

Transposing on the Fly

National Standards: 1, 4-6, 10-11

In music, transposition is defined as the process of moving a collection of pitches (notes) up or down by a consistent distance or musical interval. Many instruments like trumpets, saxophones and others are what are called “transposing instruments,” meaning a “C” on those horns has a different pitch than the C on a piano. All in all, there are three methods of transposing, which students learn about in this lesson.

Prepare

Have students discuss what they know about transposing already. Have them give real-life examples of how they've used methods of transposing in their own music or how they've observed it in other music. Have students ever had to change the key of a song in order to help, for example, the key better fit the range of the vocalist? Many bands and artists change the key of their songs live if the recording is a bit out of their range, for example.

Key points in the article:

- The basic definition of transposition is defined as the process of moving a collection of pitches (notes) up or down by a consistent distance or musical interval.
- The three methods of transposing music are transposing by The Numbers, transposing by intervals and transposing by clefs.
- Think of transposing as the "language" of music, with transposing like "translating" to a different key.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article:

- INTERVAL: the inclusive distance between one tone and another.
- TRANSPOSITION: the process of moving a collection of pitches (notes) up or down by a consistent distance or musical interval.

- **ACCIDENTAL:** a sign placed immediately to the left of (or above) a note to show that the note must be changed in pitch.
- **SCALE DEGREES:** the position of a particular note on a scale relative to the tonic, the first and main note of the scale from which each octave is assumed to begin.

Discuss

Read through and discuss the three methods that can be used to transpose any kind of music in the lesson. The first is transposing by the numbers, which is a clear and simple method of assigning numbers to the notes in the piece of music to be transposed. The second is transposing by musical interval, which works well for tonal melodies and pieces that straddle more than one key or pieces that are not in a key at all. The third is transposing by clefs. Reading a set of notes in a different clef instantly transforms the same dots on the staff into different pitches.

Questions

1. What does “on the fly” mean?
2. Give examples of transposing instruments mentioned in the feature.
3. How does transposing music help singers?
4. What musical skill does a musician need before they can transpose “on the fly”?

Answers

1. To be able to do something when an activity is in motion.
2. Trumpets and saxophones.
3. Transposing music and changing a song's key can enable multiple singers with different ranges to sing the same piece. You can transpose the music into a key that better fits the vocalist.
4. The ability to “sight read.”

Expand

Have students take what they learned in the lesson to work. Have them find a song on YouTube that they want to transpose and use one of the three methods in the lesson to transpose that piece. Have them perform it in the original key and the new key. Does the song take on a different feel or vibe in a different key?