Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Tonality

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Keys and tonality

- **Major** keys usually sound bright and happy; **minor** keys usually sound darker or sadder.
- Modal music uses modes (older scales, such as the Dorian mode), common in folk music.
- **Atonal** music has no key centre, common in some 20th-century music.
- **Pentatonic scales** have five notes; they are used in folk, blues and many world musics.

Modulation

- **Modulation** is changing key during a piece, to add variety and interest.
- Common **modulations** are to related keys: the dominant (the key five notes above), the subdominant, and the relative **major** or **minor**.
- The **relative minor** shares the same key signature as its **major**: A **minor** is the relative minor of C major.
- A key change up a step near the end of a pop song gives a lift of energy.

Hearing tonality

- Listen to the overall mood, the chords (**major** chords sound bright) and the final chord.
- In an exam, you may be asked to identify the key at the start and end, or whether it modulates.

Key terms

Tonality	Whether music is major, minor, modal or atonal.
Major	A key or chord that usually sounds bright.
Minor	A key or chord that usually sounds darker.

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Modulation	Changing key during a piece.
Relative minor	The minor key that shares a major key's key signature.
Atonal	Music with no key centre.
Pentatonic scale	A scale of five notes.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. How does a minor key usually sound?
2. What is modulation?
3. What is the relative minor of C major?
4. What is atonal music?
5. How many notes are in a pentatonic scale?
6. Which key is the dominant of C major?
7. What does modal music use?
8. Why do pop songs often modulate up a step near the end?

Answers

1. Darker or sadder
2. Changing key during a piece
3. A minor
4. Music with no key centre
5. Five
6. G major
7. Modes, older scales such as the Dorian
8. To give a lift of energy

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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