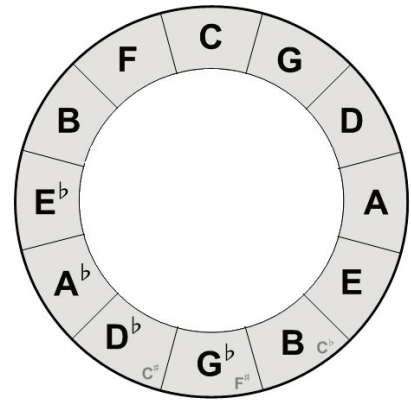


The Circle of Fifths

The Circle of Fifths is a graphic representation of two important intervals, the fourth and the fifth. While Circle of Fifths is the more popular name, you will sometimes see it referred to as the Circle of Fourths.

When these intervals are depicted graphically in a circle, many other important musical elements are revealed. Since music is the result of different regular frequencies resonating with each other, its ability to create patterns is nearly endless. What prisms do to light, instruments do to music. And just as a kaleidoscope shows patterns of light, the Circle of Fifths shows a pattern of music. This pattern is useful in understanding how music is put together.



THE RING OF NOTES

Most of the time the Circle of Fifths is shown as a ring with 12 (or 15) notes on it. This stripped down version has left many musicians scratching their heads wondering what it all means. To be sure, such a basic diagram does nothing to show you how and why this information is so useful.

There are 12 distinct keys or tonal centers in music. There are, however, three keys that share the same tones but their notes go by different names. For instance, even though the key of $D\flat$ and $C\sharp$ sound identical, they are written differently on a musical staff.

Each of the 12 keys is made up of seven notes. So, 12 keys times 7 notes equals 84 notes ($12 \times 7 = 84$).

When you wrap these 84 notes in a circle and highlight every seventh note, you can see why the notes on the Circle of Fifths are arranged they way they are. The interval of a fifth is $3\text{-}1/2$ whole steps up the scale.

