

10. Playing in a Band

Music sheets that are used by small bands usually consist of a single treble clef melody line with the chord signatures above it and the lyrics below it. This form is commonly called a fake sheet and when in book form are called fake books. Because the full orchestration for the various instruments is not written it's up to the band members to “improvise” the supporting rhythm, harmony and bass for the melody. To achieve an ideal performance of a song its important that the band members utilize the playing guidelines as described below.

Basic playing rules for bands:

1. **Bass** – *The bass player provides the tempo for the entire band and the band members must follow the “beat” of the bass. The bass maintains a steady and solid tempo for everyone in the band to follow including the vocalist(s). The bass player, when reading fake book sheets observes any written bass breaks and plays through the melody rests unless it's otherwise noted on the arrangement. It is important for the bass player to maintain a steady and continuous tempo because the entire band will follow the bass.*
2. **Vocals** - *Vocalists should follow the established tempo throughout the song with the band. There may be an occasion when a vocalist may incidentally slip the timing. Should that happen the entire band including the bass should hold the tempo and the vocalist should return with the set tempo at the correct place rejoining the band.*
3. **Lead player** – *The lead player plays the melody line in place of a vocalist and follows the vocalist rules. The lead player should play harmony or rhythm while the vocalist is singing or while another lead player is playing the melody.*

Rhythm:

The rhythm is the most important component when playing a song. The rhythm tempo is set with either a countdown or a brief introduction and once it has been set it must be followed by the band members. All band players including those playing either the harmony or the melody should follow the established rhythm. Rhythm players play through the melody breaks and rests unless otherwise instructed or it is noted on the music sheet. Having a strong solid rhythm is essential.

Harmony:

Harmony is playing to support and re-enforce the melody without duplicating the melody. Harmony playing should not be the main focus of the tune for the listeners, the melody should be the focus. Harmony playing is acquired by developing an ear for various chord and note patterns that add “color” and support the melody. Harmony can also be picked notes rather than chords as long as it adds to the tune. Harmony is sometimes referred to as the “second part”.

Melody:

Melody is the voice (lyrics) of the song be it vocal or played by an instrument. Rarely is it proper to have more than one player playing the melody at the same time. However, this can sound really nice if it's done by two different instruments as a duet or a vocalist and an instrument harmonizing together just like two vocalists singing together.

Note:

By following these basic rules when using fake book sheets the music will sound “arranged” to the listeners rather than “jammed”.