

The Note Reader

for those who don't

Why Read Music?

by Mark Gaare, originally from The Note Reader, published by MG MUSIC Company, Mesa, AZ, July 1991.

Musical notation is the language of musicians. For more than 900 years, this graphical representation system has allowed musicians to communicate the performance and presentation of music. It is also a universal language, knowing no boundaries of state or nation. Anyone who calls themselves a musician should be able to read music to some extent. Those who do not know this language are merely tourists in a foreign land.

Granted: a tourist can survive, function, and even mix with the locals. But rarely can one experience life as a native. Indeed, how could a tourist fully appreciate the richness of the culture and its customs without first knowing its history? Or perceive subtle shades of meaning in the expressions of their arts? Or understand the individual relationships without comprehending the messages between them? Furthermore, language can present a barrier to communicating one's own thoughts and ideas. Unless one is fluent, a misinterpretation of the intended message is likely to occur.

The irony is that musical notation is the simplest language one could ever learn! There are no verbs to conjugate, no gender differences, and no multiple meanings. It's definitely easier than the conversational English that you learned as a child. Music notation can be taught in as little as one day. And that knowledge can be applied immediately.

Learning to read music is the first step into a larger world. Navigation is possible by learning just a few basic road signs. And as soon as the map legend is fully deciphered, an entire world of songs and sounds is revealed, ready to be explored. Soon, an appreciation develops for the accurate, consistent, and even sensitive execution of music. Finally, one is naturalized into the culture; interacting and contributing without fear or shame.

Musical notation is alive and well today. And it is also changing to meet the needs of our modern-day musicians and composers. There is even an international movement underway to provide much-needed reforms to our present system. The organization behind this movement is the Musical Notation Modernization Association. It is comprised of musicians, composers, teachers, and professionals from around the world. Visit them on the web at: <http://musicnotation.org/mnma/>