



BY ROGER GOODMAN

IT IS WRITTEN

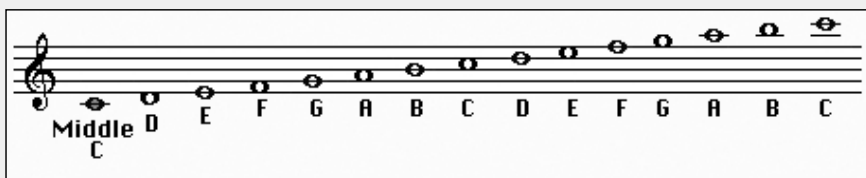
(SO DO I REALLY HAVE TO BE ABLE TO READ IT?)

My wife has a favorite story about a passerby who stops to listen to an old man playing a tune on his fiddle. When the old man finishes the tune the passerby says, "So, you must know how to read music?" The old guy thinks for a moment and then says, "Well, not enough to hurt my playin'."

Many people want to play a musical instrument, only to be put off by the idea of first having to learn to read music. My advice: don't let anything like that stop you. Learn any way that you can and still stay motivated. You can always learn to read music later, but in the meantime you will still be learning your instrument. I play old-time fiddle, and most of the people with whom I play, even some of the very best players, don't know how to read a note of music.

I'm not saying that you should not learn to read music. History and music were both oral traditions long before they were written down. But as the body of knowledge grew beyond the ability and scope of the oral tradition it became necessary to develop tools to save that knowledge from being lost. Just as we have the ability to speak even if we do not know how to read, I doubt that many of us would consider the ability to read the printed word as unimportant. So it is with music. Knowing how to read music will afford you access to a much larger body of work. When I think that a musician in the 18th Century put pen to paper and now, two centuries later, I can look at that paper and the same melody comes back to life — what could be more magical than that? So let's see how this magic works.

Modern music is written on a five-line staff. As the notes are placed higher up on the staff they represent successively higher pitches. Each line and each space has an associated note name as shown:



There are some common memory tricks used to retain this information. The note names that fall on the lines are EGBDF and are usually remembered with the sentence, "Every Good Boy Does Fine." The notes occupying the spaces on the staff spell the easily remembered word, "FACE."



In a past lesson we developed the major scales in all the keys. Here's how that information is important to this lesson. You probably remember that the key of C has no sharps or flats. The key of G has 1 sharp (F#); D has 2 sharps (F#, C#); A has 3 sharps (F#, C#, G#); E has 4 sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and so on. Notice that as you progress to each successive scale, you just add another sharped note. You don't have to start over each time a sharp is added. Simply keep the same list and add the next note to be sharped. The same, of course, is true for the flat keys.

When the musical staff for a particular key is set up, the sharp (#) or flat (b) symbols are actually placed on the corresponding lines or spaces to show which notes are to be altered for that key. So the key of G has 1 sharp placed on the top line of the staff to denote F#. The key of D, with 2 sharps, keeps the F# and adds C# on the middle space of the staff. This set of sharps or flats at the beginning of the staff is called the key signature. The sharp and flat symbols that make up any of the key signatures always appear in the same order as they were added to create each successive key. You'll see this chart again when we cover the relative minor keys shown here in a future issue.



When you look at a key signature on a sheet of music, you don't have to figure out which notes are to be sharped or flatted and then try to remember all of that while you play. Instead, you need only count the number of sharps or flats, and that tells you what scale to use. Now you think in that key's scale and the sharps or flats take care of themselves. Once again there is an underlying simplicity, logic and beauty to be discovered. I think you will find this more and more if you just stay tuned.

CORRECTION

Due to a print-time error part of this chart was missing from last month's *Keys to the Highway - Adventures in Music Theory* article. The entire chart did appear correctly in the on-line edition at www.folkworks.org.

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

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