The major scale

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The Major Scale is a big part of the foundation for western musical theory. Every musical note, chord, scale, and progression can in some way be linked to the major scale. This is the reason that I would like to tackle this subject. Through this article you will hopefully gain a basic knowledge of the major scale. I highly recommend finding a notation chart for your specific instrument to help you locate notes as we explore this chapter. Throughout this article you will find many definitions for terms. Make sure to pay attention to the definitions as we will be building knowledge on knowledge through the article.

The major scale is vital in the construction and understanding of music especially western rock/pop music, which is what we will be discussing. The major scale is simply a series of intervals and intervals are simply spaces between notes. These “spaces” between notes are referred to as steps. To move a whole step means to move two notes and to move a half step means to move one note.

For example, if we play the note “C” and then play the note “C#” we moved a half step. If we play the note “C” and then play the note “D” we have moved a whole step.

The major scale, and every scale, is made up of a series of these intervals. Let’s look at the way the major scale is structured and some examples of its use.

Here is the interval pattern for the major scale:
[whole-whole-half-whole-whole-whole-half]

This might sound confusing but look at the example below and it will help you better understand the structure of the scale.

Here is a list of all the notes in western music from “C” to “C”:

C-C#-D-D#-E-F-F#-G-G#-A-A#-B-C

If you begin with all twelve notes in the musical spectrum it is easier to see where the major scale is derived from. Here is the same twelve note musical spectrum with the “C” major scale highlighted.

C-C#-**D**-D#-**E**-**F**-F#-**G**-G#-**A**-A#-**B**-**C**
->(wh) (wh) (hf) (wh) (wh) (wh) (hf)

Notice the intervals between the notes indicate the pattern for the major scale. Take a moment and match the interval pattern to the notes in the above example. You will find that the scale matches the interval pattern perfectly. The scale and pattern take you from one “C” to the “C”. (From one note across the musical spectrum of notes to the same note in a higher or lower pitch is called an octave.) This scale takes you from “C” to the note “C” one octave higher.

So here are the notes in the scale of “C” major:

C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C

These notes also have numbers that correspond to help with communication when dealing with different keys. Check out the articles on chord structure and chord progression structure for more info on this subject, but here is an example of the numbers that correspond to the notes of the “C” major scale.

C=1 D=2 E=3 F=4 G=5 A=6 B=7 C=8

Remember that you can do this formula to derive the major scale for any key. The first example was in the key of “C” major. Let’s do another example in the key of “G” major.

Here are the notes in the musical spectrum from “G” to “G”:

G-G#-A-A#-B-C-C#-D-D#-E-F-F#-G

Here we will highlight the notes in the scale of “G” major:

G-G#-**A**-A#-**B**-**C**-C#-**D**-D#-**E**-F-**F#**-**G**
->(wh) (wh) (hf) (wh) (wh) (wh) (hf)

Once again, match up the interval pattern with the notes from the scale of “G” major. You will again find that they match up perfectly. Here are the notes in the scale of “G” major.

G-A-B-C-D-E-F#-G

Now grab a piece of paper and do this exercise again in at least two more keys. Start with the entire 12 note musical spectrum choose any key you wish. Check a notation chart for your specific instrument if you are unsure of notes.

The major scale is important because it is a big part of the foundation for the majority of western music theory. The major scale helps us understand chord structure, chord progression structure, and the relationship of notes to other notes. Happy theorizing!