imagery division also contains two non-preference subtests, which are called Tempo and Meter. The Musical Sensitivity division contains three preference subtests, which are called Phrasing, Balance, and Style. Directions and practice exercises are offered at the beginning of each subtest, and the questions on all of the subtests are performed by professional musicians with sensitive musical interpretation.

Each main division on the Music Aptitude Profile takes 50 minutes to administer. The listening time for each subtest is 15 minutes. The non-preference subtests contain 40 questions each, and the preference subtests contain 30 questions each. The battery should be administered in three 50-minute periods on three different days. The testing days do not have to be consecutive and may even be weeks or months apart during the academic year without affecting results.

Each of the main divisions are on individual recordings. The two Tonal Imagery subtests are administered during the first 50-minute period, the two Rhythm Imagery subtests are administered during the second 50-minute period, and the three Music Sensitivity subtests are administered during the final 50-minute period. If there is not enough time to administer all of the tests, or if an extensive diagnosis is not necessary, then the Melody and Meter subtests may be used to measure students' overall music aptitude.

For each question in the Melody and Harmony subtests, the student is asked to compare a musical answer with a short but complete musical statement that is a few seconds in duration. The musical answer contains more notes than the musical statement. The student is asked to imagine that there are no extra notes in the musical answer and to decide whether the musical answer without the additional notes sounds the same as the musical statement. If the students are in doubt about whether the musical answer sounds the same as or different from

the musical statement, they are asked not to guess and to mark the in-doubt response on the answer sheet.

On the Tempo subtest, there is a musical statement and a musical answer, and the melody is the same for both of them. The ending of the musical answer, however, is performed either faster, slower, or at the same tempo as the musical statement. This is done by using a re-recording of the statement when the intended answer is meant to be the same for a question. The student is asked to decide whether the musical answer sounds the same as or different from the musical statement. If the answer sounds different, the student is *not* asked, however, to indicate whether the ending of the musical answer is faster or slower than the ending of the musical statement.

On the Meter subtest, there is a musical statement and a musical answer, and the musical answer may be the same as or different from the musical statement. If the musical answer is different, it is because of a difference in meter. The tonal dimension remains the same in all cases. For both Rhythm Imagery subtests, if the students are in doubt about whether the musical answer sounds the same as or different from the musical statement, they are again asked to mark the in-doubt response on the answer sheet rather than guess.

For the Phrasing subtest, the same original melody is performed twice, but with different musical expression. The tempo rubato, dynamics, tone quality (or intonation), or two or more of these together are altered in the second performance of the melody. The student is asked to decide which of the two renditions of the melody sounds better. On the Balance subtest, two original melodies are performed. The beginning of each melody is the same, but the endings are different as a result of tonal and/or rhythm changes. The student is asked to decide which of the two endings better compliments the beginning. On the Style subtest, the same original melody is performed twice, but at different tempos. All other aspects of the melody are the same. The student is asked to decide which of the two tempos for the melody sound better. Again, when in doubt, the student is asked to mark the in-doubt response.

## ADVANCED MEASURES OF MUSIC AUDIATION

The Advanced Measures of Music Audiation is a recorded test of stabilized music aptitude that is designed for high school students and college/university music and non-music majors. The test also offers satisfactory reliability when used with students as young as twelve years old. When the test is administered in grades seven through twelve, it is recommended that the Musical Aptitude Profile be given at a later time to students who are participating in music activities. That way, additional information can be gathered about their individual musical strengths and weaknesses.

There are two important purposes of AMMA. The first is to enable administrators to establish objective and realistic expectations for the music achievement of high school and college/university music and non-music majors. The second is to efficiently and diagnostically adapt the music teaching in classrooms, ensembles, and private instruction to fit the individual musical differences among students.

The test is made up of 30 questions that were programmed on a computer and performed on an electronic instrument. Directions for taking the test and three practice exercises are included. The test requires no more than 20 minutes of administration time.

Each test question consists of a short musical statement followed by a short musical answer. The student is asked to decide whether the musical statement and the musical answer are the same or different for each question. If the musical answer is different from the musical statement, the student is then asked to decide whether the difference is a tonal change or rhythm change, which is thoroughly explained during the practice exercises. There may be one or more tonal changes or one or more rhythm changes in a musical answer, but there is never a tonal change *and* a rhythm change in the same musical answer.

If the musical answer is the same as the musical statement, the student fills in the blank in the same column on the answer sheet after the number for the question. If the musical answer is different from the musical statement because of a tonal change, the student fills in the blank in the tonal column. If the musical answer is different from the

musical statement because of a rhythm change, the student fills in the blank in the rhythm column. If a student is unsure of an answer, he or she is asked to leave the blank unfilled.

In each question, the musical statement and musical answer have the same number of notes. Therefore, a student cannot arrive at a correct answer by simply counting and comparing the number of notes in the musical statement and the musical answer.

A musical answer may be different from a musical statement as a result of a tonal change of one or more pitches, tonality, and/or keyality, or as a result of a rhythm change of one or more durations, meters, and/or tempos. Various tonalities, keyalities, meters, and tempos, as well as tonal and rhythm modulations, are represented in the questions.

In regard to scoring, the Tonal score, Rhythm score, and total score are derived from the same 30 questions.

## **HARMONIC IMPROVISATION READINESS RECORD**

The Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record test is designed for students and adults of all ages. The purpose of HIRR is to help teachers objectively determine whether individual students have the necessary harmonic readiness to learn to improvise as well as to help them adapt instruction to an individual student's musical differences when teaching improvisation.

This 17-minute recorded group test consists of 43-harmonic patterns, which are performed in various tonalities. All of the tonalities are in the same uncomplicated rhythm. Each pattern includes three chords, all of equal duration, with the tonic chord being the first and last chord in the keyality of C. The directions for taking the test, along with practice exercises, are on the recording. Students are asked to listen to pairs of harmonic patterns and mark on an answer sheet whether or not the two patterns in each pair sound the same. If the two patterns do not sound the same, it is because the middle chord in the second pattern is different from the middle chord in the first pattern. If students are not sure of the correct answer, they are told to mark the question-mark column, which indicates that they are in doubt.

## **RHYTHM IMPROVISATION READINESS RECORD**

The Rhythm Improvisation Readiness Record test is designed for students and adults of all ages. The purpose of this test is the same as that of the Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record test. However, results from the Rhythm Improvisation Readiness Record test indicate whether or not a student has the ability to adequately deal with temporal relations.

This 20-minute group test consists of 40 pairs of rhythm patterns, each pair performed with the same simple melodic line in the keyality of C. Each melodic line incorporates only four uncomplicated note values. The directions for taking RIRR, along with practice exercises, are on the recording. Students are asked to listen to pairs of patterns and to mark on the answer sheet whether or not the two patterns in each pair sound the same. If the two patterns do not sound the same, it is because one of the durations on a given pitch in the second pattern is longer or shorter than it is in the first pattern. The pitches in the two patterns always remain the same. If students are not sure of the correct answer, they are told to mark the question-mark column.

When used in conjunction with a valid music aptitude test, the interpretation of results on the Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record and the Rhythm Improvisation Readiness Record are further enhanced.

## **INSTRUMENT TIMBRE PREFERENCE TEST**

The primary purpose of the Instrument Timbre Preference Test is to assist teachers and parents in helping students in grades three through twelve choose an appropriate woodwind, brass, or sting instrument to learn in beginning instrumental music instruction. Whether students do or do not have a timbre and range preference, more than 40% of students who have a composite score above 80% on the Music Aptitude Profile or the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation test do not volunteer for instrumental study. One of the reasons could be that they have not identified the instrument they would like to play. It has been



found in research that when beginning instrumental music students with high music aptitude are guided in choosing an instrument to learn to play that corresponds with their timbre and range preferences, the majority of them will remain in the instrumental program longer and their overall music achievement will increase significantly. Thus, it is recommended that ITPT be administered in conjunction with a valid music aptitude test.

ITPT takes less than 20 minutes to administer and includes seven synthetic timbre which use the same brief melody. The timbre are all performed on a synthesizer using the same musical expression. Each of the seven synthesized timbre is intended to represent the sound of one or more instruments.

The seven timbre are organized into 42-recorded test questions. Each of the seven timbres is paired twice with every other timbre so that each timbre is heard once as first in the pair and once as second in the pair. The students are asked to listen to each question and indicate which of the two timbres they prefer. Because the melody is always the same and musical expression is constant, timbre and range are the only changing factors in each question. The melody does not become boring because it is unusual and brief.

There are a few reasons why synthesized sounds are used for this test rather than the sounds of actual instruments: 1) It was not possible for musicians to perform a melody on different instruments with the same expression. 2) It was not possible to include all of the different style timbres for each instrument on the recording. 3) Although students might claim to prefer a specific timbre when an actual instrument is used, their preference may be more a matter of familiarity than a matter of preference.

## IOWA TESTS OF MUSIC LITERACY

The Iowa Tests of Music Literacy is a multi-level battery designed to measure simple to complex dimensions of music achievement. Through the use of ITML, the measurement and evaluation of students' tonal and rhythm audiation and notational audiation may be

made from semester-to-semester or from year-to-year using test levels that are most appropriate for students' current music achievement. There are elementary, middle, and high school music and non-music norms available for the test.

The Iowa Tests of Music Literacy has four main purposes. The first is to diagnose a student's comparative strengths and weaknesses in six dimensions of tonal and rhythm audiation and notational audiation. The second is to compare student's achievement in audiation and notational audiation to their potential to achieve as indicated by their music aptitude scores. The third is to evaluate student's continuous and sequential achievement in tonal and rhythm audiation and notational audiation. The fourth is to determine student's relative overall standing in tonal and rhythm audiation and notational audiation.

ITML includes six subtests, which are classified into two divisions: Tonal Concepts and Rhythm Concepts. The three subtests in the Tonal Concepts division are Audiation/Listening, Audiation/Reading, and Audiation/Writing. The three subtests in the Rhythm Concepts division are also Audiation/Listening, Audiation/Reading, and Audiation/Writing. The three subtests in each division are administered sequentially during the same period and require less than 30 minutes.

There are six recorded levels of the test, including directions and practice exercises. Each of the six levels includes six subtests that are similarly titled from level-to-level, with the content of each level becoming more and more difficult. The actual test questions consist of tonal patterns for the tonal subtests and rhythm patterns for the rhythm subtests, all of which are performed on a synthesizer.

For the tonal Audiation/Listening subtests, students indicate the tonality they hear on the recording by filling in ovals on the answer sheet. On the lower levels of the battery, only major and harmonic minor tonalities are presented, whereas on higher levels, students are presented with multiple, multi-tonal, and pentatonic patterns. For the tonal Audiation/Reading subtests, students indicate whether the notated patterns they see on the answer sheet are the same as those they hear performed on the recording. The same sequence of tonalities,

multi-tonalities, and pentatonicism are used. As the level increases and the questions become more complex, accidentals, the treble clef, the bass clef, and chord symbols are introduced. For the tonal Audiation/Writing subtests, students complete the notation of the tonal patterns they hear performed. Only major and harmonic minor tonalities and multi-tonalities are used in the writing subtests, and accidentals, the treble clef, the bass clef, and part-music are introduced in the writing subtests as the levels of complexity increase.

For the rhythm Audiation/Listening subtests, students indicate the meter they hear performed on the recording. On the lower levels of the battery, only usual duple and triple meters are presented. On the higher levels, multi-metric patterns are presented in usual and unusual meters. For the rhythm Audiation/Reading subtests, students indicate whether the notated patterns they see on the answer sheet are the same as those they hear performed on the recording. The same sequence of meters and multi-metricity is used and various measure signatures are introduced as the levels become more complex. For the tonal Audiation/Writing subtests, students complete the notation of the rhythm patterns they hear performed. Usual, unusual, combined meters, multi-metricity, and different measure signatures are introduced as complexity increases for each level.

## SUMMARY

There are several possible choices when considering which music aptitude test should be used with students of a given chronological age. For students in grades one through three, either the Primary Measures of Music Audiation or the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation is suitable. Students' scores on the Primary Measures of Music Audiation determine which of the two tests is most appropriate. If an analysis of the Primary Measures of Music Audiation scores indicate that a large number of students scored above average on one or both subtests, then the Primary Measures of Music Audiation should no longer be used. Either one or both of the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation subtests should be administered instead.

For students in grades four through six, either the Musical Aptitude Profile or the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation is suitable, even though of the two, the Music Aptitude Profile offers greater reliability and precision. Also, the Musical Aptitude Profile is designed to provide greater diagnostic information than the two subtests on the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation test.

For students in junior high and high school, either the Musical Aptitude Profile or the Advanced Measures of Music Audiation test may be used depending on whether extensive diagnostic information from the Musical Aptitude Profile is of importance.