

Chord Progressions

There are five kinds of chord progressions in music:

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

Over the next 5 months, we are going to explain and demonstrate these five kinds of chord progressions. You will then be able to recognize them in the music you play. You will also be able to use the knowledge of chord progressions to change the music you play and make it more interesting.

Basic Harmony

The notes of a major scale can be harmonized with only three chords, built on the first, fourth and fifth notes of the scale. In the key of C major, these chords are C, F and G7.

“Harmonizing” a melody means putting chords with it.

The notes C, E, and G, are usually harmonized with the C chord.

The note A is harmonized with an F chord.

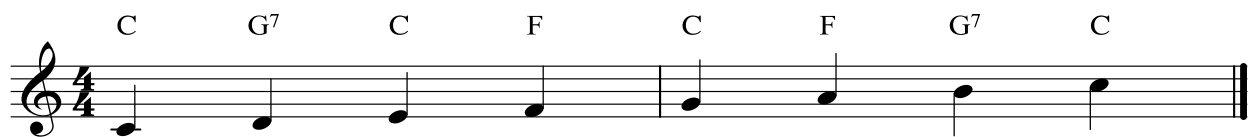
The note F is often harmonized with an F chord, but sometimes with G7.

The notes B and D are harmonized with the G7 chord.

There are two common variations to these harmonies:

The note C can also be harmonized with an F chord.

The note G can also be harmonized with a G7 chord.



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

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

Michael, Row the Boat Ashore

C F C

Musical notation for the first line of the song, measures 1-5. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes.

6 G⁷ C G⁷ C

Musical notation for the second line of the song, measures 6-10. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody continues with quarter and eighth notes.

10 F C

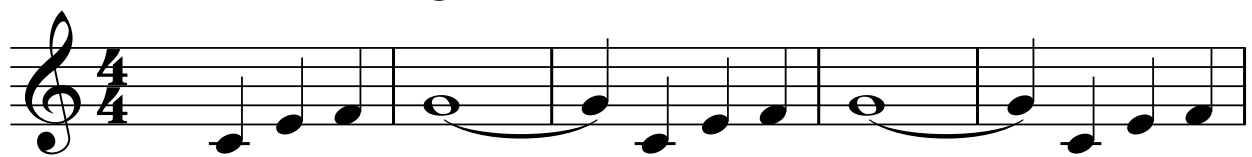
Musical notation for the third line of the song, measures 11-14. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody continues with quarter and eighth notes.

14 G⁷ C G⁷ C

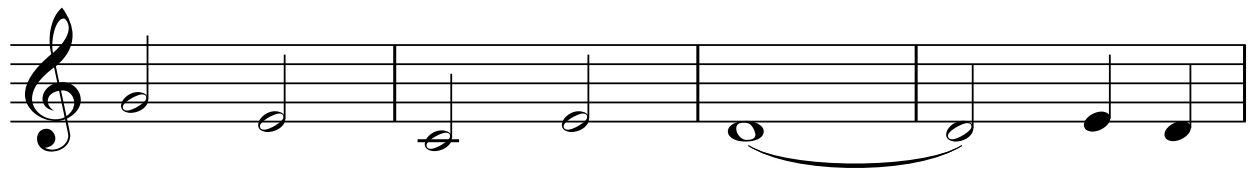
Musical notation for the fourth line of the song, measures 15-18. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody concludes with quarter and eighth notes.

When the Saints Go Marching In


C




6 G⁷



10 C F



14 C C G⁷ C



Silent Night - Basic Harmony

1 C C

Musical staff 1: Treble clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords C and C. Notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, F4, E4.

5 G⁷ C

Musical staff 2: Treble clef. Chords G⁷ and C. Notes: G4, B4, D5, G4, F4, E4.

9 F C

Musical staff 3: Treble clef. Chords F and C. Notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, G4, F4.

13 F C

Musical staff 4: Treble clef. Chords F and C. Notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, G4, F4.

17 G⁷ C

Musical staff 5: Treble clef. Chords G⁷ and C. Notes: G4, B4, D5, G4, F4, E4.

21 C G⁷ C

Musical staff 6: Treble clef. Chords C, G⁷, and C. Notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, F4, E4.