Table of Contents

Decoding Piano– by Fretboard Toolbox

Chord Jig Explained

(Chord Jig shown is from the G Major/E minor page)

The Basics–

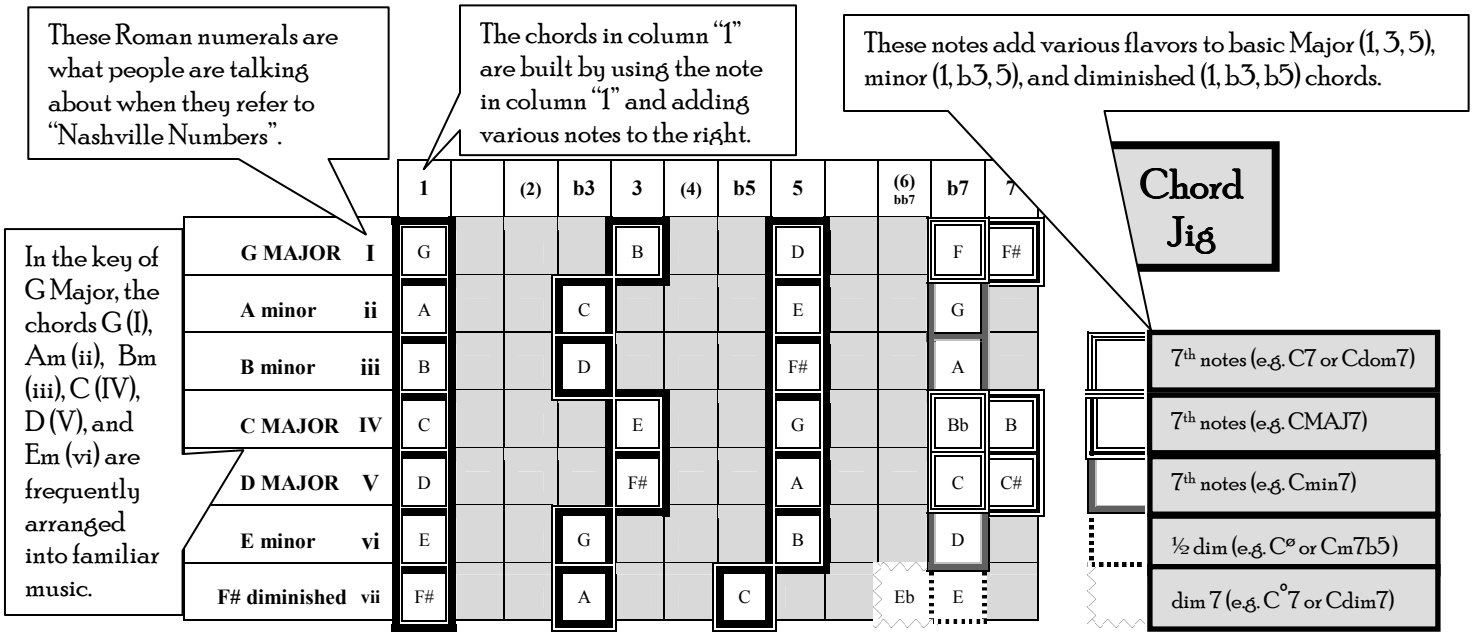
How do I know which chords sound good together? Major scales (do–re–mi…) sound good to our ears. By going down column "1" of the Chord Jig, you can play the Major scale for each of the keys. The Major scale for G Major, for example, is made of the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, and F#. The secret to understanding which chords sound good together is learning that **each note of the Major scale can be turned into its own chord.** Turn a "G" note into a "G Major" chord by playing the notes G, B, D. Turn an "A" note into an "A minor" chord by playing A, C, E, etc. (Major chords use notes from the 1, 3, and 5 columns of the Chord Jig, and minor chords use the notes 1, b3 (read "flat–3") and 5). **All of these chords (chords I–vii) sound good together because all of the notes from the G Major scale sound good together! The chords I–vi are especially common, and countless songs use some or all of these chords in nearly endless arrangements!**

How can knowing the Nashville Numbers system improve my playing? In the Chord Jig for each key, chords are given Roman numerals, sometimes called "Nashville Numbers", so players can easily describe chord changes. In the key of G Major, the "I" chord is G Major, the "ii" chord is A minor, the "iii" chord is B minor, etc. Note that, in Major keys, the chords I, IV, and V are most often played as Major chords, and chords ii, iii, and vi are most often played as minor chords. If someone tells you a song is a simple I –IV– V progression in the key of G Major, you'd just play the chords G Major (I) – C Major (IV) – D Major (V). **This is a *very* common progression!** To play a song with a I – vi – IV –V progression in the key o f G Major, you'd just play G Major (I) – E minor (vi) – C Major (IV) – D Major (V). When you start thinking in terms of Nashville Numbers, you'll start training your ear to recognize lots of different common progressions of chords. Practice learning the I–vi chords in every key, and watch your jams sessions transform when you're figuring out songs on the fly!

Beyond Basics–

What if I want to play a song in a different key ("transpose" a song)? If you can figure out what the chord progression of a song is in one key, and change those chords into Nashville Numbers, then you can use Decoding Piano book to find that same progression in any key! e.g. To play the I – vi – IV – V progression in D Major, just play D Major (I) – B minor (vi) – G Major (IV) – A Major (V). It's that easy!

Can these chord rules be broken? Once you know the chords that "go together" within a key, you can also see what substituting chords from outside the key will sound like. Decoding Piano is different in that you can ***know*** which chords fall outside of the key and give that chord change its particular sound in the song. In G Major, try changing the iii chord into a **Major III chord** (the B minor chord changes to a B **Major** chord– instead of playing the notes B, D, and F#, you'd play B, D#, and F#) and remember the sound you get. Another great variation in G Major is playing a I chord (G Major), and then a IV chord (C Major), followed by an iv chord (C minor). This has a beautiful, sad sound. The music we listen to has tons of these chord substitutions, and when you ***know*** which rules you're breaking, you can get that sound in any key you want! You can build tons of chords by studying the Chord Toolbox on p. 17–18.



Grand Staff Jig Explained

Decoding Piano~ by Fretboard Toolbox

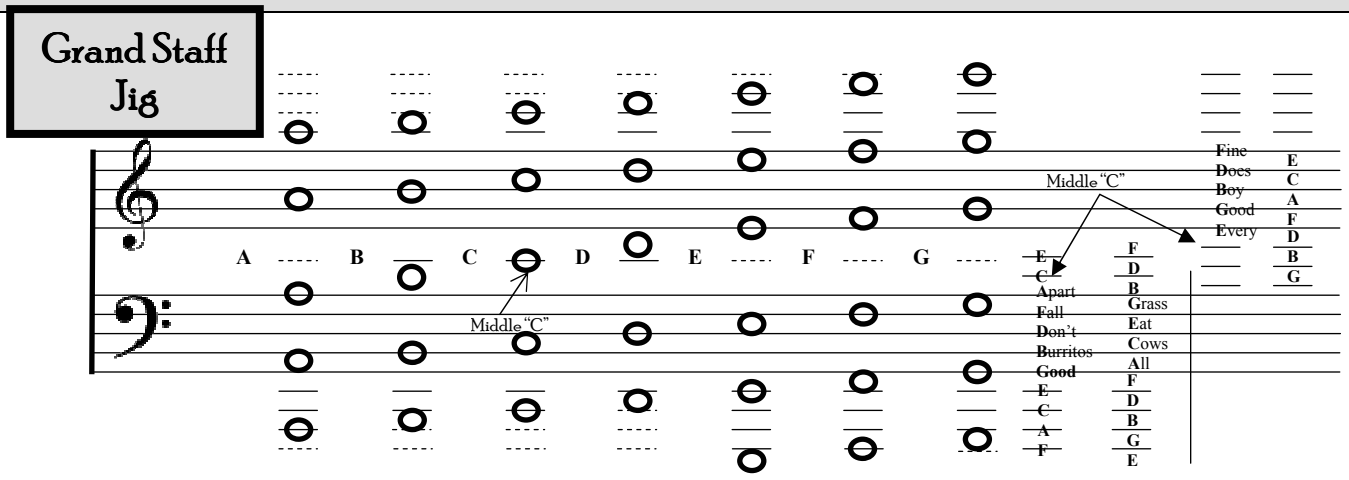
The Basics~

How is the Grand Staff Jig used? The Grand Staff is used by pianists to know which notes to play in a given song. Each note can be flat (b), sharp (#), or natural (♮). To tell whether a certain note is sharp (#), flat (b), or natural (♮) in a given key, just figure out which key you're song is in by using the Table of Contents from your Decoding Piano book, and then turn to that page. Next, use the notes down column "1" of your Chord Jig for that key and then you'll know which notes are supposed to be played sharp or flat. For example, if the key signature has one sharp, by looking at the Table of Contents you'll see that that key is either G Major or E minor. Then, by turning to the G Major/E minor page (p. 6), you'll see that the G Major scale is made of the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F# (and then back to G). The key of E minor is made of the **exact same notes**, except it keeps coming back to E minor instead of G Major. Play this scale (the natural minor), by starting on E, and then play F#, G, A, B, C, and D. If you want to make that minor scale sound really cool, then you can take the seventh note (D) and change it to a D#. This makes a beautiful sounding scale called the harmonic minor. You'll find the sound of the harmonic minor instantly recognizable. The harmonic minor scale in E minor is E, F#, G, A, B, C, **D#.**

How is the Grand Staff laid out? The Grand Staff is divided into two groups, called clefs. The clef on the bottom is the bass clef, and the clef on the top is called the treble clef. The lines of the bass clef , starting at the bottom line and going up, are made of the notes G, B, D, F, and A. Piano players often use mnemonics to remember the order of notes on the different clefs, and "Good Burritos Don't Fall Apart" is one that you can use for the bass clef. The lines of the treble clef, starting on the bottom and going up, are E, G, B, D, and F. People sometimes remember this as "Every Good Boy Does Fine". You can see a couple of other common mnemonics to remember the spaces of each clef. You can see that the note directly in between both clefs is a "C", called "middle-C", because it is the "C" note located on the middle of a full-length piano. "C" notes are found every 12 keys above and below middle-C, and by using the Grand Staff Jig, you can see where on the Grand Staff each of those "C" notes falls. For example, The "C" played below middle-C is found on the second space up from the bottom on the bass clef. To play this note from the bass clef, simply play the "C" note located 12 keys below middle-C. It's that easy! Notice that lots of notes are located above and below the treble and bass clefs, and are above, on, or below some little lines. These lines are called "ledger lines" and allow you to find notes that fall outside of the lines and spaces of either clef. The Grand Staff Jig doesn't cover all of the notes of a full piano, but it covers enough to play most commonly played sheet music.

Beyond Basics~

What can I learn about chords from the Grand Staff Jig? By using your Chord Jig and Grand Staff Jigs together, you can look at the notes that are found in a chord, and then figure out what chord is being played. You'll often see three notes stacked on top of each other. For example, in the key of G Major, you'll often see G Major chords built with G, B, and D notes stacked three in a row with "G" on the bottom and "D" on the top. This is a G Major chord played in what's called "root position". In the same key, you'll see A, C, and E notes stacked in the same way, and this is an A minor chord in root position. However, lots of times, you'll see chords stacked in different ways. G Major can also be played with the "B" note lowest, a "D" on top of the "B", and then a "G" note 1½ lines/spaces above. This is still a G Major chord, but it's called a "1st inversion" since you played the "B" note first. You can also play a G Major by playing the "D" note lowest, and then playing the "G" note along with the "B" to the right. This is called a "2nd inversion, since you're playing the "D" note from the G Major chord first. All the Major and minor chords for each of the scales can be built in this same way!



Keyboard Layout Explained

Decoding Piano~ by Fretboard Toolbox

The Basics~

How is the Keyboard Layout used? One of the best parts about the Decoding Piano book is that, for each key, the Keyboard Layout shows you where each note from the key you've chosen is located. So, for example, to play a G Major scale, you just turn to the G Major/E minor page (p. 6) and then look on the Keyboard Layout to see where to find the notes from that scale. For the key of G Major, you would find that the "G" notes have an asterisk (*) above them, since "G" is the "root note" of that key. To play the entire G Major scale, you would just start with one of the "G" notes and then play each note to the right in ascending order~ G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, and then back to G.

What can I learn about chords from the Keyboard Layout? One of the coolest things to discover is that, for each key, you can turn each note of the Major scale into its own chord. Since the notes of the Major scale all sound good to our ears when played together, turning each of those notes into it's own chord means that those *chords* will all sound good together! So, for example, you can take the G Major scale and then turn the G note into a G Major chord by looking at your Chord Jig and seeing that G Major chords are built of the notes G, B, and D, so by playing those notes together (in any order), you'll be playing a G Major chord. Look at your Keyboard Layout to find all sorts of ways that you can play the notes G, B, and D together. You can repeat as many of those notes as you'd like, and notice the different sound that each grouping of those notes gives you. Once you have some G Major chords down, use your Chord Jig to see that A minor notes are built of the notes A, C, and E. Find different places you can play those notes, and then listen to the sound of going from G Major to A minor and back. It should start sounding like a song! Practice turning the B note into B minor chords, the C notes into C Major chords, etc. Once you can play the chords of the G Major scale, pay extra special attention to how cool the sound of going from the V chord (D Major) to the I chord (G Major). This "V" to "I" chord progression is UNBELIEVABLY common in popular music, so once you recognize the sound, you'll start hearing it in tons of songs. When you can play all of the chords of the G Major scale, especially chords I~vi (the "vi" chord is much less common in popular music), then you can start composing your own songs!

Beyond Basics~

What can I learn about chords from the Grand Staff Jig? By using your Chord Jig and Grand Staff Jigs together, you can look at the notes that are found in a chord, and then figure out what chord is being played. You'll often see three notes stacked on top of each other. For example, in the key of G Major, you'll often see G Major chords built with G, B, and D notes stacked three in a row with G on the bottom and D on the top. This is a G Major chord played in what's called "root position". In the same key, you'll see A, C, and E notes stacked in the same way, and this is an A minor chord in root position. However, lots of times, you'll see chords stacked in different ways. G Major can also be played with the B note lowest, a D on top of the B, and then a G note 1½ lines above. This is still a G Major chord, but it's called a "1st inversion" since you played the B note first. You can also play a G Major by playing the D note lowest, and then playing the G note along with the B right next to it. This is called a "2nd inversion, since you're playing the D note from the G Major chord first. All of the Major and minor chords for each of the scales can be built in this same way!

Keyboard Layout: Notes from major scale of this key are underlined. Accidentals, notes outside of this key, are *italicized* and gray and are shown in musical notation with sharps (#) and flats (b).