

Circle of Fifths

The circle of fifths can help with standard Western chord progressions for many songs. Many of the old tin pan alley tunes follow this simple format, along with a majority of Hawaiian and hapa haole tunes.

First, we'll look at a bit of standard numbering notation for the key of C:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	D	E	F	G	A	B

The Hawaiian Vamp for the key of C is: D7-G7-C. Graphically, we can write it this way:

II7	V7	I
D7	G7	C

Without getting into Western music theory, this is a standard seventh progression that resolves back to the root note (I or "C" in this case). The reason this sounds "pleasant" to our ears is that it is based on fifths. "D" is five notes up from "G" which is five notes up from C.

Hence, the circle of fifths is just a way of following chord progressions for a song. In many songs, the chord progression uses the 7th chord. In the diagram, below, the 7ths are listed for each of the notations.

IV	VII	III	VI	II	V	Root (I)
F7	B7	E7	A7	D7	G7	C

One of the easiest songs to remember to help with learning the circle of fifths is *Five Foot Two*.

C E7 A7
 Five foot two, eyes of blue, but oh what those five feet can do
 D7 G7 C
 Has anybody seen my gal?

Here are the rest of the most common keys. After you get the hang of it, memorizing the rest of the circle of fifths for each of the major roots helps to play any song in any key.

IV	VII	III	VI	II	V	Root (I)
F7	B7	E7	A7	D7	G7	C
G7	C#7	F#7	B7	E7	A7	D
Ab7	D7	G7	C7	F7	Bb7	Eb
A7	D#7	G#7	C#7	F#7	B7	E
Bb7	E7	A7	D7	G7	C7	F
C7	F#7	B7	E7	A7	D7	G
D7	G#7	C#7	F#7	B7	E7	A
Eb7	A7	D7	G7	C7	F7	Bb
E7	A#7	D#7	G#7	C#7	F#7	B

