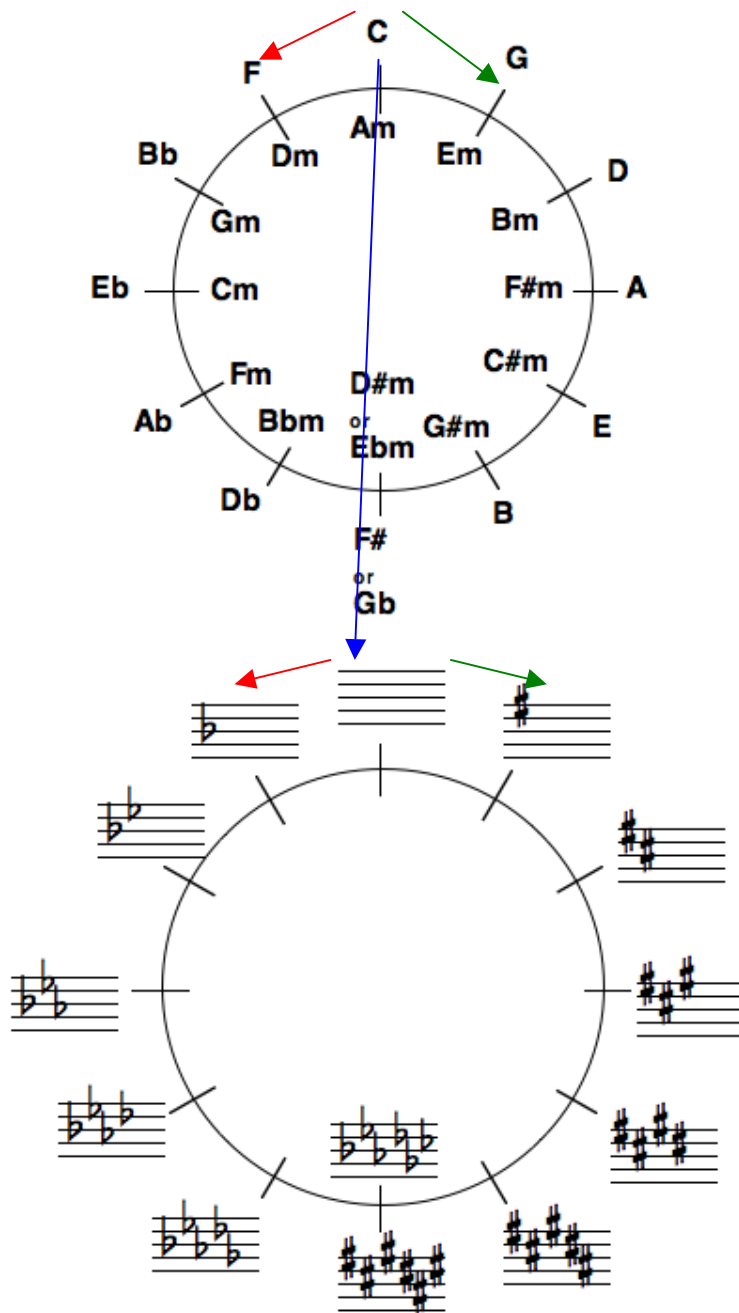


Circle of Fifths/Fourths

“What is the Circle of Fifths/Fourths?”



This is a question I hear often.

There are 12 keys in the chromatic western musical system. But how do they relate together?

These key names can correspond to the twelve markers on an analog clock. In the diagram I've given you here, each of the names of the Major keys are around the outside of the circle. C, which is at the top or 12 o'clock position, has no sharps or flats in its key signature.

The blue line drawn from the Key of C in the top

circle to the corresponding key signature in the lower circle illustrates this. (You may want to review **Lesson 4** if key signatures are unclear to you.)

When you follow the **green** arrow clockwise around the circle, you are following the Circle of Fifths. The key of G, to the right of C, is the fifth step in the C scale. The key of D, to the right of G, is the fifth step in the G scale, and so on.

In a similar way, if you follow the same arrow around in the lower circle, you can see that one sharp (#) gets added to the key signature of each new key as you travel around the circle in a clockwise fashion.

When you follow the **red** arrow counter-clockwise around the circle, you are following the Circle of Fourths. The key of F, to the left of C, is the fourth step in the C scale. The key of Bb, to the left of F, is the fourth step in the F scale, and so on.

In a similar way, if you follow the same arrow around in the lower circle, you can see that one flat (b) gets added to the key signature of each new key as you travel around the circle in a clockwise fashion.

What is fascinating and elegant is that by starting at any point on the circle and traveling in one direction or the other through all the keys, you can always return back to where you started!

We'll talk about some uses of this understanding in the next lesson.

