

THE

The
Harmonium
evolution

HARMONIUM HANDBOOK



START TO PLAY IN **7** STEPS

e-book

Kenny Clarys & Mari Joël

“...This book is dedicated to
all the people out there who want to
spread love and light into the world
using music as their universal language...”

The Harmonium evolution



Copyright ©, Kenny Clarys & Mari Joël 2023

All rights reserved. No parts of this book may be copied, distributed, or published in any form without permission from the authors.

For permissions contact: kenny@harmoniumevolution.com

Photos & artwork by Kenny Clarys and Véronique Tabak

Published by The Harmonium Evolution

HARMONIUMEVOLUTION.COM



STEP 1	Find A Good One	
	Calcutta Style	5
	Delhi Style	5
	Regular or Click-in	6
	Pricing	6
	Cheap Alternative	7
STEP 2	How It Works	
	The Different Parts	8
	The Playing Process	9
	Important Note	10
STEP 3	Start To Play	11
	Left Hand & Bellows	12
	Notes About the Bellows	12
	Right Hand & Keys	13
	Fingers vs. Numbers	13
	Exercise 1	14
STEP 4	Know Your History	15
	Music System: East vs. West	16
	Western Notes are Absolute	17
	Indian Notes are Relative	17
	Ragas vs. Scales	18
STEP 5	Basics Of Music	
	One: Melody	19
	Two: Harmony	19
	Three: Rhythm	20
STEP 6	From Scales To Melodies	
	Semitones & Whole tones	21
	Major Scale & Exercise 2	22
	Minor Scale & Exercise 3	22
	Exercise 4	23
STEP 7	From Intervals To Chords	
	Fifths	24
	Exercise 5	25
	Thirds & Exercise 6	26
	Build a Chord - The Formula	27
	Exercise 7	27
	Inversions	28
	Exercise 8	29
	Your First Song	31
	Final Advice	32

PREFACE

So you are interested in playing the harmonium and improving your skills on this unique instrument? Maybe you're a complete beginner who has never touched a harmonium before, or you already own a harmonium and tried to play it on your own. In the last case, chances are that you found yourself getting stuck at some point: either you're always playing the same tunes, or you don't know how to play a certain chord, or maybe you've never figured out how to play chords at all. However normal and understandable this is, it can get the best of you and cause you to lose motivation. Now this is where our book comes in.

Next to our Harmonium Evolution online course, consisting of more than 120 lessons and 27+ hours course material, we wanted to create a short and sweet beginner course in bookform, offering practical advice and step-by-step information.

Wherever you're at, and whether you did or didn't start your own harmonium evolution yet, this e-book is designed to help you prevent or fix the most common difficulties you'll meet, and to make your learning process on the harmonium an enjoyable one.

With this book as your guide you will learn the fundamentals of how to play any song or mantra. We've designed it to ignite your motivation and to keep any musical and technical knowhow to the bare minimum needed to get you started and well on your way on the most confident and joyful path of music.

An important note is that we strongly recommend, from the very beginning, to take your harmonium out of your room and into the world as much as possible, even if your skills are still quite limited. This in particular is what took us from absolute beginners to a professional level. Nothing will be better and more inspiring for your own progress (at any level) than connecting with others, whether by playing in a group or circle, accompanying a singer or a meditation session, or performing in front of an audience.

Music is to be enjoyed, and our heartfelt wish is that this book may inspire you toward both developing the skills and having lots of fun on your very own Harmonium Evolution!

Kenny & Mari

01 FIND A GOOD ONE

If you're still in need of a harmonium - or about to buy a new one - check out this chapter first, where we've listed the most important things to consider when buying your instrument.

In fact there's only two main types of harmoniums, called 'Delhi style' and 'Calcutta style'. Which one to buy depends entirely on your own preferences. Let's go over the most important traits of each type.

CALCUTTA STYLE



A 'Calcutta style' harmonium is the more basic, what-you-see-is-what-you-get type. When you strike a key, you hear one note. The bellows are pushed in and out with your fingers. The sound is softer and subtler than the 'Delhi style' harmonium, which makes it perfect to sing along to (when you're not using a microphone) as it will be less likely to overpower your voice when singing solo.

DELHI STYLE



The 'Delhi style' harmonium offers some hidden surprises. One of them is called a coupler, which produces an extra note - one octave higher or lower - each time you hit a key. This will give your melody double strength, resulting in a richer, fuller, warmer and louder sound than the 'Calcutta style' harmonium. Another extra is a spring, which pushes the bellows back outwards after you've pushed them in.

This type of harmonium sounds more impressive, direct and on the foreground. With its rich and strong sound it will be well suited to accompany a group of singers, or any other type of music circle or band.

REGULAR OR CLICK IN

Another thing to consider is whether or not you want a click-in system.



A click-in harmonium has small levers on the sides, making you able to lower the harmonium into the box underneath. Put the lid on top and fasten it, and it turns into a suitcase, which you can carry by the handle. This can definitely come in handy to transport your instrument, but this type of harmonium is usually a bit smaller (because of the box it has to fit into), which could have an effect on the sound.

PRICING

If you're sure that you want to engage yourself in learning the harmonium thoroughly, which involves long-term regular practice, we highly recommend buying a new instrument.

Prices range from \$500 to over \$1000, but like we mentioned before the sound and feel of the harmonium that suits you best should be according to your personal taste. So preferably don't go automatically for either the cheapest or the most expensive one, but try out different instruments and compare them.

Of course you can find some second-hand harmoniums. But in this case comparing them to other harmoniums is usually difficult, and chances are that some parts of the instrument will be worn out or damaged.

It is possible to find a good second-hand harmonium, and if you are well prepared and know what you are looking for you should be able to get a good deal, though rarely below \$250.

Whether you want to buy your harmonium new or second-hand, always make sure you're well-informed about what to look at and what to listen for.

To help you, we've made a video with tips and tricks, so you will know exactly what makes a great harmonium!



<< Click here to watch >>

"11 things you need to know when
buying a new harmonium"

<https://harmoniumevolution.com/buy-new>

CHEAP ALTERNATIVE

But what if you're not yet ready to buy your first harmonium, or if you just can't afford one at the moment? The good news is that you can already start learning how to play chords and melodies, because the keys of a harmonium are similar to those of a piano. So if you have a piano already, you can use the Harmonium Evolution online course (or our free YouTube videos) to start your progress.



Or you can buy a cheap Casio or children's keyboard for as little as \$10-\$20, which has exactly the same piano keys you need to take your first steps. That way you can start playing on any budget!

On some children's keyboards, you can't play more than one or two notes at the same time. Make sure you can play three notes simultaneously if you buy one!



02

HOW IT WORKS

If you own a harmonium, there's some things you need to know before you start playing. Going over the different elements of the harmonium first will prevent you from using it in a way that could damage the instrument.

THE DIFFERENT PARTS

Each harmonium consists of the following parts:

KEYS

black and white keys, similar to a piano



REEDS

small metal plates inside the harmonium that produce the sound



BELLOWS

to pump air into the system



AIR CHAMBER

a bag inside, collecting the air that is pumped in



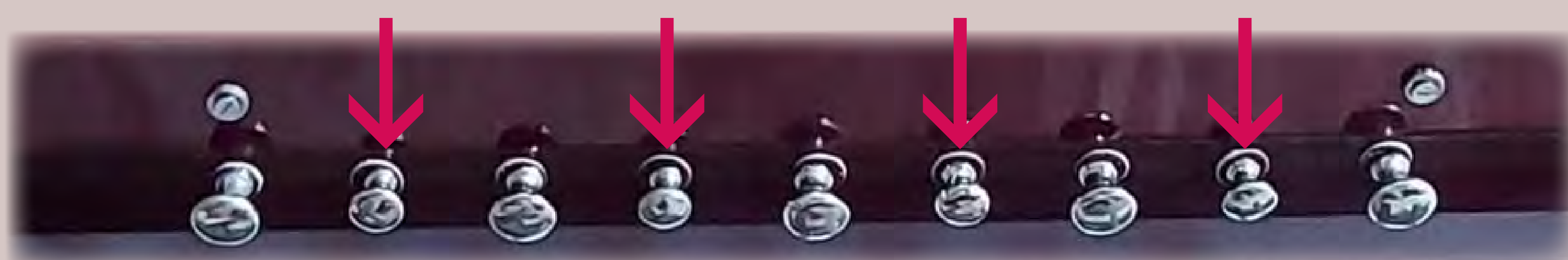
STOPS

knobs that can be pulled out or pushed in, to open the air chambers



DRONES

*smaller knobs, designed to create an additional 'background tone'
(not on every harmonium)*



THE PLAYING PROCESS

So what exactly happens when you play the harmonium? When you pump the bellows, you are actually pumping air into the air chamber, which lies hidden inside.

By pulling all of the stops either out or pushing them in (depending on the harmonium) you are opening the gates to the air chamber, allowing the air to escape when you press a key. And by pressing the keys you allow the air to come out at a specific tone, or several tones at once.

Now pay attention to the following:

- When you keep pumping the bellows without pressing keys, the air keeps flowing into the air chamber, building up

pressure without any means of escape. This can cause the air chamber to break, and your harmonium will be damaged.

- When you press the keys and pump the bellows without having used the stops to open the gates to the air chamber, air will go in but can't go out because the gates are closed. This can damage your harmonium in the same way. You can recognise this situation when you pump the bellows and press the keys, but no sound is coming out.

All you need to do is open the gates to the air chamber by using the stops.

- When you press the keys without pumping the bellows, no sound will come out because no air is coming in. This is however not harmful for the harmonium.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Never leave your harmonium unattended in a room full of people. Some curious bystanders (especially children) could possibly not resist experimenting with this very accessible looking instrument. But because they don't know how a harmonium works, they could end up breaking it because of the forementioned situations you should avoid.

If you find yourself in a crowded place without any means to safely store away your harmonium while you're not using it, just make sure to cover it with a cloth or lid, put it in its transport bag if you have one, or close the click-in system if you have that type of harmonium. Or even better: take some time to kindly assist and help those who want to try out while they take their first steps!



03

START TO PLAY

Now you know the technical workings, you can take your harmonium and place it in front of you, and we will cover the most healthy posture while playing. Sitting in the right posture will prevent you from straining your back, neck, legs, shoulders, or wrists.



If you really want to make sure that you're sitting and playing the harmonium in the best possible way, we've made a video where we cover everything in detail.



<< Click here to watch >>

"How to play Harmonium: Technique of the Right Hand"

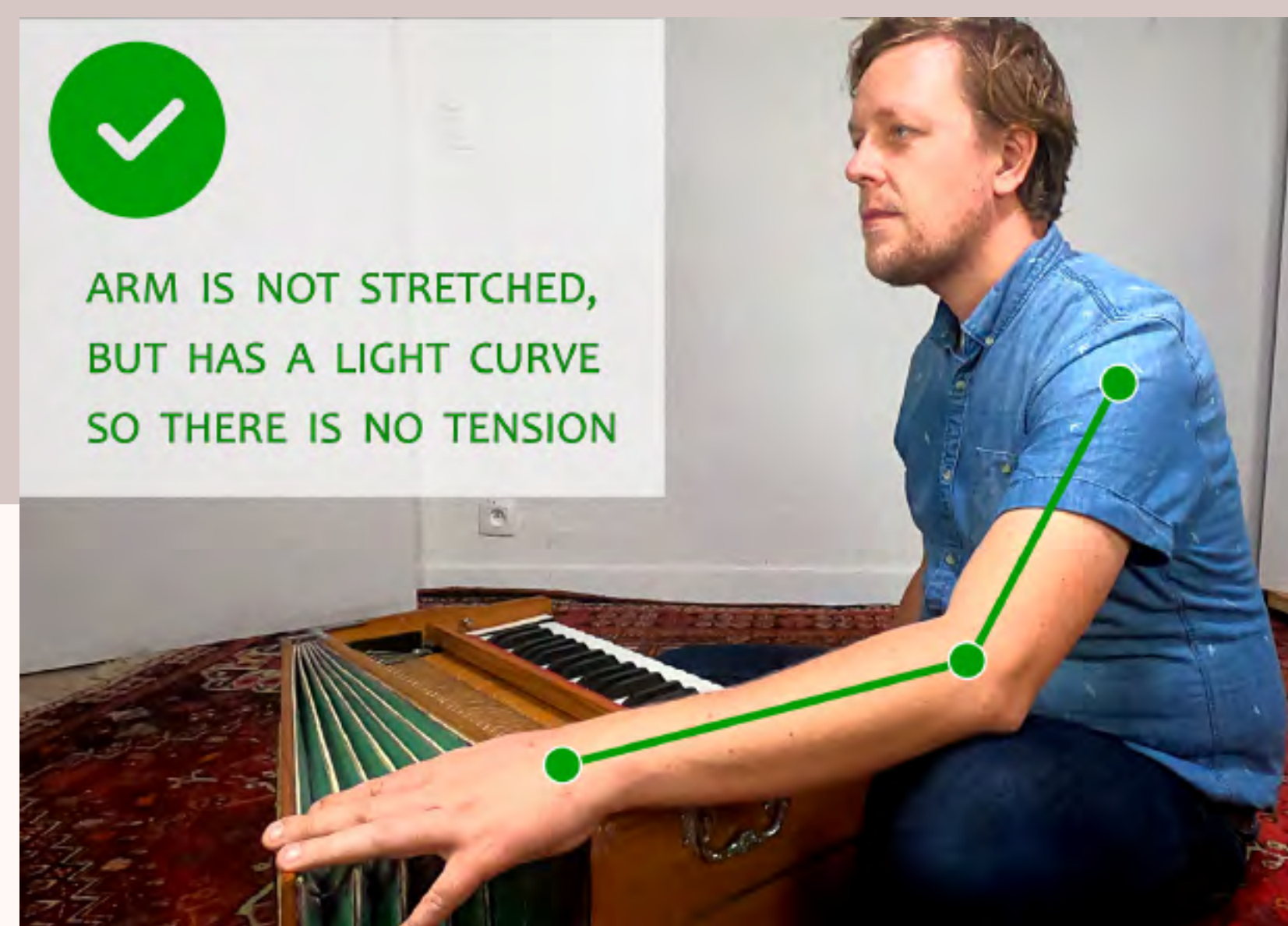
<https://harmoniumevolution.com/right-hand>

If you have some issues making it difficult or impossible to sit on the floor, you can heighten the harmonium by placing it on a small table or a pedestal, while you're sitting on a chair in front of it.

Just make sure that the height of the pedestal is such that your right upper arm and your forearm make an angle of approximately 90° when you sit on the chair in front of your harmonium with your fingers on the keys.

LEFT HAND & BELLOWS

The left hand is always used to pump the bellows. Now let's start doing this the right way. If you sit in front of your harmonium (with the bellows still locked), place your left hand on the left upper corner of your harmonium, in a relaxed and comfortable way. Your arm shouldn't be stretched out completely, but bent a little. Let the base of your hand just rest naturally on the wood.



Next you unlock the bellows and hold it with three fingers: your index finger, middle finger and ring finger. The little finger isn't involved, and your thumb just keeps resting on the upper corner of the harmonium. Now stretch your fingers and let the bellows go out naturally. Then push them in, towards you, while pressing one or more of the piano keys with your right hand. If you're doing it right, you should now hear the sound of the keys you're pressing, while your left arm is feeling comfortable and not strained.

NOTES ABOUT THE BELLOWS

- If you have very small hands, chances are that the bellows are not going all the way outward when you're stretching your fingers completely. In that case, try placing your hand a bit further, so your wrist is resting on the corner of the harmonium instead of your thumb.
- If your harmonium has a spring in its bellows (like a Delhi style usually does), it will automatically open wider and faster than when it doesn't have this addition. When there is no spring, you might have to push the bellows out a bit further with your fingers. The sound of the keys is only triggered when the bellows go inward, so make sure that the outward movement of the bellows happens a bit faster than the inward movement. So "in - fast out - in - fast out - in".
- The faster your outward movement goes, the higher the volume. If you're a beginner, just focus on creating a consistent sound, which isn't fluctuating too much between soft and loud. This is done by keeping the speed of your inward and outward left hand movement regular.

RIGHT HAND & KEYS

When you sit down with your harmonium in front of you, place the fingers of your right hand on the piano keyboard in a relaxed way. First pay attention to your posture and how your body feels: make sure there is no tension in your fingers, wrist, arm and shoulder. Your arm should form a slight curve, not too low and not too high.



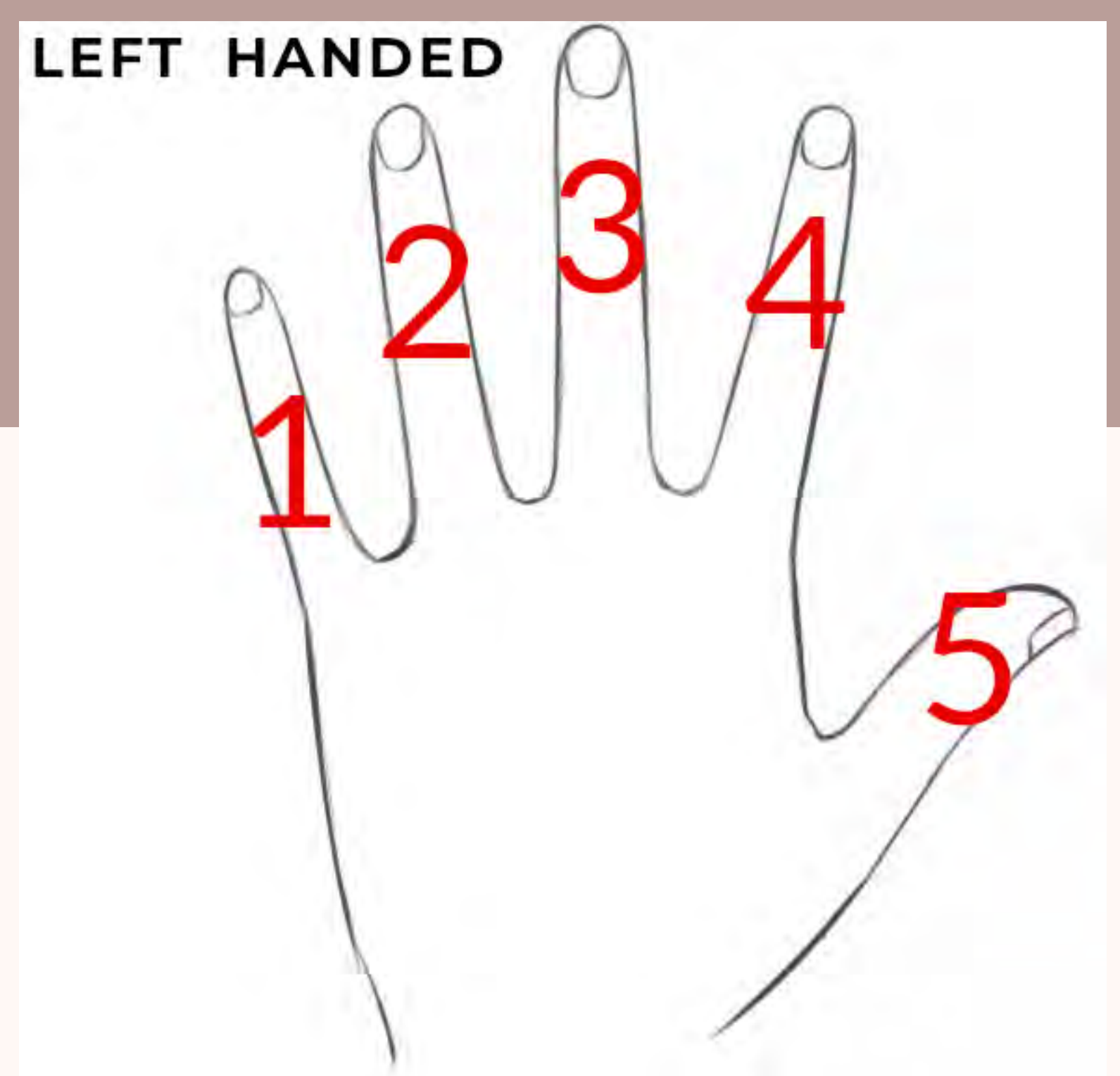
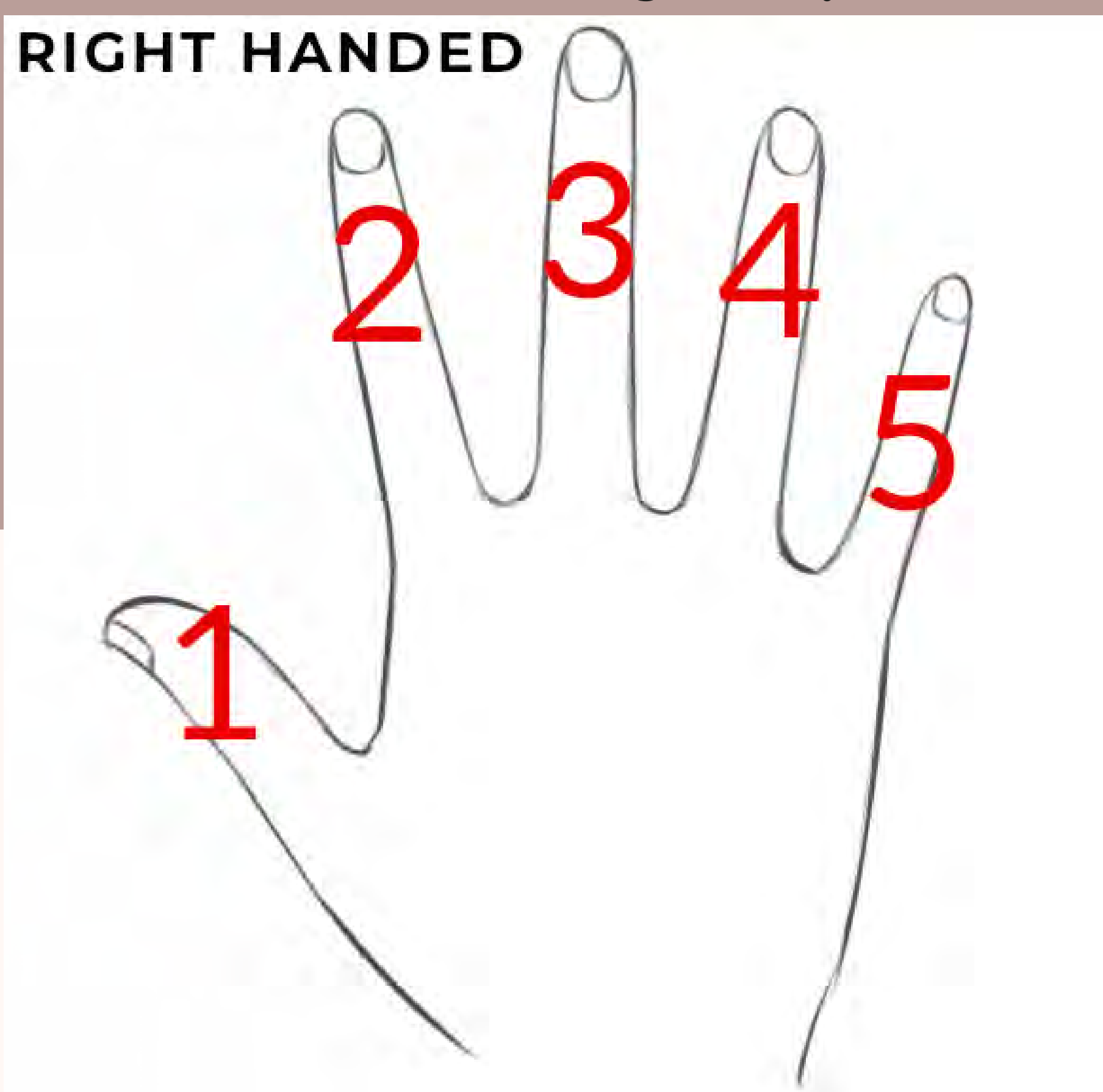
Also your fingers on the keys should be slightly curved and relaxed. The harmonium doesn't have weighted keys like a piano, so you need to apply very little pressure when pressing a key. Even while playing your fingers should stay curved; and keep them in touch with the keys as much as possible. Avoid lifting your fingers up high when you change keys.

FINGERS vs. NUMBERS

When we use music notation to describe a chord or a melody, it helps to refer to the fingers as numbers. Using numbers you can easily see how to play a certain chord or which fingers are used to press the keys to form the melody you want to play.

90% of all people are right handed, so in general we play the keys with our right hand. If you are left handed you can choose to play the keys with your left hand, in which case the numbers are different (see the image below) and the bellows need to be pumped by your right hand.

To keep it simple, we will link the numbers to the fingers of your right hand throughout this book. If you'd rather play the keys with your left hand, we suggest you make notations to translate the numbers to the fingers of your left hand, using the images below:



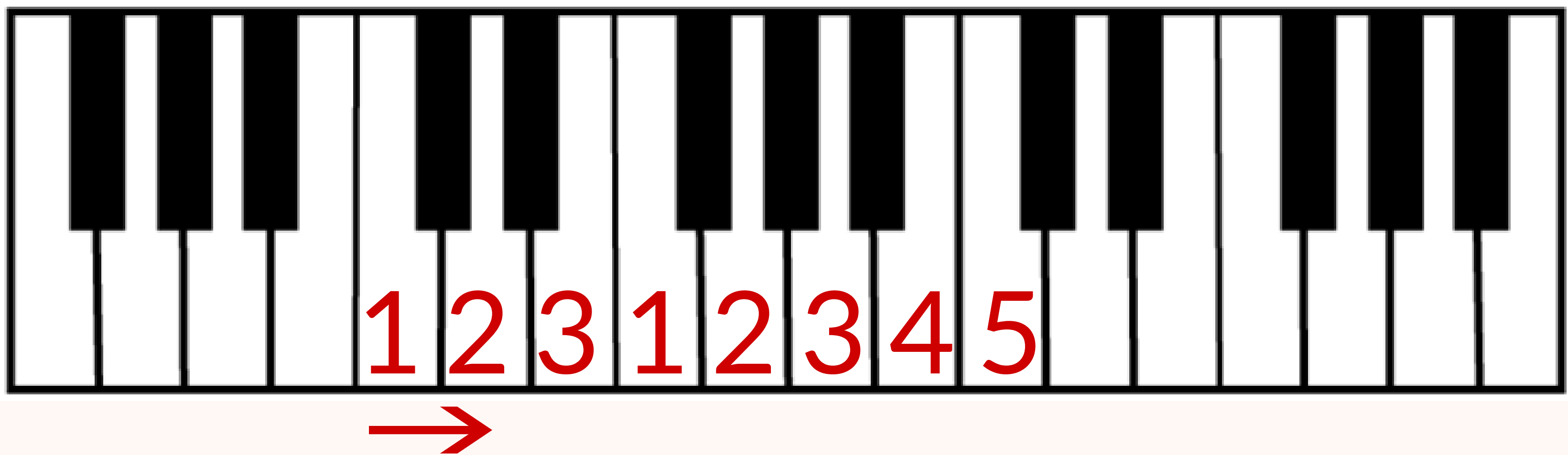


EXERCISE 1

Let's start playing, and test what you've learned up until now!

You will now learn how to play your first scale, a series of eight consecutive notes on which melodies are based. Your thumb - finger number 1 - goes on the first C on your keyboard (which is usually the very first key on the left side of the harmonium).

What you're going to do looks like this:

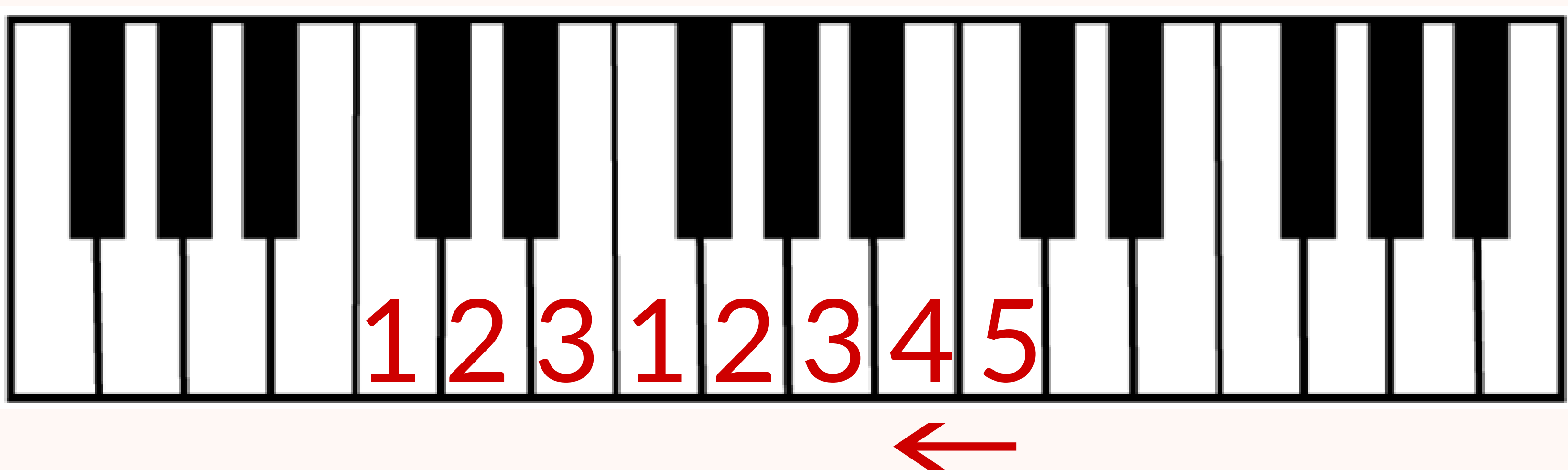


Translated to your fingers, you start on note C and press each consecutive white key up until the next C, like this:

Thumb (1) - index (2) - middle (3) - thumb (1) - index (2) - middle (3) - ring (4) - little finger (5)

Important: when you've reached the middle finger, switch to the thumb again by moving your thumb underneath your middle finger (while keeping your wrist straight) and placing it on the next white key.

If you feel really confident you can try and make it back as well, starting from where you've ended (the second C on your keyboard).



Little finger (5) - ring (4) - middle (3) - index (2) - thumb (1) - middle (3) - index (2) - thumb (1).

This time you work all the way downward starting from the second C with your little finger, back to the first C with your thumb.

Make sure that when you've reached your thumb (1) for the first time, you cross over your thumb with your middle finger (3). Again keep your wrist straight while doing this.

Congratulations! You've played your first scale...

04

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

Now before we go deeper into chords and melodies, there's some things you need to know first. One of them is that the harmonium is not quite the Eastern instrument it seems...

Its piano keys, with their defined consecutive notes, are unlike any other Indian or Eastern based instrument. That is because the harmonium was invented in Europe.

Knowing your instrument's history results in understanding it better. And it will clarify why we'll teach you in this book how to play the harmonium using particularly the Western music system. The Indian music system is built upon a culture so rich and deep that it may go beyond the reach of a Western mind. But the Western system deals best with the defined notes you'll hear when pressing your harmonium's piano keys.

In the 18th century, predecessors of the harmonium we know appeared in several places throughout Europe. Its origins can be traced back to Copenhagen, Vienna and France, where its inventors got inspired to create an instrument that worked by blowing air over metal reeds.

The first harmonium was a tall wooden piece of furniture with keys like those on a piano, which was played with both hands while air was pumped in by foot-operated bellows.



When Europeans immigrated to the United States they introduced the harmonium to their new country, and small churches that couldn't afford expensive pipe-organs gratefully started using it. When even famous composers started composing music pieces specifically for the harmonium, the instrument gained popularity, was enlarged and became more expensive. For a while it was only accessible to the Western elite.

Meanwhile, because of its portability and heat resistance, the British had taken the harmonium to their overseas colonies, where they used it in their homes and churches. In India the harmonium underwent some important changes, in order to adapt it to the prevalent music culture. The harmonium became smaller in size, so it could be played while sitting on the floor, which is what Indian performers are used to.

And instead of by foot, the bellows of the harmonium were adapted to being operated by hand, using the other hand for playing melodies - because harmonies (chords) weren't used in Indian classical music. That's how India started manufacturing harmoniums, until it became the world's leading producer of these instruments.

In the West, the harmonium disappeared fast when the electronic organ was invented in the 1930's. But in India, after a period of turmoil and opposition - after all, the harmonium was associated with the British - it got widely established as a reliable and accessible instrument used to accompany solo and group singing, up until today.



MUSIC SYSTEM: EAST vs. WEST

As we have seen, the harmonium is mainly used for Eastern - mostly Indian - based music, but its piano keys are an important Western element. For this reason you will soon learn how to play chords and melodies using the Western based music system.

But let's first go over the differences between the Indian and Western music elements, and their respective importance.

- Western music uses defined consecutive notes, and switches between notes by 'jumping' towards their respective frequencies. Indian music on the other hand likes to glide toward the following notes, as if wanting to touch every frequency between one note and the next.
- Western music uses a lot of chords and harmonies, while Indian music is largely based on solo music pieces, either sung or instrumental, with a drone (series of long repetitive tones) in the background.

- Though both Indian and Western music have fixed songs, the Western system is more about written compositions in the smallest detail, whereas Indian music uses a lot of improvisation (playing the music 'as it comes', or composing on the spot) and meditative intuition.

- Western music is based on scales, Indian (classical) music on ragas. A scale has a fixed starting point, the root note, and a series of eight consecutive notes starting from that root note. For example, a composition in D major will almost exclusively use the eight notes starting from the note D.

Ragas have a similar function, but they will more likely provide the framework for an improvisation. A raga can consist of equal, less, or more notes than a scale and is usually more complicated. When singing or playing, the musician respects the raga while touching every note.

WESTERN NOTES ARE ABSOLUTE

In the Western music system a certain key can only have one name (besides the black keys, which we'll clarify underneath). We refer to the keys by using letters 'c-d-e-f-g-a-b': each letter is tied to a specific key (see the image below). Black keys have names connected to their neighboring white keys; depending on the scale you're using they can either be called 'sharps' or 'flats'.

- A *sharp* is when we alter a white key a semitone higher: its symbol is #.
- A *flat* is when we alter a white key a semitone lower: its symbol is ♭.

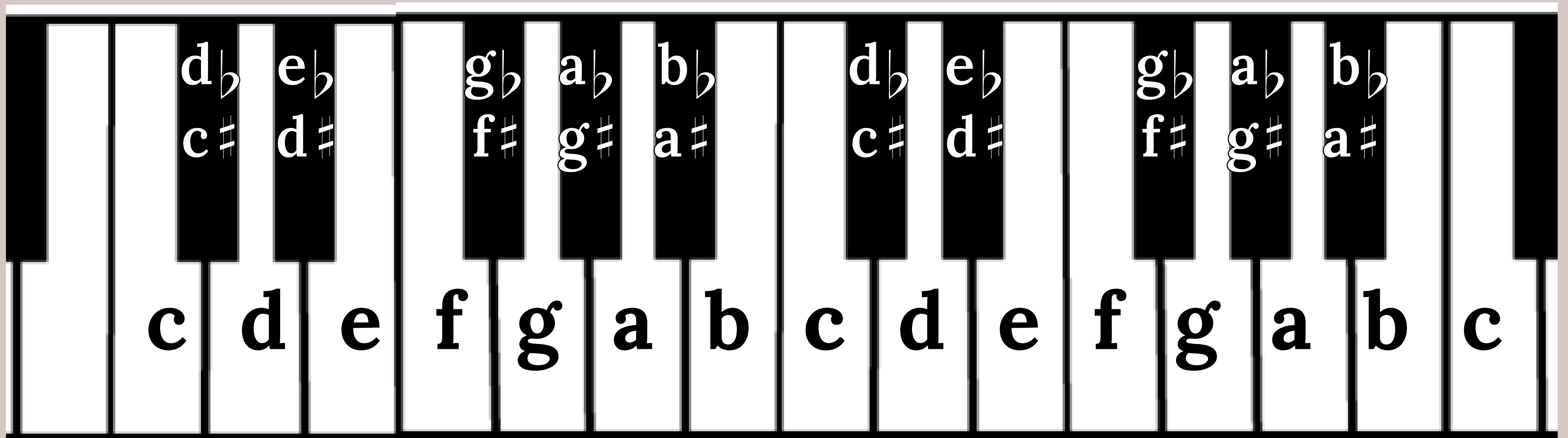
When we refer to the note 'f' we refer to the white key on the left of the three black keys. When we refer to 'f#' or 'g♭' - which is the exact same note - we refer to the most left key of the three black keys.

IMPORTANT!

Notes are written in small letters: c - d - e - f - g - a - b.

Chords are written in capitals: C - D - E - F - G - A - B.

In order to play songs, chords and melodies fluently guided by music notation, we recommend learning the names of the notes by heart. In the beginning it helps to put stickers on the white keys with their names/letters on them.



INDIAN NOTES ARE RELATIVE

In the Indian music system we use: SA RE GA MA PA DHA NI SA.

It doesn't matter which scale or raga you play and which note you start and end with, you will always start with SA. The root note of any scale or raga will be called SA every time, the note next to it is RE, one note higher is GA, and so on. This means that any key can be called SA or RE or GA, etcetera. Indian music notation is not tied to any keys in specific, which makes it a relative system.

An important difference compared to the Western system, is that in the Indian music system we cannot alter just any note like in the Western system:

- SA and PA (once the root note is set) can never be raised or lowered, they are fixed.
- We can only lower RE, GA, PA and DHA. This is called *komal*, meaning the same as 'flat'.
- We can only raise MA. This is called *teevra*, meaning the same as 'sharp'.

RAGAS vs. SCALES

Ragas and scales have more differences than we can mention here. While scales are just for practical purposes, ragas have inherent meaning: they can represent a certain time of day, a season or a feeling, or express devotion toward a particular deity.

There are many more ragas than there are scales, and it requires great practice to master certain ragas.

One can certainly play ragas on the harmonium, but if you just want to accompany yourself or others while singing mantras, bhajans and kirtans it is not absolutely necessary to study them.

In order to learn the harmonium as a beginner it is much easier to start with scales and chords. Moreover, the international music notation standard of the Western system linked to the piano keys will make more sense in the learning process. That is why we will use the Western music system to teach you how to play the harmonium.



05

BASICS OF MUSIC

You can't learn to play the harmonium without knowing the basics of music first.

Luckily they consist of only three main elements, and we will cover them here quickly.

The three elements of music are:

1 MELODY



It is the tune which we sing, or that which a solo instrument plays. We will usually remember this tune and feel that it has a priority over the music meant to accompany it. In a song words are written to the melody, and it gives the song its identity.

This is truly universal, because melodies exist in all cultures worldwide.

2 HARMONY



As the word implies, this happens when two or more notes are played together, blending perfectly and sounding pleasant. Like two or more people can function together in harmony, complementing and supporting each other, this happens in music too. Harmony or disharmony in music can be recognised by anyone, whether or not you have a trained musical ear. When two notes are played that do not blend together nicely, it will generally be recognised as 'ugly sounding' or 'out of tune'.

Chords on the harmonium are sets of three notes that complement each other perfectly. A series of chords forms the context in which the melody is set. The same melody can sound happy, sad or mysterious, depending on which chords - or harmonies - you use.

3 RHYTHM

This is the heartbeat of the music, a steady pulse to which the melody resonates. This pulse is like a beat, inaudible if the music is played by a single solo instrument, but audible if played or accompanied by a percussion instrument such as a drum or a tabla. Whether this beat is audible or just in your mind, it should be respected.

The *tempo* - how fast or slow the beat goes - is usually determined by the musician, or based upon guidelines of the composer.

In order to play music, it is important to train yourself in rhythm and tempo.

Here's how you can do that:

- Especially as a beginner, practice a lot while using a metronome or a rhythm loop. You could purchase a metronome, but there are some useful apps for this as well. To build up your steadiness or to learn how to play a certain melody properly, start in a slow tempo and build it up gradually.
- Follow some rhythm exercises and practice by clapping, tapping or pressing a key on the harmonium.
- Become aware of the rhythm, feel it in your body and become one with it. While listening to a song, try to resonate with it consciously by moving your body, your head or your feet to the beat. Play together with other singers or musicians to develop your intuitive 'music communication' and to make sure you're all feeling and playing to the same rhythmic pulse.



→ *On our website you can find some exercises to get you started.*



<< Click here to watch >>

"Understanding rhythm"

<https://harmoniumevolution.com/rhythm>

06

FROM SCALES TO MELODIES

In Chapter 3, you've played your first scale. A scale is basically a pattern of eight notes in a row. The scale that you played was C major: **c - d - e - f - g - a - b - c**.

As you can see it starts and ends with 'c'.

The last 'c' is the same note as the first one, but sounds higher.

The musical distance (also called an *interval*) between the first and the second 'c' is called an *octave* - 'octa' for eight notes. So when we play the scale of C, we start from 'c', go all the way up to the next 'c', and then back following the same notes.

But of course you can play a major scale starting from every other note. To know how to do that, all you need to do is use the exact same pattern. The pattern of a major scale is made up of whole tones and semitones.

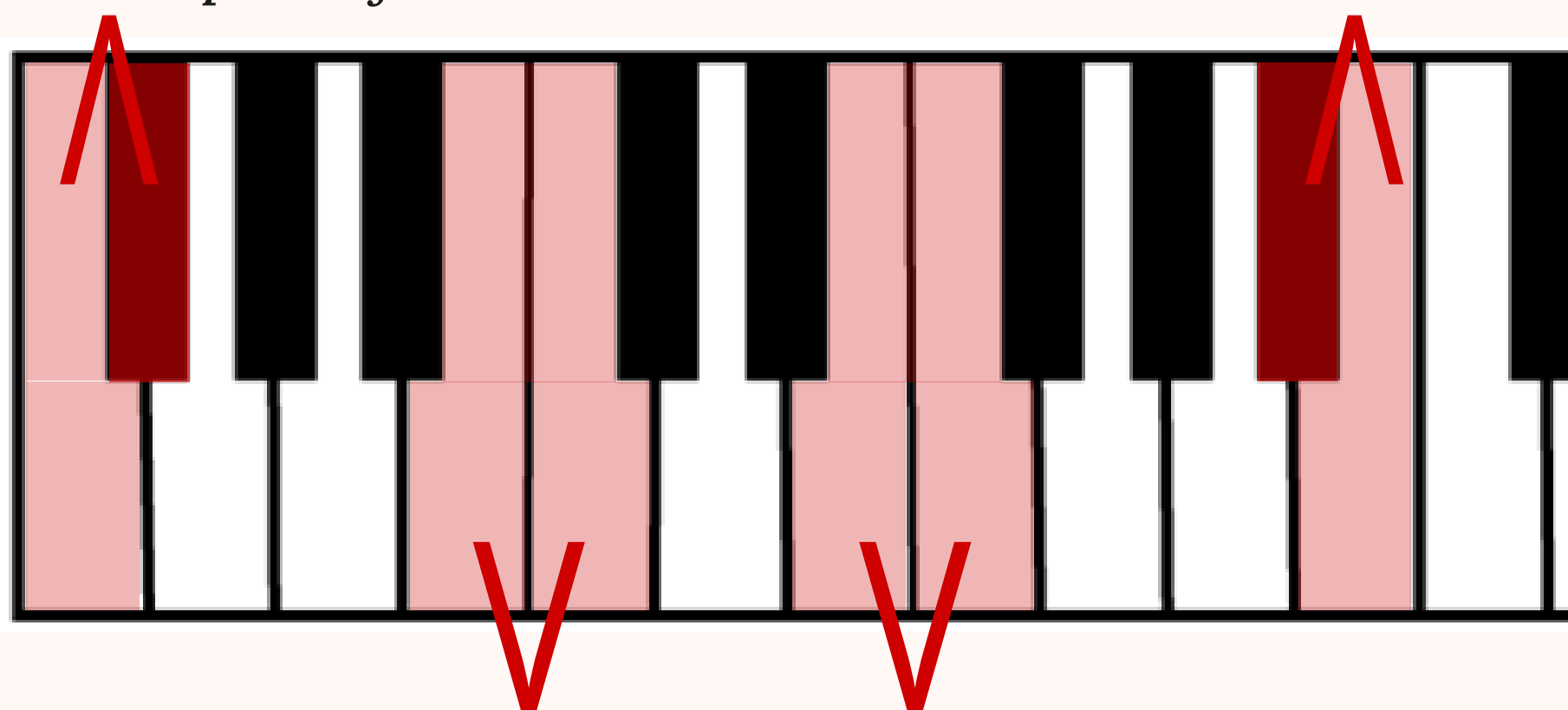
SEMITONES

A semitone is the smallest possible distance between notes on a keyboard.

The interval can look like this:

- From a white key to the adjacent black key to the right or to the left of it.
- From a black key to the adjacent white key to the right or to the left of it.
- From one white key to the adjacent white key right next to it, *provided that there is no black key in between*.

Examples of semitones:

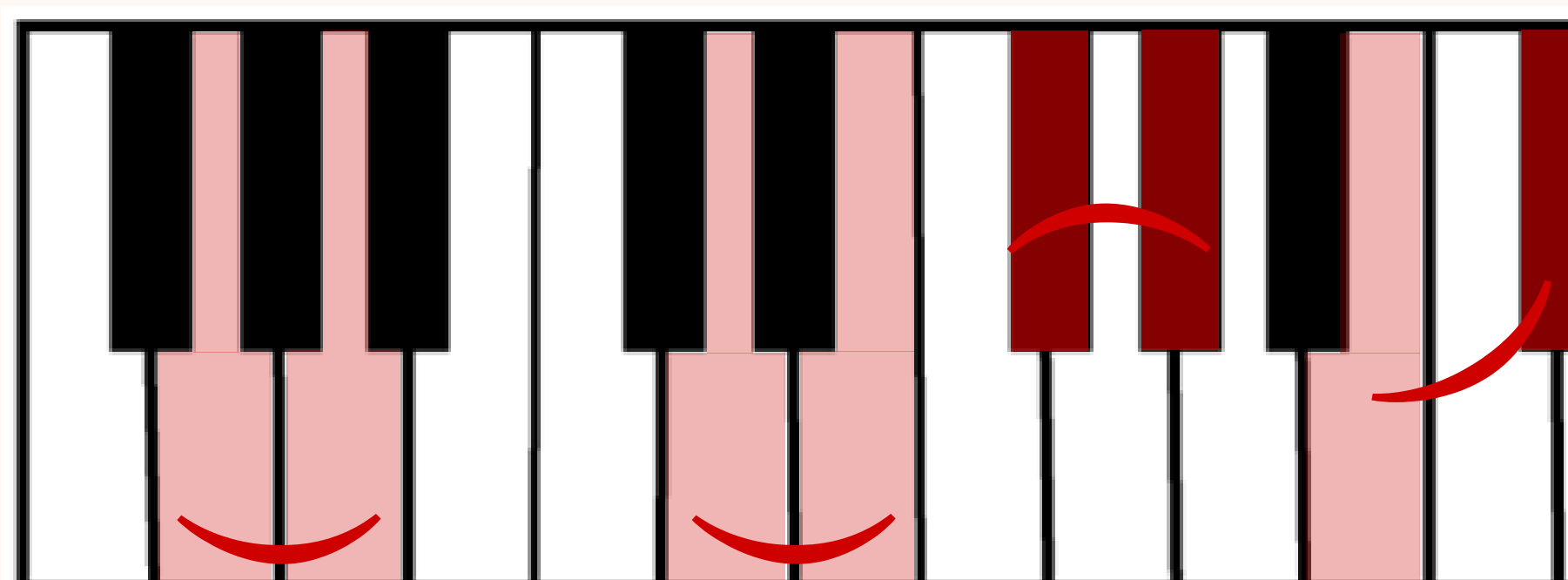


WHOLE TONES

A whole tone is composed of two semitones. This interval can look like this:

- From one white key to the white key next to it, *with a black key in between*.
- From one black key to the black key next to it, *with a white key in between*.
- White key - another white key next to it - black key.

Examples of whole tones:



MAJOR SCALE

A major scale, starting from any note on the keyboard (called the *root note*, the foundation of the scale), is always composed of the following pattern:

Root note - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone - tone - semitone

Knowing this, you can already figure out any major scale on the harmonium!



EXERCISE 2

Let's take for example the scale of **D major**.

Starting from note '**d**' - the root note of a D scale - just follow the major pattern all the way up, and then back down again. You will see the scale looks like this:

d - e - f# - g - a - b - c# - d - c# - b - a - g - f# - e - d

(skip back to page 17 if you want a reminder of where each note is placed on the keyboard)

→ *Now pick any note you like, and try to create a major scale out of it!*

MINOR SCALE

Where a major scale is often said to sound 'happy', a minor scale is more likely recognised as 'sad' sounding. A minor scale has a slightly different pattern:

Root note - tone - semitone - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone



EXERCISE 3

This pattern could start from any note on the keyboard as well. But let's start with the simplest minor scale, the one that only uses white keys: **A minor**.

It goes like this:

a - b - c - d - e - f - g - a

Play it on your keyboard: can you see the minor pattern of tones and semitones?

Let's try a different starting point: the scale of **G minor**, following the exact same minor pattern of tones and semitones.

g - a - b_b - c - d - e_b - f - g

→ *Now go ahead and try out some other minor scales...*



EXERCISE 4

We recommend you practice, gradually, on playing every major and minor scale on the keyboard; starting from C on every white and every black key up until the next C.

Why is this so important? Because melodies are built up out of scales. Like we've mentioned before, the scale determines the notes of the melody.

You will see how that works when you start playing a melody yourself. We will do that in a minute. First, prepare yourself by playing the scale of C major:

c - d - e - f - g - a - b - c - b - a - g - f - e - d - c

Now we'll take a well-known, easy to play melody in the scale of C major. Just follow along, play the notes and you'll find out which one it is.

This is the melody, consisting only of notes from the C major scale:

c - c - g - g - a - a - g - g - f - f - e - e - d - d - c

→ Do you recognize it?



07

FROM INTERVALS TO CHORDS

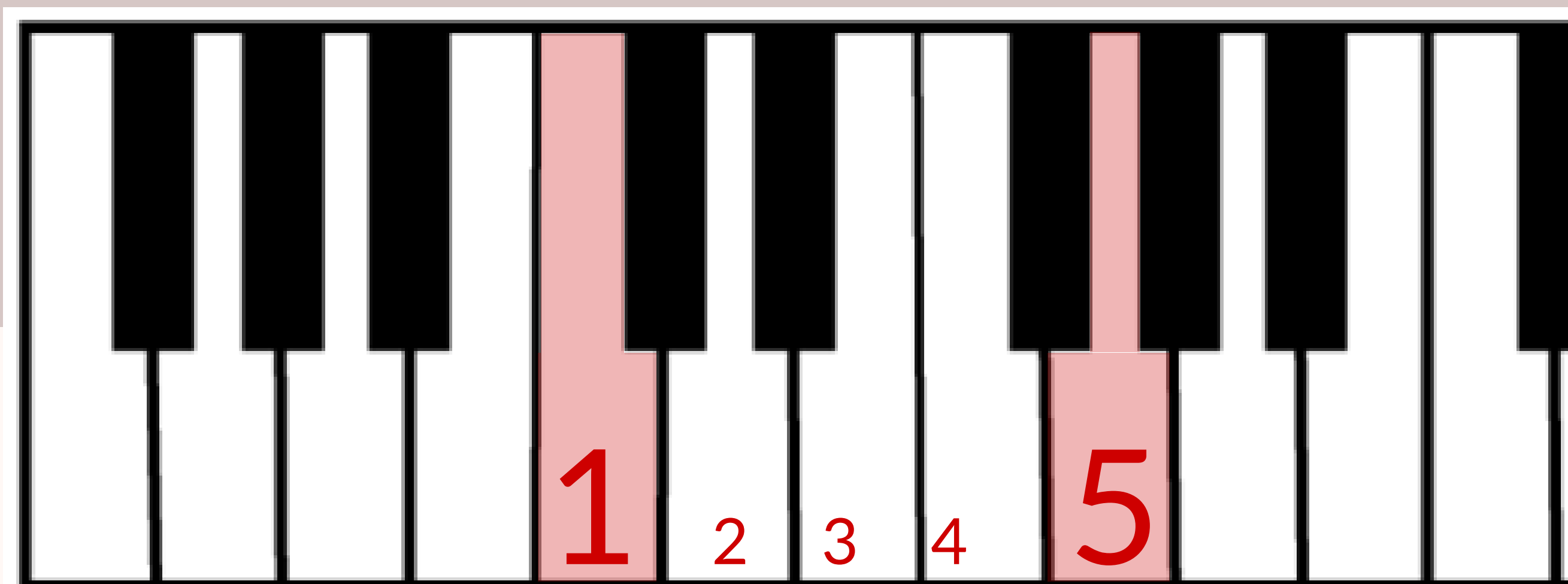
An interval, as we've seen earlier, is another word for **the distance between two tones**. This can go from a semi-tone - the smallest interval on a keyboard and in the Western music system - to an octave, the distance needed to reach the same note as the root note in the next higher or lower position. All of the intervals in between have names, but we'll only be focusing on the ones we need to create a chord.

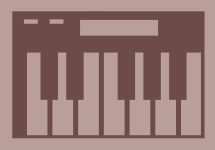
FIFTHS

There are basically just two intervals that matter when learning to play chords on the harmonium. The first one is a *fifth* - also called a 'perfect fifth' - and is simply achieved by playing the root note of the chord (for example root note 'c' for a C major/minor chord) together with the fifth note of the scale (which is the note 'g' in the same C major/minor chord). The root note is played by your thumb, the fifth note with your little finger.

Notice that if you put your fingers next to each other on the keyboard in a relaxed way, with your thumb on 'c', your little finger will automatically rest on 'g'*. All you need to do now is press your thumb and your little finger simultaneously, and you've already got the basics of the C major and minor chord - the perfect fifth.

**This is true when you have small to medium sized hands and fingers, and in this case we use the numbers below - 1 and 5 for thumb and little finger - to refer to the 'fifth'. If you have big hands and long fingers, it will be easier for you to play this interval with your thumb and ring finger; in that case the numbers are 1 and 4.*





EXERCISE 5

Now this perfect fifth can be played with any other note functioning as the root note, in order to form the basics of the resulting chord. We've seen that the fifth for a C chord is **c - g**.

Your next assignment is to start playing the first fifth on 'c', and then go upwards on the white keys and play the perfect fifth on each one of these root notes.

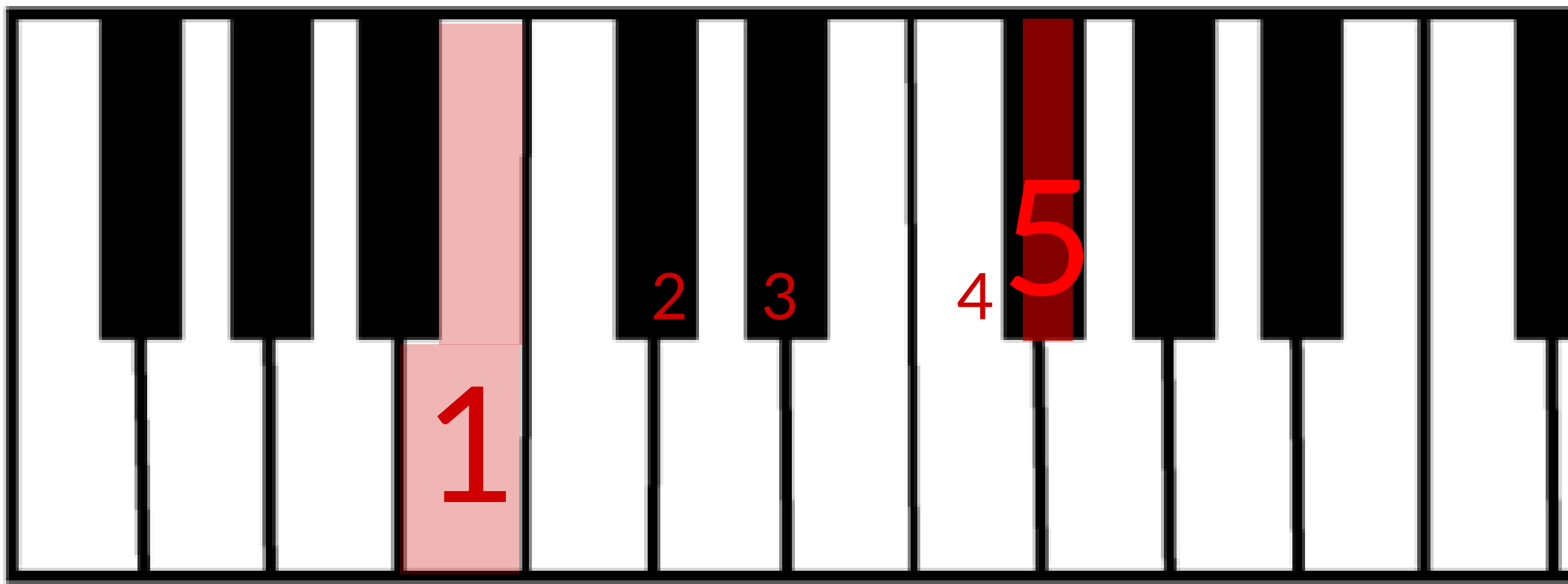
For example:

d - a (for a D chord)

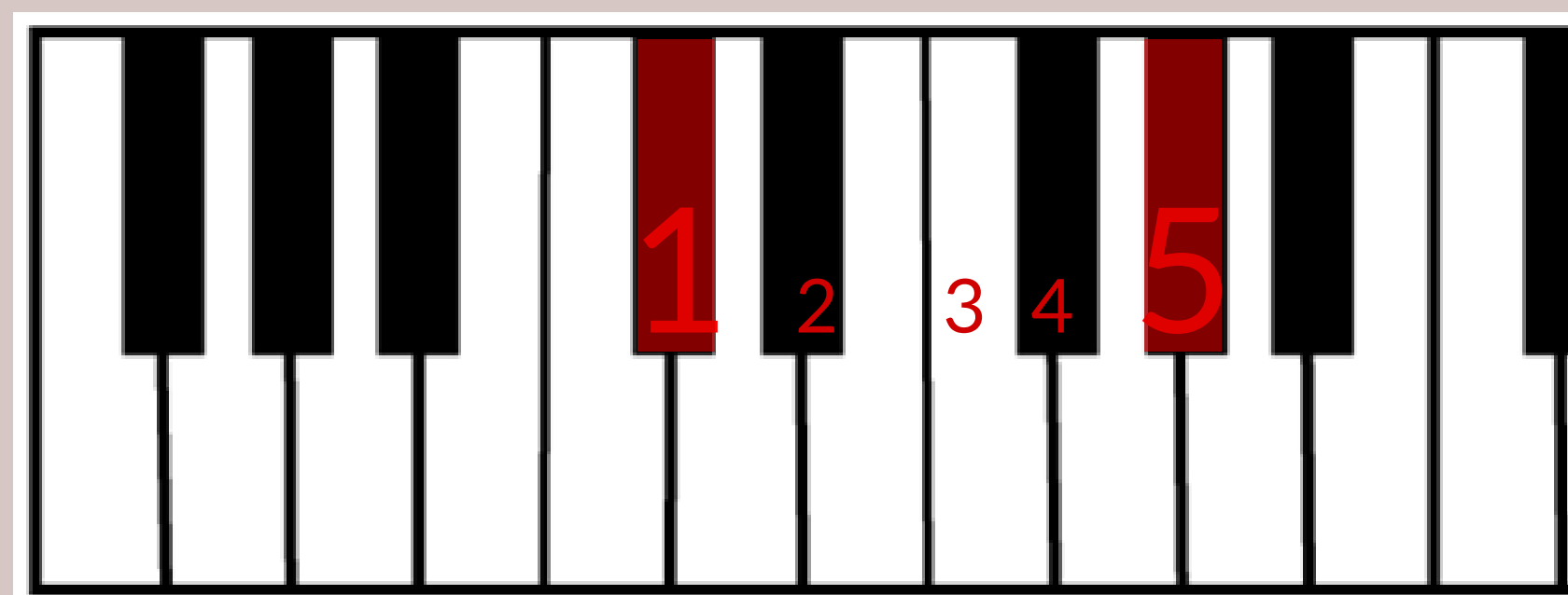
e - b (for an E chord), and so on until you're at the next 'c'.

You will notice that each note in the C scale will have another white key as its perfect fifth - *except for root note 'b'*. Here's why: a perfect fifth is an interval of exactly 3,5 tones. You can count this for yourself (7 semitones, or 3 whole tones plus a semitone) when figuring out the perfect fifth on each note. Root note 'b' has therefore not 'f', but 'f#' as its fifth.

(You will see that this makes sense if you start from fifth c - g and lower each of these notes a semitone. The result will be the fifth right below it: b - f#.)



When you're done finding the perfect fifth on each white key, do the same with the black keys. Start with **c# - g#**, the basics for a C# chord.



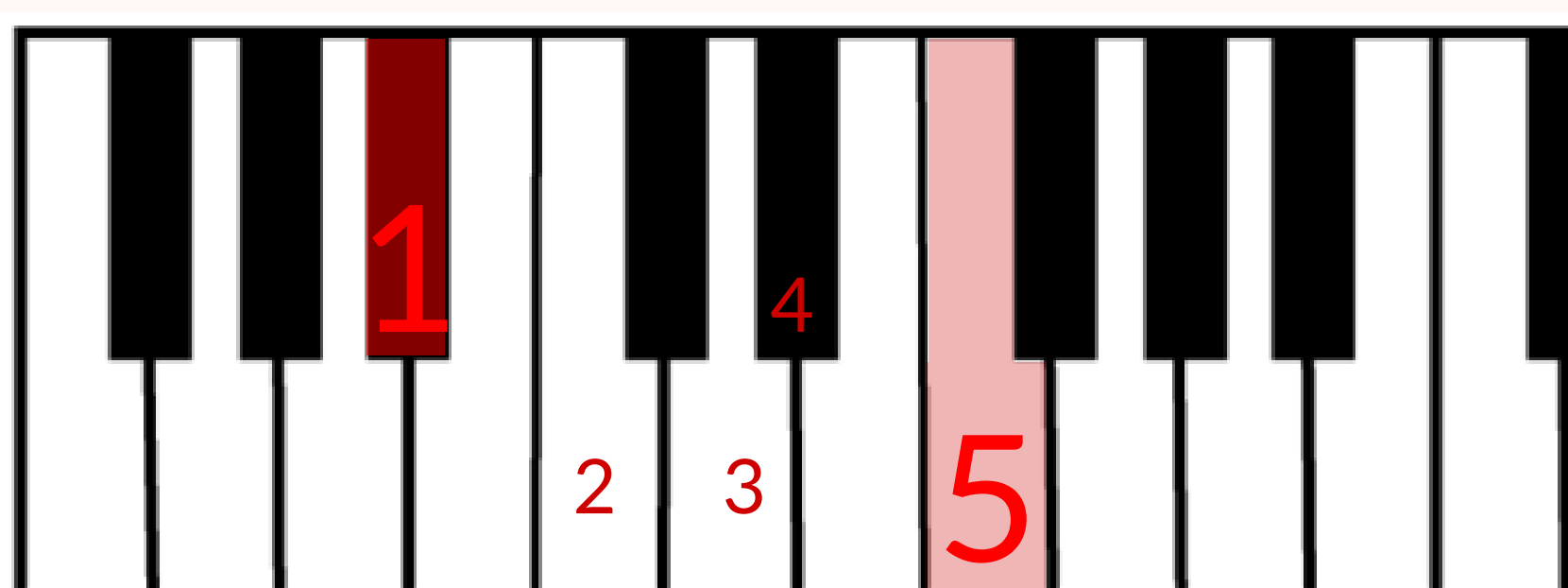
Then:

d# - a# (for a D# chord),

f# - c# (for an F# chord), and so on.

Here too, notice that every black key has another black key as its perfect fifth - *except for root note 'a#'*.

If you count 3,5 tones up again, you will find that the perfect fifth on root note 'a#' is 'f'.



THIRDS

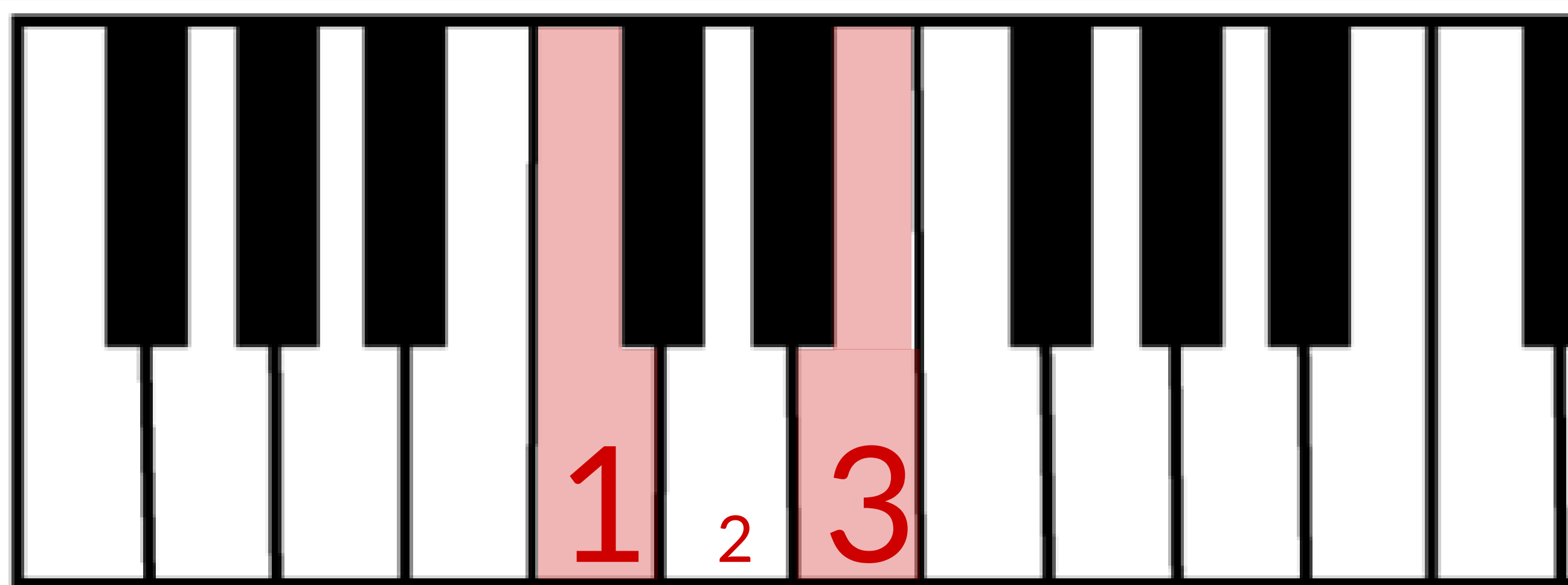
Now that you've learned the two fundamental elements of any chord, it's time for the last element, which will enable you to play a full chord: it's called the *third*. Just like a 'fifth' is the *fifth note in a scale*, the 'third' is the *third note in a scale*. And while we will only use a perfect fifth in any chord on the harmonium, we do have a choice between a major or a minor third.

This is the difference between them:

MAJOR THIRD

A major third is an interval of 2 whole tones from the root note, like 'c - e', or 'f - a'.

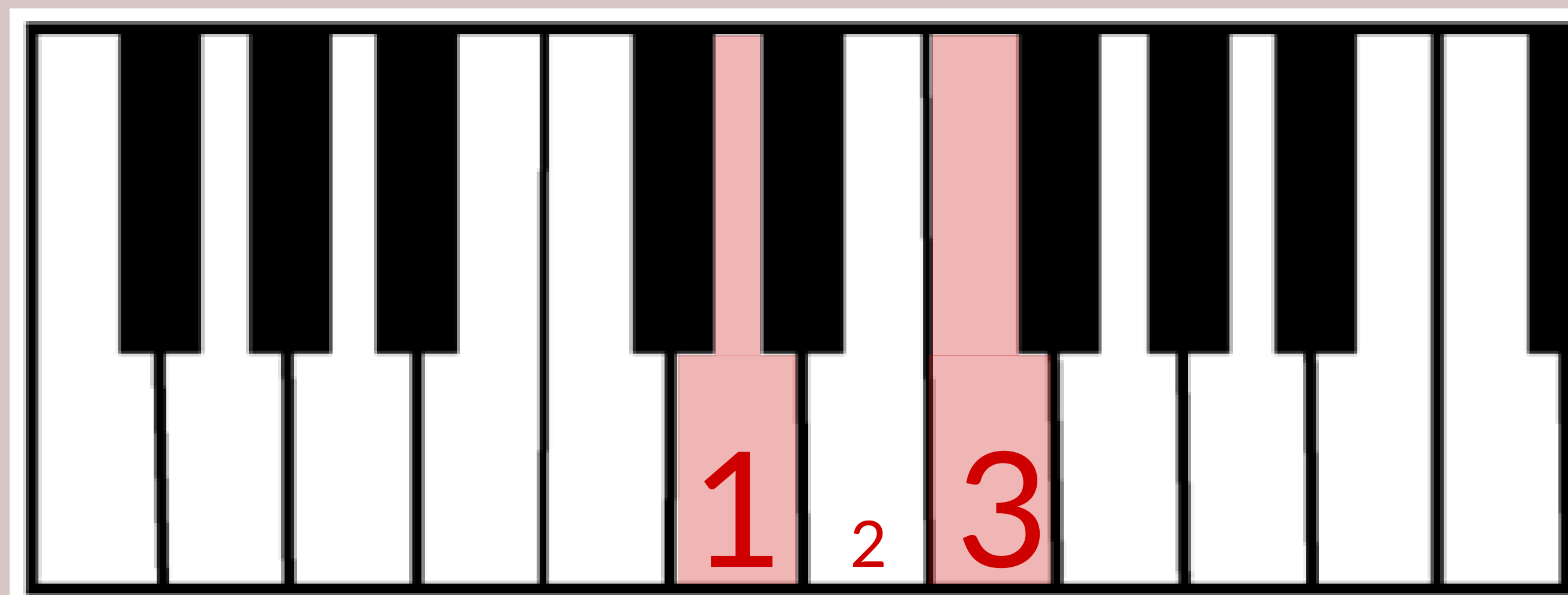
(Notice the two black keys in between: this counts for all thirds with a white root note.)



MINOR THIRD

A minor third is an interval of 1,5 tones (1 whole tone and a semitone) from the root note, like 'd - f', or 'b - d'.

(Notice there's only one black key in between: this counts for all thirds with a white root note.)



EXERCISE 6

Play a third on every white key, using your thumb and middle finger*. Find out if this third is a minor or a major third. If it is minor, make it major by raising the top note a semitone higher. If it is major, make it minor by lowering the top note a semitone lower.

If this goes well, you can also try to play thirds with a black root note.

To find the third of a black note, you can start from a third (1-3) on a white key and either raise or lower both the root note (1) and the third (3) with a semitone.

*Use thumb - middlefinger (1 - 3) if you have small to medium sized hands. If you have big hands, use your thumb and index finger (numbers 1 - 2) to play the third.

BUILD A CHORD - THE FORMULA

A chord consists of 3 main notes. Here's the formula to building a chord:

ROOT NOTE

(decides the chord name)

+

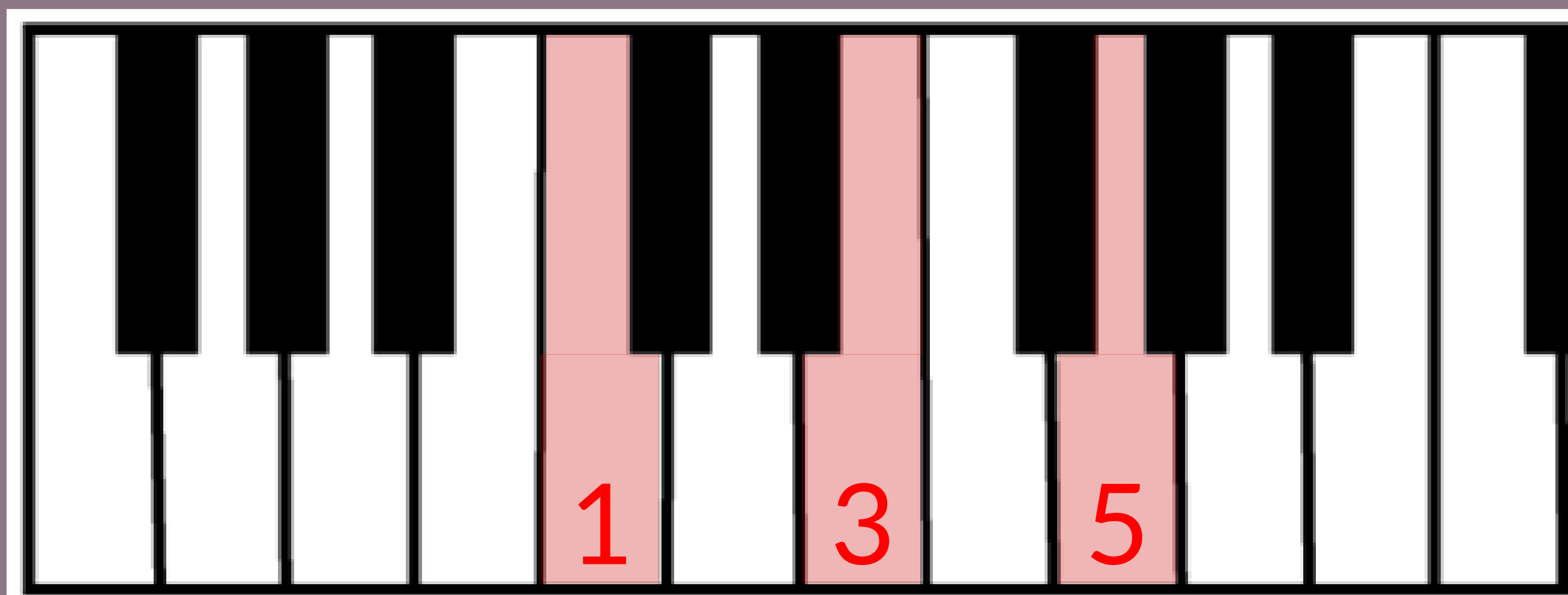
MAJOR/MINOR THIRD

(decides the major or minor 'mood')

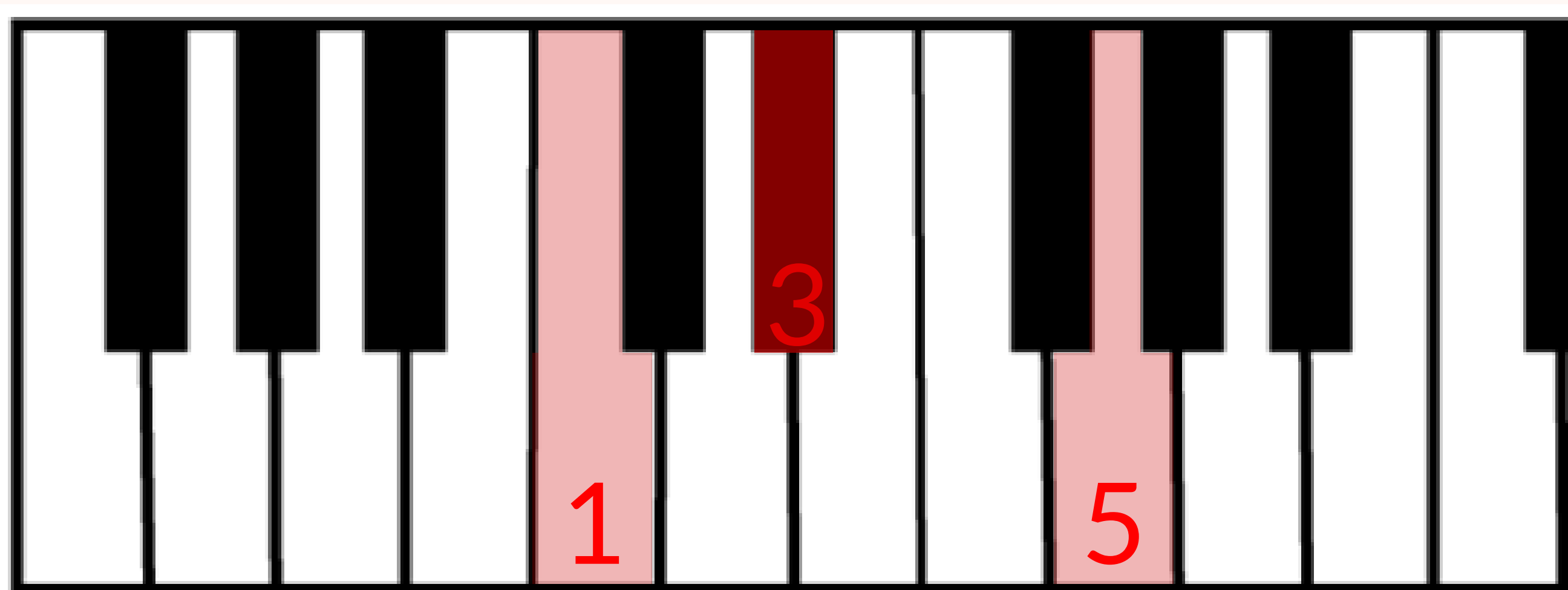
+

PERFECT FIFTH

(supports the root note)



C major chord



C minor chord



EXERCISE 7

There you go: you've learned everything you need to play any major and minor chord on the harmonium! Let's do it right away. You can start on all the white keys. Take enough time for each step, because listening closely to what you're playing is crucial in your harmonium evolution.

Here's the process:

- Take root note 'c', play it with the thumb of your right hand.
- Play a perfect fifth on it, with your middle finger* (on root note 'c' this is 'g').

Keep pumping the bellows of your harmonium to make the root note and the fifth sound in unison. Listen to it and let it sink in. Train your ear to recognise the sound of a perfect fifth. Feel how harmonious the root note and the fifth sound together.

*Or ring finger if you have big hands.

- Now, while you keep playing the root note and the fifth together, add the major third. On root note 'c' this is 'e'. If your fingers are neatly aligned next to your thumb, this should work by just pressing down your middle finger*. Notice how this major third is at a distance of exactly 2 whole tones from the root note. Keep pumping the bellows of your harmonium, and listen to the entire **major chord** you've formed: *root note - major third - fifth*.

- Next, take your middle finger* from the major third (while keeping your other fingers on the root note and the fifth) and move it to the minor third, which is just a semitone lower. On root note 'c' this means that instead of 'e', you will be playing 'e \flat ' with your middle finger* (the black key right below 'e'). Notice that it is at a distance of exactly 1,5 tones from the root note. Keep pumping the bellows of your harmonium, and listen to the entire **minor chord** you've formed: *root note - minor third - fifth*.

- Repeat this process on root notes 'd', 'e', and so on. After finishing all the white keys, start from 'c \sharp ' and form your major and minor chords on all the black keys.

*With big hands: your index finger.

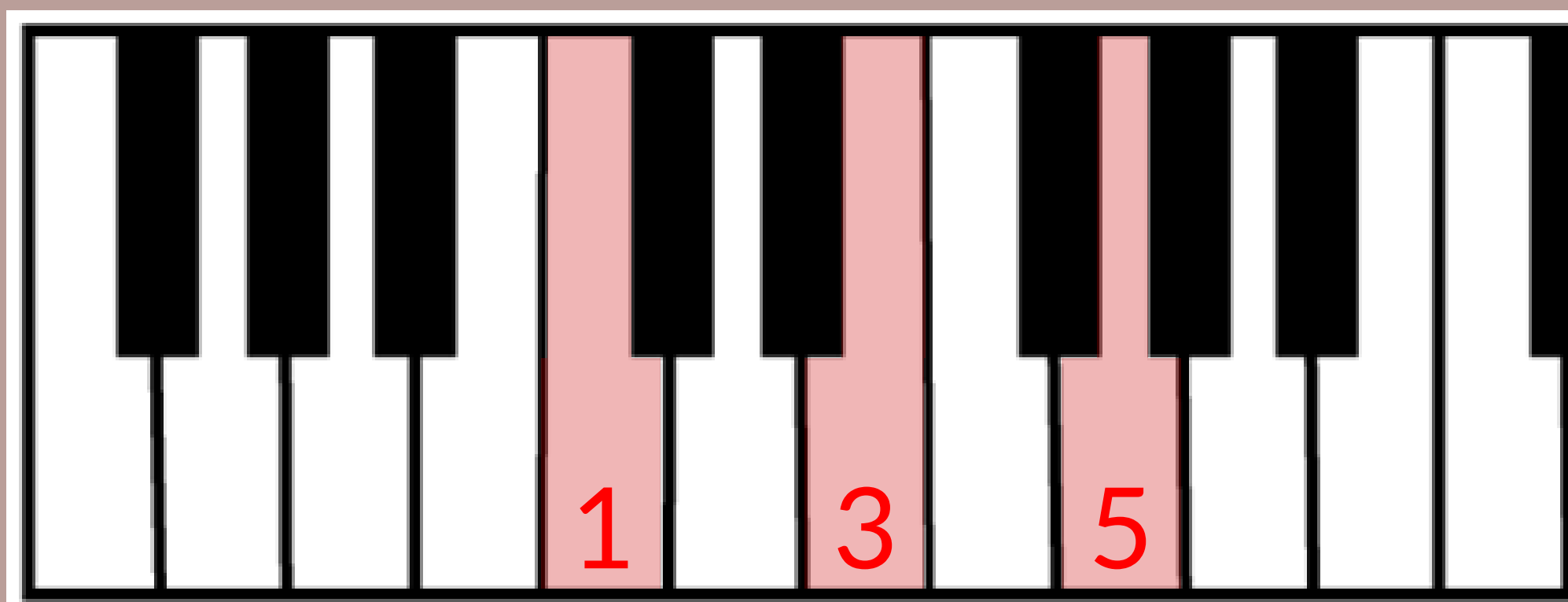
INVERSIONS

Congratulations, you've learned how to play chords!

There's only one more thing you need to know about chords: what you've learned up until now are the chords in their **root positions**. This means, the position where the root note is at the base of the chord and the third and fifth are built on top of it.

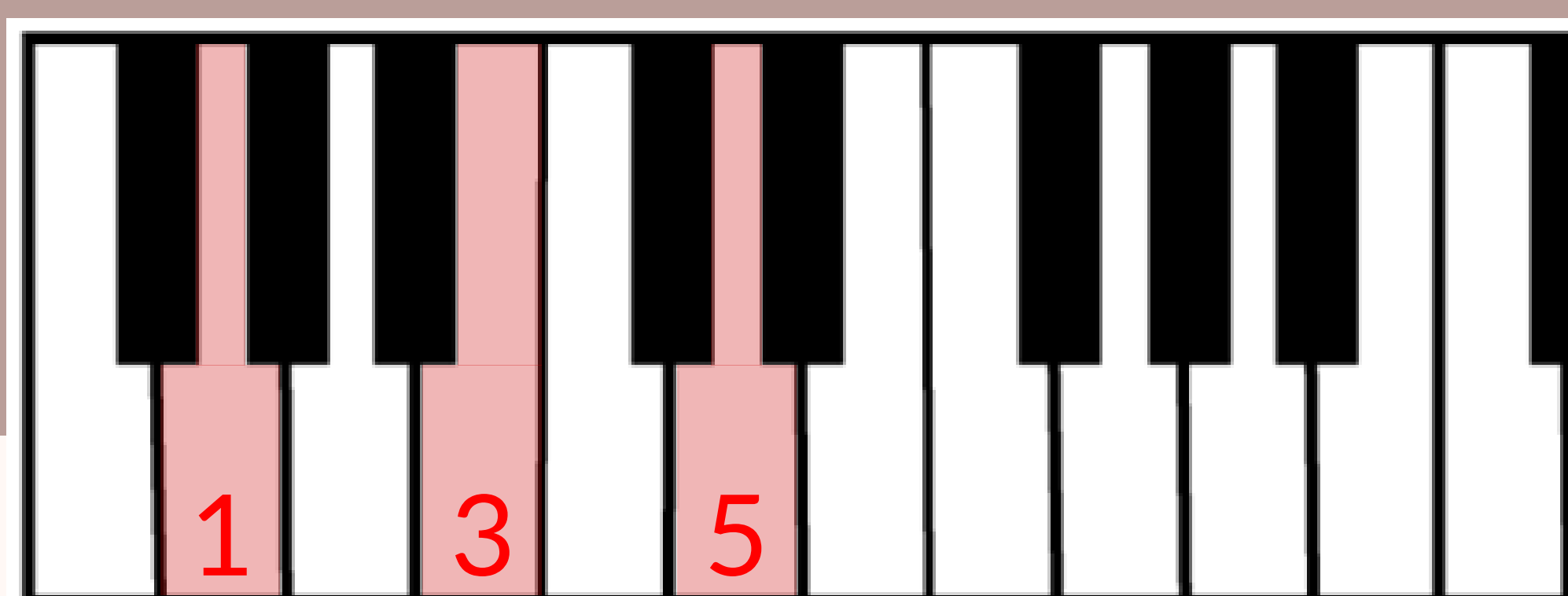
If you would only play chords in their root positions, you would have to make unnatural sounding jumps - for example from C major to G major - which are difficult to play and less pleasant to the ear.

From
C major



to

G major



Fortunately there is a way to let different chords merge into each other more smoothly, and this is done by inverting the positions of certain chords.

When and in which way to invert a chord is something that can only be learned by practice. The good news is that it works very logically, and if you have the chords for songs or mantras you can figure out for yourself in which position you can best play each chord.

This is how inversions work:

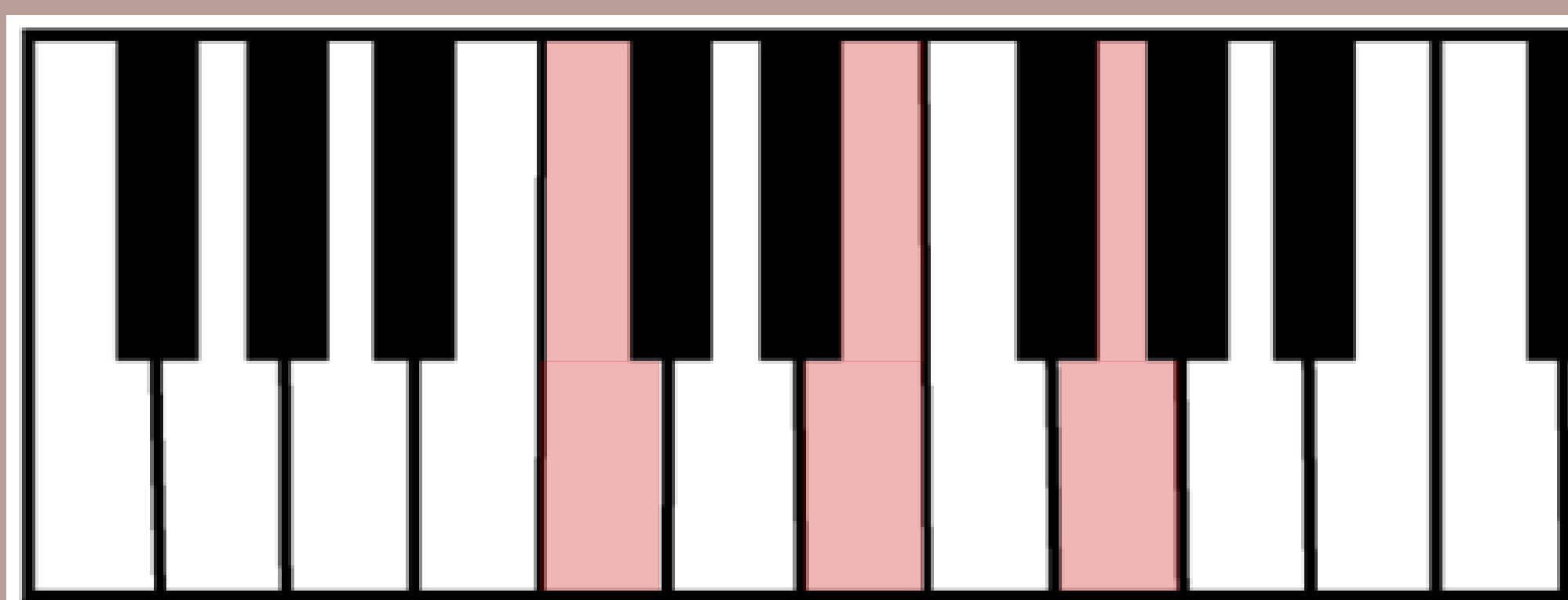
- Each chord has **one root position** and **two inversions**.
- The first inversion is achieved by raising the root note one octave higher. The C major chord in its root position of 'c - e - g' becomes 'e - g - c', making the third of the chord the new base. Notice how the notes of the chord are exactly the same, only placed differently.
- The second inversion is achieved by raising the (major or minor) third - which became the base of the second inversion - one octave higher. 'e - g - c' now becomes 'g - e - c', making the fifth the new base. Notice again how the notes stay the same.



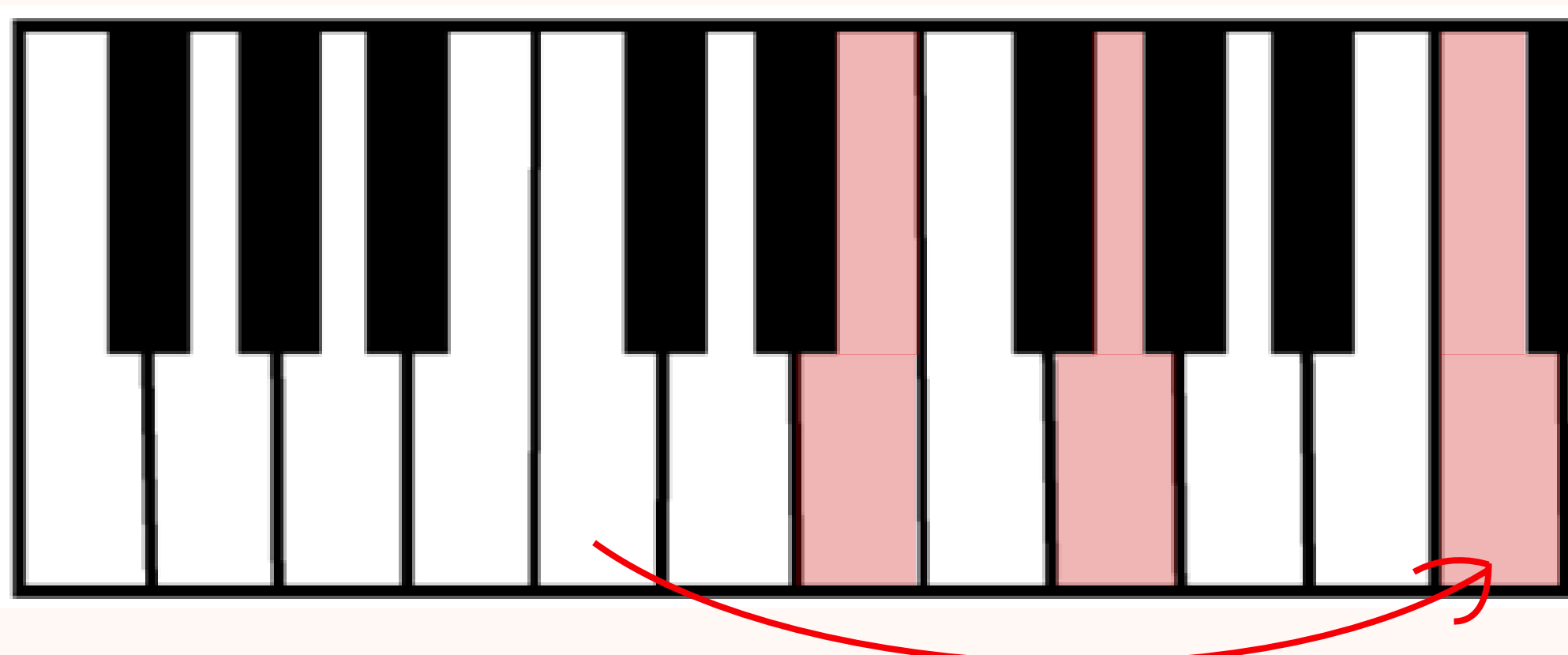
EXERCISE 8

Practice makes perfect, so let's get you started on your last step toward understanding and playing chords on the harmonium. You're going to learn how to convert chords to their inversions.

- Place your thumb on the 'c' and form the C major chord in its root position: 'c - e - g'.



- Now take your thumb and middle finger off the keys and form the first inversion: the thumb now goes on 'e', your index finger on 'g' and your little finger on 'c' (one octave higher). The chord is now 'e - g - c', played with thumb - index finger - little finger.



- Take your thumb and index finger off the keys and form the second inversion: place the thumb on 'g', your middle finger on 'c' and your little finger on 'e' (one octave higher). The chord is now 'g - c - e', played with thumb - middle finger - little finger.



- Repeat this process for the C minor chord:

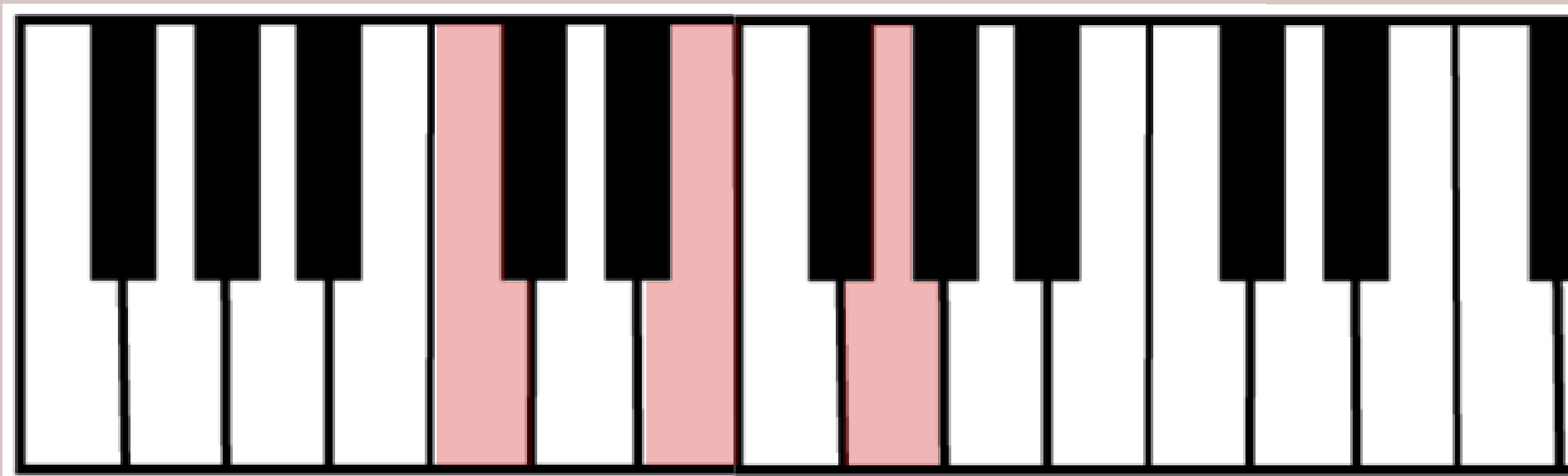
c - e_b - g → e_b - g - c → g - c - e_b

- Do the same for any other note on the keyboard, on every white and black key: play the major chord in its root position, convert the chord to its inversions, then repeat for the minor chord. By using an inversion the connection from one chord to the next becomes easier and more pleasant to listen to.

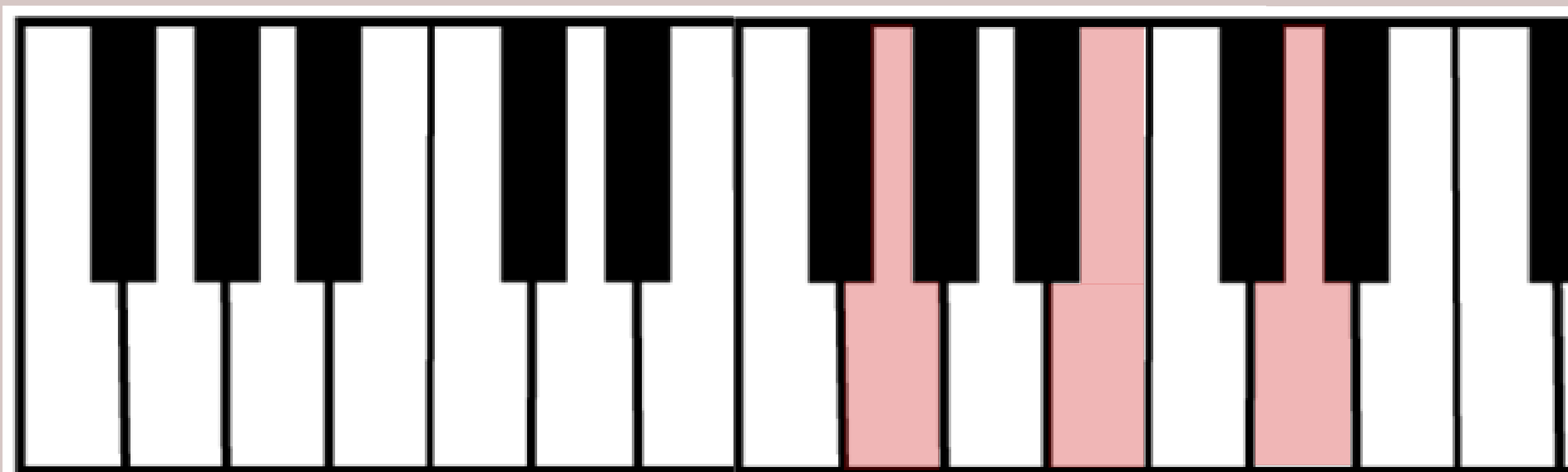
→ You can try this out for yourself by playing these chords: Cmajor - Gmajor - Cmajor.

First play the chords "C - G - C" in root position:

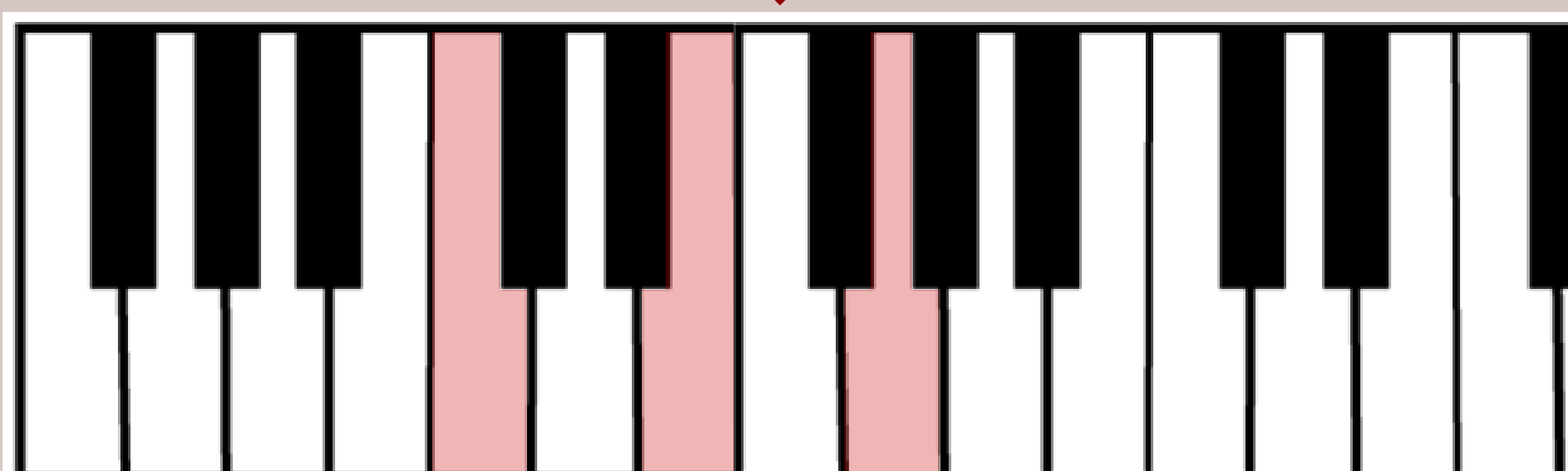
C major
(root position)



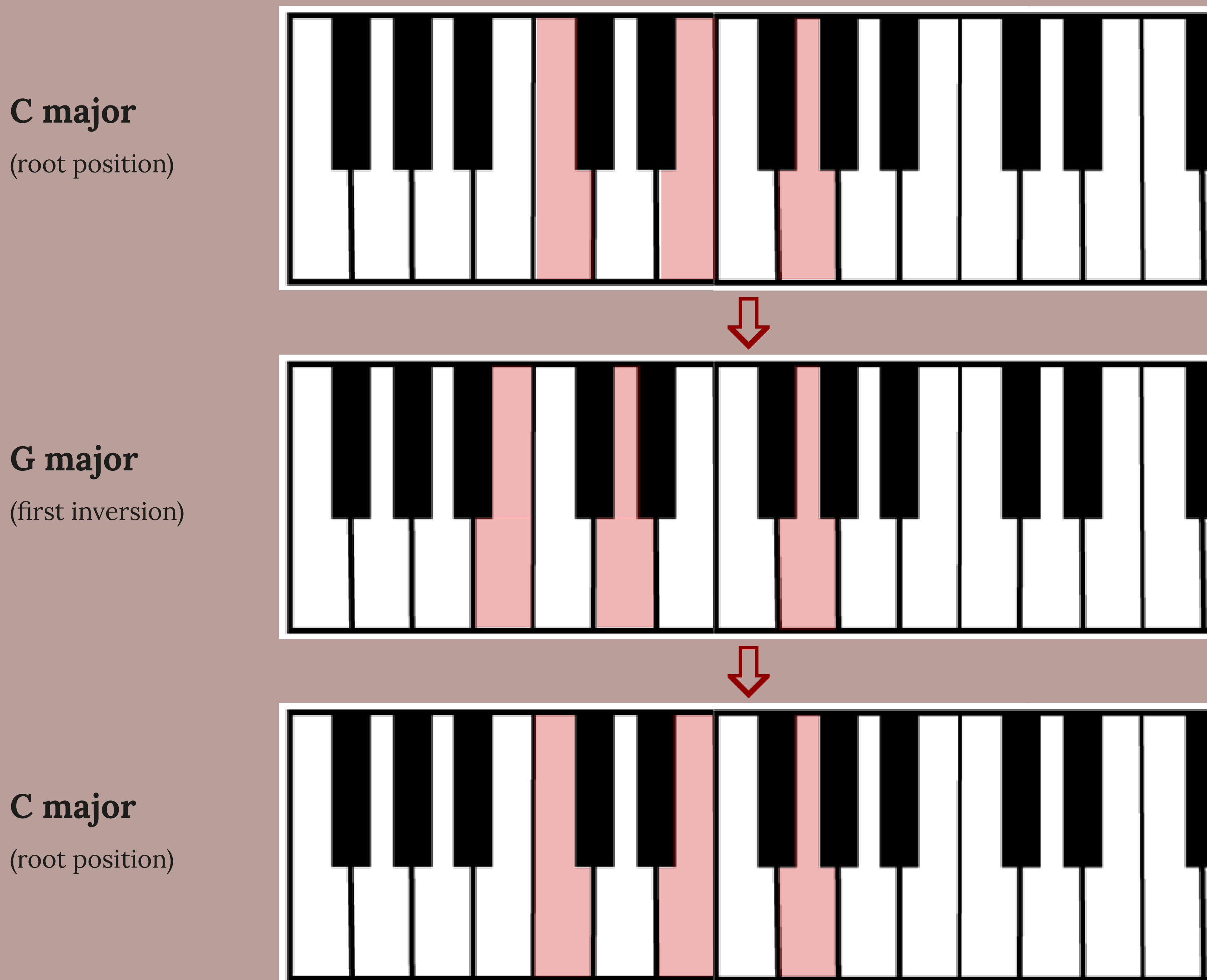
G major
(root position)



C major
(root position)



Then play the same chord progression, only this time you will use the **first inversion of the G chord**, making it closer and better connected to the (root position) C chord:



You will feel right away how it is much easier and feels more logical to play the chord progression this way. In fact, if you keep pumping the bellows, you can leave your little finger on the G note - which isn't changing throughout the two chords - while you just lift your other fingers to place them at the closest possible position of the next chord.

This is in general what you can always look out for when playing chords and using inversions: look for the notes in the next chord that are similar, and create your inversion based on those similar notes. This - easier and more logical - should be the main guideline in your ongoing practice of connecting chords to each other while playing the harmonium.

YOUR FIRST SONG

Well done, you did it! The awesome news is that you are ready now to play your first song! Because it is easier to learn this through a video, we will direct you to our website, where you will find the detailed instructions to playing the Guru Mantra.



<< Learn To Play >>

"Guru Mantra"

<https://harmoniumevolution.com/guru-mantra>



FINAL ADVICE

Congratulations!

You now know the fundamentals - technical to musical - to learn how to play any song, mantra or kirtan. But this is just the beginning of your evolution. At any level there will always be so much more to learn, and realising this you can still enjoy every step you take, and be proud of every progress you make!

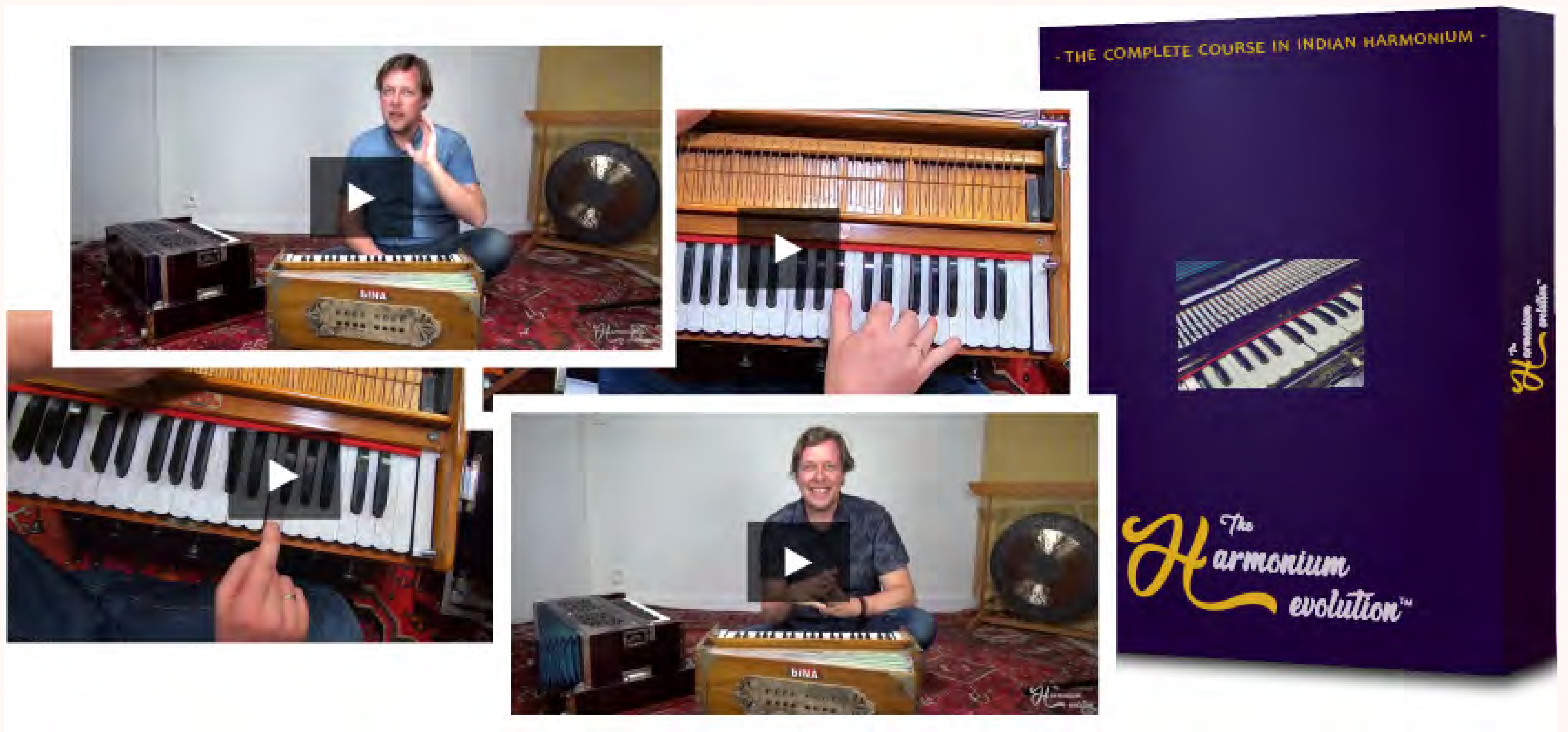
We hope this e-book was of great value to you. But a book also has its limitations: on these pages we could only use words and images to teach you the basics of harmonium playing. There is so much more we would like to show you, from detailed practice and explanations to completely new techniques and many more songs. You could learn to accompany yourself on the harmonium while singing, train your rhythmic skills, and discover how to play melodies and chords at the same time...

Whenever you're ready, you can find these gems and more in our in depth training videos, recorded in great detail, with high image and sound quality, showing you in multiple camera angles step-by-step what to play. And if you still have questions or need extra personal support, you can join in on our weekly Q&A calls and ask us personally.

All this is included in the Harmonium Evolution online course, which is just one click away if you decide to take your learning process to the next level.

We'll be delighted to meet you, and for now we wish you lots of success and joy of playing!

-Kenny & Mari Joël



<< **Click Here** >>

Go to

<https://harmoniumevolution.com>

to learn more

