

The background of the entire image is a close-up, slightly blurred photograph of an acoustic guitar. The guitar's body is made of light-colored wood, and its neck is dark wood with frets. A blue graphic, consisting of a semi-circle and several parallel diagonal lines, is overlaid on the upper part of the guitar. The text "BEYOND THE GUITAR" is centered horizontally across the upper half of the image, with the blue graphic partially obscuring the word "THE".

BEYOND THE GUITAR

THE 3 PILLARS OF ARRANGING
#1: EAR TRAINING

Pillar #1: Ear Training

Nathan Mills, Beyond The Guitar

This is the big one that terrifies most students, but unless you're working off of a score, you're going to be listening to a recording of the original song you're arranging as your main reference. You need to train your ear to be able to identify the notes and chords you're hearing so you can then piece them together on the guitar.

Thankfully this is a specific area that has no shortage of great resources to get you started. I'm going to share some of the best **free** ear training programs I've found, and I just want you to pick one and spend as little as **10 minutes a day** going through exercises.

Even if you feel lost at first and get every single question wrong, I promise that over time your ear will start to catch on and things will begin to click. Think of your musical ear as a muscle. You might listen to a song now and have no clue how to identify or isolate specific notes out of the mix, but after a few weeks and months of simple targeted training you'll be surprised by what they can do.

Functional Ear Trainer - [iOS](#) [Android](#) [Desktop](#)



Functional Ear Trainer 4+
Ear training for everyone
[Sergiy Korchan](#)
★★★★★ 4.9, 462 Ratings
Free

Screenshots [iPhone](#) [iPad](#)



BEYOND THE GUITAR

Disclaimer: I haven't used the Android version of the app and couldn't get the desktop version to download, so I can only speak on my experience with the iOS app. That being said, the app runs very smoothly and the interface is clean and intuitive.

I was skeptical about this one at first because it takes a less traditional approach to ear training, but it soon became **my favorite ear training app** because of that very approach. After downloading the app you'll need to go through the "Learn The Method" section to understand the "*Alain Benbassat Method*" that defines this program's approach to ear training. It might seem confusing at first, but after going through some exercises you'll begin to understand its application.

Essentially, it replaces note names with numbers based on their position in the key. This **trains you to hear the relationship between notes in the context of a key**, which is much more beneficial for arranging than simply listening to and comparing 2 or more notes completely out of context like in most ear training programs. As an added bonus, it includes a short music theory introduction if you're unfamiliar with scales and keys.

In each exercise, rather than giving you the tonic note (the 1st scale degree of a given key. Ex: In C Major, the note C is the tonic) for reference, it plays a I IV V I chord progression for context instead. This forces you to identify the tonic in your ear based on the chord progression, another more practical application of this method for arranging purposes. But, if you're having a hard time hearing the tonic this way starting out, you can change the "Cadence" in settings to just play the tonic note instead of the chord progression.

Another feature I really liked is that, after identifying the correct note in each exercise, it will play the scale back up or down to the tonic, reinforcing your ability to hear the relationship between that specific note and the tonic of the key.

My only complaint is that it doesn't offer any chord exercises, like identifying chord progressions or quality of chords (major, minor, augmented, diminished). But after mastering this app, you can always move on to another program that offers such exercises.

Finally, as with any ear training program, I recommend having your guitar in-hand whenever possible and finding each answer on the guitar as well. This will help strengthen your association between specific pitches and their locations on the fretboard.



B E Y O N D T H E G U I T A R

While Functional Ear Trainer is by far my favorite, here are some alternative options:

Earpeggio - [iOS](#)



Pros

- Clean layout
- Gradual increase in difficulty
- Exercises ranging from easy to hard covering intervals, melodic & rhythmic dictation, chords, and scales (tap "+" sign in the app to see all available exercises)

Cons

- Doesn't explain any involved theory. Assumes users have a basic understanding of intervals and triads, for example
- Limited to iOS



BEYOND THE GUITAR

Perfect Ear - [iOS](#) [Android](#)



Perfect Ear - Ear Trainer

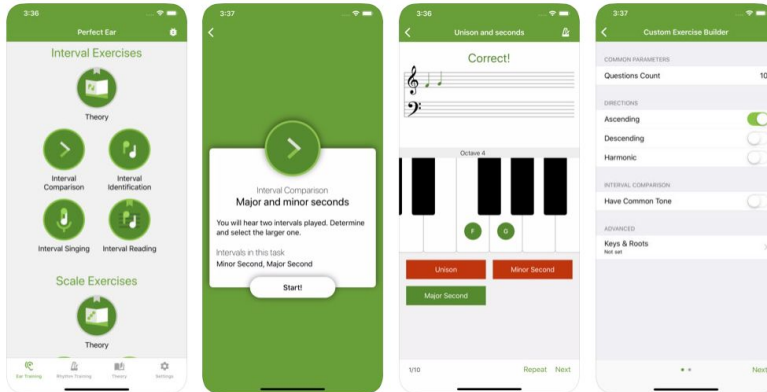
A music tutor in your pocket!

Aleksandr Osmanov

★★★★★ 4.8, 31 Ratings

Free · Offers In-App Purchases

Screenshots [iPhone](#) [iPad](#)



Pros

- Clean layout
- Gives music theory introduction before each training section to ensure that you understand the concepts you're practicing
- Exercises include intervals, scales, melodic dictation, chord identification + chord progressions, and rhythm
- You can change the instrument to a guitar and the exercises replace the keyboard with a guitar fretboard

Cons

- Lots of content is locked behind a paywall, but still has a decent amount of free exercises



BEYOND THE GUITAR

MusicTheory.Net - [Web](#)

EAR TRAINING



Keyboard Ear Training

Listen and press the piano key of the played note.



Note Ear Training

Listen and identify the played note.



Interval Ear Training

Listen and identify the played interval.



Scale Ear Training

Listen and identify the played scale.



Chord Ear Training

Listen and identify the played chord.

Pros

- Exercises include individual notes, intervals, scales, and chords.
- Simple. What you see is what you get

Cons

- No difficulty structure or progression. Advanced exercises are mixed randomly with beginner exercises

Again, regardless of the program you use, consistency is key. Having a well developed musical ear is crucial to the arranging process, and being able to play "by ear" is so freeing. It doesn't take a lot, but you need to commit to those 5-10 minutes a day of exercises. If you're consistent, over time you **will see results**.

I'll follow up shortly with another lesson on Pillar #2: Fretboard Knowledge. Thanks again for being a student and subscriber. Now go train those ears!

Nathan Mills

BeyondTheGuitar.com



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