

GETTING STARTED

Let's start with the essentials: scales, intervals, and chords—and how to sing them. Singers sometimes feel they “don't need to know this stuff.” After all, they just open their mouths, and it's all there, right? Well maybe for some people, but as a rule, most vocalists need at least a little training. Even if you have a perfect voice and a wonderful ear, it always helps to know a little about what you're doing.

There are many aspects to singing, especially if you're going to sing backing vocals. You never know when someone will throw a chart in front of you and ask, “Do you read?” or say, “Oh, just make up some parts, will ya?” (We vocalists typically want to respond, “Okay, just give me some vocal arranger credit, will ya?”)

As a singer, it's good for you to at least know the basics. What's a key signature? What's a staff? What are all those little black dots? For some of you this may be old news, but for those of you just beginning, this is an introduction into the musician's world, of which you are a part. Don't just think of yourself as a “singer”; think of yourself as a musician with the most natural and beautiful instrument of all, the voice. When you're trying to communicate with other musicians, or they with you, knowing the basics of harmony and theory, being able to read a little, and having some idea of what is going on around you can help tremendously.

How to Read Music

One reason music is known as a “universal language” is that it has a written notation system all its own. It's full of all types of symbols and figures you may never have seen before—or that you may have seen but didn't know what the heck they were.

Staff & Clef

Music is written on a series of lines and spaces called a *staff*. To capture the full range of pitches available, two staves are typically used—one with a *treble clef* (or “G clef”), the other with a *bass clef* (or “F clef”).



Treble clef is used for music and voices in the high registers—female voice, male tenor voice, guitar, right hand of the piano. Bass clef is used for music in the low registers—male bass voice, left hand of the piano.

Notes

Names of the notes follow the first seven letters of the alphabet—A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. A quick way to learn the notes on each staff is to break them down by lines and spaces. In treble clef, the lines of the staff, from bottom to top, are **E-G-B-D-F**. The spaces are **F-A-C-E**.

