

# MUSIC THEORY.aargh©

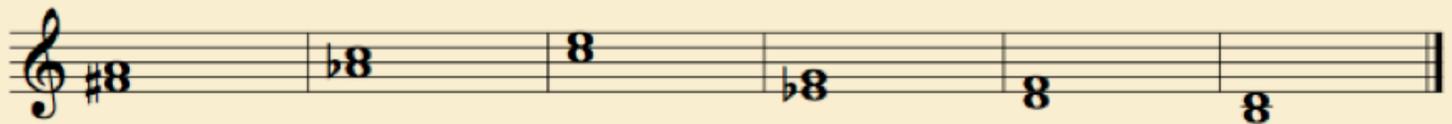
## The Year of the Interval: THIRDS (Session 13)

By Dr. Ona Pinsonneault

**Answers to August questions about SECONDS:** G# to A is a minor second, Ab to Bb a major second, C to D a major second, Eb to F a major second, D to E a major second, and B to C a minor second. *Für Elise* begins with a minor second, *Joy to the World* with a minor second, *Three Blind Mice* a Major second, and *Doe, a Deer* a Major second. (See Session 12 in August issue.) Did you get them right?

This time let's talk about thirds. A whole step contains two half steps. Two whole steps make up a *Major Third* if the letters of the two notes are also three letters apart. Pairs of notes that are major thirds apart are C up to E, D up to F#, E up to G#, F up to A, G up to B, A up to C#, and B up to D#. (Count two whole steps and three letters, i.e., C, D, E.) Why do some of these pairs have a sharp (#) on one of the notes? Without the sharp, the two letters would be 1½ steps apart. They are called *Minor Thirds*: D up to F, E up to G, A up to C, and B up to D. What about the flats? These are all minor thirds: C up to Eb, F up to Ab, G up to Bb; also, minor thirds are found between C# up to E, F# up to A, G# up to B, D# up to F#, etc.

Can you identify these intervals as *major* or *minor thirds*?



Thirds begin these well-known compositions: Are they major or minor thirds?

- *Lullaby* by Brahms
- *Good-night (Ladies)*
- *The Star Spangled Banner* (first two notes)
- *An-chors (Away)*

Answers will appear in the next issue of *Clapper Chatter*.

Until next time,

**Dr. P**

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*A Major Third* occurs between the root and third of a Major triad. (See Session 11, April 2013.) This contributes to the strength of the Major triad as a sound. Compositions in Major keys sound strong, noble, positive, triumphant, joyous, etc. (Key type is coupled with dynamics, meter, range and tempo for the complete desired effect.)

*A Minor Third* occurs between the root and third of a minor triad, the distance between tonic and the third of a minor scale. Compositions in minor keys sound soulful, warm, contemplative, introspective, etc. Again together with dynamics, meter, range and tempo the composer can convey the total effect desired. Recognizing the quality of the third is paramount for a true reading of a composition. Where thirds appear in a composition is a key element to tonal music.

*Compound Intervals* exceed the distance of an octave. C5 up to E6 is a *compound major third* or a *major tenth*. C5 up to Eb6 is a *compound minor third* or a *minor tenth*. Compound intervals maintain the same qualities (for example: strong vs. soulful) as their *Simple* (intervals of an octave or less) counterparts, with the sound more expansive.