

THE CIRCLE OF FIFTHS

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Previously on the musical highway we produced all of the major scales in the sharp (#) keys and, in the last installment, we finished up all of the flat (b) keys. So, here is the complete set of major scales in all the keys:

Key	#/b	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1
C#	7#	C#	D#	E#	F#	G#	A#	B#	C#
F#	6#	F#	G#	A#	B	C#	D#	E#	F#
B	5#	B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B
E	4#	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
A	3#	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
D	2#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
G	1#	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
C	0	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
F	1b	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F
Bb	2b	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	Ab	Bb
Eb	3b	Eb	F	G	Ab	Bb	C	D	Eb
Ab	4b	Ab	Bb	C	Db	Eb	F	G	Ab
Db	5b	Db	Eb	F	Gb	Ab	Bb	C	Db
Gb	6b	Gb	Ab	Bb	Cb	Db	Eb	F	Gb
Cb	7b	Cb	Db	Eb	Fb	Gb	Ab	Bb	Cb

In the last issue, we learned a logical way to get from one scale to the next in a specific order. Move a **fifth up** to get to the next **sharp** key, a **fifth down** to get to the next **flat** key. Beginning with the key of C (no sharps, no flats) and, starting with the note C as "1", we counted **up 5** to arrive at the next key, G, the key of 1 sharp. From the G major scale we counted G as 1 and went up 5 to D, the key of 2 sharps

and so on up to the key of C#, the key of 7 sharps. For flat keys, we counted 5 in the opposite direction to get to the next one and continued to Cb with 7 flats.

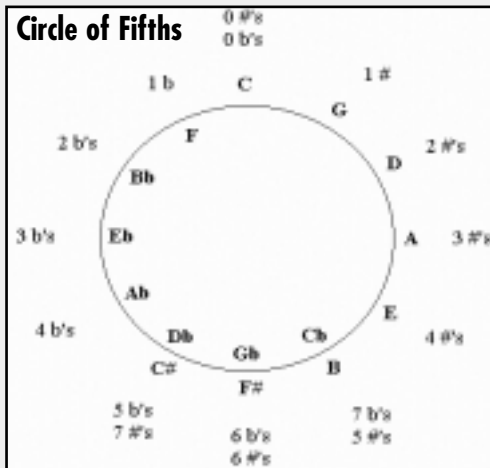
This progression of keys by fifths is a difficult concept for some people to visualize, but it is so important, it has been encapsulated into a construct known as the **Circle of Fifths**. It is typically pictured as a circle with the sharp and flat progressions written in opposite directions around the circle as shown. Notice that moving clockwise from the top takes you through the sharp keys and moving counter-clockwise takes you through the flat keys. As mentioned last time, a "fifth down" lands you on the same letter name as a "fourth up." So the **Circle of Fifths** is also a Circle of Fourths.

By using a circle instead of a line to visualize the progression of fifths it is

obvious that the **Circle of Fifths** overlaps itself. The three overlapping keys at the bottom of the circle are known as **enharmonic** keys (sounds the same, but has a different name). C# and Db, for example, are named and notated differently but sound exactly the same.

If you've spent time around any serious musicians you've probably heard of the **Circle of Fifths** and wondered what it was. Just as other fields of study have tools to help you remember pertinent details and visualize complex concepts;

the **Circle of Fifths** is basically a tool that synthesizes lots of information in a concise, visual way. Actually, it turns out that the Circle of Fifths is even more interesting and useful than it appears. As we progress farther along the musical highway we will keep revisiting the Circle of Fifths and show how to use it in many different musical applications.



Here's a little extra information: I found a host of interesting things while researching the **Circle of Fifths** on the web. Here are the three most unusual I encountered:

- **Circle of Fifths Watch** (I bought one and love it)
http://www.chromaticwatch.com/Details/Circle_of_Fifths/circle_of_fifths.html
- **The Harp Circle-Of-Fifths** (Play in any key on any harmonica... like I'm sure.)
<http://www.angelfire.com/tx/myquill/CircleOfFifths.html>
- **The Unit Circle of Fifths** (Why?)
<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~gavenoni/fifths.html>

When I first discovered the **Circle of Fifths** I was immediately struck by its beauty and simplicity. It was one of those great moments when I felt like I had stumbled on a universal secret. So keep looking for musical truths and be sure to stay tuned...

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