

KS3 Spine Notation

1. The Creation of Western Music Notation

Music from the Western Classical tradition is written on a staff. Before music notation was invented, music was passed on **orally** (sung) or **aurally** (listening to sounds). Whilst an effective way of sharing music, this method had problems as pieces of music often changed over time and it was common for different versions of the same piece of music to exist.

The church had a desire to share the same music throughout its churches and began to create a system using horizontal lines as a reference point for notes to be added. This was the starting point for the staff and notation as we know it today.



2. Pitch

The **stave** is a set of five horizontal lines; the position of the notes on the stave determines the pitch of the notes.

There are two main **clefs** (a symbol that informs the performer the pitch of each note on the stave) that are used in notation.

The **treble clef** has its name as it was used by boys with unchanged voices who sang at a high pitch (**treble**). It is also used by other high pitched instruments such as the flute, violin, guitar and the right hand of the piano.



The **bass clef** has its name as it was used by men who sang at a low pitch (**bass**). It is also used by instruments such as the bassoon, tuba, cello, bass guitar and the left hand of the piano.



Ledger lines are additional drawn on lines either through, under or above a note in order to extend the stave. These are used when a note goes higher than the top line of the stave, or below the bottom line.



Sharps (a symbol to raise a note by a semitone - #) and **flats** (a symbol used to lower a note by a semitone - b) are types of **accidentals** used to alter a given note.

3. Rhythm

Whilst the **stave** refers to the pitch of the note written, a range of symbols are used to tell the musician how long each note should be held.

A **semibreve** is held for four beats. 

A **minim** is held for two beats. 

A **crotchet** is held for one beat. 

A **quaver** is held for half a beat. 

A **semiquaver** is held for quarter of a beat. 

A **beat** is the basic unit of time in a bar. **Time signatures** are used to tell the musician how many beats are in each bar. The top – or first – number states how many beats are in each bar, and the bottom – or second – number states what type of beat it is (4 would be crotchet and 8 would be quaver).

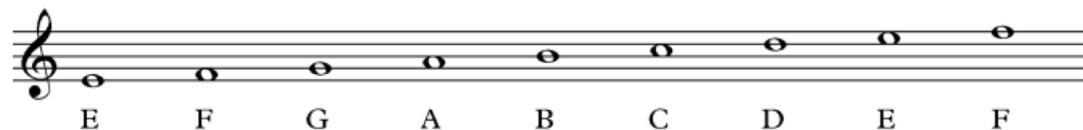
For example, a 4/4 time signature means that there are four crotchet beats in a bar, whereas a 6/8 time signature means that there are six quaver beats in a bar.

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4. Alternative notational systems

There are a number of other notational systems that are in use, outside of the Western Classical Tradition. Many popular musicians use **tablature** (or **TAB** for short). This is written for a specific instrument and, instead of the horizontal lines representing a pitch, horizontal lines are used to represent a string on a guitar. Numbers are then added on the lines to tell the musician which fret they should press down on. This is a very friendly notation to start using, although there are some limitations. For example, it does not inform the musician how long each note should be held for, so notation may be used in tandem with guitar **TAB**.

Graphic scores are also sometimes used by more modern composers, where any range of symbols can be used (sometimes with symbols from standard notation). These symbols are not as prescriptive as standard notation so the performer has some artistic licence regarding how they interpret what is written by the composer. This means that every performance of a piece of work using this type of notation is likely to be different in some way.



Activities

Task

Write down a piece of music that you know, using standard notation. Use your instrument to help you work out what the pitch is.

Task

Create a glossary of musical keywords associated with music notation and pitch and rhythm.

Activities

Recap quiz

1. How was music passed around before the use of Western Classical notation?
2. Who began to create a starting point for notation as we know it today?
3. What do sharps and flats do?
4. Name two instruments that use a treble clef and two instruments that use a bass clef.
5. What is a ledger line?

State how long each of these note values lasts for:

- Minim
- Semiquaver
- Semibreve
- Crotchet
- Quaver

Create an acronym to remember the notes of the treble and bass clefs.