



Instruction: Auralia 3.5 Student

What? Ear training... music theory... fun?¹⁵

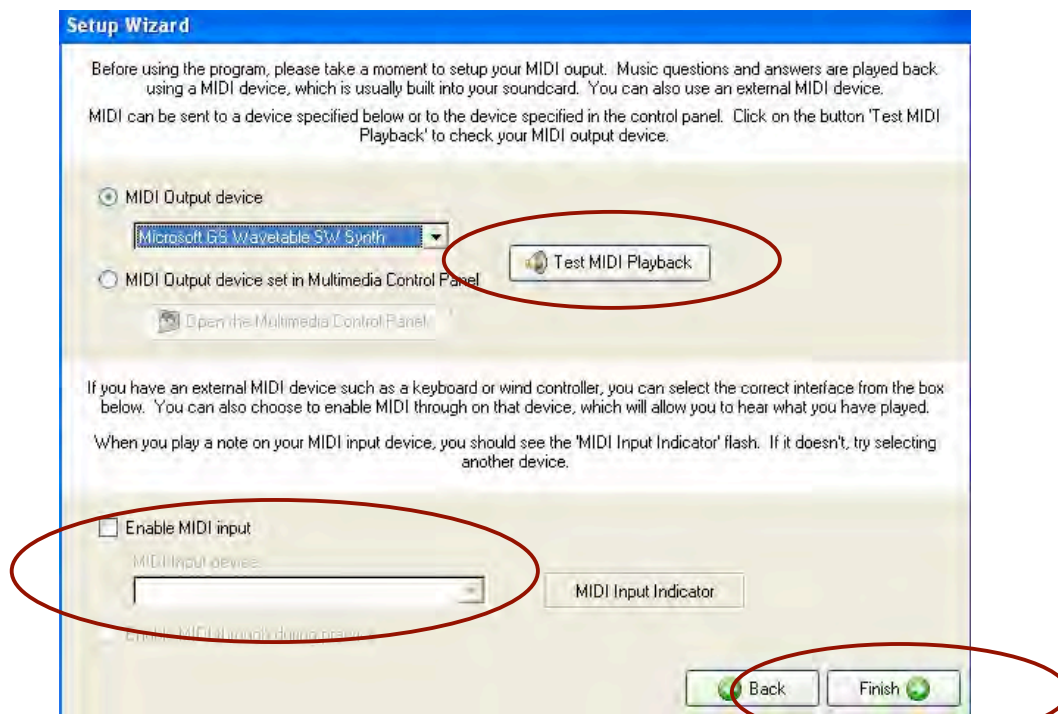
MAC
PC

> Why Auralia?

Auralia is a complete package for ear training and music theory that grades your progress as you go. There are five sections that test everything from listening, imitating, rhythm, jazz, tuning or singing, with informative lessons and customizable quizzes. Every answer you submit is instantly marked and feedback given. You can even track your progress through the presented activities using the reports feature. Add a MIDI keyboard and external microphone to the mix and *Rising Software* claims you have "...by far the most comprehensive ear training package!" Whether you are a beginning student or experienced musician this package is "...suitable for both classical and contemporary musicians of any age and ability!"¹⁶

> Setup

I went to the [Rising Software](#) website and download the demo. Unfortunately the latest version (3.5) is for Windows *not* Mac (still stuck on 2.1). It is about 21mb and has 41 drillable topics. The Mac version has 26 topics and is only 8mb. I decided to go for the windows version and run it under *Parallels* on my Macbook Pro. The installation was simple and clean. I opened Auralia and instantly I was presented with a setup wizard that asked for my language, sound preferences and how I would like my MIDI options configured. If you do not know what this means just click *finish* – but it is good to be able to setup your MIDI keyboard if you have one or just to test that you be able to hear sounds produced in the program.

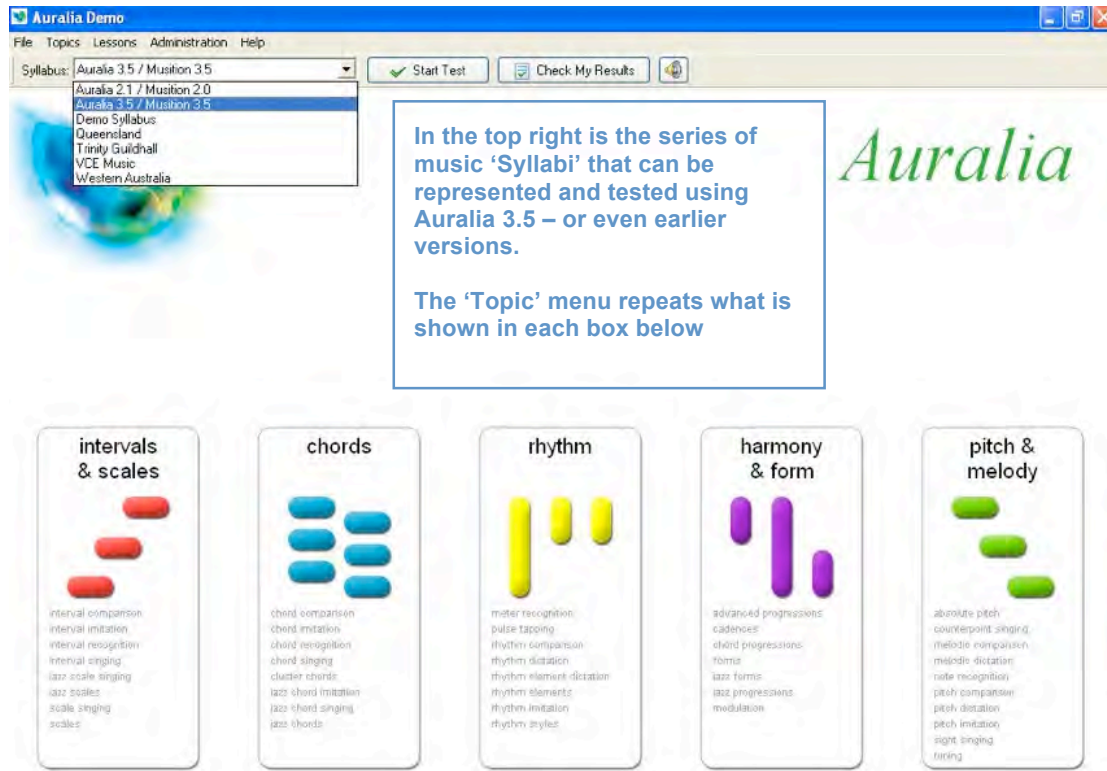


¹⁵ DVD Box Picture: <http://www.sibelius.com/press/images/auralia_dvd_th.jpg>.

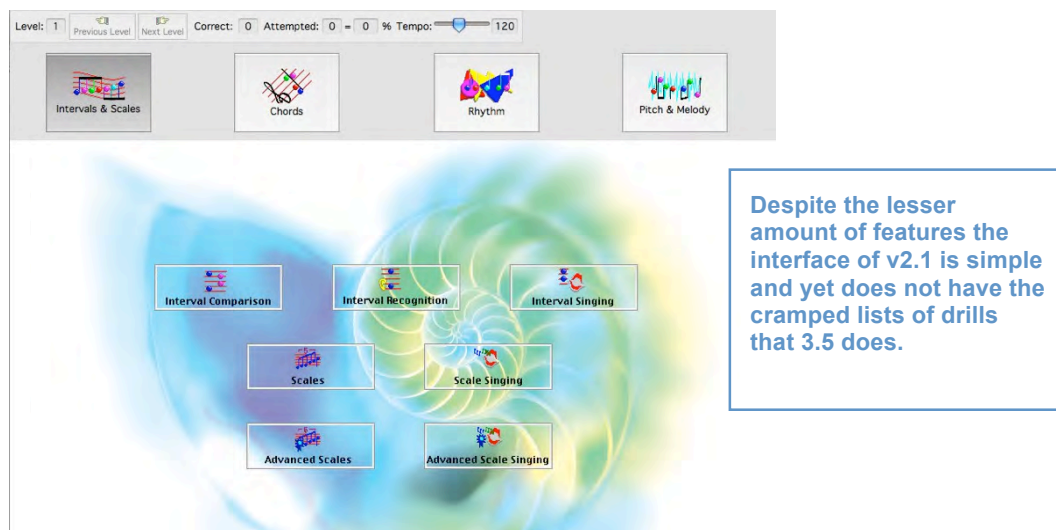
¹⁶ Auralia information page, viewed 29 March 2009, <<http://www.sibelius.com/products/auralia/index.html>>.

> GUI & Fundamental features

After the initial setup you are presented with the demo splash screen (below). The GUI is uncluttered and bright. Each of the five topics represented are shown with a particular graphic and corresponding colour, but what they represent is unclear. Then there is the breakdown of quizzes under each heading and these are grey and difficult to read. It would be good to see some correlation between the colours and graphics to make the splash page more user-friendly.

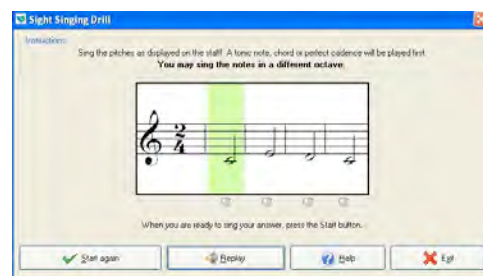


In the Mac version (v2.1) although there are only four topics along the top of the screen, they act as buttons to direct the user to a screen (below) of labeled quizzes. This is a more direct and intuitive approach, albeit less colourful.



Each of the five topics are as *comprehensive* as the developer claims. The key features include drills and lessons on:

- Intervals & Scales: imitation, recognition, scales
- Chords: imitation, recognition, comparison
- Rhythm: pulse tapping, dictation, style comparison
- Harmony & Form: chord progressions, cadences, forms
- Pitch & Melody: tuning, sight singing, dictation



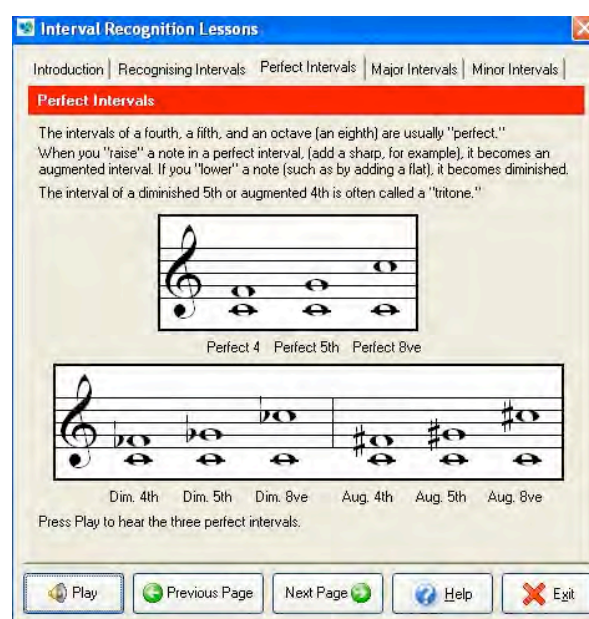
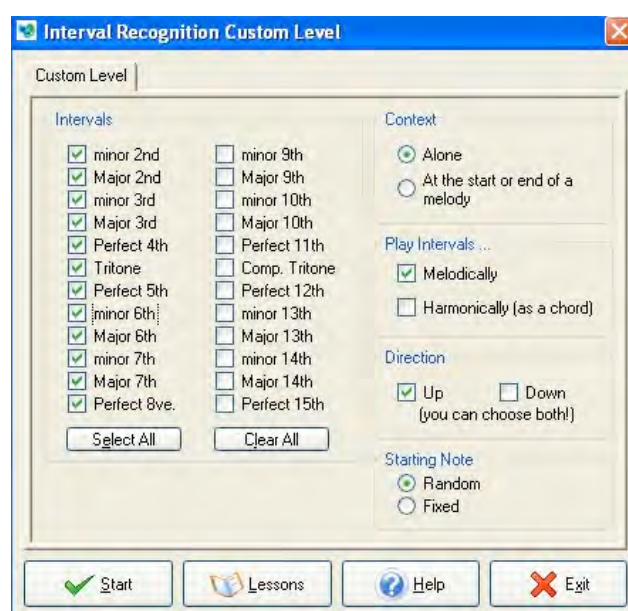
A more detailed list of the topics and drills can be found [here](#).

> Getting your hands dirty

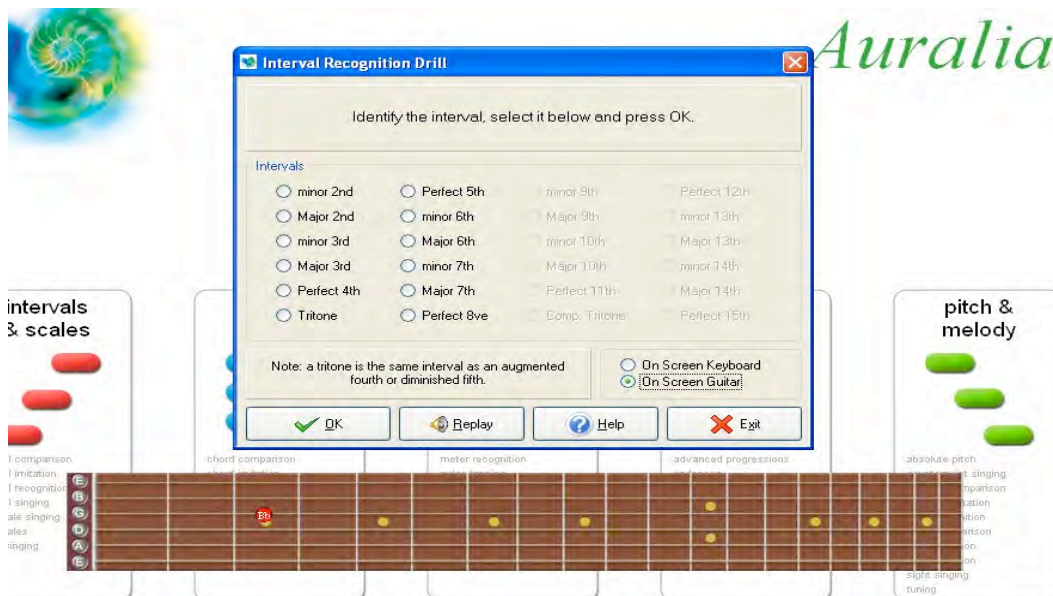
> Interval Recognition

Once you click on this test in the *red* graphics bar you are presented with 'start test' and 'levels.' I have clicked on 'custom level' to see what is on offer (left hand picture below). The range of options can be daunting but they are clearly presented in check box format. The user can 'exit' or learn what this drill is about by clicking on 'lessons' (seen in the right hand picture below). I really like this byte-sized way of conveying the musical concepts to a user, whether the user is a professional or beginner it is helpful as a reference tool *inside* the program.

All necessary information is presented with tabs for navigation.



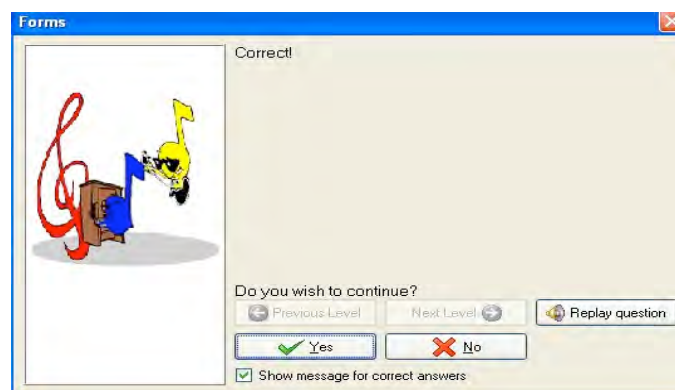
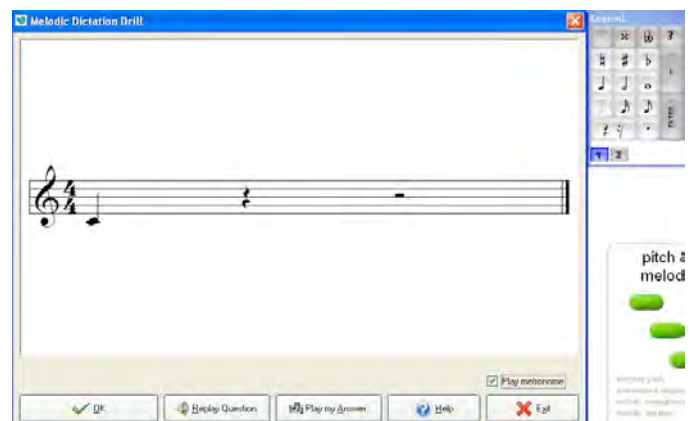
Undertaking a test or drill is easy. Students can sit, listen and brainwash their minds with cadences, scales and intervals and rack up decent scores to be reported on later. Auralia will keep a record of every correct and wrong answer to the logged in user. This can later be accessed by the teacher for example and printed off or stored in a grading program.



Within such a test (such as the Interval Recognition Drill above), I was able to select to have either a floating keyboard or guitar fretboard to help me with my answers. Thanks to MIDI drivers, the notes on both will play when they are clicked with the mouse. The 'replay' button adds that extra playing when you need to double-check your answers.

> Melodic Dictation

Another test worth mentioning is 'melodic dictation.' A series of pitches are played and I had to notate them on the treble staff below. The note pallet on the top left allows users to enter different types of pitches/rhythms with the mouse as the drill is played. Once you have your answer, besides the excellent 'replay' button, you can 'play my answer' to see if you have it correct. Click 'okay' and you will hear the resounding sound of success!



One frustrating feature was when I attempted a drill and clicked 'okay' to see if my answer was correct I would get a picture and sound telling you so. If I was not correct, I had to answer a second question 'Do you wish to continue?' rather than be shown the correct answer and move on to the next exercise. You can move on by clicking on 'no' and then you get the actual answer.

> Will it work in the classroom?

I believe so. The Internet is full of reviews and music teachers implementing this software into the planning and testing of their schools' curriculum. There is also a text book designed by teachers who use Auralia in the classroom entitled [The Performing Ear](#) that can help educators and others use Auralia to it fullest potential. Peter Lewis, Head of Music at Northcote Secondary College wrote:

"Auralia is fantastic drill practice with a wide variety of topics played to the students by the software. The Performing Ear is a welcome supplement to the Auralia software program. The text provides an extensive range of materials that can be used to introduce students to aural skills through graded topics..."¹⁷

> Does anyone ever read the manual?

Troubleshooting and support for Auralia can be found in the program itself under the 'help' button on the splash screen and at the bottom of each drill. There is also the Rising Software website that contains PDF versions of the manual and trouble shooting practices.

The Help Menu (on the right) contains information regarding setup, making tests, networking Auralia or setting up the microphone for sight-singing drills. I had to do learn about setting up the mic because it was not as easy as I had first hoped. Using the built in mic for the mac version was much simpler.



Alternatively *Rising Software* provide a support email address (support@risingsoftware.com) to which I sent an enquiry regarding any future releases of Auralia for the latest Mac & PC operating systems. A reply came within 24 hours and was very exciting:

"There is a new cross platform version of Auralia and Musition in development that is scheduled for release around the 2nd half of this year. We can inform you when it is released if you like?"

> What else compares?

- [Aquallegro](#) (Mac freeware)
- [EarMasterPro](#) (Mac & PC shareware)
- Online Ear trainers such as
<http://www.good-ear.com/>
<http://www.gmajormusictheory.org/>
<http://www.musictheory.net/>

¹⁷ The Performing Ear, information page, viewed 29 March 2009, <http://www.rising.com.au/auralia3/performing_ear.shtml>.

> Final Thoughts

Despite the strange imbalance between the Mac and Windows versions Auralia is as comprehensive and useful as its makers claim. I personally am discouraged by the interface but that does not negate its educational value. The range of topics and ease of navigation is a definite plus. Additionally, the support and ease to which the program 'simply works' is outstanding.

One thing I must emphasise is that buying a network licence can be troublesome. Imagine you have 20 students ready to undertake a test you spent all night making in Auralia and then the school network dies and no-one can even access the program! Single licenses are the best method. I want to start using this in the classroom and I have begun road-testing it on some of my elective music classes. Lastly, keep your eyes out for the next installation of Auralia due later this year!

Developer: <http://www.risingsoftware.com/>

Price: \$249 AUD Professional - \$199 AUD Academic - \$99 AUD Student (Lab and network packs are also available)

How to Buy: http://www.sibelius.com/shop/retail_partners.html

Get the demo here: <http://www.sibelius.com/products/auralia/index.html>

Computer requirements:

PC (v3.5) with windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP/NT4 or later, 32MB RAM, 50MB free hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, soundcard, MIDI keyboard (optional) and microphone for singing features. Vista compatibility notes are on the website. Mac (v2.0) Classic to Mac OSX with 16MB RAM, 30MB free hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, MIDI keyboard (optional).

Do you need to be a trained musician to operate this? Yes, but you will learn a lot if you are not a muso.

Educational Value? Enormous. Check out <http://www.sibelius.com/news/press114.html>

Overall Rating of 3 out of 5 Mice



¹⁸ All ideas for ratings and layout were inspired in some form by various issues of Computer Music Magazine <<http://www.computermusic.co.uk/>>, and Macworld Magazine <<http://www.macworld.com.au/magazine>>.