COMBINING MELODY AND CHORDS

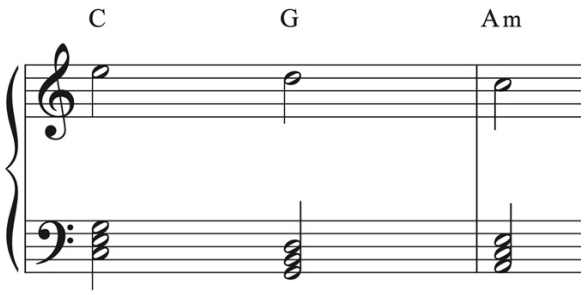
While anything is "allowed" in music, there are certain basic practices that help the combination of chords and melodies sound cohesive. Typically, the melody is in the highest register and the chords (aka "harmony") are in the lower register.

CHORD TONES & NONCHORD TONES

When combining melody and harmony, the melody notes fall into two categories: *chord tones* and *nonchord tones*. A chord tone is a melody note that coincides with one of the notes in the accompanying chord. A non-chord tone is a melody note that is not a part of the accompanying chord.

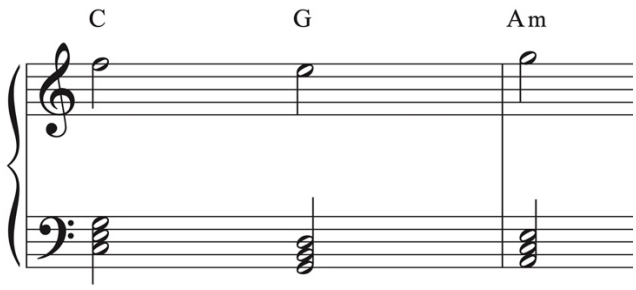
These melody notes below are chord tones because they are notes that are also a part of the underlying chord. The result is a very cohesive blend between the melody and harmony.

Chord Tones Example (with chord symbols above the staff)



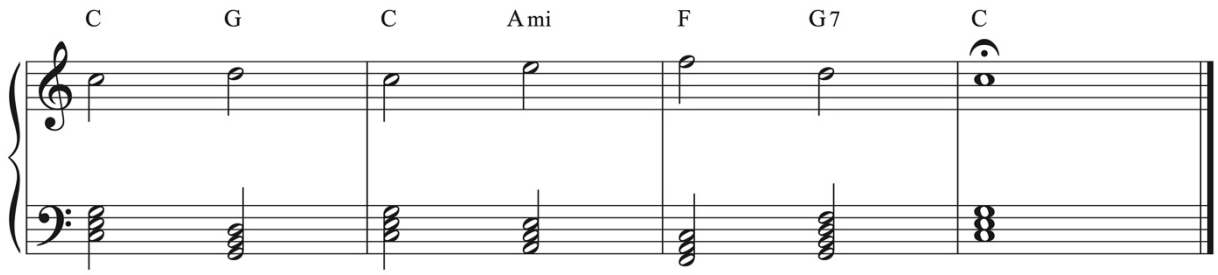
These melody notes (below) are nonchord tones because they are not a part of their underlying harmonies. The result is a bit of a clash between the melody and harmony (a *dissonance*). While this dissonance may or may not sound "ugly" to you, the overall blend of the nonchord tone with the chord creates a less stylistically typical sound. While nonchord tones are a normal and effective part of traditional melody/harmony combinations, their placement is limited and controlled.

Nonchord Tones Example (with chord symbols above the staff)



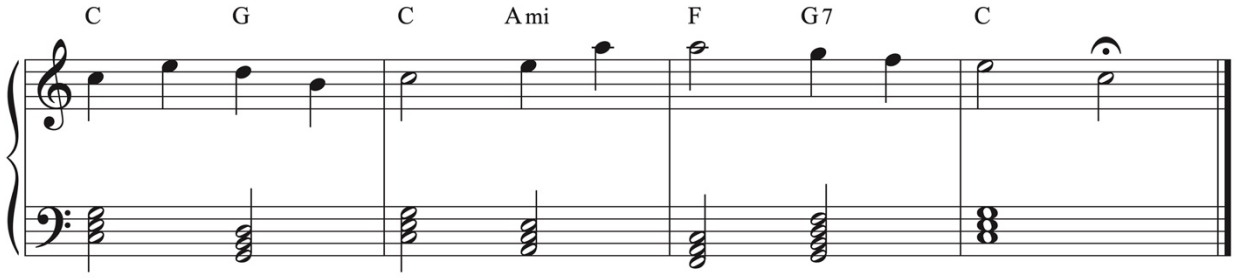
COMBINING MELODY AND HARMONY – THE PROCESS

Our first attempt at combining melody with harmony will limit itself to only chord tones in the melody, and one note per chord. A basic chord tone melody might fit like so:



Notice that the above melody line is fairly smooth, with mostly steps, and a few skips.

Since the melody notes can move faster than the underlying chords, we can try to insert some quarter note chord tones over the same half note-paced progression, making the melody more interesting and rhythmically independent from the speed of the chords:



Notice that the above melody has a larger leap in the second measure (E up to A), and that after the upward leap, the line changes direction and steps down. This is called *resolving the leap*. It's not a requirement in all melodies, but it's an especially smooth way to proceed.

Chord Tones Melody (with motif) Example 1

(with a "pop" style accompniment)

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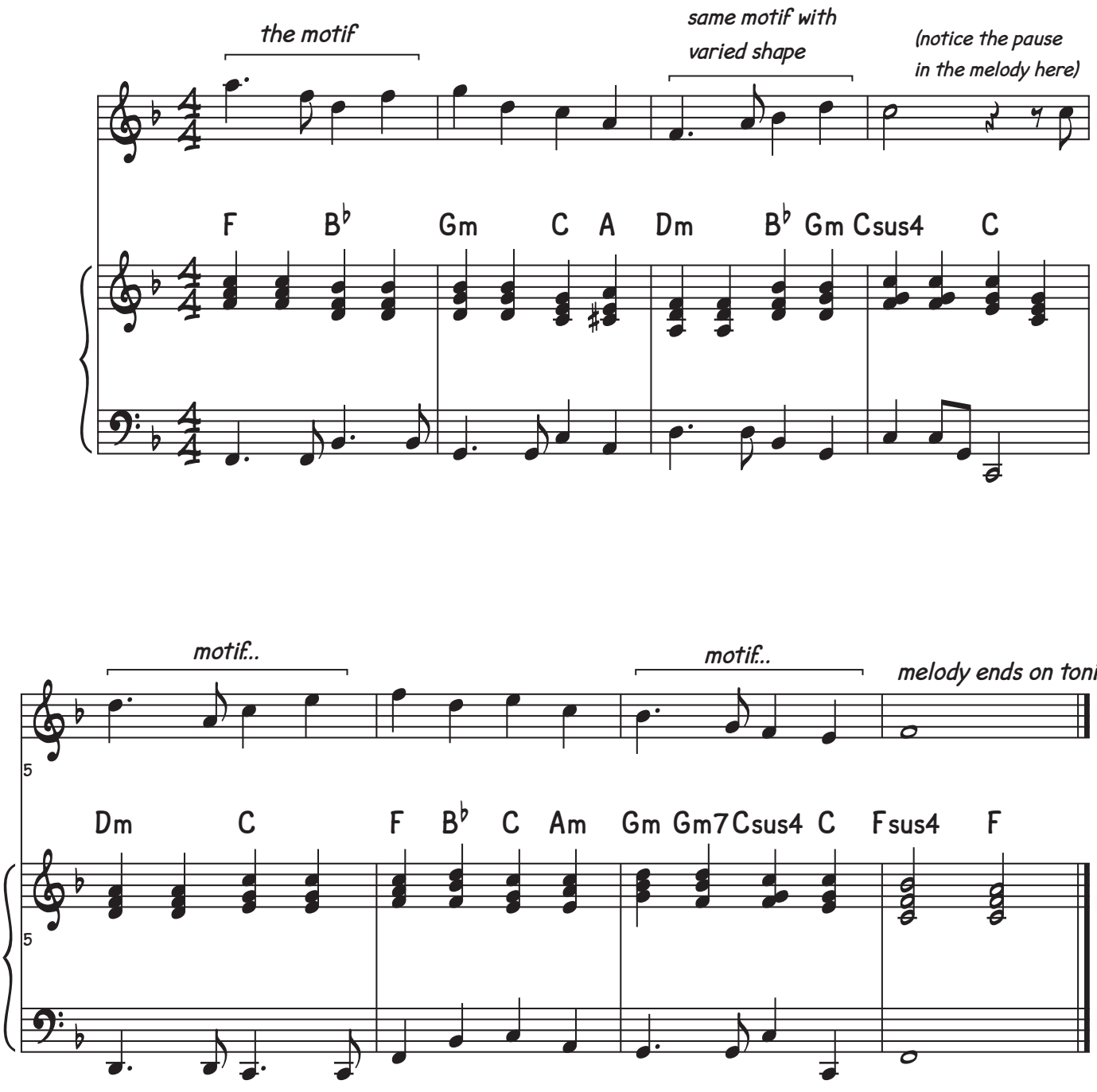
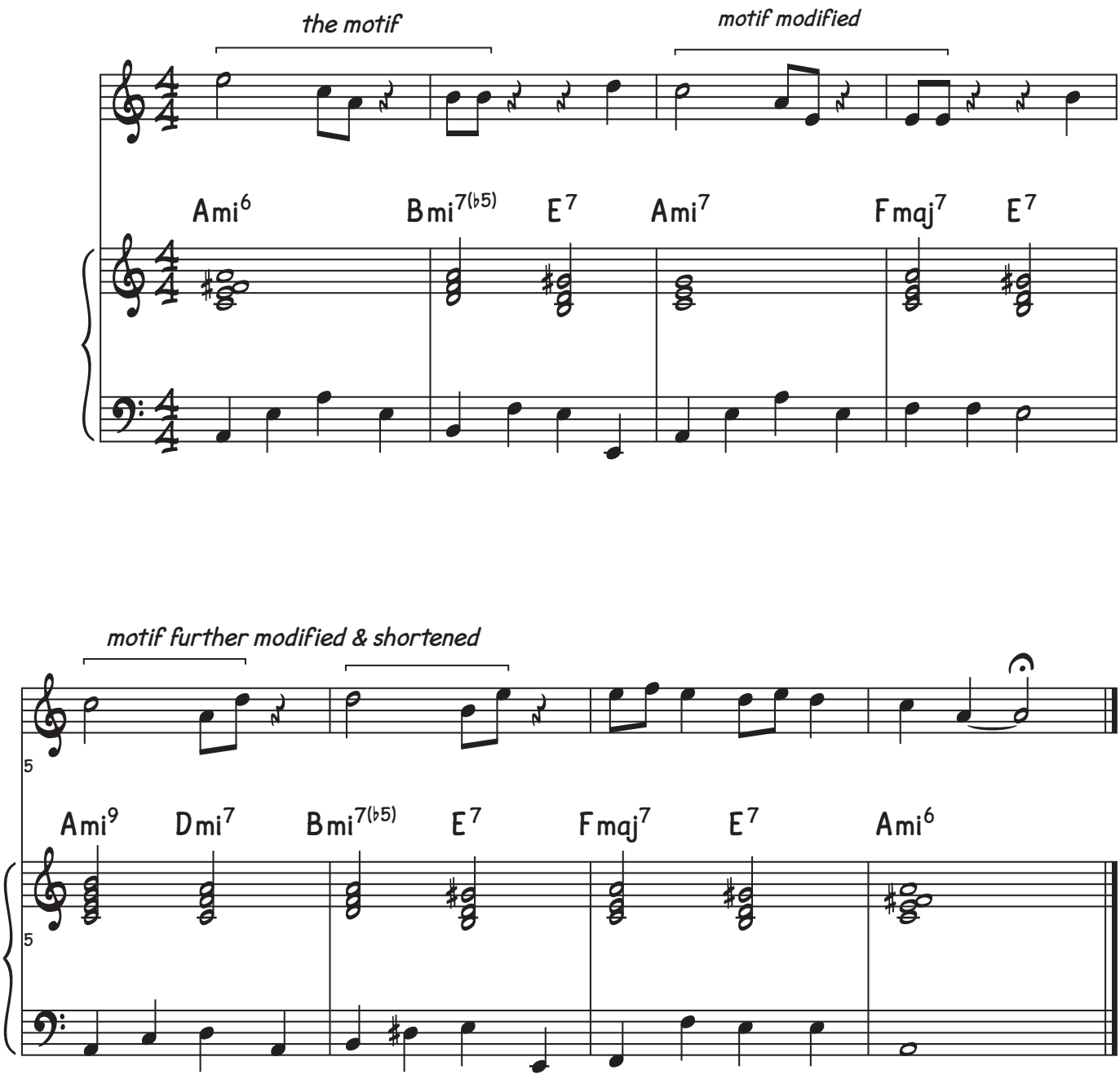


Chord Tones Melody (with motif) Example 2

(with a "jazz" style accompniment)

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