

Table 2-1. Major and minor keys and their attributes, according to Charpentier, Mattheson, Rameau, Quantz, and LaBorde.

Key and Mode	Marc-Antoine Charpentier, <i>Règles de composition</i> (ca. 1682), manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. 6355	Johann Mattheson, <i>Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre</i> (1713)	Jean-Philippe Rameau, <i>Traité de l'harmonie</i> (Paris, 1722), 164	Johann Joachim Quantz, <i>On Playing the Flute</i> (1752), 164–165	Jean Benjamin de LaBorde, <i>Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne</i> (Paris, 1780), 28–29
C major	“gay and warlike”	“rude and impudent character; suited to rejoicing”	“songs of mirth and rejoicing”		“serious, grave, majestic, suited to war, sometimes for religious subjects” [both modes]
C minor	“obscure and sad”	“extremely lovely, but sad”	“tenderness and plaints”	“melancholy . . . mournful”	
D major	“joyous and very warlike”	“somewhat shrill and stubborn; suited to noisy, joyful, warlike, and rousing things”	“songs of mirth and rejoicing”		“ardent, proud, impetuous, vehement, terrible; sometimes also more quiet”
D minor	“serious and pious”	“somewhat devout, calm, also somewhat grand, pleasant, and expressive of contentment”	“sweetness and tenderness”		
E flat major	“cruel and hard”	“pathetic; concerned with serious and plaintive things; bitterly hostile to all lasciviousness”			“grave and very somber”
E major	“quarrelsome and boisterous”	“expresses a desperate or wholly fatal sadness incomparably well; most suited for the extremes of helpless and hopeless love”	“tender and gay songs; grandeur and magnificence”		“animated, rousing, sometimes pathetic and proper for softness [<i>mollesse</i>]” [both modes]
E minor	“effeminate, amorous, plaintive”	“hardly joyful because it is normally	“sweetness and tenderness”		

very pensive, profound,
grieved, and sad, [but]
still hope for
consolation"

F major	"furious and quick-tempered subjects"	"capable of expressing the most beautiful sentiments in the world in a natural way and with incomparable facility, politeness, and cleverness"	"tempests, furies, and the like"		"noisy, but sometimes melancholy and pathetic"
F minor	"obscure and plaintive"	"mild and calm, deep and heavy with despair, exceedingly moving; sometimes causes the listener to shudder with horror"	"tenderness and plaints"	"melancholy . . . mournful"	
G major	"quietly joyful"	"possesses much that is insinuating and persuasive; quite brilliant, suited to serious and to cheerful things"	"tender and gay songs"		"affectionate, but gay, often soft [<i>doux</i>] and majestic" [both modes]
G minor	"serious and magnificent"	"almost the most beautiful key; combines a serious quality with spirited loveliness, also brings an uncommon grace and kindness"	"sweetness and tenderness"	"melancholy . . . mournful"	
A major	"joyful and pastoral"	"very gripping, although at the same time brilliant, more suited to lamenting and sad passions than to <i>divertissements</i> ; especially good for violin music."	"songs of mirth and rejoicing; grandeur and magnificence"		"brilliant and sometimes calm and peaceful" [both modes]