

Beginner Harmony and Theory Part 3

We recently discussed the 7 diatonic chords that can be constructed from a major scale. We have yet to talk about how the chords can be used. We will first discuss different resolutions that the chords can create. The first resolution we should discuss is the V7-Imaj7 resolution. This can be any V7 chord from any key resolving to the Imaj7 chord from the same key. For instance, in the key of C the V7 chord would be G7 - I figured that out by counting up to the fifth scale degree of C major. Then G7 would resolve to the Imaj7th chord or in this case, a Cmaj7th chord, (see figure below).

V7 TO IMAJ7TH RESOLUTIONS

KEY OF C

The diagram shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure contains the G7 chord, with notes G, B, D, and F. Above the staff is the label 'G7' and below it is 'V7'. The second measure contains the Cmaj7 chord, with notes C, E, G, and B. Above the staff is the label 'CMAJ7' and below it is 'IMAJ7'.

In order to understand this resolution, you need to understand how these chords function. Let's start with the V7 chord. The dominant chord in jazz harmony and theory is considered a very "unstable" chord, meaning it wants to move to another chord. The instability of the chord is caused by the tritone interval that is found between the 3rd degree of G7 the note B, and the 7th degree of G7, the note F, (see figure below).

TRITONE WITHIN DOMINANT 7TH CHORDS

The diagram shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure contains the G7 chord, with notes G, B, D, and F. Above the staff is the label 'G7'. The second measure contains the tritone interval between the notes B and F, with the label 'TRITONE' above the staff.

The tritone interval was named the “Devils interval”. This interval is extremely dissonant and unstable. What does instability want to do? It creates tension and wants to be resolved. This is why dominant chords typically move to stable chords; in this case the Imaj7th chord, thus creating the V7-Imaj7 progression.

The Imaj7 is the most stable chord in music. This is in part because it has two perfect fifth intervals. The fifths are found between the 1st and the 5th, being the notes C and G, and the 3rd and the 7th, being the notes E and B. The Imaj7th chord creates the perfect stability for a V7 chord to resolve to and ease the tension in all the listeners’ ears. When analyzing jazz standards you will notice how most of the time, the V7 chord will resolve to a Imaj7th chord. The comprehension of this progression and more to come only increases your ability to play pieces, solo, comp, and become a better player overall.