

GT Tips

Sweet Harmony —

Part One



How do bands like Steely Dan, Wishbone Ash and Iron Maiden work out all those harmony guitar parts?

Lesson by Dave Kilminster

GTCD TRACK 14

❖ **The record** for the most number of harmony guitar parts on a single song has never been established. Our bet is Queen's Brian May would probably win, though!

❖ **natural minor**

So called to distinguish it from the melodic and harmonic forms of the minor scale

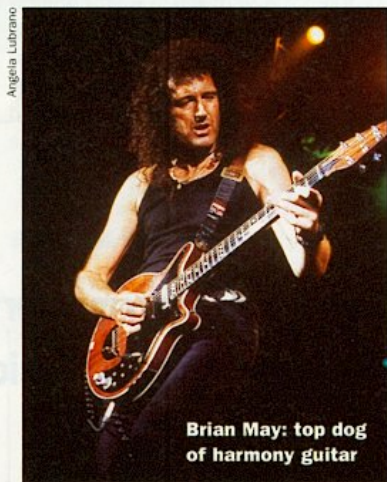
We've had loads of letters asking about harmony guitar playing and so, in this special two part *GT Tips* feature, I'll attempt to answer all your queries, and hopefully provide you with some new cool-sounding ideas as well.

For demonstration purposes, I've

written a piece called 'Skinny Wish', which utilises all the most commonly used harmony ideas found in bands from Thin Lizzy to Racer X, from Wishbone Ash to Cacophony, Brian May to Steve Vai to Iron Maiden to Steely Dan...

For the intro I've used ideas based on diatonic thirds.

In harmony: the boys from Maiden



Brian May: top dog of harmony guitar



Ex 1 Intro - 3rds Skinny Wish

♩. = 137

Gtr 1

E B G D A E

5 4 (4) 0 2 (2) 5 4 (4) 0 2 (2) 5 4 (4) 0 2

Am F

Gtr 2

E B G D A E

5 3 (3) 0 1 (1) 5 3 (3) 0 1 (1) 5 3 (3) 0 1

Am F



Thirds mean that the harmony (guitar 2) is found two notes above the melody (guitar 1) and diatonic means that you stick to the notes in a particular scale. This means that sometimes you will have major 3rds and sometimes you will have minor 3rds – don't worry if you don't understand this bit yet. Just trust me.

The scale we are using is A **natural minor** (aka A Aeolian aka C major):

A B C D E F G
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

A B C D E F G
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

So if the melody starts on the note C, the harmony above will start on the note E (ie two notes higher). The next note of the melody is B, so the harmony note is D and when the melody goes to G, the harmony goes to B, and so on.

As an experiment, try working out a melody using any of the notes in A Aeolian, record it, and then work out the harmony. It's as easy as painting by numbers!

At the end of the intro, I decided to make it a little more interesting by placing an E major chord at the end. Now anyone who knows their harmonised C major scale will realise that E major is not contained therein. E major has a G# in it. But instead

of changing the whole scale for this one passing chord, it's far easier (and sounds nicer) if you just change the relevant note in the scale. So, changing G to G# gives us A harmonic minor (aka E Phrygian dominant):

A B C D E F G#
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

A B C D E F G#
1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

So, for the last four bars, all the diatonic 3rds were derived from this new scale, making it sound a bit more exotic. For the verse, I opted to use 4ths:



Ex 2 Verse - 4ths

▶

gliss

S H H H S

Gtr 1

E B G D A E

7 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 8 10

Am

S H H H S

Gtr 2

E B G D A E

12 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 8 5 (5) 5 5 8 10

1 Am

vib

TA vib

H H

E B G D A E

10 12 8 (8) (8) (8)

F

TA vib

Am

H H

E B G D A E

10 12 8 (8) (8) (8)

3 F Am

gliss

gliss gliss

gliss gliss vib

H S S S S

E B G D A E

(5) 5 5 7 5 (5) 5 5 8 10 10 12 8 (8) 8 10 5 (5) (5)

H S F S S S S

E B G D A E

(5) 5 5 8 5 (5) 5 5 8 10 10 12 8 (8) 8 10 5 (5) (5)

6 F

And it's back to A Aeolian:

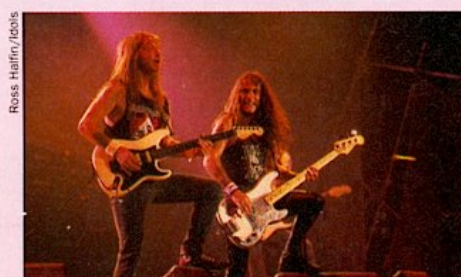
A B C D E F G
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A B C D E F G
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

This time the harmony is three notes higher, so when the melody plays D and E, the

harmony notes are G and A. This seemed to work fine all the way through, except when I played the C as a melody note. The F harmony didn't sound very pleasant, so I changed it to an E instead. This is maybe not theoretically correct, but it corresponds perfectly to my only rule in music - if it sounds good, it is good!

Men behaving harmoniously; the lovable Iron Maiden torture a few intervals live on stage!



Ross Helfin/Topix



Ex 3 - Chorus 5ths

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with two guitar parts (Gtr 1 and Gtr 2) and a treble clef staff. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The first system (measures 1-4) features chords Dm, C, G/B, and Bb7. The second system (measures 4-7) features chords Dm, C, and G/B. The third system (measures 7-10) features chords Bb7 and Bb7. Fingerings and techniques like glissando and vibrato are indicated throughout.

For the chorus, I chose 5ths (see above). Again, I wanted to put a little harmonic twist in there, so the chorus alternates between A Aeolian and C Aeolian (two bars of each).

C	D	E \flat	F	G	A \flat	B \flat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	D	E \flat	F	G	A \flat	B \flat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

To find the fifth harmony, you go up four notes so that when the melody is A \flat , the harmony is E \flat .

To finish off the chorus, I wanted something a little 'off the wall', so I used parallel flat five harmony for the last bar. The melody (if you can call it that) is not based in any scale, but is really a pattern going across the strings so the easiest thing to do was to play the same shape,

only six frets higher. So, if you start on a C# (top E, 9th fret), the harmony would start on the G (top E, 15th fret).

Finally, we get to the 'middle 8' which utilises 6ths:



GTCD track 14

vib *gliss* *gliss* *gliss* *gliss* *gliss* *gliss*

Half time feel

Gtr 1

E B G D A E

9 (9) 5 7 2 (2) 9 (9) (9) 12

Am F Am

Gtr 2

E B G D A E

13 (13) 10 12 6 (6) 13 (13) (13) 17

Am F Am

1

gliss *gliss* *gliss* *gliss* *gliss*

E B G D A E

9 5 5 7 2 (2) 2 5 4 (4) 4 4 (4) 7

S S S S TAS

E B G D A E

13 10 10 12 6 (6) 6 10 8 (8) 8 8 (8) 10

S S S F G S TAS

6

F G

E B G D A E

6 7 9 7 9 10 9 7 9 7 6 7 9 7 9 10 9 10 12 10 9 10 9 7

E7#9

E B G D A E

9 10 12 10 12 13 12 10 12 10 9 10 12 10 12 13 12 13 15 13 12 13 12 10

11

E7#9

7 7

E B G D A E

9 7 6 7 9 7 9 10 9 7 9 7 6 7 9 7 9 10 9 10 12 10 9 10 9 7

E B G D A E

12 10 9 10 12 10 12 13 12 10 12 10 9 10 12 10 12 13 12 13 15 13 12 13 12 10

13



7

E
B
G
D
A
E

9 10 9 10 12 10 12 13 12 10 12 10 9 10 9 7 10 9 6

E
B
G
D
A
E

12 13 12 13 15 13 15 16 15 13 15 13 12 14 13 10 14 12 9

14

We're back to the A Aeolian again. To play a diatonic 6th harmony, the note must be five higher than the melody. So if the melody starts on E, the harmony starts on C. 6ths sound very sweet and are used a lot in country music, so I thought that they would be a good choice for our melodic breakdown.

The middle 8 finishes with a monster lick taken from A harmonic minor; but this time, instead of the harmony guitar playing diatonic 3rds, it's playing parallel 3rds. In

other words, it plays the same physical shape as the melody guitar, only three frets higher. When harmonisers were first introduced, all they could do was parallel harmonies (which, admittedly, sounded great for certain things).

Parallel harmonies are also great if you're in a recording studio at 4.00am and can't be bothered to work out a diatonic harmony... or so I've been told, at any rate!

See you all next month for part two! ❖

Gratuitous sax:
Steely Dan's
Walter Becker
and Donald
Fagan



Neal Preston/Retna