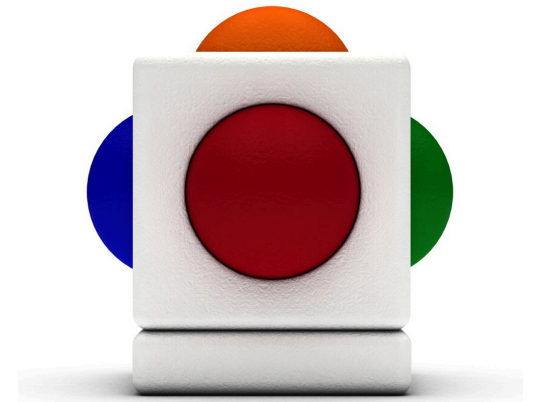


Arranging Music For the Skoog

By Maggie Tam



In this lesson

While the Skoog can play only 5 notes at a time, you might be surprised to know that with a bit of rearranging, it can play most well known nursery rhymes and pop songs! So here is a guide to show how you can adapt your own materials onto the Skoog, and I will be covering the following topics:

- Skoog for a melody with 5 notes or less
- Arranging songs with more than 5 notes for the Skoog
- Playing chords on the Skoog
- Arrange a Skoog duet

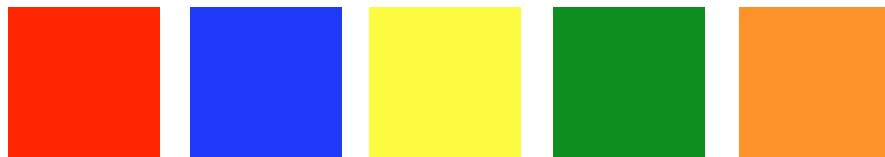


Skoog for a melody with 5 notes or less

The most straight forward way to adapt a song to the Skoog, given that the melody uses 5 notes or less, is to transcribe the melody directly to the Skoog.

Often, particularly in pop songs, while the main melody (the main vocal melody, for example) has more than 5 notes, some of the riffs in the song might be easily transcribable on the Skoog. So listen out for the individual parts in the accompaniment too!

Once you have worked out the 5 notes that are used in the melody, assign them to the Skoog via the Notes Tab in the Skoogmusic software. Although you do not need to follow this system, but personally I have found it particularly helpful to first order the notes from lowest to highest in pitch, then assign them in a clockwise manner, from Red for the lowest to Orange for the highest:



Lowest Note -----> Highest Note



Arranging songs with more than 5 notes

So what do we do when we want to play a song on the Skoog but it has more than 5 notes? Here are a few things to consider when deciding which 5 notes to keep to play your tune:

Omit Passing Notes

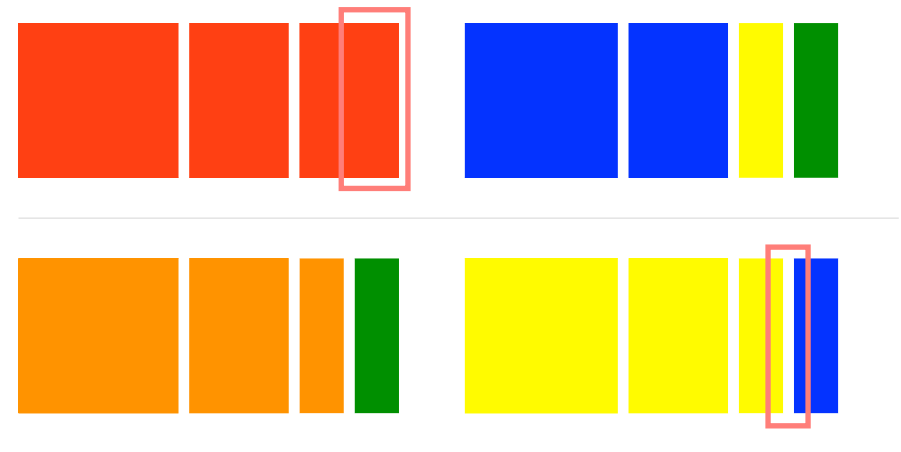
If a passing note is not used elsewhere in the song, how would it sound if it was omitted? Below is an example of an arrangement for the bass line in 'Pumped Up Kicks' by Foster the People - several passing notes have been taken out but the overall melody has been preserved:

Original - bracketed are the notes that have been omitted in the arrangement:

Bass Guitar 

B. Guit. 

Arranged for Skoog - bracketed is where passing notes have been omitted:



Replace with another note

Sometimes it might sound better replacing a note rather than taking it out altogether. Generally speaking, a note from the same chord as the harmony would be a good replacement note. Have a look at this example from the Skoog arrangement for One Direction's 'What Makes You Beautiful':

Original - bracketed is the note to be replaced:



Arranged for the Skoog. Bracketed is the note that has replaced another one. In this case the original B has been replaced by the blue F#, which is the dominant note of the B Major chord - the harmony at that point in the song.



Note that an E would work quite well here too, even though it does not belong to B major chord:



This is because, in the original melody, the shape of this particular phrase is flat (it repeats the note E) until it tails off to a lower note (B) at the end. So repeating the same note again will perhaps preserve its shape better than for it to increase in pitch right at the end as in the previous example with the blue F# (NB. the red E is already the lowest note in the set of 5 notes).

Other example includes transposing it up/down an octave. Do take both the harmony AND the shape of the melody in to consideration, and experiment a little until you find a note that you like!



Playing chords on the Skoog

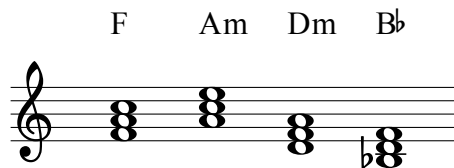
If the song that you want to play has a very tuneful melody, and is too difficult to rearrange for the Skoog - there are still other ways that you can play it on the Skoog!

Consider the harmony of the song. Many pop songs only consist of 4 or 5 chords, and often you can very easily play them all on the Skoog with some clever arrangement of its 5 notes.

Take for example, 'Price Tag' by Jessie J. Its chord progression is, and repeats throughout the song, as follows:

||: F Am Dm Bb :||

If we take a look at how the chords look on traditional notations:



So out of all the notes that make up these chords, which notes do we use? As you have probably already noticed, these chords share some notes with each other, and are displayed in the following table:

	F Major	A Minor	D Minor	Bb Major
F Major	-	-	-	-
A Minor	A, C	-	-	-
D Minor	F, A	A	-	-
Bb Major	F	None	D, F	-

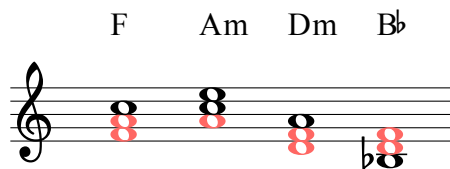
The tonic of a chord, as we know from general music theory, is the most important note in conveying the harmony, and is therefore given more weight when it comes to selecting notes for your Skoog - especially when they are also shared notes between chords. In this case, F, A, D, are both tonic notes, and shared notes between chords. So let's include them on our Skoog.



This is what our table looks like now that we have selected 3 of our 5 notes:

	F Major	A Minor	D Minor	Bb Major
F Major	-	-	-	-
A Minor	A, C	-	-	-
D Minor	F, A	A	-	-
Bb Major	F	None	D, F	-

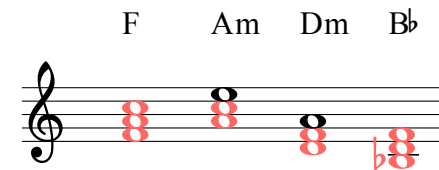
In considering the other notes, let's think about how the chords are represented with the currently selected notes:



The A minor chord, at the moment, is only represented by one note - its tonic. In considering which note to select to make a chord better represented, we tend to prefer the third to the fifth - in this case the C; which will also complete the F major chord.

For our fifth and last note, we will look at better representing the chord Bb major. Although 2 of its notes - its third and fifth - are already present in our note set, its tonic is not. Bb - the tonic for this chord, shall complete our set of 5 notes for the Skoog.

So here is how all the chords will be represented by the 5 notes that we have chosen:



All chords are well represented. We can now work out how we can arrange the notes on the Skoog in order to play these chords.

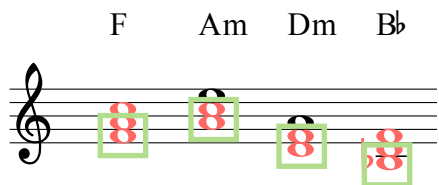


Which side to assign which note?

An important factor to bear in mind is that you cannot play notes assigned on opposing sides of the Skoog - so Red and Yellow cannot play together at the same time, neither can Blue and Green. This is because the Skoog works with the pressure you assert on each of its sides; and pressure on opposing sides at the same time will simply cancel each other out.

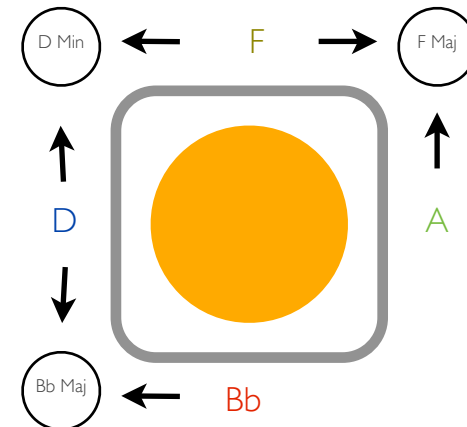
On the other hand, the orange side can play with every other side, so it is very important to leave this side for the most in-demand note of the set. The corner can be played too - which means the Skoog can play up to three notes at a time, and you can use that to its advantage.

Back to our example - as mentioned previously, we prefer thirds to fifths, as in the following:



The bracketed notes in the diagram are the thirds. So we will try to work with these intervals first; and if that fails, we proceed to work with the fifths instead. At this point I should mention that there are no correct or wrong ways to assign notes - as long as your combination can convey the chord progression, it is good!

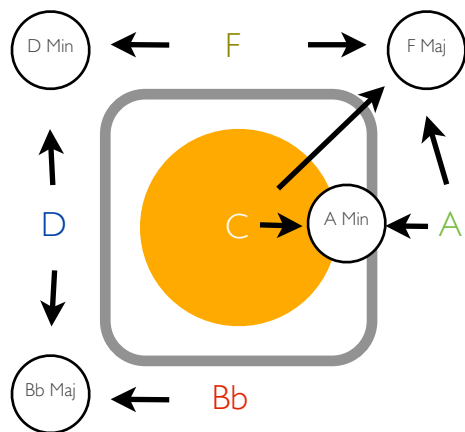
A trend found in our example is that the Bb major third shares its top note (D) with D minor (it's tonic), and the D minor third's top note (F) is the tonic of F major. We can arrange our notes as such so that we can play these intervals:



So now when we play the Red and the Blue side together, we will play the bottom half of the Bb major chord. Blue and Yellow will play D minor, and Yellow and Green will play F major.

The problem now is with the C. The Red side already has Bb assigned to it, so Green - where A is currently assigned to - cannot form a chord within our chord progression with the Red side. However, if we put the C on the orange side, the Green and the Orange can form the bottom half of A minor: plus when the corner between Orange, Green, and Yellow is pressed it can form the full F major chord.

Finally, this is the notes you need to play the chords in 'Price Tag' by Jessie J:



Sometimes, the notes you have chosen might not be able to fit onto the 5 sides playing the intervals that you desire - in that case you will need to reselect your notes and try arranging them again. But with some creativity and some experiments, you will most likely find a solution.

If you simply cannot find a way to fit the right notes on the Skoog, an alternative would be to first of all record the chords individually on your Skoog (you will be able to play these chords in full, by using a corner), then assigning these samples of chords to each side of the Skoog. That way your Skoog can play 5 different chords in the one song, and you can even experiment with mixing the chords!



Arrange a Skoog duet

If you have access to more than one Skoogs, the most fun way to arrange your material is to write a Skoog duet.

Band Style

The most straight forward way to Skoogify a song into a duet or even a trio or quartet, is to directly transcribe the different vocal and instrumental parts already present in the song. This would follow the same process as arranging a melody for a solo Skoog.

Note that duets in this style will require a fair bit of coordination between the musicians to play - while it might be challenging at first, it can also be an ideal way to learn to play in a group.

Question and Answer Style

To write a question and answer style duet for the Skoogs, where one Skoog plays then the other answers, requires a similar process as arranging a melody for a solo Skoog. You will need to first work out which portion of the melody each Skoog is playing, then use the same method as for a solo Skoog to work out how best to arrange the song for each of the Skoogs.

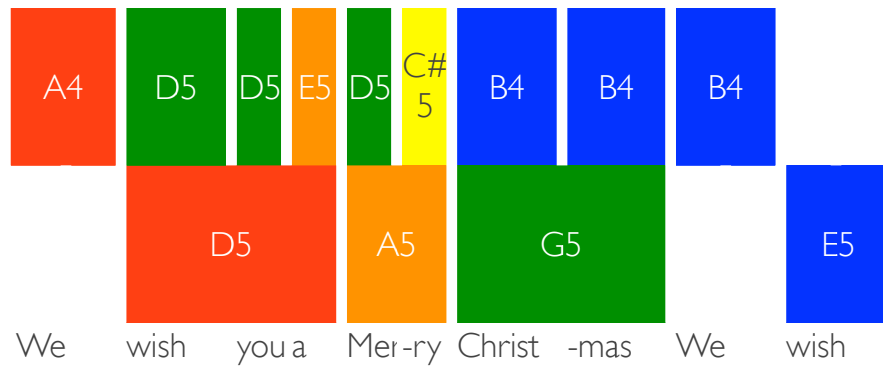
Harmony Style

A duet in this style has the two Skoogs harmonising each other. An excellent example of this is the 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' duet available on our website.

This can be used as a clever tactic to 'increase' the compass of the Skoog - so now you can have a selection of 10 notes instead of just 5. It will mean that the melody is split between the two Skoogs - although at times it might not be at the most sensible places. This is an excellent exercise for the players to recognise where the melody is, and who has the melody at what point, and how the two players together can accentuate the melody (by keeping the accompaniment / harmony part quiet and the melody prominent).

When one player has the main melody, the other player will play a note (or more) from their assigned set of 5 notes that belongs to the same chord as the harmony at the time - much like when working out how to play chords on a solo Skoog.





Notice how the melody here has been split in an inconvenient place too - the player must learn where the 'handover' of the melody happens, and co-ordinate to deliver a smooth melody line as if played by a single person.

In the above extract, the Skoog on the top plays the melody from 'We wish you...' to 'We' in the next phrase.

Meanwhile, the Skoog at the bottom harmonises using the notes that it has been assigned (D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5). In this phrase, the harmony moves from D major at the beginning, to G major at 'Christmas'. Out of this Skoog's selection of notes, D5 and A5 belong to the D major triad, and G5 is the tonic of G major. This gives us the opportunity to emphasise the cadence here with D (tonic of D major), then up to A (dominant of D major), and back down to resolve to G - the tonic of the new chord, G major.



For more information

You can find comprehensive information about procedures and concepts in the Skoogmusic User Guide. To access the Skoogmusic User Guide, choose Help menu > User Guide...

To access Skoog related resources on the web, visit <http://www.skoogmusic.com/resources>

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