History of Accidentals in Music

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TUG & BachoTEX 2017 — 2nd May 2017

Why This Talk

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Some typographic rules.
Some accidentals included into Unicode $\Longleftarrow$ debatable about *microintervals*.

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Raise a note's pitch by a semitone $\Longrightarrow \sharp$

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Raise a note's pitch by a semitone $\Longrightarrow \sharp$
Lower it by a semitone $\Longrightarrow \flat$

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Raise a note's pitch by a semitone $\Longrightarrow \sharp$
Lower it by a semitone $\Longrightarrow \flat$
Restore it at its normal picth $\Longrightarrow \natural$

Originally

Hexachords:

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- *Natural*: A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

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- *Soft*: F, G, A, B♭, C, D.

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Hexachords:

- *Natural*: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. $\Longleftarrow$ Hymn to John the Baptist.
- *Soft*: F, G, A, B♭, C, D.
- *Hard*: G, A, B, C, D, E.

Originally

Hexachords:

- *Natural*: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. $\Longleftarrow$ Hymn to John the Baptist.
- *Soft*: F, G, A, B♭, C, D.
- *Hard*: G, A, B, C, D, E.

In German:

- B is for B♭, H is for B♮;

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Hexachords:

- *Natural*: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. $\Longleftarrow$ Hymn to John the Baptist.
- *Soft*: F, G, A, B♭, C, D.
- *Hard*: G, A, B, C, D, E.

In German:

- B is for B♭, H is for B♮;
- *Dur* for *Major*, *moll* for *minor*.

Graphically

$\flat \Longleftarrow \mathit{round}\ b$

Graphically

$\flat \Longleftarrow$ *round b* (soft b)

Graphically

♭ $\Longleftarrow$ *round b* (soft b) [bé mol]

Graphically

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♭ ⟸ *round b* (soft b) [bé mol]:

♮ ⟸ *square b*

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♭ ⟸ *round b* (soft b) [bé mol]:

♮ ⟸ *square b* [bé quarré]

Etymologically

sharp, *flat* $\Longleftarrow$ so high (resp. low) as to be out of tune

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sharp, *flat* $\Longleftarrow$ so high (resp. low) as to be out of tune
French *dièse* $\Longleftarrow$ Latin *diesis*
First, a quarter tone interval, then a semitone one.

Accidentals were appearing

B♭, F♯, E♭, ...

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B♭, F♯, E♭, ...
in connection with *scales*

Double accidentals

Raise or lower a note's pitch by *two* semitones.

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First ♭, then ♯

Double accidentals

Raise or lower a note's pitch by *two* semitones.
First $\flat$, then $\sharp$
First $\times$, then $\flat\flat$

Double accidentals

Raise or lower a note's pitch by *two* semitones.
First $\flat$, then $\sharp$
First $\times$, then $\flat\flat$
in connection with *minor* scales.

How to Use Accidentals

Before the note's head.

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Above or *below* $\Longleftarrow$ restored (P. Attaingnant).

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Before the note's head.
Above or *below* $\Longleftarrow$ restored (P. Attaingnant).
Parentheses $\Longleftarrow$ *courtesy* accidentals.

Ancient Scores

Many accidentals were implicit or *relative* (N. Bernier).

More Double Accidentals

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Now many publishers have got rid of this ridiculous complication, an accidental has *absolute* meaning.

Accidentals and Bars

$\longrightarrow$ the following note and any repetition of it at the same octave and in the same bar, unless cancelled by another accidental.

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Ancient scores.
Modern scores.

Key signatures

Correctly managed by music software.

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Correctly managed by music software.
Warning! Within pre-classic music, some signatures now look incorrect.

Accidentals and LilyPond

Accidentals styles $\ni$ `dodecaphonic`, `modern`, `extraNatural`, `forget`, `modern-cautionary`, ...

Micro-intervals

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Other divisons: M. Ohana (1/3 tones).

Oriental Music

Not based on quarter tones, in the sense that Occidental music includes semitones.

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Semitones, *great* tones (5/4),

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Not based on quarter tones, in the sense that Occidental music includes semitones.
Semitones, *great* tones (5/4), *small* tones (3/4).
(Show modes.)

Discovering quarter tones

A scale, orientalism, excerpts from A. Schnittke and I. Wyschnegradsky.

Graphically

for *exact* quarter tones.

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Alternatives:

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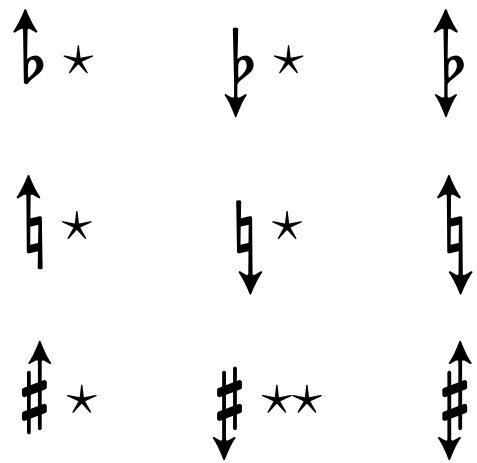

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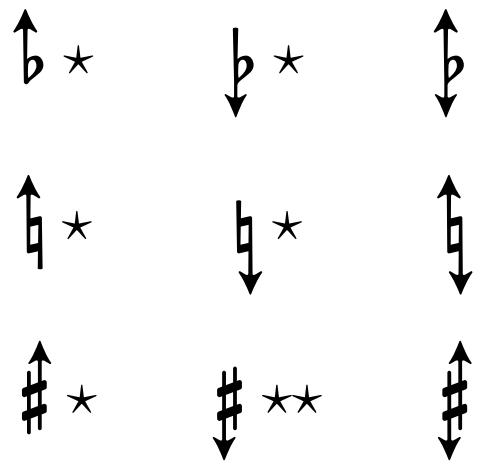

$\Longrightarrow$ *indeterminite* pitch.

Used within Byzantine chant

Breaks in the voice, approximate microintervals, too:

A Point of View

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modern composers $\Longleftarrow$ own notations with explanations.

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be clear!

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Me: very rarely.

Ending

Thanks for your attention!