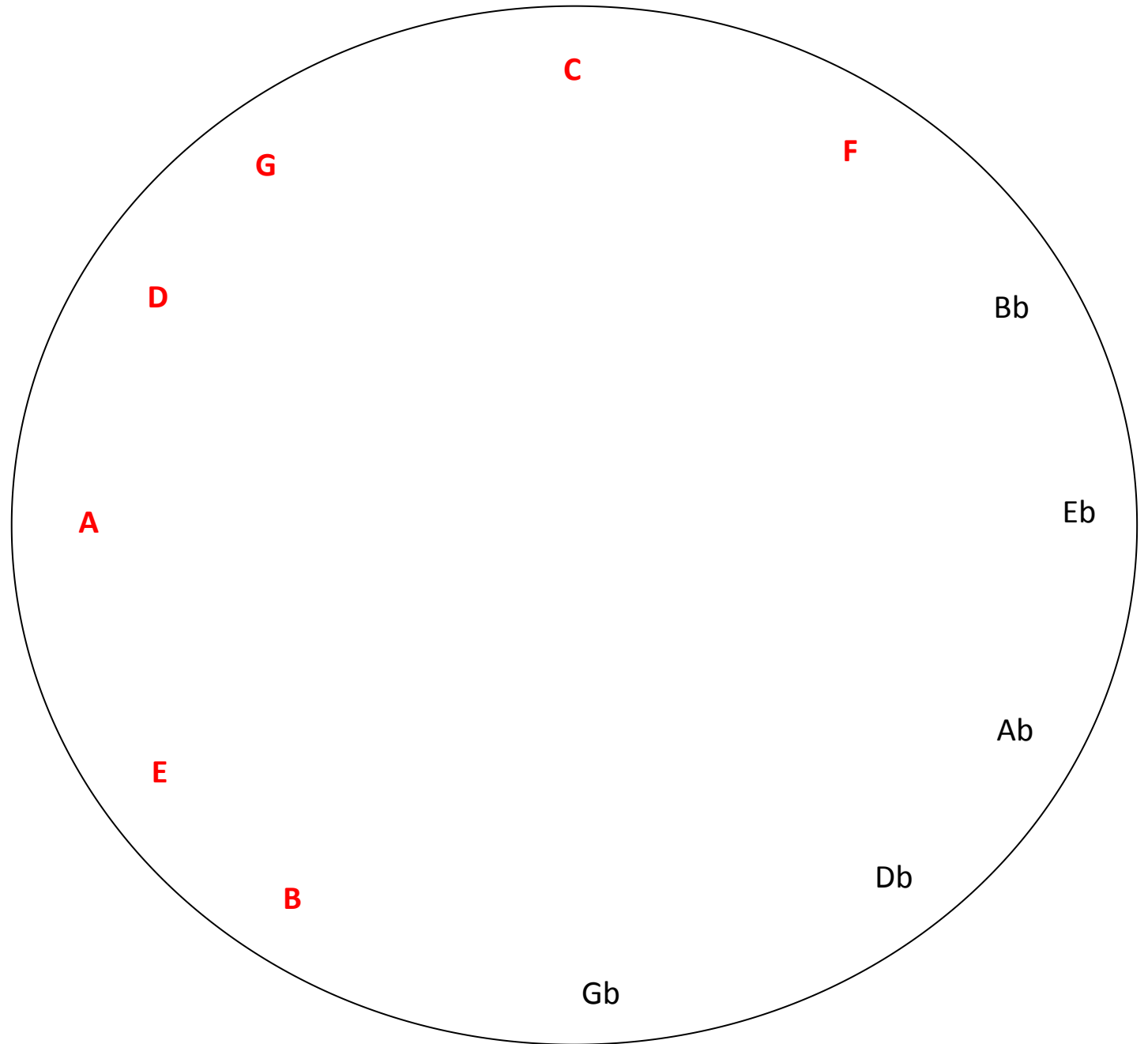


The Elements of Music

The Cycle of Keys

But how many of us have ever given thought as to how they got into this configuration?



First we need to demonstrate a Major Scale.

The formular for the construction of a Major Scale is:
2 2 1 (2) 2 2 1

1 being a semitone or half tone
2 being a tone or whole tone

The C Major Scale is all the white notes on piano keyboard.

Here it is illustrated on the 7th line of this music chart as The Ionian Scale.

Note that all of the scales illustrated use only the white keys of a keyboard. These are the modes.

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Chart 15 - The Ancient Greek Modes

The Dorian
The Phrygian
The Lydian
The Mixolydian
The Aeolian
The Locrian
The Ionian

The Ambrosian Church Modes (c 340 - 397)

The Organisation of the Cycle of Keys - The Flat Cycle

One explanation is: to find the flat sequence of scales, take the LOWER tetrachord and make it the UPPER tetrachord, then refill in the lower tetrachord.

In order to keep the tetrachords equal (the structure of a Major scale) it is necessary to flatten (b) the 4th note.

This explains why F Major has 1 flat, Bb

Chart 7 - The Flat Cycle of Keys

Lower Tetrachord *Upper Tetrachord*

This shows why the key's identity can be recognised from the 2nd last flat in the signature

Hint: if you have trouble recognising the name of keys with multiple flats, remember – the 2nd last flat of the signature is the name of the Key.

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The Organisation of the Cycle of Keys - The Sharp Cycle

To find the sharp sequence: take the UPPER tetrachord and make it the LOWER, and refill in the UPPER.

In order to maintain the Major structure it is necessary to sharpen (#) the 7th note of the scale.

This explains why G major has 1 sharp, F#

Chart 8 - The Sharp Cycle of Keys

Lower Tetrachord *Upper Tetrachord*

This illustrates why the key's identity can be recognised as a half tone above the last sharp

Hint: to identify the name of a sharp key, its name is a half-tone above the last sharp.

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