

THE TRITONE PARADOX & OTHER MYSTERIES OF THE MUSICAL INTERVAL

In the last article (see www.folkWorks.org) we discussed Major, Minor, Perfect and Diminished intervals. Now we will add two more types—the Augmented and Tritone. Remember that an interval is the space between two notes.

Wondering why you would ever want to know about such things? Well, besides being interesting (really!) and making for good dinner conversation, knowing something about intervals helps with sight singing, building chords and, believe it or not, understanding that specific intervals actually induce specific emotions. That's useful for composing or listening. So, here goes.

Augmented and tritone intervals are less commonly used than those previously discussed but important nonetheless. Recall that when you flat a perfect interval, you get a diminished interval; not too surprisingly, when you sharp a perfect interval you get an augmented interval. For example, if you start with a fifth (say C-G) which is a perfect interval, and sharp the fifth (C-G#), that interval is then referred to as an augmented fifth.

The tritone is more of an odd bird in the world of intervals. It's essentially the same interval as an augmented fourth or a diminished fifth. It's probably called a tritone because it spans three whole-steps or whole-tones. The tritone is the halfway point in the scale, an equal distance from the root note (1) and the octave (8). You won't hear the tritone interval mentioned very often, and it is usually considered to be rather dissonant. If it is used at all, it's done mostly to create tension before resolving to a more pleasing interval.

For the musically curious, there's something called the "tritone paradox" related to the psychology of musical perception. If you are intrigued, you can investigate this at: psy.ucsd.edu/~ddeutsch/psychology/deutsch_research6.html. A spin on the necessity of the tritone despite its dissonance can be read at www.mail-archive.com/basics@topica.com/msg00409.html.

Musical perception also relates to the mood that music can convey to the listener. Certain intervals promote particular emotional feelings as summarized below. This is especially useful knowledge if you are writing music and want to get just the right feeling for your composition.

major	- consonant and bright
minor	- consonant and sad
augmented	- dissonant and harsh (uneasy)
diminished	- dissonant and mysterious
tritone	- dissonant and vague (restless)



BY ROGER GOODMAN

Besides understanding the emotional impact of various intervals, it is also important to know what they sound like and how to produce them. Vocalists, for instance, must be able to "hear" the sound of an interval just by viewing it on the printed page. This can be a daunting task, especially for beginners. Here's a trick used by sight singing students to help them remember various intervals: think of songs that begin with each interval and, by singing the first two notes of each melody, you can recall the sound of the interval. You really need to try this for yourself to get the feel of how it works.

INTERVAL CHEAT SHEET

(Shamelessly lifted (in part) from <http://webpages.charter.net/kavol/Lessons/>)
M = Major; m = Minor; P = Perfect; TT = Tri Tone; 8 = Octave

INTERVALS UP	INTERVALS DOWN
m2 Jaws Stormy Weather (Don't know why...)	m2 Joy to the World Fur Elise Hernando's Hideaway
M2 Fre-re Jacques They Say, Ruby... Si-i-lent Night She'll be Comin' Oh Susanna (Oh I come from Ala.)	M2 Mar-y had a little lamb Three Blind Mice
m3 To dream the impossible dream... Greensleeves (Alas my love)	m3 When Irish eyes are smiling O-o say can you see? This old man You're a grand old flag When hap-py little bluebirds fly...
M3 Kum Ba Yah From the halls of montezuma... Oh when the Saints go marchin' in Marines Hymn	M3 Beethoven's 5th Swing low, sweet chariot Sum-mer time...and the livin' is easy
P4 Here comes the bride Taps	P4 Born free A mighty for-tress is our God Baseball chant
TT Ma-ri-a The Simpsons	TT English Police Siren
P5 Do you hear what I hear? Twinkle, twinkle, little star Star Wars Theme	P5 O, thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion Mozart Minuet in G Erie Canal (I had a mule & her name...)
m6 Theme from The Entertainer	m6 Nobody knows the trouble I've seen Night time (Music of the Night)
M6 N B C My Bonnie lies over the ocean Shortnin' bread	M6 * m7 * M7 *
m7 Somewhere (There's a place for us)	P8 There's No Business Like Show Business
M7 Superman [do-do-do ti do] Bali high	
P8 Some-where over the rainbow	

* If you find tunes that exemplify these intervals, please send them to me, roger-goodman@earthlink.net. Thanks.

There's actually more about intervals, but this is probably more than you ever wanted to know about them. You don't need to use or even remember everything you read in this column but, in case you get interested later, your familiarity with these concepts will enhance your ability to apply them. So keep learning, keep playing and, of course, stay tuned.

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