

Relative & Parallel Keys

Music

Two ways a major and a minor key can relate, and why they get confused.

Relative — shares the notes

- Same key signature, different home note
- Minor is three semitones below the major
- C major $\equiv$ A minor
- Move between them with no accidentals at all
- The most common key change in folk and pop

Parallel — shares the tonic

- Same home note, different signature
- C major $\equiv$ C minor
- Three flats apart
- Swapping them changes the mood, not the key centre
- Used for a sudden darkening or brightening

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Relative keeps the notes and moves the home. Parallel keeps the home and moves the notes.

Borrowing a chord from the parallel minor is the commonest way pop songs sound momentarily sad.