



The Method Behind The Music

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Basic Musical Notation

Especially in the days before audio recording and playback, music was often written out as a means of preserving and communicating it. To do this, a system of notation was developed that gives musicians the information they need to play music as the composer intended it.

Here is a list of topics discussed on this page:

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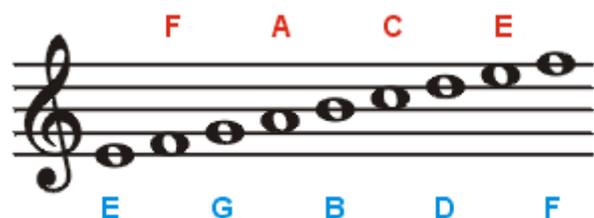
- **Articulation**
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The Staff

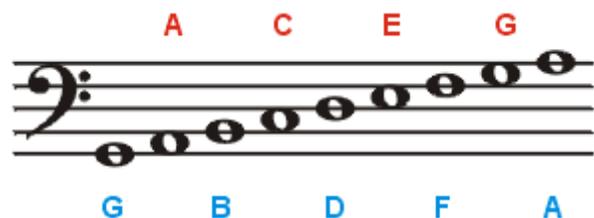
The staff is the basis of written music. It is what the notes are presented on. It consists of 5 lines with four spaces between them. A simple, unadorned staff is shown below.



Clefs

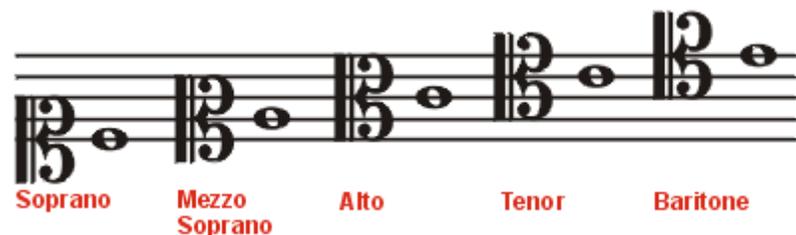


This is the treble staff. The treble clef (the large fancy symbol to the far left) shows the musician that the staff is treble. Since it curls around the G line, it is also called a G clef. The treble staff begins with the first line as E. Each successive space and line is the next letter in the musical alphabet. The staff ends with the last line as an F. Many mnemonic devices exist to help a person remember which line and space is which. One of the most common phrases to remember the names of the lines is: **Every Good Boy Does Fine**. (Also popular is **Elvis' Guitar Broke Down Friday**). To remember the spaces, just remember that they spell **FACE** starting from the bottom.



This is the bass (pronounced 'base') staff. The bass clef, also known as the F clef because it locates the line known as F, is on the far left. The bass clef uses the same musical alphabet as treble, but the letters start in different places. Instead of an E, the bottom line is a G, and the letters proceed logically from there. Again, simple mnemonics can be used to remember the names of the notes. The lines on the bass clef, from bottom to top are: G, B, D, F, A (**Good Boys Don't Fight Anyone**), and the spaces are A C E G (**All Cows Eat Grass**)

spaces are A, C, E, G (All Cows Eat Grass).



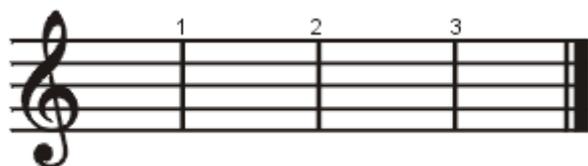
This is a C clef. The C clef can move on the staff, and the center of the symbol is always over middle C. Depending on where it is, it is given different names. The note beside each clef is middle C. These clefs are used very infrequently.

The Grand Staff



When the bass and treble clef are combined and connected by a brace (left) and lines, they become the grand staff. This greatly increases the range of pitches that can be noted, and is often used in piano music, due to the piano's wide range.

Measures



The vertical lines on the staff mark the measures. Measures are used to divide and organize music. The [time signature](#) determines how many beats can be in a measure. The thick double bars mark the beginning and ends of a piece of music. Measures are sometimes marked with numbers to make navigating a piece easier. The first measure would be measure one, the second measure two and so on.

Notes

Different pitches are named by letters. The musical alphabet is, in ascending order by pitch, A, B, C, D, E, F and G. After G, the cycle repeats going back to A. Each line and space on the staff represents a different pitch. The lower on the staff, the lower the pitch of the note. Notes are represented by little ovals on the staff. Depending on the clef (discussed below), the position of each note on the staff corresponds to a letter

name.

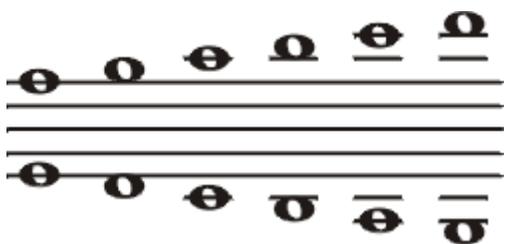
Notes Written on the Staff



Notes are centered on the lines or in the spaces between the lines. Stems on notes above the middle line trail down from the left of the note. Stems on notes below the middle line stick up on the right of the note. Stems on notes on the line usually go down except when adjacent notes have flags that go up. Note stems are usually one octave (eight successive lines and spaces) long. When two melodies occupy the same

staff, the stems for the notes in one melody are written up and the stems for notes in the other are written down.

Ledger Lines

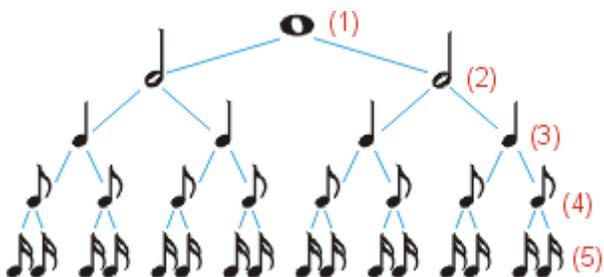


Ledger lines extend above and below the staff, allowing for higher or lower notes to be shown than would otherwise fit on the staff. These lines follow the same musical alphabet pattern as the staff does. Think of them as just extra lines and spaces on the end of the staff.

The stems of notes on ledger lines extend either up or down towards the middle line.

Note Durations

All notes have length. However, the number of beats they get depends on the [time signature](#), so only relative note durations will be discussed here.



This graphic shows a hierarchy of note values.

At the top is a whole note (1). A half note is half the duration of a whole note, so a whole note is as long as two half notes (2). Likewise, a half note is as long as two

quarter notes (3). A quarter note is as long as two eighth notes (4), and an eighth note is as long as two sixteenth notes (5).



Sixteenth notes (right) and eighth notes (left) may also look like this. Single sixteenth and eighth notes have flags, many sixteenth and eighth notes combine flags into connecting bars.



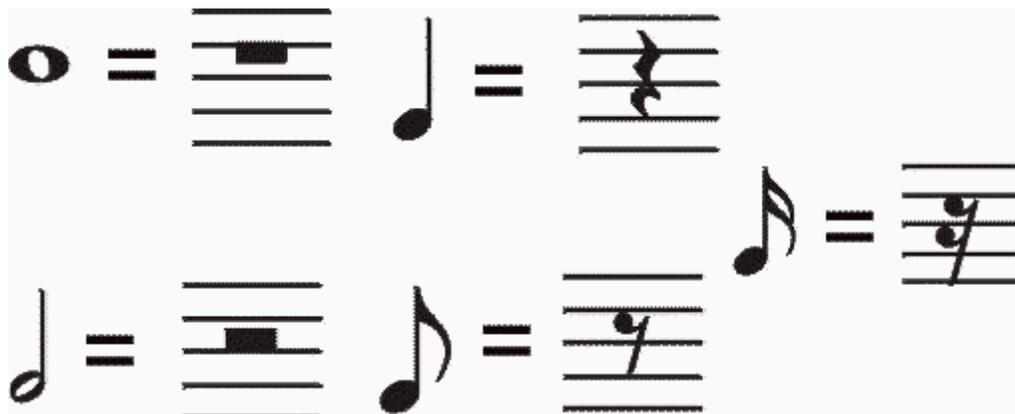
Sixteenth notes and eighth notes may also combine together. the combination looks like this picture to the left.

Dotted Notes



A dot beside a note increases its duration by half its original value. For example, half notes, in 4/4 time, are worth 2 beats. When a dot is placed next to the half note, the duration is increased by one (one being half of the original duration of two) and the resulting duration is three beats. The curved line in the picture above is a **tie**. Ties connect notes that are the same pitch together to create a sustained note.

Rests

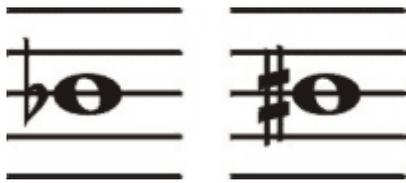


Rests are simply places where the musician does not play. Rests have equivalent values to corresponding notes of duration. Thus, there is a whole rest, half rest,

quarter rest, etc., just like normal notes. Rests are always located in the same vertical position.

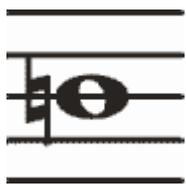
Accidentals

Accidentals modify the pitch of a note by increasing or decreasing it by one half step. Accidentals stay in effect for all notes of the same pitch for the rest of the measure. When these same symbols appear at the very beginning of the music they are specifying a [key signature](#).



Flats (left side of the picture) lower the pitch of the note by one half step.

Sharps (right side of picture) raise the pitch of the note by one half step.



Naturals cancel out any previous sharps or flats. The pitch returns to normal.

Ties and Slurs



Ties and slurs connect two or more notes together. Ties connect notes of the same pitch, forming essentially one longer note. Slurs smoothly connect notes of different pitch. This means to play the notes without breaks. The first set of notes above exhibit a tie. The second show a slur.

Articulation



Staccato - Means to play the note very short and detached.



Accent - Means to hit the note harder and louder.



Marcato - Almost a combination of staccato and accent, provides a sharp sound.



Tenuto - Hold the note for its full value.



Sforzando - A sudden, strong accent.



Fermata - Hold the note longer, approximately half again as long (1.5x), or until conducted to stop.

Dynamics

pp

This symbol is pianissimo, it means play very softly.

p

This symbol is piano, it means play softly.

mp

This symbol is mezzo piano, it means play moderately soft.

mf

This symbol is mezzo forte, it means play moderately loud.

f

This symbol is forte, it means play loudly.

ff

This symbol is fortissimo, it means play very loudly.

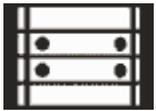


Also abbreviated Cresc. or written in as crescendo. This sign is the crescendo sign, it means gradually become louder.



Also abbreviated as Decresc. or written as decrescendo, dim., or diminuendo. This sign is decrescendo, it means gradually become softer.

Repeats



These are the begin and end repeat signs. When you reach the second, go back to the first and repeat the music. These are often accompanied by first, second and even third endings.

D.S.

This is a directional marking. It means 'Del Signo'. When you see this in music, you must go to the sign (below). This marking may also be accompanied by 'al coda' or 'al fine'. These mean 'Go to the sign, from there go to the coda' and 'Go to the sign, from there go to the end' respectively. Essentially these are big repeat signs.



This is the sign. From here you play to the coda or the end or wherever the Dal Segno directs you.



This is the coda sign. It marks when to go to the special ending, or coda. Usually you won't go to the coda until after a D.S. al coda.

Time Signatures

The time signatures (also called meter signatures) tell the musician how many beats per measure there are, and what kind of note gets the beat.



4

The top number determines how many beats there are per measure. The bottom number tells what kind of note gets the beat. In this example, 4/4 time, there are 4 beats per measure, and the quarter note (bottom 4) gets the beat. In 3/4 time, the quarter note would still get the beat, but there would only be 3 beats in a measure. In 6/8 time, the eighth note gets the beat, and there are 6 beats to a measure.

The **pulse** (or meter) is the driving beat in music that we march, feel, dance, clap and conduct to. First find the beat that seems the strongest, then try tapping along to it. Eventually you should be able to tap along with the music, and you will have found the pulse. Listen to the bass line and the rhythm section, as often they play with the pulse.

