MUSIC THEORY NOTES

Music theory is the study of how music works—the structures, patterns, and principles that govern musical compositions. It helps musicians understand how sounds fit together, why certain combinations evoke emotions, and how they can create or interpret music effectively.

1. Musical Notes and Pitch

Music is built from notes, which are sounds of varying frequencies. The standard notes in Western music are **A, B, C, D, E, F, and G**, and they repeat across different octaves. The pitch of a note is determined by its frequency: higher frequencies produce higher-pitched sounds, while lower frequencies create deeper tones. Notes can also be **sharp (#)** or **flat (♭)**, altering their pitch slightly.

2. Scales and Keys

A **scale** is a sequence of musical notes arranged in ascending or descending order. The **major scale** (often associated with happy, bright sounds) follows the pattern **W-W-H-W-W-W-H**, where W represents a whole step and H represents a half step. The **minor scale** typically conveys more somber or emotional tones. Each scale belongs to a **key**, which defines the tonal center of a piece of music.

3. Chords and Harmony

A **chord** is a group of notes played together. The most basic chord is a **triad**, consisting of three notes. Common chord types include:

- **Major chords** (e.g., C Major = C-E-G) – Bright, happy sound.
- **Minor chords** (e.g., A Minor = A-C-E) – Sad, emotional sound.
- **Diminished chords** (e.g., B Diminished = B-D-F) – Tense, unresolved feeling.
- **Augmented chords** (e.g., C Augmented = C-E-G#) – Unstable, mysterious mood.

Harmony refers to how different chords and notes interact when played together. It can create pleasing or dissonant sounds depending on the combination of intervals.

4. Rhythm and Time Signatures

Rhythm is the arrangement of sounds over time, defining the pacing of a piece. It is measured in beats, and beats are grouped into measures. A **time signature** tells musicians how beats are organized. Examples:

- **4/4 time** (common time) – Four beats per measure, widely used in pop and classical music.
- **3/4 time** (waltz time) – Three beats per measure, often found in dances.

- **6/8 time** – Gives a swinging feel, common in folk and jazz music.

Musicians use notation like quarter notes (♩), half notes (□ □), and eighth notes (♪) to define the duration of each note.

5. Musical Intervals and Melodies

An **interval** is the distance between two notes. The most common intervals include:

- **Perfect fifth (C to G)** – Stable, strong sound.
- **Major third (C to E)** – Bright and cheerful.
- **Minor third (C to E♭)** – Melancholic and expressive.

Melody is a sequence of notes played in succession to form a musical phrase. Melodies are shaped by their rhythm, contour, and harmonic relationship with accompanying chords.

6. Music Notation and Reading Sheet Music

Music is written using symbols on a **staff**, which consists of five horizontal lines. Notes are placed on this staff with symbols indicating pitch and duration.

- **Treble Clef (□)** – Used for higher-pitched instruments like violin, flute, and piano's right hand.
- **Bass Clef (□)** – Used for lower-pitched instruments like cello, tuba, and piano's left hand.

Other musical symbols include:

- **Dynamics** (e.g., **p** for soft, **f** for loud) – Indicate volume levels.
- **Accidentals** (♯, ♭, ♮) – Modify a note's pitch.
- **Repeat signs (□ □)** – Indicate that a section should be played again.

7. Compositional Techniques and Musical Forms

Music follows structured forms, such as:

- **Binary Form (AB)** – Two contrasting sections.
- **Ternary Form (ABA)** – First and third sections are similar, with a contrasting middle.
- **Sonata Form** – Common in classical music, featuring exposition, development, and recapitulation.
- **Verse-Chorus Form** – Used in popular music, alternating between verses and a repeating chorus.

Musicians use compositional techniques like **counterpoint**, where multiple melodies weave together, and **modulation**, which shifts the key for dynamic effect.