

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

By building 4-note chords on the notes of a scale, it is possible to determine which chords lie within a certain key.

In the key of C major, for instance, we get the following basic chords (the Roman numerals will allow you to transpose to other keys):

C ^Δ	Dm ⁷	Em ⁷	F ^Δ	G ⁷	Am ⁷	B [∅]
I ^Δ	II ^{m7}	III ^{m7}	IV ^Δ	V ⁷	VI ^{m7}	VII [∅]

By juggling these about in different orders, various sequences can be constructed. Firstly, there is the order in which they are in, as shown above. For example

|C^Δ | Dm⁷ | Em⁷ | F^Δ |

This can be 2 or more chords in length and each individual chord can last for any number of beats. The sequence can also occur in the reverse order. C⁶ can be used in place of the C^Δ.

Secondly, the most common progression is that of II V I, ie. II^{m7} V⁷ I^Δ (or I⁶) Provided there are no alterations or extensions which include notes out of the key, the same scale can be applied throughout.

Thirdly, there is the progression I VI II V. Sometimes the III can be substituted for the I, eg. |C^Δ (or Em⁷) | Am⁷ | Dm⁷ | G⁷ |.

Fourthly, there are other variations, such as |II VI | III |, |IV II | III VI|, and various others, including segments which repeat: | II V | being the most common.

One of the ways in which you can substitute chords for the existing ones is by replacing one of them for another. This will often have a knock-on effect so that adjacent chords will also have to be changed until you come up with the desired new sequence. You can also play around with the amount of chords you require. For example, 4 bars on a single chord can be replaced by various chords within the key (or outside it, which we will cover later). Or vice versa. You can also do all this with other scales.

Doing the same process of adding 4-part harmony to the C harmonic minor scale we get these chords:

Cm ^Δ	D [∅]	E ^{bΔ(+5)}	Fm ⁷	G ⁷	A ^{bΔ}	B [∅]
Im ^Δ	II [∅]	bIII ^{Δ(+5)}	IV ^{m7}	V ⁷	bVI ^Δ	VII [∅]

while the ascending form of C melodic minor scale produces these chords:

Cm^Δ	$Dm7$	$E^b\Delta(+5)$	$F7$	$G7$	A^\emptyset	B^\emptyset
Im^Δ	$IIm7$	$bIII^\Delta(+5)$	$IV7$	$V7$	VI^\emptyset	VII^\emptyset

The chord on the tonic (the 1st chord of the series) more often than not takes the melodic minor scale so that a $Cm6$ can be used in place of the Cm^Δ .

The II V I sequence usually involves the II^\emptyset rather than the $IIm7$.

The I VI II V is a mixture of the two, consisting of:

Im^Δ (or $Im6$)	VI^\emptyset	II^\emptyset	$V7$
Cm^Δ (or $Cm6$)	A^\emptyset	D^\emptyset	$G7$

Sometimes though the Ab^Δ is used instead of the A^\emptyset , particularly when the III ($bIII^\Delta(+5)$) replaces the I. It is even more usual to find the $bIII^\Delta$ (Eb^Δ) with an unaltered 5th in these sequence giving the progression:

$|Eb^\Delta | Ab^\Delta | D^\emptyset | G7 | Cm |$

As in the major key, the chords can be found in the order found above, either following the harmonic or melodic minor scale. Other progressions can be put together by picking and choosing. What governs this is the overall sound (ie. does it sound right?) and the strength of the adjacent sequence. A chord followed by another a perfect fifth lower (eg. $Dm7 - G7$) is the strongest of all. Others are weaker but may have more character (eg. $B^\emptyset - F^\Delta$). A mixture provides most interest.

So far, all the chords have related to the different keys. Foreign chords however can be employed to break away from the strict tonality, even if only momentarily. Chords borrowed from the minor key can often be used in the context of the major key to add a bit of flavour.

Minor sevenths can also frequently be turned into dominant seventh chords. In the key of C major, that means that the $Dm7$ (on II), the $Em7$ (on III) and the $Am7$ (on VI) can all become dominant sevenths, as can the B^\emptyset on VII - but this one requires a bit of careful handling.

The III IV II V pattern can be remodeled then as $E7 - A7 - D7 - G7$ producing a short cycle of fifths. In other sequences, this can also be effective :

$|C - Em7 | F^\Delta - Am7 | Dm7 - B^\emptyset | Em7|$ could thus become:
 $|C - E7 | F^\Delta - A7 | D7 - B7 | E7 |.$

Another possibility is to use the tritone substitute for a dominant seventh chord, particularly where each one has a flattened fifth. This is often found in chromatic falling or occasionally rising passages,

eg. C B7 Bb7 A7 in place of
C F7 Bb7 Eb7 .

Actual modulations are a feature of even the most humdrum standard tune, involving a dominant seventh, or a minor seventh followed by a dominant seventh, leading into a totally new key before returning once again to the home key. The middle eights of many tunes fall into the (new key) II V I, (new key) II V I pattern. A shorter and more temporary series of excursions occurs with various II V's in different keys. But although this helps to overcome the key-bound monotony, it is itself an overworked practice which can become too samey.

Diminished chords have always played a useful role in modulation as each one is a choice of four dominant sevenths with flattened ninths and minus the root notes. Classical composers loved this to death, and it can sound trite at times, but can come into its own in places. It's hard to imagine *S'Wonderful* without the Eb Eo Fm7 sequence. G^ø C7 could be substituted for the Eo chord but it would lose its chromatic appeal. Diminished chords these days sound quite modern when enriched by added notes (the diminished chord can take the notes of another diminished chord built a semitone below the root-note.)

Half-diminished chords are often encountered in chromatic passages too. A half-diminished a tritone away can be substituted very often for a major chord. This can give rise to progressions such as | F#^ø Fm7 | Em7 Ebo | Dm7 G7 | C |. The C in the F#^ø instead of the C# in the F#m7 roots it more firmly in the key of C.

In place of the IIm7 V7 I, a more modern sound is to sometimes use an abridged version IIm7/V I, eg. Dm7/G C. The slash means that the Dm7 chord has a G bass. (The Dm7/G chord may also be referred to as G7(sus4) or G11.) This also has the advantage of reducing the number of chord changes, which is always welcome.

In a way it is like a pedal-note in the bass. Using more prolonged pedals can create some really interesting progressions and the device also helps raise tension which is only released when the pedal note ends. All manner of juicy discords can be created in this manner.

Chords in which one or two of the voices move a tone or semitone away can also produce some nice chord progressions. You will have come across sequences like this: C triad C+ C6 and Cm triad Cm(+5) Cm6. By changing the triad into a major (or minor major seventh in the second example), it becomes more interesting.

Sequences involving enharmonic changes can also be used. On the seventh bar of the middle eight of *One Note Samba*, for instance, a II V I ends in a B^Δ. To get to the original key of Bb, Jobim uses C[∅] F7. Note that the only difference between the notes of B^Δ and the C[∅] is the root note. Jerome Kern was also a master of this technique. To get from the 6th to the 7th bar of *The Song is You*, he has the chord E^Δ followed by Bbm7, where the melody note (the D# / Eb) and the G# / Ab are common to both chords. He also uses a similar device to get from the end of the middle section of *All the things you are* to the last section. Take a look at it.

Tonicisation is a long word but means nothing more than making a chord that isn't the tonic (the home chord of the key) into a new tonic. Say, for instance, you have the simple sequence C^Δ Am7 Dm7 G7 (ie. the very common I VI II V). The existing tonic is the C^Δ. Now if you want to make the G7 into a new tonic, you have to work backwards and change the Dm7 into a D7, producing this C^Δ Am7 D7 G^Δ. It's rarely as easy as this as you often have to fit in the melody over it, and you should'nt overdo it otherwise you lose the impact, but it's a handy trick to have.

Getting away from the tonality of a piece which in some tunes may be desirable may involve a further step. That is, to treat chords as temporary individual tonal centres, almost unrelated to the adjacent chords. This works best when there are few chords in the sequence. However, for some guidance, it is worthwhile knowing that any chords of the same type can follow one another.

Thus a Cm7 could be followed, say, by an Abm7, then by an Em7. What binds it together is the odd note or two (with maybe enharmonic changes) which are shared by the consecutive chords. These notes are crucial, particularly in the melody line and when it comes to improvising over the chords.

It must be emphasized again that in using different chords, the whole thing must sound right. There is no substitute for using your ears. Play things over on a piano and make a point of not relying on cliched progressions. The jazz will sound much fresher as a result, even if the players have to work harder in creating melodic lines to match.

