

The Struggling Church Pianist's Chord Primer

Lesson #2 - Octave Notes for the Bass



Introduction

I get a lot of questions about what am I doing with my hands when I play piano. These questions usually come from people who can read basic piano music and might even know a smattering of chords.

I don't do much but it doesn't take much to make a difference. I put together this little series e-books to show a little of what I do to make a difference in my piano playing.

Table of Contents

1. What's in this book
2. Octave notes for the bass
3. Tips to help you succeed.

What's in This Book

This book is the second in my series for the beginning church pianist. You've taken your lessons or read them at least. You know how to form simple triad chords. You might even feel a bit comfortable in front of people at the piano and accompanying people as they sing or play other instruments. But you would like to increase the sound you make at the piano. You don't have a lot of time but you know you can add a little more to your music. You don't necessarily want an extreme sound just a little something more. Well follow along and maybe you'll be able to use a little of what I use to embellish a song at the piano.

Octave Notes for the Bass

Once I became comfortable playing basic chords on the piano and even adding in a note or two of my own (within the scale or concept of the song of course) I set about trying to learn how to have a bigger sound. You know a fuller sound on the piano.

My piano teacher at the time tried to get me started on the root/chord sound in the left hand. If you're not familiar with this method of piano playing this a left hand pattern where is where you break up your left hand chords.

It is easiest explained by using 4/4 time. On the first and third beats of the measure you would play the root note of your chord in an octave formation (pinky/thumb). And on the 2nd and fourth beats you would play the chord in whichever inversion sounds

may be a bit of a stretch at first.

I have small hands and when my teacher first started working with me on reachin an octave I could not reach one. I just worked on it for probably a few months and at this point I can reach one note over an octave comfortably. Eh! Just like exercising. So keep at it and if at first you don't succeed it's just around the bend.

Okay on to our exercises...

In the following example of *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* in the first measure the F note is played in the left hand as an octave. Your thumb would be on the highest F right below middle C and your pinky 8 notes lower on the next F down. At the end of the first measure I have done what is called a walking bass. These are a very nice touch at place in music where you are changing chords and in this particular sequence I'm walking from F backwards to Bb. Just simple steps backwards on the piano in octave formation to get you to Bb. In my simple version of *What a Friend* you can see that I

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Arranged by K Quinn

C.C. Converser

The image displays a guitar chord chart for the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus". It consists of four systems, each with two staves (treble and bass clef). The first system includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The notation shows chords and fingerings for measures 1 through 16. Measure numbers 2, 4, 6, and 8 are placed above the first staff of each system. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff and below the bass staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. Triplet markings (a '3' over a bracket) are used in measures 3, 7, 11, and 15. The second system covers measures 17-32, the third system covers measures 33-48, and the fourth system covers measures 49-64. The final measure (64) ends with a double bar line.

The image displays a guitar chord lesson with six systems of two staves each. Each system contains two staves: a treble clef staff with a G-clef and a bass clef staff with an F-clef. The music is written in a style that uses chord diagrams (crosses on the staff lines) to represent fingerings. Above the staves, chord labels are provided: C, Bb, F, and C7. Measure numbers 10, 12, 14, and 16 are placed at the beginning of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh systems, respectively. The notation includes various chord voicings and some melodic lines, such as a descending eighth-note line in the treble clef of the first system.

In each measure notice that on the off beat or the 2nd and 4th beats I played the 4th or the 5th note to the chord that was being played. This is not a hard and fast rule and by all means do what sounds best to your own ears but if you're unsure try the 4th to whatever your root chord is.

For F the 4th is the C note. For Bb the 5th note is F. And to C the 5th is the G note.

You will also notice that I have notated the walking bass as triplets. Since I am using them at the end of a measure in place of a single note this is necessary to keep beat.

We tend to play and sing *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* in our church with a little rhythm. It is still sung in a slower tempo as if you were taking a stroll as opposed to walking to reach a destination.

The bass sound does not necessarily have to be played

Tips to Help You Succeed

Make sure you practice at this. If you sound funny at first don't give up! Keep trying Incorporate it into your practice time. Just a few minutes each day and one day BAM! You'll have it and move on from there.

If your hand does not feel wide enough to stretch the complete octave work at that too. I can't speak for every hand size but you may surprise yourself and it will be in a very short amount of time if you practice.

At first my piano teach would just have me rock between the octave. Play one note (usually the lowest) with my pinky and then the other note afterward (my thumb). I played the octaves like this for a few months and one day I noticed I was reaching with no stress whatsoever.

Another thing this rocking motion with my hand trained me to do was to arpeggiate the notes and so I

Play around with this method of adding sound to the left hand. Try adding some walking basses at points in your music where there are simple chord changes. That just means your hand, in this stretched out formation is playing each note along the scale until you reach your next note. Your pinky and your thumb are walking up notes.

I hope this small lesson has been of some help to you.

God Bless and we'll see you back here for lesson #3
Filling Out The Right Hand

Other lessons by the Struggling Church Musician

- **#1 Chords in Both Hands**
- **#3 Filling Out The Right Hand.**
- **#4 Knowing Your Scales.**
- **#5 Learning Some Extra Chords**

C MAJOR SCALE

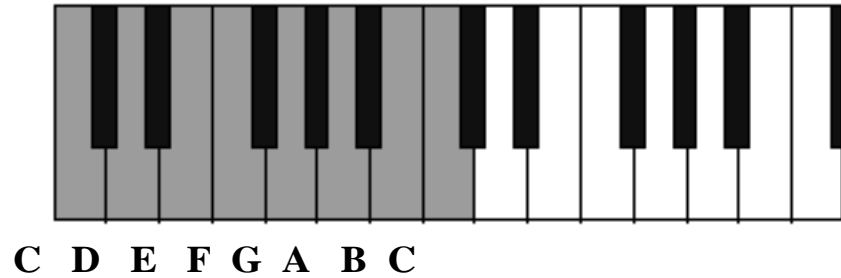


fig.20

Right Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5
Left Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

G MAJOR SCALE

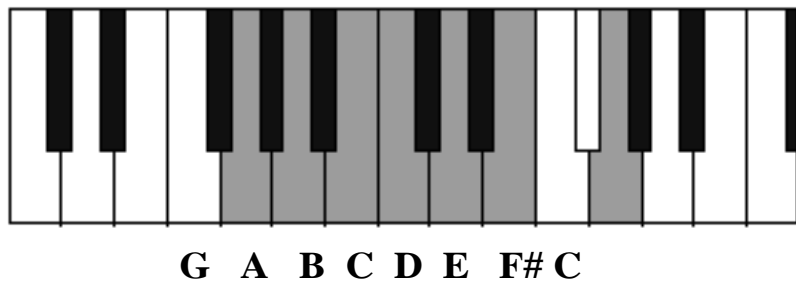


fig.21

Right Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5
Left Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

D MAJOR SCALE

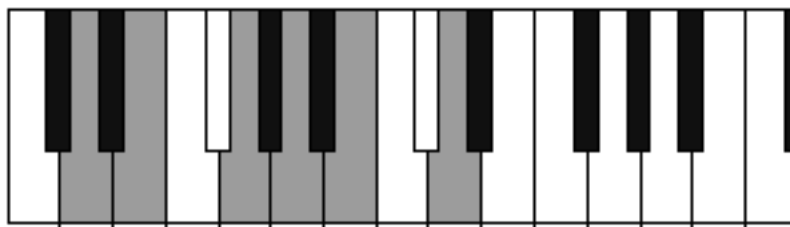


fig.22

A MAJOR SCALE

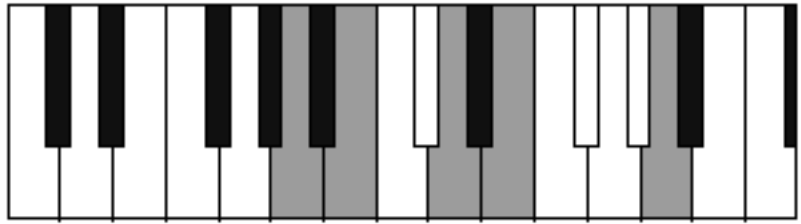


fig.23

A B C# D E F# G# A

Right Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

Left Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

E MAJOR SCALE

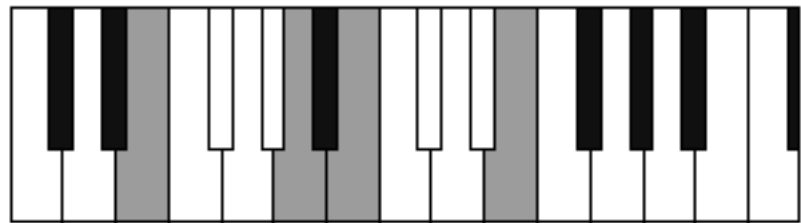


fig.24

E F# G# A B C# D# E

Right Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

Left Hand Fingering - 1,2,3,1,2,3,4,5

B/Cb*¹ MAJOR SCALE

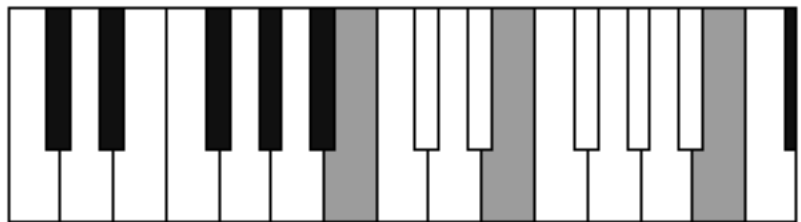


fig.25

B C# D# E F# G# A# B

F#/Gb² MAJOR SCALE

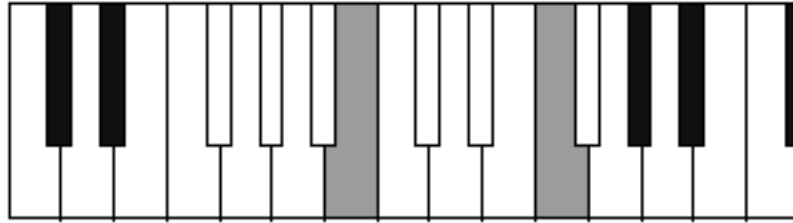


fig.26

F# G# A# B C# D# F F#

Right Hand Fingering - 2,3,4,1,2,3,1,2

Left Hand Fingering - 4,3,2,1,3,2,1,2

C#/Db*³ MAJOR SCALE

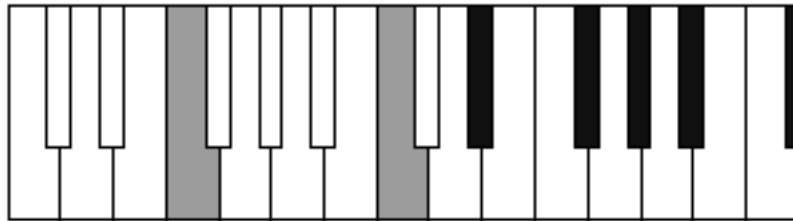


fig.27

C# D# F F# G# A# C C#

Right Hand Fingering - 2,3,1,2,3,4,1,2

Left Hand Fingering - 3,2,1,4,3,2,1,2

Ab MAJOR SCALE

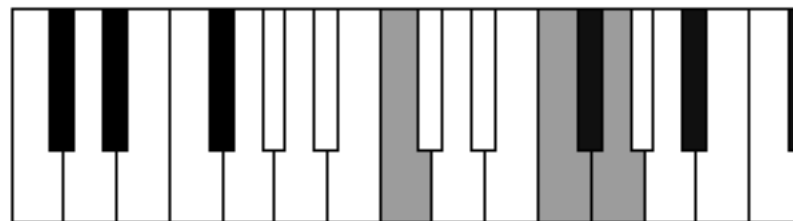


fig.28

Ab Bb C Dd Eb F G Ab

E_b MAJOR SCALE

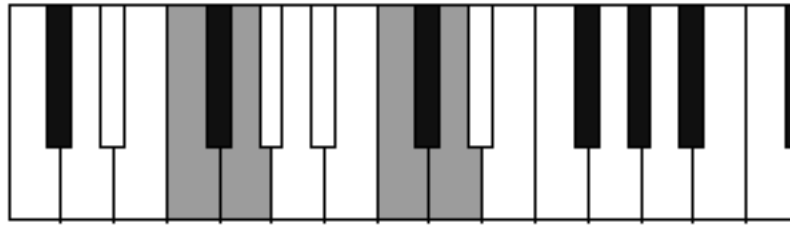


fig.29

E_b F G A_b B_b C D E_b

Right Hand Fingering - 2,1,2,3,4,1,2,3

Left Hand Fingering - 3,2,1,4,3,2,1,2

B_b MAJOR SCALE

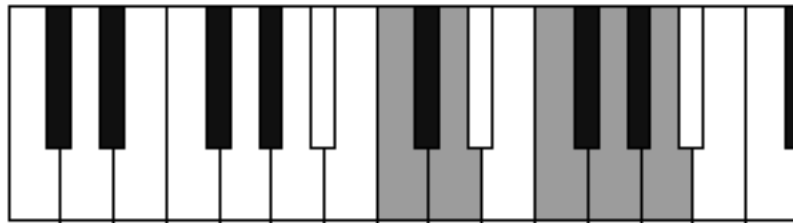


fig.30

B_b C D E_b F G A B_b

Right Hand Fingering - 2,1,2,3,1,2,3,4

Left Hand Fingering - 3,2,1,4,3,2,1,2

F MAJOR SCALE

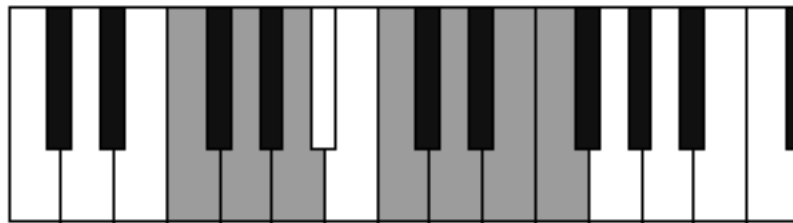


fig.31

F G A B_b C D E F

Right Hand Fingering - 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4