

FUNDAMENTALS OF MUSIC THEORY

MUSIC COURSE FOR BEGINNERS



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A Music Course for Beginners

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CHAPTER ONE

MUSIC NOTATIONS AND CLEFS

PITCH

Musical sounds are named in ascending order from the first seven letters of the alphabet A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. These represent the same notes at both higher and lower level. Pitch is used to describe how high or low a sound is.

THE STAFF AND MUSIC NOTATIONS

The five lines and 4 spaces that music is written on are called “Staff”. Another name for this is “Stave”. Stave is the plural for “Staff”.



An example of a Staff or Stave for plural

Each note has to be written on a line or in a space. A clef helps to identify notes from one another. It is always placed at the beginning of the stave. The two main clefs are Treble and Bass clefs.

TREBLE CLEF

We use this clef for high pitched notes. The treble clefs also called the G clef because it starts curling around on the 2nd line from the bottom.



The Treble Clef (This is line G)

BASS CLEF

The Bass clef is used for low pitched notes. It is also called the F clef. The top of the bass clef is curled. Base clef has two dots on either side of the line



The Bass Clef

CHAPTER 2

SHAPES OF NOTES

Notes can be divided into two parts, a head and a stem. The length of a sound is shown by notes of different shapes.

The longest note is called a **semibreve** and it lasts for four counts. It has no stem.



The next note is the **Minim** with two counts. It resembles a Semibreve with a stem.



Crotchet is similar to a Minim. The only difference between them is that the Crotchet has got a black note head. It is worth one count.



A **Quaver** is a note worth half a count. It is similar to the Crotchet but has a tail.



When there are more than one Quaver at a time, they should be written joined up.

ADDING STEMS

I am sure you have seen notes written in both directions –up and down. It could have made you wonder “Why are some notes upside down?” The answer is, they are not! They are just following the rules:

RULE 1

If a note’s head is on the third line or above, its stem should go down on the left. It would look like the letter “P”.

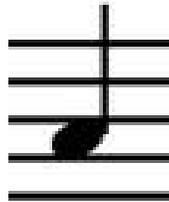


RULE 2

If a note's head is on the third line or below, its stem should go up on the right side, making it look like the letter "d".



As you can see, the stem on the third line is optional.



RESTS

A rest indicates silence. Each rest corresponds to a particular note value. Rests are used to mark a pause equivalent to their value. The table below shows the values for different notes and rests:

Note Values:

-  **Whole Note**
= play for 4 beats
-  **Half Note**
= play for 2 beats
-  **Quarter Note**
= play for 1 beat
-  **Eighth Note**
= play for $\frac{1}{2}$ of a beat

Rest Values:

-  **Whole Rest**
= rest for 4 beats
-  **Half Rest**
= rest for 2 beats
-  **Quarter Rest**
= rest for 1 beat
-  **Eighth Rest**
= rest for $\frac{1}{2}$ of a beat

CHAPTER 3

TIME SIGNATURES

A time signature is a symbol. We write this at the start of every piece. It contains two numbers, the top of which tells us how many beats there are in bar. The bottom number, on the other hand, will tell us what sort of notes we are counting. The time signature is always written after the clef and the key signature. Below is an example of a time signature. It is important to write the time signature in such a way that each number occupies two spaces:



SIMPLE TIME SIGNATURE

In the simple time signature, the beat is always a whole note. Top numbers are always 2, 3, or 4. Another feature of the simple time signature is that its beat can be divided into two. For now, we are going to assume that the bottom number will always be 4, which means there will be crochet beats only.

BAR LINE

A bar line is a vertical line which divides the staff into measures. Each measure is the distance between two bar lines.

DOUBLE BAR LINE

A double bar line is two thick vertical lines together. This shows that a piece of music has come to an end.

PLACING NOTES IN A BAR 3/4 TIME SIGNATURE AS AN EXAMPLE

Remember that this time signature means 3 crochet beats can be present in every measure or bar. It means that notes in every bar should add up to 3 counts. Any combination of rhythm can be used as long as the total is 3 counts. It is important to remember that you can never have more or less than 3 counts.

GROUPING NOTES AND RESTS

As you learn grouping notes, you will discover that each time signature has got its own rule.

Let's start with:

2/4 TIME SIGNATURE

In this example, the first beat is strong and the second is weak. Generally, group notes come together to make a single beat. That means you are allowed to join both beats.



3/4 TIME SIGNATURE

This time signature will give you the feel of a waltz. In it, a whole bar of half notes can be joined. Remember though that only the first beat is strong while the other two are weak.

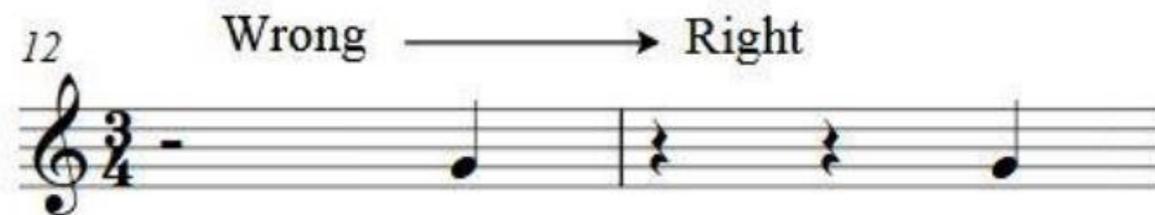


4/4 TIME SIGNATURE

In this time signature, the 1st and 3rd beats are strong. If you are using quaver notes for this time signature, you can use them for the first half or the last half. It is as if there is a barrier in the middle of the 4/4 time signature. Lastly, you must remember not to cross the barrier!

GROUPING RESTS

Rest is silence and has no value. However, we still have to follow certain rules when it comes to grouping them into different time signatures. For instance, in 2/4 time signature, this is quite simple. All you have to do is try completing each beat. In 3/4 time signature, on the other hand, do not use a Minim rest but a two Crotchet rests.



Additionally, in the 4/4 Time Signature, the semibreverest is also called a “Bar Rest”. Lastly, a Whole bar rest can be used in an empty bar in any time signature. In this time signature, follow the same rule as you would follow for notes.

CHAPTER 4

ACCIDENTALS

Accidental is the family name given to Sharp Flat and Natural.

Music Accidentals



Sharp

One Semitone higher



Flat

One Semitone Lower



Natural

Play the note normally



Double Sharp
One tone higher



Double Flat
One tone lower

These signs are placed immediately to the left of the note. An accidental changes the pitch of the note without changing its letter name.

The role of each accidental is different.

SHARP

The letter R says to raise the pitch by one semitone. Usually, if it is a white note, it will raise one semitone to the black note on your right side.

FLAT

The letter L says to lower the pitch by one semitone. In general, if it is a white note, it will be lowered one semitone to the black note on your left side.

NATURAL

This is a tricky one as it can do two jobs, i.e. Cancel the sharp and the flat.

All the accidentals last for just one bar. Moreover, it is necessary to use the accidental in case of a change.

CHAPTER 5

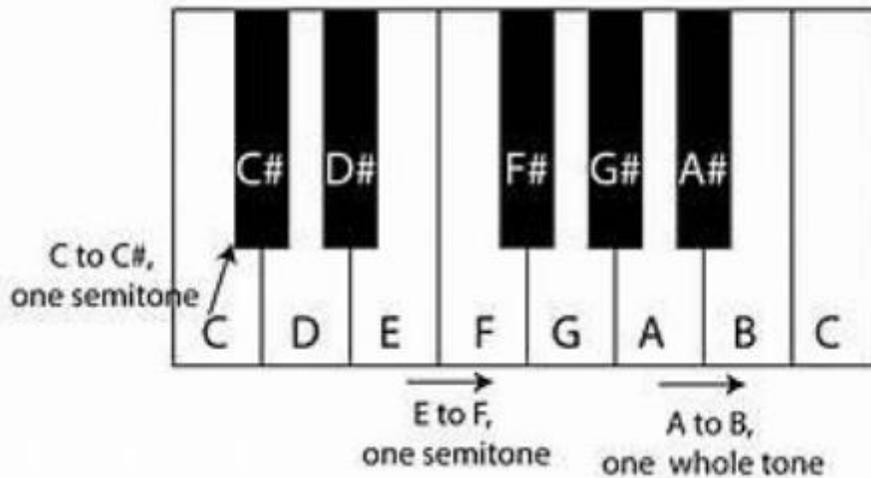
TONES AND SEMITONES & MAJOR SCALES

This chapter is about Tones and Semitones. When building scales, it becomes very important to understand them. Think of semitones and tones as two basic building blocks.

SEMITONE

A semitone is the shortest distance between two notes next to each other. Another name for semitone is half step. As an example, consider the distance between F and F sharp, which is a semitone. Think about it: F sharp is a semitone higher than F.

Generally, we encounter a semitone when we move from a white to a black note. It is important to understand that there are no black notes between B and C, as well as, E and F. So they are a semitone apart.



TONE

Tone is also known as a whole step. Two semitones make a tone. When you make a tone, you will always skip a key. For example, the distance between C to D is one tone because we will be coming across semitones when moving from C to C sharp and then C sharp to D. See the diagram above for guidance.

TONIC

Tonic is the first note of the scale. It is also called "Doh".

SCALES AND MUSIC STRUCTURE

Prior to this, we had learnt about the two basic building blocks. Now let us look at what a scale is in music. A scale is any set of musical notes ordered by pitch within an octave. It will be in ascending scale when ordered by increasing pitch and in descending for decreasing pitch. There are semitones between the 3rd - 4th degrees and 7th - 8th degrees. When we write a scale, we always mark the semitones.

Figure 1: The C Major Scale **Key Signature: No sharps or flats**

	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Degree of Scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Tone **Tone** **Semi-Tone** **Tone** **Tone** **Semi-Tone**

Whole Step **Whole Step** **Half Step** **Whole Step** **Whole Step** **Whole Step** **Half Step**

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CHAPTER 6

INTERVALS

An interval in music is the distance in pitch from one note to another. Like any measurement, intervals are measured by the number of letter names from a lower to the top note. Both notes will be those in the count. Therefore, each interval will have a number. One interval that sounds similar is called unison while the 8th interval is an octave.

Example:



CHAPTER 7

TONIC TRIADS

A chord consists of two or more notes played together. A triad is a special chord with 3 notes. For the moment, let's just focus on tonic triads.

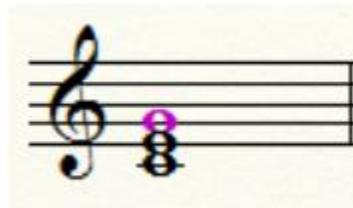
We already know tonic is the first note of the scale. When you think of a scale, you will be starting from the first note – tonic –and then pick up the 3rd and the 5th of the scale.

For example, if you need the tonic triad of the C major scale, it will be the C, E, and G, which are the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes of the scale.

These 3 notes have to be played together. Therefore, you write the notes one on top of the other.

Remember to always write the tonic first. If the first note is on a line, you will find the other two notes on the lines, as well. Similarly, if the first note is in a space, the other two notes will be in the spaces too.

Below, you can see the C Major Tonic Triad:



CHAPTER 8

WRITING AN ANSWER RHYTHM TO A GIVEN TWO BARS

Follow these guidelines for an easy way to write an answer rhythm:

1. The most important thing is to look at the time signature.
2. Give consideration to the two bars presented to you. Look at what type of notes have been used.
3. This is just common sense. Just as when you give an answer to a question, you need to work out your answer based on the question. Similarly, when writing the rhythm, give some thought to see what makes sense. You are writing a melody to a given two bars. There should therefore be a connection between the two.
4. Make the third bar similar to the first bar or reuse the first beat of the first bar and make a slight change in the last beat.
5. Now, look at the example below:



Bar 3 has been slightly changed.

6. The last bar will be the ending. Always use one note as per time signature. If the top number is 4, use a note worth 4 counts – Semibreve. For 3, use a Dotted Minim and a Minim for 2.

CHAPTER 9

OSTINATO

Ostinato comes from the Italian word obstinate. An ostinato is a melodic phrase repeated over and over again. This has to be in the same pitch. An ostinato can't be moved to a different pitch.



CHAPTER 10

ARPEGGIOS

When the notes of a chord are played one after the other, it is known as an Arpeggio. This is very similar to a triad. In the previous lesson, we learned Triads using the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes. Arpeggio is similar to it but it has got additional 8th note.

