

Hymns at Home

How Can I Keep from Singing?

March 7, 2021



Getting back in shape

“Are we there yet?” The familiar words uttered by children (and adults) on long journeys seem to be appropriate right now. We’re making progress with this pandemic. Vaccines are available and people are getting vaccinated. We’re getting there, but we’re not there yet. Be patient and don’t let down your guard yet. We’ve been washing our hands (something I hope we’ll continue to do!), wearing our masks, keeping our distance just to be safe. Hopefully we’re getting our vitamins, eating healthy, getting some exercise, and otherwise taking care of ourselves to be as healthy as we can be. We should always be doing that!

Most of us have been on a long, tiring flight, and especially if it’s been one with delays, we know that feeling of finally landing and heading to the gate only to hear – “please remain seated and keep your seatbelt fastened until the captain has turned off the fasten seatbelt sign, indicating that it is safe to move about the cabin.” Something like that. All we want to do is stand up, get our bags, and get off that plane. But we soon find everyone else feels that way too. Some people are polite in that situation, a

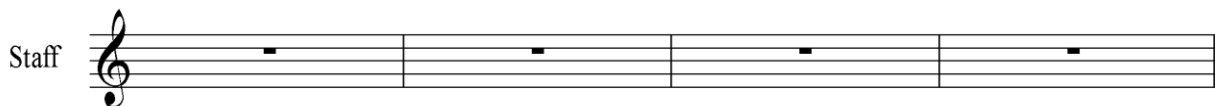
few are not. I often find it's good to stay in my seat, take a deep breath, and wait for my turn to get up and exit. So, keep your seatbelt on. We'll each get our turn to get off.

That includes a return to singing in choirs and singing in worship. I've heard a few say, "By the time we get back to it, I won't be able to sing anymore!" Yes, you will. Be patient. I'm going to continue where I left off in our music reading lessons, which will hopefully help both choirs and congregation be even better when we do get back to group singing, and it should help you now as you sing the hymns at home during our livestream services. You are singing, right?

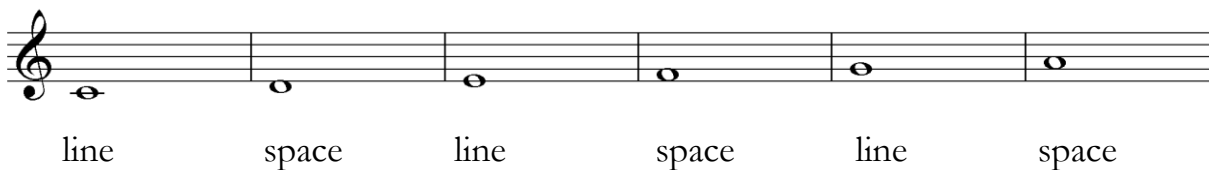
I'll let you in on a little secret – you can sing anywhere! Well, almost anywhere. Sometimes others don't want you to sing, but I'll let you be the judge of when to do it. But your voice is only "instrument" you get to carry with you everywhere you go. You use it every day to talk, and you can continue to use it to sing. Do it! Sing along on Sunday mornings. Look up your favorite hymns and anthems on YouTube and sing along. Keeping your voice in shape isn't that hard, you just have to use it. When it comes to singing in choirs, we'll ease back into it, like any other physical activity, and it won't be long until we're better than ever.

But back to the music reading. I gave you a history lesson last time about how our system was developed. Now I'll go back to the beginning with the system we have.

This, my friends, is called a staff:



It has 5 lines and 4 spaces (spaces between the lines, that is). We count them from the bottom up. Music notes are written on these lines and spaces:



With a note on the line, the line goes right through the middle of it. A note on a space is between the lines. You get the picture. If you don't, look again.

It's a little easier to see with notes that are not filled in. Notes that are filled in and look like this:

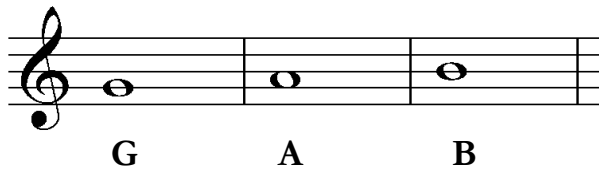


Can you still see which ones are on lines and which ones are on spaces? Hopefully so.

Going back again, we see our friend the G clef (aka treble clef). It shows us, in a fancy way, that the second line (up from the bottom) is G:

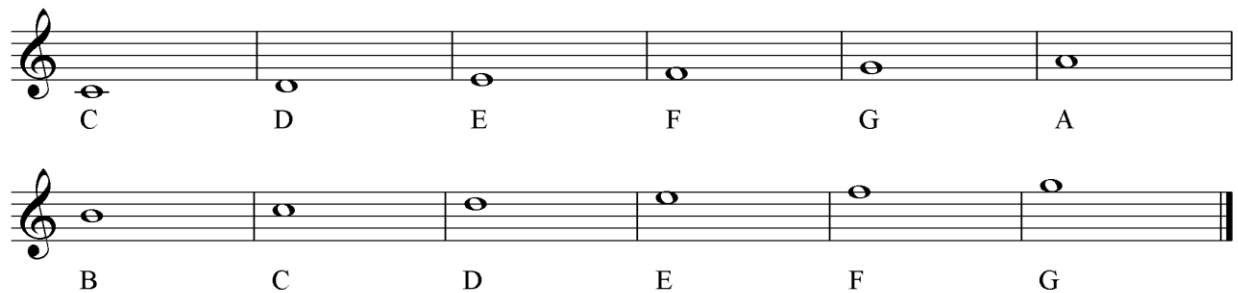


Remember the musical alphabet has only seven letters. A-G, then it starts over again. G is the last letter in the musical alphabet. After that, we start over again with A. So, going up, the next note is A, then B, etc. like this:



Still with me? There will be a test later.

The note before or below G is F. The note below that is E. Here are the notes on the G or treble clef:



But music doesn't just go up, it goes down too. What happens then? You just go backward:



Think of the notes as steps on a ladder. The note on the second line is always G (in the G or treble clef, where most melodies are written), the note on the first space is always F, etc. Those musical “steps” will always be in their place, whether you are climbing up or down.

Did you already know all of this? Good.

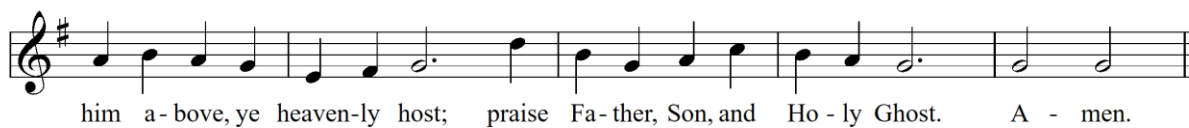
If not, are you really excited about your new musical knowledge? Good.

Are you totally confused? That’s OK too. If I can learn it, so can you.

I’ve heard people say they can’t read music, “but I do know when the notes go up, my voice goes up, and when the notes go down, my voice should go down.” That’s reading music!

Here’s something very simple you can do now and/or Sunday during worship. I think it’s safe to say most or all of us know how the doxology goes, right? Here it is, melody only (but with words – if you get lost with the music, the words can help you find your place for now).

But do this: follow the notes with your finger while you sing it, or as you hear it in your head (or during our worship service). Put your finger on the first note and follow along:



“Praise God, from whom all” goes down.

“blessings flow” goes up.

Also:

You now know that the first note is a G! So is the last one. (And so are a lot of others!) If you look at “blessings flow,” you know that those notes are G, A, and B.

When the notes are going down, the music (and hopefully your singing voice) goes down. When notes go up, the music goes up. When the notes stay the same and repeat, the music and your voice stays the same.

One more thing, just to be clear – when we talk about “notes,” we’re talking about things that are written down. We can’t hear notes, we can see and read them. Music is sound. We read notes just like we read words. When we speak or sing, we bring notes and words to life. Just as words become phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, notes become phrases, melodies, harmonies, etc. It’s important to know how to read. Once we do, we can read and speak with expression. We can bring poetry and drama to life. The same is true of music. It’s more than just the notes.

God be with you till we meet again.

John