

**A SONGWRITER'S GUIDE**

# **THE ROOT AND THIRD**

The 2 most fundamental notes in modern harmony



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# REVIEWING BASIC STEPS

Covering the fundamentals.

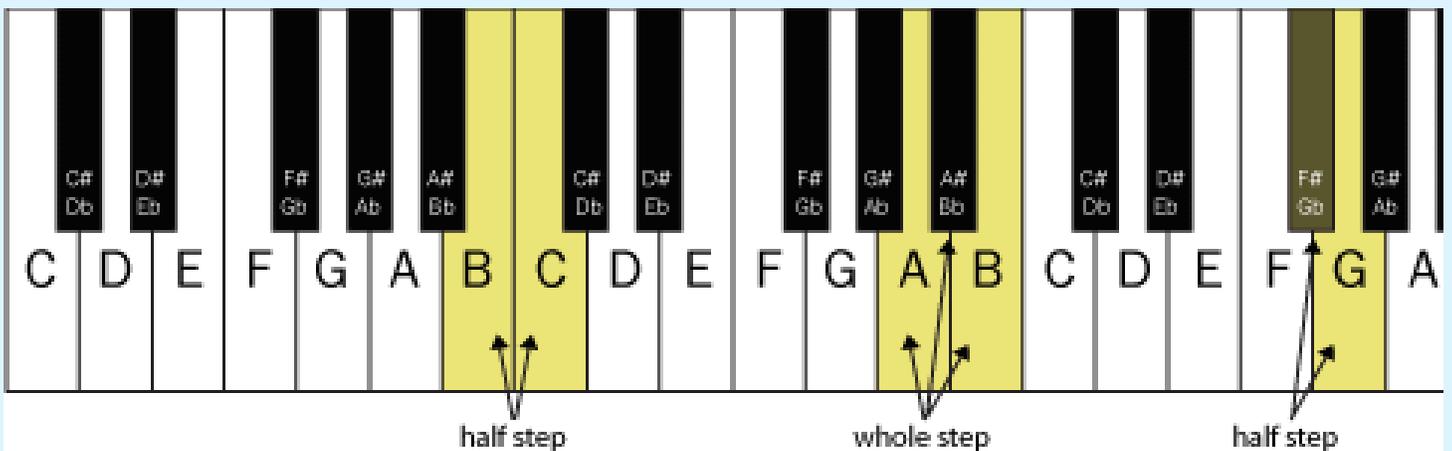
Before we discuss the root & third, we need to go over whole and half steps.

Half step: The distance from one note to the next.

- Ex: C to C#, E to F, Bb to B

Whole step: 2 half steps (with one note in between)

- Ex: C to D, D to E, B to C#



As shown above, B to C & F# to G are half steps (notes right next to each other), while A to B is a whole step (with A#/Bb in the middle). Knowing this concept is crucial.

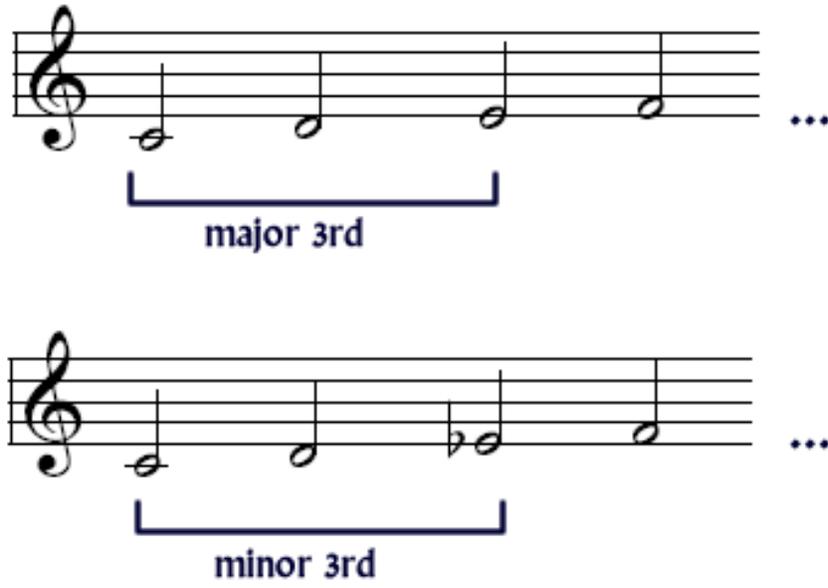
# INTERVALS

Interval: The distance between any two notes.

Intervals are created using steps. The larger the interval, the more steps in between those notes. In this short guide, we'll focus on one interval in particular: the 3rd. As you can see below, there are 2 main types of 3rd: The major and minor 3rd.

The **major 3rd** contains 4 half steps (2 whole steps) from one note to another.

The **minor 3rd** contains 3 half steps (1.5 whole steps).



The image shows two musical staves in treble clef. The first staff illustrates a major third interval, with a bracket underneath the first two notes labeled "major 3rd". The second staff illustrates a minor third interval, with a bracket underneath the first two notes labeled "minor 3rd". Both staves end with an ellipsis (...).

# EXPLORING THE THIRD

The interval that makes us laugh and cry.

The amazing thing about these intervals is that they evoke different emotions in us.

While the **major 3rd** makes us feel **happy and whole**, the **minor 3rd** gives us a sense of **sadness and regret**.

In the key of C major, C is the root, the fundamental note of the scale. Playing C-E will result in a major 3rd. Play these 2 notes (separated at first, then together) to hear the happy quality.

Then, lower the E to Eb, so that now you will play C to Eb. This is a minor 3rd, which should sound much sadder and mournful.

Knowing when to use which 3rd will result in a great-sounding song.

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use the notes of your scale to experiment!

Now that you know the difference between a major and minor 3rd, let's bring in the major scale. Using C major as an example, this is how it's spelled out:

C D E F G A B C

You'll notice there are no sharps (#) and flats (b) in the scale of C major. This is very helpful when first learning about intervals.

Now, arrange all the notes of the scale so that they are separated in 3rds. Try to find them all! Write down your findings; here are a few in the scale of C. Note that I'm always going from bottom to top in spelling.

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

# LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Analyze and play!

With your list of 3rds, make a note of which ones are major and minor 3rds (4 half steps / 3 half steps respectively). You may use your instrument to find out. It should look something like this:

- C to E = major 3rd
- A to C = minor 3rd
- E to G = minor 3rd
- F to A = major 3rd

You now have a complete list of 3rds!

Now, let's say you're writing a song with a 4-chord progression. With 4 counts in between each, choose 4 of the 3rds from your list and order them however you'd like. Play them on your instrument of choice (keyboard/guitar preferred) and listen to the results!

Pro tip: include the major 3rd starting from your root note (C to E) somewhere in the progression to really ground your song in the chosen key (C major in this example).

# RECAP

Thanks for reading!

A cool example of a progression could be:

A to C, G to B, C to E, F to A

Here's another:

C to E, D to F, A to C, G to B

Then repeat!

We did it! I hope this guide has helped you understand how important using major and minor 3rds are in our music. They really are the foundation of today's music, and once you grasp this, you'll be set to stack more intervals on top of each other to create more complex chords.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this over!

Let's make some awesome music! :D

With warmest regards,  
Christopher Siu