Incorporating Music Theory Into Private Lessons

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QUESTIONS

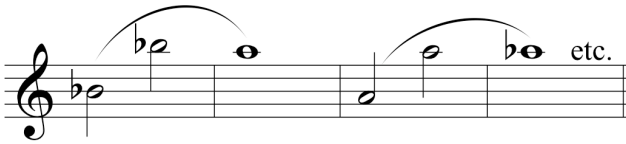
- "What is the key of this piece--what scale has the same key signature?" Point out that the piece often ends on the tonic or first note of the scale.
- If the key is minor, ask, "What is the leading tone of the key?" Point out the multiple raised sevenths that you usually find in a minor key. Also point out that this is a great hint that the piece is in a minor key instead of a major key.
- "What is the time signature?"
- "Which beat should generally be strongest?"
- If possible, ask the student who the composer was and in which time period the piece was written. (This isn't music theory, but it is great for a student to know!)
- "Where does the first phrase end?" You might even have your student mark all phrases.
- If the piece is ABA form, have the student figure out the three sections. It may be easiest to first find where the opening melody (A) repeats.
- If the piece is in sonata form, label the exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda (if there is one).
- If the piece includes broken triads, ask, "Which three notes make up the section?"
- Have the student figure out the root position of triads by stacking the three notes into thirds.
- If the triad is a tonic, subdominant, or dominant triad, have the student label it in his/her music. (You could label additional chords depending on the student's theory background.) Even if it takes a while for students to grasp this concept, it is great to at least introduce it in their music.
- If the piece modulates, ask, "What is the new key?"
- "How does the new key relate to the first key?" Often it will be the dominant or relative major/minor.
- "Does the composer ever return to the original key?"
- If an interval repeats several times, such as in a sequence, have the student identify the intervals.

EAR TRAINING

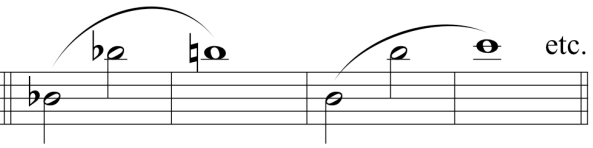
- **Echo Game:** Play a short melody and have the student echo. (You may need to start with only 3-4 notes at a time.) This is a great opening or conclusion to a lesson.
- **Variation of Echo:** Play a rhythm and have the student echo. Use the metronome.
- **Scavenger Hunt:** Play a short section from the student's piece and have him/her locate the section on the page.
- **Rhythm dictation:** Play a rhythm for the student and have him/her first echo it and then count it aloud. (Start simple until the student gets the hang of it.)
- **Dictation:** Assign the student to "dictate" a song (or play by ear) for the next lesson. Songs such as Mary Had a Little Lamb, Twinkle, or Star Spangled Banner work well, but a student might also enjoy figuring out a melody from a movie or favorite pop song.

INTERVAL STUDY

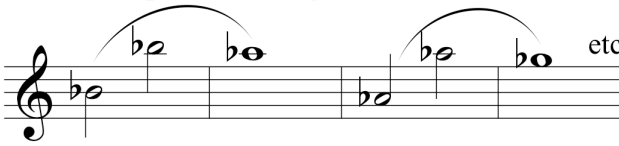
Half Steps Descending



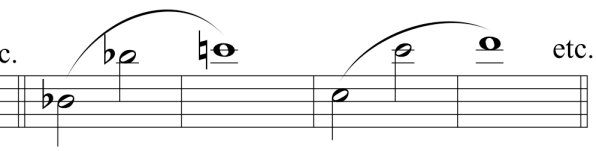
Half Steps Ascending



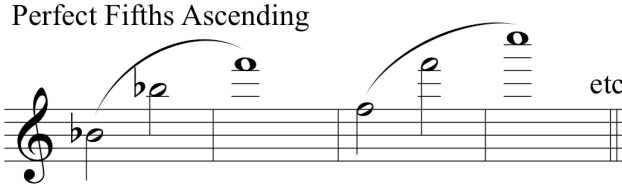
Whole Steps Descending



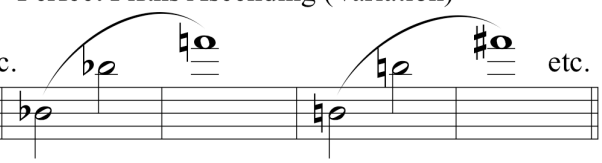
Whole Steps Ascending



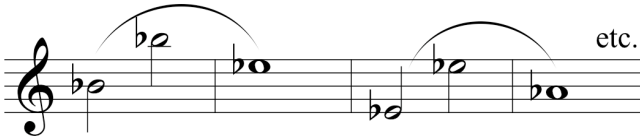
Perfect Fifths Ascending



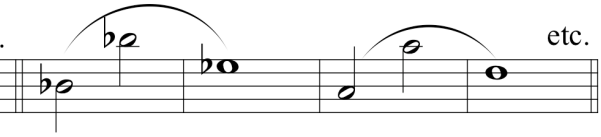
Perfect Fifths Ascending (Variation)



Perfect Fifths Descending



Perfect Fifths Descending (Variation)



MUSIC THEORY RESOURCES

Music Theory Workbooks

- Ballif, Kristi. *Music Theory for the Flutist*. Fluteworks Publishing, 2008. (www.fluteworkspublishing.com)
- Feldstein, Sandy. *Practical Theory Complete: A Self-Instruction Music Theory Course*. Alfred Publishing, 1982.
- Igrec, Seni. *TheoryBuilder Music Theory Workbooks*. (www.igrec.com/thbldr.html)
- Steinke, Greg and Paul Harder. *Basic Materials in Music Theory*. Prentice Hall, 2009.

Music Theory Software

- C.A.T.S. (Computer Aided Theory Skills)
- Music Ace Deluxe

Music Theory Lessons on the Internet

- www.musictheory.net (free)
- www.emusictheory.com (small monthly fee)
- mymusictheory.com (free)

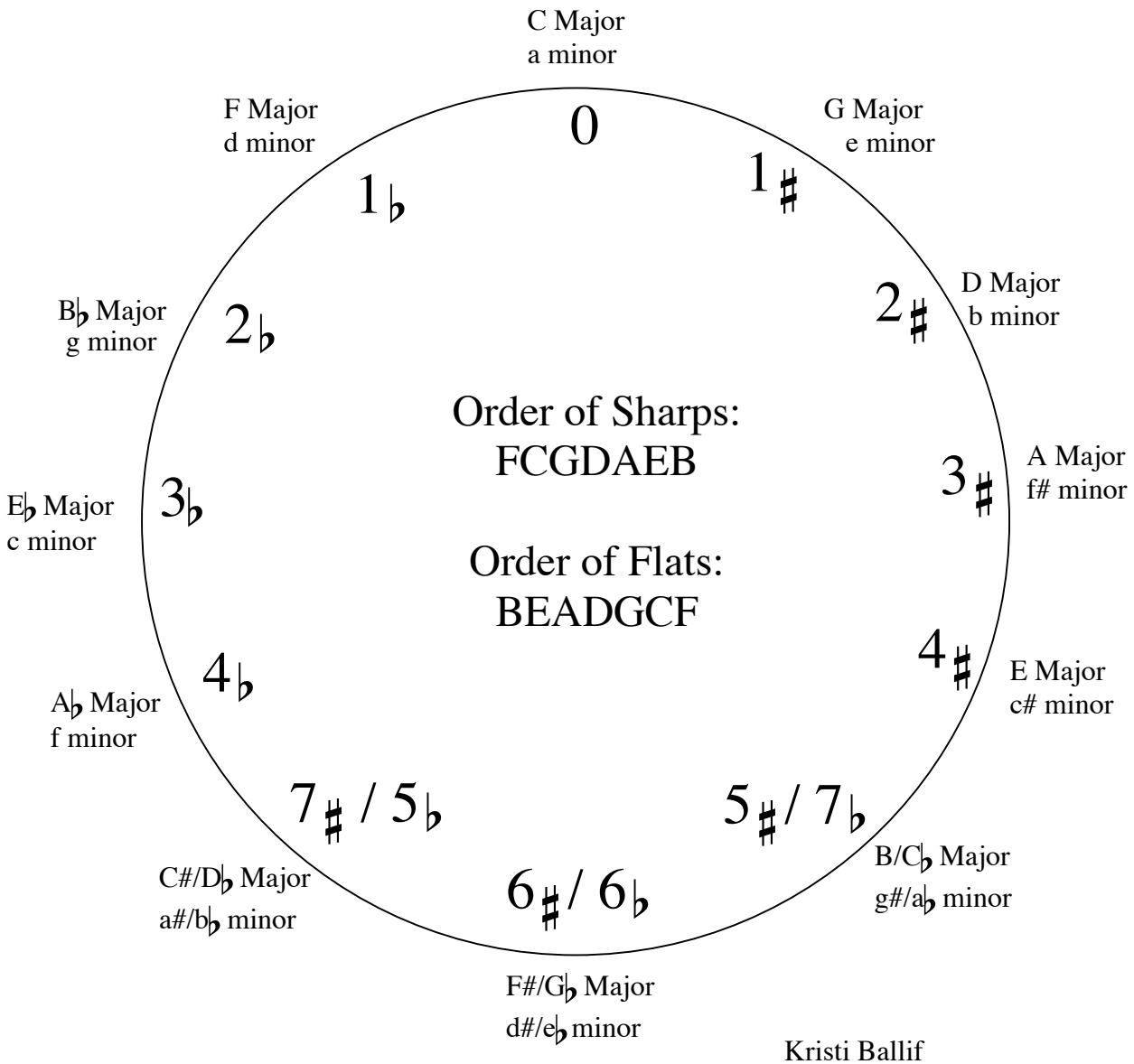
The Circle of Fifths

There is a pattern to the key signatures of the scales. It is called the **Circle of Fifths.**

Look at the following diagram. Start with C Major and find the *fifth* note of the C Major scale (G). Continue around the circle finding the fifth note of each major scale, and you will end up back at C. Notice at the bottom of the circle that two scales are grouped together. These are **enharmonic** scales. (They sound the same but are written differently.)

Now look at the pattern in the number of sharps/flats of each scale. This pattern can help to remember the key signatures of the scales.

For every major scale, there is a **minor scale** with the same key signature. Look at the circle of fifths diagram. Below each major scale, the minor scale with the same key signature is shown.



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