

MEO Op Ed

Relative pitch has been taught as long as there has been music. It is the foundation of ear training. The title means exactly what it is: Pitch that is somehow related. But related to what? And how does it relate?

If you wiki [Relative Pitch](#) (RP), you will find some traditional concepts and studies. It was how I was initially taught RP...to relate a note to the one you are coming from. It was intervallic RP. Example:

1. Take note 1
2. Sing up a major 3rd
3. Now you have the new note in relation to the first note.

Two inherent and functional problems I see with this:

1. Even if you sing (or play) the best major 3rd interval ever, the result is only as good as the starting note. If the starting note is a little sharp or flat...your new note is screwed
2. Pitch is a part of melody. Melody is made up of many pitches. Melody is meant to move forward. How and why a melody “works” is how it uses the tension / resolve relationship of the notes back to the key center.

This “key center” can be the main key...or key of the moment. It is this relationship “back to the key” that trains your ear in the most musical sense. Once a key center has been established (all you need to hear is the 1 and 3 or Do and Mi) to establish a key center) than any note played is recognized as how it functions *related to the key*

Here is the wiki on relative pitch (traditional):

“Relative pitch is the ability of a person to identify or re-create a given musical note by comparing it to a reference note and identifying the interval between those two notes. Relative pitch implies some or all of the following abilities:

- Determine the distance of a musical note from a set point of reference, e.g. “three octaves above middle C”
- Identify the intervals between given tones, regardless of their relation to concert pitch (A = 440 Hz)
- The skill used by singers to correctly **sing a melody, following musical notation, by pitching each note in the melody according to its distance from the previous note.** Alternatively, the same skill which allows someone to hear a melody for the first time and name the notes relative to some known reference pitch.”

Ugh!!! This is so convoluted to the purpose of a melody. A melody’s beauty and pull is how it plays with the notes that are tonic notes (notes that don’t want to move) and tension notes (notes that want to move). By using this above theory of Relative Pitch, you do not pay homage to this simple artistic reasoning.

You will be concentrating on “what was that interval from the previous note” (coming from) instead of the overall melody, that your understanding of the melody you are hearing will be lost.

RP as MEO teaches it, gives a musician, with very little daily practice, the ability to:

1. Play better in tune
2. Write better melodies (form follows function)
3. Arrange without the need of a pitched instrument
4. Write better functioning songs
5. Solo (improvised)

Recap:

Relative Pitch (traditional): Teaches intervallic relationships based on the note you're coming from to the note you are going to. Problems:

- a) If the note you're coming from is not in tune or is simply not right, your new note will also be flawed
- b) Melody is a forward moving element in music. The beauty of a melody is how it utilizes the natural tendencies of tension / release to keep a forward flow and pleasing to the listener.

Relative Pitch (MEO Theory): By hearing a note or series of notes and being able to recognize their tension / resolve back to the key or key of the moment, you can instantly determine the notes position in the scale and name the note (or perform the note)

Related subject: Perfect Pitch or Absolute Pitch ([wiki](#))