

Chapter 1 – Making The Melody

The dreaded melody. It's the real fear of any songwriter. You know what you want to say. You've already written it down. Now what? How can you provide the listener with a sense of constructive melody that invites them to listen to what you have to say? It ALL has to do with creating the right melody. This section deals with using tried-and-true methods on how to create the perfect sound using progressions, hooks, and stylized genres of music to generate effective tonality to your song.

a. Discovering Your Sound - Are you a rocker, country, folk, pop or jazz musician? The fact is no matter WHAT type of songwriter you are, you must decide the sound you are looking for. You'll even learn to combine various styles of music together to create a fusion - which has now become one of the most popular styles of music to date!

We've established that **this song is sad, and that it has a blues/jazz feel to it**. This is VERY important for the melody (which doesn't necessarily mean the vocal runs being performed) because we need to keep the consistency.

b. Fail-Proof Progressions - Virtually EVERY songwriter relies on a few simple concepts - "The Circle of 5ths" and "The Chord Progression Wheel", which have both been used for decades in providing the listener with the perfect ear-pleasing sound. One strange chord could make or break your song. Even if you think you know about these two elements, odds are you don't because there are so many tools within these concepts that most folks won't explain to you. This tutorial cannot be missed!

You may already know this, but typically sad tones are created using a lot of minors and in jazz/blues, dominant 7th chords. However, we're not getting *too* deep into this. Instead I want to show you how to use The Circle of 5^{ths} right now in a very easy way.



Each of the twelve letters is arranged like numbers on a clock representing the root notes of a chord of some quality (major, minor, or dominant seventh). As you move counterclockwise around the circle, each chord root descends in an interval of a perfect fifth (three and a half whole steps). Moving clockwise, each chord root descends in an interval of a perfect fourth (two and a half whole steps). This series of chords demonstrates the strong tendency or pull of the “V” (dominant) to “I” (tonic) chord. This is the strongest chord movement, or cadence in Western music.

Moving counterclockwise through the circle of fifths is often referred to as backcycling. **Some of the best songs ever written have been created using cycles of descending fifths such as the “Am7-Dm7-G7-Cmaj7” progression that moves through the circle until ultimately arriving at the tonic.**

The circle of fifths can be used to create chord progressions by starting with any chord on the circle and moving in either direction using as many or as few consecutive chord roots as you like to produce a new chord sequence. Circle progressions often begin with the “I” (tonic) chord before proceeding through the circle of fifths. The resulting chords can be major, minor or dominant seventh qualities (or any combination) that can be further embellished, altered, or substituted.

For example, if you start with “E” and move counterclockwise to “C” you create the “E-A-D-G-C” chord sequence. Then, by designating a major, minor, or dominant seventh chord quality to each root note you can create the “E7-A7-D7-G7-C” and “Em-Am-Dm-G7-C” progressions.

You can also start the sequence with the “C” (tonic) before proceeding through the circle of fifths creating the “C-E7-A7-D7-G7-C” progression. Many of the progressions that you could explore here are the basic (C-F), classic rock (C-Bb-F-C), folk (C-G), jazz (Dm7-G7-C), ragtime (C-A7-D7-G7), and standard (C-Am7-Dm7-G7), which utilize chord sequences based on circle of fifths movement, generally only cycles of four or more chords from the circle of fifths in succession are referred to as circle (circular or circle of fifths) progressions.

The possible progression combinations that can be created using the circle of fifths are almost endless and are found in classical music as well as in jazz and popular songs.

B-E-A-D-G-C Cycle

This cycle travels counterclockwise from “B” to “C.” The “B7-E7-A7-D7-G7-C” and “Bm-E7-Am-Dm-G7-C” progressions are two common types of this cycle. The first type is called a cycle of dominant seventh chords. A secondary dominant is a chord that serves as the “V” of another. For example, in the “B7-E7-A7-D7-G7-C” progression the “B7” is the “V” of the “E7” chord and the “E7” is the “V” of the “A7” chord. Similarly, the “A7” is the “V” of the “D7” chord and the “D7” is the “V” of the “G7” chord.

Since we are looking for a bluesy/jazz song here, we know that either of these cycles of B-E-A-D-G-C would work. The only real issue we have is setting the initial tone of the song. Once we decide on our ‘opening’ chord, we can use the Circle of 5^{ths} to decide the rest of our progression. Believe it or not, it REALLY is that easy.

The Bm chord is always a fun chord to begin a song with. Maybe it’s the tone that is provided, or maybe it just feels right because it’s so moody. Either way, we’ll choose that one.

To fall in line with this wonderful cycle progression of B-E-A-D-G-C, let’s play this one:

Bm-E7-Am-Dm-G7-C

While the number of chords doesn't technically matter, what I am doing here is showing you how to create progressions without fumbling around the fretboard in search of a chord that will 'work' when the logics are already present. Since there are 6 chords in this simple progression it should be easy to fit them into the verse.

D-G-C-F Cycle

(While it might seem that I am throwing a lot at you I'm really not. What I am doing is just showing you a few cycles that already appear on the Circle of 5ths chart.)

This cycle travels counter-clockwise from "D" to "F." The "Dm-G7-C-F" progression is the most common type of this cycle. Let's use this particular cycle for the chorus and see how it sounds.

Dm-G7-C-F

Sure you could just strum all of these chords, but that can get rather old in a song. Let's add an actual tab-related 'hook' from the verse to the chorus. These hooks can appear anywhere, but for the purpose of this study we'll be playing the hook at the end of each verse before moving into the chorus. Since we'll be playing in the key of B, we'll need to decide on a hook (riff) that fits within this key AND that stems from the C chord at the end of the verse theme.

The Hook

c. Developing Your Hook - A hook ties your entire song together. Without a hook, you'll find that a song tends to go nowhere. Even worse, without a hook the audience has nothing to remember you by.

We already know we are playing this progression for the verse: Bm – E7 – Am – Dm – G7 – C

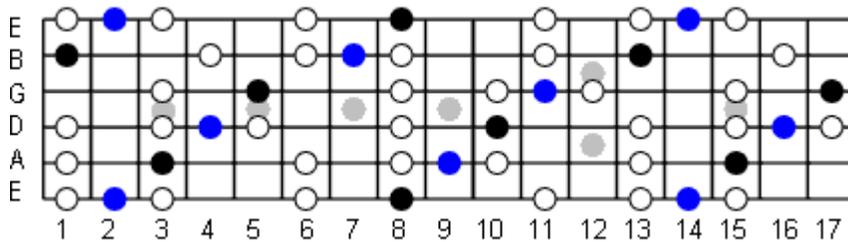
We also know we are playing this progression for the chorus: Dm – G7 – C – F

Now we need to add a basic guitar hook.

If you're EVER in doubt, the 'blues scale' is always effective. This does not ONLY apply to blues songs! It's used in a variety of styles, so don't let the name fool you.

Whether or not you are familiar with how to create licks based off of key and/or based off a given chord right now is something I simply don't have enough time to explain. However, there is a VERY easy way to guarantee that you create an effective 'lick' or 'riff' that works – even in the most basic of forms.

ONE STEP SOLUTION! Find the notes you need. In this case, we're looking to add a little hook at the end of our verse using the C major chord. This C is found in the black dots on this diagram. This diagram shows all of the C root notes and is based off the blues scale:

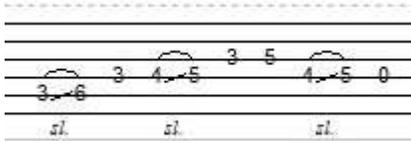


This doesn't need to be difficult, and there is no way to mess it up as long as you stay within a logical realm of chord/note usage. The only thing you need to make sure of is that when you decide on a few notes here and there, you ALWAYS make the LAST note try to revolve itself back around. In the case of the pattern I've chosen, I allowed the open D string note to ring as my last note, because I know that the open D string note is part of the Dm chord. The Dm chord comes in at the beginning of the chorus, so I know I'm safe. THIS IS THE EASY way to do it. There are much more progressive topics on creating hooks, riffs, licks, or basically solos behind your own composition, but this MUST be left up to the composer. I can't tell you which lick or riff would work, because I don't know the way you want it to sound. All I can do is show you the way I do it (which saves me a LOT of headache and recording time).

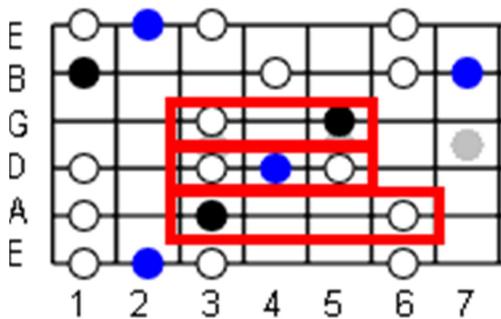
In other words – the last chord in this verse is the C. All I did was play around with the notes found in the C chord and made sure that before I moved into the Dm for the chorus I can easily make the switch. This pattern works just fine:



- I've started at the C (3rd fret) note on the A string.
- I then slide from the C (3rd fret) note on the A string to the D#/Ab (6th fret) note.
- Then I use the F (3rd fret) note on the D string, then the F#/Gb (4th fret), then the G note (5th fret).
- I then go to the G string and play the A#/Bb (3rd fret) and then the C (5th fret) note.
- I go back to the F#/Gb (4th fret) on the D string, then the G note (5th fret).
- Finally I end on the A string at the D note (5th fret) to play the Dm chord for the chorus. **Depending on the Dm you want to play, you can also play the D string OPEN for the Dm open chord.**



Since all of these notes can be found on the pattern for the C blues scale, I know I'm safe.



d. Avoiding Monotonous Pitfalls - This tutorial is meant to go hand-in-hand with "Developing Your Hook" but is a stand-alone tutorial as well. The structure of your song is quite possibly the most important element in your songwriting. Many times a simple Verse, Chorus, Verse, Chorus will work (Nirvana) but often you'll find that your songs start sounding like the 'same old thing' over and over. Monotony for you ends up being monotony for the listener, because if you're bored with your song, imagine how the listener feels!

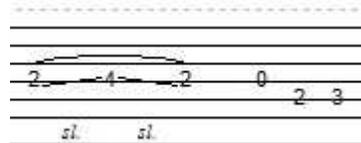
So, all that aside, what do you do now that you have a verse, a chorus, and now a little hook. Well, here's where you have to make a few of your own observations. The easiest way to do that is by playing the song using ONLY the chords we're working with. Don't pay attention to the lyrics yet. The lyrics are fine. What we need to do now is determine if the song starts sounding boring as we play it. It just might.

Play the verse progression TWICE, without using any fill or hook:

Bm – E7 – Am – Dm – G7 – C

D, D, D, DU (repeat)

It's boring isn't it? (By the way, we'll decide on an intro later.) In addition to it sounding rather boring, the C back to Bm works, but it sounds a bit strange. Maybe we need a little hook and the end of the FIRST time we play this progression to bring it around and make more sense of the C back to Bm. Let's try to add this:



Now there's no need to explain too much about this. It's just used to fill in the monotony of going back to the Bm at the end of the C. The "2" in the 2-4-2 legato slide (a legato means only pluck the first note and then DO NOT pluck the other notes that are sliding) is just an E note to an F# note (then back to the E note). I chose this because I know that I want my F# to hint in there that it is going back to the Bm at some point, so instead of first choosing the E note, I actually chose the F# note. I then reverted to a LOWER tone as to not confuse the listener. The lower tone signifies that the song isn't going to move into a different section of the song. By then opening up the D string (as noted with the "0") I've brightened up the movement, even though the open D string note doesn't technically fall into our spectrum. (If it sounds good – use it!)

The last thing I've done is walk that 2-3 on the A string. You can think of this open D string to walking the 2-3 on the A string as a "Redemption Song" or "Wish You Were Here" style of playing. It adds a new dimension to a rather repetitive song. It worked for them, so why not use it. (It's common in a BUNCH of other songs too, so you're not really stealing anything.)

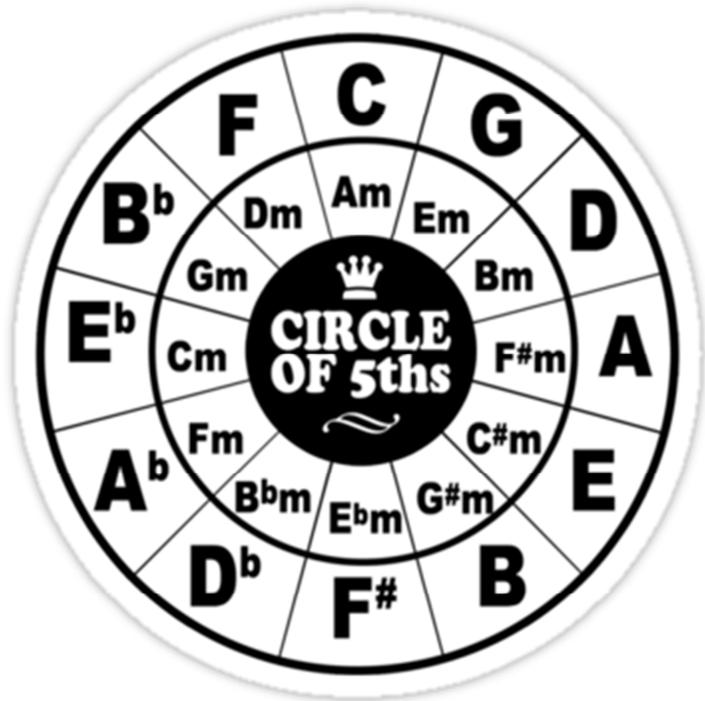
Now what about the chorus? Let's keep the chorus VERY simple.

First, play the chorus as this (played twice): Dm, G7, C, F

D, D, D, DU (repeat)

You'll find that playing this twice is rather boring. SO, let's add another chord progression. We're going to add the following chords: Bb, Gm, Am, Dm

How? Take a look:



The Bb comes in counter-clockwise from the F, so it'll work for a 'change of pace' and the Gm is the relative minor to the Bb, so it'll work too. I then changed it up a little on you and selected the Am because it is the relative minor of C. Remember the whole C thing, right? We still want the song to hint back a little. Then of course, the Dm is the relative minor of F, so again – it works too! (The easier way to do this is just to find the relative minors and play around with those. You could technically have chosen any of them, but you'll need to play them in order to decide if they offer enough diversity in the chord changes.)

So, here's what the final chorus could look like:

Dm, G7, C, F, Bb, Gm, Am, Dm

So we've completed the verse and chorus theme and broken a little of the monotony of the chord usage. Now we need to decide what our structure is. So far the structure seems to be:

Verse > Chorus > Verse > Chorus

There is NOTHING wrong with this structure. It's been proven to work time and time again. The beauty of song structure is that there really are no limitations. This will be

based on your own personal opinion. However, EVERY song has some sort of introduction. It could be a non-vocal/vocal verse progression, a non-vocal/vocal chorus progression, or even a separate intro all together. Those are pretty much the only options. Again we need to go back to what this song is going to 'feel' like. It's supposed to be a little bluesy/jazzy, and while the chords aren't necessarily extremely like the two styles, it can still sound that way. Even your vocals could change the entire feel of it. More on that later.

For the purpose of this song, I want YOU to choose which sounds better between using the verse or the chorus to kick the song off. Once you've determined which one you want to use, simply make a note of it. I'll be performing both versions for you.