

## Unit 1. Welcome to the study of Harmony!

In this course we will learn how to compose simple 4-part vocal music. That means music for four different voice parts.

Imagine a choir in a church. The choir is made up of men and women. Some of the women can sing high notes quite easily. They are called sopranos. Others sing low notes well. They are called altos. Likewise, among the men, some are good at singing higher notes. They are called tenors. The basses are the guys who can sing really low.

When we write music for these four voice types, we arrange it on a system of two staves. The music that is sung by the sopranos and altos is written on the top staff, and the men's music is on the bottom staff. To avoid confusion, the stems on the soprano and tenor notes always go up, and the stems on the alto and bass notes always go down. That way, everyone knows which note they should sing and can follow their line.

Here's an example of music written for four voices. This is the beginning of a hymn called *All through the Night*.

fig. 1.1

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass

You may be wondering why we begin studying harmony using music for singing. This is because vocal music tends, in general, to be a bit simpler than instrumental music. This makes it a good place to start for first time harmony students.

One big difference between vocal music and instrumental music is that vocal music tends to move by step (a step is a 2nd), as in a scale. In instrumental music, it is easier to leap around. A leap is any melodic interval of a 3rd or more.

Music that moves by step is said to be *conjunct*. Music that moves by leap is called *disjunct*.

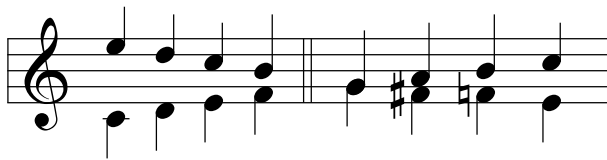
## Types of voice movement

There are some other terms and concepts with which you should be familiar before we begin:

### 1. Contrary motion:

When two voices are moving in opposite directions, we say that they are moving in *contrary motion*.

fig. 1.2



On the left are two examples of contrary motion.

### 2. Similar motion:

When 2 parts are going in the same direction, we say that they are going in *similar motion*.

fig. 1.3

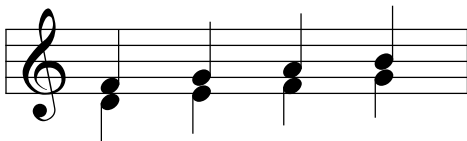


An example of similar motion

### 3. Parallel motion:

When 2 parts move in similar motion and stay exactly the same distance apart, we say that they are moving in *parallel motion*.

fig. 1.4

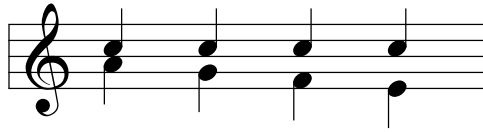


An example of parallel motion

#### 4. Oblique motion:

When one voice moves, and another stays on the same note, this is called 'oblique motion'.

fig. 1.5



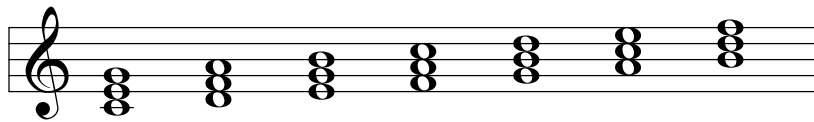
An example of oblique motion

### Triads

You will remember triads from your rudiments studies. They are formed by adding a 3rd and a 5th to each note of a major or minor scale.

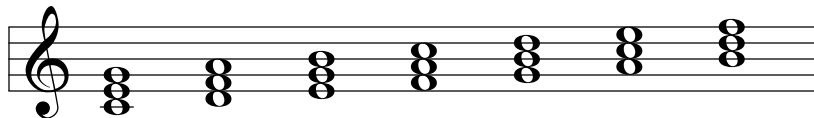
Here are the 7 triads in C major.

fig. 1.6



In classical music, we label the seven triads using roman numerals. The tonic triad is referred to as 'I', the supertonic as 'ii', and so on:

fig. 1.7



C: I    ii    iii    IV    V    vi    vii

You will notice that some of these triad symbols are written in capital numerals, and others in small numerals. The rule is that triads containing a major 3rd are written in capital numerals, and those triads with minor thirds are written in small numerals.

In major keys, the I, IV, and V triads have major 3rds and perfect 5ths, and are therefore major triads, while ii, iii and vi have minor thirds and perfect 5ths, and are minor triads.

The vii triad is the lone diminished triad in the set. It has a minor 3rd and a diminished 5th.

## Summary

1. In this course we will be studying simple vocal music.
2. Simple vocal music is written for four voice types: soprano, alto, tenor and bass.
3. Vocal music tends to have fewer leaps and more steps than instrumental music.
4. Music that leaps is called *disjunct*. Music that steps is called *conjunct*.
5. The soprano and alto parts are written in the treble clef. The bass and tenor parts are written in the bass clef.
6. Soprano and tenor stems always go up. Bass and alto stems always go down.
7. Two voices may move in contrary, similar, parallel, or oblique motion.
8. There are seven triads: I, IV, and V are major triads, ii, iii, and vi are minor triads, and vii is a diminished triad.
9. Triads with major 3rds are written in capital numerals. Ones with minor 3rds are written in small numerals.