

## Transposition Techniques

### 1. Intervallic (i.e., horizontal)

Transposing *intervallically* is a simple process of reading from note to note, following the progression of intervals: up a step, down a step, up a fifth, down a minor third, etc.

Pros: generally effective for single-line instruments as long as the music isn't too complicated.

Cons: one mistake and the whole thing might go awry; doesn't work for reading multiple transpositions (as in orchestral score reading); ignores the overall harmonic structure of the music.

### 2. Analytic

Transposing *analytically* is a process in which technical features of the music are used to help with the transposition. The simplest is by reading the scale degrees in the original melody and then playing those same scale degrees in the new key. At a more complex level, analytic transposition might involve performing a harmonic analysis of the original and then using that to play the music in the new key.

Pros: generally effective for reading harmonic music such as hymns, chorales, or predominantly homophonic textures.

Cons: requires knowledge of key centers in the music involved; generally breaks down with atonal or more complex music; impractical for reading multiple transpositions (as in orchestral score reading).

### 3. Key-Shift

Transposing by *key-shift* is using your ear to perform what on some instruments might be accomplished with a button, or a *capo* bar. The ear moves its reference tonic to the tonic of the new piece, and then hears the music in that new key from that point onwards.

Pros: for voice or some instruments, key-shift might be the most natural and effortless way to transpose.

Cons: does not work with instruments with geographical key sense (such as the piano); is not practical for musicians with a highly developed sense of pitch (because the ear will insist on hearing the pitches absolutely); is impractical for reading multiple transpositions (as in orchestral score reading).

#### **4. Clef-Based**

Transposing by *clef* is a somewhat mechanical process that requires significant training to master but which can be widely practical and reliable. The performer imagines the printed music in a clef other than the original (one in which the on-staff pitches match the pitches in the required key), making appropriate changes to the key signature according to some basic rules, and modifying accidentals, also according to some basic rules.

Pros: allows the performer to sight-read the music in the transposition; does not require analytic or an intensively trained ear; works equally well with tonal and atonal music; the only technique which will work with multiple transpositions (as in orchestral score reading.)

Cons: requires thoroughgoing familiarity with the required clefs, which may include rarities such as mezzo-soprano or baritone clef; can be more trouble than it's worth for simple transposition jobs; can break down in certain situations (such as extreme key signatures).

#### **5. Instinct-Based**

This is the one nobody can teach. Here one simply *thinks in the new key* and plays the music that way. At some mental level, undoubtedly an analytic approach is being used, but the performer is unaware of the process involved.

Such transposition technique generally only occurs after significant practice, and only among individuals with a natural ability in that direction.