

Again, if Pierce is older than I thought, he might not have bothered to insist on a computer tape prepared in his presence and under his direct supervision and might not have bothered to find out what today's music experiments have done, and taken as "gospel" the dicta of the music professors older than he, rather than listening to someone composing or performing right now. All that is understandable. But it doesn't mean progress in music.

Be it known also that the Acoustical Society Journal Article by Mathews and Pierce, which Conviser sent me, details some additional experiments that were not played on that tape, where the listeners were required to detect a shift of key of one or several stretched "semitones" when this occurred in an example. And the listeners were able to detect it under the stretch. (Of course we know this is trivial--you don't have to be an expert in 19-tone to detect changes of pitch or key when hearing your first 19-tone examples.)

But the Acoustical Society paper treats the key-system as if every musician in the world was, today in 1981, doing exactly the same things about modulation and transposing and major and minor scales as was being done in the days of Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, and Schumann. As though nothing had happened ever since! As though serialism and Schönberg and Debussy's whole-tone did not exist at all. As though the rules of Early Romantic Period Harmony were Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church and this was Spain.

Perhaps I can explain this horrible confusion by a little Semantics. The confusion is over terms such as law and rule. Rules of Harmony are not the same thing as Rules in the Anglican Church or the Jewish Kosher Dietary Regulations. Rules of Harmony were deduced by non-composer music-teachers from studying the scores of composers 50 or 100 years before them, whom they declared and worshipped as Masters. Deduced, not created out of nothing by Divine Inspiration. Laws of Science are the results of observation of numerous experiments, carried out to discover those laws, and law of physics has nothing whatever to do with San Diego County Traffic Laws or the Los Angeles Building & Safety Code or the Glendale City Zoning Ordinance.

So a physicist like Pierce knows perfectly well what a law of science is, but may mistake a Rule of Harmony for something arrived at by impersonal impartial experiment, which it is not. Nor is a Rule of Harmony equal in standing to a decree of the U S Supreme Court or the California Legislature. Happily our governments local and federal have not yet put Romantic-Period Hymn-Tune Harmony into the Penal Code or the California or U S Civil Code. But Pierce seems to act, and many music-teachers act, as though they were!

I am trying to "spell out" such things as your attitude about improvising and your statement "there is no such thing as a wrong note". I hope this makes is less vague and more definite--we have to get people to understand that difference--rules of harmony or scale-systems do not have the authority of State Laws or Penal Codes or Traffic Ordinances, and do not have the experimental scientific validity of the "Laws of Chemistry" and the 12-tone temperament

Acoustical Society of America and most of the articles are about college laboratory experiments carried on under the direction of highly-degreed professors of physics. Nearly all the articles deal with objective facts as discovered by putting apparatus through its paces and finding out whether or not the data recordings agree with the advance calculations. If the experiments do not work as predicted, then further experiments will be done to find out why.

Law and rule here, have nothing whatsoever to do with etiquette customs, nor with culture prejudices, nor with governments and their politicians decreeing this or that penalty for violation of statutes. Law of physics means what generally happens when such-and-such is done. Newton's apple fell and acids neutralize bases when brought together. But the Mathews-Pierce article, from which the lecture gave many excerpts, necessarily had to include non-physical prejudiced personal opinions of long-dead authors of harmony textbooks and the equally prejudiced and equally idiosyncratic and personal opinions of music-teachers such as many of the persons in his audience Monday 26 Jan 81, which personal opinions were founded on an after-the-fact analysis of composers like Bach who were already dead before the harmony-book-rule-maker got around to analyzing his written remains. Law and rule got mixed up with their almost opposite meanings. So the reader of JASA (official abbreviation) is almost forced to confuse the two meanings of law, and then to drag in the third meaning of law, where States and the Federal Government enact what they call laws and enforce them.

I bet you a rubber banana and a chocolate-dipped codfished ball and two scoops of Garlic Ice Cream, that nearly everyone in Pierce's audience confused the physical laws with the rules of harmony AS OF 1830 and both those with the San Diego City Ordinances. Not one word was said there, nor in the article, to define the three or more meanings of those weasel words, law, rule, principle.

Then there is a fourth meaning: the Laws or Rules of Health. Eat the wrong things and you get sick. Or fail to eat certain other things and you get sick. Perhaps subdivision of the laws of chemistry, in that scientific sense, but the penalty is imposed a little more like the policeman arresting somebody caught in the act. Which helps confuse all the meanings.

Or, let's drag in the notion of Legal Fiction. The Music Profs. behave as if a violation of their Rules of Harmony were like parking in a red No Stopping Zone, or like trying to float in the air unsupported and attempt to violate the law of Gravity. Just because of those multiordinal terms, these many-meaning words. Actually a rule of harmony is more like the rules for playing Whist, which later became Auction Bridge with bidding added, then Contract Bridge with new scoring practices. And new tuning-systems would be like new card games or unrelated card-games on different principles, such as poker, 500, Hearts, 7-Up; Cribbage.

Pierce is writing about the behavior of 1870 Whist players, when everybody now plays Contract Bridge and that was revised a few years ago. Or, these music profs are teaching how to pronounce Chaucer's kind of English when it is unintelligible to today's listener. Note Chalmers' confusion about Modern Greek not being real Greek because it has changed too much.