

# Melody and Chords

A **melody** is a sequence of notes (tones) that are played in sequence. Therefore we can consider a melody as a **horizontal** pattern.

## Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

singing-bell.com

The image shows the musical notation for the song 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a single treble clef staff. Above the staff, the chords C, F, C, F, C, G, C, F, C, G are indicated. The lyrics are: 'Twinkle twinkle lit-tle star, how I won-der what you are. Up a-bove the world so high like a dia-mond in the sky, twin-kle twin-kle lit - tle star, how I won-der what you are'.

**Chords** are a group of (typically three or more) notes sounded together, as a basis of harmony. Chords can be played as a **block** or **broken** (in sequence). Block chords can be considered as a vertical pattern.

The image shows four measures of block chords in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The chords are labeled C, F, G7, and C. The notes for each chord are: C (C4, E4, G4), F (C4, E4, A4), G7 (Bb4, D5, F5), and C (C4, E4, G4). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

**Accompaniment** is assigning the right chords to a melody so the harmonic integrity is guaranteed. The action of assigning a chord to a melody is also called **harmonization**.

The question is now how you assign a chord to a melody. The answer looks simple. Each chord has notes that could be part of the melody. For example in

Twinkle, twinkle... The first 4 notes are part of the C chord which means that the C chord is the right harmony for the first measure. The second 2 notes in Measure two are an A and would be part of the F chord.

This rule can be applied in most cases but there is another concept to be aware of. This is the existence of **Target Notes** and **Through Notes**.

A target note is a tone that lasts longer or is being repeated while a through note is just briefly passed by.

Target notes should always have a chord that has a tone of the melody. Through notes can usually be played with the same chord as the first and last tone of the melody.

## Are You Sleeping?

Through Notes    Target Notes

C-Chord

The image shows the first two staves of the song 'Are You Sleeping?' in 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody with lyrics: 'Are you sleep-ing? Are you sleep-ing? Bro - ther John, Bro - ther John'. The notes are color-coded: red circles indicate 'Target Notes' (C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G) and blue circles indicate 'Through Notes' (D, E, F, A). The second staff contains the accompaniment with lyrics: 'Morn-ing bells are ring-ing, morn-ing bells are ring-ing, Ding, dang, dong; Ding, dang, dong.' The notes are all eighth notes.

This whole song can be played with only one chord (in repetition) – The C-Major chord because all target notes are part of this chord. However an alternative harmonization would be C-G7-C-C etc. to also include the through notes with a different chord (G7 includes the D). This shows that harmonization has many different variants for a given song.

A simple song can usually be accompanied with the 3 basic chords I, IV and V or V7. Please review the **Circle Of Fifths** to spot the relationship of those chords.

In rare cases a song can modulate temporarily into another key in which case additional chords have to be applied for a proper harmonization.

A good example for this is

## Jingle Bells

mattwarnockguitar.com

The image shows a musical score for the song "Jingle Bells" in 4/4 time, with lyrics and guitar chord annotations. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first four lines of music, and the second system contains the remaining four lines. Chords are indicated by letters above the staff: C, F, G7, and C. A red circle highlights a D7 chord in the second system, with a red box and text "Temporary Modulation to G" pointing to it. The lyrics are: "Dash - ing through the snow in a one - horse o - pen sleigh. O'er the fields we go, laugh - ing all the way. Bells on bob - tail ring. Mak - ing spir - its bright. What fun it is to ride and sing a sleigh - ing song to - night. Oh! Jin - gle bells, jin - gle bells, jin - gle all the way. Oh what fun it is to ride on a one horse o - pen sleigh. one horse o - pen sleigh."

In this case D7 is applied since the 2 target notes are a D. Instead of the following G7 a G chord would also do the job.

Harmonization can be simple or more sophisticated. Beside I, IV and V also II, III, VI and VII could be used.

## Moon River

The image shows a musical score for the song "Moon River" in 3/4 time. The melody is written on a single treble clef staff. The lyrics are written below the staff, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes. Above the staff, various chords are indicated in boxes: C, Am, F, C, F, C, Bm7b5, E7, Am, C7, F, and Bb7.

**C**      **Am**      **F**      **C**

Moon Riv - er wid - er than a mile, I'm

**F**      **C**      **Bm7<sup>b5</sup>**      **E7**

cross - ing you in style some day. Old

**Am**      **C7**      **F**      **B<sup>b</sup>7**

dream - - mak - er, you heart - - break - er, wher -

This is an example of a more sophisticated harmonization.

Once you got the practice and experience you will develop a “harmonic feeling” and select the right chord by just hearing the melody. The chords can be played with the piano, guitar, ukulele or any instrument that can produce chords.

Sophisticated higher end Keyboards have sometimes an “intelligent” harmonizer built in.

When using harmonization for composing always try it out on an instrument and select the chord progression that produces the best harmonic foundation.