

Unison

This isn't an interval to learn, but it is an important bit of terminology. The root note or tonic is the first note of the key you're working in. For instance, playing in the key of C, the root is C. Simple stuff. You work out the other intervals using the root as an anchor.

The Minor Second

The minor second is one semitone above or below the root note. From C, this would be C# ascending or B descending.

Probably the most common song associated with the minor second is the theme song from *Jaws*. *Jaws* is an *ascending* minor second, so going from C to C#. Those two alternating notes are hard to forget, and that dissonant quality is what you're looking for in a minor second. It's the shortest possible distance between two notes, at least using standard Western tones.

The descending minor second is *Für Elise*. You might notice that the opening notes sound like *Jaws* in reverse. In this case, we'd be going from C to B (the actual song goes from E to D# but we'll stick with the key of C for these examples).

The Major Second

The major second is one whole tone above the root and a semitone above the minor second. It's the second note in the major scale, which is one way to memorize it.

Alternatively, you can think of *Silent Night* or *Frère Jacques*. Not the most exciting songs in the world, I know, but clear enough that your association should hold strong.

Descending, we have *Mary Had a Little Lamb* and—yet another Christmas Carol—*The First Noel*.

The Minor Third

For most people, the minor and major second are relatively easy to pick up and then they get to the minor third and seem to have great difficulty. Be prepared to spend a bit of extra time learning this one. The minor third is three semitones from the root note.

Song associations work best when the song you use is clear in your mind and easily recalled, so I'm surprised people have such difficulty with the ascending minor third when *Smoke on the Water* can be associated with it. If you've ever spent more than ten minutes in a music store, you probably never want to hear this song again thanks to

the twerps in the guitar section playing this endlessly, which unfortunately makes it excellent for association.

Descending, the options are *Hey Jude* by the Beatles and apparently, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. I'm an Aussie so I couldn't tell you what the American anthem sounds like off the top of my head, but it's probably the easiest option if you've been hearing this melody your whole life.

The Major Third

The major third is four semitones, three tones, away from the root note. It's also the second note in a major triad, in case these songs fail you—most any musician knows the sound of the major triad pretty well.

I've also heard it said that the major third (ascending) is the sound of a doorbell, but this one never worked well for me. Maybe because I've ever heard the same thing about the major second and that throws me off.

More corny classics: ascending, the major third can be associated with *When the Saints Go Marching In* and *Kumbaya*. Descending, we've got *Beethoven's 5th*. You could also use *Summertime* or *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, according to various teachers I've had, but while I've heard them at some point before, the melodies aren't

exactly burned in my mind—and I imagine it's the same for many people these days.

The Perfect Fourth

The perfect fourth is five semitones from the root note and is one of the easiest intervals to grasp. It's also one of the most common intervals in popular music (does the I, IV, V chord progression look familiar to you?).

Ascending, this song can be associated with *Amazing Grace*, as well as *Here Comes the Bride*, though in this case the root note is repeated a few times before moving to the fourth.

Descending, the perfect fourth is represented by the old hymn *Oh Come All Ye Faithful*, or the theme song from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I suppose you need to be a churchgoer or a sci-fi nerd (yeah, I'm guilty of that!) to get this one down.

The Tritone

The Devil's Interval, they called it when it was banned by the Church in times long past. Then someone realized it's a really cool interval, and lifted the ban. Or something like

that. Six semitones from the root, C-to-F#, this interval is found in a lot of heavier music.

The ascending tritone, otherwise known as the flat fifth (a name that just doesn't have the same dramatic flair), can be associated with *The Simpsons* (*The Simpsons* – I've italicized the syllable where the tritone is sung) or Black Sabbath's *Black Sabbath*.

Descending, the tritone can be associated with Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze* or *YYZ* by Rush (if you can listen without getting distracted by their odd rhythm and timings).

The Perfect Fifth

The perfect fifth is seven semitones from the root (C-to-G) and forms the third note of a major triad. The perfect fifth can usually be picked up more easily than other intervals.

Ascending, you might associate the fifth with *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, or the *Star Wars* theme song.

Descending, the best popular example is the theme song from *The Flintstones*, though if you know the melody from *The Way You Look Tonight* that'll work too.

The Minor Sixth

The minor sixth is eight semitones away from the root note (C-to-G#). This is another one people sometimes get stuck on, so be prepared to spend some time on it.

Ascending, you can associate the Beatles song *She's a Woman* or the first two notes from the theme song of *Love Story*. Ever wondered why so many of these tunes are theme songs?

The minor sixth's descending options are the *Recado Bossa Nova* and *Chega de Saudade*, which luckily can be found on YouTube. I haven't been able to find less obscure alternatives for the descending minor sixth, so if you've got ideas, let us know in the comments.

The Major Sixth

After the difficulty of the minor sixth, we have the relative ease of the major sixth. This one can usually be picked up pretty easily. It's nine semitones away from the root note, C-to-A.

Perhaps the most popular option for the ascending sixth, and the one I was taught with, is *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*. Give the first two notes of that song a listen and

you'll probably never be able to forget this interval. If that doesn't do it for you, Sinatra's classic *My Way* might.

Descending, the options are *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen* by Louis Armstrong and *The Music of the Night*, which is one of the more popular tunes from *The Phantom of the Opera*.

The Minor Seventh

The minor seventh is ten semitones away from the root note, which is C-to-A#. There are twelve semitones in an octave, so we're almost there!

The ascending minor seventh is used in the theme from the original *Star Trek*, and the song *Somewhere* from the musical *West Side Story*.

The descending minor seventh is usually Herbie Hancock's *Watermelon Man*, or the old symphony composition *An American in Paris*.

The Major Seventh

Ah, the major seventh, one semitone away from the octave at eleven semitones from the root. This jump is from C-to-B.

The ascending major seventh can be found in a-ha's (a Norwegian band that had terrible American 80s haircuts) *Take on Me*, or the theme song from *Fantasy Island*.

Descending, the major seventh can be associated with *I Love You*, an older song written by Cole Porter, but better known as popularized by Bing Crosby.

The Octave

The octave is the same note as the root note, with a higher or lower pitch. It's twelve semitones from the key tonic. This is, of course, a jump from C-to-C in either direction.

An ascending octave can be associated with the old Judy Garland song from *The Wizard of Oz*, called *Over the Rainbow* (somewhere over the rainbow– italics represents the interval).

The descending octave can be associated with the jazz standard *Willow Weep for Me*, that was written by Ann Ronell in the 30s and recorded by such notables as Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra.

Well, that's a lot to take in, so I'll be back next week to introduce you to software ear trainers to help you take this information to the next level. As you've noticed, many

of the songs frequently associated with intervals are out of date or a bit obscure—I think it's time the music world had a new list! What modern popular songs can you suggest for each interval?