

WHY THE STABILITY ORDER MATTERS

Sheet 2A gave you the **stability order**: DO → SO → MI → LA → RE → TI → FA. This companion explains **why** that order is real — rooted in physics and music theory — and how to use it intentionally when writing or revising a melody.

1 THE NOTE ISN'T JUST A NOTE

In Western tonal music, every scale degree carries a **built-in gravitational field**. The key center (DO) acts like a sun — other notes orbit around it. The further a note sits from DO in the stability order, the stronger the pull back toward home.

This is not subjective or cultural convention. It emerges from the acoustic relationships between pitches. **Stability is a physical property of intervals** — consonant intervals between a note and the tonic create stability; dissonant intervals create tension.

THE GRAVITY METAPHOR

Think of DO as the ground floor. SO and MI are comfortable chairs one floor up — easy to rest on. LA and RE are standing in a doorway — not uncomfortable, but not settled. TI and FA are leaning out a window — the pull back to ground is physical and urgent.

2 THE OVERTONE SERIES — WHY DO, SO, MI FEEL STABLE

When any note sounds, it produces **natural overtones** — a series of higher frequencies generated by the vibrating string, column, or membrane. The first few overtones above any fundamental note are the octave, the fifth (SO), and the major third (MI).

This means **DO**, **SO**, and **MI** are the notes that nature itself generates when DO is played. The ear recognizes them as consonant with home because they *are* home — they are acoustically embedded in the fundamental tone.



THE PRACTICAL RESULT

Melodies that emphasize DO, SO, and MI feel resolved and consonant. This is why these three notes make up the tonic triad — they are the notes that are "already there" in the natural acoustic property of the tonic pitch.

3 THE TRITONE: FA AND TI — MAXIMUM TENSION

The interval between **FA** and **TI** is a **tritone** — three whole steps, exactly half an octave. This is the most dissonant interval in Western music theory. Medieval theorists called it *diabolus in musica* — "the devil in music."

The tritone is uniquely unstable because it is equidistant from both directions of resolution. FA wants to fall a half-step down to MI. TI wants to rise a half-step up to DO. Together they form the harmonic engine that drives dominant chords back toward tonic.



The Tritone Pair. FA wants to resolve down to MI (half step). TI wants to resolve up to DO (half step). Together they define the strongest tension available within the key — which is why the dominant seventh chord (SO-TI-RE-FA) creates such irresistible pull toward home.

4 THE MIDDLE NOTES: LA AND RE

LA and **RE** sit in the moderate tension zone — neither as stable as the tonic triad nor as tense as the tritone pair. Each has a distinct emotional character.

LA — Warmth with a Question

LA is the 6th degree — the natural minor tonic. It sits close enough to home to feel settled, but with an emotional undertone that suggests something unresolved. Soul, gospel, and blues melodies use LA constantly for this reason: it holds feeling without forcing resolution. It can rest, but it never fully arrives.

RE — The Open Question

RE is the 2nd degree — a step away from home. It wants to fall back to DO or rise to MI. It's the melodic equivalent of ending a sentence with a question mark. RE gives melodies their sense of forward motion and yearning. Land on RE at the end of a verse phrase and the listener leans in for the answer.

WHY THE STABILITY ORDER MATTERS

5

USING THE LADDER INTENTIONALLY

Once you understand the stability ladder, you can **engineer tension arcs** in a melody by choosing which notes land on structurally important beats. The ladder is a tool, not a constraint.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

Stepping up the stability ladder (toward FA) builds tension. Stepping down (toward DO) creates resolution. The speed of the climb or descent controls the emotional pacing of your melody.

STEP UP →

DO

 →

MI

 →

RE

 →

TI

rising tension — each step more urgent

STEP DOWN →

TI

 →

RE

 →

MI

 →

DO

resolution — relaxing into home

LEAP TO TOP

DO

 →

FA

dramatic tension — sudden dissonance, demands resolution

6

COMMON STABILITY MOVES

These three patterns appear repeatedly in well-crafted melodies. Each uses the stability ladder deliberately to create a specific emotional shape.

Resolution Move

DO

 →

TI

 →

DO

Leave home, create tension, return. Classic cadence shape.

Tension Climb

RE

 →

TI

 →

FA

Build from moderate to maximum tension — pre-chorus energy.

Stable Platform

SO

 →

MI

 →

SO

Hover between stable notes — chorus hooks often rest here.

7

QUICK TEST — MAP A PHRASE'S TENSION ARC

Apply this exercise to any 4-note melody phrase to see its stability contour.

- 1

Write out the solmization syllables for the 4 key notes in your phrase (skip fast passing tones).
- 2

Rank each note on the stability ladder: DO=1, SO=2, MI=3, LA=4, RE=5, TI=6, FA=7.
- 3

Plot those four numbers: **1, 5, 6, 1** (for example) gives you a climb to tension and return. **3, 4, 5, 6** gives you constant rising tension with no release.
- 4

Ask: does the shape serve the emotional job of this section? Verse should lean toward ascending. Chorus should tend to land low.

EXAMPLE

Phrase:

MI

 →

LA

 →

TI

 →

DO

 = stability numbers **3 → 4 → 6 → 1**. This phrase climbs tension then resolves completely. Classic verse-to-arrival shape.

THE CORE INSIGHT

The stability order is physics made musical.

DO–SO–MI are stable because they live in the natural overtone series. TI and FA are tense because they form a tritone — the most dissonant interval. LA and RE sit in the emotional middle. When you understand *why* this order exists, you stop treating it as a rule and start using it as a tool.

The stability ladder is always available. Every phrase you write is already climbing or descending it. The only question is whether you're doing it deliberately.