

Theory Overview

There's way too much to digest all at one time. BUT . . . if you read it all once, to get the gist of what I'm talking about, then study it over and over, by topic, I think you'll get a TON out of it! Plus you'll know more about music theory than about 80% of the harp players in the world. ☺

Before you read this, let me preface it as follows . . .

We all wanna be the best we can. No doubt. And we wanna learn all we can. And I encourage that, too. To a point! HOWEVER . . . that being said . . . How about just playin' the darned thing. Having some fun. Let's make this simple.

OK, I'm gonna put this into a simple format. My focus is on simplicity, not perfection. So all you experienced players, don't go hammering me about some minor point that makes this more complicated than it really is. Fair enough? For the most part, I kept this in simple form, focusing on using player's terms. This isn't a theory book. It's just a guide.

Harpers, you wanna have some fun with this? If you follow this, and commit just a little bit to memory, I think you'll start playing and enjoying your harp a lot more. (**For now!** But you still need to learn all you can as you progress!)

The Chromatic scale This is nothing more than all 12 of the keys on a keyboard. And they're in alphabetical order. So how hard can it be? You have just A, B, C, D, E, F & G. Most of them have a sharp (#) or flat (*b*) associated with them.

Sharp (#) just means one half step (one key on the piano – one fret on a guitar) higher than the "name" of the note. A# is one key higher than A. (And on keyboards, it'll be a black key.)

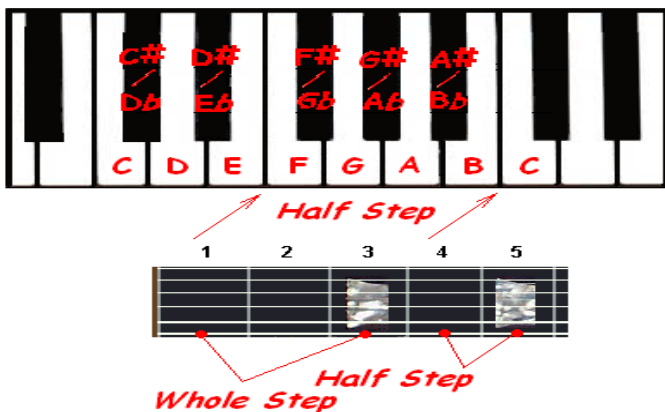
Flat (*b*) just means one half step (one key on the piano – one fret on a guitar) lower than the "name" of the note. B*b* is one key lower than B. (And on keyboards, it'll also be a black key. In fact, it's the same key as the A#.)

SIDEBAR: OK, you pros, don't go interjecting advanced theory, Medieval theory or OLD keyboard structure on this next part. As I said, I'm trying to make this simple to understand. **END SIDEBAR**

Some notes share a name. An A# is the same note as a B*b*. Look at a keyboard. The black key between A and B is named, based on the relationship to the key it's in. It's one key higher than an A. So you could call it an A#. It's also one key lower than a B. So you could also call it a B*b*. Same note. Same sound. (CALLED ENHARMONIC)

So, if you were to name all of the notes, starting with C, you'd have: C C#/D*b* D D#/E*b* E F F#/G*b* G G#/A*b* A A#/B*b* B

Natural keys C D E G A B **Flat keys** D*b* E*b* F G*b* A*b* B*b* Natural keys have sharps. The keys are: C D*b* D E*b* E F G*b* G A*b* A B*b* B Look at a keyboard. You'll see 2 places where there is no black key between white keys. . . .



THERE IS ONLY A HALF STEP BETWEEN B & C . . . AND E & F !!! COMMIT THIS TO MEMORY!

So, step one of your memorization . . . learn to "say" the chromatic scale, for natural and flat keys. And remember where the 2 half steps are. (Between B & C, and E & F) Learn to "say" . . .

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B C . . . and . . . C D*b* D E*b* E F G*b* G A*b* A B*b* B

SIDEBAR: Just so I don't get hammered, here are a few exceptions. The Key of C has no sharps or flats. And you will (from time to time) see chord charts for a tune in the key of F# instead of G*b*. But that's because no one's perfect! ☺

Um, you might actually see chord charts for other "flat keys". Just consider the source, and know the difference. As long as you know that an E*b* is also a D#, you're fine.

And there's a thing called an "accidental" You could find a note in a tune that's not in the key you're in. You could actually have a C*b* in a tune. But consider this an exception, and don't worry about it right now. **End SIDEBAR**

Everything is relative on a harp . . . Learn something on a C harp. Pick up an A harp, and it plays the same way.

There's a little difference between harps relative to blowing or drawing "tension". But the notes all lay the same. (As in, the same pattern. As long as the two harps are the same "kind". – Tuned the same)

Positions . . . UGGHHHH!

Let's forget about all the possibilities, and focus on the "norm". Again, this is for beginners, and I'm trying to keep it simple. We'll use a C harp in the example below.

For the most part, you'll either be playing straight harp (1st position. The notes of the song are in the key of "C"), or cross harp (2nd position. The notes of the song are in the key of "G"). If you have a C harp, and are playing melodies, you're most likely playing straight harp in C. You can solo over some "pretty" chord progressions using straight harp. You'll find most of the notes on the blow.

Here's a sample of playing a melody in 1st position . . . Just hit the play button when it pops up. You might need to hold down your shift key when clicking the link.

<http://www.byoaudio.com/play/WLZrrTPs>

If you're playing Blues or Rock, or soloing over progressive Country, you'll find most of your accent, or more dynamic notes on the draw.

Some tunes may have a more complex melody and contain notes not found on the harp in the key the tune is in. In many cases you can either bend the reed to get the note you need, or bend it "close" to the note. And sometimes you just "kinda" play a harmony thru a portion of the tune to compensate for a note you can't quite hit.

Usually, the listener doesn't realize a harmony note or line was played. And sometimes, you just kinda play the "close" note quickly, and go to the next note to "hide" the missing note. Again, this is for beginners. You can actually hit ALL of the notes, in any key, on a simple diatonic 10 hole harp, once you've mastered bending reeds.

A little like this tune . . . <http://www.byoaudio.com/play/Wjsg8mvs>

Here's a sample of playing in 2nd position, or sometimes called cross harp . . .

<http://www.byoaudio.com/play/WGmgF9js>

Here's the next memorization part. And it's not hard. Instead of trying to learn all the theory behind it . . . just memorize this . . .

If you're in this "key" . . . play this "harp" for melody, this "harp" for Blues, etc.

Key (song) Melody Harp Blues Harp

C or Dm	C	F
D or Em	D	G
Eb or Fm	Eb	Ab
E or F#m/Gbm	E	A
F or Gm	F	Bb
G or Am	G	C
A or Bm	A	D
Bb or Cm	Bb	Eb
B or C#m/Dbm	B	E

Also, when playing Blues harp, if a tune is in a minor key, play 2nd position as well. EX: Key is Am, try a D harp, too. Am melody, try a G harp.

So, if you have a **C harp** in your hands, you could play **straight** melody in the key of **C** or **Dm**, and **Blues** in **G** or **Gm**.

MEMORIZE THE ABOVE CHART!

Examples . . .

You want to play Oh, Suzanna in the key of C . . . make it easy on yourself. Buy a C harp!

If you hear a "pretty" tune . . . like a **I vi ii V** (1625) or a **I vi IV V** (1645), like . . . C Am Dm G7 . . . or . . . C Am F G7 . . . play straight. And have your F harp stuck between your 1st and 2nd fingers for the 2nd time thru . . . for some variety in your solo, playing cross harp.

You wanna play some Blues? If you have a C harp, you can **JAM in G & Gm**. Follow the above chart. (**G – C**)

Summary . . .

You can spend hours learning about all the positions. And it's good to know that . . . in time. But to have some fun, AND to play some kick butt jammin' music . . . you can do so just playing the harp in the chart for the key you're in.

Chords. Where the heck to the chords come from in the first place? Everything comes from the Major Scale!

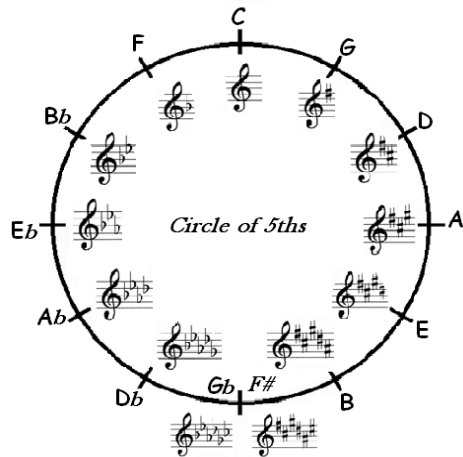
Remember the ol' Do Re Me thang you learned in school? We can all recognize a major scale when we hear one. All ya gotta know is . . . where the half steps in a scale belong. Then use the Chromatic scale, and plug notes in. Like this. C major has no # or b, right? So the notes will be . . . C D E F G A B C . . . Note that there is a half step between the 3rd and 4th note of the major scale. And between the 7th and 8th.

To make a G scale . . . do the same thing. Start by typing out all the notes, starting from G.

G A B C D E F G

Now, look at notes 3 and 4. You need a half step in there. 3 is B. 4 is C. Perfect! Now look at 7 and 8. Hmmm. There's a whole step! Yikes!!!! And look at 6 & 7 while you're at it. OUCH! Only a half step! No problem.

Change the F to F# . . . Now there's a whole step between 6 & 7 and a half step between 7 & 8 as there should be. It's really that simple. G A B C D E F# G Look at your circle of 5ths. How many sharps are in the key of G? 1!



Note that the key of G has 1 sharp, NOT one flat! Here's why. You could have just as easily made the F a Gb. You would still have a half step between 7 & 8, right? But could you have both a G and a Gb in the same scale? Simply put, you can't! So you make it an F#. Same for all the other "Natural" keys. So natural keys will have sharps. The other keys are flat keys!

OK you pros. Argue this point if ya like. But then try to explain to someone how the key of E could have flats in it! Let's see . . . E F G A B C D E . . . half steps need to be between 3&4 and 7&8. So let's make them right, using flats . . . E Gb Ab A B Db Eb E

Can you imagine reading the music for a tune in the key of E, written in flats! How hard would that be? A note on one space could be an A or an Ab. And a note on another space could be an E or an Eb.

Now let's rewrite the E scale using sharps . . . E F# G# A B C# D# E Somehow that makes a lot more sense to me.

Chords . . .

There are 4 "flavors" of a chord. Major, minor, diminished and augmented. Just memorize these 4 easy formulae . . .

Major: 1st, 3rd & 5th note of the scale. Key of C: C D E F G A B C So a C MAJOR Chord would be these 3 notes: **C E G**

Memorize: Major = 1, 3 & 5 Maj, M or a small triangle (indicating a triad), or nothing. C by itself would be C major. As would CMaj, Cmaj or CM

Minor: 1st, b3rd, 5th note of the scale. Only difference between a C MAJOR and a C minor chord is, you flat the 3rd note. (b3rd) So a C minor would be: **C Eb G**

Memorize: Minor = 1, b3 & 5 min or, m . . . Cmin or Cm

Note: Bending the E notes to Eb on a C diatonic will keep you in C minor.

Diminished: 1st, b3rd, b5th Flat the 5th, too, and you have a dim chord. Cdim would be **C Eb Gb**

Memorize: Diminished = 1, b3 & b5 Dim, - (minus sign) . . . CDim, Cdim or C-

Augmented: 1st, 3rd, #5th note of the scale. Caug would be **C E G#**

Memorize: Augmented = 1, 3 & #5 Aug, + (plus sign) . . . CAug, Caug or C+

Chord Scales . . .

Basically, a chord scale is a major scale, played in chords. These will be the most common chords in that key. If you were to sing or hum a major scale in "C", you'd sing . . . C D E F G A B C

But if you were to play those same notes as major chords, as in . . . Cmaj, Dmaj, Emaj, etc . . . and sing the scale over the chords, it wouldn't sound right at all. Some would sound OK. Some, not so good.

If you were to play . . . Cmaj, Dmin, Emin, Fmaj, G7th, Amin, Bdim, Cmaj . . . it would sound perfect!

C Major's chord scale is . . . C Dm Em F G7 Am Bdim C (OK Pros, gimme some slack. I'm keeping it simple!

Root (1) 2 3 4 5 6 7 Tonic (8) And the 7th is the norm for the 5th chord, OK?)

Here's how to write a C major chord scale. Write out the notes of the scale. C D E F G A B C

Chord 1 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of the scale. C E G is a C major.

Chord 2 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of that scale, STARTING FROM NOTE 2! D F A, which is a Dmin. The F# in a D scale is flatted to F here. b3 is minor

Chord 3 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of that scale, STARTING FROM NOTE 3! E G B, which is an Emin. The G# in an E scale is flatted to E here. b3 is minor

Chord 4 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of the scale starting from note 4! F A C Fmaj

Chord 5 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of the scale starting from note 5! G B D
USUALLY PLAYED AS A DOM7 CHORD, adding a b7(F) note. G7 = G B D & F 1 3 5 b7

Chord 6 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of that scale, starting from note 6! A C E, which is an Amin. The C# in an A scale is flatted to C here. b3 is minor

Chord 7 is the 1st, 3rd and 5th note of that scale, starting from note 7! B D F, which is a Bdim. The D# & F# in a B scale is flatted to D & F here. b3&b5 is dim.

If you just wrote out a C scale, then under it, wrote the same scale, starting on the 2nd note, then under that, starting on the 3rd, etc . . . you'd have the C major scale 7 times, just starting on a different note of the same scale. Simple enough. Then go 1 3 5 on each, and you have the notes for that chord of the chord scale.

C D E F G A B C

D E F G A B C D (Dorian Mode)

E F G A B C D E (Phrygian Mode)

F G A B C D E F (Lydian Mode)

G A B C D E F G (Mixolydian Mode)

A B C D E F G A (Aeolian Mode) - THIS IS ALSO AN A MINOR SCALE. Note the half steps between 2&3 & 5&6.

B C D E F G A B (Locrian Mode)

I'm not going there now, but if you re-read all the great posts about modes . . . I think you'll better understand them now.

I will make one point now about modes. Many associate a modal scale with its root key. This is incorrect! In the above example, the 2nd scale as Dorian mode of the D scale. You would use this scale to play in the key of D, not C

A Blues progression is often called a I IV V (1 4 5) In C, look at the scale. That would be C F & G7. And you use an F harp to JAM in C! (Go back to the chart above.) The "harp" used is the 4th of the key you're in.

When you hear a musician say "It's a 2-5 in C", he means you're playing a Dm & G (or G7).

And a I IV V (1 4 5) is C F G7. A I vi ii V (1 6 2 5) is C Am Dm G7, Etc.

Examples: A ton of "American" music is written in 12 bars. Meaning the pattern of chords to get through a verse takes 12 bars, or measures.

Johnny B. Goode is a 1 4 5 Rock n Roll tune. In "C", the chords for the 12 bars (one verse) would be . . .

[: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | :]

[: | C | % | % | C7 | F | F7 | C | C7 | G7 | % | C | C ' ' ' | :]

(" % " means repeat previous measure or bar. " : " means go back to the " [: " and repeat from there.

HOMEWORK . . .

Write out the Major scale for each key. Circle the 1st, 4th and 5th notes.

Write out the chord scale for each key. Circle the 1st, 4th and 5th chords.

Write out a 1 4 5 for each key (12 bar progression)

Write out a 1 6 4 5 & a 1 6 2 5 for each key.

B I N G O ! You now know more theory than probably 80% of the harp players in the world. :)

Enjoy.

Putting some basic theory to work . . .

OK, let's build some chords, chord phrases and chord progressions. We'll start with a simple progression, then beef it up some. I discussed some progression basics above. So, because so much of American music is built around 12 bars, and **I IV V** progressions, we'll start there.

Let's take a really simple, straight Blues progression in G. This could just as easily be used as a Country, Folk or Rock progression.

A [: | G ' ' ' | % | % | % | C ' ' ' | % | G ' ' ' | % | D ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | D ' ' ' | :]

If our band played this exact progression, we'd need to add a lot of vocal and instrumental dynamics, or it could end up getting boring for our audience really quickly! It starts with 4 measures of G. Then 2 measures of C. Then back to G again for 2 more measures. (bars) This kind of simplicity will be boring unless the instrumentalists add some dynamic strumming and solos. The vocals will also need to be pretty dynamic. So let's make the progression more interesting.

B [: | G ' ' ' | % | % | **G7** ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | **C7** ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | **G7** ' ' ' | **D7** ' ' ' | **C7** ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | **G' D7'** | :] Note bar 12 is split.

OK, that's a bit better. Let's go a little further. A common modification of a basic progression is called a "quick change". We'll replace those first 4 boring measures with a quick change. We replace the second bar of the **I** with the **IV**.

C [: | G ' ' ' | **C** ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G7 ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G7 ' ' ' | D7 ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G' D7' | :]

We can also raise the **I** chord a half step in the 3rd bar and split the 4th bar like we did in the 12th bar above.

D [: | G ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | **G' Ab'** | **G' G7'** | C ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G7 ' ' ' | D7 ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G' D7' | :]

When I use this change, I like to change the 4th bar as well. From | G7 ' ' ' | to | G' G7' |. Here's why.

Note in the upper progression (**D**), the phrasing of the bars is changing. Initially (**A**) we had 4 bars that all sounded the same. All G. I'll use **da's** and **de's** to show changes in sound. Called cadence. Cadence is a melodic configuration or series of chords marking the end of a phrase. I'm only going to reference the first 4 bars below. But note that we made a few changes in the other measures as well, adding a 7th. But this also helps add cadence to the rest of the progression.

4 bars of G have no changes in sound, or cadence. | da da da da | da da da da | da da da da | da da da da |

Then, in progression (**B**) we made a couple changes. The first 4 measures changed slightly. We added a G7.

| da da da da | da da da da | da da da da | **de de de de** |

The quick change in progression (**C**) broke up the 2nd bar. So bar 2 and 4 changed a bit.

da da da da | **de de de de** | da da da da | de de de de |

When I added the **Ab** in bar 3, we added another sound change. But this time it's within a bar.

da da da da | de de de de | **da da de de** | da da da da | So bar 3 has two sounds. Bar 4 is OK the way it is. But I like changing bar 4 as well, so it also has 2 sounds. The first 4 bars will "break up" into 2 bars of 1 sounds each, and 2 bars of 2 sounds each. da da da da | de de de de | da da de de | **da da de de** | Here's how to get that 2nd sound in bar 4.

E [: | G ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | G' Ab' | **G' G7'** | C ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G7 ' ' ' | D7 ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' ' ' | G' D7' | :]

Now bar 4 has 2 sounds. The 1st 4 bars are now da da da da | de de de de | da da de de | **da da de de** |

Not too bad now. Much more interesting. We can go a little further using the same techniques for measures 5 & 6, and 7 & 8. And there are many interesting possibilities for measures 9 thru 12, commonly called the "turn around".

Remember the discussion about chord scales? Just like notes can form a melody, so can chords. Let's try substituting some chords with chord phrases. Don't forget, the notes of all the chords in the chord scale are all in the major scale.

F [:| G ' ' ' | C ' ' ' | G ' Ab ' | G ' G7 ' | C ' ' ' | C7 ' ' ' | G ' Am ' | Bm ' Bb7 ' | Am ' ' ' | Eb ' D7 ' | G ' C7 ' | G ' D7 ' |

OK, this is a much more interesting progression! But can we go further without over-doing it? Sure. Imagination is the only limitation. We've created a more jazzy sounding progression now. So let's take that idea, going "jazzy", a step further. Just a little bit.

Just as you can make those major chords 7ths, so can you make minor chords (or diminished and augmented) 7ths. And 9ths sound great in Blues and jazz. A 9th is a Dom7th, and a 9th.

Example: C D E F G A B C D E F G Dom 7th = flat the 7th. B becomes Bb. The 9th is D. C9 = C E G Bb D
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Now let's sweeten this progression just a little more.

[:| G ' ' ' | C9 ' ' ' | G ' Ab7 ' | G ' G7 ' | C ' ' ' | C9 ' ' ' | G ' Am7 ' | Bm7 ' Bb7 ' | Am7 ' ' ' | Eb9 ' D9 ' | G ' C7 ' | G Daug7 ' ' ' |:]

The interesting thing about this progression is, you can sing the same melody, or play the same solo over it, as you can the first (A) progression. You can also add a lot of variation to your solo playing over the added chords!

Also, note the addition of the augmented chord at the end. One count of G, and 3 counts of Daug7.

You might not use all of these ideas in any one progression. But even if you don't use the chords, you can play the notes of the chords in your solo, offering a lot of variety in your solos.

More Chord Structures and Chord Alterations

I'm not going to go into chord substitution any more deeply here. But I will touch lightly on some chord alterations you can use to add flavor to your chord progressions, and to help create melodic lines using chords. (Chord phrases) I'll also give you a few more examples of building chords.

About 7ths

You know from above that a G7 is a G dominant 7th. We flat the 7th note, giving us a bluesy, or even Rock sound. But we can also use the 7th note of the scale in chords. If I use an F# instead of an F in a G chord, instead of the bluesy sounding Dom7th, I get a jazzy, "pretty" chord, a major 7th. GMaj7

I showed you above that you can make a chord a 9th by adding a flat 7th note, and a 9th note to a chord. You can also add 11ths and 13ths. Same for minor chords. Just keep counting up from 8.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 11 13
 C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C

To get a C9, for example, I'd need to add a Bb (flat 7th) to the chord, then add a D, the 9th. This would be a dom9th. The Dom is implied. C7 is the same as a Cdom7. (If I add the D without the 7th, it would simply be a Cadd9 chord.)

If I want to use the jazzier sounding natural 7th note in the chord, I need to spell that out. Cmaj9 would have the natural 7th and a 9th.

You can also add b9ths, or #9ths. (Flatted or raised 9ths) You can also have add9 chords. An add9 would be adding the 9th to a chord that doesn't have a flatted or natural 7th. There are also 6ths, and . . . well, the list is endless. ☺

So now, if you see a chord called **Bbm7b9**, you can figure out what notes are in the chord. This is by far not all the chord types.

One more interesting thing you can do is to add a bit of a melody line by changing the bass note of the chord. Often called "Slash Chords".

We could play 4 measures of Am, and change the bass note by a half step in each measure to create a cool chromatic walk down in your progression. And it'll still be an Am. We just add a slash, then the bass note desired. Am/G# for example is an Am, with a G# bass note.

The beginning of Stairway To Heaven, for example, does exactly that. Am, walking down in half steps with the bass notes. Am ' | Am/G# ' | Am/G ' | D/F# ' | (Note: This is a bit simplified. It also adds notes on the top end of the chord. The Am/G# also plays a B note on top – add9 – Amadd9/G#, or Am+9/G#. The Am/G adds a C note on top. C is just another 3rd on top.)

Next time I'll go more into chord substitution. And I might hit on music and theory terms. But that's it for now.

Read, absorb, and enjoy!

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