

What to Listen For (a general checklist)

Regardless of the style, here are some general things you should ask yourself. Note: You don't have to listen to all of these, but they are some ideas of how you can focus your attention on a particular listen. Take as many listens as you think you need to thoroughly explore the music.

- What is the instrumentation?
- What type of scales are being used?
- What is the meter? Does it change? What are the changes?
- What is the structure? How do repeated sections differ?
- What's going on behind the melody?
- Is the music polyphonic or homophonic in texture?
- What type of harmonic language is being used? Triadic, 7ths, clusters, etc?
- What are the most common rhythm patterns? Could you pause and tap them out?
- What is the overall mood, and are there changes throughout?
- How are those moods achieved?
- What are the chords or chord progressions? Could you play them yourself?
- What are the effects of dynamics throughout?
- What are the different types of articulations used?
- How would you generally describe the pace and development?
- Technical aspects: How is the mix? Reverb? Use of other effects?

For Pop and other vocal music

- Listen to the bass.
- Listen to the drums.
- Listen to the keyboards.
- Listen to the guitars.
- Listen for the lyrics.
- How are background vocals used, or overdubbing?
- What are the riffs or common patterns throughout?

For Classical (and with multiple recordings)

- What do you most like and dislike about each specific performer or conductor?
- How do the tempos differ?
- How do the dynamics differ?
- What are differences in recorded sound quality, and does that affect your opinion?
- For orchestral pieces, focus on the woodwinds...
- the strings...
- the brass...
- the percussion, and other instruments.