

Konsole Kapets

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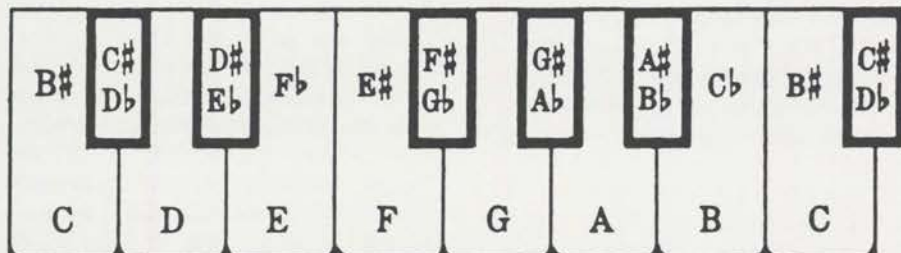
IS IT WRITTEN IN MY KEY?

How many times have you looked at a sheet of music and noted how many sharps or flats were involved in the key signature? But can you tell in an instant what key the piece is in?

The key, or general tonality, is based on the scale in which the song is written. For example, if there are no sharps or flats between the clefs and the time signature, the song is based on the C scale, which has no sharps or flats. Therefore, the piece is in the key of C. A key signature can have as

E, A and D, in that order. The next to last is Ab. Therefore, the song is in the key of Ab. All flat keys are followed by "b" (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, etc.) with two exceptions — the key of C, discussed above, and the key of F.

Sharp keys are another story. A sharp in the key signature indicates that all notes by that name are to be played a half-step higher, unless preceded by a ♮. Sharps, too, are always written in the same order — F, C, G, D, A, E, B. (Note that they are in re-



many as seven sharps or flats. Let's deal with the flats first.

A flat in the key signature indicates that all notes by that name are to be played a half-step lower. For example, a flat on the third line of the treble staff indicates that all B's are to be played flat. The only exception is if a natural sign (♮) precedes the note. Flats are always written in the same order — B, E, A, D, G, C, F. In order to determine the name of a key with flats, look at the *next to last* flat in the key signature. This is the name of the key. For example, if a piece has four flats in the key signature, they are B,

verse order of the flats.) To determine the name of a sharp key, take the *last* sharp and raise it a half-step. For example, if a key signature has four sharps, they are, in order, F, C, G and D. The last sharp is D. Therefore, by raising the D# by a half-step we find the key is E. The only exception is, again, the key of C.

A more difficult example might be found in a key signature of six sharps — F, C, G, D, A and E. What is an E#? Remember that the definition of a sharp is to raise the note a half-step. This does not necessarily indicate a black key. Therefore, E# = F, and

when raising E# by a half-step we find the key with six sharps is F#. Likewise, B# = C, and in dealing with flats Fb = E and Cb = B.

Many people who play a musical instrument find that playing in flats is easier than playing in sharps. Why? Could it be because flats *look* easier and more orderly? Is it because the human ear naturally tends to favor flats over naturals? Several isolated experiments with several choral groups indicated that, if the group sang without accompaniment, it would settle in a key comfortable to the ear, always flat. Yet if the same piece was sung starting on the lower pitch, the group held its pitch throughout. Trained singers and choirs accustomed to singing without accompaniment, of course, do not have this problem. However, many of you "by ear" players play on all black keys instead of in the key of C. So, the unanswered question remains, why do musicians prefer flats?

But now you can find the key of any piece, and be able to play in any key without being intimidated by all those sharps or flats! □

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