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Accidentals - 4 (Session 27)

For Harmonic and Melodic Reasons: The Minor Scale

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As promised this session will address **the minor scale**. The first glance of a composition in a minor key shows many accidentals. However, two of them belong to the scale, the raised 6th and 7th pitch of the scale. Why they belong to the minor scale comes from tradition more than anything else. In the Baroque period, or around the time of J. S. Bach (1685-1750), compositions began to desire to move away from the older scale basis, the modes. The one mode that remained was **Aeolian** now also called the **Natural form** of the minor scale. Compared to a **Major scale** the **Natural form** of the minor scale has 3rd, 6th, and 7th pitches a half step lower. Compare the following minor scale to that of **C Major**, no sharps or flats.

C minor: Natural minor Harmonic minor Melodic minor ascending and descending

When composers began to establish **harmonic progression** that would help emphasize the tonality, again during the time of Bach, there was a desire to use the raised 7th pitch, especially in the chord built on dominant (5, raised 7, and 2) therefore giving the scale a **leading tone**. (An important pitch a half step below tonic and forming a tritone {required resolution} with the 4th scale degree.) **See the middle scale above**. However, there was then an Augmented Second between 6 and raised 7 (Ab and B above), a dissonant sound. It was decided by composers to use both raised 6 and 7 as a melody moved up to 1 (tonic), and to use the 7 and 6 from the key signature when the melody moved down from tonic.

The composition by Kathleen Wissinger **Prairie Suite**, “*People of the South Wind*” uses all of these things. Below are two examples from that composition. The first one, measures 9-10, uses the **natural form of the scale, Ab and Bb**; the second, measure 33, uses the **harmonic form of the scale, Ab**. Measure 34 uses the **harmonic and melodic form of the scale, A and B naturals**.

Natural Form

Harmonic form (for harmony), measure 33, beat 3, Ab; measure 34, beat 1, B natural

Melodic form (for melody), measure 34, beats 2-3, bass clef

The minor scale is the only scale that consistently uses accidentals as pitches belonging to the scale.

Until next time,

Dr. P

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