

Lesson 10

# Chords and Harmony

Copyright © 2018 David Dempster. All rights reserved.

Version 1.0, 1 Mar 2018

# Dear Reader

In today's world, where so much is changing and information is so freely available, I just want to outline your rights and mine with regard to this booklet, which is part of my home study course 'Read & Play Music'.

This is a legally binding agreement between you and myself (David Dempster). Please read it carefully.

This is a multimedia home study course which contains lessons, audios, videos, and documents – all in digital format. Unlike printed books and music where you own the physical book, the standard for digital works is to purchase a licence to use the media.

Your group has purchased a Group User Licence. This means the course materials will be used only by members of your group, such as a choir, a school music class or a community study group. This licence is intended for a group of up to 20 members. If you have a larger group, your group should purchase multiple licences.

Reminder of terms of Group User Licence	
	
Your group members <u>may</u> :	Your group members <u>may not</u> :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>STUDY</b> the course materials online.</li><li>• <b>DOWNLOAD</b> the course materials and read them on their personal computers or other devices.</li><li>• <b>PRINT</b> the course materials from downloaded files, up to one copy per group member, for their personal use.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Resell, lend or give away your course login, any downloaded course files, or any printed course materials.</b></li><li>• <b>Print additional copies of the course materials.</b></li></ul>

Thank you for respecting my intellectual property rights.

  
David Dempster

<b>Course</b>	<b>Read &amp; Play Music</b>
<b>Book 2</b>	<b>Read and Play Simple Tunes with Two Hands</b>
<b>Lesson 10</b>	<b>Chords and Harmony</b>

# CONTENTS

<b>LESSON 10: Chords and Harmony</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Music Theory</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Some chords.....	2
How adjacent pitches in a chord are printed.....	5
Harmonies that sound pleasant.....	6
Harmonies that sound unpleasant.....	7
The interplay of discords and harmonies .....	9
Listen to some harmonies .....	10
<b>Practical</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Exercise 1: A 2-note chord with your left hand .....	11
Exercise 2: A series of identical chords .....	12
Exercise 3: Varying chords .....	13
Exercise 4: Hand moving around more .....	14
Exercise 5: Right hand .....	14
Exercise 6: Varying chords .....	15
Exercise 7: Hand moving around more .....	16
Exercise 8: Two hands, pitches varying in your left hand .....	17
Exercise 9: Pitches varying in your right hand .....	17
Exercise 10: Pitches varying in both hands .....	18
Exercise 11: Two hands with chords in left hand .....	19
Exercise 12: Chords in both hands .....	20
Exercise 13: Chords in both hands, advanced! .....	21
Tune 1: A well-known cowboy song .....	22
Tune 2: Another Stephen Foster song .....	23
Chat with David: A giant step forward .....	24





## LESSON 10:

# CHORDS AND HARMONY

The ability to play a number of notes at the same time is one of the special features of the piano.

Let's explore what happens when we put that feature to use.

# MUSIC THEORY

## BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

There are two words in music that are closely related and are sometimes used interchangeably. Let's get clear about what they both mean.

**Definition:** a **chord** is a set of 2 or more notes played or sung together.

**Definition:** **harmony** is the effect created by playing or singing a chord.

A chord involves *action*: playing 2 or more notes together.

Harmony involves *perception*: the effect you perceive when you play a chord.

Some musicians say that 2 notes don't make a chord: you don't have a chord until you play 3 notes together. If you prefer that definition you can use it. For me, the big leap comes when you go from playing just one note to playing 2 notes together. When you do that, you've played a chord and you begin to hear harmony.

## Some chords

You've already played many chords, with your left hand playing one note and your right hand playing a different note at the same time.

Here's an example. Play this chord now:



You can also play a chord using only one hand. For example, you can play middle C with your thumb and at the same time play E with your middle finger. Here is how that chord is shown in printed music:



The numbers above the chord show which fingers to use. Play that now.

We know those 2 notes are to be played at the same time because they are vertically aligned, one note directly above the other.



These 2 notes are played together because they are vertically aligned.

A chord can be made up of any number of notes, limited only by how many you can play at the same time with the fingers of both hands.

Here's a chord made up of 5 notes. Let's play it now. Take as long as you need placing your fingers. Once you have all your fingers in place, resting on the notes, play the chord by pushing down all the notes at the same time. Do that now.



And just in case you are feeling very adventurous today, here is a more advanced chord of 6 notes. Take as long as you need to position your fingers, and then play the chord.



As you can see, chords can be played by the left hand or by the right hand or by both hands together.

## How adjacent pitches in a chord are printed

There is one situation where the notes in a chord are not printed vertically aligned. That's when 2 notes in a chord have adjacent pitches (2 pitches next to each other such as C and D, or F and G, or A and B). Here's an example showing a chord consisting of F and G:



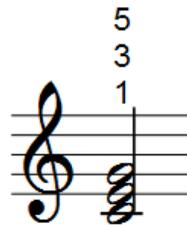
**These 2 notes are played together.**

There isn't enough space to show the G directly above the F, as the heads of the notes would overlap. So a compromise is made: one head is shown to the left of the stem and the other is shown to the right. Despite the odd-looking arrangement, the 2 notes F and G are played as a chord. Look at the above example, and play F and G at the same time.

## Harmonies that sound pleasant

Now let's turn our attention to harmony, in other words the effect you create by playing various chords.

Play this chord now, using your right thumb (1), middle finger (3) and little finger (5):



How does it sound to you? Play it again and listen to the quality of the harmony.

To most people, that harmony sounds pleasant. Sunny and cheerful.

Here's another one that people usually find pleasing. Play this now, and see if you agree:



## Harmonies that sound unpleasant

Here's another example. This rather odd-looking thing means you play the notes E, F and B, all at the same time. Play it now:



How did that sound to you? Play it again and listen to the quality of the harmony.

To most people, that harmony sounds unpleasant. There's a word to describe unpleasant harmonies:

**Definition:** a **discord** is a harmony that sounds unpleasant.

The reason we have such a word is that discords occur frequently in music. And I don't mean when you play a wrong note. I mean discords played intentionally as part of the music.

And why would we ever want to include discords in music if they sound unpleasant?

Well, how would lemon meringue pie taste if you left out the bitter lemons?

Have you ever played the game 'cops and robbers'? The cops are the good guys, trying to catch the robbers who are the bad guys. How much fun would the game be if you only had cops?

How interesting would life be if you didn't have any challenges or problems?

Some music works fine with only pleasing harmonies: children's songs, lullabies for babies, and rousing national anthems. But in other types of music, such as jazz, blues, and much classical music, discords are essential. If you were to replace all the discords with harmonies, it would completely change the nature of the music. And it would sound boring.

By the way, the word 'harmony' is often used to mean a *pleasing* sound, the opposite of a discord. So the word 'harmony' really has 2 meanings:

**Definitions:**

- (1) **harmony** is the effect created by playing or singing a chord. (This includes both pleasing sounds and discords.)
- (2) **harmony** is a *pleasing* effect created by playing or singing a chord. (This definition is more specific.)

## The interplay of discords and harmonies

A discord creates tension in the music, which is often then followed by a harmony, giving a sense of completion. It's a bit like a film where the hero thinks his girl has been killed, and then suddenly she appears and throws her arms around him.

Here's an example of a discord followed by a harmony. Play the two chords below. Take as long as you need to position your fingers on the notes before playing each chord.



Does the first of those chords sound like a discord? Does the second one sound like a pleasing harmony?

This is called 'resolution'.

**Definition: resolution** is the movement from a discord to a harmony. The discord **resolves** to the harmony.

Play the above two chords again. Do you hear a discord resolving to a harmony?

## Listen to some harmonies

Play a 2-note chord on your keyboard by picking any 2 white notes and playing them at the same time. Does it sound like a harmony or a discord?

Now do the same with a 3-note chord, and then with a 4-note chord. You can use both hands, playing 2 notes with your left hand and 2 notes with your right hand.

Each time you play a chord, decide if it's a harmony or a discord.

In this book (**Book 2**) we are playing only the white notes, and that limits the harmonies we can create. When you do **Book 4: Read and Play the Music You Want to Play**, you will also play the black notes, and the whole world of harmony will open up for you.

# PRACTICAL

## BUILD YOUR SKILL

I've given you quite a number of exercises to help you as you get started playing chords. These exercises are all very short.

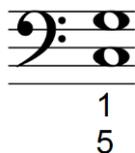
Here's the first one.

### Exercise 1:

## A 2-note chord with your left hand

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. It's a chord made of 2 notes. Play both notes with your left hand, since they are on the staff with a bass clef. Make sure you play both notes at exactly the same time. Start them together and end them together. Play this now:



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

### 2 Listen

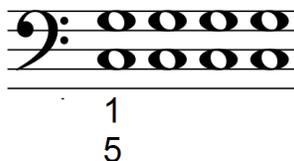
1. **Listen** to the sound of the chord. Does it sound like a harmony or a discord? (Most people hear that as a harmony.)

## Exercise 2:

### A series of identical chords

#### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. For each chord, start and end both notes in the chord at exactly the same time.

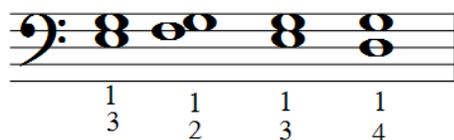


2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 3: Varying chords

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

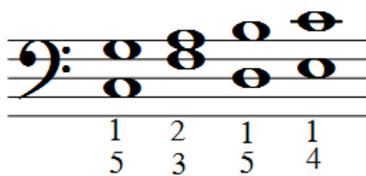
### 2 Listen

1. **Listen.** Do those chords sound like harmonies or discords? (Most people hear the second chord as a discord.)

## Exercise 4: Hand moving around more

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go.

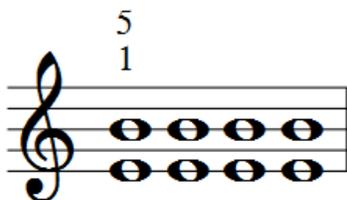


2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 5: Right hand

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Play both notes with your right hand, since they are on the staff with a treble clef. Make sure you play both notes at exactly the same time. Start them together and end them together.

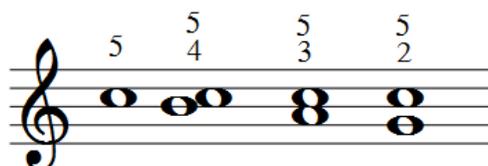


2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 6: Varying chords

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go. The second chord looks odd because B and C are adjacent pitches, so the notes are printed side by side. But they are played at the same time.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

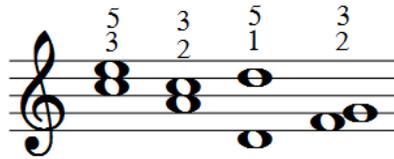
### 2 Listen

1. **Listen.** Do those chords sound like harmonies or discords? (Most people hear the second of those chords as a discord.)

## Exercise 7: Hand moving around more

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go.



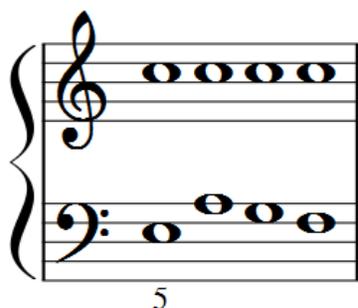
2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily. (Does that one sound a bit like a clock chiming?)

## Exercise 8:

### Two hands, pitches varying in your left hand

#### 1 Play

1. Play the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go.



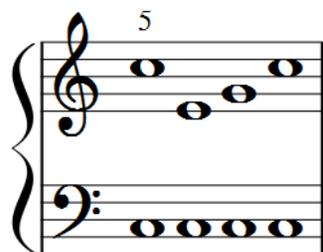
2. Repeat as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 9:

### Pitches varying in your right hand

#### 1 Play

1. Play the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go.



2. Repeat as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 10:

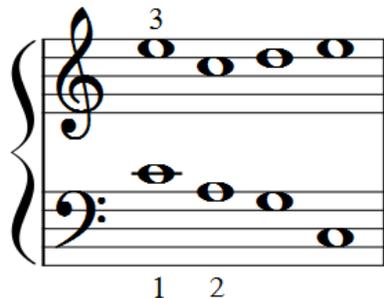
### Pitches varying in both hands

#### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two hands. Here again are the steps to apply for each move:

1. See which hand(s) move
2. Prepare left hand (if it has to move)
3. Prepare right hand (if it has to move)
4. Play

Take all the time you need to prepare each move until you know you'll make the move correctly.



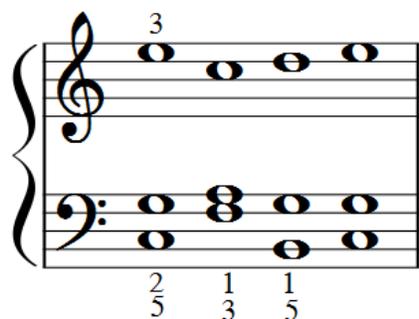
2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 11:

### Two hands with chords in left hand

#### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two Hands.

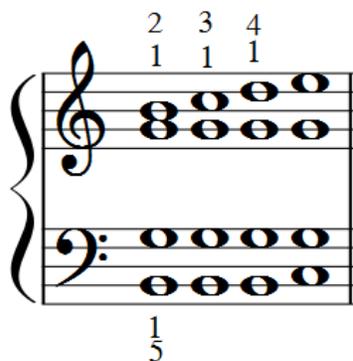


2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Exercise 12: Chords in both hands

### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two Hands.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily. Does it sound like the beginning of the Irish song ‘Danny Boy’?

## Exercise 13:

### Chords in both hands, advanced!

#### 1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. This is pretty advanced stuff. If you really apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two Hands, you will play it correctly first time through. Take as long as you need to prepare each move.

2 3 4  
1 1 1

1 1 1  
2 3 4

2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily. Don't try to play it too fast for now. Your speed in playing complex music like this will increase gradually as you play more and more.

## Tune 1:

### A well-known cowboy song

You played this snippet in an earlier lesson, with your left hand playing single notes. It will have a richer sound now, with 2-note chords in the left hand.

#### 1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

1. Apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two Hands.

*Red River Valley*



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily while disregarding the timing.

#### 2 Play with correct timing

1. Start very slowly. Find a speed at which you can play with correct timing.
2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

## Tune 2:

### Another Stephen Foster song

Do you hear a discord near the end, when you play lower B with your left hand and middle C with your right hand? Do you hear the discord resolving in the last measure?

*Hard Times*

1

1 5 2 1 1

4 4 3 2

## Chat with David: A giant step forward



You are doing it! You are playing with both hands and creating these beautiful harmonies.

Please realise what a giant step this is in building your musicianship. ■

## What's next?

There are special forms of chord and harmony. Let's learn about some of them next.

To find Lesson 11, click the green box:

**Go on to your next lesson**



or go to your Book 2 Course Materials page at  
[www.dempstermusic.com](http://www.dempstermusic.com)