

Musical Terms 10-10-21

Staff: Five lines (with four spaces) that tell us what the pitches are. The music is usually marked on the left with the letters S, A, T, or B indicating which lines are sung by Sopranos, Altos, Tenors and Basses.

Clef: The clef goes at the left end of each staff telling us whether we are singing high pitches or low pitches.

Treble (G) Clef: Used by Sopranos and Altos (and occasionally Tenors and basses who would sing the pitches an octave lower)

Tenor Clef: Looks like a Treble Clef but has the number "8" under it indicating it is an octave lower.

Bass (F) Clef: Used by Basses and Tenors.

System: When two or more staves are connected on the left by a heavy vertical line, they become a System. This would include the piano part if there is one.

Barline: A vertical line that separates measures. This includes barlines through entire systems.

Measure (ms.): Measures are numbered at the beginning of each system so they are easy to find.

Repeat Sign: When a colon (two dots) appear before a double barline, it is a repeat sign telling us to return either to the start or to the last forward repeat sign (one with the colon AFTER a double barline).

Sharp: The # symbol raises the pitch a half-step.

Flat: The flat symbol lowers a pitch by a half-step. The black keys on the piano keyboard are all sharps and flats.

Key Signature: A sequence of flats or sharps on the left side of the staff that tell us which pitches are flattened or sharpened. If there is an F# in the key signature, then all Fs are sharpened.

Time Signature: The top number tells us how many beats are in the measure so if the top number is 4, then there are 4 beats in the measure. The bottom number tells us what unit gets the beat so if the bottom number is 4, then the quarter note gets the beat. So if the time signature is 6/8, then there are six beats in the measure and the eighth note gets the beat. This gets confusing because a 6/8 measure can be divided into three beats of two or two beats of three, but it always would add up to six. If the time signature looks like a large C, then it means, "Common Time" which is 4/4, The most common time signature.

Tempo & Dynamic Markings: Markings that tell us how fast or slow (tempo) or how loud and soft (dynamics).

Ledger Lines: When a pitch is written above or below a staff, a short horizontal ledger line is used.

Melodic Interval: The distance between a pitch and the pitch heard before or after it. An "A" pitch going to a "C" pitch would be an interval of a third. Count the A as 1 and count up to C (1, 2, 3). Later on you can learn about the differences between major and minor intervals.

Harmonic Interval: In a chord like an A minor chord you would have three vertical pitches that are all heard at the same time. Because it is an A minor chord, the "root" of the chord would be an A. The next pitch would be a C (third higher). Then a third above that (the E).

Pencil: Tool used to mark your score so mistakes are never repeated (it works!)