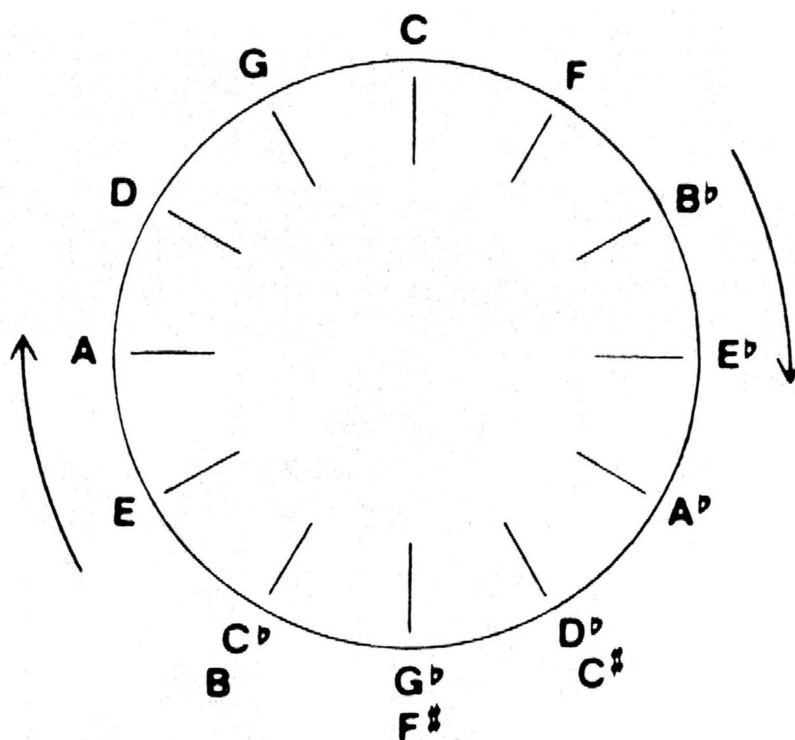


Bass Fundamentals

Column #3 – The Circle Of Life, Part One: The Cycle of Fourths

Eventually, every aspiring musician is faced with learning about the flow of music, how it 'gravitates' from one place to another. One of the means in which many songs employ that movement is by taking advantage of the Cycle of Fourths. Thankfully, some nice big brain decided to create a way to demonstrate this device in a nice, easy to understand diagram:



As you notice, at the 12 o'clock noon position is **C**. Proceed to the right and you find **F**, which also has *one flat* ($B\flat$). In the C major scale, F is the 4th note of the scale. Continue to the right and we find $B\flat$, which has *two flats* ($E\flat$, $B\flat$); $B\flat$ is the 4th note of the F Major scale. Eventually, as you travel around the cycle, you end up right back at the beginning, in C.

As you proceed around the dial, each subsequent 4th adds one more flat, so for part of this cycle, the memorisation is easy, just follow a clock face in the number of flats at each position from 1 to 5, the $D\flat/C\sharp$, which has 5 flats.

We can find examples of this movement in a lot of songs, which I'll demonstrate. Let's look at the first 5 bars of **All The Things You Are**, after the intro...



Even though we're playing the first two bars in minor chord forms, the flow still follows the Cycle of Fourths, from the F to the B \flat , to the E \flat , to the A \flat maj7 to the D \flat maj7. Each change is a 4th above the previous chord played.

Here's another example, the first ending of **Green Dolphin Street**:



As you can see, the flow of these segments is really smooth, whether major or minor in nature, even when mixing it up. This is not difficult theory, it's easy to understand, and the basic intuitive flow that music tends to 'telegraph' to us in the writing process.

To help you play through these examples, and I encourage you to do this, use the diagram of chord forms outlined in Column #1. By the way, **Autumn Leaves** also used the Cycle for portions of the music, too, like at the beginning of the tune for four measures.

This is by no means an exhaustive examination of the Cycle of Fourths, but rather an introduction, and examples of its application in the real world.

In the next installment, we'll look at the Circle of Fifths, the other half of this wonderful wheel.