Learning to play the piano

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INTRODUCTION to the KEYBOARD

The keyboard is made up of white keys with repeating patterns of black keys in groups of two and three.

We use seven letters of the alphabet to make music; A,B,C,D,E,F, and G. After G, we start over again with A.

Look at the group of two black keys. C will always be to the left of the two black keys. E will always be to the right of the two black keys. And D is right in the middle of the two black keys.

Now look at the group of three black keys. F will always be to the left of the three black keys. B will always be to the right of the three black keys.

Each key on the keyboard has a particular tone or pitch, and a certain place on the music staff. You will learn how each tone relates to a line or space, and you will be able to find it on the keyboard and combine the notes to make beautiful music.



STEPPING UP

If you do not have a musical keyboard near your computer, make a copy of the mock keyboard as directed on the first page of these lessons. It will be helpful to you in learning the keyboard.

When the notes on the staff go from a line to a space or from a space to a line, we step up or down to the next note letter.

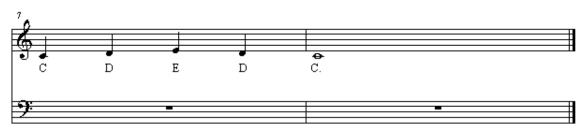
In the first measure we begin with the thumb of the right hand on the red-dotted middle C (line). Step up to D (space), then to E (line).

In the second measure, the third finger is on E (line). Step down to D (space), then back down to C (line).

This song is written in 4/4 time which means that we count 1,2,3,4 and the black note with a stem (quarter note) gets one count. The white note with a stem (half note) gets 2 counts.

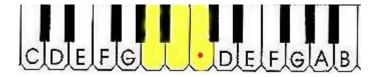






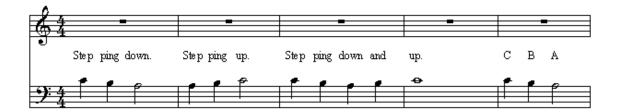
This song begins with the thumb of the left hand on middle C. In the first measure we step down from middle C (line) to B (space) to A (line). In the second measure, the third finger is on A (line). Step up to B (space), then back up to C (line).

Count 1,2,3,4 as you did in the previous song.



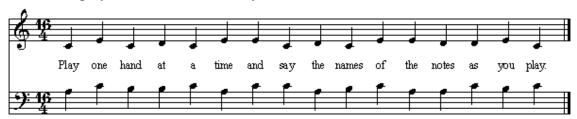
Stepping Down

Pat Stevens



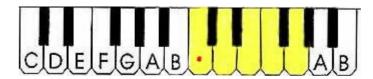


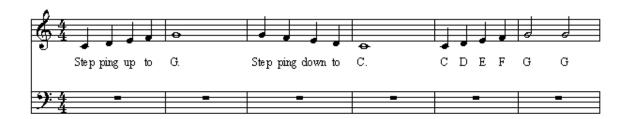
Try this sight reading exercise. First play the right hand alone. Say the names of the notes. Then play left hand alone and say the names of the notes.

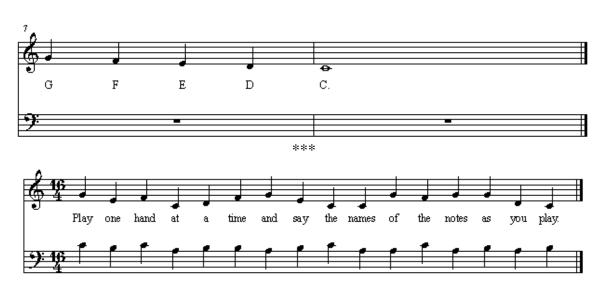


Begin with the thumb of the right hand on middle C with a red dot (line). Step up to D (space), then up to E (line), up to the next key F (space) and on up to the next one, G (line). Your 5th finger (little finger) will be on G.

G is a white note with no stem. We call this a whole note and it gets all 4 counts in 4/4 time. In the 6th measure we have two G's that are white notes with stems (half notes). Each of these notes gets two counts.







Begin with the thumb of the left hand on middle C. In the first measure we step down from middle C (line) to B (space) to A (line), to G (space) to F (line). Your 5th finger (little finger) is on F in the bass clef.

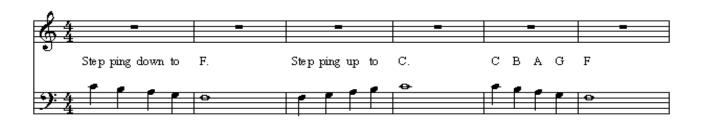
In the second measure, the 5th finger is on F (line). Step up to G (space), then up to A (line), up to B (space) and back up to middle C (line).

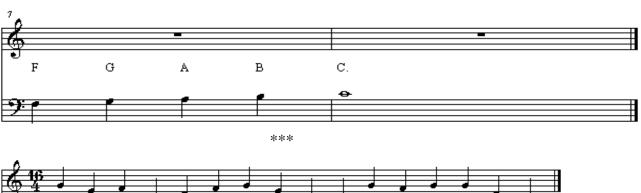
Count 1,2,3,4 as you did in the previous songs.



Stepping Down to F

Pat Stevens



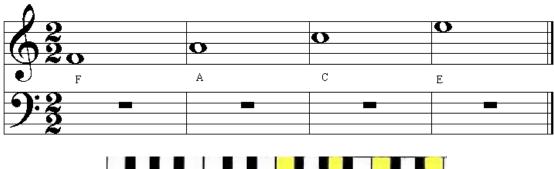




TREBLE SPACES

The treble spaces spell the word "face" F,A,C,E. The first space F is the first F above middle C. The distance from a space to a space is a "skip". You skip a letter when naming the notes.

Your teacher may use a signal to remind you of these notes. Here's one I use. Put your open palm in front of your face. Rotate it as if washing a window. This will remind you that the treble spaces spell "face", F,A,C,E.





F - A - C - E

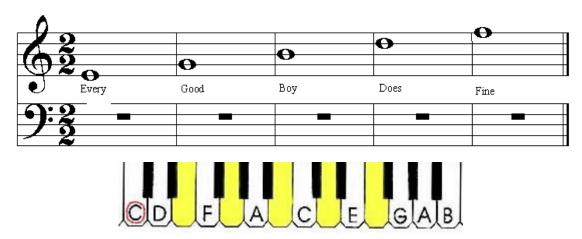






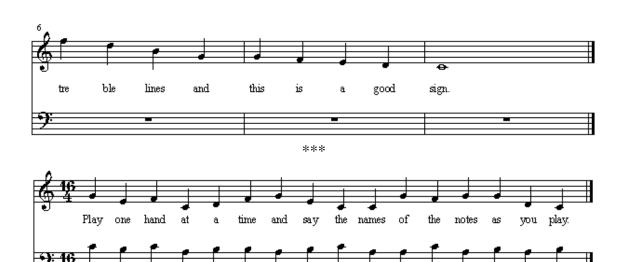
To help us remember the treble lines we say, "Every Good Boy Does Fine". The names of the line notes in the treble are E,G,B,D,F. From one line to the next is a "skip". We start on the E above middle C (with a red circle) and we skip a letter name as the notes ascend, or go up.

Our signal for this reminder is the American Sign Language sign for "boy". Pretend you are wearing a cap with a bill on it. Touch the "bill" and move the hand down and away from the face. This sign for "boy" reminds us that "Every Good Boy Does Fine", E,G,B,D,F, the treble lines.



Every Good Boy Does Fine



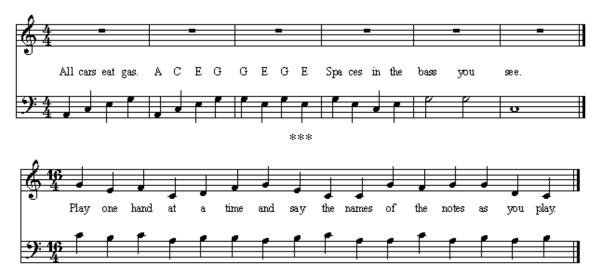


BASS SPACES

We remember the bass spaces by saying, "All Cars Eat Gas", A,C,E,G. These are the bass spaces. The A is the second A below middle C (circled in red). We "skip" from space to space, skipping a letter name in between.

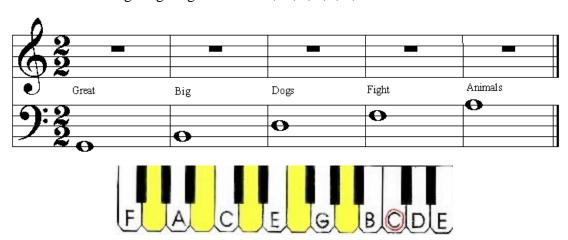
Let's learn a signal. Pretend you have a steering wheel in your hands. Turn the wheel as you "drive". This will remind you that "All Cars Eat Gas", A,C,E,G, the bass spaces.





The bass lines can be remembered with "Great Big Dogs Fight Animals" G,B,D,F,A. The first line in the bass is the second G below middle C (circled in red). We "skip" from line to line, skipping a letter in between to find these new notes.

To remember the signal for the lines say "Grrr" like an angry dog. This will help you to recall that "Great Big Dogs Fight Animals", G,B,D,F,A; the bass lines



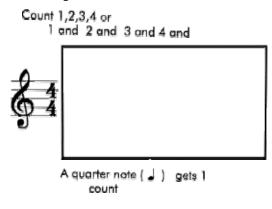
Great Big Dogs Fight Animals



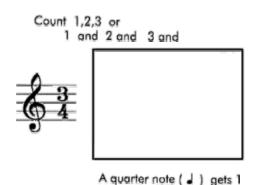
TIME SIGNATURE

The time signature, or meter, tells us how to count the music. The top number shows how many beats to count in each measure. The bottom number tells us the kind of note that gets one count.

If the top number is 4:

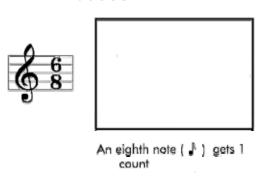


If the top number is 3:



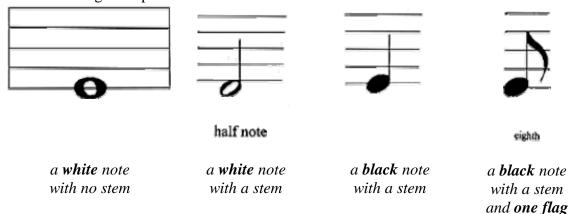
If the top number is 6:

Count 1,2,3,4,5,6

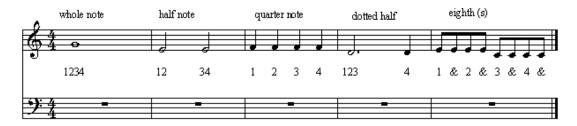


There are other meters, but these are the three most common and we will be studying those signatures.

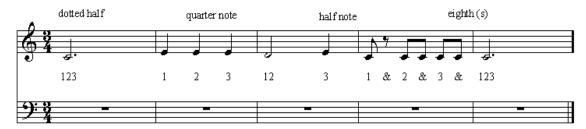
In the following examples observe that a:



This example is in **4/4 time**. A whole note gets all 4 beats, a half note gets 2 beats, a quarter note gets 1 beat and 2 eighth notes make one beat.



The next example is in **3/4 time**. A quarter note gets 1 beat, a half note 2 beats and the dot after the half adds half of the value to the count, so a dotted half gets 2+1 or 3 beats. It takes 2 eighth notes to make a beat.



The third example is in 6/8 time. An eighth note gets 1 beat and a quarter note gets 2 beats. A dotted half gets all 6 beats (4+2=6).



We can raise and lower pitches by putting a sign in front of the note, or by putting sharps or flats in the key signature which appears at the beginning of each music staff.

A **sharp** raises a note by one-half step (the very next key to the right). The raised note may be a black key, or it may be a white key, but the sharp will be to the right of the original pitch. In this lesson all sharps will be on the black keys.

A **flat** lowers a note by one-half step (the very next key to the left). It may be a black or a white key, but in this lesson all flats will be black keys.

A **natural** restores the note to its original pitch without the sharp or flat.







UP AND DOWN THE HILLS

We will learn this exercise first in the key of C Major with no sharps or flats. You will need to place your hands in the C Major position. The thumb of your right hand will be on middle C and the little finger of your left hand will be on the C below middle C.

We will count 1,2,3,4.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords which are noted above the staff. Next a rhythm can be added for more enjoyment. Start out with a metronome marking of 70 and gradually increase your speed.

Up and Down the Hills

Patsy Stevens







UP AND DOWN THE HILLS IN G MAJOR

This exercise is in the key of G Major. There is one sharp in the key signature, but there are no F's in the song, so all the notes will be on the white keys. You will need to place your hands in the G Major position. The thumb of your right hand will be on G above middle C, and the little finger of your left hand will be on the G below middle C.

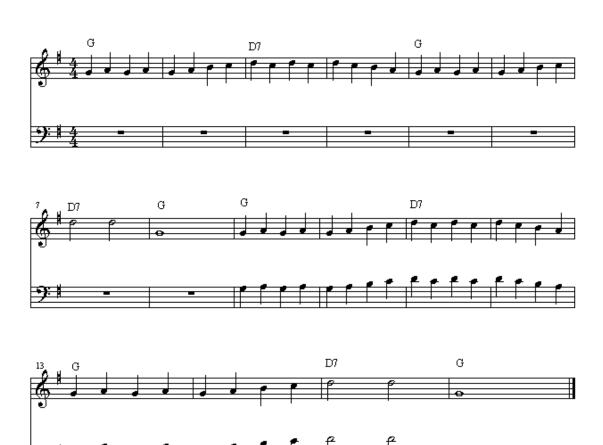
We will count 1,2,3,4.

In measures 11, 12, and 15 you will see the D next to middle C written as a leger line, a line added between the treble and bass staff. You find it as you step up from middle C.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in G

Patsy Stevens



This exercise is in the key of F Major. There is one flat in the key signature, and that flat is Bb. Your first B flat will be in the second measure. You will play the black key to the left of B. You will need to place your hands in the F Major position. The thumb of your right hand will be on F above middle C, and the little finger of your left hand will be on the F below middle C.

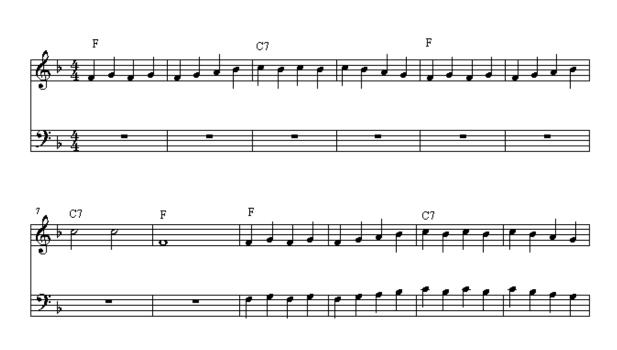
We will count 1,2,3,4.

In this exercise you may circle all the B's with a pencil to remind you to flat those notes.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in F

Patsy Stevens





UP AND DOWN THE HILLS IN D MAJOR

This exercise is in the key of D Major. There are two sharps in the key signature. In the key of D Major, all the F's and C's will be sharped. In this exercise the first F# is in the second measure. There will be no C's. You will need to place your hands in the D Major position. The thumb of your right hand will be on D above middle C, and the little finger of your left hand will be on the D below middle C.

We will count 1,2,3,4.

In this exercise you may circle all the F's with a pencil to remind you to sharp those notes.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in D



This exercise is in the key of B Flat Major. There are two flats in the key signature, and those flats are B flat and E flat. You will need to place your hands with the thumb of your right hand on the B flat to the left of middle C. This is another way to write the B next to middle C by using a leger line between the staffs. The little finger of your left hand will be on the second B flat below middle C. (This fingering is somewhat awkward and we will learn a better one later.)

We will count 1,2,3,4.

In this exercise you may circle all the B's and E's with a pencil to remind you to flat those notes.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in Bb



UP AND DOWN THE HILLS IN A MAJOR

This exercise is in the key of A Major. There are three sharps in the key signature, and those sharps are F#, C#, and G#. C# will be used in this exercise, but the other two will not.

You will need to place your hands with the thumb of your right hand on the A above middle C. The little finger of your left hand will be on the A below middle C.

There will be notes on the leger lines between the treble and bass staffs. Those notes will be the D and E right above middle C.

We will count 1,2,3,4.

In this exercise you may circle all the C's with a pencil to remind you to sharp those notes.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in A



UP AND DOWN THE HILLS IN E FLAT MAJOR

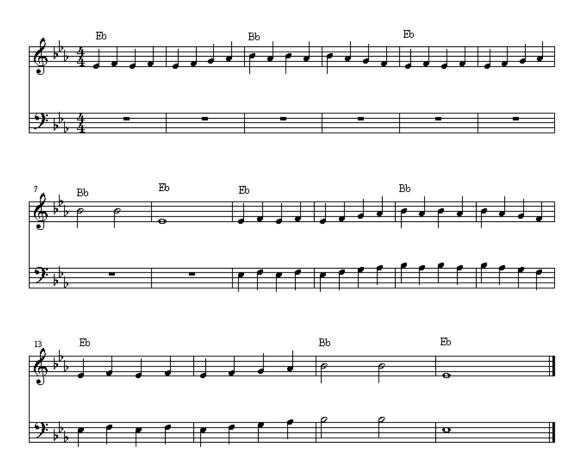
Play this exercise is in the key of E Flat Major. There are three flats in the key signature, and they are B flat, E flat and A flat. You begin on the black key of E flat. You will use all three of the flats. You will need to place your hands in the E Flat Major position. The thumb of your right hand will be on E flat above middle C, and the little finger of your left hand will be on the E flat below middle C.

We will count 1,2,3,4.

In this exercise you may circle all the E's, A's, and B's with a pencil to remind you to flat those notes.

When you learn the exercise well, you can move your hands up eight notes (an octave) and your teacher or your friend can play the automatic chords and rhythm to accompany you.

Up and Down the Hills in Eb



DUET FOR MULTIPLE KEYBOARDS

This first duet can be played on two or more keyboards. There is a first part, Primo (PRE moe), and a second part, Secondo (se KON doe). Each student learns his/her part, then they play the parts together, beginning slowly and gradually increasing the tempo.



First Duet Secondo

Patsy Stevens







Can you play the same exercise in other keys? Remember how we changed our hand position and changed the key when we played "Up and Down the Hills"?

When we change the key of a song, we say we **transpose** the song. Transpose this song to the major keys of G, F, D, B Flat, A, and E Flat.

On the keyboard:

A **half-step** is the distance from one key to the next. It may be a white key, or it may be a black key.

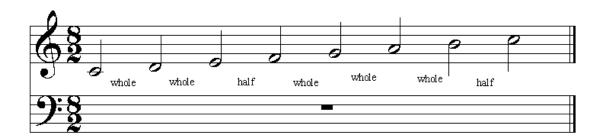
A whole-step is made up of two half-steps.

A **Major Scale** if built on a pattern of

- whole-step, whole-step, half-step,
- whole-step, whole-step, half-step,

Study and play the C Major scale below. Say the pattern of steps as you play.

Right hand fingering: 1,2,3,(thumb under) 1,2,3,4,5. **Left hand fingering:** 5,4,3,2,1,(third finger over) 3,2,1.



BUILDING A MAJOR CHORD

In this lesson you will learn to build a triad. A triad is made of three tones which are sounded at the same time. In the key of C Major, we will build our first triad (chord) on C.

Put your left finger on C, and with your right hand count up 4 half-steps. (A half-step is the distance from one key to the next. It doesn't matter whether that key is black or white.) So we start going up by half-steps; C#, D, D#, E, (1,2,3,4). We have gone up 4 half-steps and we are now on E. E is the next note of our triad.

Now hold down the E with your left finger and count up 3 half-steps with your right hand; F, F#, G, (1,2,3). You are now on G and G is the top note of the triad.

Now play the three notes together; C,E,G. This is the C Major chord or triad in root position. C is the low (bottom) note of the chord.

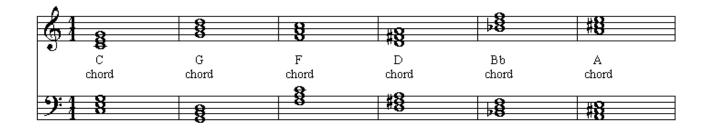
All major chords in root position will have this pattern of 4 half-steps and 3 half-steps. If the bottom note is on a line, the chord will be line-line-line. If the bottom note is on a space, the chord will be space-space.

In another lesson we will learn how to invert or turn the chords around.



Using the same pattern of 4 half-steps plus 3 half-steps, you can build major chords on any key.

Major Chords





CHORD NUMBERS AND INVERSIONS

We can build a major chord on each note of the scale. We can use Roman numerals to mark them. If the chord is built on the first note of the scale, we call it a I (One) chord.

If the chord is built on the 4th note of the scale, we call it a IV (Four) chord.

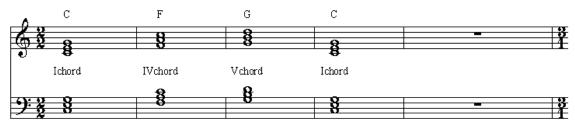
If it is built on the 5th note of the scale, we call it a V (Five) chord.

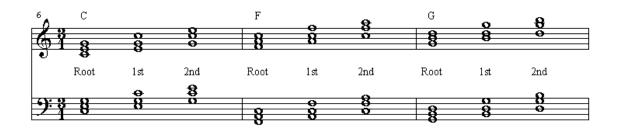
In C Major, C is the first note of the scale, so we build the I (One) chord on C. F is the 4th note of the scale, so we build the IV (Four) chord on F. G is the 5th note of the scale, so let's build the V (Five) chord on G.

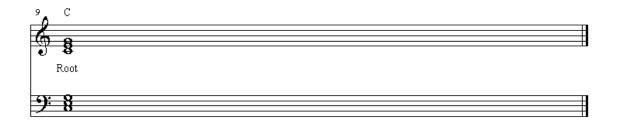
After we build the chords in **root position**, we can change the notes around.

Instead of a C,E,G chord, we can put the E as the bottom note and we now have E,G,C as the tones of the chord. We call this the **first inversion** of the chord.

Put the G on the bottom to make a G,C,E chord and this is the **second inversion** of the chord.





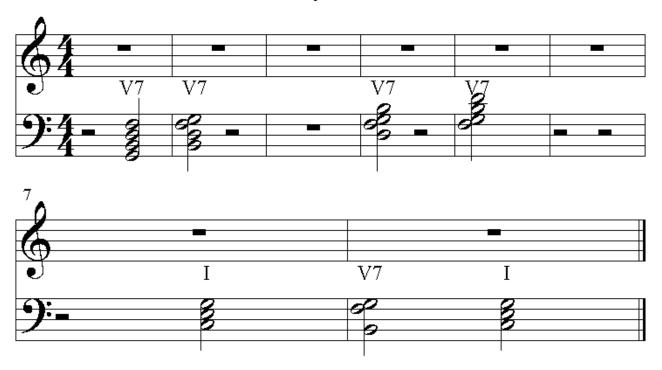


THE V7 (FIVE-SEVEN) CHORD

When you build a V (Five) chord in C Major, the bottom note is G because G is the 5th note of the C Major scale. We know that the G chord is made up of the notes G,B, and D. Now if you add the 7th tone of the scale, F, you have a nice sound for harmony. We can invert the chord and sometimes we leave out one of the tones.

To move from the I (One) chord to the V7 (Five-seven) chord:

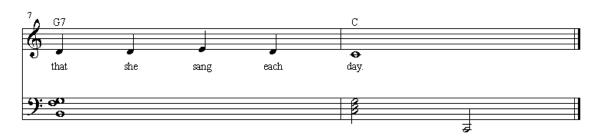
- keep the top note the same
- move the middle note **up** one-half step
- move the bottom note **down** one-half step.



You can now play Mary Had a Little Song using the progression you learned in this lesson.

Mary Had a Little Song





Learn to play the melody of this song with your right hand alone, then you can add chords with your left hand.

You will use the C chord to the G7 chord progression. The last note of the song is Low C which is 2 octaves below middle C.

The automatic chords are written above the treble staff. Add a rhythm such as a ballad. Begin ver-r-ry slowly with a metronome speed of 60. When you can play it well at that speed, then try it faster.

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

In this lesson we will learn the chord progression I (One), IV (Four), I, V7 (Five-Seven), I.

This series of chords if very useful when harmonizing songs.

In the key of C Major, the I (One) chord is C,E,G. This is the root position. Play that chord.

Keep the bottom note where it is. Move the middle tone **up** one-half step, and move the top tone **up** two half-steps (one whole step). Now you are playing C,F,A. This is the IV (Four) chord (second inversion).

Go back to the I chord in root position; C,E,G.

Now move to the V7 (Five-Seven) chord by keeping the top note in place and move the middle tone **up** one-half step, and the bottom tone **down** one-half step, as we learned in the previous lesson.

Now go back to the I chord in root position.

First play it with the left hand, then with the right hand, and then with both hands.



Play this progression in other keys.

You can now play America using the progression you learned in this lesson.

My Country Tis of Thee (America)



Learn to play the melody of this song with your right hand alone, then you can add chords with your left hand.

Use correct fingering (the numbers between the treble and bass staves) and you will have a smooth melody.

If you like, you can play the melody an octave lower beginning on middle C.

Add a rhythm such as a ballad. Begin ver-r-ry slowly with a metronome speed of 60. When you can play it well at that speed, then try it faster.

ADDING HARMONY

There are many different ways to use chords to add harmony to a melody. We will study some examples and then play the chords in different keys.

You will soon be able to tell whether you need a I (One) chord, a IV (Four) chord, or a V7 (Five-Seven) chord to harmonize with the notes. You may even find new ways to add harmony to your songs.

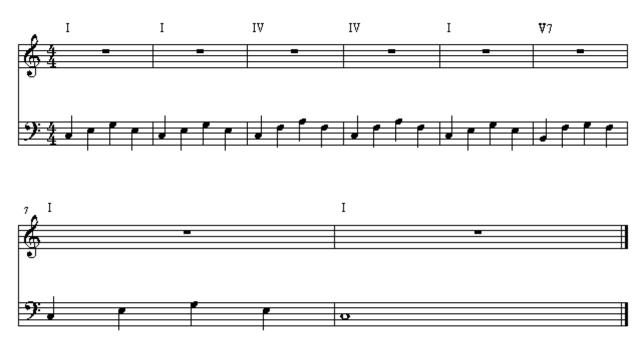
You will learn how to use chords in different ways to harmonize in 4/4 time, 3/4 time, and 6/8 time..

Oom Pah in 4/4 Time



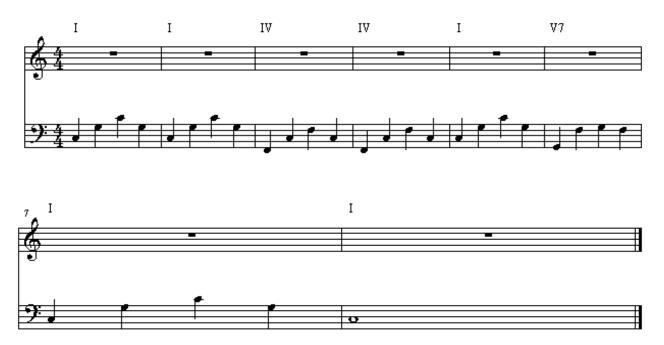
Use this simple "Oom Pah in 4/4 Time" for many melodies. Use the three notes of the C Major triad to create an "Oom Pah" with the left hand.

Skipping Up and Down the Hills



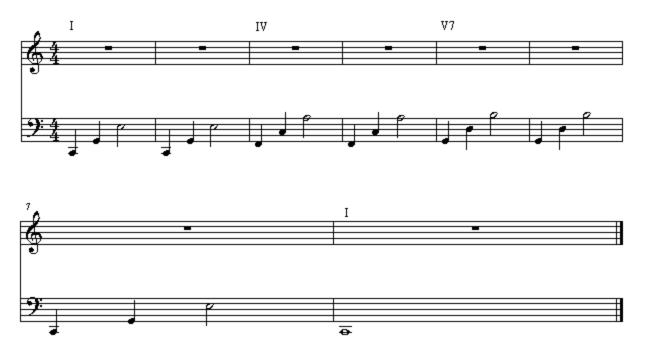
We can use "Skipping Up and Down the Hills" in 4/4 time. Use the Major triads to play a note on each beat of the measure.

Rockin' on the Octave



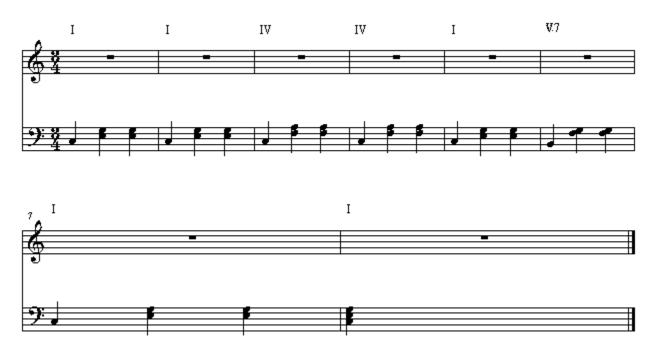
When "Rockin' on the Octave", play the root, the 5th, the root note an octave higher, and back to the 5th.

Climbing to the Tenth



"Climbing to the Tenth" makes a nice harmony. You could also use it in a 3/4 time.

Oom Pah Pah in 3/4 Time



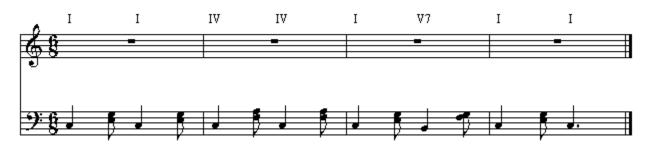
Use this pattern to add harmony to songs written in 3/4 or waltz time. Try it with Happy Birthday or My Country Tis of Thee .

Broken Triads in 6/8 Time



Use these broken triads to harmonize songs in 6/8 time.

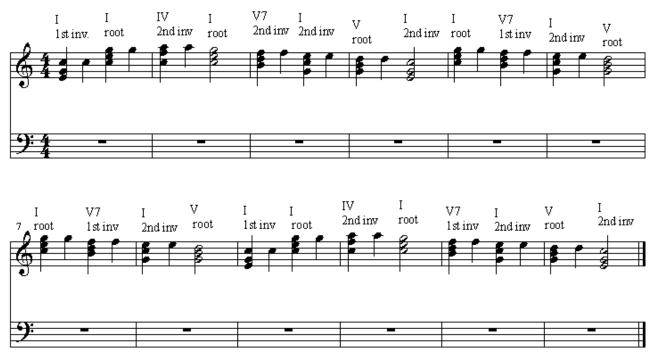
Oom Pah Pah in 6/8 Time



Use this pattern for 6/8 Time. The quarter note will get two beats and the eighth note one beat.

Enriching the Melody

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star



Use this method to make the melody sound fuller. Add some chords in different inversions with the melody as the top note of the chord.

INTERVALS

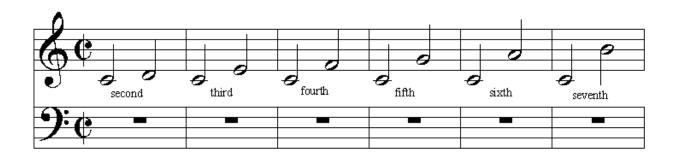
An interval is the distance from one tone to the next. We refer to intervals with ordinal words such as second, third etc.

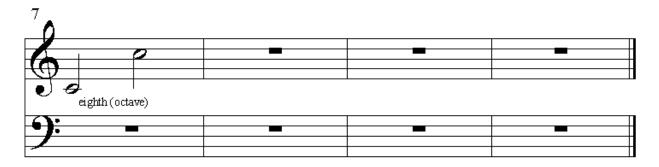
We will be learning about major intervals. You will learn to hear them, play them, and sing them.

First you need to learn to play and sing the C Major scale. Sing 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8. (Click on the speaker to hear the C Major scale.)



Intervals





SECOND

From C to D is the interval of a 2nd. These are the first two notes when you sing Doe, a deer, a female deer. from the Do, Re, Mi song. Play and sing the interval of a second.

THIRD

From C to E is the interval of a 3rd. E is the middle tone of a major chord. Play this chord: C,E,G,E,C, and sing 1,3,5,3,1. You hear the 3rd when you sing 1,3. Play and sing the interval of a third.

FOURTH

From C to F is the interval of a 4th. You hear this interval when you sing I' ve been working on the Railroad Play and sing the interval of a fourth.

FIFTH

From C to G is the interval of a 5th. Listen for this interval when you sing Twinkle, twinkle little star.. Play and sing the interval of a fifth.

SIXTH

From **C** to **A** is the interval of a 6th. This is one tone above the 5th. You can find the 6th by singing Old McDonald had a farm, **E**, I,E,I,O From "farm" to "E" is a 6th. Play and sing the interval of a sixth.

SEVENTH

From C to B is a 7th. This is a hard one to find and sing. Practice singing a 7th.

EIGHTH (OCTAVE)

From C to C is the interval of an octave. This is the same tone eight notes higher. When you are singing the Happy Birthday song and you get to the part Happy birth- day dear So-and-So, the octave is the "happy, birth-". Play and sing the interval of an octave.