Learn How to Play

PIANO / KEYBOARD

For

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

A Self Tuition Book For Adults & Teenagers!

SPECIAL EDITION

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Enquiries: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk

Acknowledgements

To all the fantastic musicians who I've had the privilege of working with back in the 1960s / 70s including: Pip Williams (guitarist / record producer); Tex Marsh (drums); Roger Flavell (bassist / singer / songwriter); Kevan Fogarty (guitarist); Tommy Hunt (singer); Ron Thomas (bassist); Martin Johnstone (bassist / vocals); Geno Washington (singer); UK No. 1 singer / songwriter Emile Ford; U.K. top 10 artists: *'The Fantastics'* - John Cheatdom, Jerome Ramos, Donald Haywoode and Richard Pitts.

To the other members of *'Aquila'* - Ralph Denyer (singer / songwriter); Phil Childs (bassist); Jim Smith (drums); George Lee (saxophonist).

To my early mentors: Alan Simonds (guitarist / vocalist); big bruv Steve (guitarist) and Mr. Henley (my inspirational music teacher at Warlingham School 1960 - 65).

And to Myriad Software: http://www.myriad-online.com for the Harmony Assistant music notation software which was used to produce this book. - Thanks!

Aquila album cover design by Keith Besford - *Thanks Keith, I still Love it!*

A Couple of my many memorable 'Aquila' gigs in 1970

Note that the links may not work if you are viewing this in a Google or Amazon preview. Please go to https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/abso_se.html for a more complete free *working* pdf preview.

Contents

⬅ Introduction ➡

As the name suggests, this book has been written for the absolute beginner and assumes no prior musical knowledge - *just the desire to do it!*

The contents are suitable for piano and / or electronic keyboard.

Items covered include:

- Buying your first keyboard or piano
- Reading music from scratch
- Easy, effective finger exercises which require minimal reading ability
- Important musical symbols
- Your first tunes
- Audio links for all tunes and exercises
- Key signatures and transposition
- Pre-scale exercises
- Major and minor scales in keyboard *and* notation view
- Chord construction
- Chord fingering
- Arpeggios in keyboard *and* notation view
- Arpeggio exercises
- Playing from a *Fake Book* with and without auto-accompaniment
- Plus, more!

After completing this book, you should have a good basic understanding of music theory as well as a good basic playing technique, paving the way for more advanced study in your chosen field - *jazz, blues, pop, classical etc.*

Ok, but what is special about this 'Special Edition'?

Compared to Editions 1 and 2 (both of which are still available) this Special Edition is both a lot more and a little less in the fact that I have only included the first three major and harmonic minor scales and arpeggios and removed the chord charts to make the paperback version more cost effective.

BUT… to make this version much better I have included free links for the digital pdf versions of the items shown next. Consequently, this edition offers far more *'bang for buck'* and if you're serious about learning you would eventually need to buy these other items anyway.

The Chord books give more information about chords and just about every chord that you will ever need including 9ths, 13ths etc., as well as diatonic chords in most keys. The scale book includes every major, minor (harmonic, melodic and natural) scale and arpeggio in every key as well as the pentatonic and blues scales and modes in the most used keys.

The Hanon book provides more of the great finger exercises already included in this book in an easy-to-read format.

One of the tune books is for normal easy two hand playing and the other has top line and chords only - for auto-accompaniment. There are also links to other free sheet music sites.

If you click on the graphics, you can see more details of these books. The download links are given at the end of this book page 138.

With the inclusion of these additional resources, I believe this book is the most complete beginners' book available and incredible value for money.

Note that all these items are available as free downloads (with this book) *only* while I'm still alive. If my website at http://gonkmusic.com or https://learn-keyboard.co.uk is still working, you can be sure I'm still here and the downloads will be available. At the time of writing this (2022) I am / was 73 and plan on living forever and so far, I have to say that it's not going too badly! But nevertheless, I realise that every day is a bonus! *If I'm dead and you can't get the downloads, please feel free to sue me!*

Get the Best from this Book

This book has been written to be read as a paperback and / or a digital eBook. If you have the paperback version - *great,* - without doubt this is the best version for flipping backwards and forwards to where you want to be. However, if you wish to hear the audio examples included, you may find it convenient to also have the digital version in pdf format which can be read on any PC, laptop or tablet. You may also find it useful to print out certain pages, perhaps to make notes on, or maybe because of inconvenient page turns etc. This you can do easily with the digital version.

If you have purchased the paperback version, the digital version is *freely* available to you *for your own use only*. The download link can be found on page 138 along with the links for the other included items. Be sure to copy the link exactly as written including the hyphen and the underscore between the words. If you have any trouble with this, I will be happy to help.

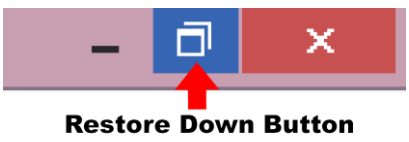
The audio links throughout the book can be accessed two ways:

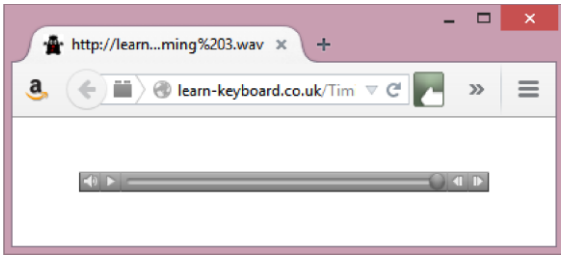
- by using the free external links at: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/audio-links/abso_se.html which gives access to all the links in the order in which they appear in each chapter or
- by using the links throughout the book as they appear in the digital pdf version - *internet connection required*

Using the *in-Book* Links

Quite probably you may only need to listen to some of the audio links, but all are included for your convenience.

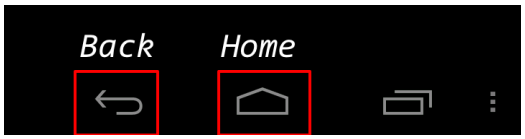
To access the links easily, if you are viewing this on a laptop or PC first of all go to your browser and click the restore down button in order to reduce the view size to something like the image below to the right (by dragging the bottom and sides).





Then click on the link which should then appear in front of the document enabling you to move it out of the way of anything that you may wish to see at the same time.

If you are viewing this on an Android tablet as soon as you click on the link you will lose the book view until you push the *'Back'* button (shown next).



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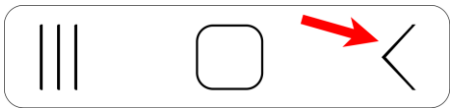
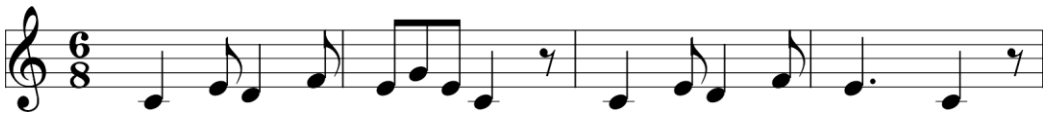


If you want to you can have a trial run now by clicking on the following graphic which actually is *'Pop Goes the Weasel'!*



Note also that each link will open a new page in your browser, so you will eventually need to cancel them - *or just close the browser!*

In addition to the external links, there are also numerous internal links to help you navigate to certain reference points in the book and return, including the arrows either side of the chapter headings. Clicking the green right-hand arrow will take you instantly to the next chapter and the red left-hand arrow to the beginning of the last chapter.

If you want to navigate to another chapter quickly, simply click on the '≤' icon which is in the footer of every page (including this one). This will take you instantly to the *'Contents'* page where you can then click and go to any section you wish - *so you can basically whizz through the document at lightning speed!*

Trust Your Self

As you progress you will no doubt have good days and bad days, but whatever happens never doubt your ability to succeed, however old you may be.

Now, what I'm going to say next you may think is absolute *'BS'*, but please hear me out - humour me if you like, as I happen to *know* that it is of tremendous value.

Throughout the book you will periodically come across the following message:

All I ask you to do is *pause* and *read* this every time you see it, out loud would be great, but silently is ok too. The more you can do this the better. Actually, it has to be a true statement as presumably you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't want to play the

piano or keyboard and if you follow the advice herein your technique and understanding *must* improve day by day!

Over the years I've met and known many individuals who have become extremely successful musicians, some are multi-millionaires and worldwide household names and some I knew when they were down and out and penniless (like I was). They all used similar techniques to the above. At the time I thought they were raving bonkers; now I know they weren't!

If you want to know more about similar success building techniques, please see my website at http://deep-relaxation.co.uk where you will find lots of freebies to prove their worth.

Also, throughout the book I have included a few of my favourite keyboards. These are not *'adverts' per se,* they are basically just to fill space. Links for *all* the major manufacturers as well as my *'keyboard review'* section can be found on my website so that you can get all the up-to-date relevant information in order to make up your own mind as to what suits your needs either now or in the future!

⬅ Buying Your First Piano / Keyboard ➡

If you haven't already bought a keyboard or if you are perhaps thinking of changing, you may find the following information useful.

There are many different types of keyboards - all have black and white keys and to the uninitiated all look the same. But they can be vastly different, and which one will be right for you will be determined by:

- Your present needs
- Your ultimate needs; and of course
- Your budget

Prices can vary from as little as £50 to many thousands of pounds. The chance of buying one that is right for your initial and ultimate needs is about nil, *but you can at least try!*

Keyboards basically fall into the following categories:

a) Digital Pianos

b) Acoustic Pianos

c) Arranger Keyboards

d) Harpsichords

e) Organs

f) Workstations

g) Synthesizers

h) Controller Keyboards

And of course, all the above could be purchased either new or second-hand.

But here we are only going to discuss the first three which are the ones most suitable for beginners, but details of all the others and up to date information can be seen on my website at: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_reviews.html .

Digital Pianos - Home Use

Home use digital pianos in general tend to be less feature filled than the stage alternatives. Most up-to-date models will have 88 weighted hammer action keys - varying in quality. Many are also incorporated in a wooden frame with pedals included or at least have the option of a wooden stand making them fitting for a home

environment. Most will also have built-in speakers making the need for external amplification unnecessary.

Some will simply be pianos with few other features (although most do have a variety of tones). Others will have additional features such as auto-accompaniment and recording functions.

For a comparatively low-cost starter piano the Casio PX S1100 and PX S3100 are hard to beat. Both have quality piano sounds, built-in speakers, quality hammer action keybeds and many other useful functions.

Casio PX S1100 (88 Keys)

If you want the convenience of all the gadgetry on an electronic digital piano and also a nice bit of furniture, then there are many *low-tech* but generally expensive instruments available such as the Yamaha Clavinovas.

Yamaha Clavinova CVP-609GP (88 Keys)

But there are many, many more to choose from in all price ranges.

Digital Pianos - Stage / Studio

In contrast, digital pianos for stage or studio use tend to be more feature filled in relation to sounds, effects and other functions. These will have either 73 / 76 or 88 hammer action keys. Built-in speakers and auto-accompaniment are less likely to be found on these and an external stand and pedals would be required. Therefore, in all cases for stage use external amplification suitable for the venue would be required. See my website for details of external amplification.

Recording functions are not the norm on stage pianos, but some may have them.

Both home and stage digital pianos will have earphone sockets enabling personal practice.

Korg SV-2S Stage Piano (88 Keys)

There are some digital pianos that are suitable for both home and stage - the Korg SV2S is available with or without built-in speakers and is about the coolest looking keyboard on the planet as well as having top notch piano sounds and the top Korg RH3 graduated keybed.

The main manufacturers for digital pianos are: Korg, Roland, Casio, Yamaha, Nord, Dexibell and Kurzweil so there's plenty of great models to choose from. There are good and possibly not so good features with most manufacturers. You may prefer the sounds on one and the key action on another, so it's worth doing some in depth study.

If it is your intention to play classical or jazz seriously, I would suggest that a digital piano could be a good choice for you. But if you are an absolute beginner then consider one which also has auto-accompaniment which in *no way* prevents the instrument from being used as a normal complete piano.

Acoustic Pianos

I would never discourage anyone from getting an acoustic piano if this is what they want, but the clear disadvantages are:

- They need periodic tuning
- They are space greedy
- They can be very expensive
- They're not suitable for gigging
- You will drive your family and neighbours nuts when you practice, as these of course don't work too good with headphones

On the plus side, when the world eventually forgets how to generate electricity, everyone will want one!

I don't think that anyone could deny that the Bosendorfer Beethoven Grand is a beautiful instrument, but at £83,000 I wouldn't really recommend this for a beginner - *especially if they live in a bedsit!*

But the sounds of this instrument and others have been faithfully reproduced by Clavia and available on all their Nord electronic keyboards. Ok, it's not the real thing, but only a *'purist'* could tell the difference and you'd save a massive £80,000 *and have a fair bit more room to walk around!*

Bosendorfer Grand Piano

So please also look at the digital piano alternatives - they are far better than they've been in the past and you might just be surprised.

Arranger Keyboards

Arranger keyboards generally come with 61 or 73 / 76 un-weighted or semi-weighted keys. The quality of the keybeds will vary tremendously from model to model. If you are wanting to learn classical or jazz piano, one of these would not be a good choice. Although piano pieces can be played on them, weighted keys give more control for this type of music. But for just about any type of *piano* playing I would advise at least 73 keys (6 octaves).

Korg Pa5X Arranger Keyboard (88 Keys)

All arranger keyboards will have a fairly large selection of pre-installed sampled sounds which may or may not be editable. The quality and polyphony of these sounds will vary very much, although there are some surprisingly good sounds on some of the less expensive models.

Additionally, arranger keyboards have the facility to split the keyboard at certain (variable) points enabling different sounds to be played in each part of the board, (i.e. bass on the lower half / piano on the top half), and / or to use the lower half of the keyboard to trigger auto-accompaniment enabling the player to effectively be a one-man-band. Indeed, many of the better-quality arrangers are used for live gigging by solo players.

Korg Pa700 (61 Keys)

Many arranger keyboards have built-in speakers, which are suitable for home use, but most also have the facility for adding external speakers for better quality and more volume. The more expensive models (Korg Pa5X / Yamaha Genos) tend not to have built in speakers as is the norm for professional equipment.

Most also have recording features, in some cases with as many as 16 fully editable tracks enabling a fair degree of quality music production *on the better models - Korg Pa700 onwards!*

Arranger keyboards are available from as little as £50 up to more than £4,000. A good entry model is the Yamaha PSR E473 and the current top professional model (in my opinion) is the Korg Pa5X - *some would argue that the Yamaha Genos is better!*

Casio CT-X5000 (61 Keys)

So, who are they good for?

The lower priced models are ideal for anyone who wants to learn music in a fairly casual way and just have fun - *for classical or jazz go for a digital piano*. The more expensive models are ideal for solo gigging, or music production by more experienced musicians. At the entry level of the market, the Casios are excellent value and hard to beat, but do also look at the Korgs, Rolands and Yamahas.

Auto-Accompaniment

All arranger keyboards and some pianos / organs have the facility to either use the instrument as a full keyboard (in piano mode) or to split the keyboard at a chosen point and use the upper half for the right-hand melody work and the lower portion with an alternative sound / instrument for bass etc., or auto-accompaniment. But remember that you'd be struggling in full piano mode with less than 73 keys.

In the auto-accompaniment mode, a particular rhythm and style can be selected which will play bass, drums and other instrumentation as soon as a chord is played below the split point. As the chord is changed, the instrumentation will follow automatically.

In most cases there will be:

- An intro - one or more
- Variations - usually four different ones
- Fills which can be triggered to activate automatically between variations
- Endings - one or more

This results in the player being in control of a complete multi-instrument band / orchestra. Clearly using this option enables even a novice to produce professional sounding work easily.

The quality of the styles varies between instruments, but at the high end they are quite stunning. This feature can allow a good player to make truly professional performances solo, something that I have done personally in the not so distant past - using a Korg SP500 digital piano.

There are thousands of styles available (downloadable) for all genres of music and it can take hours (months) to wade through them. On the advanced keyboards, you can even create your own styles, but this involves a fair learning curve.

To use this feature, ideally you will need to understand chords and inversions details of which are included herein, but in most cases, there are also features for beginners whereby the chords can be triggered with only one or two fingers.

Auto-accompaniment can be used live or incorporated into recordings where plenty of manipulation is possible.

BUT ….. I would strongly recommend that you learn to play both with *and* without the auto-accompaniment then you will get the best of both worlds. The exercises herein teach exactly this - for your greatest fulfilment. Don't make the mistake of spending hours pushing buttons, *'having fun'* and learning nothing - it's an easy trap to fall into!

Note that if you are playing with a band, auto-accompaniment would never be used.

Sequencers

Most arranger keyboards, workstations and some digital pianos have one or more built in sequencer(s). This enables you to record and playback chord sequences, styles, fills and variations or even complete songs easily *once you've got your head around it!*

Out of the sequencers that I've used, I've found the Korgs to be most user friendly - or maybe it's just because I've had a few of them and I understand the Korg way of thinking best. Some incidentally are far more editable than others, which is another reason I prefer Korgs.

Another recording option is to use an external sequencer via your PC and a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) such as Cakewalk or Cubase etc., which allows far more control, editing and mixing possibilities. To do this, in most cases you would also need an audio interface unless your keyboard has one built in which is becoming more the norm. See my website for more details about free DAWs.

Hammer Action or Semi Weighted?

If you conclude that you want a digital keyboard as against an acoustic instrument, then your next dilemma will be whether to buy one with fully weighted *'hammer action'* keys or to go for *'semi weighted'*.

Without doubt *hammer action* keys are far better for piano playing, while *semi weighted* are better for organ, electric piano, and synthesizer. Both types of keyboards incidentally tend to be *'velocity sensitive',* which means the harder you play the louder the sound - as on an acoustic piano. But there are times when you wouldn't necessarily want this (organs and harpsichords), in which case this feature can be turned off.

For my time *'on the road'* I only ever played the Hammond organ (which was *semi weighted*). The type of playing I did at that time would have been impossible on a weighted board. But now that I've calmed down somewhat, I'm finding that I play more piano type music. So, I have a conundrum - *I want both!* And not only that, I want top quality piano / organ sounds and I want to be able to move it easily without the risk of a heart attack. Clearly such an instrument has not yet been invented, but it can be done!

How?

By using a *two-tier combination* set-up, with a weighted action board at the bottom and a lightweight action at the top. There are numerous possible combinations.

Polyphony

When considering various keyboards, you will come across the words *'polyphonic'* and *'monophonic'*.

A *monophonic* keyboard will only allow you to play one note at a time as in the very early synths - if you play two notes together only one will sound. A keyboard which is say *polyphonic* to 32 notes, will allow 32 notes to be played / sounded at once.

As you only have ten fingers (presumably) you may think that this is fine, but when you consider that using the sustain pedal and / or auto-accompaniment can drastically increase the need for *polyphony*, 32 notes soon becomes inadequate. So, the larger the *polyphony* the better!

Most quality keyboards have a *polyphony* of 120 notes or more.

Midi

What is 'Midi'?

'Midi' - Musical Instrument Digital Interface is basically a way of transferring musical information from one keyboard or recording device to another via a standard midi cable or via a USB cable (if supported). A single Midi link can carry up to sixteen channels of information.

The information that *midi* carries is basically everything except *audio*. For instance, a *midi* recording could consist of:

- The notes played and how long they are held on for
- How hard they are played (velocity)
- Timing
- Pedal on / off etc.

But it won't record the *audio.* So, if you made a *midi* recording on a particular keyboard, saved it to a *midi 'smf'* file and then played it back on another keyboard or PC, it would use the sounds from the second keyboard or computer software for playback - which of course may be better or worse than the original.

A great advantage of recording in *midi* is the ability to correct mistakes (assuming the editing facilities are available in the keyboard or DAW). For instance:

- Timing mistake can be corrected by quantizing either at the time of recording or afterwards
- Bum notes can be corrected with the *'edit event'* feature
- Velocity and pedal errors can be corrected with the *'edit event'* feature
- Part of a recording can be corrected using the *'punch in'* feature

- Plus much more!

Another use for *midi* is to connect two keyboards which would enable you to play one board and use the sounds from the other.

So, what if I want to record in audio?

Many keyboards will have audio recording features which will record exactly what you play using the sounds of your instrument. But if you make an error, or something is not quite right you will need to record it again from the beginning.

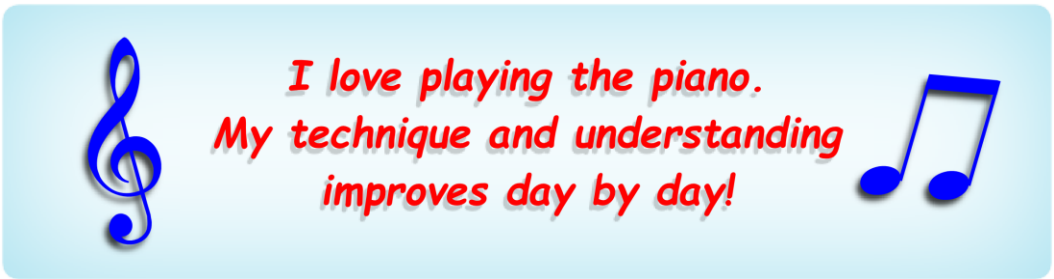
But if your keyboard or DAW has *midi and audio* recording features, you could first record in *midi,* make your corrections, then playback the corrected file *as* you record it in *audio* and *Bingo* - you will have an *audio* recording with the sounds and effects from your keyboard.

If recording *audio* into a DAW, you will need an external *audio interface* if the facility is not in your keyboard - many new keyboards have both midi *and* audio interfaces but do check before buying if this is your intention.

Other items that you will need include:

- A stool - preferably height adjustable
- A stand strong enough to accommodate the keyboard
- A good quality sustain pedal - preferably with a reverse polarity switch
- A music stand - included with some keyboards
- A dust cover for the keyboard - eBay
- Amplification and leads if not included
- A keyboard carrying bag or case if you intend gigging or moving it around
- Headphones - if you want your family to retain their sanity!

All of these are widely available from many physical and online outlets, but more details of these can again be seen in my website at https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_reviews.html .



Now we'll begin learning to play!

The Notes of the Keyboard

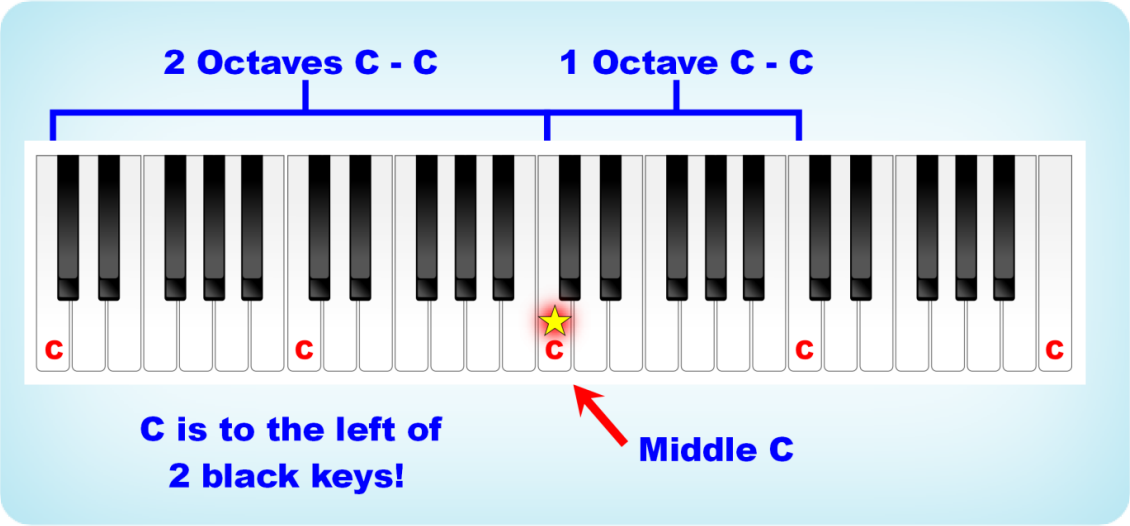
Firstly, we'll look at the notes of the keyboard and how to identify them.

As already shown, some keyboards / pianos have more keys than others, but this makes no difference in relation to understanding how to play them, as they all have the same basic arrangement of black and white keys.

If you look closely, you will see that the black keys are in groups of two then three.

This enables us to find every single note easily. And the first one that you must learn is **'C'** which can be found just to the left of two black keys.

The diagram below shows a four-octave span revealing five **C's** each of which are eight notes apart - hence octave - as in octagon and octopus - *eight!*



Probably the most important note on the keyboard is **middle C** which is the **'C'** that is more or less in the middle of the keyboard and because it is so important, we are going to put a star on ours as shown.

Now all the notes to the left of **middle C** get gradually lower in pitch and all the notes to the right gradually get higher. And usually, you will use your right hand for the higher notes and your left hand for the lower notes.

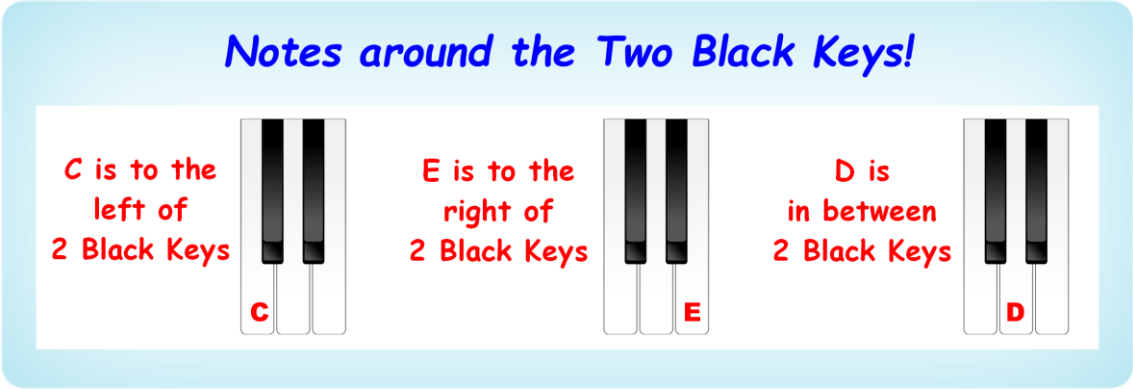
*So which hand plays **middle C**?*

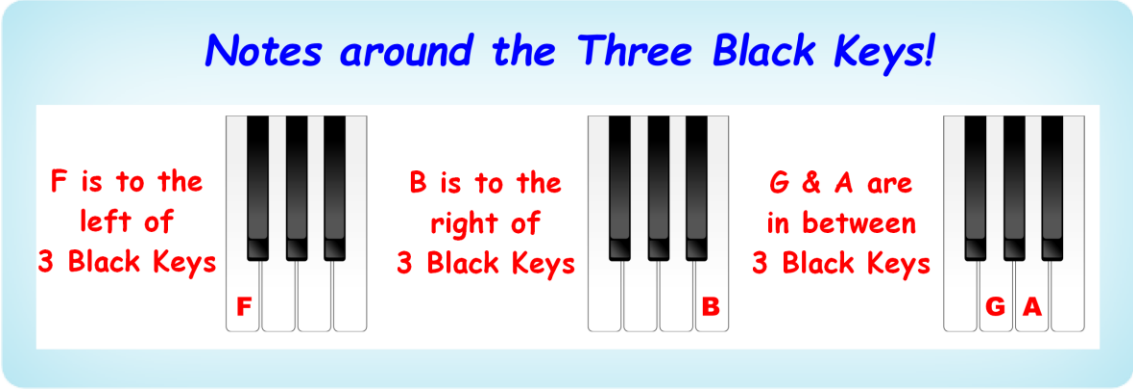
That's a good question and the answer is that it could be either, but I will explain more shortly.

Now I'll show you what all the other notes are called, but I don't want you to get too confused about all this at the moment. We will be taking it all slowly step by step.

This is mind boggling, how am I going to remember this lot?

Easy, if you split them up into two main groups according to the number of black notes as shown below:





And if you can't remember which comes first **G** or **A,** you're probably going Gaga - get it? - GA - GA!!

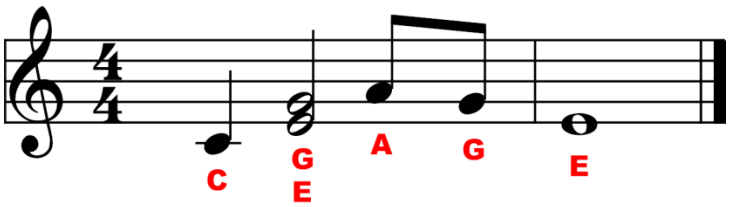
What about the black ones, what are they called?

Don't worry I've not forgotten them, we'll be dealing with them shortly, but first we'll look at how the keys of the keyboard relate to music notation.

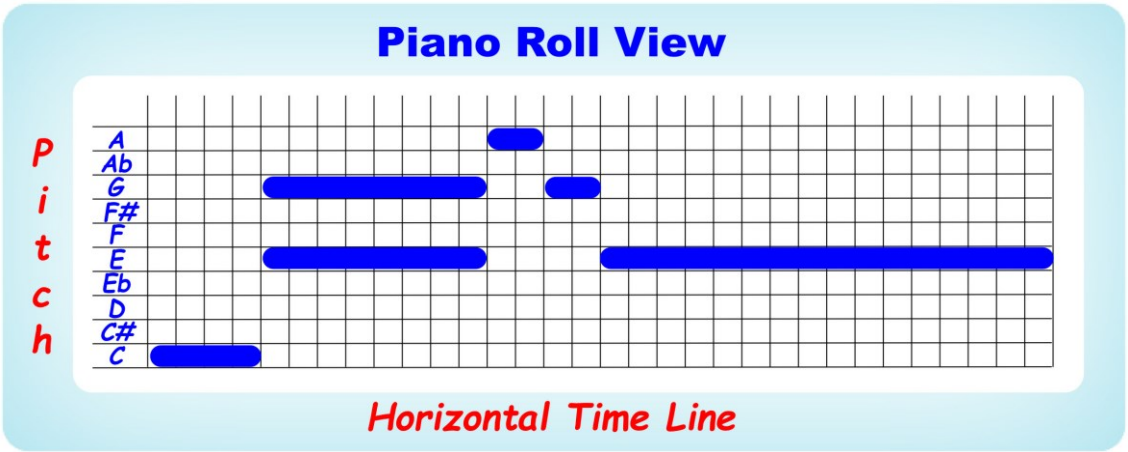
Music Notation

Music notation is basically a glorified *graph* using groups of lines called *'staves'* or *'staffs'*, with the *'time-line'* being the horizontal axis from left to right and the *'pitch'* being the vertical axis. How long a note is played for is determined by the time element of the note i.e. crotchet, quaver, minim etc. When it is played is determined by how far along the timeline it's placed. The pitch of the note is determined by how high or low it's placed on the vertical axis (the stave). Simple - easy peasy - *in theory!*

As an example, in the diagram below, the first note to be played is **C** which is the lowest pitched note of the phrase and is a *'crotchet'* (don't worry I'll explain all this shortly), followed by **E** and **G** which are higher pitched and played together. They are both *'minims'* which are sustained for twice as long as a *'crotchet'*. Then we have **A** which is the highest note of the phrase followed by **G** again both of which are *'quavers'* being timed half the value of a crotchet. And finally, the last note of the phrase is **E** which is a *'semibreve'* (notice that it has no stem) which is four times the time value of a crotchet.



The next diagram shows exactly the same phrase in graph form or *Piano Roll* form as used in music recording software. Click on either to hear the phrase if you want to.



Can you recognise the similarities between the two diagrams?

Undoubtedly any untrained musician would find the piano roll view simpler to understand, and it certainly has its uses when editing recorded music. But look at how

much space it takes up compared to the first diagram. And remember this is a very short, one hand phrase. So clearly, learning conventional music notation has to be to every musician's advantage.

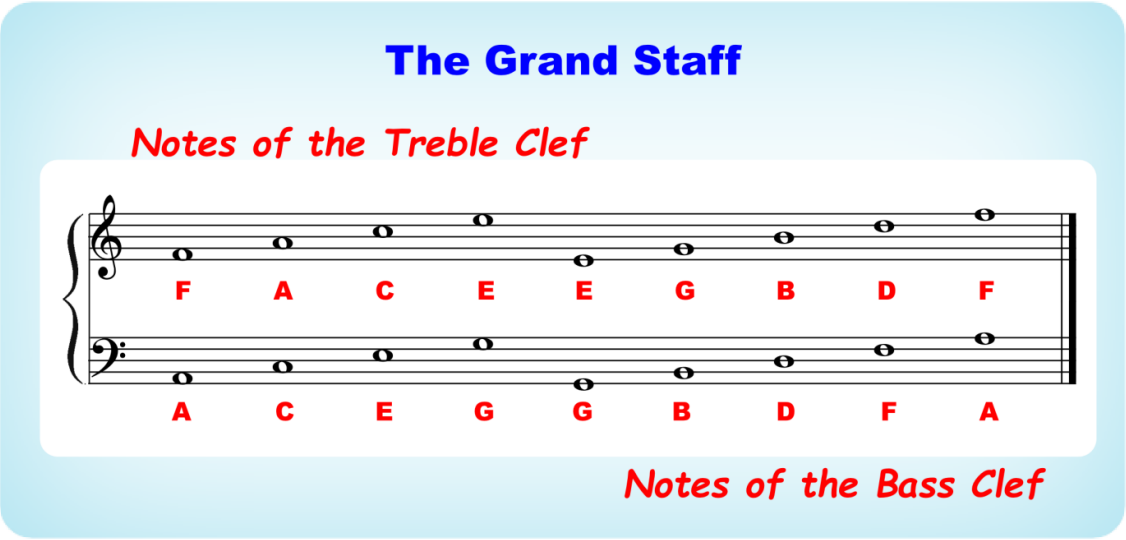
In order to extend the vertical axis (in conventional notation) and potentially accommodate more notes, this is split into *'clefs'*. The two clefs used in piano music are the *'treble'* and *'bass'* clefs as shown next and these forms the *'grand staff'* (or *'stave'*).

Saying: "the two clefs used in Piano music" implies that there are other clefs.

Yes, there are several other clefs used by other instruments and singers, the most common being the *'alto'* and *'tenor'* clefs, but from the piano / keyboard point of view, you can completely put them out of mind, just simply know that they exist and forget about them!

The Grand Staff

The *'Grand staff'* is made up of two *'staves'* or *'staffs'* of five lines each, the top one being the *'treble clef'* which is mainly used for the higher notes by the right hand and the *'bass clef'* mainly used for the lower notes by the left hand.



What's the difference between a staff and a stave?

Actually, no-one seems to know for sure - *not even Google or Wikipedia!* But clearly a *staff* is a *stave* and a *stave* is a *staff,* although generally the plural for both is *'staves'* not *'staffs'* - *but don't worry about it, it's just a word - well two words!*

The important thing that you need to learn is that the *'staves'* or *'staffs'* are split into the two *'clefs'* (for piano music) - these are what you need to learn and remember.

An easy way to remember the notes of each clef is to think of them in sections like:

- Treble Clef *space* notes **F A C E** - the word *FACE!*
- Treble Clef *line* notes **E G B D F** - *Every Good Boy Deserves Favours!*
- Bass Clef *space* notes **A C E G** - *All Cows Eat Grass!*
- Bass Clef *line* notes **G B D F A** - *Giant Bears Don't Fly Aeroplanes!*

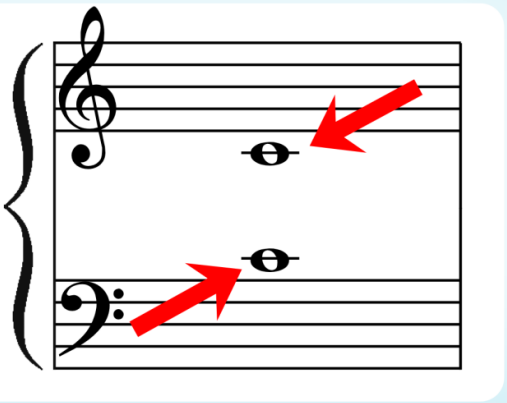
So, which one is 'middle C'?

Well actually ***'middle C'*** is not in the above illustration, because it falls below the lines of the treble clef and above the lines of the bass clef. In fact, it's exactly mid-way between both clefs.

The next illustration will show you where it is! Although it is shown in both the treble and bass clefs it is the same note.

Middle C

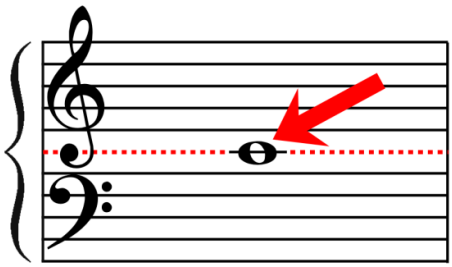
Middle C is below the lines of the Treble Clef and above the lines of the Bass Clef



If we bring the two clefs closer together, you will see that there is an imaginary line exactly midway between the two clefs and this is where ***'middle C'*** lives.

Middle C

If we bring the two clefs closer together and draw an imaginary line between them, this is where we find Middle C



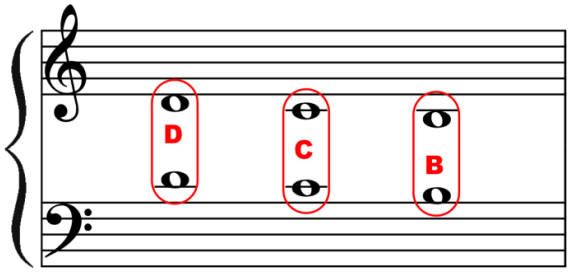
And this is why ***'middle C'*** has a line drawn through the middle of it. This is called a *'ledger line'* and happens with some other notes as well, in fact any time a note goes above or below the clef staff lines.

Now the notes both sides of middle **C** (**B** and **D**) also fall either above or below the clef staff lines which can be seen next.

I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding improves day by day!

Notes Between the Clefs

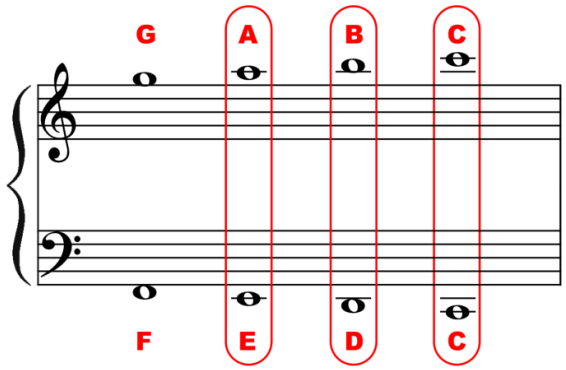
The notes shown here are the same notes written in different clefs



Now there are also notes that fall both above the treble clef and below the bass clef and these in fact would be the top four and the bottom four white notes of a four-octave spread.

Notes Above or Below the Clefs

Some notes fall above or below the clef staff lines as shown here!



The two C's shown here are 4 octaves apart!

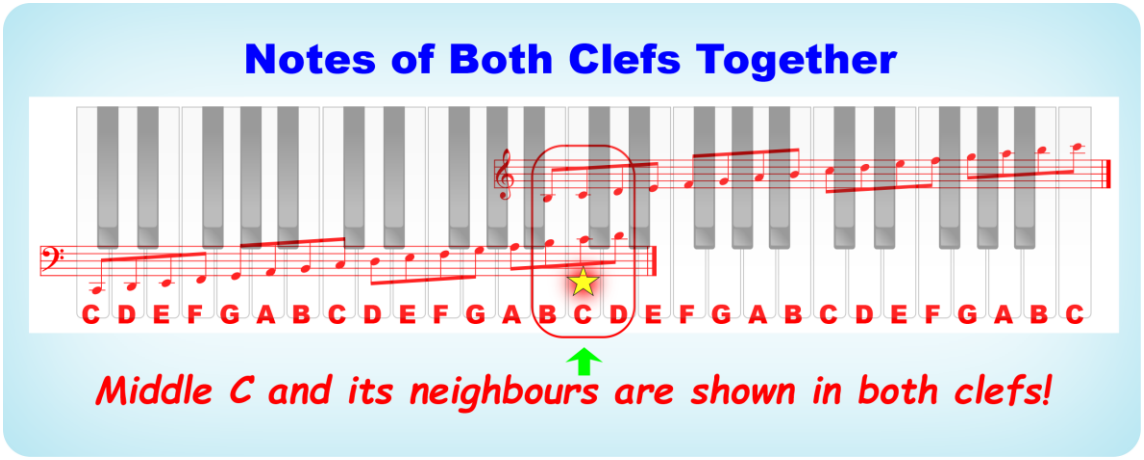
Wow this is getting heavy; I don't think I'll ever understand all this!

Please don't distress yourself, we will be dealing with everything one step at a time and it will all become clear as you progress. But you may occasionally need to review various sections to gain a complete understanding. - *Just read on!*

How the Notes Relate to the Keyboard

Now we'll look at how the musical notes relate to the keyboard.

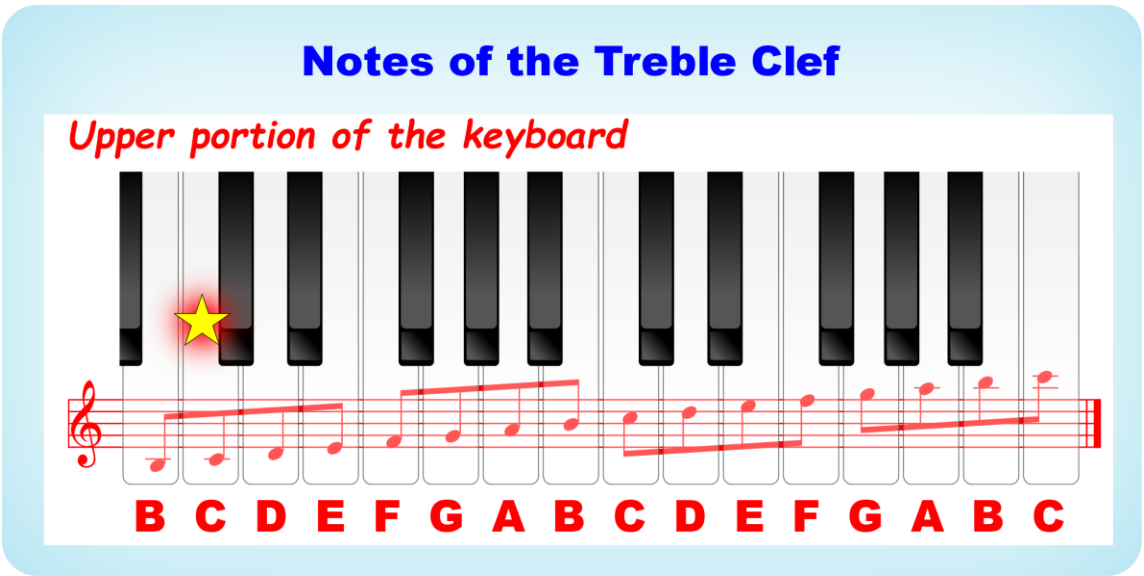
This next diagram may at first look a little confusing and difficult to read; and if you are reading this on a tablet, it may not be clear. If you haven't already done so, please go to the rear of the book to get the pdf download link and you will be able to see this much more clearly, even more so in landscape view!

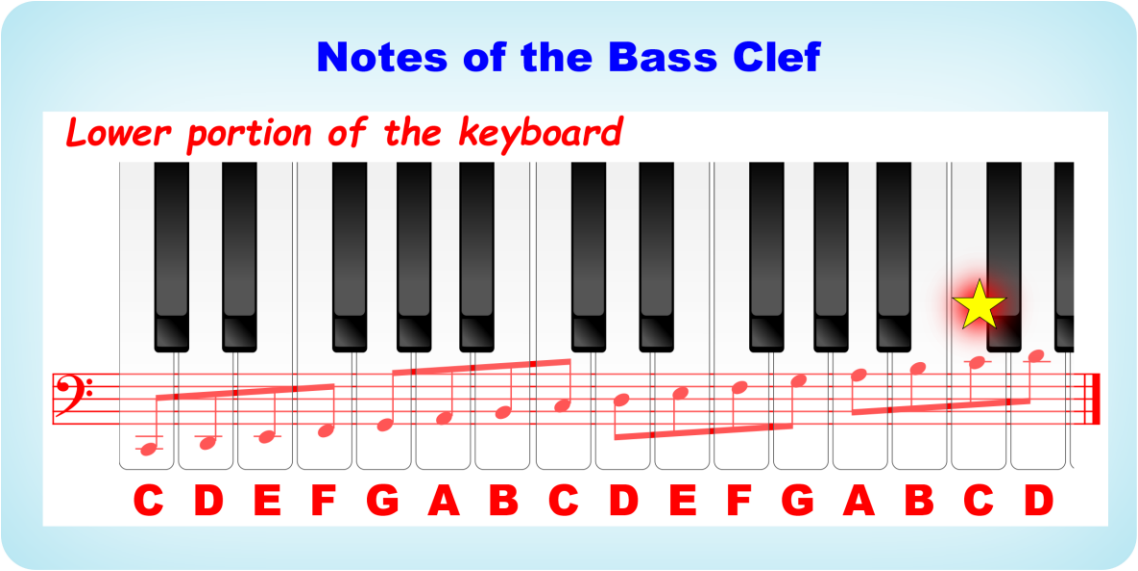


To make this easier to see, below I have split the keyboard into two 2-octave sections, one for each clef, but remember that we have put a star on ***'middle C'*** so that you can always find it!

So, notice that the next two diagrams are actually the same as the above diagram split into two.

It may be useful for you to print out these three diagrams and look at them in detail.

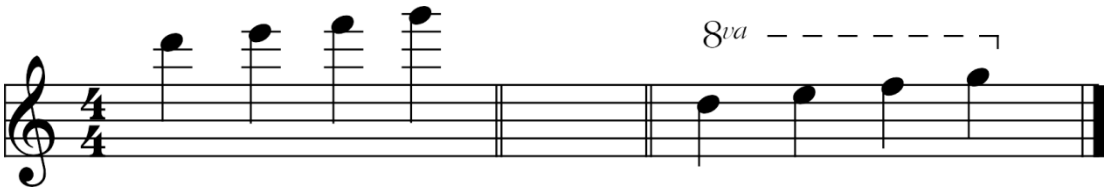




Ok so this shows a four-octave spread, but what happens when the notes are higher or lower than these as on larger keyboards?

Good question! And the answer is that up to a certain point more ledger lines are added, but when there are too many they become impossible to read quickly, so instead the music is written an octave (or more) lower or higher to keep within the clefs and then the ***8va, 8vb, 15ma*** or ***15mb*** symbols are used.

As an example, the following two phrases are exactly the same, but on the second one the ***8va*** symbol is used indicating that the notes should be played an octave higher than written.



- ***8va*** = play the bracketed notes one octave higher
- ***8vb*** = play the bracketed notes one octave lower
- ***15ma*** = play the bracketed notes two octaves higher
- ***15mb*** = play the bracketed notes two octaves lower

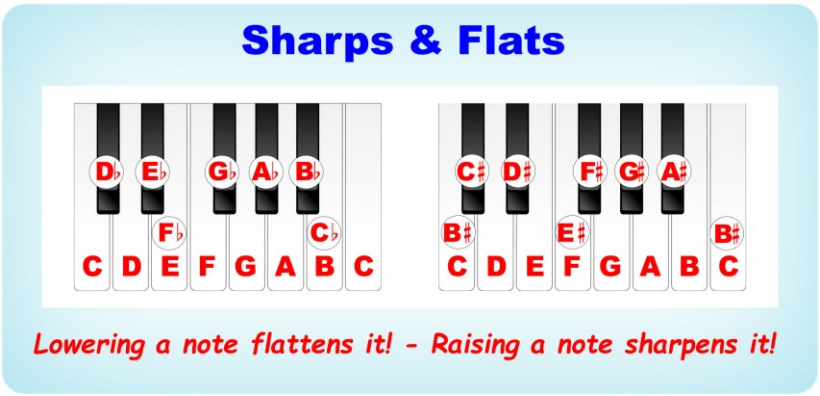
You will see a few examples of these as we progress.

Sharps & Flats

We've already learnt that the interval from one **C** to the next is an *'octave'*. And indeed, this is the same interval from **B - B** or **G - G** etc.

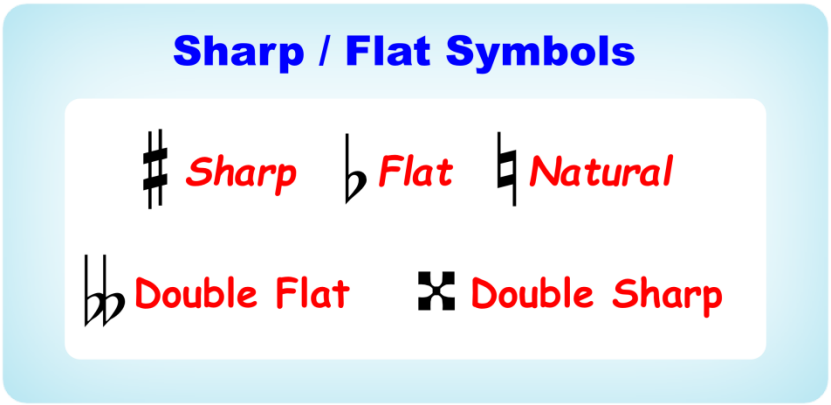
Now the smallest interval in Western music is a *'semitone'* which is the interval from any note on the keyboard to its nearest neighbour be it black or white up or down.

So, the interval between **C** and **B** is a semitone, and also the interval between **E** and **F** as in both cases there are no black notes in-between. In all the other cases there *are* black notes in-between, so the semitone interval will be to the black note above or below. And as you can see by the diagram below the first black note after **C** is called **C sharp** *or* **D flat**. Note that in some circumstances **B** could also be known as ***C flat*** (as there are no black notes in between) and **C** could also be known as ***B sharp*** - but actually this is very rare.



To *'sharpen'* a note is to raise the pitch and to *'flatten'* one is to lower the pitch.

There are also *'double sharps'* and *'double flats'* where the pitch of a note is raised or lowered twice as much (2 semi-tones). But as these only occur occasionally in keys heavily endowed in sharps or flats, we're not going to get involved with these here; and it may be years before you come across any.

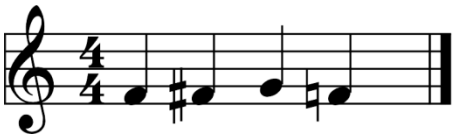


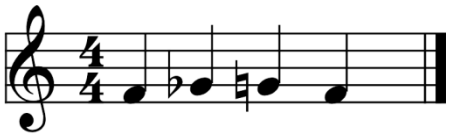
Whether a particular note is known as a sharp or a flat depends on the key signature which will be dealt with later.

Sharps and flats occur in music in two different ways:

- as *'accidentals'* or
- within key signatures (which could also include accidentals)

When they are *accidentals,* they are simply added to the music as and where they occur as shown below.





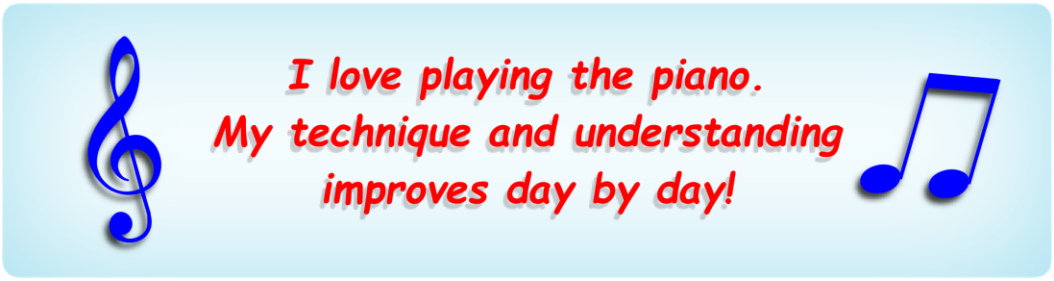
In this case any repeats of notes that are *'sharpened'* or *'flattened'* this way remains so for the duration of the bar unless *'naturalised'* using the *'natural'* symbol.

If you look carefully at the last diagrams you will see that both examples are identical. The first one uses **F sharp** and the second uses **G flat** (same notes) to produce the same result.

Why do the black notes have two names? Why not just call them 'flats' or 'sharps' but not both?

Yes, I can see the confusion, but this is because there are *'flat keys'* and *'sharp keys'* which we'll be learning about later, along with *'key signatures'*.

But first we'll deal with the timing.



Roland RD 88 Stage Piano (88 Keys)

Timing and Rhythm Part 1

Hopefully you've understood a little about the vertical axis of the musical graph (stave). Now we'll start looking at the horizontal axis - the *'time-line'*, which consists of time signatures, bars and note values.

Time Signatures and Bars

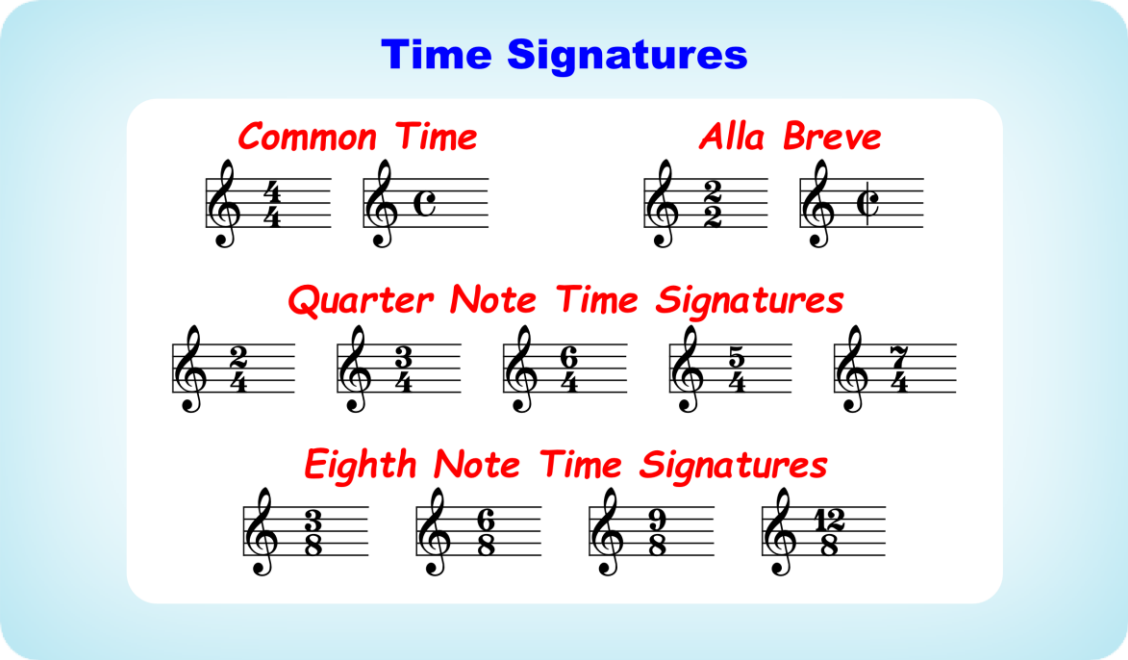
Each group of notes is separated into *'bars'* or *'measures'*, identified by the vertical *'bar lines'* separating the various notes or groups of notes. The time signature determines how many notes of what length are to be played to each bar, the first beat of which is often slightly or heavily accented.

The most common time signatures are:

- **4/4** - four quarter notes to each bar. Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4**' etc., and with your right hand tap with the '**1 2 3 4**' beats but not the *'ands'*. With your left hand tap on the '**1** and **3**' beats
- **3/4** - three quarter notes to each bar (Waltz time). Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3**' etc., and with your left hand tap on the '**1**' beats and with your right hand on the '**2 / 3**' beats
- **2/4** - two quarter notes to each bar (March time). Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 1 & 2**' etc., and with your left hand tap on the '**1**' beats and with your right hand on the '**2**' beats
- **6/8** - six eighth notes to each bar (two set of three - Jazz Waltz). Think or repeat '**1 2 3, 2 2 3 - 1 2 3, 2 2 3**' etc., (no *'ands'* this time) and tap all the beats with your right hand and the '**1**' and '**2**' beats with your left hand but giving more emphasis on the first '**1**' beat of each pattern. This may seem similar to **3/4** time, but it's generally much faster

The time signature is always given at the beginning of each piece and will remain the same throughout unless information is given to the contrary.

The most common time signature without doubt is **4/4** which is also known as *'common time'* and this also has an alternative symbol as shown below as does the **2/2** time signature which is known as *'cut common time'* or *'alla breve'*.



There are other time signatures which we're not going to deal with here, but by the time you come to need them you will understand them perfectly.

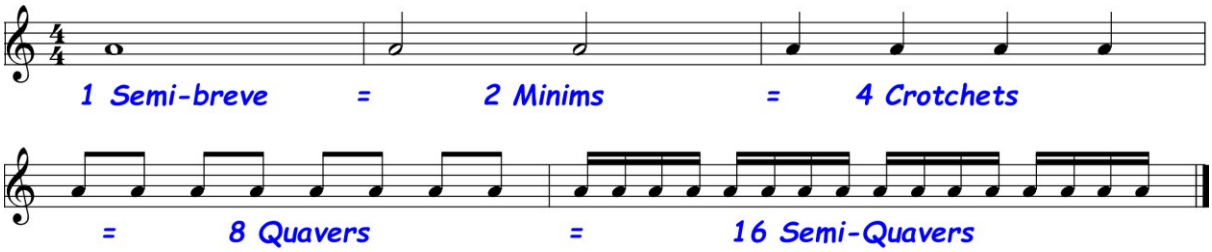
Korg Pa1000 Arranger Keyboard

This little bad boy is a beauty - what a sound!
This also has incredible recording and editing functions. Including almost all the features and sounds of the mighty Pa5X for almost half the price!

Ideal for composing or as a one-man band gigging machine.

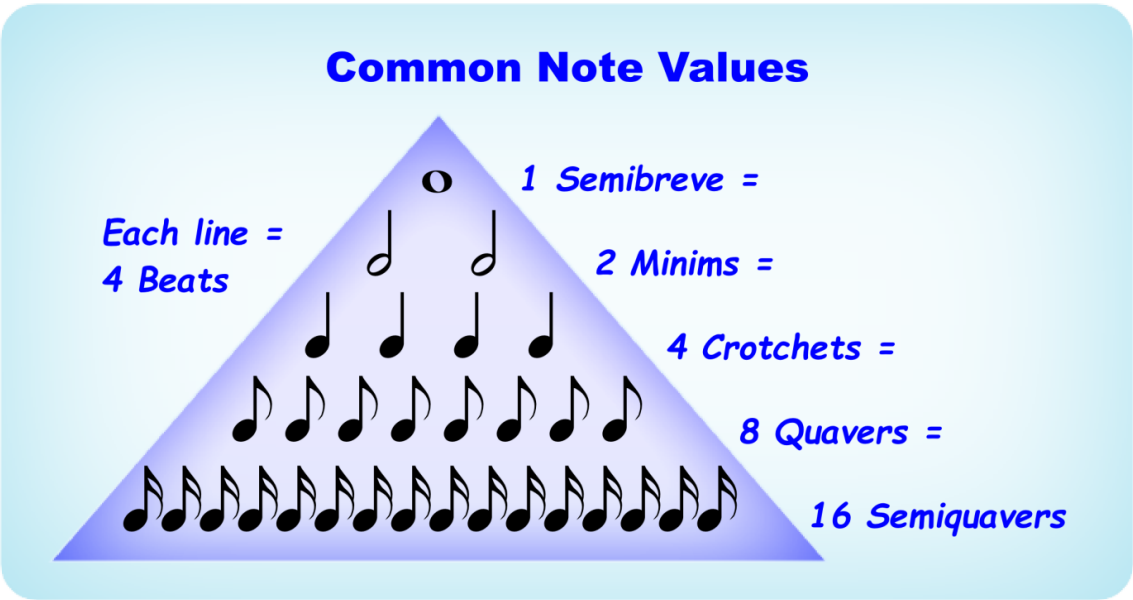
Note Values

The most important note values that you are likely to come across for a while are as follows:



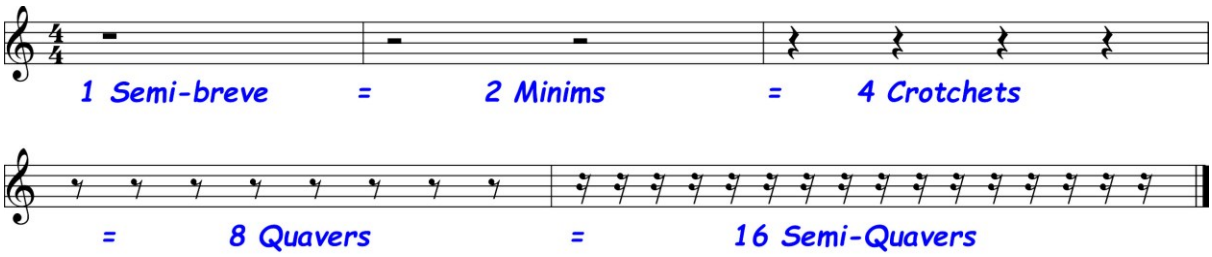
- The *'semibreve'* also known as a *'whole note'* counts as 4 beats (therefore taking up the whole of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'minim'* also known as a *'half note'* counts as 2 beats (therefore taking up half of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'crotchet'* also known as a *'quarter note'* counts as 1 beat (therefore taking up a quarter of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'quaver'* also known as an *'eighth note'* counts as half a beat (therefore taking up an eighth of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'semiquaver'* also known as a *'sixteenth note'* counts as a quarter of a beat (therefore taking up a sixteenth of a **4/4** bar).

As more *'tails'* are added to the quaver family the note values halve. So, four tails will create a 64th note, but we are not going to go into these here.



Rests

Each bar must always compute to the correct value except when *'lead in'* notes are used in the first bar (shown shortly). Therefore, any space where no note is sounded is taken up by a *'rest(s)'* which have similar values to the notes.



Note the similarity between the minim and semibreve rests. Although they look similar, they are rarely confused as the semibreve takes up the whole bar. I always remember these as a minim *'rests'* and a semibreve *'hangs'!*

*Sorry, I don't get any of this. Could you just explain again exactly what **4/4** timing means?*

Ok, the top '**4**' of the '**4/4**' symbol means that there are four beats to the bar and the bottom '**4**' tells us the value of the beats, and as a crotchet is a quarter of a semibreve, this means that there are four *'quarter'* notes (crotchets) to each bar.

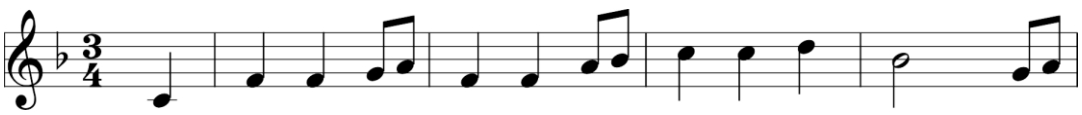
In the case of **3/4** this means that there are three *'quarter'* notes (crotchets) to a bar and **2/4**, two quarter notes to a bar.

In the case of **6/8** there are six *'eighth'* notes (quavers) to a bar.

Being totally ridiculous, if the time signature was **19/16** there would be nineteen *'sixteenth'* notes (semiquavers) to a bar, but such a time signature does not exist in practice - *maybe on another planet!* However, time signatures such as **11/8** and **7/4** etc., although a little unusual *do* exist! - I love both of them and use them frequently!

Lead in Notes

Some tunes don't start on the first beat of a bar, in which case *'lead in note(s)'* are used which will make the first bar shorter than the normal bar time. Sometimes (but not always) this is adjusted by also making the last bar a different length to make up the difference. An example of this is shown below which is in fact the first few bars of ***'Away in a Manger'***.



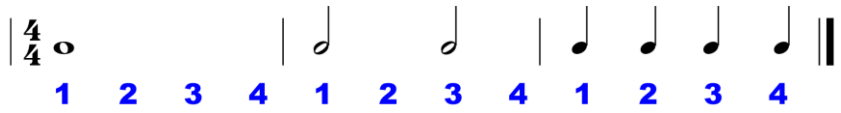
4/4 Timing

Now, looking at the example below, I want you to count out loud or in your head: **1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4** and clap your hands on the beats with the notes. Then you'll be clapping the rhythm.

Notice the **4/4** sign at the beginning and also the *'bar lines'* between each four beats.

4/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



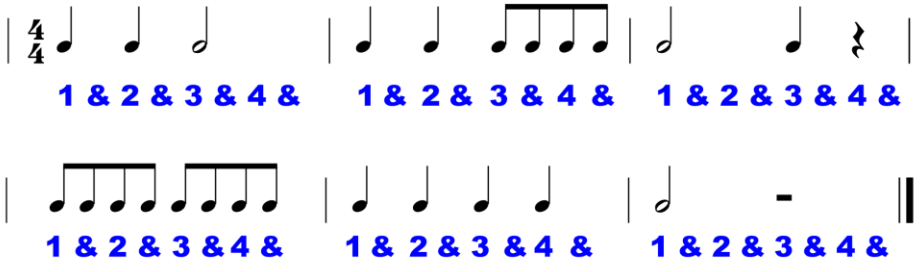
That should have been fairly simple.

Now I'd like you to count **1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &** etc., as in the next example we're going to include some quavers and also a couple of rests.

If you like, instead of clapping you can tap a steady four beats with your left hand and tap on the notes with your right hand, but don't forget to think the ***'&s'*** in your head!

4/4 Timing Example 2

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



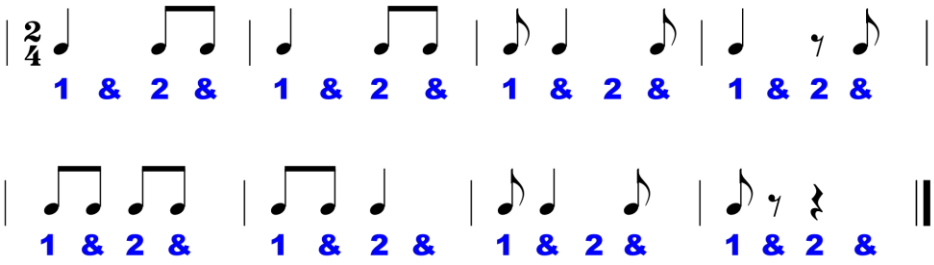
2/4 Timing

2/4, as I mentioned only a short while ago, means that there are two quarter notes (crotchets) to each bar. And this is just like *'marching'* time. So, when counting as we have done previously, you need to count **1 - 2 - 1 - 2** etc., or **1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &** etc. if there are quavers involved (which there are).

And accent should be given to both first and second beats.

2/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



Just about all military music is written in **2/4** timing. If you've ever seen our glorious U.K. monarchy's - ***'Trooping the Colour'***, you will have heard many! But **2/4** timing is also extensively used in all types of music, including folk and classical.

3/4 Timing

3/4 timing is *'waltz'* timing and should be counted: **1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3** etc., or if there are quavers involved: **1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 &** etc., with accent on the first beat only.

3/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!

So exactly how long in time is a crotchet?

There is no set time, but they are always equal unless the tempo changes during the piece. The tempo for every piece of music is generally indicated at the beginning by showing how many crotchets there are per minute or in classical music the following *Italian* terms are used:

Italian		Translation		Beats per Minute
Grave	-	*Very Slow / Solemn*	-	*40 - 44*
Largo	-	*Slow*	-	*46 - 48*
Lento	-	*Slow*	-	*50 -52*
Adagio	-	*Leisurely*	-	*54 - 56*
Andante	-	*Easily*	-	*58 - 63*
Andantino	-	*Slightly Faster*	-	*64 - 72*
Moderato	-	*Moderately*	-	*74 -92*
Allegretto	-	*Fairly Quick*	-	*96 - 108*
Allegro	-	*Quick / Lively*	-	*112 - 116*
Vivace	-	*Briskly*	-	*120 - 132*
Presto	-	*Fast*	-	*138 - 168*
Prestissimo	-	*Fast as Possible*	-	*176 - 208*

So why are all these terms in Italian?

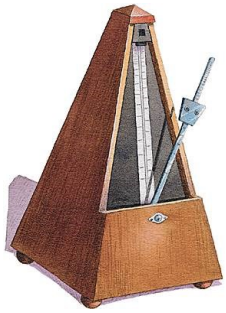
Because many of the most important composers from the Renaissance to the Baroque period were *Italian. - That's just about all the composers who eat spaghetti and who's names end in 'i'!*

Using a Metronome

If you have a modern electronic piano or keyboard there will almost certainly be a built-in metronome which can be altered to any specific time value. Note that as well as setting the timing you will also need to set how many beats there are to a bar; the metronome will then *'ding'* on the first beat of every bar and *'tick'* on the others.

If you've listened to any of the links so far, you'll notice that I've added a metronome to them - with the *'ding'* at the first beat of each bar - *or measure.*

If you are using an acoustic instrument, you will need an external metronome. Electronic versions are widely available and are very inexpensive, but there's something really special about the old-fashioned traditional clockwork versions which unfortunately are more expensive. I love them - they come in the same category as cuckoo clocks for me - *a touch of nostalgia!* - But all they do is tick, tock and ding - *no cuckoos!*



What about when a piece slows down or speeds up?

In this event no metronome (electronic or mechanical) would be able to cope with the infinite possibilities, but in these events the following terms are used in the music notation:

Italian		Translations
Accelerando	-	*Increase speed*
Rallentando	-	*Slow down*
Ritardando	-	*Slow down*
a tempo	-	*Resume original tempo*

That's it for timing and rhythm for the time being. I'll show an example of **6/8** timing a little later, as this requires the need for dotted notes which we haven't dealt with yet.

⬅ Let's Begin ➡

Hopefully you now understand a little of the theory explained so far which obviously is important. But having understood this of course you also need the physical technical ability to hit the right notes with the correct velocity in the right order at the right time. This may take months of intense practice to become reasonably proficient and years to become superb. But make no mistake about it *anyone* can do it - at any age. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you are too old or too anything else to do this - I repeat - ***anyone can do it!*** And if you're knocking on a bit like me, it could give you a new lease of life!

Do also remember that the ability to read music is not necessarily related to how good a musician you could become. Some of the world's greatest musicians are unable to read music at all (Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder etc.), but a basic understanding will certainly help you get going. Even some great sighted musicians are lousy sight readers.

One thing that every great musician has in common is that they all have a good understanding of scales, chords, harmony and rhythm (which will be covered herein) and would have all spent many hours a day practicing finger techniques. *Clearly, they were motivated!*

In short, the more you put into it - *practice* - the more pleasure you will get out of it. The satisfaction achieved is totally immense. And there are some wonderful pieces of music available that are relatively easy to play. But it's never worth going beyond your capabilities as this will just cause anxiety. *Take it one step at a time!*

Correct Hand and Seating Positioning

Firstly, it's a good idea to make sure that your hands are clean and warm. You can achieve this by soaking them in warm water for a while, but then dry them thoroughly. Alternatively, sit on them to warm them up; but if you happen to be sitting on a cold marble slab, nestle your right hand under your left armpit and your left hand under your right armpit for a while which is a method that I used regularly whilst gigging around Europe during the cold winters of the 60's.

The next thing is to be sure that you adopt a correct seating position so that you can achieve the correct hand position. If your seating is incorrect (too low or too high) then your hand positioning will never be correct. I recommend using a height adjustable piano stool so that you can experiment in order to get comfortable. Or of course you may have an adjustable keyboard stand.

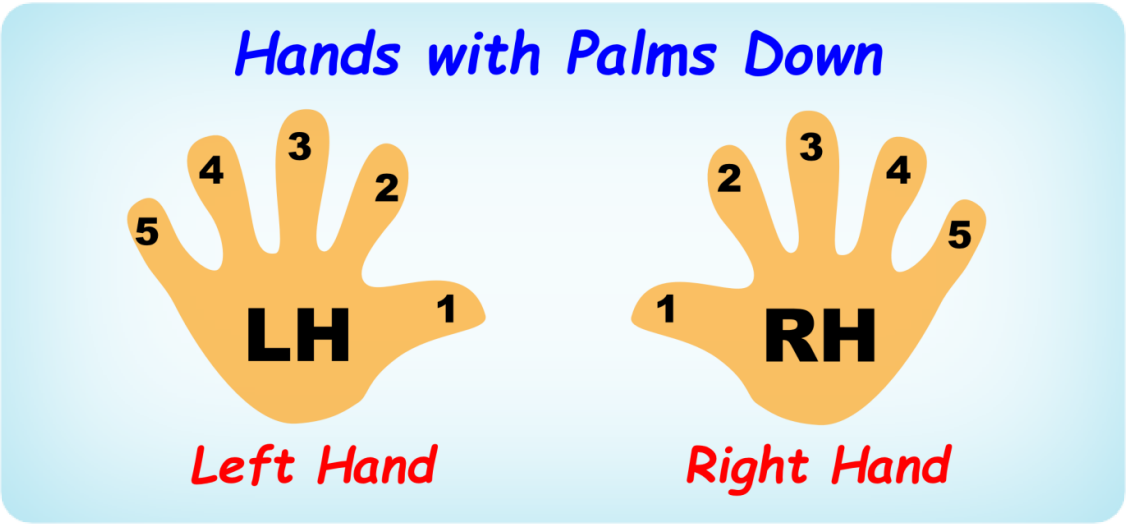
Do also consider the fact that you may need to use the pedals, or at least the sustain pedal. So, both feet should be comfortably flat on the floor to begin with.

And of course, your stool should be positioned so that you are seated more or less in the centre of the keyboard - *belly button opposite* ***middle C****!*

The next pictures illustrate the correct and incorrect hand positions.

Fingering

As far as piano / keyboard music is concerned what most people will call their *'first'* finger is their *'second'* finger as in piano music the *'first'* finger is always your *'thumb'* - *on both hands!*



Your First Exercises

As your music reading ability is no doubt limited right now, for our first few exercises we're going to use five notes only (in each hand), all of which are consecutive to one another so that you don't get lost. Each finger will always play the same note, but not necessarily in the same order.

These initial exercises will enable you to utilise every finger in both hands thereby giving each finger equal practice. And we'll only be using time elements that we've already covered: crotchets, minims and semibreves - *and quavers a little later!*

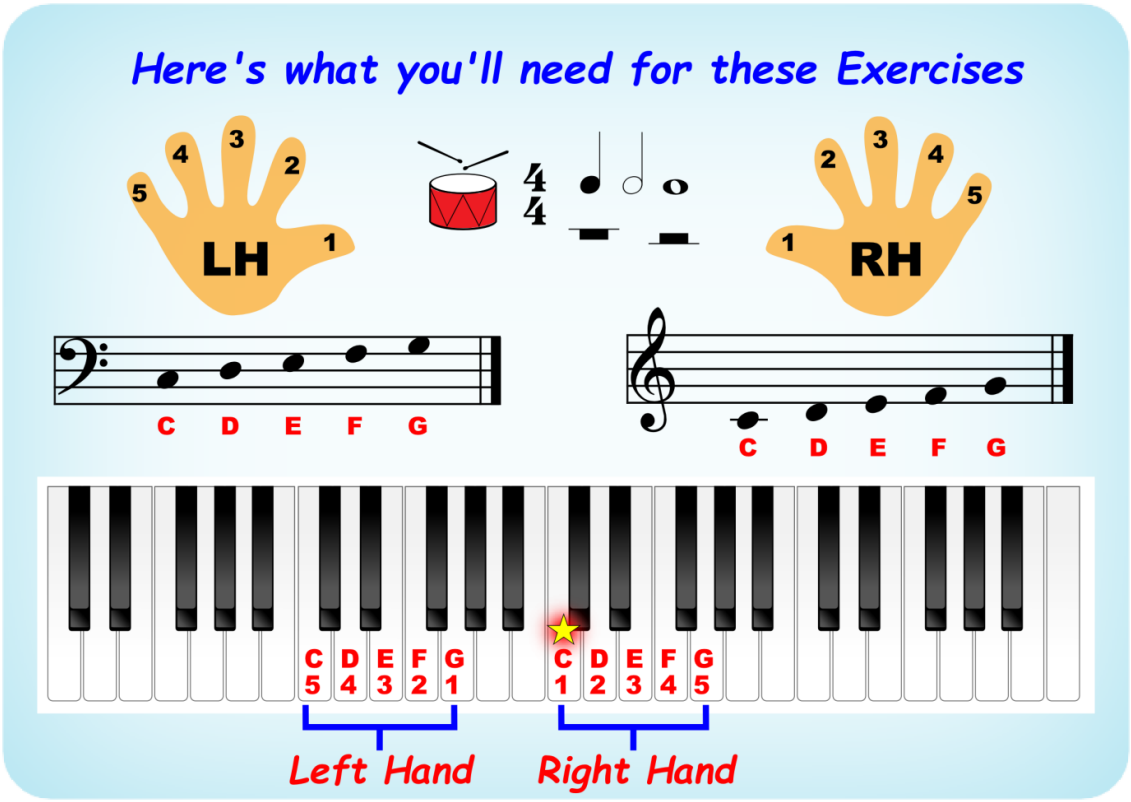
Begin by resting your hands lightly on these five notes in a relaxed claw like position; then when you are ready begin depressing the keys in the order shown in a piston type motion using the tips of your fingers and the sides of your thumbs. Make sure that you release each note before playing the next except for the minims and semibreves which should be sustained longer. And try to play each note with equal pressure, which I know is not easy at first.

Most importantly keep to a strict rhythm which can be as slow as you like, ideally use a metronome set to a comfortable speed.

Each exercise should be repeated several times and speed can be increased only when you are ready.

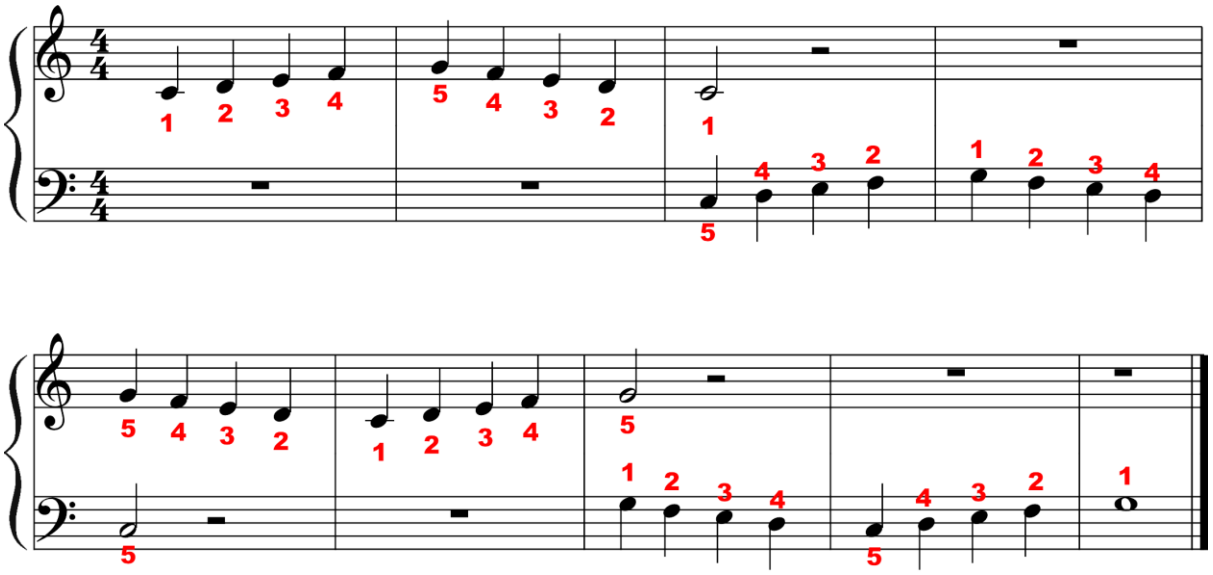
All of the exercises can be heard by clicking on the hyperlinks as they appear *as explained previously* or by downloading them from the website.

Each of these exercises uses the notes and fingering as shown in the next diagram. Note that the thumb of your right hand plays middle **C** and your left hand plays the same notes an octave below. Although both hands are used, they are not used together except for single sustained notes. In each case try and be aware of which notes you are playing. Perhaps sing along as you are doing it - *silently if you wish* - **C D E F G F** etc.



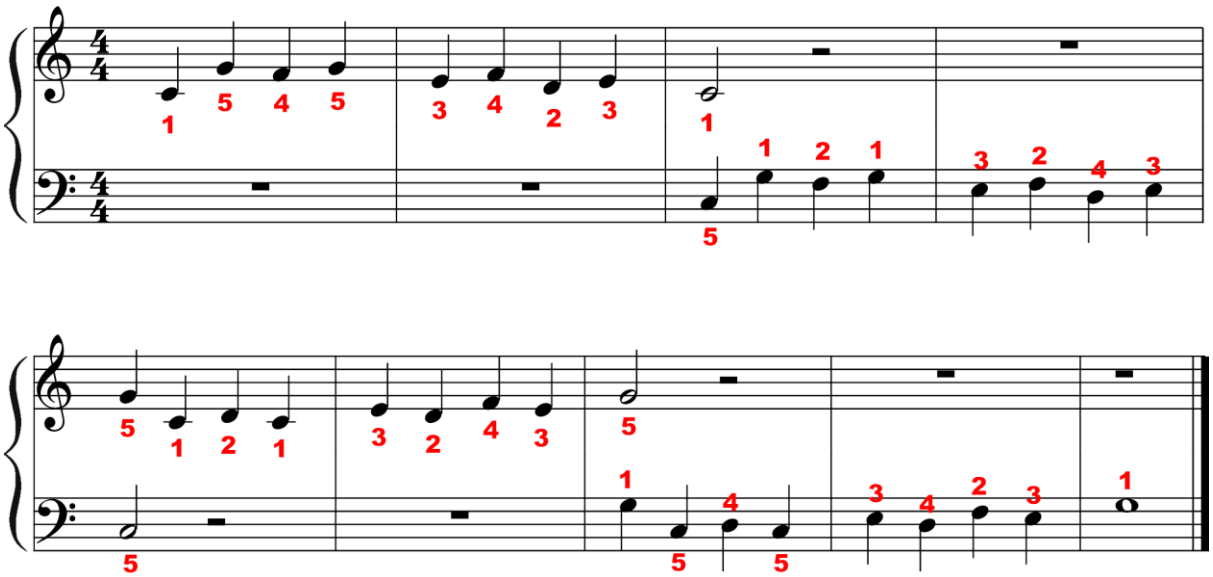
Exercise 1

This one is the simplest as it's just straight up and down, one finger after the other in order. Even though eventually you will find this very easy, I understand that if you're a complete beginner, even this will take some practice. But remember speed is not an issue.



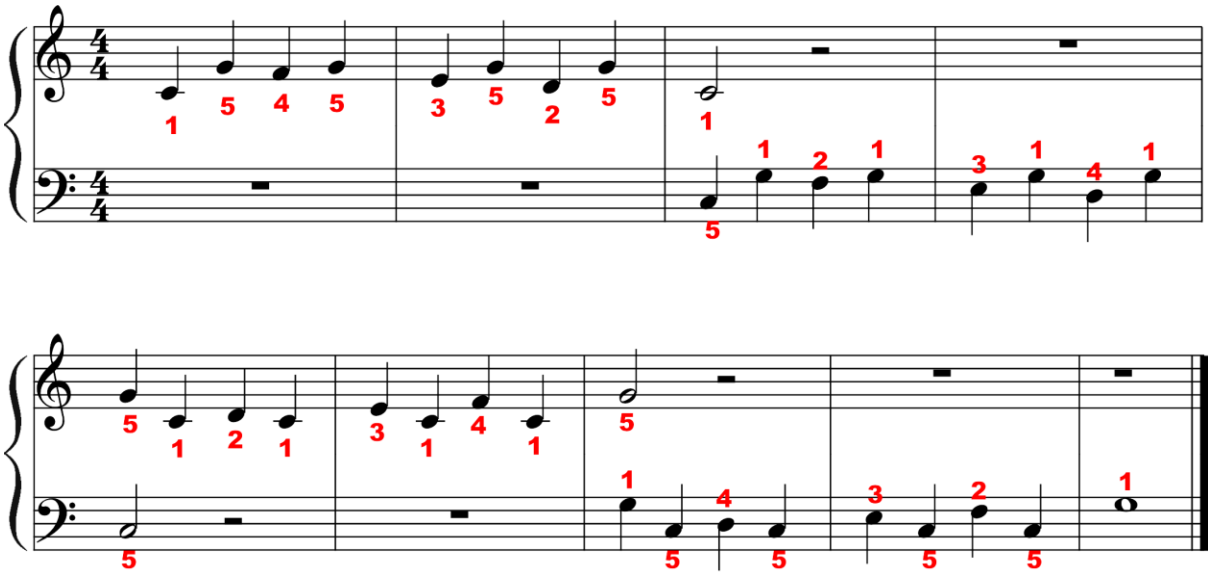
Exercise 2

This exercise uses the same five notes and fingers, but in a different order. If you hold your fingers over the notes, you can't fail to hit the correct ones, but remember, do try and be aware of which notes you are playing.



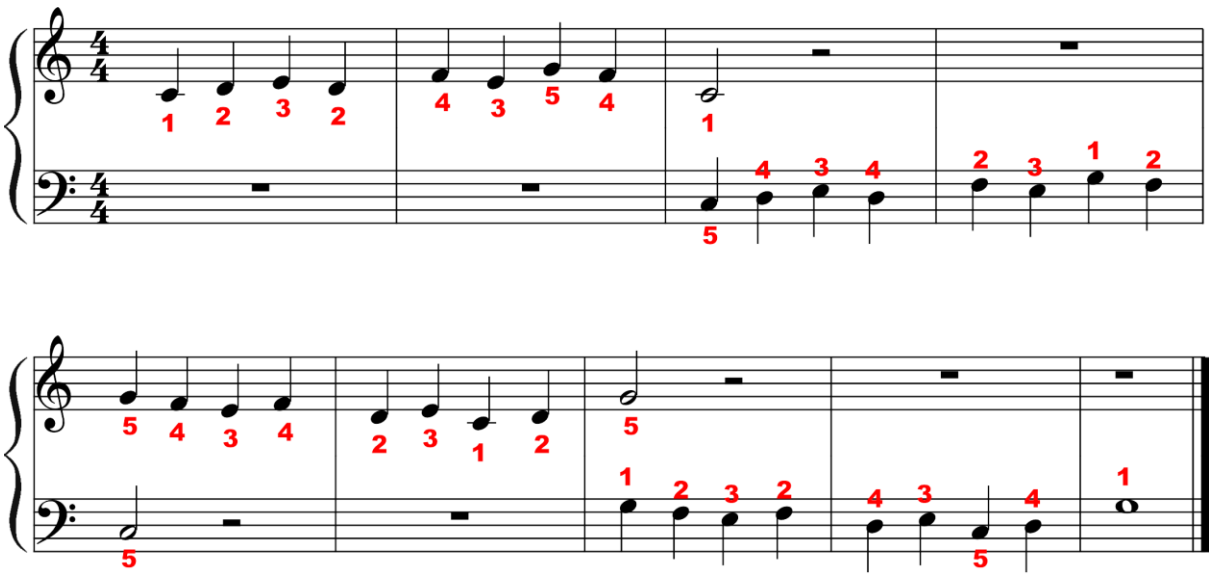
Exercise 3

This exercise looks very similar to the last one but look carefully to see the difference and notice how it gives more prominence to the first and fifth fingers.



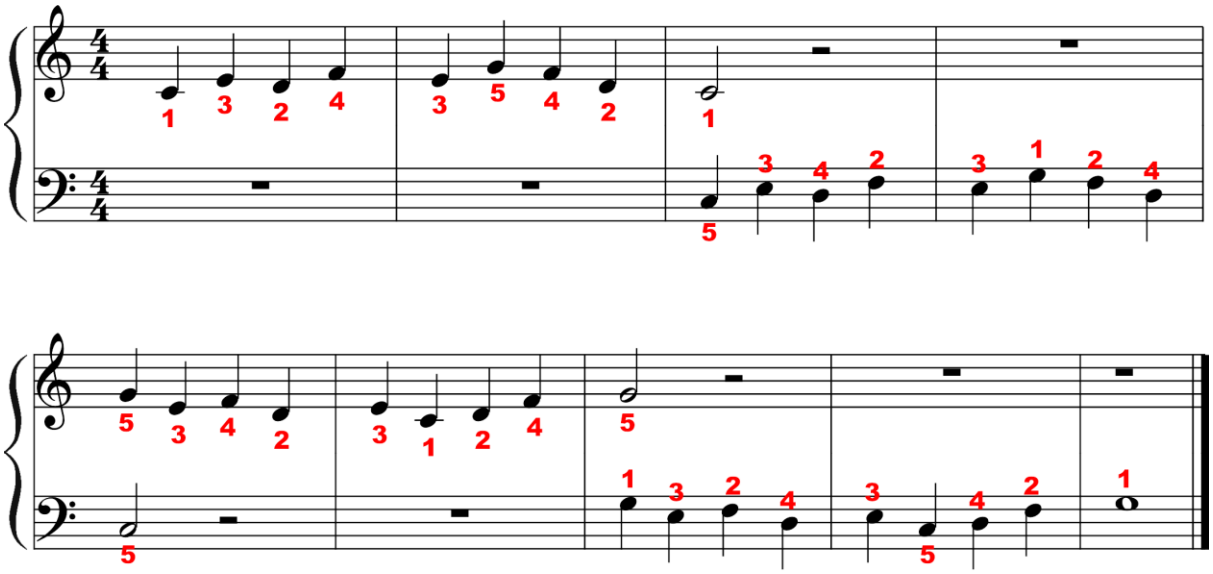
Exercise 4

And again, same notes, same fingering, different pattern.



Exercise 5

This final exercise of this section predominantly hops around in thirds. We'll be covering intervals later.



If you practice these exercises regularly you will gain strength and flexibility in all your fingers in preparation for what is to follow.

Why do some of the stems of the notes go up and others go down?

This is purely cosmetic and has nothing to do with anything other than that!

Creating Tunes with 5 Notes

Although we've been using only the same five notes in the previous exercises, we've only been using them one at a time even though they've been in different orders, and apart from the last notes of each phrase each note has been a crotchet (all the same time value).

The following examples show what can be achieved with just five notes, by playing some notes maybe twice in succession and / or by using different time values. These examples are for the right hand only and the fingering is the same as the previous exercises although I've deliberately omitted the fingering to help you *think* a little.

Notice that each example consists of two 4 bar phrases shown by the phrase marks - *the curved lines underneath*. The first phrase sort of asks a question and is unfinished; the second phrase answers it or *resolves* it. This technique is used in all kinds of music: pop, jazz and classical.

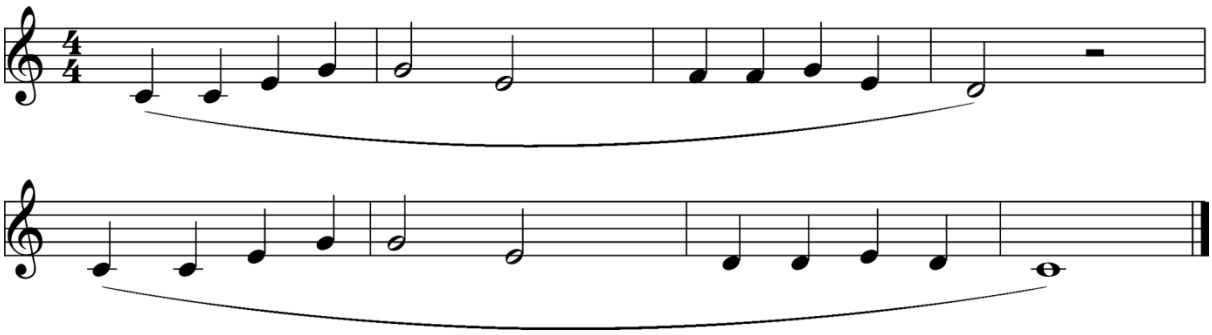
Listen to and play the following examples and then see if you can create some of your own using just these five notes and the time values that we've used so far (crotchets,

minims, semibreves and quavers) - actually the possibilities are endless. But initially I advise that you end the second phrase on **'C'**.

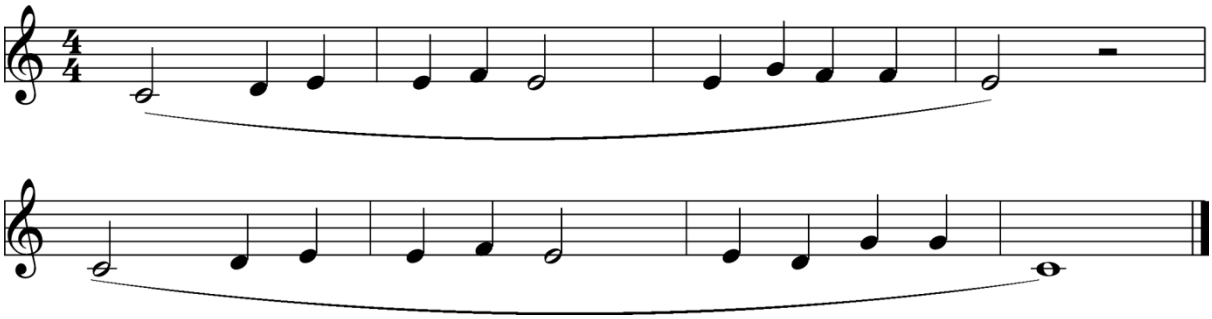
Why?

Because we are in the key of **C Major** and **C** is the root note. We'll be dealing with scales and keys later, but so far everything that we've done has been in **C Major** as it is the only key that has no sharps or flats which is why it is the first key to learn.

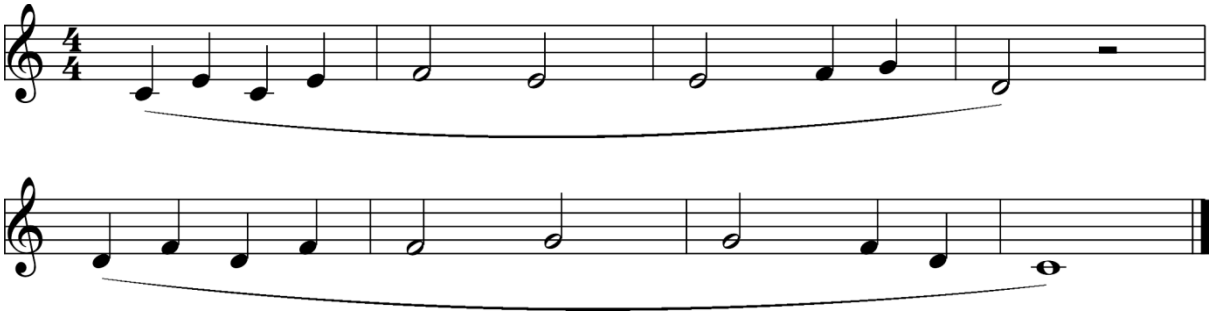
Example 1



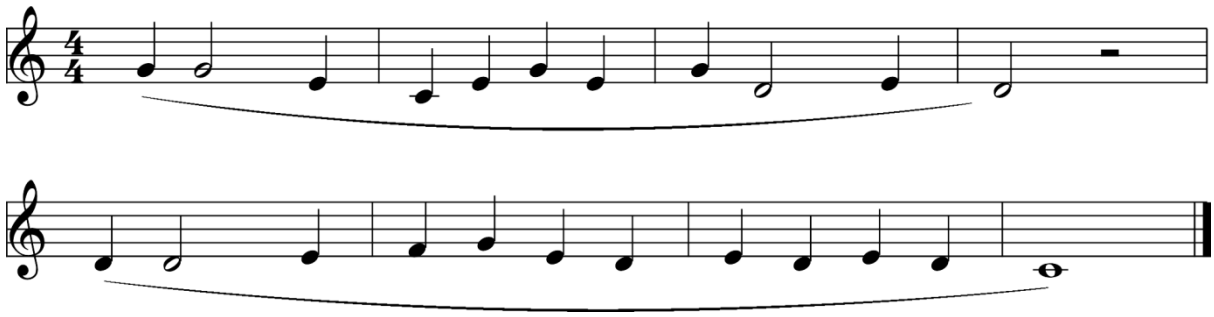
Example 2



Example 3

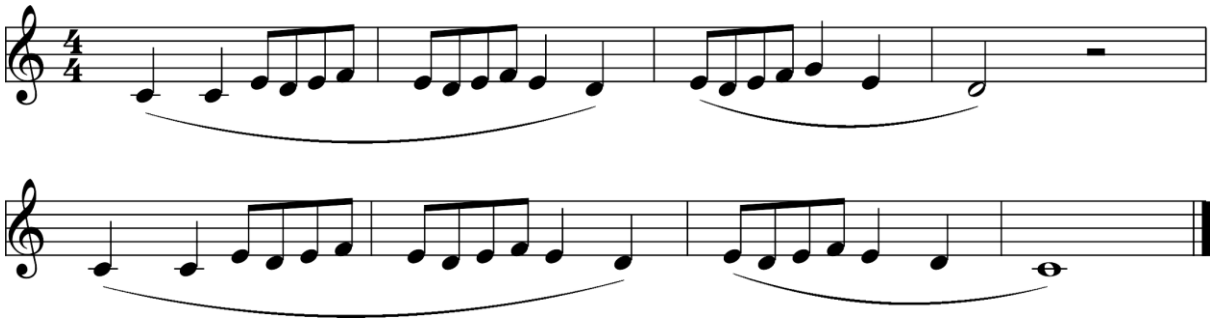


Example 4

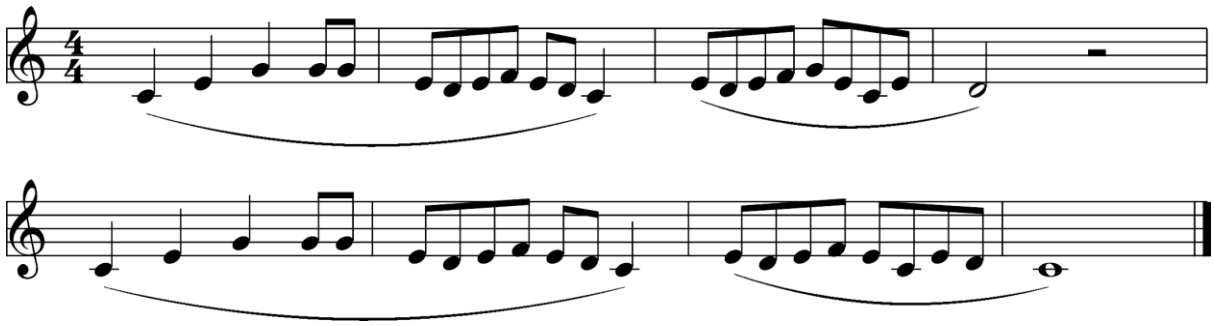


On the next two examples I've introduced some quavers, which makes the process a little more interesting.

Example 5



Example 6



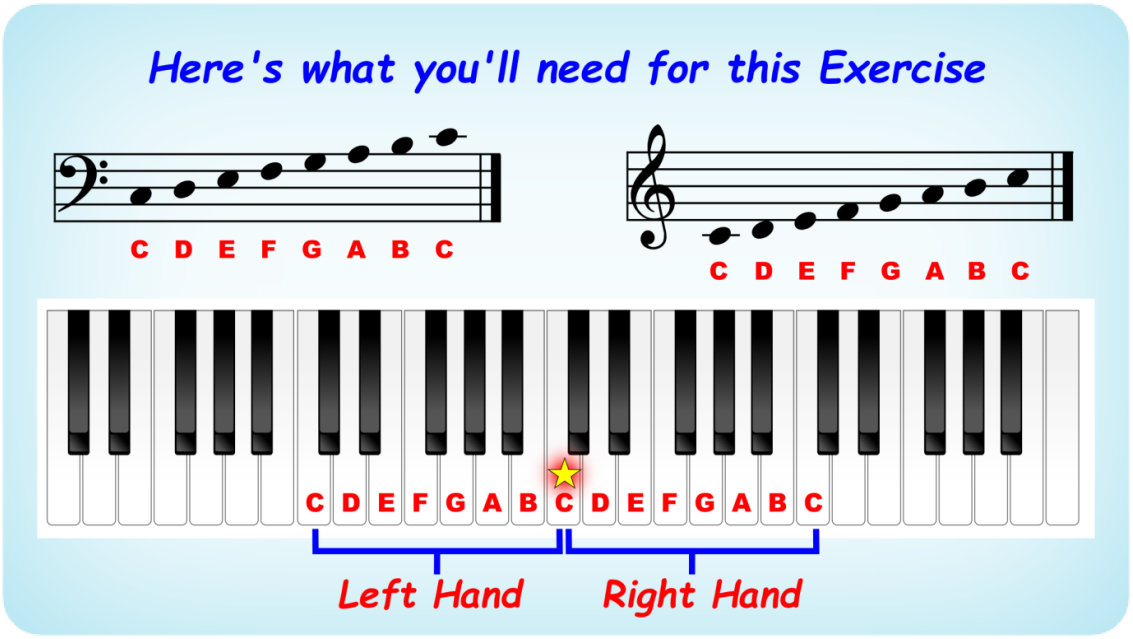
But don't get too used to using your fingers only on these five notes. The idea of doing this is just to get your fingers moving without you getting too lost. As you progress you will be using all your fingers on different notes according to which ones fit best. Our next exercise is an introduction to this process.

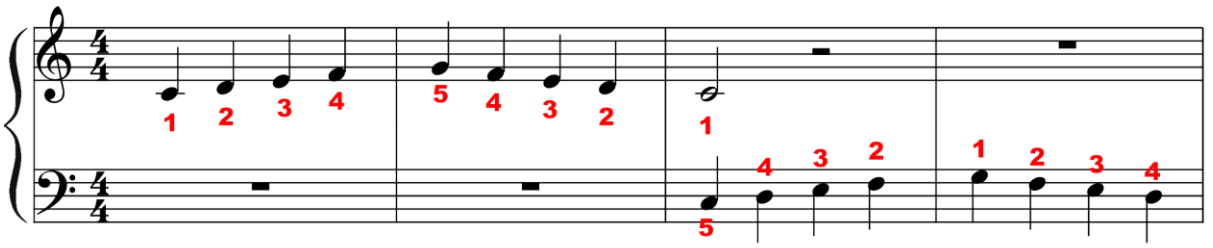
Exercise 6

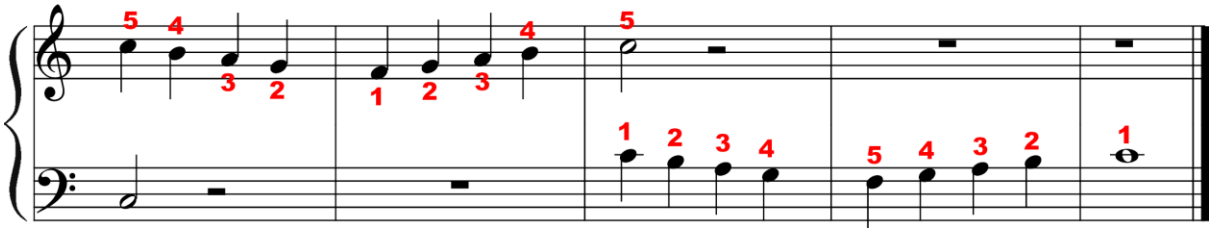
Our next exercise is exactly the same finger movements as exercise 1. In fact, the first four bars are identical, but bar 5 starts on the higher **C** instead of **G** and the same again in the left hand an octave lower beginning at bar 7.

So, although this exercise requires no more technical ability than exercise 1, you will have to think to change your hand positioning at the appropriate times.

Notice that middle **C** is used by both hands at different times.



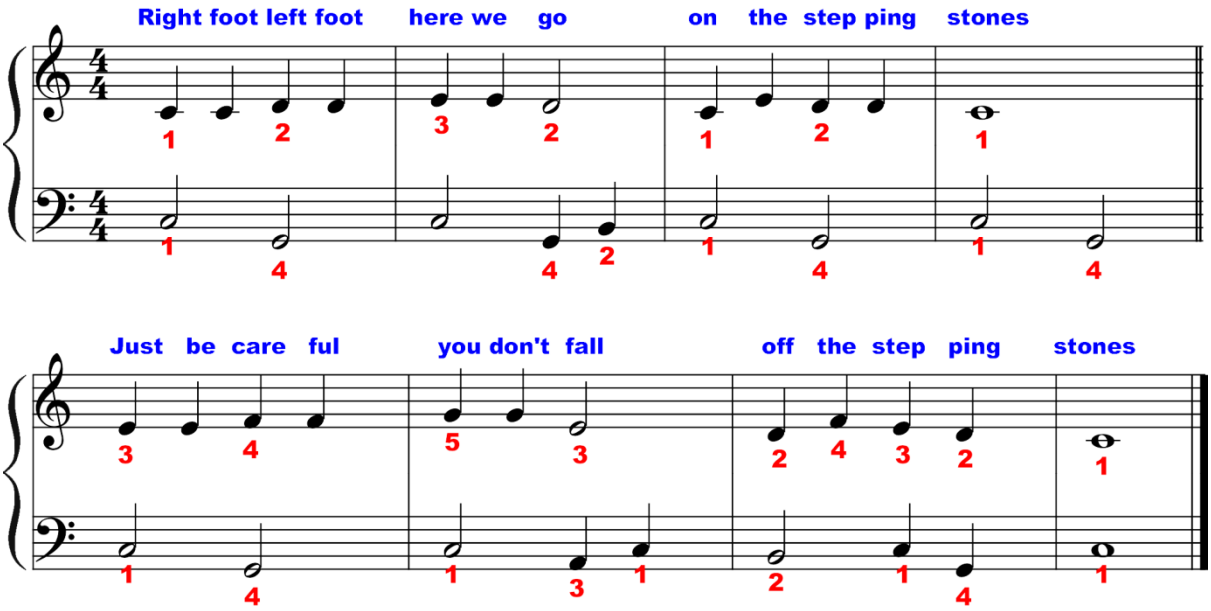




Stepping Stones

Here's a simple little piece based around the five note examples shown previously, although this one has a simple left-hand accompaniment using the notes as shown below.

Initially you may need to practice each hand separately which is fine and quite normal. When putting both hands together, do it one bar at a time and you will find this very easy.



Exercise 7

This next exercise is the without doubt the most difficult so far, but also the most important because as well as helping to give your fingers flexibility and independence, you will also need to use different fingers on different notes more so than the last exercise.

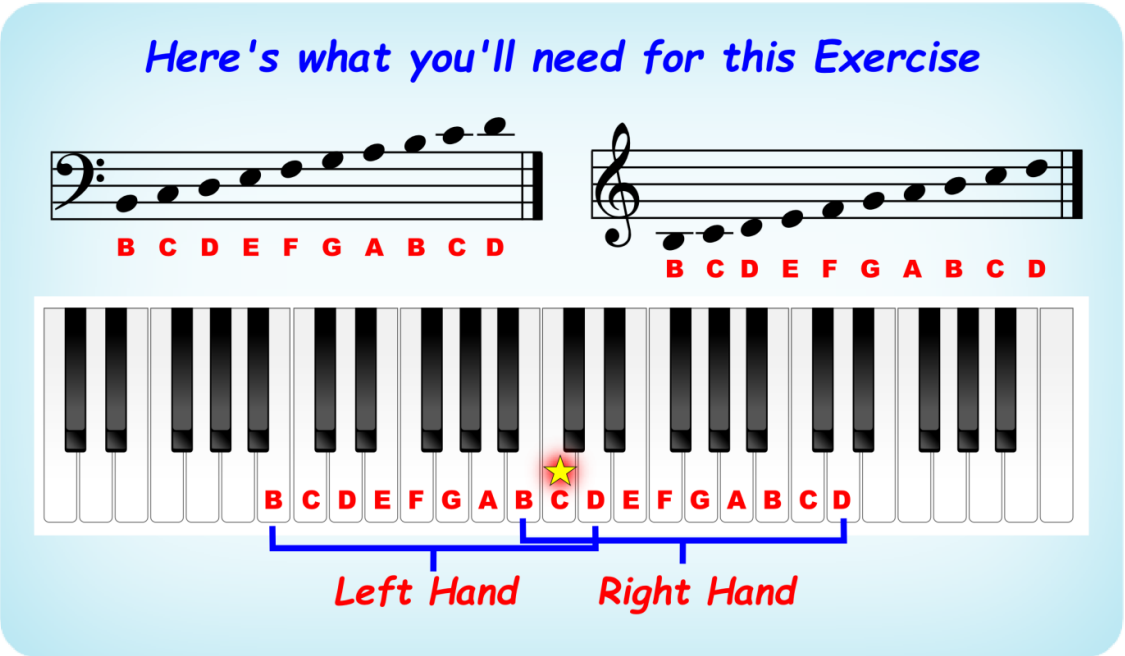
Again, you will need all your fingers and we have added just a couple more notes as shown - the top **'D's'** and bottom **'B's'**.

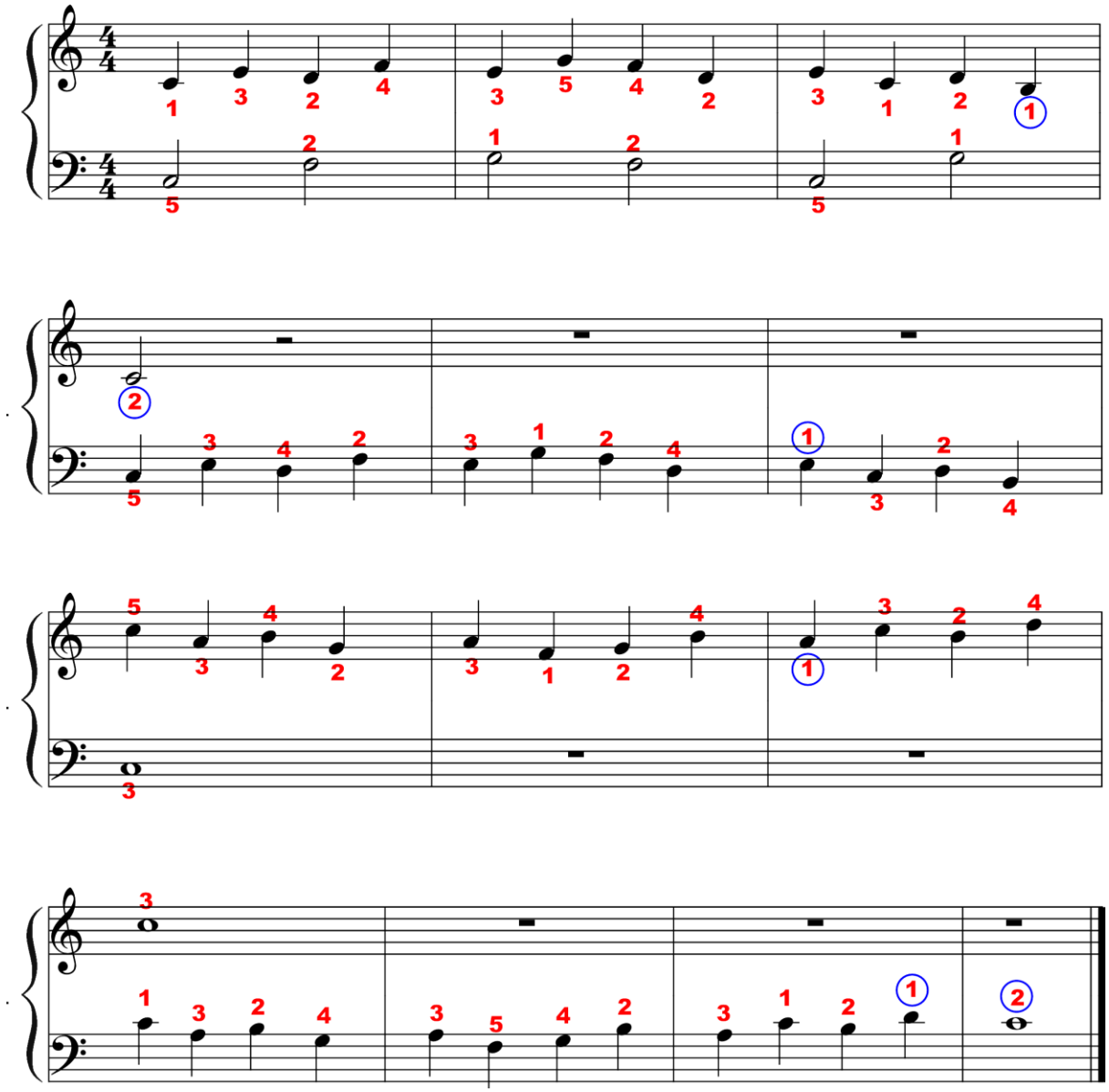
If you look at the fingering carefully you will see that at first it forms a pattern, but then alters slightly so that the new notes - the lower **'B's'** and top **'D's'** fit in. I've put a ring around the important fingering alterations:

- the **B** in bar 3 uses the first finger making the next **C** use the second finger
- in the left hand the **E** in bar 6 uses the first finger to accommodate the lower **B**
- back in the right hand the **A** in bar 8 uses the first finger to accommodate the higher **D**
- And finally, in the left hand the top **D** is forced to use the first finger in bar 12

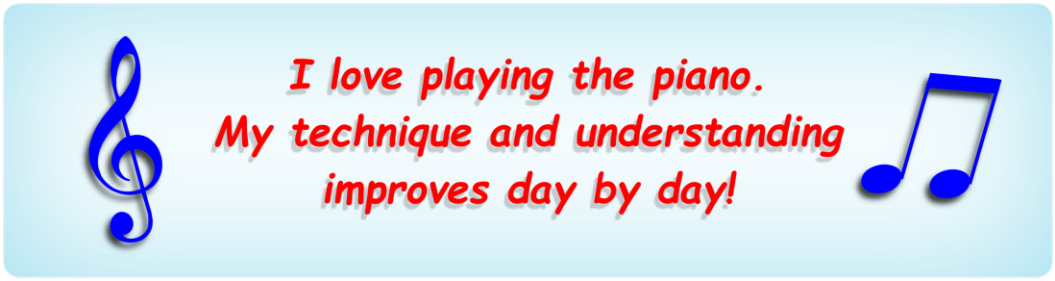
As we progress you will see many similar fingering alterations as well as finger crossovers which are essential for the scales and arpeggios.

Notice also that **middle C** and its immediate neighbours' **B** and **D** are used by both hands *at different times.*





Big Tip! - If you feel you need to, you can print out any or all of the exercises / tunes and write on any notes that you are not sure of.



Timing and Rhythm Part 2

In the last timing section, we dealt with the main time signatures as well as the note values. Now we're going to look at *'dotted notes'*, *'triplets'*, *'tied notes'* and *'grace notes'*, which will enable us to create far more interesting rhythms.

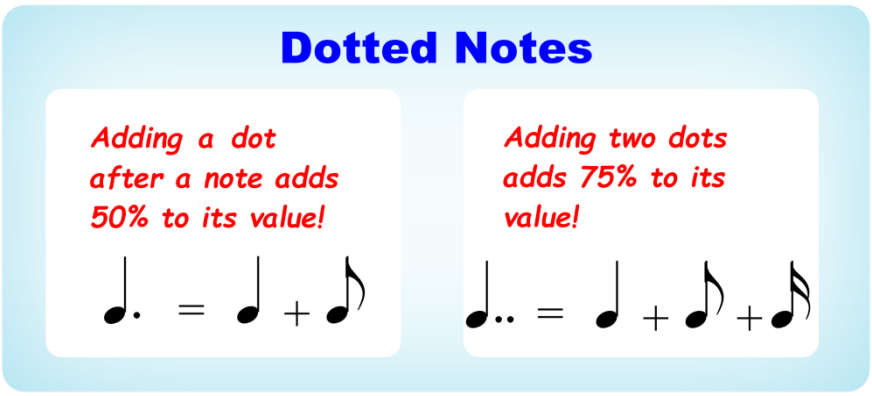
So just to re-cap, so far, we have covered:

- Semibreve = 4 beats (often referred to as a whole note)
- Minim = 2 beats (often referred to as a half note)
- Crotchet = 1 beat (often referred to as a quarter note)
- Quaver = half a beat (often referred to as an eighth note)
- Semiquaver = a quarter of a beat (often referred to as a sixteenth note)
- **4/4** - **3/4** - **2/4** timing & **6/8** timing (briefly)

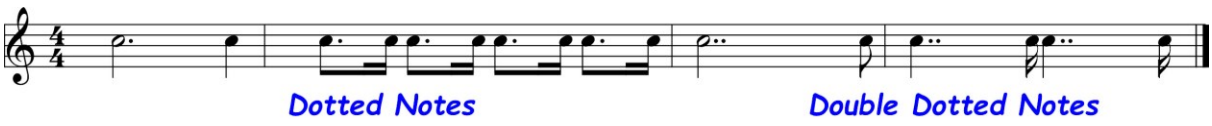
If you are at all unsure about any of the above, please refer back to the previous timing and rhythm chapter.

Dotted Notes

A single dot after (not over) a note or rest increases its length by 50%. Therefore, a *'dotted minim'* for instance would then count as 3 beats instead of 2. Two dots after a note increases its value by 75%, making a *'double dotted minim'* count as 3.5 beats.



The next diagram shows examples of how these fit into **4/4** bars.



And what about dotted rests?

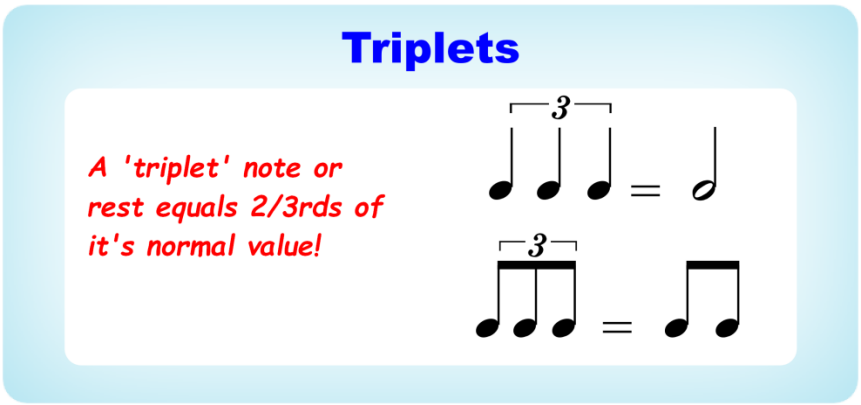
Yes, there are also *'dotted rests'* which work exactly the same.

And what about dots above or below notes?

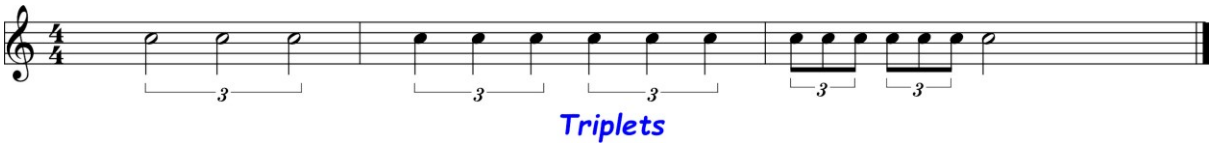
That means the notes should be played *'staccato',* which I'll explain shortly.

Triplets

Triplets are used when the timing of a group of three notes is divided equally between a beat (or combination of beats). For instance, a *'triplet'* of three crotchets would take up the space of only two and of course the timing of these would change accordingly. Similarly, a *'triplet'* of three quavers would take up 1 beat and not 1.5.



And the next diagram shows how they fit into **4/4** bars.



At first playing two beats with one hand (in the bass) and three with the other is a bit tricky, but actually you will have heard triplets in many songs and will have sung or hummed along quite easily and naturally.

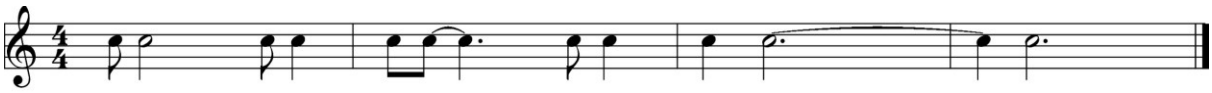
One well known song with lots of triplets that comes to mind is ***'Fool on the Hill'*** by the Beatles which is in **4/4** timing.

If converting a complicated solo into music notation it will often be found that groups of 5 or 7 or more notes are divided into a single beat. In this case the appropriate numeral will be seen instead of the '3'. This is often seen in classical music as well as pop and jazz etc.

There is a triplet exercise for you shortly.

Tied Notes

Generally, notes are written in a way which allows each beat to be identified easily. In order to achieve this, where necessary certain notes are tied together. In this event only the first note is played but is held for the length of both *'tied'* notes.



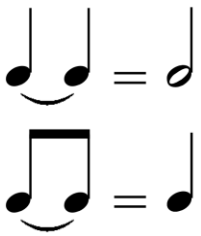
Tied Notes

Notice that bars 1 and 2 of the above are identical and could be written either way whereas the tied notes in bars 3 and 4 have to be written as shown as they cross the bar lines - remember each bar must compute to the correct value, - *you can't have leftovers!*

However please don't get these symbols mixed up with *'phrase marks'* (or *'slurs'*) which look similar but have a totally different meaning.

Tied Notes

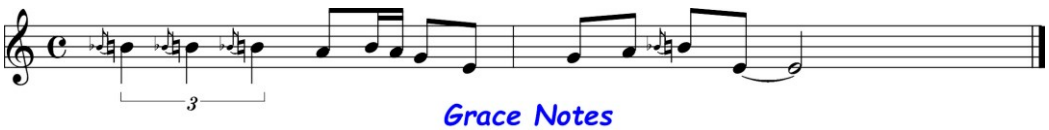
When two or more notes are tied together only the first one is played for the timing of both or all of the notes!



Grace Notes

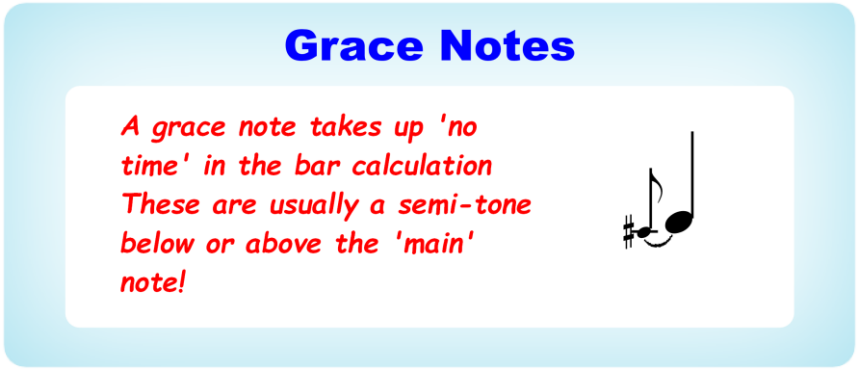
A *'grace note'*, or *'acciaccatura'* which is written as a very small quaver usually a semitone above or below the following note, is a very quick slurred note and takes up *'no time'* in the bar time calculation. Again, these are used in all types of music, but extensively in jazz and blues.

The following example shows *'grace notes'*, *'triplets'* and *'tied notes'*.



Grace Notes

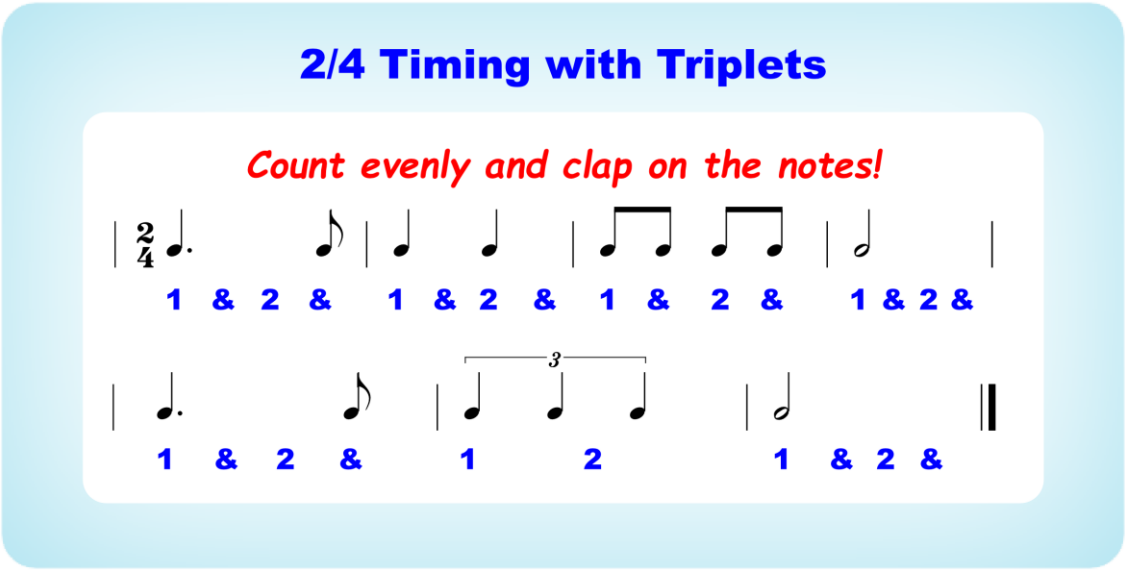
Notice that in the last example I've used the *'common time' 'C'* symbol instead of the **4/4** symbol (as shown earlier). Note that this, as well as the **2/2** *'alla breve'* symbol are purely optional alternatives.



2/4 Timing with Triplets

Here's an example of **2/4** timing with triplets and dotted notes.

As before, count **1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &** etc. until you come to the triplets, then just count **1 - 2** and clap or tap on the notes.



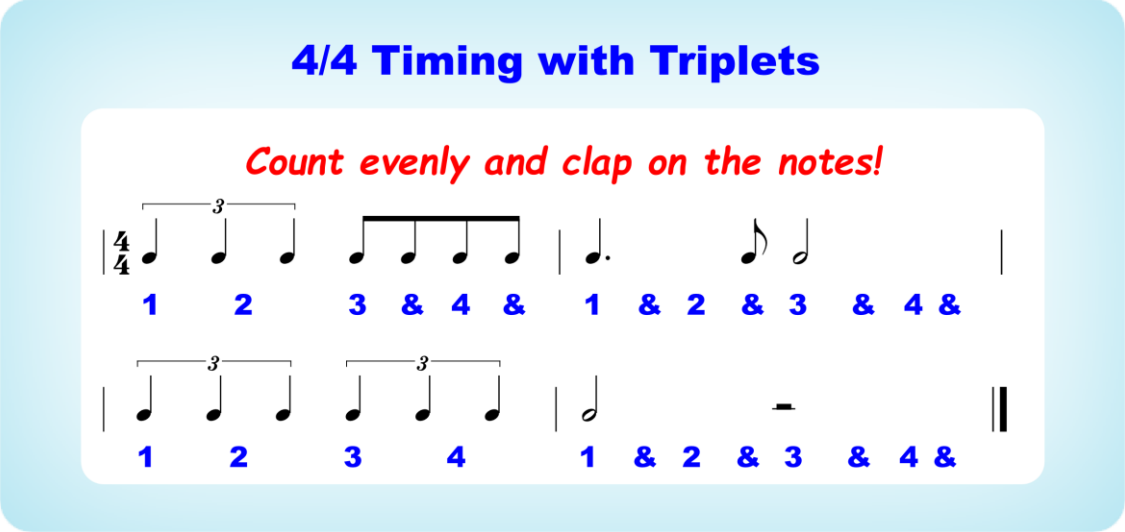
Click on any of the graphics to hear these and notice how the triplets go *across* the beats!

3/4 Timing with Triplets

And the same with **3/4** timing, just count **1 - 2 - 3** when you come to the *'triplets'*. But notice here that they are *'triplet quavers'* as against the crotchets above!

4/4 Timing with Triplets

And finally, a *'triplet'* example with **4/4** timing, but this time there are *'triplet crotchets'* and normal quavers in the same bar, so count **1 - 2 - 3 & 4 &** for that bar!



And now on to **6/8** timing which we only touched on briefly previously.

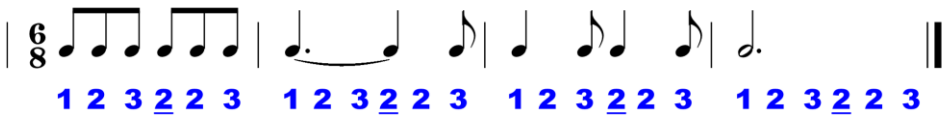
6/8 Timing

6/8 is different to all the previously mentioned time signatures. This means that there are six eighth notes (quavers) to each bar, and these are always two groups of three quavers. So, for this you will need to count: **1 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 2 - 3, 1 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 2 - 3** etc. At first you may think that this is similar to **3/4**, but it's not, as the quavers in **3/4** would be three sets of two rather than two sets of three.

So really **6/8** timing is *natural triplet timing,* **9/8** and **12/8** are similar.

6/8 Timing Example with Tied Notes

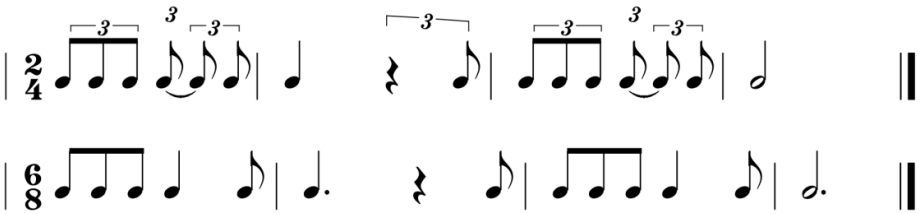
Count evenly and clap on the notes!



Now if you look at the next example, you should see what I mean about **6/8** being a *'natural triplet timing'*. The two examples are the same, one written in **2/4** and one in **6/8**.

2/4 with Triplets vs. 6/8 Timing

Both examples are the same!



Clearly 6/8 is more correct!

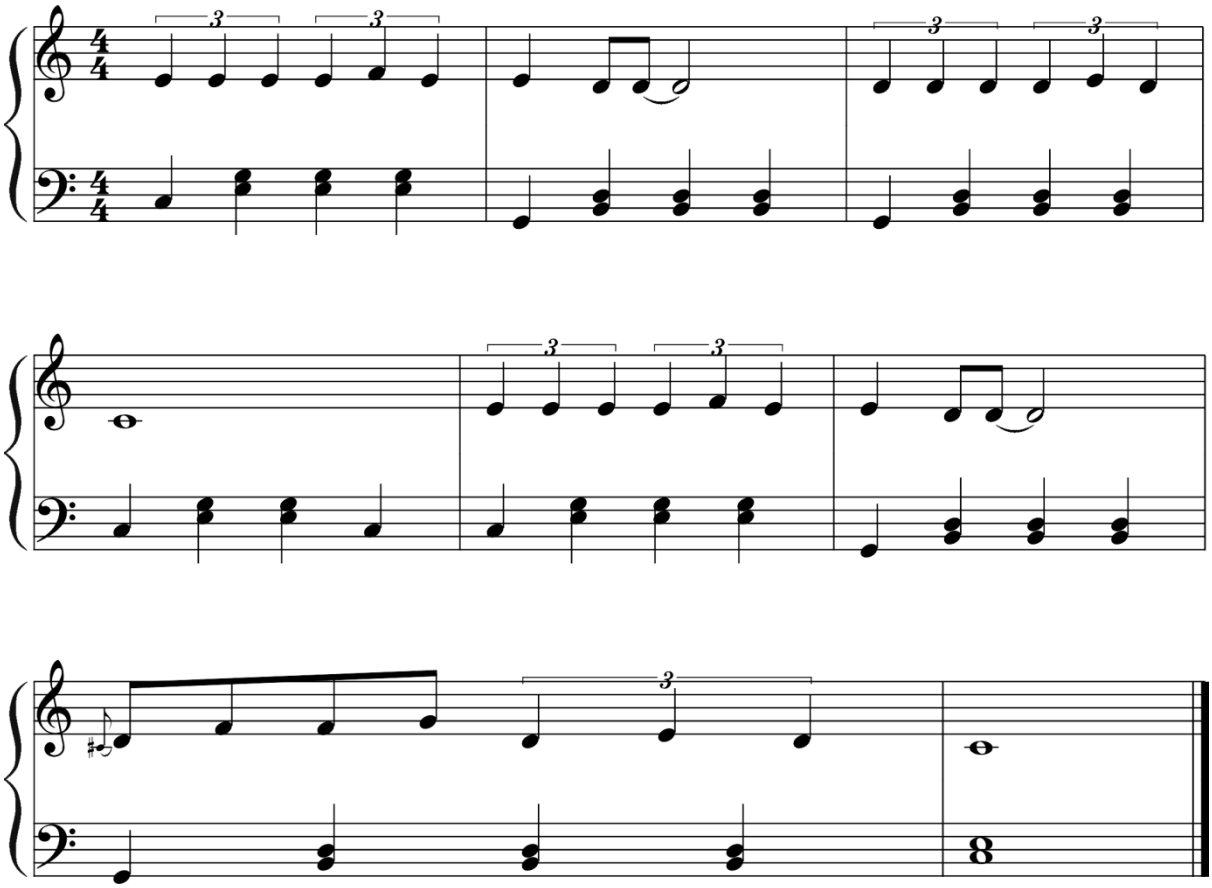
*Ok, so why bother with triplets at all? Why not just use **6/8** timing instead?*

In the case of an entire piece being in triplets you would do so, but this is not always the case, as in the **4/4** example shown previously where part of a bar is in triplets followed by normal quavers which would not compute to **6/8** timing.

All sorts of music is written in **6/8** timing including many jigs, jazz, funk etc., and even ballads (when the tempo is slower).

Triplet Exercise

This exercise uses triplets in the right hand against straight quarter notes in the left hand, which at first you may find tricky (like patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time), but it's a very important exercise. It also uses tied notes in bar 6 and a grace note in bar 7.



There is much more that I could say about timing, but enough has been said for our purposes here for the time being.

Important Musical Terms

There are an enormous amount of musical terms and symbols, many of which apply only to certain instruments. Following are the most common terms applicable to the piano / keyboard.

Staccato

Previously I have shown you the most usual way of playing the notes whereby you press the second key *as* you are releasing the first thereby creating a smooth transition which is known as *'legato'*. I hope that you have been practicing this correctly and not just banging the keys indiscriminately.

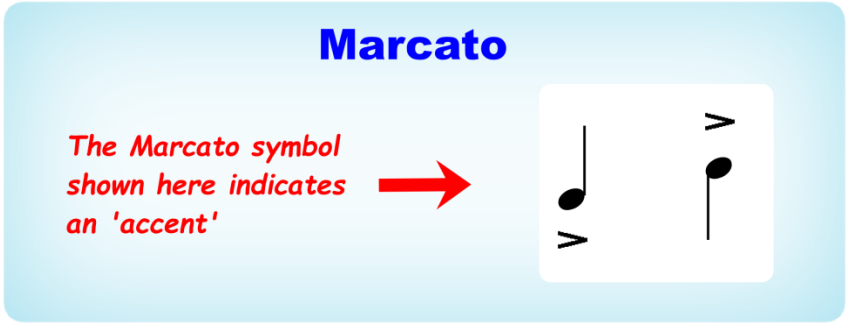
But some notes need to be struck deliberately detached or disconnected. This is known as *'staccato'*. Notes which should be played this way have a dot over or under them as shown here:

So, a dot over a note means it should be played staccato and if the dot is after it means that half as much again should be added to the time length - Yes?

Absolutely correct! The correct placing of a *'dot'* makes a huge difference!

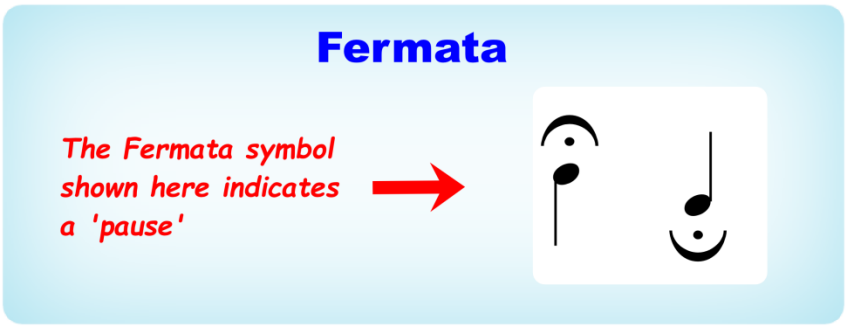
Marcato

The *'marcato'* symbol as shown below indicates that the note should be accented.



Fermata

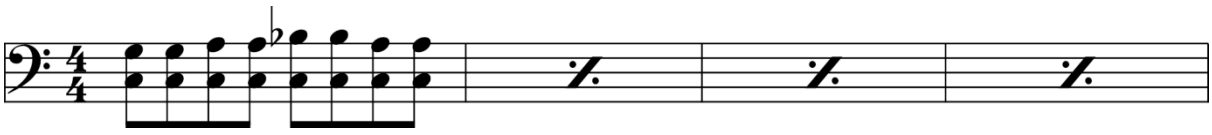
The *'fermata'* symbol as shown below indicates a *'pause'* and thus interrupts the general tempo of the piece.



You will be seeing this in a piece that follows called *'The Clowns Waltz'*, where there are a lot of pauses when the clowns keep tripping over!

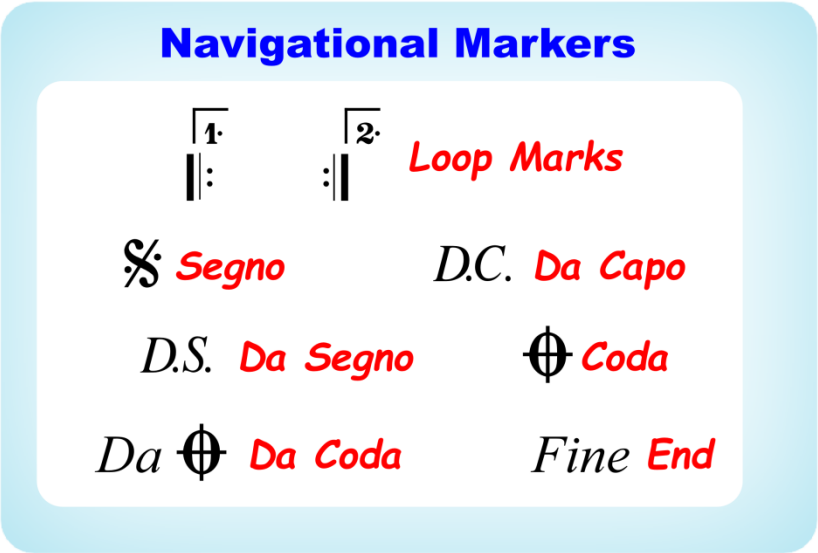
Repeat Last Measure

This symbol is used where one or more bars is an exact duplication of the previous one(s). As this is often the case in *'Blues'* or *'Boogie Woogie'* music, this is where they are mostly seen, as shown in the example below.



Navigational Symbols

Just like navigating through a website, finding your way through a piece of music is not always straight forwards. In order to minimise the number of pages and consequently save the amount of page turns certain navigational terms and symbols are used. These are all used very frequently in all types of music, so understanding these is essential.



Segno

The *'Segno'* sign is simply a reference mark and used in conjunction with the *'Da Segno'* (*D.S.*) marker.

Coda & *Da* Coda

The *'Coda'* is an end section marked by the *'Coda'* sign and used in conjunction with the *D.S.* and *D.C.* markers unless the instruction *'Da Coda'* appears which means *'go to the Coda'* after any repeats.

Fine

The *'Fine'* sign means *'end'* and is often found in the middle of a piece, meaning that the piece would end there after further instruction from either the *D.S.* or *D.C.* markers. You will see examples of this later.

Da Segno

The *'D.S.'* marker means *'go to the sign'* and is used in three ways as follows:

1. *D.S.* - jump forward or back to the *Segno* mark
2. *D.S. Al Fine* - jump to the *Segno* mark and finish at the *Fine* mark
3. *D.S. Al Coda* - jump to the *Segno* mark and then proceed to the *Coda*

Da Capo

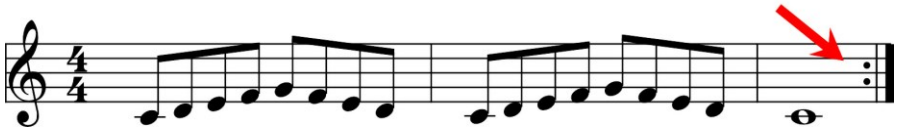
The *'D.C.'* marker means *'go to the beginning'* and is used as follows:

1. *D.C.* - go back to the start

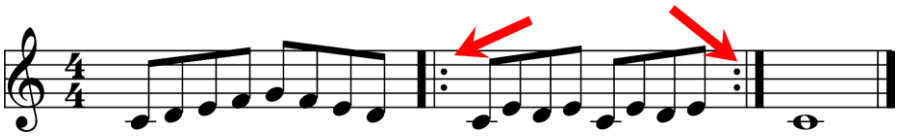
2. *D.C. Al Fine* - go back to the start and then end at the *Fine* mark
3. *D.C. Al Coda* - go back to the start and then proceed to the Coda

Loop Section

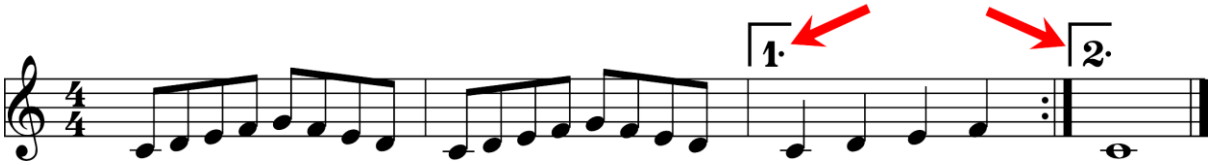
As you progress will come across some *'loop section'* symbols. The first one (below) means that the whole piece should be repeated from the beginning.



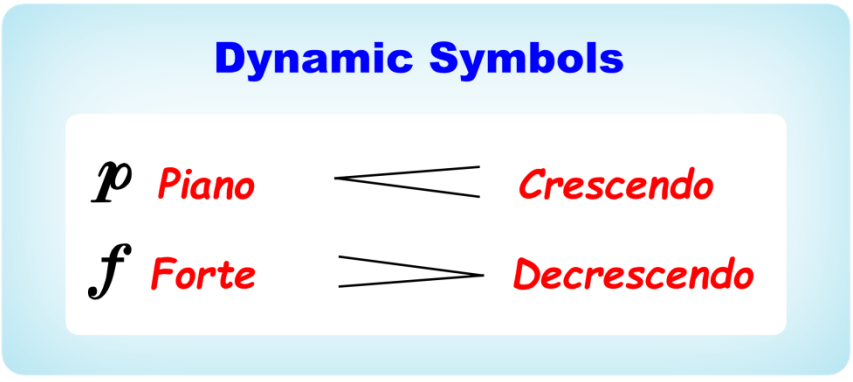
The next one means that the bar (or bars) between the markers should be repeated.



And this one means that the piece should be repeated from the beginning, using the bar marked '1' the first time and the one marked '2' the second time.



Dynamic Symbols



There are many dynamic symbols, but these are the most common in relation to the piano / keyboard.

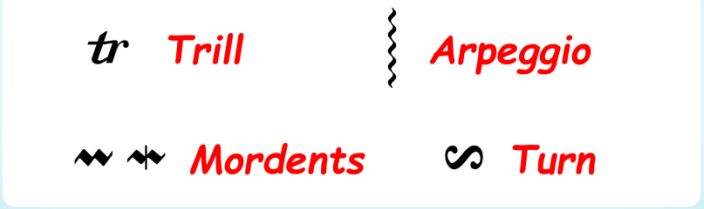
Italian Words		Translations
Crescendo (cres.)	-	*Gradually becoming louder*
Diminuendo (dim.)	-	*Gradually becoming softer*
ppp - pianississimo	-	*Very, very soft*
pp - pianissimo	-	*Very soft*
p - piano	-	*Soft*
mp - mezzo piano	-	*Moderately soft*
mf - mezzo forte	-	*Moderately loud*
f - forte	-	*Loud*
ff - fortissimo	-	*Very loud*
fff - fortississimo	-	*Very, very loud*
poco a poco	-	*Little by little*

Notice that the name *'pianoforte'* was obviously derived from the Italian words *'piano'* and *'forte'*, presumably because of the vast expression capabilities of the instrument - *in the right hands!*

Embellishments

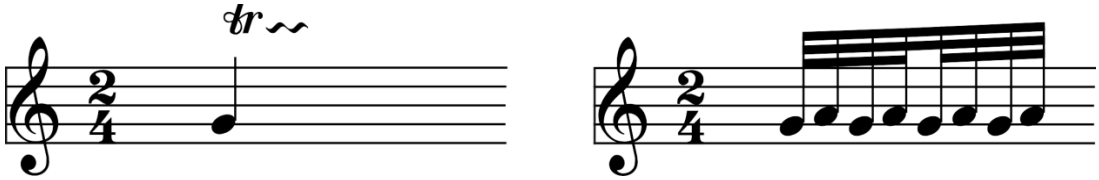
The following embellishments are mainly found in classical music, although the *'arpeggio'* is common in all types of music.

Embellishment Symbols



Trill

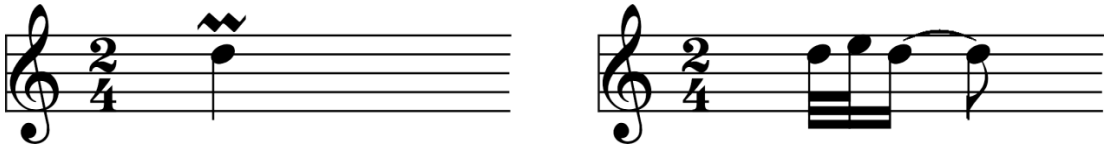
The first diagram below shows what is written and the second how it should be played. However, the *'trill'* or *'shake'* as it's sometimes called is rarely *exactly* as written in the second example; it may start off slowly and then increase in speed. It's also open to interpretation by the individual musician.



The note immediately above in the scale is used unless a sharp, flat or natural sign is used to signify otherwise. The trill can also begin on the higher of the two notes.

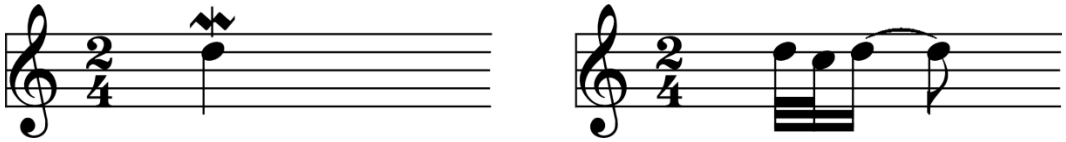
High Mordent

The *'high mordent'* does a quick *alternation* between the written note and the next note above in the scale as shown below.

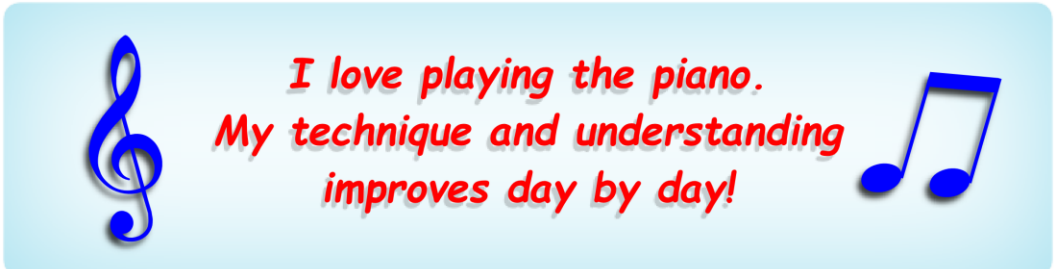


Low Mordent

The *'low mordent'* (or *'inverted mordent'*) is the opposite of the above and alternates between the written note and the next note below in the scale as shown below.

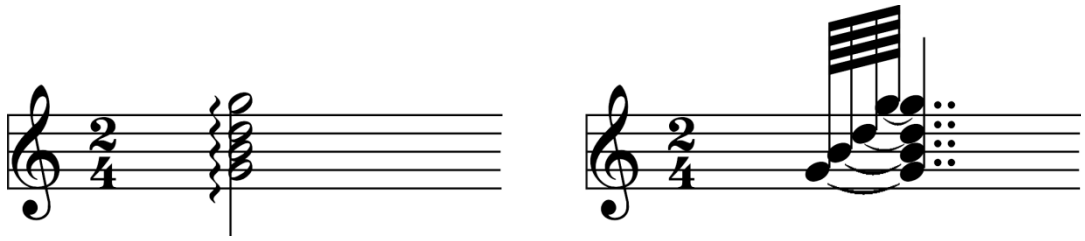


Both the high and low mordents are mainly found in classical music and rarely in any other type.



Arpeggio

The *'arpeggio'* symbol mustn't get confused with the arpeggio exercises which you'll learn shortly, although the term basically has the same meaning - *'broken chord'!*

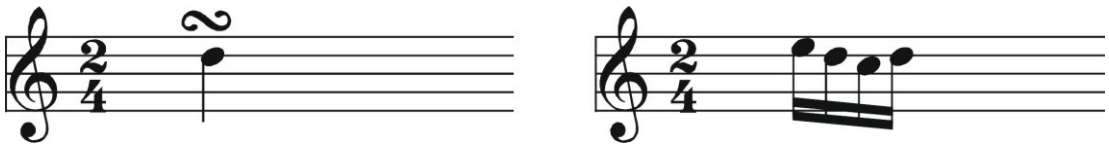


The notes should be played from the bottom in sequence, sustaining each note as they are played. This is how it would be played on a harp which is where the word originated from!

This symbol s found extensively in all types of music.

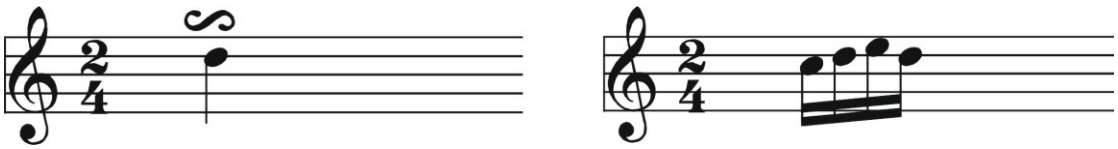
Turn

The *'turn'* and *'inverted turn'* are found very regularly in classical music. They are also used extensively in jazz, blues and rock improvisations, but are rarely seen *'written'* in these genres.



Inverted Turn

As the name suggests the *'inverted turn'* is the same as the regular *'turn'* but the other way around.



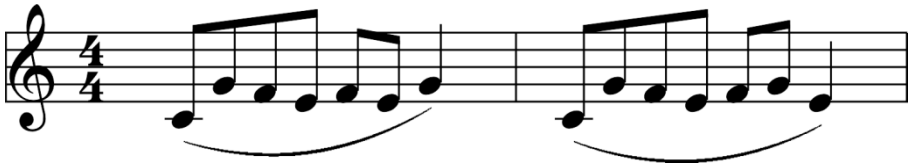
Phrase Marks

'Phrase marks' are used to join short musical sections or '*ideas'*. An example of these has already been shown in the section *'Creating Tunes with 5 Notes'*.

Phrase Marks

Phrase marks are used to join groups of notes into phrases.

A similar indistinguishable mark is called a *'slur'* and mainly used by bowed or woodwind instruments, but they are still used to mark a *'phrase'*.



But please don't get these confused with *'ties'* (as shown in the second rhythm section), which look similar but are ***totally*** different.

Sustain Pedal Symbols & Use

Without doubt the *'sustain'* or *'damper'* pedal is the most used pedal and if you have an electronic keyboard, it may indeed be the only one that you have. Where there are two or three pedals, the damper pedal is always to the right.

Often the damper pedal *'on-off'* symbols are written into the sheet music, or sometimes left to the player's discretion. But care must be taken not to *overuse* it. For instance if it is not released when the harmony (chord) changes it will not sound good.

Sustain Pedal Symbols

Pedal On

Pedal Off

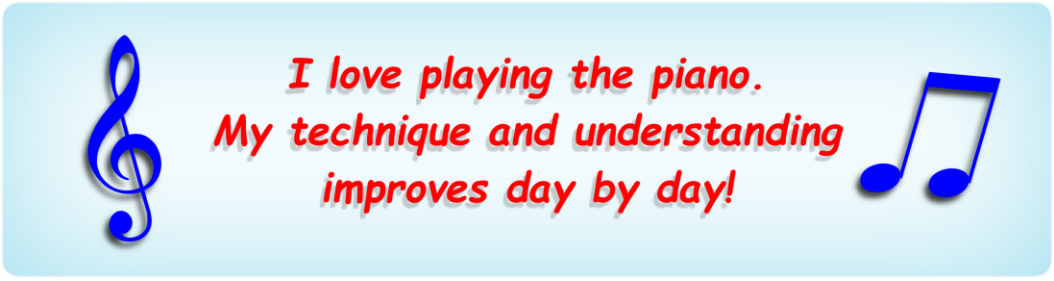
The *'una corda'* (soft) pedal, found to the left is generally used at the discretion of the musician to increase the timbre of softly played notes. When the *'una corda'* is depressed on an acoustic piano the hammer which normally strikes three strings for each note, only strikes one of them which makes the sound softer and also alters the tone somewhat.

But this pedal shouldn't be used as an alternative to *natural* dynamics, i.e. you need to learn to strike the keys with a variety of velocities (hard, soft or in-between) as and when required. To become proficient, this is something that you will need work on for many years.

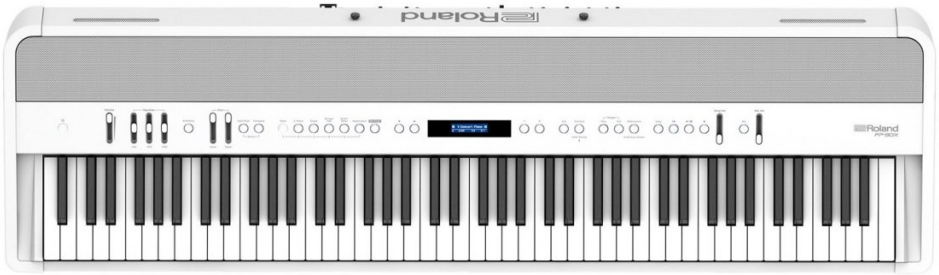
The *'sostenuto pedal'* in the centre, is generally only found on grand pianos (mainly American) and is again mainly used at the discretion of the musician in order to sustain certain notes while leaving others unaffected.

There are many more symbols and terms that you may need to know in the future, but right now I'm trying to limit these to the minimum so as not to strain your brain any more than necessary.

But, without doubt the most important thing is actual practice on the keyboard. Hopefully, you can manage this for at least 30 minutes once or twice a day. But if you can manage more than this, then so much the better!



Roland FP90x (88 Keys)



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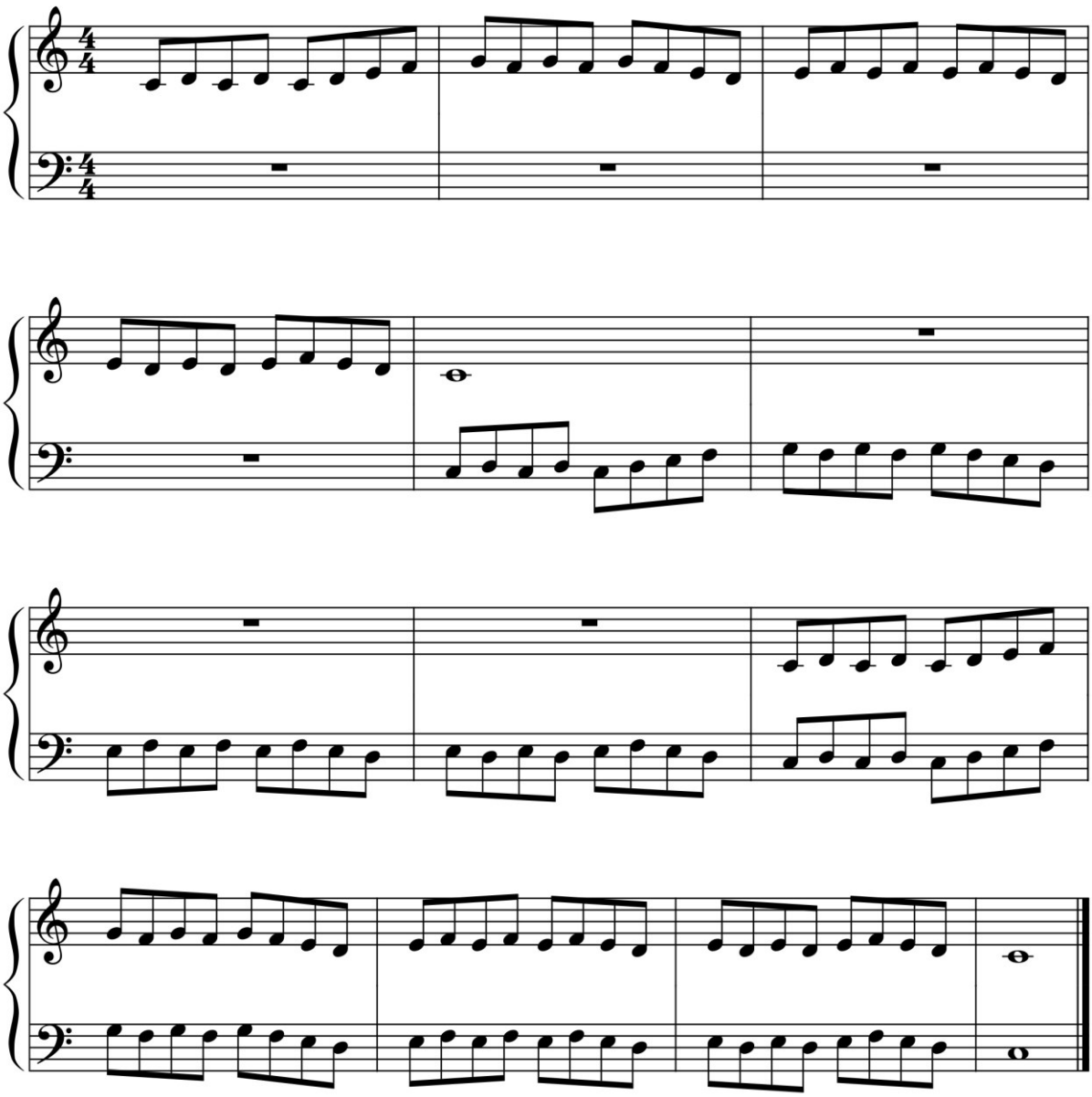
More Tunes & Exercises

Here are a few more simple tunes and exercises for you.

Exercise 8

I haven't included any fingering with this first one, as the right hand simply begins with the thumb then moves up in order. And the same for the left hand, which starts with the 5th finger and moves up in order.

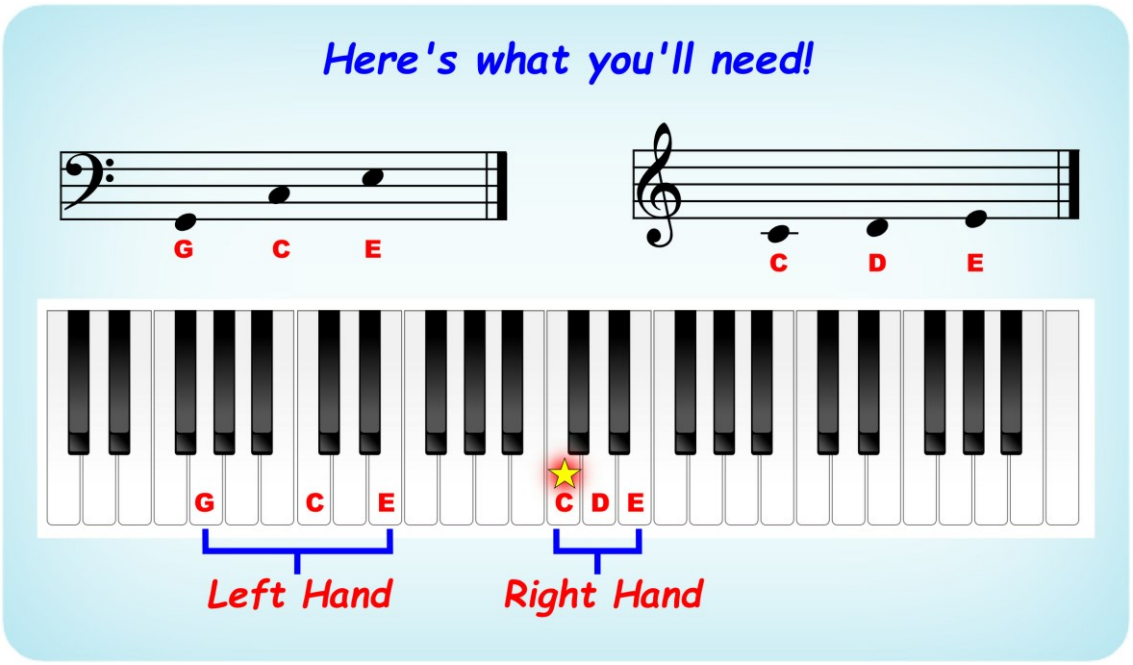
This exercise is particularly useful as an aid to strengthening your 4th and 5th fingers, which by nature are the weakest. But don't overdo it, if your fingers start hurting, give it a rest!



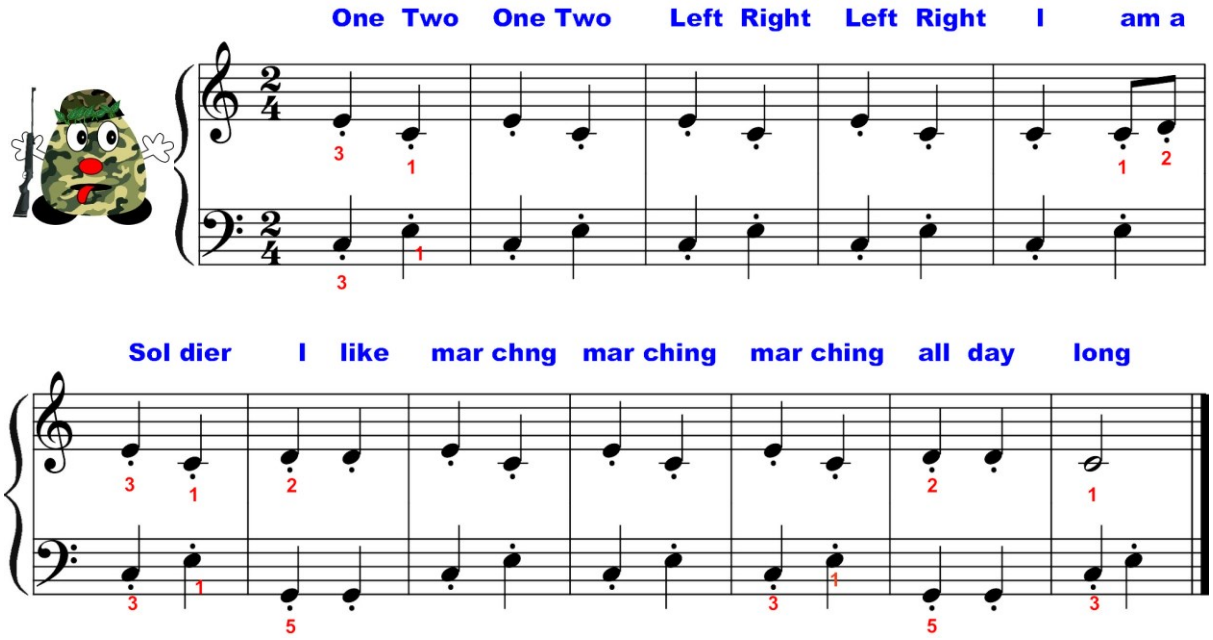
The Gonk March

This short easy staccato piece is in **2/4** timing and only requires three fingers and three notes in each hand. You should be able to play this very easily.

Remember to count **1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &** etc.



Most of the notes are straight crotchets, but except for the quavers when you sing ***'am a'*** and the very last note in the right hand which is a minim and should be held for two beats.



Grubby Hands

Notice that there is a low **'G'** in the right hand which is way below the treble clef staff lines and has two ledger lines above it. This is in the fifth bar and is not difficult once you know that it's there. I've marked this in the music notation and it only occurs once.

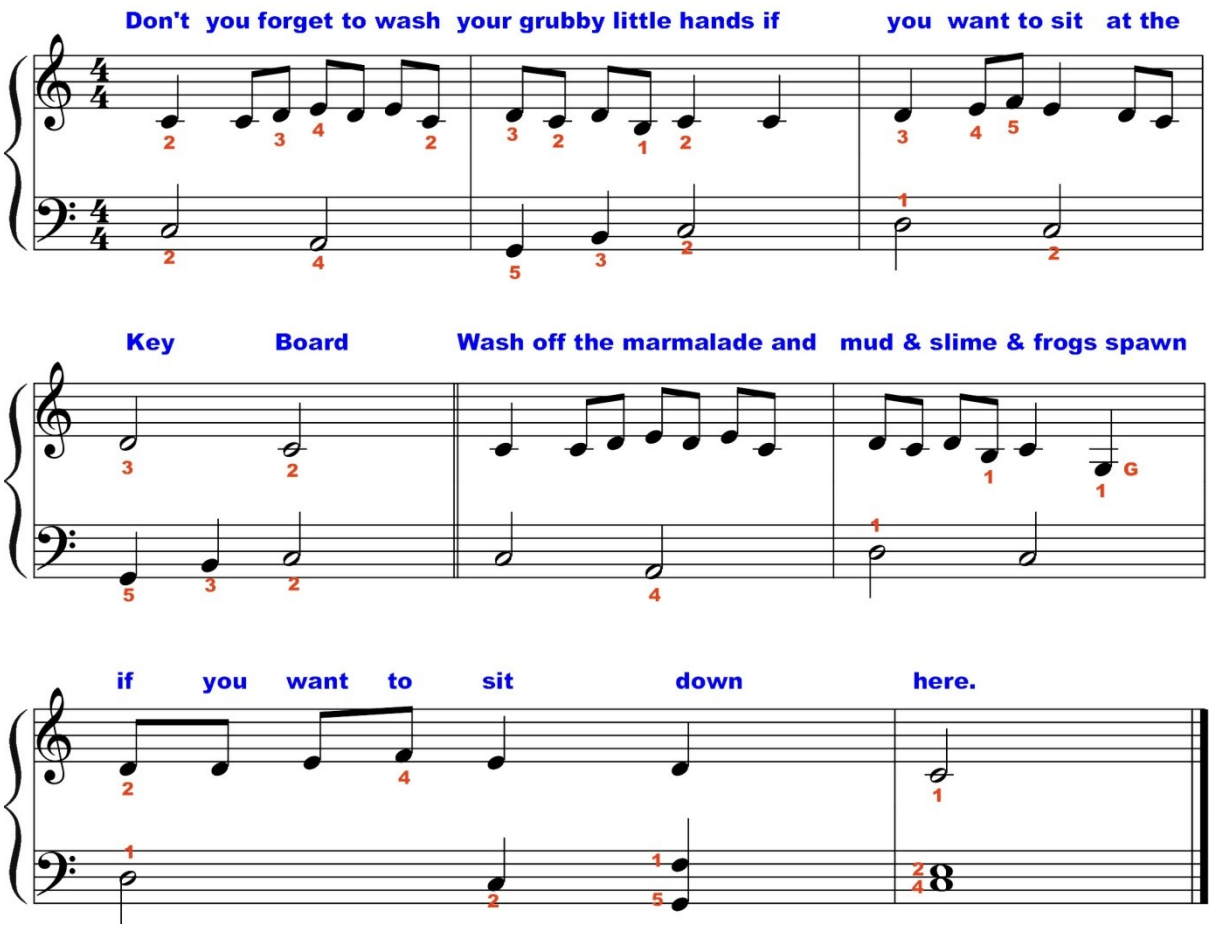
The left hand will almost certainly need to be practiced separately at first as, it is far busier than you are used to and at the end plays two notes together.

Note that the right hand starts with the second finger on **C** leaving the way clear to use the thumb on the **B** and lower **G**.

Singing along as you play (even in your head) will make it easier!

This is the last time that I'm including the *'Here's what you need'* charts, as by now you should be finding these unnecessary. But remember if you are unsure you can print out the main chart shown earlier and refer to it if / when needed.

I shall also gradually be making the fingering smaller and only including it where essential which as is more the norm.



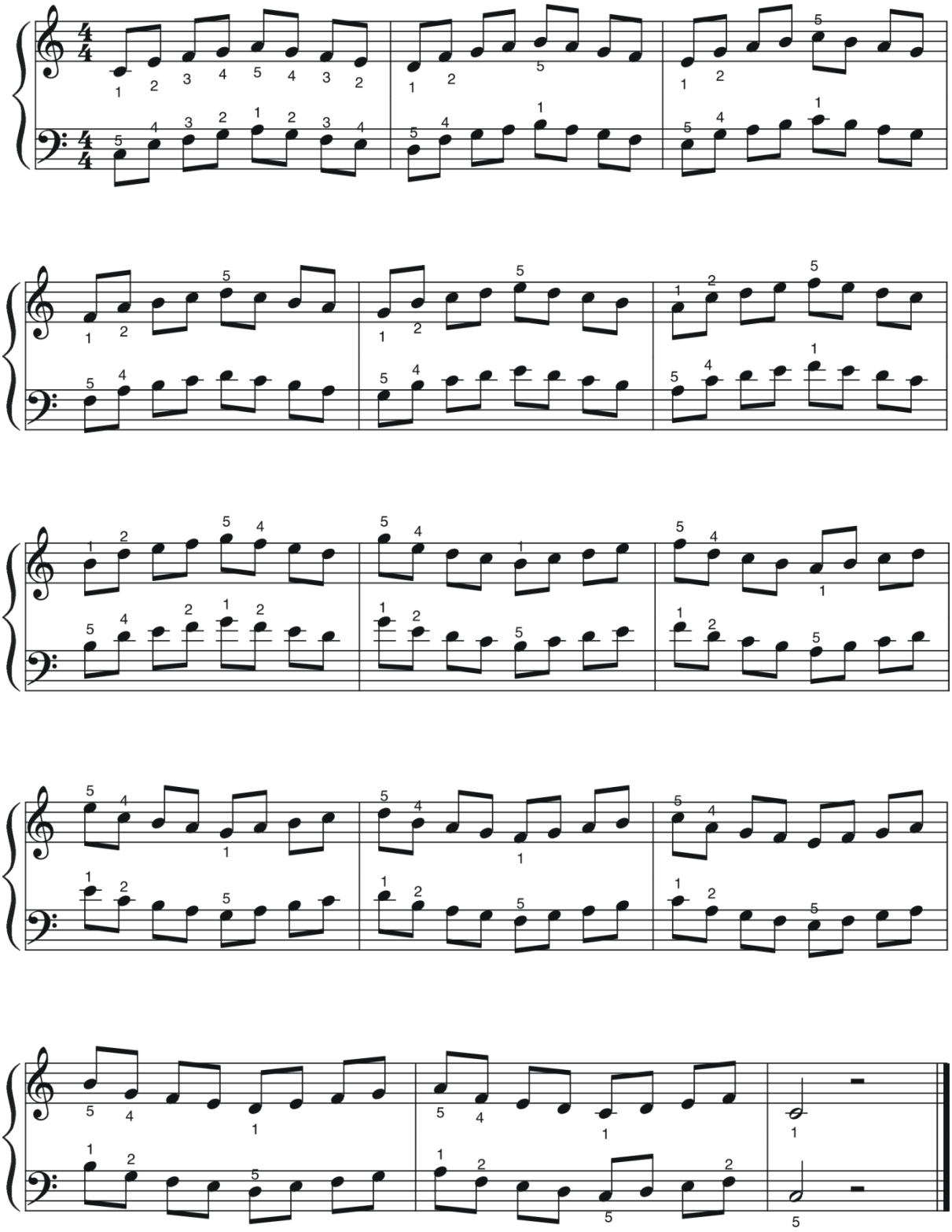
I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

Casio Privia PX S3100 Stage / Home Piano

This little beast takes some beating - especially for the price. This has incredible piano sounds, as well as one of the best keyboard feels out there. It also has other great sounds and auto accompaniment.
Suitable for beginners and professionals alike!

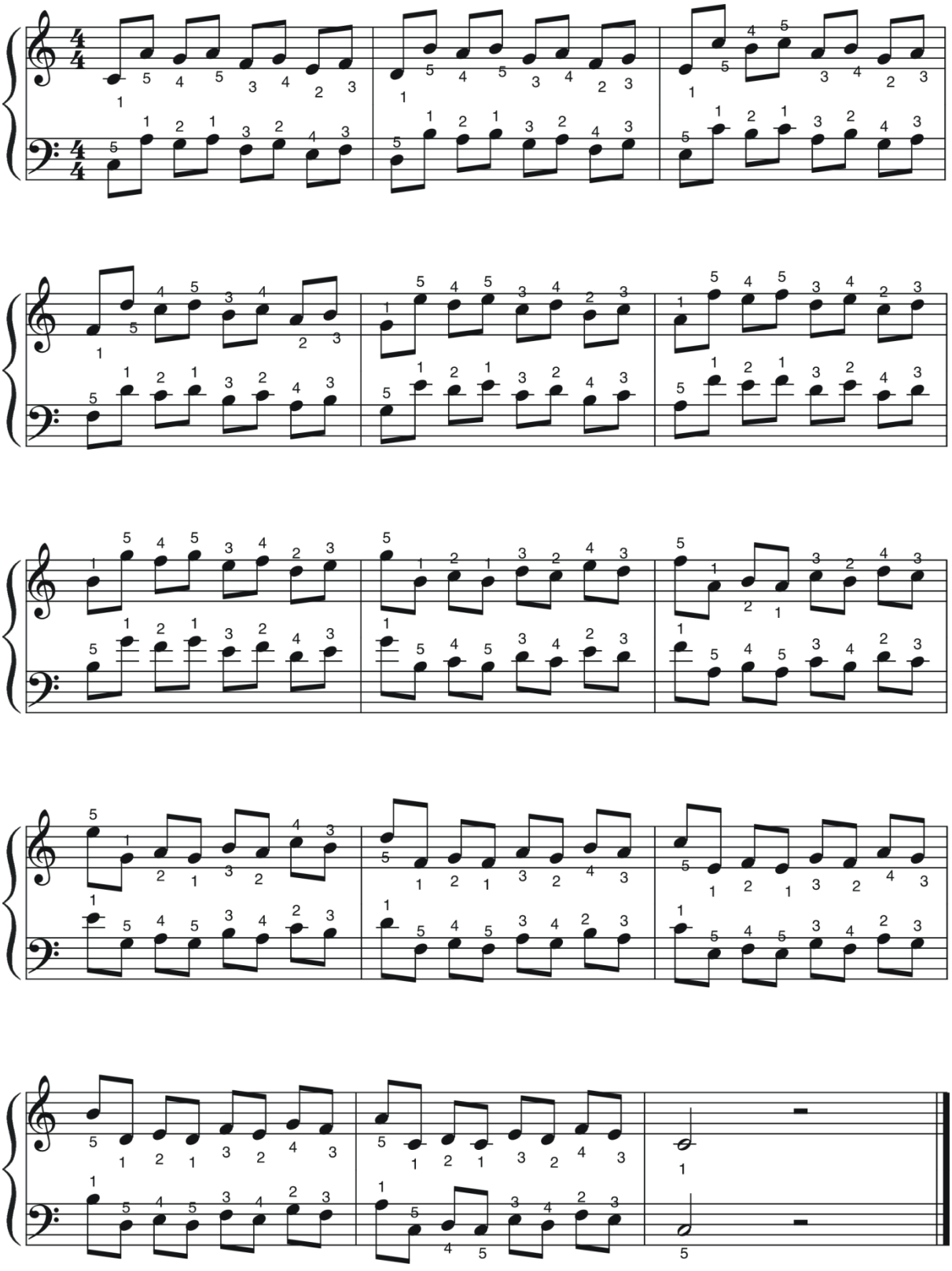
Exercise 9

Notice that this exercise is the same as exercise 1 except that there is a gap of a third at the beginning of each measure, which enables the piece to ascend the scale before descending in a similar way. Practice this one hand at a time before trying both hands together.



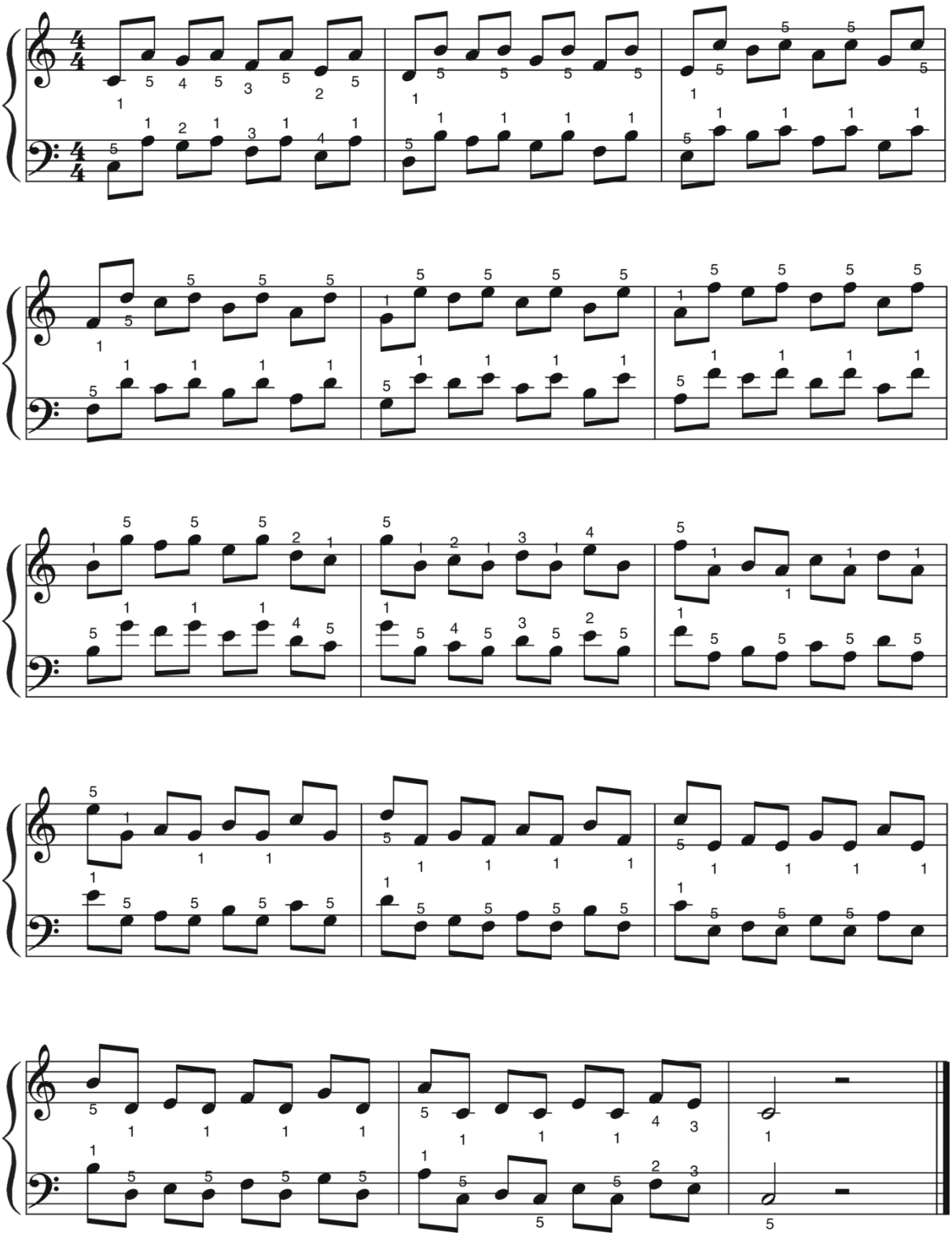
Exercise 10

This exercise uses the same pattern as exercise 2 but with a 6th interval (instead of the 5th) at the beginning of each measure.



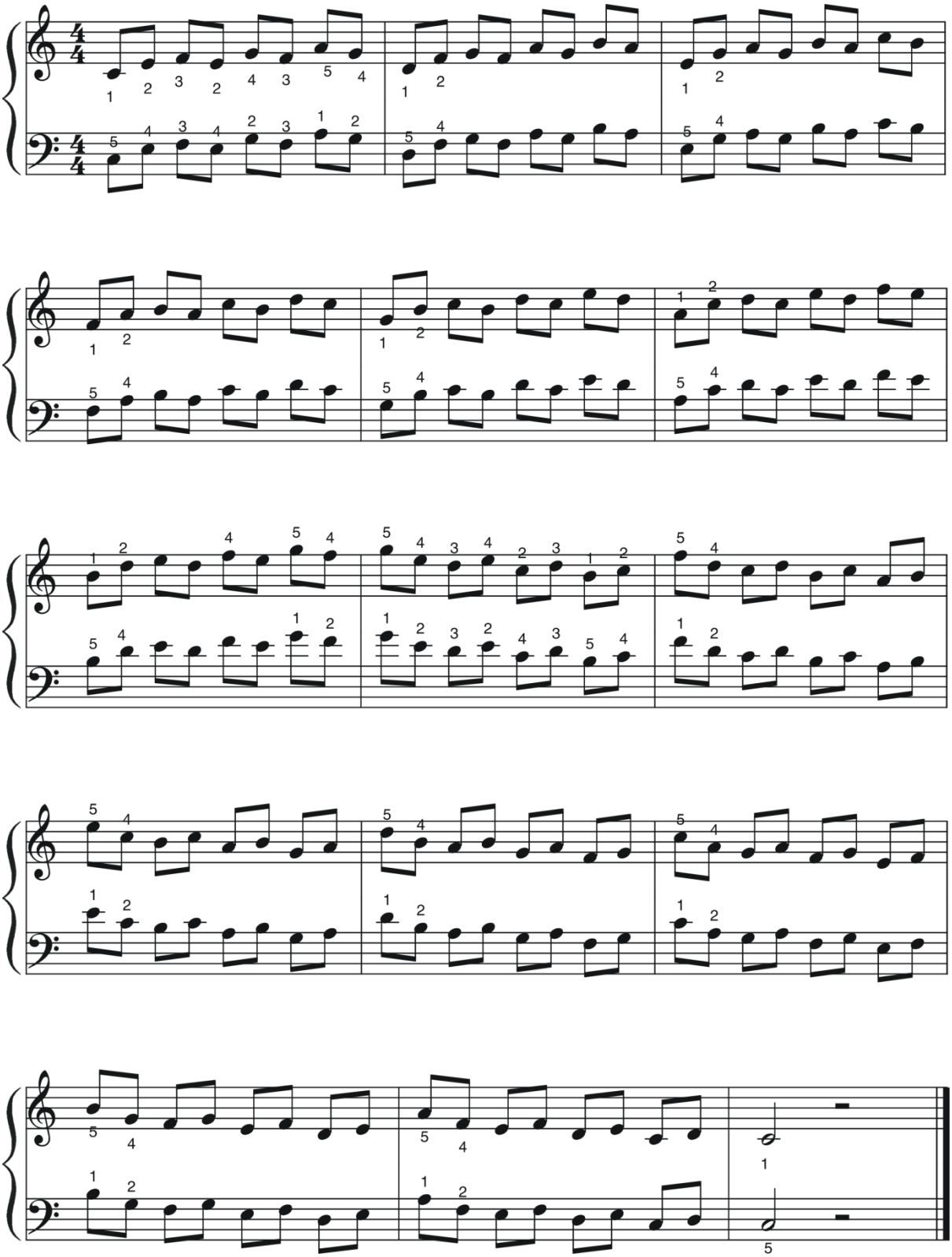
Exercise 11

This is the same as exercise 3 but again starting with the 6th interval.



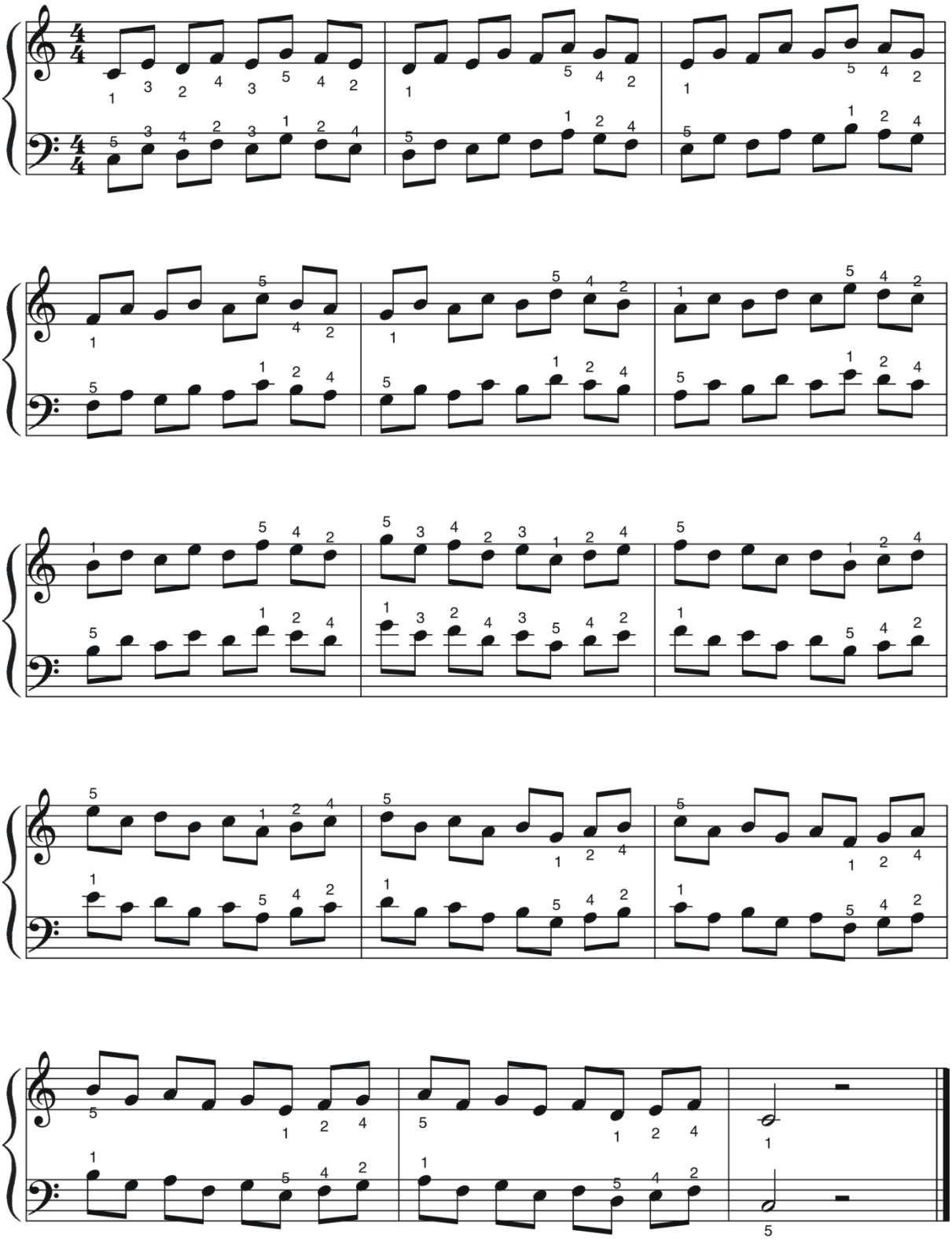
Exercise 12

This uses the same pattern and fingering as exercise 4 but with the 3rd interval at the beginning of each measure.



Exercise 13

Finally, this exercise uses the same pattern and fingering as exercise 5 and is an ascending / descending variation of this.



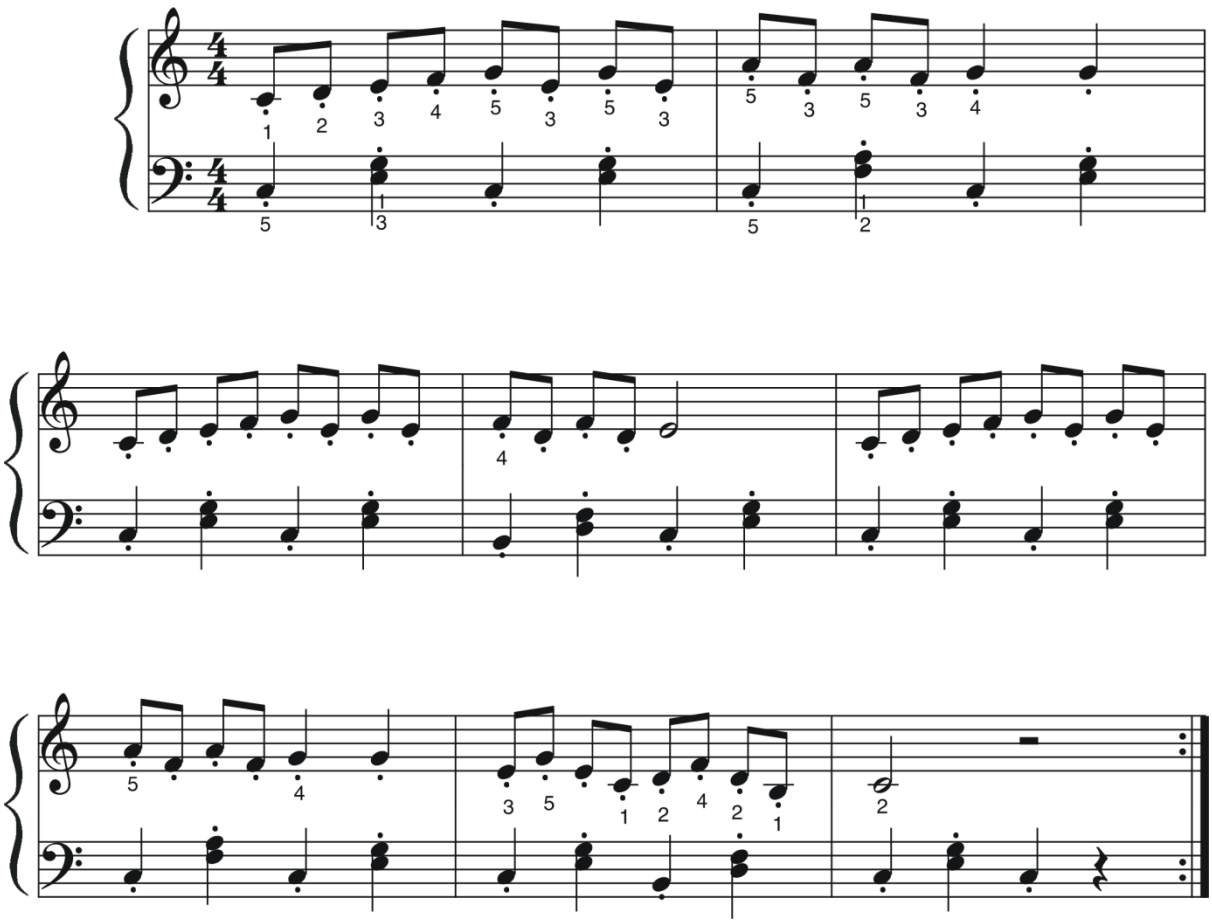
The Jolly Farmer

This next little *'staccato'* piece is quite simple, especially if you have been practicing the previous 5 finger exercises.

The only new thing is that the left hand plays a couple of notes together. This is nowhere as difficult as it looks, as they are mostly repeats.

But you may find it necessary to practice each hand separately at first, which is fine. And of course, don't go any faster than you can manage.

Also notice the loop marks at the end - so the whole tune is repeated from the beginning!

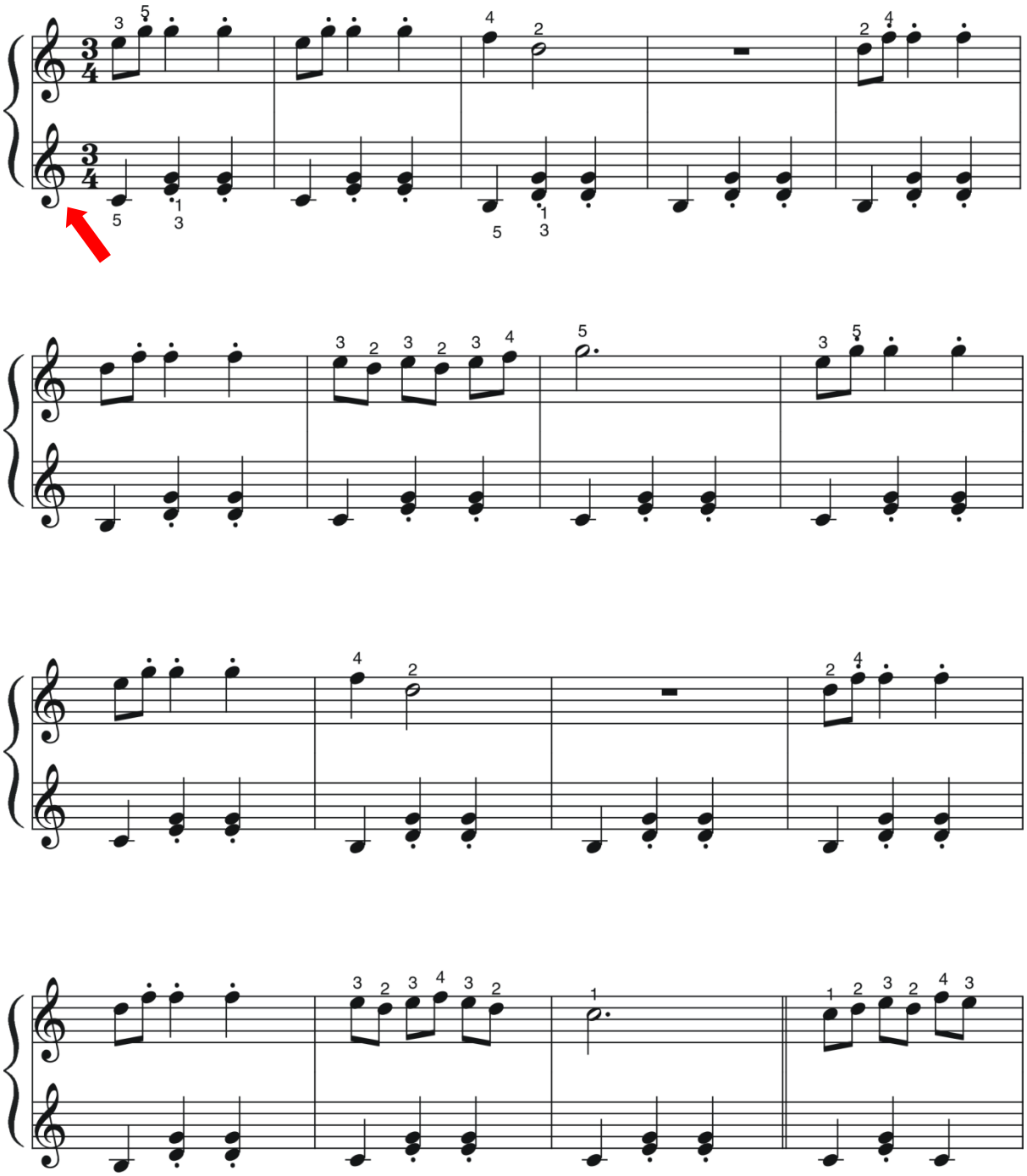


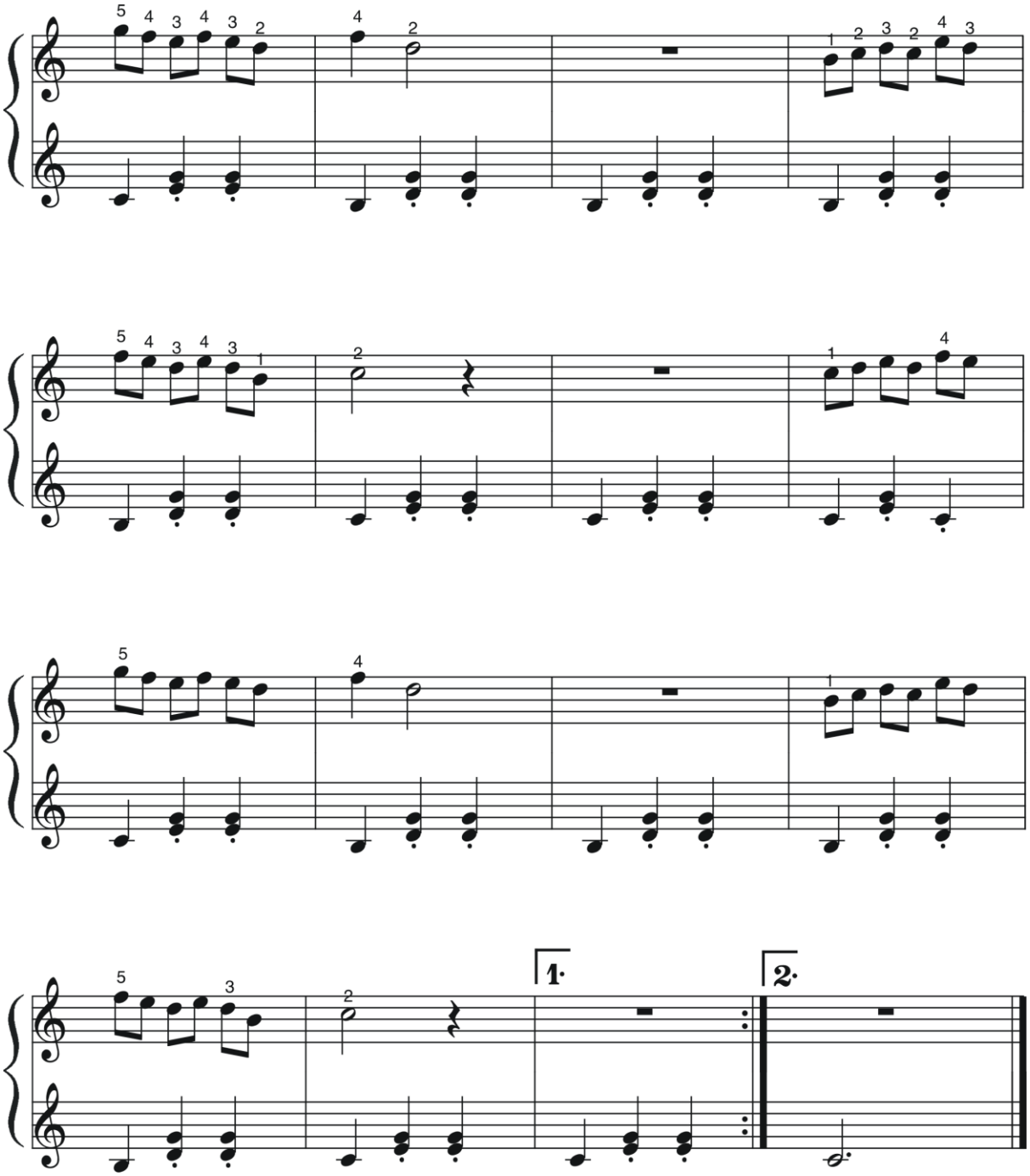
I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

Jolly Milkmaid

This little piece is in **3/4** timing and should be played *teasingly* and *joyfully* and mostly *staccato*. But steady at first; use one hand at a time if necessary.

Most importantly notice that the left hand uses the **treble clef** the same as the right hand. And again, there are also loop marks at the end, but this time the last bar after the repeat is different - the dotted minim in the left hand.



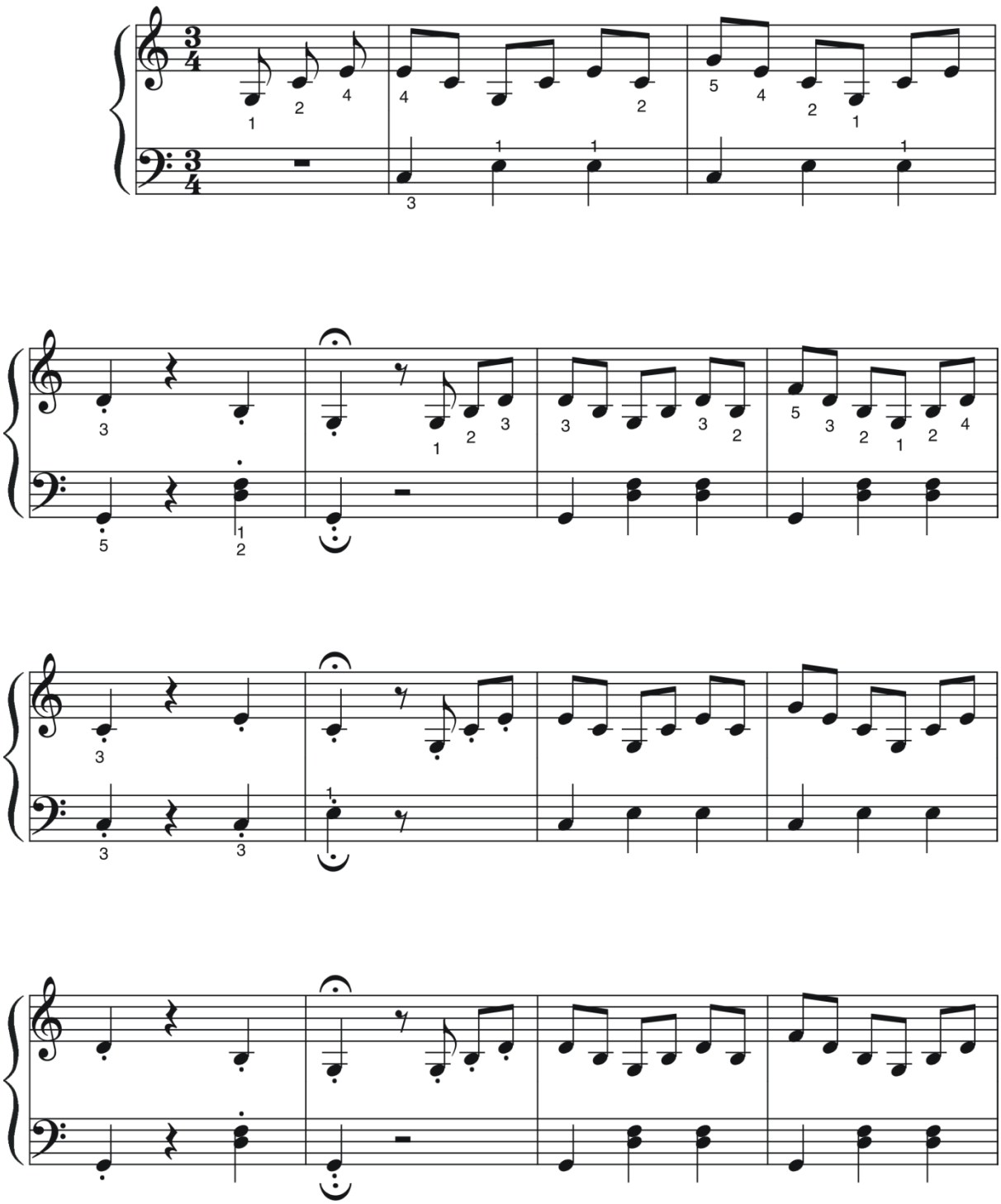


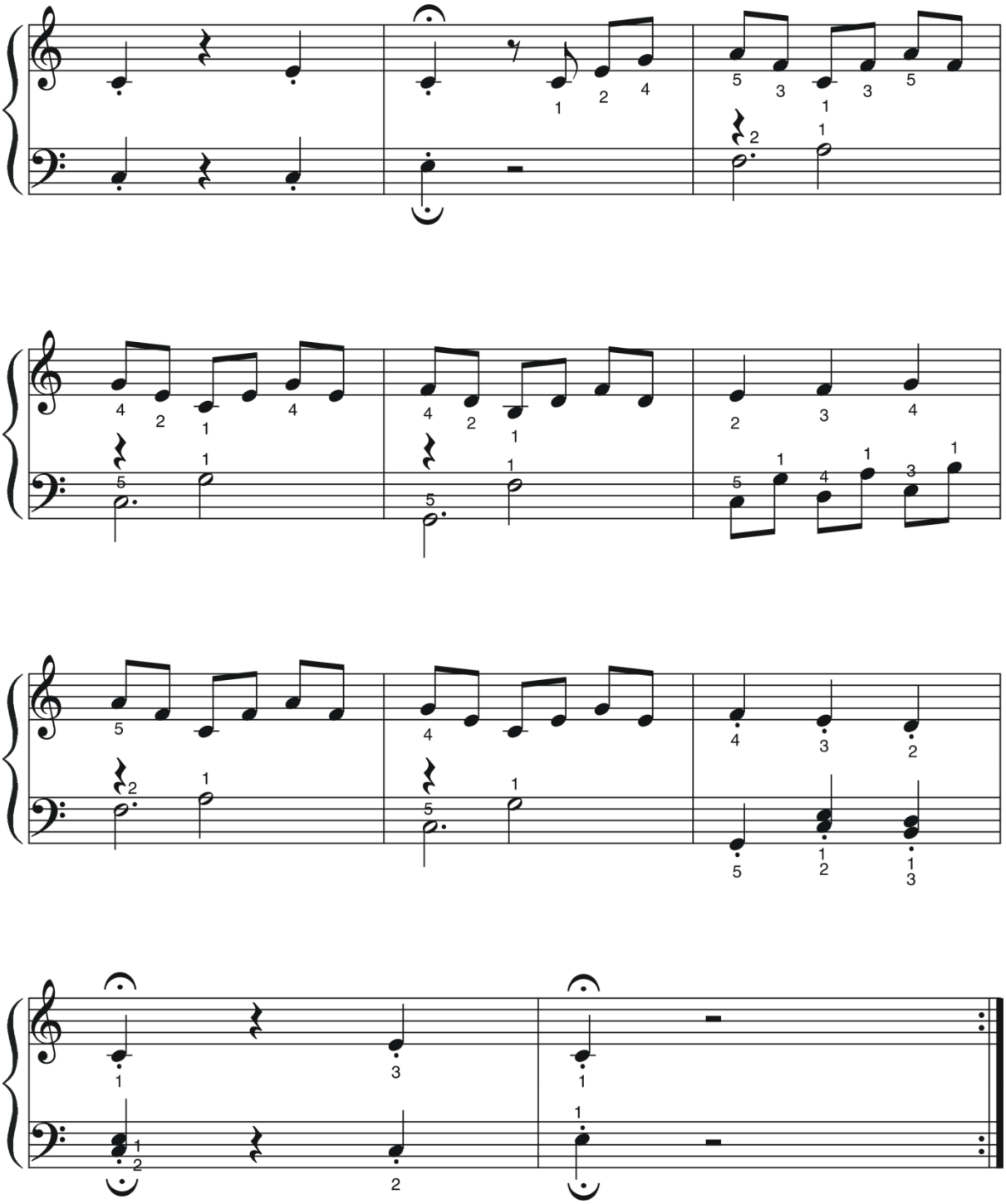
I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

The Clown Waltz

While playing this fun little piece you need to think *'Clowns'!* Imagine a Clown Ball where all the clowns are waltzing and tripping over one another - hence the several pauses.

This should be played *'lightly'* - almost *staccato.*





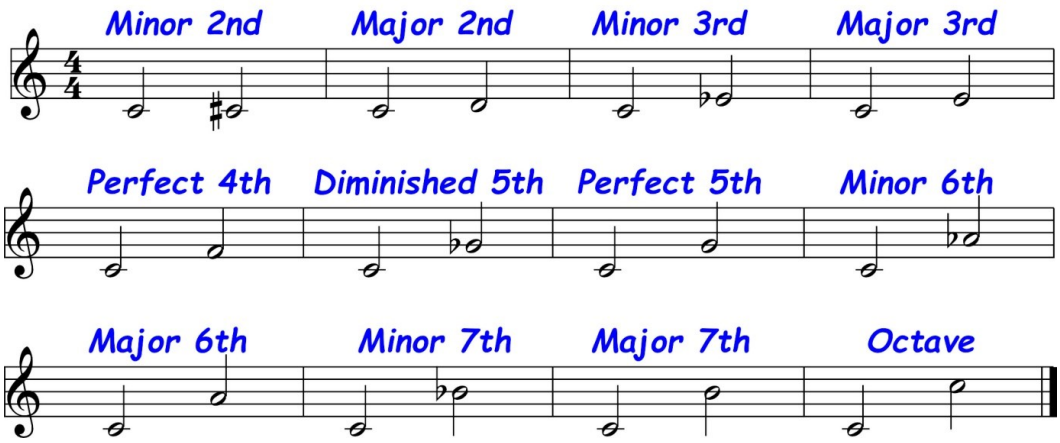
Notice in the 18th bar and a few beyond there appears to be a dotted minim followed by a minim (making 5 beats which of course doesn't compute). But the dotted minim is held for all 3 beats and the following minim added for beats 2 and 3 after the crotchet rest.

Intervals

We've already learnt that the smallest interval in Western music is the *'semi-tone'* and this is the interval from **C - C sharp** (the first black note up from **C**) and going the other way from **C - B** (as there is no black note between **C** and **B**, but the *interval* is just the same). Playing a progression of semitones for one octave or more, starting on any note and returning to the same note is known as the *'chromatic'* scale which you'll see later.

Two or more semi-tones create larger intervals. The interval between **C** and **D** is a *'tone'* (two semitones) as there is a black note in-between. The interval between **F sharp** and **G sharp** is also a tone, as there is a white note in-between. And the interval between **E** and **F sharp** is also a tone as there is again a white note in-between.

Then as more gaps are left in-between the *intervals* become greater and are named as shown below. All the intervals up to an octave are shown here starting on **C**. Continuing beyond the octave the 2nd plus an octave is known as a 9th, the 4th an 11th and the 6th a 13th. Interestingly every interval can be found more than once in every major and minor scale which you'll see later.



Note that the Minor 6th is also sometimes called an augmented 5th, and a diminished 5th could also be called an augmented 4th.

You are advised to learn how these intervals sound played one note at a time from high to low and vice versa and also how they sound played together.

Notice in the following chart how the same notes occur in the minor 3rd and the major 6th; the major 3rd and the minor 6th; the perfect 4th and perfect 5th; the minor 2nd and the major 7th etc.

So why are intervals so important?

Because different intervals form different scales, and different chords etc., and understanding them is essential for composition as well as good theoretical understanding.

The chart below shows every interval within an octave, in all cases from the lowest note upwards. You may find it useful to print this chart out!

For convenience I've used **C sharp** instead of **D flat** etc.

Interval Chart

Minor 2nd	C - C# - D - Eb - E - F - F#	1 Semitone
	F# - G - Ab - A - Bb - B - C	
Major 2nd	C - D - E - F# - Ab - Bb - C	2 Semitones
	C# - Eb - F - G - A - B - C#	
Minor 3rd	C - Eb - F# - A - C	3 Semitones
	C# - E - G - Bb - C#	
	D - F - Ab - B - D	
Major 3rd	C - E - Ab - C	4 Semitones
	C# - F - A - C#	
	D - F# - Bb - D	
	Eb - G - B - Eb	
Perfect 4th	C - F - Bb - Eb - Ab - C# - F#	5 Semitones
	F# - B - E - A - D - G - C	
Diminished 5th	C - F# - C	6 Semitones (Tritone)
	C# - G - C#	
	D - Ab - D	
	Eb - A - Eb	
	E - Bb - E	
	F - B - F	
Perfect 5th	C - G - D - A - E - B - F#	7 Semitones
	F# - C# - Ab - Eb - Bb - F - C	
Minor 6th	C - Ab - E - C	8 Semitones
	C# - A - F - C#	
	D - Bb - F# - D	
	Eb - B - G - Eb	
Major 6th	C - A - F# - Eb - C	9 Semitones
	C# - Bb - G - E - C#	
	D - B - Ab - F - D	
Minor 7th	C - Bb - Ab - F# - E - D - C	10 Semitones
	C# - B - A - G - F - Eb - C#	
Major 7th	C - B - Bb - A - Ab - G - F#	11 Semitones
	F# - F - E - Eb - D - C# - C	

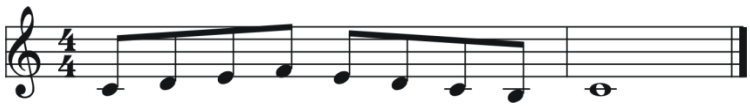
⬅ Keys, Key Signatures & Transposition ➡

The word *'key'* has two meanings in music, one being the physical *'keys'* of the instrument and the other being the *'key'* in relation to the *'key signatures'* and which *'key'* you are playing in.

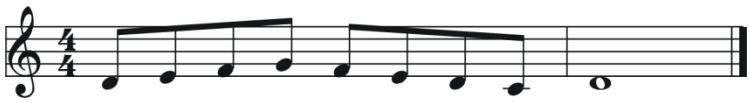
There are 12 *'major keys'* in Western music (one for each black and white note), each of which has a relative minor. With the exception of **C major** (and **A minor**) each key has a *'key signature'* which shows how many sharps or flats it has.

Everything that we have covered so far has been in the key of **C major**, which is the only major key without any sharps or flats which is the reason it has no key signature.

To hopefully explain this clearly, we're going to use a few diagrams showing a simple musical phrase as shown below. This phrase is in the key of **C major**.



The intervals between each note in this phrase are **< 2 < 2 < 1 > 1 > 2 > 2 > 1 < 1** (each **'1'** being a semitone and each **'2'** being a tone). Now if we stay in **C major** and begin the phrase a tone higher by starting on **D** instead of **C** (as shown next) this would create a *diatonic* progression as against a transposition and the intervals will be: **< 2 < 1 < 2 > 2 > 1 > 2 > 2 < 2**. And the phrase would sound completely different due to the different intervals. Play these or use the audio link and hear the difference.

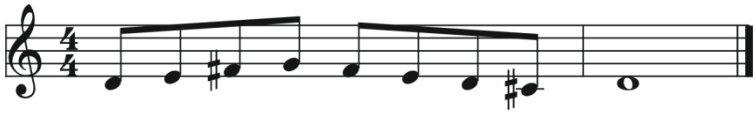


This in fact is how the five finger exercises **9 - 13** evolved; they're all *'diatonic progressions'* within the key of **C major** and each segment follows the same pattern but will sound different due to the varying intervals. But it makes no difference whether you understand this or not as they are simply designed as great finger exercises - *end of!*

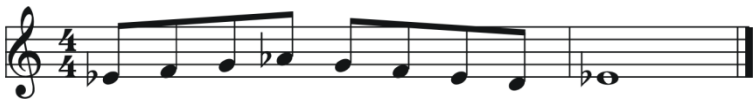
What does 'diatonic' mean?

Basically, it means using the notes only found in the scale of the key that you're in (**C major** in this case). I'll explain more about this shortly when we talk about chords.

Now if we moved the original phrase up a tone but also kept all of the intervals the same, the phrase would sound the same but at a higher pitch and would be *'transposed'* one tone higher from the key of **C major** into **D major** which as you can see contains some sharps (**F#** and **C#**).



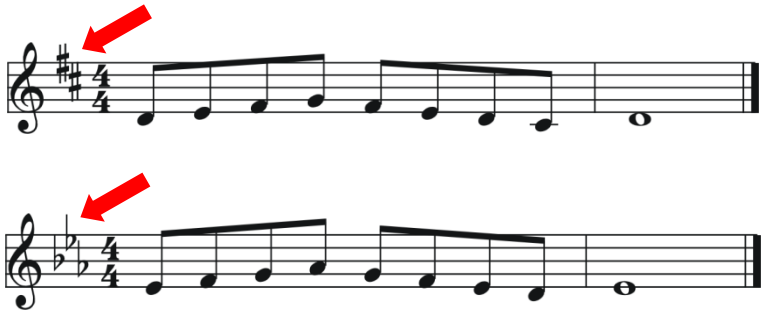
And if we moved this phrase up another semitone (again keeping all the intervals the same) it would be *transposed* into **E flat** major as shown below.



The reason for transposition is often due to a piece being more comfortable for a singer's particular range or the range of an instrument, and certainly some pieces are easier to play in certain keys. It's also often used as an embellishment halfway through a piece to give it a lift for the finale. An example of this can be heard in ***'Beary Glen'*** on the front page of my site at http://learn-keyboard.co.uk . This piece starts in **G major** and transposes to **A major** halfway through.

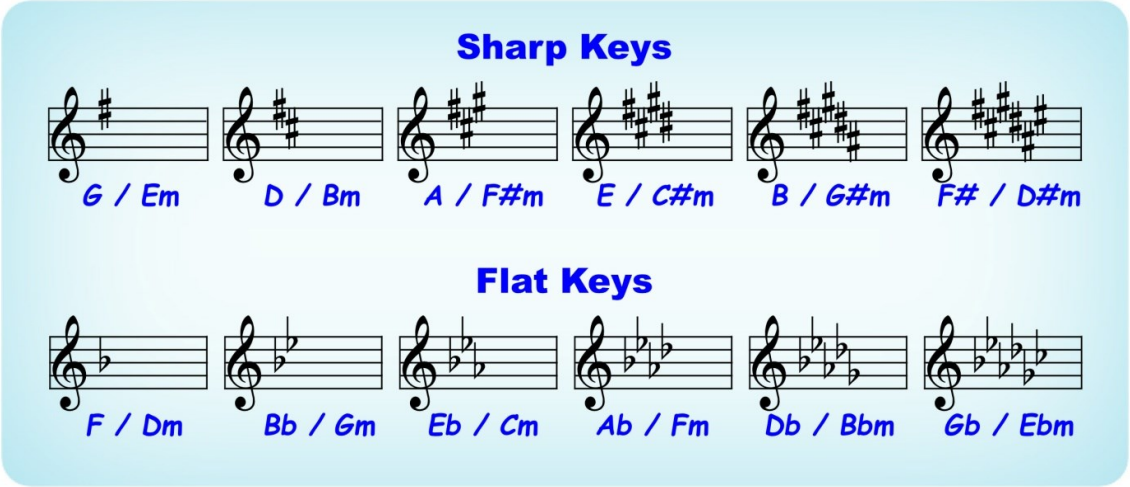
You'll notice that in the last two diagrams we've had to add accidental flats / sharps to create the intervals necessary. To minimise the use of these accidentals the different keys have *'key signatures'* which are displayed at the beginning of each piece along with the time signatures. As with timing, the key signature could change during a piece in which case a new one will be shown. The key signature indicates that every note that is *'sharpened'* or *'flattened'* in the key signature, remains so without further notice for the duration of the piece unless further information is given to the contrary. So, you must always remember which *'key'* you are playing in!

The examples shown previously in **D major** and **E flat major** are shown again below with the key signatures added instead of the accidentals.



Although the second example has three flats in the key signature, only two of these occur in the phrase.

All of the key signatures are shown in the following chart.



Note that **F sharp major** and **G flat major** (and the relative minors) are the same keys but simply written differently. **C major** and **A minor** are not included in the above chart as they are neither *'flat keys'* nor *'sharp keys'*.

I recommend that you learn all the scales in order of how many sharps and flats that they have, which is the order in which they are taught in classical music schools. If you find the thought of this too daunting, don't continue further than you feel comfortable.

Curiously the French word for *'key'* is *'clef'*. Whether this has any significance I don't know - probably not!

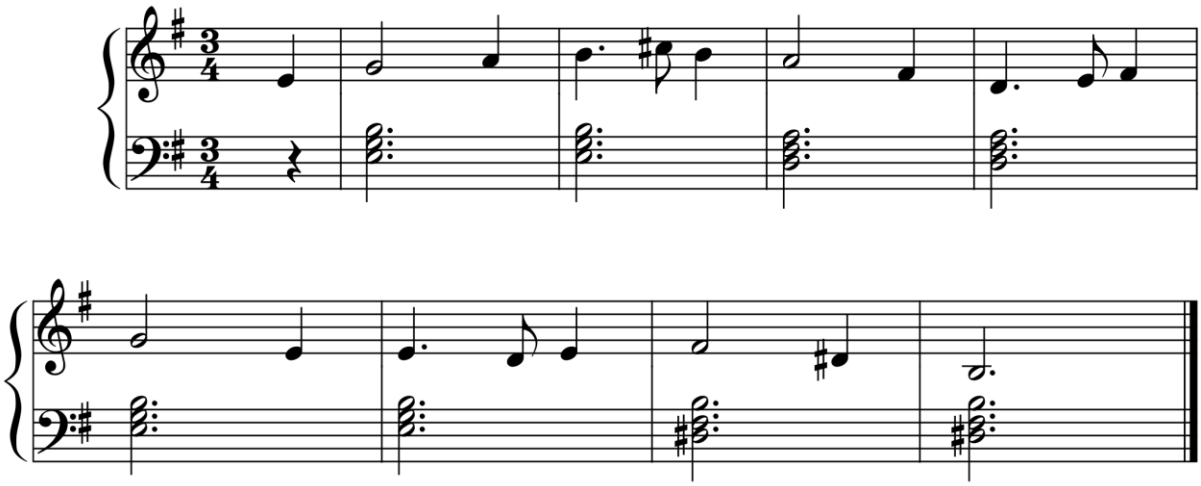
Relative Minors

The relative minor of each major key is always a minor 3rd interval below (or major 6th above), so the relative to **C major** is **A minor**. The relative minor always shares the same key signature as of the major key, but will almost certainly have additional sharps, (the 7th and possibly the 6th) as in the harmonic and melodic scales. These are not included in the key signature but added (as accidentals) where they occur during the piece. Note that when an *'accidental'* sharp or flat is added it will apply to all of the same notes for the duration of the existing bar only unless *naturalised* beforehand. See the *'natural'* symbol shown previously in the *'Music Notation'* chapter.

So how do I tell if a piece is in a major or minor key?

In the example below, it can be seen that there is an **F sharp** in the key signature; which indicates that the key is either **G major** or **E minor**. As the first few notes in the treble clef form an **E minor** triad and there is a **C sharp** (melodic scale 6th) in bar 3 and **D sharps** in bars 7 & 8 (harmonic and melodic ascending 7ths), it's blatantly obvious (perhaps not to you right now) from the melody alone that this piece is in the key of **E minor** and not **G major**. Furthermore, in the bass clef the first chord is **E minor**!

Don’t worry if you didn’t fully understand the last paragraph; we will be dealing with scales shortly after which it will make more sense!



The above example is in fact the first few bars of ***‘Greensleeves’*** which was allegedly written by King Henry VIII but was in fact probably written by some poor starving minstrel with a runny nose (hence the title) who had his head removed so that Henry could take the credit! - *This was before the days of the Musicians Union!*

You may also notice that music written in minor keys is distinctly more *‘melancholic’!*

Yamaha CP-88 Stage Piano

This superb keyboard supersedes the incredible CP4 as the flagship stage piano . In my opinion the keybed on the 88 key version is the very best available. - I love it!

⬅ Your First Scales ➡

Pre-Scale Exercises

Up to now, none of the exercises or tunes that we have covered requires any finger crossovers. But in order to play scales and more interesting pieces, finger crossovers are essential.

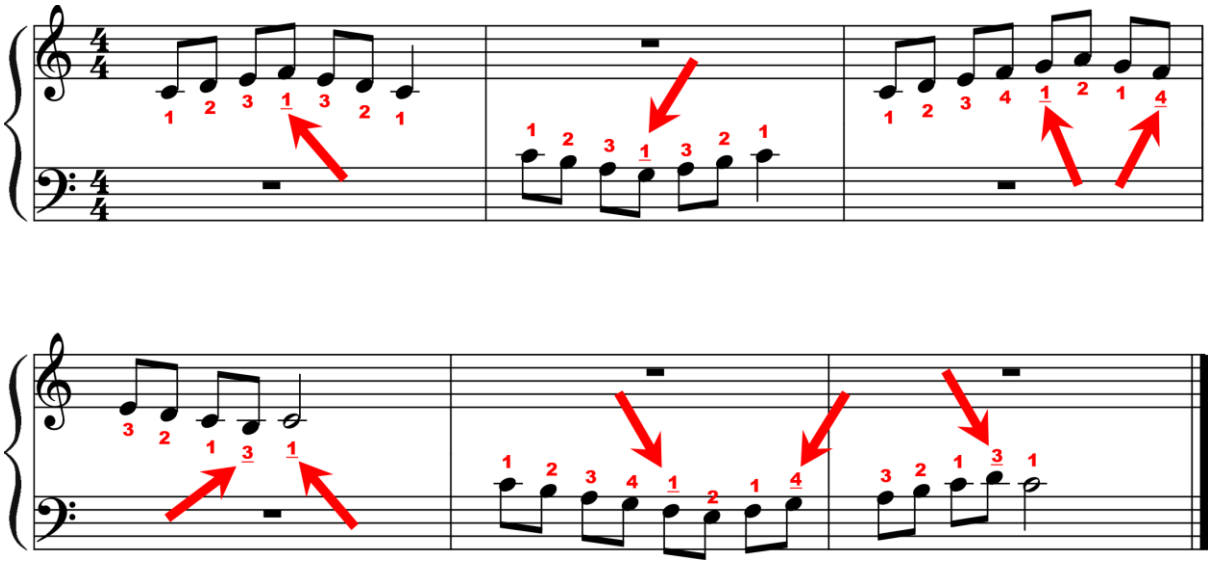
The most common crossovers are achieved by passing the thumb under the third or fourth fingers ascending and passing the third or fourth fingers over the thumb when descending, as shown in the following photos.

Passing the Thumb under (ascending)

Passing the 3rd Finger over (descending)

In order to help you learn this technique, I have included this next exercise, but **you must** follow the fingering as stated so that you can practice the finger crossovers.

Practice this slowly and evenly.



But what exactly is a scale?

A scale is a series of notes played in order usually ascending and then descending for one or more octaves.

There are different types of scales including:

- Major
- Minor (harmonic and melodic and natural)
- Chromatic
- Blues
- Pentatonic (major and minor)
- Whole tone

What identifies the different types of scales is the intervals used in their makeup. However, we will only be dealing with a few major scales, harmonic minor scales and the chromatic scale in this book. These are without doubt the most important scales to be learnt before progressing to any of the others. All the other scales in every key are including the melodic minors and more are included in the *'Scales and Arpeggios'* book which is yours to download.

To explain further we'll firstly look at the **major** scale.

The Major Scale

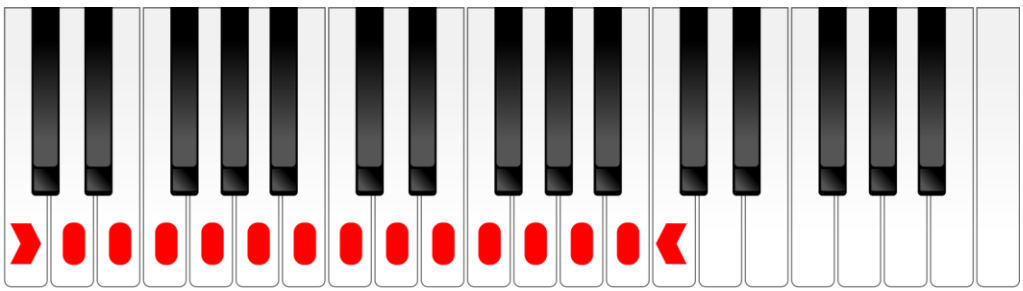
There are 12 major scales, one for each black and white note.

Every major scale has identical intervals. The only thing that makes them different is that they start on different notes and consequently are *'pitched'* differently.

For instance, **C major** in its root mode will start on **C** and **D major** on **D** etc.

If you remember what I said previously about intervals and look carefully at the following diagram of the **C major** scale, you'll see that the intervals are as follows:

1. **C - D** is a tone (2 semitones)
2. **D - E** is a tone
3. **E - F** is a semi-tone
4. **F - G** is a tone
5. **G - A** is a tone
6. **A - B** is a tone
7. **B - C** is a semi-tone



C Major Scale (2 octaves)

Or to put it another way it's: **2 - 2 - 1 - 2 - 2 - 2 - 1** for a one octave span, which is the interval sequence for every major scale.

So, with a bit of mathematical knowledge you could easily work out every major scale. But here I'll show you the first few that you should learn and as you progress, you'll no doubt learn all of them, which is a very good idea.

The major scales we'll be dealing with here are the first *sharp key* scale which is **G major**, and the first *flat key* scale which is **F** major as well as **C major** which has no black notes and is therefore neither a *sharp key* nor a *flat key scale*.

These are all shown both in keyboard and notation view in the next few pages - with audio links as usual.

In all cases I've included the *important* fingering. Where no fingering is included, it simply follows consecutively.

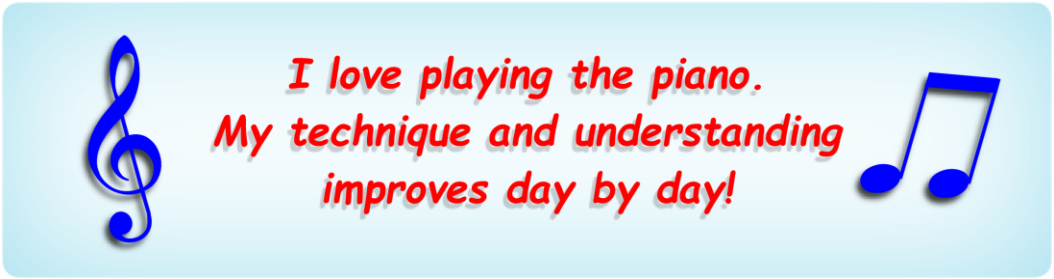
Ideally each of the scales should be practiced every day, a few times each for two or more octaves with each hand separately and then together at a comfortable speed.

But although speed is not important, accuracy and fluency *are*. Try to play each note with equal velocity in strict time - using a metronome is ideal!

The degrees of the major and minor scales are named as follows:

- Root - Tonic
- 2nd - Supertonic
- 3rd - Mediant
- 4th - Sub Dominant
- 5th - Dominant
- 6th - Sub Mediant
- 7th - Leading Note or Sub Tonic
- 8th - Octave (Tonic)

The most important ones to remember are the *'tonic'* and *'dominant'*.

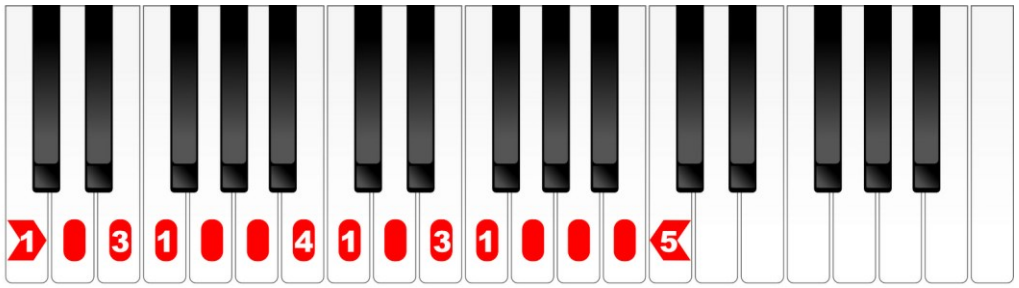


Roland Fantom O8 Workstaion (88 keys)

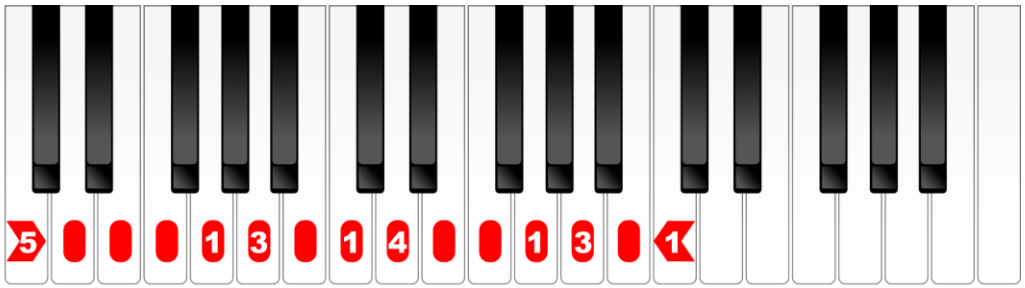
Not had a chance to get my paws around this yet, but this is a lower priced version of the Roland Fantom 8. Incredible value for money!

C Major Scale

The next diagrams show the **C major** scale for two octaves with the important fingering for both hands.

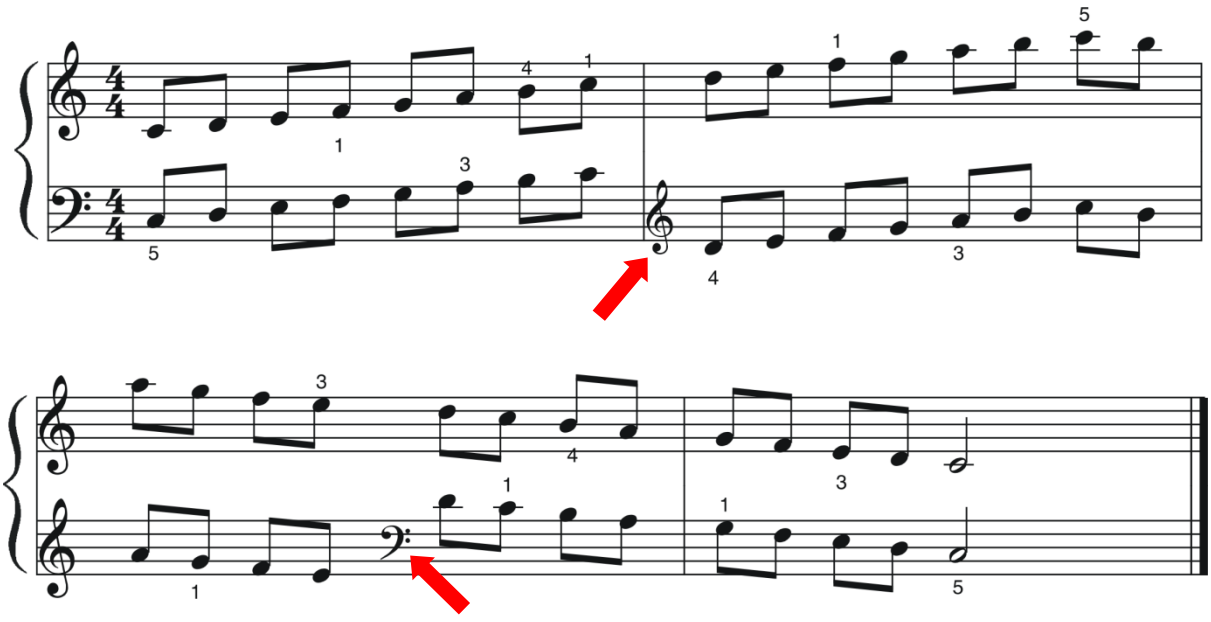


Right Hand



Left Hand

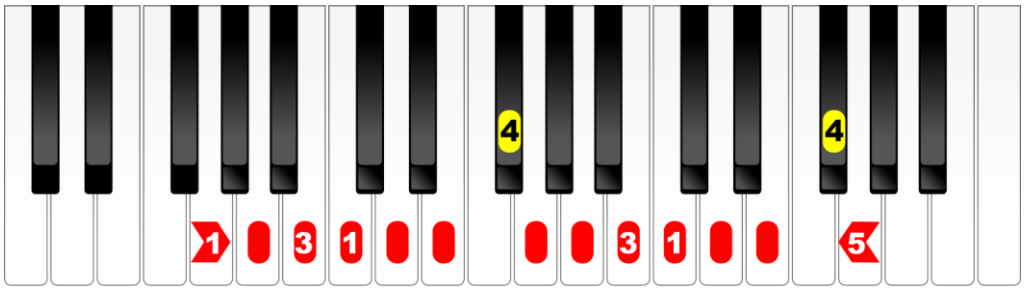
Here's the notation ascending and descending for two octaves. Notice that there are finger crossovers from **E - F** and **B - C** in the right hand and from **G - A** and **C - D** in the left hand. Notice also that the left-hand changes clefs from bass to treble and back.



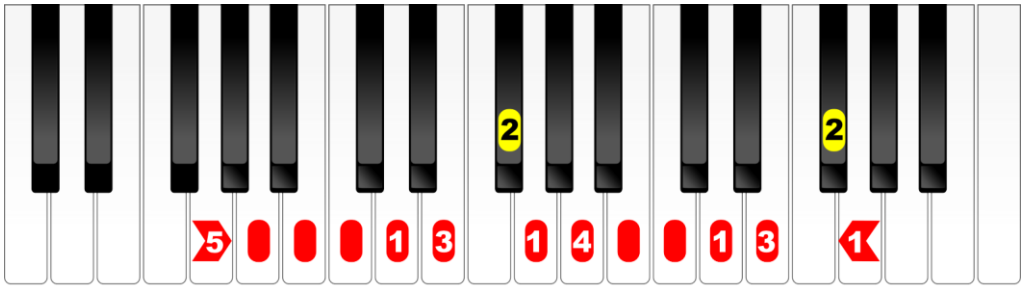
G Major Scale

This is the first *sharp key* scale and has an **F#** as shown in the key signature.

The fingering for both hands is the same as the **C major** scale.

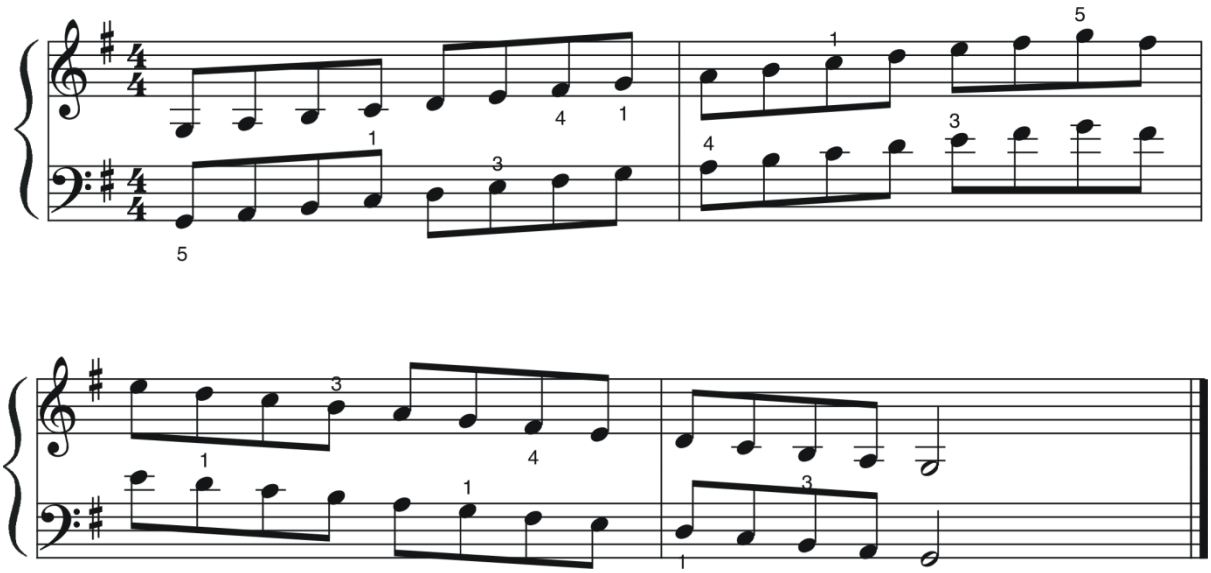


Right Hand



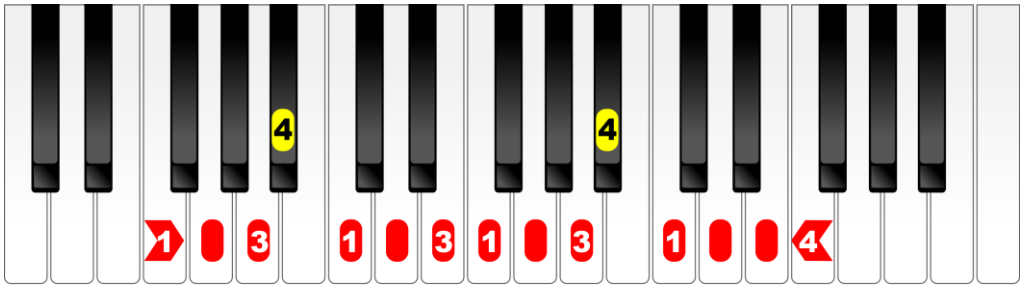
Left Hand

Notice in the notation view below that the scale begins and ends with the right hand on the **G** below middle **C** which we've seen previously.

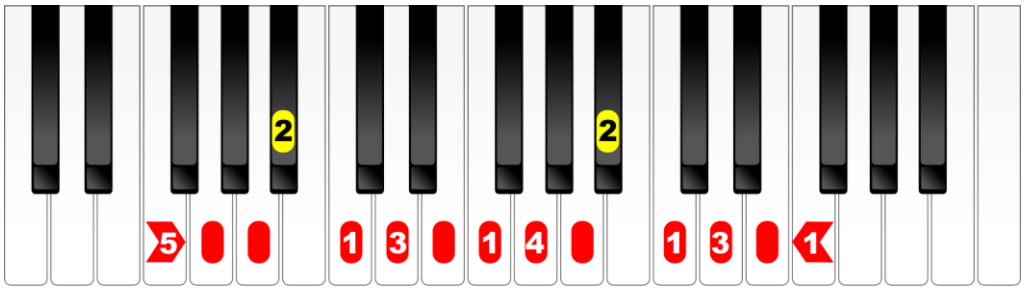


F Major Scale

The **F major** scale is the first *flat key* scale and has one flat which is **B♭** (as shown in the key signature). The right-hand fingering here is different to the two previous scales due to the position of the **B♭**, but the left-hand fingering is the same.

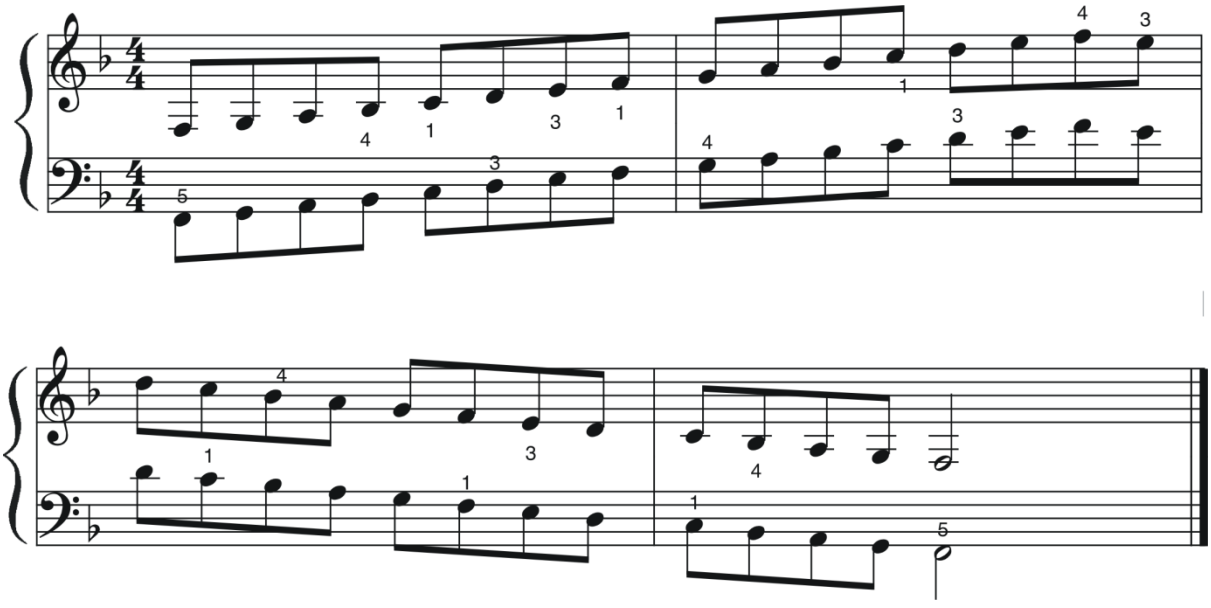


Right Hand



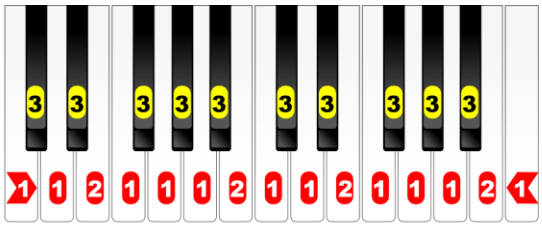
Left Hand

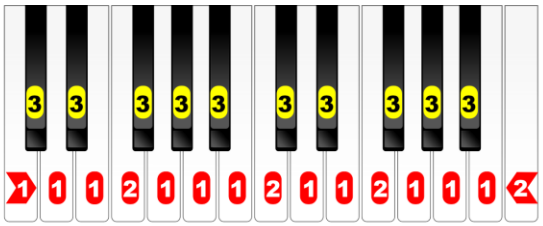
Notice that the right hand starts on the **F** below middle **C** which has three ledger lines, but this is not hard to read as each note comes in order but remember the **B flat**!



Chromatic Scale

The chromatic scale is one on its own and is shown here starting and finishing on **C** for two octaves with left-hand and right-hand fingering.



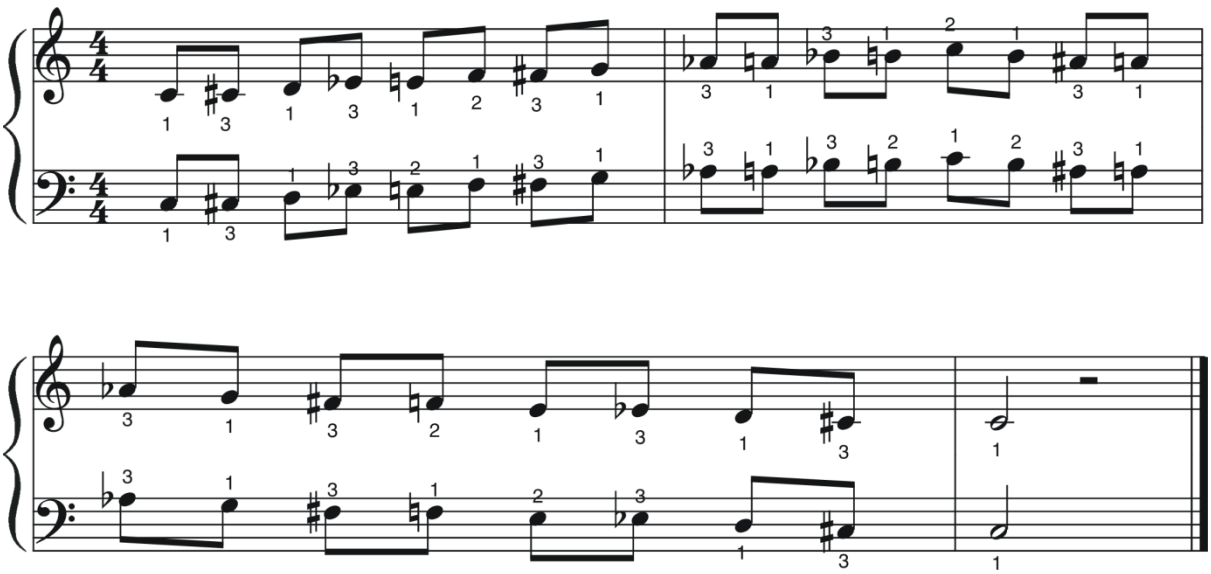


Ideally this scale should be practiced for two or more octaves both staccato and legato starting on various notes. The fingering remains the same regardless of which note you start on.

Although the (one octave) notation below looks complicated, in fact it's not.

As each note is played one after the other, no reading ability is required to play this scale other than perhaps when you first learn the fingering.

Big Tip! - The trick to learning this easily is to remember where the **2nd** finger goes - **F** and **C** in the right hand and **E** and **B** in the left hand.



So, what about minor scales?"

There are three types of minor scales - *harmonic*, *melodic* and *natural*. We will deal with the first few harmonic minor scales next.

The Harmonic Minor Scale

Each major key has a relative minor which shares the same key signature as the major key. The relative minor can always be found by counting three semitones down from the first note (the tonic) of the major scale. For instance, three semitones down from **C** is **A**, therefore:

- **A minor** is the relative to **C major**
- **E minor** is the relative to **G major**
- **D minor** is the relative to **F major**
- **B minor** is the relative to **D major**
- **G minor** is the relative to **B♭ major**

But here we will be dealing with the first three harmonic minor scales **A minor, E minor** and **D minor**.

Although the minor keys share the same key signature as their relative major keys, each minor key has one or more additional sharp(s), and these are always shown as accidentals as and when they occur (but never in the key signature). In the harmonic minor scale, there will only ever be one (extra) sharp, which is always the leading note - one semitone down from the tonic - the first and last note of the scale.

So, what is the difference between a major scale and a minor scale?

The difference is caused because of the different intervals. If you've been paying attention, you should know that the interval sequence for all major scales is: **2 - 2 - 1 - 2 - 2 - 2 - 1**.

There are two conventional minor scales, the *'harmonic'* and the *'melodic*', both of which have different interval sequences. The *'natural'* minor scale is simply the major scale beginning and ending on the relative minor, but even this will also have different intervals (to the major scale) due to its different starting position. This is also known as the *'Aeolian mode'* starting on **A**, - but you don't really need to know this!

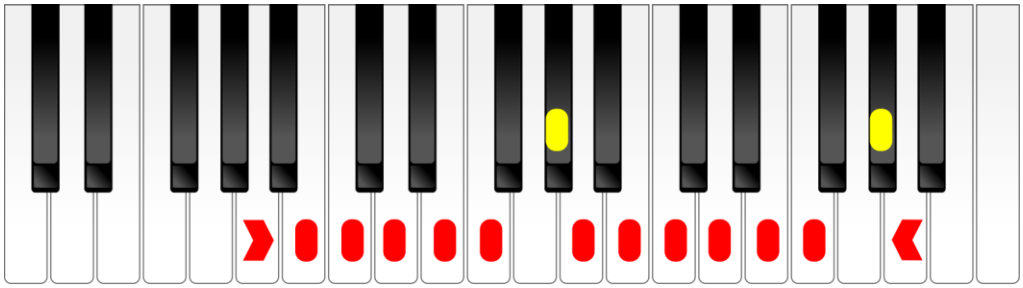
Here we will only be dealing with the *'harmonic'* minor scales relative to the major scales already dealt with, which without doubt are the first minor scales that you should learn. As you progress no doubt you will learn the rest of them.

If you look carefully at the next keyboard diagram showing the **A Harmonic minor** scale you will see that the intervals are as follows:

1. **A - B** is a tone
2. **B - C** is a semi-tone
3. **C - D** is a tone
4. **D - E** is a tone
5. **E - F** is a semi-tone

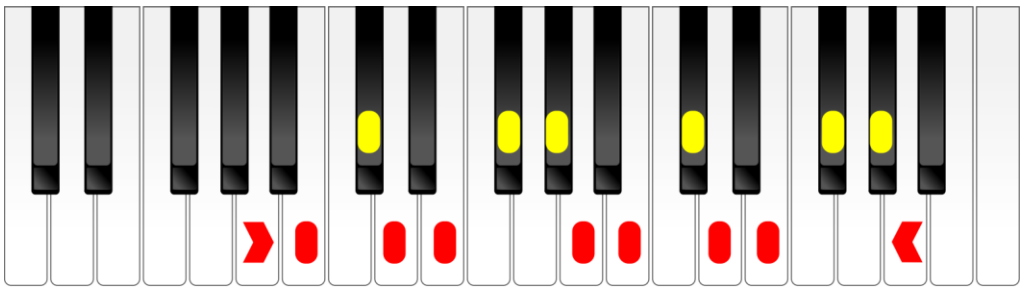
6. **F - G#** is a minor 3rd (3 semitones);
7. **G# - A** is a semi-tone.

Or: **2 - 1 - 2 - 2 - 1 - 3 - 1**.



A Harmonic Minor Scale (2 octaves)

And if you compare this sequence to the **A major** scale, you'll see that the difference is that both the 3rd and 6th notes are flattened by a semitone. Note that the **A Major** scale is not covered in this book other than this example.



A Major Scale (2 octaves)

Click on the graphics to listen to the difference. And note that **A minor** is not related to **A major** in any way, but it *is* related to **C major.**

But I must stress, that it's not essential that you understand all this at this stage.

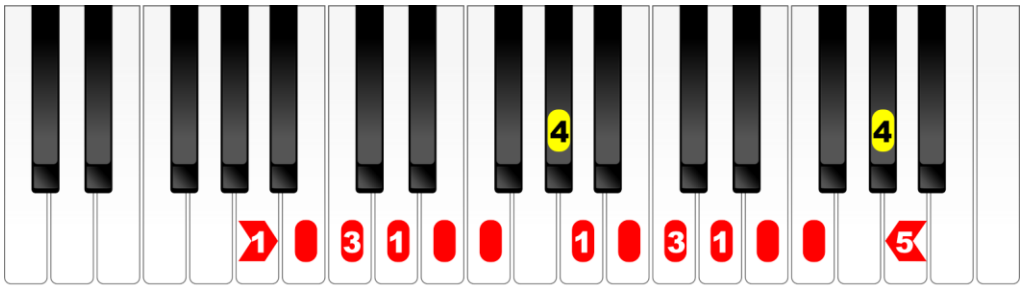
The only important things are for you to learn to play the scales correctly at your own speed and listen to the differences in how they sound.

So why are you not telling us about the melodic minor scales?

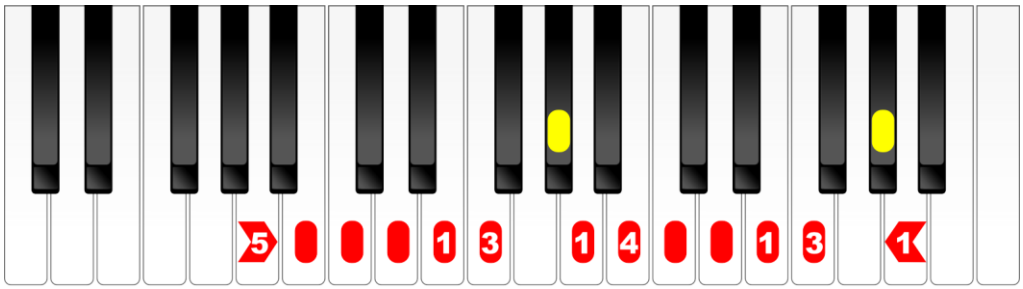
It's no great secret, but more than I want to cover in this *beginners'* book. But briefly, the *'melodic'* minor scale ascends with a *sharpened* 6th and 7th (**F#** and **G#** in **A minor**), but then descends with a *natural* 6th and 7th (**F** and **G** natural in **A minor**). So, it's just a bit more complicated, but as you progress you certainly should learn them all. And remember they are *all* included in the *'Scales and Arpeggios'* book which is yours to download, so you don't need to spend more money on these!

A Minor (Harmonic) Scale

Our first harmonic minor scale is **A minor** as shown below.



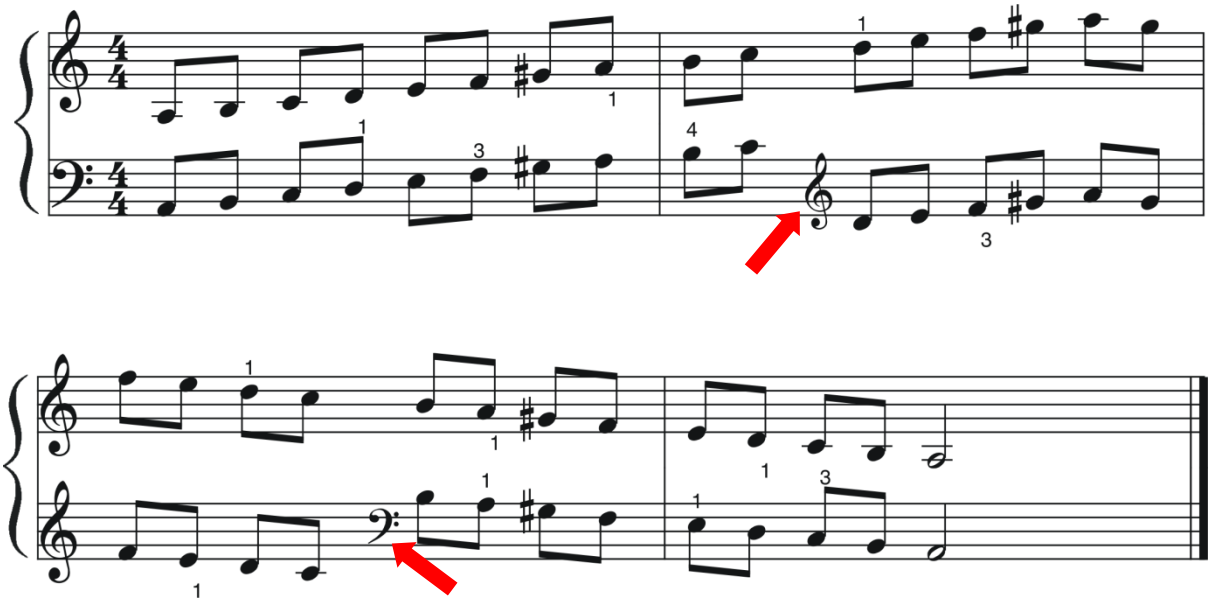
Right Hand



Left Hand

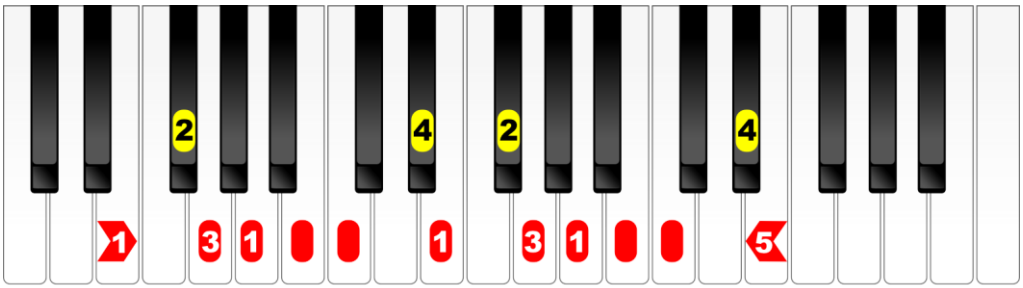
So as **A minor** is the relative to **C major**, there is no key signature, but there is a **G#** which has been included in the notation (below) with an accidental sharp.

The fingering is exactly the same as the **C major** scale for both hands, although at first you may find the interval from **F** to **G#** a bit of a stretch between the third and fourth fingers, but as you practice, this will become very easy.

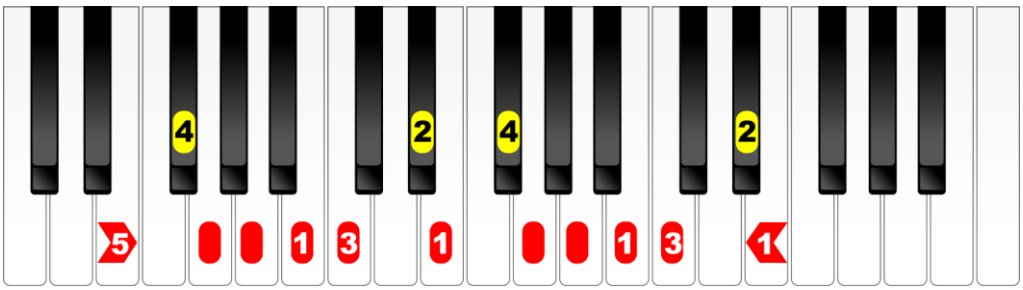


E Minor (Harmonic) Scale

E minor is the relative minor to **G major** and has **F#** in the key signature plus the accidental **D#** as shown below.

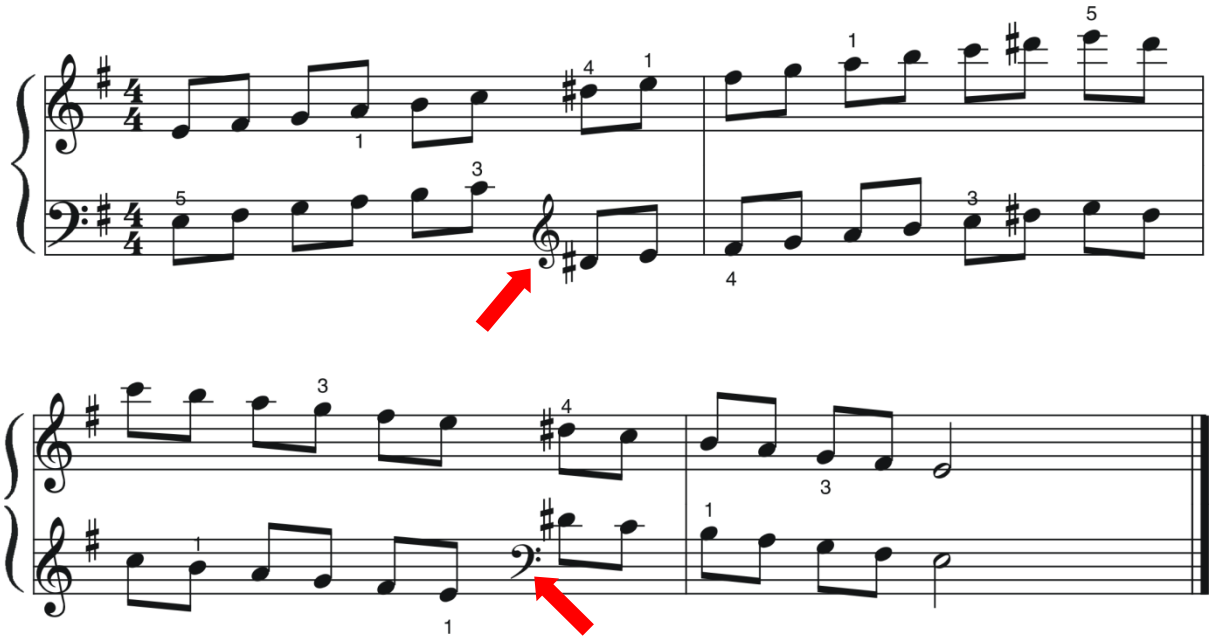


Right Hand



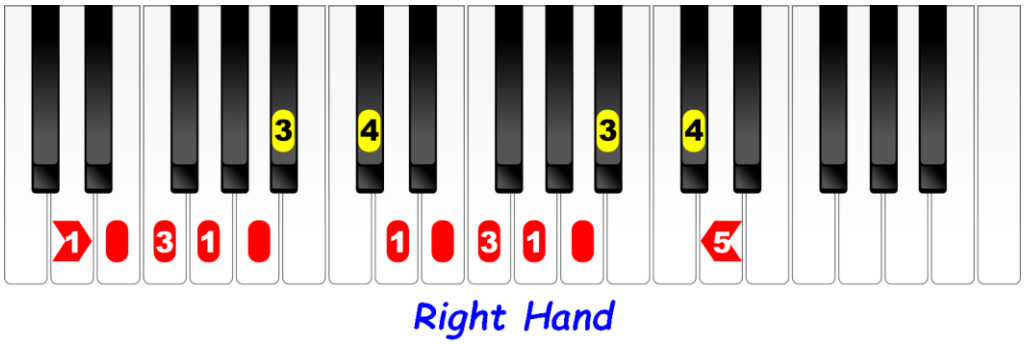
Left Hand

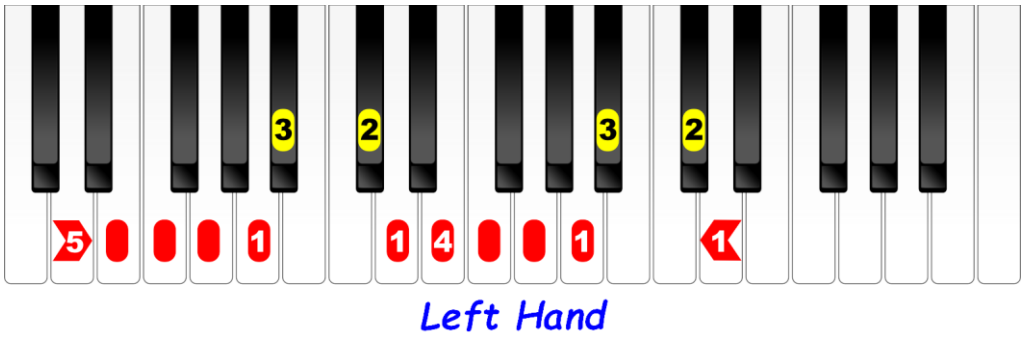
The notation might look a little frightening, as the top **E** is way above treble clef stave and has three ledger lines. But remember that the second octave where this occurs is only a direct copy of the first, but an octave higher.



D Minor (Harmonic) Scale

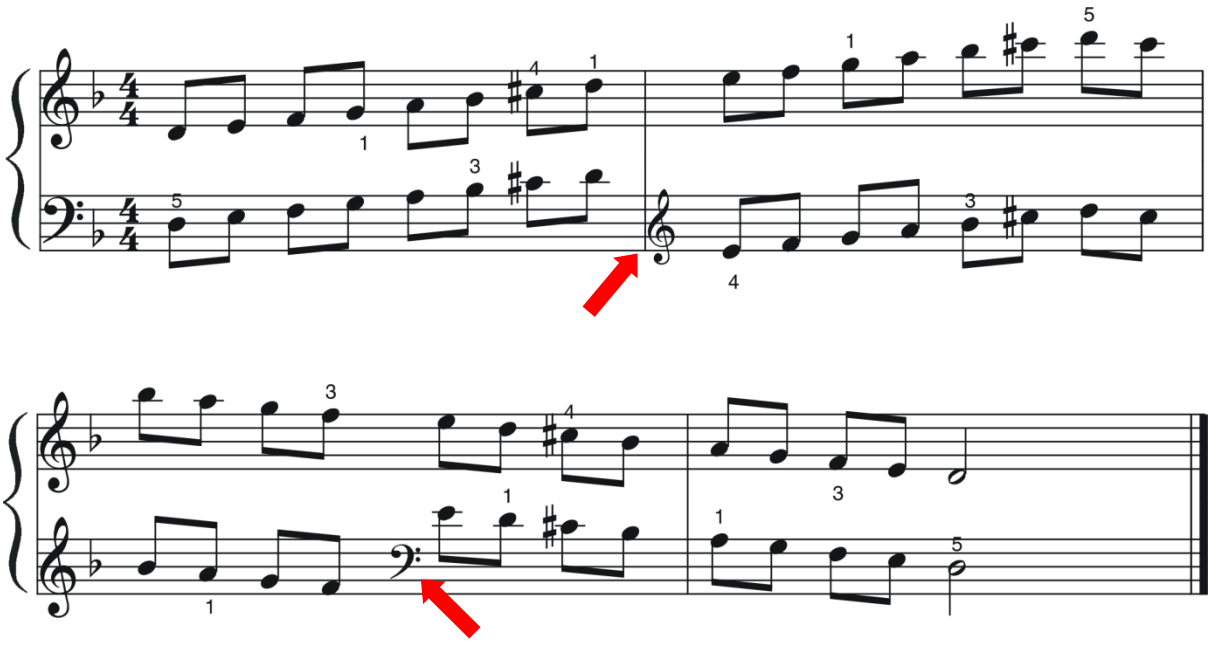
D minor is the relative to **F major** and therefore has a **B♭** in the key signature as well as the accidental **C#**s.





So, if this is a 'flat' key, how come there is an accidental 'sharp' and not a flat?

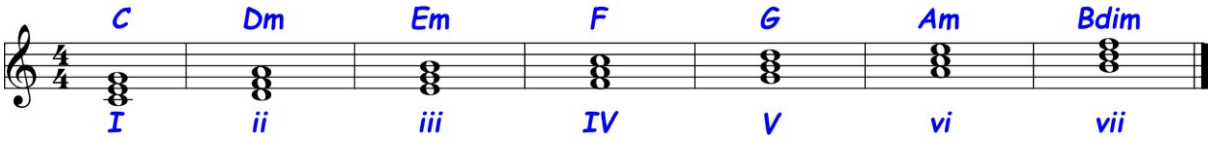
This sometimes does happen regardless of *flat* or *sharp* keys. There could also be accidental flats in sharp keys although this never occurs in the scales.



Chord Construction

Every musical piece (in classical, jazz and pop) is formed around a progression of chords, sometimes simple and sometimes very complicated. Either way learning all of the basic chords is absolutely essential and even more so if using auto-accompaniment features. Understanding how chords are constructed is essential for correct theoretical understanding - particularly for composition and improvisation.

The basic triad chords are constructed by piling notes of the scale on top of each other a third apart and playing them simultaneously. Using the scale of **C major** and referring to the diagram below you can see that the first and most important chord of the key is made as follows: **C** (root note - the *tonic*), **E** (3rd note of the scale - the *mediant*) and **G** (5th note of the scale - the *dominant*). This is the root position of the **C major** chord.



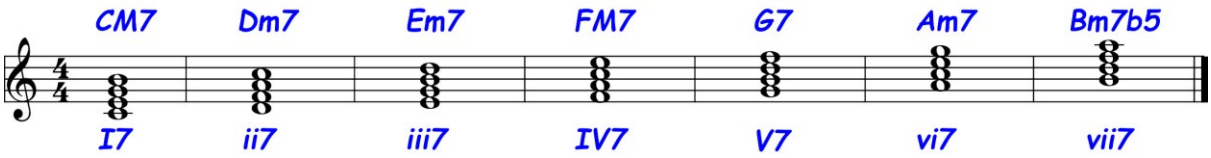
Moving up the scale, starting on **D**, we achieve a **D minor** triad, and then **E minor**, **F major**, **G major**, **A minor** and **B diminished**. These chords are the *diatonic* triads in the key of **C major**, which means that they are all *derived* from the notes of the **C major** scale and as such contain white notes only, (as there are no black notes in the **C major** scale).

Practice these with each hand separately and notice how they sound.

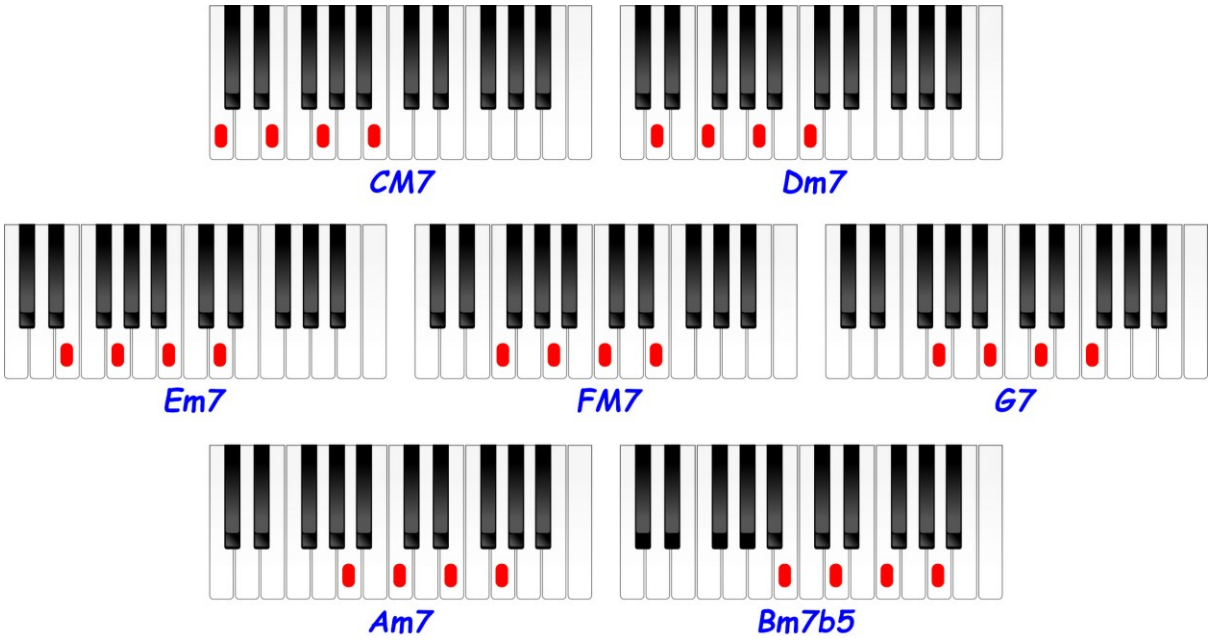
Notice that the difference between a major and minor triad is that the intervals in a *major triad* are a *'major 3rd'* followed by a *'minor 3rd',* whereas the *minor triad* has a *'minor 3rd'* followed by a *'major 3rd'*. The *diminished triad* consists of *'two minor 3rd*s' and the *augmented (+5) triad* has *'two major 3rds'*.

The Roman Numerals shown signify the degree of the scale which each chord starts on. In all cases the diatonic chords of a major scale contain *major* chords at the **I**, **IV** and **V** degrees, *minor* chords at the **ii**, **iii** and **vi** degrees and *diminished* at the **vii** degree. Usually, (but not always) the minor and diminished chords are signified with lower case Roman Numerals (**ii**, **iii**, **vi** etc., as shown here).

By adding further thirds above each triad, **CM7** is achieved, then **Dm7**, **Em7**, **FM7**, **G7**, **Am7**, **Bm7♭5**. You can go on further and create more complicated chords like **9ths** and **13ths** etc. but we will not be covering these in this book, although they are included in the two *'Chord'* books that are yours to download.



In the keyboard views below I have only shown the **7th** chords; to see the triads, simply omit the 7ths (the last note of each chord). Please also notice that some of the 7th chords are signified with a capital **'M'** and others with a lower case **'m'**, this is ***vitally important*** and will be explained shortly.

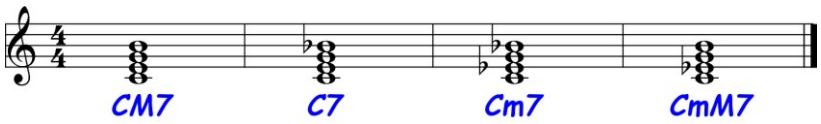


Additional chords can be created from the relative minor scales due to the harmonic and melodic (scales) differences although we are not going to go into these in this book.

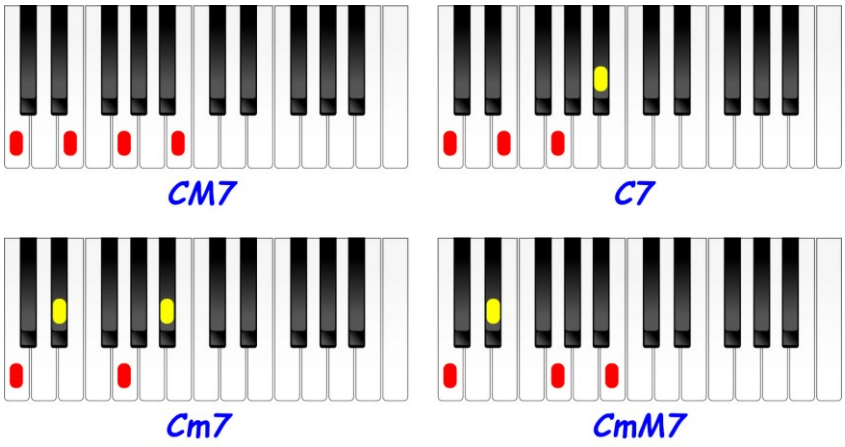
Note that it's important to remember that while many musical compositions will use only the diatonic chords (found naturally in the relevant scale) and no other, it´s by no means necessarily the case. You can use any chord in any key if you can make it work, but the diatonic chords (as found in the scale) are more likely to work!

A Few Important points about 7th Chords

Major 7th (M7) chords must not be confused with what is generally called a *'normal'* **7th** (7) chord (which really should be called a ***dominant*** 7th but often isn't). **Major 7th** chords have a major 7th (one semitone down from the octave) whereas the *'normal'* (dominant**) 7th** chords are the same major triad with a minor 7th (2 semitones down from the octave). **Minor 7th** (m7) chords are like the *'normal' dominant* 7th chords but have a minor 3rd. And a **minor chord with a major 7th**, would be written **(C)mM7** although I have to say that this one is the least common, but it needs mentioning, nevertheless and it's a great chord.



And again, in keyboard view.



The only *'normal'* **7th** chord naturally occurring (diatonic) in the major scales is the *dominant* **7th** (which is **G7** in the **C major** scale). The *dominant* **7th** chord resolving to the tonic chord (**V7 - I**) is the strongest of all progressions and is used repeatedly in all types of music (classical, pop, jazz etc.). Notice the difference in the sounds of these chords and that they are totally different and can ***NEVER*** be substituted with one another.

The same applies to **9ths**. What is normally known as a **9th**, is a *dominant* **7th** (major triad with a **minor 7th**) with an added **9th**, but a **major 9th** is a **major 7th** with the same added **9th** and is be written **(C)M9**.

So, to make this completely clear:

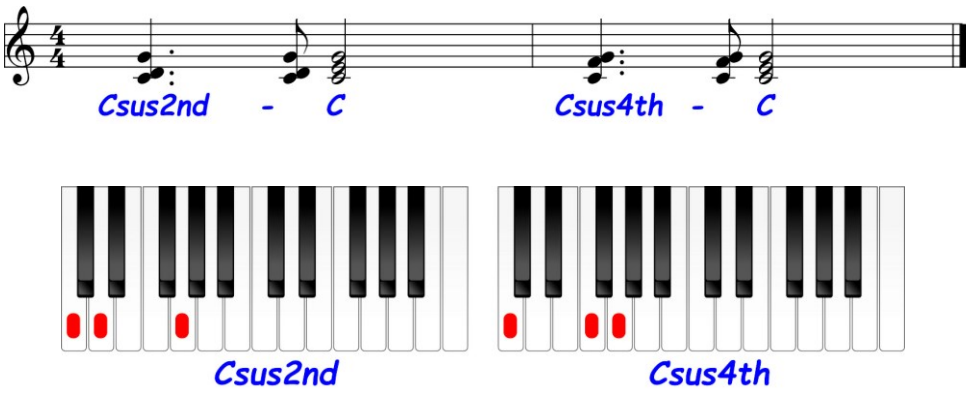
- **C7** is a major chord with a minor 7th
- **CM7** is a major chord with a major 7th
- **Cm7** is a minor chord with a minor 7th
- **CmM7** is a minor chord with a major 7th

And the only one of the above chords to appear in the notes of the **C major** scale is **CM7** and as such is the only one which is *diatonic* in the key of **C major**.

Play these now and hear the difference.

Suspended 2nd and 4th Chords

The *'suspended 2nd'* (also known as *'sus9'*) and *'suspended 4th'* (also known as *'sus'*) chords desperately want to resolve to the major chord as shown here. These are used extensively in all types of music, but perhaps more so in country music.

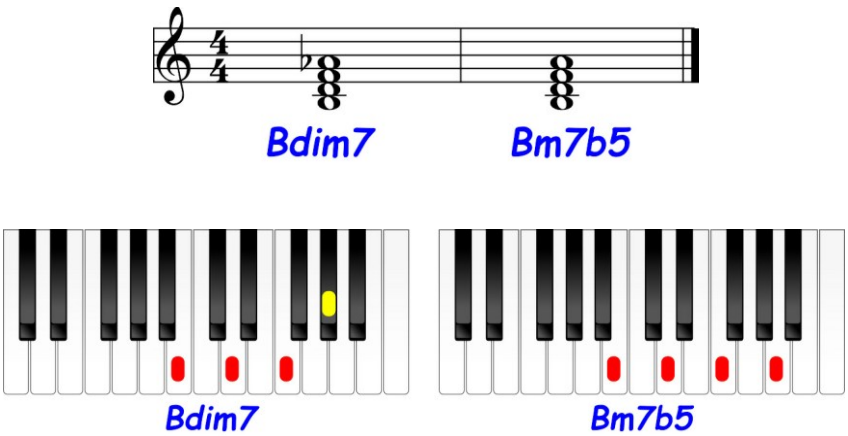


Note that these chords do not have a 3rd and as such are neither major nor minor, but as they *generally* resolve to the major chord, they can perhaps be considered more major than minor, but they could be either.

Diminished 7th Chords

You may be confused about the difference between a true *'diminished'* ***7th*** chord and what is often called a *'half diminished'* ***7th,*** (if not now you probably will be at some point).

Both have the diminished triad, which is **B**, **D** & **F** (**B diminished**, the only diminished triad in **C major**). You should notice that the triad consists of two *minor 3rd* intervals.



If we add the 7th this will put an '**A**' at the top (which is a *major 3rd* interval above **F**) and this is often known as **B (half) dim7**. But this chord could also be known as **Bm7♭5** - (**Bm7 flattened 5th**), because that is exactly what it is! Put a **G** at the bottom of this

chord and it would become **G9**, which means that **Bm7♭5** could be used as a substitute for **G9** with no problem.

Now instead of adding the **A** (7th) at the top, if we add **G#** (a minor 3rd interval above **F**) we will end up with a true *'diminished' **7th*** chord. Although **G#** (**A♭**) is not in the **C major** scale, remember it is in the relative **A minor**, both in the harmonic and melodic scales and is therefore a diatonic degree in the key of **A minor**.

The symbols shown below are often used to signify the *diminished* **7th** and the *'half diminished' **7th*** chords.

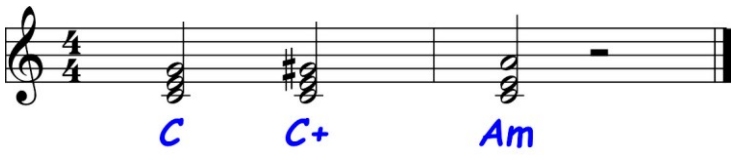
You may notice that the **B**, **D**, **F** & **G#** *diminished 7* chords are all the same - the only difference being in the bass notes!

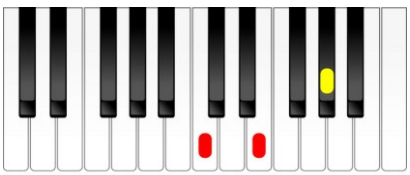
A beautiful example of the use of *diminished **7th*** chords and arpeggios can be heard in Beethoven's ***'Moonlight Sonata'*** - a superb timeless piece of music!

Augmented Chords

Augmented chords are often used *'en-passant',* i.e., stepping up from **C - Am** as shown here or from **C - F**.

Completely contrary to diminished chords, the *'augmented triad'* consists of two *major 3rd* intervals.

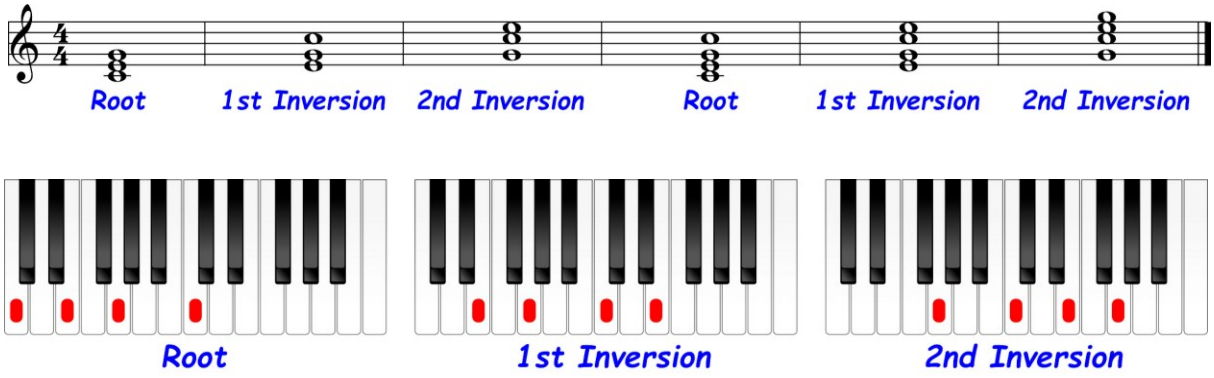




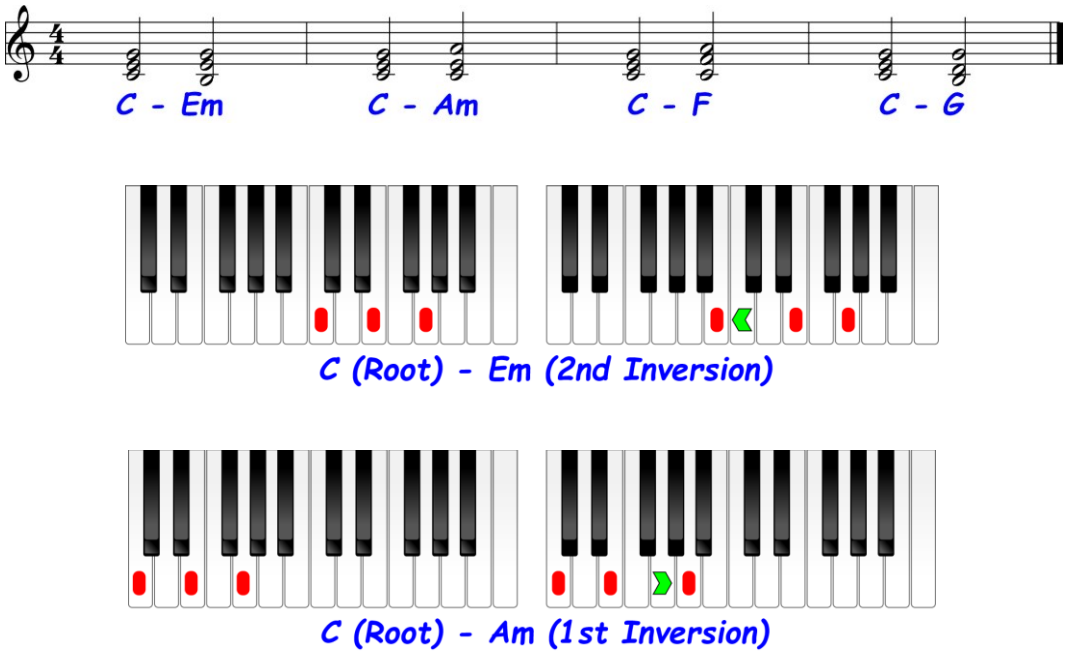
But similar to the diminished chords you may notice that **C**, **E** & **G#** augmented are all the same chords, being identified apart only by the bass notes.

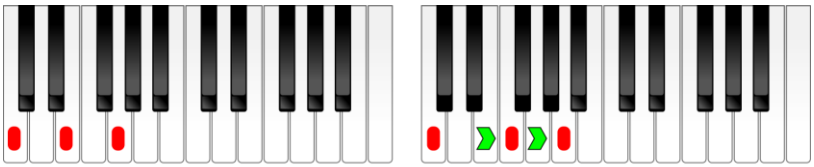
Inversions

By moving the **C** to the top of the first **C major** triad and making the **E** the bottom note, the *'1st inversion'* is created. Similarly, by moving both the **C** and **E** above, the *'2nd inversion'* is constructed. This works the same with full four note chords as well as with triads as shown below.

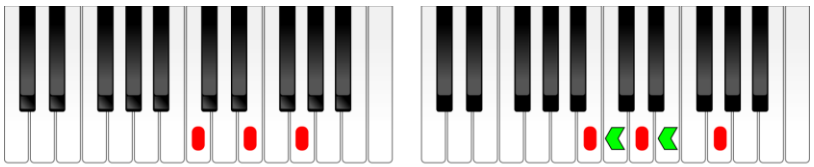


Using inversions can be useful when changing chords with the minimum amount of finger movements. For instance, the **C major** *'root position'* can be altered to an **E minor** triad simply by changing the **C** to **B**, or to an **A minor** triad by changing the **G** to **A**. And by moving only two fingers a short distance **C major** can be easily changed to **F major** or **G major** as shown below.





C (Root) - F (2nd Inversion)



C (Root) - G (1st Inversion)

If using auto-accompaniment, you'll find that most keyboards will identify the various inversions, but you will almost certainly find that there will also be a function which allows you to choose which note is sounded in the bass which would normally be the root note by default.

Chord Substitution

As you progress, you'll see that many chords are very similar, some even identical and as such can be used as substitutions if required.

For instance, **Am7** and **C6** consist of exactly the same notes - (**C**, **E**, **G** & **A**) and therefore the only thing that could identify them as being different is which note is used in the bass. It's more common (but not essential) to use the root note in the bass. So, remember that every **major 6th** is identical to the relative **minor 7th**.

Similarly, **Am7sus4** and **C6/9** are totally identical, and these are very important chords in relation to improvisation as they form the notes of the pentatonic scales, although we are not going to go into this here, but they are in the *'Scales and Arpeggios'* book which I hope you've already downloaded.

You will find that many similar substitutions can be made so don't be afraid to experiment, but always remember that a **'M7'** chord can never be substituted for a normal (dominant) **'7'** chord as they have no relationship whatsoever. Similarly, a minor chord could ***never*** be substituted for a major chord (of the same name) for the same reason.

There are many more advanced substitutions possible which on the surface seem unlikely, but we are not going to go into these here.

If using auto-accompaniment, you will almost certainly find that the short inversions of the more complicated chords would not be correctly recognised by your keyboard. In this event try the **7th** instead of the **9th** and the **6th** or **6/9th** instead of the **13th** etc., then try and incorporate the missing notes in the right hand.

See *'using auto-accompaniment'* further on.

Chord Fingering

The fingering for the various chords depends very much on whether you are playing triads or full chords and which chord (or passage) is going to follow, and of course to a certain extent it depends on which chord you are playing.

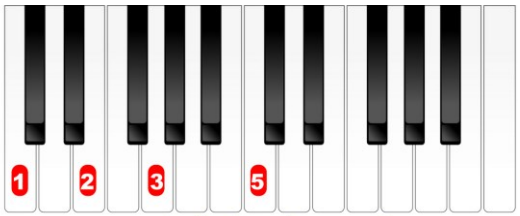
If I was to outline the fingering for each individual chord in every inversion in every circumstance it would bore you senseless apart from taking months to produce.

But what I can do more sensibly is to give you a few valuable *general* examples which work in most instances. But as always, whatever you do - if it works, it's ok.

To keep things simple, we'll start with the **C major**.

If I was asked to play a **C major triad** or a **C major full chord** with my right hand, off the top of my head without thinking, the fingerings that I would use are as follows.

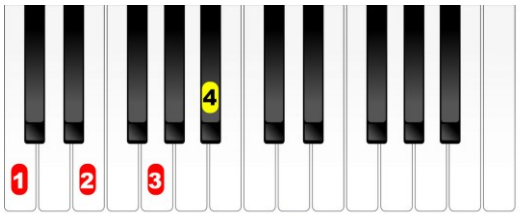
C Major Triad Root Position



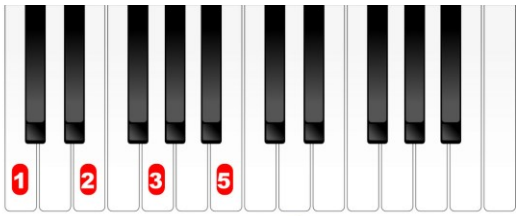
C Major Full Chord Root Position

Furthermore, the above fingering would work for every root position major and minor chord. Generally speaking, if a scale begins on a black note, you would usually use the 2nd or 3rd finger at the root, but not so with chords - the above fingering would still work for every major and minor root position chord.

Now staying with the root position, as we add the **7ths**, which finger that is used at the top (the 7th) is determined by whether it's a white note or not as shown below.

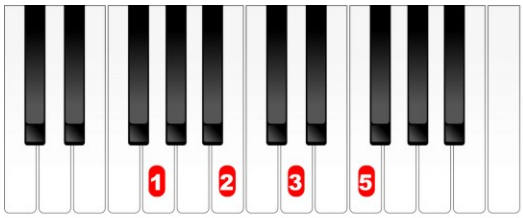


C7 - Root Position

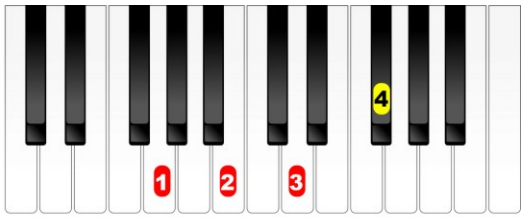


CM7 - Root Position

And if we look at **G7** and **GM7** as below, you will see that it's the other way around with the 5th finger being used on the **G7** and the 4th on the **major 7th** as it's a black note.



G7 - Root Position



GM7 - Root Position

I must stress that these are not *'rules'*, just *'guidelines'*. If you feel more comfortable using your 5th finger on the black 7th keys, then do so. But in all cases when the span is a full octave as in the full (4 note), chords then the 5th finger will *generally* be used at the top on both white and black notes.

Ok, so now we'll look at some alternatives which are commonly used when changing to other chords. The example below shows the **C major triad** changing to **F major** - the common **I - IV** progression. By using this fingering, a smooth change can be made, particularly if sustaining the **'C'** throughout.

C Major Triad Root Position -

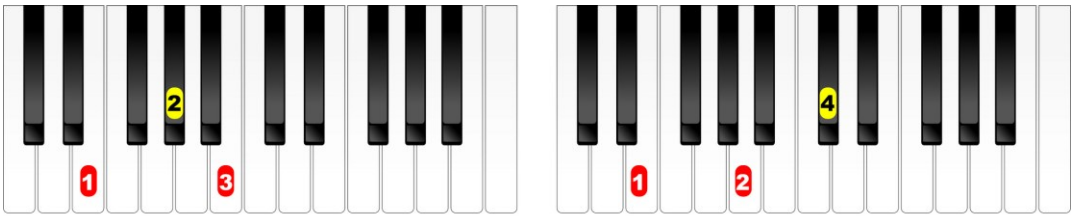
F Major 2nd Inversion

But for **C minor** to **F minor**, the fingering would alter as shown next. This is ***not*** because the chords are minor rather than major, but simply because of the way the black notes fall.

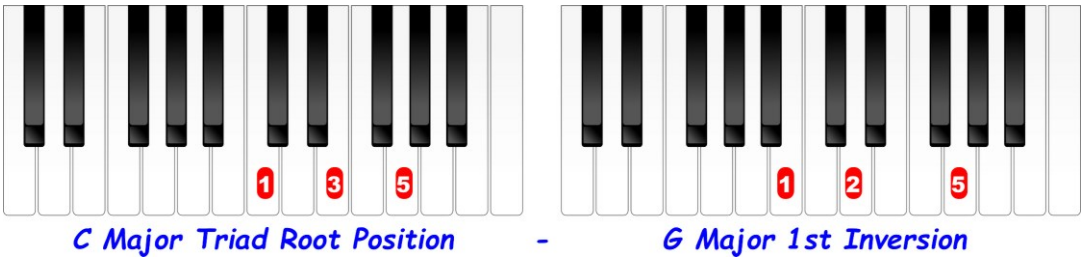
C minor Triad Root Position -

F minor 2nd Inversion

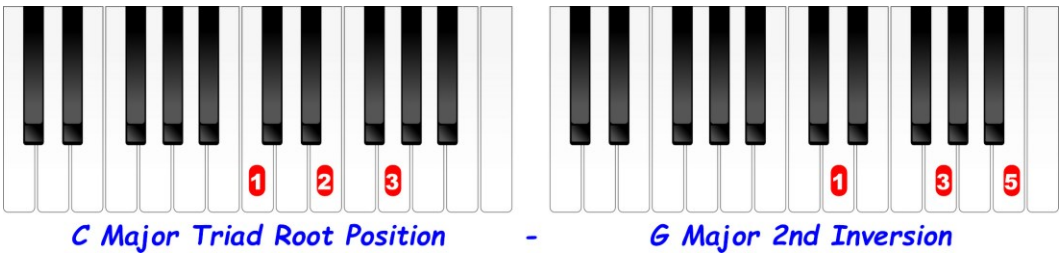
Notice that the fingering for **E major** to **A major** is exactly the same due to the black notes falling in the same relative positions - remember it's nothing to do with the major / minor difference!



Another most common progression is the **I - V** as shown below using **C major** *'root position'* to **G major** *'1st inversion'*.



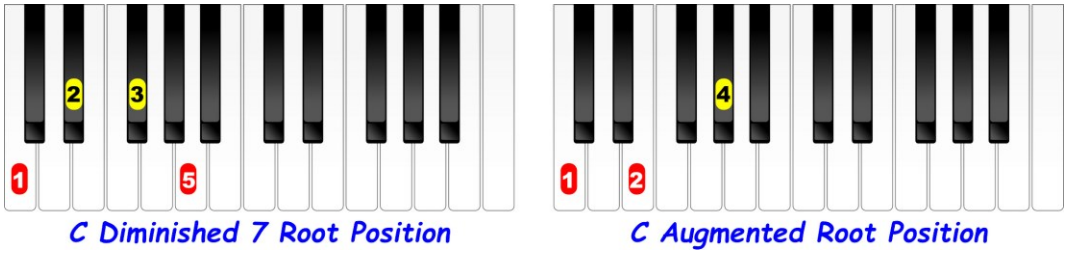
If progressing to the *'2nd inversion'* as shown next, notice that using a different fingering on the first triad is more suitable.



In all the progression examples given, note that at least one of the notes between the two chords remains the same, which assists a smooth transition. Obviously, this is not always possible, but whenever it is, it's a good idea.

Another way of ensuring a smooth transition is to *'place'* unused fingers over one or more notes of the next chord in preparation. For instance, the 5th finger could be hovering over the '**B**' in the last example which means only the 1st finger has to do any movement!

And finally, the root positions of the **C diminished 7th** and **C augmented** triad.

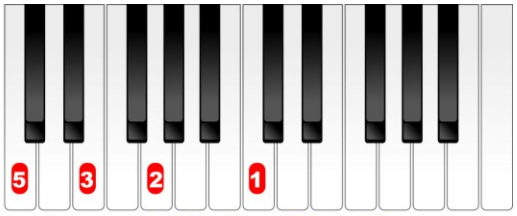


Left-Hand Chord Fingering

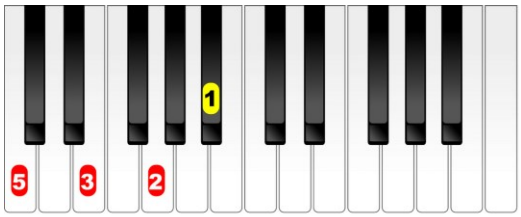
Now obviously your left hand is going to be completely different. The same sort of variations will apply - but differently. You might think that the fingering is simply *'mirrored',* but it's not, as although your hands are mirrored, the keyboard is not!

Here's the same chords and progressions but with suggested **left-hand** fingering.

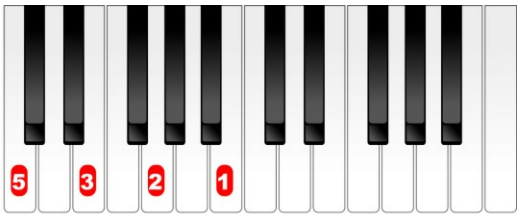
C Major Triad Root Position



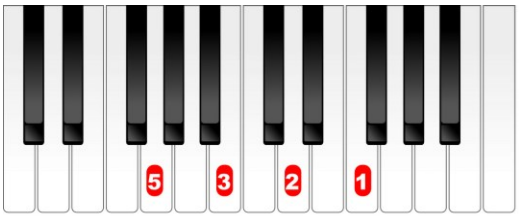
C Major Full Chord Root Position



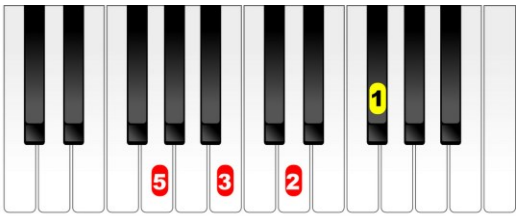
C7 - Root Position



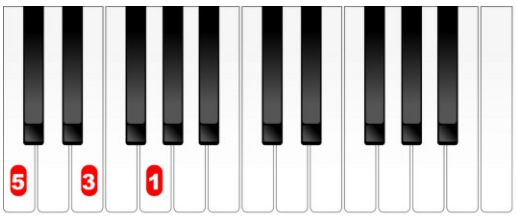
CM7 - Root Position



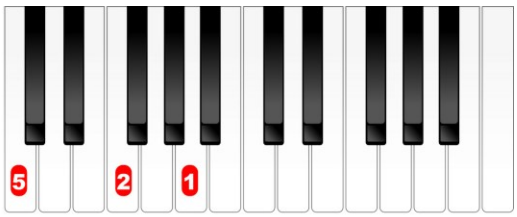
G7 - Root Position



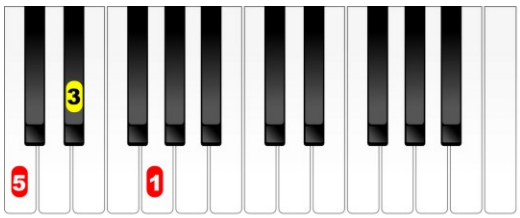
GM7 - Root Position



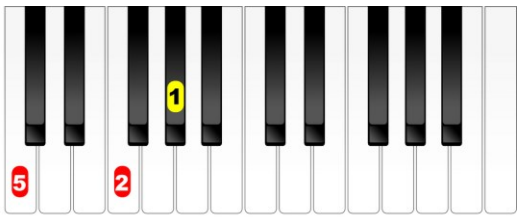
C Major Triad Root Position -



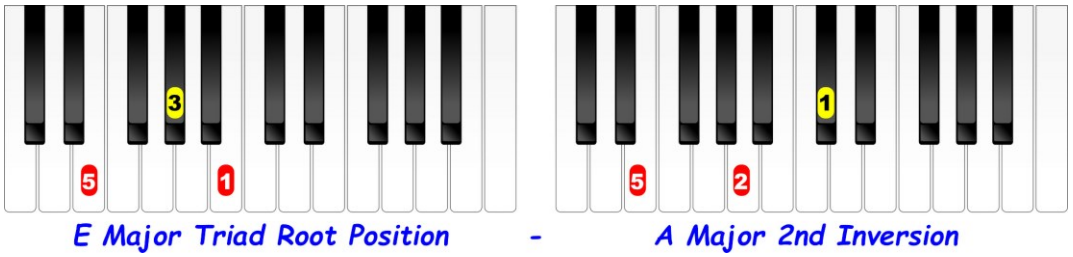
F Major 2nd Inversion

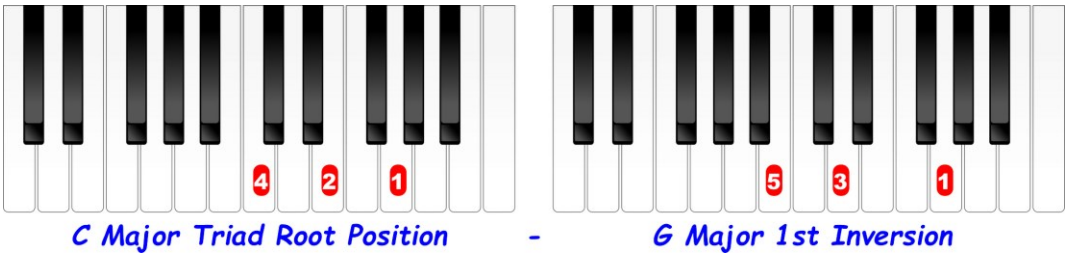


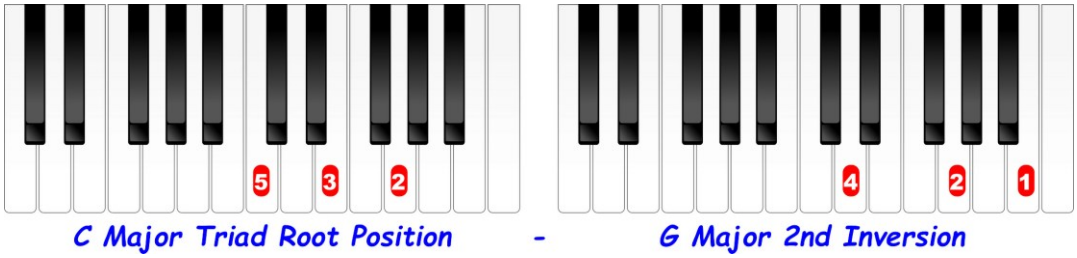
C minor Triad Root Position -

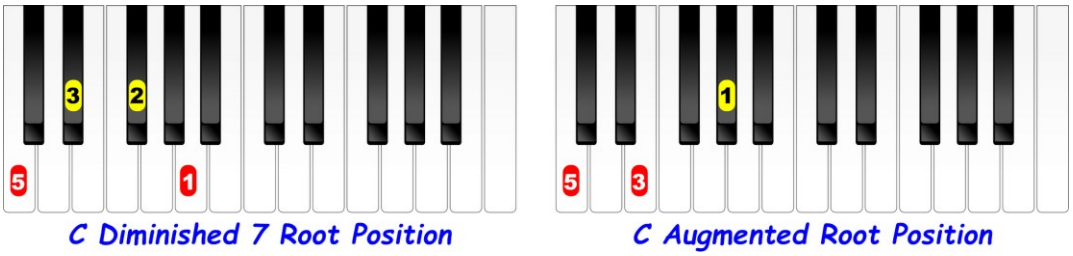


F minor 2nd Inversion









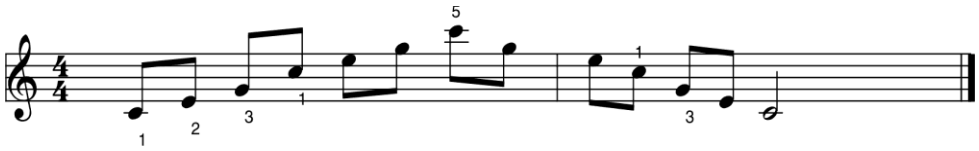
If you've been paying attention, you will have noticed that there are not so many variations with the left-hand fingerings as with the right hand. This is something that surprised me, and that I was not consciously aware of until I wrote this section.

Anyway, so hopefully now you've got the idea and can now relate all this information to other chords. But remember it's not written in blood, these fingerings work well for me, but to be honest I've seen other really good musicians who use what appears (to me) to be crazy fingering, but it works for them.

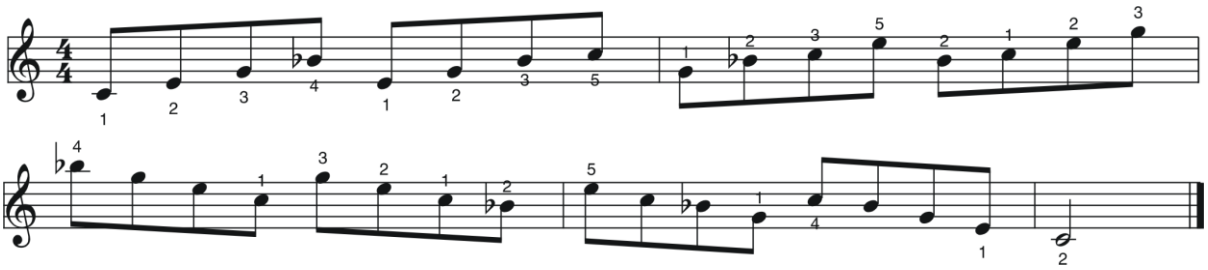
If you haven't already done so, please download the two *'Chord'* books which will give you much more information about chords.

Arpeggios

An *'arpeggio'* is simply a *'broken chord',* although the Royal College of Music describes these differently, an *'arpeggio'* being as shown below (**C major** - 2 octaves).



And a *'broken chord'* as shown in the next diagram (**C7** - 2 octaves).



Both of these they are especially important for a number of reasons:

a) They are often used (in different ways) in the left hand (classical and modern);

b) They are often used in bass patterns

c) They are excellent finger exercises

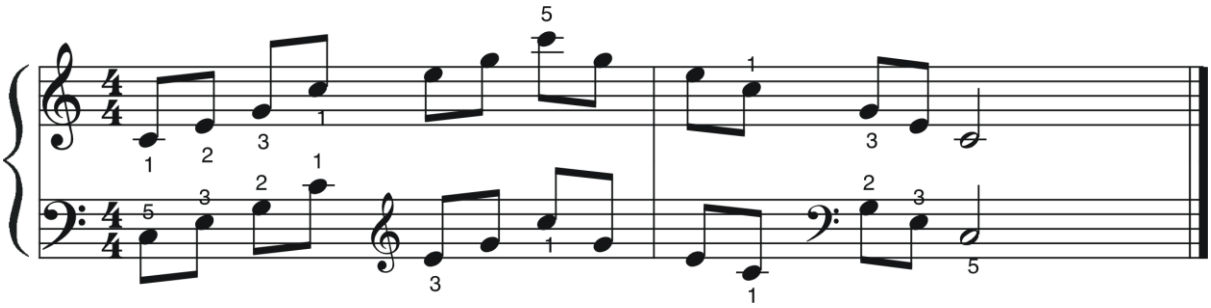
d) They are an extremely important tool to help with composition and improvisation

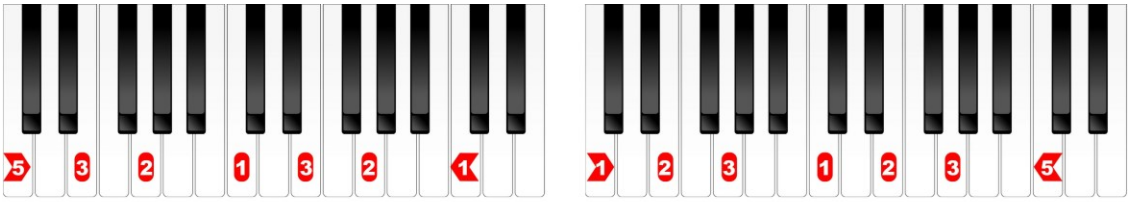
It's well worth the effort to practice every arpeggio in every key major and minor with both hands together and separately, remembering as always that speed is not important, but accuracy and fluency is! At first the finger crossovers are far more difficult than the scales as they span for much greater intervals. But in all cases avoid using the sustain pedal when practicing these as doing so will give you a false impression of fluency.

The first few arpeggios in the keys covered so far are shown over the next few pages both in keyboard and notation view with fingering for both hands. Note that there is no difference between the *harmonic*, *melodic* and *natural* minor arpeggios.

All the arpeggios in every key can be seen in the *'Scales and Arpeggio'* book which is yours to download.

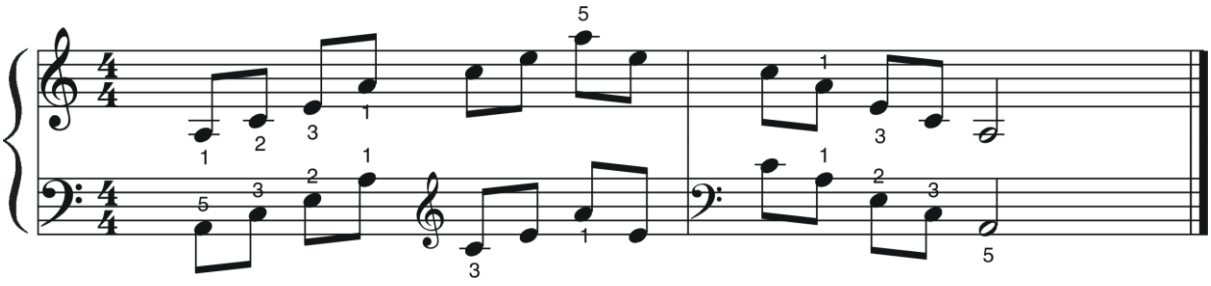
C Major Arpeggio

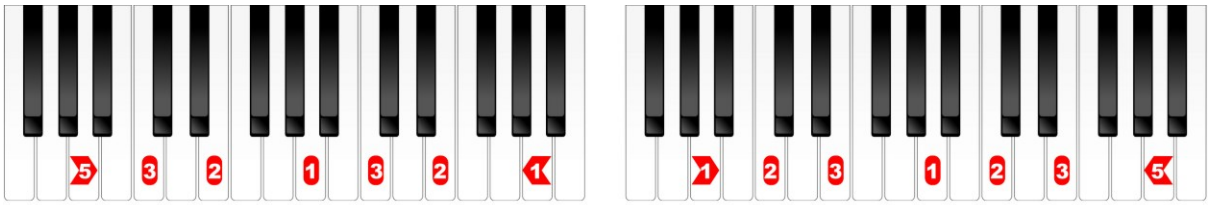




Left Hand Right Hand

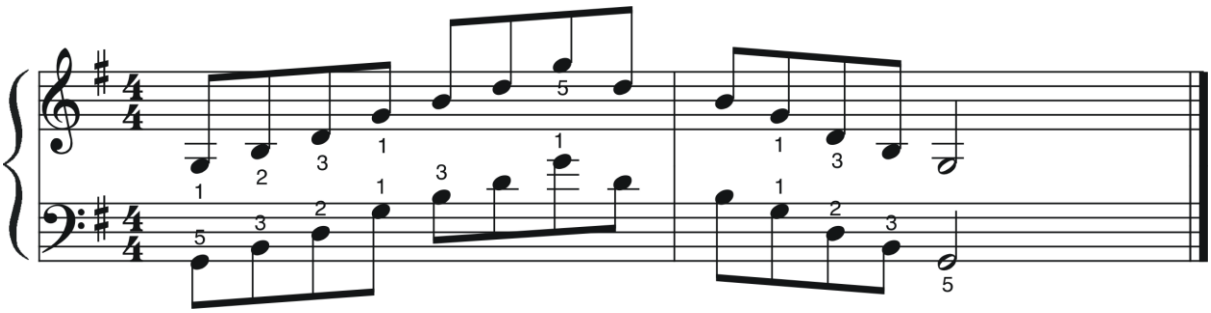
A Minor Arpeggio

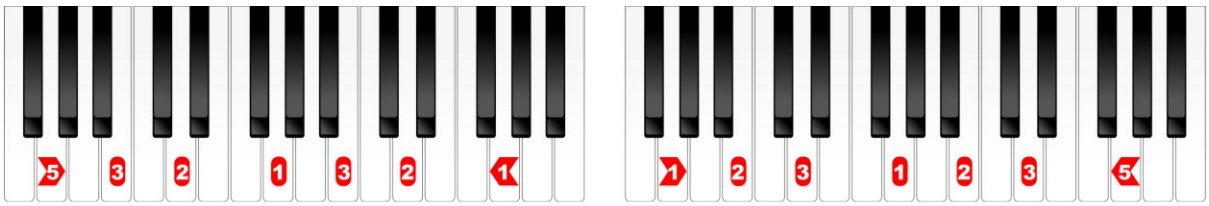




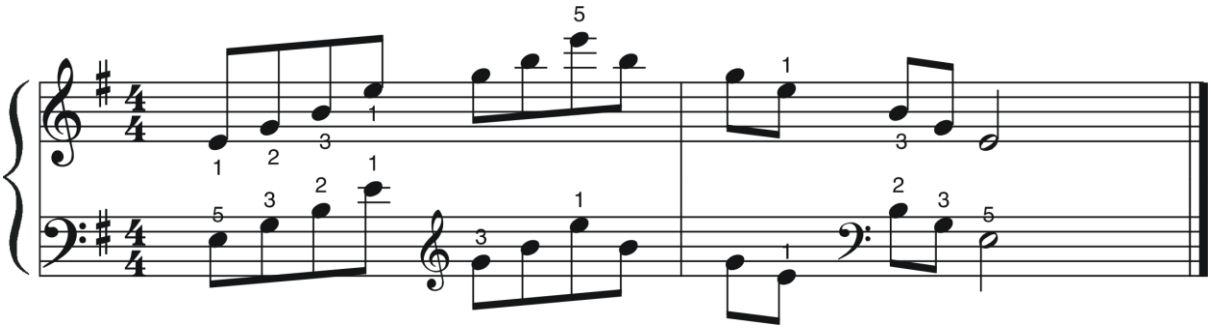
Left Hand Right Hand

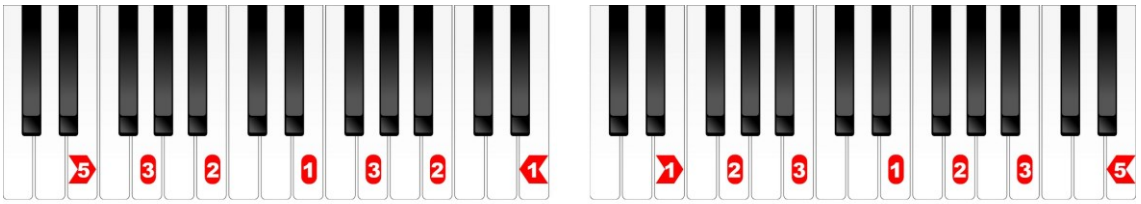
G Major Arpeggio



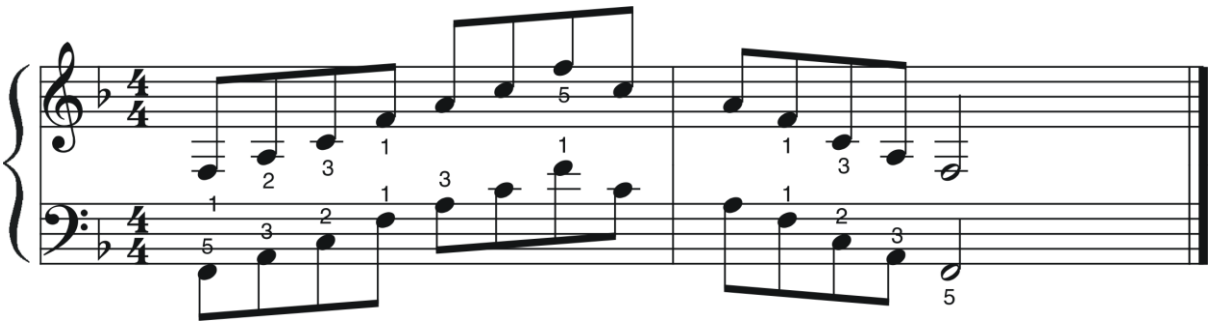


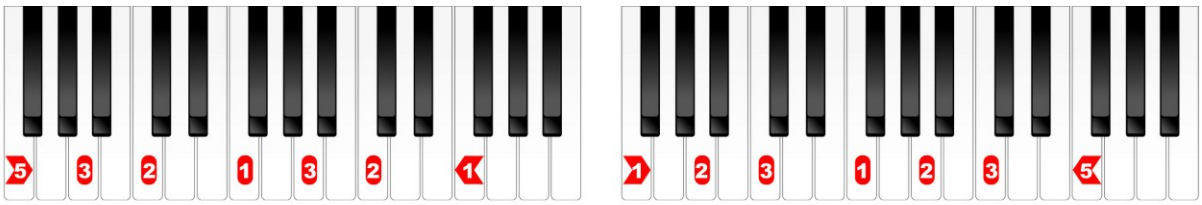
E Minor Arpeggio



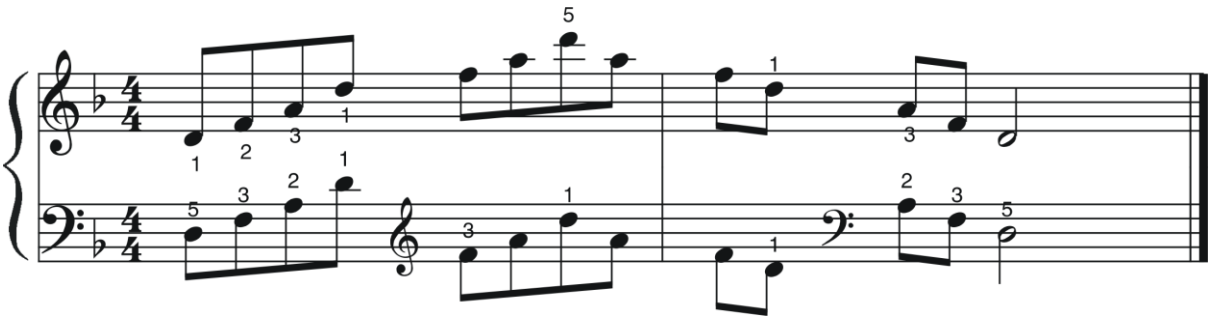


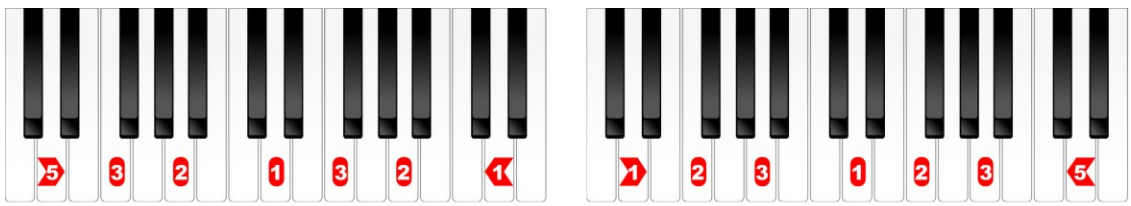
F Major Arpeggio





D Minor Arpeggio





⬅ Arpeggio Exercises ➡

These exercises are particularly important as they:

- are excellent finger exercises
- teach an understanding of chords and harmony
- are a superb aid to improvisation and composition

Notice the ***8va*** symbol in exercise **3** which means that the section marked should be played one octave above as written.

As always progress at your own rate in the order that you find easiest and put your emphasis on accuracy and fluency - not speed!

At first glance you may think that the music notation looks complicated but on close inspection you will see that each exercise / arpeggio follows a specific pattern and once these are learnt and understood the reading process becomes much easier.

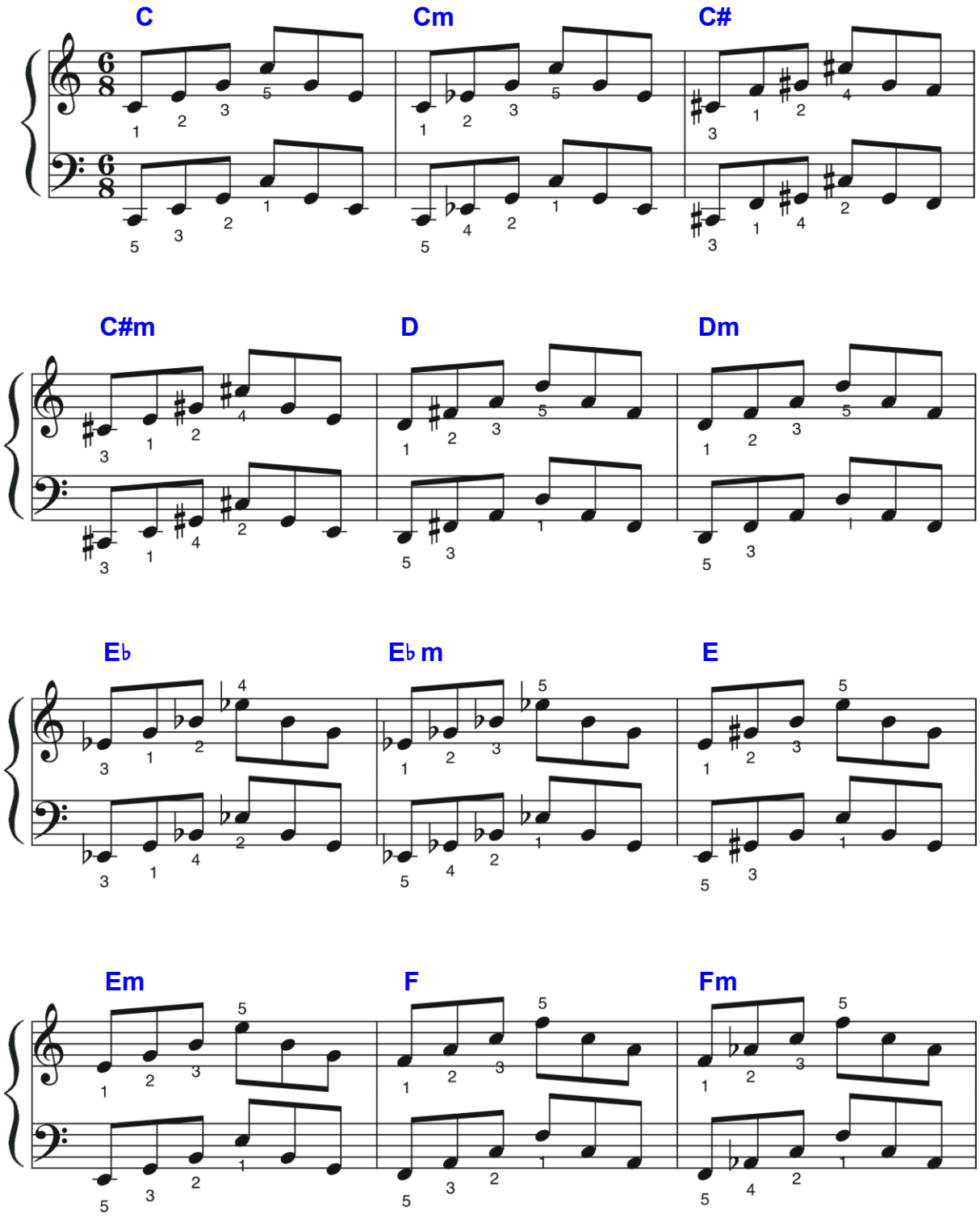
Understanding arpeggios helps you to understand chords and understanding chords helps you to understand arpeggios. Understanding scales helps you understand both! They are of course all interrelated!

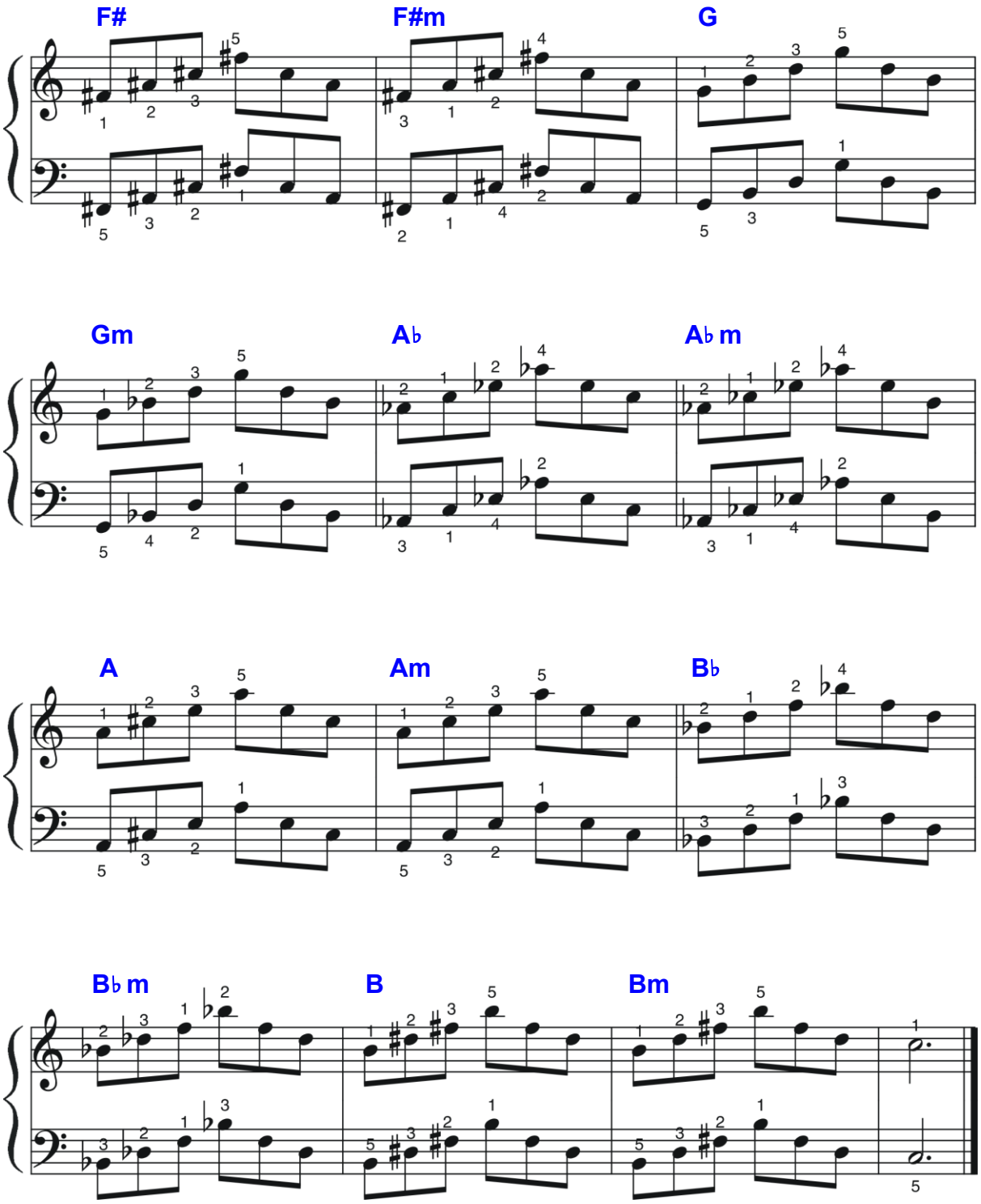
Korg Pa5X Arranger - 76 Keys

In my opinion this is the very best arranger keyboard on the market available with 61 or 76 semi-weighted keys, or 88 fully weighted. And a fair bit cheaper than the Yamaha Genos! - I love it!

Arpeggio Exercise 1

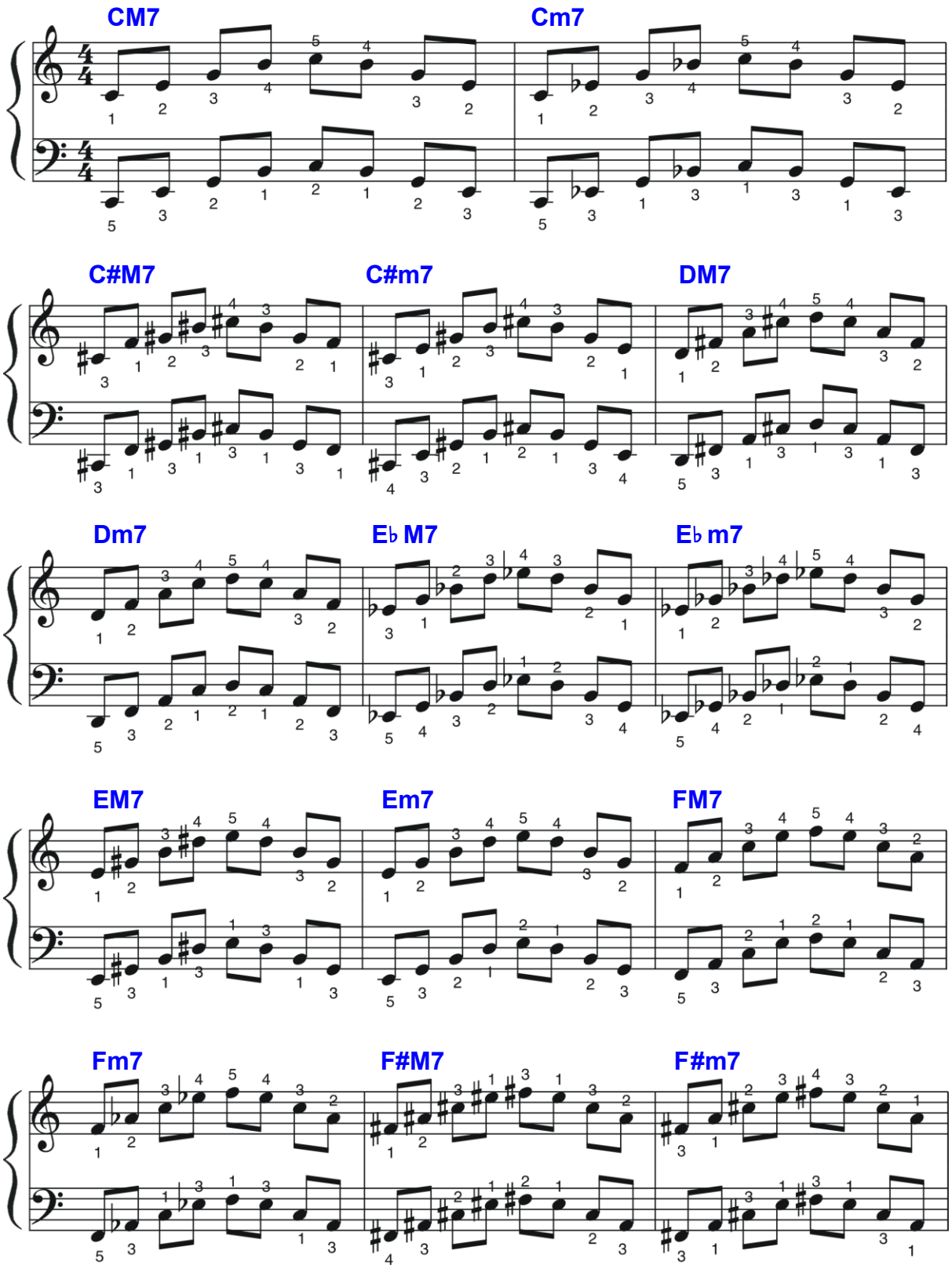
This exercise takes you through every major and minor arpeggio ascending chromatically (for one octave). Some of the fingering may not flow easily, so the pedal can be used *briefly* if necessary. Practice this with each hand separately and as slowly as you need to.

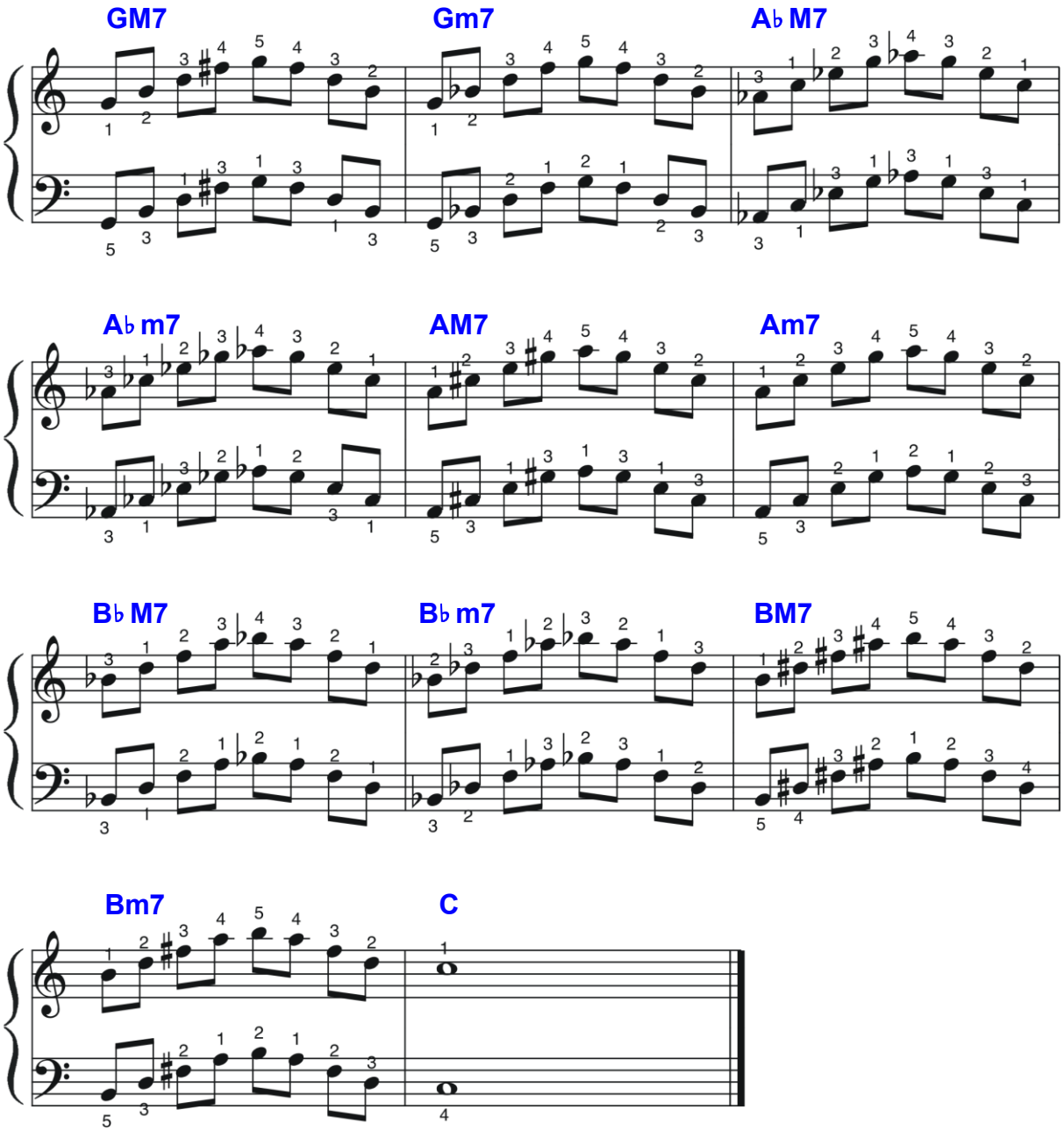




Arpeggio Exercise 2

This exercise takes you through every major 7th and minor 7th arpeggio ascending chromatically. Again, some of the fingering may not *'flow'*. And as with the last exercise, practice this with each hand separately as slowly as you need to.

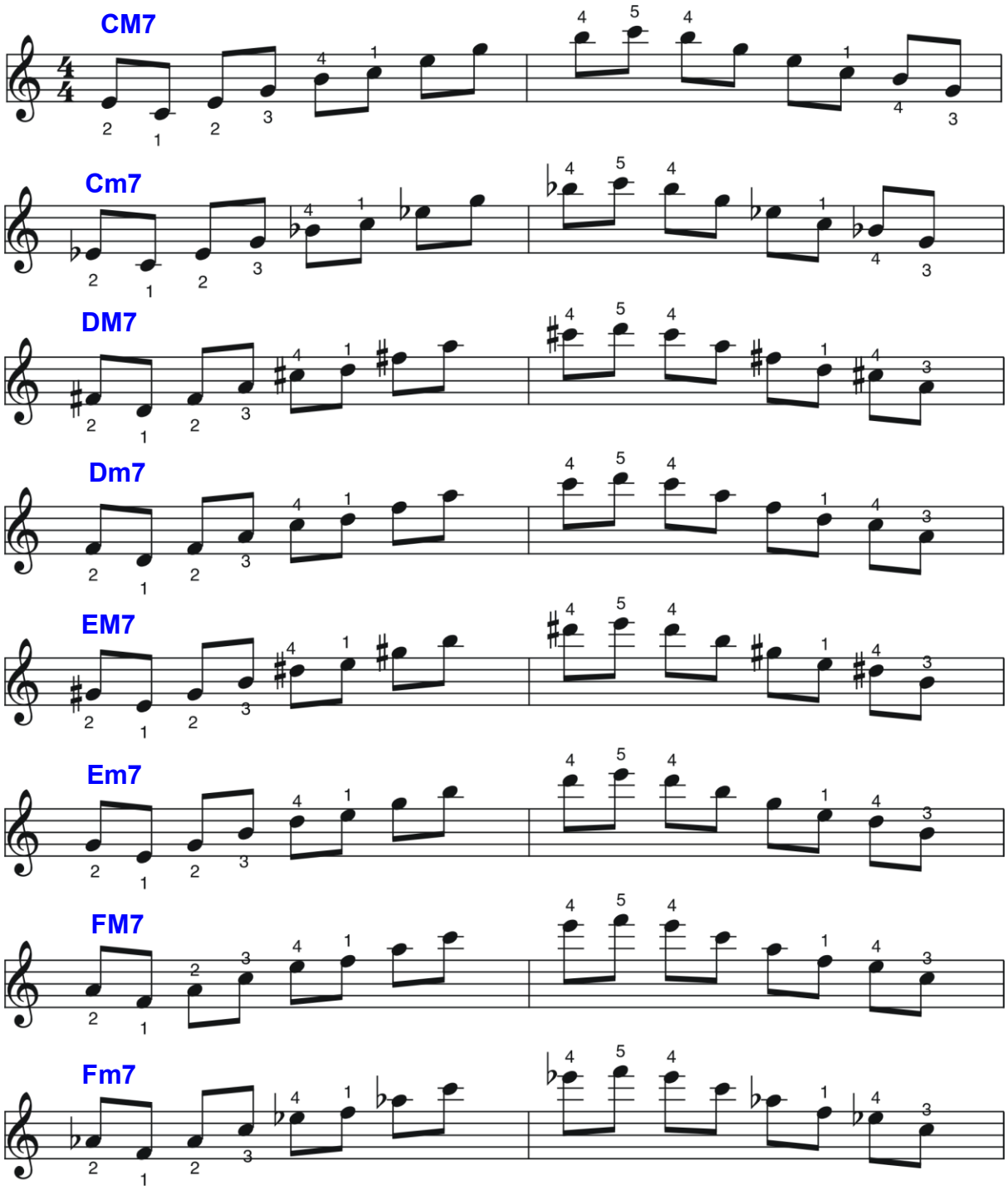


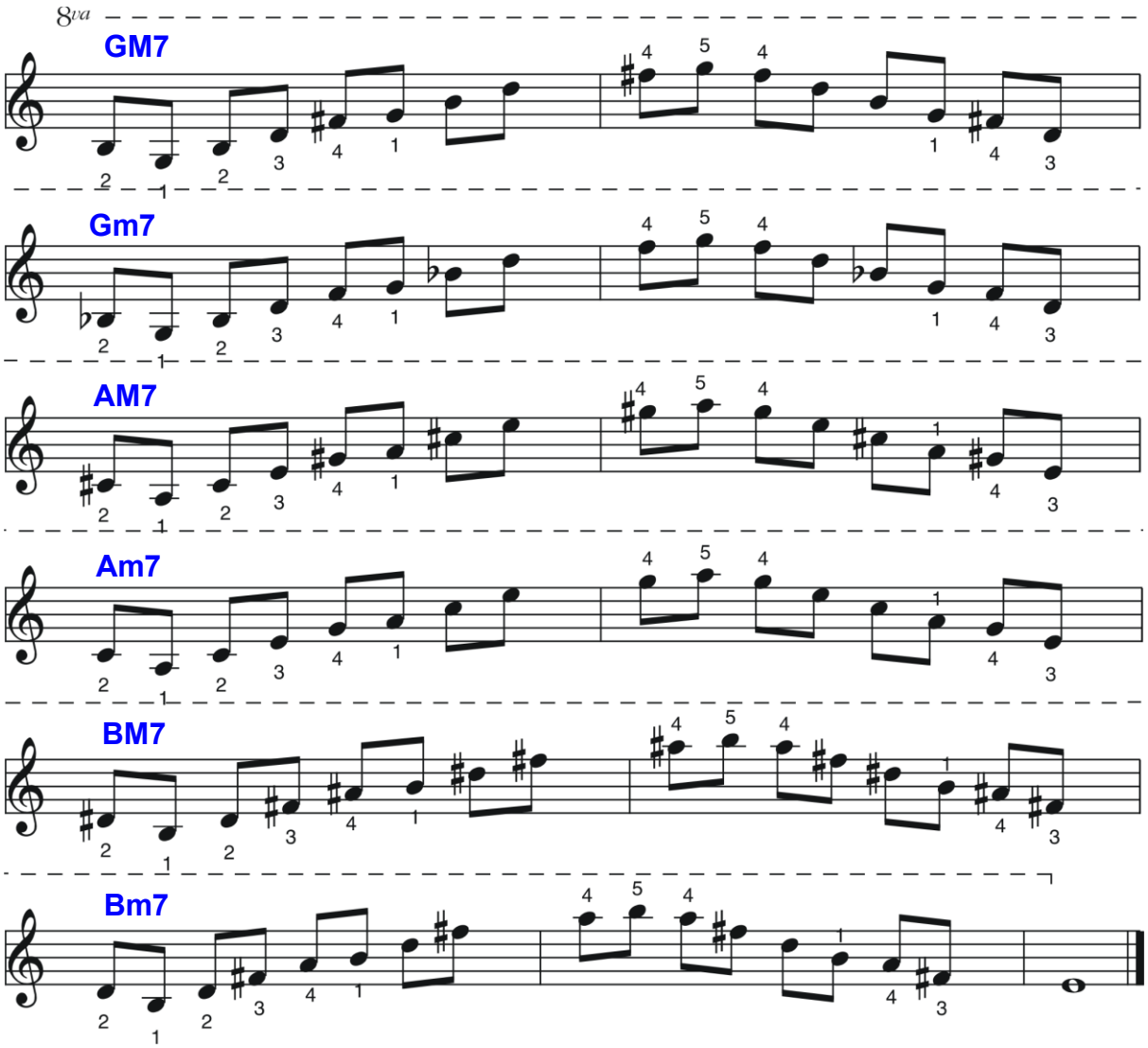


I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

Arpeggio Exercise 3

For the right hand only - this one takes you through every major 7th and minor 7th arpeggio in seven keys for two octaves starting on the 3rd. Practice this very slowly at first. This is a great exercise, for both finger dexterity and theoretical understanding.





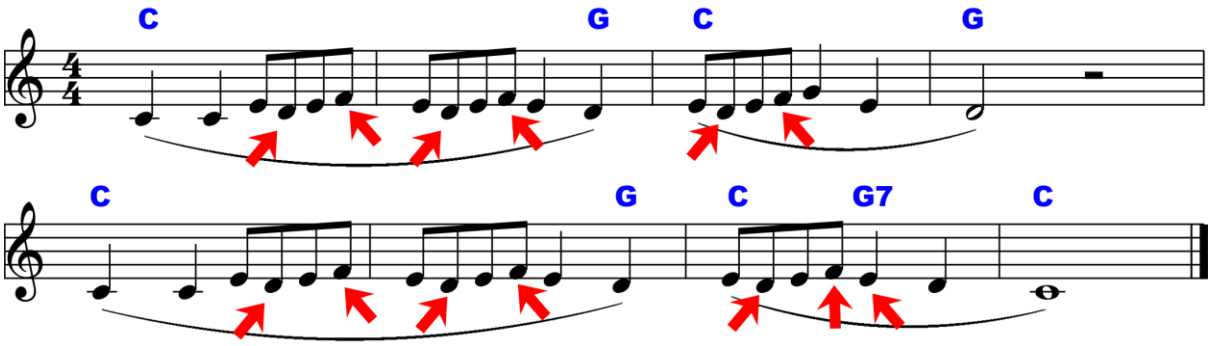
Korg D1 Portable Piano (88 keys)

If you are on a budget and want a great piano keyboard feel, this could be for you.
This has the same RH3 keybed as the mighty Kronos and the Korg SV2.
This could also make a great lower tier board with maybe a synth or organ on top!

An Arpeggio Composition

Previously I showed some very basic examples of how to create simple tunes with just the first five notes of the **C major** scale.

Here's one of them again with a chord line.



What I particularly want you to notice is that some of the notes are *'passing notes'*, meaning that they are notes of the scale (**C major**), but not notes of the chords (shown above the staff lines). These passing notes have been indicated by arrows above and this is pretty normal in most compositions.

The next example is a composition comprised *entirely* of arpeggios (and *no* passing notes). Putting it another way, every single note in the piece is part of the chord itemised above the staff.

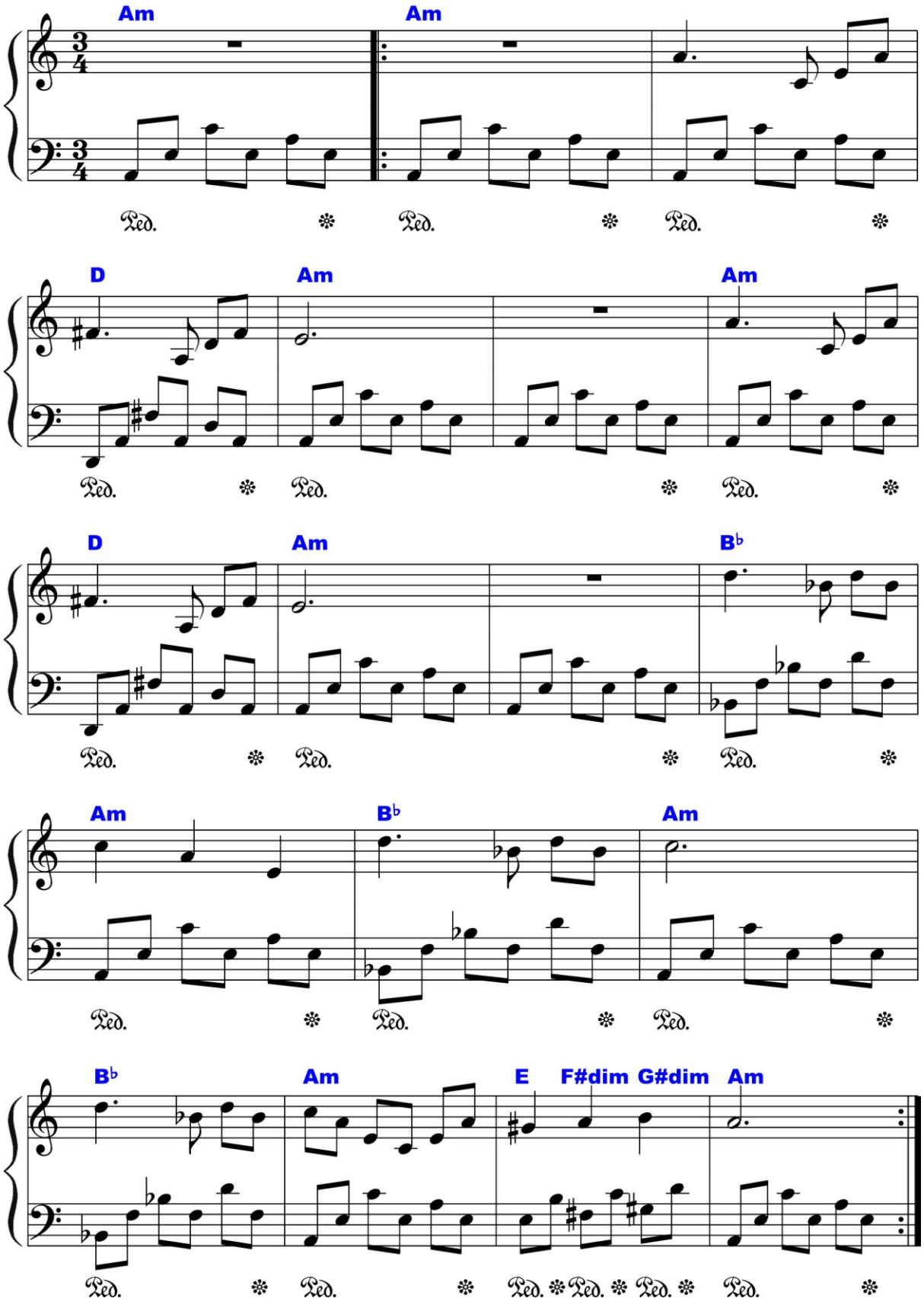
I've also said previously that most compositions are based around *diatonic* chords (found naturally in the scale) which is true, but the following example entitled ***'Flo'*** contains one *non-diatonic* chord - **B flat major.** which is repeated regularly, demonstrating that *non-diatonic* chords *can* work very effectively even though theoretically perhaps they shouldn't. All the other chords are *diatonic* chords in the key of **A minor**.

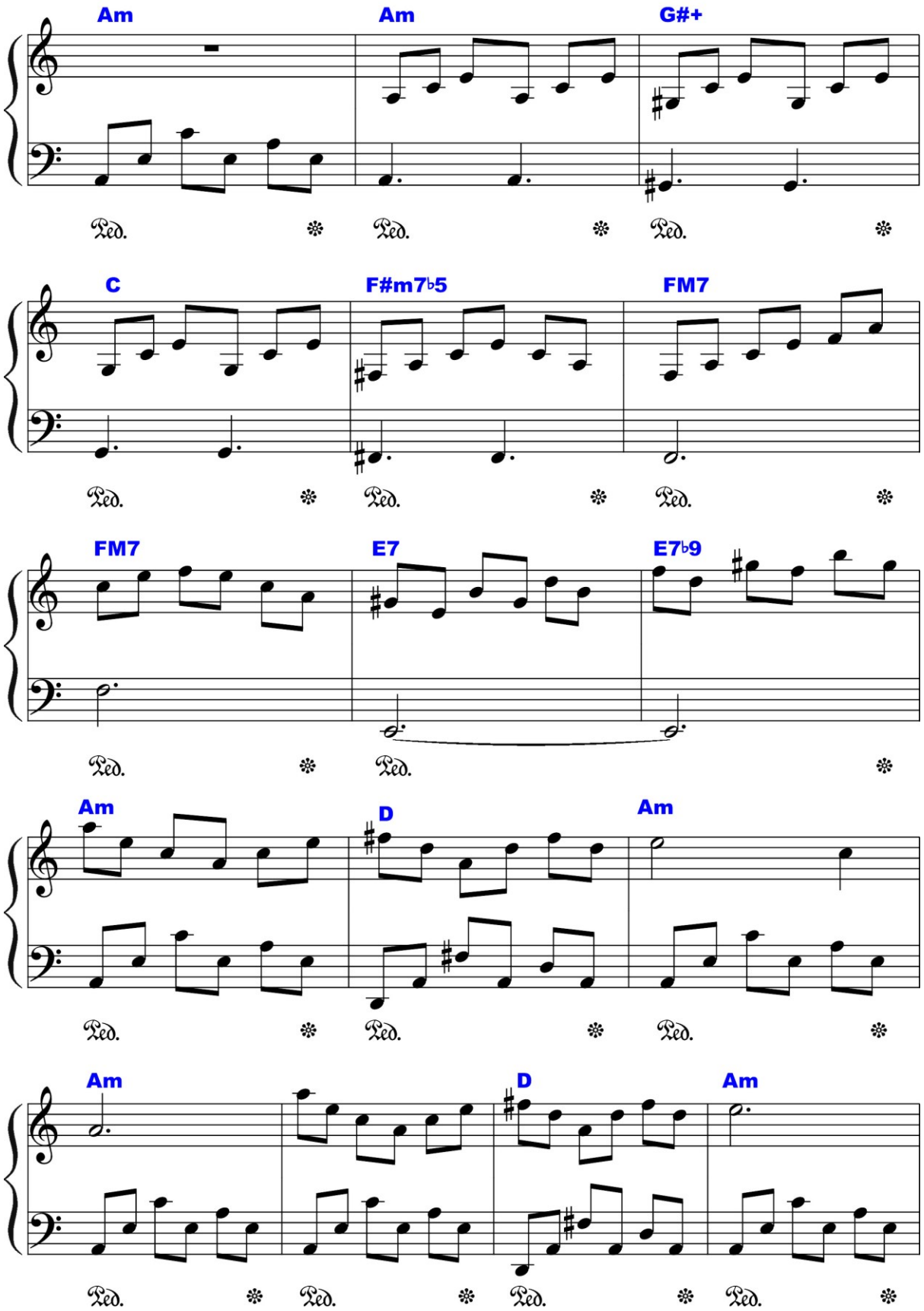
I know I've only shown you the diatonic chords in major keys, but due to the additional sharps in the minor scales, there are many more diatonic chords in the minor keys, but this isn't anything that you need to concern yourself with right now.

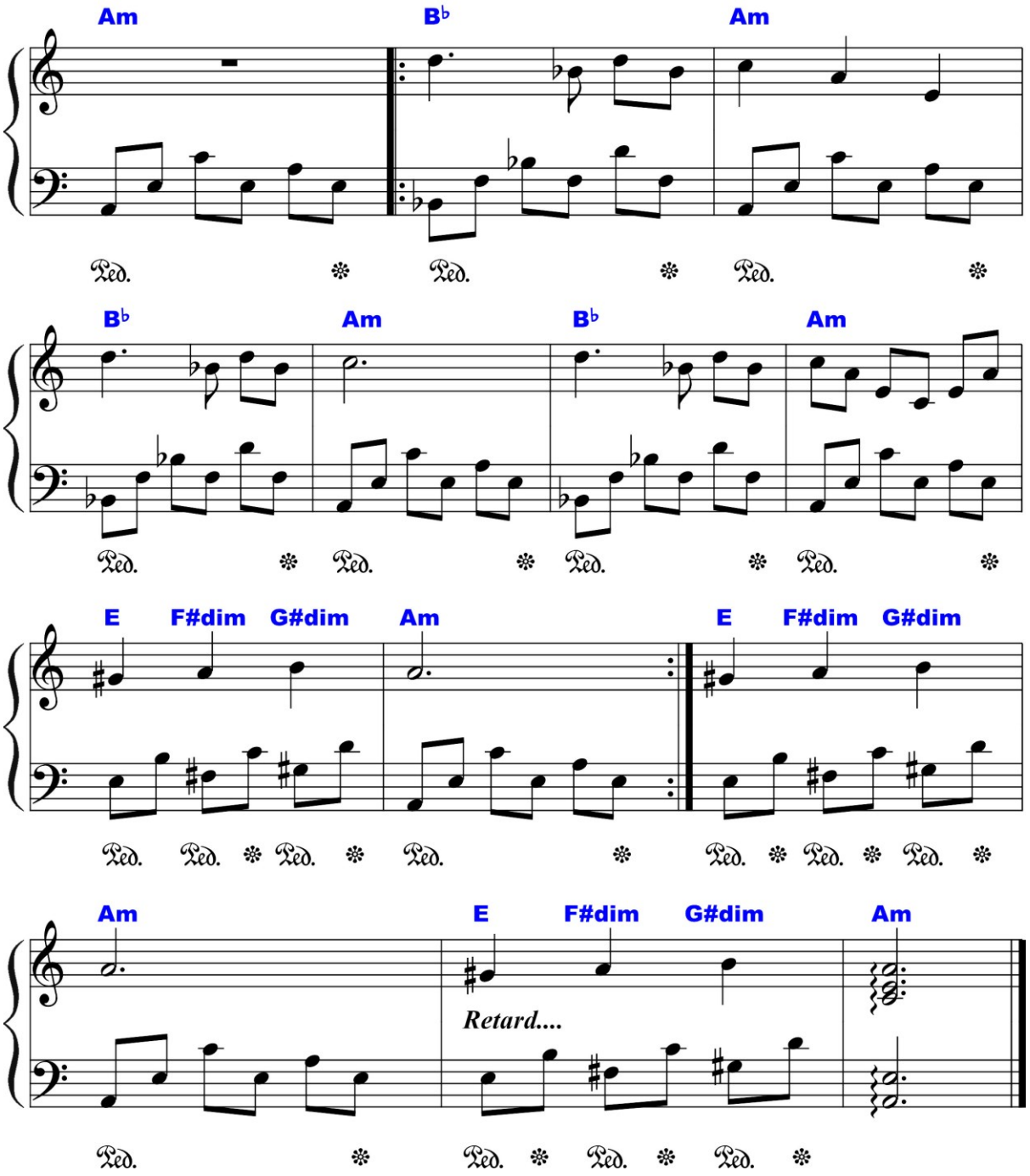
Just listen to the next example or play it if you can - it's not as difficult as it looks; then try and create some of your own in a similar way - just using arpeggios changing direction at any time you choose.

If using auto-accompaniment with the example, use **B dim7** instead of the **E7♭9** as this is more likely to be recognised. Also, **D7** and **E7** can be used instead of the **F# dim** and **G# dim** if you prefer.

Flo







I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

Playing from a Fake Book

Sheet music can be very expensive and even more so if you buy the full version including right / left hand notation. Often, I've bought books containing perhaps 20 pieces when there has been maybe only three or four that I've actually wanted.

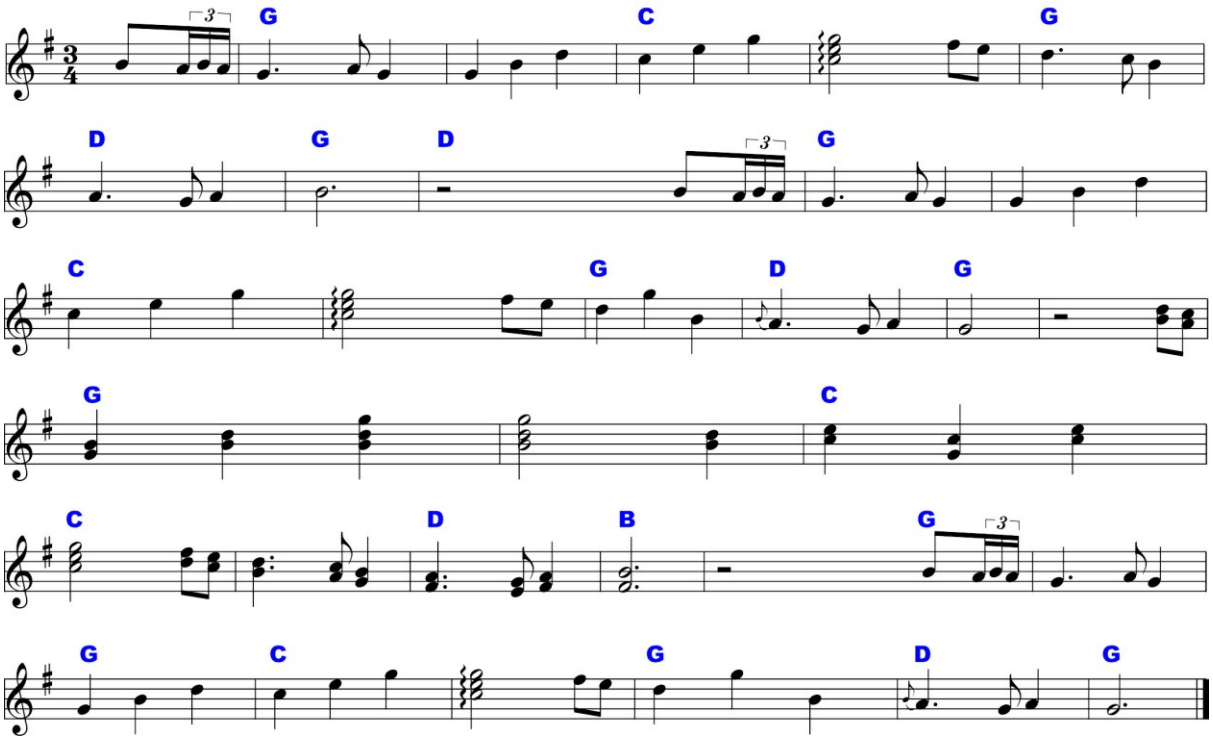
Fake books typically consist of maybe 100 tunes but only with top line (melody) notation and the appropriate chord symbols included. This is by far the most economical way of buying sheet music enabling you to acquire hundreds of pieces at a comparatively low cost.

Whether using auto-accompaniment or not, a basic understanding of chords, scales and arpeggios is essential for playing from fake books. Between the information here and the *'Chord'* downloads you've been given an extremely extensive list of chords in keyboard view with information on how to create different inversions where necessary and a good idea about fingering. Quite probably you will need to refer to these until you have learnt them completely.

Here we will be looking at playing both *with* and *without* auto-accompaniment.

Below is a typical example of how music notation looks in *'fake book'* format.

Traditional Irish Melody in G major - (top line)



Immediately you'll notice that printing the music in this format takes up less space than the full conventional format and consequently is more economical to produce.

However, if you intend playing classical music, I recommend that you obtain the full music notation and learn the pieces exactly as written. Also, if this is the route you want to take, you'd be advised to seek professional classical tuition at some point. Having said this, the information given here comes from a combination of classical tuition and professional *'pop'* experience and as such provides a good *initial* grounding for whichever direction you ultimately intend following.

Using Auto-Accompaniment

Assuming your keyboard has this function, if playing from a fake book and using auto-accompaniment simply choose an appropriate style and tempo, learn / play the melody with your right hand in the upper part of the keyboard and play the appropriate chords with your left hand in the lower section of the keyboard - easy peasy!

Hmmm!!

Well sorry, I know even this is not easy peasy to begin with, as there's still a lot to learn.

There are many differences between various makes and models of arranger keyboards, but all will have the following functions to consider:

- Split point
- Style
- Intro, variations and fills
- Sounds (for upper portion)
- Bass inversions
- Chord hold & Chord fingering mode
- Sequencer

We'll now look at these points.

Your keyboard may have a default split point somewhere midway up the board, but you will always be able to alter this - *if all else fails read the manual!* On a 76 key-board, I recommend splitting at the second **G** from the bottom which gives you enough room at the lower end to play any chord easily, and plenty of room at the top for the melody. On smaller keyboards you will need at least an octave in the lower section, perhaps just a little more.

One of the things I've always found daunting about arranger keyboards is that most have a huge amount of mediocre styles to wade through before finding any really good ones. Very often styles are created to sound really good with a specific song in order to demonstrate how good the keyboard is. In most cases you can download even more styles which makes it even more daunting (and time consuming). Or you could create

your own styles which is even more time consuming and certainly not for the novice. I personally prefer some of the older less complicated styles.

Each style consists of a rhythm backing, a bass part, as well as other accompaniment instruments and can range from simple to very complicated. Within each style there are generally two or three or more variations as well as an intro, fills and an ending. You would need to get to know these by trial and error before using them in a performance.

Some styles will automatically choose a compatible sound for the upper portion of the keyboard, but you will always have the option to change this. Very often as you change variations this sound will also change unless you program it not to.

In all cases you would be able to alter the tempo, but be sure that you choose a style with the same time value as the piece you intend playing i.e. **3/4**, **4/4** etc.

Just about all arranger keyboards have a bass note inversion option which means that, for instance if you are playing the second inversion of a **C** chord where **G** is the lower note of the inverted chord, you could set the bass accompaniment to play either the true root note of the chord (**C**), which is usually the default setting, or to play the lowest note of the inversion (**G**). Until you gain experience, I would suggest that you don't allow the bass to play inversions.

The *'hold'* mode means that when you play a chord in the lower section, the accompaniment will continue even when you release the chord and will simply change as you change chords. The alternative mode is that the accompaniment will stop as soon as you release the chord. The *'hold'* mode is preferred as a general rule.

Many arranger boards have an option where you can play chords and trigger the accompaniment in the lower section by playing one or two notes (rather than the normal triads). Although this function may be useful (and fun) to the absolute beginner, I would advise against using this function unless absolutely necessary - learn the chords and learn to play them!

All of the triad and 7th chords shown previously should be recognised by the auto-accompaniment, but initially if you come across chords such as 9ths or 13ths etc., short versions of these (which I haven't included) may not be recognised. Following is a list of suitable simple alternatives. These are *not* perfect, but they will work.

Simple Chord Alternatives

9th - 7th	b9th - 7th	13th - 6th
M9th - M7th	11th - sus4th	m7b9th - m7th
sus - sus4th	6/9 - 6th	b13th - +7

Note that for auto-accompaniment to work effectively, the chords need to be played with precision timing, usually bang on the first beat of the bar, although sometimes the chords could change on every beat which makes the process far more difficult.

If you have difficulty with this, another option is to record each chord and variation change into the sequencer in step time. To do this you wouldn't even need to physically play the chords, but you *would* need to read the keyboard manual in order to find out how to do it. This could then be saved as a *'song'* and when playing back, you would only need to play the melody with your right hand. This feature can be useful for lots of reasons but particularly brilliant for anyone with limited playing ability or for anyone who may be disabled. - Cheating? - *It's all about enjoying yourself!*

Beyond all of the above, most boards have numerous other features such as dual voicing, automatic melody harmony, drum mapping and oodles of effects etc., but again, you would need to read the manual!

As mentioned previously, one big disadvantage of using auto-accompaniment is that you could easily fall into the trap of wasting too much time *'playing around'* and never really master the instrument. Having said this even playing well with auto-accompaniment takes a fair amount of practice. And of course, it depends on how serious you intend taking it. If you are getting enjoyment, then it has to be good!

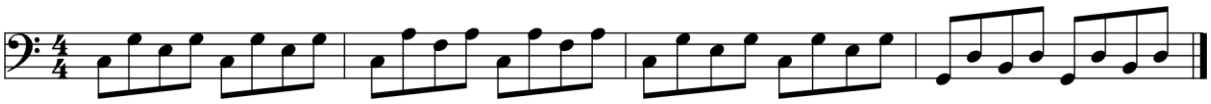
Well what if I don't want to use auto-accompaniment or haven't got it?

Playing From a Fake Book Without Auto-Accompaniment

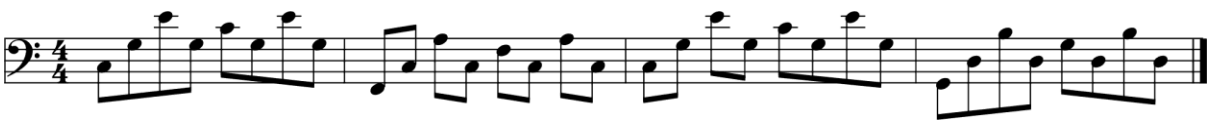
If you don't have, or don't want to use the auto-accompaniment, you will need to create a suitable accompaniment for the melody using the information from the chord symbols. This can either be very simple or very complicated depending on your ability and theoretical knowledge.

But you will see that understanding the chords and arpeggios shown previously is vitally important even for a basic accompaniment.

Probably the simplest way is to use broken chords as shown below. This enables the music to keep moving even if the melody line is very slow.

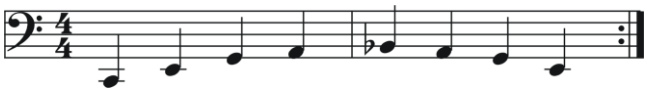


Notice in the first example (above) that the broken chords are: **C major** root position followed by **F major** second inversion, back to **C major**, then **G major** root position. And are all very *'close'* as against the next example which uses the same chords in a *'wider span'*. The former is seen often in classical music and the latter in more modern music.

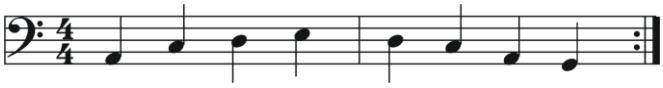


As always there are infinite variations of both.

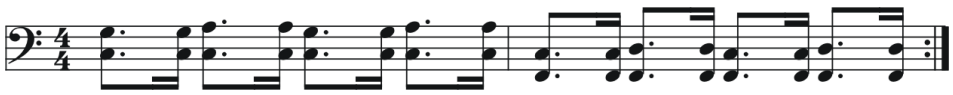
Other very common left-hand passages include the *'walking bass'* patterns as shown below (over a **C7** chord).



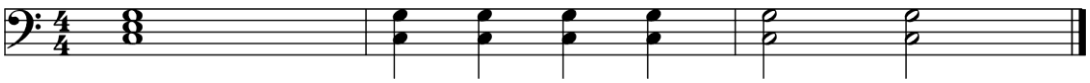
Or a pentatonic minor pattern (**A minor**) below:



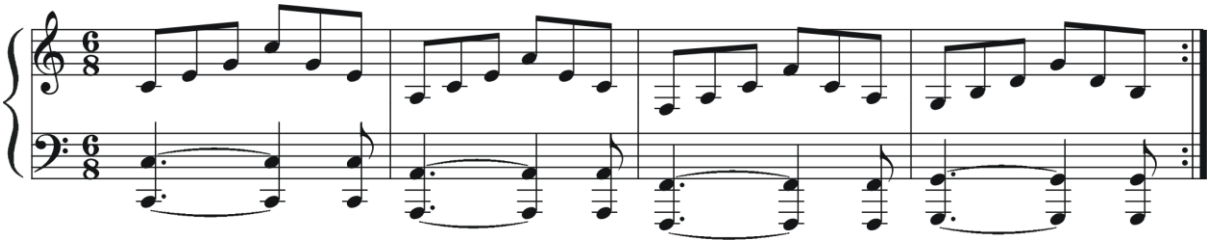
And one of the many *'boogie-woogie'* style riffs as shown in the next example (over **C / C6** and **F / F6** chords), usually used in the **12-bar blues** sequence.



But initially you may want to keep things as simple as possible in the left hand particularly if your right hand is *'busy'*. This can be as simple as a sustained triad on the first beat of the bar or a repeated tonic and fifth on each beat or every other beat as shown below.

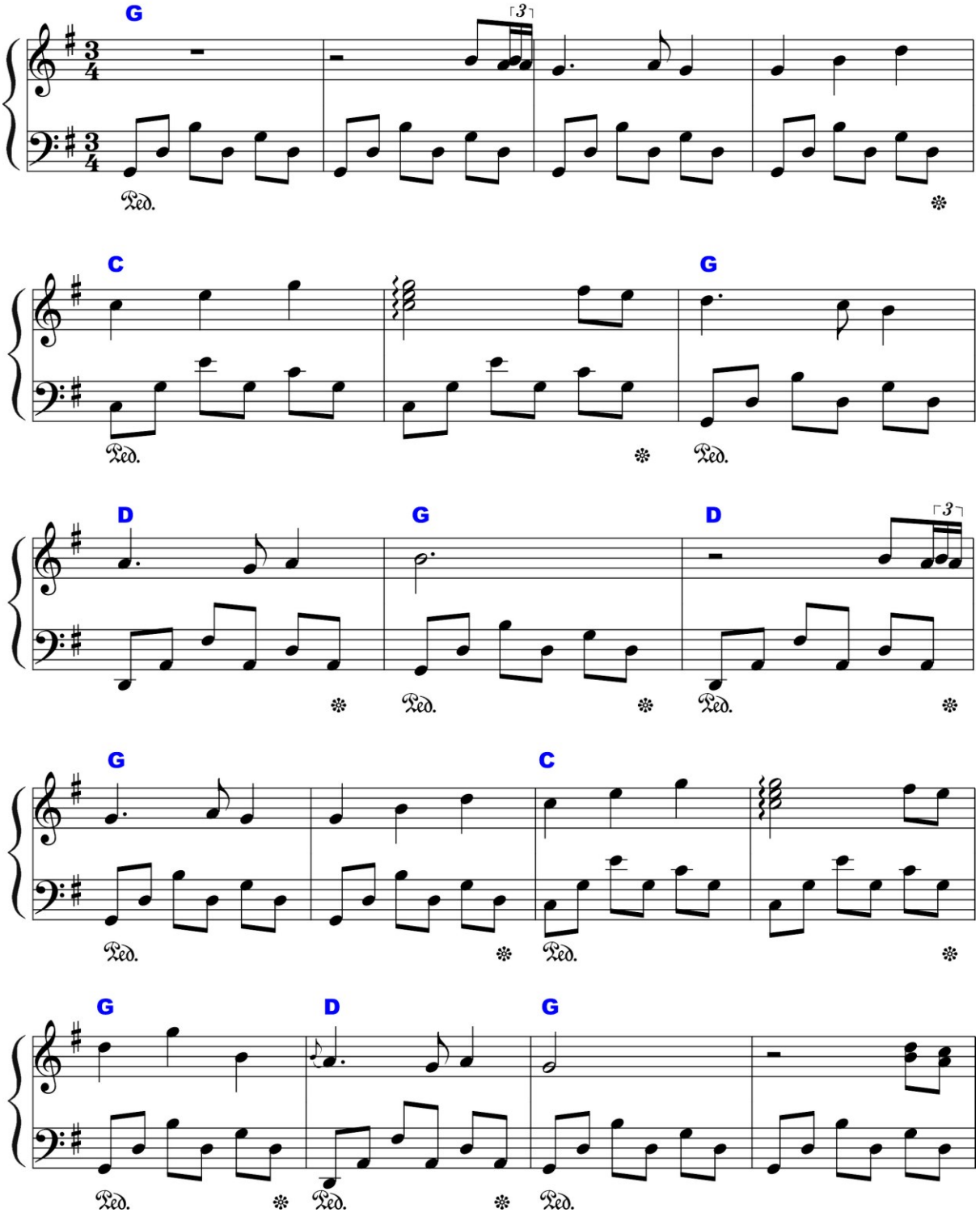


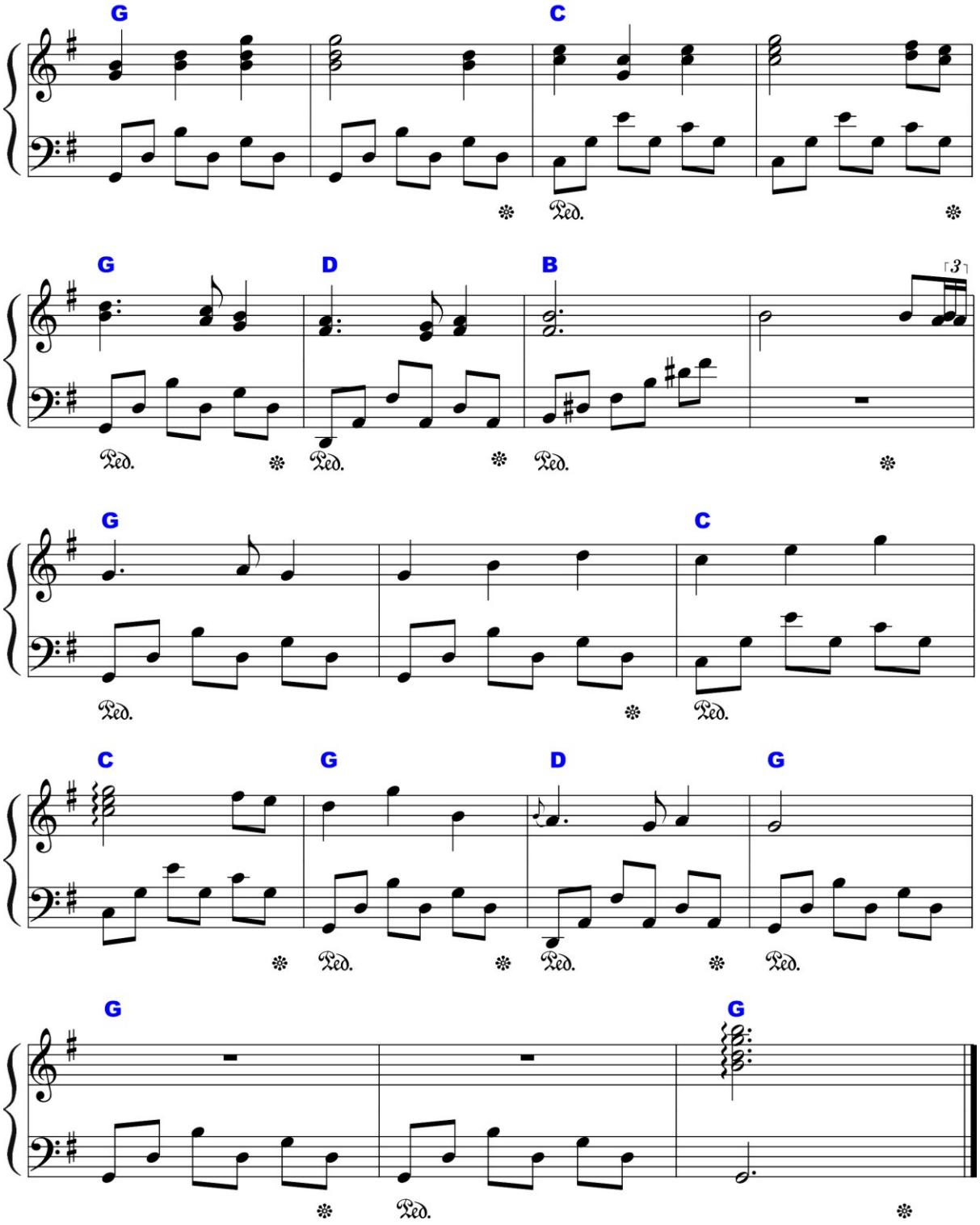
If accompanying a singer or playing with a band, it's likely that your right hand would be playing chords / arpeggios and other embellishments while your left hand compliments these by playing octaves or 10ths (if you have big enough hands).



Traditional Irish Melody - (without auto-accompaniment)

Ok, so using the information described here's the same piece again with a suitable left-hand accompaniment.





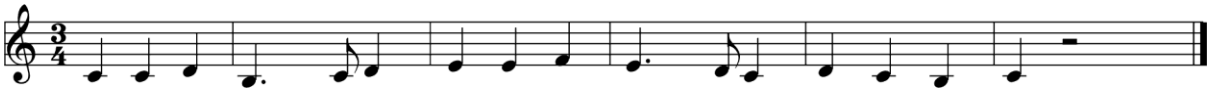
I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding
improves day by day!

What if there's No Chord Line?

With most fake books there will be a chord line, but it's bound to happen at some point that you'll come across something that you want to play that doesn't have a chord line and you'll have to work out your own.

This is nowhere as difficult as you might imagine especially if you have learnt about chord construction as already dealt with.

Ok so as an example we'll use the first few bars of the UK national anthem '*God Save the Queen'*.



The first thing always is to look at the key signature. In this case there is no key signature, so it has to be **C major** or **A minor**. To determine which of these it is, you need to look for any accidental sharps, particularly **F#** or **G#** which are included in the **A minor** scales. I know we've only briefly mentioned the melodic minor scales but remember these have a sharpened 6th and 7th *ascending.*

Looking at the notation, you'll see that there are none of these, but there aren't any **G** naturals either, but because the phrase both starts and finishes on **'C'** it's clear to me that it's in **C major** and not **A minor**.

So, the first chord is probably **C major**, based on the fact that's it's clearly in the key of **C major** and the first note is '**C**'.

But **'C'** is also contained in other triads as follows:

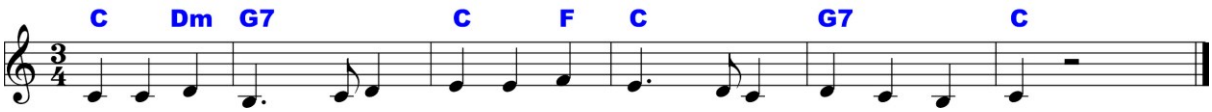
- **C** is the tonic (root note) of **C major**
- **C** is the tonic (root note) of **C minor**
- **C** is the mediant (3rd) of **A minor**
- **C** is the mediant (3rd) of **A♭ major**
- **C** is the dominant (5th) of **F major**
- **C** is the dominant (5th) of **F minor**

So, you can see that there are a fair few possibilities, and this is before we start with suspended 4ths, 7ths and 9ths, etc.

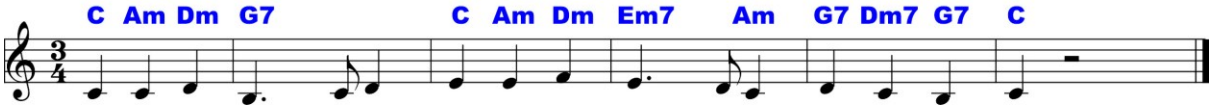
But out of the six most likely contenders only three of these are *diatonic* chords in the key of **C major** (derived from the notes of the **C major** scale). And these are **C major**, **A minor** and **F major**. So, these are the most likely ones to fit easily, but that doesn't mean that the non-diatonic chords won't work, sometimes using these can add some colourful variations.

And the same method applies to the remaining notes.

So, with all this in mind a simple chord progression for this passage is as follows:



Or you could be a bit more inventive and add a few more chords as follows:



Notice that each *main* melody note *excluding passing notes* contains either the 1st, 3rd or 5th note of the chosen chord as explained previously, with the exception of the **Dm7** where the **C** is the 7th.

You may also note that there are quite a few **V - I** progressions which remember is the strongest chord progression. These are **Am - Dm - G7 - C**; **Am - Dm**; **Em7 - Am** and **Dm7 - G7 - C**. And as this progression is the strongest of all progressions it will also sound reasonably pleasing to the ear, *although it has to be said that only Brian May can make this piece swing!*

Now which of these is *'right'* or rather *'as written'* I really don't know and can't be bothered to find out, as both *work*, and that's all that matters.

Obviously if you were playing with other musicians, you'd all have to be playing the same arrangement, but if you're playing on your own you can do anything that works!

Acquiring Free Sheet Music

Very little *new* music is legally available free of charge due to copyright laws and I'm not suggesting that these laws should be violated. But 70 years after a composer has died his / her music becomes copyright free. And as some of the best composers have died over 70 years ago there's plenty to go at. All of the compositions that I've included in this book are copyright free (or my own) which is why I've chosen to use them.

So, don't waste a fortune buying classical, ragtime or even early blues pieces from music stores as they're virtually all available free of charge from internet sites such as: https://www.free-scores.com or https://www.8notes.com . Another good source for free sheet music is to download the Casio *'Chordana Play for Piano'* app (compatible with Android and iOS) and then open the *'pdf score viewer'* where you'll find a good selection of classical pieces for a variety of skill levels. No doubt a simple *internet* search will reveal many more sources.

I particularly recommend downloading **Bach's Prelude in C** from the first link above, as it's fairly easy and sounds great - *if you can play the first bar, you can play the rest!*

If selecting classical pieces, probably the hardest thing is being aware of which pieces are suitable for your ability. A good trick is to check out the Associated Board of Music's exam pieces which are graded I - VIII. Obviously start out with grade I.

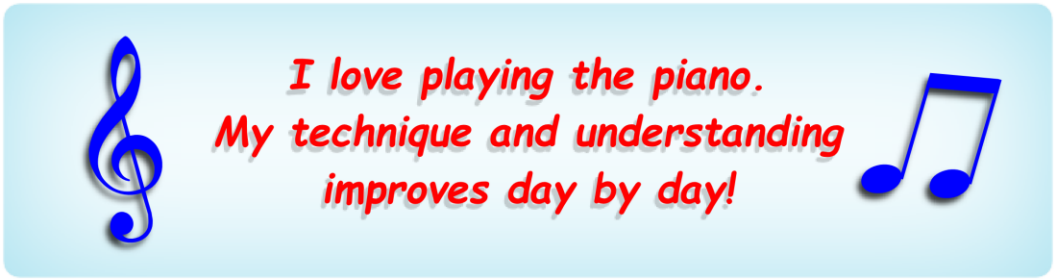
If you intend gigging (or if you just want to be incredibly organised) it's a good idea to photocopy / scan the entire music notation that you need and collate it into one or two clear pocket folders to keep everything easy to find. Technically this is a breach of copyright, but if you do this just for your own use with music that you have legitimately acquired or purchased then I can't see anything unethical about it.

Additionally, you could store all the styles and settings for each piece into your keyboard, making it available for easy instant access (if this feature is available).

Just about all the modern *'pop'* music is available as sheet music for a price, but much of this is frankly unsuitable for piano as it's not been *written* for piano. Even the best pianist in the world isn't going to make a bit of *'Led Zeppelin'* sound descent on a piano - great as it may be, it's simply not suitable!

I've personally scoured the music shops looking for music that sounds right on a piano and that I want to play. Often, I've bought a compilation of pieces which only contains one or two pieces that I actually want - *very uneconomical!*

The only book that I've ever bought where I can honestly say that I like every piece is called *'Tranquillity'* by Irish composer Phil Coulter. And all of these pieces can be played by *'mortals'!*



Korg Kronos 2 Workstation (73 keys) - very Hi-Tech

This is probably the ultimate recording keyboard / workstation. Totally amazing in every respect. ***I have one of these and I love it!***

⬅ Thank You

Well that's it folks, but finally and most importantly, I'd like to thank you kindly for buying this book. It's been my sincere desire to give excellent value for money with this and all my books. I've worked very long and very hard to achieve this and hope that you think I've succeeded.

If you've enjoyed this, your positive feedback (on Google / Amazon / Lulu etc.) would be very much appreciated. - *Thanks!*

Please feel free to contact me at http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/contact_us.html if you have any queries. I'd be pleased to hear from you, and I will always answer (unless I've snuffed it), but please check your spam box just in case my reply goes amiss.

Download Links

The download link for the pdf printable version of this book is: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/abso_se_dl.html .

And the included links to all the other items:

- Hanon Exercises: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/hanon_dl.html
- Scales & Arpeggios: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/scales_dl.html
- Chords (complete): https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/chords_dl.html
- Chords (short): https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/short_chords_dl.html
- Easy Piano Music: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/gonk_music_1_dl.html
- Easy Keyboard: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/free_top_line_songs.html

But please honour my copyright and the hard work I've put into these by using them for your own use only. Thank you!

Quick return link to introduction page.

If you have any trouble with the download link, I'll be happy to assist.

What Next?

If you've covered everything herein, you should have a good grounding ready for further advancement in your chosen genre. If you want to go the classical route, then I strongly recommend that you have some one-to-one tuition. But whichever way you want to go you will at least need to learn the rest of the scales, chords and exercises shown in the downloads listed above.

Further Reading

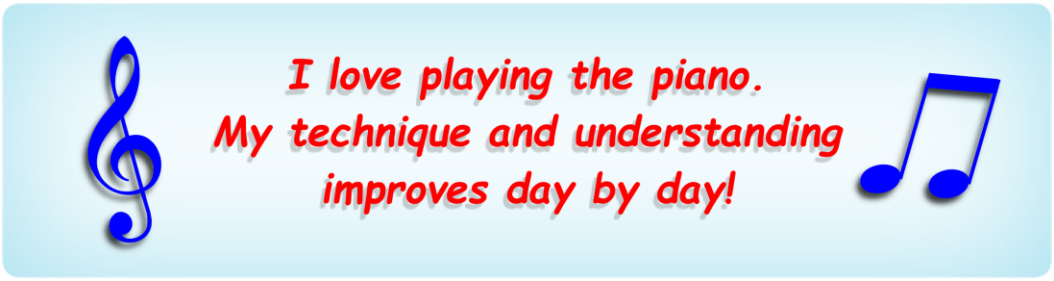
Beyond the books that I've written myself I can thoroughly recommend the following:

- *'Tranquillity'* - Phil Coulter
- *'Jazz from Scratch'* - Charles Beale
- *'Boogie Woogie Hanon' / 'Blues Hanon' / 'Jazz Hanon'* - Leo Alfassy

Please also see my web page at: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_reviews.html for unbiased reviews of new keyboards as well as *free* DAW recording software.

With gratitude and wishing you good health, wealth, success, and wisdom,

Martin



Clavia Nord Stage 3 Synth / Piano / Organ (88 keys)

This is certainly one of the very best professional boards availalble for stage and recording use, and incorporates some the best piano, organ and synth sounds available. - I love it!