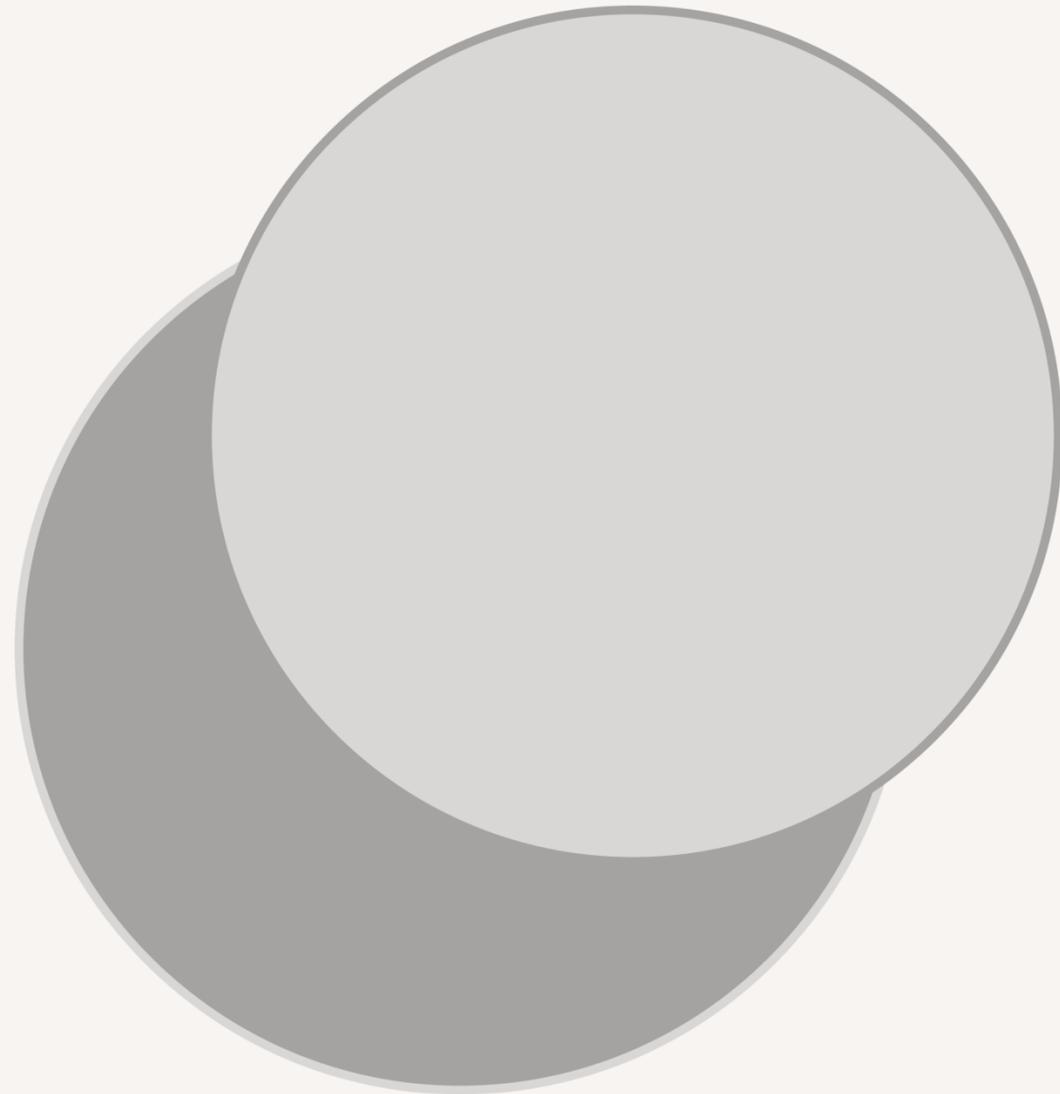


WORSHIP 4:24 - JANUARY 2026

# Music Theory for Worship Teams

Presented by David Erlandson





# The Importance of Music Theory in Worship

Music theory is foundational to creating and performing music. Even if you don't know theory, you're still using it!

Having a working knowledge of music theory gives you understanding of the music you're playing and allows for more flexibility and creativity in your music.

**Who is in the room?**

**Why are you here?**

# **Foundational Music Concepts**

# Understanding Basic Music Theory Terminology

## Chord Progressions

The sequence of chords used for a section of a song. Chord progressions are essential for creating **musical movement** and emotional dynamics, serving as the foundation for most contemporary worship songs.

## Voice Leading and Inversions

Effective voice leading ensures smooth transitions between chords, allowing each voice to move **naturally and harmonically**. Inversions vary the sound of a song and contribute to good voice leading.

## Chord Extensions

Notes added to a chord beyond the basic "1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>." These are typically notated using a number of the interval up from the root of the chord.

# Chord Function

## The Magic Phone Number

3 6 4 2 7 5 1

**\*this is traditional, functional harmony, the rules don't always apply now**

# Chord Function Learn to Listen



# The Nashville Numbers System

## Chords Become Numbers

Rather than a chord be identified by its name (i.e. "G") Chords are assigned numbers based on their location in the scale of the key the song is in.

Key of G  
G=1, C=4, D=5, Em=6-

## Eases Transposition and Communication

Allows for easy transposing of songs as all keys of a song will now have the same sheet music. Simply call out the key and each musician makes the mental shift. Communicate the number of the chord -  
Go to the 4

## Inversions and Extensions

Inversions are notated by /  
1/3 6/4

Extensions with words or numbers adjacent  
5sus, 1add2, 4<sup>2</sup>  
or  
5<sup>sus</sup> 1<sup>add2</sup> 4<sup>2</sup>

# Nashville Numbers Example

## Key of C

**C = 1**

**Dm = 2m (2-)**

**Em = 3m (3-)**

**F = 4**

**G = 5**

**Am = 6m (6-)**

**B° = 7°**

# Nashville Numbers Example

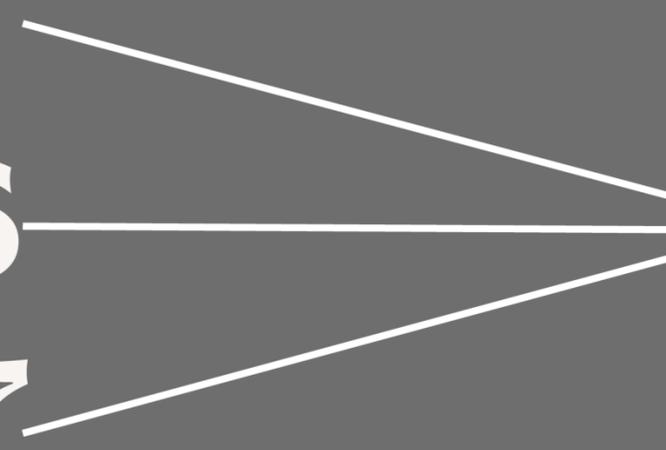
## Inversions - Key of C

**C/E = 1/3**

**F/A = 4/6**

**G/B = 5/7**

**Bass player  
(and maybe keys)  
plays these notes**



# Song Demo - How Great is Our God

## CHORUS

**1**

How great is our God sing with me

**6m<sup>7</sup>**

How great is our God and all will see

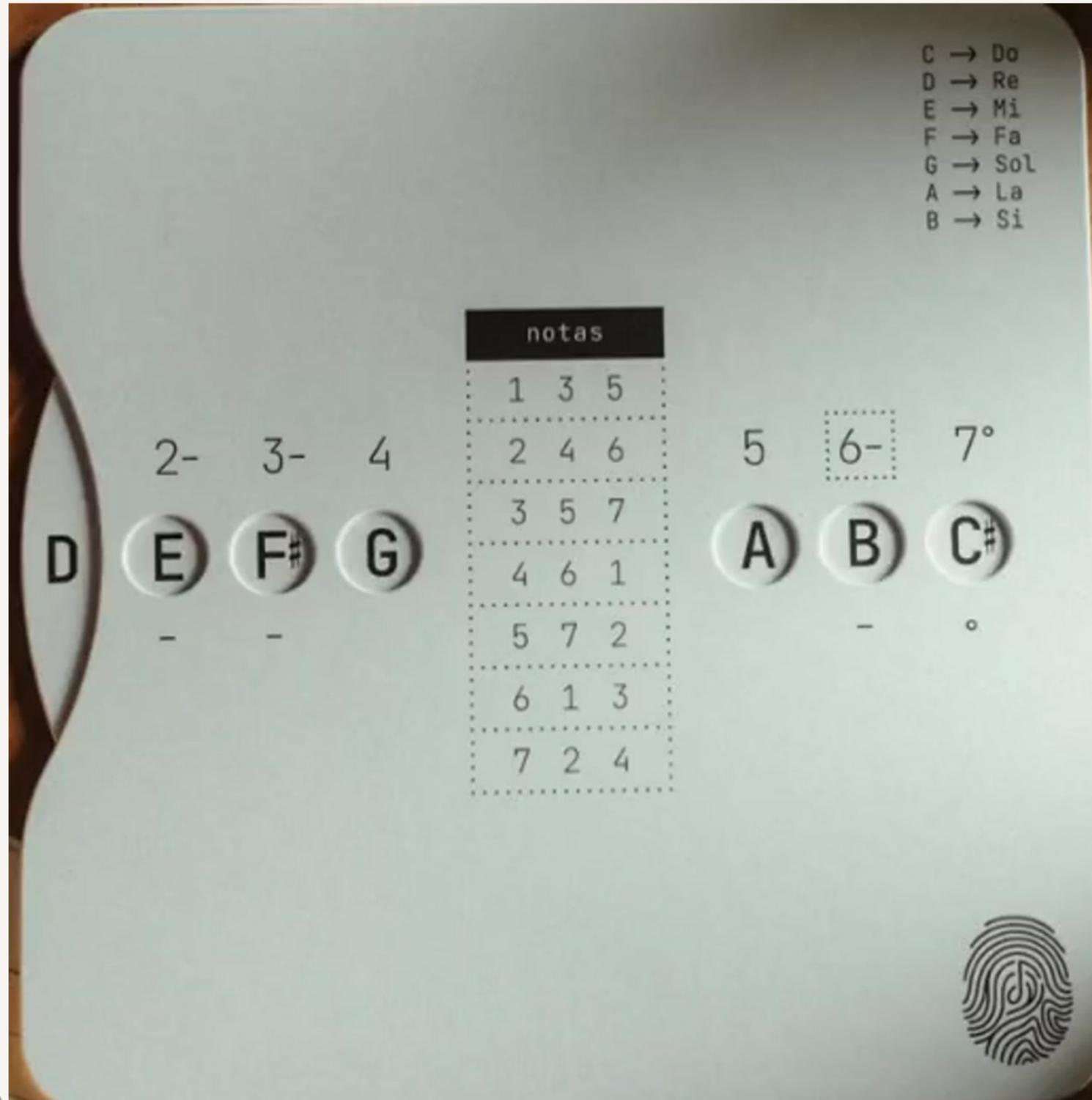
**4maj<sup>7</sup>**

How great

**5**

how great is our God

**1<sup>2</sup>**



# Chordii

A simple tool for you to learn and teach the Nashville Numbers system.

Comes in both Major and Minor styles.

Has additional information like chord progressions, chord notes, extension options and more!

[www.chordii.com](http://www.chordii.com)

# Chord Substitutions

## Extensions

Substitute “plain” chords for chords with 2<sup>nds</sup>, 9ths, 7<sup>ths</sup>, etc.

This adds color without changing much of the song.

## Borrowing

Borrow chords from the relative major/minor or from related keys/modes.

Think about the end of “Gratitude”

## Secondary Dominants

Not technically a substitution, but instead a new way to lead into the next chord.

Think about the Gospel Music “Sound”

# **Practical Application**

# Song Demo - Great Are You Lord

**1**

And all the earth will shout Your praise

**1sus**

Our hearts will cry these bones will sing

**4<sup>2</sup>**

**1**

Great are You Lord

# Song Demo - Great Are You Lord

1

And all the earth will shout Your praise

~~1sus~~ b7

Our hearts will cry these bones will sing

~~4<sup>2</sup>~~ 4/6

1

Great are You Lord

# Song Demo - Secondary Dominant Waymaker

## CHORUS

(You are) <sup>4</sup> Way Maker Miracle Worker <sup>1</sup> Promise Keeper  
<sup>5sus</sup> Light in the darkness my God that is who You are <sup>6m</sup>

# Song Demo - Secondary Dominant Waymaker

## CHORUS

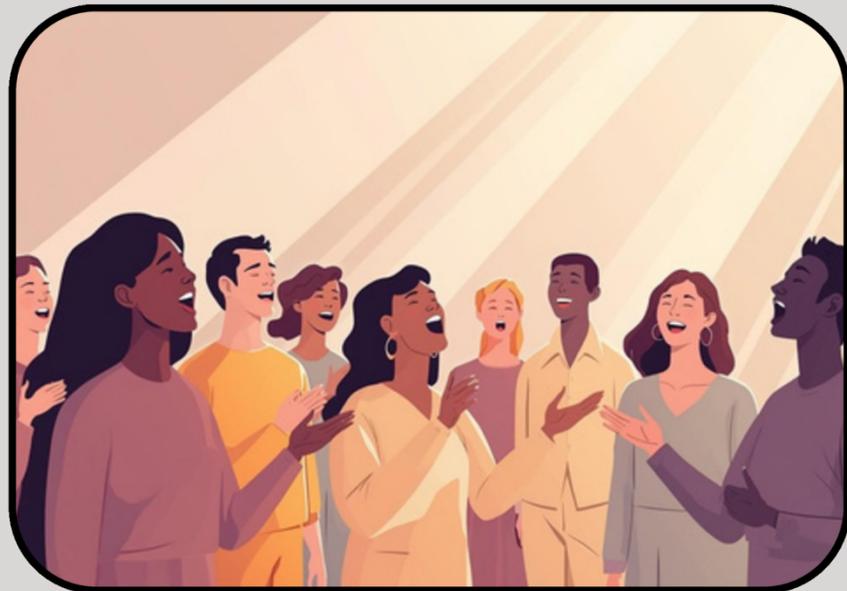
(You are) <sup>4</sup> Way Maker Miracle Worker <sup>1</sup> Promise Keeper

Light in the darkness my God that is who You are

<sup>5sus</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>6m</sup> <sup>5m-1/3</sup>

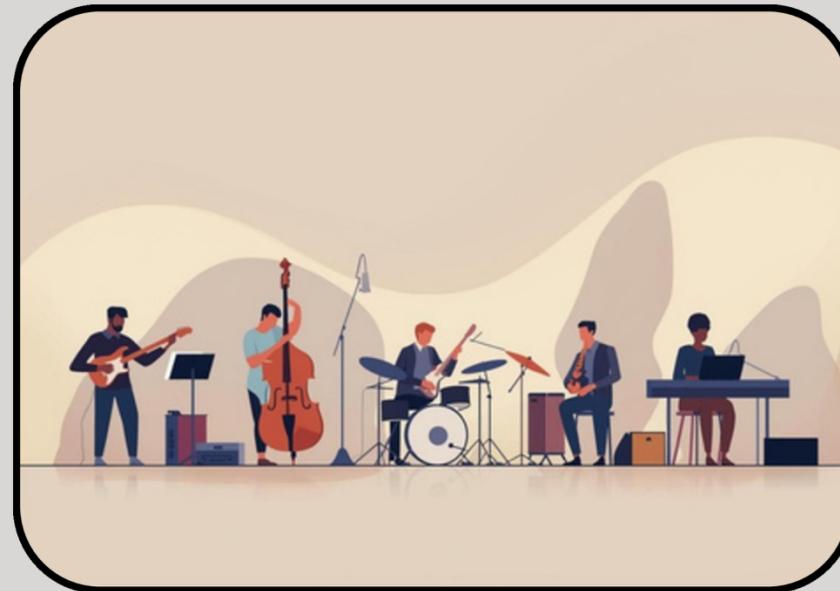
**voice leading!**

# Arranging for Your Team



## Vocals

If you change the chords, vocals will need to adapt to the new harmonies!



## Instruments

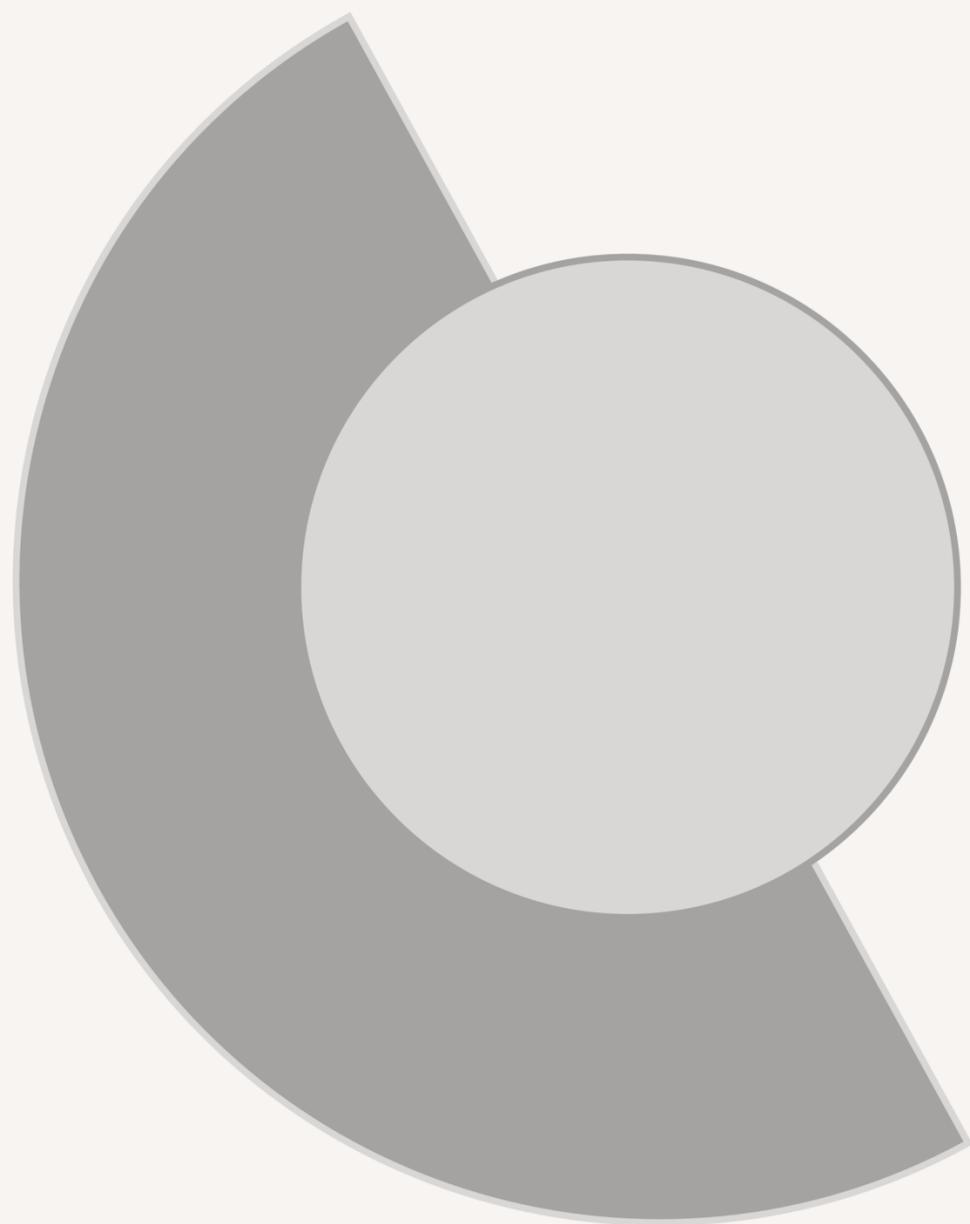
Stay out of each other's way!!!  
Think like an orchestrator



## Dynamics

Dynamics create interest and add to emotion of the song

**Questions?**  
**Comments?**  
**Snide Remarks?**



# Let's Connect!

## **PODCAST**

[www.worshipandcoffee.com](http://www.worshipandcoffee.com)

## **EMAIL**

[daviderlandson@gmail.com](mailto:daviderlandson@gmail.com)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

@daviderlandson -  
@worshipandcoffeepod