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Why Theory?

10 Ways Music Theory Can Help You Be A Better Harpist

Ice-breaker: What is music theory?

Music theory helps beginning harp students with:

1. **Tuning.**
2. **Reading pitches and rhythms on a staff.**
3. Developing a common **vocabulary** set for talking about music with your teacher and other musicians.
 - Intervals, scales, keys, accidentals, staff-related terms, rhythm and meter terms.
 - “Play” your theory.

Music theory helps the already-musically-literate harpist with:

4. **Vertical “chunking”:** Recognizing harmonic material.
5. **Horizontal “chunking”:** Recognizing melodic material.
 - Both vertical and horizontal elements can be quickly read and analyzed according to their overall pitch collection.
6. **Textural recognition:** Homophony, polyphony, varied musical textures.
7. Compositional understanding of **phrase structure** and **larger musical forms**.
8. Developing understanding of tension/release (dissonance/resolution) in **harmonic progressions**.
 - Tonic, dominant; open and closed cadences; non-chord tones; voicing.

 *Example: Marcel Grandjany, Gigue from Petite suite classique*

Music theory helps the advanced harpist with:

9. **Memorization** [and/or improvisation, and/or original composition!]
10. Making informed **expressive** choices:
 - Melodic and harmonic shape and expression
 - Dynamics, pacing, shaping, phrasing
 - ***Stylistic/interpretive decisions are often made at the intersection of several music theory elements.***

 *Example: F.J. Naderman, 1^{ere} Sonate from Sept Sonates Progressives*