

CHORD PROGRESSIONS I

To alleviate the drudgery of the prior technical terminology lesson, some basic chord progressions will be discussed. Then some more technical stuff will be covered.

The more interesting songs generally have a somewhat complex chord structure but this will start with simple and move in that direction.

Although a song can be composed using only one chord, that would be, and if there were such a song is, BORING! Harmonic complexity is generally found in the more popular songs or they use a tried and true progression.

A comment about the notation. The roman numerals by themselves represent the natural chords within a Key. "By themselves" means there are no changes indicated and all of the notes within the chord come from the key. Any chord introduced by changes to the roman numeral are "borrowed" chords. For example, in the key of C there is no G# note but the E major chord can be indicated as: III3# or sometimes III3+ both mean the same thing, raise the third above the root by a half step which will change E-G-B (e minor) to E-G#-B (E Major). As this notation is used, it will be explained and you'll become accustomed with it.

The simplest progression is: I - IV - V

Pick a key. I'll use the standard favorite: C. You already know, or can create, the triads/chords on the scale degrees and the Roman numerals simply represent those.

These are the chords for C: I = C, 4 = F, and V = G. Notes are: C-E-G, F-A-C, and G-B-D. You might want to take the blank fret diagrams and determine the fingering for these chords. You probably already know the fingering but the exercise in moving up by a half step (one fret) at a time to get to that fingering will be worthwhile.

These are the chords for E: I = E, 4 = A, and V = B. I'll leave the actual notes and the fingering for you to figure out.

Try playing those then write down the same progression for: G, D, F, and A and play them.

You'll note that they all sound very similar. Differences will be because some of the chords are not in root position, that is sounded as a triad. On the Baritone Ukulele, the C chord: 2-0-1-0 has E in the bass and the E is doubled sounding also on the first string. Since the instrument has four strings and the chord has only three notes it is expected that one note will be doubled. With the third of the chord in the bass and then doubling it, the chord is somewhat weak. Compare the C chord sequence with that of E. The E chord: 2-1-0-0, also has the note E in the bass and it is doubled on string 1 but it is in root position.

During the 50s through the middle 70s (roughly) and in some instances today, these progressions were immensely popular:

I - III - IV - V , I - VI - IV - V, and I - VI - II - V

CHORD PROGRESSIONS I

Note that all of these sequences begin with I and end with V. The V chord has a special relationship to the tonic which is so strong that it is referred to as “Dominant”. Each degree of the scale and its associated triad has a name. For reference these are: Root/Tonic, Supertonic, Mediant, Subdominant, Dominant, Submediant, and leading note.

No, these don't make a lot of sense although there are explanations for each some of which are convoluted. The only one of real interest is the Dominant and that will be used ... a LOT. The 7th note is called the Leading Note because if you play a scale and stop on it there is a great unfinished sense as this 7th tone very strongly “leads” into the tonic. This is sometimes referred to as “resolution”.

If you have access to a piano, if not use the Uke which may take a few moments to figure out, play the C major scale. By now you should know that it begins on C and is simply all the white keys up to the next C, Eight notes away. Do that a few times then play it again and stop on B, the note before C. If you feel unfulfilled then you have a good sense for music, if not, well there is always poker. You should feel the unresolved nature of stopping on B, the seventh tone, and feel much better when the C is reached.

The Seventh tone of a scale is in the V chord as the 5th interval. This along with the natural tendency of the fifth tone of the scale to return to the scale tonic is why the V chord is referred to as the Dominant. This property will be discussed again in a later lesson.

If you know or in High School ever played *Heart and Soul* on the piano then the I - VI - IV - V progression should be familiar.

26 miles a.k.a. “*Santa Catalina*” by the Four Preps (See PDF) is a classic using I - VI - IV - V almost exclusively. (ignore the little “7” on some chords, that will be covered later).

Figure out the chords for each of these progressions, the fingering (even if you already know that), and play them. If you have the time, find the performances on youtube and play along. Yes there will be a few places where you won't have the chords but that's OK, all we are trying to address are the primary progressions; there are always alterations which make for great music.

Twenty-Six Miles

Four Preps (by Bruce Belland, Glenn Larson) late 1950s early 1960s. #2 on Billboard Hot 100

At the age of 15, the band's lead singer Bruce Belland broke his ankle and took up the ukulele to pass the time while recuperating. He learned four chords, which ended up becoming the song's opening music. Standard I, VI, IV, V⁷ progression with II^{#3,7} occurring in bridge. C: C, a, D⁷, G⁷.

G	e	C	D ⁷	G	e	C	D ⁷
C	a	F	G ⁷	C	a	F	G ⁷
I	VI	IV	V ⁷	I	VI	IV	V ⁷

1. Twenty- six miles a-cross the sea. Santa Cata-lina is a-waitin' for me
2. Twenty- six miles, so near yet far I'd swim with just some water-wings and my guitar
3. Forty kilometers in a leaky old boat. Any old thing that'll stay afloat

G	e	C	D ⁷	G	e	C	D ⁷
C	a	F	G ⁷	C	a	F	G ⁷
I	VI	IV	V ⁷	I	VI	IV	V ⁷

1. Santa Cata-lina, the island of ro-mance, ro-mance, ro-mance, ro-mance
2. I could leave the wings but I'll need the guitar for romance (4 times)
3. When we arrive we'll all promote romance, romance, romance, romance

G	e	C	D ⁷	G	e	C	D ⁷
C	a	F	G ⁷	C	a	F	G ⁷
I	VI	IV	V ⁷	I	VI	IV	V ⁷

1. Water all a-round it every-where, Tropical trees and the salty air
2. Twenty- six miles across the sea. Santa Catalina is a-waitin' for me
3. Twenty- six miles across the sea. Santa Catalina is a-waitin' for me

G	e	C	D ⁷	G	D ⁷	G ⁷
C	a	F	G ⁷	C	G ⁷	C ⁷
I	VI	IV	V ⁷	I	V ⁷	I ⁷

1. But for me the thing that's a-waitin' there is ro-mance
2. Santa Catalina, the island of romance (chord through 3 unsung "romance")
3. Santa Catalina, the island of romance, romance, romance, romance **[TO OUTRO]**

[BRIDGE]

a(C)	D	G	e	C	D	G	G ⁷
d(F)	G	C	a	F	G	C	C ⁷
II(IV)	V	I	VI	IV	V	I	I ⁷

1. It seems so distant, twenty-six miles away Restin' in the water se-rene
2. A tropical heaven out in the ocean. Covered with trees and girls

a(C)	D	G	e	A ⁷	D	D ⁷
d(F)	G	C	a	D ⁷	G	G ⁷
II(IV)	V	I	VI	II ^{#3,7}	V	V ⁷

1. I'd work for anyone, even the Navy Who would float me to my island dream
2. If I have to swim, I'll do it forever 'Till I'm gazin' on those island pearls

[OUTRO 3X]

G	e	C	D ⁷	G	e	C	D/D ⁷	D ⁷	G
C	a	F	G ⁷	C	a	F	G/G ⁷	G ⁷	C
I	VI	IV	V ⁷	I	VI	IV	V	V ⁷	I

Twenty- six miles a-cross the sea. Santa Cata-lina is a-waitin' [1st] for me ... [2nd] for me!