DESCRIBING PITCH IN 24- AND 48-DIV

Basics 2

On the free resources page of the web site, you can download 2 charts, the first of which describes the quarter-tone intervals and the second describes the eighth-tone intervals from a unison to an octave (see 'Intervals in 24-div, descriptions and abbreviations' and 'Intervals in 48-div, descriptions and abbreviations').

These charts offer a sensible solution to standardisation. With such intervals becoming much more common in new music, even music which isn't necessarily 'microtonal' in orientation, it makes sense to have ways of talking about the music which we can all understand.

The abbreviations are useful for interval analysis. It is a good idea, for example, in the early stages of microtonal playing, to add these to the studies as an aid to reading.

The 'Quarter-Tone Interval Look-up Chart' and 'Eighth-Tone Interval Look-up Chart' on the same page offer the possibility to check on the name of an interval, directly from a score, identified by the abbreviation. This can help resolve confusion caused by the new intervals and, sometimes, the disorganised presentation of composers new to using them.

It is usual, in music derived from a division of the tone, as both these systems are, to describe the smallest unit as an *n-tone* (where *n* describes the degree of division of the tone). Thus, a division into four becomes a quarter-tone and, into eight parts, an eighth-tone (it is usual to hyphenate quarter-tone, third-tone etc. but not semitone, although this is not consistent practice).

When referring to a specific pitch, the word 'tone' is best omitted: thus, a quarter-tone higher than, say, 'c' becomes 'c quarter sharp'; a quarter-tone lower becomes 'c quarter flat'; an eighth-tone higher is 'c eighth-sharp' and an eighth-tone flatter, 'c eighth-flat' and so on.

Microtonal pitches deriving from a division of the tone should be described in reference to their *nearest 12-div pitch* whenever possible. The description of a pitch as 'three-quarter sharp' or 'three-quarter-flat', in the case of quarter-tone music, or 'five-eighths sharp', 'seven-eighths-sharp', 'five-eighths-flat' or 'seven-eighths flat', in the case of eighth-tone music, can cause perceptual problems for the performer and this is exacerbated by the fact that five 12-div natural notes have a tone between them and two, a semitone.

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In quarter-tone music, then, rather than 'b three-quarter flat', the description 'b flat, quarter-flat' is preferable: instead of 'g three-quarter sharp', it is better to say 'g sharp, quarter-sharp'.

In eighth-tone music, 'g sharp, eighth-sharp' is better than 'g, five-eighths sharp' and 'a flat, eighth flat' better than 'a five-eighths flat'. Along the same lines, 'a sharp, quarter-sharp, eighth-sharp' is better than 'a seven-eighths-sharp' even if it is truly cumbersome and there may well be a strong arguement in this case for writing and calling the pitch 'b eighth-flat' – but pitch spelling is a matter we will review separately in the next section.

Interval naming can become rather complicated in microtonality for the simple reason that, in most cases, there are more pitches to the octave. We will cover the notation and naming of 19-div separately because, unlike 24- and 48-div, 19-div is not a subdivision of the familiar 12-div and, therefore, the theoretical starting point is different.

In Basics 3 we shall consider pitch spelling in 24 and 48-div.

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