MUSIC THEORY FOR MUSICAL THEATRE

John Bell and Steven R. Chicurel

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Part 3

Introduction

At its most basic level, song literature represents a marriage—a lamination, if you will—of text ar music. The combination of these two modes of expression creates a language that is unique ar powerful.

Tools for understanding and then interpreting *any* language are diverse. Those for song literatu come from the worlds of theatre and music. A composer writes for the theatre the way a playwrigl writes for the theatre, except the composer uses *musical* language rather than *literal* language. Tl goal is the same: to capture the essence of character and situation. Just as the playwright uses letter the composer uses tones. The tones form chords (words), musical phrases (sentences), and music sections (paragraphs). In the same way that a playwright builds dramatic interest through the use rising action and *dénouement*, a composer uses the tools of dissonance and consonance to transport tl listener on a musical journey.

Early methods of musical theatre acting training espoused the notion that singing actors shou approach a song as if it were a monologue. Singers were encouraged to speak the text without music investigate the lyrics' naturalistic qualities. Then the student was directed to add the music graduall first as underscoring, and finally return to sung delivery. This technique, while valuable, perpetuat the dangerous assumption that the lyric of a song is the most important component of the song dramatic expression, and places little or no emphasis on the composer's art.

This book addresses the role and value of music as a contributor to the dramatic *gestalt*, particular in the musical theatre canon. Currently there is a dearth of literature that focuses on the tools tl composer uses to complete the union of spoken word and music.

This book, designed to introduce the musical theatre practitioner to a new paradigm for music theatre study, has three parts. Part 1 features elements of music theory that are basic for practic application to musical theatre songs. Part 2 contains examples from the musical theatre repertoire th demonstrate the lamination of music and text analysis. A supplementary section, Part 3, provides tl educator and the student with practical drills in a workbook format.

It is important to note this book is intended *not just* for actors, singers, and dancers. In fact, base upon the authors' personal experiences using this model for song analysis, this book will be of gre value to stage managers, designers, directors, choreographers, and musical directors. The autho believe the result can be a shared and specific working vocabulary that enhances the efficiency of tl process (design and production meetings, rehearsal, etc.) and enriches the product (performance).

Most professional musical theatre training programs require that students study music theory. Tl content of such training, however, varies widely in both depth and rigor. Now that the number musical theatre training programs has increased, so too has an awareness of the specific education and skill needs of their students.

The time has come to ask a series of questions. How do musical theatre artists differ fro traditional musical and theatre artists? Do the specific, day-to-day tasks in which the musical theat artists engage require the full complement of music theory training? If not, what should be include Is there a more logical way to sequence the information to reveal its direct application to the art form

Some musical theatre students begin their university program of study with less music

preparation than drama or dance training. As such, they find themselves overwhelmed ar ~~demoralized as they try to keep pace with their more musically sophisticated peers. This~~ boo approaches some of these challenges from the point of view that, while musical theatre artists *ma* need the full complement of traditional music theory instruction, a course of study that would app the information more directly to the art form will better serve the actor, singer, and dancer as well a directors, choreographers, stage managers, and designers.

What do musical theatre artists need, musically? Lawrence Thelan's book *The Show Make* reveals, through a series of interviews with some of the contemporary musical theatre's most prolif directors, that, for many, the ability to read music is not considered a key skill for success in th profession. Additionally, there are other musical theatre practitioners who would also assert the sam opinion. After all, that's what the musical director is for, right?

In the authors' experiences, a basic command of musical language and its primary components *is* a essential "survival skill." The ability to read and analyze melody, harmony, and rhythm allov musical theatre artists to explore the composer's contribution to character and plot development. also allows directors and musical directors to discuss, as partners, musical needs regardin introductions, interludes, and transitional music. It assists actors in preparing excerpts for auditions. enables choreographers to look at a score and recognize nuances or punctuations that they may want capture visually. One of the potential and perhaps unexpected values of this text lies in its applicatio to the training of stage managers, who must converse with other musical theatre artists. Stag managers will also benefit from the ability to understand musical language in order to facilita calling musically specific cues. In short, the musical theatre artist is working in a theatrical form th is, after all, musical. Why would he or she *not* want to speak the language?

Music contains three basic components. *Melody* gives music its voice and shape, *harmony* giv music its aesthetic color or mood, and *rhythm* gives music its movement. These components combin to create the universality that allows music to speak to all people regardless of time or place. Furthe when music is combined with words, the dramatic potential intensifies.

The authors approach this text with the assumption that the reader possesses a basic understandin of reading a musical staff, a knowledge base equivalent to an elementary-level course in music theor Therefore, this book does not provide orientation to note names, clef, and other rudiments of printe music. In a classroom setting, this text can be useful in the study of musical theatre performance ar musical theatre script and score analysis. This book will enhance the understanding of any teache student, or enthusiast who has an interest in musical theatre literature.

While it would be helpful to be able to play the musical examples on piano, it is not essential. Th authors encourage the reader to listen to recordings of the songs from which the examples are taken.

Additionally, the authors believe that the study of music theory need not be intimidating. Arme with a few basic principles of melody, harmony, and rhythm, the musical theatre artist will b successful in creating, "page-to-stage," the world that not only the playwright but also the compos and lyricist have imagined.

It is the authors' hope that this book will prove effective both in independent study and classroom settings.

1

Rudiments of Music

Melody

Melody refers to the succession of individual pitches used to express musical contour and shap
These pitches have letter names, A to G, and appear on the keyboard below (figure 1.1).

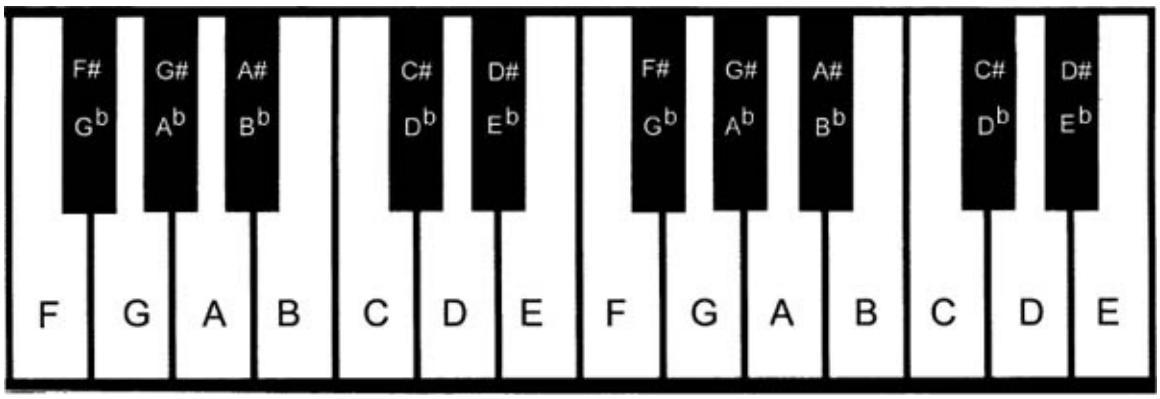

Figure 1.1. Keyboard with pitch names

The distance between any two adjacent keys is a semitone (ST), commonly referred to as a ha
step. For example, E to F and F to F# is a semitone (figure 1.2). Two adjacent semitones create
whole tone (WT), also known as a whole step. For example, G to A is a whole tone (figure 1.3).

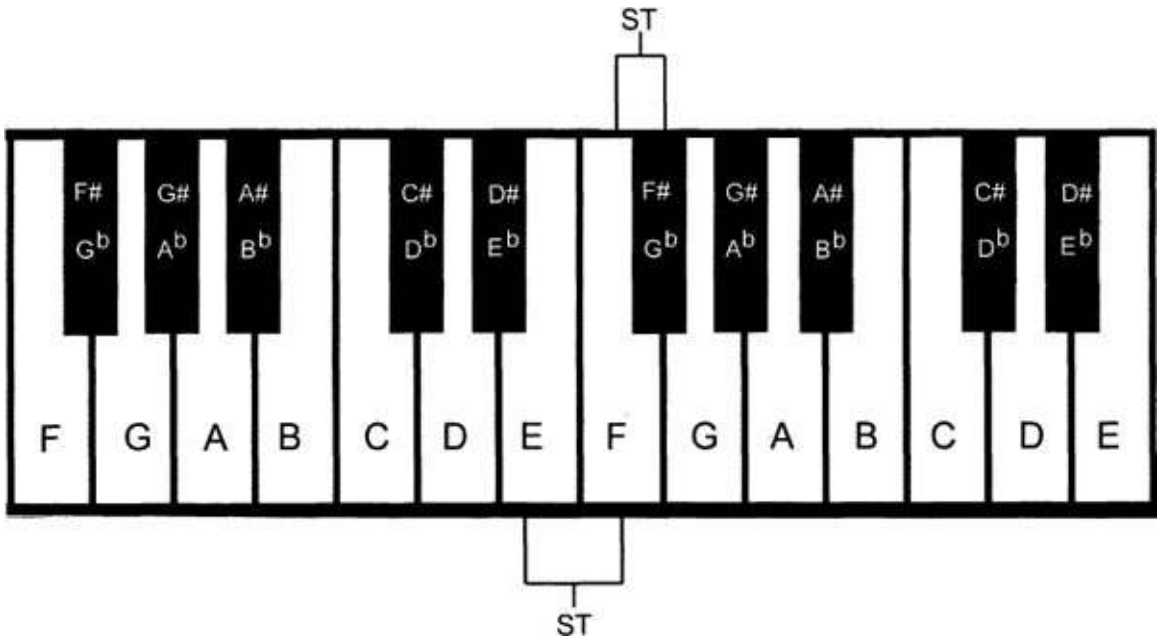

Figure 1.2. Semitones

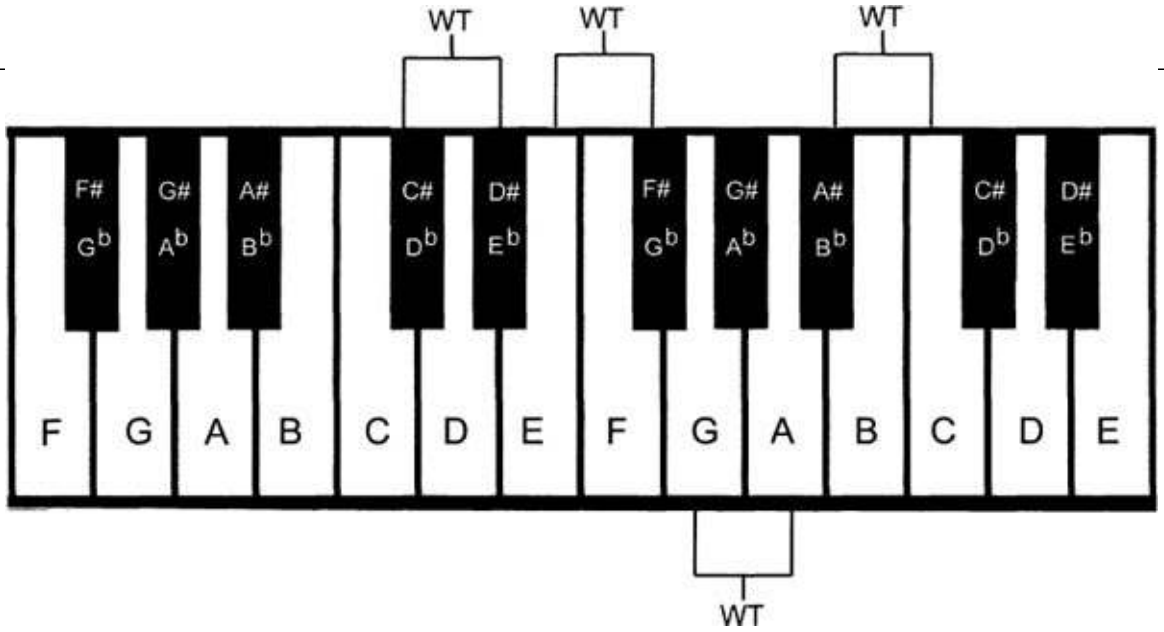

Figure 1.3. Whole tones

Alterations to named pitches are called *accidentals*. *A sharp* (#) raises a pitch by a semiton Conversely, a *flat* (♭) lowers a pitch by a semitone. A *double sharp* (×) raises a pitch by two semitone while a *double flat* (♭♭) lowers a pitch by two semitones. A *natural* (♮) cancels a previous alteration. A accidental affects the note that follows as well as all notes of the same pitch within a measure.

A stepwise sequence of semitones or whole tones creates a pattern; whether in ascending descending order, these patterns create *scales*. A scale that is built entirely of semitones is a *chromat scale* (figure 1.4).

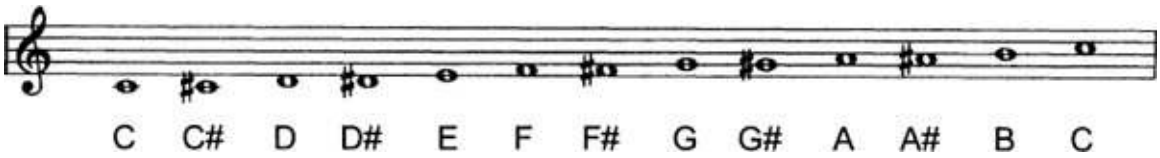

Figure 1.4. Staff with chromatic scale

Measure 55 of "Chop Suey," from *Flower Drum Song* features a chromatic scale in the top note the accompaniment (figure 1.5).

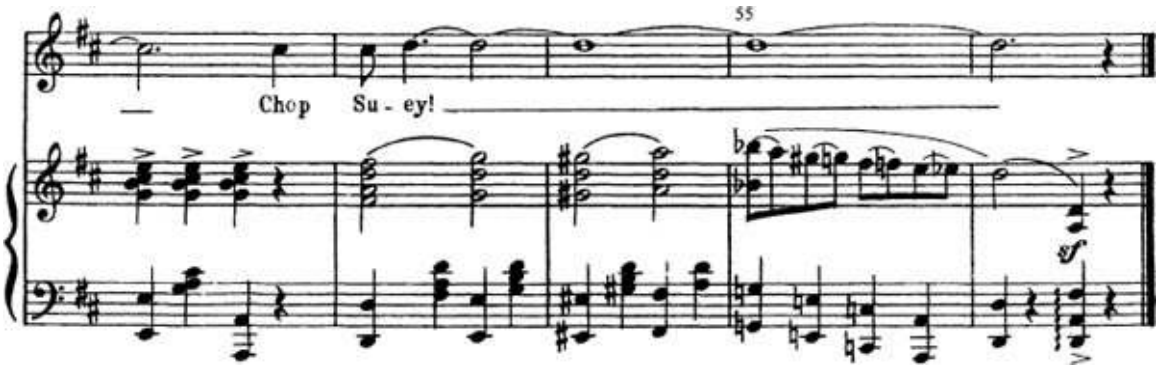

Figure 1.5. "Chop Suey," mm. 52–56, chromatic scale

A seven-note scale built on a combination of semitones and whole tones is a *diatonic* scale (figu 1.6).

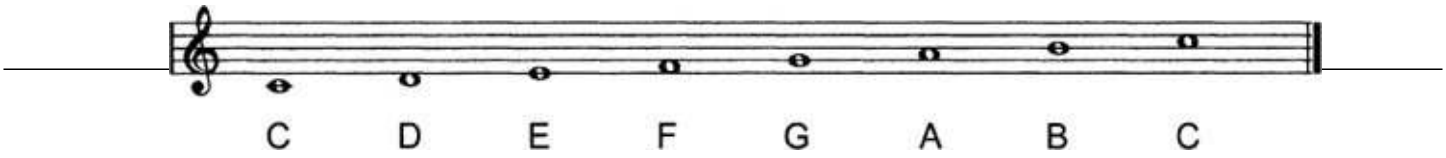

Figure 1.6. Staff with diatonic scale

An example of a melody made up of diatonic scale tones appears in measures 1-6 of "You Ar Love" from *Show Boat*. (Notice that the melody is doubled and reinforced in the accompaniment; s figure 1.7).

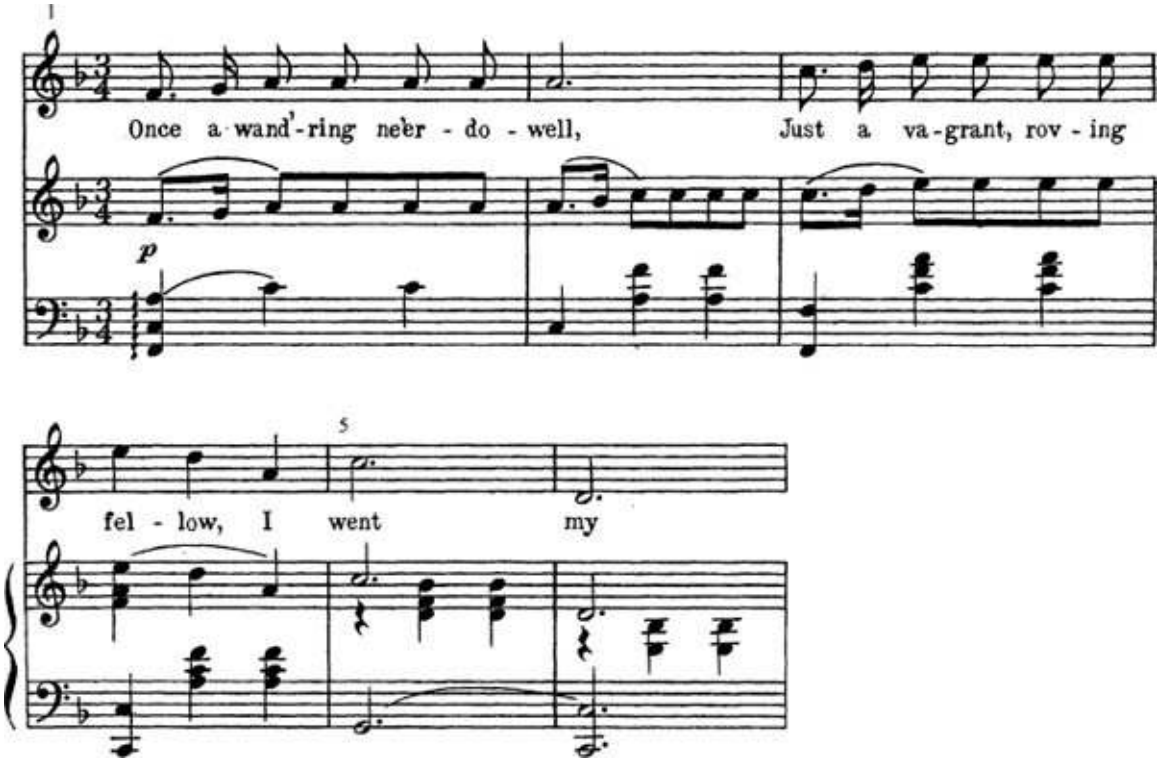

Figure 1.7. "You are Love," mm. 1-6, diatonic scale

Mode refers to the resulting color or tonality elicited from scales or melodic sequences. The tw most common modes in Western music are the *major* and *minor* modes. They consist of eight note For purposes of this book, these two modes will be emphasized.

Typically, the major mode is perceived to be "positive," "bright," or "effusive," while the minc mode is perceived to be "negative," "dark," or "reflective." Reference to the major mode is notated b capital letters. Lowercase letters are used to reference minor modes. Therefore, an uppercase represents A-major, and the key of a-minor is represented by a.

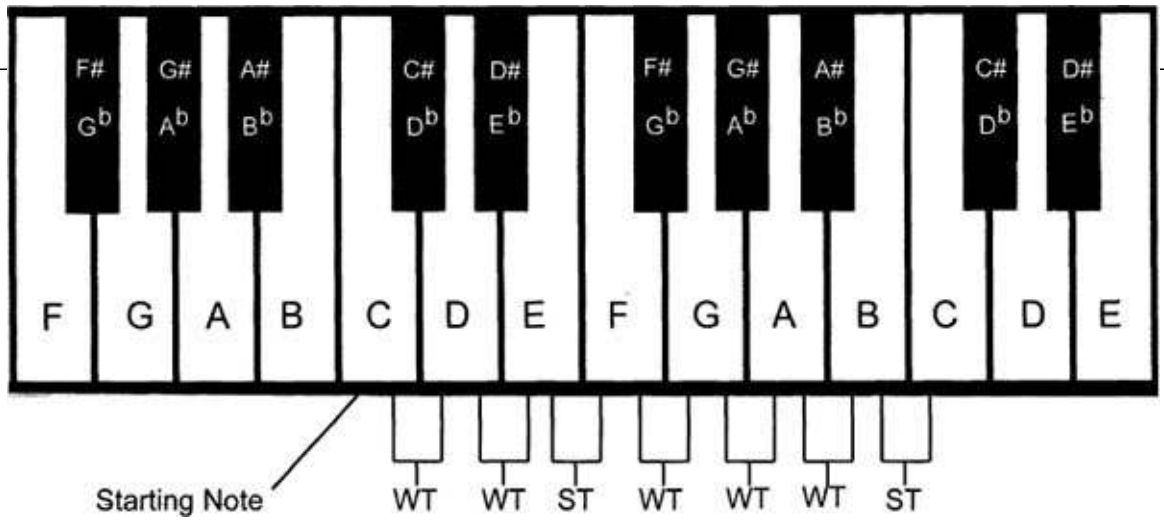

Figure l.8a. C-major scale

An ascending major scale has the following formula (this pattern is reversed for the descendin scale): Starting Note/WT/WT/ST/WT/WT/WT/ST (see figures 1.8a and 1.8b).

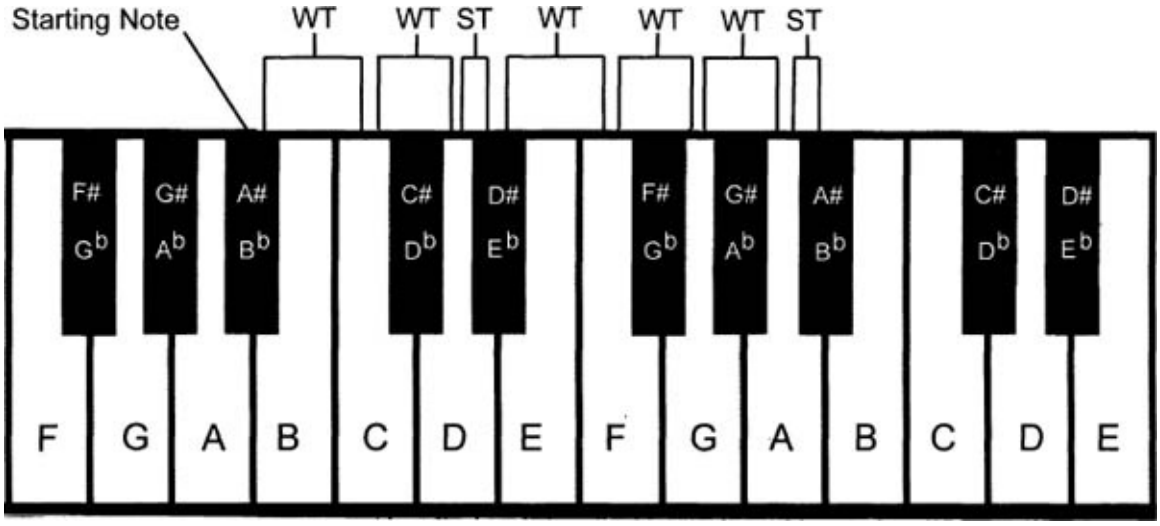

Figure 1.8b. B-flat major scale

Stephen Sondheim outlines an ascending E-major scale in measures 30 and 31 of "The Little Thin You Do Together," from *Company*. The melody begins on the second scale degree, the F#, and ascen to the high E (see figure 1.9).

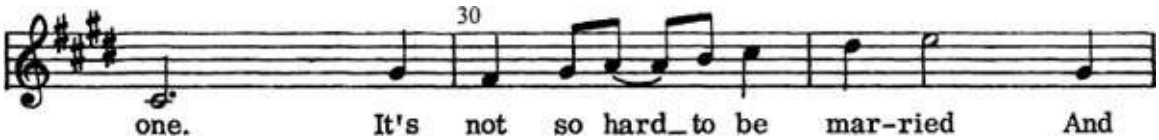

Figure 1.9. "The Little Things You Do Together," mm. 29–31, ascending E-major scale

There are three common forms of minor modes: *natural, harmonic*, and *melodic*. The natural min scale has the following formula: Starting Note/WT/ST/WT/WT/ST/WT/WT (see figure 1.10).

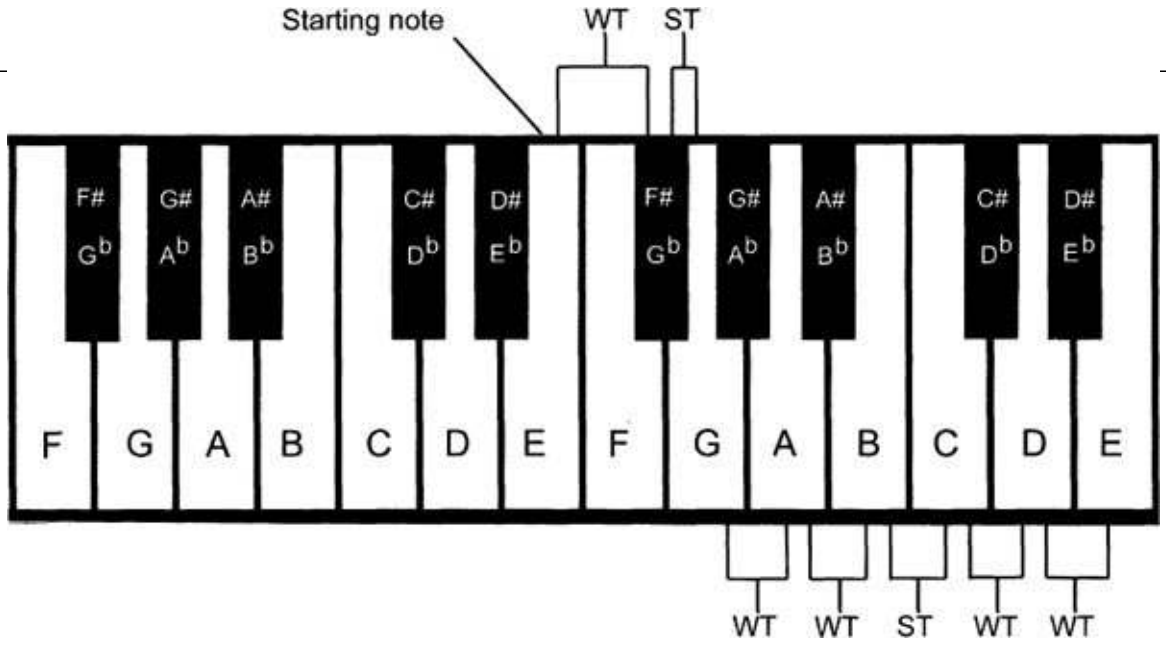

Figure 1.10. e-natural minor scale

The harmonic minor mode raises the seventh scale degree of the natural minor scale. It utilizes th following formula: Starting Note/WT/ST/WT/WT/ST/WT+ST/ST. Notice that the distance of th second-to-last interval in this formula is three semitones (a step and a half). Most Western melodie that are written in a minor mode are in the harmonic form (figure 1.11).

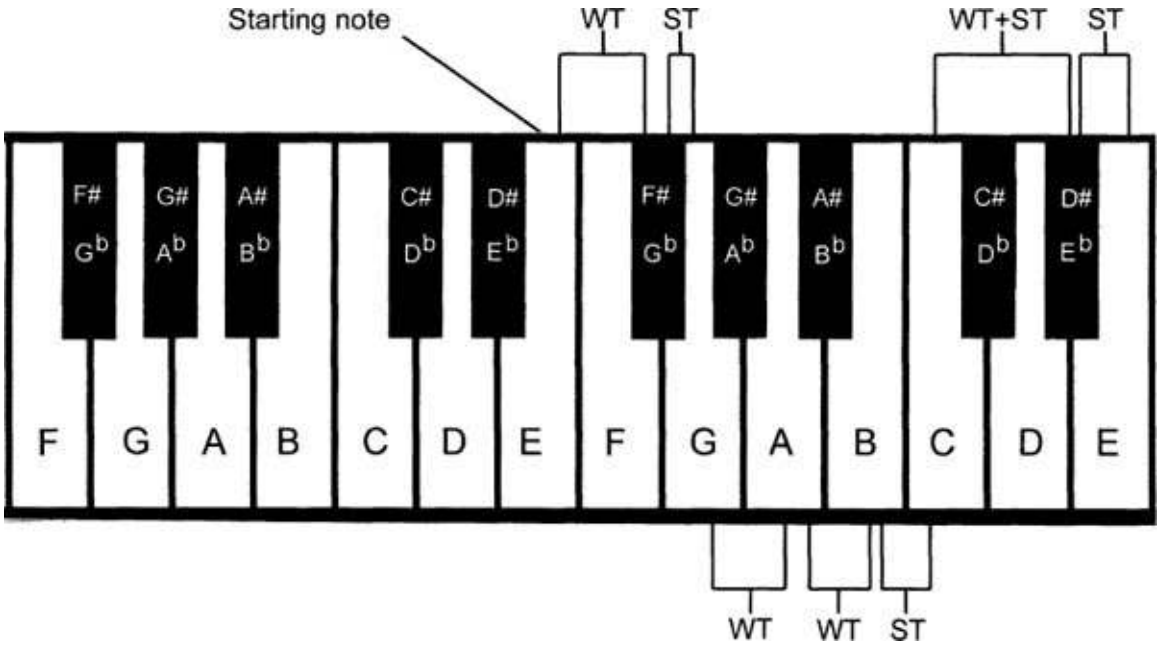

Figure 1.11. e-harmonic minor scale

The melodic minor mode raises the sixth and seventh scale degrees *ascending* by one semitone ar then follows the natural minor formula *descending*. The ascending melodic minor scale follows th formula: Starting Note/WT/ST/WT/WT/WT/WT/ST (see figures 1.12a and 1.12b). Therefore, th descending melodic minor scale is the same as the descending natural minor scale.

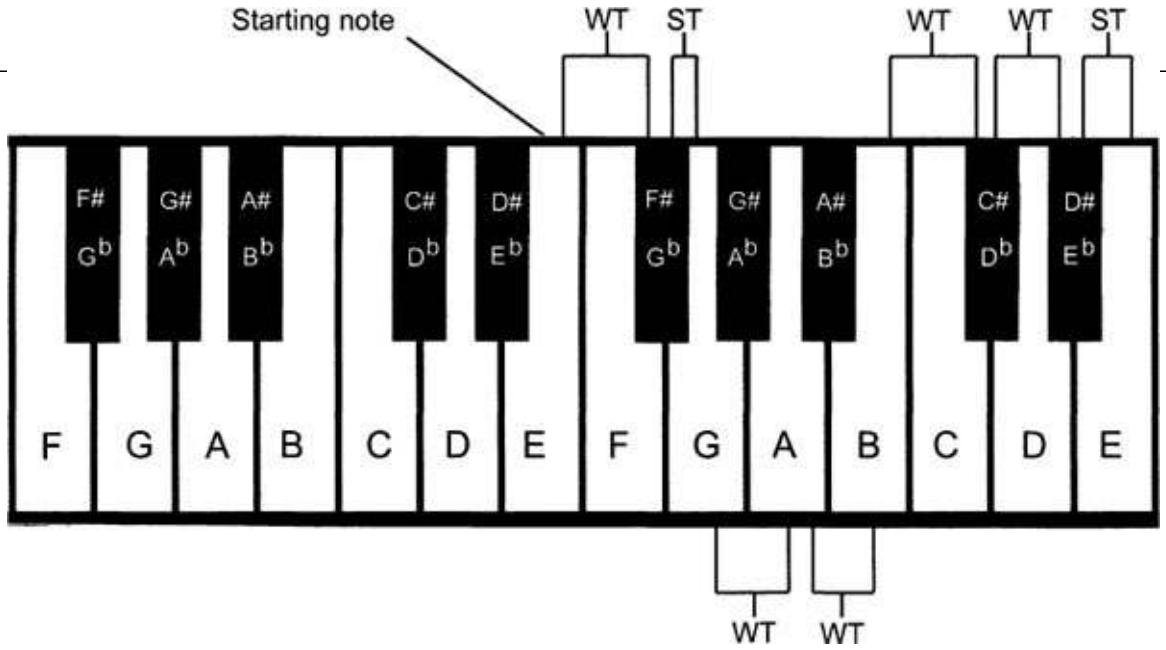

Figure 1.12a. e-melodic minor scale (ascending)

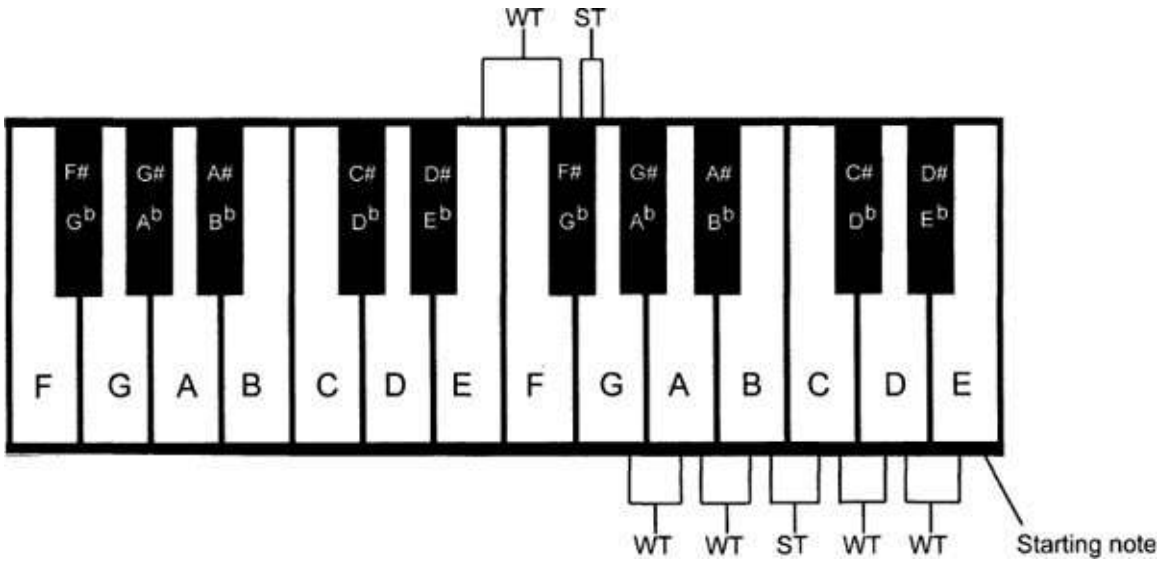

Figure 1.12b. e-melodic minor scale (descending)

In any key, scale degree notes have specific names. The first scale degree is the *tonic*, the second the *supertonic*, the third is the *mediant*, the fourth is the *subdominant*, the fifth is the *dominant*, ar the sixth is the *submediant*.

In a discussion of scales and modality, special notice should be taken of the mediant. This thi scale degree is important because it establishes either major or minor mode.

The seventh degree of major and the various minor scales is "variable." In some cases, the distan below tonic is a semitone, while in others it is a whole tone. In the major mode, the seventh sca degree is the *leading tone* because it is a mere semitone from the tonic, which gives it a feeling leading to or resolving to the tonic. The same is true with the harmonic minor and the ascendi melodic scales. In the natural and the *descending melodic* scales, the seventh scale degree is t *subtonic* because this *now-lowered* tone is a whole tone below the tonic. Finally, the eighth sca degree is the *octave* or *high tonic* (figures 1.13a and 1.13b).

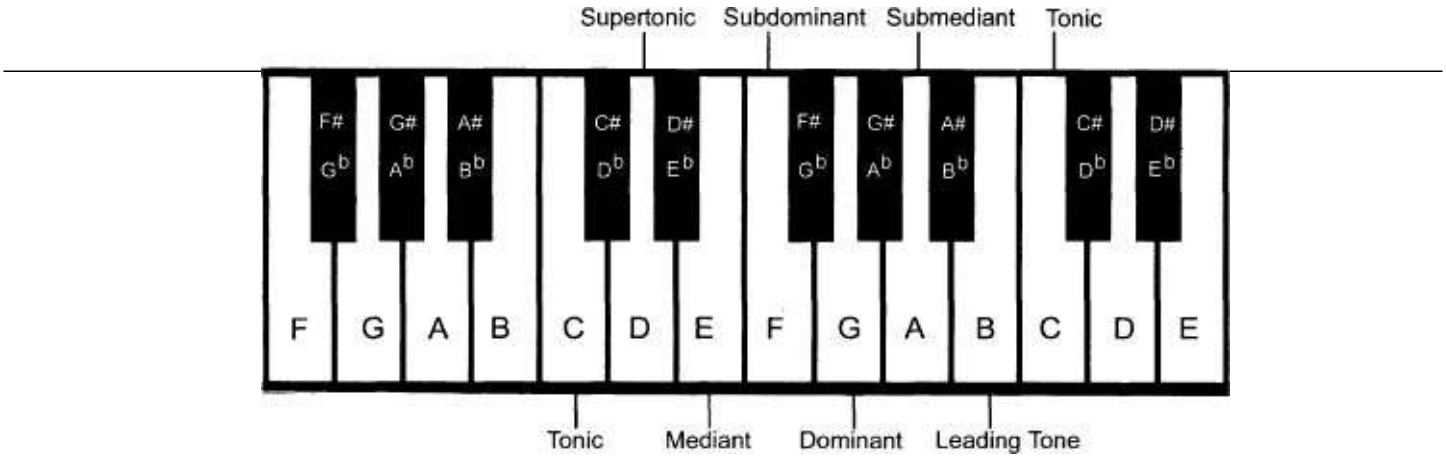

Figure 1.13a. Major scale with scale degree names

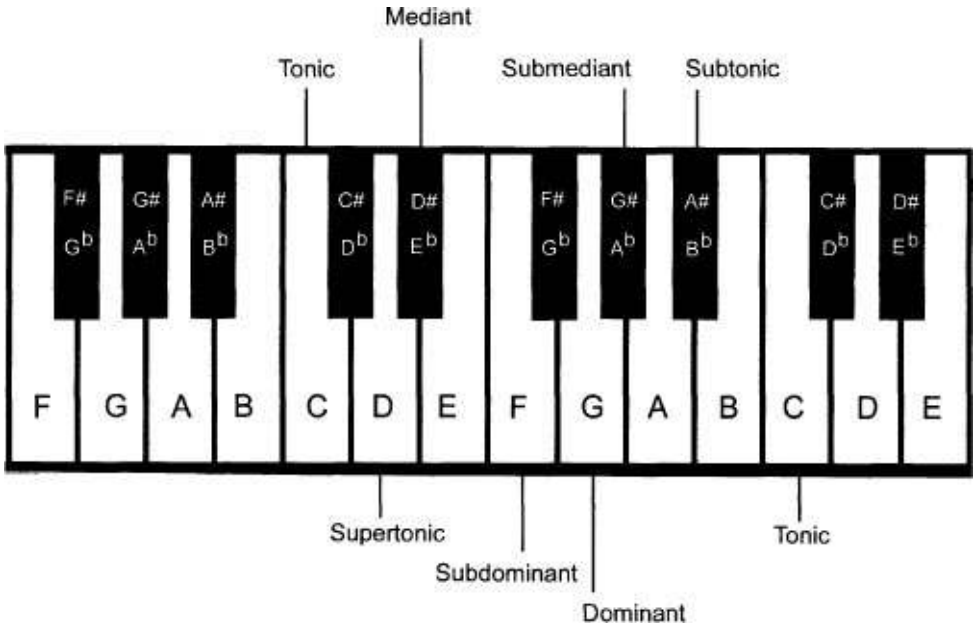

Figure 1.13b. Natural minor scale with scale degree names

When any two pitches sound consecutively or simultaneously, the distance between each is a *interval*. Intervals are defined by two components—size and quality. They can be perceived aurally a well as visually. In order to determine interval *size* visually, start with the bottom note and count line and spaces to the upper note. Be sure to count both the starting and ending notes. For example, on th staff below, starting on C and ending on the same C is a unison. Starting on C and ending on D, th interval is a second. The distance from C to E is a third, and so forth. An interval of an eighth is a octave (figures 1.14 and 1.15).

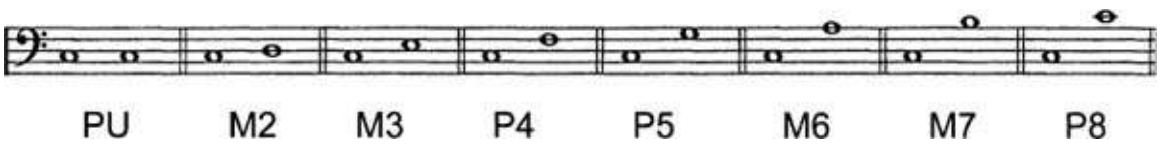

Figure 1.14. C-major intervallic scale

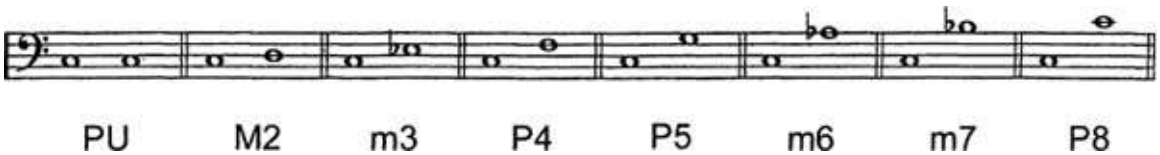

Figure 1.15. c-minor (natural) intervallic scale

Notice on the major and minor scales above that the thirds, sixths, and sevenths would sour ~~different, depending upon the mode. In addition, the specific distance (number of semitones or~~ who tones) has changed. These variances represent the interval *quality*. We define these intervall qualities as major, minor, *perfect, diminished*, and *augmented*. Perfect intervals are intervals that a the same in major and minor modes. These intervals are typically described as "open" and "hollow."

The interval size and qualities from the tonic are labeled on the C-major scale above (figure 1.14 Notice that the unison, fourth, fifth, and octave are perfect (P), and the second, third, sixth, ar seventh intervals are major (M).

The interval size and qualities (again from the tonic) are labeled on the c-natural minor scale abov (figure 1.15). As is the case in a major mode, the unison, fourth, fifth, and octave remain perfec Likewise, the second remains major. However, the third, sixth, and seventh intervals are now minc (m). Considering the intervals of the third, sixth, and seventh in both scales, the major interval "bigger," while the minor interval is "smaller."

The word "augment" means to increase, and "diminish" means to decrease. When a perfect fourth augmented or a perfect fifth is diminished they create a *tritone*. A tritone is three whole tones (figu 1.16).

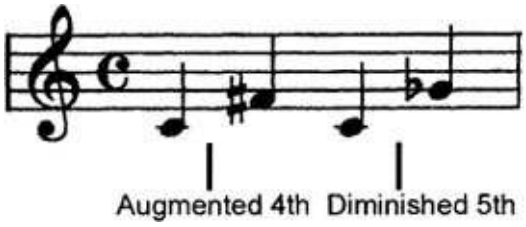

Figure 1.16. Augmented fourth or diminished fifth

An augmented fourth and a diminished fifth sound the same. *Enharmonic* equivalents are pitch that sound the same but are written differently. For example, a D-sharp and an E-flat are the sam pitch, but with different spellings. The same is true of F and E-sharp. Actually, each tone can b written in one of two or three ways (figure 1.17).

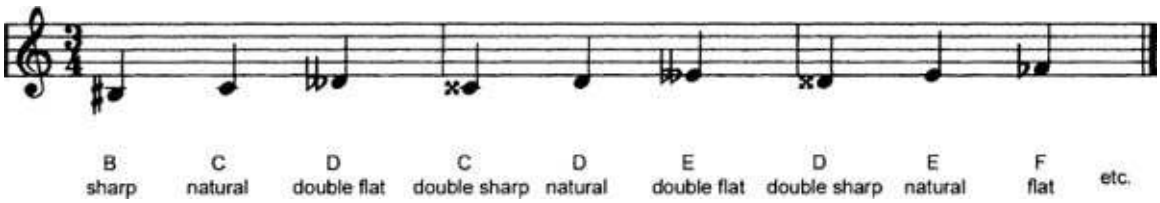

Figure 1.17. Enharmonic equivalents

In the context of a major or minor scale, the tritone does not appear as an interval above or belo the tonic, but it can be embedded within the scale. For example, in a major scale, the distance betwe the subdominant and the leading tone is an augmented fourth (figure 1.18).

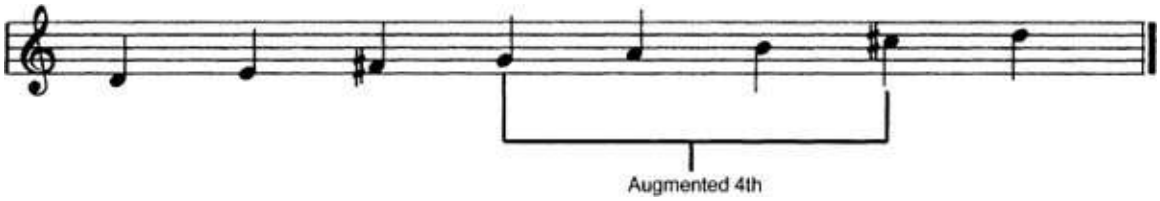

Figure 1.18. Augmented fourth in a major scale

For each scale, *key* is the means of identifying the tonal center (*root* or tonic) and mode. Sharps ar

flats indicate the *key signature* at the beginning of a composition. Key signature can change at an point as *modulations* (or shifts in tonal center) between keys occur. As already stated, key signature may contain accidentals.

The order of sharps in a key signature is always the same (figure 1.19).

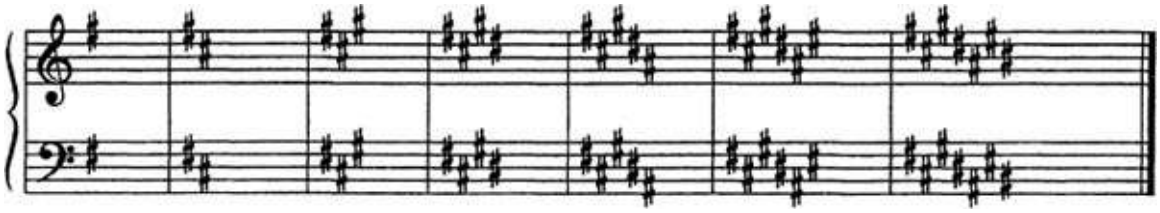

Figure 1.19. Order of sharps

The order of flats in a key signature is always the same (figure 1.20).

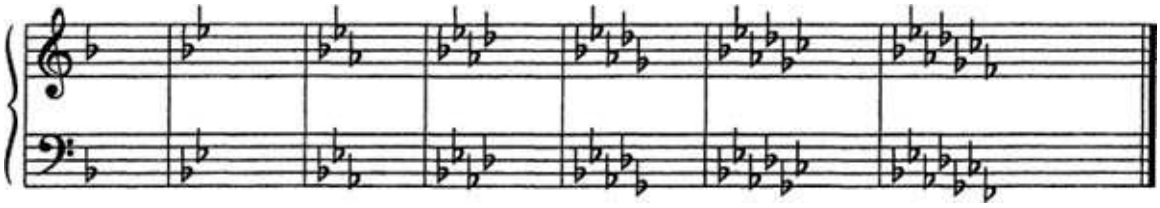

Figure 1.20. Order of flats

The number of accidentals in a key signature identifies the key's tonic. For example, one sharp (F is the key signature for G-major. So, if one begins a scale on G and then follows the formula for *major* scale, one finds that the leading tone is F-sharp. The major key signatures follow (figure 1.21).

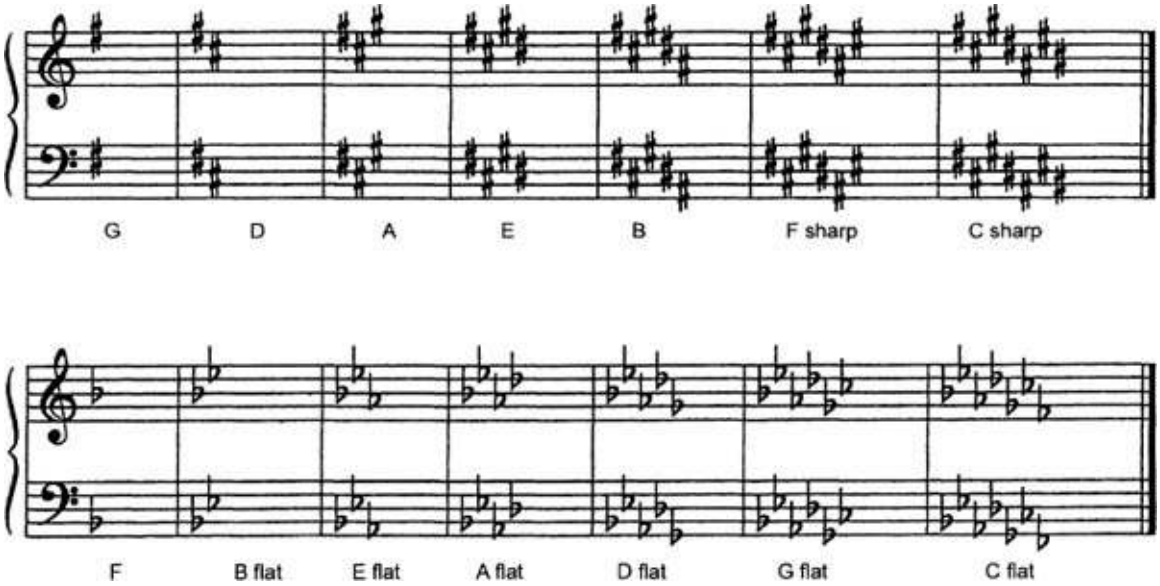

Figure 1.21. Major key signatures

The *circle of fifths* is another system of key identification. It considers the increasing number sharps or flats in the signatures. Starting with C-major (no sharps or flats) and moving clockwise b ascending fifths, one reaches G-major (one sharp). Ascending a fifth again, one reaches D-major (tw sharps), and so on. After twelve steps, one returns to C-major. Likewise, starting with C-major (n sharps or flats) and moving counterclockwise by descending fifths, one reaches F-major (one flat Descending a fifth again, one reaches B-flat major (two flats), and so on. After twelve steps, on returns again to C-major (figure 1.22).

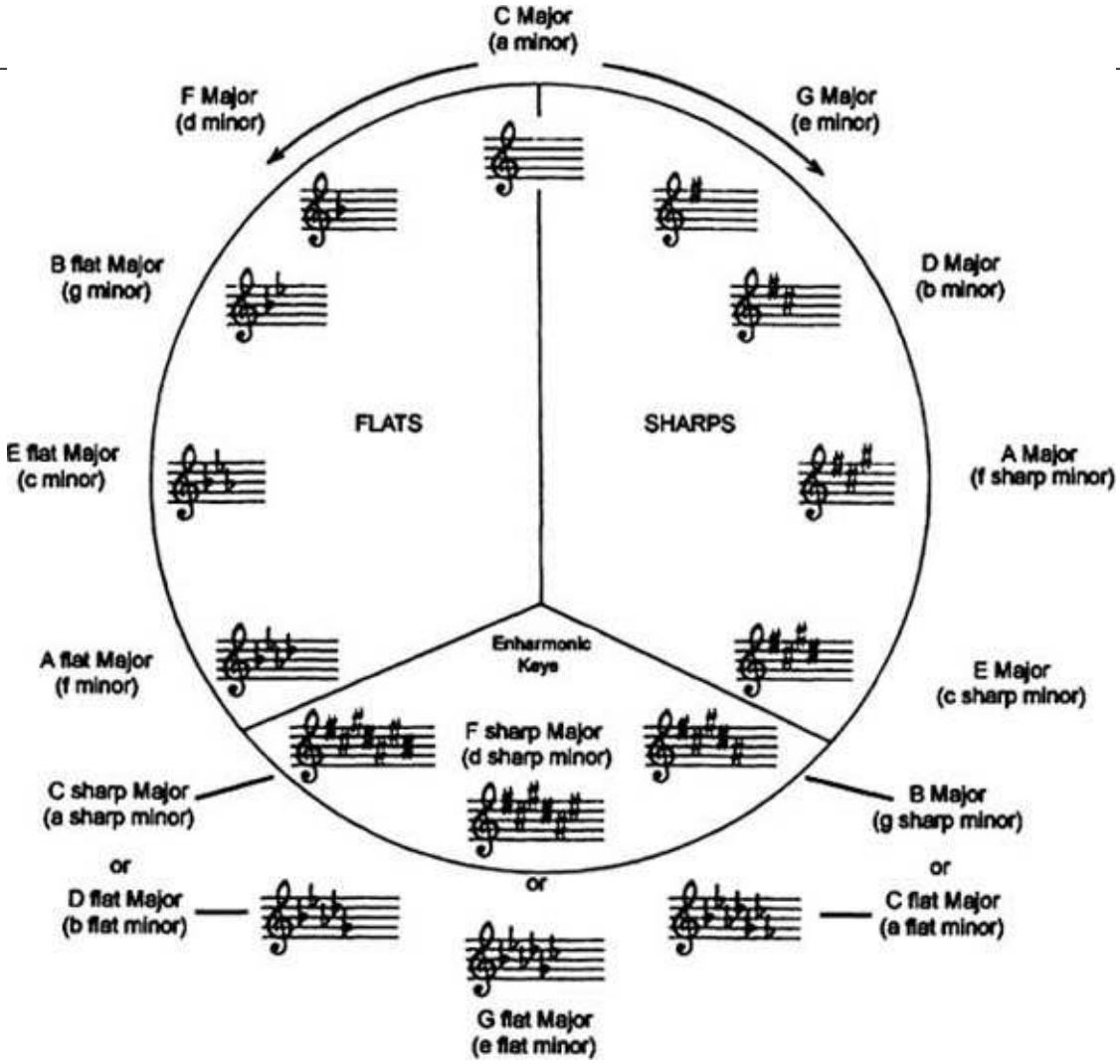

Figure 1.22. Circle of fifths

The astute student will memorize key signatures. As an aid in retention, the following tips ma prove helpful.

To determine a major key in a key signature containing sharps, simply name the sharp farthest the right in the key signature and go up one letter name. Then add the word "major" and that is th key. For example, in the key of E-major, the sharp in the key signature that is the farthest right is D Therefore, if one goes up one letter name, one arrives at E, hence E-major.

To determine a major key in the key signature containing flats, simply name the flat second fro the right in the key signature and add the word "flat" to its letter name. Then add the word "majo and that is the key. For example, the key signature of E♭-major shows an E♭ as the second from th right.

The exception to the system above is that if there is only one flat in the key signature, the key is F major. If there are no flats or sharps in the key signature, the key is C-major.

Key signatures apply to minor scales as well. Each major key has a *relative* natural minor which down, intervalically, a minor third. That is, C-major's relative minor key is A-minor. Therefore, th key of A-natural minor has the same key signature as C-major; it simply begins on A rather than on C Using that key signature, one merely adds the appropriate accidentals to construct the harmonic an melodic variations of the minor mode (figure 1.23).

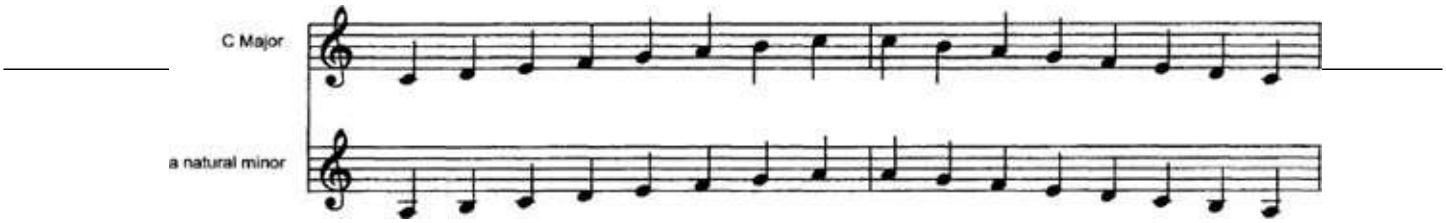

Figure 1.23. C-major scale and its relative minor

In "King Herod's Song" from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Andrew Lloyd Webber begins the song in sharp minor. At measure 9, the relative key, A-major, is established and evident in the shift from darker, ominous quality to one that is brighter (figure 1.24).

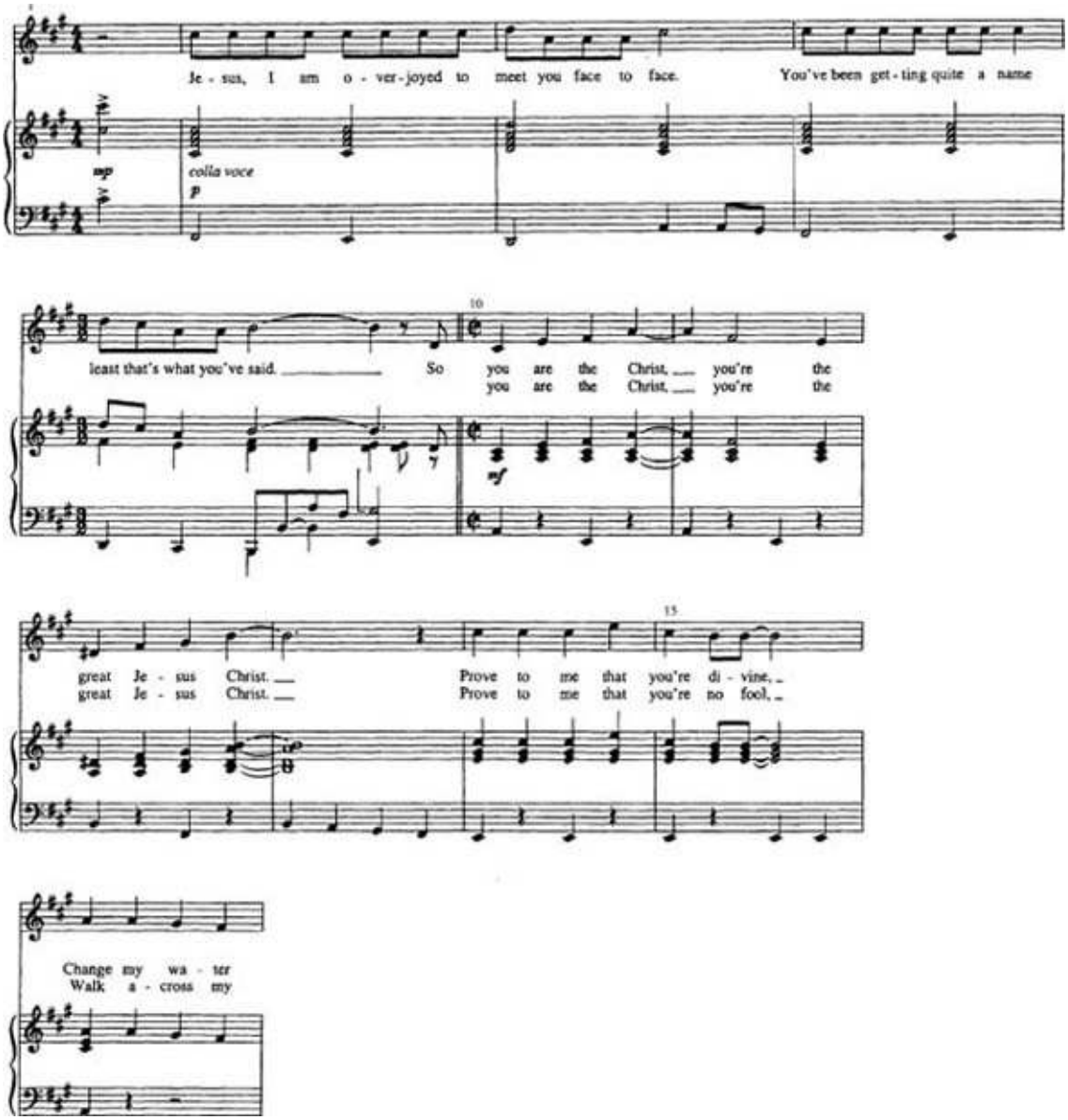

Figure 1.24. "King Herod's Song," mm. 1–4 and 9–16, relative key relationship

Note that in measures 15 and 16, A-major is reinforced with the descending major scale in th melody.

One other key relationship is the *parallel*. Parallel key relationships have the same tonic b different key signatures and notes. For example, d-minor is the parallel minor of D-major.

Notice on the scales below, C-major has no sharps or flats in the key signature (figure 1.25a). A c minor scale has three flats (figure 1.25b), reflected in the key signature (figure 1.25c). If those thre flats are translated into the key signature for the appropriate major key, it would be E-flat maj

(figure 1.25d). Note that E-flat major's relative minor, then, is c-minor (an interval of a third below).

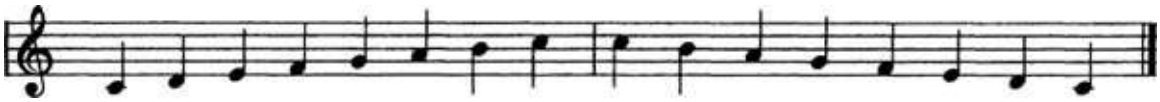

Figure 1.25a. C-major scale

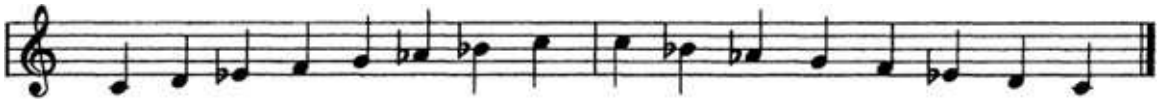

Figure 1.25b. c-natural minor scale

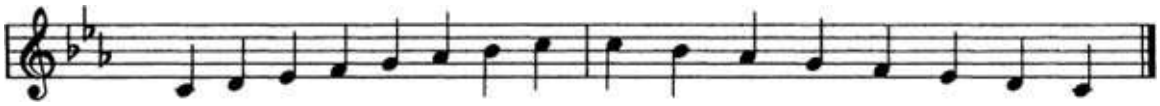

Figure 1.25c. c-natural minor scale with key signature

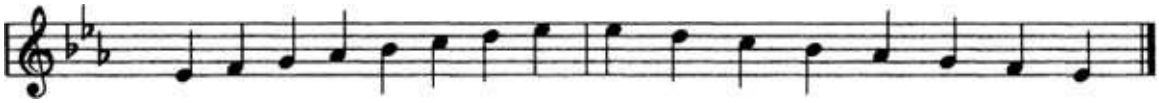

Figure 1.25d. E-flat major scale with key signature

Composers can use the device of *mutation*, or changing mode to a parallel major or minor, witho altering the key. The song "Far from the Home I Love" from *Fiddler on the Roof* provides a cle example. The song begins in the key of c-minor. At measure 12, through the use of accidentals and a ascending C-major scale in the accompaniment, the parallel major key is established to reinforce th happy recollection (figure 1.26).

Another example of mutation appears in "I Enjoy Being a Girl," from *Flower Drum Song*. In th instance, the key shift is from D-major to d-minor (figure 1.27).

The musical theatre examples quoted thus far are evidence of the potency of melody as a guide the listener and to the performer. When one considers harmony as an extension of the melod expression, an infinite number of musical possibilities unfold. Harmony can reinforce emotion an dramatic action, and sustain a mood.

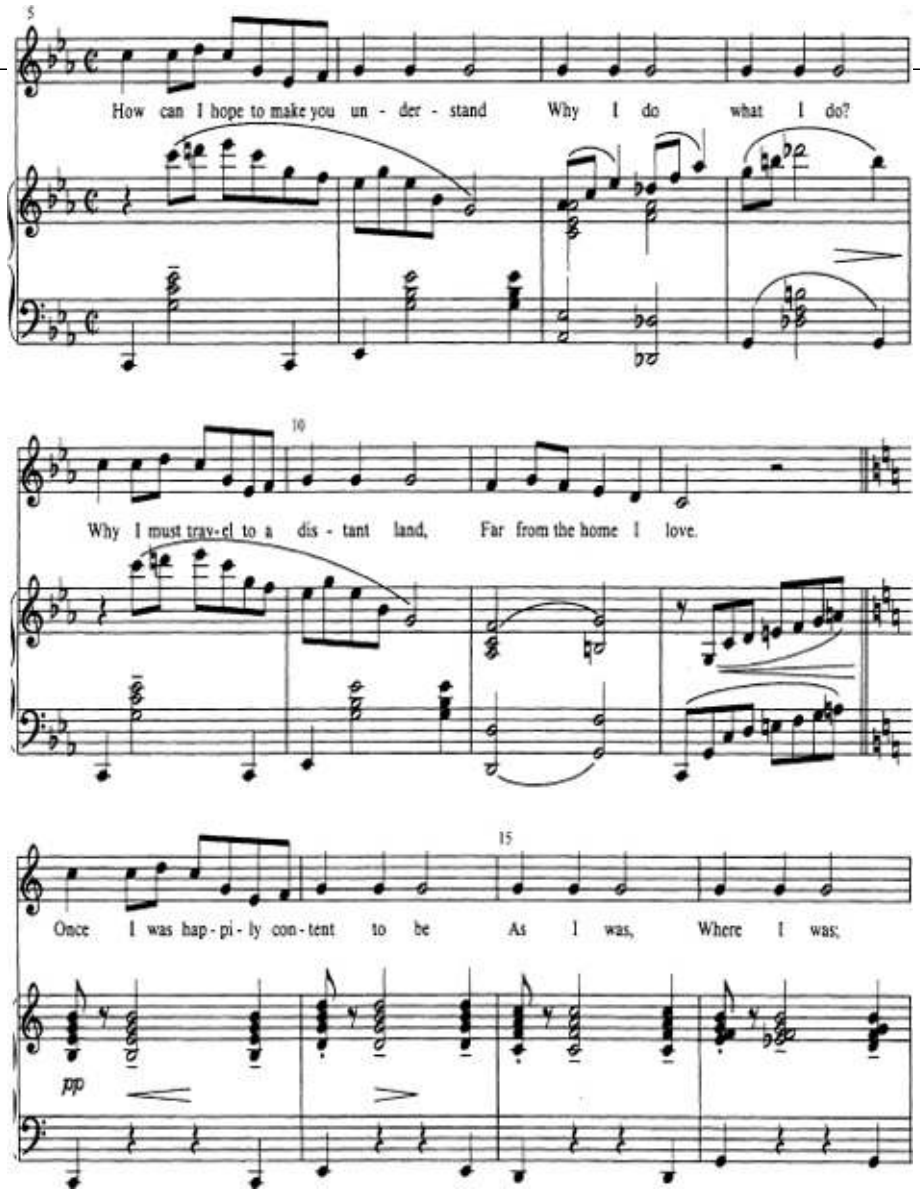

Figure 1.26. "Far from the Home I Love," mm. 5–16, mutation

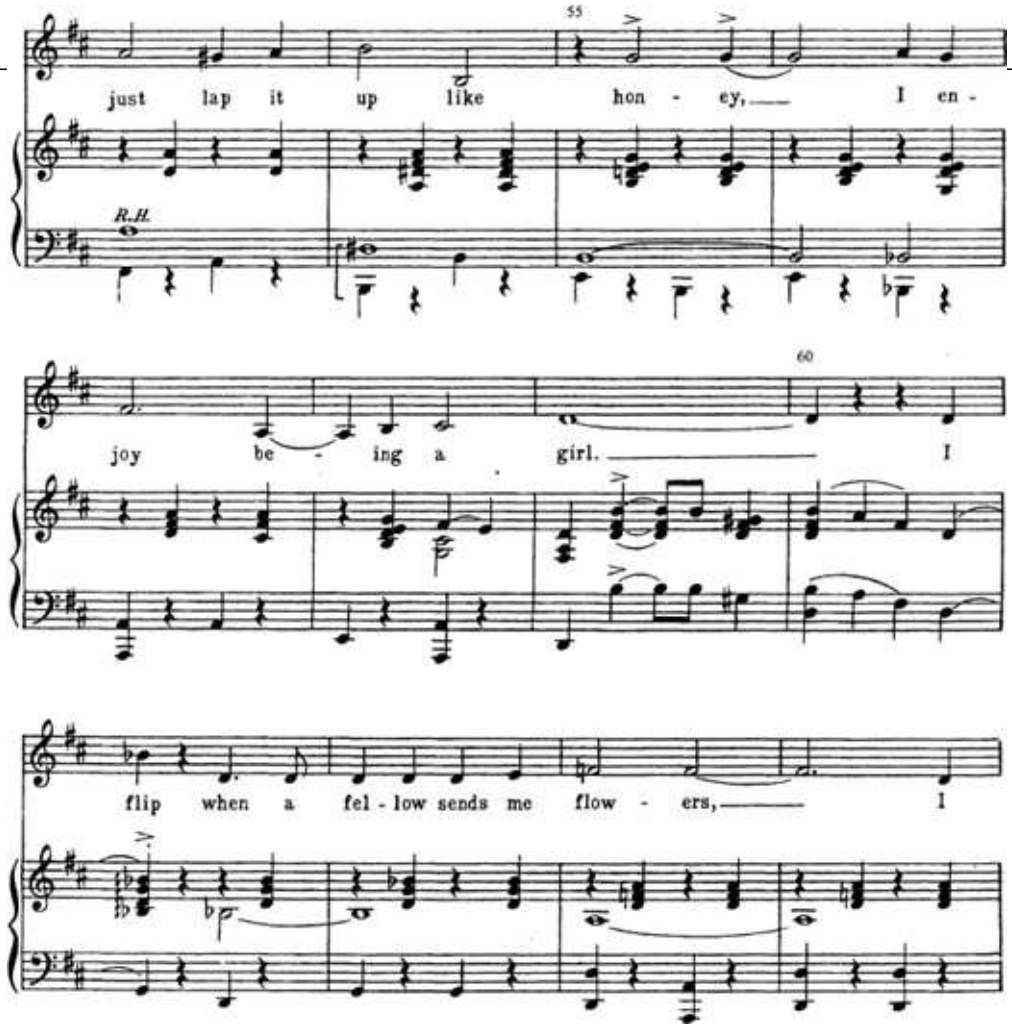

Figure 1.27. "I Enjoy Being a Girl," mm. 53–63, mutation

Harmony

Harmony refers to the simultaneous sounding of two or more pitches or tones. This coupling of ton begins to characterize sound just as a coupling of people begins to characterize a conversation relationship. Primarily, harmony references music vertically, while melody suggests a linear horizontal orientation.

Harmony is organized in many ways, but the underlying principle behind harmony is *tertian-* chords built in thirds. A *triad* is a three-note chord that contains a root or starting note, the note a thi above the root, and a note a fifth above the root. Four examples of triads built on C appear belo (figures 1.28a, 1.28b, 1.28c, and 1.28d).

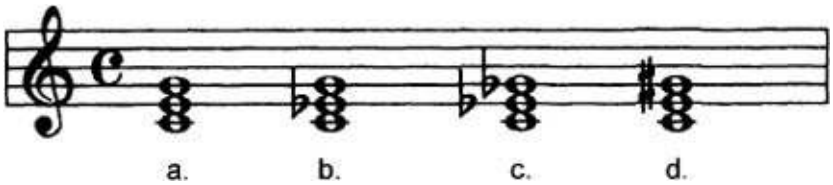

Figure 1.28a, Figure 1.28b, Figure 1.28c, Figure 1.28d. Four triads built on C

The third and the fifth notes of the triad indicate mode. When the distance between the root ar fifth of a triad is perfect, the modality is either major or minor. In the example above, figures 1.28