

CHANGING SONG SHEETS TO SUIT YOUR VOICE

Hi Folks,

This is a short guide to changing song keys to suit your voice.

How many of us 'Bari' players go to web sites, print tabs, and just play the song in whatever key it is already in, even if the key does not suit our vocal range. This article will give you a few tips on how to make life a bit easier on your vocal chords.

In my opinion, one of the best sites for Baritone Ukulele players to take tabs from is 'Chordie'. However not many of us use this site to its full advantage.

Firstly, lets find out what key suits our vocal range the best. Go to 'Chordie' and choose a song that you know well for example the Beatles 'Yesterday'. This is a good song because it will test your vocal range. Then print out the first page twelve times in the twelve different keys. It may seem a lot of work, but believe me you will be forever grateful that you did so, and so will your vocal chords.

<http://www.chordie.com/chord.pere/www.lindesign.se/uwp/guitar/b/beatles/yesterday.pro>

How do you do this?:

Go to the box that says 'Transpose Chords' and chose each of the 12 semitone changes (12 including 'None'), printing out each key.

Before printing the song in each key don't forget to choose 'Baritone Ukulele' in the 'Tuning Box' to give you the 'Bari' chord diagrams

Sing the song in all twelve keys and see which one you feel most comfortable with, i.e. the one that has the least strain on your vocal chords.

So once we have the printout with the key that you feel most comfortable with, how do we tell the key that the song is in? Well, I don't want to go into music theory with you, so a rough rule of thumb which works, probably 90% of the time is look for the last word sung and see what chord is above it or just before it i.e. the last chord for the words and this is most likely to be the key that the whole song is in. I say the last chord over the words because some songs have an 'outro' which does not always finish on the chord that the rest of the song was in.

Please note that sometimes the same song is repeated in a different key, so look at the lyrics and if they repeat at the end of the song with different chords attached to them, the key has changed. Just keep to the first set of lyrics and the first set of chords.

So far so good, but how do we change the chords of a song to suit our key.

Lets look at another well known, simple, traditional song: 'Down In The Valley'

<http://www.chordie.com/chord.pere/www.guitaretab.com/m/misc-traditional/99554.html>

The last chord of this song is a 'D' so with only a few chords it is a safe bet to assume the song is in the key of 'D'. I don't like the key of 'D' it does not suit my vocal range, my comfort zone is in the key of 'A', so I need to change it from the key of 'D' to the key of 'A'. I now know where to change it (in the box marked 'Transpose Chords' but how many semi tones do I change to get to the key of 'A'? The following chart may help you it represent the number of semitones between keys.

A
Ab
G
Gb
F
E
Eb
D
Db
C
B
Bb
A
Ab
G
Gb
F
E
Eb
D
Db
C

So, if I am in the key of 'D' I start at 'D' on the chart and If I want to change it to 'A' I can either go up or down on the chart. On the Chordie Transpose utility you can go up -5 semitones or down +6 semi tone *(these cover all 12 keys with the none position).

So let us count how many semitones A is away from D down is minus '-' up is plus '+' If I go down D is -5 semitones to A, if I go up D +7 semitones to A. So, as the 'Chordie Transpose' utility only goes to +6, I better choose the -5 line. This done, the last chord on the song is now an 'A' and the song is in the key of A.

As I say this method works 90% of the time especially with Traditional songs.

Chordie is great for modern songs and a few traditional songs, but what about the old standards? Well the best place for us 'Bari' players to get song sheets for the older style songs is at Doctor Uke's at:

<http://doctoruke.com/songs.html>

Most of his songs have a Baritone Ukulele chord sheet as well as the standard ukulele chords. Now the problem here is that Doctor Uke does not provide the ability to print out song sheets in various keys. So what do we do here. Well, this takes a bit more extra work to change the chord symbols to the key we can sing best in.

On my site "PDF-Minstrel" I have a chord conversion chart at:

http://pdfminstrel.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/chord_chart.pdf

To use this chart simply find the key that the song is already in, as described above, using the chart, put your finger on the line of the first column that begins with that key, then move your other finger to the line of the first column that starts with the key you wish to convert to. Now move your first finger along the line to the first chord you wish to convert, then move the finger down to the line (key) that you wish to convert to and where the lines intersect is the new chord name in the key you wish to convert to.

So, in the previous example "Down In The Valley" we found out that the key was in 'D' so we put our first finger on the 'D' in the first column, and the second finger goes on the 'A' in the first column. Now we already know that all 'D' chords will become 'A' but what about the other chord in the song 'A7'. Well the 7 stays the same, but by moving the first finger across the 'D' line of the chart to 'A', Then moving the finger down the column until it lines up with the line beginning with 'A' i.e. the key we wish to convert to the

two lines intersect at the box marked 'E'. so all 'A's' in the Doctor Uke key of D become 'E's' in the new key of 'A' (which happens to be my most comfortable key to sing in).

For another example if the song sheet is in the key of 'C' and we wish to convert the key to 'G' and the first chord in the song to be converted is a 'E'. Put your first finger in the C in the first column, put your other finger on the G in the first column. Move your first finger across the line until it reaches the 'E' then move it down the column until it lines up with your second finger. The box it stops on contains the letter 'B' so the chord 'E' is converted to a 'B' which is it's equivalent chord in the new key of 'G'.

Now for the hard work. I suggest that on the Doctor Uke song sheets you write in Red the new key chords that you wish to sing in. Of course the chord diagrams will no longer be valid and you will have to learn the chord shapes by heart, but the positive side is that you will no longer have to struggle to sing your favourite songs in keys that are not suitable to your vocal range.

I hope that this brief introduction to changing key/chords on song sheets to suit your voice range has been of help to you.

Hope This Helps.

Roger Ruthen