



Advanced Harmony, Melody & Rhythm

Week One – Four Chord Song



Course Overview



Analyzing compositions from a variety of genres and eras



Exploring techniques and creative ideas



Taking inspiration from songs and artists



Exercising your compositional talents



This course provides a comfortable non judgemental space for students to freely explore and express their creative talents.

- Thinking outside the box
- Weekly exercises and challenges
- Developing your own unique writing style
- Optional professional briefs for extra challenge

KEY IN MUSIC

The Basics



12 Notes

in musical octave



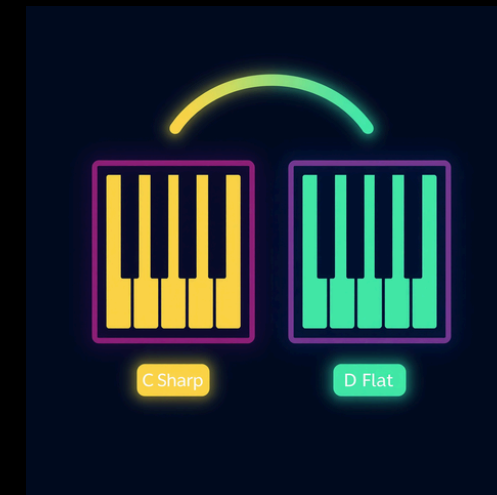
Natural Notes

A B C D E F G



Sharps & Flats

black keys on piano



Enharmonic

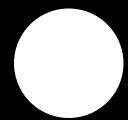
equivalents e.g.
C# = Db



Questions

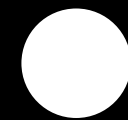
WHO KNOWS WHY
SHARPS AND FLATS
HAVE 2 NAMES?

KEY IN MUSIC **Continued**



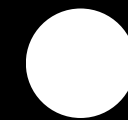
Sharps & Flats Naming

Sharp raises a note by one semitone; flat lowers it by one semitone. Each sharp/flat note has an enharmonic equivalent with the same pitch but a different name (e.g., C# = Db).



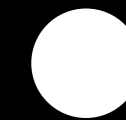
Octave Definition

An octave spans 12 semitones from one note to its next repetition at double the frequency. The same note name appears at each octave, completing the chromatic cycle.



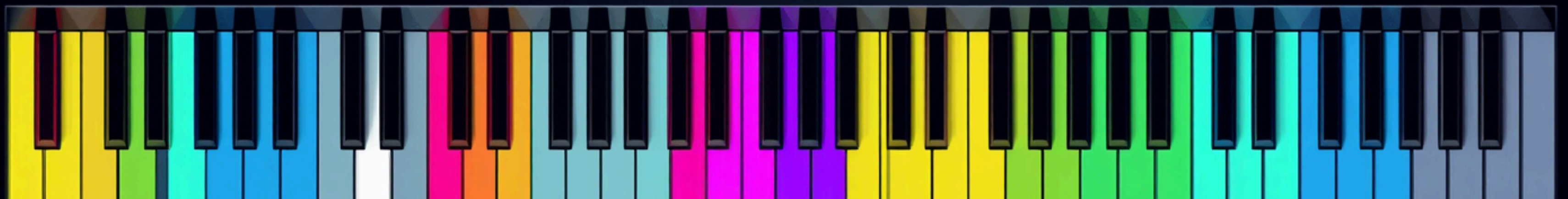
Key / Scale as 7 Notes

A key or scale selects 7 notes from the 12 available. These 7 notes form the tonal foundation for melody and harmony within that key.



Diatonic vs Non-Diatonic

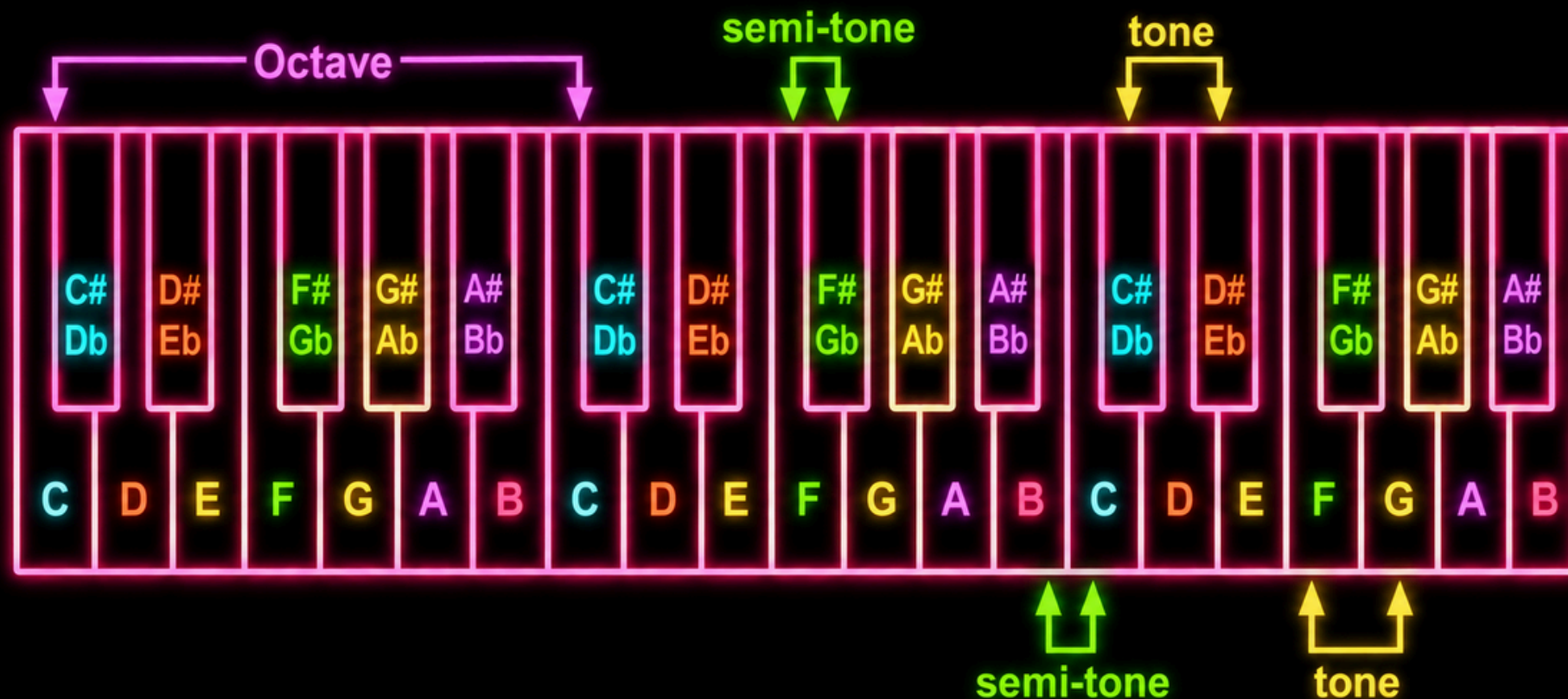
Diatonic notes belong to the key. Non-diatonic includes borrowed chords, chromatic notes, secondary dominants, and modulation to new keys.



Understanding the building blocks of scales and keys through tone and semitone intervals – the foundation of all Western harmony and melody.

Musical Intervals

Musical Intervals



Every 'Key' can be played as a scale.

A scale is all of the notes in the key played in consecutive order.

The Major Scale formula is:

Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Tone, Semitone

This formula helps you work out the notes of each key.

Every major key has a relative minor key that uses the same notes / key signature.

Circle of 5ths and 4ths - Working out the notes in each key

Circle of 4ths - Flats (b)

Start at C major (no b)

Count up 4 (C, D, E, F)

Sharpen the 4th (Bb)

F major scale has 1 b = Bb

Count up 4 (F, G, A, Bb)

Sharpen the 4th (Bb)

Bb major scale has 2 b = Bb & Eb

Continue with the diagram

Circle of 5ths - Sharps (#)

Start at C major (no #)

Count up 5 (C, D, E, F, G)

Sharpen the 7th (F#)

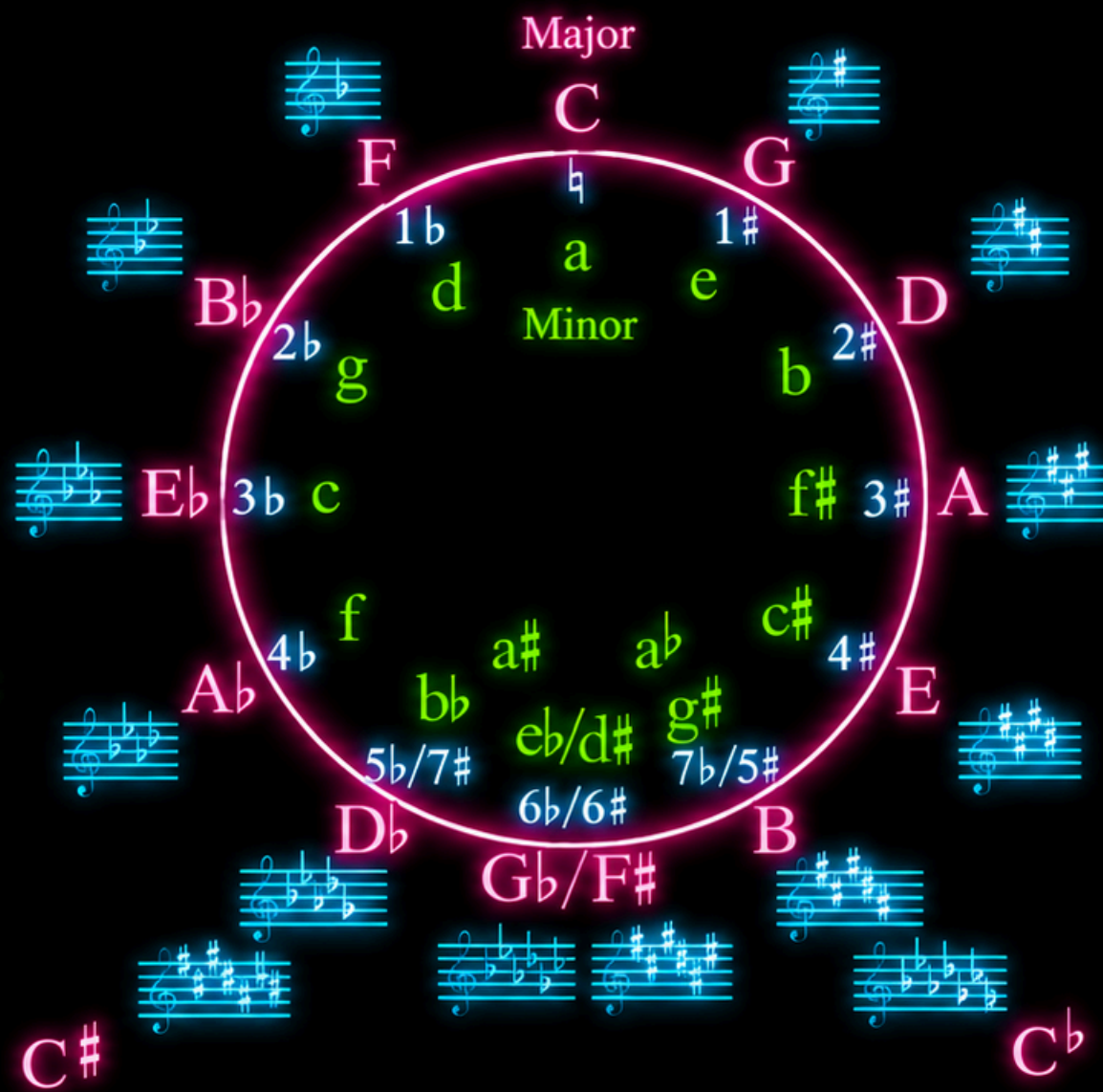
G major scale has 1 # = F#

Count up 5 (G, A, B, C, D)

Sharpen the 7th (C#)

D major scale has 2 # = F# & C#

Continue with the diagram



ROMAN NUMERALS IN CHORDS



- I = 1st chord - Major
- ii = 2nd chord - minor
- iii = 3rd chord - minor
- IV = 4th chord - Major
- V = 5th chord - Major
- vi = 6th chord - minor
- vii° = 7th chord - diminished

Let's look at the C major relative chords in TRIADS. A triad is a 3 note chord consisting of the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes of a key.

C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	C major chord = C E G
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	D minor chord = D F A
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	E minor chord = E G B
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	F major chord = F A C
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	G major chord = G B D
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	A minor chord = A C E
C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C	B diminished chord = B D F

Triad Intervals

Major Third
4 semitones

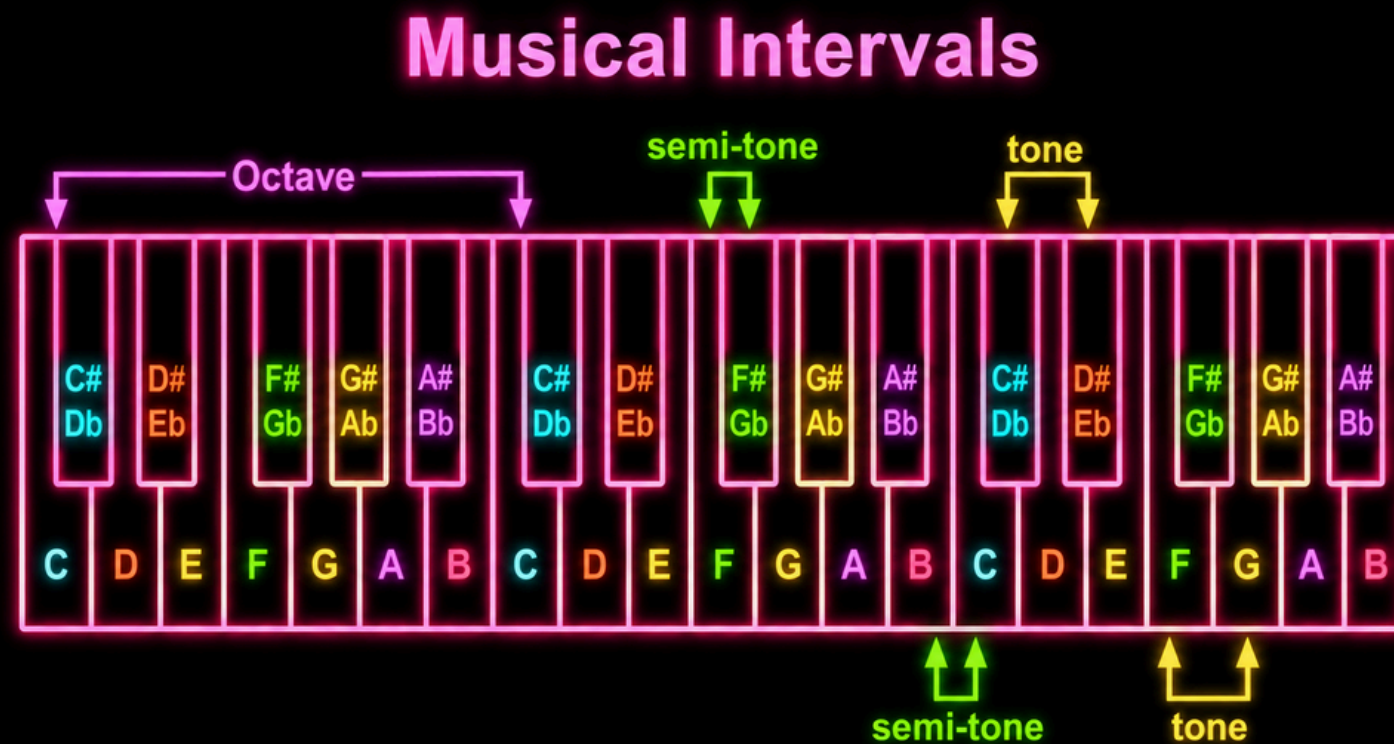
Minor Third
3 semitones

Major Triad
4 + 3 semitones

Augmented Triad
4 + 4 semitones

Minor Triad
3 + 4 semitones

Diminished Triad
3 + 3 semitones



CHORD INVERSIONS

On the piano, TRIADS can be played in 3 different ways.
What changes when you invert a chord

Bass note / harmonic foundation

The lowest note defines the harmonic “feel” of the chord.
Example: C/E (first inversion) feels lighter, less anchored, compared to root position C (stable and strong).

Smoothness of voice leading

Inversions make chord transitions smoother because the bass moves stepwise or minimally rather than jumping large intervals.
This is why I–V–vi–IV progressions in pop often use inversions in piano arrangements.

Perceived tension or openness

Root position → strongest, most stable
1st inversion → gentle, flowing, airy
2nd inversion → slightly suspended, less resolved.

Texture and spacing

Changing the inversion spreads notes differently in the left/right hands, affecting the fullness and brightness of the chord.

C Major Root Position



C Major 1st Inversion



C Major 2nd Inversion



Pre **Session Reading**

DID YOU UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF CIRCLE OF 5THS / 4THS ?

CAN YOU COMFORTABLY WORK OUT ANY KEY BASED OFF THE FORMULAS?

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE ROMAN NUMERAL SYSTEM WITH REGARDS TO CHORDS?

CAN YOU WORK OUT ALL OF THE RELATIVE CHORDS IN ANY KEY?

PRE SESSION EXERCISE

SHOWCASE YOUR CHORD PROGRESSIONS IN DIFFERENT KEYS.
WHAT WERE YOUR CHALLENGES?
DID YOU EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT CHORD VOICINGS?

RELATIVE CHORD SUBSTITUTION EXERCISE

EXPLORE HOW RELATIVE CHORDS CHANGE THE FEEL OF THE PROGRESSION, BY USING THE MINOR/MAJOR SUBSTITUTES WHERE BOTH CHORDS SHARE 2 OF

THE SAME NOTES

I - VI / III

II - IV / VII°

III - V / I

IV - II / VI

G - III / VII°

VI - I / IV

VII° - II / V

INSTEAD OF I - V - VI - IV THE PROGRESSION COULD BECOME VI - III - I - II

Exploring 6 Different Diatonic Chord Progressions



I - V - vi - IV



ii - I - V



iii - vi - ii - V



IV - I - V - vi



V - I - vi - IV



vi - IV - I - V

CAN YOU WORK OUT HOW TO PLAY THESE CHORD PROGRESSIONS IN ANY KEY AT RANDOM?
WHAT FEELING/EMOTION DO EACH OF THESE CHORD PROGRESSIONS GIVE YOU?

Four Chord Song Concept

In each of these 'four chord songs', the melodies start on a different note within the key. What else is different about them in terms of harmony/melody.

"With or Without You" – U2

Key – D major

Chord progression: I – V – vi – IV D – A – Bm – G

Melody starts on: F# (the 3rd of the D major chord)

"Let It Be" – The Beatles

Key – C major

Chord progression: I – V – vi – IV C – G – Am – F

Melody starts on: G (the 5th of the C major chord)

"Don't Stop Believin'" – Journey (chorus part)

Key – E major

Progression: I–V–vi–IV E–B–C#m–A

Melody start: The iconic "Don't stop believin'" phrase begins on the 6th (C#), the relative minor of the tonic.



In Class **Assignment**

PITCHING OBJECTIVE / BRIEF – USING YOUR RECORDING SOFTWARE, COMPOSE A 16 BAR INSTRUMENTAL, USING ONLY RELATIVE CHORDS (IN ANY KEY) FOR THE LATEST ‘COCA-COLA’ TV ADVERT. WRITE AN ARPEGGIATED LOOP, EXPERIMENTING WITH RHYTHM AND SUSPENDED/EXTENDED HARMONY.

FEEL FREE TO COMPLETE THIS TASK ALONE OR IN A SMALL GROUP.

DRAW INSPIRATION FROM THIS COCA-COLA ADVERT THAT USES THE SONG ‘SWEET DISPOSITION’ BY TEMPER TRAP.

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/OAB-F7Y3IXC?SI=8PZRGn4W67rVEDTA](https://youtu.be/OAB-F7Y3IXC?si=8PZRGn4W67rVEDTA)

“SWEET DISPOSITION” BY THE TEMPER TRAP IS AN INDIE-ROCK ANTHEM KNOWN FOR ITS SHIMMERING GUITARS, SOARING FALSETTO VOCALS, AND ATMOSPHERIC, EMOTIONALLY UPLIFTING SOUND. RELEASED IN 2008, THE SONG BUILDS GRADUALLY FROM A SPACIOUS, ECHO-LADEN GUITAR RIFF INTO A POWERFUL, LAYERED CRESCENDO, CREATING A SENSE OF MOMENTUM AND OPENNESS. ITS STRUCTURE IS UNUSUALLY MINIMAL FOR A HIT SINGLE—BUILT MOSTLY AROUND ONE REPEATED LYRICAL REFRAIN—YET IT FEELS EXPANSIVE DUE TO THE BAND’S USE OF REVERB, DYNAMIC SWELLS, AND EVOLVING INSTRUMENTAL TEXTURES. LYRICALLY, IT FOCUSES ON THEMES OF YOUTH, SPONTANEITY, AND LIVING IN THE MOMENT, WHILE MUSICALLY IT BLENDS DREAM-POP, POST-ROCK, AND INDIE ELEMENTS. THE TRACK BECAME A BREAKOUT HIT FOR THE BAND, GAINING WIDESPREAD USE IN FILMS, COMMERCIALS, AND FESTIVALS BECAUSE OF ITS EUPHORIC, CINEMATIC QUALITY.

**“SWEET DISPOSITION” USES ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC AND EMOTIONALLY EFFECTIVE PROGRESSIONS IN MODERN POP/INDIE MUSIC:
IN THE SONG’S KEY (D MAJOR) D – (A) – BM – G**

THIS IS THE SAME FAMOUS FOUR CHORD PROGRESSION USED IN MANY UPLIFTING, NOSTALGIC, AND EMOTIONALLY RESONANT TRACKS. BUT SWEET DISPOSITION DOES SOMETHING SPECIAL WITH IT. IT REPEATS WITH ALMOSTS NO HARMONIC TENSION. THE PROGRESSION LOOPS SEAMLESSLY—NO SHARP CADENCES, NO DRAMATIC STOPS. THIS MAKES IT IDEAL FOR: VOICE-OVER NARRATION, MONTAGE SEQUENCES, VISUALS THAT NEED SPACE TO BREATHE, SLOW-MOTION SHOTS, EMOTIONAL BUILD-UPS.

IT’S SUPPORTIVE MUSIC, NOT INTRUSIVE.

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EVEN THOUGH THE CHORDS ARE SIMPLE, THE TEMPER TRAP'S USE OF REVERBED GUITARS, DELAY PATTERNS, OPEN VOICINGS, SUSTAINED PADS CREATES AN EXPANSIVE, CINEMATIC TEXTURE. THE GUITAR LOOP IS BASED AROUND THE MAJOR 1 CHORD, BUT TOUCHES ON THE 4TH NOTE CREATING A FEELING OF SUSPENSION.

THIS TURNS A SIMPLE PROGRESSION INTO SOMETHING EPIC AND WIDESCREEN.

THE PROGRESSION IS FAMILIAR BUT NOT DISTRACTING

I–V–VI–IV IS UNIVERSALLY PLEASANT, INSTANTLY RECOGNIZABLE, AND EMOTIONALLY NEUTRAL ENOUGH TO BE PLACED BENEATH ALMOST ANY STORYLINE.

IT'S A PROGRESSION THAT FEELS COMFORTING, MODERN, CINEMATIC, UPLIFTING WITHOUT BEING CHEESY.

THIS "FRIENDLY FAMILIARITY" LETS VIEWERS CONNECT EMOTIONALLY WITHOUT CONSCIOUSLY NOTICING THE MUSIC. REPETITION BUILDS A TRANCE-LIKE EMOTIONAL ARC BECAUSE THE SONG STAYS ON THAT LOOP FOR MOST OF ITS RUNTIME, IT ALLOWS LONG EMOTIONAL CLIMBS, DYNAMIC SHIFTS, LAYERING OF VOCALS AND INSTRUMENTS, VISUAL STORYTELLING TO TAKE CENTER STAGE.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT EDITORS NEED WHEN CUTTING FOOTAGE FOR ADS OR FILM SCENES.

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Why It's Perfect for TV & Film

- INSTANT EMOTIONAL GRAB
- DOESN'T OVERPOWER DIALOGUE
- FEELS CINEMATIC AT ANY VOLUME
- WORKS UNDER SLOW-MOTION, LANDSCAPE SHOTS, OR PRODUCT REVEALS
- UNIVERSAL EMOTIONAL RESONANCE
- EASILY EDITED, LOOPED, OR REMIXED
- FITS BOTH INDIE AUTHENTICITY AND COMMERCIAL POLISH

THE SONG IS SIMPLE ENOUGH TO FIT ANYTHING, BUT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO ELEVATE EVERYTHING.

PITCHING OBJECTIVE / BRIEF - USING YOUR RECORDING SOFTWARE, COMPOSE A 16 BAR INSTRUMENTAL, USING ONLY RELATIVE CHORDS (IN ANY KEY) FOR THE LATEST 'COCA-COLA' TV ADVERT. FEEL FREE TO COMPLETE THIS TASK ALONE OR IN A SMALL GROUP.



Post Session Assignment



Continue working on your in-class pitching assignment. Keep composing, stay inspired, and bring your unique creative voice to every bar you write. Your music matters – make it count!



Keep Creating!



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