

SONGWRITING WORKSHOP by Paul 'Aka' Kessler

LEARNING GOALS:

Learning the basics and techniques of the composition process in popular music.

Why do you write songs?

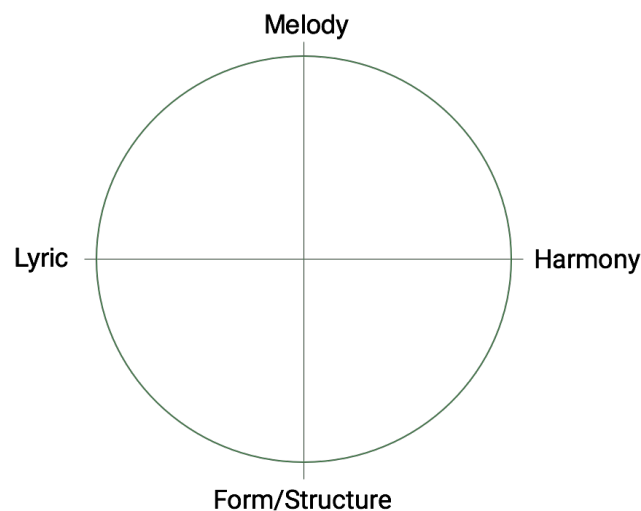
Maybe you have a creative urge and want to share something with the world? Or you play an instrument and are tired of playing other people's songs? Whatever! These considerations are rather philosophical, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't even ask yourself these questions.

Another reason is of course:

It is your profession or writing songs is part of your profession.

The songwriting process

Songwriting-Circle



When you work on a song, you can first roughly distinguish 4 areas:

Melody, harmony, song form/structure and lyrics.

During the songwriting process you will probably switch back and forth between these areas.

Perhaps a chord progression inspires you to write a melody, or a lyric dictates the song form.

Starting point harmony

Basic knowledge of harmony

Do I need that? Do I need to study harmony to write better songs?

In a nutshell: Yes.

And it is not discussed!

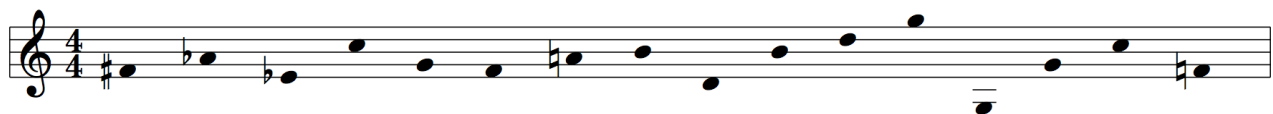
Seriously, you don't need to be able to write a dissertation on absurd harmonic analysis, but you should be familiar with the following topics:

- Music notation
- Intervals
- Triads & 4-note chords
- Functional harmony
- Modal systems (church scales)

Highly recommended for beginners is "Die neue Harmonielehre" (Volume 1; AMA Verlag) by Frank Haunschild.

Here are a few written exercises:

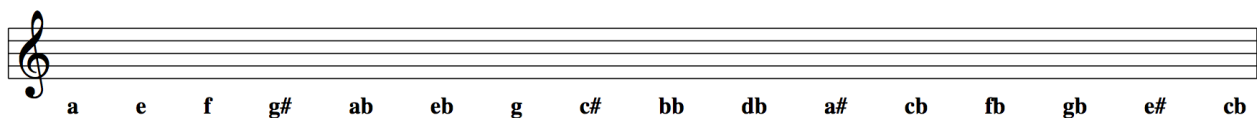
Name the notes



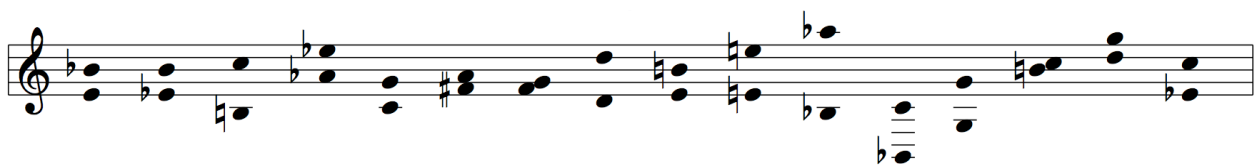
Name the note values



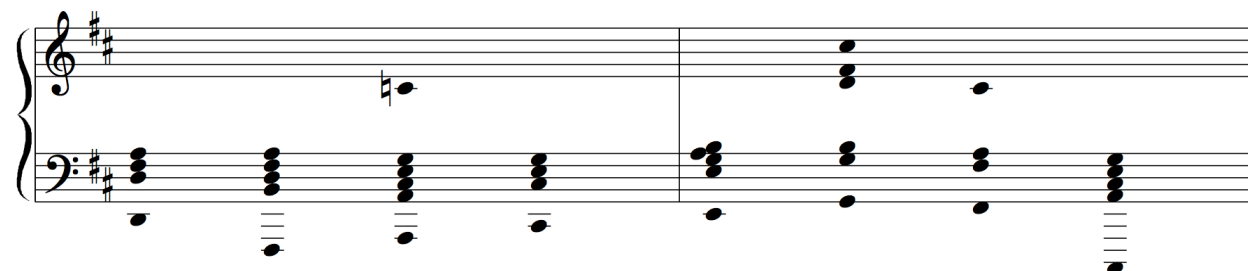
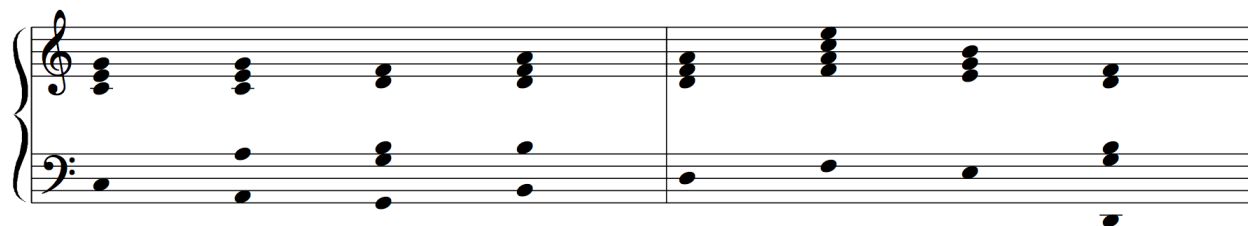
Write the corresponding notes; octave does not matter



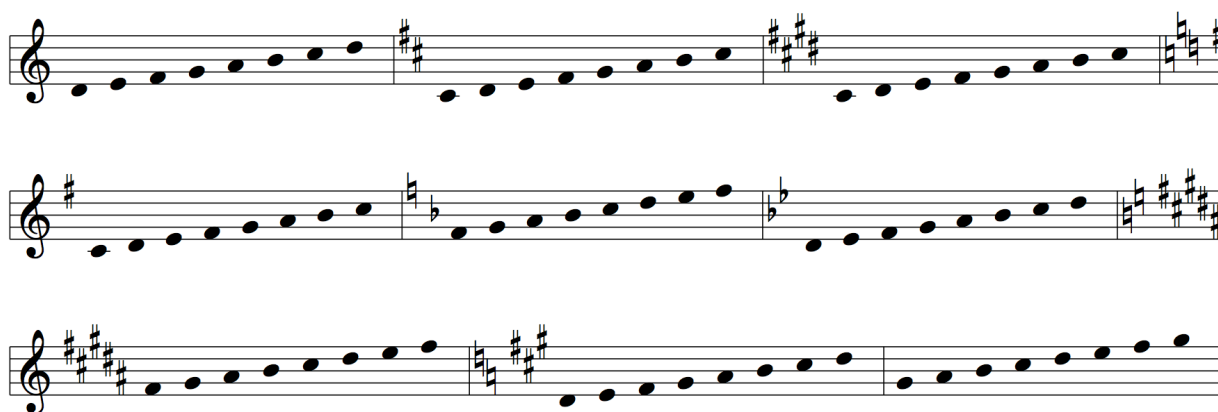
Name the intervals



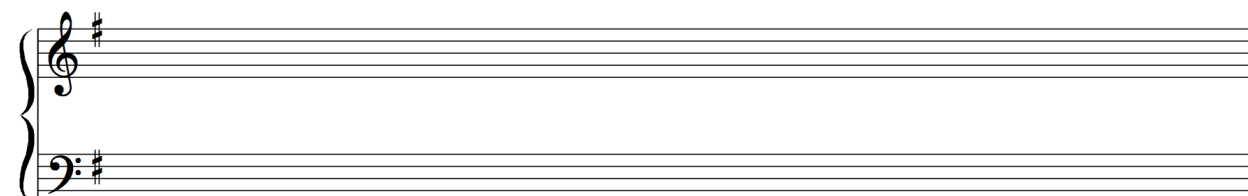
Name the triads and 4-note chords in chord symbol notation.



Name the scales



Write the 4-note chords of G major with their function names (tonic, dominant, etc)



Praxis

Get to work - create a groove!

Have 4 things in mind:

1. Tempo
2. Feel (Style)
3. Rhythmic level (Which note values occur?)
4. Rhythm idea

Exercise 1

Write a groove based on any chord. Choose a tempo, a style, note values and a rhythmic idea. What feelings do you associate with your groove?



Exercise 2

Write a groove by combining 2 different chord progressions from 2 songs you know. And again: What emotions do you associate with them?



Exercise 3

Take your groove from exercise 2 and come up with a melody to go with it. What mood is created by the combination of groove and melody?



Exercise 4

Now make a song part out of it. What you're still missing is a lyric. What will come out of it? A chorus? A verse?



Remember!

Whatever you write: Remember the story! What is it about? Will it be funny, sad, aggressive or tender?

Because if the moods of the different areas (see songwriting circle) don't work well together, the quality of your song will suffer.