

Common Chord Patterns in Music

To create music in any style, it is important to know what chord patterns are appropriate to different styles of music. Here are four of the most common musical chord patterns in the key of C Major:

“I IV V I” progression:

||: C | F | G | C :||

E.g. Most classical music, and numerous ‘pop’ songs, namely I Wanna Hold Your Hand, Bad Romance, Louie Louie, etc.

“Classic Rock” progression:

(V IV I or I bVII IV)

||: G | F | C | C :||

E.g. Numerous classic rock songs (Sweet Home Alabama, Fortunate Son, etc.); last 4 bars of 12 bar blues

“Rhythm Changes” progression:

(I vi ii V)

||: C | A- | D- | G :||

E.g. Jazz standards based on I Got Rhythm, and 1950s popular music (I vi IV V variation), e.g. Stand By Me, Soundtrack to Grease, 50s doo-wop, etc.

“Avril Lavigne Secret Chord Progression” (or “Avril Lavigne” progression):

(I V vi IV)

||: C | G | A- | F :||

E.g. Contemporary popular music, namely With or Without You (U2); When I Come Around (Green Day); (and countless other 90s alt rock songs); Complicated and My Happy Ending by Avril Lavigne; Let it Go from Frozen (chorus)

How To Compose Good Melodies

Good melodies are generally simple enough to be easy for the average person to sing (and therefore remember) while also being unpredictable enough to grab our attention and interest. These two paradoxical traits are what make a melody ‘catchy’ or get stuck in people’s heads. Here are six guidelines for writing good melodies:

- 1) Keep range of melody within one octave or less
- 2) Stepwise motion predominates
- 3) Leaps are generally followed by stepwise motion in opposite direction
- 4) Vary the contour during repetitive sections
- 5) Good melodies often have a climax or unique high note either at the end of the song or 2/3 of the way through.
- 6) When setting lyrics to a melody, have the melody follow the natural pitch contour of the spoken word