

Chord Progressions

There are five kinds of chord progressions in music:

- Basic Harmony
- Scale Chords
- Substitute Chords
- Circle of Fifth Chords
- Chromatic Chords

Last month we presented Basic Harmony. This month we will be working with Scale Chords. Over the coming months, we are going to explain and demonstrate all five kinds of chord progressions. You will then be able to recognize them in the music you play. You will also be able to use the knowledge of chord progressions to change the music you play and make it more interesting.

Scale Chord Harmony

Each note of the scale can have a chord built on it using only the notes of the scale. These are called the Scale Chords. For example:

Scale Chords in the Key of C

The diagram shows a piano accompaniment for the scale chords in the key of C. The bass line contains chords: C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am, Bdim, C. The treble line shows the root notes of these chords: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C.

Any chord note works well in the melody. Below we show the chord root in the melody (the right hand notes, in treble clef)

The diagram shows the first four measures of the scale chord progression. The treble line shows the root notes of the chords: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The bass line shows the chords: C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am, Bdim, C.


The diagram shows the last two measures of the scale chord progression. The treble line shows the root notes of the chords: C, B, A, G, F, E, D, C. The bass line shows the chords: C, Bdim, Am, G, F, Em, Dm, C.

The following three songs are harmonized using scale chord harmony chords in the Key of C. However, not every note is harmonized. We are usually harmonizing the first note of each measure with the correct Scale Chord. In a few instances, we have also added a chord in the middle of the measure to strengthen the feeling of harmonic progression. Other notes that aren't harmonized in the melody exist as passing notes or neighbors. (They could be harmonized with scale chords, but too many chords clutter the sound.)

The three example songs are done with purely Scale Chord Harmony. Most songs have a mixture of the types of chord progressions. Try to find Scale Chord Harmony sections in the songs you play. Next month we'll cover Substitute Chord harmony.

Michael, Row the Boat Ashore

C Dm Em



6 Dm Em Dm C



10 Dm C



14 Em Dm C Dm C



Greensleeves

Am G F

Musical notation for measures 1-7. Treble clef, 3/4 time. Chords: Am, G, F.

8 Em Am G F

Musical notation for measures 8-14. Treble clef, 3/4 time. Chords: Em, Am, G, F.

15 E Am C G

Musical notation for measures 15-21. Treble clef, 3/4 time. Chords: E, Am, C, G.

22 F Em C

Musical notation for measures 22-27. Treble clef, 3/4 time. Chords: F, Em, C.

28 G F E Am


Musical notation for measures 28-34. Treble clef, 3/4 time. Chords: G, F, E, Am.

Silent Night - Scale Chords 1

1 C Dm Em F




5 G Am B° C Dm Em




9 F Em Dm C B° Am G



13 F Em Dm Em F Em Dm C Am



17 Dm Em F G7 Am B° C B° Am G



21 C Dm Em Dm F G7 F Em Dm C

