

Music Theory – Level 1

Introduction

The key to learning basic music theory is to learn and use the same systems that all us musicians use.

Music is a language. It has parts that make up the whole, and those parts are made of even smaller parts. This sentence is made of words, and these words are made of letters. To learn how to make the sentence as a whole, you have to learn the letters of the alphabet, and learn how to put them together into words. Then you have to learn certain words, and learn how to put them together into sentences.

Music works the same way. You first learn the alphabet, then put those pieces together to make musical phrases, then put those together to make a song.

What Every Musician Needs to Know

Learning basic music theory is absolutely necessary to communicate with other musicians. Whether we are writing a song together, singing/playing at a concert, or just jamming at the house, we have to know how to talk about what it is we're playing.

Luckily, this stuff is really easy to learn! Here are some of the essentials of music theory that we will need to know to get started.

Alphabet

The music alphabet is like the English alphabet. It is a system of letters that are assigned to represent sounds in music that we call notes. This is the simplest part to learn, and everything else will be based on this, so we'll start here!

Scales

Scales are just a linear arrangement of notes. If notes are actual pitches, then scales are those pitches in a certain order. (ex. A B C D E F G) Because scales or pieces of scales are used in just about every song ever written, they are a huge piece of basic music theory.

Intervals

An Interval is the distance from one note to another. Whether it's B to C (a Second) or G# to Eb (a Sixth), every interval has its own name. This stuff is really useful in figuring out harmonies.

Chords

Chords are certain members of a scale combined into one sound. (For instance "C + E + G = CMaj" or "D + F + A = DMin".) Chords give structure, organization, and shape to a song. They make the song "sound" a certain way. Regardless of whether you are playing/singing alone or with others, you NEED to know this. Even as a wind-instrument player, I use chords all the time to talk and think about the songs.

Key Signatures

Key signatures tell us the tonality or "key" of a song. It also tells us which notes the song will be using. The more you work with these, the more familiar you get with the range and scale of particular keys. Unless you want all of your songs to sound the same, you will want to study these.

And much more from the Musical Concepts of Rhythm, Melody, Harmony, Form, Timbre/Texture, and Expression