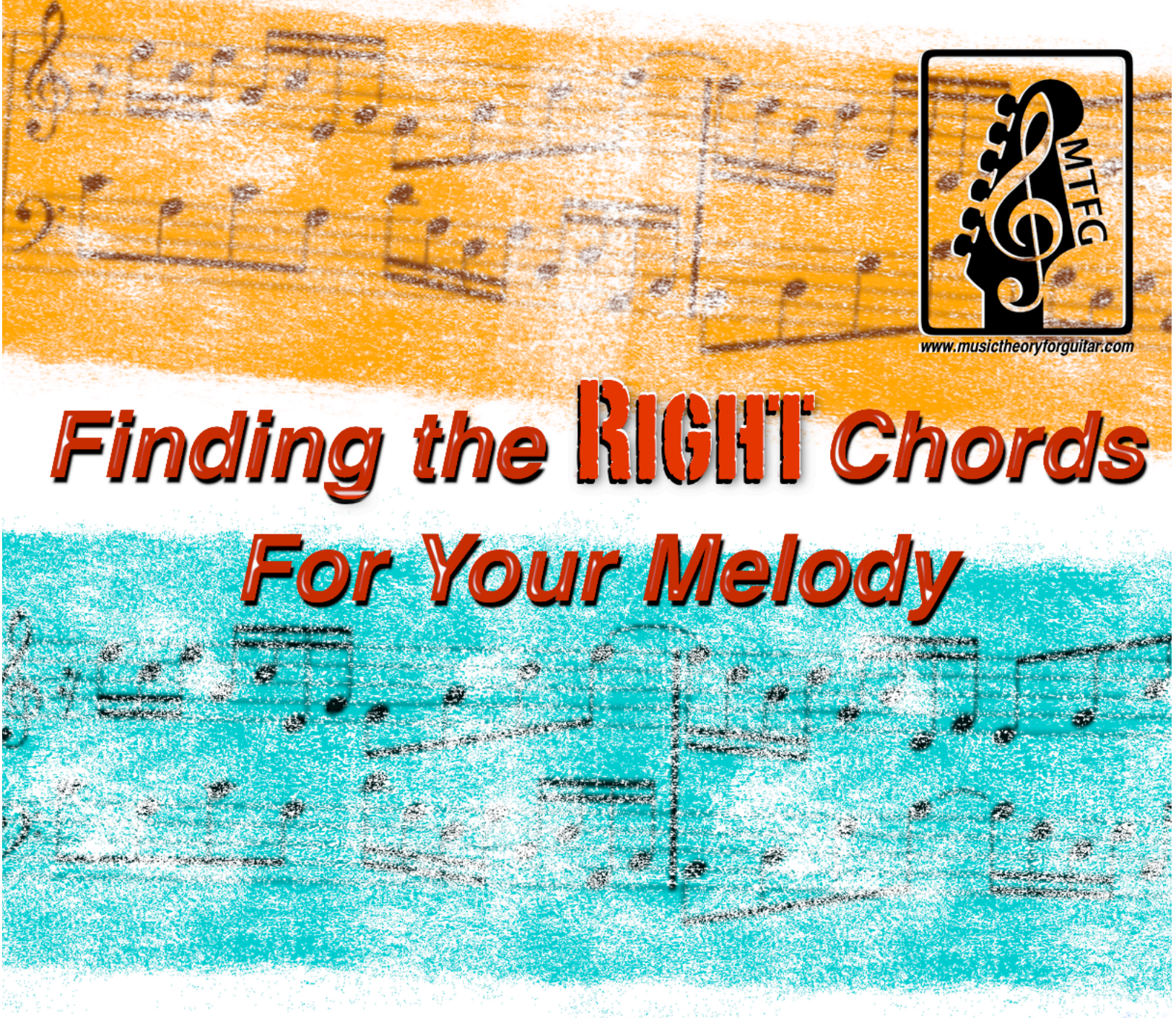

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Finding the RIGHT Chords For Your Melody

Tommaso Zillio

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Ok, I got this cool melody. How do I find the right chords that go with it? I've tried some chords that I know — you know, A, G, D — but I can't really find something that fits my melody. It's perfectly clear in my mind how this is supposed to sound, but somehow I can't do it on the guitar. Can you help me?"

Sure I can help you! This is one of the problem that every musician or songwriter faces every day. The solution to this is not difficult, as we are going to see in the next pages. All you need to know is some basic notions of music theory and then get a bit of practice in applying them. We are going to cover everything in this e-book, in a gradual, easy, step-by-step fashion. And remember that like in all music theory, knowing is only the first half of the battle: the second half is experimenting with the notions you have learned.

1.1 Why it is useful to know how melodies and chords relate

Before we start with he actual explanation, let's see what you can do when you know how to find the connection between a melody and a chord pro-

gression.

You can write a song In a moment of inspiration you have written an amazing melody. If you know how chords and melodies relate you can easily find the right chords to accompany your voice.

You can transcribe a song While transcribing the melody of a song is very easy with your guitar, finding the chords of the song is usually more difficult. If you know how chords and melodies relate, you can have a guide of what chords are the most likely to work. Transcribing songs become easier.

You can re-harmonize a song You want to make a cover of a famous song, and you want to go "creative" with it. You can keep the melody intact (so everybody will understand what song you are covering) but you can change the chords from the original version! This is a sure way of making an original cover — and one that has been used by many famous artists.

CHAPTER 2

BASIC CONCEPTS

In this section we will review some basic concepts that we need to be able to properly harmonize a melody. If you never met these concepts before, reading this section will put you up-to-date with what we will be doing later. If, on the other hand, you are already familiar with these concepts, this section may help you brush up your knowledge.

2.1 Chords

The simplest (and most used) chords are called *triads*, as they are made of three notes. There are four types of triads: Major Triads, Minor Triads, Augmented Triads and Diminished Triads; in this book we will need only Major and Minor Triads. To find the three notes that make up a Major triad, you proceed this way:

1. Choose a note to be the root note of the triad. Let's choose C.
2. Take the note 4 frets above the root. In our example this is E.
3. Take the note 3 frets above the last note you found (E). In our case this is G.

These three notes, C, E, and G, taken together are the C Major triad.

A Minor triad is constructed the same way as a Major triad, but the middle note is lowered one fret. As an example, the C minor triad is composed by C, Eb, G.

The notes that compose the chord are called *the tones* of that chord (or "chord tones" for short). Keep this in mind, it will become important later.

2.2 Keys

A key is simply a set of notes (and chords). Keys are built so that when you compose music using only notes and chords in a key, you are sure that they will sound good together.

A key is specified by the name of its root note, and then saying if it's a major or minor key. Inside a key there are 7 notes and 7 chords (3 major chords, 3 minor chords, and one diminished chord, regardless if the key is major or minor). You can find a table of the chords in each key at the end of this e-book in the Appendix B. You don't need to learn this table by heart: you'll see that when you use it for a while the table will simply memorize itself.

2.3 The Main Concept

Now that we know what chords are we are ready to understand the main principle of melody harmonization. This is it:

> *To properly harmonize a melody you have to choose chords that contain the SAME NOTE that is playing in the melody at that moment.*

Let's make an example: if the melody has a C note into it, you can use one of the following chords: C major, C minor, Ab major, A minor, F major, or F minor. All of these triads (and only these) contain the C note. Of course, all these chords will sound in a different way from each other, but at least we have restricted the possibilities to only 6 chords rather than to 24 chords (12 major and 12 minor triads). With a bit of experience, and using that fact that most melodies are inside a key (that further reduces the number of viable chords) you will be able to write harmonizations for any melody you can invent.

In short:

- Chords work with the melody if they contain the notes in the melody.
- Conversely, the melody works with the chord if it's using chord notes.

2.4 The First Step

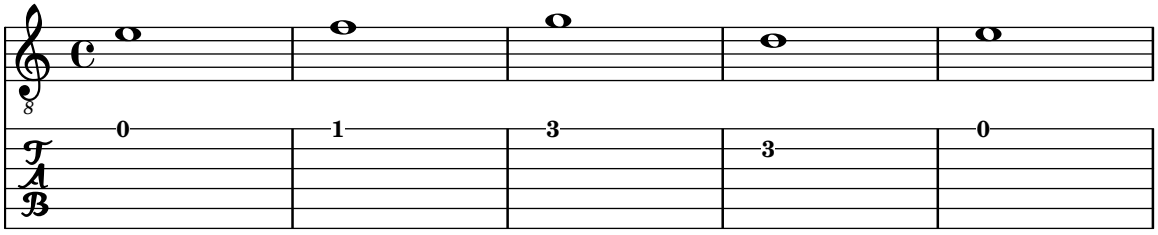
So, the first step that you need to do in order to harmonize your melody is to write down your melody. You do not need to be able to read music notation to do it. You can simply write down the names of the notes in the melody. Let's now see some example of melody harmonization in different situations.

CHAPTER 3

HARMONIZING INSIDE A KEY

The simplest examples of harmonizations are when we are using only notes and chords in a given key. In this case we have only six chords to choose from, three major and three minor, which greatly simplifies our work (the diminished chord present in every key is not being used if not in special situations).

Let's see some examples. The first example is in the key of Am (**Click here to hear Example 1**). Here is the melody:

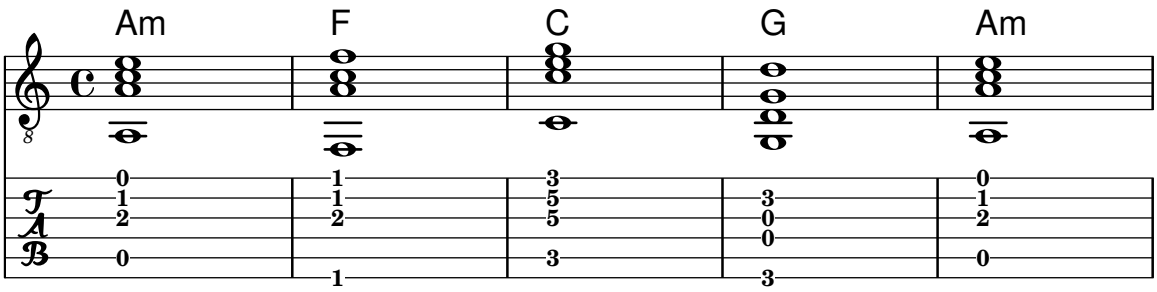


For the harmonization, we proceed this way: we look on the tables (Appendix B) what chords are in the key of Am. They are: Am, C, Dm, Em, F, G (we are ignoring the B diminished chord). Then we examine the first note of the melody, that is an E. Among the chords in the key of Am, only three of them contain an E note (see Appendix A): Am, C, Em. We choose Am for our harmonization. Of course, we could have chosen C or Em, leading to some different results. We will discuss more about the many possible

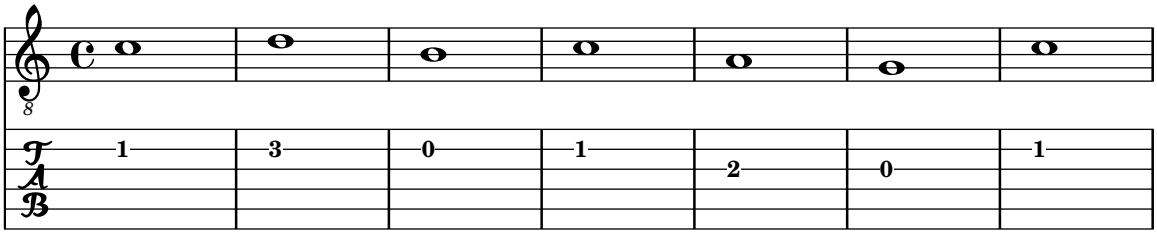
harmonizations below.

Then we examine the second note of the melody, an F. Only two chords in the key of Am contain an F note: Dm and F. After trying both alternatives on the guitar, we decide we like F better than Dm. Both are "correct" choices, of course.

The third note is a G note, so the possible chord candidates are C, Em, G. We chose C. The fourth note is a D note, so we need to choose between Dm and G (we take G). Finally the last note is an E note, and we decide to go back from where we started (i.e. to use Am). This is the resulting harmonization **Click here to hear Example 2**:



Let's run another example for clarity. This time it is in the key of C major (**Click here to hear Example 3**). The melody is:

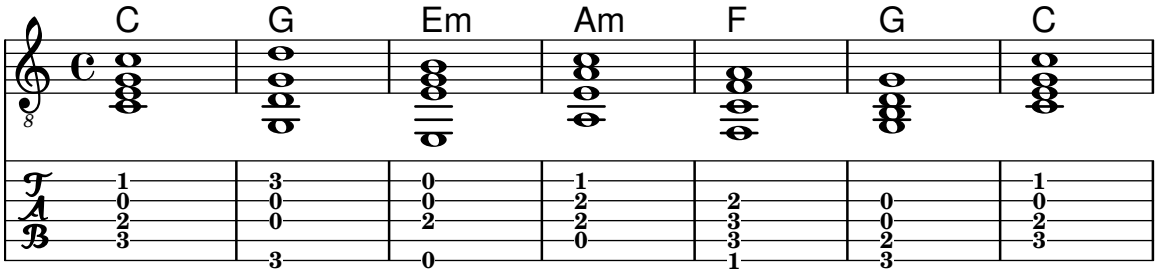


The chords for C major are (Appendix B): C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am.

The first note is a C note. Candidate chords: C, F, Am. Our choice: C.
The second note is a D note. Candidate chords: Dm, G. Our choice: G.

The third note is a B note. Candidate chords: Em, G. Our choice: Em.
The fourth note is a C note. Candidate chords: C, F, Am. Our choice: Am.
The fifth note is a A note. Candidate chords: Dm, F, Am. Our choice: F.
The sixth note is a G note. Candidate chords: C, Em, G. Our choice: G.
The seventh note is a C note. Candidate chords: C, F, Am. Our choice: C.

All these choices are arbitrary. We have selected these chords by hearing the effect while playing on the guitar. Here is the resulting harmonization (**Click here to hear Example 4**):

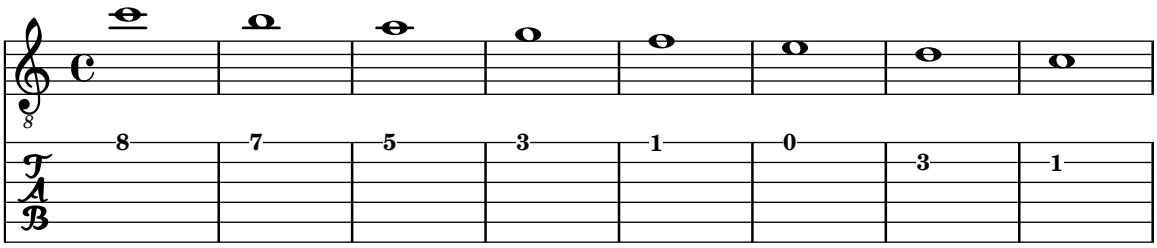


3.1 More than One Solution

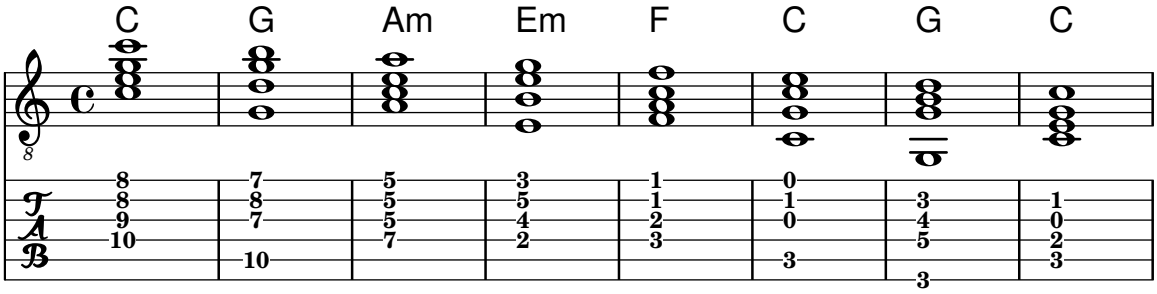
One important thing to understand about harmonization is that for a given melody there are usually *more than one* possible harmonizations. In other words, there is not one "right solution", but many possibilities that sound good. Of course, all these possibilities sound *different* from each other! It is up to you, the musician, to decide which one of the possible solutions you prefer.

This also mean that you should not just keep the first harmonization that come to your mind. Try more than one possible harmonization and then choose the one that sound best to you.

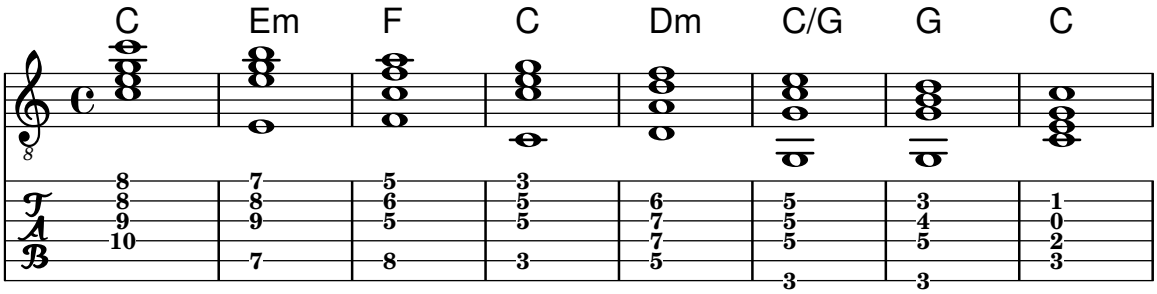
As an example of this concept, let's harmonize a descending C major scale (**Click here to hear Example 5**):



One possible solution is (**Click here to hear Example 6**):



Another solution may be (**Click here to hear Example 7**) [1]:



As you can hear, both sound good — both are technically correct, as they respect the principle of correspondence between chords and melody. But they sound different. This is what makes music and art rather than a science: you can choose the harmonization you prefer.

[1] the notation C/G in this example means that we are playing the C chord with a G note on the bass. See the tablature for a realization of that chord. This is known as *slash notation*.

CHAPTER 4

HARMONIZING OUT OF KEY

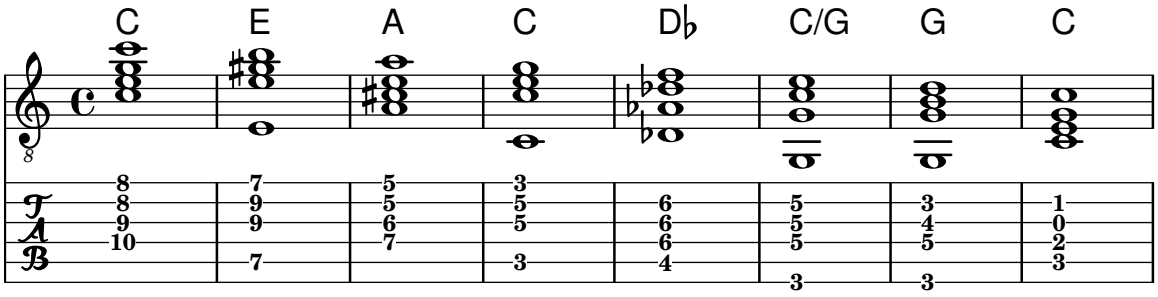
There are situations in music where we may want, or we are forced, to use chords outside of a given key. Let's see some examples.

4.1 Melody in Key, Chords out or Key

If our melody is in a given key, we may still want to use some out-of-key chords to add some special flavor to it. It is not a problem to step out of a key occasionally, as long as we come back to it afterwards. We still have to respect the principle of correspondence between chords and melody, but now the pool from which we drawn our chords is larger, not being restricted to the chords of the key.

For example, here we harmonize again the descending C major scale, but this time we introduce some out-of-key chords (E, A, and Db).

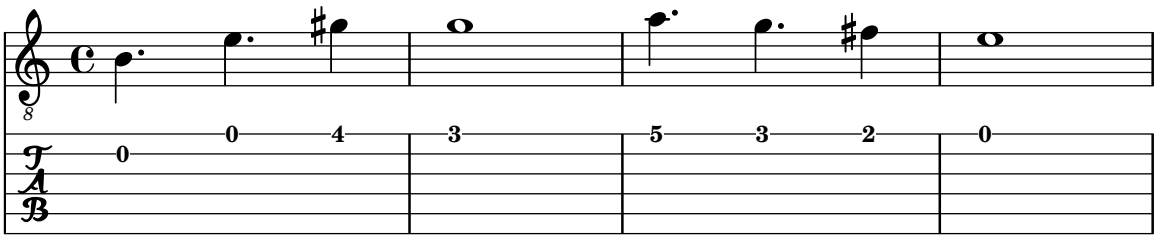
Click here to hear Example 8



The result is definitely spicier than the earlier versions! Since we have more choice here, it will take a bit more practice and experimentation to be able to make out-of-key chords sound good. The usual in-key chords are easier to use, but the results given by including out-of-keys chords are often worth the extra work!

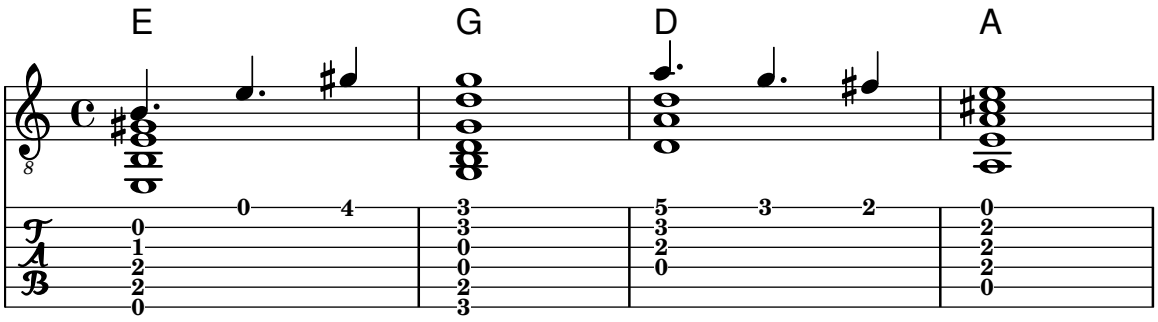
4.2 Melody and Chords both out of Key

Up to now we have considered that the melody is contained in a single specific key. On the other hand, nobody forces us to do that: we can as well write a melody that is not contained in any specific major or minor scale. In this case you HAVE to use out-of-key chords to harmonize the melody. In this case simply ignore Appendix B and go straight to appendix A to see what chords are compatible with each note in the melody. Let's see a simple example (**Click here to hear Example 9**):

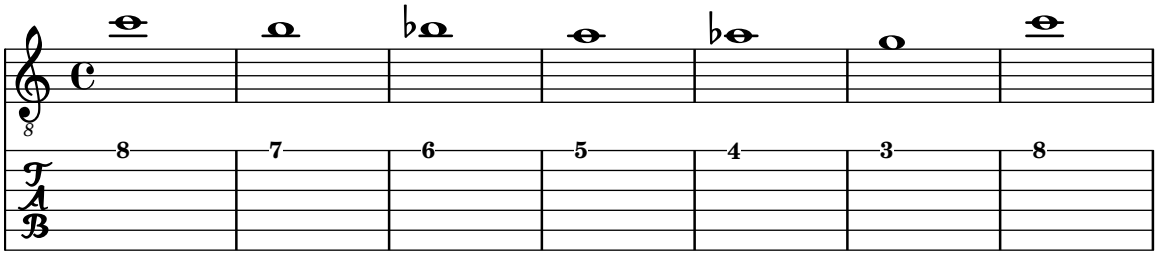


As you can see, this melody is not contained in any major or minor scale (it contains F#, G, G#, and A all at the same time). The only solution we have here is to harmonize out-of-key, since we do not have a scale to begin with!

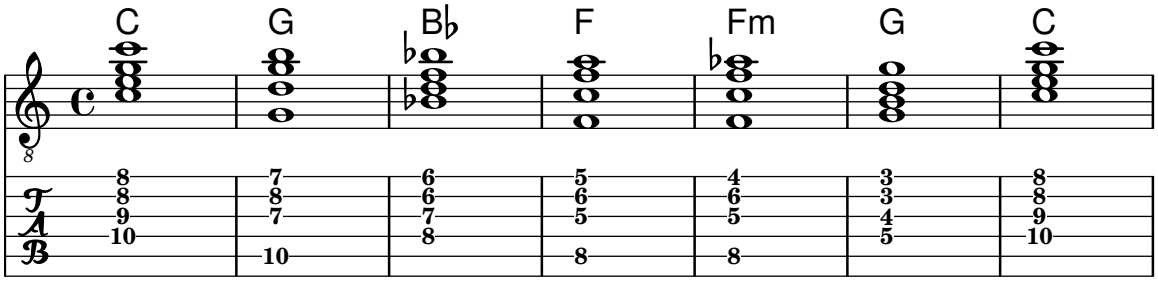
Here is one possible harmonization (**Click here to hear Example 10**):



With this technique we can harmonize even sections of the chromatic scale, as **Click here to hear Example 11**:



And here is one possible harmonization of this melody (**Click here to hear Example 12)**:



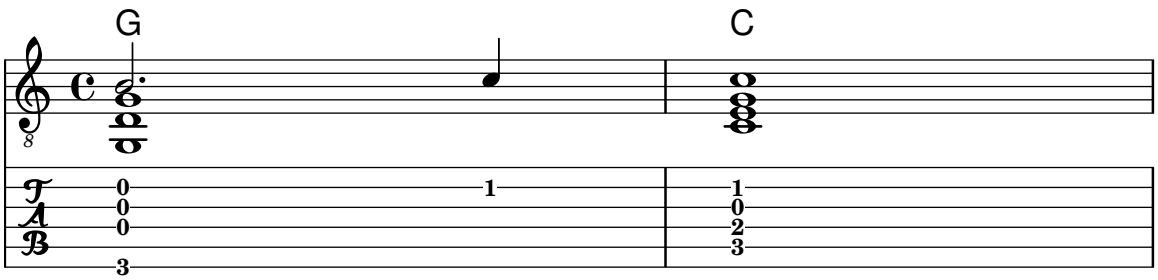
CHAPTER 5

DISSONANCES

Up to now we have required absolute correspondence between the melody and the chord progression. On the other hand, sometimes the melody and chord progression mismatch on purpose to provide tension — we cal that mismatch a *dissonance*. Our ears love to hear a dissonance if the tension is then *resolved* by a perfect match just after the dissonance. Music theorists have codified many types of dissonances used by composers in the past. Here we see three examples among the simplest ones: the Anticipation, the Suspension, and the Appoggiatura. This is not meant to be comprehensive list of all possible dissonances, but just something to get you started.

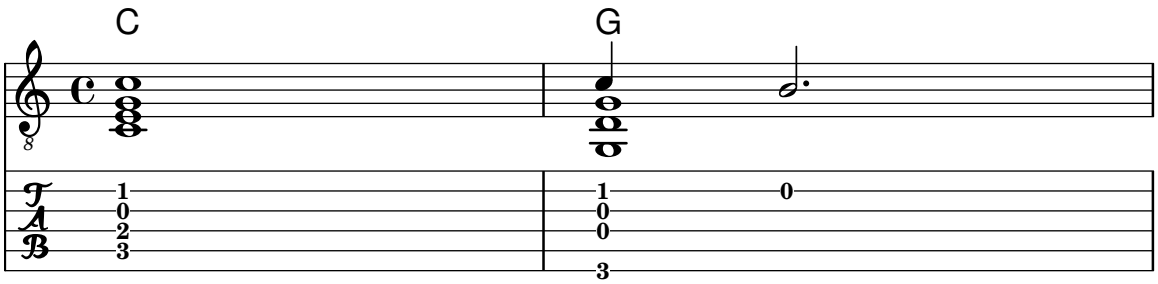
5.1 Anticipation

An Anticipation is using a chord note before the chord is actually played. I the example below, we are on a G chord when the melody plays a C note — that is not contained into the G chord (G,B,D). The C note on the G chord is thus a mismatch of chord and melody. The dissonance is then resolved when the chord changes to C (that obviously contains the C note). As you can see, the melody 'anticipates' the chord changes, thus the name "Anticipation". (**Click here to hear Example 13**)



5.2 Suspension

A Suspension is essentially the inverse of a Anticipation: we keep one of the chord notes into the following chord (where it is a dissonance), and then we resolve it down (if you resolve it up it is called a "Retardation" instead). In the example below, we have a C chord playing, and a C note in the melody. When the chord changes to G, we keep playing the C note in the melody (here is the dissonance) and then we resolve the dissonance by playing the B note, that is in the G chord and is lower than the C note (**Click here to hear Example 14**).



5.3 Appoggiatura

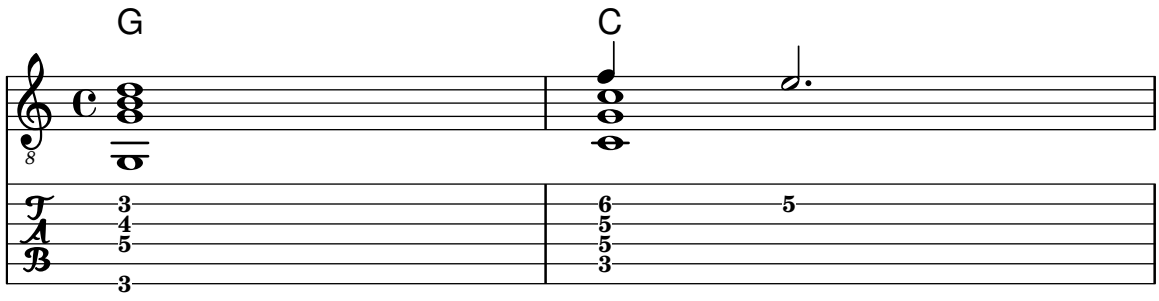
The Appoggiatura is the most complex kind of dissonance that we are going to explore here. It works this way:

1. As usual we have a chord change. In the example below, we have a G followed by a C.

2. The melody starts on a chord note of the first chord (the note D on the G chord in our example) and ends on a chord note of the second chord (the note E on the C chord). It is important that the last note is higher in pitch than the first.

3. The appoggiatura happens when we change the chord: here we play the note just higher than the final note, and then we resolve down to the final note. In the example below, the final note is E, so when the chord changes from G to C, we first play the F note (just higher than E), and then the E note. Our dissonance (the F note) is usually not a chord note of the first or the second chord.

In layman terms, the Appoggiatura is simply "going up with a melody (from D to E), overshooting your mark (playing F rather than E), then come down to the place we originally wanted to go to (E)".
Click here to hear Example 15



5.4 And Now?

"Ok, I learned all this cool theory stuff on how to put chords and melodies together. What is my next step?"

At **musictheoryforguitar.com** we want to help you get better at music.

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- You want to learn harmony on the guitar fretboard.
- You are interested in **songwriting and composition.**

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If you're like most guitar players, you might still be struggling to master chords and chord progressions everywhere on the guitar. Hey, I've been there too, we all have. It seems like there is soooo much stuff to learn, and it would take a lifetime to learn it all! That's what I used to think. It was so frustrating.

...but what I've found is there are people in this world who have mastered chords and harmony and it didn't take that long to do. They aren't any smarter or more talented than you or I.

I've developed a simple – but complete – harmony system that I use with my own real-life students. This system takes out the mystery from the guitar so that they can learn, understand and (fluently) play all sorts of chords in a short time.

You too will be able to play any chord, from simple to very advanced, all over the fretboard, in any position, inversion or voicing.

You too can learn how to understand and apply chords and harmony on guitar. You will be able to write cool chord progression - the kind that make people say "what did he just play?".

You will be able to use complex chords without even thinking. You will be able to play awesome rhythm parts on your guitar in any style YOU want!

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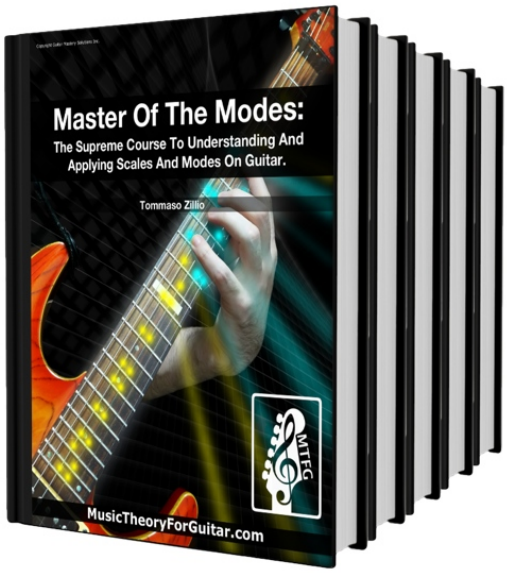
Master Of The Modes



[Master Of The Modes](http://www.musictheoryforguitar.com/scalesandmodesguitarlessons.html) is the course you want if:

- You want to focus on **lead guitar**.
- You want to completely master the guitar fretboard
- You want be able to **improvise** over ANY backing track or chord progression

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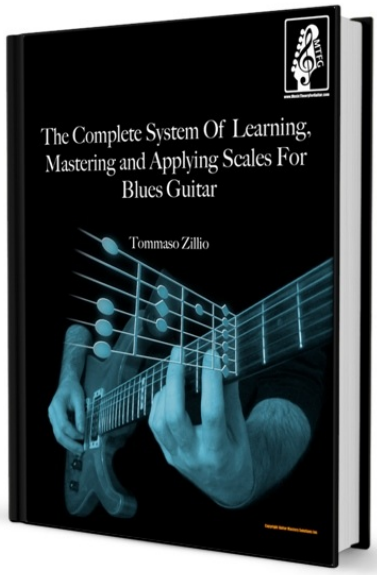
http://www.musictheoryforguitar.com/scalesandmodesguitarlessons.html

Scales For Blues Guitar



Scales for Blues Guitar is the course you want to take if you want to focus on pentatonic Blues and Classic Rock leads.

- You hear great Blues players creating solos that sound amazing but have no idea how to do it by yourself?
- Do you struggle in playing the Blues in all keys and over all the fretboard (as opposed in just one basic position)?
- Are you thinking too much about "what to play next"? Wouldn't you rather than let your emotions speak through your playing?

If you have answered "yes" to any of the questions above, then you need to learn how music theory applies to Blues. And you need to understand how to use this knowledge into your guitar playing in an effective way.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE OF CHORDS THAT CONTAIN A GIVEN NOTE

Note	Chords					
	as Root		as M3	as m3	as Fifth	
C	C	Cm	Ab	Am	F	Fm
C#	C#	C#m	A	Bbm	F#	F#m
D	D	Dm	Bb	Bm	G	Gm
Eb	Eb	Ebm	B	Cm	Ab	Abm
E	E	Em	C	C#m	A	Am
F	F	Fm	C#	Dm	Bb	Bbm
F#	F#	F#m	D	Ebm	B	Bm
G	G	Gm	Eb	Em	C	Cm
Ab	Ab	Abm	E	Fm	C#	C#m
A	A	Am	F	F#m	D	Dm
Bb	Bb	Bbm	F#	Gm	Eb	Ebm
B	B	Bm	G	Abm	E	Em

The first line of this table can be read as: "C is the root note of the chords C major and C minor. C is the major third in Ab and the minor third in A minor. C is the fifth of the chord F major and F minor".

In other words, the chords C, Cm, Ab, Am, F, and Fm are all the possible triads that harmonize the note C.

APPENDIX B

TABLES OF CHORDS IN A GIVEN KEY

Major Keys:

Key	Chords						
	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
C	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim
Db	Db	Ebm	Fm	Gb	Ab	Bbm	Cdim
D	D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#dim
Eb	Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb	Cm	Ddim
E	E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#dim
F	F	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	Edim
Gb	Gb	Abm	Bbm	Cb	Db	Ebm	Fdim
G	G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#dim
Ab	Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb	Fm	Gdim
A	A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#dim
Bb	Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F	Gm	Adim
B	B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#dim

Minor Keys:

Key	Chords						
	i	ii°	bIII	iv	v	bVI	bVII
Cm	Cm	Ddim	Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb
C#m	C#m	D#dim	E	F#m	G#m	A	B
Dm	Dm	Edim	F	Gm	Am	Bb	C
Ebm	Ebm	Fbdim	Gb	Abm	Bbm	Cb	Db
Em	Em	F#dim	G	Am	Bm	C	D
Fm	Fm	Gdim	Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb
F#m	F#m	G#dim	A	Bm	C#m	D	E
Gm	Gm	Adim	Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F
G#m	G#m	A#dim	B	C#m	D#m	E	F#
Am	Am	Bdim	C	Dm	Em	F	G
Bbm	Bbm	Cdim	Db	Ebm	Fm	Gb	Ab
Bm	Bm	C#dim	D	Em	F#m	G	A

About the Author

Tommaso Zillio is a recording artist, composer, session guitarist, guitar trainer and instructional author.

His expertise as a teacher is on training guitar players on how to use music theory to create their own style and express themselves. His main focus is on helping guitar players thinking both inside and outside the box and to eliminate anything that can restrict their free expression on the instrument.

Tommaso holds a PhD in Theoretical Physics from the International School of Advanced Studies (SISSA/ISAS) in Trieste, Italy. He has been a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Smithsonian and to date he has published a dozen peer-reviewed research articles on topics ranging from Physics to Ecology.

Tommaso's influences are very varied, expressing the love of music that transcends genera and instruments. Some of his favorite musicians are: Dream Theater, Pink Floyd, Joe Satriani, Andy Timmons, Mike Oldfield, Jean-Michel Jarre, Nightwish, Astor Piazzolla, John Williams, Gustav Holst, Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Tommaso is a graduate of Tom Hess's Music Careers Mentoring Program and is a charter member of the Elite Guitar Teachers Inner Circle. He earned the esteemed "Elite Master Guitar Teacher" title given to less than 10 guitar teachers world wide to date.

For more info about Tommaso, or to contact him, go to:
https://www.musictheoryforguitar.com/abouttommasozillio.html.