

## HARMONY PRELIMINARIES

### 2) SCALES

A knowledge of scales and intervals is required as a basis for learning harmony.

What is a scale? It is a sequence consisting of all the notes of a key in ascending or descending order. What we need to remember is that any given scale must always contain seven different notes, comprising all the letters ABCDEFG, once and once only. For example, you can't say the scale of G is GABCDEG $\flat$ G. Enharmonics (alternative spellings of a note) can cause a lot of trouble unless you are on your guard.

Major scales are easy. Or are they? Yes, if you remember the above caution. Scale of C $\flat$  major is:

C $\flat$  D $\flat$  E $\flat$  F $\flat$  G $\flat$  A $\flat$  B $\flat$  C $\flat$  NOT: C $\flat$  D $\flat$  E $\flat$  E F $\sharp$  A $\flat$  B $\flat$  C $\flat$ . That has two forms of E and no G.

Minor scales give the most problems, because there are three forms of the scale:

- 1) Harmonic minor** (so called because it is the basis of harmonic structures). In this we sharpen the 7<sup>th</sup> degree with an accidental. The key signature never takes care of this 7<sup>th</sup> note: we have to sharpen it ourselves. The 7<sup>th</sup> degree is called the Leading Note because it tends to go up a semitone to the tonic. Left alone without our added accidental, it would be a whole tone from the tonic and would not tend to lead up. Examples of the necessarily-altered 7<sup>th</sup> degrees in various keys:

In A minor (open key) G $\sharp$

In F $\sharp$  minor (three sharps) E $\sharp$  (NOT F!!!)

In G $\sharp$  minor (five sharps) F $\times$  (NOT G!!!)

In C minor (three flats) B natural.

In fact, in all minor keys with more than two flats, the leading note needs a natural sign to be added in the actual music.

(The presence of this sharpened leading note, which has to be continually fixed every time it arises in a piece, is a good clue as to whether the piece is major or minor.)

- 2) Melodic minor, ascending.** In this we sharpen both the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> notes of the scale. Examples should be unnecessary.
- 3) Melodic minor, descending.** In this, nothing is sharpened, all notes conforming to the key signature. This clearly bears a resemblance to the relative major scale, apart from the start and end notes.

### Summary

A scale is the notes of a key in ascending or descending order, plus the curious fact that in the minor key there are three forms of the key (???) Not really: the *harmonic* minor is the true form of the minor key, the other two are special liberties we are allowed to take, under certain conditions which will be explained later in the harmony course. Always use the harmonic minor unless you are sure of what you are doing.

Note that if you use notes which are outside the scale of the key you are in, these foreign notes are classed as either 1) chromatic or 2) modulating, depending on their context. So the sharpened 6<sup>th</sup> of the

rising melodic minor, and the flattened 7<sup>th</sup> of the descending melodic minor, are really chromatic notes. What I am really saying for now is, don't introduce such foreign notes until you learn how.

### **Names of the degrees of the scale**

We often identify each degree of the scale by its special name, thus:

1 <sup>st</sup> degree is called the Tonic	(= keynote)
2 <sup>nd</sup> .....Supertonic	the one above the Tonic
3 <sup>rd</sup> .....Mediant	Midway between Tonic and Dominant
4 <sup>th</sup> .....Subdominant	Same distance below Tonic as Dominant is above it.
5 <sup>th</sup> .....Dominant	Because of its importance.
6 <sup>th</sup> .....Submediant	Midway (downwards) between Tonic and Subdominant.
7 <sup>th</sup> .....Leading note	Because it wants to lead up to the Tonic.

These names apply in both major and minor keys. Examples:

C is the Tonic of C major, or the Supertonic of Bb major, or the Mediant of A minor.

G# is the Mediant of E major or the Dominant of C# major/minor, or the Leading note of A minor.