

### Characterization of the Keys\*

Each key is either colored or not colored.

One expresses innocence and simplicity with uncolored keys.

Gentle, melancholic feelings [are expressed] with flat keys; wild and strong passions with sharp keys.

C major is quite pure. Its character is innocence, simplicity, naivety, [and] baby-talk.

A minor, pious womanhood and tenderness of character.

F major, complaisance and repose.

D minor, dejected womanhood which broods notions and illusions.

B-flat major, cheerful love, good conscience, hope, a longing for a better world.

G minor, displeasure, uneasiness, worry about a failed scheme; discontented gnashing at the bit; in a word, anger and disgust.

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\*Schubart published this list in his Vaterlandische Chronik (1787) and in his Vaterlandschronik (1789). See Holzer, pp. 133-34. His characterization of the keys was the subject of discussion for both Beethoven and Schumann. See Anton Felix Schindler, Beethoven As I Knew Him, ed. Donald W. MacAradel, trans. Constance S. Jolly (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 366-67 and Leon B. Plantiga, Schumann as Critic, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 70. More recently, this list has even appeared in English translation. See R. Murray Schafer, E. T. A. Hoffman and Music, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 151-52, and Rita Steblin, A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), a published version of "Key Characteristics in the 18th and 19th Centuries: A Historical Approach," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1981), pp. 162-68.

E-flat major, the key of love, of devotion, of intimate conversation with God; expressing, through its three flats, the holy Trinity.

C minor, declaration of love, and at the same time lamentation of unrequited love. Every languishing, longing, sighing of the love-crazed soul lies in this key.

A-flat major, the grave key. Death, grave, decay, judgment, eternity lie in its circumference.

F minor, deep depression, wailing for the dead, groans of misery and yearning for the grave.

D-flat major, a leering key, degenerating into grief and rapture. It cannot laugh, but it can smile; it cannot howl, but at least it can grimace its weeping. Consequently, one can transfer only unusual characters and feelings to this key.

B-flat minor, an oddity, for the most part dressed in the garment of night. It is somewhat disgruntled and embraces most rarely a pleasant mien. Mockery against God and the world; displeasure with itself and with everything; preparation for suicide resound in this key.

G-flat major, triumph in difficulty, a free sigh of relief on having crossed hills, reminiscence of a soul which has struggled hard and finally is victorious lie in all applications of this key.

E-flat minor, feelings of anxiety of all the soul's deepest distress, of being lost in daydreaming despair, of blackest

melancholy, of the soul's gloomiest condition. Every fear, every hesitation of the shuddering heart breathes from the shocking E-flat minor. If ghosts could speak, they would doubtless speak from this key.

B major, strongly colored, announcing wild passions, made up of the crudest colors. Anger, rage, jealousy, fury, desperation, and every burden of the heart lies in its sphere.

G-sharp minor, ill-humor, a heart squeezed to the point of suffocation, laments of misery which sigh at the double-sharp, difficult struggle, in a word, everything that laboriously rings through is this key's color.

E major, loud shouts for joy, laughing pleasure, and still not altogether full gratification lies in E major.

C-sharp minor, laments or repentance, intimate conversations with God, the friend and the playmate of life, sighs of unsatisfied friendship and love lie in its circle.

A major, this key contains declarations of innocent love, contentment over its situation, hope of reunion at the parting of a lover, youthful cheerfulness, and trust in God.

F-sharp minor, a gloomy key. It pulls at passion as the biting dog at one's pants leg. Anger and discontent are its language. Ordinarily, it does not seem to be well in its position; therefore, it always languishes for the repose of A major or for the conquering bliss of D major.

D major, the key of triumph, of Hallelujahs, of battle cries, of triumphant rejoicing. Accordingly, one sets attractive symphonies, marches, festive songs, and heaven-rejoicing choruses in this key.

B minor, is, as it were, the key of patience, of the silent expectation of fate, and of the submission to the divine decree. Therefore, its complaint is so gentle, without ever breaking out in offending murmurs or whimpers. The application of this key is rather difficult for all instruments; for that reason, one finds so few pieces which are composed expressly in this key.

G major, everything rustic, moderately idyllic and lyrical, each quiet and satisfied passion, each tender recompense for sincere friendship and true love; in a word, each gentle and serene motion of the heart can be expressed splendidly in this key. Too bad that it is today so very much neglected on account of its seeming agility. One does not consider that there is no difficult and facile key in the real sense, but these apparent difficulties and agilities depend on the composer.

E minor, naive, womanly. innocent declaration of love, lament without murmuring, sighs accompanied by few tears. This key speaks of impending hope of the purest happiness calling forth in C major. Since by nature it has only one color, one could compare it with a girl, dressed in white, with a rose-red bow on her bosom. One withdraws from this tone with inexpressible grace again to the fundamental C major, where heart and ear find the most perfect satisfaction.

If one wanted to object to this characterization of keys as in the literary criticism that no key could have a determined character

because of the various ornaments, one must consider that it is the duty of every composer to study closely the character of its keys and only take up the sympathetic ones in its halo. A good companion never invites bizarre characters which disturb the circle of his confidants; on the contrary, he chooses homogeneous men who elevate the pleasure of society. A freethinker who brands himself through slovenliness does not belong to a silent, Christian gathering on Good Friday even if he would stay put in his rightful place. Even so it is also the case with the composer. As soon as he has once selected a suitable key of prevailing feeling, he may never slip into keys which contradict this feeling. It would be unbearable, for example, if an aria whose fundamental key is C major concluded the first part in B major, or if one wanted to change over suddenly from F minor to F-sharp major. In short, the musical expression through all keys is so strictly determined that--although I wonder if philosophical critics have not made it valid enough--it far surpasses the poetical and pictorial expression in precision.

Devotion and sublimity are the characters of sacred expression; amazement, heroics, majesty, the deeply moving, melancholy, and joy is the character of dramatic expression.

Intimate conversation, on the other hand, sociability, conformity to each character, musically all-in-one concentrated, signifies the expression of chamber music.

Also, popular music is a carcass without nature's expression that is rightly buried in the meadow.