

How to Transcribe

Selective listening is important in order to transcribe well. This means that you have to focus on one aspect of the music at a time, and not allow the other aspects to confuse you at each stage. Transcribing is a combination of rational analysis and intuition. For instance, if you know a piece is in a certain key, you know that the pitches will mostly come out of that key. If you know a chord, but have trouble with the melody, you can figure that the melody may match the chord tones .

1. Simply Listen:

First listen to the piece through and simply make mental notes of the piece (Number of sections, fast, slow, changes of key, length, counterlines, major and minor keys, etc)

2. Meter:

Listen to the first part and get the time signature (2/4, 3/4 etc).

3. Endings

Note if there are first and second endings. or if the endings of the sections are exactly the same.

4. Form and Number of Measures:

Tap along with the tune and count how many measures are in each section. This will usually be 8 or 16 bars. If there are first and second endings, bar out the 8 bar section with 10 bars to leave room for the 2nd ending. Make a complete sheet which has the number of bars in the piece. In a 3 part piece this will be 24 or 32 bars.

5. Pick-ups

Do the sections begin directly on the beat or are there pick-ups. Leave room for the pickup at bar one.

6. Key Signature

Listen to the last note of the first section and hum the key you think it is in. Usually the last note of the section is the key. Put in the key signature on all lines.

7. Bass lines

If you can hear the bass, try to write the first bass note of each bar above the line as a letter (B E A , etc). Sometime it is difficult to locate the bass, so don't let it discourage you from continuing if you can't get it. This part of the puzzle may become clearer after you figure out other aspects.

8. Melodic rhythm

Try to listen to the melody and simply make chicken scratches above each bar for the number of impulses you hear in the melody for each bar

9. Melody and Counterlines

Try to notate as much of the melody as you can. If you get stuck on one bar, leave it blank. As you get other aspects, it may become clearer.

10. Chords

Listen for chord qualities (major and minor). Remember the key you are in and listen closely to the bass, which usually plays the root of the chord, but not always.