

Basic Seven-Shape Note Method (Aiken Shapes)

Donnie Bryson, January 2005

Introduction

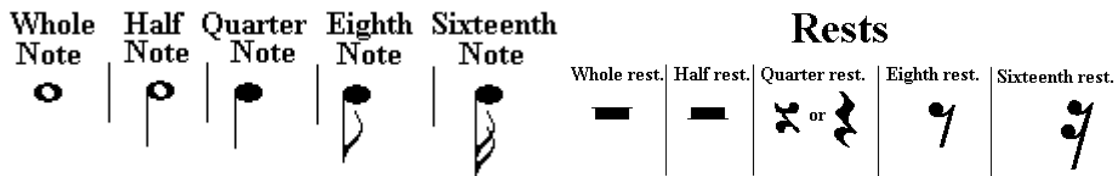
This handout does not seek to replace more comprehensive texts like Showalter or Daily. Also, it is certainly not designed to compete with complete undergraduate sight singing courses like Berkowitz *A New Approach to Sight Singing*. This handout is specifically designed to supplement the Church Hymnal in our 12 one-hour sessions. Our goal is to teach you, in the most direct manner possible, the functional essentials of reading the most common shape note methodology in the South (seven note shape-notes using the Aiken shapes). This is the style of shape-notes used in the maroon Church Hymnals still in use in many churches in the Chattanooga area. While there were other seven note shape-notes used in the South, the Aiken method, to the best of my knowledge, is the only seven note shape-note method actively used around Chattanooga.

The discussion of the history of solfeggio and the development of various shape-note methods is fascinating; however, we do not have the time to spend on history. All we will do now is define exactly which system we are using within the context of the other system used around Chattanooga. There are two main types of shape-notes used around Chattanooga: four note and seven note. Four note shape-note (for examples, see the *Sacred Harp*) use the following syllables: fa (triangle) – sol (circle) – la (square) – mi (diamond). A full seven-note major scale is executed by repeating syllables and shapes: fa sol la fa sol la mi fa.

Seven note shape-note singing uses all seven Italian syllables / shapes: do (pyramid), re (half moon / bucket), mi (diamond), fa (pointed triangle), sol (circle), la (square), ti (pie slice). The syllable system we will be using is called the movable-do system for reasons that will be obvious later.

Measures, notes, and rests

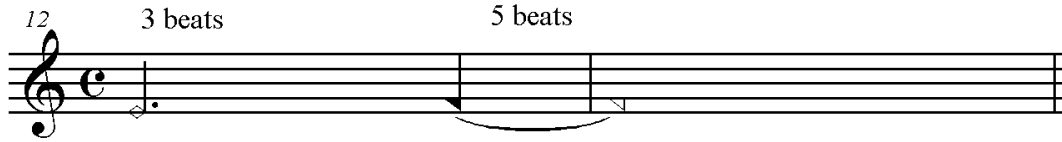
The various combinations of note and rest give us rhythm. There are basically five types of notes and rests that we commonly use: whole, half, quarter, eighth, and sixteenth.



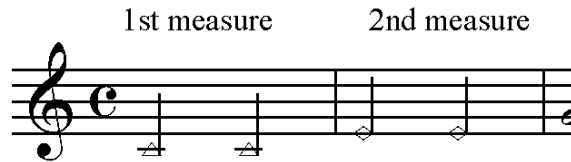
Each successive type is twice as long as the next one. Two half notes are as long as one whole note. Two quarter notes are as long as one half note. Two eighth notes are as long as one quarter. Two sixteenth notes are as long as one eighth note.

A tie, the arch symbol below, combines two notes of the same pitch. The quarter note tied to the whole note is increased to five beats (1 beat + 4 beats). The same symbol can indicate, in vocal music, that more than one note goes with the same syllable. When the

arch connects different pitches, it is called a slur. A dot increases a note a 1/2. Thus, the dotted half note, which would normally get two beats, is increased to three.



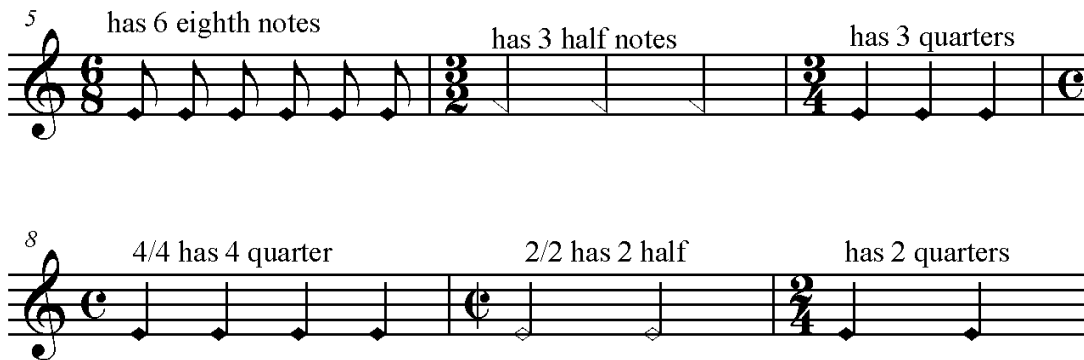
Music is divided up into even units of time by measures. A measure is indicated by the space between the vertical bars. Measures are not just visual on the printed music, but can be heard. Think of a waltz 1-2-3 or a march 1-2.



The actual length of time contained in measures, notes, and rests is counted by beats.

Time Signatures

Time signatures define the amount and type of notes each measure contains. The top number indicates the number of notes and the bottom number indicates what type of note. There are two special time signatures, common time (4/4) and cut-time (2/2), which are indicate as C and C with slash.



There are two types of time signatures: simple and compound. Simple time signatures have beats that divide into two notes and Compound time signatures have beats that divide into three notes.

- Simple duple – 2/4, 2/2, 2/8 – counted as 1 2 (accent on first beat). *One at Last* page 84 is in 2/4.
- Simple triple – 3/4, 3/2, 3/8 – counted as 1 2 3 (accent on the first beat). *Mansions in Heaven* page 160 is in 3/8, *I know He heard my Prayer* page 16 is in 3/4, *Rock of Ages* page 83 is in 3/2.

- Simple quadruple – 4/4, 4/2, 4/8 – counted as **1 2 3 4** (heavy accent on 1 and light accent on 3). *The Meeting in the Air* page 10 is in 4/4.
- Compound duple – 6/8, 6/4, 6/2, 6/16 – counted as **1 2** (each beat = dotted quarter in 6/8 and each beat = dotted half in 6/4). 6/2 and 6/16 are almost never used. *Praise Him! Praise Him!* Page 151 is in 6/8, *Make me a Blessing* page 152 is in 6/4.
- Compound triple – 9/8, 9/4, 9/2, 9/16 – counted as **1 2 3** (each beat = dotted quarter in 9/8 and each beat = dotted half in 9/4). 9/2 and 9/16 are almost never used. *Ready* page 386 is in 9/8.
- Compound quadruple – 12/8, 12/4, 12/2, 12/16 – counted as **1 2 3 4** (each beat = dotted quarter in 12/8 and each beat = dotted half in 12/4). Again, 12/2 and 12/16 are almost never used. *Be Ready to Go* page 24 is in 12/8.

Chromatic shapes / Chromatic syllables

A sharp (#) raises a note. A flat (b) lowers a note. A natural (♮) removes an existing sharp or flat. A natural raises the note if it removes a flat and lowers a note if it cancels a sharp.

The shapes are the same regardless if the note has been lowered or raised. However, the syllables change if the note has been modified by a sharp, flat, or natural.

do di re ri mi fa fi sol si la li ti do
doe dee ray ree mee fah fee sole see lah lee tee doe

do ti te la le sol se fa mi me re ra do
doe tee tay lah lay sole say fah mee may ray rah doe

The four parts -- Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Virtually all seven shape note hymns will be scored in two staves. The women will sing the top staff (with the G clef) and the men sing the bottom staff (with the F clef).

The top line of music in the women's staff will be the sopranos. The bottom line of music will be the alto.

The top line of music in the men's staff will be the tenor. The bottom line of music will be the bass.

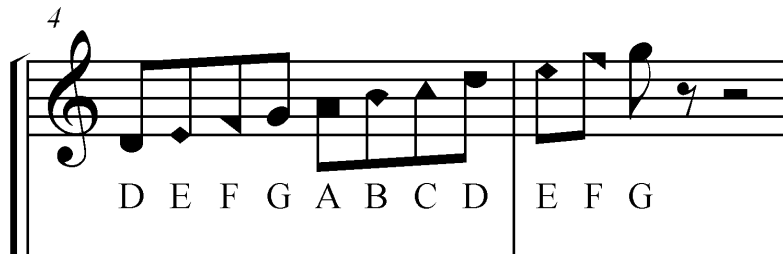
Note letter names

The letter names are very simple. Each line and space has a letter name of the staff. Also, if you can remember the alphabet, you can remember the note order (A, B, C, D, E, F, G). These simply repeat.

You can also remember the G Clef lines with the sentence, (E)very (G)ood (B)oy (D)oes (F)ine. The spaces spell the word FACE.

The F Clef lines can be remembered with the sentence (G)ood (B)oy (D)o (F)ine (A)lways. The spaces can be remembered with the sentence (A)ll (C)ows (E)at (G)ass.

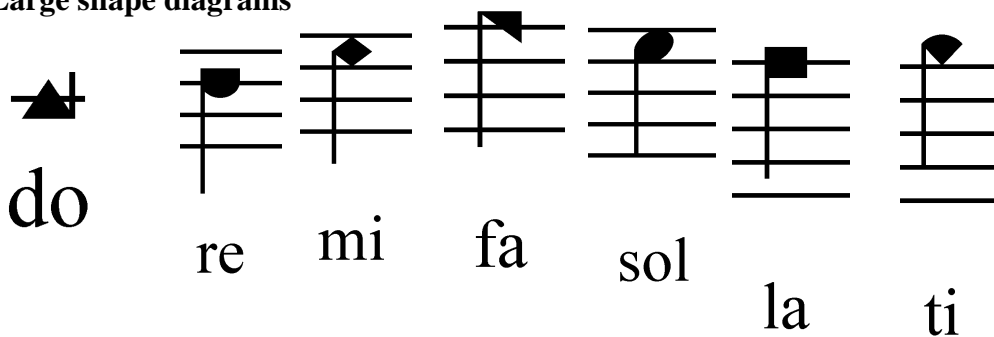
Treble Clef -- The G Clef circles the G line.



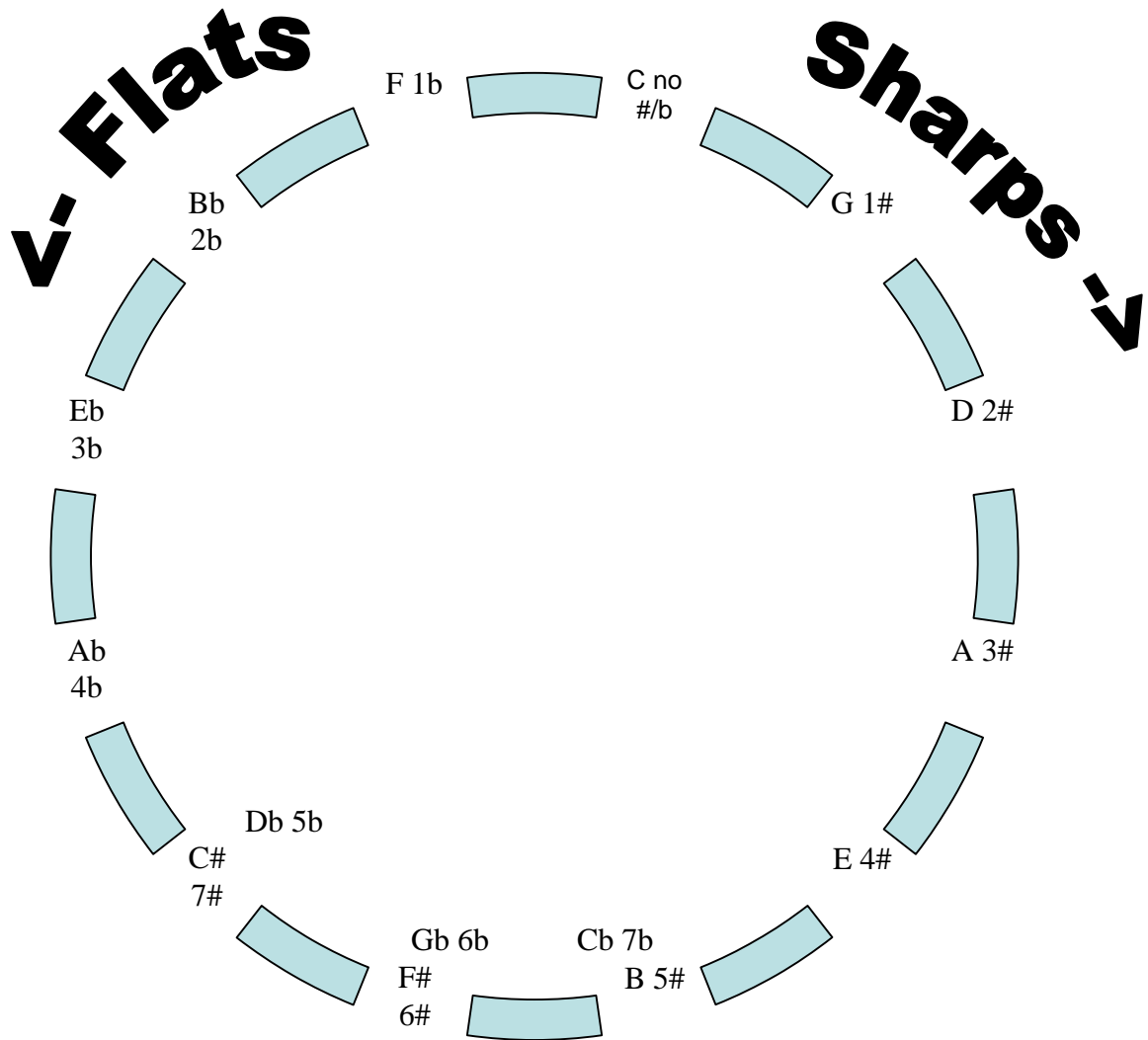
Bass Clef -- The F Clef circles the F line



Large shape diagrams



The Circle of Fifths



Enharmonic Keys: C#=Db, F#=Gb, B=Cb

Major and Relative Minor Scales

Relative minor is built on the 6th degree (la) of the major key

Major: C – Minor: Am	Major: G – Minor: Em	Major: D – Minor: Bm	Major: A – Minor: F#m
Major: E – Minor: C#m	Major: B – Minor: G#m	Major: F# -- Minor: D#m	Major: C# -- Minor: A#m
Major: F – Minor: Dm	Major: Bb – Minor: Gm	Major: Eb – Minor: Cm	Major: Ab – Minor: Fm
Major: Db – Minor: Bbm	Major: Gb – Minor: Ebm	Major: Cb – Minor: Abm	