

MUSIC COMPOSITION WITH THE PIANO

The Ultimate Guide to

**PIANO, HARMONY, CHORDS &
MUSIC THEORY**

for



Composers



Producers



Songwriters

LEAN MUSICIAN

SHORT OUTLINE

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FULL OUTLINE

PART 1: HARMONIC & TECHNICAL FOUNDATIONS

Part 1 of this course lays the necessary foundations of both harmony and navigating the piano, both theoretically and physically. Even if you're reasonably experienced as a beginner at piano, it's worth going through this chapter to help frame the rest of the course and sow certain concepts in your mind for the more powerful ideas in later chapters.

1. Introduction: Up & Running with Chords & Melodies

In this section we start with the building blocks of music and the piano to get you up and running with playing, harmony and writing basic chords & melodies. We also get the note names down and write a short ambient track.

2. Gravity: Harmonic Centres

One of the core ideas in western music is the idea of tonal centres, or 'gravity'. In this chapter we look at what keys are, how to create them and lay the foundation for learning all of diatonic harmony - mainly based in the circle of fifths. We cover major keys, minor keys and the act of transposing music, a skill vital to the process of music composition.

3. Piano Technique: The Key to Fluency

Although this is primarily a composing and songwriting course, having a strong technique and facility to move around the piano is vital. You need to



be able to play at or close to the speed of your thinking, *without* falling over your fingers! In this chapter, we go over the fundamentals of piano technique: position of function, hand positions, fingerings, posture etc. This also lays the foundations for improvisation and we create a track based off of our random 'hand wanderings'.

PART 2: BASIC HARMONY

Part 2 dives straight into the most practical things you need as a writer to start creating great music. Chords, melodies and progressions. By the end of this section, you'll have solidified your understanding of and access to diatonic harmony, melody and harmonic structure (chord progressions).

4. Diatonic Harmony: Chords & Progressions Inside Keys

Here we dive deeper into diatonic harmony, which covers the bulk of western mainstream music. We get our head fully round the idea of chords inside of a key and all the different types of simple chords. We also look at harmonic analysis and common chord progressions & conventions. At the end of this chapter you'll understand how simple songwriting is when it comes to harmony and will know how to really immerse yourself in studying other artist's chord progressions.

5. Melody over Harmony

Having started to gain a solid foundation in diatonic harmony, we move into looking at how to construct melodies over and through different harmonies. Rather than being a different skill, this builds directly on the harmonic experience you have gained so far. We look at the feelings behind different intervals, what makes certain melodies sound unique, how to build the perfect amount of tension & resolution into your melodies. We also look at quick and easy scales that are almost impossible to NOT write good melodies with and much more.

6. Structuring Harmony: Extending & Creating New Harmonic Sections

Thinking deeper about the temporal (time) side of harmony is key to creating powerful and emotive stories in long compositions, tracks or any kind of music. This doesn't mean 'more complexity' is better, but we should be able to have options when structuring our compositions. In this chapter we look at how to extend, vary and modulate your music to different keys to create variety in harmony.

PART 3: INTERMEDIATE HARMONY

By far the largest and most valuable part of the course! After having gained our fundamental music theory badge in the first two parts, this is where we really start to spice things up and make things sound more: *sophisticated, contemporary, organic* etc... Rather than the 'basic' sounding beginners stuff that you have to necessarily do when you're learning. This is where the payoff comes for all your previous hard work.

7. Chord Voicings & Arrangement

If you know anything about the 'four chord song' you'll know that it's not the chords that make songs what they are - but the way they are expressed. In this chapter we start taking the harmonies you've learned and start expressing them in more sophisticated ways, primarily involving voicings and arrangement. It's also the key to good accompaniment - i.e. the way you support your melody lines. At the end of this chapter we'll create an interesting and dynamic accompaniment for a singer and also write a short passage from string orchestra with interesting 4-part voice leading.

8. Bass Lines

Any bassist will tell you that, the bass line is very often the most underrated element in music. It holds up the harmony, adds groove and beefs up the arrangement. In this chapter we'll look at the conventions, techniques and theory behind building great bass lines and give numerous examples at the piano.

9. Chromatic Harmony: Chords From Scratch

To really, really compose flexibly, we need to understand harmony independent of a key or scale. In this chapter we cover all you need to know about creating ANY chord from scratch and look at how you can start analysing, learning and drawing from all the music you love to build it back into your writing.

10. Upper Structures

By this point in the course you've covered a lot of harmony. You have enough to be working with for a long time. However, if you're after a different colour in your sound, exploring upper structures could be for you. In this section we extend our chords to include, 4, 5, & 6 notes - creating very different sounds that are often associated with Jazz Harmony and Jazz idioms like as blues. At the end of this chapter we have a go at re-harmonising a well known tune to make it sound more modern or 'jazzy'.

11. Reading Chord Symbols

A short chapter covering how to read chords symbols, roman numerals, figured bass and also provide you with the third harmony cheat sheet - one of the courses many PDF guides that are free to download as harmony references.

PART 4: APPLYING YOUR TOOLKIT

Once you've learned a lot of harmony at the piano, getting better as a composer is less about learning *new* things and more about actually *applying* what you've learned - over and over again and in new contexts. In this chapter we get to the nitty gritty about how to construct material, generate ideas when you "have none" and how to solve the classic and most common problems we all face when composing and manipulating musical material.

12. Problem Solving

- 'Where do I start? How do I generate material?'
- 'I have a chord progression, how do I make it more interesting?'
- 'I have chords, how do I add a bass line?'
- 'I have a melody, how do I add chords?'
- 'I have chords, how do I add a melody?'
- 'I have a bass line, how do I add chords?'

13. Harmonic Rhythm

One of the lesser thought of aspects of composition. How the undercurrent of your harmonies affects the listener unconsciously. How to excite, confirm, inspire and transition between sections with harmonic rhythm.

14. Melodic Rhythm

The rhythm of our melodies often comes naturally to us, much like our accent. That's a good thing and the more we develop our voice, the more this will unconsciously develop. However, it's *always* worth taking a scientific look at the rhythms behind your writing and seeing whether you have other options that you hadn't thought of.

15. Accompaniment & Arrangement Rhythms

Looking in greater detail at the structures in place behind the 'main parts' of our composition, we look at accompaniment patterns and the greater organisation of our arrangements and how useful it is to think in layers and alignment/misalignment when writing and planning music compositions.

PART 5: ADVANCED COLOURS & TOOLS

In the final section (for now) of this course we look at advanced melodic and harmonic colours. This section is particularly useful for film and game composers who are looking for music that really evokes different feelings. Think Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings etc.

16. New melodic colours

There are more than 300 different scales, and I mean *types* of scales - major, minor only count as 2 types... I know, crazy amounts of expressive potential in here... stay tuned.

17. Non-diatonic Chord Relationships

Chord relationships are ways to help us construct non-diatonic harmony in organised and intentional ways. Using them gives us very distinct flavours and will help you understand how the great film composers have created such iconic themes that you wouldn't really be able to get if you were composing in just 'C Major'.

18. Resources, Conclusion & Where to Go From Here

