



Introduction

Hello friends,

Welcome back to Swiftlessons for another mini-songwriting tutorial. There comes a time in every composers development when they hit a creative wall and become bored of stock chord progressions like the 1.6.4.5. Sure, these chords sound nice, but there just isn't a lot of flavor there. So, If you want to take your songwriting to the next level, then it's time to delve into the advanced harmony concept of "borrowed chords."

"But, what are borrowed chords?"

There is a common misconception that songwriting is confined to the seven chords of the major and natural minor scales, but the fact is every scale and mode can be harmonized and mixed together to form beautiful and inspiring progressions. Today, let's learn five magic chord changes that are guaranteed to revolutionize your songwriting:

Change #1 - The Minor IV

The majority of pop songs make use of progressions that are derived from the major scale. In the key of C, we have the notes **C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C**, which can be harmonized to produce the chords

This is where pop hit formulas like the 1.6.4.5 or C, Am, F, G are derived, it's a tried and true chord progression that is both pleasing to the ear, but also quite generic. To liven these chord changes up, we can borrow an Fm chord from the "parallel minor," the C Natural Minor Scale. This intense, melancholy chord change creates a burst of tension, forcing your listeners to crave a resolution back to the tonic chord, Cmaj. Let's use this minor four chord as a substitute for the 5 chord in the key of C, giving us a 1.6.4.m4 progression:



Change #2 - The Dominant III Chord

One powerful secret to creating more flavorful chord progressions is to exchange chords that are typically minor for dominant 7 chords. Theoretically, this is done using a concept called "secondary dominants," where each chord in a major key can be reached by performing whatever dominant 7 chord is a 5th above. So, for example, we can take a chord change like Cmaj to Am and insert an E7 chord in between. For inspiration, check out songs like "Santeria" by Sublime or "Hard Times" by Ray Charles.

Diagram illustrating the chord shapes for C, E7, Am, F, G, and C. Below the chord shapes is a fretboard diagram showing the progression of these chords across frets 7, 8, 9, and 10. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 on the strings.

Change #3 - The Dominant VI chord

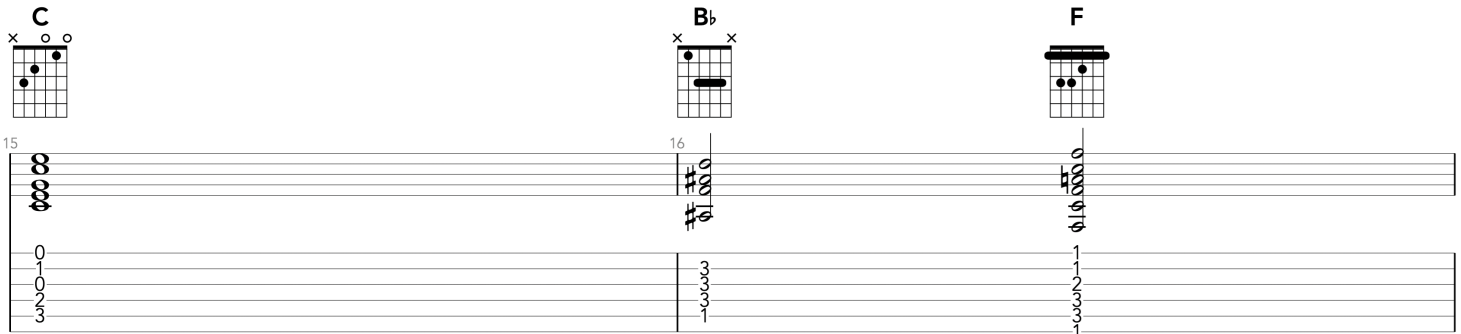
One of the trademarks of a major key is its relative minor found on the 6th scale degree, in the key of Cmaj, that would be an Am chord. That said, thanks to secondary dominants, we once again have the flexibility to flip that minor chord to major, and use it as a pathway to the II chord, Dm. Here's an example that incorporates both the minor and major tonalities:

Diagram illustrating the chord shapes for C, Am, A7, Dm, G, and G7. Below the chord shapes is a fretboard diagram showing the progression of these chords across frets 11, 12, 13, and 14. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 on the strings.

Suggested Lesson
How to Write Better Lyrics

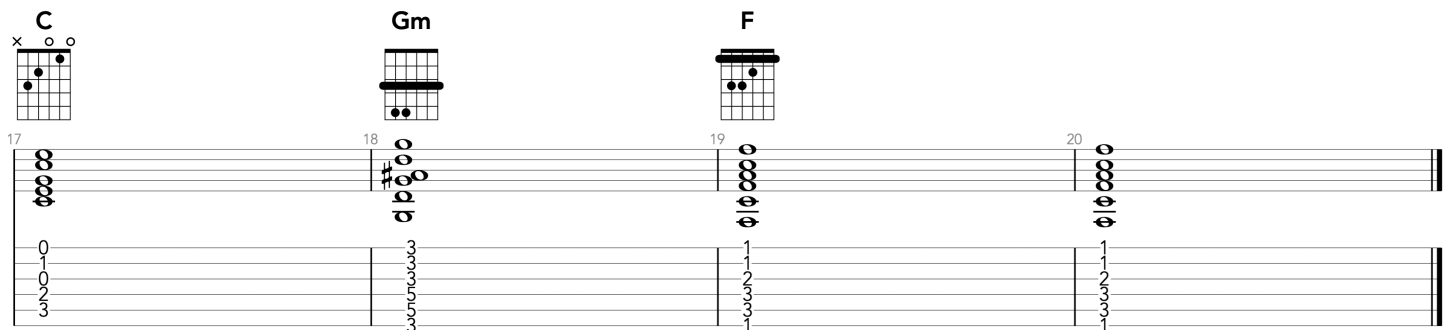
Change #4 - The Major \flat VII Chord

Once again borrowing from the parallel minor, adding the major \flat VII chord is an excellent way of capturing that rock and roll attitude. In the key of Cmaj, we're locating the 7th note of the scale, flattening it back one half step and applying a major harmony to create the chord Bbmaj, which sounds great between the I and IV chords. Here's an example:



Change #5 - The Minor 5 Chord

For our final change, we'll achieve some exotic flavor by borrowing from the mixolydian mode in C. The minor 5 chord sounds excellent when paired with the I and IV chords, and can be improvised over using the C mixolydian scale (major scale with a flatted 7.) For inspiration, listen to "You Were Never There" by Diego Garcia.



Suggested Lesson

**How to Write Great Songs
(Learn from the Masters)**