

LESSON TWO: RHYTHMIC STUDIES

An effective strategy for sight reading music is to break it down into simpler, more manageable tasks and mastering those first. Practicing rhythm removed from pitches is an example.

Performance and Tempo

The rhythmic exercises should be performed while conducting. You will find that “tuh” and “tut” (for long and short durations) or similar syllables are suitable for rhythmic singing. The tempo of each exercise should be determined by you. The best tempo is the one that allows you to concentrate on three important characteristics of good performance—a steady beat, accurate articulations, and correct note durations.

Balancing all of those considerations at once suggests that you start with a slow tempo. Don't interpret a slow tempo as a sign of inability—just the opposite—it shows that you are aware of the more important goals in the learning process: the mastery of time, articulation, and duration. As you gain confidence in the performance of each new set of rhythms, tempo may be raised to whatever challenge you desire.

Self-Evaluation of Performance

You may ask yourself, “How do I know if my time is solid, my durations correct, or my articulations accurate?” You have to take responsibility for this and, simply put, self-awareness is the answer, whether you are using this text in a classroom situation or by yourself. Again, this consideration touches on tempo. Go slowly enough so you know *how* you are doing *as* you are doing it—if you are not sure, slow down—it is that simple!

Conducting is very helpful in self-evaluation of your performance. If you notice that your hand is beating beat 4 but you are reading beat 2, there is clearly a problem. Assume that your conducting hand is correct. Try to find your place in the music and keep going. You should also keep going if you make a mistake. Try to keep your eye moving over the music and jump back in when you can. Then go back and slowly practice the troublesome rhythm until you have mastered it. Then go back and sing the whole rhythm.

Metronomes

A metronome is useful in ear training. In the initial stages of learning rhythms or melodies, the metronome, by mirroring the beats of the time signature and the conducting pattern, helps you to keep time. The metronome is also useful as a tool of articulation. For example, in an exercise in 4/4 time that uses eighth-note rhythms, the metronome may be set at the pace of the eighth-note subdivision to help you with articulation.

EIGHTH-NOTE SUBDIVISIONS IN 4/4 TIME

Fig. 2.1.

The figure shows two musical staves. The top staff, labeled 'metronome', consists of four groups of four eighth notes, each group starting on a new beat. The bottom staff, labeled 'sing', is in 4/4 time and shows a melody: the first beat has a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note; the second beat has a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter rest; the third beat has a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter note; the fourth beat has a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note.

In the example above, the metronome should be set to the eighth-note subdivision. While conducting, sing the example slowly, paying careful attention to the relationship between your articulations and the beats of the metronome. Use of the metronome in more difficult rhythms (such as highly syncopated rhythms) helps provide an ensemble context of time and counterpoint, which helps build rhythmic independence. If you are active in music technology, you may want to substitute a drum machine or sequencer/MIDI device combination for the metronome. The potential for creating a greater ensemble context with the use of these types of instruments is great.

A final note on use of the metronome: As useful a tool as it is, the metronome limits its user—it doesn't allow for variation of feel and tempo. Additionally, you must establish a reliable inner clock of your own. This comes only after much practice and musical experience, but it is a skill that must be learned. Thus, you are advised to practice with and without the metronome—with it during the initial stages of working on rhythmic problems or when an ensemble context is desired, and without it as mastery of rhythms is gained and the sense of the internal clock is strengthened.

Duets

In addition to being able to keep time and to perform rhythms accurately, it is essential that you be able to coordinate your rhythmic sense with that of other musicians. The duets allow you to do rhythms in tag-team style. Two individual students start, one on each part. As they proceed through the duet, the class leader cues other students to jump in and take over one part or the other.

If you are studying these duets alone, use a tape recorder. Start your recorder, count off a few beats and then sing one of the parts. Then sing the duet along with the recording. Repeat this procedure for the other part.

Ideally, you should practice duet exercises with another student. If these exercises are used in a classroom situation, students can be divided into two groups, one on each part.

LESSON THREE: SIGHT RECOGNITION (PITCH) STUDIES

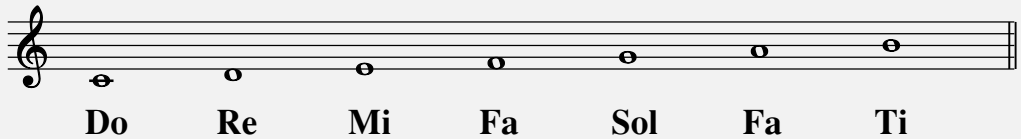
At Berklee, I have found that movable-do solfège, as opposed to fixed-do solfège, is the most successful ear training method for contemporary musicians. In fixed-do solfège, the note C is always Do, D is Re, and so on; in movable-do solfège, the one or tonic of the key is Do. Fixed-Do solfège teaches you to hear intervallic relationships. Moveable-Do solfège teaches you to hear functional relationships related to particular solfège syllables. Hearing functional relationships allows you to understand the general structure of melody when you hear it (whether you know the key or not), allows you to transpose easily to other keys, and helps you to hear harmonies as well. The use of movable-do requires you to learn the relationships of the notes of every key and the corresponding solfège syllables. That seems like a large task, but understanding the melodic functions of each key is very useful for a musician, and the many advantages of movable-do solfège mastery clearly outweigh that difficulty.

The Solfège Syllables

Solfège syllables are based on the diatonic major scale. Here they are in the key of C major:

SOLFÈGE SYLLABLES IN C MAJOR

Fig. 3.1.



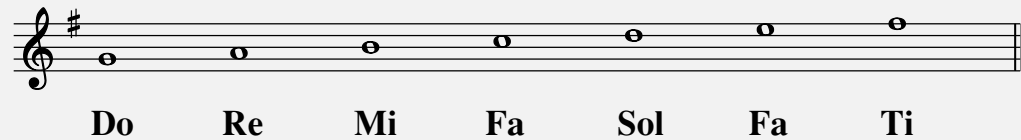
Do Re Mi Fa Sol Fa Ti

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a C-clef (soprano clef) on the first line. The notes are C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4. Below the staff, the syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, Fa, Ti are aligned with the notes. The staff is enclosed in a black box with the title 'SOLFÈGE SYLLABLES IN C MAJOR' at the top.

These syllables are often called solfège functions to reinforce that they are actually expressing relationships and functionality rather than specific pitches. Here are the major solfège syllables in the key of G major:

SOLFÈGE SYLLABLES IN G MAJOR

Fig. 3.2.



Do Re Mi Fa Sol Fa Ti

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a G-clef (soprano clef) on the second line and a sharp sign on the first line. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5. Below the staff, the syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, Fa, Ti are aligned with the notes. The staff is enclosed in a black box with the title 'SOLFÈGE SYLLABLES IN G MAJOR' at the top.

As you can see, the syllables are the same.

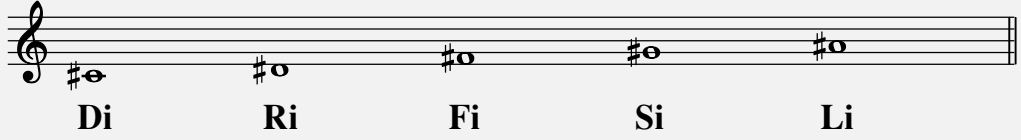
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SIGHT RECOGNITION (PITCH) STUDIES

Chromatic alterations of these notes are indicated with altered vowel endings of the syllables. Sharped notes are indicated with syllables using the vowel alteration “i” (pronounced like a long “e,” as in the “i” in “diva”).

SHARPED NOTES

Fig. 3.3.




Di Ri Fi Si Li

Flatted notes are indicated with syllables ending in the vowel alteration “a” (like the “a” in “father”) or “e” (like the “e” in “grey”).

FLATTED NOTES

Fig. 3.4.



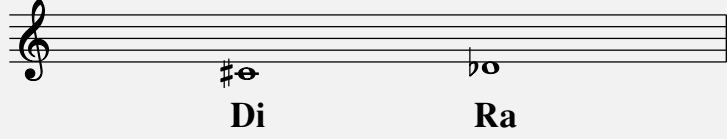
Ra Me Se Le Te

This means that the same pitch will be sung with a different syllable depending on how it functions. The two notes indicated below are enharmonically equivalent but functionally different and, therefore, have different syllables. Di’s functional tendency is to resolve upward. Ra’s tendency is to resolve downward.

ENHARMONIC NOTES

Fig. 3.5.

C Major



Di Ra

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SIGHT RECOGNITION (PITCH) STUDIES

Here, then, is the chromatic set of all solfège syllables, presented in the key of C major:

CHROMATIC SOLFÈGE SYLLABLES

Fig. 3.6.



Do Di Re Ri Mi Fa Fi Sol Si La Li Ti Do Ti Te La Le Sol Se Fa Mi Me Re Ra Do

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef showing a chromatic scale. The notes are: C (Do), C# (Di), D (Re), D# (Ri), E (Mi), E# (Fi), F (Fa), F# (Fi), G (Sol), G# (Si), A (La), A# (Li), B (Ti), B# (Do), C (Do), C# (Ti), D (Te), D# (La), E (Le), E# (Sol), F (Se), F# (Fa), G (Mi), G# (Me), A (Re), A# (Ra), B (Do). The syllables are written below the notes.

With practice, these syllables are easily integrated with your sense of pitch functions, and they are a great aid in the reading and comprehension of music.

Sight Recognition

Sight recognition studies help you associate solfège functions with notes. This technique is taught in isolation from other aspects of ear training; the studies have no rhythm and no time signature—just note heads.

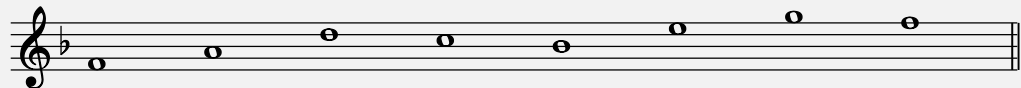
Practice the sight recognition studies in this book by saying the syllable for each note, keeping steady time. (Metronomes are helpful with these exercises.)

Here is an example of a sight recognition study:

SIGHT RECOGNITION STUDY

Fig. 3.7.

F Major



Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (F Major). The notes are: F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F. The notes are represented by simple note heads.

Step One: Find “Do”

In this example, we are in the key of F, so F is Do. Silently scan the staff, quickly orienting yourself to the solfège syllable for each note. The scale is indicated in each exercise.

Step Two: Beat a tempo

Using a metronome or a conducting pattern, choose a tempo fast enough to challenge you but slow enough so you can find the syllables without breaking time.

Step Three: Say each syllable in time

In this example, you would say, “Do Mi La Sol Fa Ti Re Do.” If you miss a beat, slow down the tempo or alternate saying notes and resting on every other beat. If you can do this exercise easily, speed up the tempo. Practice each sight recognition study until you can perform it comfortably at a fast tempo.