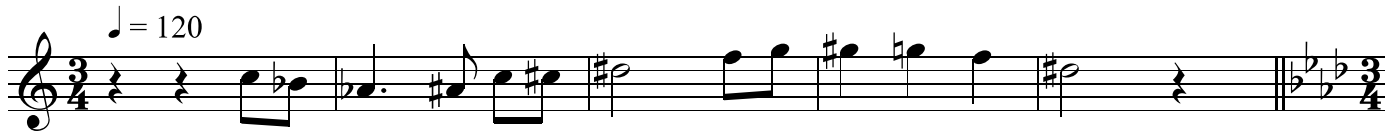


Scales Are Tools!

Allen Cole

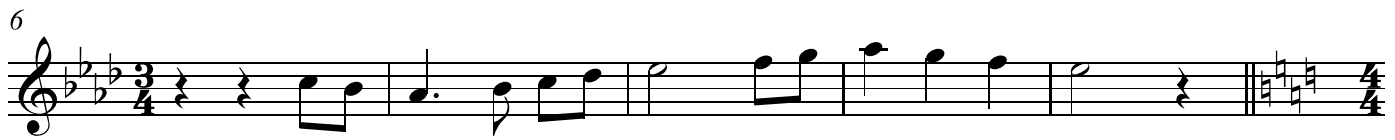
Most young musicians go for years without properly learning their scales because they don't know *why* those scales are important. But scales are a fantastic and essential tool for both reading and improvising music. Let's see how:

1. Without our major scales, each octave of notes has 12 different pitches, 1/2 step apart. If you're trying to figure out the notes to a favorite song, that's a lot of stuff to try and guess. Look at what happens if we try to play "The First Noel" starting on a C:

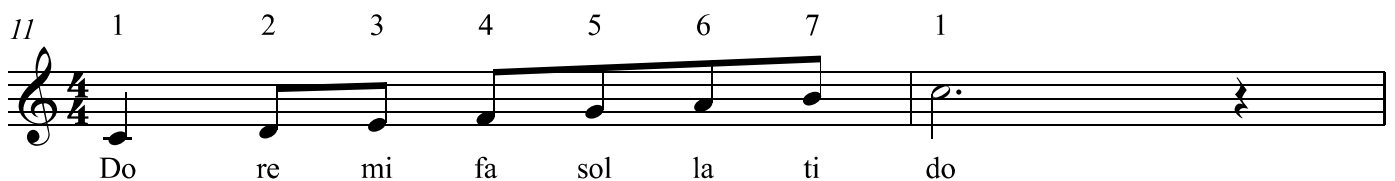


If you look closely, you'll see that there are only 7 different pitches, plus the 8th note that makes the octave. But there are stray sharps, flats and naturals all over the place, and many of these notes are actually being called two different things. Most common songs are based on a scale of 7 different notes, which means you can *feel* your way through them almost never seeing the five least likely notes. (like the black keys on the piano when you're playing in C)

When you're using a major scale, the primary seven notes can be arranged in a pattern using a *key signature* which helps identify the scale, and organize the note names into a consistent pattern. If you practice this pattern enough, you'll *feel* it in your fingers and not have to think as much about the sharps and flats.



2. The second thing the scale does is to help us measure the pitches we hear, and the melodies they form. Each note in an octave of scale has a unique sound. We identify these sounds either by their solfegge note names or their scale element numbering:



These numbers are consistent in their sound from scale to scale. Here is *Jingle Bells* in C, B-flat and G.

