

Playing By Ear for Piano Chords

Exercises



Lesson 1: Starting Notes, Key & Melody



Exercise 1

Choose a song to start figuring out the melody with. This could be a simple song you know well or one of the following:

Jingle Bells
Happy Birthday
O Danny Boy
Take Me Out To the Ball Game
House of the Rising Sun

Step 1: Listen to it.

Step 2: Find the starting note. (Are you in the right octave?)

Step 3: Work out the key. Are there any black notes?

Step 4: Start working out the melody (including those black notes).

Questions to ask:

Is the melody going up (higher) or down (lower)?

Are the notes close together or far apart?

Keys & Black Notes



Sharps / Flats	Key
None	C
F#	G
F# C#	D
F# C# G#	A
F# C# G# D#	E
F# C# G# D# A#	B
F# C# G# D# A# E#	F#
F# C# G# D# A# E# B#	C#
Bb.....	F
Bb Eb	Bb
Bb Eb Ab	Eb
Bb Eb Ab Db	Ab
Bb Eb Ab Db Gb	Db
Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb.....	Gb
Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb Fb.....	Cb

Lesson 2: Intervals

Exercise 1

Choose an interval, play the specific one over and over for a few days or a week. Really get used to the sound of it.

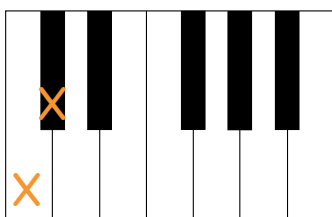
Exercise 2

Choose a key. Play a variety of different intervals in that key getting used to the sounds of them.

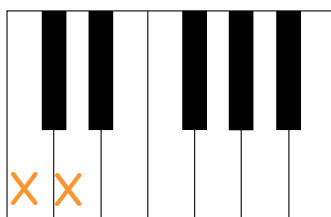
Interval Cheat Sheet

Note: the pattern of the interval will apply no matter which note you start on. Just look at how many notes (semi-tones) are in between.

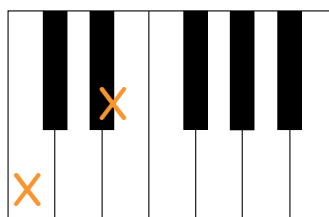
Minor 2nd



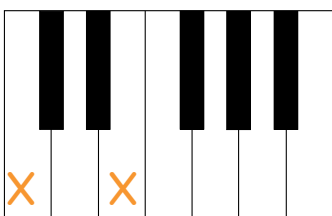
Major 2nd



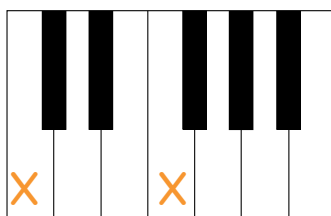
Minor 3rd



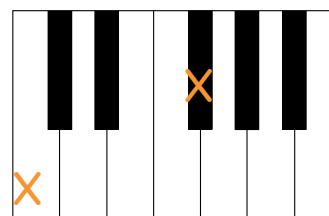
Major 3rd



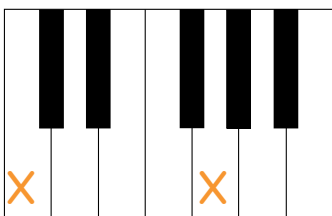
Perfect 4th



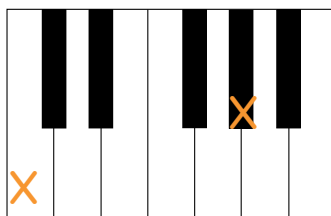
Augmented 4th / Diminished 5th



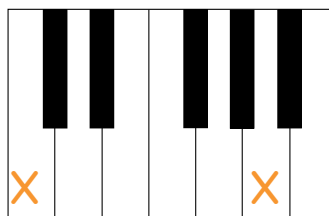
Perfect 5th



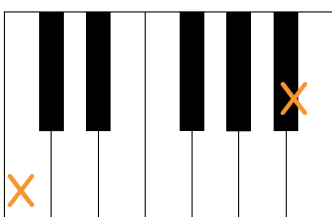
Minor 6th



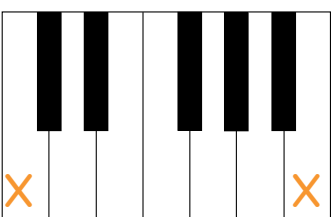
Major 6th



Minor 7th



Major 7th



Lesson 3: Bass Lines



Exercise 1

Work out the bass lines to at least 5 different songs. Use "4 chord songs" for this exercise. You can Google "list of 4 chord songs" or use the following lists:

<https://blog.truefire.com/guitar-lessons/229-easy-guitar-songs-just-4-chords/>

<https://www.rockademy.co.uk/single-post/2017/05/09/50-songs-that-have-only-4-chords>

<https://www.fender.com/articles/how-to/40-of-the-easiest-songs-to-learn-on-guitar>

The Process:

1. Find your starting note - the first bass note in a chord progression.
2. Work out the bass notes / bass line.
3. Figure out the first chord in the chord progression.
4. Try to work out which key you're in. It's like the key of the first note of the bass line. (Optional)
5. Work out the chords for the rest of the bass line (just play major or minor chords for now).

Lesson 4: Hearing Different Types of Chords



Exercise 1

Play specific types of chords over and over. Get used to the sound of them. Really work on hearing the sound of that type of chord.

In order of importance:

Major (ex. C)

Minor (ex. Cm)

7th (ex. C7)

Minor 7th (ex. Cm7)

Suspended (ex. Csus)

Major 7th (ex. CM7)

Exercise 2

Take a bass line of your own or one below and turn it into a chord progression.

Steps:

1. Play a chord that starts on the first note of the bass line. (What key are you in?)
2. Work out the next chords for that bass line.

Bass lines (these aren't chords):

G D C E

F Bb D C

A F# D C#

B F# E C#

Eb Bb Ab C

Exercise 3

Choose a song, one you've been working on already or a new one, and try and figure out the chords. (Happy Birthday or Jingle Bells would both be on the easier side here.)

Figure out the bass line.

Figure out the chords.

Figure out some melody.

Challenge: try to play the chords and melody - even a little.

Lesson 5: Listening Practice



Exercise 1: Major or Minor

	Major	Minor
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		

Exercise 2: Major, Minor or Suspended

	Major	Minor	Suspended
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			

Exercise 3: Major or Minor

	7	m7
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

Exercise 4: 7, m7, M7

	7	m7	M7
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

Exercise 5: Major, Minor, Suspended, 7, m7, M7

	Major	Minor	Sus	7	m7	M7
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						

Lesson 5: Answers

Exercise 1: Major or Minor

	Major	Minor
1	X	
2		X
3	X	
4	X	
5		X
6	X	
7		X
8		X
9	X	
10		X
11	X	
12		X
13		X
14		X
15	X	
16	X	
17		X
18	X	
19	X	
20	X	

Exercise 2: Major, Minor or Suspended

	Major	Minor	Suspended
1	X		
2			X
3	X		
4			X
5		X	
6	X		
7		X	
8			X
9			X
10		X	
11	X		
12		X	
13			X
14			X
15			X
16		X	

Exercise 3: 7 or m7

	7	m7
1	X	
2		X
3	X	
4		X
5		X
6	X	
7	X	
8		X
9	X	
10	X	
11		X
12		X

Exercise 4: 7, m7, M7

	7	m7	M7
1			X
2	X		
3		X	
4			X
5	X		
6			X
7	X		
8		X	
9		X	
10			X
11		X	
12	X		

Exercise 5: Major, Minor, Suspended, 7, m7, M7

	Major	Minor	Sus	7	m7	M7
1					X	
2	X					
3		X				
4			X			
5						X
6				X		
7		X				
8	X					
9			X			
10					X	
11				X		
12						X

Lesson 6: Bass Lines Listening Practice

What are the bass line notes?

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____
6 _____
7 _____

VIDEO 2

What is the chord progression? (Simpler version)

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____
6 _____
7 _____

What is the chord progression? (Complex version)

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____
6 _____
7 _____

Lesson 6: Answers (Bass Lines)

What are the bass line notes?

1 D A B G

2 C E F G

3 A D F# E

4 G D E C

5 F C Bb D

6 Eb Bb C Ab

7 E G# C# B

VIDEO 2

What is the chord progression? (Simpler version)

1 D A Bm G

2 C Em F G

3 A D F#m E

4 G D Em7 C

5 F C Bb Dm

6 Eb Bb Cm Ab

7 E G#m C#m B

What is the chord progression? (Complex version)

1 C Em F G

2 G D Em7 C

3 Eb Bb Cm Ab

4 D A Bm G

5 A D F#m E

6 F C Bb Dm

7 E G#m C#m B

Lesson 7: Putting It All Together



Exercise

Choose a song and try putting it all together.

The process:

Find your starting note.

Play some melody.

Find the root note of the first chord.

Work out the chord.

Play that little bit of melody with the chord.

Does it work? If so, move onto the next chord and next bit of melody.

Ultimate goal: playing an entire song by ear.