

SCALES & CHORDS

If you sit at the piano and you squash all 7 notes of the C Major Scale at once you might think you're just making noise. But what if I told you that you can play all 7 notes of the C Major Scale at the same time and have it sound like a chord?

What we need to do is spread the notes out. The simplest and most common way of doing this is to use a two octave C Major Scale (instead of the 1 octave scale we used above) and use every alternate note.

The diagram illustrates a two-octave C Major Scale in 4/4 time. The first octave (Octave 1) is on the bass clef, and the second octave (Octave 2) is on the treble clef. Notes are numbered 1 through 15. Red circles highlight every alternate note (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13). A red 'X' is over the final note of the second octave. To the right, a diagram shows the notes stacked vertically on a staff, with a red bracket and text: "THE NOTES ARE NOW SPREAD FARTHER APART. THIS RESULTS IN A MORE HARMONIOUS SOUND."

What we now have is a 7 note chord built by spreading the C Major Scale out in intervals of thirds (Major and Minor Thirds). This is the basic formula for building chords in Western Music. The interval of a third is what gives Western Music such rich chord sounds. The chord we just made is called a C Major 13 chord because it is a C Major Chord which includes all chord tones up to and including the 13th chord tone.

Most chords don't need to be so big. In pop and folk music for example, chords often contain only three notes. For these chords you would use the 1st, 3rd and 5th scale degrees. In jazz music 4 note chords are very common. For these chords we would use the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th scale degrees. But all these chords are built using the same logic as the big 7 note chord we created earlier - take any scale and harmonise it by using alternate notes from that scale.

This is very important to understand, because most people think of scales and chords as two different things. Lots of teachers will show you a chord and then tell you what scale goes with it, or vice versa. But Scales and Chords really are the same thing - play any scale and harmonise it into a chord by stacking every alternate note.