Oral Transmission: 

A Marriage of Music, Language, and Tradition
Communication and spreading of music
- Typically associated with ancient to medieval music practices.
- Strongly tied to oral tradition

What is oral transmission?
Terms

- Oral vs. Aural tradition
- Oral transmission vs. aural tradition
- An ancient practice
- Dichotomy between oral transmission and written notation

What is it not?
Not only ancient to medieval
No strict dichotomy between oral transmission and notation
Chronologically, oral transmission did occur before written notation developed.

Both written notation & oral transmission entailed:

- Copying, remembering, and composing

- Both processes should be viewed as subtly different and connected

Oral transmission & Notation
- Accuracy of oral transmission
- Early notation was simply an aid
- Not the most reliable source to understand early music.

Oral Transmission & Notation
Early notation
Early notation

Neat and even beautiful appearance
Only provided general melodic curve
Aids musicians' memory of already memorized patterns and skills.
❖ 1950s: Study of melodic stability
❖ 1970s: Orally transmitted music contains formulas
❖ 2000s: Oral transmission is deeply rooted in music and language itself

Development of Oral Transmission Research
Contemporary Oral Transmission
Horizontal transmission: dispersal of music to other people in one generation

Vertical Transmission: Prolonging of music to later generations

Horizontal vs. Vertical Transmission
“Anything that assists in the oral transmission process”

Technology: CDs, MP3 players, recording equipment, internet and social media

Mediated Orality
YouTube

- Uploading music,
- covering other performer's work
- watching performances
- receiving feedback
- Making joint music projects
University of Michigan School of Music
Self-Administered Aural Skills Review

ANSWERS

EXERCISE 1: Two-Voice Dictation.

EXERCISE 2: Harmonic Dictation.

Music Education
Children’s Musical Play
Aural Learning Styles

Apprenticeships

Jazz Music
Fake Books

Straight Ahead Jazz Fakebook

Jazz Music

Autumn Leaves

Manha de Carnaval
Far beyond its reputation as a stagnant custom that occurred before written notation developed,

A pervasive practice throughout the history of music. From communication in ancient medieval times to education in current music circles,

An abundance of research pointing to the essential qualities of oral transmission that inextricably marries it to music, language, and culture.

Oral Transmission
Oral transmission is not something that needs to be specifically revived or taught, because it is a tradition that will always occur as long as music, language, and culture are present.

However, it can be further encouraged as an effective pedagogical tool and celebrated as it continues evolving as culture and music evolves as well.