

# Keys to Transposition

A Method for the Teaching & Learning  
of Transposition on the Horn



A Sampler



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with Brian O'Donnell & Heidi Oros

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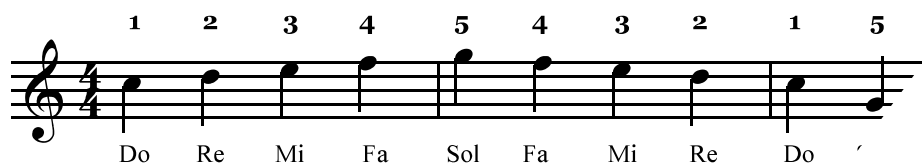
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# Introduction

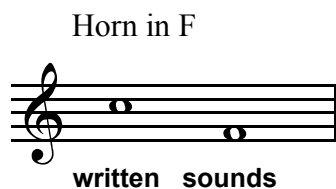
The goal of *Keys to Transposition* is to allow the student to develop transposition skills without the frustration that can accompany that process. By using a step-by-step approach, building on scale and arpeggiated patterns, the mind is gradually trained to transpose groups of notes and patterns, rather than single notes. Over time, as patterns are learned, musical excerpts are presented to give the student the opportunity to practice on repertoire carefully selected for training. The student can then go on to explore the vast repertoire that requires transposition with strategies and tools to succeed.

## What is transposition and why do horn players have to do it?

**Transposition by Key** is the concept that a written note does not indicate a specific frequency, but represents a scale degree in a given key. A written middle C, for instance, does not indicate a frequency of 261.6 Hertz, but rather indicates the first step (tonic, "Do") of a natural major scale.



Hence, when we indicate "Horn in F," a written C sounds as the first degree of an F major scale. In "Horn in D," the same written C sounds as the second degree of a D major scale. In both cases, as always, the written note C



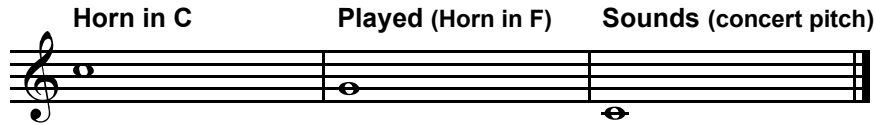
The need to transpose on horn stems from the horn's history before valves were invented. Early horns, having a single unchangeable length, could play only the notes of the harmonic series, about four octaves. The "natural" harmonic series is such that some notes (the lower overtones) are not usable with hand horn technique. The notes between the harmonic series are called "hand horn" notes. The horn player must learn to tune harmonics and hand horn notes in the best position in the brass instrument.

# Unit 1

## Horn in C (basso) (Do, Ut)

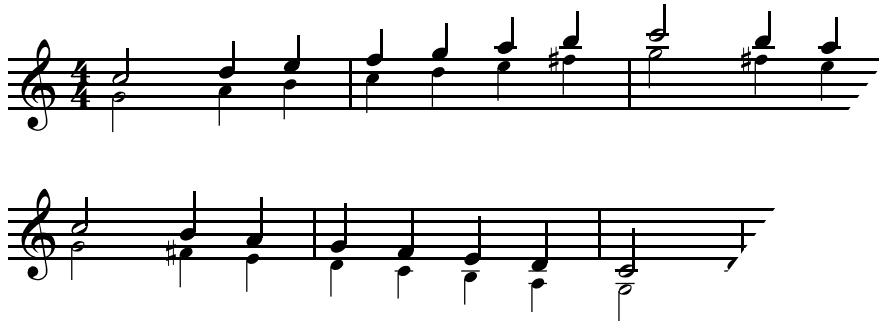
### Transposition

A horn in C sounds a perfect fourth lower than a horn in F. To transpose to Horn in C, play all perfect fourths.\*



### Scales

When seeing a written C major scale, one plays a G major scale (a perfect fourth below). Play the small notes below while looking at the large notes.



Now play the G major scale while looking at this



### Arpeggios

Thoroughly learn this arpeggiated horn parts as a G major arpeggio



Now r



\* For an explanation of intervals, see Appendix III.

## The Lowest Octave

In Classical and early Romantic era horn music, the lowest octave most often has only written C's and E's and the notes that are available open on the natural horn. In Horn in D, that means that most often, only C and E's are played.

Written (Horn in D)      New Notation (same notes)\*      Old Notation (still the same)

Played (in F)  
A E A E    A E A E      New Notation (same notes)\*      Old Notation (still the same)

## Patterns

The following patterns are common in Classical and early Romantic and then turn to Appendix I on page 83 and play it as it appears in the key of C. You are transposing Horn in D.

Horn in F

(Old)

\* See explanation of bass clef for horn in Introduction.

## Excerpts for Study

### 1. Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68 (1876) — II. Andante Sostenuto

Look for patterns. The first two measures are repeated. This is followed by a G major arpeggio (resulting in an F# major arpeggio) and then a scale down to the written C major arpeggios (play B major). In measure 11, the same sequence as the opening is repeated a fourth higher ending with another C major arpeggio.

Johannes Brahms

Horn 1 in E

*p espr.* *cresc.* *f*

8

*pp* *f* *p* *espr.* *cresc.*



This unison duet with the concertmaster must be played expressively and with a warm measure. The dotted rhythms must be precise and the tempo generally steady. The

### 2. A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 61 (1842) — Noct

The written F# turns the Eb into an E# (F). The written C# turns the B into a Bb and the slight variations Mendelssohn uses—sometimes the Bb and sometimes the B natural tone is used, sometimes a suspension and change of

**Con moto tranquillo**

Horn 1 in E

*p dolce*

8

17

*cresc.*

26

*p*



This  
in

# Appendix III

## Intervals

The term “interval” refers to the distance between two pitches. Knowing intervals is important for transposing, but also will help your sight-reading skills and improve your intonation. In addition to being able to recognize the written intervals, it is important to know what they sound like both melodically (sequentially) and harmonically (played at the same time). Start by learning how to spell them so that you can recognize them.

The name of each interval includes a letter and a numeral. The **letter** portion represents the quality of the

interval (major, minor, perfect, diminished) which is determined by the number of notes between the notes. The **numeral** portion refers to the distance between two notes by the number of notes, with the first note counting as “one.” For example, the interval from B down to F# is a third because it spans three note names, B-A-G-F#; the interval from B up to F# is a fifth, B-C-D-E-F# to see these concepts

P1 - A **Perfect Unison** is also called a “prime” and consists of two notes that are on the same pitch in the same octave and are spelled the same



D5 - A **diminished** “tritone”) over five

A1 - An **Augmented Prime** or **Augmented Unison** is one 1/2-step apart and spelled with the same note letter name.



m2 - A **minor second** is one 1/2-step apart and spelled with adjacent note names.



M2 - A **Major Second** is two 1/2-steps (one whole step) and spelled with adjacent note names



m3 - A **minor third** is three 1/2-steps comprising a span of three note names.



M3 - a **Major Third** is four 1/2-steps comprising a span of three note names.

P4 - a **Perfect fourth** is five 1/2-steps comprising a span of four note names.

A4 - An **Augmented fourth** or **diminished fifth** is six 1/2-steps comprising a span of five note names.

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\* Unit 10.1 - Transposition with a Key Signature

\*\* Unit 10.2 - Stopped Horn While Transposing

† Unit 12 - Chromatic & Challenging Excerpts

†† Appendix III

‡ Not standard horn repertoire. Used to demonstrate a transposition technique.



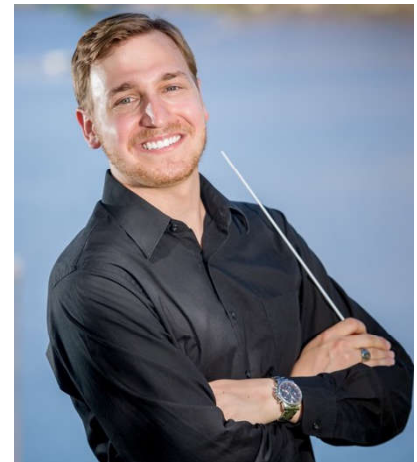
# Horn players need to transpose.

*Keys to Transposition* is a complete method devoted to teaching this essential skill. This method provides a concrete strategy to master transposition by building skills through exercises and excerpts from the horn literature with helpful transposition tips, musical advice and practice techniques.

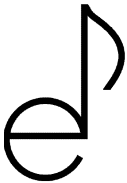


UC Davis Horn Instructor and Director of Concert Bands, **Pete Nowlen**, was previously a member of the Sacramento Symphony Horn Section and the CSU, Sacramento Faculty. Pete has performed frequently with the San Francisco Symphony, Opera and Ballet Orchestras and, for several years, as principal hornist of the International Orchestra of Italy. A prize-winning horn soloist, Pete has been featured with numerous Italian and American orchestras and festivals. More recently, he has an active career as a conductor and artistic director of orchestras, concert bands and choruses.

**Brian O'Donnell** is a commissioned officer-conductor with The United States Air Force Bands. Raised in California, he was an active freelancer and educator both on horn and with the baton from 2009 until 2018. Although his focus is primarily on conducting now, he keeps his chops up by occasionally sitting in with the horn sections of the bands in which he works and continues to freelance wherever he is stationed. An advocate for music education, Brian hopes you find this book helpful for yourself and/or your students. Keep on blowin' that horn!



**Heidi Oros** is a freelance hornist in the Finger Lakes area of New York and is a former second hornist with La Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México. Heidi is a founding member (2006) of the woodwind ensemble, "i venti dementi," and has been the hornist with the Swamp College Brass Quintet since 2007. Heidi also plays horn in Kuro Winds, a woodwind quintet situated in Ithaca, NY. Heidi earned her BM and MM at Ithaca College. She teaches private horn lessons in Trumansburg, NY.

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