Fortunately for me, with a great love for good music and no talent, my late wife was a concert cellist. Her musical education had included fifteen years of private study in this country and a formal course at the Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Bruxelles, from which she was a prize graduate in 1914. Ignorant and curious, I asked her the reason for foreign study -- what could she learn in Belgium that wasn't taught in the United States? She listed a number of topics in reply, with emphasis on counterpoint, ensemble and solfege.

That last word was new to me, as were its near-synonyms, solfaying and solmization. In explaining it to me, with an oversimplifying analogy because of my laity in music, she began by describing solfege as "singing words in songs without words". Many people will use just the one word la and intone a musical phrase, theme or passage as "la, la, la, la, la, la" or even with a prefatory tra. With more variety, the so-called Fate Theme of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (which encodes VV, the victory theme of the Second World War) has been rendered "ta-ta-ta taw ... da-da-da dum". But in solfege, each note of the scale has a different word associated with it. That Fate Theme becomes "sol-sol-sol bo ... fa-fa-fa re".

This was Greek to me in more ways than one. I neither knew the words nor could I intone in tune, being a helpless monotone. Years later, however, I became addicted to crossword puzzles, in which, one by one, a dozen or so of these words were added (literally but not musically) to my vocabulary. Some were defined simply as "musical note" and others more definitely as such-and-such a note of Guido's scale. I became curious. Who was this guy Guido? Were there other words of solfege besides those met in crossword puzzles? I was curious enough to begin some research, in encyclopedias (Groves and Britannica) and my wife's musical library.

The story is a long one -- too long to warrant more than an abstract for the current purpose. Guido d'Arezzo, anglicized to Guy of Arezzo, was a monk born nearly a thousand years ago, long before there was a well-tempered clavichord. He assigned syllabic names to the six notes of a diatonic hexachord and overlapped two hexachords for a working range (the gamut) extending approximately from 256 to 640 cycles per second. Guido proposed the names UT, RE, MI, FA, SOL and LA for the notes C, D, E, F, G and A in his lower hexachord.

His upper A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, was used by composers and the musician from music known so male deo.

Later F, G, A, was used by the musician and the note was.

Various other than and later able do, note, and words were nomenclatures. A#: the all and Obuk.

In what had been more work by reflect Boheme, Following by a triple quintuplet, been written definition ranged in introduced. The answer is.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.
His upper hexachord started at G and used the same six names for G, A, B, C, D, and E. The word E-LA keeps popping up in crossword puzzles as "the highest note in Guido's scale", but Guido never heard of it! This name was added (that is, substituted for LA) long after Guido's death, in order to distinguish the LA of the lower hexachord from that of the upper. (By analogy, the highest note in the lower hexachord was called a-la, but this nomenclature seems to have died out.)

Later, it was felt that all the notes of the diatonic scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C) should have names. Guido's hexachord nomenclature was used as a base (with the more familiar DO substituting for UT), and the note B was christened TI (alternatively, SI) by an unknown musician. Most people are familiar with this set of solfege words from music lessons in elementary school, as well as from the well-known song in the movie "The Sound of Music" ("Do, a deer, a female deer; Re, a drop of golden sun...").

Various schemes were devised to adapt this basic system to keys other than C and minor modes, first to enharmonic "accidentals" and later to the tempered chromatic scale, particularly (1) the "movable dol" for which the sequence of words was moved from C to the key note, and (2) the "fixed dol" for which DO remained on C and new words were coined for the five black keys. There are two different nomenclatures for the black-key intermediates C#, D#, F#, G#, and A#: the anonymous PA, BO, TU, DE, and SA (alternatively, NO), and Obukof's LO, TE, RA, --, and BI.

In what follows, I adopt the fixed do scheme, partly because this had been taught to my wife in solfege, and partly because it gave me more words for the game described below. This game was suggested by reflecting that Mimi, the tragically doomed diva of Puccini's "La Boheme", could be represented by an E-E couplet on a musical staff. Following this lead, I noted that the word retire could be represented by a triplet D-B-D, several words by quadruplets, and one word by a quintuplet. As a recreational exercise, eight words of this type have been written in musical notation and referenced by number to their definitions, there being one word to each measure and the words arranged in alphabetical order. All of the 20 capitalized solfege words introduced above have been used, with some repetition for extra clues. The answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

1. A unit contest, such as boxing
2. Calcium-magnesium carbonate
3. To embellish with care
4. Angular distance from the equator
5. A small cream-colored horse
6. An ironic composition censoring vice
7. To speak with a hissing sound
8. To sing the notes of the gamut
As a more extensive research project, I have listed 78 common words formed in this way drawn from Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Several words not in Webster also occurred to me -- proper names such as Lalo, Mimi and Nora, and place names such as Laredo, Tulare and Lodore.

bide desire late palomino rebore silo
bite dodo latitude papa redo sire
bode dolomite lobo para relate site
bola domino lode parabola reside soldo
bolo dote lore parade rete sol-fa
bora elaborate lout parasite retire teredo
borate elate milo parasol salami terete
bore fade mire pare samite tete
bout fa la mite pate sate tide
delate fare node rara satire titi
demi- fate nolo rare saturate tufa
denote Fatimite note rate sibilate tire
desiderate lade palate ratite side tutu

From the above list, the most amicable words of solfege are TE, RE, DE and LA; the least amicable are ELA, UT, BI, and SOL.