

# Helpful Music Theory



Worship Training Day 2013 // [www.lifechurchhome.com/music](http://www.lifechurchhome.com/music)

## First steps – Notes & Pitch

As we look at a piano, there are twelve different keys available to us between one note and the same note at another pitch. These twelve keys are separated into names, as follows:

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B

The gap between one note and its immediate neighbour is called a *semitone*. If you start from one note and move ahead **two notes**, it is called a *tone* (or Whole Tone).

## Section 1 - The Major Scale

- A scale is a selection of notes from all those available to use, played usually in ascending or descending order from one note to the next of its kind.
- The primary scale used in much of western music is the *Major Scale*.
- Between each note is a gap called an *Interval*. As the scale progresses, the intervals change in a specific pattern.
- This pattern of intervals gives the major scale a specific sound that we know.
- The Scale Intervals are as follows (**T** = Tone, **S** = Semitone):

T --- T --- S --- T --- T --- T --- S

- If you follow this pattern, beginning from any note, it will sound the Major Scale.
- By knowing note names and the construction of the Major Scale, you are able to recognize the *Key* of a song.
- The *Key* is the musical framework for a piece of music, within which is determined what notes fit into place, and which notes do not. Notes that fit will sound 'right', notes that don't fit in the key signature will feel and sound 'wrong'.

## Section 2 - Chord Construction

- A Chord, simply put, is a group of notes played at the same time.
- The most common form of chord used in Western music is the Triad. Each Triad is made up of three notes taken from the major scale.
- First, let's look at the C Major Scale: C D E F G A B C
- To construct a Triad chord, you take any note, then add in the third and fifth notes which follow it in the scale. For example:

C --- E --- G  
D --- F --- A  
E --- G --- B

- We can divide chords in two kinds of 'feels' or 'style'. *Major* chords tend to sound happy, whilst *Minor* chords tend to sound sad. In a Major scale, the chords switch from Major to Minor in a specific pattern:

1 = Major    2 = Minor    3 = Minor    4 = Major    5 = Major    6 = Minor

– Notice how the Seventh chord is not included in the scale. The Seventh chord in the scale is known as a Diminished chord – it is rarely used in church music (if you play the chord you will hear why).

– If you swap the first note in any triad with either of the other two notes in the same triad, an *Inverted Chord* is created. The use of Inverted Chords (or **Inversions**) can create variation in a piece of music. Notation: 1/3 (e.g. C/E – a C chord with an E in the bass).

#### Section 4 - Nashville Number System

– In the above example the chords are numbered from **1** to **6**, starting from the first note in the scale, up to the sixth.

– In the Key of C Major, chord **1** will be C (the first note in the scale), and it will be Major, as the example shows.

– By using this method, a band can play in any given key and yet know what style / feel a chord is going to be given its appropriate number.

– The Nashville system is simply using numbers to memorise songs rather than remembering specific chords.

#### Section 5 - Time Signature

– Time signature is the other main framework on a piece of music, and it determines the rhythm of a piece. Especially important for Drummers to know, however a good understanding of this is crucial to every part of a band.

– Time Signature is often given in the form of two numbers, separated by a slash.

– Common time signatures: 4/4, 6/8, less common: 3/4, 7/8, 9/8

– The first number is given to show how many beats are in one **bar** of music, whereas the second number gives the Length value to each of those beats (eg: **4/4** = 4 Quarter notes).

– In a standard **4/4** Time Signature, it is possible to keep in time with the beat by counting 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.

– If it is a struggle to keep in the correct time, understanding the correct time signature will help in counting the correct timing, locking the band together.

#### Section 6 – Helpful tips

1 - Want to link two songs together? Look for a common chord between songs.

Example: a song in D has chords (D – Em – F#m – G – A – Bm) where a song in G has chords (G – Am – Bm – C – D – Em). If you hold on a common chord, that will make the transition to the new key easier.

2 – Not sure what key a song is in? It's often the first note or the last note of the song. You should be able to play that note all the way through without it sounding too bad. Knowing the key of a song is essential for using the Nashville system.

3 – As mentioned, the chord on note 7 of your scale is a Diminished chord, which is not very usable in church music. Try to play a 5/7 instead – it'll fit great!