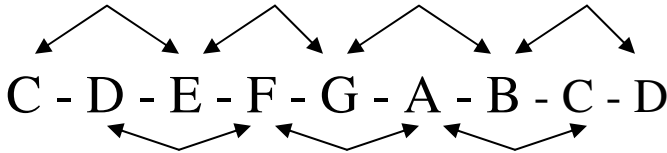


Can't We All Live in Harmony (part 1)

Written by Alex Boccia

After speaking with many guitar players/students and seeing conversations on forums, I have noticed that when harmonizing is discussed the understanding is very limited. This is due to the fact that the most traditional way of harmonizing in rock music is using the intervals 3rd's, 6th's, and/or octaves (8th's), so that is all most people think exist. Those are all real cool tools to use when harmonizing, but there are also many others. A harmony is simply when 2 or more notes are sounding simultaneously.
(* A basic understanding of intervals is needed to understand the following information)

First let's not neglect harmonies using diatonic 4th's, 5th's, 7th's, and 9th's. Those numbers are all intervals that are diatonic to a specific key. Know that an interval is the distance between two pitches. For those who don't understand what those numbers mean and/or represent I will give you a brief explanation and example by using the key of C major (the notes in the key of C major are C-D-E-F-G-A-B). Let's try harmonizing by 3rd's starting with the note C. If we are harmonizing C by using a 3rd that simply means you are using the third note in the C major scale above the C note (you must count C as one). So let's find that third note; C(1)...D(2)...E(3). Our third note above C is E. So if you played a C and were correctly harmonizing by a 3rd, then the other note would be an E. Let's find a 3rd above the second scale degree of C major. The second scale degree is D, so D(1)...E(2)...F(3). Our third note above D is F. I want to give you a guide of thirds in the key of C major (below the arrows are connecting the 3rd's)...



* I also want to remind you that the repeated C and D are both octaves of the 1st C and D. Going into octaves will be necessary for the harmonizing process.

For the remaining intervals you will do the same thing. Below are examples of each interval in the key of C major (lower case letters will represent notes that are within the octave, or higher, of the upper case letter)...

4th's: (C,F) (D,G) (E,A) (F,B) (G,c) (A,d) (B,e)

5th's: (C,G) (D,A) (E,B) (F,c) (G,d) (A,e) (B,f)

6th's: (C,A) (D,B) (E,c) (F,d) (G,e) (A,f) (B,g)

7th's: (C,B) (D,c) (E,d) (F,e) (G,f) (A,g) (B,a)

octaves (8th 's): (C,c) (D,d) (E,e) (F,f) (G,g) (A,a) (B,b)

9th's: (C,d) (D,e) (E,f) (F,g) (G,a) (A,b) (B,c)

I want to quickly point out why I didn't include the interval of a 2nd on the previous list. Intervals of a 2nd, such as B & C and F & G, are harsh to the ear. This is why we use 9th's instead. 9th's are simply 2nd's an octave higher. The distance between the octaves smooth out the otherwise harsh sound. You can move any note into the octave for a different sound. This is how we come about 11th and 13th chords.

Now you can utilize harmonies on your own, or with another guitar player and/or any other instrument. It is commonly done both ways. If you are playing both notes on your own then it is referred to as a double stop. Double stops are common in many styles if not all; from classical to country, metal to folk, and punk to jazz. Now that's diverse! To use double stops you will place each note on a separate string. For example you can put a finger on the A note (2nd string, 10th fret), and a finger on the C# note (1st string, 9th fret)

An easy way to harmonize with another guitarist's melody is by utilizing the modes of whatever key the melody is in. For example if you want to harmonize a melody in the key of C major by using thirds then you can simply use the third mode of C major which would be E phrygian. Try having one guitarist play through the key of C major note for note while you do the same in E phrygian. This will achieve diatonic harmonization of thirds. Following is a diagram of how the notes in these two scales pair up:

C Major: C-D-E-F-G-A-B
E Phrygian: E-F-G-A-B-C-D

If you want to harmonize in 5th's you can use the Major scale's relative Mixolydian mode (Mixolydian is the 5th mode of the Major scale). You can use this method with all the Major scale modes.

All of the previous information was in relation to a specific type of harmonic motion known as parallel motion. Parallel motion is when the harmonies are moving the same direction and by the same interval. There are three other types of harmonic motion, and that's where it really starts getting interesting. In my next article on harmony we will discuss one of the three remaining types of harmonic motion, similar motion. Until then I leave you with a new box of tools to experiment with.