

# Improvising at the Keyboard

by

Richard Grayson



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To Professor Suguru (Steve) Agata and my students at Showa Academia Musicae,  
Kawasaki, Japan.



and

To my colleague, Mary Ann Cummins, and my students at the Crossroads School,  
Santa Monica, California.



Please send comments and suggestions to Richard Grayson:

Email: [rgrayson@oxy.edu](mailto:rgrayson@oxy.edu)

Website: <http://faculty.oxy.edu/rgrayson//>

YouTube excerpts: <http://faculty.oxy.edu/rgrayson//YouTube%20excerpts.html>



Cover drawing by Nozomi Moroi, Showa Academia Musicae



# Improvising at the Keyboard

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## Introduction:

This book is intended to introduce keyboard players to improvisation in styles that derive primarily from European Classical music. The purpose is to allow them to create meaningful, expressive music using relatively simple materials, often those they have already learned in harmony courses, or are familiar with from pieces they have played. When musicians feel free to create melodies of any shape or rhythm that fit the harmonic accompaniment, the result is greater variety and expressiveness. Most importantly, when they create spontaneously, there is a direct connection to their feelings, sometimes called the “unconscious,” which can make the experience deeply meaningful. Mastery of even basic materials will allow this experience to occur.

The basic approach of this method is to generate all melodies from the accompanying harmonies. I have avoided making rules for good, or even interesting, melodies. Both beginners and advanced players, including those without a “gift” for improvising, usually come up with satisfying results just by playing with these materials. The advantage of using simple materials is that players are freer to let their fingers lead them intuitively, since many possibilities work adequately. Students usually progress quickly from playing random notes that fit the harmony, to creating meaningful melodies from these notes. If students feel the need for guidance, they can find many kinds of melodic shapes in the standard repertoire. I have found, however, that the best results come from alternating phrases with a more experienced player.

Another important aspect of this approach is that students do not learn a fixed repertoire of melodies. From the beginning, they are invited to create melodies of different shapes and rhythms. Complexity is gradually introduced through non-chord tones, different kinds of accompaniments, new chords, modulations, and ABA forms.

In addition to “The Blues,” there is also a section on playing popular songs from lead sheets. This is a very enjoyable skill, and will introduce classical musicians to the wonderful repertoire of popular songs from the 1910's through the 1950's and beyond. The method for improvising melodies on these tunes is the same as the method for classical improvisation: namely, to create melodies from the harmonies that are indicated in the lead sheet.

Melodic Shapes:



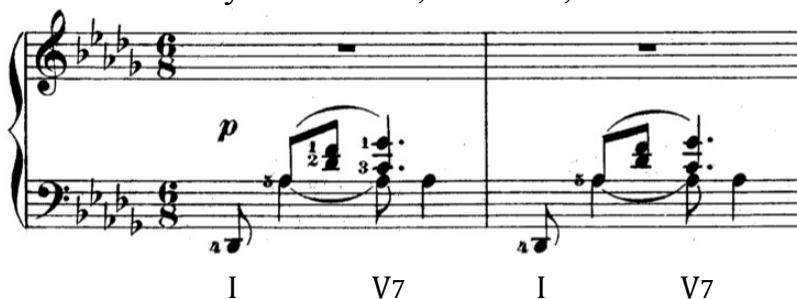
We all respond to beautiful, inspired melodies, and as improvisers we would like to create them ourselves. Although it is possible to analyze a successful melody and see what contributes to its beauty, it is almost impossible to establish rules for creating one. In general, melody looks for a balance between unity (similarity) and variety (difference). If you find you are using too much of the same note or rhythm, add some variety. Conversely, if every measure has too many different shapes and seems unrelated, you need more unity in your choice of pitches, and maybe more importantly, rhythms.

From the beginning of your improvisation studies, think of your melodies as shapes based on the notes of your harmony. This is important because it avoids the main difficulty for new improvisers: how to find a harmony that fits your melody. With the use of different shapes (including repeated notes) and different rhythms, the combinations using only chord notes are endless. You will see basic examples of this in "Chord and Melody Improvising on the Piano." No matter how complicated your melodies become through the use of non-chord (decorating, or embellishing) tones, they will always make musical sense if you are aware of the harmony.

Of course, there is a strong connection between melody and harmony. A dull melody can be made interesting with good harmony, and an interesting melody can make simple harmony beautiful. For example, if heard by itself, the melody of Chopin's Prelude no. 4 in E minor is rather boring, but with its wonderful harmonies it has great meaning and intensity.



At the other extreme, Chopin's "Berceuse" is an example of a beautiful melody which uses only two chords, I and V7, for almost the entire piece.



## Chapter 1: Pentatonic scale improvising.



We will begin by improvising melodies using only the black notes of the piano. These notes create a Pentatonic (5-note) scale that is easy to see, and can be accompanied effectively by just one or two chords.

The "major mode" version of the scale is F# G# A# C# D#, with F# as the primary note, or "tonic."



The "minor mode" version of the scale is D# F# G# A# C#, with D# as the primary note, or "tonic."



The accompaniments will help to support whichever mode you use. Your job is to create an interesting and varied melody to the accompaniment, preferably in 8 measure phrases divided 4 + 4. This will tend to happen naturally, either right away or very soon. Please see the pentatonic melody examples if you would like some guidance.

You have been given four different versions, each in "A B A" form. Each version uses a different arrangement of duple, triple, major and minor:

1. Major-Minor-Major pentatonic in duple meter.
2. Major-Minor-Major pentatonic in triple (compound duple) meter
3. Minor-Major-Minor pentatonic in duple meter.
4. Minor-Major-Minor pentatonic in triple (compound duple) meter



The accompaniments assume that there are at least two players: one to accompany and one to improvise a melody. At the end of 8 measures (or perhaps 16), the players switch roles.



If you do not have a second player, there is a left hand accompaniment at the bottom of the musical examples.



If there are several players and instruments, give each person a chance to play the melody while everyone else plays the accompaniment.

Give both the accompaniment and the improvised melody a "character" through the use of tempo and dynamics: perhaps happy, sad, aggressive, etc., so that the result will sound expressive, and not like an exercise.

Suggestion for the melody: sometimes play in octaves using right and left hand. Advanced players can use both hands to create two-voice counterpoint.

## Pentatonic improvising in ABA form

One person plays the accompaniment, one person improvises a pentatonic melody. If you like, you can exchange melody/accompaniment roles every 8 or 16 measures. Let the person playing the melody use the left hand to hand signal **1** or **2**, and a "fist" to indicate the End. Try different tempos and dynamics. Two measures of accompaniment makes a good "intro."

**#1.** Major Minor Major

Duple 1 (repeat at least 8 times) 2 (repeat at least 8 times) 1 (repeat at least 8 times) End

**#2.** Major Minor Major

1 Triple (compound duple) 2 1 End

**#3.** Minor Major Minor

Duple 1 2 1 End

**#4.** Minor Major Minor

1 Triple (compound duple) 2 1 End

Left hand accompaniment for **solo** pentatonic improvising

Major Minor Major Minor

Duple Triple (compound duple)

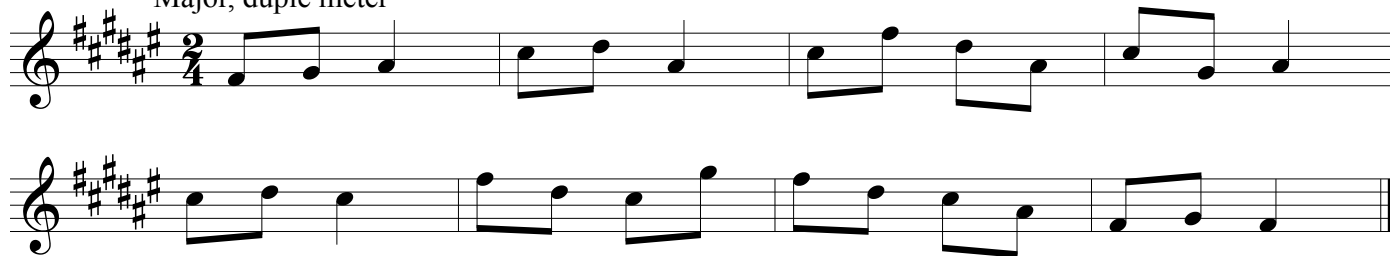
For smaller hands:



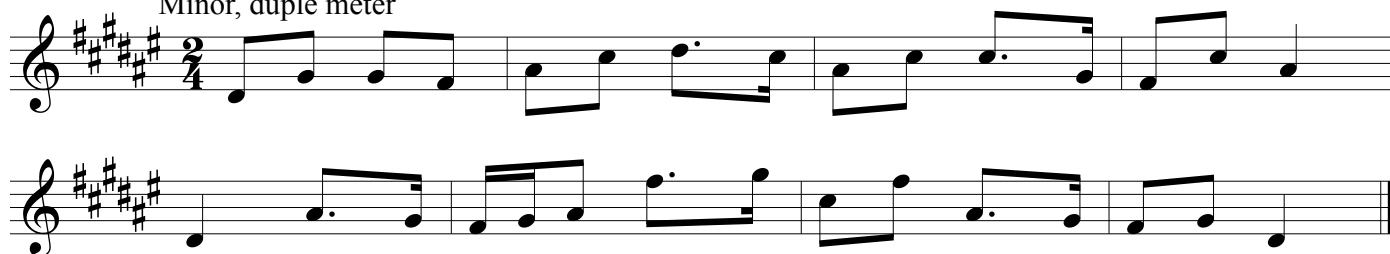
# Pentatonic Melody Examples

Richard Grayson

Major, duple meter



Minor, duple meter



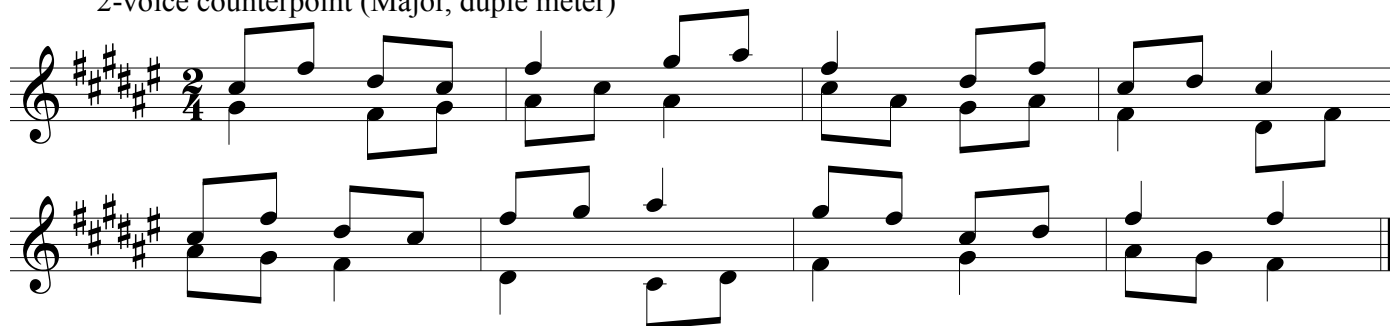
Major, triple (compound duple) meter



Minor, triple (compound duple) meter



2-voice counterpoint (Major, duple meter)



## Chapter 2: Improvising with one chord



This chapter will allow you to concentrate on one chord at a time. It is important to become comfortable creating different melody shapes and rhythms with just a single chord. The end of this chapter includes practice with two chords.

There is little that needs to be said about how to approach this task. The musical examples should answer most of your questions. Try to play each improvisation as expressively as you can. Even very simple music can be effective when played musically. Give the melodies a shape as you play, and don't overpower them with the accompaniment. Pedal each measure to sustain the accompaniment.

**Melodies based on the I (C major) or i (C minor) chord. I or i is called the “tonic” chord.**

example using C,E,G or C, E-flat, G

example

C major or minor

(for minor, use E-flats)

This musical example consists of two parts. The first part is in common time (C) and shows a melody in the treble clef over a steady accompaniment of C major or C minor chords in the bass clef. The second part is in 3/4 time and shows a different melody in the treble clef over the same accompaniment. The text 'C major or minor' is written above the bass staff, and '(for minor, use E-flats)' is written below it.

create your own melody

C major or minor

(for minor, use E-flats)

This musical example is a template for creating a melody. It shows a treble clef staff with a single note in the first measure, followed by a double bar line, and then a 3/4 time signature. The bass clef staff shows a steady accompaniment of C major or C minor chords. The text 'C major or minor' is written above the bass staff, and '(for minor, use E-flats)' is written below it.

## Melodies based on the V7 (G7) chord

example using G, B, D, F

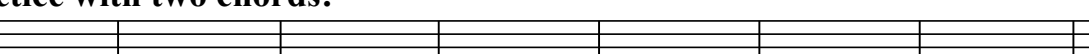
example

create your own melody

G7

create your own melody

**Practice with two chords:**



(for minor, use E-flats)

If you find that your melodies don't connect well at the chord changes (C to G7, or G7 to C), consider these suggestions:

1. Repeat G as the “shared” melody note between the two chords.
2. Use a note that is close (a 2nd or a 3rd) to a note in the new chord.

## Chapter 3: Improvising with four basic chords.

The four basic chords are I, IV, V, and V7. You were introduced to I and V7 in Chapter 2. Note that V7 is really an intensification of V and not a completely separate chord. However, you will get more variety if you learn them separately, and not assume that all V chords can be replaced by V7.



If Roman numerals (numbers) are new to you, it should not take you long to learn them. Some older clocks and watches used them instead of Arabic numerals. Of course, only the first seven are used, because they correspond to the notes of a scale:

I = 1, II = 2, III = 3, IV = 4, V = 5, VI = 6, and VII = 7

Here are two important things to know:

1. "I" always represents the **tonic** (1st, or primary, chord) of whatever key you are in. It actually indicates a "triad" on that note, namely 1, 3, and 5 of the scale. Each Roman numeral represents a triad on that note of the scale.

2. While it is not universal, most current music theory books use upper case Roman numerals for Major (and Augmented) triads, and lower case Roman numerals for Minor (and Diminished) triads. This will be helpful when you read progressions which show only Roman numerals.

For example, iv = Minor, V = Major, ii° = Diminished, III+ = Augmented.

You have already been introduced to I and V7. Now you will be introduced to IV and V, the two remaining chords that will allow you to create many basic progressions. The first measures (right hand) of IV and V show the normal melody range of chord notes. The second measures of IV and V give a short melodic example. The left hand plays a simple accompaniment.

chord notes      melody      chord notes      melody

IV (sub-dominant)      V (dominant)

Now you are ready to improvise your first 8-measure phrase.



Notice that the bass note of the C chord is now an octave lower. This will give more resonance, but is slightly more difficult to play. You can use the upper octave if you like. Use pedal for each measure to help sustain it.

Key of C major:

I      IV      V      V7      I      IV      V7      I

1. Try this also 3/4 time. Here is the left-hand pattern:



2. Now try this in C minor, in both 4/4 and 3/4 time. E = E-flat, A = A-flat.

Here are some suggestions for working with the materials you have learned so far:

1. Improvise as you look at the music. Make different shapes and rhythms each time you play.

2. Improvise from memory without looking at the music.

3. Try them with different accompaniments. Here are some possibilities:



4. Make up your own 8-measure progressions using these chords.

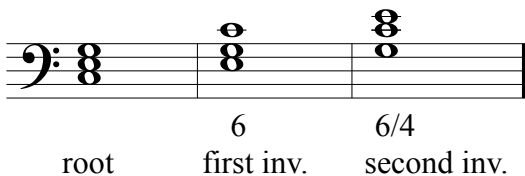
5. With two (or more) keyboard players, you can alternate 8-measure melodic improvisations. All players can play the accompaniment.

## What do the other numbers (Arabic numerals) mean?

A Roman numeral with no number after it is a triad (chord) in root position.

If it is followed by 6, it is the triad in first inversion.

If it is followed by 6/4, it is the triad in second inversion.



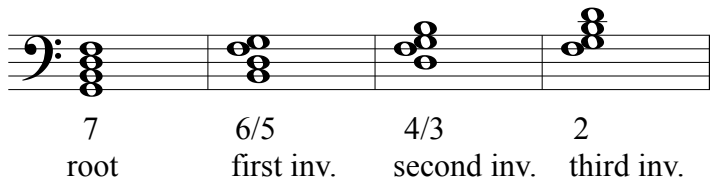
A Roman numeral followed by a 7, 6/5, 4/3, or 2 means a seventh chord instead of just a triad.

7 = root position

6/5 = first inversion

4/3 = second inversion

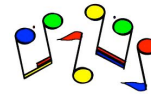
2 (sometimes written 4/2) = 3rd inversion.



Note: in word-processing format, it is more convenient to write 6/4, etc. However, you will ordinarily see the numbers from top to bottom:

$\begin{array}{ccc} 6 & 6 & 4 \\ 4 & 5 & 3 \end{array}$

## Chapter 4: Embellishing your melody

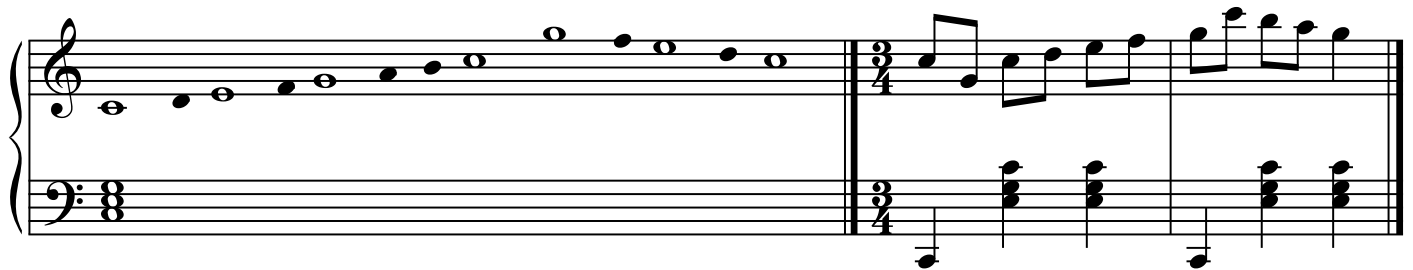


As you can see from the examples, there is a lot of flexibility in decorating chord tones. The most important thing is to remember which chord you are using at the moment, and what notes it contains. Most melodies emphasize chord notes, which is what you should do at first. Gradually, you can introduce embellishing tones until you become comfortable using them.

Note: “embellishing tones” can also be called “non-chord tones,” or “non-harmonic tones.”

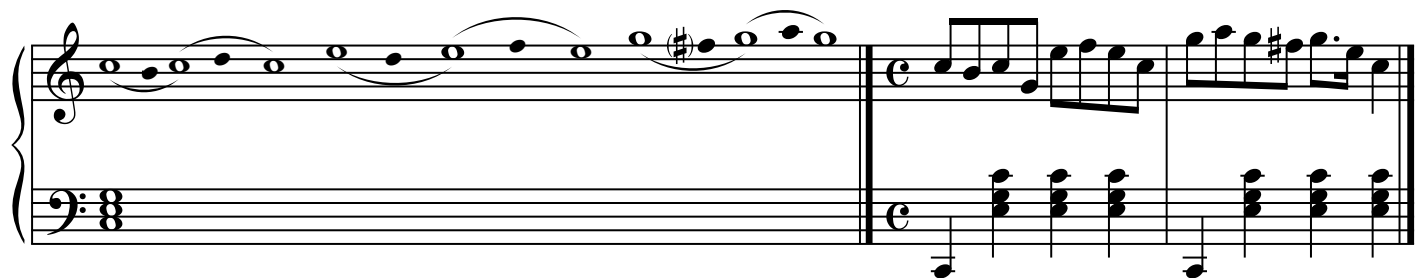
1. **Passing notes (P)** are the most common form of embellishment. They are the black notes.

example



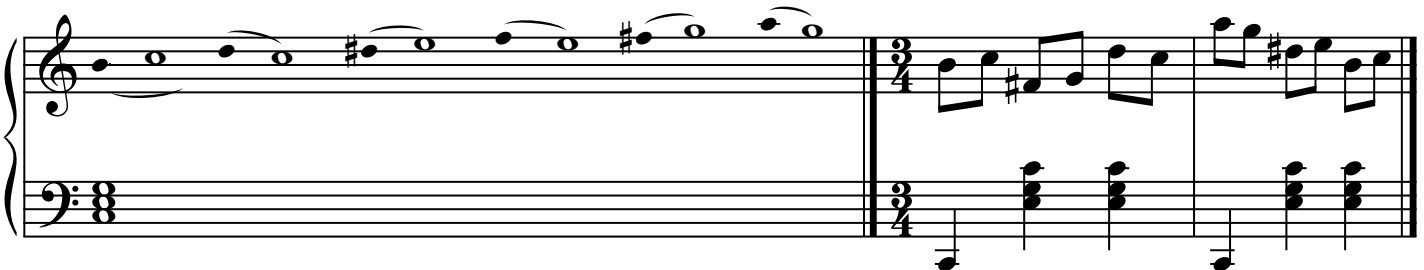
2. **Neighbor notes (N)** decorate a single note by going above or below it and then returning.

example



3. **Appoggiaturas (AP)** decorate the chord note from a step or a half-step above or below.

example



Here is an example which uses all three kinds of embellishing tones with the IV and V7 chord in C major:

IV V7

Here is another 8-measure progression which includes two new chords: the ii6 and the I6/4. At first, create a melody with only chord tones. Then use the embellishing tones introduced in this chapter. It can be changed to the Minor mode by using E-flats and A-flats.

I IV I V I ii6 I6/4 V7 I

Here is a the same progression in 3/4 time:

I IV I V I ii6 I6/4 V7 I



## Chapter 5: Other 8-measure progressions:



Here are some more useful 8-measure phrases. Each Roman numeral is one measure. Why are they written with Roman numerals?

1. to give you more practice with them
2. to save space, since Roman numerals apply to ALL keys
3. to think chords “inside your head,” rather than only to read the music

For the Minor mode, the following changes need to be made:

I and IV = minor (i and iv)

iii and vi = major (III and VI)

ii = diminished (ii<sup>o</sup>)

V and V7 remain the same.

**For example: Major I—IV—ii— V—vi— ii<sup>6</sup> —V7—I**  
**Minor i—iv—ii<sup>o</sup>— V—VI—ii<sup>o</sup>6—V7—i**

You can check your understanding of these Roman numerals by comparing them with the written examples below (C major and minor only). Just the bass clef (left hand accompaniment) is given. You do not have to use the exact chord positions given here. When you are comfortable with the progression, improvise a right hand melody to your accompaniment.

**C Major**

I IV ii V vi ii<sup>6</sup> V7 I

**C Minor**

i iv ii<sup>o</sup> V VI ii<sup>o</sup>6 V7 i

The advanced student may notice some incorrect parallel voices between V-vi (V-VI). This is a small problem, and is hardly heard when playing this kind of accompaniment.

V vi

**More progressions.** Remember to try them in both Major and Minor:  
Two Roman numerals in brackets [ ] = two chords in one measure.

**I—V—I—V—I6—IV—V7—I**

**I—I—V—V—I6—IV—V7—I**

**I—IV—ii—V—vi—ii6—V7—I**

**I—vi—ii6—V—I6—vi—[ii6-V7]—I**

**I—vi—ii6—V—I6—ii6—[I 6/4-V7]—I**

**I—V—V7—I—I6—IV—[I 6/4-V7]—I (3/4 = Happy Birthday)**

**Most of your improvisations will be a series of 8-measure progressions, so for variety, you should also practice beginning or ending on other chords than I:**

**8 measure progressions starting on IV or V:**

**IV—I6—V—I—IV—I6—[ii6-V7]—I**

**IV—V—I—vi—ii6—V—[I -V7]—I**

**V—I6—ii6—V—I—I6—V7—I**

**8 measure progressions ending of V (“half-cadence”):**

**I—I—IV—V—I—IV—[I6-ii6]—[I 6/4-V]**

**I—vi—IV—V—I—vi—V7/V—V**

**I—IV—vii<sup>o</sup>—iii—vi—ii6—vii<sup>o</sup>7/V—V**

Here are four more useful 8-measure phrases. Of course, they can be transposed to different keys and also played in 3/4 time. The first two can be played in either the Major or Minor mode. The last two are only for Major or Minor.

R. Grayson

Major and Minor

I IV ii V i6 vi ii6 V7 I

Major and Minor

I iii IV ii V vi ii6 I6/4 V7 I

Major only

I V7/ii ii V7/IV IV I6/4 V7 I

Minor only

i iv V7/III III iio6 i6/4 V7 i

## Chapter 6: Repeating Progressions



In chapters 3, 4 and 5 you learned some basic 8-measure progressions for improvising melodies. None of them was of such great harmonic interest that you would want to keep repeating them. However, there are some progressions that are so lovely that they invite repetition. With these progressions your goal will be to create a series of melodic "variations" so that the overall improvisation has interest and direction. Although it is possible to improvise and accompany yourself at the same time, these progressions work best if there are at least two keyboard players who can alternate improvising and accompanying roles. Generally it is best to start with simple, slower moving melodies, and gradually increase the complexity through the use of faster notes.

It is also possible to give the accompaniments some variation as the improvisation progresses. This will add interest, and give the person playing the accompaniment a chance to participate in the improvising. See suggestions under "Varied Accompaniments for Repeating Progressions" at the end of this chapter.

Note that the progressions use three different kinds of notation: normal music notation, Roman numerals, and Popular chord symbols.

The  $\frown$  (fermata) indicates where the improvisation will finally end.

a. La Folia, is a 16th-17th century harmonic progression on which musicians improvised music for dancing or entertainment. The complete progression is 16 measures long. If you have a room full of keyboard players, as often happens in a classroom setting, you can shorten it by repeating the first ending, giving everyone an 8-measure improvisation. Save the second ending for the very end. Alternatively, one can just use the second ending each time. It can also be effective to have the whole group improvise together for the final time. There are famous examples of La Folia variations by Corelli and Rachmaninoff.

b. Pachelbel, Canon in D. This famous piece is based on a repeating bass line on which Pachelbel wrote a canon in three parts above it. The progression is beautiful enough by itself to entice both classical and popular musicians to improvise on it. George Rochberg's String Quartet No. 6 includes a series of variations on the Pachelbel theme, and the slow movement of John Adams' Violin Concerto uses a theme very similar to it.

c. Paganini, Caprice no. 24. This wonderful progression composed by Niccolò Paganini formed the basis of his virtuoso variations for solo violin. Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and Lutoslawski also composed pieces based on Paganini's theme.

d. Handel, Passacaglia in G minor: Handel wrote a wonderful set of variations on this theme as the last movement of his Harpsichord Suite in G minor.

e. Classical Period: This is not only typical of the "Classical Period," but is an example of a Classical "period" form. This is when two phrases consist of a "question and answer" in which the first phrase (four measures in this case) ends inconclusively, such as on V or with an Imperfect Authentic Cadence, and the second phrase is conclusive, usually with a Perfect Authentic Cadence. Challenging aspects of this progression include several inverted chords, and quick harmonic changes in measures 4 and 8.

f. Beethoven: Based on Beethoven's 32 variations in C minor, this progression uses the beautiful Augmented 6th in measure 6. In general, try to avoid using the bass notes as prominent notes in the melody. More importantly, do not parallel the bass line in the melody from measure to measure, as this will cause awkward parallel octaves.

g. Bach composed a 32-measure theme that provided the basis of his amazing "Goldberg Variations." The first 8 measures, used here, make a fine repeating progression for improvising. Try to avoid parallel octaves in your melody and bass at the beginning of each measure.

h. Romanesca: This is another repeating progression from the Renaissance period. The tune "Greensleeves," based on this progression, is the most famous melody associated with it.

# Repeating Progressions for improvising

arr. by Richard Grayson

## a. "La Folia"

1st ending 2nd ending

i V i VII III VII i V i iv V i  
Am E Am G C G Am E Am Dm E Am

## b. Pachelbel, Canon

I V vi iii IV I ii<sup>6</sup> V7 I  
D A Bm F#m G D Em7/G A7 D

## c. Paganini, Caprice no. 24

i V i V i V i V V/iv iv VII III ii<sup>6</sup> i<sup>6</sup> Fr+6 V i  
Am E Am E Am E Am E A Dm G C B<sup>o</sup>/D Am/C F7-5 E Am

## d. Handel, Passacaglia

i iv VII III VI ii<sup>o</sup> V i  
Gm Cm F Bb Eb A dim D Gm

# Repeating Progressions, continued.

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## e. Classical Period-Form

I V V7 I IV I6 V<sup>4/3</sup> I V I V V7 I IV I6 ii6 V7 I

Eb Bb Bb7 Eb Ab Eb/G Bb7/F Eb Bb Eb Bb Bb7 Eb Ab Eb/G Ab/F Bb7 Eb

## f. Beethoven: based on his "Variations in C minor"

i V6 V<sup>4/2</sup>/iv IV Ger.+6 i 6/4 iv ii<sup>4/3</sup> V i

Cm G/B C/Bb F/A Ab7 Cm/G Fm G Cm

Dm7-5/Ab

## g. Bach: based on first 8 ms. of "Goldberg Variations"

I V6 viio6 /V V I6 ii6 V7 I

G D/F# C#dim/E D G/B Am/C D7 G

## h. Romanesca ("Greensleeves")

i VII i V i VII i iv V I

Em D Em B Em D Em Am B E

III VII i V III VII i iv V I

G D Em B G D Em Am B E

## Varied accompaniments for Repeating Progressions

arr. by Richard Grayson

### a. La Folia

original

The musical score for 'a. La Folia' is presented in a grand staff format. The treble staff contains the original melody, which is a repeating progression of chords and single notes. The bass staff provides a piano accompaniment, featuring a steady eighth-note bass line and occasional chords. The word 'original' is written in the treble staff.

### b. Pachelbel

original

The musical score for 'b. Pachelbel' is presented in a grand staff format. The bass staff contains the original melody, which is a repeating progression of chords and single notes. The treble staff provides a piano accompaniment, featuring a steady eighth-note bass line and occasional chords. The word 'original' is written in the bass staff.

### c. Paganini

original

The musical score for 'c. Paganini' is presented in a grand staff format. The treble staff contains the original melody, which is a repeating progression of chords and single notes. The bass staff provides a piano accompaniment, featuring a steady eighth-note bass line and occasional chords. The word 'original' is written in the treble staff.

### d. Handel

original

The musical score for 'd. Handel' is presented in a grand staff format. The treble staff contains the original melody, which is a repeating progression of chords and single notes. The bass staff provides a piano accompaniment, featuring a steady eighth-note bass line and occasional chords. The word 'original' is written in the treble staff.



## Varied accompaniments, continued.

e. Classical Period

original

This musical score is for a piano piece in the Classical Period, labeled 'e.'. It is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The right hand (treble clef) features a melody of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a steady accompaniment of quarter notes. The piece consists of five measures, with the first measure marked 'original'.

f. Beethoven

original

This musical score is for a piano piece by Beethoven, labeled 'f.'. It is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of dotted half notes, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter and eighth notes. The piece consists of five measures, with the first measure marked 'original'.

g. Bach

original

This musical score is for a piano piece by Bach, labeled 'g.'. It is in 3/4 time and D major. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of quarter notes, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The piece consists of five measures, with the first measure marked 'original'.

h. Romanesca:

original

This musical score is for a piano piece titled 'Romanesca', labeled 'h.'. It is in 6/4 time and D major. The right hand (treble clef) features a melody of quarter and eighth notes, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a steady accompaniment of quarter notes. The piece consists of five measures, with the first measure marked 'original'.

## Chapter 7: ABA improvisation



The relatively simple ABA form is the easiest way to achieve both continuity and contrast beyond basic 8 measure phrases. ABA forms can be as short as 24 measures (8+8+8), although at that length they generally won't feel like complete pieces. However, with at least 16 measures in each section, one can create a complete piece. You can have many more measures in each section as long as the ABA is clearly distinguished by different key areas.

The strongest and most frequent key contrast is:

Major to Relative Minor (I to vi), or Minor to Relative Major (i to III).

Example: C major–A minor–C major

A minor–C major–A minor

Also frequently used:

Major to Parallel Minor (I to i), or Minor to Parallel Major (i to I).

Example: C major–C minor–C major

C minor–C major–C minor

When improvising with two or more players, there are choices for how long each player will play. Here are the two most likely possibilities:

1. Each performer plays the complete ABA with all repeats.
2. One performer plays the first section, the next performer plays the repeat, etc.

The entire ABA form can be repeated as much as you like. As with the “Repeating Progressions” in Chapter 6, you should try to create variety in order to keep yourself and your listeners interested.

*See the bottom of the next page for additional suggestions for ABA key relationships.*

Here is a simple but useful ABA example that uses the keys of C major and A minor. The Roman numerals will help you to transpose it to different keys.

### ABA (48 ms) I (C)—vi (Am)—I (C)

R. Grayson

**A**

C: I V V7 I

*Fine* (after repeat)

IV I V7 I

**B**

Am: i iv V7 VI

*D.C. al Fine*

ii°6 i6/4 V7 i i C: V7

### Other ABA key relationships:

**From Major keys:**  
 I–V–I (example: C–G–C)  
 I–IV–I (example: C–F–C)  
 I–iii–I (example: C–Em–C)

**From Minor keys:**  
 i–V–i (example: Am–E–Am)  
 i–iv–i (example: Am–Dm–Am)  
 i–VI–i (example: Am–F–Am)

This ABA example is also 48 measures, but uses more complicated harmonies and more variety in the first (1.) and second (2.) endings. Use the pedal to sustain, if played on the organ, use the pedal for each new harmony. Avoid parallel octaves with melody and bass when harmony changes.

### ABA (48 ms) I (Ab)—vi (Fm)—I (Ab)

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**A**

Ab Eb7/G Ab Eb

Fm Eb/Bb Ao7 Eb/Bb Bb7 Eb Eb7

1.

Fm Bbm/Db Eb7 Ab

2.

**B**

C7 Fm Bbm Fm/Ab

Bbm Fm/C G7/D C

1.

Eb/G Ab Bb7 Eb Eb7

2.

**A**

Ab Eb7/G Ab Eb

Fm Eb/Bb Ao7 Eb/Bb Bb7 Eb Eb7

1.

Fm Bbm/Db Ab/Eb Eb7 Ab

2.

Here are two typical Major key progressions that will allow you to improvise an A-B-A form based on almost any tonal motive, such as you might be required to do for a Yamaha Grade Exam. See Chapter 5 about turning this into the minor mode.

### **Simple A–B–short A “rounded binary” form consisting of 4 phrases**

**A:**

**I–I–IV–V–I–vi –ii6–V [or I–I–IV–V–I–vi –V7/V–V]**

**I–I–IV–V–vi–ii6–V–I**

**B:**

**V–I–IV–I–V–I–V7/V–V [or IV–I–V–I–IV–I–V7/V–V]**

**A (short):**

**I–vi–IV–V–vi–ii6–V–I**

### **Full A B A “ternary” form consisting of 6 phrases**

**A:**

**I–I–IV–V–I–vi –V7/V–V**

**I–I–IV–V–vi–ii6–V–I**

**B: (relative key) vi in major, III in minor:**

**V–i–iv–i–V–i–V7/V–V**

**V–i–iv–i–V–i–original key: V7/V–V**

**A:**

**I–I–IV–V–I–vi –V7/V–V**

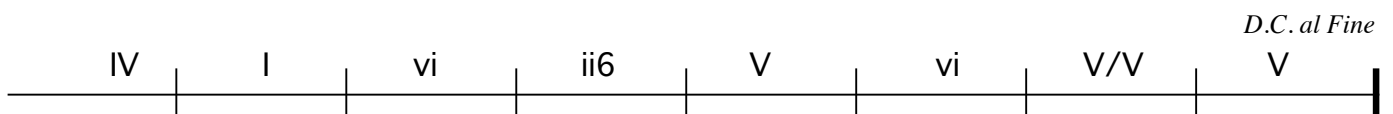
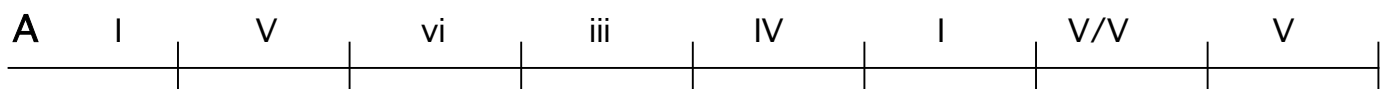
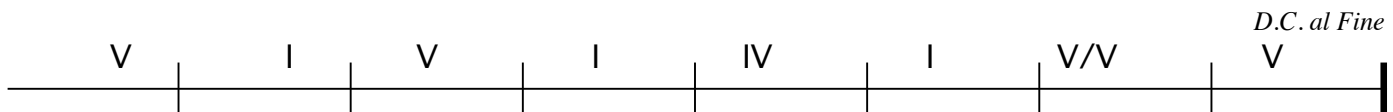
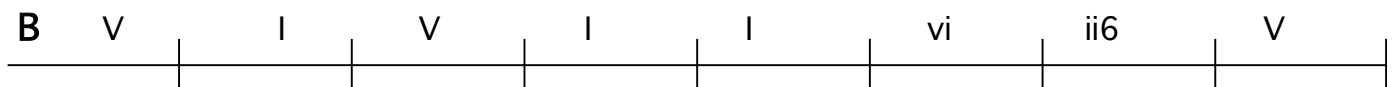
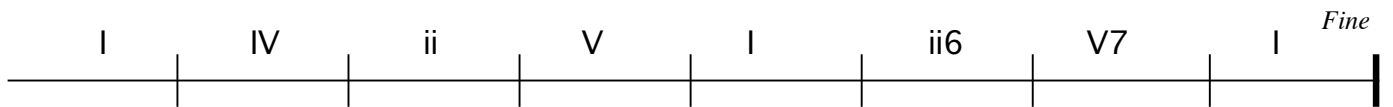
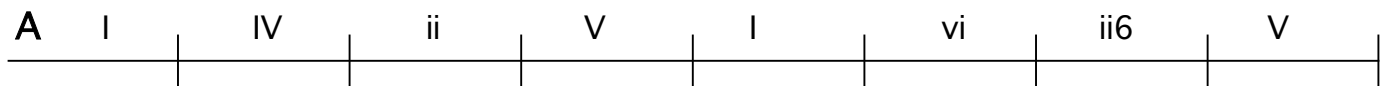
**I–I–IV–V–vi–ii6–V–I**

Here are two more ABA progressions written with Roman numerals. The “B” section does not change keys, but contains a cadence to V/V just before the end. You can review the Roman numeral changes from major to minor in Chapter 5.

Of course, the final “A” is indicated by the Italian “*D.C. al Fine*” (*da capo al fine*), which means “repeat from the beginning until the ending (*Fine*) sign.”

### major or minor—3/4 or 4/4

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## Chapter 8: Progressions for everyday practice



Almost all pianists practice scales and arpeggios in all the major and minor keys. As an improviser you also need to practice basic chord progressions in all keys. This will increase your facility both as an improviser and a sight-reader.

The following three progressions, in order of complexity, are very useful. Play them in several different keys each day.

### 1. I-IV-V-I or i-iv-V-i

This is the most basic progression, and includes the chords you first learned to improvise with in Chapters 1 and 2. You will notice that you can start with the root, 3rd, or 5th in the top voice. Thus, there are three positions for each progression. You should learn them in all major and minor keys.

You should decide which order of keys you would like to use. Here are some possibilities:

- Each major key and its parallel minor key by the circle of 5ths (C/Cm, G/Gm, D/Dm, etc.)
- Each major key and its relative minor key by the circle of 5ths. (C/Am, G/Em, D/Bm, etc.)
- Each key up chromatically (C/Cm, C#/C#m, D/Dm, etc.)
- Create an order that makes sense to you.

#### Major

#### Minor

2. I-vi-IV-ii-I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I or i-VI-iv-ii<sup>o</sup>-i<sup>6/4</sup>-V-i

This progression uses descending thirds (the first four chords), followed by the strong cadence I<sup>6/4</sup>-V-I.

It is probably best to follow each major key by its parallel minor. Then proceed by the circle of 5ths, or up chromatically.

Here is a helpful hint: for the first four chords, only two notes move: the note that you go DOWN to in the left hand, is the note that you go UP to in the right hand.

**Major**

I vi IV ii I<sup>6/4</sup> V I

**Minor**

i VI iv ii<sup>o</sup> i<sup>6/4</sup> V i

3. Chords down by 5ths will take you through all of the chords of a single key. Many pieces of music have passages that contain several descending 5ths in a row. The Handel Passacaglia that you learned in Chapter 6 is based on a complete cycle of descending 5ths.

There are four similar progressions for each key: Triads in Major, Sevenths in Major, Triads in Minor, and Sevenths in Minor.



There are several ways to approach this. Perhaps the easiest is to take the first one (Major mode using triads) and learn it in all keys. Then, the next one in all keys, etc. Since the bass pattern is the same (or similar, as in the minor mode), you should find each new progression easier to learn.

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### Major mode using triads

I IV vii<sup>o</sup> iii vi ii V I

### Major mode using seventh chords

I<sup>maj7</sup> IV<sup>maj7</sup> vii<sup>o7</sup> iii<sup>7</sup> vi<sup>7</sup> ii<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I

### Minor mode using triads

i iv VII III VI ii<sup>o</sup> V i

### Minor mode using seventh chords

i<sup>7</sup> iv<sup>7</sup> VII<sup>7</sup> III<sup>maj7</sup> VI<sup>maj7</sup> ii<sup>o7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> i



Finally, here are some examples of ways to make melodic patterns from the progressions in this chapter. Feel free to create your own.

arr. R. Grayson

1.

I IV V I

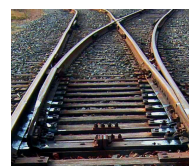
2.

I vi iv ii I6/4 V I

3.

I IV vii° iii vi ii V I Imaj7 IVmaj7 vii°7 iii7 vi7 ii7 V7 I

## Chapter 9: Modulation to closely related keys



In chapters 1 through 8 you stayed in one key, or, if you changed keys, as in the ABA progressions, you were given all the chords. It is useful for you to learn how to modulate (change) from one key to other closely related keys, while improvising. This will give you more flexibility, and allow you to choose different keys for the “B” section of an ABA improvisation.

Examples are given for modulating from I (or i) to V, vi, IV, III, and v. In all but the last example you are given two versions. The second of each is stronger, and allows you to start the new key at the beginning of a phrase.

1a. to Dominant (V) -----Confirming phrase ending in the new key

I in C =  
IV in G

G: IV ii V7 I ii6 ii I6/4 V7 I

1b. to Dominant (V) -----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

I in C =  
IV in G

G: IV ii V7 I ii6 V6/5 of V V V7 of V V

2a. to Relative minor (vi) -----Confirming phrase ending in the new key

I in C =  
III in Am

Am: III ii V i6 ii°6 V7 i

2b. to Relative minor (vi) -----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

I in C =  
III in Am

Am: III ii V7 i6 ii°6 vii°7/V i6/4 V

## Modulations, continued

3a. to Subdominant (IV)

-----Confirming phrase ending in the new key

I in C =  
V in F

F: V    V7    I    V 7    vi    ii6    I6/4 V7    I

3b. to Subdominant (IV)

-----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

I in C =  
V in F

F: V    V7    I    V 7    vi    ii6    vii<sup>o</sup>7/V    V

4a. to Relative Major (III)

-----Confirming phrase ending in the new key

i in Cm =  
vi in Eb

Eb: vi    ii    V6/5    I    ii6    ii    I6/4 V7    I

4b. to Relative Major (III)

-----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

i in Cm =  
vi in Eb

Eb: vi    ii    V6/5    I    ii6    vii<sup>o</sup>7/V    I6/4    V

5. to minor Dominant (v)

-----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

i in Cm =  
iv in Gm

Gm: iv    V    i    i6    iv    vii<sup>o</sup>7/V    i6/4    V

## Examples of phrases which modulate to a different key

The first 8 measures are from the progression in Chapter 4, page 16. The left-hand accompaniment uses arpeggio patterns.

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-----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

etc.

G: IV ii V7 I ii6 V6/5 of V V V7 of V V

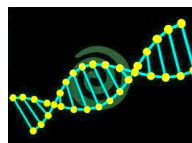
The first 8 measures are from Chapter 5, page 18.

----Confirming phrase ending on V of the new key

etc.

Eb: vi ii V6/5 I ii6 vii°7/V I6/4 V

## Chapter 10: Counter-melodies



There are times when you will want to add counterpoint to your melody in order to make the texture more interesting and complex. If you are aware of your harmony (chords), you will be able to add other chord notes to the texture.

Counter-melody added to  
example 1, Ch. 4, page 15

Counter-melody added to  
example 2, Ch.4, page 15

Counter-melody added to  
example 3, Ch. 4, page 15

Counter-melody added to  
Ch.4, page 16

New melody and counter-melody added to 8-measure progression, Ch.4, page 16.

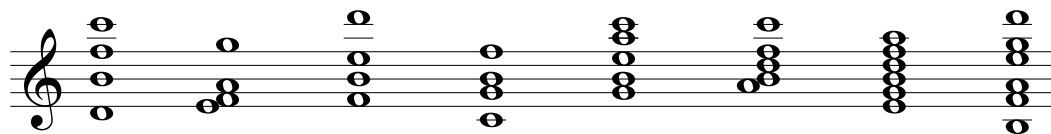
## Chapter 11: Pan-diatonic improvisation



Pan-diatonic (or Pandiatonic) refers to the use of diatonic (7-note) scales without reference to conventional chords or tonality. It has great flexibility, and can be found in works by Stravinsky (especially during his Russian and Neo-Classical period), Copland, Steve Reich, John Adams, and many others. It can be mildly dissonant, or very dissonant, depending on how it is used.

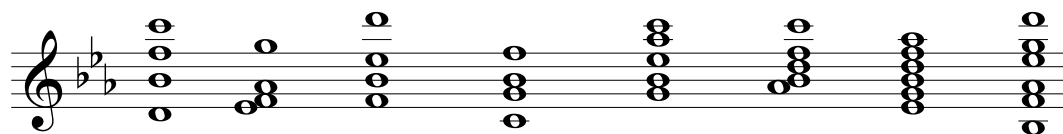
You should base your Pandiatonic chords and melodies on a **major** or **natural minor** scale. A “white note” scale is the easiest to start with.

Here are examples of dissonant “chords” that come from the notes of a C **major** scale (both hands are needed to play these):

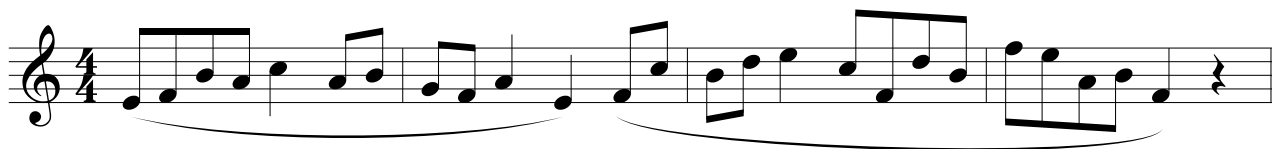


C is not the “tonic” unless we emphasize it. However, no matter what we play, it will sound somewhat “tonal” because we have used only one scale.

Here are the same “chords” as above, but you will notice that they sound quite different with the notes of the C **natural minor** scale.



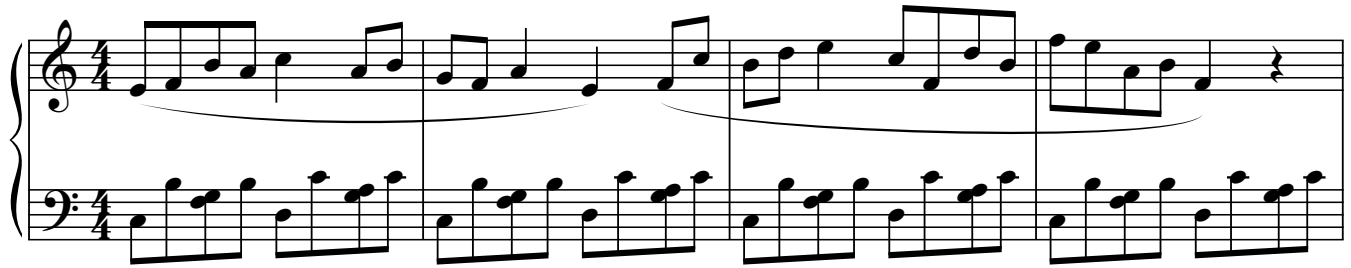
Here is a 4-measure **melody** that comes from a C **major** scale. It is more abstract, and does not emphasize traditional chord notes.



Here are four different left-hand **accompaniment** patterns of one-measure. Each one can be repeated for several measures:



Let us use the previous **melody** with the last **accompaniment** pattern:



You can create melodies and accompaniment patterns almost as easily as with the Pentatonic scale, although it will take practice. Think of it as making interesting shapes with the notes of the C major scale.

Try the same melody and accompaniment using the C **natural minor** scale.

Here is a 4-measure example using F# natural minor (same notes as A Major) with a “free” left-hand accompaniment.



Here is a more complicated example using the same scale:



For a contrasting (B) section , choose another key: the parallel major/minor or the chromatic third (example, D-Bb) work well. Return to original key to create an A-B-A form. Each section should feel complete.

Here are a few examples:

**D-Bb-D, Bb-G-Bb, G-B-G, A-C-A, F#m-D-F#m, Dm-Fm-Dm**



## Pandiatonic improvising with two keyboards:



Make the following choices before starting:

1. Which scales will you use? What meter? What tempo?
  - a. Try it first with only the “white notes” of the keyboard.
  - b. Then try it as an ABA form, choosing two key areas (scales).
2. Decide who will start with the accompaniment pattern and who will be the “soloist” (melody). After 16 measures (or longer), exchange roles. “Nod” your head to start the “B” or return to the final “A” section. “Nod” again to end the piece. Practice together!

On the next two pages are some Major scale **accompaniment patterns**. They can be repeated, or varied as often as you like. Ideally, you will create your own patterns, but this is a way to get started. Note that the Major scale and the relative natural-Minor scale use the same notes. The difference will be which “tonic” note is emphasized:

The musical examples are arranged in similar 4/4 and 3/4 versions for each scale. That way you can choose ABA pairs of scales for either meter. To obtain contrast between your two keys, I suggest using a “chromatic third” relationship. This is a key that is a third higher or lower, but has a chromatic change, and is therefore not part of the same scale or key.

Here are some “chromatic third” ABA examples for the scales I have used:

**C–Eb–C, C–E–C, C–A–C**

**D–Bb–D, D–F–D**

**Eb–C–Eb, Eb–G–Eb**

**E–C–E, E–G–E**

**F–D–F, F–A–F**

**G–Eb–G, G–E–G, G–Bb–G**

**A–F–A, A–C–A**

**Bb–D–Bb, Bb–G–Bb**

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C scale

The C scale is presented in two parts. The first part is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The right hand plays a sequence of chords: C4-E4, C4-G4, F4-A4, and E4-G4. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: C3, E3, G3, and C4. The second part is in 3/4 time and also consists of four measures. The right hand plays the same sequence of chords as the first part. The left hand plays the same sequence of notes as the first part.

D scale

The D scale is presented in two parts. The first part is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The right hand plays a sequence of chords: D4-F#4, D4-A4, C#5-B4, and A4-G#4. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: D3, F#3, A3, and D4. The second part is in 3/4 time and also consists of four measures. The right hand plays the same sequence of chords as the first part. The left hand plays the same sequence of notes as the first part.

E-flat scale

The E-flat scale is presented in two parts. The first part is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The right hand plays a sequence of chords: E♭4-G♭4, E♭4-B♭4, D♭5-F♭5, and C♭5-B♭4. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: E♭3, G♭3, B♭3, and E♭4. The second part is in 3/4 time and also consists of four measures. The right hand plays the same sequence of chords as the first part. The left hand plays the same sequence of notes as the first part.

E scale

The E scale is presented in two parts. The first part is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The right hand plays a sequence of chords: E4-G4, E4-B4, F#5-A4, and G4-F#4. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: E3, G3, B3, and E4. The second part is in 3/4 time and also consists of four measures. The right hand plays the same sequence of chords as the first part. The left hand plays the same sequence of notes as the first part.

F scale

G scale

A scale

B-flat scale

Example

## Chapter 12: Stylistic Improvisation



Perhaps the most difficult challenge for the keyboard player is to improvise in the style of another composer. If you have gotten this far in “**Improvising at the Keyboard**,” then you know that we have derived all our melodies from the chords of the accompaniment. We will continue to do this, but now we will try to use materials that are associated with a particular composer or style.

1. Let us first practice creating many textures from a single chord:

chord      melody      passing tones      lower appoggiaturas

upper appoggiaturas      upper and lower appoggiaturas (double neighbor tones)      double neighbor tones

chord tones only

The image displays three systems of musical notation in 3/4 time, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system shows a single chord in the bass staff, followed by a melody in the treble staff, then passing tones in the treble staff, and finally lower appoggiaturas in the treble staff. The second system shows upper appoggiaturas in the treble staff, followed by upper and lower appoggiaturas (double neighbor tones) in the treble staff, and finally double neighbor tones in the treble staff. The third system shows chord tones only in the treble staff, followed by chord tones only in the treble staff, and finally chord tones only in the treble staff.

2. Here are several 2-measure phrases based on I and V in the styles of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Brahms:

**2 measure phrases (I-V)**

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**Mozart style**  
*Allegro*

I                      V

**Beethoven style**  
*Andante*                      *Allegro*

**Chopin style**                      *Lento*

**Brahms style**  
*Andante*

**Brahms style**  
*Andante*

3. Here are several 8-measure phrases based on a simple harmonic progression, again in the styles of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Brahms. You will sometimes see small changes from the basic harmony.

Richard Grayson

I V I V I IV V I

Mozart style  
*Allegretto*

I V (7) I V (7) I IV V (7) I

Mozart style, with variations in the harmonies

I V (7) I  $V^4_3/V$   $I^6_4$  V I  $V^2/IV$   $IV^6$   $ii^6$   $I^6_4$   $V^7$   $V^7/I$  ped I

Beethoven style  
*Moderato*

I V (7) I vi  $ii^6$   $I^6_4$  V 7

I  $V^2/IV$   $IV^6$   $ii^6_5$   $I^6_4$   $V^7$   $V^7/I$  ped I

Chopin style

Chopin style

I V<sup>7</sup> I<sup>6</sup> V<sup>7</sup>

V<sup>7</sup>/IV ii<sup>6</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I

Brahms style  
Andante

i V i (vii<sup>7</sup>/V)

V V<sup>9</sup>/iv V<sup>2</sup>/iv iv<sup>6</sup> Aug.6 i<sup>6</sup> V<sup>7</sup> i iv i

4. Let us add four more styles based on the same chord progression:  
 William Byrd, Bach, the French “Les Six” represented by Milhaud and Poulenc,  
 and finally, Gershwin:

16th century English harpsichord style (William Byrd) Richard Grayson

I V I V

I IV V I

Bach style: Allemande

I V I V

I IV V I



Milhaud/Poulenc style: These harmonies are based on a Pandiatonic scale.

R. Grayson

*mf*

I (A major scale) V (E major scale)

I (A major scale) V (E major scale)

*mp*

I (A major scale) IV (D major scale)

*mf*

V (E major scale) I (A major scale)

Gershwin style: (Melody based on A major pentonic scale, plus blues minor 3rd: A-B-C-C#-E-F#; harmony is expanded to include pop chords) R. Grayson

Classical: I V<sup>9</sup> I V<sup>9</sup> (sus4) V<sup>9</sup>  
 Pop: A E9 A E9 (sus4) E9

I [V<sup>7</sup>/IV] IV<sup>9</sup> V<sup>9</sup> (sus4) V<sup>9</sup> I (b7) iiø4/2 I  
 A7 A7 (add6) DMaj.9 E9 (sus4) E9 A7 Dm6/A A

I hope you will find these examples interesting and useful. You can also choose your own examples from any of the great composers. Start with a measure or two and see if you can continue it. It will be challenging, but rewarding.

See the next page for some more 2-measure phrases for improvising.

Here are some 2-measure phrases in different styles to improvise with.

Composed by Richard Grayson

Phrases 1 through 4. Each phrase is a 2-measure musical phrase in 3/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
1. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of G2-B2-D3 and F2-A2-C3.  
2. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
3. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.  
4. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Gb2-Bb2-Db2 and Fb2-Ab2-Cb2.

Phrases 5 through 7. Each phrase is a 2-measure musical phrase in 4/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff.  
5. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
6. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.  
7. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.

Phrases 8 through 11. Each phrase is a 2-measure musical phrase in 3/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff.  
8. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
9. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.  
10. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
11. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.

Phrases 12 through 14. Each phrase is a 2-measure musical phrase in 4/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff.  
12. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
13. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.  
14. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.

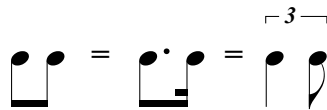
Phrases 15 through 17. Each phrase is a 2-measure musical phrase in 3/4 time. The notation is presented in a grand staff.  
15. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.  
16. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of Bb2-Db2-Fb2 and Ab2-Cb2-Eb2.  
17. Treble: quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth, quarter, eighth. Bass: two chords of D3-F#3-A3 and B3-D#3-F#3.

## Chapter 13: Blues



“[Blues](#)” has a long history in the United States, going back at least to the 1890’s. The period of greatest popularity was from around 1910-1930, although it continues to be played and sung into the present time.

Blues, whether slow or fast, is played with "swinging" eighth notes. The notation can be different, but the intention is the same:



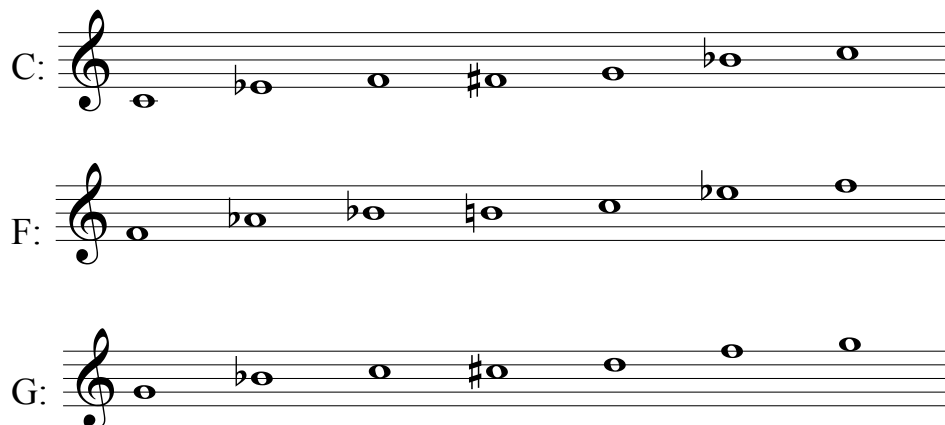
Blues can be played in any key, but the most common ones are C and B-flat. Blues is a repeating pattern of 12 bars (16 bars is also possible). It was originally a song with instrumental accompaniment, although it is sometimes performed with just instruments.

The text for each verse consists of two phrases, the first of which repeats, giving it an “aab” form. The final words of “a” and “b” rhyme.

Example: “[Empty Bed Blues](#)” sung by [Bessie Smith](#) (1928)

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| a: <a href="#">I woke up this morning with a awful aching <u>head</u></a>     | (4 bars of music) |
| a: <a href="#">I woke up this morning with a awful aching <u>head</u></a>     | (4 bars of music) |
| b: <a href="#">My new man had left me, just a room and a empty <u>bed</u></a> | (4 bars of music) |

For Blues in C, the basic Blues scale is found on C, F and G:



Here is a 12-bar Blues in C. Repeat *ad libitum* (as often as you wish), taking the “turn around” measure. End with the “ending” measure.

The **left hand** uses a rhythm pattern and a decoration of the basic chord.

The **right hand** uses a rhythm pattern and the Blues scale. You can play it as written until you can create your own Blues “riffs.” (see the next page)

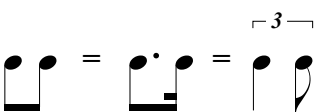
The last four bars, including the “turn around” make a good introduction.

R. Grayson

The score is a 12-bar blues in C major, 4/4 time. It is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment, while the right hand plays a bluesy melody using the C blues scale. The chords are indicated below the staff: I (C7), IV (F7), I-C7, IV-F7, I-C7, V-G7, IV-F7, I-C7, V-G7, and I-C7. The final two bars are labeled "turn around" and "ending".

**Note:** measure 2 uses the IV chord with the I Blues scale. This small variation takes advantage of the fact that the I Blues scale can be harmonized by I, IV, or V.

Here are some Blues “riffs” (patterns) for you to practice. However, to learn the “language” of the Blues, you must listen to real [Blues musicians](#).

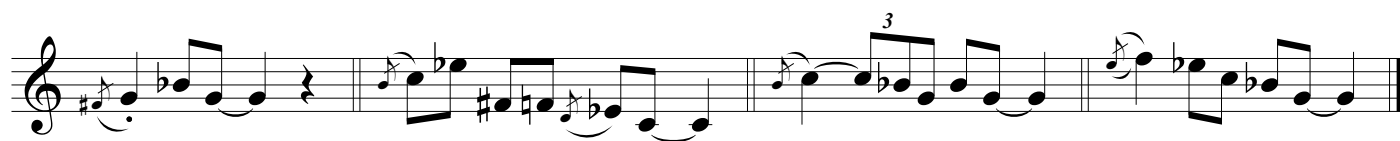
Remember the “swinging” rhythm: 

R. Grayson

**Examples of tonic (I) riffs. These will work with I, IV, or V chords**



I, IV, or V



**Examples of sub-dominant (IV) riffs.**



IV



**Examples of dominant (V) riffs.**



V



## Chapter 14: Popular Music



[American popular music](#) includes a great variety of wonderful songs and instrumental pieces going back to the mid-19th century. However, it was Blues and Jazz (popular music influenced by the Blues style) from the 1910's and beyond, which created many of the songs that are still performed. Names such as George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, Richard Rogers, as well as many others, are known throughout the world.

We will start with a simple, well-known tune, “Amazing Grace.” The composer of the melody is not known. This is a church hymn rather than a popular song, but it is a tune that you probably know, and it will introduce you to basic chords.

We will use two arrangements: one simple, and one slightly more complicated. Although each arrangement is complete, you will notice that chord names have been written above the music. These are the kinds of chords that you will find in “lead sheet” versions of songs, which we will deal with after this. In the meantime you can start by learning the chords that are used in both versions of “Amazing Grace.” Here is the information you need to know about each type of chord:

### Amazing Grace version no.1

G = G B D (Major triad). Any note by itself (F#, A, Eb, etc) is a Major triad.

G7 = G B D F (Dominant 7th chord). Any note plus 7 = Dom. 7th chord.

Em7 = E G B D (Minor 7th chord = minor triad, minor 7th)

A7/E = E G A C# = A Dom. 7th chord over E. The note AFTER the slash is the lowest note.

G/B = B D G. The note AFTER the slash is the lowest note.

C#°/E = E G C# = C# Diminished triad. E is the lowest note.

### Amazing Grace version no.2: chords not found in version no.1

GMaj7 = G B D F# (G Major 7th chord = Major triad plus Major 3rd)

A7sus4 = A D E G = Dominant 7th chord with a 4th instead of a 3rd.

Eb7-5 = Eb G A C# = Eb Dom. 7th with the 5th lowered 1/2 step. - (minus) = flat

The spelling is flexible (Bbb = A, Db = C#)

# Amazing Grace

composer unknown  
arr. by R. Grayson

## Version no.1

Version no.1 musical score, measures 1-10. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for piano with treble and bass staves. Chords are indicated above the staff: G, G7, C, G, G, Em7, A7/E, D, D7. A 'Rev.' marking is present below the first measure of the bass staff.

## Version no.2

Version no.2 musical score, measures 1-10. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for piano with treble and bass staves. Chords are indicated above the staff: G, GMaj7, G7, F, C, G, D/F#, Em, Em7, A7sus4, A7, D, D7. A 'Rev.' marking is present below the first measure of the bass staff.



Now let us look at our first “lead sheet” song, Gershwin’s famous slow ballad,  
[“Somebody Loves Me.”](#)

## Somebody Loves Me

Words by B.G. DeSylva and Ballard MacDonald

Music by George Gershwin  
 1924

Some - bod - y Loves Me I won - der who, I won - der who she can be; —

Some - body - y Loves Me I wish I knew, who she can

be wor - ries me. — For ev - 'ry girl who pass - es by I shout, Hey!

may - be you were meant to be my lov - ing ba - by. Some - bod - y Loves Me

I won - der who, may - be it's you. — you. —

The melody is written in conventional music notation, but all the chords are written as “chord symbols.” You are already familiar with some of them from “Amazing Grace” as well as from previous chapters.

Here is a list of the chords used in this tune:

G = G B D (Major triad)

Am7 = A C E G (Minor 7th chord = minor triad, minor 7th)

D7 = D F# A C (Dominant 7th chord)

C7 = C E G Bb

D7b9 = D F# A C Eb (Dominant minor 9th chord = dominant 7th chord, minor 9th)

A7 = A C# E G

Bm = B D F# (Minor triad)

C#7b9 = C# E# G# B D

C#m7/F# = F# C# E G# B (C# minor 7th chord with an F# as the bass note).

The note AFTER the slash is the lowest note.

F#7 = F# A# C# E

E7 = E G# B D

Am = A C E

Dm6/A = A B D F = (D minor triad with added Major 6th, A in the bass)

Em7 = E G B D

D+ = D F# A# (augmented triad)

Em = E G B

Here is how to approach this song, starting with the basic outline, and proceeding toward an “arrangement.” (There are some very good complete arrangements available for purchase.)

Step 1:

Play the melody in your right hand and the chords in your left hand. For now, play one chord each time you see it above the melody.

There are certain rules that you need to know:

a. Chord symbols (Am7, etc.) are placed above the melody at exactly where they should be played. They are not written in rhythmic notation. They continue until the NEXT chord is indicated. Most of the time this will be clear, as in ms. 2; ms. 8 changes on beat 4; ms. 24 and 29 change on beat 3.

Measure 6 and 14 are tricky, since the melody uses syncopation. Note that the chords are on beats 1, 3, and 4.

b. If the chord is too big to play with your left hand, use your right hand as well (for example the D7b9 in ms. 8). Sometimes the melody will include the chord note, so you don't have to play it with your left hand (for example, C#7b9 in ms.14). The C#m7/F# on beat 3 will have to be divided between the two hands.

Here are the first 8 measures of the song:

Chords: G, Am7 D7, G, C7, G, C7, Am7 D7, G, D7b9

Step 2:

Use an “oom-pah” (strong-weak) accompaniment in your left hand. If the chord lasts four beats, use the “root” of the chord on one, and the “5th” on three. Sometimes the “3rd” works well, also.

Root, Root, etc.

Step 3:

Keeping the “weak-beat” chords closer to the melody will provide a smoother accompaniment. This is more difficult for the right hand, but easier for the left.

Root, Root, etc.

If you are accompanying a singer or instrumentalist, consider this kind of texture:

## Here are the two primary ways to improvise on a pop tune:

1. Improvise on the melody. In other words, make the melody “jazzy” but recognizable.
2. Improvise on the chords. This allows you to play something completely different from the melody, but still sound convincing.

If you play the tune several times (several “choruses”), start by improvising on the melody, and then improvise on the chords. This allows the listener to “get to know” the melody before you depart from it.

Here is a possible plan for four times (four choruses) of the song:

1. Original melody
2. Melody improvisation
3. Chord improvisation
4. Melody improvisation (or Original melody)

### Improvisation based on the melody ("Somebody Loves Me")

The first system of notation shows a piano accompaniment for the first four measures of the original melody. The right hand plays a simple melody, and the left hand plays a bass line. The text "easy swinging feeling" is written above the first measure. The second system shows the melody being improvised, with the right hand playing a more complex, "jazzy" line. The text "(filler/extra notes)" is written above the fifth measure. The left hand continues to play the same bass line.

### Improvisation based on the chords

The first system of notation shows a piano accompaniment for the first four measures of the original melody. The right hand plays a simple melody, and the left hand plays a bass line. The text "easy swinging feeling" is written above the first measure. The second system shows the melody being improvised, with the right hand playing a more complex, "jazzy" line. The text "(filler/extra notes)" is written above the fifth measure. The left hand continues to play the same bass line.

Now let us look at “[Take The ‘A’ Train](#)” by Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington’s most famous arranger, and made popular by Duke Ellington and his band. It is an example of “[Big Band swing](#)” of the 1930’s and ’40’s.

## Take the "A" Train

Words and Music by Billy Strayhorn  
1941

You \_\_\_\_\_ must Take The "A" Train \_\_\_\_\_ to  
If \_\_\_\_\_ you miss the "A" Train, \_\_\_\_\_ you'll

6 go to Sug - ar Hill way up in Har-lem. \_\_\_\_\_  
find you've missed the quick - est way to Har-lem. \_\_\_\_\_

Fmaj7 D7  
Hur-ry, \_\_\_\_\_ get on now it's com-ing. \_\_\_\_\_ Lis-ten \_\_\_\_\_

14 to those rails a - thrum-ming \_\_\_\_\_ All 'board! \_\_\_\_\_ Get on the "A" Train, \_\_\_\_\_

20 \_\_\_\_\_ soon you will be on Sug - ar Hill in Har-lem. \_\_\_\_\_

Here are the new types of chords that were not found in “Somebody Loves Me.”

C6 = C E G A (major triad with added Major 6th)

D7b5 = D F# Ab C (dominant 5th chord with flatted 5)

FMaj7 = F A C E (major 7th chord = major triad, major 7th)

Dm9 = D F A C E (minor 9th chord = minor 7th chord, major 9th)

G9 = G B D F A (major 9th chord = dominant 7th chord, major 9th)

(note: Db9 = Db F Ab Cb Eb; D7b9 = D F# A C Eb)

The last two measures look complicated, but they are simply outlining the ending bass line:

C E F Gb G A B C (look at the lowest note of the chords in ms. 23, and the melody in ms. 24)

We will use the same method to learn this song.

### Step 1:

Play the melody in your right hand and the chords in your left hand. For now, play one chord each time you see it above the melody.

Step 1 musical notation: A piano score in C major, 4/4 time. The right hand plays a melody consisting of quarter and eighth notes. The left hand plays block chords corresponding to the labels above the staff: C6, D7b5, Dm7, G7, and C. The chords are played as single notes or small groups of notes.

### Step 2:

Activate the accompaniment with a “Big Band” rhythmic style. This example is one of many possible accompaniments:

Step 2 musical notation: A piano score in C major, 4/4 time. The right hand plays the same melody as in Step 1. The left hand accompaniment is more complex, featuring a “Big Band” rhythmic style with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a variety of chord voicings, including some with accidentals.

### Step 3:

Add a moving bass line and bring the chords to the right hand. Again, this is one of many possibilities:

Step 3 musical notation: A piano score in C major, 4/4 time. The right hand plays a melody with chords. The left hand features a moving bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. A (C6) chord label is present in the right hand.

## Ch. 15: More progressions to practice

### I-V7-I progressions with inversions of V7 chords.

Practice in all major and minor keys. For minor, make each tonic chord minor.

$\leftrightarrow$  can be played in both directions.

Richard Grayson

### 1st inversion

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for the accompaniment. The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The accompaniment is a simple bass line. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure contains a treble staff with a treble clef and a bass staff with a bass clef. The second and third measures contain only a treble staff with a treble clef. The score ends with a double bar line.

## 2nd inversion

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The bass staff provides a simple harmonic accompaniment. The score is divided into three measures by double bar lines. The first measure contains a treble staff with a melody and a bass staff with a single note. The second measure contains a treble staff with a melody and a bass staff with a single note. The third measure contains a treble staff with a melody and a bass staff with a single note. The score ends with a double bar line.

A musical score for the song "The Rose Tree". It features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains a melody with many beamed eighth notes, while the bass staff provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with quarter notes. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. Below the bass staff, there are four double-headed arrows, each spanning one measure, indicating the tempo or rhythm.

### 3rd inversion

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It features a piano introduction in G major, 3/4 time. The score is written for piano (p) and includes a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, and the bass line is in the bass staff. The score is divided into four measures, each containing a single note in the bass line and a chord in the treble staff. The notes in the bass line are G, A, B, and C, and the chords in the treble staff are G, A, B, and C.

Here is a longer chord progression using mostly inversions of V7 chords.  
Practice in all major and minor keys.

R. Grayson

For C minor use E-flat and A-flat

Chord progression (System 1): I, V6/5, I, V4/3, I6, IV, V4/3, I, V6/5, I, V4/2, I6, V4/3, I, V

Chord progression (System 2): V4/2, I6, V6/5, I, V4/2, I6, ii6/5, V4/2, I6, V4/3, I, ii6, I6/4, V7, I

Fill in the right hand harmony as in the example above



Secondary Dominants in the MAJOR KEY. (a Secondary Dominant is a V7 to a chord OTHER THAN the Tonic of the key)

For a chord to be preceded by a V7, it must be a Major or Minor triad. That is why vii is not used here. Therefore, Major uses I, ii, iii, IV, V, and vi.

1. Play through the example from beginning to end to become familiar with the chords.
2. Start with the first measure, then play through the measures in random order. You may play as long as you like, repeating *ad libitum*. End with the final measure. You may jump to any Secondary Dominant as long as it resolves correctly.
3. Improvise on the melody. The V7 scale uses the scale of the chord you are GOING to. For a minor chord, the Melodic Minor scale is used. You may be flexible, however.
4. Try in all keys. For practice, play the scale, then the chords of each key.

R. Grayson

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords and their secondary dominants in the key of C major. The score is divided into three systems. The first system begins with a 'start' label and includes the chords I (C), V7/ii (A7), ii (d), V7/iii (B7), and iii (e). The second system continues with V7/IV (C7), IV (F), V7/V (D7), and V (G). The third system concludes with V7/vi (E7), vi (a), V7 (G7), and finally I (C), marked with an 'end' label. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the harmony is in the bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) for the secondary dominants and no sharps or flats for the primary chords.

**Secondary Dominants** in the MINOR KEY: In Minor, VII can be a major triad, which is why we can use it. However, ii is diminished, and we cannot use it. Therefore, Minor uses i, III, iv, V (v), VI, and VII. Note that V (ms.4) can be major or minor. For major, use the accidentals in parenthesis. Follow steps 1-4 on the previous page.

R. Grayson

start

i (Cm) V7/III (Bb7) III (Eb) V7/iv (C7) iv (Fm)

V7/V (D7) V (G) or v (Gm) V7/V (Eb7) VI (Ab)

end

V7/VII (F7) VII (Bb) V7 (G7) i (Cm)

## Ch.16: Electronic organ versions of selected items

From Chapters 3 & 4



### Chord and Melody Improvising on the Organ

Richard Grayson

chord notes      melody made from chord notes

I (tonic)

chord notes      melody      chord notes      melody      chord notes      melody

V (dominant)      V7 (dominant 7)      IV (sub-dominant)

Improvise a melody using chord notes. Later on, you can use non-chord tones as well.

I      IV      V      V7      I      IV      V7      I

### Non-chord tones

Passing notes (P)

## Chords & Melody, continued

R.Grayson

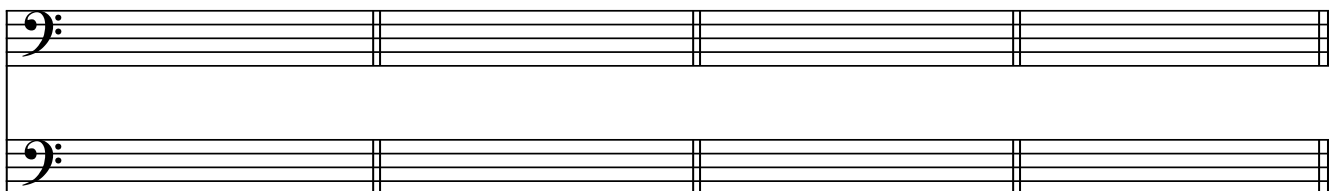
Neighbor notes (N)

## Sample Organ Accompaniments

R. Grayson



Make up your own



## From Chapter 10 Counter-melodies

From previous examples with added counter-melody from chord notes

The first example shows a piano accompaniment in common time (C). The right hand features a counter-melody that uses notes from the chords. The left hand plays a series of chords. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line. The first measure is in common time, and the second measure is in 3/4 time.

Chord progression: I, I

The second example shows a piano accompaniment in 3/4 time. The right hand features a counter-melody that uses notes from the chords. The left hand plays a series of chords. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line. The first measure is in 3/4 time, and the second measure is in common time.

Chord progression: I, IV, V

Basic chord progression + melody + counter-melody

The third example shows a piano accompaniment in common time (C). The right hand features a counter-melody that uses notes from the chords. The left hand plays a series of chords. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line. The first measure is in common time, and the second measure is in 3/4 time.

Chord progression: I, IV, I, V (7), I, IV, V7, I

From Chapter 13

12-bar Blues on the Electone

R. Grayson

I (C7) IV (F7) I (C7)

IV (F7) I (C7)

V (G7) IV (F7) I (C7) V (G7) I (C7)

"turn around" ending

## Pop music styles: Ballad

### "Somebody Loves Me"

Ballad melody and accompaniment—very smooth

Chord progression: G Am7 D7 G C7 G C7 Am7 D7 G D7b9

This musical score is for a smooth ballad style. It features a melody in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into two systems, each with three staves (treble, piano right, and piano left).

Ballad melody and accompaniment—stronger beat

This musical score is for a ballad style with a stronger beat. It features a melody in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into two systems, each with three staves (treble, piano right, and piano left).

Ballad melody and accompaniment—fuller texture

"George Shearing" style

Accompaniment only

This musical score is for a ballad style with a fuller texture. It features a melody in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into two systems, each with three staves (treble, piano right, and piano left).



## Pop music styles: Swing

### "Take the 'A' Train"

Swing melody and accompaniment—basic      Swing melody and accompaniment—advanced

This section contains two musical examples. The first, labeled 'Swing melody and accompaniment—basic', shows a melody in the treble clef and a simple accompaniment in the bass clef. The second, labeled 'Swing melody and accompaniment—advanced', shows a more complex melody in the treble clef and a more intricate accompaniment in the bass clef. Both examples are in 4/4 time and feature a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Swing accompaniment—basic      Swing accompaniment—advanced

This section contains two musical examples. The first, labeled 'Swing accompaniment—basic', shows a simple accompaniment in the bass clef. The second, labeled 'Swing accompaniment—advanced', shows a more complex accompaniment in the bass clef. Both examples are in 4/4 time and feature a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Other swing rhythm accompaniments

This section contains three musical examples showing different swing rhythm accompaniments. Each example is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first example shows a simple accompaniment in the bass clef. The second example shows a more complex accompaniment in the bass clef. The third example shows a more complex accompaniment in the bass clef.