

Keyboard Harmony

(Instructions for the teacher)

General Information

1. What is Keyboard Harmony?

Keyboard harmony is the harmonization on the piano of a melody or bass line, in four-part writing.

2. What is expected in harmony graduation examinations?

The student is expected to harmonize a bass line and a melody about eight to ten meters long each, in ten minutes time, in the presence of the jury. Both bass line and melody will include simple rhythms and time values, modulations, non-chord tones, and some altered chords. The harmonization should be realized simply and vertically, as four-part writing, not as a piano accompaniment (see Appendix C, Suggestions for Chordal Accompaniment).

3. When should students start this course?

Students may start the course of Keyboard Harmony and the study of this book in the 1st year of harmony, once basic chord progressions and first inversion chords have been taught and understood.

4. Alternative uses of this book

This book is suitable for the course of Chord-Progression Dictation. In every chapter Exercise 2 may be used, as well as the exercises at the end of each chapter.

Moreover, it is designed to be an effective, accessible source of material for the musicians who wish to further pursue their practical understanding of tonal scales, chord progressions and harmonic relations, and to improve their harmonization and chordal accompaniment skills on key instruments. In a few words, it aims to help students to easily and rightly harmonize any given melody.

For a better understanding of the book and its use during the lesson,

We explain to the student:

- i. What Keyboard Harmony is
- ii. What to expect in graduation examinations
- iii. What the book includes
- iv. The importance of learning the scales, as they appear at the end of the book, and the significance of focusing on the differences between them
- v. The alternative ways of playing: in other words, how to transform a simple chord progression into a beautiful piano accompaniment (see Appendix C, Suggestions for Chordal Accompaniment)
- vi. Then, we proceed to the exercises, in accordance with the following instructions

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(Instructions for the teacher)

Exercise 1

In Exercise 1, we write the roman numerals underneath the chords. By taking a simple chord progression, for example I-V-I, as a point of reference we demonstrate the common tones between the chords and indicate the fingers playing them. (Later on, the student should do the analysis on his/her own.)

In the progression I-V-I, we explain for each hand separately, starting with the left hand, how easily we can transpose this progression to other keys: we simply apply the suggested fingering to the new key, as we do, for example, when transposing any Hanon piano exercise. In other words, when we place the 2nd finger of the left hand on I, the 5th is already placed on V! So, using the same fingering and maintaining the interval of the perfect fourth, we can transpose I-V-I in all keys.

We follow the same procedure for the right hand, pointing out that the common tones should be played with the same fingers. We also emphasize that the right hand moves mainly by steps or thirds, and remind the student to read the exercises moving upwards from the bottom and to build the chords from left to right.

We play the progression I-V-I two or three times. Then, we encourage the student to transpose it to “easy” keys, for example G major, F major, A minor. The transposition should be done only via fingering memory, paying attention to the new key signature.

Notice here that, by using the same fingering and having a sound knowledge of key signatures, we can easily transpose any chord progression to any key. However, in some progressions the fingering may vary, mainly in the left hand. Nevertheless, in the basic chord progressions the fingering remains strictly the same in both hands. In the following chord progressions and individual chords, the student must keep the given fingering in both hands:

- a) I – V – I I – IV – I I – IV – V – I I – V – VI – V – I
b) I – VII – I I – V₆ – I I₆ VII₆

c) In all three versions of the second inversion (6/4), passing, neighboring, cadential; in the sequence; in the V₇ chord and its inversions.

The practicing of chord progressions should not end up being another piano exercise. So, we require the student to verbally describe the chords while playing, both during the lesson and at home. This way the student will be able to combine “finger-memory” with “harmony-memory”, which refers to hand position and contents of each chord. The same practicing technique should be followed in Exercise 2.

Once Exercise 1 is played and understood, we may choose a figured bass from the exercises at the end of the chapter, and ask the student to harmonize it.

Finally, we can further trigger the imagination and creativity of the students by demonstrating Exercise 1, using one of the alternative, more pianistic and pleasant ways of accompaniment shown in Appendix 3. When the student is able to play Exercise 1 quite comfortably, I recommend the use of accompaniment suggestions 1 and 2.

* Further instructions details in our website: www.nickmusic.gr/instructions-videos

Keyboard Harmony

(Instructions for the teacher)

Exercise 2

In Exercise 2, the student should be able to play the chord progressions on the piano by heart, in a slow tempo without mistakes, while verbally describing the harmonic analysis. This exercise may be practiced in two ways: either playing the progressions vertically, or choosing one of the accompaniment suggestions at the end of the book (see chapter *Suggestions for Chordal Accompaniment*). I suggest opting for this choice if and when the student becomes fluent in the exercises.

In earlier lessons, we may ask the student to perform the progressions placing the root of the chord on the soprano; in later lessons, the student may change the spacing, placing first the 3rd of the chord on the soprano, and then the 5th.

However, if the student is not yet capable of performing the above exercise in the given options, then he/she should persist in practicing Exercise 1 vertically.

Exercise 3

In Exercise 3, we ask the student to perform the scales slowly with right hand only, preferably using the provided fingering. Starting from C, the student plays all scales commencing from this note, announcing each time the performed scale. For example: “C major”, or “C minor natural” etc. He/she repeats the same process for all scales starting from D, E and so on.

I insist on having the students naming the scale they are performing, to help them distinguish between major and minor scales, and between scales that start from notes with the same name: for example, the student should say “this is G major” instead of simply “G”, or “this is C major” instead of “C”; “this is C minor harmonic”, “this C minor melodic”, “this is F major”, “this is F sharp major”.

To conclude, the scales must be performed by memory, in a slow tempo, without mistakes and hesitations.

It is very important to highlight early the differences between the scales and to offer memorizing techniques.

Taking minor scales starting from C as an example, we explain the following:

- a) All scales consist of two tetrachords; that is, two groups of four notes each
- b) C minor natural is the only minor scale starting from C that does not include a leading tone: its two last notes form a whole-step.
- c) C minor harmonic is similar to C minor natural, with the addition of the leading tone at the end: its two last notes form a half-step.
- d) In C minor melodic ascending, the first tetrachord is similar to the first tetrachord of both C minor natural and C minor harmonic; the second tetrachord is similar to the second tetrachord of C major. C minor melodic descending is similar to the C minor natural. That is, the three first notes of the descending line form two whole-steps.
- e) Finally, we always ask the student to indicate the leading tone of each scale.

** Further instructions details in our website: www.nickmusic.gr/instructions-videos*

Keyboard Harmony

(Instructions for the teacher)

End-of chapter exercises: Harmonization and practicing

At the end of each chapter we provide exercises with figured basses and melodies. It is recommended to proceed to these exercises, once exercises 1 and 2 have been taught, at least in keys with up to two accidentals, both major and minor. Specifically:

Harmonizing figured basses:

- a) Dividing the exercise in four-measure sections, we allow the student sufficient time to decide which chords to use in each section.
- b) We help the student, mainly in the earlier lessons, to consider the note, that is the bass voice, placed in the left hand, which chord corresponds to it, and the notes included in this chord. When the student feels ready, he/she plays the four-note chord. Then, we repeat the same procedure for the next note. Observing the right hand, the student points out the common tones between the previous and the current chord. The fingers playing the common tones remain in the same position, and the other fingers complete the rest of the chord. The progression II6-V is an exception to this rule.

In few words, the student always checks for common tones before moving his/her fingers from one chord to another.

Harmonizing melodies:

We follow the same procedure as in harmonizing figured basses, but now we firstly focus on the soprano line, that is, the highest voice on the right hand. Next, the student decides about the bass line, the basis of the chord; last, he/she completes the inner voices.

*With regards to melodies in particular, it is recommended to also use the cadential 6/4 every four measures and at the end of the melodic line, once the second inversion has been taught.

* Further instructions details in our website: www.nickmusic.gr/instructions-videos

Keyboard Harmony

(Instructions for the teacher)

How to study, examine, teach and recognize chord progressions, exercises, and scales; how to teach the syllabus for every chapter.

Studying

During his/her practicing, and also during the lesson, the student must *verbally describe* the chord progressions when playing them. This way, he/she will be able to combine “hand memory”, i.e. fingering, with “harmony memory”, i.e. the position and the contents of each chord.

Lesson duration

I would recommend a 20-minutes lesson per student, added to his/her weekly harmony lesson.

Examination

During each lesson, in less than 20 minutes, the student should be able to perform slowly and comfortably exercises 2 and 3, *verbally describing* the chord progressions and clarifying the key.

Teaching and dictation

The amount of homework is left at the teacher’s discretion, depending on each student’s abilities. However, weekly assignments should include at least one major scale and its relative minor.

In the early lessons, the teacher’s help is required for solving technical and musical issues such as rhythmic problems, difficulty in playing the chords or analyzing the progressions. Later on, the teacher gradually reduces his/her assistance to the point of simply assigning material for studying and practicing.

The teacher may use the remaining lesson time for chord-progression dictation, choosing progressions, either from exercise 2 or from the exercises at the end of each chapter.

Exercises

For practicing and examination preparation, we recommend the exercises at the end of each chapter. Specifically, all exercises in C minor could be assigned; from the remaining exercises, at least three figured basses and melodies may be used as well.

*We assign practicing and examination exercises on the condition that the student has already played Exercise 1 in the three first major scales with sharps and flats and their relative minor scales too.

Keyboard Harmony

(Instructions for the teacher)

Material

Each chapter's material should cover *the first two or three major scales with sharps and flats, and their relative minor scales as well*. Depending on the student, the teacher may proceed to more complicated scales, for example F sharp minor. The addition of advanced material will greatly benefit the student, not only in preparing for examination, but also in his/her professional life as a musician.

Scales

If the student's abilities limit him/her to the two first major scales with flats and sharps and their relative minor scales, it is crucial to practice thoroughly Exercise 3, which concerns learning scales. In other words, the student must memorize all scales during the first year of Keyboard Harmony, regardless of his/her efficiency in the other exercises.

Review exercises

These exercises include all material taught during the two years of the Keyboard Harmony course.

Last thoughts...

It is crucial that the student is able to perform easily and without mistakes Exercises 1 and 2 in the keys of C major and A minor quite early, because these exercises are simply transposed to several other keys throughout the books.

I believe that, once the student succeeds in sufficiently performing Exercises 1 and 2 in these keys, he/she will be able to easily transpose them in any given key.

It is a matter of practice only!

Good luck.