musicademy
OUTSTANDING PRACTICAL WORSHIP TUITION

Playing the keyboard for worship

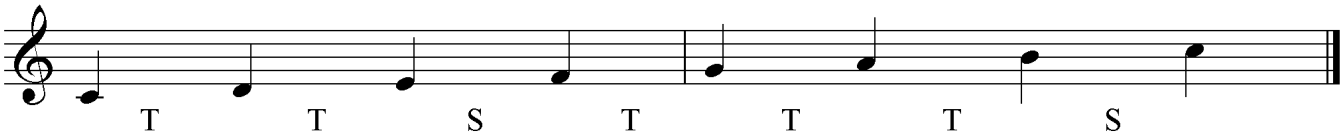
Playing keyboard for worship either in a band or on your own is very different from playing classical music. One major factor in this is that parts are written to be simple and fit in the minimum possible space for publishers. This means that they often don't reflect the style of the piece very well and that they contain the tune (which we don't want to play all the time). There are three basic concepts that we can apply to improve and strengthen our playing:

1. Understanding chords and their voicings (also known as chord inversions)
2. Understanding contemporary rhythms
3. Understanding how to form and use melodic fills.

Below is a quick 'users guide' to help you with the theory of each of these.

Understanding chords and their voicings

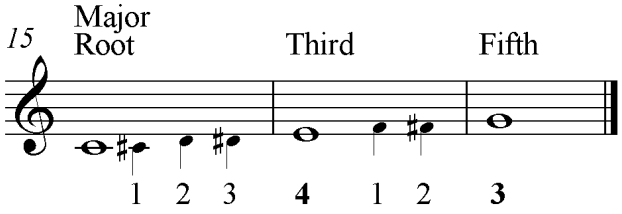
Before we can understand chords we need to understand something about scales. Most (though not all) worship songs are in major keys so for this basic introduction we'll avoid minor scales. If you know your scales you're already well ahead. However, if you don't you can always work them out. Each major scale is made up of the same combination of tones (T) and semitones (S). A semitone is the smallest interval in music and can be found by playing notes immediately next to each other on a keyboard (including black notes). One tone = two semitones. In a C major scale you don't play any black notes so it's easy to work out whether there's a tone or a semitone between each note:

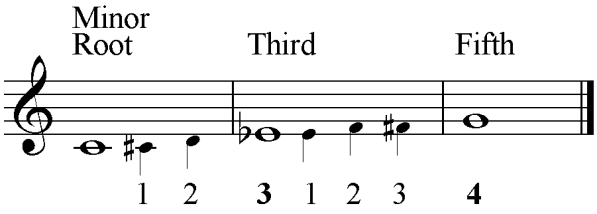


You can work out a major scale starting on any note using this pattern of tones and semitones.

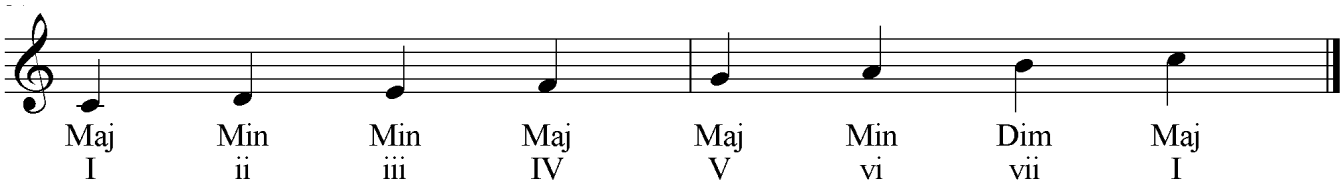
The most important and strongest chords in any piece will be based on notes from the scale. Also once we get onto using passing notes and auxiliary notes (wait until later to understand that) we need to stick to the notes in the major scale if they're going to work well.

Basic chords are made up of three notes. They have a root, a third and a fifth. The root is the note that they start on, the third would be the third note in a scale starting on the root note and the fifth would be the fifth note in a scale starting on the root note. There are two main types of chords, major and minor. The only difference between these is the third. Here's how you can work out any major or minor chord by counting semitones (the root note here is C):

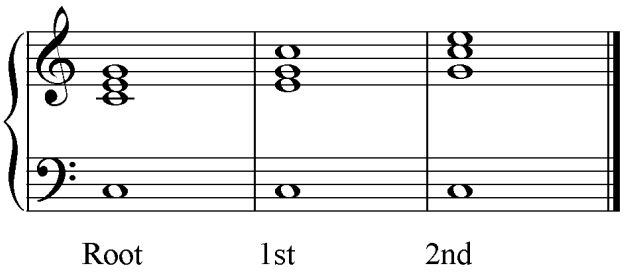




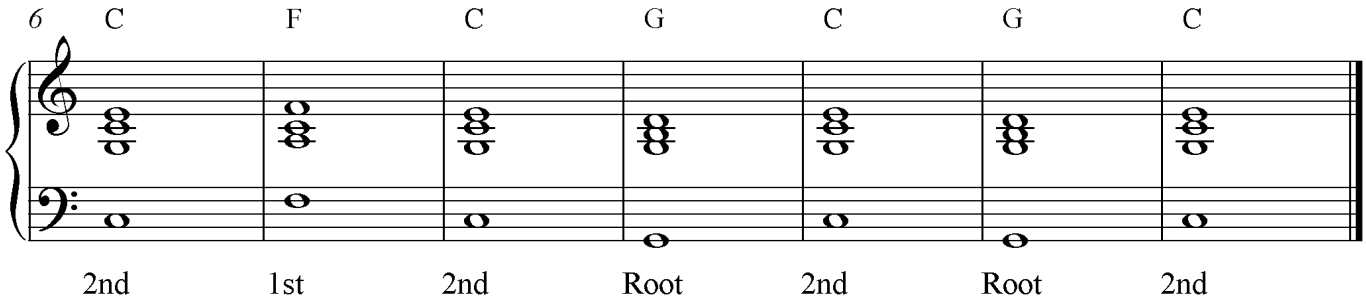
You can play a chord on any note in a scale. If you only use notes that are in the major scale you will always get major chords on some notes and minor chords on others. To make this easier to understand we sometimes refer to notes of the scale using numbers or roman numerals. For example the first note of a major scale would be called 1 (or I) and would always have a major chord associated with it. Here's a diagram so that you can see which notes in a scale have major and minor chords associated with them (again, this pattern applies to every major scale):



The first job of a good keyboard player is to learn all their major and minor chords so that they are natural and easy to play. You may just see a chord symbol (e.g. G or Em) above the stave and you have to interpret this properly. Not only that, but there are different positions in which you can play every chord. If we assume that we'll always play the root (1st) note of a chord in the bass (left hand) we can then play all three notes in the right hand in any order. We can therefore play each chord in three positions or inversions:



These three inversions can also be played at different octaves on the keyboard. The reason that we use different inversions is that if we only used root position chords our hands would be jumping around all over the keyboard and it would sound quite disjointed. Once we use different chord inversions it is possible to restrict our movement and in turn make sequences of chords easier to play as in the example below:



You should try to get to know all chords in as many inversions and octaves as possible so that they become natural and you can use them easily. Also try to play pieces finding the closest possible inversion of the next song so that your playing can become really smooth.