Chordplay for Windows

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Getting started

The best way to quickly check out the various features of Chordplay is to load one of the demonstration files and follow this little tutorial.

Use Menu File/Open to load EXAMPLE.SNG. You'll see some text appearing in the large text field in the middle of the screen. There's a title, some comments included in quotation marks and a little chord progression underneath.

Now press the large GO-button in the upper right corner of the screen (or select Menu Play/Go):

The button will change it's appearance to:

and Chordplay will start playing the chord progression. Chordplay   indicates the currently played chord by highliting it. Press the large button again (or select Menu Play/Stop) to stop the music.

Read the next section to find out how you can edit and modify your own chord progressions.

How to write chord progressions

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Overview

Chordplay is a tool written for musicians who are playing a solo instrument like saxophone or lead guitar and who want to improve their improvisation skills.

Chordplay allows one to enter the basic harmonies of a piece of music in an intuitive text format, as it it used in many books about jazz harmony. While Chordplay can play back those harmonies on your midi-compatible soundcard in various, user-defined styles, you can try to play the melody line or improvise with your solo instrument.

Furthermore, Chordplay can help you to learn more about jazz harmony, especially when used with one of the numerous books which are available on this topic. You can quickly type in the examples given in those books, hear them and play around with your own modifications.

You may also try to use Chordplay as a composing tool and sketch the chord progression of your own music titles.

Chordplay IS NOT 'yet another midi sequencer'. It was designed clearly as a learning tool for musicians. So Chordplay will not produce nice, interesting and sophisticated pieces of music. But Chordplay will help YOU to produce nice, interesting and sophisticated pieces of music. Anyway, real, hand made music is still much more fun than music produced by a computer, isn't it?

Chordplay exports simple ASCII-files, which can easily be distributed on the internet. So it's easy for you to share your favorite jazz progressions with thousands of other musicians on the net, for instance on USENET's famous newsgroup 'alt.guitar.tab'.

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Is Chordplay for free?

Yes, it's really a freebie!

Chordplay is for non-commercial use -this code must not be re-sold.
Apart from copying/distrubtion costs it *must* be free, and *must* be distributed in it's original form. Use at your own risk, I take no liability for this code.

I wrote Chordplay mainly for my own use and pleasure (I'm a hobby jazz guitarist and don't always have an accompying band at hand), but I thought it might be worth to feed it into the net.

I'd really appreciate your feedback about Chordplay. This could be:

> Bug reports, flames, curses
> Comments, suggestions, ideas for future versions
> Nice songs and patterns!
> Greetings + postcards (yes, I like postcards!)

Achnowledgement

I would like to thank
- Lindsay Offer, who gave me a lot of support, suggestions, ideas...
- Sergiu Partenie, for his suggestions and the Melody-pattern MDUST1

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How to edit chord progressions

Chordplay follows a simple, common convention to define chord progressions. Let's take this little example:

| C / / / | F / / / | G7 / / / | C / / / |

will tell Chordplay to play four beats (=one bar) in C, four beats in F, four beats in G7 and again four beats in C. Easy, isn't it?

Chordplay is some kind of simple programming language and works with so-called tokens. Tokens are single characters or small expressions which Chordplay will interpret as commands when it scans through the text. Here is a complete list of the commands understood by Chordplay:

/	:	Play same chord as before
-	:	Don't play any chord
|	:	Next bar begins
I:	:	Repeat from
:I	:	Repeat to
M=xx	:	Use the melody pattern xx
R=yy	:	Use the rhythm pattern yy
S=zz	:	Set speed (to zz ticks per minute)

Text in quotation marks (as "text") is ignored, therefore you can insert comments and lyrics wherever you want.

There are two ways to enter tokens and chords: You can manually type them into the text field, or use one of the numerous shortcut buttons. Chordplay is roughly divided into two sections:

In the right section of the screen you'll find a column of yellow buttons which you can use to insert tokens into the text at the current cursor position. Some of them will display a short dialog, where you can select for example a melody- or rhythm pattern from a list or set the tick speed, before the actual token is inserted.
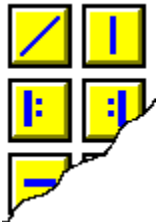
In Chordplay's left screen section, you'll find the tools to select and hear certain chords before you insert them into the text:

There's a piano keyboard for the selection of the chord's base note (C,D,E...)
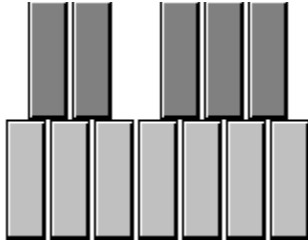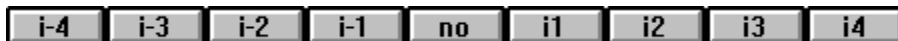
24 chord buttons with common harmonies (major, major7, major6, minor ...)

|	7	6
m	m7	m6
75b	75#	76
m75b	m75#	m76
9	11	13
m9	m11	m13
maj	+	dim
mmaj	sus	sus7

one larger button ('other chords') for additional chords which are defined in CHORDS.DAT

Other chords

and a horizontal row of buttons under the text field which allows you to change the current chord inversion

| i-4 | i-3 | i-2 | i-1 | no | i1 | i2 | i3 | i4 |

Once you press one of those buttons, the updated version of the chord under construction is displayed in a small display in the upper left corner

`Cm7`
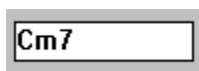
and you'll hear the result. You can click on this field   with the left mousebutton to hear this chord again.
If you like your choice, you can transfer the chord expression into the text field   by activating the transfer button:

The chord expression will show up in the text field at cursor position.

Read the next section to understand Chordplay's chord concept:

[Chords](#)

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Advanced features

Some tips and tricks

Use the right mouse button to click on any chord expression in the editfield. The expression will be highlighted and you'll hear the chord! This will only work when Chordplay is not playing a song at the same time.

You can tell Chordplay to play only one   selected part of a song by highliting it with   your mouse (click left button and drag your mouse over the part you wish to hear) and then pressing the GO-button.

You can use Menu Midi/Shut Up to clear the midi output (shut up all voices immediately)

[The Chordplay mixer](#)

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Rhythm and Melodypatterns

Rhythm- or melody patterns are structures that contain information about Chordplay's melodic and percussive playback style.
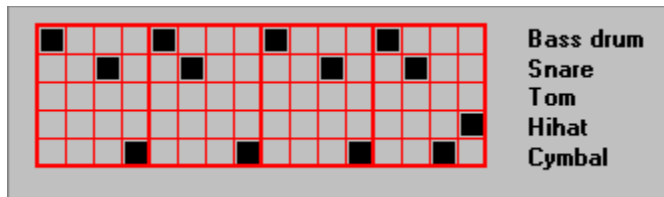
Rhythm patterns

Rhythm patterns are defined in the ASCII-file RHYTHMS.DAT. Each pattern consists of a name and a field of 16*5 numbers (1 or 0). This field contains the timing information, when each of the five percussion voices shall be activated within a bar.   Chordplay resolves one bar into 16 ticks.
Here's an example, the definition for the pattern 'Myown_2:

```
Myown_2
 1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0    " <----bass drum"
 0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0    " <----snare "
 0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0    " <----tom     "
 0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0    " <--- hihat   "
 0 1 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0    " <---cymbal"
```

A 1 means activate,   a 0 means don't activate. You can add your own patterns by modifying/extending RHYTHMS.DAT with a common text editor (for example Windows Notepad).

You may also use Chordplay's built-in pattern editor. ChoosePatterns/Rhythm from the menu. You'll see a graphical display of the various   rhythm patterns, which you can customize with your mouse. Left click inside the red fields to activate or delete the current settings. Push the 'Test'-button to simultaneously hear the result. Use the option 'Save' to save your changes permanently into RHYTHMS.DAT.

Melody patterns

Melody patterns are defined in the ASCII-file MELODY.DAT. Each pattern consists of a name and a field of 16*6 numbers (1 or 0). This field contains the timing information, when each of the six melodic voices shall be activated within a bar.   Chordplay resolves one bar into 16 ticks.
Here's an example, the definition for the pattern 'Mdust1', something that sounds somehow similar to the famous 'Dust in the wind'-picking

```
Mdust1
 0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0       " <----voice  1"
 1 0 0 0  0 1 0 0  1 0 0 0  0 1 0 0       " <----voice  2"
 0 0 0 1  1 0 0 1  0 0 0 1  1 0 0 1       " <----voice  3"
```

```
0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0  0 0 1 0      " <----voice  4"
1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0  1 0 0 0      " <----voice  5"
0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0  0 0 0 0      " <----voice  6"
```

A 1 means activate,   a 0 means don't activate. You can add your own patterns by modifying/extending MELODY.DAT with a common text editor (for example Windows Notepad).

You may also use Chordplay's built-in pattern editor. ChoosePatterns/Melody from the menu. You'll see a graphical display of the various melody patterns, which you can customize with your mouse. Left click inside the red fields to activate or delete the current settings. Push the 'Test'-button to simultaneously hear the result. Use the option 'Save' to save your changes permanently into MELODY.DAT.
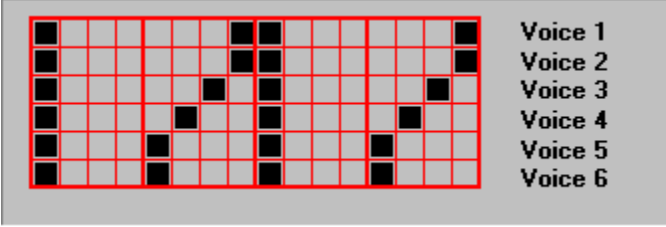
Read the next section to get some tips about Chordplay's advanced features

Advanced features

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The Chordplay mixer

Choose Menu Midi/Mixer to invoke the Chordplay mixer. You can use it to define the volume of the melodic and percussion output.

These settings can be saved permanently if you choose Menu Voices/Save Settings.
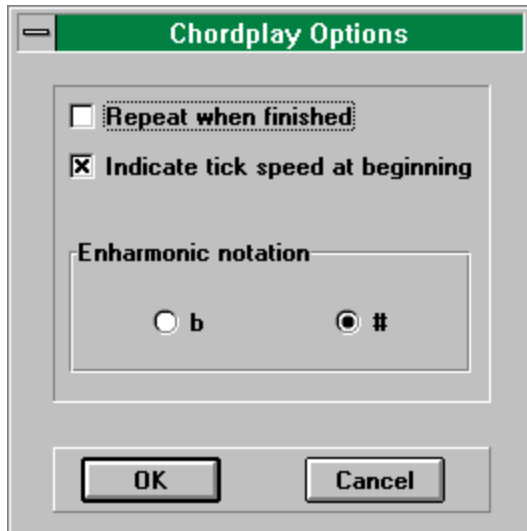

The Chordplay Tuner

Help overview

Chordplay options

Choose Menu Play/Options to invoke the options dialog. You can define the following things here:

Repeat when finished

When this item is checked, Chordplay won't stop at the end of a song (or the selected part of a song that you chose to play back) but repeat it over and over again. This feature is helpful if you want to practise a particular phrase.

Indicate tick speed at beginning

When this item is checked, Chordplay will beat the time before it starts playing.

Enharmonic notation

As you know, certain notes can be written down in several ways. For instance, a F# is the same note as a Gb. You can tell Chordplay to use either the #- or b-style when a chord is constructed in the transfer field in the upper left corner of the main screen.

Requirements and technical notes

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Troubleshooting

Error message 'Can't open MIDI device'

If you get this message at startup, you might have to check your Windows Midi Mapper Setup for proper settings. A MIDI-compatible soundcard has to be properly installed.

No percussion output

Chordplay uses the midi channels 1-6 for the six melodic voices and channel 10 for percussion output. Channel 10 is the General Midi (GM) default channel for the percussion voices. If you don't hear drums but melody instead, you'll have to change your Windows Midi Mapper Setup to change the destination channel for source channel 10.

Requirements

286 or higher processor
Microsoft Windows 3.1 or higher
Midi compatible soundcard, properly installed under Windows
Mouse (recommended)

Technical notes

Chordplay was written in C++, using Watcom C/C++ v10.5 and MFC 2.5.

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Acknowledgement

Special thanks to

Changing instruments

Chordplay uses six voices for melodic output and five voices for percussion.
There are some default definitions which can be selected with Menu Voices/ Set Defaults.

Melodic voices

You can change the default melodic instrument with Menu Voices/Melodic. You'll get a list of 128 standard midi instruments to choose from. The selection can be permanently saved with Menu Voices/Save settings.
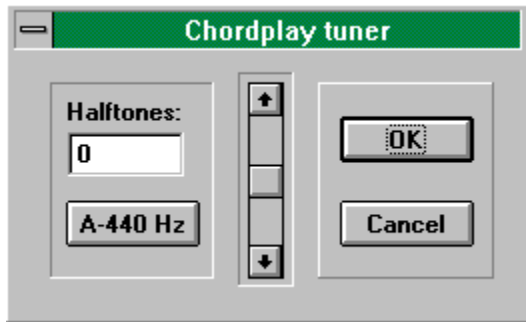
Percussion voices

You can modify each of the five rhythm voices with Menu Voices/Percussion.

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Chordplay tuner

Use Menu Midi/Tune to transpose the Chordplay output up or down in halftone steps. Press 'A-440Hz' to hear how a default 440Hz-A is transposed under the current settings.

Chordplay Options

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Chords

Chords are defined in the ASCII-file CHORDS.DAT. Here are the first six entries:

```
C            0 4 7 12 16 19
C7           0 4 7 10 12 16
C6           0 4 7 9  12 16

Cm           0 3 7 12 15 19
Cm7          0 3 7 10 12 15
Cm6          0 3 7 9  12 15
```

All chords in CHORDS.DAT are defined for C. There's a name, followed by 6 numbers and comments (not mandatory, of course), included in quotation marks. The numbers simply define the halftone steps for each of the six melodic voices. The first example is a major chord, consisting of:

C (=0) E (=4) G(=7) C'(=12) E'(=16) G'(=19)

You can add your own, user defined chords by extending CHORDS.DAT with a simple text editor (Windows Notepad, for instance). Just make shure that the new chord name is unique and cannot be misunderstood by Chordplay's expression parser.

Go to the next section to learn about rhythm- and melody patterns.

Rhythm- and melody patterns

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