

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____

Learning about Music Theory

Notation: the Single-Line Staff and the Five-Line Staff

Music notation has developed since ancient times to the standard five-line staff we know today. The challenge is to represent sound and time, in particular, pitch and rhythm. The pitch, which you shaped in your process of learning the first two songs in this chapter, is high and low, and relates to the physical frequency of the sound. The rhythms of the sounds are the proportional durations of the pitches. You clapped the rhythms of the first two pieces in order to learn them. You used your feet to walk the beats in order to keep the proportions right. You'll have a chance to collect what you know about rhythms a little later in the chapter. Now consider notation and how it relates to pitch.

Our standard notation now probably can be traced most easily back to medieval notation. Originally, notation showed the contour of the pitches without anchors or reference lines. To help singers better understand the relative pitches, a single line was introduced, just as you saw on pages 2-7 of this chapter. It's very precise: pitches can be on, below, or above the line. However, it's also limited. If a tune uses more than three pitches (like "Old Mister Rabbit"), there is no easy way to show the fourth pitch. So, using more than one line is usually desirable, as in this example of medieval music. The "notes" (actually called neumes) are the little black squares. If you look closely, you may be able to see that the notation uses staves with four lines each:



