CONTENTS

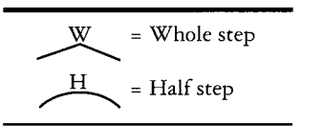
SCALES AND KEYS

SCALES

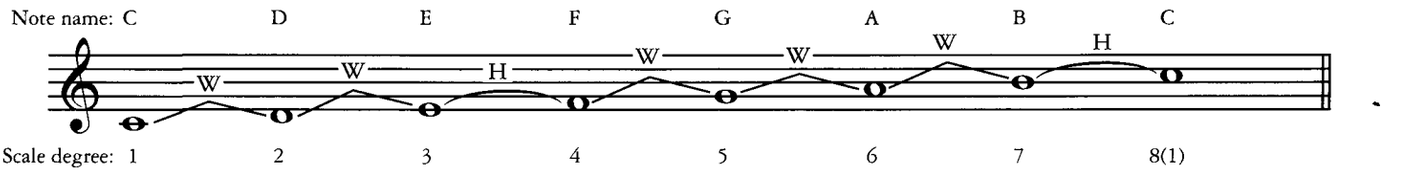
A *scale* is a series of notes in a specific pattern of whole steps and half steps. Each note of a scale is a *scale degree* and is given a number (1–2–3–4, etc.).

THE MAJOR SCALE

The *major scale* is important because it helps us understand many musical concepts. It has seven tones in this order of whole steps (W) and half steps (H): W–W–H–W–W–W–H. Each letter of the musical alphabet is used only once in any major scale, though it may be sharped or flatted. Below is the C Major scale, which has no sharps or flats. Note that the eighth degree (8) is the *octave* of the 1 or *tonic* (first note of the scale). An *octave* is the distance of 6 whole steps between two pitches of the same name.



C MAJOR SCALE

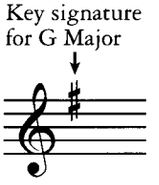


KEYS

Keys get their names from scales. A key is made up of all the notes of the scale it is named from. For example, the notes of the C Major scale make up the key of C Major.

KEY SIGNATURES

The *key signature* is the group of sharps or flats at the beginning of every line of music—just after the clef sign—that tells you what key you are in. It indicates which notes are sharped or flatted throughout the entire piece. For example, below is the key signature for G Major. It indicates F is sharp. So *all* F-notes in *all* octaves will be played as F♯.



To increase your versatility as a songwriter, you should memorize the major scales and key signatures for all the keys. A helpful tool in this effort is the circle of 5ths.

THE CIRCLE OF 5THS

The *circle of 5ths* is like the "secret agent decoder ring" of music theory. A *5th* is the distance between the 1st and 5th degrees of a scale. To make a circle of 5ths, take the keys and arrange them in a circle so that the next note (going clockwise) is the 5th degree of the previous scale. For example, the 5th degree of a C Major scale is G, so the next key in the circle after C is G.

The circle of 5ths makes it easy to learn the key signatures for each key. The sharp keys (clockwise on the circle) add one sharp for each new key. The new sharp is always the 7th scale degree of that key. The flat keys (counterclockwise) add one new flat for each key. That flat is always the 4th scale degree of the key.

Notice that the keys of G♭ and F♯ are in the same position in the circle. They are enharmonic keys—they are played and sound exactly the same.