

## MASTERS OF THE MUSIC ALPHABET

(Credits: Cheryl Floyd and GIA Publications)

Most of learning takes place when we are taught a pattern or sequence that moves forward from a beginning point to an ending point. We learn to say the alphabet starting with A then B then C through the 26 letters. (We learn to count starting with 1 then 2 then 3 through infinity). We learn to read words in a sentence starting with the first word on the left to the last word on the right of the sentence. We read words from the first letter on the left to the last letter on the right. We learn with forward motion and direction. We usually don't count backwards (well, the New Year is brought in with a "backward counting" chant) but counting backward is usually the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time we count forward, we read words and sentences left to right and we say the alphabet forward.

The musical alphabet consists of seven letters: A B C D E F G. We are proficient in saying these letters starting with A and moving forward through the sequence. (We know this from learning the alphabet and reading, writing and spelling that way since kindergarten.)

HOWEVER, when students are reading and thinking about notation they are often thinking and reading and playing notation that requires a reverse or backward thought process—like a descending line in the music.

It is easy to think: A B C D E F G because this is how we think the alphabet for reading words. In music we also expect our students to think the pattern backward: G F E D C B A.

So to play Masters of the Musical Alphabet students must be able to say each of the seven letter name patterns forward and backward using an eight count eighth note pattern.

## Masters of the Alphabet

The image shows seven lines of musical notation in 2/4 time, each with a starting measure number (4, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25) and a series of notes with letter labels below them. The notes are connected by beams, and each line ends with a double bar line. The patterns are as follows:

- Line 4: A B C D | E F G A | G F E D | C B A
- Line 5: B C D E | F G A B | A G F E | D C B
- Line 9: C D E F | G A B C | B A G F | E D C
- Line 13: D E F G | A B C D | C B A G | F E D
- Line 17: E F G A | B C D E | D C B A | G F E
- Line 21: F G A B | C D E F | E D C B | A G F
- Line 25: G A B C | D E F G | F E D C | B A G

Ok you try it. Can you say all 7 patterns forward and backward?

Remember this is done from memory AND if you miss a letter you are done and have to start again at the beginning with Line One and the A pattern. :-)

Set a metronome with a click. You have to say it up and down in strict time.

Now try it with a faster tempo without messing up.

We have found the process of saying the musical alphabet both forward and backward has greatly helped our students. This helps so much with Scales.

Too many students learn a scale by muscle memory alone and then when they make a mistake (usually coming down). They have no idea where they are because they are not thinking.

I ask them to say the scales up and down and show me the fingering.

When my students are “Masters of the Alphabet,” their ability to play their scales correctly up and down dramatically improves. Review this game for several days during strategic times of the year.