<u>About Temperaments</u> • <u>Pythagorean</u> • <u>Meantone</u> • <u>Modified Meantone</u> • <u>Well</u> • <u>Victorian Well</u> • <u>Quasi-Equal</u> • <u>Equal</u> • <u>Modern Well</u> • <u>EBVT</u> • <u>Return to</u> <u>rollingball home</u>

#### About Temperaments

#### Historical Overview

This section contains a brief graphic overview of types of temperaments in the context of classical composers. The **bottom half of the graphic has live hotspots**, but the upper half (with the names of composers) is sadly lacking in interactivity.

If you click on a miniature and get the full-size chart, you can press **backspace** to return to the current History image.

Homage to Jorgensen

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About "Key Color"

#### Temperamental links - other

websites sites of interest will appear in the frame to the right, and you can explore while remaining at rollingball.com...



Click on a type of temperament (meantone, modified meantone, well, victorian well, quasi-equal, or equal).

The temperament dates and detailed temperament information are drawn primarily from Jorgensen's tome, Tuning. The composer dates were quickly abstracted from <u>Classical Net's Timeline of Composers</u>.

Consider two aspects of this:

(1) What temperament would the composers have heard when they were children?

(2) What temperament would they have had their keyboards tuned to?

### **About Temperaments**

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## Pythagorean

Favors pure fifths. <u>Thumbnails</u> <u>Boulliau (1373)</u> <u>Grammateus (1518)</u> <u>Neidhardt (1732)</u> <u>Neidhardt-Marpurg-De Morgan (1858)</u> <u>Moscow (1895)</u>

#### Meantone

Favors pure thirds. The Wolf becomes a factor. Eight keys are playable. [Note, the red and blue "ET horizon" lines are not accurate in the meantone or modified meantone graphs. Yet.]

Thumbnails

Aaron (1523)

<u>Zarlino (1558)</u>

Huygens (1661)

Holder (1694)

Keller (1707)

Silbermann (1714)

Smith (1749)

Romieu (1755)

<u>Holden (1770)</u>

Marsh (1809)

### **Modified Meantone**

Attempting to mitigate the Wolf and get nine playable keys. This is a transition to Well.

Thumbnails

D'Alembert (1752)

Britannica (1797)

<u>Hawkes (1807)</u>

Fisher (1818)

Secor #3 (1975)

### Well

Key Color emerges as all 24 keys can be used. **Thumbnails** Werckmeister (1691) Prelleur (1731) Tans'ur (1746) D'Alembert (1752) Rousseau Equal-Beating (1768) Rousseau Theoretical (1768) Kirnberger (1771) Handel (1780) Vallotti (1781) Preston Equal-Beating (1785) Preston Theoretical (1785) Young (1799) Vallotti-Young (1799) Stanhope Equal-Beating (1806) Stanhope Theoretical (1806) Bemetztrieder (1808) Prinz Equal-Beating (1808) Prinz Theoretical (1808) Jousse (1832) Kellner (1978) Jorgensen's Prinz (2002)

### Victorian Well

While maintaining key color, objectionable thirds are toned down.

Thumbnails

Tuner's Guide #1 (1840)

Tuner's Guide #2 (1840)

Tuner's Guide #3 (1840)

De Morgan (1843)

Broadwood's Best (1885)

Broadwood's Usual (1885)

Moore (1885)

## Quasi-Equal

Conceptually driving for equal temperament, without the critical understanding of where to listen for beat rates.

Thumbnails

Merrick (1811)

Graupner (1819)

Hummel (1829)

Viennese (1829)

<u>Jousse (1832)</u>

Becket (1840)

Marsh (1840)

Best Factory (1840)

Ellis (1875)

Ellis (1885)

Broadwood (1885)

Wicks (1887)

Pyle (1906)

## Equal

The first mathematically sound method of tuning truly equal temperament appeared in 1911. Equal Temperament

### Modern Well

With the advent of electronic tuning devices, there has been a resurgence of key color in a variety of well temperaments.

Thumbnails

Di Veroli (1978)

Bailey (1993)

Bailey (2002)

Coleman 4 (1994)

Coleman 10 (2001)

Coleman 11 (1999)

Coleman 16 (2001)

Koval Penny (2002)

Koval Variable 1.5 (2002)

Koval Variable 1.9 (2002)

Koval Variable 3.0 (2002)

Koval Variable 5.0 (2002)

Wendell's Well (2002)

Wendell's ET Equivalent 2002

Wendell's Synchronous Victorian 2002

Wendell's Tweaked Synchronous Victorian #1

Wendell's Tweaked Synchronous Victorian #2

George Secor #2 (1975)

## EBVT

"Equal-Beating Victorian Temperament". Homegrown by Bill Bremmer and eventually refined with Jorgensen's and Swafford's assistance after imbalances were pointed out by Ed Foote, Jason Kanter, Ron Koval, Kent Swafford, and Owen Jorgensen.

#### A Graphic History of the EBVT

"Do the results create: F3-C4 pure? C4-F4 pure? F3-Bb pure? Bb3-F4 pure? F#3-C#4 pure? G#3-C#4 pure? F3-A3, G3-B3, G3-E4 and C4-E4 all beating exactly the same, 6 beats per second? A3-C#4 and Bb3-D4 beating exactly the same, about 9 beats per second? G3-D4 and A3-D4 tempered exactly the same, about 2 beats per second? Ab3-Eb4 and Bb3-Eb4 tempered exactly the same, very little, less than in ET? These are the features of my EBVT." (8/29/02)



## Click on a type of temperament (meantone, modified meantone, well, victorian well, quasi-equal, or equal).

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Consider two aspects of this:

- (1) What temperament would the composers have heard when they were children?
- (2) What temperament would they have had their keyboards tuned to?

#### Homage to Jorgensen

Most of the information in this website is cheerfully lifted from Owen Jorgensen's monumental tome, **Tuning: Containing The Perfection of Eighteenth-Century Temperament**; **The Lost Art of Nineteenth-Century Temperament**; and **The Science of Equal Temperament**. To save space, I have summarized Jorgensen's wording and decided in many places to eliminate quotation marks and just admit at the outset that it is all taken from his book. Each image contains a citation for the source of the information, generally a page in Jorgensen.

I must say that as a professional organizer of information, I am staggered by the amount of research that Jorgensen managed to capture. It is regrettable that the book has gone out of print. My effort here should be thought of as a supplement to Jorgensen. There may be places where I have misinterpreted the data, and I take full responsibility for that.

There are temperaments here that you will not find in Jorgensen: Coleman, Bailey, Koval, Wendell, Secor, Di Veroli, Bremmer, and Jorgensen's own improvement on Prinz/Kirnberger. In each case I have made comments drawn from personal emails or website postings. Again, if I have misrepresented anything, please let me know and I will promptly fix it.

You may download a **somewhat current PDF** file (9/29/06) of these charts <u>here</u>. This is a large file, over 6 MB, so expect it to take a while.

Suggestions to speed things up: if you are using Internet Explorer, once the page has loaded you can "add to Favorites" and on that dialog box you can click **Make available offline**. If you click the **Customize** button, you can save everything within a couple of clicks. This will store all the images on your computer.

On the Mac, you can accomplish the same thus: Go to the menu item **Favorites>Subscribe...** and click the **Customize** button. Then click the Offline tab. Check the box for **Download site for offline browsing** and click the **Options** button. There, click **Download links 3 levels deep** and **Skip links to other sites**. Click **OK** twice to get out of here, and you're done. Later on, when I have updated the site, go to **Favorites** menu and choose **Update Subscriptions**.

# **Reading the Charts**

The charts display **thirteen major triads** in a cycle of fifths, starting with the C3E3G3 triad at the left and proceeding up by fifths and down by fourths until you reach C4E4G4 at the right.



The bars indicate **cents**; the numbers represent **beats**.

Fifths are **blue**; major thirds are **red**; minor thirds are **green**. [Technically, the minor third bars should be shown below zero, since minor thirds are contracted (not expanded like thirds and fourths). But I think they look better behind the major thirds.]

Therefore, in the example C major triad shown at the left, the blue CG fifth is contracted by about 3 cents and beats at 0.7 beats per second (bps). The red CE major third is expanded by a little more than 5 cents, and beats at 2.0 bps. The green EG minor third is contracted by about 8 cents and beats at 4.9 bps.

The fifth CG, minor third of EG, and major third of CE are thus seen together. The "feeling" of C Major is represented in the mingling beat rates of these three intervals. When those beats are synchronous (equal or in whole-number ratios such as 3:2) ... so that they are beating together ... there is something that happens in the soul of the listener.

Immediately below each triad is the **offset** for the fundamental of that triad. (In the example triad shown on this page, C is offset by 6.20 cents sharp.) There is a red "horizon" line (ET reference line) representing 13.7 cents, the amount by which Equally Tempered major thirds are expanded. Likewise there is a blue ET horizon representing equally-tempered fifths, which are all contracted by 1.96 cents. The dotted curves are polynomial trendlines that help to show the degree of balance in the temperament.

The **large red numbers** in the upper right of the chart indicate the minimum and maximum size of the Major Thirds (in cents). This can serve as a quick guide to the degree of key coloring in the temperament.

These are busy charts, and there is some overlapping data. Below the graph is a data table that shows every number in the graph. *Watch this space for an announcement of a printed reference guide containing all these charts (and more) in high-resolution, 11 x 8.5 format.* 

# **About "Key Color"**

Each of the 12 major and 12 minor keys was thought to have its own emotional quality. This is primarily due to the varying sizes of the major thirds in the Well temperaments, which dominated European music during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. These descriptions are arranged according to the circle of fifths. You can see that the descriptions change from more peaceful around C major / A minor to more struggling/distressed around F# major / D# minor.

--text drawn from from Christian Schubart's *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (1806).Translated by Rita Steblin in A History of Key *Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries*. UMI Research Press (1983)

| or: Pious womanliness and ness of character.   |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
| <b>E minor:</b> Naïve, womanly innocent declaration of love, lament without grumbling; sighs accompanied by few tears; this key speaks of the imminent hope of resolving in the pure happiness of C major. |  |
| <b>B Minor:</b> This is as it were the key of patience, of calm awaiting one's fate and of submission to divine dispensation.  |  |
| <b>F# Minor:</b> A gloomy key: it tugs at passion as a dog biting a dress.<br>Resentment and discontent are its language.  |  |
| <b>C# Minor:</b> Penitential lamentation, intimate conversation with God, the friend and help-meet of life; sighs of disappointed friendship and love lie in its radius.                                   |  |
| <b>Ab Minor:</b> Grumbling, heart squeezed<br>until it suffocates; wailing lament,<br>difficult struggle; in a word, the color of<br>this key is everything struggling with<br>difficulty.                 |  |
|  |  |

| F#-A# | <b>F# Major:</b> Triumph over difficulty, free sigh of relief uttered when hurdles are surmounted; echo of a soul which has fiercely struggled and finally conquered lies in all uses of this key.   | <b>D# Minor:</b> Feelings of the anxiety of the soul's deepest distress, of brooding despair, of blackest depression, of the most gloomy condition of the soul. Every fear, every hesitation of the shuddering heart, breathes out of horrible D# minor. <i>If ghosts could speak, their speech would approximate this key.</i> |  |
|-------|--|---|--|
| Db-F  | <b>Db Major</b> : A leering key, degenerating<br>into grief and rapture. It cannot laugh,<br>but it can smile; it cannot howl, but it can<br>at least grimace its crying. Consequently<br>only unusual characters and feelings can<br>be brought out in this key.<br><b>Bb minor</b> : A quaint creature, often<br>dressed in the garment of night. It is<br>somewhat surly and very seldom take<br>on a pleasant countenance. Mocking<br>and the world; discontented with itse<br>and with everything; preparation for<br>suicide sounds in this key. |   |  |
| Ab-C  | <b>Ab Major:</b> Key of the grave. Death,<br>grave, putrefaction, judgment, eternity lie<br>in its radius.   | <b>F Minor:</b> Deep depression, funereal lament, groans of misery and longing for the grave.   |  |
| Eb-G  | <b>Eb Major:</b> The key of love, of devotion, of intimate conversation with God.  | <b>C Minor:</b> Declaration of love and at the same time the lament of unhappy love. All languishing, longing, sighing of the love-sick soul lies in this key.  |  |
| Bb-D  | <b>Bb Major:</b> Cheerful love, clear conscience, hope aspiration for a better world.  | <b>G Minor:</b> Discontent, uneasiness, worry about a failed scheme; bad-tempered gnashing of teeth; in a word: resentment and dislike.   |  |
| F-A   | F Major: Complaisance & Calm.  | : Complaisance & Calm. D Minor: Melancholy womanliness, the spleen and humours brood.   |  |
| C-E   | <b>C Major:</b> Completely pure. Its character is: innocence, simplicity, naivety, children's talk.  | <b>A minor</b> : Pious womanliness and tenderness of character.   |  |



The math for tuning equal temperament (ET) wasn't worked out correctly until 1911. In a perfect ET, all semitones are exactly the same size. It contains no key-coloring and no tonality. Equal temperament is:

- Unrestrictive, because modulation through all keys is free from wolf intervals.
- Regular, because all fifths are the same size.
- Circulating, because it obeys the cycle of fifths.

#### What have we lost?



In 1885, the scientist Ellis analyzed the work of seven tuners. These charts represent three of them. Comparing these Victorian-era tunings to the earlier Well temperaments, we can see that the differences between the "smoothest" and "harshest" major thirds have been reduced.

Broadwood's Best: This tuning was done by one of Broadwood's "best tuners". A shade less color contrast than the Broadwood Usual.

Broadwood's Usual: This was done by Ellis's personal piano tuner, a "usual tuner" from Broadwood. A shade more color contrast than the Broadwood Best.

Moore (sometimes called "Representative Victorian"): This tuning was done on a harmonium by a tuner from Moore & Moore. Note that there is some key-coloring but no M3 is expanded beyond 16 cents.



These were tuning methods aiming at equal temperament, without benefit of the correct math for setting the temperament. Most of these tunings have each note within 1 cent of "correct" equal temperament, and hence most of them would pass the strict PTG Tuning Examination. On hearing the piano played, it is unlikely that even a discriminating ear would be able to distinguish any of these tunings from perfect ET.

- Graupner: The founder of the Boston Philharmonic, Graupner wanted the fifths "rather flat"
- •
- Graupner: The founder of the Boston Philharmonic, Graupner wanted the fifths "rather flat" and the thirds "rather sharp than otherwise". Hummel: An Austrian musician, known as "Europe's greatest pianist", a student of Mozart. "The only concern for piano tuners in 1829 was that all twelve fifths should be smooth sounding." (Jorgensen, p. 407) Viennese: Also by Hummel. This temperament became popularly known as the Viennese. Ellis: "New Equal-Beating" (1885). A scientist, Ellis concluded that no one was able to tune mathematically exact equal temperament, and developed this plan to help solve the problem. He had concluded that it was impossible to count beats faster than 5/second. Pyle: Pyle and William Braid White both used the same bearing plan, which is the standard still in use today. Pyle started using this variation in 1884. Braid-White's became the standard for Equal Temperament. •



These well temperaments share certain characteristics. They all minimize the size of the Inese well temperaments share certain characteristics. They all minimize the size of the major thirds in the vicinity of C on the circle of fifths, and keep the most extreme M3s to exactly or just under the "maximum" of 21.51 cents. These widest thirds are called Pythagorean Thirds because they are formed by the Pythagorean rule of tuning a series of four perfect fifths. (For example, the sequence C-F-Bb-Eb-Ab is tuned with perfect fifths, resulting in a major third Ab-C that measures 21.51 cents wide of just. This principle can be observed exactly in Werckmeister, Kirnberger, and Prinz, and a fifth lower in Vallotti and Young.)

- Werckmeister showed that excellent well-temperaments were possible with about eight pure fifths. This version is 1/4 ditonic comma well, with tempered fifths on C, G, D and B.
  Kirnberger: German theorist, composer, student of Bach. C Major, G Major, E minor and B minor triads were all completely just, achieved by compromising the D and A fifths. Contains some of the purest harmony acoustically possible.
  Vallotti: The fifths on the white keys CDEFGA are each one-sixth ditonic comma narrow. The remaining six fifths are pure. A "very conservative" temperament.
  Young: Jorgensen lavishes this praise on the Young temperament: "Notice the complete symmetry... the even changes in the sizes of thirds...the most perfect idealized form of well temperament ever published...a summation of the best ideals of well temperament...the greatest perfection possible."
  Prinz: The major third CE is just. This assured that the Prinz contains as much color-contrast as the original Kirnberger.



The Meantone family of temperaments strives for extremely clean major thirds in 8 keys, pushing all imperfection into the four remaining major thirds. Theoretically correct meantone temperaments have eleven fifths exactly the same size. Another characteristic is the augmented fifth (actually a diminished sixth) at Ab, the "wolf" fifth. In any meantone temperament, one-third of the potential harmony was intolerable.

- Aaron: 1/4 syntonic comma.
  Zarlino: 2/7 syntonic comma.
  Huygens: Based on 31 equal divisions of the octave.
  Keller: Almost 1/5 Ditonic. A German harpsichordist who lived in England. He wrote: "Sharp thirds must be as sharp as the ear will permit, and all fifths as flat as the ear will permit." Keller had equal-beating major triads.
  Romieu: 1/7 comma.
  Marsh: 4/25 syntonic. Although Well temperament was quite prominent, Marsh's philosophy was that is better to have only two-thirds of the keyboard harmony tolerably in tune... he disapproved of tempering for the sake of the characters of the keys.



The purpose of modified meantone was to increase the number of good M3s to nine or more. The price paid for this was harmonic waste in the major triads C#, Eb, Bb, F.

- ٠
- D'Alembert: French mathematician. Britannica: By 1797, tuners had learned to modify the meantone temperament so that nine keys could be used. The Britannica described this temperament as "better adapted than any other .
- to keyed instruments." Hawkes: "Improved Modified Meantone" (1807) Fisher: A Yale mathematics professor, Fisher studied musical compositions for interval usage, and constructed this temperament so that the C, G, D and A major thirds would be perfect. •

Pythagorean Thumbnails

| <br>****************** | <br>************* | *************************************** |
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Meantone Thumbnails






















Modified Meantone Thumbnails



.. d'Alembert ... Britannica ... Hawkes ... Fisher ... Secor











## Well Thumbnails

Hover over the thumbnail for a second to see the name of the temperament. Click on the thumbnail to see the detailed chart.

The last two (Preston) are actually modified meantones, not Well temperaments, as you can see from the characteristic rectangular profile and the augmented fifth.











































## Victorian Well Thumbnails














## Quasi-Equal Thumbnails

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## Modern Well Thumbnails

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## A Long Road to a Balanced Temperament...









































