Companion to the Cape Breton Piano Accompaniment Online Workshop

Winter 2012

I've written this companion with the intention that the information presented here will help solidify the concepts outlined in the videos.

In the following chapters, we will look at three main areas of Cape Breton piano accompaniment:

- major and modal harmony
- basic rhythms for the jig, reel, strathspey, and march
- bass line construction

We will apply these concepts to the tunes that we are studying. Do not worry too much about memorizing the theory that I've presented here. Music theory simply helps us understand why things work. Knowing sounds is most important.

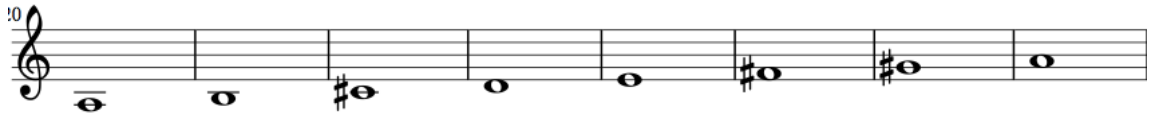
My goal for this entire course is for you to have the tools to begin learning more and more on your own. Cape Breton pianists learn mostly by ear and observation, and like the fiddle, piano accompaniment has only recently been taught in formal lessons.

This course is designed to give you common sounds and technique to help your ear training and transcribing. By transcribing, I do not really mean writing out what you are hearing but rather just trying to replicate what you are hearing. You will notice that when you do a lot of transcribing, common bass lines, harmony and rhythms in the style emerge. When you hear them often enough, you will understand how they function from tune to tune and you will be able to implement them into your own playing.

I hope you enjoy the course and I'm excited to get the chance to help develop your skills in this discipline.

Major Key Harmony

All of the chords available to us in any key come from its scale. In this section we will using the A major scale as our example.



We can build a chord from each note of the scale by stacking the notes vertically on top of each other in intervals of 3rds. We are technically building triads here, which are three notes. A triad is composed of a

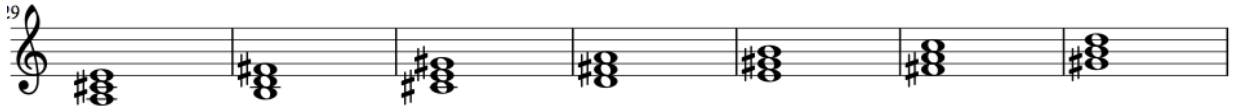
- **root** -the bottom note

- **a 3rd** -the middle note

- **a 5th -**fifth-the top note

The number is the interval away from the bottom note or the root.

Starting with the first note of the scale, **A**, we will skip a note and go two tones up to **C#** and place that on top of the **A.** Then skip another note and go two tones up again to the **E** and put that on top of the **C#**. So vertically, we have stacked **A C#** and **E**. This has formed an **A major triad**. To build the rest of the chords, we use this same process for each note of the scale.



The chords then for **A major** are the following:

I	A major	A C# E
ii	B minor	B D F#
iii	C# minor	C# E G#
IV	D major	D F# A
V	E major	E G# B
vi	F# minor	F# A C#
vii	G# diminished	G# B D

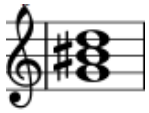
These triads that we formed are referred to as **diatonic** because they use only the notes available in this scale.

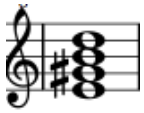
Notice the pattern of the quality of chords:

I major
ii minor
iii minor
IV major
V major
vi minor
vii diminished

This pattern of the quality of chords is the same for every major key. For example, if you repeated this same process for G major, the I chord is **G Major,** the ii chord is **A minor**, the iii chord is **B minor,** etc. You can find the chords in any key by repeating this process of stacking the notes vertically in intervals of 3rds from each note of the scale.

We are not really concerned with a diminished chord in this course. The diminished chord is related to the triad of the **V** chord. If we stack one interval of a 3rd below the diminished triad we form the **V7** chord instead. In this key, the **V7** chord is **E7 (E G# B D)**. This is also called the E dominant 7th chord. The 7th stands for the interval from the top note from the bottom note.

G# dim 

E7 

Primary Chords in the Major Key

Out of these seven chords we have formed from the major scale, how do we know which ones we need to use?

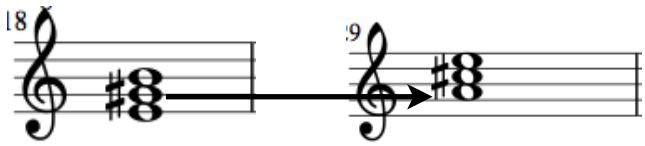
Major key harmony at least for fiddle tunes is based on three primary chords from the major scale. These are **I** the **IV** and **V**. In the key of A major, these are **A Major**, **D Major** and **E Major.** Each one has a primary function. Other chords are used as well and have a function, but we can relate everything back to the function of these three primary chords. By the term function, we mean what is the role of a chord? Where does a chord typically progress to? What is its typical behavior?

There are three main categories of chord function in which we can fit all of the seven chords:

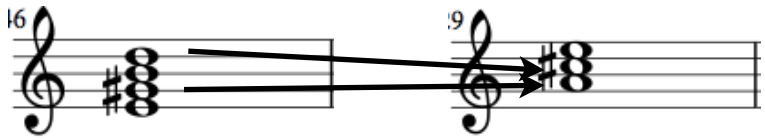
Tonic **I,** iii, vi
Sub dominant **IV,** ii, vi
Dominant **V (V7),** vii

We can think of the **I** chord or the **Tonic** as home base. This is where the other chords want to move toward and resolve to. It is where the melody is most stable. Tunes usually begin and end on the tonic chord but of course, there are exceptions.

The **V** chord or **Dominant** chord is very unstable. It creates tension in a chord progression and usually aches to get back home to the **I** chord. There are exceptions but the **V** chord usually resolves back to the **I** chord. In the key of A major this is the resolution of **E** to **A**. We want to hear the resolution of the **G#** of the **E** chord to the **A** of the A chord:



Cape Breton pianists also use the **V7** to **I** progression. This is the strongest tension/resolution in western music. In addition to the **G#** leading to the **A** our ears want to hear the resolution of the **D** in the E7 chord to the **C#** of the A chord. Often times, the melody will spell out the chord tones of the E7 chord rather than just the E triad. But playing the E triad works fine in these places.



The **IV** chord or **sub dominant** chord usually creates movement toward the **V** chord, but it could very well go back to the **I**. It is not quite as stable as the **I** chord nor quite as unstable as the **V**.

Play through the chord progression **I IV V I** in the key of A major **(A, D E A)** See if you can hear these functions of the chords.

These chords are also in these particular categories because they can behave similarly to the primary chords. They also can be good substitution chords because they share two chord tones with the primary chords.

In the Tonic category we have also have the **iii** and the **vi** chord. In the key of A, these are **C# minor** and **F# minor**. With C# minor, A major shares the chord tones of **C#** and **E**, and with F# minor, it shares **A** and **C#.**

In the sub dominant category we have the **ii** chord. In A Major, this is the **B minor** chord. It shares the chord tones of **D** and **F#** with the D Major. We also have the vi chord. It shares the chord tones of **F#** and **A**.

In the Dominant category, we have the vii dim chord. In A major this is G# diminished. As we have discussed, this is almost the same chord as E major or E7 as it shares the **G#**, **B** and **D**.

Often times, when the primary chord fits, one of its sub chords can fit as well. But that does not mean we should use them at random just because can they fit. You do not typically hear a **iii** chord start off a part of a tune. But you may hear a **iii** chord following a **I** chord to produce a different effect. Certain substitution chords are heard more often than others. For the I chord, **vi** is more common than the **iii**. Choosing a good sub chord depends on the overall context of the harmony and also what the melody spells out. Also, the melody may explicitly will spell the chord tones of what is considered sub chord rather than the primary chord.

Remember that it is not important to know the technical names of the function of these chords. Using your ears is most important. Play through the chord progression **I IV V I** in the key of A major **(A D E A)**. See if you can hear these functions of the chords. Understanding how chords function may help your ear training. Knowing that V's tendency to resolve to I and really understanding that sound will help you relate this to accompanying a tune. When you hear that the tune is on a V chord, you will know that most likely the tune will resolve back to I so you may not randomly go to a IV chord to just see if it fits.

How do we know which chords go along with the melody?

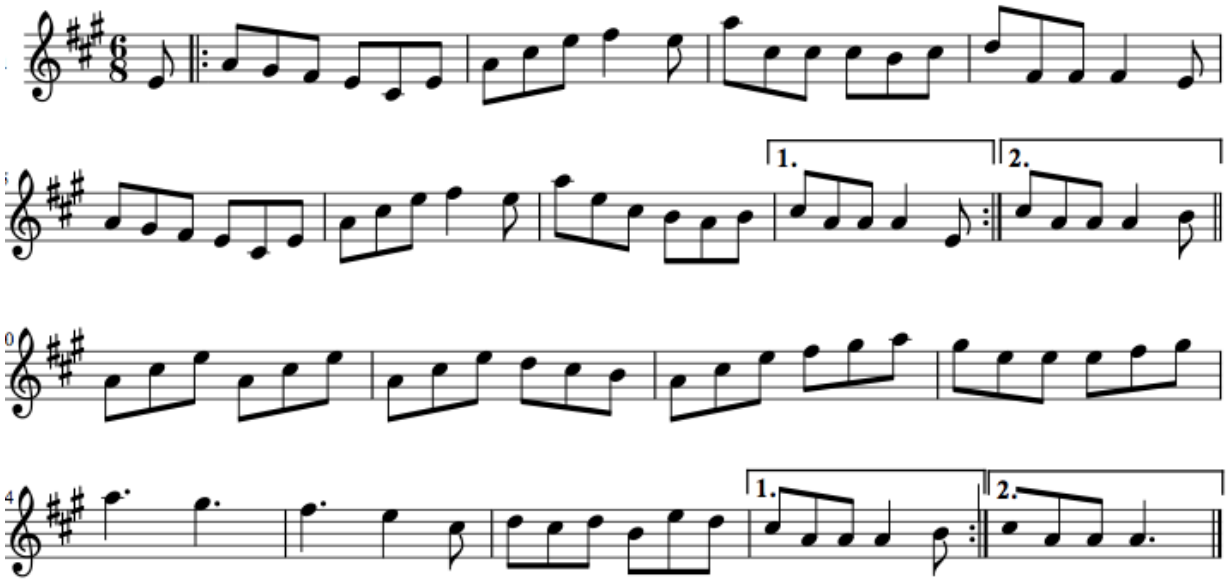
Melodies as our Guide

Many parts of a tune are simply arpeggiated chords blatantly telling us which chord to use. Other parts of the melody are a little more ambiguous with more linear stepwise lines but there are lots of clues to guide us in our chord selection. In this section, we are going to look for the chord tones of the primary chords to guide us in our chord selection. Later, we will look at some other chord substitutes. In this discussion we will use the jig, The Road to Skye.

Again, the 3 chords we are looking for are:

A major A C# E
D major D F# A
E major E G# B or E7 E G# B D

The Road to Skye



In the 1st and 5th bars, with the exception of the F# and G# which we will consider passing tones, we have the chord tones of the A major chord. We also have an A major arpeggio for the first half of the 2nd and 6th bars which lead to an F#. Out of the three primary chords, the F# is contained in the D chord. In the 3rd and 4th bars, we have primarily the chord tones of the A major chord and the D major chord respectively. In the first half of the 7th bar, we have the A major arpeggio. The second half of that bar is strongly centered around a B note which is in the E major chord. Then in the 8th bar, we are back to the chord tones of the A major arpeggio.

In the second half of the tune, the 1st bar is just a repeated A major arpeggio. This is the same for the second half of the 2nd bar. Then we have the notes D C# and B. D and B are chord tones of the E7 chord. In the 3rd bar, we have a choice. The first half of the bar is explicitly an A major arpeggio. In the second half of the bar, we could consider the F# and G# passing tones and the A a chord tone to which we would just stay on the A chord, or we could consider the F# and the A chord tones and play a D chord. I will play this both ways. In the 4th bar, we have primarily two of the chord tones of the E major chord, the E and the G#. In the 5th and 6th bars, we have chord tones for the duration of a full pulse. We are going to consider the A as part of A major, the G# as part of E major, the F# as part of E major and the E as part of A major.

In the 7th bar we again have a choice. In the first half of the bar, the main melody note is a D. In the second half of the bar, we have all the chord tones of E7. So we could play D major followed by E7, or we could consider the D in the first half of the bar as a chord tone of E7 and play that chord for the whole bar. Both ways fit. This is a subjective choice. It depends on how much movement is desired toward the I chord. In the 8th bar, we finish the part with the chord tones of the A major chord.

In the 5th and 6th bars, we primarily have one chord tone to guide us since each one is a full pulse. In a case like this we also have to depend on the over all harmonic context of the tune. At the beginning of the 5th bar we have an A for the full pulse. This could be part of the D chord or the A chord. But since it follows the V chord, and V's tendency is to want to resolve to I, the A chord would be a better choice. At the end of the 6th bar, we have an E to finish that phrase. This could be either E major or A major. But in the next bar, we are either moving toward E major or playing a full

bar of E major. In this context the E at the end of the 6th bar just does not fit. The phrase sounds like it just wants to go home to the A chord.

Our chart for this tune looks like this:

|A A | A D |A A |D D|A A |A D| A E|A A:||

A A |A E7 | A A |E E|A E |D A|*D E7|A A:||

*|E7 E7|

You may be wondering “Do accompanists actually hear these arpeggios and chord tones in the melody when they hear a tune for the first time?” After a while of developing your ear, you will begin to hear these chord tones in the melody. But in addition to analyzing the melody for chord tones, we can also depend on predictable melodic and harmonic patterns to help guide us in choosing chords.

Melodic Structure of Tunes

If you know quite a bit of tunes already, you’ve probably noticed that a lot of them share a similar melodic structure. In a large amount of tunes, we can think about the melody in terms of a question/answer/conclusion type of analysis. Many tunes are composed of two 8 bar parts. Usually, a melodic idea is introduced in the first two bars. We will call this the question. This is followed by another melodic idea, the answer, which usually takes us to the end of of the 4th bar. By this point we have reached the climax of the part. This is where the melody usually builds tension. Then the same initial question, or a variation of the question, is usually introduced again. The last two bars usually build tension again leading to a final conclusion. Sometimes this is a variant of the answer that was introduced earlier in the part. This is typical of an 8 bar part of a tune. Sometimes this form is condensed into 4 bar parts.

| Phrase 1 |----------| Phrase 2| ----------| Phrase 1 | ----------| Phrase 2 |----------||
(Question) (Answer) (Question (with variation)
(climax) repeated) (conclusion)

Not all tunes follow this structure but those that do not are usually variations that follow a similar pattern. For example, after the 4 bar, the tune might not go back to the same question that was at the beginning of the tune.

It is important to think about tunes this way because once you discover these melodic patterns, the chords become much easier to figure out. The tune will not seem like a long melody but a series of repeated patterns. That is why pianists are often able to figure out a tune 'on the fly' only after hearing it one time through. Some tunes are more complicated however, and take longer to figure out.

Harmonic structure of tunes

This melodic pattern can be associated with a predictable harmonic template. For many tunes in a major key, we can depend on where we can find the I and the V chord. If I'm hearing a tune for the first time, this is what I usually try and nail down first. Let's look at the V I chord progression and how it can correspond to the melodic template above.

As I've noted earlier, the V I progression or V7 I progression is the strongest resolution in western music. Play an A chord, a D chord and an E chord in that order. What do you expect to hear after the E chord? Our ears expect to hear the the A chord- the resolution to the I chord.

In an 8 bar part, there are two points where you usually hear this V I progression - between the 4th and 5th bar and between the 7th and 8th bar. As we see in the melodic pattern above, this is where the melody usually builds and releases tension. We can usually also count on the tune beginning at home base or the I chord. The V chord may fill the whole 4th bar or be preceded by another chord. It may also fill the entire 7th bar or the first half of the 8th bar before the part resolves back to the I chord:

| I | | |(V V)|I | |(V V|V) I||

I've notated brackets around the V to indicate that these are all possible places to find the V.

I like to think of this as a template but tunes certainly deviate from this. A tune may not head for the V chord at all in the 4th bar. We saw this in the

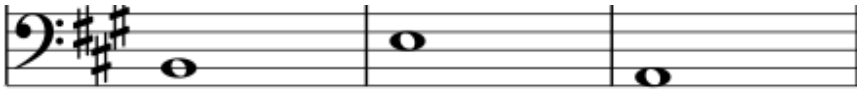
Road to Skye. Also, the end of a part may not resolve at all and just hang on the V chord until the resolution of the I chord in the beginning of the next part. If you are beginning to learn by ear, listening for the the V I chord progression is a good place to start.

Often times the V chord is preceded by the IV or ii chord since the tendency for these chords is to push towards the V chord to create strong movement toward the I chord.

The ii Chord (B minor)

The ii chord is often found before the V chord instead of the IV chord. Remember that the ii chord functions similarly as the IV chord. In many cases, the melody will call for the use of the ii chord instead of the IV. This common chord progression is known as the **ii V** progression.

What makes this progression so strong is what is known as the root motion of a 5th. Common chord progressions often move in descending intervals of 5ths. Here we considering the root motion of the 5th the interval descending from B to E (B is the root of the B minor chord and E is the root of the E major chord). When the V chord resolves to the I chord, that is also a root motion of a 5th. In the key of A, that is the E chord resolving to the A chord. So if we have a full ii V I progression, we have a circular motion of descending 5ths. Our ears like to hear these motions of the 5th. In this example the E is up an interval of a 4th from the B, but this is just the inverse relationship of the intervals. We often hear the roots of this progression in this way. The effect of the descending 5ths on our ears is still the same.



B E A

Play both of these progressions:

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|Bm  E|A   A|    and    |D    E|A     A|
|ii   V|I    I|          |IV   V|I      I|
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How does the sound of each progression compare? The character of the motion toward the I chord is different. Sometimes both fit in a tune. The choice can be subjective but sometimes the melody dictates a better choice.

Let's look at this progression in the Road to Skye.

At the end of the 2nd part, we initially settled on the chord progression in bars 7 and 8 to conclude the part.

|D E|A A||

The ii V progression works just as well. We said that the D fit in the first half of the 7th bar because the main note of the phrase was a D. The D is still a chord tone of the B minor chord as well. This is a subjective choice between IV V I and ii V I.

The F# minor chord

The F# minor chord is often a substitution of the I chord. Let's see how this may fit in the Road to Skye.

In the 2nd part in bars 5 and 6 we have the following progression:

|A E|D A|

What if we subbed the the F# minor for the first A chord and played this instead:

|F# E|D A|

We then come up with a nice way to phrase this part of the melody. First of all, it voice leads nicely. We created a smooth descending line from F#. But also, the flavor of the chord signifies that the end of the part is coming. Play through both progressions and try and hear the different colors produced by each one. On the first time around the second part I like to play the A

instead of the F# minor, and on the second time around this part, I like to play the F# minor to make it sound more final.

The I vi ii V Progression

The I vi ii V chord progression is very common in western music and very commonly heard in the harmony of fiddle tunes. A good place for this chord progression in the Road to Skye is in the 3rd and 4th bars of the second part.

So far in those bars we have the following chord progression:

|A D|E E|

We also said that this progression fits:

|A A|E E|

We can consider the F# minor chord a substitution for the second A chord leading towards the E chord. Also, F# minor fits very well with the melody here if we consider the F# and the A chord tones. (Refer to the second half of the 3rd bar of the tune). So we could also play this:

|A F#|E E|

We also said the that ii chord is very often found before the V chord. The ii V progression is so strong that it often fits even when the melody does not dictate it with chord tones. What if we played this instead:

|A F#m|Bm E|

Even though the melody in this part is a G# to an E, the ii V in this bar washes over it well because the harmonic pull is so strong. Also, the G# and E do not actually clash with the B minor chord. In jazz harmony, these would actually be considered chord tones of the chord called ‘extensions’. Try playing this progression over the tune in this part and hear the pull of the ii V for yourself.

You could also play the progression without the F#m and play the following:

|A A|Bm E|

So as you've seen, our chord choices are guided by the both the melody and by common harmonic progressions. We saw that even though we expect a tune in a major key to progress to a V chord by the end of the 4th bar, the melody in the Road to Skye dictated otherwise with the chord tones of the D major chord instead. Sometimes, the choice is very subjective, like the choice between IV V I and ii V I. When the melody is more ambiguous, we often depend more on common chord progressions.

With every chord substitution there are tasteful ways to use it. Sub chords create interest and can make a melody stand out in a different way. But if they are overused or used in an improper function, they can detract from the melody. Sub chords should be used to enhance the melody. Transcribing other accompanists choices is a good way to start learning common chord substitutions.

Modal Harmony

For the most part we think of tunes in two categories - major and minor. However, in traditional music, tunes that sound minor actually come from three different scales. Each scale produces different chords. While it as not that important to memorize the names or theory behind the scales, it is important to recognize the basic fact that minor tunes do not all come from the same source and that the scale upon which the tunes are based affect our chord choices.

In traditional music, minor tunes come from the following scales:

Aeolian or the **natural** minor scale
Dorian scale
Mixolydian scale

These scales are all derived from the major scale, better known as the **modes** of the major scale. You may have heard this term 'mode' or 'modal music' when people talk about Celtic music. Modes are simply just different scales. There are seven different modes, one built from each note of the major scale.

When we think of a scale, for example, the C major scale, we think of a specific territory: we are in the realm of C. A major scale is a pattern of intervals - a specific pattern of whole steps and half steps. When the notes are played from C to C, this pattern produces a certain sound that we associate with a major 'sound'. The major scale is actually the first of the seven modes. It is called the Ionian mode.

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

So what would happen if in the C major scale we didn't play from C to C but instead, we played the same exact notes, starting from the second note of the scale, and ventured from D to D?

D E F G A B C D

The sound is completely different. Instead of sounding major, it sounds more minor. This is the scale of **D Dorian.** Dorian is the 2nd mode because it is derived from the second note of the major scale. Now that we are in the territory of D instead of C, we think of it as a new scale beginning on D – D Dorian

Let's compare this to the D major scale.

D E F# G A B C# D

In D Dorian, the F (3rd note of the scale) and C (7th note) are natural, compared to F# and C# in D major. Because they are a half step down from where they would be in the normal scale, we refer to these notes as a flat 3 and flat 7.

Why are we comparing these scales to their major scales? By comparing to the major scale, we find characteristics about each of its modes so that we can use to easily transpose. If I want to find the scale of A Dorian, I know that a Dorian scale uses a flat 3 and a flat 7 compared to the major scale. So I lower the 3rd and 7th note of the A major scale to come up with the A Dorian scale.

A major

A B C# D E F# G# A

becomes

A Dorian

A B C D E F# G A

This can be quicker than figuring out the A Dorian scale from the parent G major scale.

We can do this with all of the notes from the C major scale. If we start on the third note, the E, we get the 3rd mode, called the **Phrygian** mode.

E Phrygian:

E F G A B C D E

Compared to the E major scale
Flat 2,3,6,7

Starting on the 4th note of the scale, we get a very bright sounding mode called **Lydian**.

F Lydian:

F G A B C D E F

Compared to F major, the B is raised by a half step. This is called a sharp 4. (B is the 4th note of the F major).

The 5th mode, staring on G, is called **Mixolydian**

G Mixolydian:

G A B C D E F G

Compared to G Major scale
Flat 7

The sixth mode is called **Aeolian**. Starting on the 6th note of the C major scale we get A Aeolian. This is also called the natural minor scale. Because it shares the same key signature as the parent major scale, it is called the relative minor.

A Aeolian:

A B C D E F G A

Compared to A major
Flat 3,6,7

The 7th and last mode is the darkest sounding mode. It's called the **Locrian** mode.

B Locrian:
B C D E F G A B

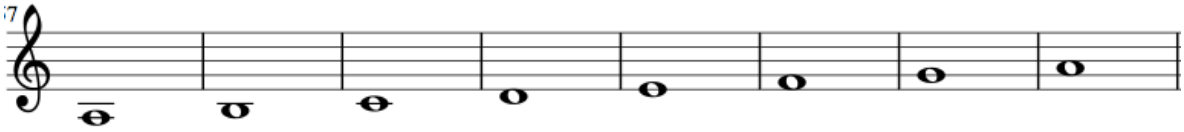
compared to B major scale
Flat 2,3,5,6,7

Traditional tunes and Modes

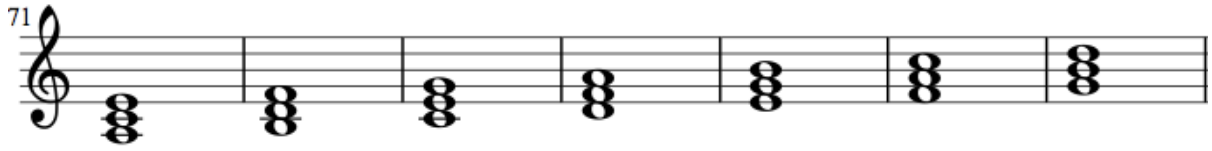
Out of these 7 modes, we only need to be concerned with three of them in accompanying fiddle tunes - **Dorian**, **Mixolydian** and **Aeolian**. However, tunes are rarely based on the Aeolian scale so most of our discussion will focus on the Dorian and Mixolydian scale and chords.

The same method for finding our chords available in major keys applies to finding the chords for any scale: stacking the notes in intervals of 3rds . In **A Aeolian** we get the following chords from the scale:

A Aeolian scale:

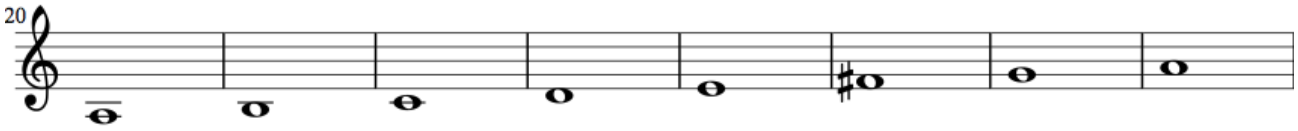


Chords derived from A Aeolian scale:

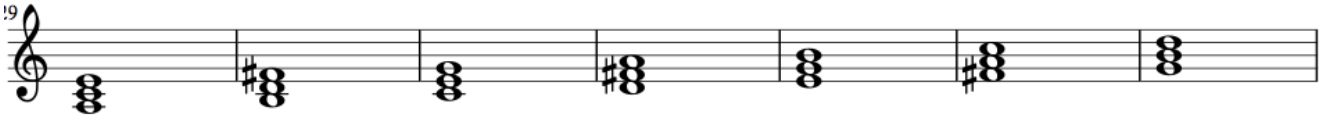


i	A minor
ii	B diminished
III	C Major
iv	D minor
v	E minor
VI	F major
VII	G major

A Dorian

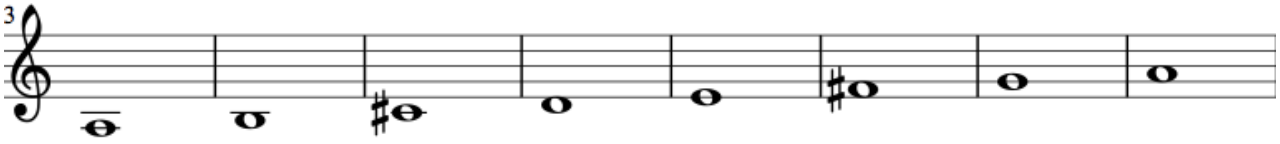


Chords derived from A Dorian scale:

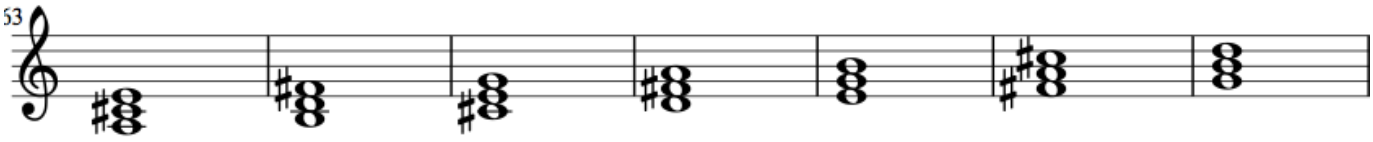


i	A minor
ii	B minor
III	C Major
iv	D major
v	E minor
VI	F# dim
VII	G major

A Mixolydian scale



Chords derived from the A Mixolydian scale:



i	A major
ii	B minor
III	C# dim
iv	D major
v	E minor
VI	F# min
VII	G major

Play each scale and listen to the character of each one. Notice the A Mixolydian sounds very major except for the G natural.

Notice that in each of these modes, the chord built on the 7th note, G major (flat VII), is the same. It is the flat 7 that makes the key sound minor. However in Dorian and Aeolian, the i chord is minor and in Mixolydian, the I chord is Major. There is a C natural and C# in the difference. That is a very important different to recognize. Often I hear the mistake of assuming the I chord is minor just because the tune sounds minor.

The tricky part about accompanying modal tunes is that they can often switch modes. The well known strathspey King George the IV is a good example of this. In the A part, the melody uses a C natural. In the B part it uses a C# and a C natural. So in the first part, accompanists use an A minor chord, and an A major chord in the second when appropriate.

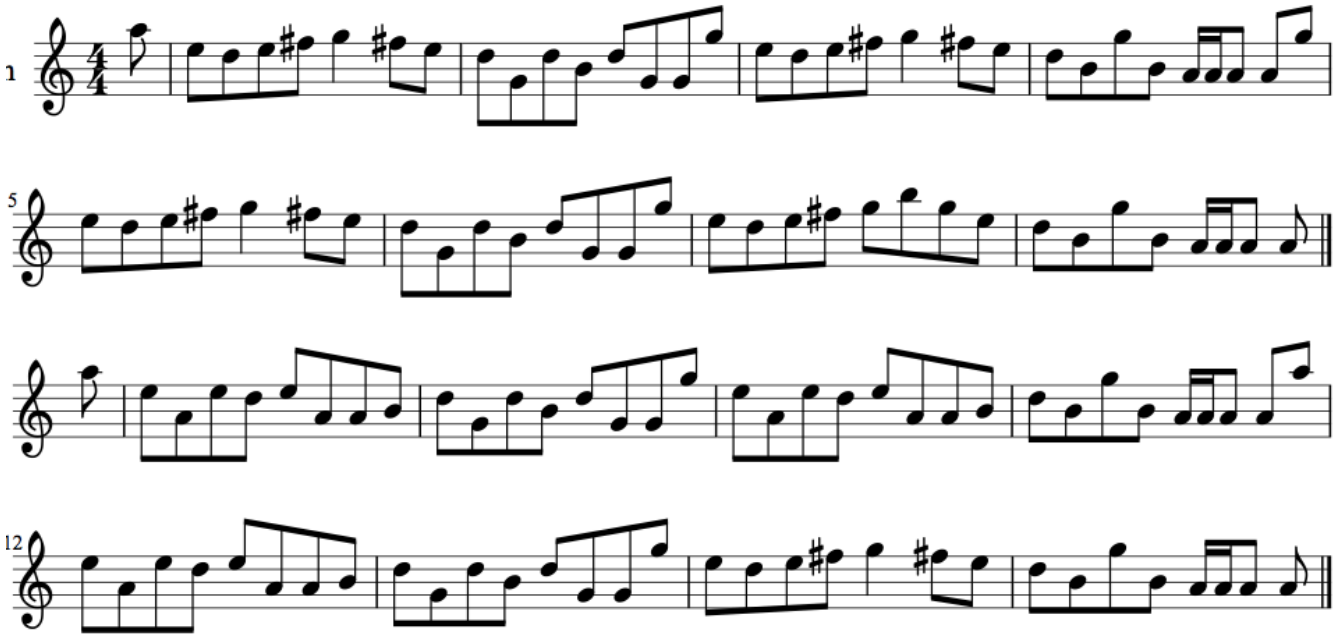
However, some Cape Breton fiddlers play what is known as ‘neutral tones’ in modal keys. In an ‘A’ modal key, you may here a note that is ‘in the cracks’ between C natural and C#. This is a characteristic not so prominent today but it still occurs. In that case, it is best to leave out the 3rd note of the chord. In an A major chord, this would be just A and E. That way, the chord does not clash with the melody. When accompanying in modal keys, especially on the fly, it is good idea to leave out the 3rd until you get to know the tune and the fiddler.

Do not worry if your ear is not distinguishing the differences between modes right away. Your ear will get more accustomed to the sounds as you learn more tunes in these keys and get used to the pattern of chords associated with the sounds. Learning the melodies of the tunes can really help especially in cases where the tune does not stay in the same mode.

Finding our chords in A Dorian

The melodies of Dorian tunes tend to revolve around the chord tones of the i and the flat VII. We will treat these chords as our primary chords since the melody tends to go back and forth between the two. For a large part of tunes in Dorian, we can get away with accompanying with just these two chords.

Let's look at Muilean Dubh and find these chords in the melody:



In the first part, let's first look at bars 2 and 4 and 6 and 8. In bars 2 and 6, the melody is just the chord tones of the G major chord, G, B and D. In the first half of the 4th and 8th bar, we have the same notes implying the G major chord again. At the ends of these two bars, we have a cut* on the note A implying the A minor chord. We usually expect the part to resolve on the i chord.

*A cut is a 3 note bowed embellished on the fiddle. It is 3 of the same notes consisting of 2 16th notes followed by an 8th note.

The 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th bars are a little more tricky in terms of just looking at the melody. There are many more notes than just the chord tones of one specific chord. At the moment, we are going to assume playing the i chord, the A minor chord, for the entire duration of these bars. We expect to hear the i chord on the opening phrase of a tune and this opening phrase in bar 1 is the same as in bars 3 and 5 with a variation in bar 7. If we want to look at chord tones, there is an E which is a chord tone of A minor. You may look at these bars, though, and see that on the 3rd beat there is a note G for a duration of a quarter note (variant in bar 7). Usually we would think that we would switch to the G chord here since it is such a strong note, but the rhythm of the harmony does not make sense. In simple terms, it just sounds like we jumped the gun on getting to the G chord. I've heard this done as a special effect, but for the most part, pianists play the A minor for the whole bar. Sometimes what our ears are used to hearing harmonically overrides what the melody may be implying.

The second part is a little more straight forward. Bars 2, 4, 6 and 8 are pretty much the same as the A part, implying the G chord, and both the G and the A minor chord in bar 8. Bars 1, 3 and 5 contain both the A and the E, chord tones of the A minor chord with a passing tone of a D. Bar 7 is the same as that in the first part.

So far, this is our chart:

|Am Am |G G|Am Am|G Am |Am Am|G G|Am Am|G Am :||

This 8 bars are repeated for both the first and the second parts.

Let's expand on this with two more chords- the III and the v. In A Dorian this is C and the Em.

We will first take a look at the v chord. If you look at its chord tones, you will notice that is shares two of the same chord tones with the VII.

G- <u>G B</u> D

Em- E <u>G B</u>

This makes it very interchangeable with the VII chord. Usually, if the v is played as a substitution for the v chord, you will hear it just before going to

the i chord. That is if there are two G chords in a bar, you may hear instead a G and an Em before returning to the A minor. This is because the v in modal keys acts very similarly to the V chord in major keys. It wants to go back to i. Even though it does not contain a leading tone of the G# resolving to the A, our ears like to hear the root motion of going from E to A, or the root motion of a 5th. It sounds very final.

So in Muilean Dubh, you may hear this variation on the chart we just made of the i and VII chords, or a combination of both charts.

|Am Am|G Em|Am Am|Em Am|Am Am|G Em|Am Am|Em Am:||

Let's expand on this chart a little more.

We can think of the first section of this tune as the same 4 bars repeated. The 7th bar is just a variation of the 4th bar. Therefore, the 4th and 8th bars are the end of the part. It is nice to create a little more movement here towards the final i chord by playing the following progression:

|Am Am|G Em|Am G|Em Am|Am Am|G Em|Am G|Em Am:||

I initially said that in the 3rd and 7th bar that playing the G as the second chord even though the melody implied it just did not sound right in terms of harmonic rhythm. In this context however, when followed with the Em, it creates a nice moving progression towards the final i chord.

Like the v and the VII, the i and the III also share two chord tones making them very interchangeable:

C- C E G

Am- A C E

You often hear the III following the i chord and often times the melody implies it. Let's look at this progression in Muilean Dubh

|Am C| G G|Am C|G Am |Am C |G G|Am C|G Am:||

The C is placed in the spots where I initially said the G chord did not sound quite right unless is was followed by the Em moving back towards the i chord. If we look at melody in these spots, this is where we have the G quarter note, (or variant in bar 7). This is a chord tone of C major.

You may hear a combination of the above two charts:

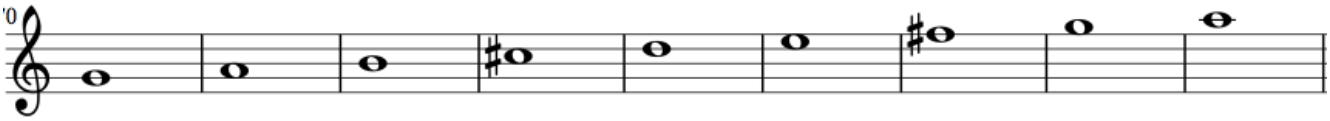
|Am C| G Em|Am C|G Am|Am C|G Em|Am G|Em Am:||

Thus in Dorian, the I, III and v and VII are the main chords we use, thinking of the I and VII as the primary chords since these are the two triads the melody tends to move between unless it blatantly indicates otherwise. The choice of the III and the v can be a bit more ambiguous depending on the tune but we can rely on both common chord progressions i.e, i followed by III and VII followed by v as well as what the melody tells us. Sometimes the melody is very particular in spelling out these chords.

One note about tunes in Dorian. They often are based on a gapped scale where there is no 3rd in the tune, meaning no C of any kind, as in Muilean Dubh. So technically, playing an A major chord would not clash with the melody. However in these types of tunes, most pianists interpret the key as Dorian using the A minor chord.

Chords in A Mixolydian

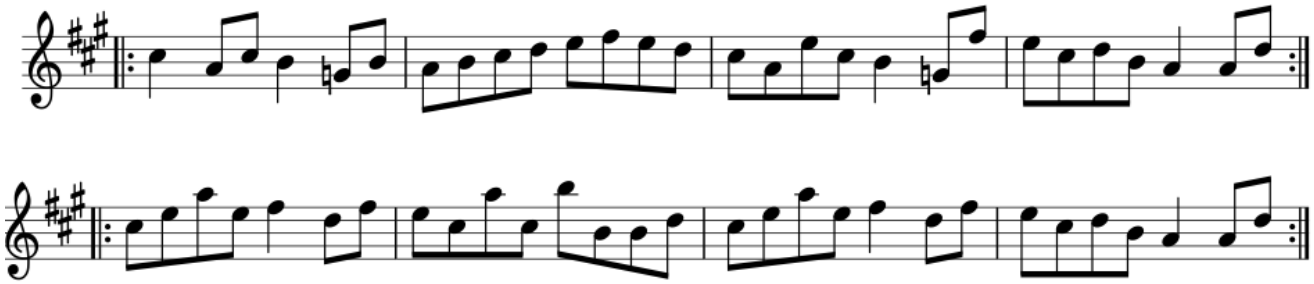
The mixolydian scale is actually the same as the scale of the Highland bagpipe chanter. The scale of the pipes contain 9 notes, from G natural to A



This is why so many pipe tunes are in this key. There are many pipe tunes in Dorian mode as well, but they use the gapped scale that does not a C natural or C#.

Tunes in Mixolydian tend not to completely center around the I chord and the VII chord. They can be tricky to since they sound so major but yet have that minor sound with the flat VII chord. Many of the tunes in this mode are nearly major with a small portion of the melody implying the G chord. This is the case with the tune we are studying, Miss Charlotte Alston

Stewart. It is only in the first part where we have a G natural implying the G major chord. The second part is completely major.



Let's look at the chords for this tune.

Each part is 4 bars repeated with a total of 8 bars per part. In the 1st and 3rd bars of the first part, we have the chord tones of C# and A followed by B and G. This is clearly outlining the A and the G chord.

The 2nd and 4th bars are a little less clear and the reason why modal harmony tends to be more difficult. Sometimes there is no 'right' choice. We depend on common harmonic progressions that our ears like to hear along with the melody, the context of the melody and also how other pianists have interpreted the tune.

In the first half of the 2nd bar we have an ascending line from A to D. We'll think of the A and the C# as chord tones of the A chord and the others as passing notes. In the last half of the bar we have three choices that can make sense. The notes are E F# E D. It could be interpreted as a D chord, thinking of F# and D as chord tones, or as a B minor chord with the same chord tones. We could also think of is as an E7 chord with the E and D as chord tones. (We will discuss the E7 chord in this key a little later). I've heard pianists play it all of these ways. The E7 also fits well because occurs where we expect the climax in the part, at the mid point.

In the 4th bar, the melody is a little ambiguous in the first half. of the bar. The notes are A C# D B. We interpret this as a V chord again or, the E7 chord. Even though we have the chord tones of A and C#, we don't really

have time to play the A so we wash over that with a V I resolution with the A chord falling on the final note of the bar, the A.

We treat the second part of this tune as completely major. The entire melody is explicit chord tones. In the 1st and 3rd bars we have all the chord tones of the A major chord and two of the D, D and F#. We could also play a B minor chord here. In the first half of the 2nd bar, we again have all the chord tones of the A major chord, then the chord tones of the B minor chord. Since this is the mid point of the tune and where we usually expect the V chord or the E7 in this key, we could also play that chord treating the B and the D as chord tones. The 4 bar is the same as the first part.

However, you have to think about your chord choices in their overall context. If you choose to play B minor in the first bar and then again in the 2nd, this can sound repetitive. So if you play B minor in the first, it would better to play E in the second bar instead of B minor.

Let's take a closer look at the E chord in this key. I've stated E7 a little loosely. Often times, I like to leave out the third of the chord. Technically in true mixolydian, the V chord is minor and that is true if we build one more third on top of the triad and make it Em7 (EGBD). But in the first part, we have flavors of major and minor. This is the character of mixolydian. E7 with a G# technically fits within the melodic fragment but it the over all context of the melody with the G naturals, it can be too defining as major. Conversely, playing an Em7 with a G natural is too defining as minor. Even though the fragment of the melody does not clash with either, both can sometimes sound 'wrong' within the context of this key. So I like to keep it ambiguous. A voicing I like to use for this chord is D (Thumb) E (index) and B (pinky).

In the second part, since it is all major, I will play an E7 chord.

So our chart for this tune is the following:

A G |A D |A G| E7* A :||

A D |A E |A D| E7* A :||

*D E B voicing

Rhythm

The complex rhythm of Cape Breton accompaniment is its most distinguishing characteristic. It was born out of the rhythms that unite all the idioms of Cape Breton Gaelic music – the language, song, piping, dancing and the fiddling. Cape Breton music functions as dance music and the rhythms of the dance are very evident in the style.

The basic technique of any accompaniment style is to play octaves in the left hand and chords in the right. Many piano accompaniment styles emphasize the on and of beats of a tune in a 'boom - chuck' manner by playing solid octaves in the left (where the thumb and pinky are played at the same time) emphasizing the pulse or strong beats of a tune, and solid chords in the right hand (where all the notes are played together) emphasizing the off beats. The more complex rhythmic patterns found in Cape Breton accompaniment not only outline the on and offbeats but also subdivisions of the beat. This is achieved through the basic technique of broken octaves in the left hand broken chords in the right.

The left hand outlines both the on and off beats in a tune with the broken octave. The pinky plays the on beat and the thumb plays the off-beat. The thumb and the pinky only play together, or solidly, when playing a chromatic bass run.

In a more basic rhythm, the right hand will play a chord solidly on the off beat. But much of the time, the right hand plays broken chords, meaning that the notes in the chord do not all go down at the same time. For example, the thumb may play one note of the chord while the 3rd and 5th finger play the other notes of the chord outlining subdivisions in the beat. The chords can be broken up in a number of ways and each piano player does this a little differently.

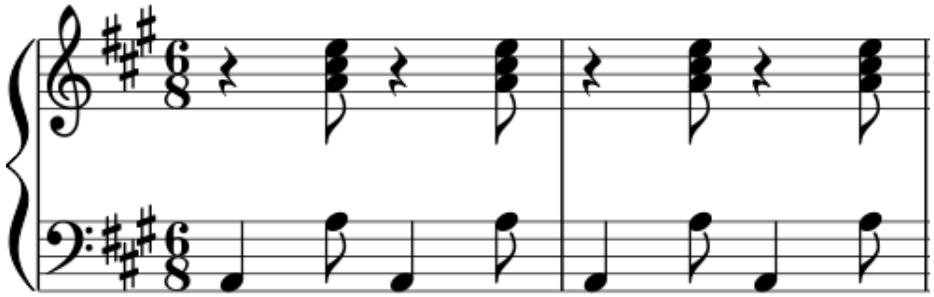
Pianists improvise rhythms using a combination of playing solid and broken chords on the various subdivisions of the beat or pulse. For the most part, pianists know the repertoire and unconsciously use the rhythm of the tune to guide their improvisations. All pianists draw from basic rhythms for each tune type. In the following section, we will take a look at the basic rhythms for each tune type and discuss the feel for each.

Jigs

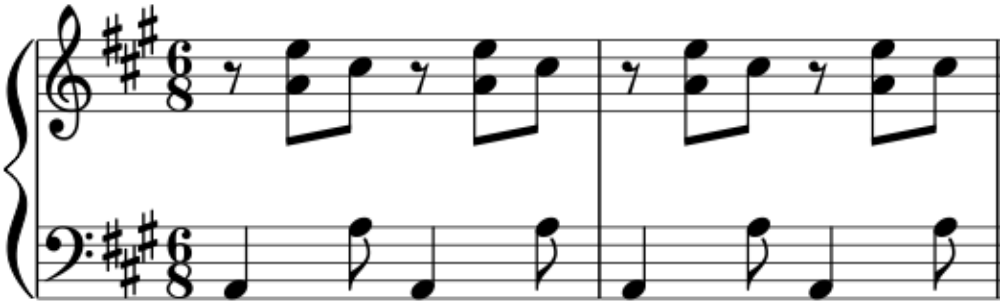
A jig is a type of dance tune in 6/8. In this time signature, there are six 8th notes per measure. In each measure, we feel the two strong beats on the 1 and the 4. The strong beats are called the pulse. This is what we feel when tapping our foot to a jig.

In accompanying a jig, we outline the pulse with left hand by playing the pinky on beat 1 and 4, along with playing the off beats with the thumb on beats 3 and 6.

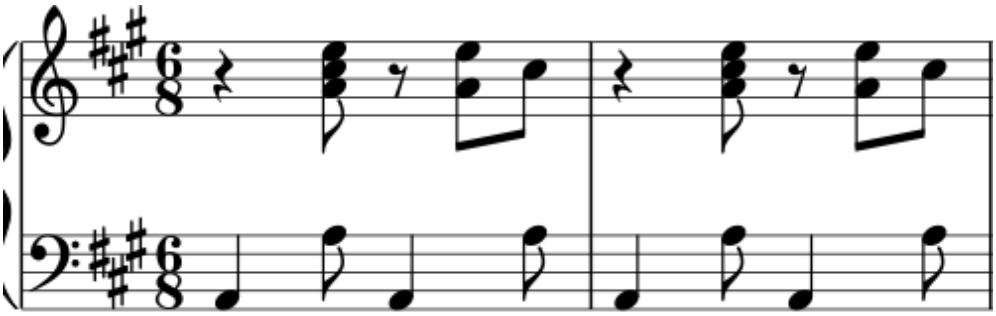
In a basic jig rhythm, the right hand will play the off beats with a solid chord along with the thumb of the left hand on beats 3 and 6.



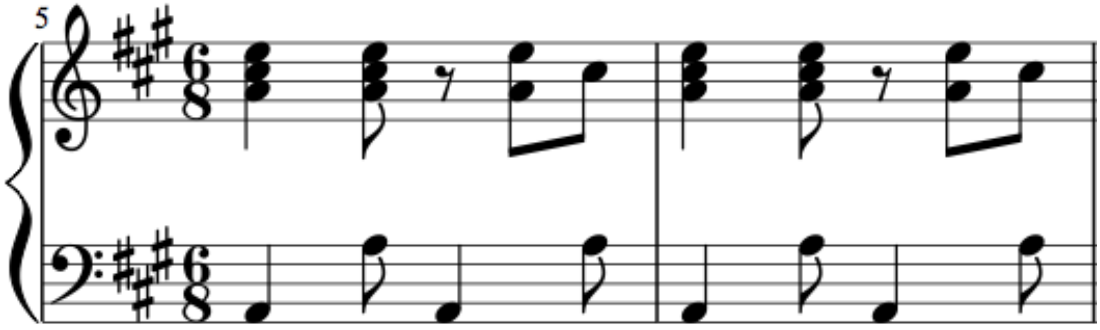
In Cape Breton piano accompaniment, the most common pattern is to outline the subdivisions of the pulse in the right hand- beats 2 and 3 and 5 and 6. Thus, the basic jig rhythm plays on all the beats in 6/8.



We can combine these two patters to come up with one pulse on the off beat with a solid right hand, and the next pulse with a broken right hand playing beats 2 and 3.



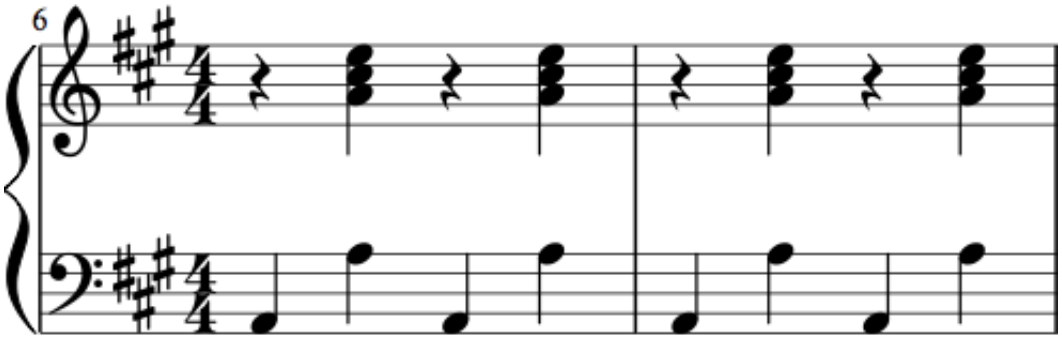
Sometimes the right hand will play a solid chord on the on beat and the off beat for a pulse. This will be heard combined with one of the rhythms above and can look something like this:



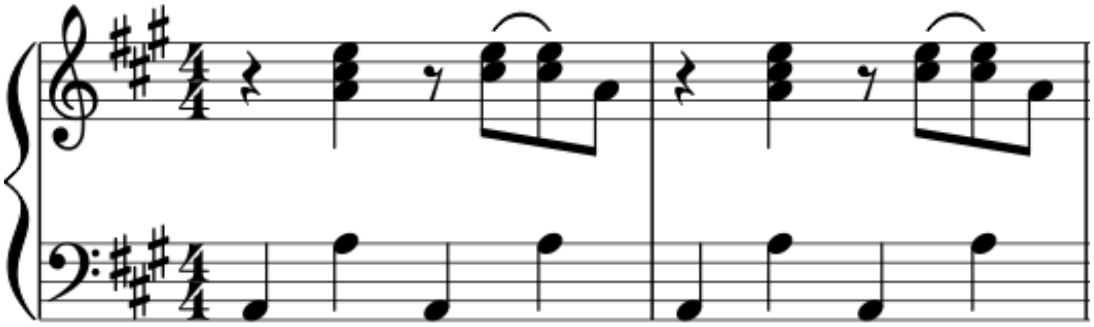
Reels

Reels are a dance tune in 4/4. The common internal rhythm is straight 8th notes. Even though reels are in 4/4, we feel a pulse of two with the strong beats are on beats 1 and 3.

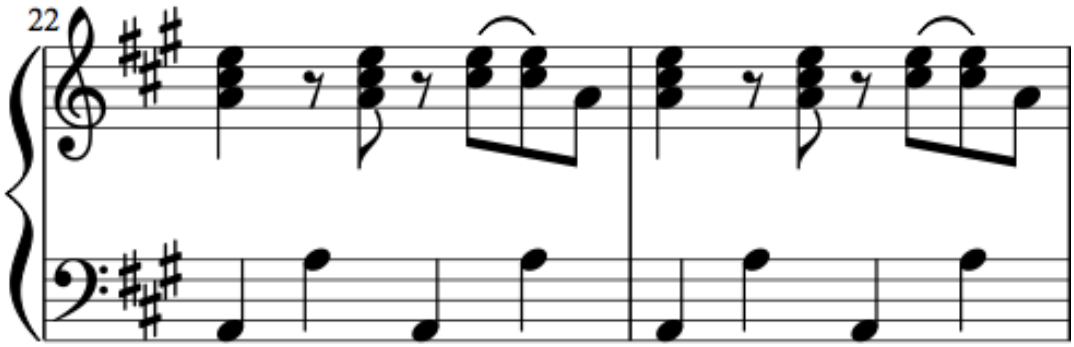
The left hand again lays out the pulse with the pinky on the on beat and the thumb on the off beat. So the pinky plays on beats 1 and 3 and the thumb on beats 2 and 4. For a basic off beat rhythm, the right hand will play a solid chord on the off beats with the thumb.



A more Cape Breton-type rhythm with a broken right hand lays out the subdivisions of the beat. On beat 2 the right hand plays a solid chord, then plays the second half of beats 3 and 4.



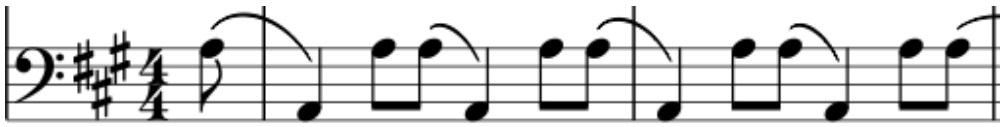
Again, like the jig, this can be combined with the right hand sometimes playing a solid chord on the on beat. In this example, the right hand plays a solid chord on beat 1 and plays the second halves of beats 2, 3 and 4.



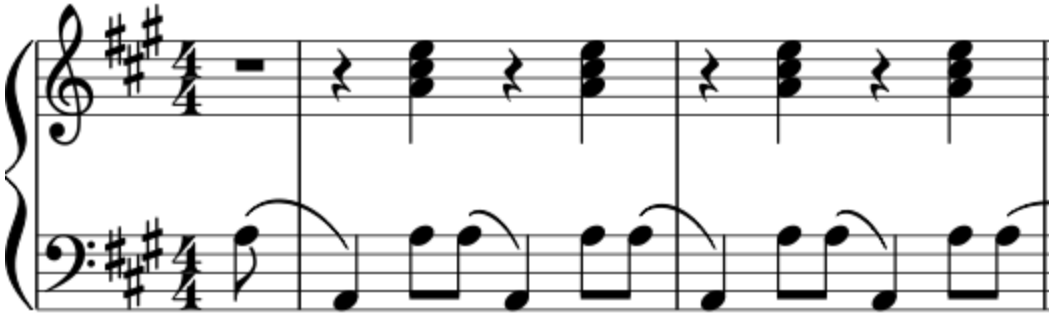
Strathspeys

The strathspey is also a type of dance tune in 4/4 but unlike the reel, each beat is felt as a strong pulse. The internal rhythm of a strathspey is a dotted 8th note followed by a 16th note or vice versa. This rhythm is usually combined with 16th note and triplet passages making for a very rhythmically complex tune. Therefore, strathspeys can be challenging to accompany. It can be a balancing act of not making the accompaniment sound too busy or too sparse. What also makes them challenging is that in terms of tempo, they are a transitional type of tune. There are slow strathspeys and faster dance strathspeys. They may be preceded by a march, but they are always played before a reel. Thus, the tempo is frequently changing unlike when accompanying reels and jigs. Strathspey accompaniment can be extremely syncopated but the accompanists primary role is to lay down that strong 4/4 pulse. Pianists frequently play on the on-beat with not only solid chords but also rolled chords where the chord is quickly arpeggiated. Chords often change on every beat in a strathspey and to accommodate this pianists often play passages of solid chords and solid octaves together.

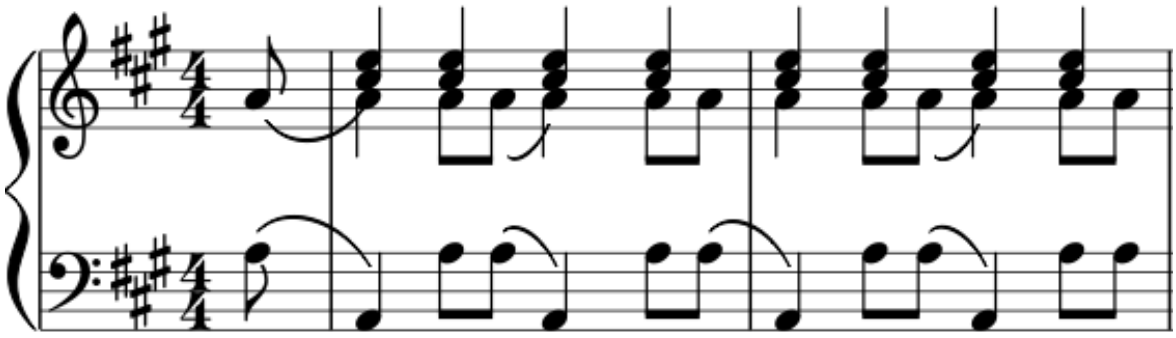
In strathspeys, pianists frequently employ what I think of as a grace note in the left hand octaves. Before the pinky plays on the beat, the thumb will play a grace note just before. This adds quite a bit of rhythm to push the ‘swinging’ feeling of the strathspey along.



Often times in the strathspey, this left hand technique is heard with just a solid chord in the right hand on the off beat.



Sometimes you will hear the right hand mimic this rhythm and play a grace note before the chord on the on beat. The chord can be broken up in many ways:

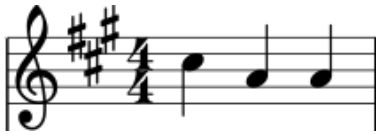


Marches

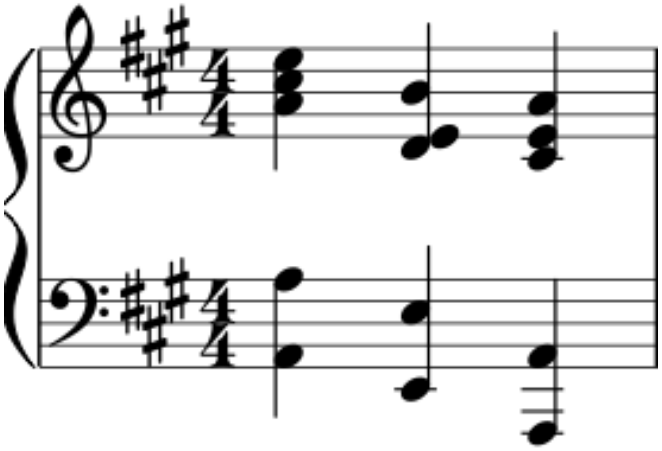
Marches are usually in 2/4 but also 6/8. Marches in 6/8 have for the most part become absorbed into the jig repertoire in Cape Breton so they are not really accompanied in a march style.

The internal rhythms of the march are similar to the strathspey with the dotted 8th note followed by a 16th or vice versa. However, there is a heavy 2 pulse feeling per bar as opposed to strong 4/4 pulse of the strathspey. The technique in accompanying a march is similar to a strathspey with the grace note often used in the left hand and the right hand using a combination of solid off beats as well as copying the grace note pattern of the left hand. (See notation for the strathspey above).

The parts of a march often end with a pattern of 3 quarter notes. In the key of A, a typical ending may be



Often times, the accompanist will follow this rhythm of the three quarter notes with solid chords and octaves together. Typically, the left hand will play I V I on each of the three beats. So in A Major or a modal key, this will be A E A. Over the 5th of the chord, the E, the right hand may play an ambiguous voicing hinting at V chord. This may look something like this:



Again these are very basic rhythms, but they are the essence of each tune type. Pianists have developed a highly syncopated way of accompanying these tunes based upon these rhythms and noting beyond these would be very tedious to read through. The best way to go about learning rhythms is to internalize the basics and begin transcribing

Bass lines

Chord tones with Broken Octaves in the Left Hand

Chromatic bass lines a big part of the distinguishing Cape Breton accompaniment sound. Bass lines add movement and rhythm and create smooth lines from chord to chord. For the most part, bass lines are improvised. Within the style, there are common bass runs that can be heard from player to player.

The first step to creating bass lines is to think about chord tones. A chord can be placed over anyone of its chord tones in the left hand- the root, 3rd or 5th. Let's look at the A major chord:

A C# E

We can play that chord any of these ways:

Right Hand	A	A	A
Left Hand	A (root)	C# (3rd)	E (5th)

When a progression stays on the same chord for more than one pulse, putting the chord over its various chord tones is a way to make the progression more interesting. At this point, we are not changing the broken octave technique of the left hand. It still plays a broken octave in the same rhythm on any of the chord tones.

One of the most common ways of doing this is putting the chord over its 5th. The chord tone of the 5th is common because the interval is neither major nor minor, meaning that you can play both a major chord and its minor counter part over its 5th. For example, A major and A minor can both be played over E in the left hand.

Let's apply this to the following chord progression to make it more interesting.

|A A| A A |D D|

Instead of playing all of the four A major chords over the root, let's put every second one over its 5th (E). This is a very common sound in many accompaniment styles, not just Cape Breton piano accompaniment

```
A    A |A    A|D    D|
     E       E
```

Playing the E in the left hand just before going to the D chord is a smoother approach than leaping from the A to the D. To get to the E from the A, I suggest moving down as opposed to moving up. Our ears like to hear the descending interval of the 5th. Also, this is a shorter distance than moving up to the E.

Another way of approaching the D smoothly is to put the A chord over the C# just before going to the D chord.

Let's combine this with the previous progression to come up with an interesting bass line for the four A chords

```
A    A |A    A|D    D|
     C#      C#
```

Similarly, if we had the progression:

```
|E    E|A    A|
```

we could lead smoothly to the A chord by putting the second E over its 3rd, the G#:

```
|E    E|A    A|
      G#
```

We have a few examples in the tunes we are studying that show how putting the chords over their chord tones can create smooth linear bass lines.

In the Road to Skye, we have the following progression in the last 4 bars of the 2nd part:

|A E|D A|D E| A A||

Instead of hopping around to the roots of the chords in the left hand, we can create a smooth descending scale-like passage by thinking about other chord tones:

|A E| D A|D E| A A||
G#F# E

We can also smoothly ascend back up to the A:

|A E| D A|D E| A A||
G#F# E F# G#

In the strathspey, The Editor's Favorite, we can create a whole descending scale in the left hand in the last 2 bars of the 2nd part:

|A E D A|D A E A|

becomes

|A E D A|D A E A|
G# F# E D C# B A

Oftentimes in strathspeys and marches, the left hand will play solid octaves. This is because chords often change on every beat. Playing solid octaves is the only way to accommodate this. There is no time to play a broken octave in places when chords change on each beat. This is the case in the progression for the strathspey above.
We rarely have places in jigs and reels where we have to change chords on every beat. Chords usually change on the pulse, or the strong beats.

Chromatic Bass lines with Solid Octaves

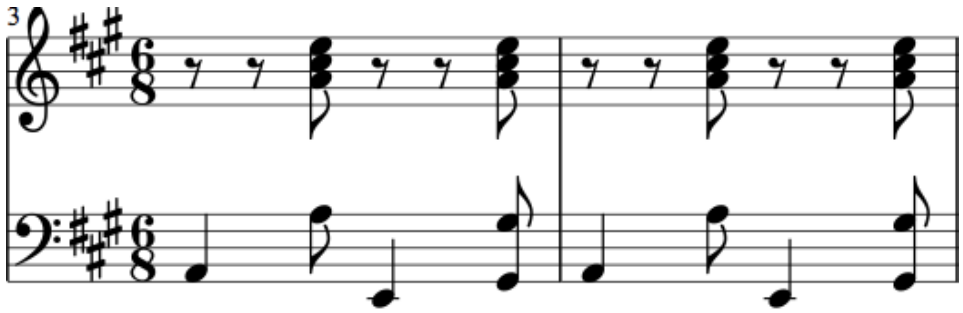
Another approach to creating bass runs is thinking about how we get from chord to chord and bass note to bass note as smoothly as possible. We do this through approaching a bass note chromatically (by a half-step) from below and above. Sometimes these are chord tones, but often times not. When playing these more chromatic bass runs, our left hand technique changes from always playing broken octaves to playing a combination of broken and solid octaves. The rhythm in the left hand does not change. It still plays both the pulse and off beats. But the flavor of the rhythm is changed by playing more chromatic movement.

Let's apply this concept to 4 pulses of an A chord of which the second A is over an E in the left hand

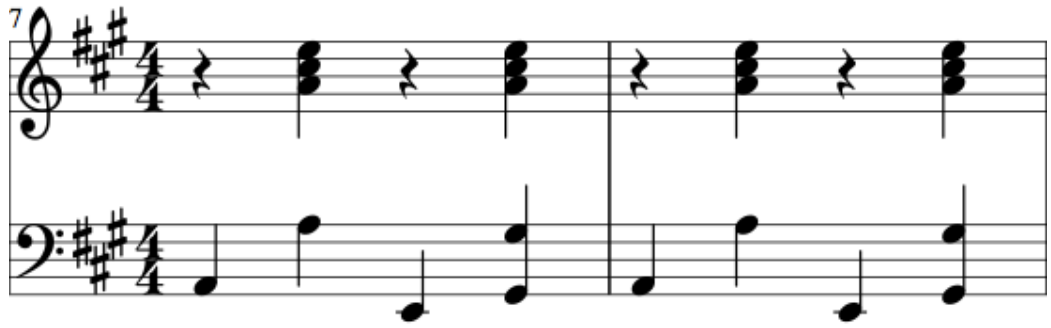
|A A/E|A A|

To get back to the A in the left hand after playing the E, we can approach the A chromatically with a G#. We then play the E and G# as a solid octave instead of playing a broken octave on the E. The solid octave of the G# takes the place of playing the thumb on the E in the broken octave. Musically notated, the left hand now looks like this.

In a jig:



In a reel:



In our chord charts, I have notated this solid octave like this:

|A A |A A|
E-G#

In the musical notations above, I have put the right hand directly on the off beat. This is an A major chord played with a G# in the left hand. This is played so quickly that the dissonance is not heard. Often times, the right hand is played in a more syncopated rhythm so that the right and left do not play at the same time.

We can apply that same concept to change the flavor of a bass run we already have looked at going from the A to a D chord

|A A|D D|
C#

Instead of playing the C# as a broken octave, we can treat it like a chromatic approach note.

|A A |D D|
A-C#

A very common bass run at the end of a part accommodates the I IV V I progression or in the key of A

| A D | E A |

We can link all of these chords chromatically to come up with a very common bass run:

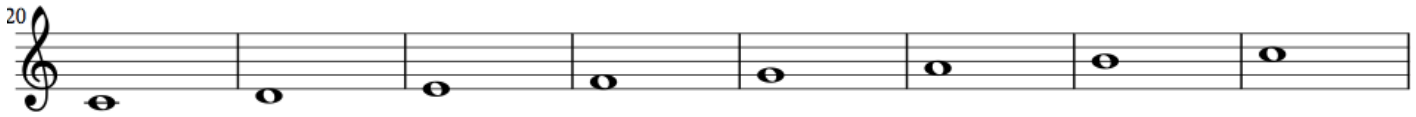
| A D | E A |
A-C# D-D# E-G# A

This is a great run to practice is all major keys common to fiddle tunes like C, D, E, F, G, and Bb and Eb.

As you can see, adding chord tones and chromaticism in the left hand creates seemingly endless possibilities in for accompanying a tune. This may seem overwhelming. The best approach to incorporate bass lines into your playing is to treat them like patterns. Practice the same bass run in the same place in a tune until it becomes a part of your bass line vocabulary. This could be as little as the **A-C#** going to the D chord, or the more complicated bass line that goes along with the I IV V I progression above. Once you have internalized a few patterns like this, you will be able combine them various ways. This is the start of the improvisation process.

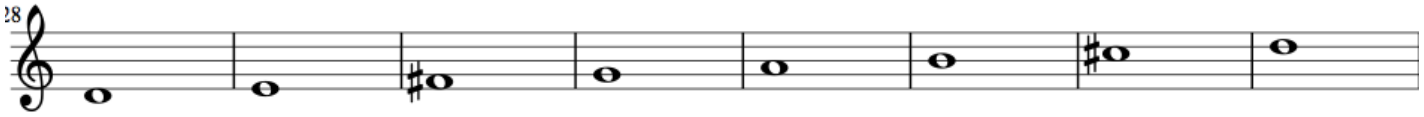
Major Scales and Key Signatures

C Major



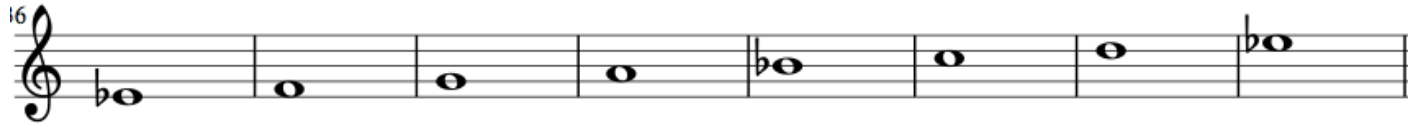
C D E F G A B C

D Major



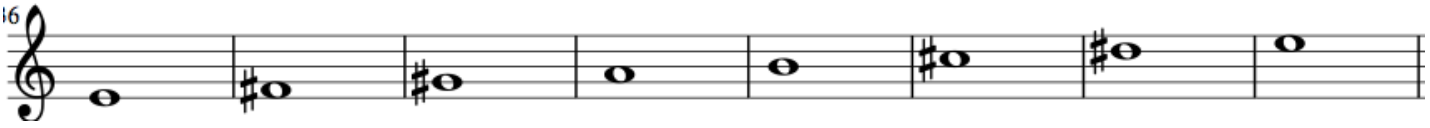
D E F G A B C# D

Eb Major



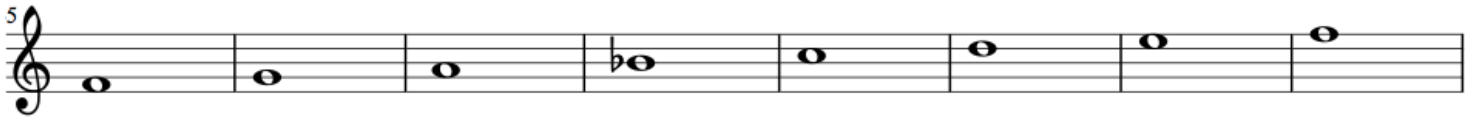
Eb F G A B C# D Eb

E Major



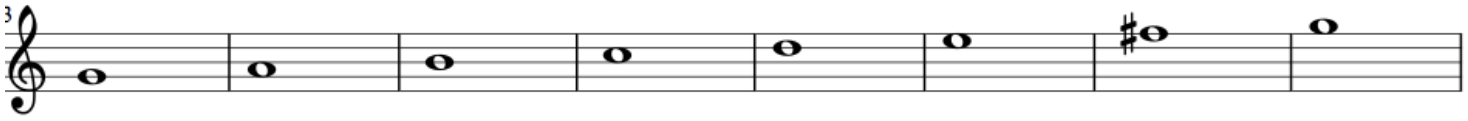
E F# G# A B C# D# E

F Major



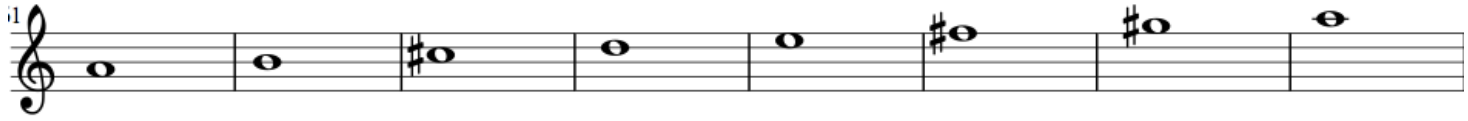
F G A Bb C D E F

G Major



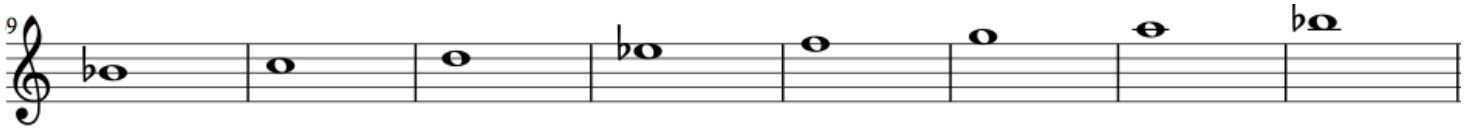
G A B C D E F# G

A Major



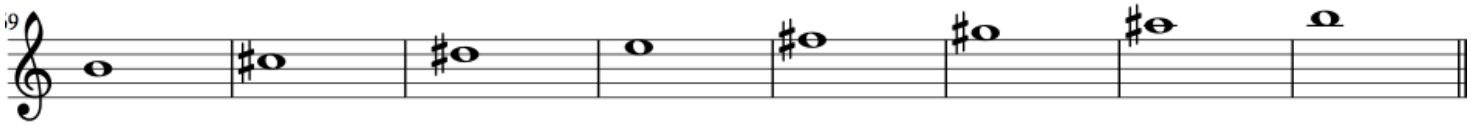
A B C# D E F# G# A

Bb Major



Bb C D Eb F G A Bb

B Major



B C# D# E F# G# A# B