How to Harmonize Melody

Key: A
Tempo: Medium Swing
Chords needed: A, Bm, E7
Video Tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdDN-DTMB6I

Step 1: Give your melody timing

Let's examine the first phrase. A lot of times you will get the timing naturally when you are noodling around, but you may not know exactly how it is timed out, this is our melody written out with no timing. After I feel really comfortable with it and I've played it a couple times I will try and count out loud, 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 or 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & depending on the timing, to figure out where the notes are rhythmically, which is vital for a strong song.

```
A|7--4--4--4--5--4--2-|
E|--------------------|
C|--------------------|
G|--------------------|
```

After counting out our melody I was able to work it out into this.

```
  1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
A|7-----4---------|4-5-4---2-------|
E|----------------|---------------|
C|----------------|---------------|
G|----------------|---------------|
```

At this point I know I have two measures of music, why is that important? It helps determine when we change our chords, which is just as important as what chord to play because that will be our rhythmic structure, or the skeleton of our song. The most common chord change is on the first beat of a measure, now, it is important to know there are no limitations to when you can change chords or how many chords you can play, but there are more common changes. The most common is on the 1st beat of every measure; other common changes are the 1st beat of every other measure, or changes on the 1st and 3rd of the measure. To a lesser degree you will see changes on the & after the 2nd beat, common in Latin music among many other genres.

Step 2: Identify the chords in your key

The key of A is

A Bm C#m D E F#m G#dim

The key of A harmonized to the 7ᵗʰ degree

Amaj7 Bm7 C#m7 Dmaj7 E7 F#m7 G#dim7

Step 3: Looking for what melody notes match what chords.
(Letters in tabs are notes)

```
  1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1  & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   E     C#          C# D C#   B
A|7-----4---------|4--5-4---2-------|
E|---------------|----------------|
C|---------------|----------------|
G|---------------|----------------|
```

We are going to harmonize this song with a different chord for each measure, so we will examine what chords contain the E and C# notes.

The **A** major has both E and C#

The **C#m** has both the C# and the E notes as well

The **F#m** contains the C# note

The **E** major contains the E note

After examining these notes we can see that two of those chords contain two chords tones, that means two of these chords are going to have very strong harmonies. In general the last note tends to be more important, but this isn't a rule you have to live and die by, just it is good to keep in mind. So the question is do want to have a happy and bright vibe, or a sad and dark vibe? We are going to go with a happy jovial type of tune, so we will use A major chord.

```
  1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   A
A|7-----4---------|4-5-4---2-------|
E|5-----5---------|---------------|
C|4-----4---------|---------------|
G|6-----6---------|---------------|
```

So know we need to repeat the process again with the notes for our next measure.

```
  |1  & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   C# D C#   B
A|4--5-4---2-------|
```

```
E|----------------|
C|----------------|
G|----------------|
```

After looking at the chords again we can see that we have

A – C#

Bm – B and D notes

C#m – C# note

D – D note

E – B note

F#m – C# note

When the notes are bunched up like this you will see less chords with multiple chord tones, now if you were to extend these to their 7th chords, E7 for example, you will find new chord tones (the D note in the E7). You can use these to create harmonies, but they tend to be slightly less stable, there are also other color tones for example as well, adding a D note to a B minor makes it a Bm9, which is also a great chord. The most important notes are the root, 3rd and 5th, but after that just now there are other colors and tones you can experiment with. We will keep our harmony strong and go with the B minor chord. I don't usually use the chord on the & and I only sometimes use the chord on the 2nd and 4th beats, my personal preference is the 1st and 3rd beats.

```
 |1  & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   Bm
A|4--5-4---2-------|
E|2-------2-------|
C|2-------2-------|
G|4-------4-------|
```

Combining these two ideas we get our first phrase loosely harmonized.

```
  1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
  A               Bm
A|7-----4---------|4-5-4---2-------|
E|5-----5---------|2-------2-------|
C|4-----4---------|2-------2-------|
G|6-----6---------|4-------4-------|
```

These works, but because the first measure has less melody I decided to add a little more strumming and rhythm.

```
   1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   A                 Bm
A|7---x-4---4-x---|4-5-4---2---x---|
E|5---x-5---5-x---|2-------2---x---|
C|4---x-4---4-x---|2-------2---x---|
G|6---x-6---6-x---|4-------4---x---|
```

After repeating this process for phrases 3 and 4 (phrase 2 is the same as
the first) we can transform melody into a complete chord melody song.

```
   1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   A                 Bm                A                 Bm
A|7---x-4---4-x---|4-5-4---2---x---|7---x-4---4-x---|4-5-4---2---x---|
E|5---x-5---5-x---|2-------2---x---|5---x-5---5-x---|2-------2---x---|
C|4---x-4---4-x---|2-------2---x---|4---x-4---4-x---|2-------2---x---|
G|6---x-6---6-x---|4-------4---x---|6---x-6---6-x---|4-------4---x---|

   1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
   A                 Bm                E7                A
A|7---x-4---4-x---|4-5-4---5---x---|5-7-5---2-4-2---|0-----2-0-------|
E|5---x-5---5-x---|2-------2---x---|4-------0-------|0-------0-------|
C|4---x-4---4-x---|2-------2---x---|4-------2-------|1-------1-------|
G|6---x-6---6-x---|4-------4---x---|4-------1-------|2-------2-------|
```

A couple final thoughts on the fourth phrase.

E7 is the V chord of the key of A and it is the classic and strongest way
to move back to the I chord, this is easily one of the most common ways to
move a melody back to the beginning in all types of music.

You can also see that the last chord is an A chord and the last note is an
A note. That is the strongest way to finish a song hands down and happens
in 99.9% of music, maybe even more!

Haven't seen part 1 yet? Check out how to write your own melody here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88XDQLraRnc