LESSON 2: MELODY
understanding scales and solfege

In today's lesson, we're going to be going over how to use your knowledge of music theory in your melody writing.

1. THE SCALE

The "scale" includes every note in a key laid out in order, starting with the root note of the key.

Here's the scale in the key of C major. Notice how it starts on C and ends on C:

C D E F G A B C

Remember if you have sharps or flats in the key, you'll need to include them in the scale. Here's an example of a key with sharps, D major:

D E F# G A B C# D

2. SCALE DEGREES

The "scale degree" of a note is a way to label where that note falls in the scale. The first scale degree of D major is D. The 3rd scale degree is F#. The 6th scale degree is B.B.

D E F# G A B C# D

Make sense?
3. **HALF STEPS AND WHOLE STEPS**

Every scale follows the same pattern of half steps and whole steps.

*From the 1st scale degree to the 2nd is a whole step.*  
*From the 2nd scale degree to the 3rd is a whole step.*  
*From the 3rd scale degree to the 4th is a half step.*  
*From the 4th scale degree to the 5th is a whole step.*  
*From the 5th scale degree to the 6th is a whole step.*  
*From the 6th scale degree to the 7th is a whole step.*  
*From the 7th scale degree to the 8th is a half step.*

The pattern is: **W W H W W H**

*You’re welcome to memorize that pattern, but I prefer to think of it like this:*  
*The half steps fall between 3 & 4 and 7 & 8. Everything else is a whole step.*  
*We’ll come back to these patterns in a second.*

4. **SOLFEGE**

Solfege is another way to label the scale degrees. If you’ve ever heard "Do Re Mi" from the Sound of Music, then congrats, you already know solfege! Each scale degree is paired with a unique syllable to label it: Do, re mi, fa, sol, la, ti, and do.

1 - **do**  
2 - **re**  
3 - **mi**  
4 - **fa**  
5 - **sol**  
6 - **la**  
7 - **ti**  
8 - **do**
4. VISUALIZE

I want you to draw a ladder. (or use the worksheet on the next page).

Now on this ladder, write a solfege syllable in every space. BUT. We're going to do it upside down. Do should be on the bottom. Re is one space above do. Mi is one space above re. So every time you move up the scale, you'll move up the ladder.

Write out the solfege scale twice on your ladder. This should be enough to cover most melodies, but if you find yourself with a melody that has a wider range, just make the ladder longer.

Now sing a line of a really easy melody. I'm talking "Mary Had A Little Lamb" kind of easy. Try pointing to each solfege syllable as you sing it.

I'm going to be honest with you, if you've never done this before, it's going to be freakin' hard. You'll need to constantly double-check yourself to make sure you're staying on track.

But I promise, it gets easier. And if you can become competent in understanding where your melody falls within the scale, melody-writing will be a piece of cake. Singing harmony will become SO much easier. And when you're listening to your favorite song, you'll know exactly how to incorporate that super catchy melody into your next song.

NOTE: You don't HAVE to use solfege. If you prefer to use scale degrees, that's fine! Just remember to call the 8th scale degree 1 - so you'll sing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2, 3...etc.

Once you've mastered solfege visualization, you'll be able to quickly analyze and understand melodies. You'll start to notice similarities and trends in your favorite music. That's why this skill is so important in melody writing.
SOLFEGE LADDER
for melody visualization
LESSON 2
CHALLENGES

TIME TO TAKE ACTION!

☐ Sing a cover song, pointing to the syllables on the solfege ladder as you sing.

☐ Check yourself using your instrument, music notation, or playing back your melody and see what you got right and what you missed.

☐ Sing an original song using the solfege ladder.

**TIP:** Write out the actual notes of the scale next to your solfege ladder. This will make double-checking yourself a LOT easier.