

The Key of D

Notes in music are like letters in the alphabet. Notes make up chords like letters make up words.

When you play chords one after the other, you get cadences. A cadence is like a musical sentence.

Songs are composed of cadences, played one after the other, like paragraphs are made of sentences.

The keyboard and guitar are easy to make notes on, since the notes are already built in. It is not like flute or violin, for example, where you must learn how to hold your hand or mouth to make the note correctly.

A key is a set of notes, chords, and cadences, that we can use to make up songs. Like letters, words, and sentences, there are different languages that do it differently than we do.

To be a good musician means that you can use the notes, chords, and cadences to express musical thoughts. This is like a good writer, who can use letters, words and sentences to express spoken thoughts. To be a good worship musician, means that your musical thoughts come from the Holy Spirit, and so when you share them, people find God.

The first key we will study is the key of D. D has three main chords, D, G, and A (or A7). We give them names for the sound each one has in the key. That way, when you learn other chords in other keys, you have a word for the sound. The names are D (tonic) G (subdominant) and A (dominant).

Here are the notes in the key of D. These are the notes the song must be made up of, to be in the key. If you put the notes in order, starting on D, the list of notes is called the “D-scale”. This is also the notes in the three chords. The notes of the chords are D=D,F#,A G=G,B,D and A=A,C#,E. A7=A,C#,E,G. # is called “sharp”. On the keyboard it means “the next key to the right”. If you put these notes in order, you get the scale. If you take every other note of the scale, you get these chords.

The diagram illustrates the D scale on a guitar fretboard and a corresponding keyboard diagram. The guitar fretboard shows the 6th string (E), 5th string (A), 4th string (D), 3rd string (G), 2nd string (B), and 1st string (E) with frets 1 through 5. The keyboard diagram shows the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C with black circles for D, E, G, A, B and white circles for C, F. Labels for flats and sharps are provided for each note.

The cadences are the musical sentences that build a song. Each line is usually one cadence. If you play by cadences, you can memorize songs really easily. You can learn to hear what chord will come next. This is called “playing by ear”.

There are 3 main cadences. Most music is just these 3 cadences over and over.

1. Dominant: D A D
2. Subdominant: D G D
3. Complete: D G A D

There are three more chords Bm, Em, and F#m in the key of D (m is read “minor”. Regular chords are also called “major” so we will not get confused). These are substitute chords. They are each a lot like a main chord. They have two common notes, and one note is different. Bm is D,F#,B and so is like D. Em is E,G,B, and so is like G. F#m is A,C#,F# and so is like A.

Sometimes, songs will use a substitute chord instead of one of the main chords. If you use a lot of them, it is called playing in the “relative minor key”. The relative minor key of D is Bm.

Here are the three relative minor cadences:

1. Dominant: Bm F#m Bm
2. Subdominant: Bm Em Bm
3. Complete: Bm Em F#m Bm

This is just the three main cadences with the relative minor substitute chords instead.

There are two simple substitute cadences that are used a lot. They just add one minor chord:

1. Bm turnaround: D Bm G A D
2. Em turnaround: D Em G A D

Songs that use these, use them over and over for the whole song.

Borrowing cadences:

Sometimes people borrow a chord from another key. Here are a few common examples:

1. Supertonic: D E7 A D (used a lot in 200 year old hymns)
2. Modal: D C D (used a lot since 1960, when guitars first came into church.)
3. Harmonic minor: Bm (Em) F# Bm (borrows F# major from the key of B)
4. Melodic minor: Bm (E) F# Bm (borrows F# and E from the key of B).