

# Musings

Offbeat insights and random ramblings from a self-proclaimed outsider.

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## About Me



Lyn

I am a professional musician and teacher. I travel far and frequently, considering myself to be an experienced observer of the world. I love to eat and my latest challenge is finding ways to enjoy amazing food while following my health requirements of being gluten-free, dairy-free, and sugar-free. After trying for 6 years (unsuccessfully) to have a child of our own, my husband and I finally had a sweet baby girl! We are still in the process of adopting a child from India. (We started the process before I got pregnant.)

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## Followers

Monday, May 10, 2010

## Copland's 3 Planes of Listening

This week I am doing listening exercises with my students and I came across something I think is worth sharing. The American composer Aaron Copland wrote a book in 1957 entitled, "What to Listen for in Music". In this book, he describes what he calls the "Three Planes of Listening". While there is no new information here, I have found it useful because it's so clear. It helps my students focus and really hear more deeply than before.

### The Three Planes of Listening:

- 1. The Sensual Plane** - It's not what it sounds like. The sensual plane is the level where you're aware of the music, but you don't listen enough to really make a judgement about it. It can even be background music. When you notice instrumentation or the quality of the sound, that's the sensual plane. Most people never listen to music outside of this plane.
- 2. The Expressive Plane** - In the expressive plane, you notice how the music makes you feel. For example, you might notice that a minor key may make you feel down and a major key might make you feel up. Also, fast music might make you feel nervous. In this plane, you can visualize what the music might represent. (Like a storm or a beautiful sunny day.) Sometimes, I have my students draw or paint a visual representation of a piece of music that I play for them. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I was helping them to hear music in the expressive plane.
- 3. The Sheerly Musical Plane** - This is the plane at which most musicians, conductors, critics, music teachers, and judges listen to music. In the purely musical plane, you can separate the music into elements such as tempo, pitch, dynamics, key signature, time signature, form, chord analysis, etc. It contains all the jargon as well.

It helps me to be aware of these 3 planes. When I listen to a student play, I usually am listening on the Sheerly Musical Plane while most parents listen on the Sensual Plane. This explains some of the discrepancies in judgement that sometimes occur. Also, sometimes it's helpful for me to just sit back and listen on the sensual plane just for the enjoyment of it.

Next time you listen to any kind of music, try listening on the three levels and see if it changes the experience for you. I'd love to hear what you think.

Posted by Lyn at 11:23 AM

Labels: [music](#)

15 comments:

[Citrus Quark](#) [May 19, 2010 at 10:07 PM](#)

thanks for sharing this. i think i may have read this a long time ago, but have since forgotten about it. it's a good reminder that there are many ways to enjoy music.

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[Lyn](#) [May 20, 2010 at 10:28 AM](#)

Thanks for reading! I agree--- there are many ways to enjoy music. This is why I can enjoy silly pop-music, show tunes, AND deep serious music. Some people see this as a contradiction, but I don't. :-)

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[Anonymous](#) [July 6, 2010 at 5:09 AM](#)

Thanks I've read the book but o forgot about it..suddenly my former student post a question about this and good thing it's in the net..it helps..

[Reply](#)

[Anonymous](#) [March 6, 2011 at 8:14 PM](#)

thanks for sharing!

[Reply](#)

[Anonymous](#) [April 9, 2011 at 11:51 AM](#)

Is there a place online to find the article that talks about this?

[Reply](#)



[Lyn](#) [April 9, 2011 at 8:05 PM](#)

Sorry, but I don't think so. I found the article in a magazine called "In Tune". You might check out their website and see if you can view or request old articles. [www.intunemonthly.com](#)

If that doesn't work, you can always check out Copland's book, "What to Listen for in Music". Good luck!

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[Spencerbat](#) [March 23, 2012 at 2:27 PM](#)

I am taking COMP I and was assigned to read "How We Listen" by Aaron Copland and I am reading it from the book Norton Reader 12th edition by Linda H. Peterson and John Brereton page 1121.