MUT 1001
FUNDAMENTALS OF MUSIC

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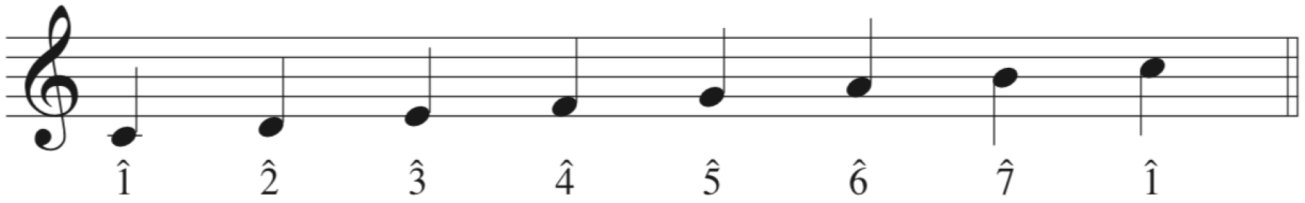
UNIT 6
MINOR KEYS AND SCALES

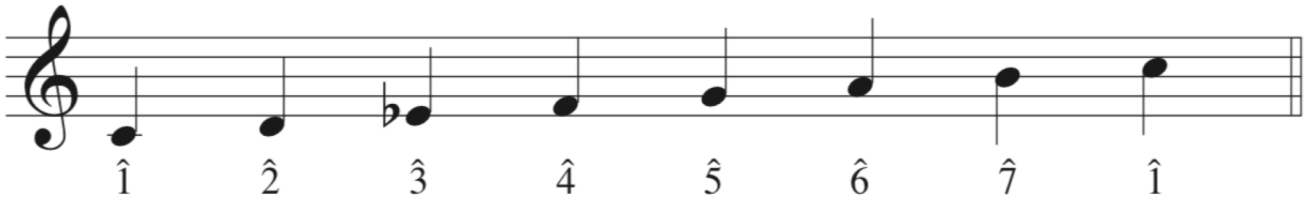
MAJOR TO MINOR

The simplest way to generate a minor scale is to start with a major scale and lower the third note ($\hat{3}$). You may think of a minor scale as an inflected major scale.
The lowered third is the basic and most important difference between major and minor scales.

C major



C minor

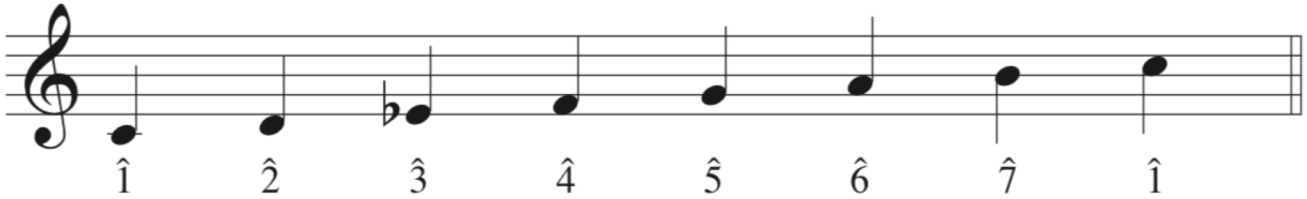


Ex. 6-1

MAJOR TO MINOR

Another important difference between major and minor scales is that while there is only one major scale, there are three common types of minor scales. The scale we obtain by simply lowering the third of a major scale is called melodic minor scale. The other two are harmonic and natural.

C melodic minor

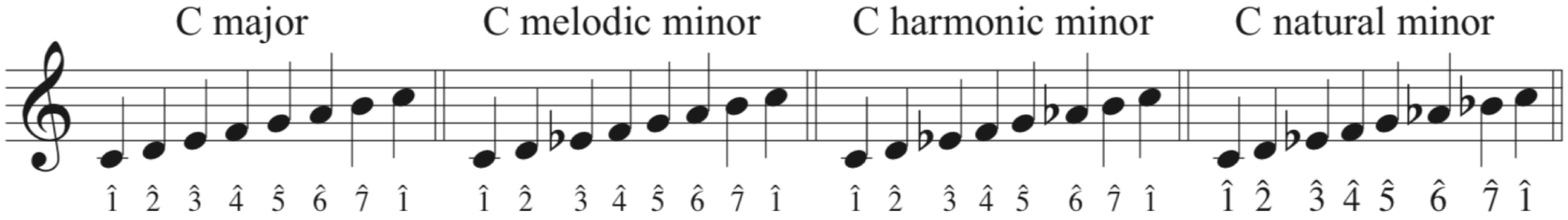


Note that while each of these scales has a different name, in practice, a composition in a minor key will often contain fragments of all three. When we describe a piece as being in a *minor key*, we do not need to specify the scale (in most cases this would not be possible anyway). We simply say that it is in *minor* instead of *major*.

Ex. 6-2

PARALLEL MINOR

There are two methods for constructing minor scales: parallel and relative. The parallel method consists of altering a major scale to derive a minor scale. We constructed our first scale (Ex. 6-1) using this method. The term *parallel* refers to the fact that the starting note of the scale (known as *tonic*) is the same for both the major scale and the minor scale derived from it (i.e. C major/C minor). The example below shows all three minor scales constructed using this method. The scales are arranged in order of how many notes are altered with respect to the major scale. Note that all three minor scales have a lowered $\hat{3}$. Notice also that $\hat{1}$, $\hat{4}$, and $\hat{5}$ are the same for all four scales.



Ex. 6-3

PARALLEL MINOR

Before discussing the relative method let's summarize the parallel method:

Parallel Method Summary
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 = major scale
1 2 ♭3 4 5 6 7 = melodic minor
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 7 = harmonic minor
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7 = natural minor

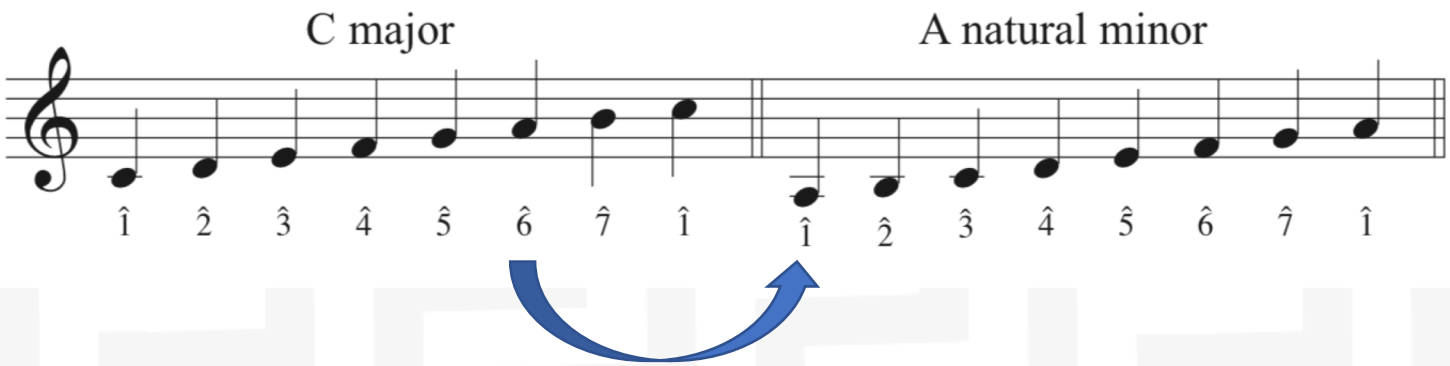
Try spelling the following scales using the parallel method:

D harmonic minor
E melodic minor
G natural minor
A harmonic minor

Ex. 6-4

RELATIVE MINOR

Minor and major scales also share another interesting relationship:
A major scale starting from $\hat{6}$ becomes a natural minor scale.



The A ($\hat{6}$ of the C major scale) becomes $\hat{1}$ in the A natural minor scale. Note that both scales have the same accidentals (in this case none).

Ex. 6-5

RELATIVE MINOR

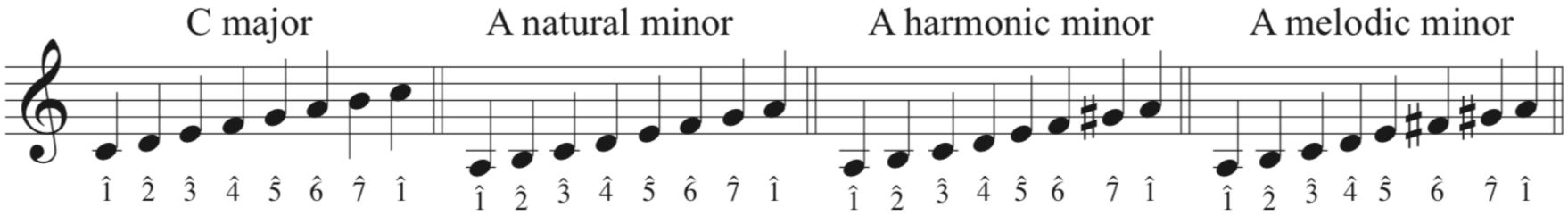
Based on the previous example we can state the following:

1) All major scales have a relative minor

2) A major scale and its relative minor have the same accidentals and therefore the same key signature

3) When we move from a major scale to the relative minor, we shift the tonic from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{6}$ of the major scale. $\hat{6}$ then becomes $\hat{1}$ of the minor scale. This scale will be a natural minor scale.

Once we construct our natural minor scale we can alter it do derive the harmonic and melodic versions.



You may have noticed that the scales are arranged in different order here than Ex. 6-3. This is because the natural minor has the most notes in common with the relative major.

Ex. 6-5

RELATIVE MINOR

Relative Method Summary
Natural minor = major scale starting from $\hat{6}$ ($\hat{6}$ becomes $\hat{1}$)
Harmonic minor = natural minor with raised $\hat{7}$
Melodic minor = natural minor with raised $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$

Note that the accidental used to raise a note will depend on the spelling of the starting notes. Here is a quick reference:

If the starting note is natural use a sharp sign (♯)
If the starting note is flat use a natural sign (♮)
If the starting note is sharp use a double sharp sign (𝄪)

Ex. 6-6

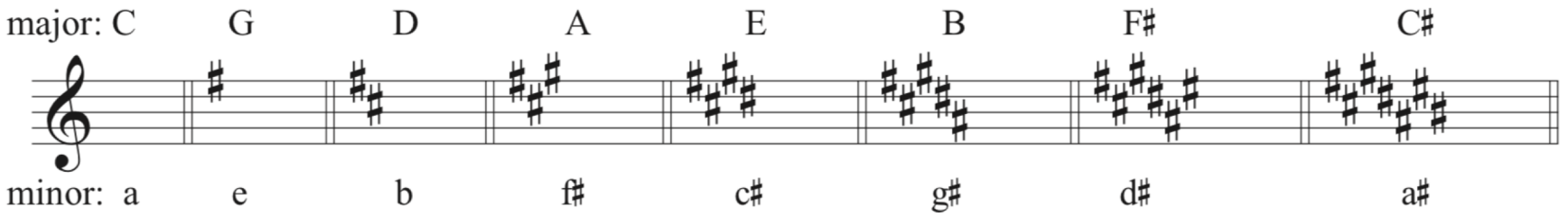
RELATIVE MINOR

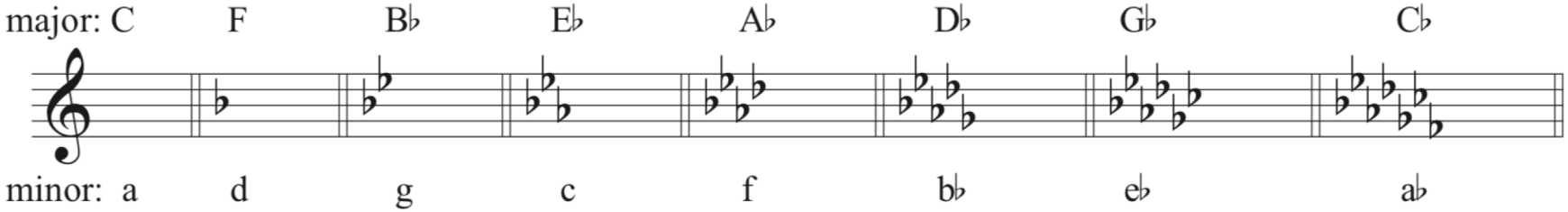
Now try spelling the following scales using the relative method:

B natural minor
D melodic minor
G harmonic minor
F# natural minor

On the next slide you will find a key signature reference that you may find helpful.

MAJOR AND MINOR KEY SIGNATURES





CLASS PRACTICE 1

Spell out the following scales using the parallel method:

C natural minor

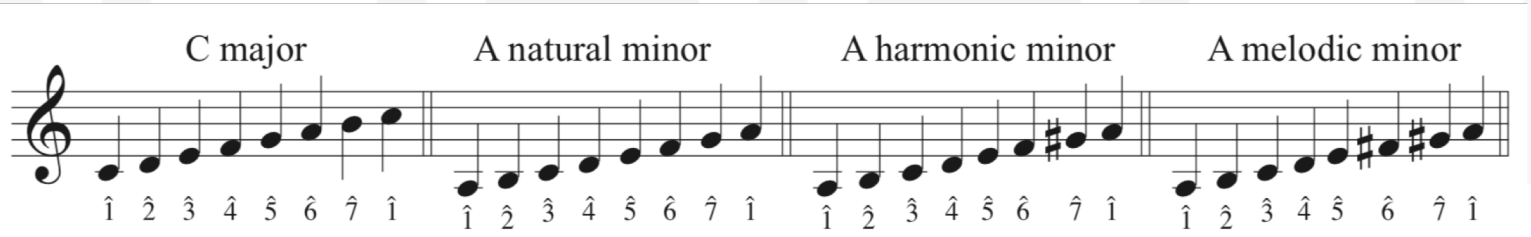
D♭ major

C♯ harmonic minor

G melodic minor (ascending and descending)

CLASS PRACTICE 2

Given the following majors scales, derive the relative minor scale, then write the harmonic and melodic minor version:

D major, B major, F major, G major

Example: