

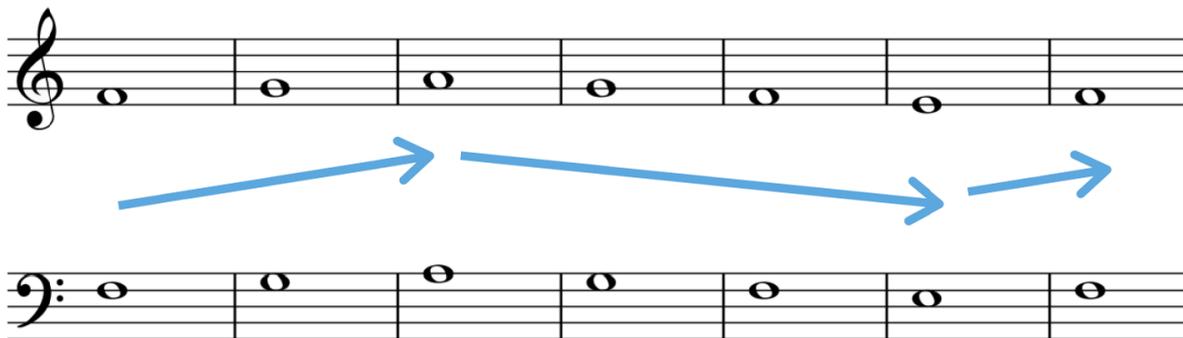
The Basics of Reading Music

Week Three: Basic Sight-Singing

One of the things that musicians hate most is sight singing or sight playing. It's actually a test in music exams and involves you playing or singing a piece literally on first sight – without any real chance to work out or practise the notes in advance. It's a real skill and there's always that annoying person in choir who can "sight read anything".

Next, we're going to have a go at our first sight-reading for singers. We'll start off slowly just following a vocal line up and down, and then progress on to combining everything we've learned so far.

EXERCISE: Have a go at singing through this example that just moves by step. Listen to the first note given on the piano and try to copy it. Then, if the next pitch looks higher up the staff then move up to the next pitch. If the next pitch looks lower down the staff, then move down to the next pitch – and so on.

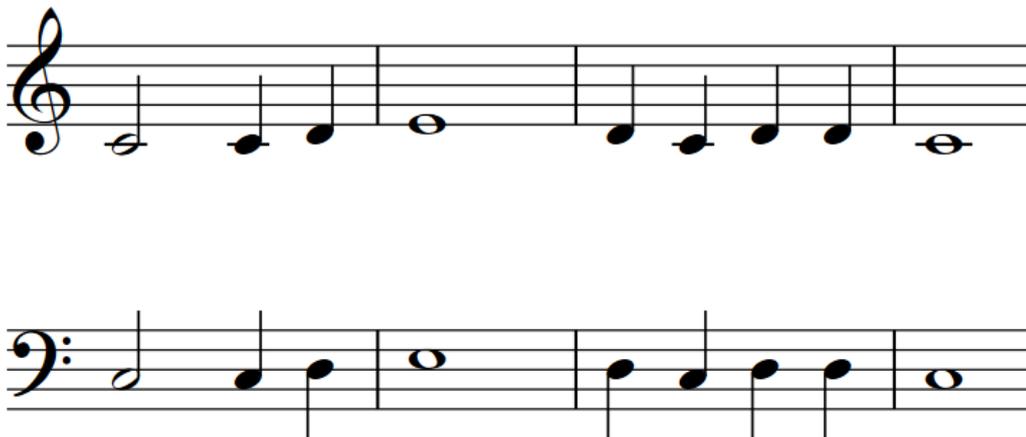


Now, we're going to combine the two things you have learned so far:

the note PITCHES (which one to sing or play)

and the note VALUES (lengths).

EXERCISE Sing your way through this example that moves by step. Notice that this time, there are different note values (lengths) to contend with.



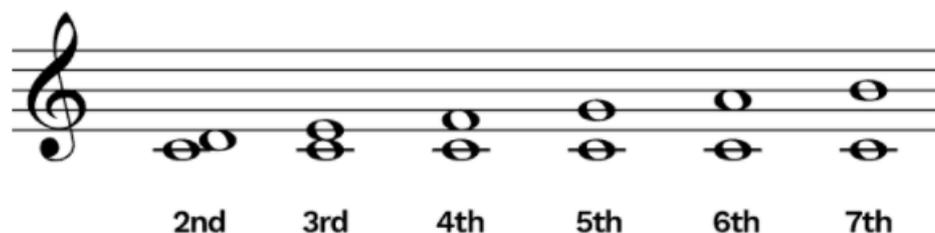
CONGRATULATIONS! You just sang your very first tune!

Intervals

Now you know how to clap basic rhythms and sing basic melodies that move up and down by step. But most music doesn't move by step – so what should you do then? How do you know how far to jump up and down in pitch?

Next, we're going to look at an aspect of music called **intervals**.

An interval is simply the distance between two notes and we number them like this:



In each of these intervals, you count both the note you start on and the note you finish on so

C to D = 2nd (C D or 1 2)

C to E = 3rd (C D E or 1 2 3)

C to F = 4th (C D E F or 1 2 3 4)

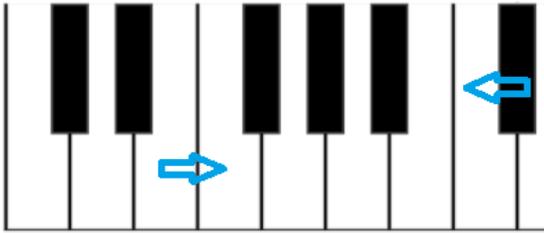
C to G = 5th (C D E F G or 1 2 3 4 5) and so on.

EXERCISE Number the following intervals e.g. 2nd, 3rd, 4th and so on. Remember to count both your starting note and finishing note.



The larger the gap between the notes, the larger the difference in pitch.

The smallest interval that we use in Western music is a “semi-tone” or, in US English, a “half-step”. To picture this, imagine moving on a piano keyboard from one note up or down to the next nearest one – whether it’s black or white:



After this comes a move of two “semi-tones” which makes a tone or “whole step”.

Why is this important?

As long as you can name the two notes in the interval (which you can, because we learned to do that last week), then you can use your knowledge of intervals to help you figure out where to place the next note in your voice.

How to use Intervals for Sight Reading

Imagine you’re sight-singing something in choir, or practising at home. You come to a section of the piece where the tune jumps up by quite a big leap rather than moving by simple steps. You know that intervals can help you figure out how to find the next note and so you turn to the following method.

Musicians have a clever way of singing the leaps in intervals and it’s based on using familiar songs as a guide:

An interval of a 2nd (e.g. C to D) is the first two notes of “Happy Birthday”.

An interval of a 3rd (e.g. C to E) is the first two notes of “O When the Saints”

An interval of a 4th (e.g. C to F) is the first two notes of “Amazing Grace”

An interval of a 5th (e.g. C to G) is the first two notes of “Twinkle Twinkle”

An interval of a 6th (e.g. C to A) is the first two notes of “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean”

An interval of a 7th (e.g. C to B) is the LARGE LEAP in “Superman”

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9vrfEoc8_g#t=51s)

An interval of an 8th (an octave C to C) is the first two notes of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”

[Here’s a great list online in case you want to find songs that are more familiar to you:

<https://www.earmaster.com/products/free-tools/interval-song-chart-generator.html>]

