

BUILDING CHORDS

AS GUITARISTS IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW THE BASICS OF HOW MUSIC FUNCTIONS. WHAT I HAVE PRESENTED HERE IS, WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE, A GUITAR FRIENDLY APPROACH TO CHORDS AND THE GUITAR. I HAVE TO WARN YOU THAT WE ARE DIPPING OUR TOE INTO A BIT OF MUSIC THEORY...DUN DUN DUUUNN.

MANY OF THE BASIC CHORDS WE PLAY ARE ACTUALLY TRIADS. TRIADS ARE CHORDS CONSISTING OF THREE PITCHES, SEPERATED BY THIRDS. BELOW I HAVE SOME EXAMPLES:

GUITAR

I EXPLAIN IT TO MY STUDENTS LIKE THIS: THINK ABOUT ALL THE LETTERS WE USE IN MUSIC (LEAVING OUT THE SHARPS AND FLATS)

A B C D E F G

IF WE TAKE 'C' AS OUR STATING NOTE WHICH WE WILL CALL THE ROOT' WE CAN FIND THE SECOND NOTE OF THE TRIAD (THE 3RD) BY COUNTING TO THREE. WHEN WE DO THIS WE FIND 'E' IS THE NEXT NOTE IN OUR TRIAD. IF WE TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER AND CONTINUE TO 5, WE LAND ON 'G' (THE 5TH). THE NOTES IN A 'C' CHORD ARE C - E - G.

C IS THE ROOT, E IS THE 3RD, AND G IS THE 5TH.

THIS IS AN OVER SIMPLIFICATION, BUT IT WORKS TO EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT. WHEN WE ADD SHARPS/FLATS/MINOR CHORDS IT GETS A BIT MORE COMPLEX. LET'S START WITH MINOR CHORDS.

GTR.

THERE IS ONLY A ONE NOTE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A C MAJOR CHORD AND A C MINOR CHORD. IT IS THE 3RD.

MAJOR - ROOT, 3RD, 5TH (C, E, G)

MINOR - ROOT, FLAT 3RD, 5TH (C, E FLAT, G)

I HAVE DEMONSTRATED HOW TO FIND A MINOR TRIAD BASED ON THE MAJOR TRIAD. BUT THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST WAY TO APPROACH CHORDS. NOW WE ADD IN THE SHARPS AND THE FLATS, AND REALLY WHAT WE NEED IS AN UNDERSTANDING OF OUR KEY SIGNATURES. I WILL PROCEED ASSUMING THAT WE ARE SECURE IN THIS KNOWLEDGE AND SAVE THE EXPLANATION OF KEYS FOR ANOTHER TIME.

LET'S TAKE F# MAJOR AS AN EXAMPLE. HOW DO WE FIND THE NOTES IN THIS TRIAD?

FIRST, WE LOOK TO THE KEY SIGNATURE. AS YOU SEE BELOW, THE SHARPED NOTES IN F# ARE: F# C# G# D# A# E#

GTR.

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IF WE USE THE PROCESS I SET UP IN THE VERY BEGINNING, WE COME UP WITH THIS RESULT:

F# - ROOT

A# - 3RD

C# - 5TH

WE CAN USE THIS KEY TO FIND A MINOR CHORD AS WELL. LET'S DO G# MINOR:

IF WE START ON G# USING THE SCALE ABOVE WE GET THIS AS OUR RESULT:

G# - ROOT

B - 3RD

D# - 5TH

HOPEFULLY THIS POINTS YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. YOU MAY BE ASKING YOURSELF 'WHY DO I NEED TO KNOW ALL OF THIS?' IT IS FAIR, BUT I WILL LEAVE YOU WITH THIS ONE LAST THOUGHT. THE MORE OF THIS YOU KNOW, THE MORE IT WILL HELP YOUR OVERALL MUSICALITY, YOUR CONCEPT OF MELODY AND HARMONY, AND FOR US GUITARISTS OUR SOLOING ABILITY.