

MUSIC NOTATION:

A South African Guide

For Sallyann Goodall

MUSIC NOTATION:

A South African Guide



Christine Lucia

UNISA PRESS
PRETORIA

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First edition, first impression

ISBN 978-1-86888-568-8

Published by Unisa Press
University of South Africa
P O Box 392, 0003 UNISA

All musical examples were originated in Sibelius 5.2.5 by Christine Lucia

Project editor: Lindsey Morton

Book designer: Doris Hyman

Copy editor: Eileen Pearse

Indexer: Hannlie Knoetze

Typesetters: Pamset, Johannesburg, and Nozipho Noble, Unisa Press

Printer: Lebone Litho Printers, Johannesburg

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Preface and acknowledgements

The purpose of this book is to introduce staff notation and theory of music through music familiar in South Africa among various communities of music-makers. Ideally, you should work through it over a period of at least six months – longer if you are using it in the classroom or with a community group. Music examples are integral to the approach used here, and should be sung or played before you learn the concepts, names, and symbols of staff notation that are drawn from them. The point of the book is to learn to read and write staff notation aurally as well as theoretically, developing the sound of music in one's outer and inner ear as you proceed. There are 30 chapters, averaging five to ten pages each. Each chapter is divided into many sections, so you can easily keep an eye on your progress. You can also use the Index to look up terms and concepts.

The approach is formative rather than summative, modelled on the way we learn to read and write language. Here you do not memorise information so that you can pass exams, but acquire it gradually, in a method that proceeds from the known to the unknown and concentrates on acquiring notational skill and theoretical information incrementally, so that you can write music and read it fluently. This, together with the emphasis on aural development, means that each step depends heavily on the one before. You will get the most out of this book, then, if you try not to leave sections out.

Compositions from a wide range of music known in South Africa provide the many music examples used: African traditional and choral music, jazz, Indian music, Western art music, and European folk songs. All South Africans can relate to some of the music, and everyone will learn something new. There is however a leaning towards choral music, because members of choirs are the largest musical constituency in the country. Tonic solfa is used as a basis for learning pitch at the beginning of the book and well into it, because it is a good sight-singing method and already widely used in South Africa. Rhythmic aspects are introduced next, then melodic; keys, scales, and time signatures are gradually worked through until the logic of key relationships and harmony can be understood by the end of the book. The book deals with modes from early Western music and folk songs, African music, and jazz, and with musical forms such as the twelve-bar blues, popular song, and African cyclic form. There are no composition exercises as such, but many pieces can be studied here as compositional models. References to sources used in this book are given at the end.

I hope that this book will inspire new compositions written in staff notation, give rise to more transcriptions from solfa to staff (and vice versa), and open up branches of music study, the music profession, and the music industry: all areas in which you need to know music staff notation. Access to a small electronic keyboard or melodica is essential to using this book; access to a piano is even better. The main thing is to pace yourself, and only proceed to the next section or chapter when you feel completely ready.

Sallyann Goodall and my students at the University of Durban-Westville 1989–97 were the original inspiration behind this book. Sallyann always shared my vision of an alternative approach to music theory, and was the book's most careful reader as it developed. Profound thanks also go to Deepak Ram and Andrew Tracey for opening my ears to Indian and African music, and to former colleagues and students at UDW, especially my students in 'Compositional Techniques IB' 1996, who were the first users of material in the book in its early stages.

Preface and acknowledgements

I remember with affection many other students who sweated through different versions, especially Nontsi Mbulawo and Klaas Skosana, who translated a preliminary version into isiXhosa and isiZulu respectively. Other people who assisted along the way as it became the basis for a foundation course in several universities, include (in alphabetical order) Michael Blake, Rika Engelbrecht, Heather Gale, Clare Loveday, Nishlyn Ramanna, Ishbel Sholto-Douglas, Cameron Upchurch, and Seena Yacoob. To all of you, my deepest thanks. Finally, I am grateful to the University of Stellenbosch for appointing me Extraordinary Professor 2009–2011 and making facilities available to complete the book, and to the staff at Unisa Press for their endless patience.

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Christine Lucia

University of Stellenbosch

Foreword

When I was a Bachelor of Music student at the University of Durban-Westville in the 1990s, Theory of Music (or what our department called Compositional Techniques) was one of the most difficult subjects in the degree curriculum, because it relied on a ready knowledge of staff notation. Most students arrived to study music at university or college without prior formal music training: they had not studied music at school, indeed music as a subject was not part of the normal academic curriculum at black schools. The common language we understood was tonic solfa, because it was the standard notation (and still is) of black composers, whose choral compositions we sang at school choir competitions and eisteddfodau throughout the country.

For the further advancement and development of the tens of thousands of choristers that are actively involved in the South African music scene, and to eliminate tonic solfa's boundaries, we needed a book that would introduce staff notation. We needed a book that would bridge that gap and other gaps, and Christine Lucia's *Music Notation: A South African Guide* does exactly this, in the choice of all her music examples, in her choice of a straightforward music language, as well as in her deployment of the English language.

Many books have been written on basic Theory of Music and many teachers have invented ways to help their students cope with it as an academic subject. The difference between *Music Notation: A South African Guide* and other books is the simplicity with which this subject is tackled. It will play a rudimentary role for amateurs and student beginners from all musical communities, and is a guide to aspiring composers, arrangers, and professional performers.

The music examples are relevant to the general South African population and are easily recognisable. It is clear from reading the book that Christine Lucia has a vast wealth of experience as a music teacher and that in her many years of teaching music especially to students from historically disadvantaged communities, she has grasped the difficulties that stand in the way of their understanding of the subject. I think that this is why the book 'talks' to readers: it is as though she is standing and teaching in front of them. It is a relevant, truly well thought out book that will help many future generations come to grips with the 'monster' - Theory of Music.

Musa Nkuna (MMus, BMus, Dipl. de Concert, UPLM, UTLM)

Lisbon, Portugal, March 2011

1 Tonic Solfa



1.1 Tonic solfa notation

Tonic solfa notation is a path leading towards staff notation. It helps you to read pitch and rhythm and to hear music inside your head. This in turn makes it easier to read and write music and to begin using staff notation when you perform or compose music. This study guide does not teach you how to compose in tonic solfa but, by the end of it, you will be able to transcribe music from solfa to staff notation, and vice versa. Another good reason for learning tonic solfa is that millions of people in South Africa use it, and hundreds of compositions use it. For all these reasons, it is a good place to begin.

1.2 Tonic solfa pitch names

Notes in tonic solfa pitch are sung to the names doh, ray, me, fah, soh, lah, te. The word 'solfa' (or 'sol-fa') comes from two of the names: soh (sometimes spelled sol) and fah. The names doh, ray, me, fah, soh, lah, te are usually shortened to letters: d r m f s l t. In sequence they make a ladder or 'scale' of pitches that you can sing upwards like this:

Ex. 1.2.1 Tonic solfa pitch names rising

d (doh) r (ray) m (me) f (fah) s (soh) l (lah) t (te)

Normally the rising pitch is not shown visually; the letters are written on one level. Sing:

Ex. 1.2.2 Tonic solfa pitch names on one level

d r m f s l t

Once you have sung up to t you can continue up from d again, as if you were adding an upper extension to a ladder. This is written d¹ to show that it is higher than d. Pick a low note in your voice range as a starting note and sing the following several times, until you can do it perfectly: