

# 7

## The Mechanics of Singing

1. Can you read music? How well?
2. Do you think knowing a little bit about music would help you worship better? Please explain your answer?
3. What part (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) do you sing?

At the beginning of this lesson two things are very important: (1) Let it be known from the outset that I am not a music expert! I enjoy music, I love music – but I am not an expert. There are many symbols in our songbooks that I am not familiar with and must look up (just like you). Many are the times that I must seek out those among us that have much more musical experience than I. So as we go through this lesson, please do not assume that I have all the answers. We will need the collective knowledge of the entire group to possibly answer all the questions. (2) As we have stated from the very beginning the object of this class is not to make us music majors. The main goal has been, and continues to be, to help us focus on praising the Lord and teaching and admonishing each other in song. We have discussing ways that we might focus on MY heart, and how I might focus on the words of the songs instead of the music. After all as Sewell Hall said in his article in our last lesson, “good music may enhance the song, but the words determine whether God is truly praised or whether saints teach and admonish one another effectively.”

That being said, having a basic understanding of music, the symbols you see on a page in our song book, will help you concentrate less on the music itself, and more on the words and the worship. If you are constantly worried about how long a note is to be held, or where the song repeats to, or where the song actually ends, then you can't really focus on the words. It is very distracting when a third of the congregation is ahead of the song leader and a third is behind the song leader and a third is with the song leader (which one are you?). When that happens everyone is wondering what is going on

and why the song leader can't control everybody! And isn't it embarrassing when you get your Allegro and your Allegretto mixed up? Or when you should be singing Legato, but instead you sing Leggero (we've all been there haven't we?).

The object of this lesson is not to make everyone music majors, but to give us enough musical understanding that we can focus on the words and the Lord, and not so much on the music. I'll apologize up front for the lesson not being as exciting as some of the others, but I believe it is necessary.

Let's get a few basic definitions out of the way first:

**Pitch** – the highness or lowness of a tone

**Length** – the longness or shortness of a tone

**Power** – The loudness or softness of a tone

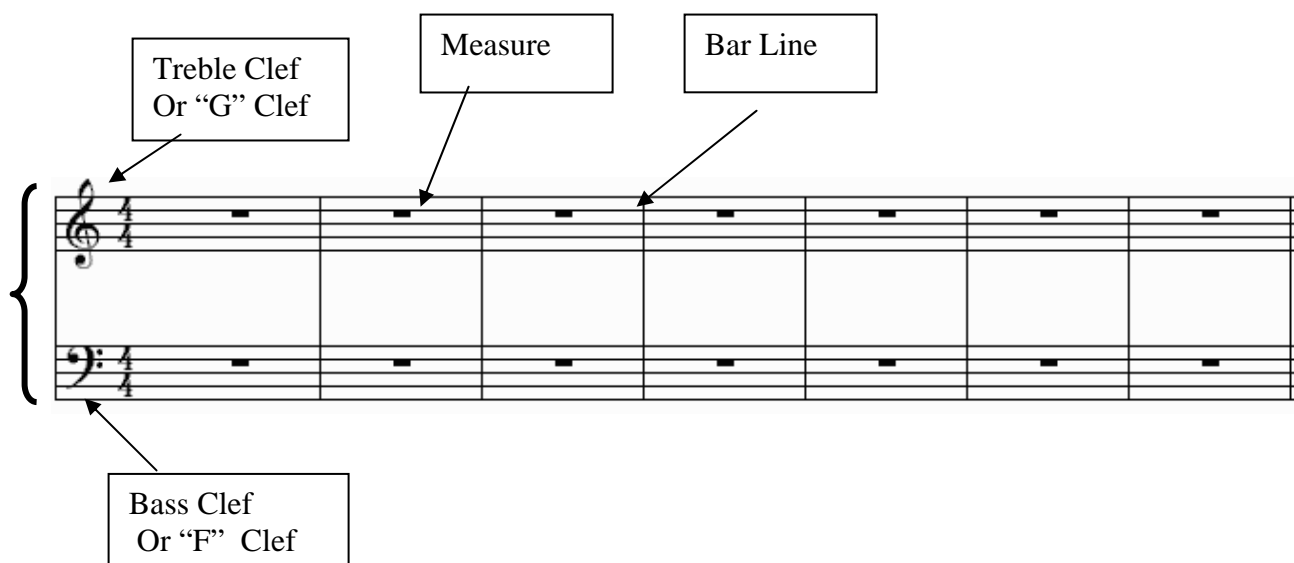
**Quality** – the character or "timbre" of a tone

**Musical Alphabet** – A-B-C-D-E-F-G. These letters stand for the primary name of the absolute pitch of each of these tones.

**Naming each pitch** – DO – RE- MI – FA – SOL – LA – TI – DO. These are the "singing names" of each key tone. These are Italian designations for each tone (in case you were wondering).

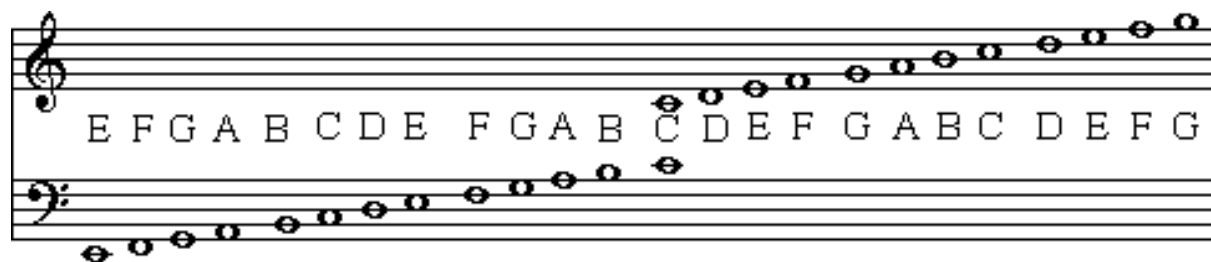
**Singing Parts** – As a general rule mature voices are placed in four categories, two for women, and two for men. High women's voices are soprano, low women's voices are alto. Of the men's voices, the higher is called tenor, and the lower is called bass. Again, these are just rules. I know many women that sing tenor, and I know many men that sing the soprano part. Find the part that suits your voice range, and stick with it. You might find that your range is between a bass and a tenor and therefore you have to switch between the two parts depending on the song that is being sung.

Now, the first thing that you notice when you look at a song is something that looks like this



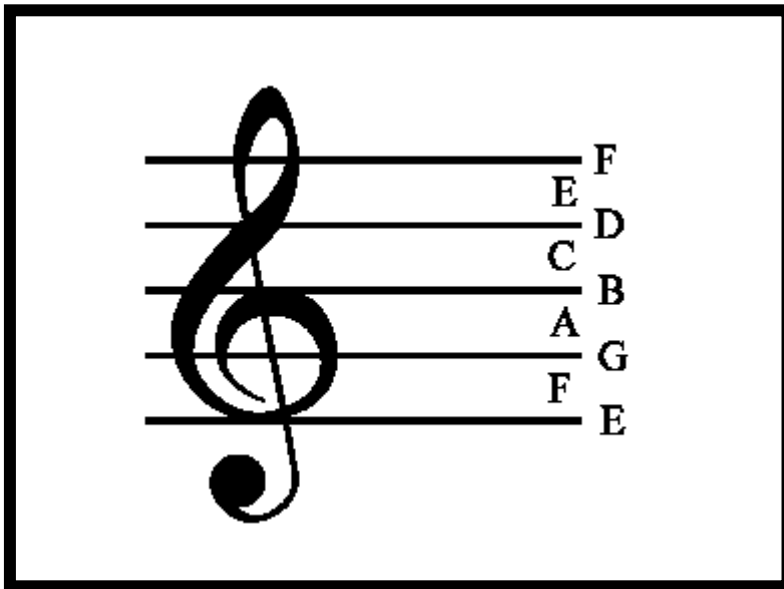
This is called a grand staff. It is made up of two staves, each has five lines, one stacked on top of the other (not to be confusing, but there is actually an 11<sup>th</sup> line in the middle but we'll deal with it later when we talk about middle "C"). The top staff is called the Treble Clef (or "G" Clef) and the bottom is called the Bass Clef (or "F" Clef). In our song books the treble clef normally has the soprano and alto parts, and the bass clef has the tenor and bass parts.

Now, what about the notes – what do they mean?



Please notice that each note has a place on the staff, and each note has each own pitch. The higher up on the staff, the higher the pitch.

While it is not essential to memorize the names of the notes, it is beneficial. Here are some tricks:



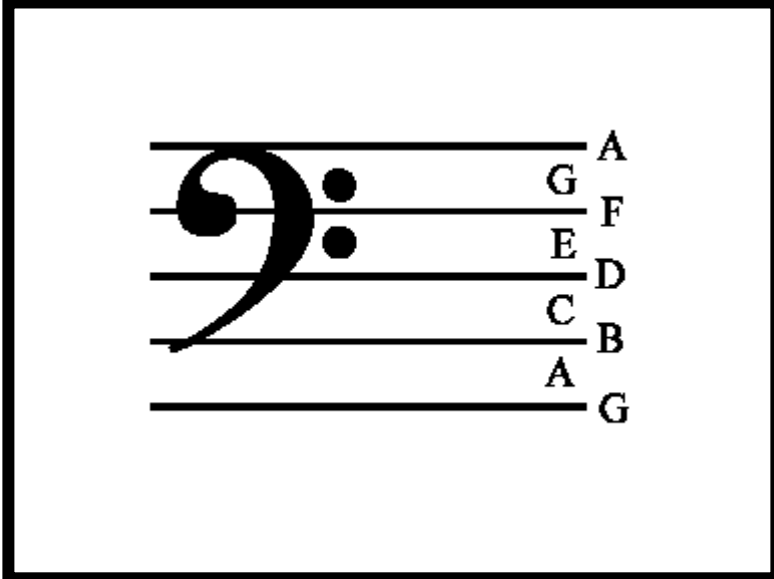
### TREBLE CLEF

Lines:

**Every Good Boy Does Fine**

Spaces:

**F - A - C - E**



### BASE CLEF

Lines

**Good Boys Do Fine Always**

Spaces

**All Cows Eat Grass**

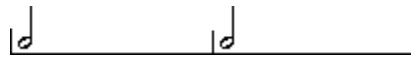
Now that we have an understanding of the notes and what they are called, you might be wondering why they all look different? Some are solid, some are just circles, others have what looks like a pole sticking up, and still others have flags hanging off their poles. Well believe it or not, these are all symbols that tell you the length of the note (how long to hold the note you are singing).

Musical notes are not all held for the same duration. There are long notes and short ones, and all others in between. Composers need a way of indicating to performers **how long** to hold each note. By making each note look a little different, this can be easily communicated.

Here is a **whole note**, a note you've probably seen before, sitting on a line:



The whole note is not normally found sitting on a line like this, of course. It's been placed there to help you visualize its length. This diagram is showing that one whole note takes up the entire line. If we divide the line into two equal parts, a whole note would be too big to fit in it. We need notes of shorter duration. These are called **half notes**:



You can tell with this diagram that it takes two half notes to make a whole note. Let's keep going. The next smaller note value is called a **quarter note**:



It takes four quarters to make a whole note. Also, you can tell that it takes two quarter notes to make one half note.

We could keep going, theoretically, forever! However, let's just do one more for now. Here are notes of even shorter value, called **eighth notes**. They look like quarter notes with flags:

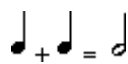


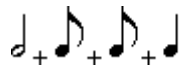
So eight eighths equals one whole. It also equals two halves. Anything else?

Let's look at all the diagrams placed together. You can see the relationships between note lengths very clearly\*:



Here's an equation that should now make some sense to you:

 It shows that two quarter notes equal one half note in length. Here's another one:


 This may look a little complicated, but take your time and figure it out: if you add together the lengths of one half note, two eighth notes and one quarter note, you will get one whole note. It's just the same as the following arithmetic equation, assuming that we give the half note a value of 2:


$$2 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} + 1 = 4$$


No problem!

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## DOTTED NOTES

You know that in many time signatures a quarter note  equals one beat. When you add a dot to a note, you add **half of its value** to the note. What's half of one?  $\frac{1}{2}$ . If you add that to the quarter, you get a note that is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  beats long (That is assuming that the quarter note equals one beat. There are time signatures where this is not the case, but we won't worry about that now).



A dotted quarter note looks like this: . The dot makes the note half again as long as a quarter note.  $(1 + \frac{1}{2}) = 1\frac{1}{2}$



Here is a dotted half note: . It is one half note plus half of a half note (one quarter). A dotted half note, therefore, is three quarter notes long.  $(2 + 1 = 3)$



Adding a **flag** to a note makes a note **half as long**.


Remember the eighth note?  Without the flag, it would look like a quarter note. By adding the flag it becomes a note of **half that value** - an eighth note. By adding another flag, it becomes half as long as an eighth note - a **sixteenth note**: 

It takes two sixteenth notes to equal one eighth note. It takes four sixteenth notes to equal one quarter note. How many sixteenth notes does it take to make one half note? Eight! One whole note? Sixteen!

Many times when two or more eighth notes are written side-by-side, the flag is replaced with a beam:  These two **beamed eighths** are exactly the same as if the writer had written: 

Same thing for sixteenths:  is the same as:  Using the beam in place of the flags simply makes it look a little "tidier", and a little easier for to read.

For every note, there is a corresponding rest of the same length. For example, in many time signatures the whole note () is a note that gets four beats. in cases the **whole rest** also gets four beats:  As you can see, it looks like a small black rectangle that hangs from the fourth line. It hangs from that line no matter which clef you use.

If the whole note gets four beats, the half note would get two beats, and so would the **half rest**: 











**Here are the "rest" of the rests, using our example of the whole note/rest getting four beats:**

The quarter rest (1 beat): 

The eighth rest ( $\frac{1}{2}$  beat): 

The sixteenth rest ( $\frac{1}{4}$  beat): 

Take a look at the following table. It shows the relationship between all of the notes and rests that you will use for the next several lessons\*. Again, this table makes the assumption for now that the whole note gets 4 beats, which is not always the case:

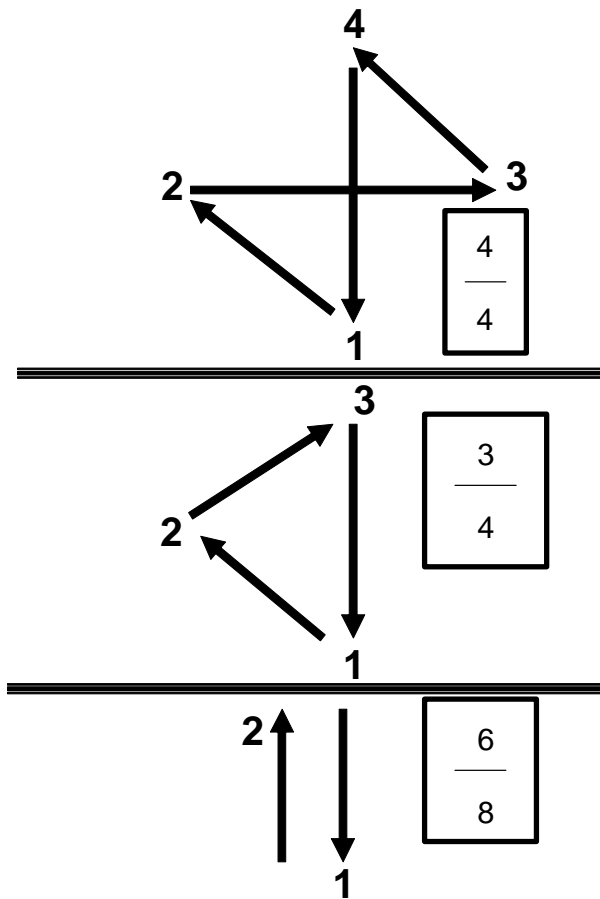
NUMBER OF BEATS	NOTE	REST
4		
2		
1		
0.5 (1/2)		
0.25 (1/4)		

Music is divided up into units called **measures** or **bars**. Each measure has a certain number of beats. The number of beats is determined by the **time signature**. (Another word for time signature is **meter**). For example, some music is written so that every measure has four beats, and that the **quarter note** is the unit that "gets the beat". In such a piece the time signature would be  $\frac{4}{4}$ . We say "four four" when we read this time signature. In  $\frac{4}{4}$  time,





Time Signature	Beat	Measure
$\frac{2}{4}$		
$\frac{3}{4}$		
$\frac{4}{4}$		
$\frac{2}{2}$		
$\frac{3}{2}$		
$\frac{4}{2}$		
$\frac{2}{8}$		
$\frac{3}{8}$		



Getting your pitch. Have you ever wondered what the song leader was doing when he sings “Do – Mi – Sol” ? Well he is trying to give every one in the congregation their starting note or pitch to begin the song. That way we don’t have to fumble around for the first several measures trying to find our part or the right note.

This is called a TRIAD (Do – Mi – Sol). In our song books, all four parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass). Look at the song below (Seek Ye First) – can you pick out the four parts and name the starting notes for the four parts?

Soprano\_\_\_\_ Alto\_\_\_\_ Tenor\_\_\_\_ Bass\_\_\_\_

## 1 - Seek Ye First

The image shows a musical score for the song "Seek Ye First". It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the vocal parts and a bass clef staff for the bass line. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/2. The lyrics are: "Seek ye first the king - dom of God". The notes are shaped as follows: Soprano (diamond), Alto (triangle), Tenor (oval), and Bass (square).

But when the song leader gives you the triad (Do – Mi – Sol) how do you know if the “Do” belongs to the soprano part or the tenor? VERY IMPORTANT – every song is different. The “Sol” for one song may be the soprano part, but then the alto for the next song. Here’s how to know your starting note (actually there are several ways, but we will talk about the easiest way). Until you become proficient at knowing the notes, notice how our song books use notes that are shaped? They all have a variety of different shapes – from triangles, to squares, to ovals, to diamonds. This makes it very easy to find your starting note.

The image shows a musical staff with two measures. The first measure is labeled '1' and the second measure is labeled '2'. The notes are: Do (triangle), Re (square), Mi (diamond), Fa (square), So (oval), La (oval), Ti (square), Do (triangle). The notes Do, Mi, and So in the first measure are circled in red. The lyrics below the staff are: "Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do" for the first measure and "Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do" for the second measure.

Please remember that “Do” will always be the triangle shaped note, and “Mi” will always be the diamond shaped note, and “La” will always be the oval shaped note. That holds true with every song we sing in our books.

So, here is how it works. When the song leader announces the song (in this case “Seek Ye First” you want to find your part. If you sing soprano you will notice right away that your starting note is in an diamond shape. If you sing alto, your starting note is a triangle, if you are a tenor you start with an oval shaped note, and the bass part starts with a triangle. So, now you are ready for the song leader to give you the Triad. If you are a Alto or Bass – you listen for the “Do” and that is your starting note. If you are the Soprano, you are listening for the “Mi”, and the Tenor is listening for the “Sol”. Now as soon as the song leader begins singing, you can start worshipping immediately without

stumbling around for the first several measures trying to find your correct pitch. Easy right?

In class we will also talk about the many symbols that you see in our books that might be confusing.

Well, there you have it – Music 101. I know that I have probably done a poor job explaining it, and we will try to do a more clear explanation in class when we discuss these things, but I hope you at least can get a feel for what we are trying to accomplish. We want to take our minds off the music and on to the words. Then we can put them in our hearts and glorify God. Thank you for your patience with this lesson.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Is knowing a little about music helpful in our worship to God? How?
2. How can we focus too much on the music? How would this be a bad thing?
3. If someone sitting near us does not know music, but is singing and glorifying God in their hearts – what can I learn and benefit from this?
4. How can I be encouraged by someone who can't sing very well?
5. How might I encourage someone who does not sing out – to do so?

# **I Know Whom I Have Believed**

## **#291**

I know not why God's wondrous grace To me He hath made known, Nor why, unworthy, Christ  
in love Redeemed me for His own.

*Chorus:*

"But I know whom I have believed, "And am persuaded that He is able "To keep that which I've  
committed "Unto Him against that day."

I know not what of good or ill May be reserved for me, Of weary ways or golden days,  
Before His face I see.

*(Chorus)*

I know not when my Lord may come, At night or noontide fair, Nor if I'll walk the vale with Him  
Or "meet Him in the air."

*(Chorus)*

### **Understanding "I Know Whom I Have Believed."**

1. Where in the Bible do you find the chorus?
2. How do the verses interact with the chorus?
3. In v. 3, when the hymn talks about walking the vale with Jesus, is it necessarily teaching premillennial doctrine? Consider Psalm 23:4 before you answer.
4. What is the message of this hymn to the Christian?
5. Why is that message spiritually useful?