

Vocal Technique Lesson with Romain – Handout Friday 26 June 2020

Intervals

Hello everyone!

If a song or musical piece was a cooked meal, the music score or charts would be the recipe and the intervals would be some of the most important ingredients. Each of them has got a specific flavour or taste. There is probably no need for you to know everything about them when you sing a song but it is definitely good to be aware of them, and to be able to recognise some of them.

Intervals can be heard melodically or harmonically. Melodically when it is a succession of intervals, individual notes going up or down. Harmonically when the intervals belong to a chord. A three notes chord will have three intervals. For example, the C Major chord is the interval C-E called a major third, plus the interval E-G called a minor third, as well as the interval C-G called a fifth. Some musical motifs have got the same pattern of intervals, like scales. Remember that the major scale is a succession of a tone, a tone, a semi-tone, a tone, a tone, a tone and finally a semi-tone. In today's lesson, we are going to combine music theory and vocal exercise by singing the different main intervals you can possibly come across when you sing a song and I'll give you examples of songs or musical pieces using these intervals.

Microtone

Only found in some contemporary classical music and world music, very rarely in pop music. They are even smaller than semitones. If you sing a note a tiny bit out of tune either a bit sharp or flat, you are probably singing microtones unconsciously.

Semitone: C to C#

In pop music, it is the smallest interval, very common as you can imagine. It is the space between your frets on your guitar or the space between two keys on the piano.

You hear it a lot in film music when the film is dark, scary or tense, 'The Jaws' theme for example. Or if you know Beethoven's piece 'Letter to Elise', the very beginning is a repetition of the same semitones, which makes it sound hesitating.

Choose any note on a piano or a guitar and sing it. Then play the next note up and sing that second note. And now sing both notes one after another and repeat it in a loop. This is a semitone.

Feel it and imagine that it is the smallest interval of all. Try to sing the interval either smoothly or separating both notes.

'**Fly me** to the moon' starts with a descending semitone.

Tone: C to D

Play it and sing it.

You find it in the national anthem, going upwards: 'God **save the** queen' when you sing 'save the'.

Or twice downwards at the start of the chorus in '**Let it be**'

Or twice downwards and twice upwards (backwards) in '**Mary had a little lamb**'

Minor third: C to Eb

Play it and sing it.

'**Hey Jude**' starts with a descending minor third.

Major third: C to E

Play it and sing it.

'**Oh when** the saints' starts with an ascending one. '**Summertime**' starts with a descending major third followed by an ascending one (backwards).

Fourth: C to F

Play it and sing it.

Both '**Amazing grace**' and '**Somewhere** beyond the sea' start with an ascending fourth.

Augmented fourth or Diminished fifth or Tritone: C to F# or Gb

Play it and sing it.

It is very rare in pop music. It has also been called the 'devil's interval' because it sounds scary and clashy. At the very start of the Simpsons music theme, you'll hear one: **'The Simpsons' (C F# G)**

Fifth: C to G

Play it and sing it.

The beginning of 'Can't help falling in love' has got two consecutive fifths, one upward, one downward: **'Wise men say'**

And the melody of the nursery rhymes **'Twinkle twinkle** little stars' starts with the notes 'C C G G'

Minor 6th: C to Ab

Play it and sing it.

You may have heard of 'The Entertainer' a ragtime piano piece by Scott Joplin. The third, fourth and following notes of the theme are minor thirds: D, D#, **E, C, E, C, E, C**

Major 6th: C to A

Play it and sing it.

'My bonnie lies over the ocean' and 'Jingle bells' (**'Dashing** through the snow') both start with an ascending major 6th.

'My Way' also starts with a major 6th. And you can even hear a minor 6th soon after the beginning.

Minor 7th: C to Bb

Play it and sing it.

The chorus of 'The winner takes it all' by ABBA features a ascending minor 7th

Major 7th: C to B

Play it and sing it.

Also rare in pop music. The very start of 'Don't know why' by Norah Jones is an ascending major 7th

Octave: C to C

Play it and sing it.

More common, found at the start of **'Somewhere** over the rainbow' and **'I'm singing** in the rain'

As a vocal warm-up, you can sing all these intervals one after another. Here is an example:

C – C# – C

C – D – C

C – Eb – C

C – E – C

C – F – C

C – F# – C

C – G – C

C – Ab – C

C – A – C

C – Bb – C

C – B – C

C – C – C

And then the same thing but starting the whole warm-up up a semitone:

C# – D – C#, C# – D# – C#, C# – E – C#, C# – E# – C#, C# – F# – C#, C# – G – C#, C# – G# – C#, C# – A – C#, C# – A# – C#, C# – B – C#, C# – B# – C#, C# – C# – C#

And up another semitone:

D – D# – D, D – E – D, D – F – D, D – F# – D, D – G – D, D – G# – D, D – A – D, D – Bb – D, D – B – D, D – C – D, D – C# – D, D – D – D and so on...

Take care everybody!