**Basic Music Theory**

**For Barbershop Harmony Singers**

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**Objective**: To inspire you to undertake the task of beginning to learn the language of music.

Most of us actually understand the language of music very well. We intuitively know the difference between bad music, good music and great music. But if you are in this class, you are most likely not musically illiterate, which simply means that you cannot read or write the language of music.

When learning a new language, one usually begins with the alphabet. This class will deal mostly with learning about the alphabet of the language of music. These are the symbols that allow us to represent notes, melodies, songs, arrangements and entire symphonic works.

**Staff**

Our point of reference; a place to orient our symbols.

* Five lines also result in four spaces
* Ledger lines above and below
* Barbershop grand staves for men and women

**Clefs**

Tell us which pitch corresponds with each line and space

* Treble
* Bass
* Modified Barbershop Clefs

**Pitches**

* Each line or space on the staff corresponds to a pitch which corresponds to a key on the keyboard.
* Treble clef note names and keyboard location
* Bass clef notes and keyboard location
* Accidentals raise or lower the pitch: sharps, flats, naturals, double flats, double sharps

**Meter**

Tells us how many beats per measure (or more importantly, what kind of dance we’ll be doing!)

* Common time (4/4)
* What do the top and bottom numbers mean? How many beats per measure. What note receives one beat.
* What are some of the other meters that we use in barbershop? 3/4, 6/8, 12/8, 9/8, 2/2, 2/4

**Modes**

* Major – what we use almost exclusively in barbershop
* Minor – used on occasion

**Key Signatures**

* Why do we have different keys?
* Flat keys
* Sharp keys
* Relative major and minor keys

**Rhythm**

Tells us the duration of each note

* Simple rhythms: whole note and its simple subdivision
* Rests
* Dots and ties

**With Knowledge comes Power!**

* Ability to know what key a song is in and what pitch to blow
* Ability to play a line on the keyboard for learning and teaching purposes
* Let’s put our new knowledge and power to use on a tag!

**A long journey that you will never complete**

* Build a strong foundation in your basic understanding of the alphabet of language of music
* Create a plan for growth: Do something every day to improve your level of musicianship
* Practice and drill: flash cards, internet exercises
* Put your new skills to use: Like any language, if you don’t use it, you will lose it!
* Be patient. It can take some time to see how your work is going to pay off, but it will! Stick with it!

Resources

* [www.musictheory.net](http://www.musictheory.net)
* <http://barbershop.org/music-theory-1.html>
* Many other FREE internet resources