The Composer's Materials

Module 1 of *Music: Under the Hood*

John Hooker
Carnegie Mellon University

Osher Course
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Outline

- Basic elements of music
- Musical notation
- Harmonic partials
- Intervals and chords
- Keys
- Cadences
- Temperament
- Just tuning

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Basic Elements of Music

- **Rhythm**
  - Everyone loves music with a "beat"
    - Some composers emphasize rhythm
    - Stravinsky, jazz composers, pop stars
  - Rhythm is ever-present
    - Heartbeat, walking
    - Same tempos reflected in music!
  - Rhythm and dance are universal
    - Dance seems to be genetic in humans

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Basic Elements of Music

- **Melody**
  - Based in song
    - Some composers emphasize melody
    - Chopin, Schubert, Broadway composers
  - Song is basic to human expression
    - May be original form of communication
    - Later replaced by language

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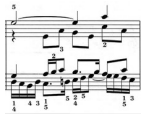
Western Music

- **Harmony**
  - A fundamental characteristic of music
    - Even a single tone creates harmony (upper partials)
    - Allows us to make sense of tones sounded together
- **Counterpoint**
  - Interaction of different "voices"
    - We can follow the voices if they are in harmony.



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Western Music

- **Abstraction**
  - Western music is fundamentally abstract
    - More accurately, nonrepresentational.
    - Exceptions: Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, etc.
  - Most **visual** art is representational
    - Exception: Islamic art
    - Even "abstract" art is often representational

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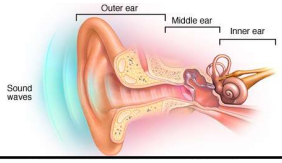
Western Music

- **It is complex**
  - The ear is analytic like no other sense
    - Breaks down every sound into its components
    - The eye cannot do this.
    - Western music takes advantage of this.
  - This allows us to understand multiple voices
    - Makes harmony & counterpoint possible.



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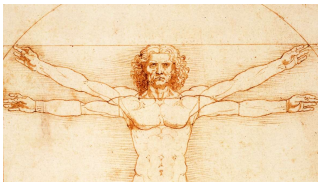
Western Music

- **Basic challenge of Western music**
  - Make abstract music intelligible
    - This course is about how composers do this.
  - Address the full human being
    - Intellectual as well as emotional.



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Musical Notation

- One doesn't "read" music as one reads French.
  - It is a **graphic** representation
    - The development of notation made Western music possible.
  - You will catch on as we go along.

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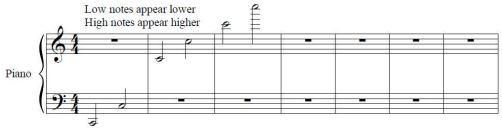
Musical Notation

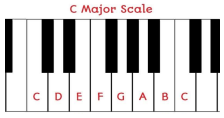
Audio file

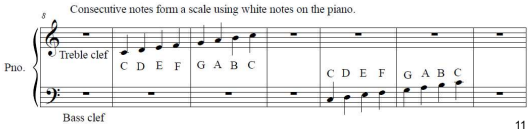


Musical Notation

Audio file

C Major Scale





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Musical Notation

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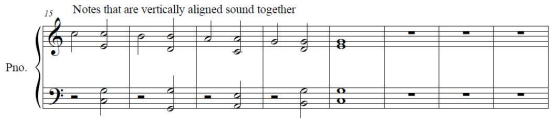

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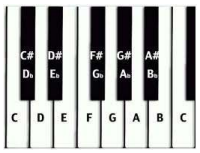

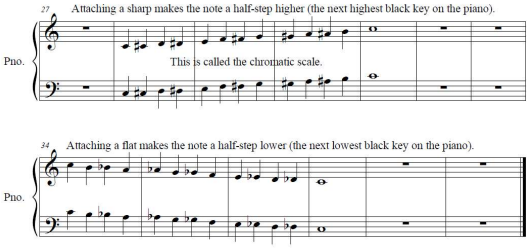

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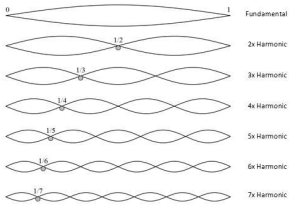
Harmonics

- Acoustic instruments generate **harmonics** of each tone
  - Multiples of the original frequency.
    - Also called **harmonic partials** or **overtones**
    - 1st overtone = 2nd harmonic

Piano or guitar string



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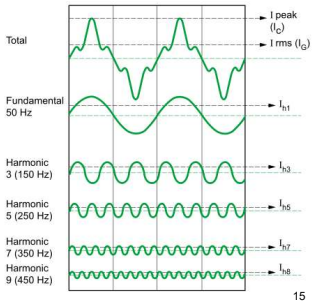
Harmonics

- Musical timbre
  - is based on the relative strength of harmonics
    - This is **Fourier analysis** →
    - **The ear** performs Fourier analysis!



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Harmonious Intervals

- It is easy to recognize intervals whose frequencies have simple ratios.
  - They have many harmonics in common.

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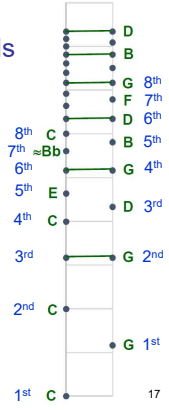
Harmonious Intervals

- It is easy to recognize intervals whose frequencies have simple ratios.
  - They have many harmonics in common.
    - For example, a **perfect fifth**…

Harmonics of C and G, which have frequency ratio 2:3



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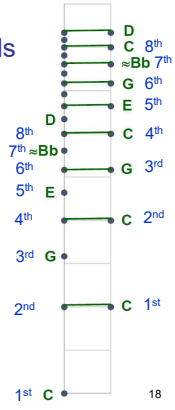
Harmonious Intervals

- It is easy to recognize intervals whose frequencies have simple ratios.
  - They have many harmonics in common.
    - For example, an **octave**…

Harmonics of C and C octave, which have frequency ratio 1:2



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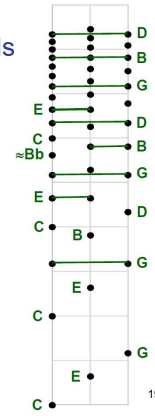
Harmonious Intervals

- It is easy to recognize intervals whose frequencies have simple ratios.
  - They have many harmonics in common.
    - For example, a **major triad**…

Harmonics of C, E and G, which have frequency ratios 3:4:5



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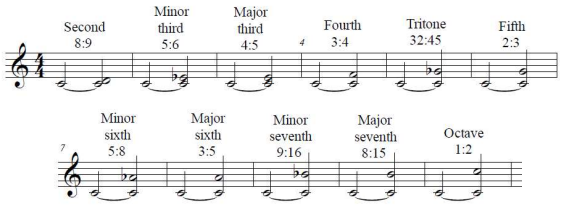
Intervals

Ratios with smaller numbers indicate greater consonance

Audio file



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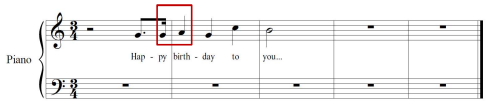
Intervals

Major second 8:9

Audio file

Happy Birthday



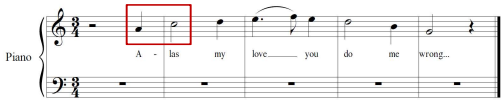
21

Intervals

Minor third 4:5

Audio file

Greensleeves



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Intervals

Major third 5:6

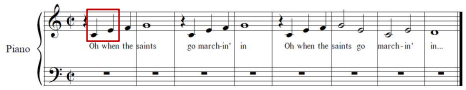
Audio file

Careful: Not all doorbells ring a major 3rd!

Cukoos? They sing a minor 3rd, major 3rd, or 4th, depending on the time of year.

Audio file

When the Saints Go Marching In



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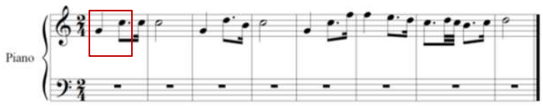
Intervals

Fourth 3:4

Audio file

Wedding March (Wagner)



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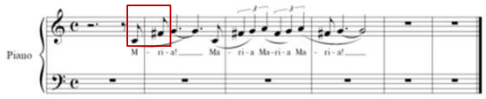
Intervals

Tritone 32:45

Audio file

Maria (Bernstein/Sondheim)



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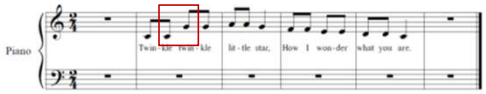
Intervals

Fifth 2:3

Audio file

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star



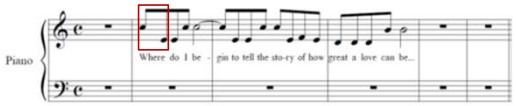
26

Intervals

Minor sixth 5:8

Audio file

Love Story (Taylor Swift)



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Intervals

Major sixth 3:5

Audio file

Audio file

My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean

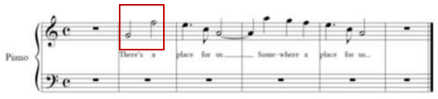
28

Intervals

Minor seventh 9:16

Audio file

Somewhere (Bernstein/Sondheim)



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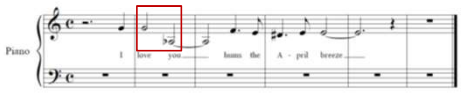
Intervals

Major seventh 8:15

Audio file

I Love You (Cole Porter)

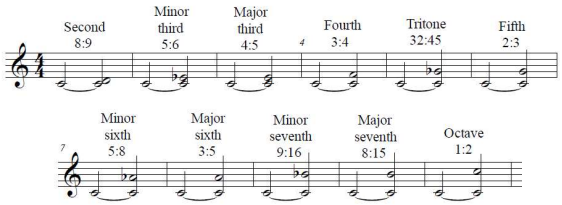


30

Intervals

Ratios with smaller numbers indicate greater consonance

Audio file



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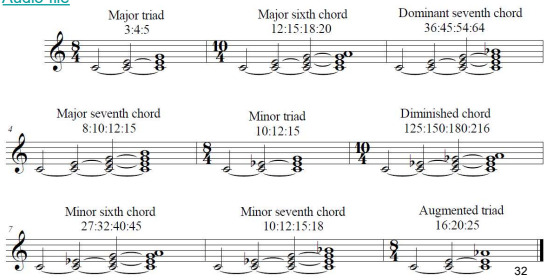
Common chords

Ratios with smaller numbers indicate greater consonance

Audio file



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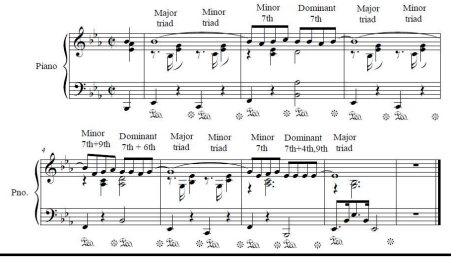
Chords

Example: "Blue Moon" (1933)

Richard Rogers (music) and Lorenz Hart (lyrics)

Audio file from *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934) 0:06

Audio file of the excerpt below



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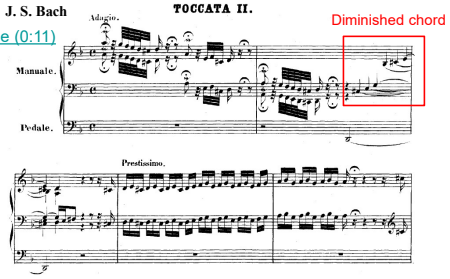
Chords

Example: Diminished chord 125:150:180:216

Audio file (0:11)



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Chords

Example: Minor 6 chord 27:32:40:45

Most popular sound for US freight trains

Audio file (0:08)

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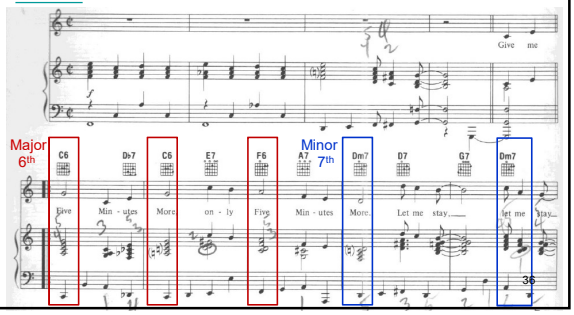
Chords

Example: "Five Minutes More" (1946)

Jule Styne (music) and Sammy Cahn (lyrics)

Audio file



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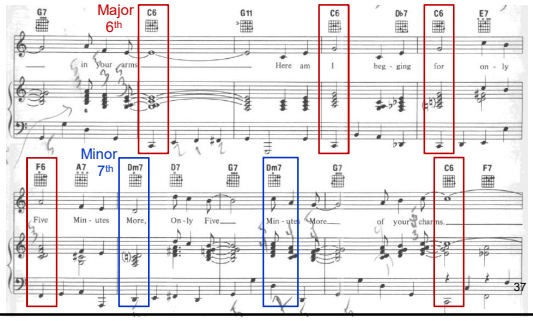
Chords

Example: “Five Minutes More” (1946)



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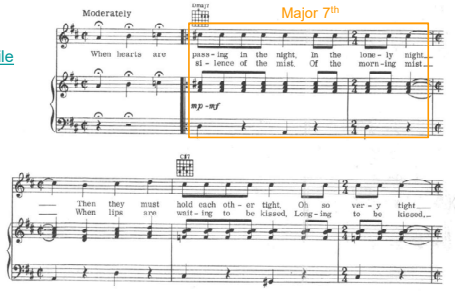
Chords

Example: “A Man and a Woman” (1946)

Francis Lai (music) and Pierre Barouh (lyrics)

Audio file



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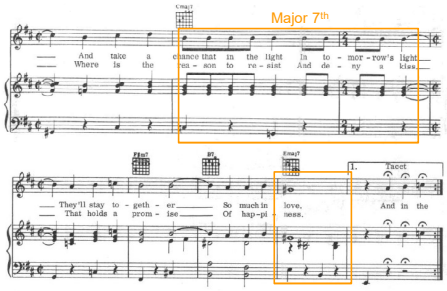
Chords

Example: “A Man and a Woman” (1946)



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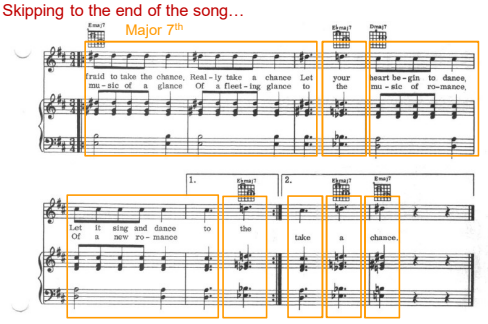
Chords

Example: “A Man and a Woman” (1946)

Skipping to the end of the song…



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Keys

- One can start a scale on any one of the 12 chromatic notes.
  - This produces the 12 **keys**.
- Some keys are more **distant** from the **tonic** key
  - Tonic key = the one we start the music in.
  - More distant keys have **fewer notes in common**.

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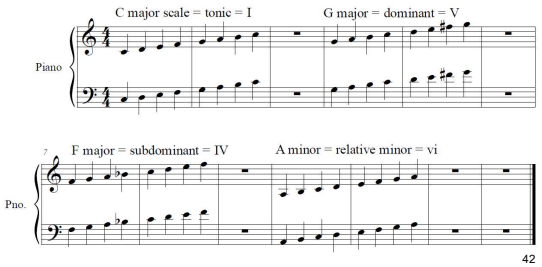
Keys

Some closely related keys

Audio file



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Keys

- Western music likes travel & adventure…
  - Start at home (tonic)
  - Travel to other lands (other keys)
  - Return home (tonic)
- Much music moves from tonic to dominant to tonic (I-V-I)
  - The return to the tonic is a **cadence**.

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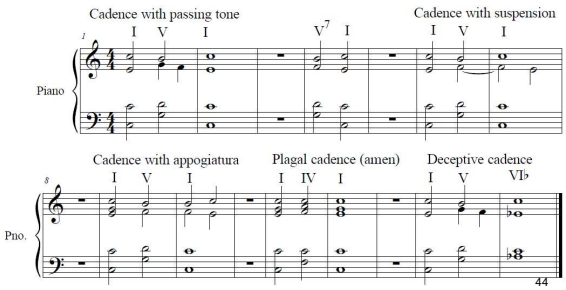
Cadences

Audio file



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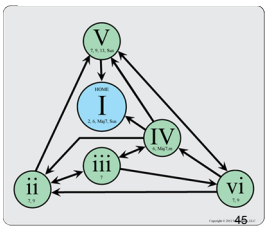
Cadences

- Dominant 7th chord is from V-I cadence
  - Passing tone creates 7th chord
  - Dominant 7th chord does not "lead to" tonic
- Harmony should flow organically from the music
  - Not be imposed from outside as a "standard" chord progression.



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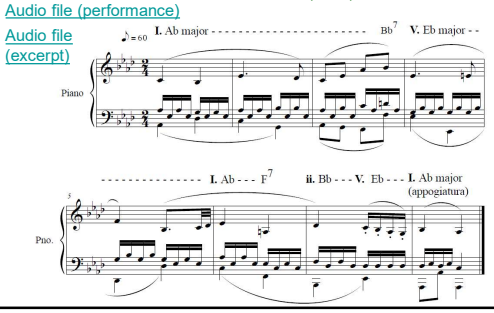
Cadences

Example: Adagio Cantabile from Pathetique Sonata
L. van Beethoven (1798)

Audio file (performance)
Audio file (excerpt)



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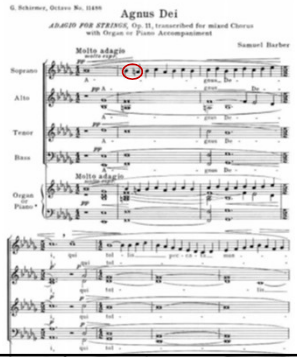
Suspension

Example:
Agnus Dei
(from Adagio or Strings)
Samuel Barber

Audio file (performance)



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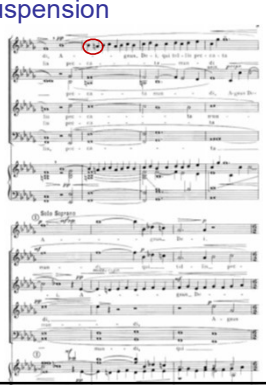
Suspension

Example:
Agnus Dei
(from Adagio or Strings)
Samuel Barber



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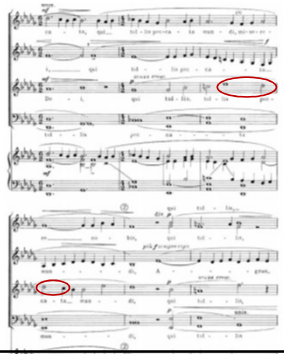
Suspension

Example:
Agnus Dei
(from Adagio
or Strings)
Samuel Barber



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Temperament

- There is a problem with playing all the keys with only 12 different notes.
  - The harmonic intervals are not exactly right.
- The pitches are adjusted so that every key is slightly out of tune.
  - The errors are the same in every key
  - **This is equal temperament**.

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Temperament

Interval	Error
C-D (second)	Slightly flat
C-E (major third)	Sharp
C-F (fourth)	Slightly sharp
C-G (fifth)	Slightly flat
C-A (sixth)	Sharp
C-B (seventh)	Sharp

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Alternative Scales

- Are the traditional scales the best choice?
  - They are the **second best** choice!

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Alternative Scales

- Are the traditional scales the best choice?
  - They are the **second best** choice!
- The 19-tone chromatic is a better choice.
  - Based on a complete combinatorial search.
  - Provides a larger set of consonant chords.
  - Basis for many interesting scales.

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Alternative Scales

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- The 19-tone chromatic is a better choice.
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- Why didn't someone discover the 19-note chromatic?

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Alternative Scales

- Are the traditional scales the best choice?
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- The 19-tone chromatic is a better choice.
  - Based on a complete combinatorial search.
  - Provides a larger set of consonant chords.
  - Basis for many interesting scales.
- Why didn't someone discover the 19-note chromatic?
  - **Someone did!**

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Alternative Scales

- Advantages of 19-note chromatic were discovered during the Renaissance.
  - By Spanish organist and music theorist **Francisco de Salinas** (1530-1590).
  - Didn't catch on…

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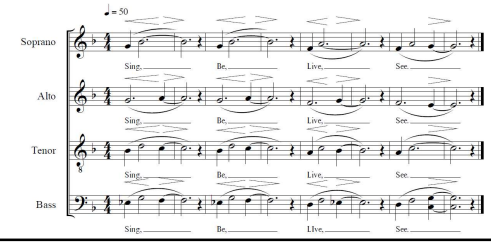
Just Tuning

Example: "Earth Song" for SATB
Frank Ticheli (2006)

Audio file (choral performance)
Audio file (excerpt below)



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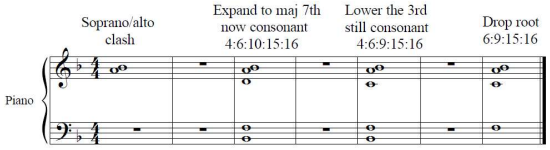
Just Tuning

Example: "Earth Song" for SATB
Frank Ticheli (2006)

Ticheli's chord

Audio file



- The chord is **consonant** when performed with just tuning.
- Also, the A-B*b* clash produces a **beat note** that is exactly 2 octaves below the root Bb.

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Just Tuning

Example: "Alleluia" for SATB
Randall Thompson (1940)

Audio file

- Entire text consists of 2 words from Hebrew – *Alleluia, Amen*
- Performed by Octarium.
- Written for opening of Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood)
- An example of how beautiful harmonious voices can be.
- Note major 6th chords (3 different inversions) just after climax (4:54, 5:08, 5:18)

Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood

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