The Mail Box

Dear Editor:

. . . Visitors seeing your latest issue here wondered about the Supplement ("Views On Musical Nomenclature" Ed.) being longer than the "main" part.

I wasn't sure what to tell them about that--I guess I could say that the nomenclature system has been allowed to grow into a confusing state while the very very gradual development of the problems has been carefully ignored, so that now it's almost too big to deal with.

One is tempted to cut Gordian knots.

Regarding your contributions to that Supplement: I wonder if enough attention was paid by any of us to the READING OUT LOUD of the various existing names or new suggested names. We were so preocupied with writing notes down and writing words down on paper that we may have forgotten that in any face-to-face or telephoned discussion, or an educational music cassette for instance, all these designations have to be spoken in some manner? This indeed could explain why the Latin countries scrapped the letters ABCDEFG and went in for do re mi fa sol la si. All these are ONE-syllable words. True, the Latin countries did not get around to 12 syllables or other one-syllable designations for the "accidentals" or chromatics--C-sharp is do diese or in Spanish do sostenido while D-flat is re bemol and so on, but in German they did get it all down to one syllable so that C-sharp is cis (pronounced tsiss) and D-flat is des (as in designate). 1B (T.S.R.'s proposed fixed note names, where 1A, 2A, through 6A equals the C whole tone scale, and 1B, 2B, etc., equals the C-sharp whole tone scale. Ed.) would have to read wun-bee, so there you have two syllables--taking almost but not quite as long to speak as see-sharp does. Notice that I did not bring that up at all and I should have, way back at the beginning. The time it takes in fractions of a second to utter a spoken word is important in this case, since it adds up to a lot of syllables in the course of a music lesson or a lecture from the platform or on a demo or instruction tape. (That was the main reason for constructing the Numaudo Code in 1958.) Appearances are deceptive --something may LOOK compact but take as long or longer to say.

This in turn brings up the question of the names in English of the numerals, which nobody seems ever to think about at all. 7 being seven has two syllables whereas 1 through 10 have only one syllable. This does not matter until we count beats in music in times having more than six counts in a measure. Eleven has three syllables. Now, if we are going to do the Carrillo thing and number the 12 tones, we have seven and eleven to take longer to utter. Trivial in itself, but we have to think of the overall cumulative general effect of unequal spoken names as opposed to equal written symbols. There were two blunders of this kind in Esperanto: one was unu, having two syllables when it is the most necessary of the numerals, and the other more serious blunder was ses, which sounds almost like sep over the phone or on a cassette or poor quality radio broadcast or in other such situations. It probably should have been seis to be like the Spanish word for 6 which is seis with that same dipthong in it. Too late to do anything about that, and Zamenhof had much more important matters on his mind, no doubt. The telephone was getting invented about the time that Zamenhof was creating his language, and it was decades before telephones were common enough in homes to make this as important as it is now.

Over the years since 1958 I have been cussed out and scolded for the syllables I chose for the numerals in Numaudo, but some better sets--i.e. sets of numeral syllables taken from Indo-European languages--could not be used because they collided with other words or would have been worse over the phone.

Nobody ever stops to think!

So the field is still wide open for a set of 12 syllables that would be internationally easy to pronounce, not just in English--and would be sufficiently different one from another not to be confused with each other when there were 12 to deal with.

I have seen 3 or 4 such sets of 12 syllables but do not remember any of them.

For a moment, let's get back to ordinary names: A may be ay in English, but it is Ah in most other languages, so there is trouble since Ah is the British name for the letter R. If you don't believe me, listen when some British person is on the air. C is <u>see</u> in English, but <u>say</u> in French, and <u>tsay</u> in German, and <u>chay</u> in Italian, and <u>thay</u> in Castilian Spanish but <u>say</u> in Mexican Spanish, and so what appears to be one name is actually half-a-dozen.

If you have that little pamphlet <u>Muzika Terminaro</u> (by M. C. Butler and F. Merrick, 2nd ed. 1960, in Esperanto, Esperanto Press, Oakville, Ontario, Canada, 36 pp. Ed.), you will see that the attempt to deal with letter-names in Esperanto and with sharps and flats and sol-fa is a complete hopeless mess, worse than the English situation if that were possible.

So even in Esperanto I had to give <u>double</u> names.

Any reform good enough is going to cause dislocation and upheaval, so it might as well be done right to be worth the trouble, even for tired old twelve-tone.

There is another situation that musically-trained people all ignore: When I went to grade school in 1925 or whenever, there were music classes--my school had a piano and violin studio in the basement, and also there was sol-fa singing for everybody in the school, all the grades, from charts with a number system--1 through 8, which numbers were sung as do re mi fa sol la ti, by the way. The only accidentals used were the ones for the nearest keys, te as flat of ti and fi as sharp of fa. There were no charts with letters nor with the syllables spelt out. This, by the way, was called the Ward System. I suppose it was also in the Midwest back in those days. But I have asked various young people at various times about music in schools or even singing for elementary grades, and it all seems to have gone out long, long ago --I may have been at the very tail end of it--I certainly didn't see any music classes when I went to high school, so maybe even back then it was being discontinued.

Anyway, we now have more than one generation of musical illiterates out there in the Real World now. Most people do not know how to read staff notation. For them it is not necessary to convert them to a new notation because they never saw the old one. They haven't the foggiest idea what F-sharp is or what a diminished fifth is.

This could be an advantage for you.

Reform By Default, as it were! . . .

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