

## Singing The Interval

Hopefully you have read *Finding the Interval* in the Song Craft section of our web site. You are a whiz at determining the key that any song is written in and can identify the note you are to begin with. You hear the pitch pipe play the key and.....

### Pitch a Fit

....you have no clue how that pitch pipe note will get you to the right starting pitch for your part. What is needed is to be able to determine the interval (number of notes) between the key (tonic note) and your note and be able to sing that interval. Unless you have been trained to sing intervals by ear (like as a music educator), learning to be able to sing your opening note from the pitch pipe will take some practice and, most likely, the use of some of our shortcuts.

When you first listen to the Learning Track for a new song, notice if the pitch pipe is higher or lower than your starting note. This will help you know whether the interval you are seeking is ascending (the pitch pipe is lower than your starting note) or descending (vice versa).

### Anatomy of an Octave

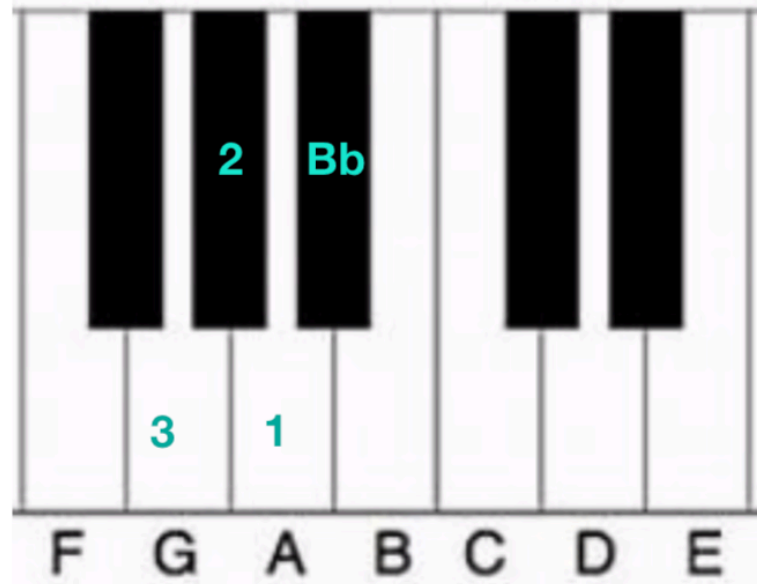
Technically octaves are musical notes that are twice or half the frequency of another note. To the human ear they are the “same note” sung higher or lower. Octaves play an important role in barbershop harmony, so including singing octave-intervals as part of your daily warmup is a great idea.

The octave in a major scale has eight notes (Doe-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Doe) where Doe and Doe are octave notes. They represent the white keys on a piano. However the octave can also be broken down into half, or semi, tones. That represents the distance between all piano key (white and black) in an

octave. And there are 12 semitones. Why should you care? It is in semitones that we measure the interval between the tonic note (keynote) and your starting note.

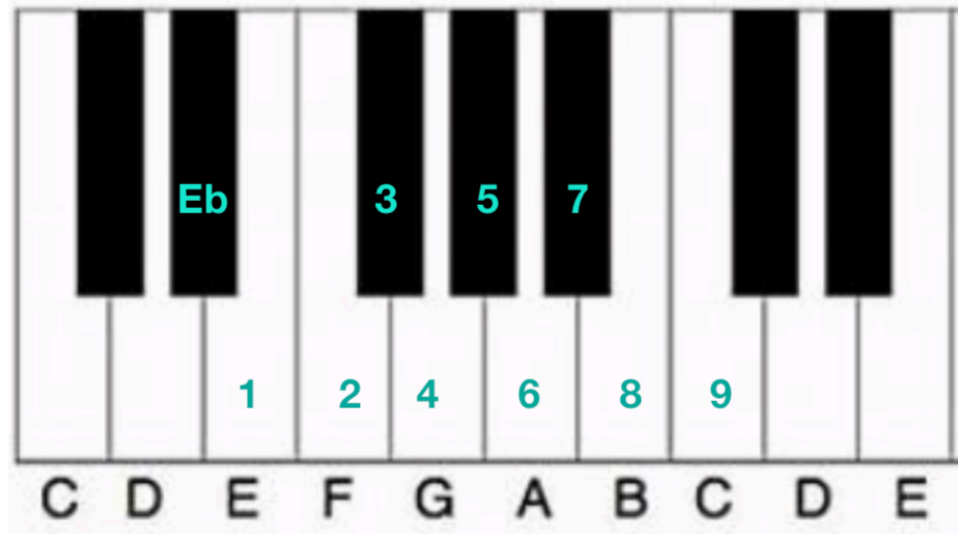
### Measure twice, sing once

First, using the facsimile of a piano keyboard found in the introduction to the *Interval* articles, locate the tonic note (pitch pipe) and your starting note. If the pitch pipe note is say a Bb and your note is the G below, then count the semitones between them. To do so, do not count the tonic note but count all of the white and black keys down to, and including, your note. Remember that each key is a semitone.



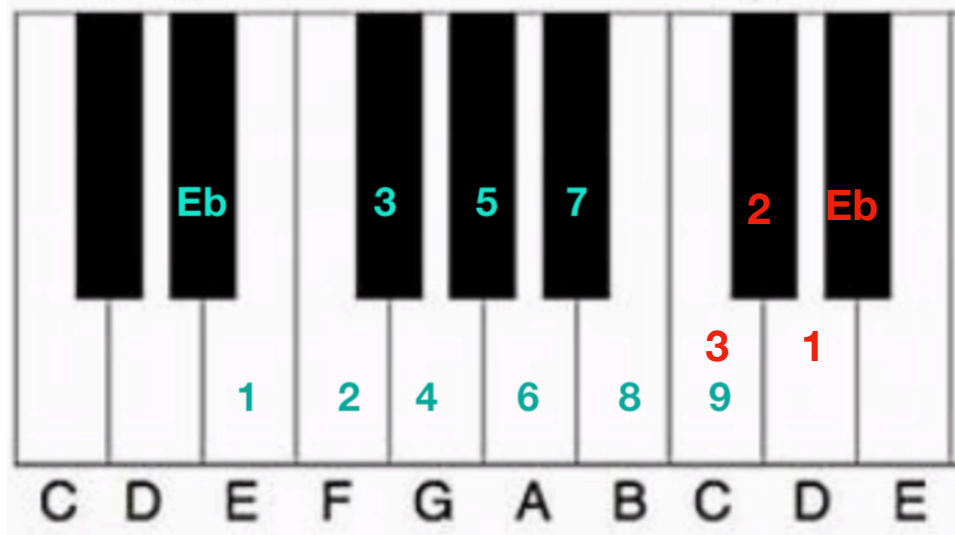
There are 3 semitones in the interval between what you hear with the pitch pipe and the note you will sing. This number will become important in just a minute. If the keynote is below your starting note

(say an Eb up to a C above) then you would again not count the tonic (Eb) but would count every black and white key up to and including your C.



As you can see this would make the interval 9 semitones. But this is where you might want to try a second way to calculate the interval.

Like most things in life, the farther the target is away from you the harder it is to hit accurately. So when the initial interval is 6 or more semitones you may want to think octave. That is taking the pitch and calculating the interval from its octave either above or below.



With this second way of computing the interval, you have 3 semitones descending from the octave.

### Sing, Sing a Song

Now look at the reference sheet, *Songs For The 12 Intervals*, which you should have printed before you downloaded this article. The sheet lists common songs that demonstrate each of the intervals. They are organized by the number of semitone between the tonic note and yours. There are selections for ascending and descending intervals. When you hear the pitch pipe, in your mind, sing that note (or its octave) as the start of your interval song. Then proceed to the next note in the song which is the same as your starting note.

For the example, above you might choose **Dash-ing** [through the snow], or **It Came** [upon a midnight clear] for the 9 semitone ascending or perhaps **Hey Jude** [don't bring me down] or **Frost-y** [the snowman] if you are more comfortable descending from the octave. Choose your interval song when

you begin your practice and use each time you sing along with the track to make sure you can always find that opening note with confidence.