

REGINA PACIS COLLEGE, ABUJA

MUSIC - JSS 3 CLASS NOTE

Topic: Key Signature

Sub-topic: Understanding Key Signatures, Sharps and Flats

Learning Objectives

At the end of the lesson, students should be able to: (1) Define a key signature. (2) Explain its purpose in music. (3) Identify sharps and flats used as key signatures. (4) Identify major keys associated with common key signatures. (5) Write key signatures correctly on the musical staff.

1. Meaning of Key Signature

A key signature is a group of sharps (#) or flats (b) written at the beginning of a musical staff, immediately after the clef. It tells us which notes are to be consistently played or sung as sharp or flat throughout a piece of music, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Purpose of a Key Signature

A key signature is used to show the key in which a piece is written, avoid writing the same sharp or flat repeatedly, help performers know which notes are normally sharp or flat, and make musical notation shorter and easier to read.

3. Sharps and Flats

A. Sharp Key Signatures (#)

A sharp raises the pitch of a note by one semitone.

Order of sharps: F# – C# – G# – D# – A# – E# – B#

Mnemonic: Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle.

B. Flat Key Signatures (b)

A flat lowers the pitch of a note by one semitone.

Order of flats: Bb – Eb – Ab – Db – Gb – Cb – Fb

Mnemonic: Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles' Father.

4. Major Key Signatures

Number of Accidentals	Key	Key Signature
0	C Major	None
1 #	G Major	F#
2 #	D Major	F#, C#
3 #	A Major	F#, C#, G#
4 #	E Major	F#, C#, G#, D#
5 #	B Major	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#
6 #	F# Major	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#
7 #	C# Major	All seven sharps
1 b	F Major	Bb

Number of Accidentals	Key	Key Signature
2 $\flat$	B $\flat$ Major	B $\flat$, E $\flat$
3 $\flat$	E $\flat$ Major	B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$
4 $\flat$	A $\flat$ Major	B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$, D $\flat$
5 $\flat$	D $\flat$ Major	B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$, D $\flat$, G $\flat$
6 $\flat$	G $\flat$ Major	B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$, D $\flat$, G $\flat$, C $\flat$
7 $\flat$	C $\flat$ Major	All seven flats

5. Key Signature and the Major Scale

G Major Scale: G – A – B – C – D – E – F $\sharp$ – G. Therefore, G Major has one sharp (F $\sharp$) in its key signature.

F Major Scale: F – G – A – B – B $\flat$ – C – D – E – F.

Correction: The correct F Major scale is F – G – A – B $\flat$ – C – D – E – F. Therefore, F Major has one flat (B $\flat$).

6. How to Identify a Key from Sharps

When a key signature contains sharps, the last sharp is one semitone below the name of the major key. Example: F $\sharp$, C $\sharp$, G $\sharp$ → the last sharp is G $\sharp$; one semitone above G $\sharp$ is A. Therefore, the key is A Major.

7. How to Identify a Key from Flats

When a key signature contains flats, the second-to-last flat gives the name of the major key. Example: B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$ → the second-to-last flat is E $\flat$, so the key is E $\flat$ Major. Exception: one flat = F Major.

8. Key Signature and Accidentals

A key signature appears at the beginning of the staff and applies throughout the piece. An accidental is a sharp, flat, or natural sign placed before an individual note to temporarily change its pitch.

Main accidentals: Sharp ($\sharp$) – raises a note by one semitone; Flat ($\flat$) – lowers a note by one semitone; Natural ($\natural$) – cancels a previous sharp or flat.

Class Exercise

A. Answer the following:

1. What is a key signature?
2. Where is a key signature written?
3. What is the purpose of a key signature?
4. State the order of sharps.
5. State the order of flats.
6. How many sharps are in D Major?
7. What is the key signature of F Major?
8. What major key has three sharps?
9. What major key has three flats?
10. What is the difference between a key signature and an accidental?

B. Identify the keys:

1. No sharps or flats = _____

2. F# = _____
3. F#, C# = _____
4. B $\flat$ = _____
5. B $\flat$, E $\flat$ = _____
6. B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$ = _____

Summary

A key signature is a group of sharps or flats placed after the clef at the beginning of a musical piece. It indicates the key of the music and tells the performer which notes are normally sharp or flat. Learning key signatures helps musicians read, perform, compose, and understand music more accurately.