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# Chapter 2: Basic Music Theory

Music theory helps explain how music works. It gives musicians the fundamental knowledge to understand what makes music sound good to our ears. As a blues player, music theory will give you the foundation for knowledgeable playing, writing, and improvisation. Although most old-time blues players had no formal music theory training, they often learned from other musicians,

or figured out the basics of music theory on their own. Even though many blues musicians could not read music, one listen to their playing makes it apparent that they had a deep understanding of how music is put together.

## Intervals

One of the most basic concepts in music theory is the *interval*, which is the distance between two notes. It is helpful to see these distances at the keyboard and what they look like on the staff. Each interval also has a unique sound. As you familiarize yourself with how these intervals look, you should also play them on the keyboard and become accustomed to how they sound.

### Half Steps and Whole Steps

The smallest intervals are *half steps* and *whole steps*. A half step is the distance between any key on the keyboard and the very next key (black or white). A whole step is equal to two half steps, or two adjacent keys, in either direction.

### Perfect and Major Intervals

The distances between notes are identified by both a quality and a number, such as major 2nd, perfect 5th, etc. (Though we may also refer to the 1st as a *unison* and the 8th as an *octave*.) We'll start by looking at the *major* and *perfect* intervals, and the distances in half steps between the two notes that comprise them (see below). The possible perfect intervals are: perfect unison, perfect 4th, perfect 5th, and perfect octave. The possible major intervals are: major 2nd, major 3rd, major 6th, and major 7th. Notice that a *major 2nd* is the same as a whole step. Don't forget to play all of these intervals on the keyboard to familiarize yourself with how they sound.

### Major and Perfect Intervals

Interval	Number of half steps
Perfect Unison	0
Major 2nd	2
Major 3rd	4
Perfect 4th	5
Perfect 5th	7
Major 6th	9
Major 7th	11
Perfect Octave	12