

## Major Tonality

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The first lesson on intervals should be completed before starting this lesson.

You have probably played major scales. Now look at the interval structure of major scales.

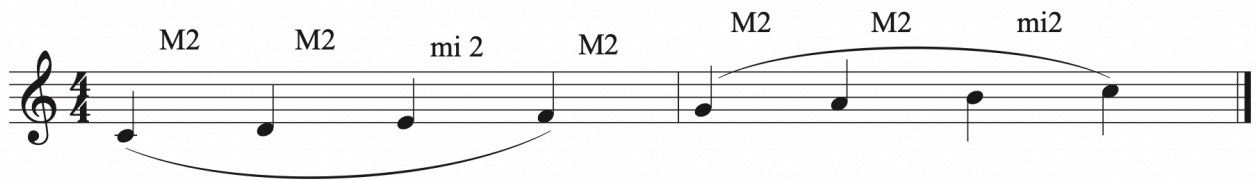
The first (bottom note or any octaves of that note) is called the tonic. Tonic means “key.” The notes of that scale or melodies based on that scale will want to move towards the tonic and end on the tonic.

When melodies move away from the tonic, it causes a slight feeling of tension, that can be resolved by moving back to the tonic. This moving from and to the tonic gives feeling to much of the music that we play and hear.

Play the major scale below. It is helpful to notice that the first four notes and the last four notes have the same interval structure: M2, M2, m1. These two patterns are joined by a M2. In C major the lower interval group is C, D, E and F. F to G leads to the upper interval group of G, A, B, and C. Noticing this grouping may also help you remember the different sounds of the major second and minor second. Tetrachord is another name for a group of

four notes, so if you like lingo, you could say that a major scale is two identical tetrachords separated by a major second.

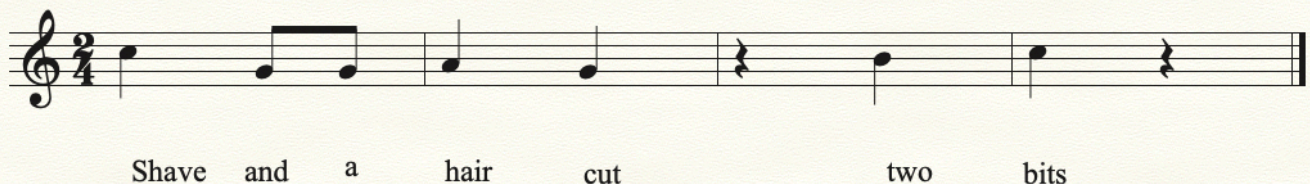
Major Scale as Two Adjacent Tetrachords Separated by a Major Second



Test yourself by playing major scales with tonics of G, F, Eb, and A, thinking of the interval structure.

The ability of major and minor tonality to create feeling of tension and resolution is amazing. Books have been written on it and we will go into more depth in later lessons. For now, let's start with the simplest and probably most familiar example. Sing or play the tune below and leave out the final tonic. For most people, the tension of not going to the tonic is maddening. Then sing or play it again and have a new appreciation for resolving the tension by playing the tonic.

## Shave and a Hair Cut



Play an ascending major scale and stop on the seventh note. Notice how you have a strong feeling of wanting to hear the next note, the tonic.

Play a descending major scale and stop on the next-to-last note. Notice how you have a strong feeling of wanting to go to the tonic note.

Play a chromatic scale and start and stop on any note. Because the intervals are all the same, you won't have the feeling of needing to resolve to some other note.

Each note in the major scale has a name that refers to its function. Reading down refers to descending notes and reading from the bottom up refers to ascending notes.

- c super tonic
- b leading tone
- a mediant
- g dominant
- f sub-dominant
- e mediant
- d supertonic
- c tonic

The name refers to the function within the tonality. For example, the leading tone in F major is e and the leading tone G major is f#.

You don't need to memorize these now. You will learn them as you find them in writings about music and as you listen to musicians talking about music.

### **Assignment**

Play a piece that in major tonality and try stopping on various notes to notice tension or resolution.