

Scales and Chords

How They Relate To Each Other

Knowing your scales and chords, and knowing how they relate can help you in multiple ways. We're going to see how chords relate to a Major Scale. This subject can be massive. There are whole books on it. Therefore in order to keep it simple, we are going to take just the C Major Scale and build chords from those notes.

One great way to write songs or learn songs by ear, is to know which chords fit into a "Key". The Key of a song is the scale that the song is original built from. You will be able to find the majority of the notes in the song from this scale and you can find most or all of the chords that are built off this scale.

The C Major Scale is built with these notes and in this order: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, Cthese notes can continue on.. D, E, F and so on would come after the last C note. There is a Whole Step (W) and a Half Step (H) relationship between the notes. WWHWWWH is the order of the notes (Half Steps between E and F, also B and C) to make a major scale. To build a basic chord (triad in musical terms) with this scale, take three notes; every other one starting any where, and get a major, minor, or diminished chord.

Here are the 7 chords you get (one to match each one of the notes)

- C = C-E-G (C..2whole steps ..E ... 1 1/2steps..G)
- Dm = D-F-A (D..1 1/2 steps ..F..2 whole steps..A)
- Em = E-G-B (E..1 1/2 steps..G..2 whole steps..B)
- F = F-A-C (F..2 whole steps..A..1 1/2 steps..C)
- G = G-B-D (G..2 whole steps..B..1 1/2 steps ..D)
- Am = A-C-E (A..1 1/2 steps..C..2 whole steps..E)
- Bmb5 = B-D-F (B..1 1/2 steps ..D..1 1/2 steps..F)

As you can see, the step relationship between the three notes alternates (except for Bmb5). If it is 2 whole steps then 1 1/2 steps, it is a major chord (bright sounding)--C,F, and G. If it is 1 1/2 step then 2 whole steps, it is a minor chord (dark sounding) --Dm, Em, and Am. The Bmb5 (or diminished triad) is an odd chord and we're going to leave it alone for now.

Keep in mind that these chords have one thing in common; the C Major Scale. Therefore, if you use just this set of chords to make a song with, you can use the C Major Scale to make up your melody and solo with. You can also use this system with the other 11 Keys (just remember the other scales will have sharps or flats involved) --pretty cool huh? This system has been and still is being used by countless song writers in all the styles of music.

The diagram shows a treble clef staff with the C Major Scale notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. Lines connect every other note to form seven chords: C (C-E-G), Dm (D-F-A), Em (E-G-B), F (F-A-C), G (G-B-D), Am (A-C-E), and Bmb5 (B-D-F). The chords are labeled above or below the staff with lines indicating their constituent notes.