



DartmouthX

How We Listen

A Toolbox addition for Opera listeners from the OperaX team at DartmouthX

Derived from: *What to Listen for in Music*

By Aaron Copland

Musical Planes

"We all listen to music according to our separate capacities. But for the sake of analysis, the whole listening process may become clearer if we break it up into its component parts, so to speak. In a certain sense we all listen to music on three separate planes." - Aaron Copland, renowned composer.

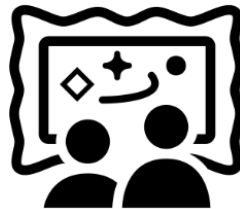
Copland goes on to describe the three musical planes:

Sensuous Plane



"to listen for the sheer pleasure of the musical sound itself. That is the sensuous plane."

Expressive Plane



"...music has a certain meaning behind the notes and that the meaning behind the notes constitutes, after all, what the piece is saying, what the pieces is about."

Musical Plane



"Besides the pleasurable sound of music and the expressive feeling that it gives off, music does exist in terms of the notes themselves and of their manipulation."

Elements of the Musical Plane

Music Conveys Drama



Copland describes the different things we are attentively listening for in the musical plane. He encourages us to listen to "the notes themselves," becoming active listeners. Listen for these musical elements from the musical plane. This is where we enter the composer's world.

We have to use these planes as tools for listening. Listen to all three at the same time and correlate them to better understand how the music is conveying drama.



Rhythm

"... the natural tie-up between bodily movement and basic rhythms are further proof ... that rhythm is the first of the musical elements."

Melody

"A beautiful melody ... should be of satisfying proportions. It must give us a sense of completion and of inevitability."

Harmony

"The sounding together of separate tones produce chords. Harmony ... is the study of these chords and their relationship among one another."

Tone Color

"It is difficult to imagine a person so 'tone-blind' that he cannot tell a bass voice from a soprano or, to put it instrumentally, a tuba from a cello."

Musical Structures

Notice the moments where the statement-departure-return or A-B-A forms are used to underscore—or undermine—the dramatic context.

