



Fundamentals of Musical Composition

Arnold Schoenberg , Gerald Strang (Editor) , Leonard Stein (Editor)

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Fundamentals of Musical Composition represents the culmination of more than forty years in Schoenberg's life devoted to the teaching of musical principles to students and composers in Europe and America. For his classes he developed a manner of presentation in which 'every technical matter is discussed in a very fundamental way, so that at the same time it is both simple and thorough'.

This book can be used for analysis as well as for composition. On the one hand, it has the practical objective of introducing students to the process of composing in a systematic way, from the smallest to the largest forms; on the other hand, the author analyses in thorough detail and with numerous illustrations those particular sections in the works of the masters which relate to the compositional problem under discussion.

Fundamentals of Musical Composition Details

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From Reader Review Fundamentals of Musical Composition for online ebook

Juan Pablo Fernandez says

Debería titularse "Apología de Schoenberg".

Difícil puntuar a este libro. Creo que el problema está en que no es tanto un manual de composición como una defensa de la manera de componer del autor. Esto nos lleva al debate de ¿qué sería un manual de composición? ya que este concepto cambió mucho a lo largo de la historia. Creo que si bien muchos de los conceptos que explica Schoenberg se adecúan a mucha de la música de la primera mitad del siglo XX, también es cierto que muchos otros no. Ocurre también que intenta permanentemente poner como ejemplo música del pasado (principalmente Beethoven) con lo cual el libro queda, en mi opinión, a medio camino entre un libro de composición clásica y uno de siglo XX. Por esto es que digo que suena a defensa de la teoría de Schoenberg, ya que pareciera que intenta demostrar como su método de composición es en realidad una continuación de lo que hicieron grandes maestros como Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, etc. Tampoco me queda claro a quienes está dirigido ya que es algo básico para quienes quieren profundizar en su estilo y es algo tendencioso para quienes se inician en la composición.

En resumen, es interesante leerlo más como una manera de conocer a Schoenberg que de aprender a componer.

Josh Eustis says

I learned how to write music from reading this book, I'm not shitting you.

Acer Pseudoplatanus says

While there is definitely a lot to be learned from this book, it won't suffice just reading it. Playing or listening to the examples and analysing them (within the context of the work and by putting thought into it) is crucial to get the most out of it.

The main focus of the author are van Beethoven's piano sonatas, although he does draw from other common practice repertoire in order to illustrate approaches to writing themes and to explain forms.

I would, however, not recommend taking anything as gospel; The claim, for example, that the inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion of a theme are considered "exact repetitions" of a motive is ridiculous, especially as the author defines exact repetitions as those preserving all features, which would imply that direction of melodic movement and orientation are of no relevance.

Dennis says

Written as a companion and outgrowth of his music courses at USC and UCLA, this book, contrary to what its title may imply, will not teach you how to compose. Let me clarify; this book, by itself, will not teach you

how to be a composer. To benefit from the wisdom of this text, you must have some substantial musical experience or a good teacher. Schoenberg likely understood this since he was more accustomed to delivering this information in a class setting.

Schoenberg provides an array of loosely organized morsels of profound knowledge with many, many examples as illustrations. The information starts at the motive level building gradually to themes, concluding with discussions of longer forms. Schoenberg provides very brief explanations of concepts, devoting far more space to naming and examining musical examples. While one certainly learns composition best by studying scores, the text suffers somewhat from this format, coming across as more of a study outline than a textbook. Passages occasionally strain for coherence as Schoenberg, a native German speaker, attempts to translate his ideas into concise statements in English.

The ultimate result is a wealth of wisdom in a short format that is unfortunately difficult to grasp without either a knowledgeable teacher to fill the gaps or some prior understanding of music adequate to decipher the author's meaning. The text is most useful when Schoenberg is discussing practice rather than theory or shining light on notable examples from the repertoire. The ultimate lesson of the book boils down to this: composition is learned through looking at the work of people who have come before you. Read this way, *Fundamentals of Music Composition* provides the tools you need to start learning how to compose.

Carol says

This book isn't really a manual for learning how to compose. It's about how musical form works, from small units to large forms like sonata-allegro. Schoenberg is very thorough and methodical, arranging the material into a completely logical progression. Although his style and approach may be a little old-fashioned, he is extremely good at writing educational texts. Even though this book covers things I already know, I found it to be an excellent and engaging explanation of form.

Ben says

Schoenberg is exhaustive, as always, in his examination of theme and form, though the points in this book are left more open than in his others, as compositional style is not something that can be taught by rote. The text is divided into two sections that explore, respectively, the construction of motives and themes and the most common forms of Western classical music. The material is firmly rooted in common practice and tonal harmony and unfortunately doesn't offer much at all for compositions that do not adhere to these standards.

David says

Nothing earth-shattering, but a good book for music teachers to have on the shelf. Schoenberg's textbook takes students through the construction of melodies, phrase-structures, and short and long forms: ternaries, rondos, sonatas, and others. More an annotated collection of music examples than a narrative, "Fundamentals of Musical Composition" is a dry read: if you're not obsessed with this stuff beforehand, go for Charles Rosen's "Sonata Forms" instead; it covers much of the same material in a more humanistic way. But "Fundamentals" is a great grab bag of illustrations of musical forms and will make a music teacher's search for examples of periods, sentences, and sonata rondos much quicker. Assumes a knowledge of tonal harmony.

