

POP Piano

Michael Gundlach

METHOD - VOLUME 1

Play and accompany
songs professionally
with chord symbols



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Basic rules

The following three rules put together are the foundation of every good piano arrangement. Therefore it is important to know them and to be proficient in them.

Basic rule 1

The pianist's left hand takes over the role of the bassist in the band. The bass figures, which mostly have only one voice in them, achieve two important functions at the same time. On the one hand the style of music is considerably affected by the rhythm of the bass-line, and on the other hand the deep bass notes support the harmony and the chord changes in the song. For this purpose, the keynote of every chord is played as a general rule on the first beat, and the bass-run is varied with the keynote, the fifth and the octave. This kind of pattern for the left hand can be used for major and minor chords because without the deciding third the chord is 'neutral'.

The right hand always plays the chord or variations of it. After you have become acquainted with the three basic rules, we will introduce you to six possible variations for the right hand.

Example:

The example shows a piano arrangement for a C major chord in 4/4 time. The right hand plays a C major triad (C4, E4, G4) in the first measure and a C major triad (C5, E5, G5) in the second measure. The left hand plays a bass line: C3 (Root), E3 (Fifth), C3 (Root), E3 (Fifth), and C3 (Root). Labels 'C' are placed above the first and second measures. Labels 'Root' and 'Fifth' are placed below the bass line notes.

Basic rule 2

If the piano does not only have to accompany a singer or an instrumentalist but also has to play the melody at the same time, then the right hand has a dual function to perform. It plays the melody above and the same time plays the chord underneath. The highest note in the right hand is always equivalent to the note in the melody-line. The chords should be played, as far as possible, on the stressed parts of the bar (4/4-time: first and third beat; 3/4-time; first beat).

Two simple examples make the first two basic rules clear with the traditional songs "Sur le pont d'Avignon" and "Auld Lang Syne". When you compare each lead-sheet with the following worked-out version of the song, you can see the melody-line clearly set in the chords.

Exercises with chord inversions

3a

4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2

5 2 1

3b

4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2

5 1 2

3c

4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2

5 1 2

3d

4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2

3e

4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2 4 2 1 5 4 2

5 1 2

3. Chords without the third / with the ninth

If the third in the chord is replaced with the second, or rather the ninth (the second and the ninth are on and the same note that differ only by the octave position), we become a rather romantic sound that is typical for slower songs and ballads. Likewise this variant does not determine the issue of whether or not it is a major or minor chord.

C2no3
C9no3

Exercises with chords without the third / with the ninth

19a

19b

19c

20a



Oh My Darling

Accompaniment with chords without the third / with the ninth

Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach

System 1: Musical score for the first system of "Oh My Darling". It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features chords G9no3, D9no3, and G9no3 with fingerings 5 3, 1, 5 2, 1, 5 3, 1, and 5 3, 1. The bass line has fingerings 5 2 1 and 5 2 1.

System 2: Musical score for the second system of "Oh My Darling". It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features chords G9no3, G9no3, and D9no3 with fingerings 5 2, 1. The bass line has fingerings 5 2 1 and 5 2 1.

System 3: Musical score for the third system of "Oh My Darling". It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features chords Am, G9no3, D9no3, and G9no3 with fingerings 5 3, 1, 5 2, 1, 5 2, 1, and 5 2, 1. The bass line has fingerings 5 2 1 and 5 2 1.

6. Embellishing Chords

A more ambitious possibility for the right hand, even more interesting and varied, is to use “embellishing chords”. In this case the actual chord is connected with another chord. A simple rule to find a suitable embellishing chord is shown in the next two examples:

A major chord is embellished with a minor chord that is a whole step above the original chord.

Example: C major is varied with D minor. The keynote “C” remains in the left hand.

C

In the case of the minor chord, it is exactly the opposite. We add a major chord located one whole step below the original chord.

Example: D minor is varied with C major. The keynote “D” remains in the left hand.

D m

The use of embellishing chords is an excellent choice for piano solo work because the melody line comes out much better and stronger (see example of the song ‘Sloop John B.’ at the end of this chapter).

Exercises with embellishing chords in C major

Basic exercise 1

45



Sloop John B.

Piano solo with embellishing chords

Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach

Chords: G, D, G, C/D

The first system of music consists of four measures. The treble clef staff features a series of chords and melodic lines. The bass clef staff provides a simple accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff: G (4 2 1), D (5 3 1), G (5 3 1), and C/D (5 3 1). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

Chords: G, G, G

The second system of music consists of four measures. The treble clef staff continues the melodic and harmonic development. The bass clef staff maintains the accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff: G (4 2 1), G (4 2 1), G (4 2 1), and G (4 2 1). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

Chords: G, G, D, D

The third system of music consists of four measures. The treble clef staff shows more complex chordal textures. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff: G (4 2 1), G (5 4 2), D (4 2 1), and D (4 2 1). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

Chords: G, G, C, C

The fourth system of music consists of four measures. The treble clef staff features a variety of chordal patterns. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff: G (5 2 1), G (5 2 1), C (5 2 1), and C (5 2 1). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

Chords: G, D, G, G

The fifth system of music consists of four measures. The treble clef staff concludes the piece with final chords and melodic phrases. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff: G (5 3 1), D (4 2 1), G (5 2 1), and G (5 2 1). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

Free Intros

In the following you will be introduced to 6 typical harmonic progressions of pop music that not only lend themselves to intros, but can also be used as interludes to bring you back to the beginning of the song (see also chapter "Transitions and interludes"). All the examples are in the key of C major. You should learn these harmonic progressions off by heart, so what when you need to, you can fall back on them and try to develop your own accompaniment patterns to the harmony.

1. C F/C G/C F/C C F/C Gsus G

2. C C/E F Gsus G

3. C C7/E F F#dim C/G G C F/G

4. C Am7 F Gsus G C Am7 Dm7 Gsus

5. F C/E Dm7 C F C/E Dm7 Gsus G

6. C G/B Am7 C/G F C/G G7 C F/G

The following notated examples demonstrate how these harmonic progressions can be practiced. Many of these intros fit to several different styles. The style descriptions here are only one of many possibilities. You could, for example, transform a fast pop intro into a slower ballad intro just by changing the tempo.

Styles of Pop Music

The broad term 'pop music', short for popular music, includes many different styles. At the same time, there are a few "standard styles" which a solo pianist or accompanist should be familiar with. We want to introduce them and analyze them using exercises and developed songs.

Pop

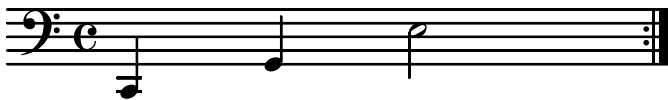
The typical characteristics of pop-piano-playing have already been introduced in the chapter "Chords varying the third with the fourth" and "Embellishing chords". In order to get a good feeling of them again, you should play complete worked-out pieces in this chapter. Another style under "Pop" is the pop-ballad which will be discussed here separately.

Before you play the arranged ballad accompaniment of "Oh My Darling", you should practice with your left hand the following typical bass-figures.

If the sustain-pedal (right pedal on the piano) is held for a complete bar you get a rather "flat" or two-dimensional character to your playing which goes well with a pop-ballad.

Pop-ballad bass figures

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



93

House Of The Rising Sun

Piano solo

Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach

The score is written for piano solo in 6/8 time, featuring a mix of treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The piece is divided into four systems of three measures each. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. Dynamics include piano (p) and piano fortissimo (p^{ff}). Chord symbols and their voicings are provided above the treble clef staff.

System 1:

- Measure 1: Chord Dm (5 2 1), Treble: D4, F4, A4 (5 2 1), Bass: D3, F3, A3.
- Measure 2: Chord B \flat (4 2 1), Treble: B \flat 4, D5, F5 (4 2 1), Bass: B \flat 3, D4, F4.
- Measure 3: Chord A \sharp sus (5 2), Treble: A \sharp 4, C5, E5 (5 2), Bass: A \sharp 3, C4, E4.

System 2:

- Measure 4: Chord A (4 2 1), Treble: A4, C5, E5 (4 2 1), Bass: A3, C4, E4.
- Measure 5: Chord Dm (5 2 1), Treble: D4, F4, A4 (5 2 1), Bass: D3, F3, A3.
- Measure 6: Chord F (5 2 1), Treble: F4, A4, C5 (5 2 1), Bass: F3, A3, C4.

System 3:

- Measure 7: Chord G (4 2 1), Treble: G4, B4, D5 (4 2 1), Bass: G3, B3, D4.
- Measure 8: Chord B \flat (4 2 1), Treble: B \flat 4, D5, F5 (4 2 1), Bass: B \flat 3, D4, F4.
- Measure 9: Chord Dm (5 2 1), Treble: D4, F4, A4 (5 2 1), Bass: D3, F3, A3.

System 4:

- Measure 10: Chord F (5 3 1), Treble: F4, A4, C5 (5 3 1), Bass: F3, A3, C4.
- Measure 11: Chord A (4 2 1), Treble: A4, C5, E5 (4 2 1), Bass: A3, C4, E4.
- Measure 12: Chord A (4 2 1), Treble: A4, C5, E5 (4 2 1), Bass: A3, C4, E4.

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POP *Piano*

METHOD - VOLUME 1 EXERCISES IN ALL KEYS

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Exercises with chord inversions, D Major

Exercise 1: Treble clef contains chords in D major (D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4). Bass clef contains eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4.

Exercise 2: Treble clef contains chords in D major with slurs. Bass clef contains eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4.

Exercise 3: Treble clef contains chords in D major with slurs. Bass clef contains eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4.

Exercise 4: Treble clef contains chords in D major with slurs. Bass clef contains eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4.

Exercise 5: Treble clef contains chords in D major with slurs. Bass clef contains eighth notes: D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4.