

Intro to Chord Melody

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What is Chord Melody?

Maybe you've heard this term in the ukulele community, perhaps it seems like something unapproachable or hard to do, but chord melody playing is pretty much what it sounds like: Playing the chords and the melody at the same time. This style has been popularized by ukulele players such as Jake Shimabukuro, James Hill, Kalei Gamiao, Taimane Gardner, and Abe Lagrimas Jr., and guitar players like Chet Atkins and Tommy Emmanuel. That short list of music legends is already pretty intimidating just looking at it.

But as a student of mine once told me, the ukulele can be as easy or hard as you want it to be. So at the most basic level, if you're playing the chords and the melody at the same time, you're winning! Let's jam!

Basics

You will want to develop a few skills before you start trying to put it together. Tab reading is a big part of chord melody, and you can benefit greatly from practicing a few exercises to connect your fingers to numbers. Try a few of these exercises up and down on every string to help improve your tab reading.

Basic Exercises for proper position playing

```
A-0-1-2-3-----|-1-2-3-4-----|-3-5-7-----|-7-8-9-10-----|
E-----0-1-2-3--|-----1-2-3-4--|-----3-5-7---|-----7-8-9-10-|
C-----etc.-|-----etc.-|-----etc.-|-----etc.-|
G-----|-----|-----|-----|
      I M R   I M R   I M R P I M R P   I M P I M P   I M R P I M R P
```

One useful tip is to make sure to maintain finger discipline. Use the fingers suggested and stick to them so you no longer have to look at your hands when you read tab. In the first two examples, we are playing in "first position", meaning your index finger is in charge of the 1st fret. Subsequently each finger plays the following frets – middle = 2nd, ring = 3rd, pinky = 4th.

In the 3rd example, we practice stretching our fingers so that index plays 3, middle plays 5, and pinky plays 7. This is especially helpful for many beginning arrangements as most melodies live on these frets.

Lastly, in the 4th example, we jump up to the 7th fret to tackle the 7th position. Note that this exercise will feel almost identical to the 2nd example. Remember this as a key concept – wherever you travel on the fretboard, your default move will be to play each fret with IMRP.

Other Useful Positions:

```
A-3-5-6-----|-5-7-8-----|-8-10-12-----|
E-----3-5-6--|-----5-7-8--|-----8-10-12-|
C-----etc.-|-----etc.-|-----etc.-|
G-----|-----|-----|
      I R P I R P   I R P I R P   I M P I M P
```

Melody Playing

You can't spell "Chord Melody" without "Melody." Playing melodies is vital to bringing the instrumental arrangement to life, and you should as much as possible, play every melody as if you're singing it (even if you're a self-identified non-singer). Mouth the words or hum along while you play – it makes a difference.

Play these melodies that we will soon turn into chord melodies.

Just The Way You Are

C **Am** **F** **C**
 A-----3-5-7-----3-5---7-5-3-5-3---3-3-5-7---5---8---7---3---5---3---
 E-3-3-----3-----
 C-----
 G-----
 I I I M P I I M P M I M I I I M P I P P I M I

You Are My Sunshine

C **C** **F** **C**
 A---3-5-7---7---7-5-7-3---3---3-5-7-8---12---12-10-8-7-----
 E-3-----
 C-----
 G-----
 I I M P P P M P I I I M P P P P M I I

F **C** **C** **G7** **C**
 A-3-5-7-8--12---12-10-8-7---3---3-5-7---8-5---5-7-3-----
 E-----
 C-----
 G-----
 I M P P P P M I I I I M P P I I R I

I Can See Clearly Now

C **F** **C** **C** **C** **F** **G7** **G7**
 A-----3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----3-5-7-8---8-7-5---2-3-5-----
 E-----3-----
 C-----
 G-----
 I M P P P M I P I I I M P P P R I I M P

C **F** **C** **C** **Bb** **F** **C**
 A-----3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----1---0---3-3-5-5---3---
 E-----3-----3333-----
 C-----
 G----- (0) --- (0000) -----
 I M P P P M I P I I I I I I I I R R I

Hound Dog

C **C** (X2) Last line:
F **C** **G7** **F7** **C**
 A---6-6---6-6-6-6-3-3---6---0-3-3---| -6-6---5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-6---5---5---3-3
 E-----3-----| -----
 C-----| -----
 G----- (0) -----| -----
 P P P P P P I I P I I I P P R R R R R R R R P R R I I

Learn the Chords

So what about the chords? First off, it is valuable simply to play the chords with the song as well. You can use any standard chords and sing the song while you play them, to get a feel as to where the chord should change. Once that's done, you will find that you'll need a bunch of extra chords that you might not find written anywhere else...until now.

The basic rules of the game are simple, make sure that you are playing the melody and chord at the same time. Where it gets tricky is when you don't know how to combine [x note] and [y chord] at the same time. Here are some examples of funky chords that you might need for your next move:

```

C Dm Em F G G7 Am Bb F C
A-7---5---7---8---10---5---7---3---3---5-----
E-0---5---7---5---7---3---8---1---1---0-----
C-0---5---7---0---7---5---9---2---0---0-----
G-0---x---x---0---7---0---0---3---2---0-----
  
```

Now that you have a few ideas, here are the completed arrangements of our original melodies. For now, just play them like you would any tab, but know down the road, you should try to memorize a lot of these chord shapes so you can use them again.

Just The Way You Are

```

C Am F C
A-----3-5-7-----3-5---7-5-3-5-3---3-3-5-7---5---8---7---3---5---3--
E-3-3-----0---3-----8-----5-----5-----0--
C-----0-----9-----0-----0-----0-----0--
G-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0--
  
```

You Are My Sunshine

```

C C F C
A--3-5-7---7---7-5-7-3---3---3-5-7-8---12---12-10-8-7-----
E-3-----0-----0-----5-----0-----
C-----0-----0-----0-----0-----
G-----0-----0-----0-----0-----
  
```

```

F C C G7 C
A-3-5-7-8--12---12-10-8-7---3---3-5-7---8-5---5-7-3-----
E-----5-----0-----0-----3-----0-----
C-----0-----0-----0-----5-----0-----
G-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----
  
```

I Can See Clearly Now

```

C F C C C F G7 G7
A--3--3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----3--3-3-5-7-8---8-7-5---2-3-5--5---
E--0-----5-----0-----3--0--0-----5-----1-----3-----
C--0-----0-----0-----0--0--0-----0-----2-----5-----
G--0-----0-----0-----0--0--0-----0-----0-----0-----
  
```

```

C F C C Bb F C
A--3--3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----3-----1-----0---3-3-5-5---3---
E--0-----5-----0-----3--0--3333--1-----1-----0-----
C--0-----0-----0-----0-----2-----0-----0-----
G--0-----0-----0-----0----- (0) 0- (0000) -x-----2-----0-----
  
```

Jazzing Up an Arrangement

Once you have what I consider to be your "vanilla" arrangement of a song, I try to look for pockets in the music where I can elaborate and add more notes. This can take the form of simply strumming or arpeggiating (holding the same chord but using individual strings one at a time) during the open spaces. See how "Just The Way You Are" gets jazzed up:

Just The Way You Are

```

          C                               Am
A-----3-5-7-----7-----3-5---7-5-3-5-3-----
E-3-3-----0-----0-----0-----0-3-----8-----0---0--
C-----0-0-----0-----0-0-0-----9-----0-0-----
G-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----2-----2

          F                               C
A-3-3-5-7---5-----5-----8---7---3---5---3-----3---3---
E-----5-----5-----5-----5-----0---0-----0---
C-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-0-----0---
G-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----0---

```

If you have a lot of time, you might be able to get away with some strumming, and this shuffle strum is a perfect fit for Hound Dog. Try the shuffle:

```

          C                               F                               G7  F7
A--3--3--3--3--|--3--3--3--3--|          A-5---6---
E--0--0--0--0--|--1--1--1--1--|          E-3---5---
C--0--0--0--0--|--0--2--3--2--|          C-5---5---
G--0--2--3--2--|--2--2--2--2--|          G-0---5---

```

And you get a little chord melody magic:

Hound Dog

```

          C          c/c/          C          c/
A---6-6---6-6-6-6-3-3-3-3-3-3---6---0-3-3-3-3-3-|
E-----0-0-0-0-0-0-----3---0-0-0-0-0-0-|
C-----0-0-0-0-0-0-----0-0-0-0-0-0-|
G-----0-2-3-2-0-0-----(0)--0-2-3-2-0-|

          F          F/F/          C          C C C/
A---6-6---6-6-6-6-3-3-3-3-3-3---6---0-3-3-3-3-3-3
E-----1-1-1-1-1-1-----3---0-0-0-0-0-0-0
C-----0-2-3-2-0-0-----0-0-0-0-0-0-0
G-----2-2-2-2-2-2-----(0)--0-2-3-2-0-2-3

```

```

          G7          F7          C          Ending          C7
A-6-6---5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-6---5---5---3-|-3-3-3-3-3-|-3-----0-2-3---1--|
E-----3-3-3-3-3-3-3-3-5---5---5-----|-0-0-0-0-0-|-0-0-1-2-3-----0--|
C-----5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5---5---5-----|-0-0-0-0-0-|-0-----0--|
G-----0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-5---5---5-----|-0-2-3-2-0-|-0-----0--|

```

Conclusion

Hope you got a little something out of this workshop! Explore the vast library of the world wide web and learn a few arrangements before attempting your very own chord melody songs! Some of my personal favorites that I've arranged: La Vie en Rose, Canon in C, At Last, and make sure to check out the full version of "I Can See Clearly Now" on YouTube! Another wonderful resource for starters is the Ukulele Mike Chord Melody Book One, which has a bunch of super approachable arrangements to get you started. Enjoy!

Chord Melody Cheat Sheet - Standard Uke

Melody Notes

A-0-2-3-5-7-8-10-12-14-15-----
A B C D E F G A B C

C

A-0-2---3-3-3---5-5-5---7-7-7-7---8-8---10-10-10--12-12-
E-0-0---0-3-3---0-3-3---0-3-3-8---0-8---0--8--8---0--12-
C-0-0---0-4-4---0-4-4---0-0-4-7---0-7---0--0--7---0--12-
G-0-0---0-0-5---0-0-5---0-0-5-0---0-0---0--0--0---0--12-

Dm

A-0-2-3-5-7---8-8---10---12-12---14---15---
E-1-1-1-5-5---5-10---10---10-13---13---13---
C-2-2-2-5-5---5-9---9---9--14---14---14---
G-2-2-2-5-5---7-10---10---10-14---14---14---

Em

A-0-2-3---5-5---7-8---10-10---12---14-14---15-
E-3-3-3---3-3---7-7---7--12---12---12-15---15-
C-4-4-4---4-4---7-7---7--11---11---11-16---16-
G-0-0-4---0-4---9-9---9--12---12---12-16---16-

F

A-0-2-3-5-7---8-8---10---12-12---14-15-----
E-1-1-1-5-5---5-5---8---8--13---13-13-----
C-0-0-0-5-5---0-5---9---9--12---12-12-----
G-2-2-2-5-5---0-5---10---10-x---x--x-----

G (and G7)

A-0-2-3---5-5---7-7-7---8---10-10-10---12---14-14---15---
E-1-1-1---3-3---3-3-7---7---7--7--10---10---10-13---13---
C-2-2-2---5-5---5-5-7---7---7--7--11---11---11-14---14---
G-0-0-0---0-4---0-4-7---7---7--10-10---10---10-12---12---

Am

A-0-2-3-5---7-7---8---10-10---12---14---15
E-0-0-0-5---5-8---8---8---8---12---12---12
C-0-0-0-4---4-9---9---9---9---12---12---12
G-2-2-2-5---5-0---9---0---9---12---12---14

Twinkle Twinkle (Lenny's Version)

C	C	F	C	F	C	G7	C
A-3---3---10--10---12---12---10-----8---8---7---7---5---5---3---							
E-0---0---0---0---8---8---0-----5---5---3---3---3---3---0---							
C-0---0---0---0---9---9---0-----0---0---0---0---5---5---0---							
G-0---0---0---0---10---10---0-----0---0---0---0---0---0---0---							

C	F	C	G7
A-10--10--8---8---7---7---5---			
E-0---0---5---5---3---3---3---			
C-0---0---0---0---0---0---5---			
G-0---0---0---0---0---0---0---			

Melody

Aloha 'Oe

Queen Liliuokalani

Ukulele Arrangement by Ukulenny

Ukulele

F F C

A - lo - ha 'Oe A - lo - ha 'Oe eke

Ukulele

T 3 0 3 8 0 3 7 3
A 1 1 5 3 0 0 0 0
B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Uk. 5

G7 G7 C C7

o - na o - na no - ho i ka li - po one

Uk. 5

2 0 2 3 5 5 7 8 7 3 3
1 1 1 3 3 3 0 0 0 0 3
2 2 2 5 5 5 0 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Uk. 9

F F C C

fond em - brace be - fore I de - part un -

Uk. 9

0 3 8 0 3 3 7 3
1 1 5 3 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Uk. 13

G7 G7 C C

til we meet a - gain

Uk. 13

2 3 7 5 2 3
1 7 7 3 1 0
2 7 7 5 2 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 (3)

La Vie En Rose

Edith Piaf

Arr. by LSJ

Ukulele

Ukulele

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with strings labeled T (top), A, B, and E. The notes are: Measure 1: C (C4, E4, G4, C5); Measure 2: Cmaj7 (C4, E4, G4, Bb4); Measure 3: C6 (C4, E4, G4, A4); Measure 4: Dm (D4, F4, Ab4, C5).

Uk.

Uk.

This system contains measures 5 through 8. Measure 5 starts with a finger number '5' above the staff. The notes are: Measure 5: G7 (G4, B4, D5, F#4); Measure 6: G7 (G4, B4, D5, F#4); Measure 7: G7 (G4, B4, D5, F#4); Measure 8: C (C4, E4, G4, C5).

Uk.

Uk.

This system contains measures 9 through 12. The notes are: Measure 9: C (C4, E4, G4, C5); Measure 10: Cmaj7 (C4, E4, G4, Bb4); Measure 11: C6 (C4, E4, G4, A4); Measure 12: F (F4, A4, C5, F5).

Uk.

Uk.

This system contains measures 13 through 16. The notes are: Measure 13: Dm (D4, F4, Ab4, C5); Measure 14: Fm6 (F4, Ab4, C5, Eb5); Measure 15: C (C4, E4, G4, C5); Measure 16: D7 (D4, F#4, A4, C5).

Uk.

Uk.

This system contains measures 17 through 20. The notes are: Measure 17: C (C4, E4, G4, C5); Measure 18: Cmaj7 (C4, E4, G4, Bb4); Measure 19: Dm (D4, F4, Ab4, C5); Measure 20: G7 (G4, B4, D5, F#4). Measure 21: C (C4, E4, G4, C5); Measure 22: Fm6 (F4, Ab4, C5, Eb5); Measure 23: C (C4, E4, G4, C5). Measure 24 is a whole rest.

I Can See Clearly Now – Chord Melody

Jimmy Cliff (originally by Johnny Nash)

Arranged by Ukulenny

Verse

C F C C F G7
A-3---3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----3---3-5-7-8---8-7-5---2-3-5-----
E-0-----5-----0-----3--0-----5-----1---3-----
C-0-----0-----0-----0-----0-----2---5-----
G-0-----0-----0----- (0) --0-----0-----0-----0-----

C F C C Bb F C
A-3---3-5-7-8---7-5-3-7---3-----3-----1-----0---3-3-5---5---3---
E-0-----5-----0-----3--0-3333--1-----1-----0---0---
C-0-----0-----0-----0-----2-----0-----0---0---
G-0-----0-----0----- (0) --0 (0000) -0-----0-----0---0---

C Bb F C
A-3-----1-----0---3-3-5---5---3---3---
E-0-3333--1-----1-----0---0---0---
C-0-----2-----0-----0---0---0---
G-0 (0000) -0-----0-----0---0---0---

Bridge

Eb Bb
A-6---10-10-10-10-----10-10-----8---5-----5-----
E-3---11-----11-----11-13-11---6---6---8---6-----
C-3---10-----10-----10-----5---5-----5-----
G-3-----

Eb G Bm F Bm
A-6---10-10-10-10-----10-10-----10---10---9---8---9---
E-3---11-----11-----11-13-11---7-----10---5---10---
C-3---10-----10-----10-----7-----11---5---11---
G-3-----7-----5-----

F Bb Am G G7
A-8---8---7---5---5---
E-5---6---8---3---3---
C-5---5---9---2---5---
G-5---0---0---0---0---

Coda

C Bb F C
A-3-----1-----0---3-3-5---5---3---3---
E-0-3333--1-----1-----0---0---0---
C-0-----2-----0-----0---0---0---
G-0 (0000) -0-----0-----0---0---0---

Norwegian Wood

Lennon-McCartney
Uke Arrangement by Ukulenny

Ukulele

G G G F G Gsus4

I And once had a girl or should I say she once had me

Ukulele

5 3 2 0 3 2 3 1 0 2 3 3 3 2 0

Uk.

G G G F G

And when I a-woke I was a-lone this bird had flown

Uk.

5 3 2 0 3 2 3 1 0 2 3 3 3 2 7

Uk.

Gm C Csus4 C

So I lit a room fire is-n't it good Nor-we-gian wood she

Uk.

5 6 7 5 5 5 5 3 1 0 3 1 3 0 0 3 3 0 0 0 3 1 0 0 7

Uk.

Gm Am7 D D7

I looked a-round and I no-ticed there was-n't a chair

Uk.

5 6 7 5 5 5 5 3 1 0 3 1 3 0 0 3 0 0 0 2 3 0 0 2

Uk.

G Gsus4 G

wood

Uk.

2 3 3 2 3 3 2 3 3 2 3 3 2 3 2

