

Lesson 11

More about Chords and Harmony

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Course	Read & Play Music
Book 2	Read and Play Simple Tunes with Two Hands
Lesson 11	More about Chords and Harmony

CONTENTS

LESSON 11: More about Chords and Harmony 1

Music Theory 2

 Triads 2

 2-part harmony 3

 4-part harmony 5

 Harmonic progression 8

Practical 10

 Exercise 1: Triads in the left hand 10

 Exercise 2: Varying triads in the left hand 11

 Tune 1: A traditional lullaby, with triads in left hand 12

 Exercise 3: Triads in the right hand 13

 Exercise 4: Varying triads in the right hand 14

 Exercise 5: 2-part harmony 15

 Exercise 6: 2-part harmony with timing 16

 Tune 2: The same lullaby, with 2-part harmony 17

 Exercise 7: 4-part harmony 18

 Exercise 8: 4-part harmony with timing 19

 Tune 3: The same lullaby, with 4-part harmony 20



LESSON 11:

MORE ABOUT CHORDS AND HARMONY

I mentioned earlier that the subject of harmony is vast. There is a whole rich universe of harmony waiting for you to explore as you continue your journey in music.

For now, let's take up a few more basics about chords and harmony.

MUSIC THEORY

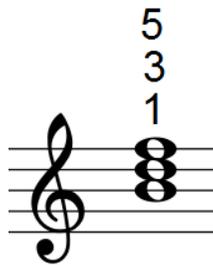
BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Triads

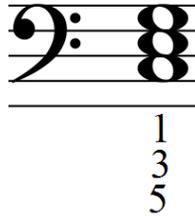
There is a particular kind of chord called a ‘triad’, which is a basic building block of musical harmony.

Definition: a **triad** is a chord consisting of 3 notes that appear on 3 consecutive lines or 3 consecutive spaces of the staff.

Here is a triad on 3 consecutive lines. This one has a treble clef, so you play it with your right hand, using fingers 1 (thumb), 3 and 5:



And here is a triad on 3 consecutive spaces. This one has a bass clef, so you play this with your left hand:



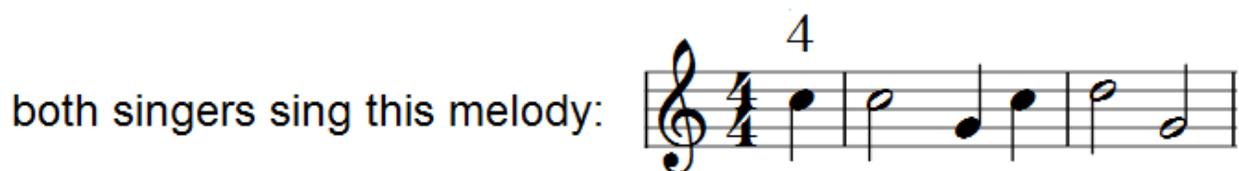
In a moment we will make use of triads in your left hand to accompany a tune played by your right hand.

2-part harmony

Imagine two singers singing a piece of music such as a Christmas carol.

There are two ways they can do it.

Option 1: They can both sing the melody, so they sound like one voice. Here's an example:



Play the above music now, and imagine two singers singing it together.

Option 2: If they are experienced singers, they can create an interesting effect by singing different melodies at the same time. Let's say there's a woman singing the tune, like you just played, and a man sings a lower melody. It might sound like this:

the woman sings this melody: 

the man sings this melody: 

Play the above music now, and imagine a woman singing the top melody and a man singing the bottom melody.

When they sing different melodies like that, each one is called a **part**.

Definition: a **part** is a melody played or sung by one instrument or voice, in a piece of music that has more than one melody occurring at the same time.

In music that has 2 parts, we have a series of chords and we hear a succession of harmonies. This is called **2-part harmony**.

Definition: 2-part harmony is music that has 2 different tunes played or sung at the same time, combining to create pleasing harmonies. At any moment in time, the 2 tunes create a chord made up of 2 notes.

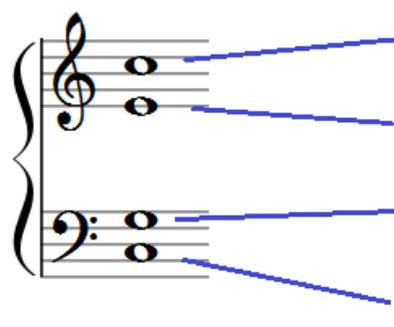
In the case of piano music like you just played, your right hand can play one part while your left hand plays a different part.

4-part harmony

If we add one more part, we would have 3-part harmony. Music with 3 parts does exist, but it is not very common.

However when we add a fourth part, it's a whole different story. Four-part harmony is everywhere.

One reason for its popularity is that it accommodates all types of singer. Here's a 4-part chord that could be sung by a choir. There's a note for you to sing regardless of whether you're a man, woman or child, and whether you have a high-pitched or low-pitched voice:



The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. A brace on the left groups the two staves. Four notes are placed on the staves: two on the treble staff and two on the bass staff. Blue lines connect each note to a text label on the right:

- The highest note (treble staff, 5th line) is labeled "note sung by **woman** or **child** with **high voice**".
- The second-highest note (treble staff, 4th line) is labeled "note sung by **woman** or **child** with **low voice**".
- The third-highest note (bass staff, 4th line) is labeled "note sung by **man** with **high voice**".
- The lowest note (bass staff, 3rd line) is labeled "note sung by **man** with **low voice**".

Play that chord now, and imagine it being sung by a choir. If your keyboard is able to imitate the sound of voices (with a setting called 'choir' or 'voices'), you can use that now.

Four-part harmony is perfect for choirs.

It's also perfect for various groups of instruments, and a great body of 4-part music has been written for instruments.

Another reason 4-part harmony is so common is that it provides a rich satisfying sound that you don't really get from 2- or 3-part harmony. Play this now, and you'll hear what I mean:

Musical notation for a 4-part harmony exercise in 4/4 time. The piece consists of three measures. The first measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (F4, A4, C5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F3, A2, C3). The second measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (G4, B4, D5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (G2, B2, D3). The third measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A4, C5, E5) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (A2, C3, E3). Fingerings are indicated: 4-1 in the first measure, 5-1 in the second, and 1-2 in the third.

Now play the 2-part version again, and compare how it sounds:

Musical notation for a 2-part harmony exercise in 4/4 time. The piece consists of three measures. The first measure has a treble clef with a whole note (F4) and a bass clef with a whole note (F3). The second measure has a treble clef with a whole note (G4) and a bass clef with a whole note (G2). The third measure has a treble clef with a whole note (A4) and a bass clef with a whole note (A2). A fingering of 4 is shown above the first measure in the treble clef, and a fingering of 1 is shown below the first measure in the bass clef.

It doesn't sound the same, does it?

Let's separate out the parts of the 4-part harmony you just played. I'll show you the names of the parts when they are sung by a choir. Play each part on its own: first the soprano part, then the alto part, and so on:

soprano
(high woman's or child's voice)

alto (or contralto)
(low woman's or child's voice)

tenor
(high man's voice)

bass
(low man's voice)

names of parts
in a choir

The 4 parts making up that 4-part harmony.

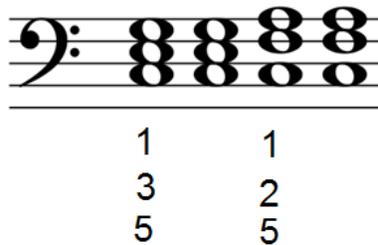
Now play them all together again, like this:

One of the fun things you can do as a pianist, when you've got your skill up to a high enough level, is to accompany a choir. When the choir is rehearsing, you play the 4-part harmony along with the singers to help them learn to sing the right notes. And they may also want you to play when they perform, to enhance the quality of the sound. If it's a church choir, you'll get to play the church organ, which is easy to do when you've learned to play the piano. And you'll make a glorious sound that fills the building.

If your keyboard can be made to sound like a church organ, try playing that snippet you just learned and imagine yourself playing to the congregation in your local church or cathedral. Once you're playing it pretty well, turn the volume up loud and let the neighbours hear it!

Harmonic progression

Here are 4 chords. Play them now with your left hand:



Did you notice that the first two chords are the same, but chord 3 is different? That means the harmony changed on chord 3. How would you describe the effect?

When the harmony changes like that, it is called a **harmonic progression**.

Definition: a **harmonic progression** is the effect created when different harmonies are played one after another.

The word ‘progression’ comes from a Latin word meaning ‘walking forward’. A harmonic progression has the effect of moving the music forward so it doesn’t seem stuck in one place.

It’s a bit like riding in a train. You look out the window and see a wheat field, and then you see a forest, and then a village. The change in scenery gives you the sense of moving forward and makes the journey interesting. You feel you’re going somewhere, and you might start to get curious about what’s coming up next.

In the same way, changes in harmony make the music interesting and give a sense the it is ‘walking forward’ rather than staying in one place.

Just as *harmony* is an important characteristic that distinguishes different styles of music, so also is *harmonic progression*. In fact, there’s one type of music, blues, which uses the same harmonic progression repeated over and over. That’s one thing that gives blues its particular character. To play blues, you need to use the black notes on your keyboard, and you’ll get to that in **Book 4: Read and Play the Music You Want to Play**.

PRACTICAL

BUILD YOUR SKILL

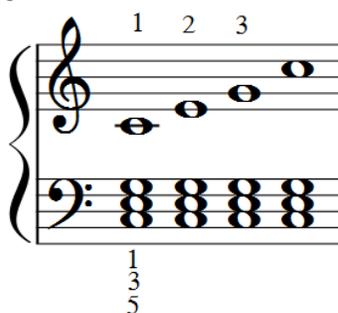
Exercise 1: Triads in the left hand

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 2:

Varying triads in the left hand

1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go. I've suggested fingering for your left hand. If you prefer, you can try playing all of the triads with fingers 1-3-5.

1

2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily. Does it sound like the beginning of the second part of 'Danny Boy'?

Tune 1:

A traditional lullaby, with triads in left hand

This has triads in the left hand, to accompany the tune played by the right hand.

1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

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

Golden Slumbers

The image shows a musical score for 'Golden Slumbers' in 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) has a melody with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 3, 1, 2, 1. The left hand (bass clef) has triads: G3-B2-D3, G3-B2-D3, G3-B2-D3, G3-B2-D3. Fingerings 1, 3, 5 are indicated below the triads.

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.

Tip: If you find it helpful, you can count the timing aloud like you did in **Book 1**.

Exercise 3:

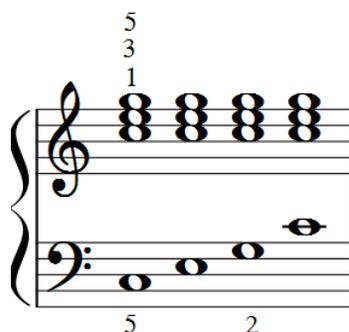
Triads in the right hand

Usually you'll find the left hand playing a triad while the right hand plays the tune. But sometimes your right hand will get to play triads as well.

Here's an example.

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 4:

Varying triads in the right hand

1 Play

1. **Play** the music below. Start slowly. Apply Know-Before-You-Go. I've given you fingering to apply. If you prefer, you can play all the triads with fingers 1-3-5 of your right hand.

The image shows a musical exercise on a grand staff. The right hand (treble clef) plays four triads: C major, D minor, E minor, and F major. The left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line consisting of four quarter notes: C2, D2, E2, and F2. Fingering is indicated above the right hand notes and below the left hand notes.

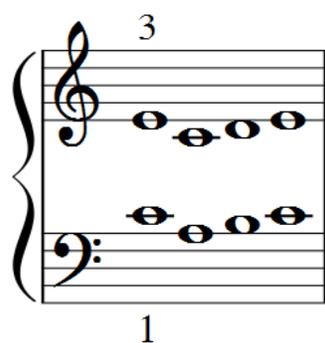
Triad	Right Hand Fingering	Left Hand Fingering
C major	5, 3, 1	4
D minor	5, 3, 2	4
E minor	3, 2, 1	4
F major	5, 3, 2	4

2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily. Don't those triads sound pretty?

Exercise 5: 2-part harmony

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 6: 2-part harmony with timing

1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

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



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:

The same lullaby, with 2-part harmony

1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

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

Golden Slumbers

3 1 2 1

5

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.

Exercise 7: 4-part harmony

1 Play

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

2 5 4 3
1 1

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

Exercise 8:

4-part harmony with timing

1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

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

Musical notation for Exercise 8, Part 1. The piece is in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) has notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The left hand (bass clef) has notes E3, F3, G3, and A3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above and below the notes.

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 3:

The same lullaby, with 4-part harmony

This time you'll play 4-part harmony. This is what you might play if you were accompanying a choir.

1 Play the notes, disregarding timing

1. This is pretty advanced. Just apply Know-Before-You-Go for Two Hands, and you'll play it accurately the first time through. Take as long as you need before making each move.

Golden Slumbers

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.

What's next?

We're going to learn 2 more rich, deep notes way down to the left of your keyboard.

To find Lesson 12, click the green box:

Go on to your next lesson



or go to your Book 2 Course Materials page at
www.dempstermusic.com