

Definitive Piano Improvisation Course



By Yoke Wong

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Thank you for purchasing piano improvisation DVD course.

It is my hope that these lessons will help you improve your piano improvising skills. There is no doubt in my mind that once you start applying these techniques you will see an improvement in your piano playing.

I still remember the night I asked God to prepare me to be a better pianist in order to serve Him well. These lessons are results of my prayers. I have spent almost 20 years of my life improving and fine-tuning my own improvising techniques.

"If you give a man a fish, you can feed him for a day.
If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for life!"

My goal is for you to start improvising and making-up your own music instead of always relying on sheet music. I thank God for giving me the chance to serve Him by playing the piano. I also thank you for allowing me to show you these improvising techniques.

God Bless You!

Yoke Wong
<http://www.PlayPianoTips.com>

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Topic: How To Improvise A Song Using Pentatonic Scale

Goals:

1. Ability to compose piano music by using the pentatonic scale.
2. Ability to improvise any song using the pentatonic scale.

Pentatonic scale is one of the easiest scales to master. As the name indicates, this scale consists of 5 notes. Knowing the pentatonic scale helps you to create many piano music styles; including gospel/evangelical, new age, and a variety of Oriental music, etc

First, let's go through the pentatonic scale. Do you know the notes of the pentatonic scale?

They are the I, II, III, V, VI notes of a regular scale.

In the key of C major, it is C, D, E, G, and A

In the Key of D major, it is D, E, F sharp, A, and B.

In the Key of E major, it is E, F sharp, G sharp, B, and C sharp. ...

If you have trouble with other keys, send me a note, and I will let you know what the pentatonic scales are for other keys.

Now, let's listen to them carefully as I play the C major pentatonic scale.

Listen to audio sample - CD1 track 1

This is your assignment:

For the next two weeks, practice the C major, F major, G major, and D major pentatonic scales everyday (for now, use just your right hand, do not worry about your left hand yet).

The fingering I use is 12355 (it is fine to use another fingering as long as you can move along the scale relatively fast. You may use any fingering combinations. Just make sure you can play up and down the keyboard rather smoothly.

After you become adept at the scale, try playing it in different combinations. That is, instead of always I, II, III, V, VI, try varying the order of the five notes.

For example: TRY III, V, II, III, I or II, III, V, VI, V (Yes, you may use the same note twice).

Listen to audio example –CD1 track 2

Do you get it?

Why do we need to practice the pentatonic scale? You see, as you are practicing different combinations and ordering of notes in the pentatonic scale, you are also practicing improvisation and composition. Improvisation and composition are not rocket science. It can be practiced and trained. Change the rhythm of your scale. Do you notice you are creating a different musical phrase every time you do so. In the old days, composers spent a lot of time "messing around" with different piano notes. This is called "creative time". Let your hands guide you. Do not depend on the sheet music.

You ask: What about my left hand? What notes do I use, what chords do I use? You see, since the pentatonic scale only has five notes, and three of them are I, III, V, which belong to the tonic chord. It is fine to use just the tonic chord in the left hand. Note: tonic chord is the first triad chord of any key. For example: In the Key of C major, C chord is the tonic chord (CEG). Instead of using a block chord (three notes play at the same time), I recommend using just the bottom and top notes of the C maj chord. C and G played separately can create a very nice open voicing. Also, try using A and E notes, which are part of the A minor chord (you see, A minor chord consists of ACE, which are also parts of the C pentatonic scale (C,d,E,g,A). You may play in alternate octaves to create variations. Sometimes play at a lower range, sometimes at a higher range.

Listen to my left hand audio sample – CD1 track 3

Now, are you ready for the exciting parts? You are going to combine what you have practiced, both right hand and left hand, and start creating some music.

Let me repeat the steps:

1. With your right hand, play C pentatonic scale in any combination or order and in any octaves.
2. With your left hand, use C and G notes plus A and E notes interchangeably. You can play in lower octave and higher octaves.
3. Make sure to use the sustain pedal often, change the pedal when you change chords on left hand.

Listen to my audio sample – CD 1 track 4

What do you think? Are you making up music as you go on?

It really is not hard to improvise, is it? My advice is: spend more time on the

piano without any sheet music. Let your hands guide and move you, the better you are with the scale, the easier it is to improvise. Very soon, you will be able to sit down at the piano for an hour or two and enjoy making up your own piano music without any sheet music in front of you. The more you do it, the more enjoyable it becomes. It is great to know how to play piano.

C Pentatonic Scale Diagram



Topic: Country Western Style Made Possible

Goals:

1. Ability to imitate or make up country western sounds whenever desired.
2. Improvise and make up country western music using principles discussed.

This lesson takes more time to practice and perfect. Be patient and keep smiling!

Introduction

Before I show you how to play country western music. I would like you to listen to the following song sample.

Listen to audio sample –CD 1 track 5

How exactly is country western style music different from standard ballad? Rock? Blues? Jazz? Can you think of anything that relates to country western style?

The first thing that comes to my mind is country twang! Also, the mosey horse-riding feeling.

How exactly do you apply these features to your piano playing? One thing I learned about playing different piano styles (whether it is ragtime, country western, blues, rock, swing, etc) is to internalize the style. That gives me a head start on the rhythm and feeling. Now let's see how we can create country twang and mosey feeling on piano.

Right Hand Methods

This is how a country twang will sound on the piano:

Listen to audio sample – CD 1 track 6

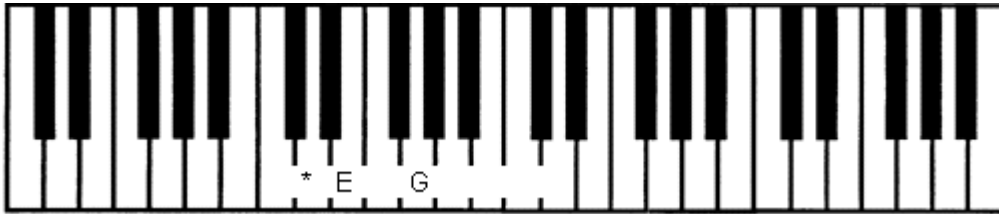
How exactly did I do that?

Step 1: The country twang effect is done by the right hand. Let's say you have a G note that is going to "twang". Here is how you do it: Add a third below the G note (that is E), and play both of them together, however, before you play both of them together you need to add a grace note to these two notes. The grace note you add is the D note which is one step below E.

Take a look at the diagram and listen to the sound sample and see how I did it.

Listen to audio sample –CD 1, track 7

In order to play a twang on G note, you need to add an E note! Before you play both E and G, you need to slide D quickly into E&G.



Did you get it?

Tips: don't overuse it in any song, because it will get boring if you overuse it.

Question: If I want to create a twang on C note, how do I play it?

ANSWER: I will add a third below C note, which is A note. Before I play both A & C, I will add a grace note (G) and slide off the G to play A&C.

Step 2: When you have a long note to hold, you can try the twang techniques at a higher octave and then come down to a lower octave. The notes you play depend on the chord. Let's say you have C chord for 4 beats.

The way to play C chord octave twang is by using two groups of twang on C scale notes (group one: sliding G to A and C and land on E, group two: sliding D to E and G and land on C). You will play this at a higher octave and then quickly come down to a lower octave. The key to playing twang octave is to slide V to VI & VIII and land on III as group one and then slide II to III & V and land on I as group two. Remember, this principle applies to any key.

Let's say you are playing a G chord octave twang, you will slide D to E&G and land on B as group one, then slide A to B and D and land on G as group two.

This might sound complicated but once you listen to the audio sample you will understand what I am saying.

Listen to audio sample – track 8

Diagram on fingering usage:



Right hand fingering used: E (1), G (2), A (3), C (5)



Right hand fingering used: C(1), D(2), E(3), G(5)

Fingering Tips: Use thumb as an anchor and cross other fingers over after playing group one.

2. In addition to step 1, we also need to use parallelism on right hand to create the country western. Listen to the sample and you will understand what I mean by parallelism.

Listen to audio sample track 9

Step 1: Parallelism is created by having both notes go down the same direction. Let's say I have both E&G notes created from step 1 and I want to finish on E notes from G note. I will then move both of them down half steps at the same time, it become E&G, then Eflat &G flat, then, D & F, and finally land on C&E.

Left Hand Methods

1. Use a broken sixth chord to create a country western style bass. Lets say we are playing a C chord with the left hand, we need to add a sixth to the C chord, making it a C6 chord (C,E,G,A). Divide the C6 chord into 2 parts. The root (C), and the rest of the chords (EGA).

If you have 4 beats of C6 chord, count in this manner: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Step 1: Play a low C (count 1)

Step 2: Then, move up an octave to play a higher C in the bass clef area. (count &)

Step 3: Play the rest of C6 chord (EGA) at the same octave as step 2. (count 2)

Step 4: Play the same C as step 2. (count &)

Step 5: Play a low G. (count 3)

Step 6: Play the same as step 2.

Step 7: Play the rest of C6 chord the same as step3. (count 4)

Step 8: Play the same C as step 2. (count &)

Listen to the audio to understand the style

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 10

Question: If you need to play a F chord, how do you create the left hand country western accompaniment?

Answer: First, add a sixth to make it a F6 chord (FACD). Then repeat step one to step eight by replacing all the C with F (we are using different chord, and hence the bass will be different). Now what note do you use to replace step 5?

Ask yourself how far is G from C? That is a fifth. So, what is a fifth from F, that is C. You will replace the G note with a C note. Get it?

Question: What if you need to play a A chord on left hand, how do you create the left hand country western accompaniment?

Answer: First, add a sixth to make it a A6 chord (A C# E F#). Then repeat every step. Now what is a fifth from A? That is E. So we will play a low E instead of G on step 5.

This same formula applies to every chord changes. Make sure you understand each chord and its fifth note.

As for fingering: I will always use the pinky to play the lowest note, and 321 fingers to play the rest of the sixth chord.

Bass for 3/4

1. We will count 1&2&3&.
2. Play step one through step four, then repeat step 3 and step four

Listen to audio sample – track 11

One common ending on country western style

1. A major 10th is a common ending. If you end on a C chord, you will play C & E (play E that is a tenth from the C, and not a third.
2. Walk up 4 steps and come back 4 steps down to the original note. C, D, E, F with your left hand, and E, F, G, A (octave above) with your right hand.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 12

Conclusion:

Combine all techniques and you will have a style like this:

Listen to audio sample –CD 1 track 13

In case you don't quite grasp the whole concept of country western style, I have attached the next page for you to view the structure in written form.

Country Western style sheet music exercise

Is this too much for you? Don't be discouraged. Repeat this process every week. After a while you can make up your own country western style piano music without any sheet music. That is what I did on the song above. I made up the melody and applied the twang techniques and left hand bass. This can easily become your own music.

Will talk more in the next lesson!

Country Western Style Made Easy

Twang Technique 1



Twang Technique 2



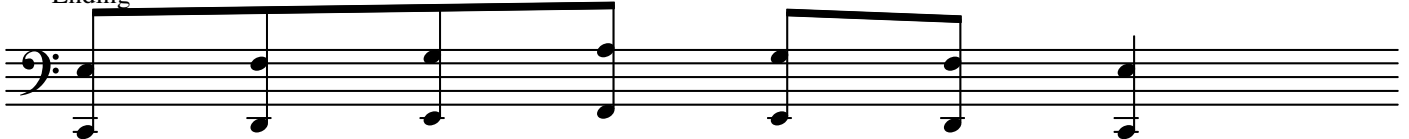
Right Hand Parallelism



Left Hand Method



Ending



Topic: The Most Used Chords in Any Key (Left hand harmonization method)

This lesson will cover the most used chords in any major or minor key. Also, you will learn how to apply them in any melody. Before we move on, do you know how many basic chords there are? Answer: 144 Basic Chords. There are only 12 major chords, 12 minor chords, 12 augmented chords, and 12 diminished chord. That makes 48. Then each one can be turned upside down (inverted) 3 times. Three times 48 is 144. These are the basic 12 dozen chords you need to know.

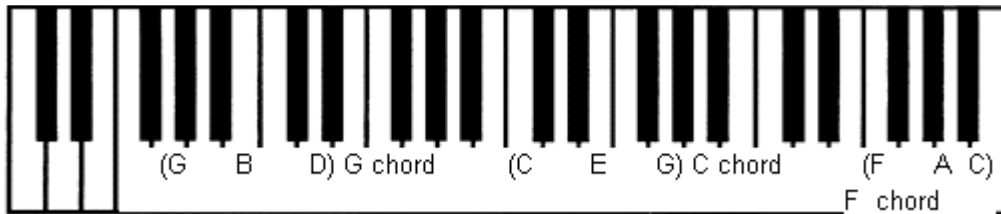
Notice that we are not including color chords that include 6th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, and so on.

In any given key, there are three important chords you need to know. They are tonic (I), dominant (V), and subdominant (IV).

Understand that applying these three chords on a melody does not mean the melody will sound spectacular. There are many things you can do to decorate or arrange a melody such as using color tone, block chord style, fillers, far-out melodies, polytonality, and etc. That is not our topic today. We are trying to help you play any melody with a few simple chords.

We are in the key of C major:

The most used chords are C chord (CEG), F chord (FAC), and G (GBD)



Note: you can invert these three chords. For example: C chord can be GCE, ECG, or CEG. As long as you are playing all three notes the order of the notes does not matter.

Example One:

Why are these three chords most commonly used? In order to answer this, you will need to know the structure of a scale.

In the key of C major:

C D E F G A B C

We can use chords

I&IV V I IV I&V IV V I&IV

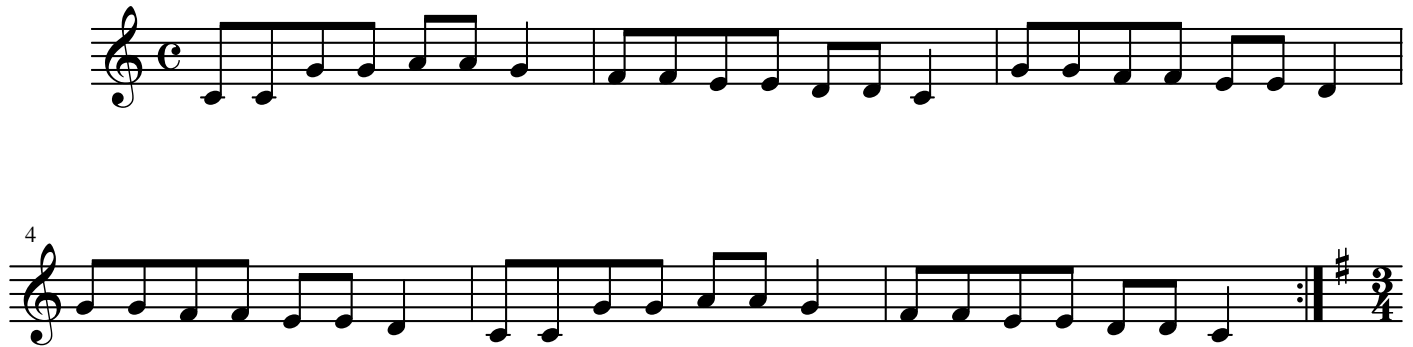
What makes up C chord? Answers: CEG. Since C is part of C chord, if you have a C note in a melody of C major key, you mostly likely will harmonize it with C chord which is the tonic chord of the C major. You may also try the subdominant chord (IV chord) which is F chord in the key of C major, and it consists of FAC (notice C is also part of the F chord).

Based on the theory above, if you come across a G note, what chord can you use? Bingo! The tonic or the dominant chord.

To make sure you understand this principle, I am attaching a few songs in the following page for you to try out.

You do not have to harmonize every note in the melody. Only quarter notes and larger. If a song has a lot of eighth note, then you will need to harmonize the eighth notes whenever the melody sounds dissonant. For example, if you have CDEC phrase in quarter notes, a C chord will harmonize the whole phrase. Always use your ear to listen. Once it starts sounding dissonant change the left hand chord until it sounds pleasant.

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star



Amazing Grace



Note: Use C chord, F chord, and G chord to harmonize Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (C major Key)
Use G chord, C chord, and D chord to harmonize Amazing Grace (G major Key)

When the Saints Go Marching In



Note: Use C chord, F chord, and G chord for this song

Topic - Right Hand Arranging Techniques

Goals:

1. Ability to arrange melodies of any piano music with a varieties of styles.

Introduction:

Before I knew the techniques of arrangements, I used to struggle with playing songs out of a fake book (fake book is the type of music book that does not give full scores. It only gives you the right hand melody and left hand chords). I had no idea how to play a song without the complete sheet music.

If you are struggling with how to arrange piano music, these next few lessons will help you a great deal.

We will only discuss the right hand part in this lesson!

Method 1:

Play Melody In Thirds

This is by far the most common way to arrange any song. If you have sung in any choir, you probably know that the alto parts of the choir are structured mostly a third below the soprano.

So if you have a melody line of notes: [E F G F] [E F G G]

Listen to the audio sample – CD1 track 14

Add a third below all of the notes [C D E D][C D E E]

Listen to the audio sample –CD 2 track 15

Fingering: Use little finger to play melody, third finger to play a third below melody.

Method 2:

Play A Sixth Under The Melody

Do you know why a sixth under the melody is very commonly used and sounds pleasant with the melody notes? Now, what is a third above the melody note? A sixth below and a third above the melody note is actually the same note in different octave. Let's say I have a melody note of C, a sixth below C is E, and a third above C is also E (one octave higher). Therefore, a third and a sixth sound very pleasant in nature.

If your melody notes are: [E F G F] [E F G G]

Listen to audio sample – CD 1 track 16

Add a sixth below the melody [G A B A] [G A B B]

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 17

Fingering: use little finger to play melody note and thumb play a sixth under.

Method 3:

Play Melody in Octaves

This is commonly used in evangelistic piano playing. This method is very effective to create a strong and solid melody. You will play the melody note and add an octave above it.

If your melody notes are: [E F G F] [E F G G]

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 14

Add an octave above: [E F G F] [E F G G]

Listen to audio sample – CD1 track 18

Fingering: use thumb for melody note, little finger for octave above.

Method 4:

Play Melody With Two Chord Notes Under It

This method sounds quite rich and beautiful. Do not use it on fast passages, otherwise the effect might not be so spectacular. The chord notes used depends on the left hand chord used.

Chord used	C	G7	F	G
If your melody notes are:	E	G]	[F	D]

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 19

Chord used	C	G7	F	G
Add 2 chord notes under:	[GCE	BFG]	[ACF	BDG]

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 20

Fingering: use little finger on melody note, thumb on the bottom note, 2 or 3 finger for the middle note

Method 5:

Play Melody With Two Chord Notes Plus A Color Tone Under It
(a total of 4 fingers used on right hand).

This method utilize the method 4 plus an additional note to make the right hand sounds lush and full. What is a color tone? The color tones are 6ths, 7ths, major 7ths, and 9ths (9th is the second of a scale) of any scale. A basic chord has three notes (also called triads), when you add a color tone to it, it becomes a color chord. The chord used also determined largely by the left hand chord.

For example:

D chord consists of [D F# and A] (it is the 1st, 3rd, and 5th of D major scale).

D maj7 chord is [D, F#, A, and C#].

C# is the seventh note of a D major scale.

D7 chord is [D, F#, A, & C].

Notice how D7 is different from D maj7? They share the same D triad but the color tone is different. The C note is a half step down from C# .

Chord used	Cmaj7	G7	Cmaj7	F6
If your melody notes are	[G	G	E	F]

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 21

Add color chords under [BCEG BDFG GBCE ACDF]

Listen to the audio sample –CD track 22

Fingering: use little finger on melody note. Thumb on the bottom note, use any of the other three fingers to play the rest.

These right hand techniques should keep you busy for a while. Use it on the following melodies:

1. [Down in the Valley](#)
2. [Swanee River](#)
3. [Beautiful Brown Eyes](#)

Make sure you use these right hand methods interchangeably. They will become natural to you after a few exercises. Now, use all five methods on any song you like from a fake book. Try it out. Sometimes one method sounds better than others. Experiment with them over and over again, until they become very smooth.

Right Hand Arrangement Techniques

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

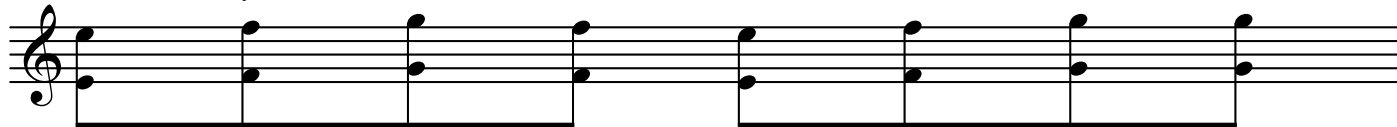
Method 1. Melody in Thirds



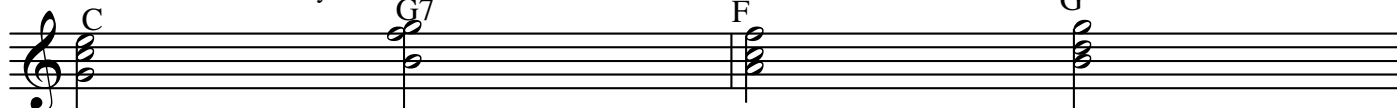
Method 2. Melody in Sixths



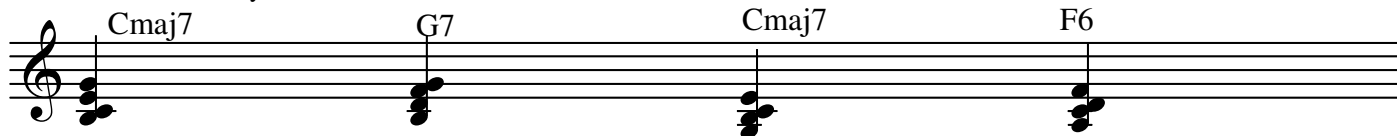
Method 3. Melody in Octaves



Method 4. Melody with 2 chord notes underneath

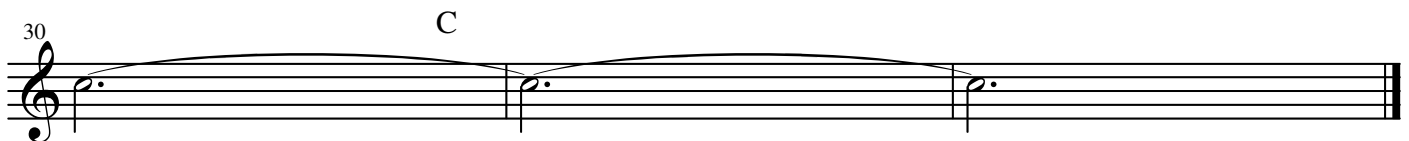
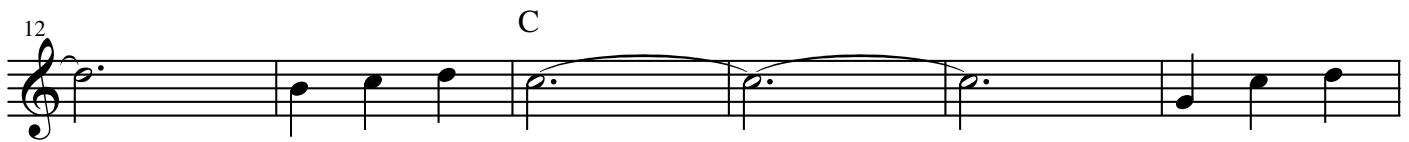


Method 5. Melody with color chords.



Down In The Valley

<http://www.playpianotips.com>



Swanee River

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The musical score for "Swanee River" is presented in six staves, each containing a line of music in C major (one sharp, F#) and 2/4 time. The chords are indicated above the notes:

- Staff 1: Chords C, F, C.
- Staff 2: Chords G7, C, F.
- Staff 3: Chords C, G7, C, G7.
- Staff 4: Chords C, F.
- Staff 5: Chords C, G7, F.
- Staff 6: Chords C, G7, C.

Beautiful Brown Eyes

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The musical score for "Beautiful Brown Eyes" is presented in three staves, all in treble clef and 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a C chord and contains 5 measures. The second staff begins at measure 6 and contains 8 measures, with chord changes to G7 at measure 7, C at measure 9, and F at measure 11. The third staff begins at measure 12 and contains 6 measures, with a G7 chord at measure 13 and a C chord at measure 15. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the final measure.

Topic: Left Hand Arrangement Techniques Series One

Goals: The ability to use any of the following left hand techniques interchangeably whenever required.

Introduction:

There are many types of piano music; standard ballad, rock, evangelistic you name it. Do you know that many of these styles can be created by just changing one little thing on your left hand?

Rhythm changes, chord changes, walking up on the piano, walking down on the keyboards, all these can alter the feeling of the song you are playing.

You will learn 5 effective ways to alter your left hand accompaniment in order to create different piano styles.

Left Hand Technique 1 - "Ballad Style Color 9th Chord"

This is one of the most common piano style. Songs like "Moon River", "Yesterday", "Edelweiss". Any sentimental piano music will work.

The way to do this is by breaking up your simple chord and add a 9th note to it.

Example: You are supposed to play a C chord for 4 beats on your left hand, instead of just playing CEG for 4 beats, you will break up C chord and play C, G, C, D, E, G, C up the piano (adding a 9th note (D)).

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 23



Left hand
Fingering

5 2 1 4 3 2 1

Tips: The 9th note of any scale is also the 2nd note of the scale

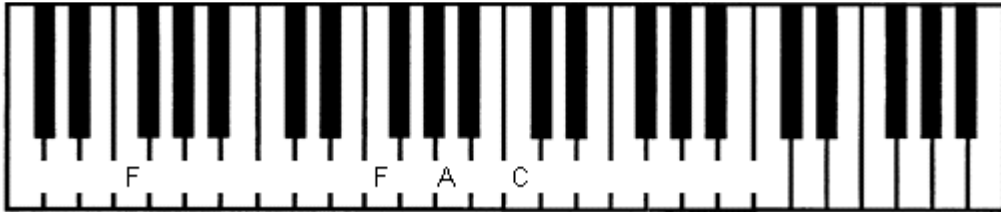
Example 2: If you are supposed to play F chord for 4 beats, break up F chord and add a 9th to make it F, C, F, G, A, C. F

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 2 - "Swing Bass"

This method is used to create a swing feeling. Use root of any chord on lower octave, and play the whole chord one or two octaves above.

For example: F chord for 4 beats: You play a low F note, and go up one octave to play F A C. Repeat this process for 2 more beats in order to have 4 beats.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 24



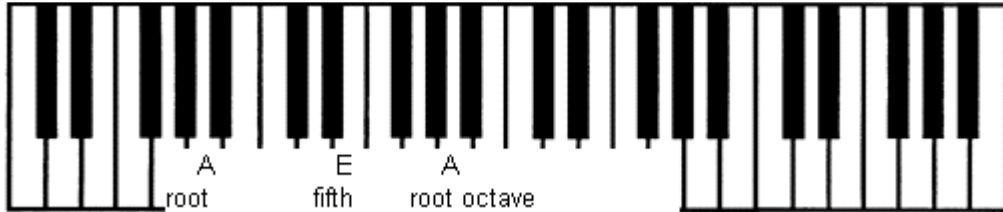
Fingering: 5 5 3 1

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 3 - "Alternating Root-Fifth"

This method is used to create a lively rhythm. You may try this method on "Jingle Bell". The way to do this is by playing root - root octave - fifth - root octave (I, VIII, V, VIII).

Example: If you have a left hand chord of A maj for 4 beats. Instead of playing A chord, just break up the chord and play A -- A octave higher - E - A octave.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 25



Fingering: 5 1 2 1

Tips: use this method only if you want to create a lively rhythm.

Left Hand Technique 4 - Western Bass Style

This method creates an authentic country western feeling. The way to do this is by playing the root, the fifth, the sixth, and the fifth (I, V, VI, V). Make sure you play long, short, long, short.

For example: if the left hand chord is C chord, just play C, G, A, G.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 26

Fingering: 5 2 1 2

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 5 - Evangelistic Walk Down

As the name implies, it is commonly done in evangelistic or gospel piano playing. You will walk down the piano from the top note. Let's say you have a C chord for four beats, you will just walk down from C to B to A and finally to G. It is more effective to walk down in octaves and rapidly.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 27

Do not underestimate the power of this method. Chopin used this method in his Polonaise (Polonaise in Ab major).

Since this method is quite simple to understand, there is no exercise sheet for practice.

Conclusion:

All these five methods are highly specialized and take time to master. Make sure you go through the exercises and apply them on different songs you know of.

Listen to the following song and see how I apply these techniques interchangeably to create different styles.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 28

Left Hand Techniques - Ballad style color 9th chord

C chord

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

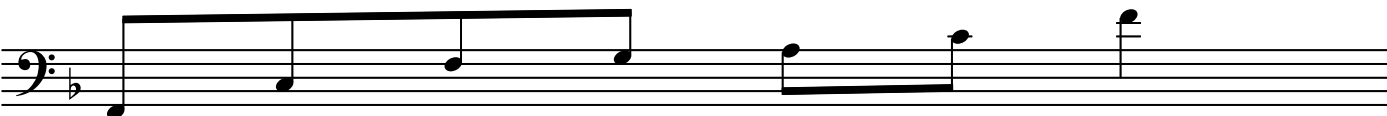
Left Hand Techniques: Ballad Style Color 9th in C chord



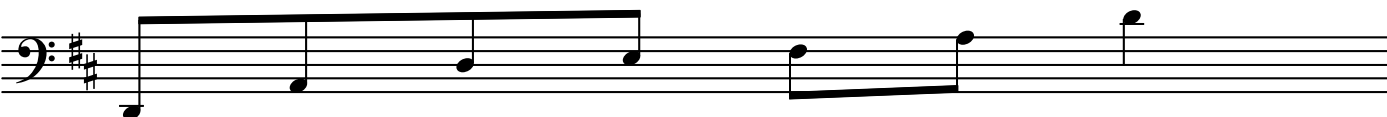
G chord



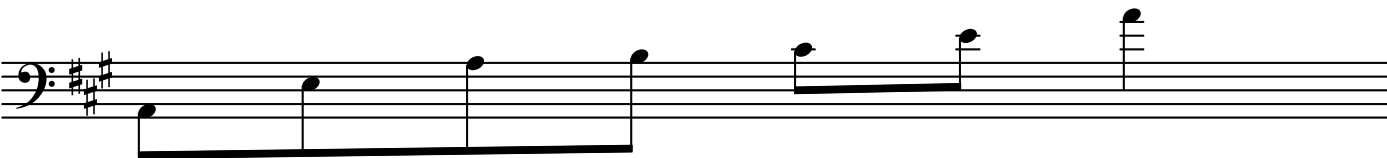
F chord



D chord



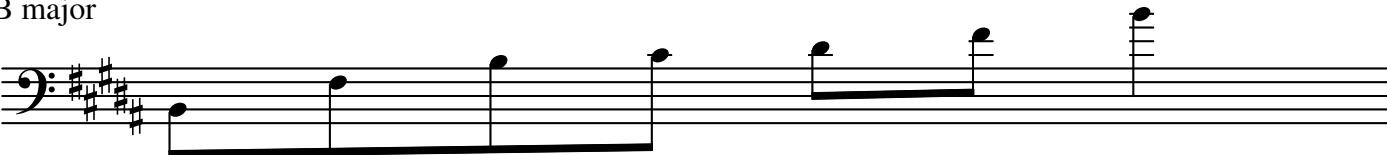
A chord



E chord



B major



E flat Chord



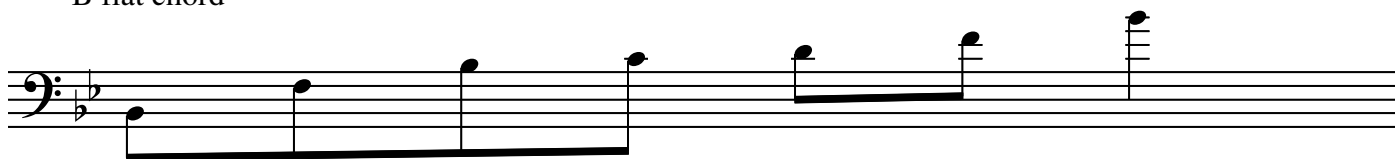
D flat Chord



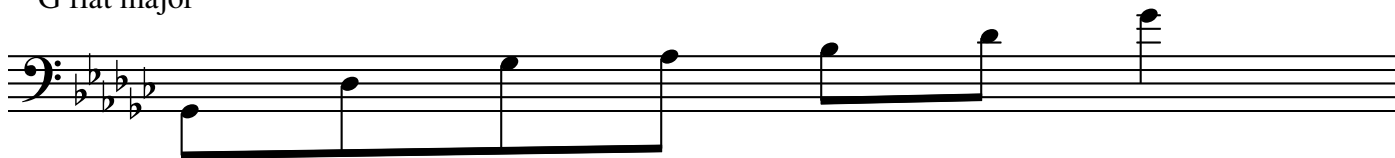
G flat chord



B flat chord



G flat major



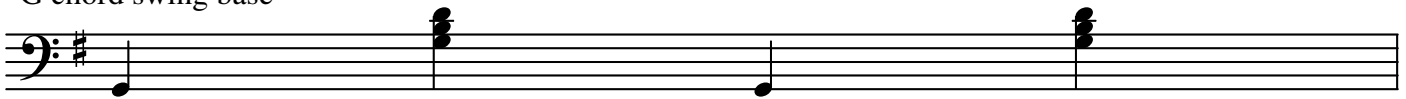
Left Hand Arrangement Techniques - Swing Base

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C chord swing base



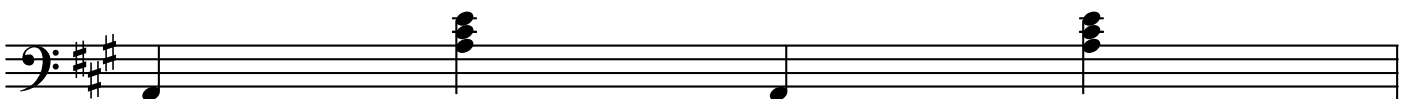
G chord swing base



D chord swing base



A chord swing base



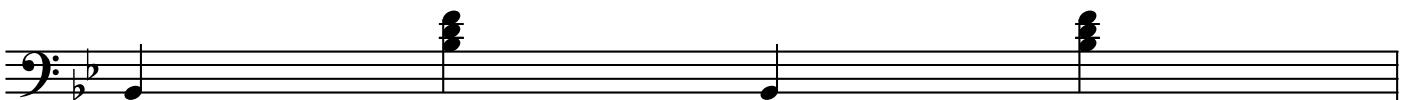
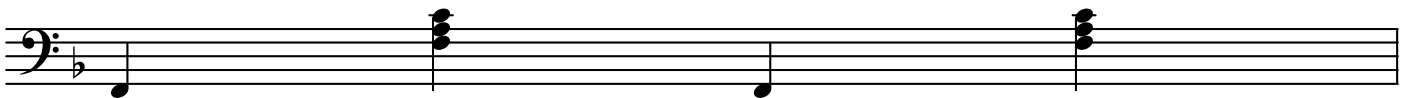
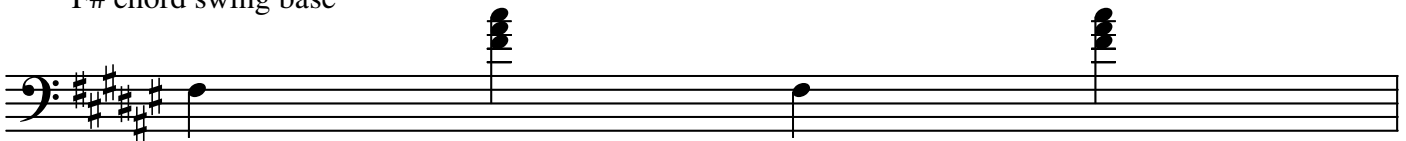
E chord swing base



B chord swing base

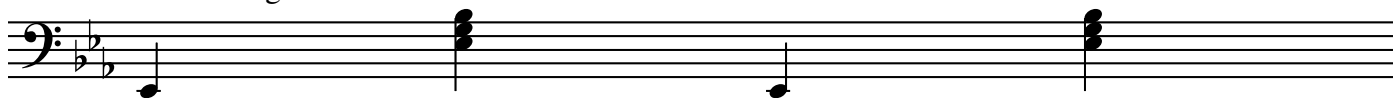


F# chord swing base

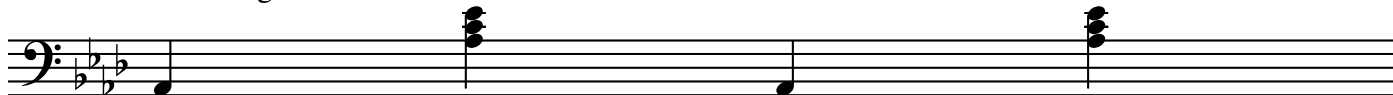


Swing Base - Left Hand Arrangement

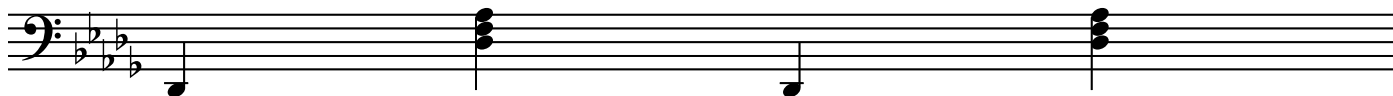
E flat chord swing base



A flat chord swing base



D flat chord swing base



Left Hand Arrangement Technique 3 - Alternating Root Fifth

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C G D

A E B

F B flat E flat

A flat D flat G flat

Topic: Left Hand Arrangement Techniques Series Two

Goal: Apply these left hand arrangement techniques on any songs.

Introduction:

Getting bored with the way you arrange piano music? Now is the chance to learn more exciting left hand piano arrangement methods. Once you combine everything you learn from this lesson, your music will sound very exciting and entirely refreshing. I constantly apply what I learn into songs I play, and they sound different and exciting each and every time.

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 1: Marching Style

This method is so easy and yet often overlooked by experienced players. In order to create a solid and firm marching sound, all you have to do is use "root - fifth - root - fifth" rule.

For example: You are playing a hymn with a strong march feeling, and the left hand has four beats of C chord. Instead of playing C chord throughout the whole measure, break it up and play C, G, C, G.

Listen to audio sample –CD 1 track 29

Tips: Play in a lower octave to create a stronger and a firmer marching sound. If you prefer, you may use octaves on all bass notes. Be careful not to strain your thumb. I have had thumb injuries due to overuse of left hand octaves.

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 2: Simple Boogies

I like to play a variety of styles on my piano music. Boogies is a good way to mix up your music. A very simple way to sound boogie-like on your piano playing is to play root fifth (together) - root fifth (together) -root sixth (together) - root sixth (together).

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 30

Tips: Alter your rhythm a little bit, instead of playing a solid beat all the time, try a long short long short rhythm.

For example: You have a left hand F chord, apply this method and play FC (together) - FC (together)- FD (together)- FD (together).

Fingering: use 5 1 fingers together for all measures.

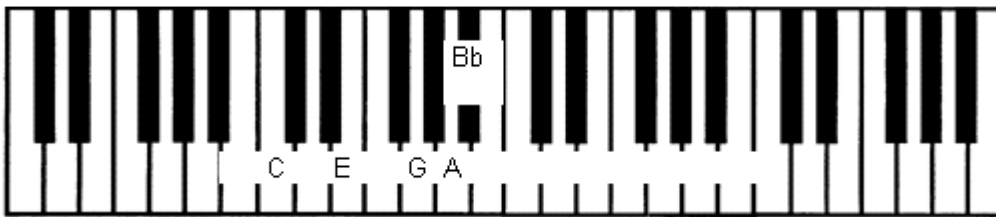
Left Hand Arrangement Technique 3: Boogies 7th

This boogie style is somewhat more challenging than the previous one since it requires the use of a seventh chord. It does sound very cool once you get it going. Remember the notes used: I, iii, v, vi, flat 7th, vi, v, iii.

For example: To play a C chord boogie 7th, you will play C, E, G, A, B flat, A, G, E.
Hard to follow?

Listen to the audio and look at the practice sheet, you will understand what I mean. You right hand doesn't even need a melody, you just need to play the C block chord (CEG together) throughout the measurement until you start changing a new chord.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 31



Left Hand Arrangement Technique 4: Tango Pattern

This Latin rhythm is very easy to create (compared to others like salsa, bossa nova), and yet gives a refreshing rhythm to any song. To apply this technique use root, fifth, root octave higher, fifth.

Tips: Play a dotted quarter (1 1/2 beat) first note, follow by a eighth note (1/2 beat), and two quarter notes.

For example: To play a tango rhythm on F chord, you will play

F	C	F (octave)	C
1 &	2 &	3 &	4 &

Listen to the audio sample – track 32

	F	C	F octave	C
Fingering:	5	2	1	2

Conclusion:

Once you fully master these techniques you can apply them on any situations. Pick up a simple melody and apply the tango rhythm (make sure it is a 4/4 or 2/2 rhythm), see how that changes the mood of the song.

Also, make up your own boogie using the boogie 7th and simple boogie arrangement. The right hand melody can be the same chord as your left hand chord, or you may play

any notes that is part of the left hand chord. The testing and trials process is very fun and helps develop your improvisational skills.
Have fun with the piano playing!

Left Hand Arrangement Series 2

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

Left Hand Arrangement Method 1: Marching Style

C G D A

E B F B flat

E flat A flat D flat

Detailed description: This section contains three staves of music in bass clef with a common time signature. The first staff shows measures 1-4 with chords C, G, D, and A. The second staff shows measures 5-8 with chords E, B, F, and B flat. The third staff shows measures 9-12 with chords E flat, A flat, and D flat. The notes are written in a simple, rhythmic style typical of a marching band accompaniment.

Left Hand Arrangement Method 2: Simple Boogie

Detailed description: This section contains three staves of music in bass clef. The first staff shows measures 1-4, the second staff shows measures 5-8, and the third staff shows measures 9-12. The music is written in a simple boogie style, featuring a consistent eighth-note bass line and block chords. The key signature changes from C major to E major (two sharps) in the second staff, and then to E flat major (one sharp, one flat) in the third staff.

Left Hand Arrangement Techniques Series 2

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

Left Hand Arrangement Technique 3 - Boogies 7th

C G D

A E B

F# F B flat

E flat A flat D flat

Left Hand Arrangement Techniques 4: Simple Tango Pattern

C G D

A E B

F# F B flat

E flat A flat D flat

Topic: Be a master in the key of C major

Goals:

1. Able to play the scale of C major.
2. Able to convert any song of C major into its relative minor key.
3. Understand and form the most used chords in C major and its relative minor.

Introduction:

I know a lot of pianists that can play extremely well on the key of C major. Apart from it, the pianist is not able to transpose or sight read very well anything in other keys. Why do we need to know so many keys? The answer is quite simple: not all song is written in C major. The ability of playing in different keys is even more important if you are accompanying another singer or church congregation. This also brings up the point of transposition. Once you master the ability of playing in many keys, you will also be proficient in transposing one key to another key, provided you know the techniques of transposition.

Do you know that each key sounded quite differently even though they all have the same amount of notes? For instance, the key of D major sounds very bright and is most suitable for song that requires bright tone. Handel's Messiah Chorus was written in the key of D major.

C major scale

This scale consists of C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. This is the all white notes key. The easiest of all scales. In fact, you can make up your own rainbow tune by playing any of the white key except the F note.

Listen to audio sample – track 33

Diagram of C major scale



Fingering:

123 12345 (thumb cross under after you play E).

If you need to repeat another octave just replace the 5th finger with 1 finger. It becomes 123 1234 123 12345.

A very important formula to remember whenever you need to construct notes in a scale is:
whole whole half whole whole whole half

For example: if you want to find out what notes are parts of the C major scale?

Answer: You start with C, now apply the formula WWHWWWH.

What is a whole step from C? It is D.

What is a whole step from D? It is E.

What is an half step from E? It is F.

What is a whole step from F? It is G.

What is a whole step from G? It is A.

What is a whole step from A? It is a B.

What is an half step from B? It is C.

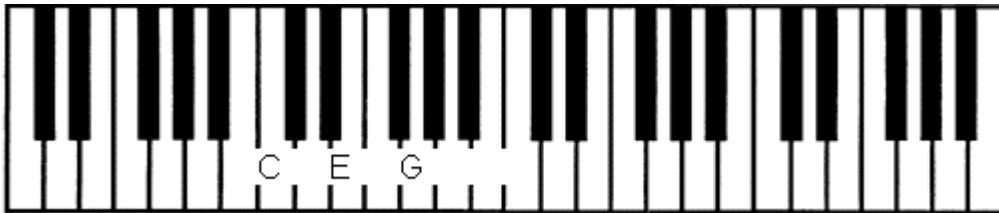
Thus, the scale of C major, consists of C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. Did you get it?

The three most important chords in the key of C major is C chord (CEG), F chord (FAC), and G7 chord (GBDF). What does it mean by the most important chords?

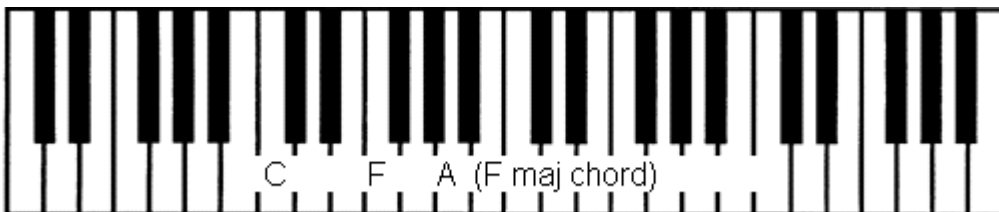
It means whenever you are in the key of C major, these three chords are used most often in your left hand to harmonize your right hand melody.

Let's practice these three chords in the best used position so that your left hand can move quickly whenever a chord change is required.

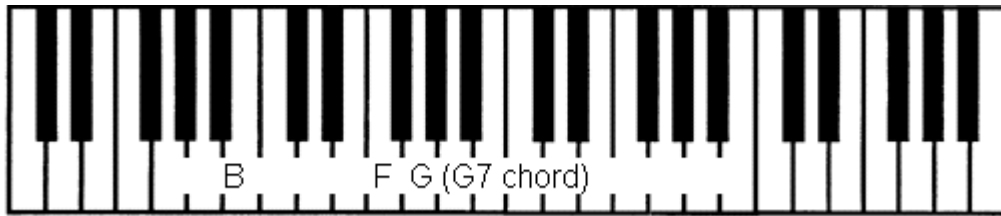
Left Hand C chord root position



Left Hand F chord 2nd inversion (CFA)



Left Hand G7 chord 1st inversion (BFG)



Tips: You can often omit the fifth note of any 7th chord and still sound like a 7th chord, this helps fingering and create a open voicing.

Notice how easy it is to move from one chord to another chord. Your left hand does not have to make big move. Make sure you practice these three chords really well and be able to find them relatively quick.

Now play the following song with the most used chords and the best used position on the piano.

The Saints Go Marching In (Lead Sheet Provided On Following Page)

The relative minor of C major - A minor

How do you find out what is the relative minor of C major? Relative minor means the minor key that shares the same characteristics as C major, the key that has no sharp or flat. The way to do that is by counting six steps up from C, this give you A minor.

There are three types of minor key, the one we are discussing is called harmonic minor which is also the relative minor. A minor has the same notes as C major, except it start on A instead of C, also, the 7th note is raised half step, and becomes G# instead of G natural.



Listen to audio sample –CD 1, track 34

Listen to how The Saints Go Marching In in the key of A minor

Listen to audio sample –CD1, track 35

My assignment for you is to convert this song to the key of A minor from C major. Can you do it?

All you need to do is lower the whole song a third. You will start the first note in A instead of C.

What about your most used chords?

C chord becomes A minor chord (ACE)

F chord becomes D minor chord (DFA)

G7 chord becomes E7 chord (EG#BD). (Notice how every chord is down a third!)

The best positions are indicated below:



A minor root position



D minor 2nd inversion



E7 chord 1st inversion

Conclusion:

I will have to say you have truly master the key of C major now. You know the three most used chords and can easily form them on your left hand. You also know the relative minor of C major and are able to convert any C major song to A minor. You also are able to find out the most used chords in the key of A minor. By switching the melody between the major scale and relative minor scale, you are improvising! Congratulation!

When The Saints Go Marching In

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C

5 G7

10 C C F C

15 G7 C C

Topic: How to fill long measures

Goals: Be able to add a variety of styles and phrases into any long measure.

Introduction:

Playing same old song can be quite boring if we don't add decorative arrangements and coloring phrases to it. Adding salt and pepper into our meals can add so much taste to it. The same thing applies to our piano playing. This lesson we will learn how to add tricks to songs that have long hold measures. Whether you have a note that last 4 beats or 8 beats, it can be extremely refreshing when something different is added to it.

Tricks 1:

The one trick you can do is to break up the chord into different inversions and run up on the keys in triplets at a very fast speed. This takes a lot of practice to reach accuracy. The good news is since you are doing it so fast, slight mistakes here and there are no big deal! Practice make perfect.

For example: You are playing a song in the key of C major. Somewhere in the middle of the song is a note G that last for 4 beats and the left hand chord is G chord. You will need to hold the left hand G chord for 4 beats either by playing just a G note or you may play the G chord in block (GBD) . Your right hand will break up the G chord into G B & D and run up on the piano in different inversions. ie, GBD, BDG, DGB, GBD etc. Play each inversion in triplet. The way to count is by saying 1-po-let, 2-po-let, 3-po-let, etc

Picture: Right Hand Notes Play



G B D (root position)

B D G (first inversion)

D G B (second inversion)

G B G (root position)

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 36

Tips: Every chord has its inversions. Inversion means same notes in a chord played in different orders.

Fingering for right hand: Root position - 135, first inversion - 125, second inversion - 135.

Trick #2:

This technique works best when you have a long hold measure plus a pause. The trick is called a suspended chord. A suspended chord is formed when you alter the middle note of a chord into a fourth. For example C sus (short form of C suspended chord) is CFG (instead of CEG, the E is replaced by F which is the fourth note of the scale). You will need to break down the long measure into two equal section: First by playing the suspended chord in the first half, then play the second half with regular chord. Since a suspended chord sounds incomplete by itself, you need to revert to the regular chord to complete the phrase. After you finish both section you will need to add a pause to the regular chord. Lost? Listen to the audio sample and this will be clear to you.

For example: You have a A note that last for four beats plus a pause indicated. You will play 2 beats (4 eighth notes sound better than 2 quarter notes) of A sus (ADE) and two beats (also use 4 eighth notes) of A min(ACE) plus an additional pause in A min chord.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 37



Fingering: 1 4 5 (sus chord) 1 3 5 (regular chord)

Trick #3

This technique requires precision. I call it crisp octaves. When you come across a note that last for 4 or more beats, you will play the note and note octave separately either going up or coming down in eighth beats. I call it crisp octave because it sounded quite crispy. Practice this technique often and you will be able to play really fast and professionally. Notice all these techniques will separate you from an average player. Other people might think you improvised it but guess what you do need to practice improvisation. The trick is that you practice ahead of time and when the time is right you pull out the trick and surprise everybody. You see "surprise" requires a lot of prep work. You can't just surprise people without preparing something ahead of time.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 38

Fingering: use 1 5 for every note and note octave

Conclusion:

Once you apply all these techniques in every song you play, even a non piano player can tell you have improved significantly. Not every technique is applicable to every situation. You will need to experiment with each of the techniques in every song to know if it works. Will catch up next time!

How to fill up long measurement - Trick #1 Triplet Chord Runs

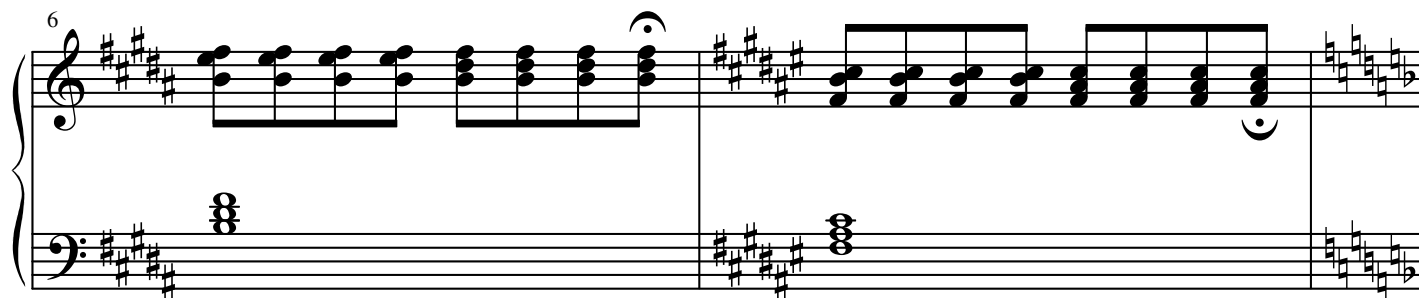
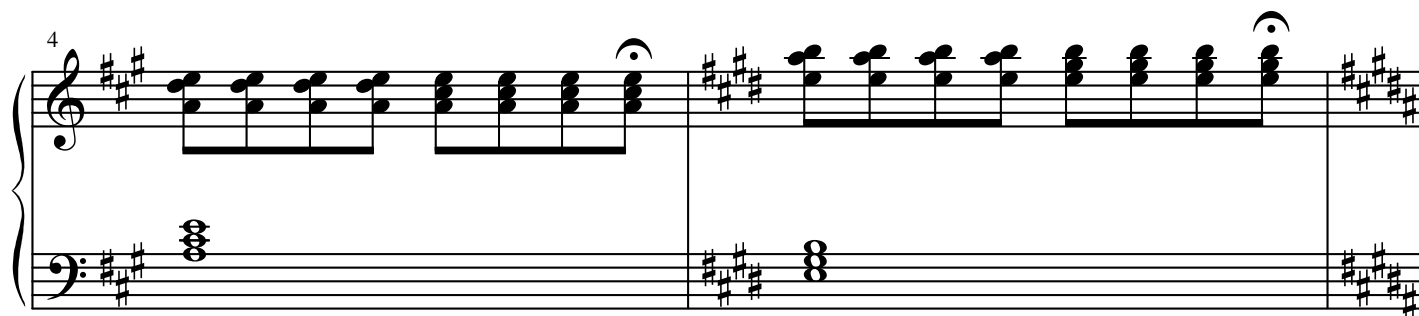
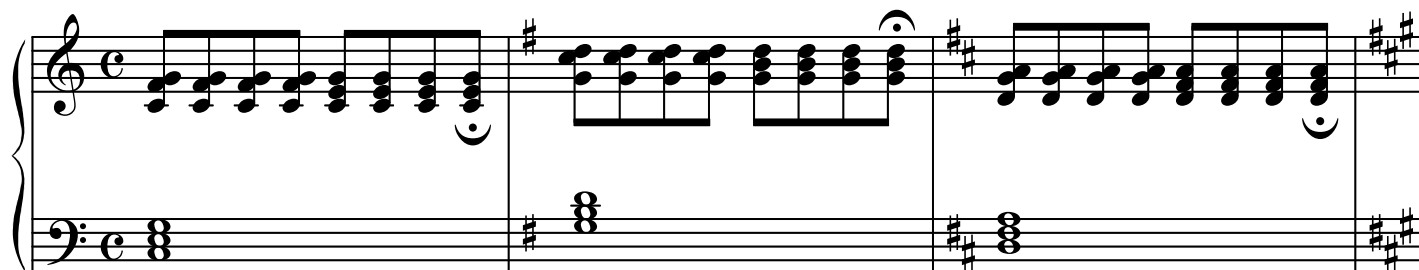
<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The image displays 12 musical staves, each representing a different chord. Each staff contains a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a triplet of quarter notes, and then a triplet of eighth notes. The chords are arranged in three rows of four. The first row contains C, G, D, and A. The second row contains E, B, F sharp, and F. The third row contains B flat, E flat, A flat, and D flat. The key signature is C major, and the time signature is 4/4. The notation is as follows:

- Row 1: C (C4, E4, G4), G (B3, D4, E4), D (F3, A3, B3), A (C4, E4, G4).
- Row 2: E (G3, B3, C4), B (D3, F3, G3), F sharp (A2, C3, D3), F (G2, B2, C3).
- Row 3: B flat (D2, F2, G2), E flat (G1, B1, C2), A flat (C2, E2, F2), D flat (F1, A1, B1).

Long Hold Measurement - Trick #2 Suspended Chord

<http://www.playpianotips.com>



long hold measurement - trick #2 suspended chord

8

Musical notation for measures 8-10. Measure 8: Treble clef has a half note chord (F4, A4, C5) with a fermata; Bass clef has a half note chord (Bb3, D4, F4). Measure 9: Treble clef has a half note chord (F4, A4, C5) with a fermata; Bass clef has a half note chord (Bb3, D4, F4). Measure 10: Treble clef has a half note chord (F4, A4, C5) with a fermata; Bass clef has a half note chord (Bb3, D4, F4).

11

Musical notation for measures 11-12. Measure 11: Treble clef has a half note chord (F4, A4, C5) with a fermata; Bass clef has a half note chord (Bb3, D4, F4). Measure 12: Treble clef has a half note chord (F4, A4, C5) with a fermata; Bass clef has a half note chord (Bb3, D4, F4).

How to fill up long measurement - trick #3 crisp octave

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

Crisp Octave Up

The 'Crisp Octave Up' section contains seven rows of musical notation, each for a different starting note. Each row consists of two measures separated by a double bar line. The first measure contains a sequence of eighth notes ascending to the note above the starting note, and the second measure contains a sequence of eighth notes descending from that note back to the starting note. The notes are labeled above the first measure of each row: C, G, D, A, E, B, F sharp, F, B flat, E flat, A flat, and D flat. The key signature changes to match the starting note: C major, G major, D major, A major, E major, B major, F# major, F major, Bb major, Eb major, Ab major, and Db major.

Crisp Octave Down

The 'Crisp Octave Down' section contains two rows of musical notation for notes C and D. Each row consists of two measures separated by a double bar line. The first measure contains a sequence of eighth notes descending to the note below the starting note, and the second measure contains a sequence of eighth notes ascending from that note back to the starting note. The notes are labeled above the first measure of each row: C and D. The key signature changes to match the starting note: C major and D major.

how to fill up long measurement - trick 3 crisp octave

The image displays four staves of musical notation, each containing a sequence of notes designed to fill long measurements with a crisp octave. The notes are arranged in a way that demonstrates the technique of filling long measurements with a crisp octave.

The first staff shows the notes E and B. The second staff shows F sharp and F. The third staff shows B flat and E flat. The fourth staff shows A flat and D flat.

Topic: Chord Inversion and Improvisation

Goals: Ability to improvise with single notes of chord inversions

Introduction:

I learned about chord inversions when I took my piano theory class. I had no idea what to make use of them at that time. It was like carrying a visa card in my wallet without knowing its use.

You probably know about inversions. To make long story short, each chord has many positions; a root position, a first inversion, and a second inversion. If you are playing a color chord (a basic chord plus a 6th, 7th, or 9th...), it has a third inversion, or even a fourth inversion. Inversions are chords in different positions. C chord is CEG (root position), the first inversion is EGC, and the second inversion is GCE. Why so many inversions?

Certain positions are easier to locate than others.

Each inversion sound different-some sound more open, and some sound closed. I personally prefer the sound of 1st and 2nd inversions over root positions. You may experiment with each one to see which one you prefer.

I hope you can start making use of inversions after completing this lesson.

Exercise on different basic chord inversions

This exercise drills on chord inversions. You will learn to play basic chords in broken and block forms.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 39

Once you know the structure of inversions. I would like you to play them without referring to the music score. It is important that you know how to play this exercise without referring to the score.

What do you do with these exercises?

Well, when you have a note that last for many measures, you can plug these broken chord inversions in to sound better.

Let's say you have a G note that last for four beats. You can play a broken G chord in many inversions up the keys without sounding idle. *Do not over do it. Use it occasionally.*

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 40

Exercise on chord inversion in pattern 1

This exercise helps you break up chord inversion in a 2-1 pattern. For the C chord (CEG), you play E&G first, and C later.

Then, play C&E first, and G later....so on.

Listen to audio sample –CD 1 track 41

You may also change the rhythm of the 2-1 break up pattern.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 42

Now practice this exercise in different chord pattern, please make sure you know how to form this pattern without referring to the score.

Fingering: use 3&5 finger for the first two notes, and thumb on the last note.

When do you use this 2-1 pattern? I normally use it when there is a note that lasts longer than 2 beats. It sounds very pleasant when you use this trick.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 43

Exercise on broken chord inversions in alternating patterns.

This exercise is helpful when you want to start a song or fill any long note. Play a chord with one note at a time in alternating ways. Let's say you want to play a G chord (GBD), you will play GDBG, BGDB, etc. You may play this chord going up the keyboard or coming down the keyboard.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 44

Now practice this exercise with different chords. Make sure you thoroughly understand the principle behind this pattern and be able to form it without referring to the score.

Fingering: Either 1325 or 1425

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 45

Exercise on broken chord inversions in alternating pattern 2 (straddle)

This exercise is helpful when you want to start a song or fill up any long note. Play a chord with two notes at a time in an alternating way. One chord note will not be played in this method. For example in the chord of F major (FAC), you play F&C, then A&F.....you can either go up on the piano or coming down on the piano.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 46

Listen to this method on a song, audio sample –CD1 track 47

Conclusion:

Do you see how useful inversions are? Their combination is almost endless if you start putting in color chords like a 6th, or 7th, or 9th.

Listen to combined inversion techniques on [Silent Night](#) (lead sheet can be found toward the end of the binder)

Audio sample –CD1 track 48

Indeed, inversions are great tools to use whenever you want to improvise.

Chord Inversions

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

Tips: Practice each hand separately.

C **G** **D**

135 125 135
531 531 5 2 1

A **E** **B**

F sharp **F major** **B flat**

E flat **A flat** **D flat**

Chord Inversions in 2-1 Break Up Pattern

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

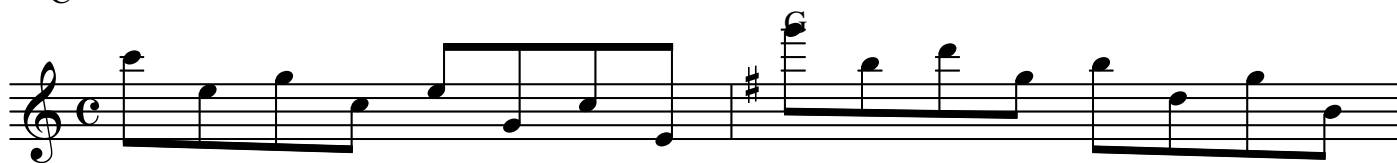
The image displays 12 musical staves, each representing a different chord inversion in a 2-1 break up pattern. The chords are arranged in two columns of six. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notes are written as eighth notes, with the first two notes of each measure beamed together. The pattern for each chord is as follows: the first measure contains the root and the second degree of the chord, and the second measure contains the third and fourth degrees. The chords and their corresponding note sequences (Root, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) are:

- C:** C4, D4, E4, F4
- G:** G3, A3, B3, C4
- D:** D3, E3, F#3, G#3
- A:** A2, B2, C#3, D#3
- E:** E2, F#2, G#2, A#2
- B:** B1, C#2, D#2, E#2
- F sharp:** F#2, G#2, A#2, B#2
- F:** F2, G2, A2, B2
- B flat:** B1, C2, D2, E2
- E flat:** E1, F2, G2, A2
- A flat:** A1, B1, C2, D2
- D flat:** D1, E1, F1, G1

Chord Inversions in Alternating Pattern 1

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C



D



E



B



F sharp

F



B flat

E flat



A flat

D flat

Chord Inversions in Break Up Pattern 2

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The image displays six staves of musical notation, each representing a different chord inversion of the Break Up Pattern 2. The patterns are arranged in two columns of three. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notes are grouped into chords, with the root of each chord labeled above the staff. The patterns are as follows:

- Staff 1 (C):** Root C. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: C (root position), C (first inversion), C (second inversion), and C (third inversion).
- Staff 2 (D):** Root D. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: D (root position), D (first inversion), D (second inversion), and D (third inversion).
- Staff 3 (E):** Root E. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: E (root position), E (first inversion), E (second inversion), and E (third inversion).
- Staff 4 (F sharp):** Root F sharp. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: F sharp (root position), F sharp (first inversion), F sharp (second inversion), and F sharp (third inversion).
- Staff 5 (B flat):** Root B flat. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: B flat (root position), B flat (first inversion), B flat (second inversion), and B flat (third inversion).
- Staff 6 (A flat):** Root A flat. The pattern consists of a sequence of chords: A flat (root position), A flat (first inversion), A flat (second inversion), and A flat (third inversion).

Topic: Meter Challenge and Improvisations

Goal: Create your own variation by altering the existing meter.

Introduction:

Rhythm is the pulse of music. Any song without rhythm is incomplete. The three essential parts of music are rhythm, melody, and harmony. We have discussed harmony and melody (in fact, my piano studio is called *harmony and melody studio* :)). We will discuss the importance of rhythm in this lesson.

The meter signature is the number you see in the beginning of any sheet music, it can be a 2/4, a 3/4, a 4/4, a 6/8, 9/8, 12/8 or even 5/4 (a combination of 3/4 and 2/4).

By altering the meter of any song, we create a new song. Meter changes are also part of improvisation and arrangement techniques.

Meter

3/4

Can you think of any song in 3/4 meter?

How about Silent Night? How about Edelweiss? Amazing Grace? Yes, these songs are in 3/4.

In this lesson, we will show you how to alter the original rhythm of any song to make a new meter.

Let use "Amazing Grace" for an example:

[Listen to Amazing grace in its original meter](#) -CD 1 track 49

[Listen to Amazing Grace in 4/4 meter](#) (count in 1234 instead of 123) – CD 1 track 50

[Listen to Amazing Grace in 6/8 meter](#) (count in 123 456 123 456) –CD 1 track 51

The new rhythm combinations are almost unlimited.

There are a number ways to change 3/4 into 4/4.

1. Change 2 eighth notes to 2 quarter notes in order to become 4/4.
2. Extend a quarter note to become half note (2 beats) and thus creating an extra beat in the measure to become 4/4.
3. Put a quarter rest in any measure thus adding an extra beat to become 4/4.
4. Combine any of the above methods.

To achieve a 6/8 meter:

1. Alter the existing quarter note to become dotted quarter note (1 1/2 beats).
2. Convert eighth notes into quarter notes.

3. Use triplets for some of the eighth or quarter notes.

Now, try to apply these techniques in any 3/4 songs you know.

4/4

The same technique can be applied to a song in 4/4. Your new challenge is to reassign each measure and make it either a 3/4, or 6/8, or any other meter you want.

Listen to the following song in its original meter –

["What a friend we have in Jesus"](#) –CD1 track 52

[Listen to this song in 6/8 meter](#) – CD1 track 53

[Listen to this song in 3/4 meter](#) –CD 1 track 54

To achieve any of the new meter, you need to figure out how to adjust the rhythm. One best way is to let your left hand establish a strong and firm beat (1, 2, 3) by using standard waltz. Your right hand can then adjust the melody according to the left hand rhythm.

A 6/8, 9/8 or, 12/8 can be created by using triplet on left hand. Left hand plays - (123, 456) (123, 456).

Now, go back to listen both examples in 6/8, paying attention to the strong left hand triplet notes.

Jazz Waltz

I like to discuss the use of Jazz Waltz in this lesson.

A traditional waltz is very strong and clear on each beat 1, 2, 3. Or 1 & 2 & 3 &

A Jazz Waltz is quite the contrary. It accents on weak beats. 1 & 2 & 3 &. Often, it is a combination of strong beats and weak beats. Lost?

[Listen to Jazz Waltz](#) –CD 1 track 55

[Listen to Standard Waltz](#) –CD 1 track 56

Now, try to practice Jazz Waltz left hand pattern using C chord, F chord, and G chord. Make sure you play a low bass note on the first beat, then move up an octave to play a whole block chord (CEG).

Play the block chord on 1 & 2 & 3 &

Another way to improvise on rhythms is by using a jazz waltz with a traditional 3/4 or 4/4 meter.

Listen to [Amazing Grace](#) (*Jazz Waltz*)—*CD1 track 57*

I hope you have fun with this lesson. I have lots of fun using this method on many songs.

Topic: 12-Bar Blues and Improvisation

Goals: Ability to improvise in the blues style

Introduction:

In order to master the 12-bar blues, one needs to know

1. How to form the blues scale of any key;
2. The structure of the 12 bar blues.

Remember that the 12 bar blues is a very unique style. When somebody says a song is bluesy, it does not mean it is a 12 bar blues. 12 bar blues, as the name indicates, contains 12 bars (12 measures). The 12 bars may be repeated over and over again to become 24 bars, 36 bars and so on.

Right Hand Part of 12 Bar Blues

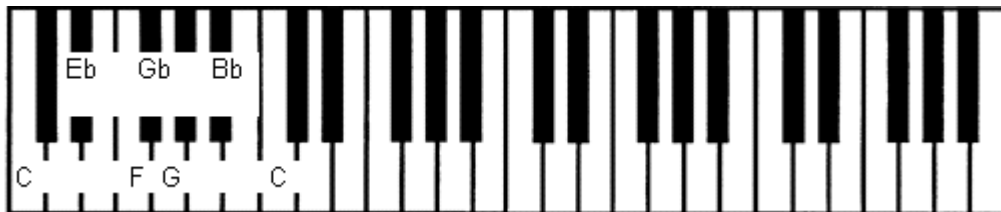
In order to create a blues scale, one needs to understand a basic scale structure.

C major scale consists of: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C



C blues scale consists of C, Eb, F, Gb, G, Bb, C.

Listen to [C blues scale](#) – track 58



Right hand fingering:

1(c) 2(Eb) 3(F) 4(Gb) thumb cross under to play 1(G) 3(Bb) 4(c)

Notice that the C blues scale has a flat third (E flat), flat fifth (G flat), and flat seventh (B flat).

Your first assignment is to practice C blues scale.

Make sure you can play the C blues scale in any note combination. Also, run up and down the piano.

Listen to the audio sample – track 59

Use syncopation and different rhythm combinations.

Improvise your C blues scale to create the types of sound you prefer. For instance: you may slide E flat to E & G or you may slide E flat to E & C. You may also run down part of the C blues scale.

Remember: There is no right or wrong when you improvise. If it sounds good, it is a good improvisation. If it sounds lousy, pick a different note!

You need to know the blues scales in different keys in order to improvise effectively.

View the score (pg 62) and practice the exercise repeatedly.

Left hand part of 12 bar blues

What is the structure of a 12 bar blues?

Basically, a 12 bar blues has the following structure:

4 measures of I chord

2 measures of IV chord

2 measures of I chord

1 measure of V chord

1 measure of IV chord

2 measures of I chord

If the key is C maj, then the I chord is the C chord; the IV chord is the F chord; the V chord is the G chord.

Lost? Take a look at one of my blues improvisations (pg 63) and analyze the left hand part.

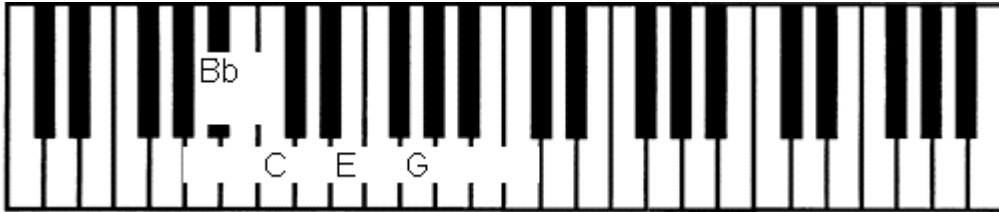
You will see the left hand part follows the 12 bar blues structure.

In this example the first 4 bars are the I chord (C chord/C7 chord), the next two measures are the IV chord (F7 chord), and so on.

Practice the following chords with the left hand.

C7 - C, E, G, and B flat.

Use the following inversion for better hand movement (B flat, C, E, and G).

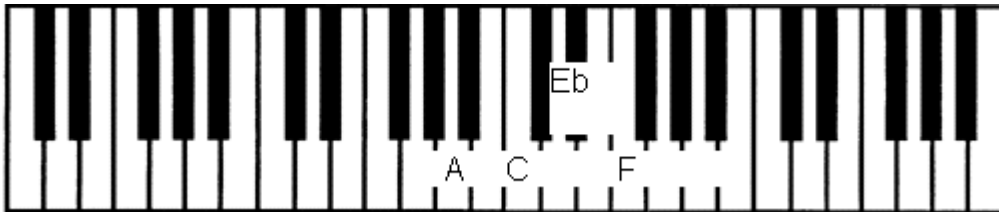


C7 chord

LH fingering: 4 3 2 1

F7 - F, A, C, and E flat

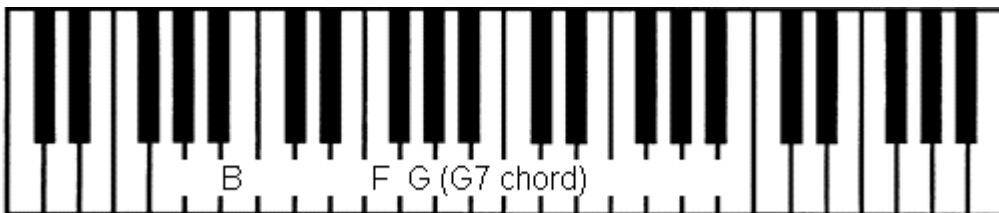
Use the following inversion for better hand movement (A, C, Eb, F)



F7 chord

LH fingering: 5 3 2 1

G7 - G, B, D, F Use the following inversion for better hand movement (B, F, G) Note: I am eliminating the D note. It is sufficient to use just three notes to create a G7 sound.



G7 chord

LH fingering: 5 2 1

Your next assignment is to create a 12 bar blues structure on the key of C with the left hand.

You will need to play:

4 measures of C7 chord (play block chords on every beat 1 2 3 4, 2 2 3 4, 3 2 3 4, 4 2 3 4)

2 measures of F7 chord (same as above. Count 5 2 3 4, 6 2 3 4)
2 measures of C7 chord
1 measure of G7 chord
1 measure of F7 chord
2 measures of C7 chord.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 60

Press C7, F7, and G7 chords with fingers in slightly broken form.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 61.

This creates a typical blues rhythm.

Practice the three seventh chords in different keys – exercise provided!

Combine both right and left hand to create blues in the key of C.

1. Play the C blues scale with your right hand.
2. Play the 12 bar blues structure with your left hand.

Whenever your left hand is playing a different chord than C7 (measures 5&6, measures 9&10), your right hand can either play the C blues scale or any note of the left hand chord. When you first improvise with the right hand, do not add too many variations. Play one note at a time. Once you get better, you may play many notes from the C blues scale.

Listen to the audio sample –CD1 track 62.

If it does not sound good, change the right hand note.

Listen to C blues improvisation. –CD 1 track 63.

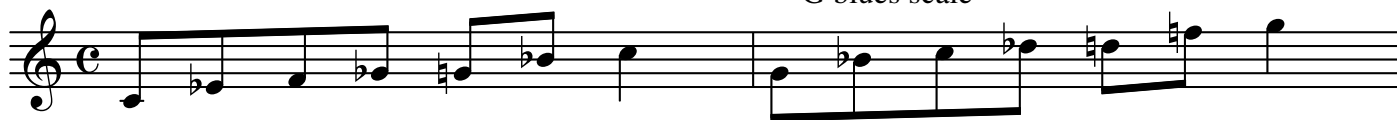
When I first played blues, I had trouble with measures. I sometime forgot which measures I was in since I was busy improvising the right hand. If you have the same problem, it is okay. The whole thing about improvisation is having fun. If you are playing with a band then it is a different story; you need to follow the rhythm of the other instruments in a band setting.

Have fun improvising blues of your own!

12 bar blues in different keys

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C blues scale



G blues scale



D blues scale

A blues scale



E blues scale

B blues scale



F blues scale

B flat blues scale



E flat blues scale

A flat blues scale



D flat blues scale

G flat blues scale

BLUES IMPROV2

YOKE WONG

[HTTP://WWW.PLAYPIANOTIPS.COM](http://www.playpianotips.com)

PIANO

The first system of the piano blues improvisation. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a C7 chord symbol above the first measure. The left hand (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords, including a C7 chord symbol above the first measure.

The second system of the piano blues improvisation. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a C7 chord symbol above the first measure and F7 chord symbols above the second and third measures. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords, including a C7 chord symbol above the first measure and F7 chord symbols above the second and third measures.

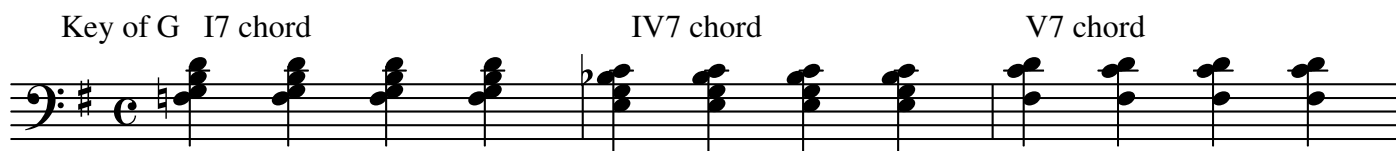
The third system of the piano blues improvisation. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a G7 chord symbol above the first measure. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords, including a G7 chord symbol above the first measure.

The fourth system of the piano blues improvisation. The right hand continues the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a 12-measure rest symbol above the first measure. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords, including a 12-measure rest symbol above the first measure. The system concludes with a double bar line and a 'RIT' (Ritardando) marking.

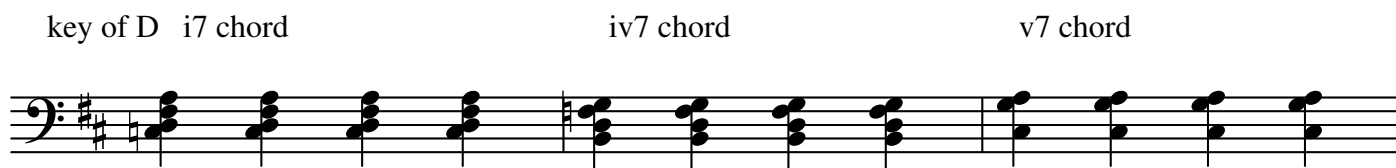
12 Bar Blues Structure

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

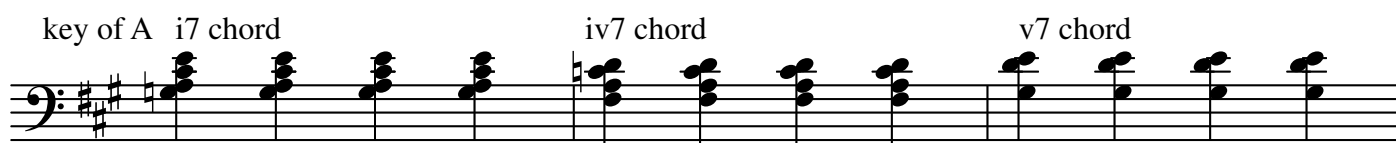
Key of G I7 chord IV7 chord V7 chord



key of D i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



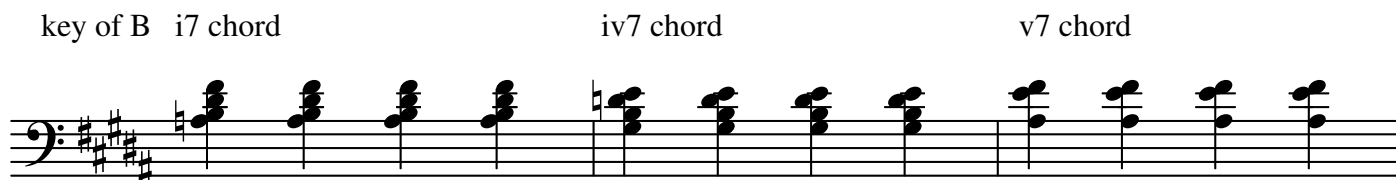
key of A i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



key of E i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



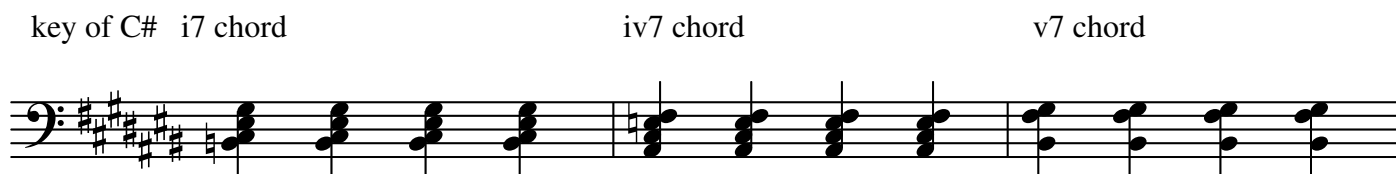
key of B i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



key of F# i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



key of C# i7 chord iv7 chord v7 chord



Topic: Color Chord and Improvisation Part 1 - Major 7th

Goal: Ability to improvise songs using a color chord - major 7th

Introduction:

Color chords add color/luster to a simple melody. We know that a chord/triad is a group of three notes. It is the 1st, 3rd, and the 5th notes of any scale. When an additional note is added to the basic triad; it is called a color chord. For an example: F maj chord consists of F, A, and C notes (the 1st, 3rd, and the 5th of F major scale). When the "E" note is added to F maj chord, it becomes F maj 7. E is the 7th note of the F major scale. F maj 7 is a color chord. We will drill on the major 7th chord in this lesson. A major 7th is considered a chord with beautiful sound. Often new age music and jazz music are improvised based on this chord.

Beautiful Sound - The Major 7th Chord

Make sure you can answer the following questions:

1. What makes up the D maj 7 chord?
2. What is the 7th note of A major scale?
3. What major 7th is this? (G# B D# E) Tips: Use inversion to figure this out!
4. What notes are in the B maj 7 chord?
5. What chord is this? C and B Tips: This is the 1st and 7th notes of a scale.

Answer:

1. D F# A C#
2. G#
3. E maj 7th
4. B D# F# A#
5. C maj 7th

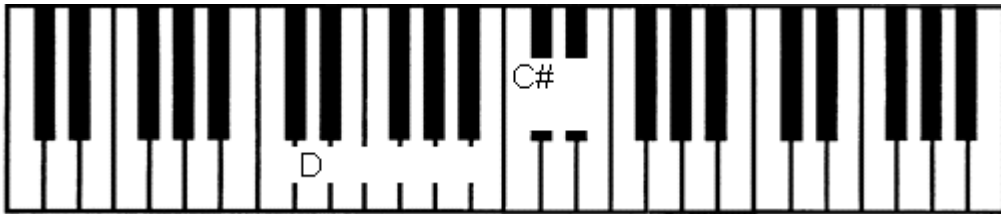
To build a nice and open sound with the major 7th chord, you just need two notes. The root and the seventh.

Remember the 7th notes of any scale is a half step down from the higher octave note. For an example: The 7th notes of D major is C#. C# is a half step down from D. Thus, in order to build an open and beautiful D maj7 chord, you need D and C# (C# needs to be higher than the D note and not the note directly beside it. It crashes when you play two notes next to each other.

Wrong D maj7th



Correct D maj7th



If you want a thick and beautiful sound, you will need to use at least three out of the four notes required to build a major 7th chord. A root, a third, and a seventh notes are required. Often, I use all four notes (a root, a third, a fifth, and a seventh of the scale).

Practice the major 7th chord on both right and left hands, view the exercise. Make sure you can do different inversions. These major 7th chords are very important in improvisations; it is the building blocks of jazz riffs and new age style music. The ability to play any inversions of the major 7th chord will separate an advanced player from a novice.

Whenever you come across a basic chord in any song, replace it with a maj 7th. Listen to how it sounds. Does it add more color to it? That is why maj 7th chord is a color chord.

Major 7th chord and improvisation

This section is the highlight of this lesson.

1. Play a maj 7th chord with your left hand. Let's do a F maj 7th (F, A, C and E notes).
Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 64
2. Play any note of the F maj 7th (F A C E) with your right hand.
3. Slowly add notes that belong to the F major scale into your right hand. You may play a fragment of the scale. You are now playing any of the following note: F G A Bb C D E . If the note does not sound good, use a different note. If possible, try to add grace note; for example: if I want to play F, G, and A. I can add Ab as a grace note. It plays F, G, Ab, and *Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 65*

4. Vary your rhythm as you start improvising. Try to use alternating inversions, straddle, and 2-1 break-up to your right hand melody (refers to the inversion and improvisation lessons).
5. As you get tired of repeating F maj 7th chord, switch to Bb maj 7th chord and C maj 7th.

Switch the chords back and forth with your left hand. As you switch the chord with your left hand, your right hand will need to improvise notes based on the left hand chord. If you are playing Bb maj 7th chord, your right hand needs to be playing notes out of the Bb maj 7 chord (Bb, D, F, A). You see it is important to know what notes make up a chord.

Listen to audio sample –CD1 track 66

Question: Why switch from F maj 7th to Bb maj 7th and C maj 7th?

Answer: The most used chords in any keys are the I, IV, and V chord. Since we started out with F major 7th, the fourth and fifth chord are the Bb maj 7th and C maj 7th chords.

6. When you improvise with your right hand, if a certain phrase sounds spectacular, try to remember how it is formed. A riff is basically an improvised phrase that is played repeatedly by a pianist.

Conclusion:

A major 7th chord is very important in the development of jazz and other music. Do not be afraid to try new phrases when you improvise. The more you improvise based on the chord structure and scale formation, the better you become!

Color Chord - Major 7th Chord

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C major 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the C major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first measure shows the root position chord (C-E-G-B) in both treble and bass staves. The subsequent three measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions, with the bass note moving up an octave and the other notes rearranged. The treble staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef, both in common time (C).

G major 7th

This block shows the G major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first measure shows the root position chord (G-B-D-F) in both treble and bass staves. The subsequent three measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions. The treble staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef, both in common time (C). The key signature has one sharp (F#).

D major 7th

This block shows the D major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first measure shows the root position chord (D-F#-A-C) in both treble and bass staves. The subsequent three measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions. The treble staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef, both in common time (C). The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

A major 7th

This block shows the A major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first measure shows the root position chord (A-C#-E-G) in both treble and bass staves. The subsequent three measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions. The treble staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef, both in common time (C). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, and G#).

Color Chord - Major 7th Chord (pg. 2)

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

E major 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the E major 7th chord and its first three inversions on a grand staff. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C). The E major 7th chord is shown in the first measure. The first inversion is in the second measure, the second inversion in the third measure, and the third inversion in the fourth measure. Each measure contains a treble and a bass clef staff with the chord notes.

B major 7th

This block shows the B major 7th chord and its first three inversions on a grand staff. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and the time signature is common time (C). The B major 7th chord is shown in the first measure. The first inversion is in the second measure, the second inversion in the third measure, and the third inversion in the fourth measure. Each measure contains a treble and a bass clef staff with the chord notes.

F# major 7th

This block shows the F# major 7th chord and its first three inversions on a grand staff. The key signature has five sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#, A#) and the time signature is common time (C). The F# major 7th chord is shown in the first measure. The first inversion is in the second measure, the second inversion in the third measure, and the third inversion in the fourth measure. Each measure contains a treble and a bass clef staff with the chord notes.

C# major 7th

This block shows the C# major 7th chord and its first three inversions on a grand staff. The key signature has six sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#) and the time signature is common time (C). The C# major 7th chord is shown in the first measure. The first inversion is in the second measure, the second inversion in the third measure, and the third inversion in the fourth measure. Each measure contains a treble and a bass clef staff with the chord notes.

Color Chord - Major 7th Chord, pg 3

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

F major 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the F major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef, both in common time (C). The F major 7th chord consists of F4, A4, C5, and E5. The 1st inversion has F4, C5, and E5. The 2nd inversion has F4, E5, and C5. The 3rd inversion has F4, C5, and E5.

Bb major 7th

This block shows the Bb major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef, both in common time (C). The Bb major 7th chord consists of Bb4, D5, F5, and Ab5. The 1st inversion has Bb4, F5, and Ab5. The 2nd inversion has Bb4, Ab5, and F5. The 3rd inversion has Bb4, F5, and Ab5.

E flat major 7th

This block shows the E flat major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef, both in common time (C). The E flat major 7th chord consists of Eb4, Gb4, Bb4, and Db5. The 1st inversion has Eb4, Bb4, and Db5. The 2nd inversion has Eb4, Db5, and Bb4. The 3rd inversion has Eb4, Bb4, and Db5.

A flat major 7th

This block shows the A flat major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef, both in common time (C). The A flat major 7th chord consists of Ab4, Bb4, Db5, and Eb5. The 1st inversion has Ab4, Db5, and Eb5. The 2nd inversion has Ab4, Eb5, and Db5. The 3rd inversion has Ab4, Db5, and Eb5.

Color Chord - Major 7th Chord (pg. 4)

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

D flat major 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the D flat major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (D-flat, F, Ab, Bb). The subsequent measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions, with the bass note moving up a fourth and the other notes rearranged.

G flat major 7th

This block shows the G flat major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (G-flat, Bb, Db, Eb). The subsequent measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions, with the bass note moving up a fourth and the other notes rearranged.

C flat major 7th

This block shows the C flat major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (C-flat, Eb, F, Ab). The subsequent measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions, with the bass note moving up a fourth and the other notes rearranged.

C# major 7th

This block shows the C# major 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (C-sharp, E, G#, B). The subsequent measures show the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions, with the bass note moving up a fourth and the other notes rearranged.

Topic: Color Chord and Improvisations Part 2 - Minor 7th chord

Goal: Ability to make up songs using a color chord - minor 7th chord

Introduction:

This is the second series of color chord improvisations. If you have worked on the first part, then you are familiar with the features of a major 7th chord - the beautiful sound! This lesson will drill on another color tone - the minor 7th chord; commonly called the warm sound!

A minor 7th chord gives a very contemporary sound that is commonly used by jazz and contemporary pianist.

The way to form a minor 7th chord is by using a simple minor triad (1st, flat 3rd, and 5th of a major scale) + flat 7th (whole step down from the top octave note) of a major scale.

For example:

D minor 7th = simple D minor triad (D, F, A) + C (C is a whole step down from top octave D).



D minor triad + C (whole step down from top octave D)

The way to figure out a minor key signature is by using the relative major key. Remember that the minor key that shares the same signature is the sixth note of that major scale.

For examples:

D major's relative minor is B minor (both keys have two sharps; F# and C#; B is the sixth note on D major scale).

E flat major's relative minor is C minor (both keys have three flat; Bb, Eb, and Ab; C is the sixth note on E flat major scale).

Exercise 1:

Answer the following questions to review your minor 7th chord knowledge:

1. How do you form a C#minor 7th chord? (hint: Think about E major's signature).
2. What minor 7th chord made up of: G Bb D F? (hint: think about Bb major).
3. How do you form a F# minor 7th chord? (hint: think about A major).
4. How many sharps does G# minor have? (hint: think about B major).
5. How do you form a Bb minor 7th chord? (hint: think about Db major).
6. What minor 7th chord is made up of F Ab C Eb?

Make sure you can answer all these questions without referring to answers. These questions help you to think in different major and minor keys. It might take some time to think through each key. It will get better. Once you are able to form your own chords, you do not need any sheet music to aid you. It is important in the development of improvisation to be able to break down any scale and chord.

Answer:

1. C# E G#, B
2. G minor 7th
3. F# A C# E
4. 5 sharps; F# C# G# D# A#
5. Bb Db F Ab
6. F minor 7th

Minor 7th chord and improvisations Exercise 2

In this exercise you will need to break down the minor 7th chord and make up your own melody.

Exercises provided with this lesson.

For example:

D minor 7th chord:

1. Your left hand will play D minor 7th chord in any position (root, first inversions, etc).
Root position (DFAC), 1st inversion (FACD), 2nd inversion (ACDF), 3rd inversion (CDFA).
2. Your right hand will play any of the notes belongs to the D minor 7th chord in random combinations. Alter your rhythm as you improvise. You may try two 8th notes of each one. You may also try one quarter note, two eighth notes, a half note, etc. Any combination is fine. Remember, this is a creative time; just like a chef will cook with different ingredients without really following the recipe book.

3. As you improvise, experiment your left hand with different positions. This way you will know your positions very well.

Listen to the [audio for D minor 7th improvisation](#) – *track 1 – CD 2*
Make sure you spend a solid few days to practice this exercise.

D minor improvisation exercise 3

You will need to spend at least a week to work on the following improvisation exercise. Do not expect to achieve results within a short time. It takes time to practice improvisation.

1. Once you are able to make up a simple melody using the above exercise, you are ready to use more minor 7th chord for variations.
2. Play D minor 7th, then G minor 7th chord (can you form G minor 7th chord?) and then A minor 7 chord (I assume you will have no trouble figuring out these chords if you have worked on the first exercise in this lesson) with your left hand.
3. If your left hand is playing G minor 7th chord, your right hand will improvise based on the notes on G minor 7th chord (ie: G Bb D F). A grace note can be added in between notes. For example: To play Bb after G, you may add A note. To play Bb after D, you may slide from D to C to B, then finally to Bb. You need to experiment with grace notes to see which sounds better. This will become your riff, and you can do it over and over again if the phrase sounds pleasant.

Listen to *G min7th chord– track 2 –CD 2*

4. Practice improvisation on the A minor 7th chord.
Listen to *A minor 7th chord. – track 3 – CD 2*
5. Combine the D minor 7th, G minor 7th, and A minor 7th to create a melody or tune that you enjoy!

Listen to the *audio sample – track 4 – CD 2*

Conclusion:

It is no doubt you are way ahead of many pianists after this lesson. Many pianists may know their scale very well, but not many know what to do with them in terms of improvisation and chord formation. Your practice time is well worth it. Piano playing is so much fun once you know what you are doing! Keep up the good work!

Color Chord - Minor 7th Chord

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

C minor 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the C minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The C minor 7th chord is shown in the first measure, with notes C4, E♭4, G4, and B♭4. The first inversion is shown in the second measure, with notes E♭4, G4, B♭4, and C5. The second inversion is shown in the third measure, with notes G4, B♭4, C5, and E♭5. The third inversion is shown in the fourth measure, with notes B♭4, C5, E♭5, and G5. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature.

G minor 7th

This block shows the G minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The G minor 7th chord is shown in the first measure, with notes G4, B♭4, D5, and F5. The first inversion is shown in the second measure, with notes B♭4, D5, F5, and G5. The second inversion is shown in the third measure, with notes D5, F5, G5, and B♭5. The third inversion is shown in the fourth measure, with notes F5, G5, B♭5, and D6. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature.

D minor 7th

This block shows the D minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The D minor 7th chord is shown in the first measure, with notes D4, F4, A4, and C5. The first inversion is shown in the second measure, with notes F4, A4, C5, and D5. The second inversion is shown in the third measure, with notes A4, C5, D5, and F5. The third inversion is shown in the fourth measure, with notes C5, D5, F5, and A5. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of two sharps and a common time signature.

A minor 7th

This block shows the A minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The A minor 7th chord is shown in the first measure, with notes A4, C5, E5, and G5. The first inversion is shown in the second measure, with notes C5, E5, G5, and A5. The second inversion is shown in the third measure, with notes E5, G5, A5, and C6. The third inversion is shown in the fourth measure, with notes G5, A5, C6, and E6. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature.

Color Chord - Minor 7th Chord (pg. 2)

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

E minor 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the E minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (E, G, B, D). The second measure shows the first inversion (G, B, D, E). The third measure shows the second inversion (B, D, E, G). The fourth measure shows the third inversion (D, E, G, B).

B minor 7th

This block shows the B minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (B, D, F#, A). The second measure shows the first inversion (D, F#, A, B). The third measure shows the second inversion (F#, A, B, D). The fourth measure shows the third inversion (A, B, D, F#).

F# minor 7th

This block shows the F# minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has five sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#, A#). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (F#, A, C#, E). The second measure shows the first inversion (A, C#, E, F#). The third measure shows the second inversion (C#, E, F#, A). The fourth measure shows the third inversion (E, F#, A, C#).

C# minor 7th

This block shows the C# minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The key signature has six sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The first measure shows the root position chord (C#, E, G#, B). The second measure shows the first inversion (E, G#, B, C#). The third measure shows the second inversion (G#, B, C#, E). The fourth measure shows the third inversion (B, C#, E, G#).

Color Chord - Minor 7th Chord, pg 3

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

F minor 7th 1st inversion 2nd inversion 3rd inversion

This block shows the F minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff shows the root position (F, Ab, Cb, Eb) and the three inversions (Ab, Cb, Eb, F; Cb, Eb, F, Ab; Eb, F, Ab, Cb). The second staff shows the same chords in the bass clef.

Bb minor 7th

This block shows the Bb minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef. The key signature has three flats (Bb, Eb, and Ab). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff shows the root position (Bb, Db, Fb, Ab) and the three inversions (Db, Fb, Ab, Bb; Fb, Ab, Bb, Db; Ab, Bb, Db, Fb). The second staff shows the same chords in the bass clef.

E flat minor 7th

This block shows the E flat minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef. The key signature has three flats (Bb, Eb, and Ab). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff shows the root position (Eb, Gb, Bb, Db) and the three inversions (Gb, Bb, Db, Eb; Bb, Db, Eb, Gb; Db, Eb, Gb, Bb). The second staff shows the same chords in the bass clef.

A flat minor 7th

This block shows the A flat minor 7th chord and its first three inversions. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef. The key signature has four flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, and Db). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff shows the root position (Ab, Cb, Eb, Gb) and the three inversions (Cb, Eb, Gb, Ab; Eb, Gb, Ab, Cb; Gb, Ab, Cb, Eb). The second staff shows the same chords in the bass clef.

Topic: Color Chord and Improvisations Part 3 - Dominant Seventh/ 7th Chord & Combination of major, minor, and dominant 7th chords.

Goals: Ability to improvise using the seventh chord.

Introduction:

The dominant seventh or the seventh chord is known as the power chord. This chord is used to create tension. On a lead sheet, the symbol used for seventh chords is quite simple; G7, A7, C7, Db7, etc.

Contrary from the major seventh chord which uses symbol like Cmaj7, D maj7, the seventh chord (also known as the dominant seventh) is formed by using a simple major triad (1st, 3rd, and 5th of a major scale) + flat 7th (the flat 7th is a whole step down from the top octave note).

For example:

A7 -- A C# E G (1st, 3rd, 5rd, and flat 7th of a major scale).

D7 -- D F# A C (1st, 3rd, 5rd, and flat 7th of a major scale).

Exercise 1:

Answer the following questions to review the understanding of the seventh chord.

Questions:

1. What notes are in a E7?
2. What seventh chord is made up of A C Eb F?
3. Write the root position, 1st inversion, 2nd inversion, and 3rd inversion of the G7 chord.
4. What notes are in a Bb7?
5. Bb Db Eb G is the inversion of what 7th chord?
6. C7 consists of what notes?
7. C Eb G Ab is the inversion of what 7th chord?

Answer:

1. E G# B D
2. F7
3. GBDF, BDFG, DFGB, FGBD
4. Bb D F Ab
5. Eb7
6. C E G Bb
7. Ab7

Exercise 2:

Break down the seventh chord and improvise on these notes.

Build a F7 chord on your left hand. With your right hand improvise a melody based on the F7 chord notes and F major scale. Remember we talked about grace note in the last two lessons? Try to put in grace notes whenever you improvise. For example: To go from F to A, I can add G & Ab as grace notes. Experiment with different notes and different rhythms until you like how it sounds.

Listen to audio sample – CD 2 track 5.

Improvise a melody using F7 chord and F major, Bb7 chord and Bb major, and C7 chord and C major (whenever you switch the chord with the left hand, your right hand improvise based on the chord and that key).

Listen to audio sample – CD2 track 6.

Exercise 3:

This exercise combines every color chord we learned so far.

1. Form a D min7 chord.
2. What is the formula for the minor 7th chord?
3. What chord is made of Eb G Bb Db?
4. What color chord gives a beautiful sound? Dominant 7th? Minor 7th? or Major 7th?
5. If I want to create a power chord that gives a feeling of suspense, what color chord should I use?
6. Db major 7th chord is made up of what notes?
7. What notes are in the the C min7?
8. What chord is made up of: F# A# C# E?

Answer:

1. D F A Ca.
2. 1st, flat 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th of a major scale.
3. Eb 7 Chord / Eb Dominant 7chord.
4. Major 7th.
5. Dominant 7th / 7th chord.
6. Db F Ab C.
7. C Eb G Bb.
8. F#7 chord.

Exercise 4:

This exercise uses a chord progression that is commonly used by jazz pianist. This chord progression combines major 7th, minor 7th, and dominant 7th chords.

The chord progression is called I vi ii V chord progression.

The I chord is major 7th chord, both vi and ii chords are minor 7th chords, and the V chord is a dominant 7th chord.

1. We will use the key of A major for this exercise.
The chord progression is A maj 7 (I), F min 7 (vi), B min 7 (ii), E7 (V).
2. Play A maj7 with your left hand. With your right hand you will improvise based on A maj7 notes and A major scale. Make sure you use some grace notes.
Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 7.
3. Play F min7 with your left hand. With your right hand you will improvise based on the F min7 notes, and F minor scale.
Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 8.
4. Play B min 7 with your left hand. With your right hand you will improvise based on the B min7 chord and the B min scale.
Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 9.
5. Play E7 with your left hand. With your right hand you will improvise based on the E7 chord and E major scale.
Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 10.
6. Improvise a tune based on this chord progression.
Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 11.

Congratulation!

You have gone through the color chord series! To be able to master the improvisation techniques, you will need to practice these color chords on a regular basis! Send me a note and let me know how the lessons have gone for you!

Topic: Middle Eastern Music & Improvisation

Goal: Ability to improvise simple Middle Eastern music

Introduction:

Middle eastern music is very different from traditional western music. This type of music uses different scales from what we are familiar with. In this lesson, we will explore one type of scale commonly used in the Middle Eastern music.

Minor Scale

We know that every major scale has a relative minor scale. The minor scale starts on the sixth degree of the major scale. For example: C major scale has a relative minor scale, it is the A minor scale; A is the sixth note of C major scale. The major scale and its relative minor scale share the same key signature.

Middle eastern music uses a minor scale that's been modified.

Let's take a look at A minor scale:

A B C D E F G A

Middle Eastern A minor scale

Listen to audio sample – CD 2 track 12

A Bb C# D E F G# A

Fingering: 1(A) 2(Bb) 3(C#) 1(D) 2(E) 3(F) 4(G#) 5(A)

notice: #2 note is a half step down, #3 note is a half step up, and #7 note is a half step up

It is the minor scale with slight variations that gives a unique Middle Eastern music flavor.

Make sure you practice this modified A minor scale well.

Exercises on different Middle Eastern minor scales.

Questions:

1. Can you form a Middle Eastern C minor scale and a traditional C minor scale?
2. What is the relative minor of D major scale? Can you form a Middle Eastern minor scale based on that?
3. Form the E minor scale and Middle Eastern E minor scale.

ANSWER:

1. C minor is the relative minor of Eb major, it has three flats; Bb Eb Ab.
Regular C minor: C D Eb F G Ab Bb C
Middle Eastern C minor: C Db E F G Ab B C (#2 note a half step down, #3 & #7 notes are a half step up).
2. B is the sixth note on D major scale, thus, B minor is the relative minor of D major. D major contains 2 sharps; F# & C#.
B minor scale: B C# D E F# G A B
B minor middle eastern scale: B C D# E F# G A# B (no.2 note a half step down, no.3 & 7 notes are a half step up).
3. E minor scale is the relative minor scale of G major.
E minor scale: E F# G A B C D E
E minor Middle Eastern scale: E F G# A B C D# E

Improvisation on Middle Eastern Music

1. With the right hand you will play the Middle Eastern A minor scale. Improvise based on this scale. You may try octaves or any two or three notes together.

Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 13.

2. With the left hand you will play A note or E note. Notes: The A note is the root of the scale, the E note is the fifth note of the scale. It will harmonize any note played in this minor scale. Use different rhythms with your left hand; syncopated, or regular rhythm.

Listen to the CD 2 track 14.

3. Combine both steps to create your unique version of Middle Eastern music.

Listen to the CD 2 track 15.

Conclusions:

Music can be found in every corner of the world. It is a whole new experience to learn something different. I hope you have fun improvising using this Middle Eastern minor scale.

Topic: Chord Substitution

Goal: Ability to replace an existing chord with new chords in any melody

Introduction:

We know from previous lessons that there are three chords that are the most important and most used in any key. These three chords are the I, IV, and V chords. Sometimes, we can replace these three chords with other chords and make the music stand out and sound more exciting. We will discover ways to substitute any chord with a new chord in this lesson. The ability to substitute chords will help your improvisation skills as you are no longer bound to the few chords written on the music. You are able to use many more chords that sound unique from each other.

Principle of Chord Substitution

In theory, you can replace a chord with another chord as long as the notes you are playing belong to the new chord. Let's say you are playing C and E notes with your right hand and you are in the key of C major. It makes sense to harmonize these notes with the C chord since the C chord consists of C, E, and G. Therefore the C chord is your primary choice.

Now ask yourself, what other chord has C and E notes?

Answer: A minor (A,C,E), C6 maj (C,E,G,A), F7 major (F,A,C,E), etc

These new chords become your substitute chords. You may need to play each one of them in order to hear which one sounds better. Not all the chords mentioned above may be used. Only chords that sound pleasant with the right hand melody may be used.

Tips: if you are playing a major chord and would like to make a substitution, your first choice is the relative minor chord (the sixth degree of that scale). For example: the chord substitution for F maj (F A C) is D min (D F A). D minor is the relative minor of F major. Observe and see that there are two notes belonging to both chord (F and A).

Exercises on chord substitution

Question:

(Answers given below will give you choices to experiment with. There may be other chords that are not listed; you may also play and experiment with them). Think about the questions and try to answer them before you look up the answer. Think.....think.....think...playing piano is about using your logical mind as well.

1. If you are playing the F note with your right hand, what other chords can you use other than the F maj chord (FAC)? (Assuming you are in the key of F major).
2. The melody note is C#, you are in the key of E major; what other chords can you use other than the A maj chord? (Thinkwhat other chord has the C# note)?
3. What other chords can you use other than the D min, if you are playing the D note in D minor scale?

4. Other than the G maj chord, what other chords contain the G note?
5. Can you name a few chord substitutions for the C maj chord, assuming you are playing the C note?

Answer (make sure you play each one of the following chord and hear the differences):

1. D min (D, F, A), Bb maj (Bb, D, F), Bb maj 6 (Bb, D, F, G), D min 7 (D, F, A, C), C sus (C F G), F sus (F, Bb, C), G min 7 (G, Bb, D, F), Bb min (Bb, Db, F), etc
2. F# min (F#, A, C#), E maj 6 (E, G#, B, C#), D maj 7 (D, F#, A, C#), F aug (F, A, C#), A maj 7 (A, C#, E, G#), A9 (A, B, C#, E), F# min 7 (F#, A, C#, E), etc
3. F maj 6 (F, A, C, D), Bb maj (Bb, D, F), G min (G, Bb, D), Eb maj 7 (Eb, G, Bb, D), G maj (G, B, D), E min 7 (E G B D), C9 (C, D, E, G), etc
4. G min (G, Bb, D), E min (E, G, B), C maj (C, E, G), C6 (C,E,G,A), C maj 7 (C, E, G, B), C 7 (C, E, G, Bb), Bb 6 (Bb, D, F, G), Ab maj 7 (Ab, C, Eb, G), Eb maj (Eb, G, Bb).
5. A min (A, C, E), Ab maj (Ab, C, Eb), F maj (F,A, C), F maj 7 (F, A, C, E), F7 (F,A, C, Eb), C 6 (C, E, G, A), C7 (C, E, G, Bb), C maj 7 (C, E, G, B), Ab maj 7 (Ab, C, Eb, G), A min 7 (A, C, E, G), etc

Exercise - Play the following songs with chord substitution technique

"Auld Lang Syne"

Instead of playing the chord as written, use the principle of chord substitution and apply the new chords to make this song sound different than it is written.

Listen to this song with original chord – *CD 2 track 16*.

Listen to this song with substitute chord – *CD 2 track 17*.

"Birthday Greetings"

Instead of playing the chord as written, use the principle of chord substitution and apply the new chords to make this song sound different than it is written.

Listen to this song with original chords – *CD 2 track 18*.

Listen to this song with substitute chords- *CD 2 track 19*.

Your next assignment is to apply the chord substitution principle to a favorite song of yours. Hear what a big difference it makes to any song.

Conclusion:

I hope you master this technique well and start applying the technique to songs you know. This skill will certainly change the way you play piano. Feel free to email me with your progress and let me know how your playing is going so far.

Auld Lang Syne

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The musical score for "Auld Lang Syne" is presented in F major, 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of piano accompaniment. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a common time signature (C). The melody is written in a simple, accessible style, with notes and rests clearly marked. Above the staff, the chords F and C are indicated. The second staff starts at measure 5, with a Bb chord marking above the first measure. The third staff starts at measure 9, with F and C chord markings above the first and third measures respectively. The fourth staff starts at measure 13, with Bb and F chord markings above the first and fifth measures respectively. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fourth staff.

5 Bb F C F

9 F F C F

13 Bb F C Bb F

Birthday Greetings

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6

11

16

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Topic: Five Great Ways To End Any Song

Goal: The ability to end a song with unexpected chords

Introduction:

Have you ever wondered how in the world does a musician invent endings that make you gasp? I never knew I could create those endings until I mastered the chord substitution technique. In this lesson, I will show you how you can create/improvise an ending using a few basic principles.

Ending a song with a cadence after the last chord (IV-i)

Those of you that signed up for my improvisation tips know that the "Plagal Cadence" is commonly used in any song ending, especially in a hymn setting. The way it works is that after you play the last chord (normally the first chord of the key) of the song, you will add a IV- I to the ending. Just like what you hear in the hymn, the amen ending is commonly added after the song is completed.

For example: In the key of F major (F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F), the IV chord is the Bb chord, and the I chord is the F maj. Therefore, after you finish playing the final part of any F major song, you will add a Bb maj chord and F maj chord to the ending.

Listen to the *"Home on the range" – CD2 Track 20.*

Substitute the last chord with a plagal cadence (IV - I)

This technique applies the same plagal cadence, except substitute the last chord of the song with a plagal cadence. Let's say the song end with a C chord, instead of playing C chord, you will apply plagal cadence. The plagal cadence is the Fmaj - C maj chord in this example.

This technique gives an unexpected pleasant ending.

Listen to the *"Home on the range" – CD 2 Track 21* and hear for yourself the difference between the first technique and the second technique.

Substitute the last chord with a iv minor - I

This technique is rather similar with the no.2 technique except the IV chord is replaced by a iv minor chord. For example: A song is played in the key of D major, and the ending chord is D maj chord. Instead of playing D maj chord at the end of the song, we will use g minor chord and back to D maj chord. G note is the IV note of the D major scale (D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D), g minor chord is used instead of G major chord (as in the plagal cadence).

This technique also gives an unexpected but pleasant ending to many listeners.

Listen to "*Home on the range*" – *CD2 Track 22* with this ending technique.

Substitute the last chord with a VI flat major - I chord

This technique is similar to the 2 and 3 technique, except we will be using the VI flat major chord of the key instead of the IV major or IV minor chord.

For example: In the key of C major, the last chord is normally the C chord. We will replace C chord with the Vi flat major chord. In the key of C major (C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C), the VI note is A, the VI flat major chord is therefore the A flat major chord (Ab, C, Eb), and then go back to the C major chord.

Do you see a principle behind all these ending techniques? The chord used in every case has a note that belongs to the key of the song. Let's say we use Ab major chord, C note is part of the Ab major, and this song is in the key of C major. The one thing you ask yourself: Is there any other chord that has the C note in it? Apply the chord and see how it sounds. You will be amazed at how many variations you can use.

Listen to "*Home on the Range*" – *CD Track 23* with VI flat major - I chord ending.

This technique is very powerful, and will surprise your audience.

Substitute the last chord with VI flat major-VII flat major-I major chord.

The technique separates a pro from an average pianist. Notice how this technique is similar with 4 technique, except a VII flat major chord is added after the VI flat major chord is played.

In the key of C major: we will end the song with Ab major chord, then Bb major chord (B note is the 7th note of C major scale, and Bb major chord is the VII flat major chord), then back to C chord. Though Bb major chord does not have a C note in it, Bb is in between Ab and C. In fact, Bb is one step above Ab, and one step below C. Therefore, the Bb major chord serves as a connector from the Ab major chord to the C major chord.

Listen to the *"Home on the Range" – CD2 Track 24* ending part to see how this technique is so powerful and effective.

Conclusion:

I hope you have learned something out of this lesson. Many great players use these techniques on their songs. The piano playing world is colorful and fun. Apply the many techniques you learned from this course to songs you currently know!

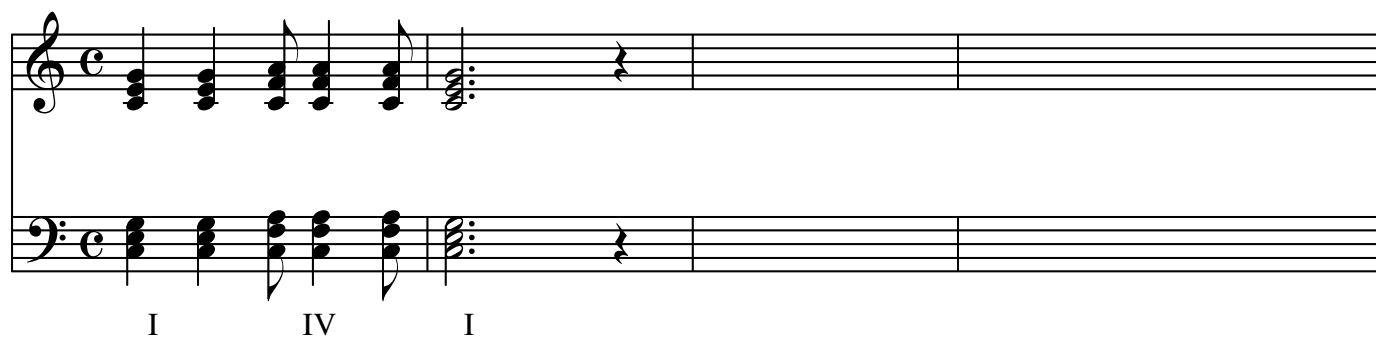
Feel free to send me your comments!

How to end a song

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Plagal Cadence Sample One



Sample One shows a plagal cadence in C major. The treble staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The bass staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The cadence is marked with a double bar line and repeat dots after the final C major chord in both staves.

I IV I

Plagal Cadence Sample Two



Sample Two shows a plagal cadence in C major. The treble staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The bass staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The cadence is marked with a double bar line and repeat dots after the final C major chord in both staves.

I IV I

Plagal Cadence Sample Three



Sample Three shows a plagal cadence in C major. The treble staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The bass staff contains a series of chords: C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), C major (C-E-G), F major (F-A-C), and C major (C-E-G). The cadence is marked with a double bar line and repeat dots after the final C major chord in both staves.

I IV I

Topic: Transposition

Goal: Ability to transpose from one key to another key without the aid of sheet music

Introduction:

When I play the piano to accompany a solo singer or a church congregation, I use a lot of transposition. One of the main reasons is that everyone has a different vocal range. Not everyone is born to be a soprano nor a tenor. Sometimes it is necessary to transpose the song to a lower/higher range to accommodate a singer. Modulation, transposition, and improvisation are very much related. If you can modulate and transpose a song easily, this will create excitement and give variety to a basic song. You may transpose a song from one key to another key when there is a long measures to create variation.

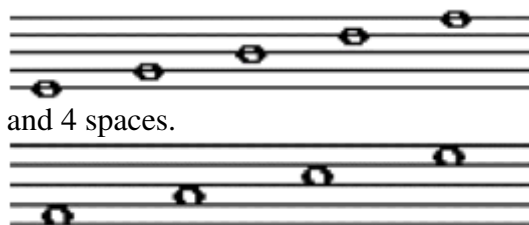
There are basically two common methods used to transpose a song. First, by intervals, secondly, by the scale.

Intervals and Transposition

Let say a song is in the key of C major and we want to transpose it to D major. You ask, what is the interval between C and D (interval is the distance between two notes)? The answer is a 2nd or a whole step.

We need to go up a whole step in order to transpose from C to D. Therefore, every note in the original song will need to move up a 2nd/a whole note to be in the correct position. The caveat is that you need to pay attention to accidentals (sharps and flats). We know that D major has two sharps and there are F# and C#. You will need to make sure to play sharp whenever you come across the two notes after you have transposed them. Also, if the original key (C major) has some notes that are flats or sharps, you need to make sure to either lower a half step or raise a half step after you have transposed to the new key. For instance, if the original note is E# in C major; after you transpose it to D major, the note is now F## (which is also G). This technique sounds very simple but takes a lot of practice.

Intervals can also be done by referring to the grand staff. We know that the notes are written on 5 lines.



Whenever you go from one line to the next line you are going up a 3rd. From one space

to the next space you are also going up a 3rd. If you want to go up a 5th (let's say transpose from E major to B major, we are going up a 5th) from the first line, you will end up on the third line. Take a good look at the grand staff and see if you can figure out on your own how to go up a 2nd, a 3rd, a 4th, a 5th, a 6th, and a 7th from a space note, and then from a line note. Notice if you start with line note, you will always end up in a line note if you are going up or down in odd number (3rd, 5th, 7th). Same thing happens to space notes, if you go up or down an odd number you will always end up with a space note (up or down a 3rd, a 5th, or 7th). However, if you are going up or down from a line note in even number (2nd, 4th, 6th), you will end up with a space note and vice versa.

It is easier to say than do. Here are the exercises. Make sure to work it out.

Exercises provided.

Tips: Work on the exercise on manuscript paper first, and then transpose it directly onto the piano without having to write it down. The goal is for you to be able to transpose directly from the original sheet music onto the piano without the extra step of transposing on manuscript paper.

Transposition by scales

This second method takes more effort but is equally as effective once you understand the principle. You will need to master most of the major scales in order to use this method effectively. The way to do this is by figuring out the note of each scale and its corresponding number.

The C major scale:

c d e f g a b c (Every note on C major scale)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 (Number)

Tip: You see, every note has a number in this method.

If we are going to transpose C major to D major, we will need to know the numbers of the D major scale note.

D major scale

D E F# G A B C# D
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

To transpose from C major to D major, you simply match the number of old key with the correct note on the new key. E on C major is F# on D major (they both have number 3).

I use this method a lot when I am playing for church congregation. I normally write down the number on the sheet music. When I play the piano for the congregation, I can

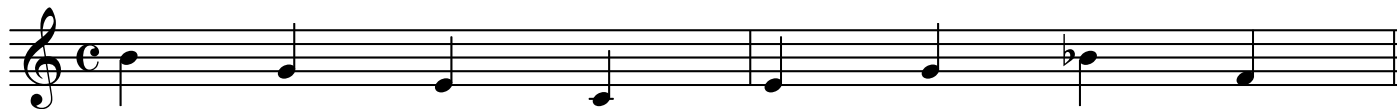
transpose to any key I want by just looking at the number instead of the notes. The only advice: know your scales. Songs that are written in sulfege system (do-re-mi) come in handy using this method.

Exercise: Use the same exercise you printed from section and write down the numbers that correspond to the notes then transpose to the key required. You may need to write down the numbers of the new key in order to familiarize yourself.

Transposition Exercise One

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

1. Transpose from C major to D major



2. Transpose from G major to F major



3. Transpose from D major to Eb major



4. Transpose from F major to A major



5. Transpose from Bb major to F major



6. Transpose from Eb major to A major



Topic: Rubato piano playing and phrasing

Goal: Ability to alter any original rhythm and create a rhythm that suits your own style.

Introduction:

This technique is so easy to apply and yet often overlooked by many pianists. The principle is simple: instead of playing the melody exactly like it is written on the sheet music, change the note values around to make it different and yet retain the original melody. The term rubato is used a lot in the classical music world, especially when one is playing the music of Chopin.

Listen to "The First Noel" – **CD2 Track 25** and take a look at the lead sheet you will understand what I mean by altering the rhythm of this melody and yet retaining the original melody. It basically means adjusting the quarter, eighth notes, or other notes value of the melody to make it different and yet retain the feature of the melody. This technique is mostly used to arrange any old hymns. I am sure you have heard of "Amazing Grace" in many different versions. Yet, they all sounded like Amazing Grace!

This technique overlapped with our previous technique called meter challenge and improvisation. In order to use this technique, one needs to forget the original rhythm and feel free to improvise a new rhythm. For those of you that rely on sheet music, note counting is not so important in this technique, as long as the melody notes are played.

In fact, every time you play the melody it is going to have a different rhythm since every time you are creating a whole new rhythm. This technique let you express your emotions and feeling freely since you are not bound to play the melody with the correct counting. It is up to you to decide when to play fast and when to slow down.

Listen to [The First Noel](#) Original Melody – **CD 2 Track 26**

Listen to [The First Noel](#) Melody 1 – **CD 2 Track 27**

Listen to [The First Noel](#) Melody 2 – **CD 2 Track 28**

Notice how each sample retains the melody but the rhythms are different?

Tip: Use crescendo (<) and decrescendo (>) often as you play with your own feeling.

Crescendo means becoming gradually louder and decrescendo means becoming gradually softer. Also use ritardando. (becoming gradually slower)

Exercise 1:

Improvise a whole new rhythm of "The First Noel" based on the lead sheet

Tip: Focus on the right hand melody, use a simple ballad chord (refer to left hand arrangement technique) with your left hand.

Exercise 2:

Improvise a whole new rhythm of "The Holly and The Ivy" (lead sheet provided)

The principle of this technique is simple: "Slow down and catch up, Speed up and Slow down!". Have fun rearranging any song you think of!

The First Noel

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

D Bm A G F# G D G

6 F# G F# G F# A A7 D Bm

11 A F# G D G F# G F# A

17 D Chorus Bm F#m D G D Bm F#m G

23 D G A7 F# A D

1. The First Noel the angels did say was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay. In fields where they lay keeping their sheep On a cold winter's night that was so deep. Chorus
2. They looked up and saw a star shining in the east beyond them far, And to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night. Chorus
3. And by the light of that same star, three wise men came from country far. To seek for a king was their intent. And to follow the star wherever it went. Chorus
4. This star drew night to the northwest. O'er Bethlehem it took its rest. And there it did both stop and stay Right over the place where Jesus lay. Chorus
5. Then entered in those wise men three, Full rev'rently upon their knee, and offered there in His presence. their gold and myrrh and frankincense. Chorus

Chorus: Noel Noel Noel Noel Born is the king of Israel.

The Holly and The Ivy

18th Century English Carol
<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The musical score is written on a single staff in 3/4 time. It consists of four lines of music, each with a measure number and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are as follows:

- Line 1 (Measures 1-5): Measure 1 is a whole rest. Measures 2-5 contain the notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
- Line 2 (Measures 6-10): Measure 6 starts with a measure rest. Measures 7-10 contain the notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
- Line 3 (Measures 11-15): Measure 11 starts with a measure rest. Measures 12-15 contain the notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
- Line 4 (Measures 16-17): Measure 16 contains the notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. Measure 17 contains the notes: B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

Chords are indicated above the staff: G, C, G, C, D, G, C, G, Em, C, D, G, G, C, G, C, D, G.

Topic: Melody Improvisation

Goal: The ability to arrange the melody of any song.

Introduction:

This technique is used when the melody of a song has long pauses before the next phrase begins. There are a few things one can do to improvise a song that have many long pauses in the middle of a song. We will discuss two ways of arranging the melody.

1. Simple Echo

Echo is used when you repeat the previous melody during the long measure. For example: "Do you hear what I hear" is a Christmas song with many long pauses. We can improvise the melody by adding many echoes. Echo can be part of the melody, or it can be the whole melody. In another word, you will play part/all of the melody during the pause to create an echo effect.

Listen to Original "[Do you hear what I hear](#)" – *CD2 Track 29*

Listen to Echo version of "[Do you hear what I hear](#)" – *CD 2 Track 30*

Tip: experiment with different echoes, start with one or two notes to echo. It is okay if the echo cuts into the measure of next phrase. Do not be too concerned about the exact counting.

Exercise:

Make up you own "[Do you hear what I hear](#)" improvised echo. Try a few versions.

2. Partial Scale Echo

Using the same example, we can reproduced an improvised version of "Do you hear what I hear" by using a different echo. This time the echo is created by using part of the scale this song belongs to. If the song is in the scale of C major, the echo will be part of the C major scale note. Another word, the echo does not sound like the melody at all. It is a completely different melody.

Listen to " [Do you hear what I hear](#)" sample 1. – *CD 2 Track 31*

Listen to " [Do you hear what I hear](#)" sample 2 – *CD 2 Track 32*

Exercise:

Using the same sample create your own version of "partial scale echo". It is okay if the echo effect is not what you expected. Keep trying to get the best echo effect. Combine all the techniques you know to any song. Doing this will customized each song to your own style. You can use echo, rubato phrasing, left hand arrangement techniques, and chord substitution techniques to "Do you hear what I hear" and it will sound different every time you play

Topic: Oriental Music and Improvisation

Goal: The ability to improvise using all black keys.

Introduction:

This lesson ought to be the most entertaining of all. We will be using all black keys in this lesson. In fact, if you play a song with all black keys, it will definitely sound oriental. The reason is: these black notes are the pentatonic scale (I,II, III, V, VI) of Gb major (refer to pentatonic and improvisation). These black notes are Gb, Ab, Bb, Db, and Eb. More than 80% of traditional oriental music is composed in the pentatonic scale. If you are playing all black notes, it will guarantee an oriental sound.

1. Oriental Bell

To create a bell/chimes effect that mimics oriental sound, all you need to do is by playing any black notes from the group of three black notes (Gb, Ab, Bb) plus any black notes from the group of two black notes (Db, Eb). Make sure you practice enough to make it sound fluent and not choppy.

Listen to audio sample –CD2 track 33 of chimes effect

Exercise:

Make up your own version of oriental chimes

2. Making-up an introduction to oriental music

One simple way to make up an introduction to oriental music is by running up the scale (playing all black notes) from the lower end of the piano to the higher end of the piano with your right hand. Your left hand will be playing a low Gb note.

You may also let the right hand run down the scale from the higher end of the piano. Do this back and forth to create a domino effect.

Listen to audio sample- CD 2 track 34 of an introduction

Exercise:

Create your own version of an introduction.

3. Making-up a song using all black keys

You may play any black notes with your right hand. I would recommend playing mostly eighth notes (half beat) and use a half note (two beats) occasionally. Combine two or three black notes to create variations. Run up or down on the piano for a more cascading effect.

The left hand can harmonize the right hand with mostly Gb and Db, with a few other black notes.

Listen to the audio sample – CD 2 track 35

Note: Do not ask me for sheet music. If you are depending on sheet music, you eyes will not be able to watch your fingers, and you will not be able to practice improvisation. This is an exercise for improvisation. Let your fingers guide you. All long as you are playing all black keys and they are fluent, you are doing great! It might not sound great in the beginning. That is where practice takes place!

Topic: Ragtime style and improvisation

Goal: The ability to create a ragtime style of music

Introduction:

Ragtime style was invented by Joplin. A few of his famous ragtimes include: The Entertainer, Maple Leaf Rag, and etc. When he first started this style, it was not considered an acceptable way of playing by the music society. The style became more popular after his death. This style applies a heavy rhythm on the left hand using many root/fifth chord structure.

Listen to an example of ragtime style – **CD2 track 36**

1. Ragtime Alternate Bass

To master ragtime technique, one need to master the left hand ragtime alternate bass. It is quite simple in theory but takes hard work to play well. One requirement for ragtime is to have many measures of 4 beats of same the chord. Also, a lively rhythm is expected.

Example of Ragtime base:

If you have a melody that last for 4 beats with the C chord in the left hand, the left hand will play the following:

Low C C chord (octave higher) Low G C chord (octave higher)

Listen to audio sample – **CD2 track 37**.

Tip:

Root chord fifth chord - memorize this principle.

Exercise:

Alternate bass exercises are provided. Make sure you are able to play without referring to the sheet music. This exercise will pay off in the long run!

2. Walk up or walk down bass

Often we need to use walk up or walk down techniques to bridge different alternate bass chords. Let's say you have 8 beats of C chord and then 4 beats of F chord for the left hand. You will need to play 4 beats of alternate bass for C chord and then play C C D E (one beat for each note) before playing 4 beats of F alternate bass. You can listen to the audio sample and understand what I mean.

Listen to audio sample – **CD2 track 38**.

If the chord changes to a G chord from a C chord, you will then walk down by using C C B A and finally land on G alternate bass. Sometimes, the chord change does not allow an interval of fourth (C to F is a fourth). In this case, you might use a passing note.

For example:

Moving from C to E chord.

You may use C alternate bass and then do a walk up of C C D Eb then land on E chord.

The Eb becomes a passing tone.

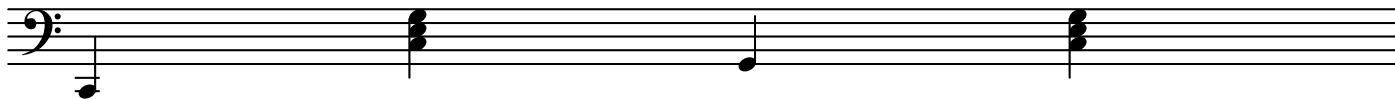
3. Alternate bass and swing bass

These two basses are actually the same. If you want to create a swing feeling, the rhythm will need to be slower and swing-like instead of the rock steady type used in ragtime.

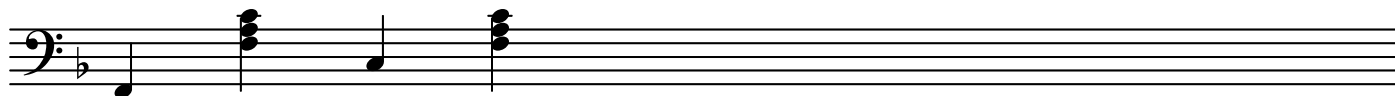
Alternate base used for ragtime techniques

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

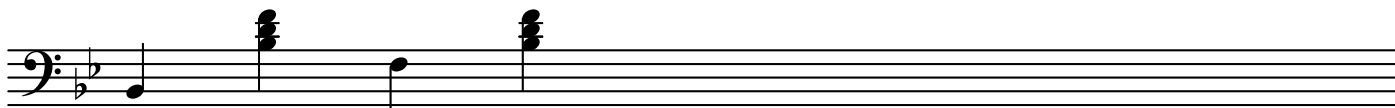
C chord



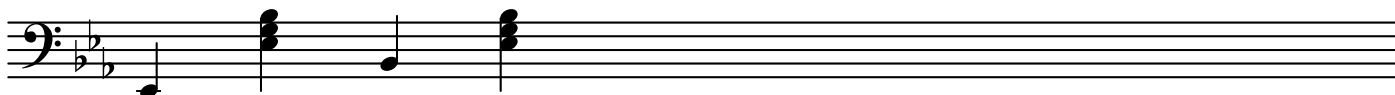
F chord



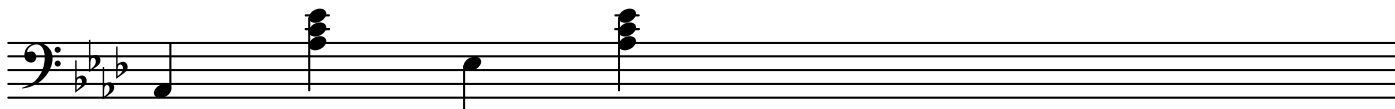
Bb chord



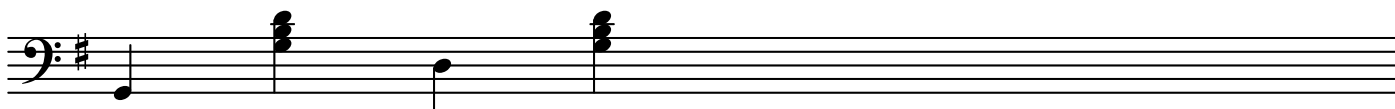
E flat chord



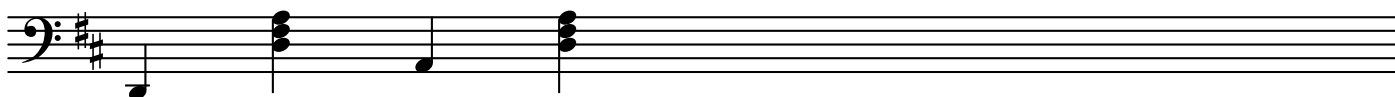
A flat chord



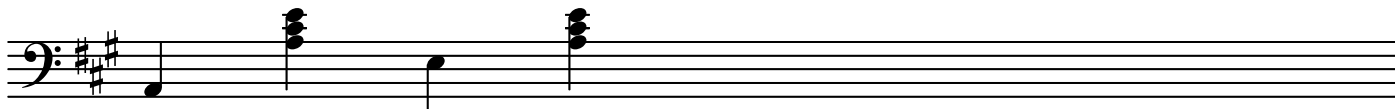
G chord



D chord



A chord



Topic: Modulation and Improvisation

Goals: Ability to modulate from one key to another key.

Introduction:

Modulation and Transposition are two techniques that are highly specialized and only used by skillful pianists. When a musician is playing a song in the key of X major and want to transpose it to a different key, there are two steps involved. First, the modulation. It is the process where the original song is going through a chord progression in order to change to the new key. Secondly, the transposition - where all the notes of the original key become notes of a different key.

Song in X key -----> Song in Y key (every note is transposed)
(Go through Modulation Process)

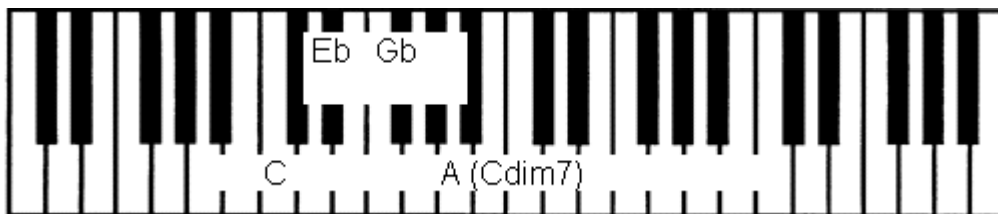
Diminished 7th chord

In order to modulate a song from one key to another key, we need to master the diminished 7th chords. The good news is that you only need to master three diminished 7th chords. Then, you are set to modulate to any key. How simple can that be?

The three diminished 7th chord's:

C diminished 7th chord, C- Eb - Gb – A

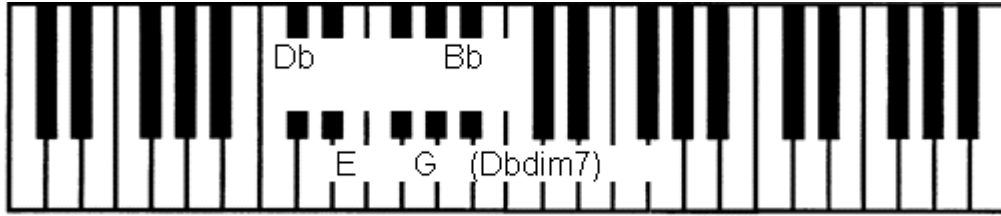
Listen to audio sample – CD2 Track 39



Right hand fingering 1(C) 2(Eb) 3(Gb) 5(A)

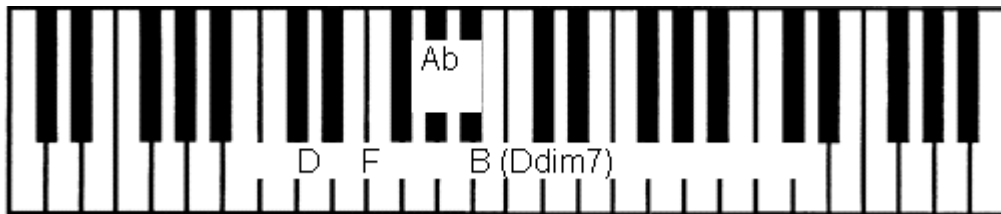
Db diminished 7th chord, Db - E - G - Bb

Listen to audio sample – *CD 2 Track 40*



Right hand fingering 1(Db) 2(E) 3(G) 5(Bb)

D diminished 7th chord, D - F - Ab - B – *CD 2 Track 41*



Right hand fingering 1(D) 2(F) 3(Ab) 5(B)

All diminished 7th chords sound unstable (play any one of three chords above) and want to resolve to a dominant 7th/seventh chord.

Even though there are only three diminished 7th chords to remember, there are actually a total of 12 diminished 7th chords available. Do you know that the C diminished 7th chord is also the Eb diminished 7th chord, it is also the Gb diminished 7th chord, and it is also A diminished 7th chord. All you need to remember is that whatever note is present in that diminished 7th chord, it is also the diminished seventh chord of that note. Since there are four notes present in any diminished chord, that diminished chord is also the diminished chord of those four notes. You ask, how can that be possible? Well, you know all chords have inversions. For example: C diminished 7 root position happens to be the 3rd inversion of Eb diminished 7th, 2nd inversion of Gb diminished 7th, and 1st inversion of A diminished 7th. That is why you just need to memorize three diminished 7th chords and you master all twelve diminished 7th chords.

Remember that all diminished 7th chords sound very unstable and want to resolve the tension and move to dominant 7th. If you move just one note down a half step out of any of the four notes in the diminished 7th chord, the diminished seventh chord becomes a dominant 7th chord of that new note.

Example 1: C diminished 7th (C, Eb, Gb, A)-- If we move C note down a half step to B, the C diminished 7th chord becomes B7 (also called B dominant 7th, B, D#/Eb, F#/Gb, A).

Example 2: D diminished 7th (D, F, Ab, B) -- If we move F note down a half step to E,

the D diminished 7th chord becomes E7 (also called 3rd inversion of E dominant 7th, D, E, G#/Ab, B).

Diminished 7th to Dominant 7th Exercise:

1. What notes are in C diminished 7th?
2. Name the four notes that are present in D diminished 7th.
3. How do I convert a D diminished 7th to G7?
4. How do I form a F7 from a diminished 7th?
5. Explains what it takes to form a A7 from a diminished 7th.
6. Name the notes in F diminished 7th (tip: F diminished 7th is also diminished 7th of what?)
7. Eb diminished 7th is also what diminished 7th?

Answer:

1. C, Eb, Gb, A
2. D, F, Ab, B
3. By lowering Ab to G note, thus becomes D, F, G, B.
4. We know that Gb is a half step above F note, and Gb belongs to C diminished 7th; thus by converting C diminished 7th (C, Eb, Gb, A), we can form a F7 (C, Eb, F, A).
5. First, raise a half step from A, this gives us Bb. Then, figure out which diminished 7th contains Bb out of the three diminished 7th. We know that Bb is part of the Db Diminished 7th. By playing Db diminished 7th (Db, E, G, Bb), and lower the Bb to A note give us A7.
6. F diminished 7th is also D diminished 7th, D, F, Ab, B.
7. It is also C diminished 7th, Gb diminished 7, and A diminished 7.

Introduction of a song with perfect cadence.

Almost every song starts with the I chord. A common chord progression for an introduction is V7 ----> I, it is called the Perfect cadence.

Let's say you want to start a song in the key of D major, you can use the following chord progression: A7 -----> D

Exercise:

1. How can you start a song with a perfect cadence in F major?
2. What is the perfect cadence of Eb major?
3. What is the fifth note of A major?
4. How can you start a song with a perfect cadence in Ab major?

Answer:

1. C7>F
2. Bb>Eb
3. E
4. Eb>Ab

Now, you are ready to modulate to any key!

Modulation

To modulate from any key to a different key, there are a few steps involved.

X key (first chord) > (Diminished 7th chord that leads to the Dominant 7th of the fifth of Y key > Dominant 7th of the fifth note of the Y scale) > Y key (first chord)

Example: To modulate from C major to G major. Listen to *CD2 Track 42*

C major > Eb diminished 7th > D7 > G major

Tip: If you are modulating to a key that is the fourth above the old key, you can skip the diminished 7th chord and go directly from the old key to the dominant 7th chord of the old key and then to the first chord of the new key.

Example: To modulate from C major to F major. *Listen to CD2 Track 43*

C major > C7 > F major

Exercise:

1. Modulate from Eb major to F major
2. Modulate from G major to F major
3. Modulate from E major to A major
4. Modulate from D major to Eb major
5. Modulate from D major to E major
6. Modulate from Ab to A major
7. Modulate from Bb to Eb major
8. Modulate from F to G major

Answer:

1. Eb major > Db diminished 7 > C7 > F major
2. G major > Db diminished 7.> C7> F major
3. E major > E7> A
4. D major > B diminished 7 (also D diminished 7)> Bb 7 > Eb major
5. D major > C diminished 7 > B7 > E major
6. Ab major > F diminished 7 (also D diminished 7th) > E7 > A major
7. Bb major > Bb 7 > Eb major
8. F major > Eb diminished 7th (also C diminished 7th) > D7 > G major

Conclusion:

Modulation might seem like a lot of work to do in the beginning. Make sure you pause and think about the logic behind each chord. The thinking process reinforces your piano playing. Once you are capable of modulation, you can accompany any singer and any instrumentalist.

Once you work through this lesson, I would like for you to drop me a note to let me know your progress!

Topic: Musical Ornaments and Improvisation

Goal: Ability to improvise any melody with ornaments

Introduction:

Ornaments or embellishments are probably the one most used technique in piano improvisation. This technique is also used in Classical music by great composers, such as Beethoven, Mozart, and many others. We all know the meaning of ornaments. They are used sparingly to add beauty to a certain object. Hence, this technique should only be used occasionally. In this lesson, we will explore a few ways of decorating your melody using ornaments.

1. Tremolo

Literally "Shaking". When you are given a group of notes to play whether in right or left hand, you may apply this technique. Use this technique when you want to create heavy, loud, thundering, effects.

Let's say you have a C chord (CEG), you will play C then E, then G. You basically roll the chord from bottom up repeatedly and with great strength.

Listen to CD2 Track 44.

Sheet music exercise is included.

Tips: This technique can be used when you are playing a thick chord. Let's say both right and left hands are playing C chord at the same time, you may use tremolo to add excitement.

Listen to CD2 Track 45

2. Turn

This is one of my favorite musical embellishments. A turn may be played by starting on the given note or on the note above. Five or four notes are played in the space of one note.

Let's say you have a C quarter note, you play D C B C (all in sixteenth notes). Thus, the original C quarter note becomes four sixteenth notes. Start at the note higher (D), then back to C note, and then to the note lower than C (B), and go back to C again. You will need to know your scale in order to figure out which note comes after and before the original note.

Listen to CD2 Track 46

Tips: This technique will sound better if you play the first note slightly longer than the rest of the three notes.

Listen to CD2 Track 47.

Grace notes:

Grace note can be added in whole step, half step, or interval jumps. You can even play multiple grace notes.

Listen to CD2 Track 48.

Tips: If you want to create bluesy sound, use flat 3rd, flat 5th, and flat 7th. Let's say you have a E note in C major scale; before playing E note you can slide Eb up to E. Eb is the flat 3rd of C major scale-it is also added as a grace note.

Listen to CD2 Track 49.

4. Roll

This is my favorite embellishment, I use it a lot on slower songs. Notes of a chord are "rolled" from the bottom up. The difference between tremolo and rolls is that in tremolo you roll all notes from the bottom up many times and shake it heavily; while in roll you only roll the chord once and gently.

Listen to CD2 Track 50

Tips: Be sure to use roll gently to create beautiful sounds.

Listen to CD2 Track 51.

Conclusion:

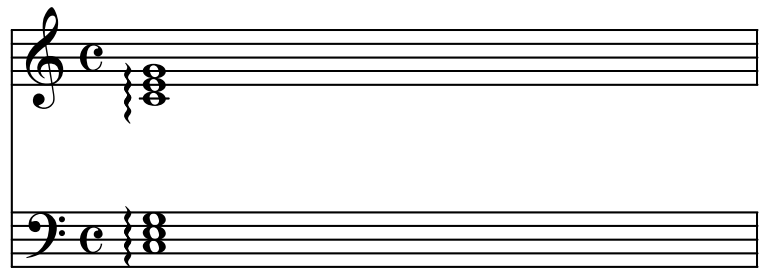
Start applying any of these embellishment techniques. You will see a dramatic improvement on your piano playing.

Listen to CD2 Track 52 that utilizes all these embellishments. Do you recognize them?

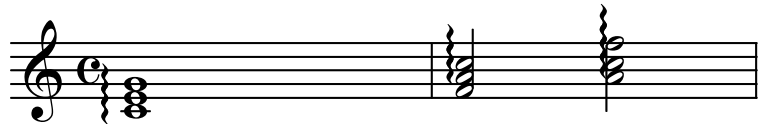
Ornaments/Embellishments and Improvisations

<http://www.playpianotips.com>

Tremelo.



Roll



Turn using 4 notes



or

Turn using 5 notes



Grace notes in single note or multiple notes



Topic: Master the keys of G major and E minor

Goal: Ability to play any song in G major and E minor; master the scales of both keys; ability to use the most used chords in these keys. Proficient in the pentatonic scale in both keys.

Introduction:

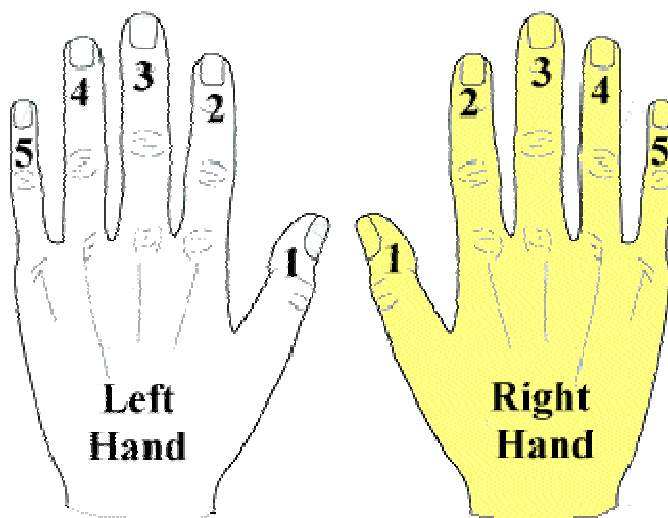
I understand that everyone's piano playing level is different, some of you might have played piano for decades. Yet, some are beginners. The lesson is to help cover the basic and application part of the scale. Stay tuned even if you think you know it all already.

1. G major scale and chords

a)

G major consists of one sharp - F#. The G major scale structure is as follows:

	G	A	B	C	D	E	F #	G
Fingering (RH)	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1
(LH)	5	4	3	2	1	3	2	1



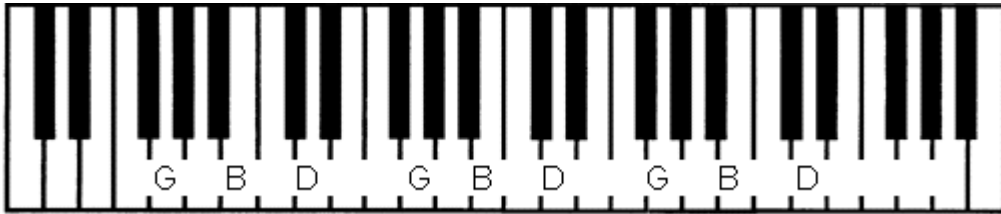
b)

The three most used chords in G major is:

1. G maj chord (GBD)
2. C maj chord (CEG)
3. D7 chord (DF#AC)

The best hand position for the chord are as follow:

G maj chord



C maj chord



D7 chord



(1st inversion)

"A" note is eliminated to
facilitate the hand movement

2. G major pentatonic scale

If you have studied the pentatonic scale lesson you will know that the pentatonic scale of any key is the I, II, III, V, VI of that key.

The pentatonic scale of G major is

G	A	B	D	E
i	ii	iii	v	vi

You have mastered the G major scale and E minor scale. Your next assignment is to play the following song using the lead sheet provided and harmonize it with the chord written on the top. You may break down the chord or play them as block chord. (*Listen to CD2 Track 58*)

The Holly and The Ivy

After you have done this, transpose this song into E minor by lowering every note a third (for example: G will become E (E is a third down from G. G>F>E).

This song sound totally different now. You have just improvised a new tune by converting the existing song into its relative minor key. (*Listen to CD2 Track 59*).

The Holly and The Ivy

18th Century English Carol
<http://www.playpianotips.com>

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 3/4 time. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score consists of four staves, each containing a melodic line and piano accompaniment indicated by chords above the notes.

Staff 1: Measures 1-5. Chords: G, C, G, C, D.

Staff 2: Measures 6-10. Chords: G, C, G, Em, C, D, G, G, C.

Staff 3: Measures 11-15. Chords: G, C, D, G, C, Em.

Staff 4: Measures 16-17. Chords: D, G.

Topic: Block hand style and arrangement technique

Goal: The ability to apply block hand style technique in any given melody.

Objective:

Almost everybody play the melody of a song with the right hand. The left hand is commonly used for harmonization. Once in a while this rule is broken in order to create a spectacular effect. Block hand style is the term used to describe when the melody is played by the left hand, and the right hand is playing a chord to harmonize the left hand melody. The technique should not be used throughout the song, it gets boring! It should be used as salt and pepper to decorate or arrange the music.

A. Block hand style

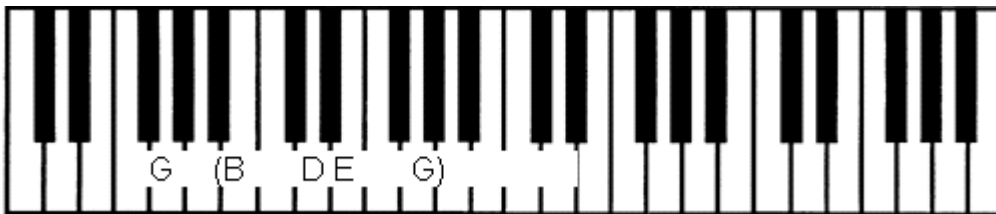
Listen to an example of block hand style (*Listen to CD 2 Track 60*).

Notice how the melody stands out in this sample. I would not recommend using block hand style throughout the whole song. As you can tell, it gets rather boring toward the end of the song.

The principle of this technique is rather simple. Play the melody note with left hand. The right hand fifth finger is also playing the melody. The rest of the fingers are playing the remaining notes belonging to the chord that harmonizes the melody note.

Example 1:

If the melody note is G, and the chord is G6(GBDE), you will play the melody as follows:



G note played by left hand.

(BDEG) played by right hand.

As you can see from the diagram, the left hand and the right hand 5th finger are playing the melody note. The G notes are an octave apart, the rest of the notes belong to G6 chord (GBDE).

The trick to this technique is to play the left hand louder than the right hand.

B. This technique does not sound very impressive without grace notes and a strong bass. Quite often before you play the melody note with the left hand, you will need to play a low melody note prior to playing the actual note. Often, it sounds even more impressive

to add some grace notes prior to the actual melody note.

Using the same example above:

The G note is the melody note, G6 is the harmonizing chord.

1. Play a low G note first.
2. Play E & F notes as grace notes right before you play the melody note.
3. Play example 1
4. ***Listen to CD2 Track 61***

Tip: use block hand style with grace note often to create beautiful sounds.

As you can see one needs to know the chord well enough to play more right hand notes. Often, chord substitution is used to enhance the effects.

C. One way to master this technique is to apply it on a simple song that you are familiar with. Let's say "Mary has a little lamb". You will notice how this technique totally change the song and gives a refreshing impression. Remember to use grace notes and chord substitution often. Adjust your rhythm. Instead of playing straight quarter notes, play a more syncopated rhythm. This technique is commonly used in jazz playing.

Listen to CD 2 Track 62

D. Apply this technique to "Silent Night" (download lead sheet)

Tip: Do not be too concerned if it sounds unpleasant in the beginning. It takes a lot of time to master this technique since we are not used to playing the melody with the left hand. A few lessons to use along with this technique are:

- a. Chord Inversion
- b. Chord Substitution
- c. Ornaments (focus on grace notes)

I hope you enjoy this lesson and continue to master this technique. I practice this method very often, and try to apply it on almost every song I come across. Remember, do not over use it!

Silent Night

<http://www.playpianotips.com>



1. Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin mother and Child. Holly infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.
2. Silent night, Holy night. Shepherds quake at the sight. Glories stream from Heaven a far. Heavenly hosts sing alleluia. Christ the Savior, is born, Christ the savior is born.
3. Silent night. Holy night. Son of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from thy holy face. With the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus Lord at they birth. Jesus Lord at thy birth.

Londonderry Air/Danny Boy

Public Domain

Chord symbols: G7, C, Am, F, C, Am, G7, C, Am, Dm, G7, C, G7, C, G7, C, G7, D7, G7, C, F, C, G7, C, Am, Dm, G7, C.

5

10

15

20

25

30

Kum-Bah-Yah

Public Domain

5 A7 D G D G A7

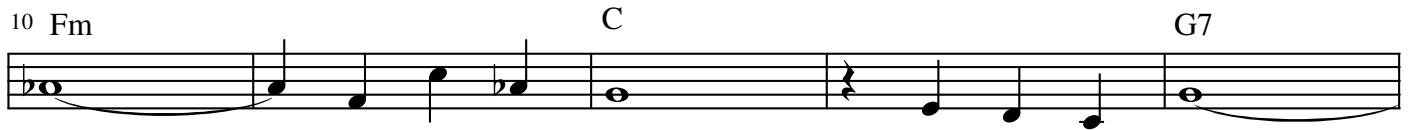
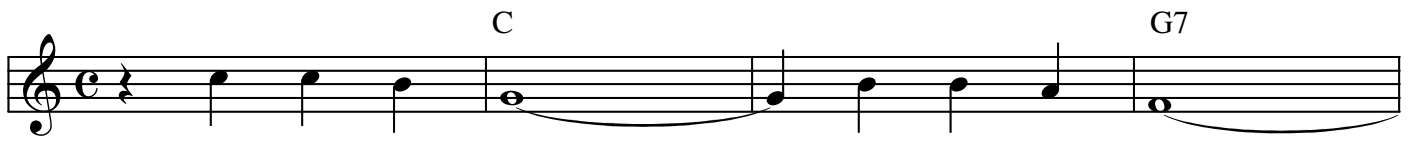
10 D D G D D G

14 A7 D G D G A7 D

Kum-Bah-Yah

O Sole Mio

Public Domain



Aura Lee

Public Domain

Chord symbols: G, A7, D7, G

5 G A7 D7 G G

10 B7 Em Am G G E7

14 A7 D7 G

The musical score for 'Aura Lee' is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1-4 with chords G, A7, D7, and G. The second staff contains measures 5-8 with chords G, A7, D7, G, and G. The third staff contains measures 9-12 with chords B7, Em, Am, G, G, and E7. The fourth staff contains measures 13-14 with chords A7, D7, and G. The piece ends with a double bar line at the end of the fourth staff.

Resources

Music Theory

1. <http://www.musictheory.net>
2. <http://library.thinkquest.org/15413/theory/theory.htm>
3. <http://www.teoria.com>

Piano Sheet Music

1. <http://www.pitt.edu/~deben/freebies.html>
2. <http://www.easybyte.org>
3. <http://www.freesheetmusic.net>
4. <http://www.music-scores.com>
5. <http://www.sheetmusicarchive.net>

Complete Scale And Chord Formula

1. <http://www.monkzone.com/chords.htm>

Music Reading Tools, Composers, Games, Misc

1. <http://www.classicsforkids.com/games/>
2. <http://www.sphinxkids.org/>
3. <http://pedaplus.com/content/view/80/140/>

And of course our free resource at

<http://www.yokewong.net>