

Elements of Music

Terms

HARMONY

Harmony is created when two or more notes (**pitches**) sound at the same time. Another way to think of it is the combination of a melody and its accompaniment.

Harmony is often thought of as the art of combining pitches into **chords** (several notes played simultaneously as a “block”). In this way we think of harmony as vertical.

***Chords** are usually arranged into sentence-like patterns called **chord progressions**.

Harmony also occurs in **counterpoint** when the notes of separate melodies sound together. In this way, we think of harmony as linear.

Scale

A series of notes differing in pitch and arranged according to a specific scheme

A **scale** is made up of a series of whole steps and half steps - a pattern of **intervals**.

Two main types of scales are **Major** scales and **Minor** scales.

In a **major** scale, the pattern of intervals is: W-W-H-W-W-W-H (ascending)

In a **minor** scale, the pattern of intervals is: W-H-W-W-W-H-W (ascending)

Keynote or Tonic

Most melodies are dominated by a **Keynote (tonic)** - the melody centers around it, and it becomes a point of arrival; when you reach it, the melody sounds finished.

Key

If a melody centers around the note C, it is said to be in the **Key of C.

Keys can also be **major** or **minor**. Each **key** has a family of chords associated with it.

Modulation is the process of changing from one key center (**tonic**) to another. Sometimes a piece of music will have several different key centers.

Harmony is often described in terms of its relative harshness:

1. **Dissonance**: a harsh-sounding harmony

2. **Consonance**: a smooth or pleasant-sounding harmony

***Dissonant** chords produce musical “tension” which is often “released” by moving to a **Consonant** chord (we call this a resolution).

***Since we all have different opinions about what is consonant and what is dissonant, these terms are somewhat subjective.*

Other terms related to harmony:

Sharp: The symbol that indicates to raise a pitch 1/2 step

Flat: The symbol that indicates to lower a pitch 1/2 step

Key Signature: The set of sharp or flat symbols placed at the beginning of a staff (line of music) to tell the musician in what key to play.