

SONG THEORY BASICS

Ukulele Tuesdays – Evergreen Library

June 11, 2024

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PLAYING MUSIC IS MORE THAN JUST MEMORIZING A BUNCH OF CHORDS ON YOUR INSTRUMENT.

That's difficult. And takes a long time.

BASIC THINGS TO KNOW

Basic Music Theory

- Scales
- Keys
 - Key Signatures
 - Circle of Fifths
- Chords
 - Chord Types

Song Theory

- Song Keys
- Song Parts
- Song Structure
- Rhythm

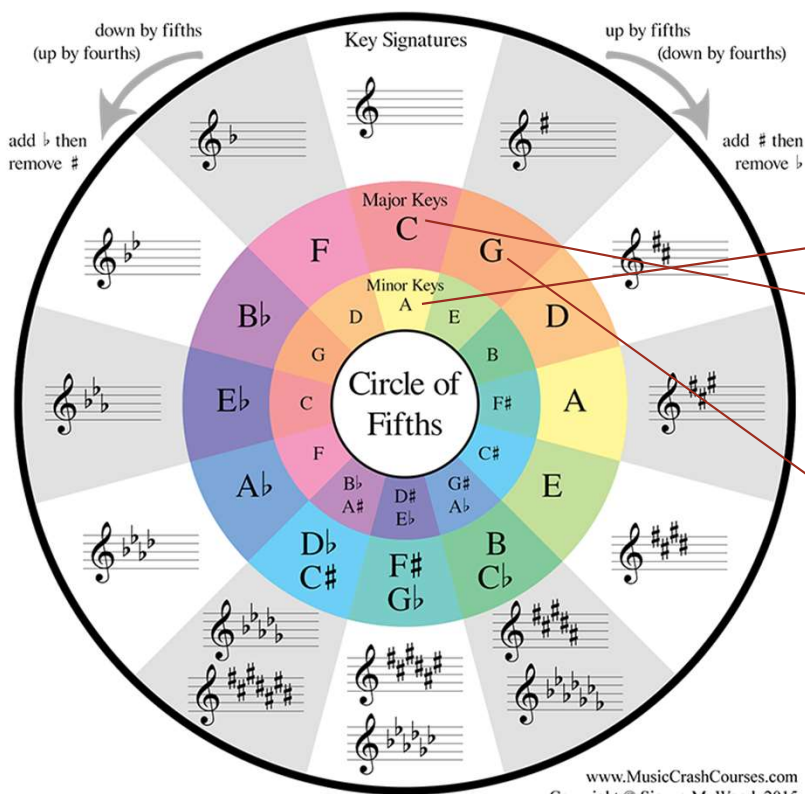
SCALES AND KEYS

Key of C Major	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Key of G Major	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
Interval Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 / 1
Interval Name	Unison	Major 2 nd	Major 3 rd	Perfect 4 th	Perfect 5 th	Major 6 th	Major 7 th	Octave / Unison
Roman Numeral	I	II / ii	III / iii	IV	V	VI / vi	VII / vii	VIII / I
Scale Degree	Tonic	Super-tonic	Mediant	Sub-dominant	Dominant	Sub-medi-ant	Leading Tone	Tonic

Many, MANY modern songs follow the “1,4,5” chord progression



POSSIBLE KEYS



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Edit Lyrics for *Blue Bayou*

Convert to ICDb Format

Convert to Standard Format

Restore Previous Copy

Undo Conversion

Capo at this fret: No Capo ▾

Riffs in IC

Lyrics: (ly)

Chord Shape Key:

- ☐ A Major ☒ A Minor
- ☐ Ab Major ☐ A# Minor
- ☐ B Major ☐ Ab Minor
- ☐ Bb Major ☐ B Minor
- ☐ C Major ☐ Bb Minor
- ☐ C# Major ☐ C Minor
- ☐ Cb Major ☐ C# Minor
- ☐ D Major ☐ D Minor
- ☐ Db Major ☐ D# Minor
- ☐ E Major ☐ E Minor
- ☐ Eb Major ☐ Eb Minor
- ☐ F Major ☐ F Minor
- ☐ F# Major ☐ F# Minor
- ☐ G Major ☐ G Minor
- ☐ Gb Major ☐ G# Minor

DETERMINING THE KEY OF A RECORDING

- **This method works for most songs, but music often has outliers**
- Tune your instrument first!
- Steps:
 1. Listen carefully to the final note played at the end of a chorus (and usually the verse, too)
 2. Pluck the string at different frets until you find the same note (ex. 3rd fret = Note C)
 3. Once you find the note, you know the root chord of the song. (ex. C Major, probably)
 4. **Thus the song is in that key (ex. Key of C Major)**
- When the next chorus comes, strum that chord to verify it sounds right.
- *Watching the fret hand of the person playing can give you clues*

FRET BOARD REVIEW

- Reviewing the **C-Major Scale**

Nut	G4	C4	E4	A4
Fret 1	Ab/G#	C#/Db	F	A#/Bb
Fret 2	A	D	F#/Gb	B
Fret 3	A#/Bb	D#/Eb	G	C
Fret 4	B	E	Ab/G#	C#/Db
Fret 5	C	F	A	D
Fret 6	C#/Db	F#/Gb	A#/Bb	D#/Eb
Fret 7	D	G	B	E
Fret 8	D#/Eb	Ab/G#	C	F
Fret 9	E	A	C#/Db	F#/Gb
Fret 10	F	A#/Bb	D	G
Fret 11	F#/Gb	B	D#/Eb	Ab/G#
Fret 12	G	C	E	A
Fret 13	Ab/G#	C#/Db	F	A#/Bb

EXERCISE

- On the Road Again by Willie Nelson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6Ggp3TJjuE>

EXERCISE

Chorus

On the road again, just can't wait to get on the road again.
The life I love is makin' music with my friends.
And I can't wait to get on the road a-gain.

Verse 1

On the road again, going places that I've never been.
Seein' things that I may never see again.
And I can't wait to get on the road a-gain.

Bridge

On the road again, like a band of gypsies we go down the highway
We're the best of friends, insisting that the world keep turnin' our way, and our way.

Repeat Chorus

	Nut	G4	C4	E4	A4
Fret 1		A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat	F	A \sharp /B \flat
Fret 2		A	D	F \sharp /G \flat	B
Fret 3		A \sharp /B \flat	D \sharp /E \flat	G	C
Fret 4		B	E	A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat
Fret 5		C	F	A	D
Fret 6		C \sharp /D \flat	F \sharp /G \flat	A \sharp /B \flat	D \sharp /E \flat
Fret 7		D	G	B	E
Fret 8		D \sharp /E \flat	A \flat /G \sharp	C	F
Fret 9		E	A	C \sharp /D \flat	F \sharp /G \flat
Fret 10		F	A \sharp /B \flat	D	G
Fret 11		F \sharp /G \flat	B	D \sharp /E \flat	A \flat /G \sharp
Fret 12		G	C	E	A
Fret 13		A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat	F	A \sharp /B \flat

EXERCISE

- On the Road Again by Willie Nelson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6Ggp3TJjuE>
- Chorus resolves to an = Note E
- Key of E Major (not minor)
- Thus, chords E, A and B
 - (because of the 1, 4, 5 pattern)

Nut	G4	C4	E4	A4
Fret 1	A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat	F	A \sharp /B \flat
Fret 2	A	D	F \sharp /G \flat	B
Fret 3	A \sharp /B \flat	D \sharp /E \flat	G	C
Fret 4	B	E	A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat
Fret 5	C	F	A	D
Fret 6	C \sharp /D \flat	F \sharp /G \flat	A \sharp /B \flat	D \sharp /E \flat
Fret 7	D	G	B	E
Fret 8	D \sharp /E \flat	A \flat /G \sharp	C	F
Fret 9	E	A	C \sharp /D \flat	F \sharp /G \flat
Fret 10	F	A \sharp /B \flat	D	G
Fret 11	F \sharp /G \flat	B	D \sharp /E \flat	A \flat /G \sharp
Fret 12	G	C	E	A
Fret 13	A \flat /G \sharp	C \sharp /D \flat	F	A \sharp /B \flat

COMMON CHORD TYPES

Type	Description	Examples
Major	Happy, simple, cheerful, confident, bright, satisfying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Major [C]
Minor	Sad, serious, dark, sullen, apprehensive, melancholy, depressed, mysterious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Minor [Cm]
Sevenths	Strong, relentless, funky, soulful, moderate edginess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Dominant 7th [C7] • C Major 7th [Cmaj7] • C Minor 7th [Cm7]
Sixths		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Major 6th [C6] • C Minor C6th [Cm6]
Ninths	Open, optimistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant 9th [C9] • C Major w/ added 9th [C(add9)]
Power Chord	Strong but neutral, neither happy nor sad, the root and its perfect 5 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C5 [C5]
Others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C Diminished [Cdim] • C Suspended 2nd [Csus2] • C Suspended 4th [Csus4]

SONG SECTION TYPES

- Verse
 - Contains the main story or meaning of the song
 - Usually not repeated, but sometimes is
- Chorus / Refrain
 - A section of a song that is repeated several times, usually after each verse
 - May contrast with the verse melodically, rhythmically, and harmonically; it may assume a higher level of dynamics and activity
 - Usually resolves to the song's key
- Bridge
 - A contrasting section that prepares for the return of the verse and the chorus
 - Often in the relative minor of the song's key
- Hook
 - A short riff, passage, or phrase, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and to "catch the ear of the listener"

SONG STRUCTURE

Many songs use this common format:

1. Verse 1
2. Chorus
3. Verse 2
4. Chorus
5. Bridge
6. Chorus
7. Verse 3 (sometimes)
8. Chorus

Country Roads by John Denver

Verse 1

Almost Heaven; West Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, Shenandoah River.
Life is old here, older than the trees, younger than the mountains,
Blowin' like a breeze.

Chorus

Country Roads, take me home, to a place, where I be-long,
West Vir-ginia, mountain mama, take me home, country roads.

Verse 2

All my memories gather round her, miner's lady, stranger to blue water.
Dark and dusty, painted on the sky, misty taste of moonshine,
Teardrop in my eye.

Chorus

Country Roads, take me home, to a place, where I be-long,
West Vir-ginia, mountain mama, take me home, country roads.

Bridge

I hear her voice in the morning hour she calls me,
The radio re-minds me of my home far away.
And driving down the road I get a feeling that I should have been home
yesterday, yester-day.

Outro Chorus

Country Roads, take me home, to a place, where I be-long,
West Vir-ginia, mountain mama, take me home, country roads.
Country Roads, take me home, to a place, where I be-long,
West Vir-ginia, mountain mama, take me home, country roads.
Take me home, country roads; take me home, down country roads

ALL VERSES

- Some songs only have verses and no repeated sections

A Boy Named Sue by Johnny Cash

Verse 1

My daddy left home when I was three
And he didn't leave much to Ma and me
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze.

Verse 2

Now, I don't blame him cause he run and hid
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he went and named me 'Sue.'

Verse 3

Well, he must o' thought that is was quite a joke
And it got a lot of laughs from a' lots of folk,
It seems I had to fight my whole life through.

Verse 4

Some gal would giggle and I'd get red
And some guy'd laugh and I'd bust his head,
I tell ya, life ain't easy for a boy named 'Sue.'

Verse 5

Well, I grew up quick and I grew up mean,
My fist got hard and my wits got keen,
I'd roam from town to town to hide my shame.

Verse 6

But I made me a vow to the moon and stars
That I'd search the honky-tonks and bars
And kill that man that give me that awful name.

Verse 7

Well, it was Gatlinburg in mid-July
And I just hit town and my throat was dry,
I thought I'd stop and have myself a brew.

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

- Many verses and choruses follow the “1, 4, 5” chord progression (or similar):
 - Key of C Major = C, F, G
 - Key of G Major = G, C, D
- Sometimes the minor 6th is added
 - Key of C Major = Am
 - Key of G Major = Em

Verse 1

[1] I'd like to be [6m] under the sea
[4] In an Octopus's Garden in the [5] shade.
[1] He'd let us in [6m] knows where we've been,
[4] In his Octopus's Garden in the [5] shade.
[6m] I'd ask my friends to come and see
[4] An Octopus's Gar- [5] den with me.
[1] I'd like to be [6m] under the sea
[4] In an Octopus's [5] Garden in the [1] shade.

Section 1

[1] Shave and a [4] hair [1] cut
[5] two [1] bits

Chorus

[1] All I want is you, will you [4] be my [1] bride?
[1] Take me by the hand, stand [5] by my [1] side
[1] All I want is you, will you [4] stay with [1] me?
[1] Hold me in your arms, [5] sway me like the [1] sea

Verse 1

The other [1] night dear, as I lay [4] slee- [1] ping
[1] I dreamed I [4] held you in my [1] arms
[1] But when I a- [4] woke dear, I was mis- [1] taken
[1] And I hung my [5] head and [1] cried

Verse 1

[1] I hear the train a comin'
[1] It's rollin' 'round the bend,
[1] And I ain't seen the sunshine,
[1] Since, I don't know when,
I'm [4] stuck in Folsom Prison,
[4] And time keeps draggin' [1] on,
[1] But that [5] train keeps a-rollin',
[5] On down to San An [1] tone.

RHYTHM

- Understanding rhythm is crucial to accurate arraignments
 - Lines of lyrics often only span 4 or 8 beats (or 3 or 6 if in waltz time)
- Down Beat verses Up Beat
- 4/4 time – Counting to 4s or 8s
 - **1** 2 **3** 4
 - **1** 2 **3** 4 **5** 6 **7** 8
- 3/4 time – Waltz time
 - **1** 2 3
- Chord changes are on the **down beat** 80% of the time
- Hearing this is crucial to accurate arraignments
 - Listen to the bass or drums

“LEAD INS”

- This is when the first word of a line of lyrics is technically in the measure before
- Nearly all bluegrass, folk, and pop song do this
- A “tacet” is when the instrument doesn’t sound
 - In our case, it means there’s no strum of the ukulele
- Fixing this in source material and songs already in the database is something I do a lot of:

Verse 1

{C} C
The wheels on the bus go round and round
G7 C
Round and round round and round
C
The wheels on the bus go round and round
G7 C
All through the town

Verse 1

[E] I hear the train a comin'
[E] It's rollin' 'round the bend,
[E] And I ain't seen the sunshine,
[E] Since, I don't know when,
I'm [A] stuck in Folsom Prison,
[A] And time keeps draggin' [E] on,
[E] But that [B7] train keeps a-rollin',
[B7] On down to San An [E] tone.



Verse 1
[E] I hear the train a comin'
[E] It's rollin' 'round the bend,
[E] And I ain't seen the sunshine,
[E] Since, I don't know when,
[tacet] I'm [A] stuck in Folsom Prison,
[A] And time keeps draggin' [E] on,
[E] But that [B7] train keeps a-rollin',
[B7] On down to San An [E] tone.



Verse 1
[tacet] I [E] hear the train a comin'
[tacet] It's [E] rollin' 'round the bend,
[tacet] And [E] I ain't seen the sunshine,
[tacet] Since, [E] I don't know when,
[tacet] I'm [A] stuck in Folsom Prison,
[tacet] And [A] time keeps draggin' [E] on,
[tacet] But that [B7] train keeps a-rollin',
[tacet] On [B7] down to San An [E] tone.



Verse 1

I [E] hear the train a comin'
It's [E] rollin' 'round the bend,
And [E] I ain't seen the sunshine,
Since, [E] I don't know when,
I'm [A] stuck in Folsom Prison,
And [A] time keeps draggin' [E] on,
But that [B7] train keeps a-rollin',
On [B7] down to San An [E] tone.



QUESTIONS?