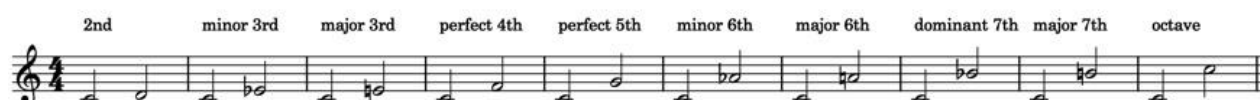


## Writing Melodies 1

### Intervals

An interval is the distance between two notes. We use numbers to describe intervals. Just to remind you, the staff below shows the most common intervals using C as the root note. All of these intervals go up, so we call them 'rising intervals'.



But intervals can go down as well as up, and we call these 'falling intervals'. The staff below shows the same intervals in C but falling.



We will look at the effects that some of these intervals have on the feeling of melodies.

**Intervals are important in melodies; the first interval in your tune can set the whole character for your piece.**

#### 1. 5ths, Octaves and Falling 4th

A really good example of this is the perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. With the root of C that's a C to a G. The perfect 5<sup>th</sup> has a brave, heroic and epic feel. A really good example is the main theme from *Star Wars*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0ZQPqeJkk> written by John Williams. There's a fanfare at the start which uses lots of 5ths and then the main tune starts. Here's the first few bars.



Along with the 5<sup>th</sup>, the octave and the falling 4<sup>th</sup> has a similar effect and heroic themes often use all of these, the *Star Wars* theme does. In the first few bars you have one 5<sup>th</sup>, an octave and a falling 4<sup>th</sup>.

Richard Strauss was famous for his heroic bold music. Here's some links to two of his famous pieces that use these intervals.

The first is the beginning to *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, also used in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETveS23djXM> You only need to listen to the first 1:30 secs.



The second is his famous tone poem *Don Juan*, a piece about a heroic if morally dubious character: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XG4uBRBMdzY> Listen from 11:00 minutes as the strings build to a held tremolo note and then the horns come in with their big octave theme.

**Exercise:**

Here's a melody I've created, but I've left some gaps for you to try out different intervals. Try to fill the gaps with 5ths, Octaves or falling 4ths. The key signature is one flat so that's F major or D minor. The great thing about these intervals is they aren't affected by the piece being major or minor –the same intervals work in both. Write your notes next to the rests in bar 1 and bar 3. Both are one beat, a crochet long. There are three staves for you to try different intervals.

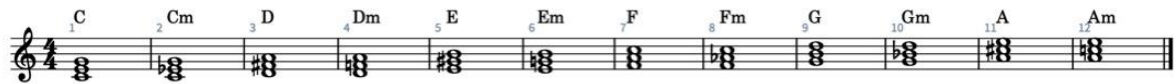
The image shows three identical musical staves in 4/4 time with one flat in the key signature. Each staff contains a melody with two rests in bar 1 and bar 3. The rests are marked with orange and green vertical lines respectively. The melody consists of quarter notes and eighth notes.

Finally, see if you can find any other famous songs or music that uses the 5<sup>th</sup>, falling 4<sup>th</sup> or octave and write their names below:



## 2. Major and Minor 3rds

This is a very important interval because it's the one that usually tells you if the piece is in a major or minor key. In an ordinary triad chord the root and the 5<sup>th</sup> stay the same whether its major or minor, it's the 3<sup>rd</sup> that changes. Here's a few triads in different keys to demonstrate:



You can see that the only difference between the C major and C minor triads is the E becoming flattened in the minor chord.

The opening of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony is really famous and is all about 3rds.



Here's a link to the piece: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv2WJMVPQj8>

You'll notice that the first third G to E flat is actually a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and the second F to D is minor. Even so the piece sounds minor when it starts. You can see from the 3 flats key signature that the piece is in C minor or E flat major. Beethoven uses this uncertainty about the key at the start to create extra drama and tension.

Some other famous pieces that use the 3<sup>rd</sup> at the start are:

'Hey Jude' by the Beatles: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_MjCqQoLLA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_MjCqQoLLA)

'Poker Face' by Lady Gaga is full of minor thirds see if you can hear them:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bESGLojNYSo>

### Exercise:

On the staff below is 'Happy Birthday to You' but two versions, one major, the one we all sing and a minor version. In the minor version I've added some for the first half but not the second half. Add the flats where you think they should go in bars 16 and 17:



### 3. Major and Minor 6ths

The 6ths are very emotional intervals the minor 6<sup>th</sup> rising or falling can give your tune a sense of sadness, the major 6<sup>th</sup> a more hopeful feel. They are like 3<sup>rd</sup>s in that you can major and minor 6ths regardless of the key. A 6<sup>th</sup> is like a big 3<sup>rd</sup> made more dramatic by the big jump in the interval.

The theme from a sad film called *Love Story* uses the minor 6<sup>th</sup> really well to create a sense of strong emotions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4cmPh2peBY>  
You'll hear some 6ths in the intro, but the main theme starts at 0:22.

Here's the first few bars of the main theme in A minor:



The major 6<sup>th</sup> is more hopeful and its used really well in Michael Jackson's 'The Man in the Mirror'. The first two notes of the lyric "I'm gonna make a change" are D rising to B, a major 6<sup>th</sup>: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOnABvJWS30>

Some other famous pieces that use the 6<sup>th</sup> both major and minor are:

Minor 6ths: <https://youtu.be/TSoXBkF832I> 'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin

[https://youtu.be/SUT\\_0c2QVzo](https://youtu.be/SUT_0c2QVzo) 'Waltz op.64' Chopin

Major 6th: <https://youtu.be/p29JUupsOSTE> 'Nocturne no.9' Chopin

<https://youtu.be/qQzdAsjWGPg> 'My Way'

#### Exercise:

Here's a little waltz tune but with two version one in C major using major 6ths and one in C Minor with minor 6ths. Have a go at finishing the tune in the blank bars for both versions. You need to use at least one 6<sup>th</sup> in each version. The slurs on the notes tell the player to play the notes smoothly.



#### 4. 7ths

7ths are exciting intervals, because they are just short of the whole octave they create a sense of trying for something and not quite reaching it. They can give your melody a yearning quality.

Here's a lovely use of the minor 7th in the song Somewhere from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein:

This a great version of it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ32cIGgdE>

The major 7<sup>th</sup> is used really well by Eric Satie at the start of his famous piano piece 'Trois Gymnopidies, when the melody comes in at bar 5 the first note is a G in the bass followed by an F sharp above in the right hand.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyUNbrgLezl>

#### Exercise:

7ths are quite hard to hear and find but try and write down three pieces that use major or minor sevenths:

#### Summary:

So, we can see intervals are really important in melodies, they can give your tune a very particular feel or mood. You can use these intervals at any point in your piece, but the first interval is very important for setting the tone. The little table below might help you choose the right interval for the feel that you want for your piece. Have a go using it to write something and happy composing!

Interval	Mood
Minor 3rd	Sad, emotional or dramatic
Major 3rd	Cheerful, sunny, hopeful
Falling perfect 4th, perfect 5ths and octaves	Heroic, bold, epic, military
Major 6 <sup>th</sup>	Brave, positive, bright
Minor 6 <sup>th</sup>	Lonely, grieving, disappointed
Minor 7th	Yearning, sad, tragic
Major 7th	Thoughtful, dreamy

