

NATALIE DOUGLASS GRANA

A SINGING
APPROACH
TO HORN
PLAYING

*Pitch, Rhythm, and
Harmony Training for Horn*

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Training for Horn

Natalie Douglass Grana

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Reviews

“This beautifully formulated book, specifically designed with the horn player in mind, is a training manual for fine-tuning your inner ear, tightening your rhythm and improving your pitching skills—all elements in which every horn player should excel. Through a series of specially developed exercises, using solfège, singing, harmony, and pulse, Dr. Natalie Grana gives you all the materials you’ll need to develop the skills absolutely fundamental to any aspiring musician. With the incorporation of many examples taken from the standard horn repertoire, this book should be on the shelf of every horn studio.”—**Frank Lloyd**, *Professor for Horn at the Folkwang University of Arts in Essen, Germany, former member of the Philip Jones Brass ensemble the English Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic orchestra, renowned soloist and chamber player.*

“*A Singing Approach to Horn Playing* is a welcome addition to standard horn curricula and is a must-have for aspiring young horn players and seasoned professionals alike. A highly trained ear is required for success on horn. This book presents a methodical, logical, and yet fun approach to developing pitch and interval recognition, solfège dexterity, and rhythmic proficiency. Dr. Grana uses traditional melodies from many different cultures to sequentially develop aural skills, and then applies these skills directly into a wide array of horn-specific repertoire including solos, etudes, and orchestral excerpts. Many teachers use the phrase, “If you can sing it, you can play it.” This book gives you the tools necessary to make that statement a reality!” —**Jesse McCormick**, *Second Horn, The Cleveland Orchestra; Associate Artistic Director, Kendall Betts Horn Camp; Instructor of Horn, Baldwin Wallace Conservatory*

“This text reveals the pathway for a renewal in thinking about instrumental teaching and learning. Finally, a way of pedagogical thinking that sees music learning as a complete activity which incorporates the development of the whole musical mind alongside the technical aspects of playing a brass instrument. The proven efficacy of a singing approach to music learning is combined with the finesse required for convincing instrumental performance. This is a must read for everyone involved in music education.” —**Dr. James Cuskelly**, *Immediate Past President, International Kodály Society; Director, Cuskelly College of Music, Brisbane, Australia*

“This is the book I have been waiting for. Dr. Grana puts musicianship at the heart of her approach to horn playing and does us all a great service.” —**Michael Thompson**, *Professor of Horn, Royal Academy of Music, London*

“This book is incredible! I have opera singers for parents and wife, so I’ve benefitted from a LOT of vocal influences in my life. This book bridges the gap between brass playing and singing in simple, compelling, and wonderfully incremental ways. Dr Grana has used the Concone vocal exercises and more to open us brass players up to our deeply creative and wildly freeing connection to singing.”—Jeff Nelsen, Hornist, Canadian Brass; Professor of Horn, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music

“Quite simply: In my experience I have never heard a single successful hornist who could not also sing in time and in tune. Singing is a fundamental building block, indeed the necessary DNA not only for the healthy development of the ear but also for technique, and most importantly for the growth of essential musical language ability. As such, Dr. Grana’s very welcome book goes a long way to fill what has long been a gaping hole in much horn pedagogy. Indeed, the positive ramifications of her work will surely resonate with students and teachers of all instruments. Highly recommended.” —**Fergus McWilliam**, hornist, Berlin Philharmonic; author, *Blow Your OWN Horn*”

“*A Singing Approach to Horn Playing* is a brilliant contribution to horn pedagogy. In these pages, Dr. Grana leads horn players, young students through professional-level musicians, to systematically develop and refine their musicianship skills through an approach based on the Kodály method and to connect those skills to their horn playing. These essential skills, more than anything else, power the navigation system that guides musicians to perform winning auditions and realize their full potential. Whatever your performance level and horn playing goals, *A Singing Approach to Horn Playing* is for you. I consider Dr. Grana’s method to be a “must buy” for the library of any horn teacher, student, or performer, and ideal for use in brass pedagogy programs.” —**Randy Gardner**, Professor Emeritus, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music; Former Second Horn, Philadelphia Orchestra; author, *Mastering the Horn’s Low Register* and *Good Vibrations: Masterclasses for Brass Players*

“It is well known that horn players, to achieve enduring success on their beautiful but treacherous instrument, must hear the notes about to be played internally. Dr. Natalie Grana, a true “hornplayer’s hornplayer” and an expert teacher of these skills, has assembled materials developed specifically to nurture these elusive skills. Whether you are a beginner or you are a seasoned professional, her book is a sine qua non for all singers, all brass players, and especially for hornplayers.” —**Lowell Greer**, former hornist with the Milwaukee, Detroit, Cincinnati, Mexico City, and Toledo orchestras; chamber orchestra horn in Ann Arbor, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, New York City, Boston, Toronto, Vancouver, Washington D.C.; former professor at the University of Michigan, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Finske Konservatorium

“Dr. Grana has accomplished something truly extraordinary in her new book, “A Singing Approach to Horn Playing.” She has seamlessly melded an eclectic blend of techniques normally used for vocal study such as the Kodály Method and solfège into a comprehensive learning manual that is sure to instill a rigorous understanding of the subject matter for all who invest themselves in its pages. I wholeheartedly recommend this book for anyone who desires to become not only a better horn player, but who desires to become the best musician they can be, period.” —**Bernhard Scully**, *Associate Professor of Horn, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Artistic Director, Kendall Betts Horn Camp*

Acknowledgments

This book is the realization of the time, talents, and devotion of many people.

I would not be the musician or teacher that I am today without the brilliant people of the US Fulbright Program, specifically the Hungarian Fulbright Commission in Budapest. They believed in my purpose and dedicated the resources necessary for my year at the Kodály Institute in Kecskemét, Hungary. This experience was life-changing. I'd particularly like to thank my mentors at the Institute, László Norbert Nemes, Agnes Gerges Gal, and Renáta Darász, whose teaching transformed my musicianship and continues to inspire me. This book is my best effort to share the incredible Hungarian approach to music education. I hope that this mission to share Kodály with the horn community expresses my deep appreciation for the opportunity to be at the Institute.

I am profoundly grateful to my husband, Dan, who encouraged me to write this book and provided unfailing support throughout the process. Dan, I am blessed to have married someone who loves and believes in me like you do. You are an amazing person and an amazing husband.

My teachers, Randy Gardner and Bernhard Scully, inspired and challenged me to be the best horn player and musician that I could be. I will always be grateful for the countless ways that they invested in me and continue to provide their mentorship. It was an honor to study with people that I admire deeply for their artistry, teaching, and integrity.


A very special thank you to Anne Laskey and Gail Needleman at Holy Names University, and the entire team dedicated to building the *American Folk Song Collection*. This resource has made a major impact on teachers around the world and it was a crucial part of my writing. Anne, thank you for taking the time to review my song choices, provide cogent pedagogical insights, and encourage me as I created this method.

James Cuskelly, Lowell Greer, Nikki LaBonte, Austin Larson, Frank Lloyd, Jesse McCormick, Fergus McWilliam, Jeff Nelsen, and Michael Thompson all reviewed my manuscript and provided invaluable insights during the editing process. I am so honored and grateful that musicians of their stature invested their time toward making this book as effective as possible. I appreciate and respect all of you so much.

To my parents, Wylie and Ardyth, and my siblings, Andrea, Eric, Wylie, and Kristen—thank you for loving and supporting me in every way a family could. If I have accomplished anything, it is because I have come from a place of unconditional love and infinite support. I love you all more than I can say.

About the Companion Website

www.oup.com/us/asingingapproachtohornplaying

Oxford has created a website to accompany *A Singing Approach to Horn Playing*. There are a number of video examples with which you can sing and play along. Examples available online are indicated in the book with Oxford's symbol . Use of headphones or earbuds is recommended for the best sound and volume.

Introduction

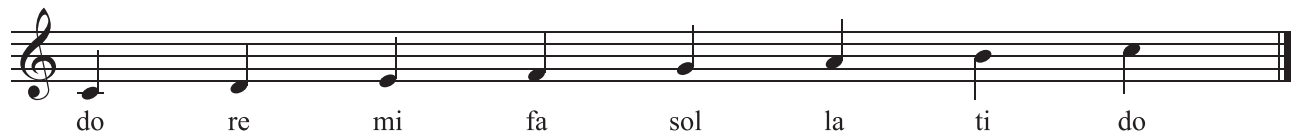
Kodály’s method of teaching music is brilliant. . . .
All good music-making begins with the voice.

—Sir Georg Solti

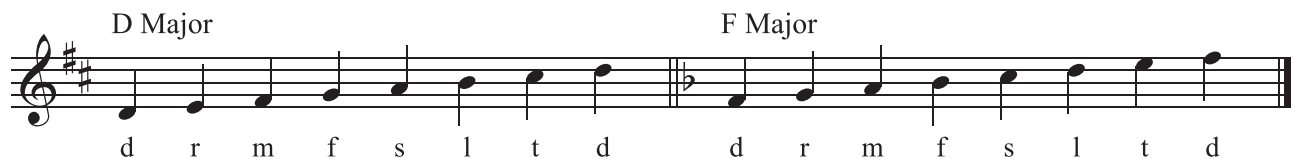
Solfège and Pitch Names

This book uses a “moveable do” system, meaning that do is the first note of the key in which you are playing or singing.

C Major



When written, solfège syllables will be shortened to the first letter of the syllable and will always be written in lower case.



do = d, re = r, mi = m, fa = f, sol = s, la = l, ti = t.

There are two methods of singing minor scales in the moveable do system. One method, “do-based minor,” keeps do as the first note of the scale and changes the syllables for the flat third (me), sixth (le), and seventh (te) scale degrees.

C minor

D minor

F minor

Another method is to start the scale on la, since singing la to la in any major key creates the relative minor scale. This is referred to as “la-based minor.” This system shows the relationship between the relative major and minor scales, since the solfège syllables stay the same.

C minor

Eb Major

C minor

D minor

F minor

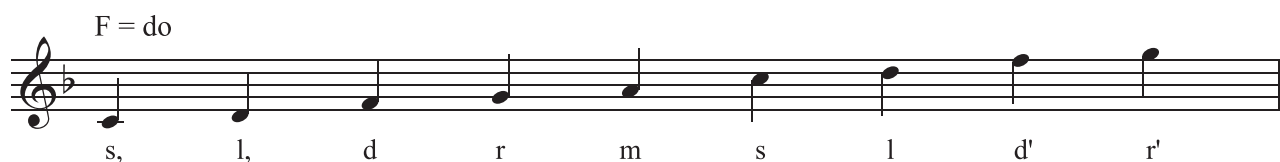
Both systems are widely used and each has its own merits. The minor melodies in this book have been notated with both do- and la-based minor and I encourage you to use whichever system seems the most intuitive as you progress. The only exception is that the minor pentatonic songs by tone set (i.e., l, drm and l, drm s) have been written with la minor, rather than do. It is my opinion that this is preferable when training with smaller tone sets within the pentatonic scale.

There are few chromatic alterations in this book. However, any chromatic alterations, or accidentals, will be written out completely, as shown below.

All absolute pitch names, or letter names, will be written in upper case. For example, a B \flat major scale would read:

B \flat C D E \flat F G A B \flat

Commas (,) and apostrophes (') are used to indicate octaves when necessary. Commas (,) indicate pitches below and apostrophes (') indicate pitches above an octave. For instance, the tone set s,l, drm sl d'r' would appear as follows:



Exercises

This book uses several musicianship training strategies throughout:

1. Singing

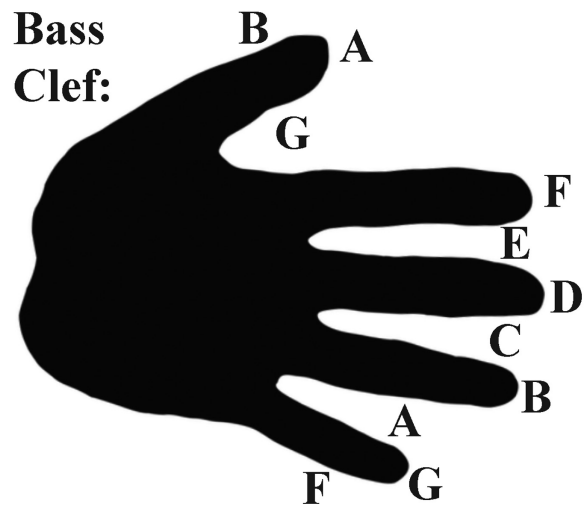
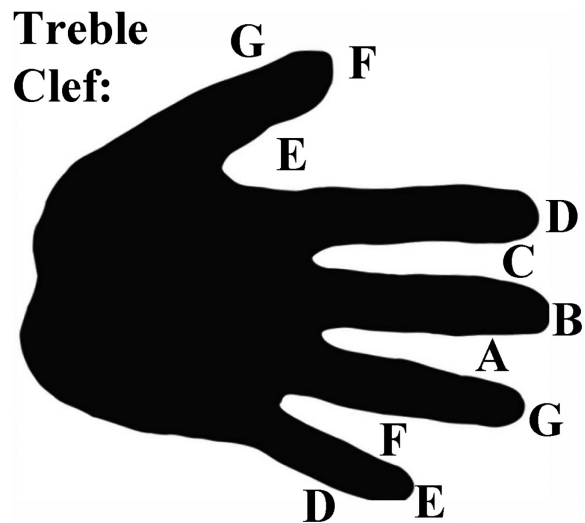
Singing is a critical step toward connecting your instrument to your musical mind. You do not need to be a trained singer to incorporate singing into your horn routine as many of the principles that give life to your horn playing translate to singing as well. Make sure to breathe deeply and maintain good posture. Enjoy the intuitive nature of the human voice and your innate ability to create music without an instrument.

Please note that your voice will not be able to sing all the examples in the written octave. Women will most likely need to sing bass clef examples up an octave, and men will most likely need to sing treble clef examples down an octave. In all cases, choose the register that best suits your voice.

2. Handstaff

Certain exercises require showing pitches on a “handstaff”—using your five fingers to represent the five lines of the staff. Hold out your left hand, palm facing your body, fingers pointing to the right. In treble clef, your pinky is E, ring finger is G, middle finger is B, pointer finger is D, and thumb is F. The spaces between your fingers represent the spaces of the staff, bottom to top: F, A, C, E. A diagram for handstaff in treble and bass clef appears below.

Showing pitches on handstaff while singing helps you translate solfège syllables to the written pitches for horn. This is especially valuable when transposing and provides a visual representation of melodies in the transposed key.



3. Buzzing

Buzzing is not only worthwhile physical training for the embouchure, but it is also the closest exercise horn players have to “singing” while playing the instrument. Without the aid of the instrument to place notes, buzzing is a direct representation of how accurate a perceived pitch is in your mind and how accurately you can reproduce this sound with your embouchure.

Some of the musical examples, particularly excerpts in bass clef, may extend below your comfortable buzzing range. If you struggle to buzz any of these excerpts at pitch, you may practice buzzing them up an octave or skip this step altogether.

4. Inner Hearing

Certain exercises include “inner hearing” specified parts of melodies. “Inner hearing” means to hear vividly in one’s mind without producing sound with

either the voice or the horn. The ultimate goal is to read music in the same way you read text, hearing each pitch in your head as you would each syllable of written language. Training this skill is of the utmost importance, as the sound in your mind is what directs your embouchure to buzz the correct pitch.

Inner hearing training may include exercises like singing only certain rhythmic values or pitches while inner hearing the others or tapping the rhythm of a song from memory without singing it. In each case, strive to hear the pitch as vividly and loudly in your mind as possible.

5. Transposition

The transposition training in this book has two direct benefits. The first is developing the skill of transposition itself, since horn players are regularly expected to transpose literature in a variety of keys. From Mozart Horn Concerti to Brahms Symphonies, this skill is embedded in the heart of the horn literature.

The second and equally valuable benefit is the ear training that transposition provides. This book requires singing melodies in a variety of keys. The process of transferring a melody to a new key requires the ear to reconstruct the patterns in each melody. It also reinforces the intervallic relationships between solfège syllables.

6. Canon

One of the principal objectives of this manual is to develop your “polyphonic sense,” or the ability to think and hear in multiple parts. Whether you are playing a solo with accompaniment or playing alongside other instruments in a band or orchestra, your horn part is only one piece of the musical fabric. By training your polyphonic sense, you will be able to engage with multiple musical lines by hearing how your part fits in regard to rhythm, harmony, and phrasing.

Canon is a simple way of training this valuable ability. This book will often require you to sing a melody while tapping its rhythm in canon, or showing the canon on handstaff. In either case, the exercise requires hearing in two parts. This foundational skill will ultimately allow you to hear multiple unique, independent parts, as is required when playing solo or ensemble repertoire.

7. Memorization

Many of the exercises in this book require memorization. Your tonal memory, or the ability to recall pitch, is a fundamental musical skill. Once you are free from looking at the page, you can practice singing and playing with inner hearing alone.

You will find that memorizing causes your brain to find patterns in the music to assist the memorization process. You might notice structures that repeat or recur transposed, outlines of chords or harmonic progressions, or

phrases that help you remember the melody. Finding these patterns will ultimately help you recognize forms and structures as you learn new repertoire.

8. Stick Notation

Stick notation uses rhythms labeled with solfège instead of standard musical writing on a five-line staff. When singing a melody written on a standard staff, your ear has two primary tasks: (1) to identify the solfège syllable within the given key and (2) to hear the correct pitch of that syllable. Singing on stick notation eliminates the first task of syllable identification, since it is already labeled. In this way, stick notation allows the reader to focus first on pitch alone.

Stick notation can also be used to practice transposition. Since only solfège and not absolute pitch names are given, stick notation melodies can be performed in any key. You will see the most benefit from these exercises if you practice them in a number of different keys, particularly those less familiar to you.

Musical Contents

All musical examples can be practiced alone or in groups of two to four horn players, depending on the exercise. There is benefit to practicing each one independently as well as with partners, and I suggest incorporating some of each into your routine.

1. Songs by Tone Set

The song chapters are organized by solfège syllable sets. d m s = songs with only do, mi, and sol; l, drm s = songs with only la, do, re, mi, sol, etc. This is to facilitate learning only one new solfège syllable at a time. When approached in order, the songs start with three notes (d m s), then four (drm s), and so on.

Many of the songs are paired together by tone set, key, and time signature so that they may be sung and played as duets. Instructions on how to use these songs together are included in the “Advanced Exercises” list on the second page of the paired songs.

The majority of these songs are pentatonic. The pentatonic scale consists of five notes, do, re, mi, sol, and la. You can construct a pentatonic scale by taking the half step intervals out of the major scale, omitting mi and ti (mi-fa and ti-do are half steps). Many folk melodies are based on this scale and it provides a solid and more accessible foundation for those new to aural training. When pentatonic melodies center (usually ending) on do, they have a major tonality. When centering (usually ending) on la, they have a minor tonality. For an example of this, refer to the s,l, drm songs chapter. The songs “Old Brass Wagon” and “The Dear Companion” are both s,l, drm tone sets, however “Old Brass Wagon” is do-centered (major) and “The Dear Companion” is la-centered (minor). As previously mentioned in the solfège discussion, the solfège syllables

The Intended Use of this Book

For Teaching

Many of my colleagues have asked how to first introduce solfège to beginner students. The pentatonic chapters of this book gradually introduce solfège by starting with three-note songs and adding only one new syllable at a time. In their basic presentation, these melodies can be done with very young students. When the advanced exercises are added, they can be done with even very experienced horn players. Depending on the song and exercise, I have used these activities with middle school hornists, professional hornists, and everyone in between.

These methods do not need to take up a long portion of any given lesson. Consistency is more important—short, but regular routines are very effective. I recommend using them at the start of any lesson as a warmup, as the singing, buzzing, and playing stimulates the embouchure and the musical mind alike.

Some of your students might seem timid when asked to sing. If this is the case, I recommend that you start by singing along with your students, then asking them to sing by themselves. In my experience, this helps them to feel less vulnerable and establishes a sense of security before singing on their own. Their hesitation will go away once it becomes a familiar part of your lesson routine.

For Personal Practice

Practice time is precious. Incorporating ear training into your regimen does not have to detract from time devoted to repertoire, and in fact, sharpening your ears will make you more efficient when practicing and learning new music. I have had colleagues use 10- to 15-minute routines that, when practiced regularly, made major impacts on their playing.

I suggest using the melodies and exercises in this book as a warmup or part of your fundamentals routine. They also work particularly well in the middle of a session when your embouchure needs a break. Time spent singing and playing easy melodies will keep you engaged and maximize your practice session while your lips recover.

For Excerpt Preparation: Practice the Full Horn Part

This book is not intended as an orchestral excerpt preparation book. While the exercises are designed to assist hearing and performing excerpts more accurately and musically, it is only meant as a supplement to excerpt study. There is no substitute for preparing excerpts from the original horn parts in their entirety. In some cases, expression and articulation markings have been omitted from this book to facilitate reading notated solfège syllables and other musicianship tasks. Use this book to engage your ears and then practice playing the excerpts from the full orchestral parts.