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## Chapter One

### *Chords of the Major Scale*

This book has been designed to appeal to pianists and keyboardists from diverse backgrounds and varied skill levels. The Introduction has suggestions on the most efficient method of study according to your current skills and goals. If you haven't already read it, you are urged to do so before proceeding.

We'll use very few scales for the purpose of constructing chords. The most useful of these is the *Major Scale*, since most songs are written in a major key.

The *key* of a song is simply the scale on which the song is based. For example, in a song written in the key of C major, most, if not all, of the melody and chord notes will be from the C major scale. The key of C has no sharps or flats, so there is no *key signature*.

There are two *half-step intervals* found in the major scale: between the 3rd & 4th notes and between the 7th & 8th notes. All the other notes are a *whole-step* apart.

Example 1. C major scale:

(W = whole step; H = half step)

C D E F G A B C D E F  
1 W 2 W 3 H 4 W 5 W 6 W 7 H 1 2 3 4 etc.

One important thing to remember about the major scales: There will never be two adjacent notes with the same letter name. For example, in the F scale, the third note is A, so the fourth note will be Bb, not A#. All the major scales are notated in Appendix A on page 156.

We can make a chord based on any of the seven notes of the scale. The most basic chord is the *triad*, a three-note chord. The triads we'll be discussing first are all built the same way. Choose any note of the scale as your starting note, then add two more notes, skipping every other note of the scale.



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### Major Triads

Chords that begin on a scale tone and contain only scale tones are called *diatonic chords*. In the major scale, there are three *major triads* that occur *diatonically*. They are built on scale tones 1, 4 and 5. Many popular songs have been written using only these three chords.

Major chords are notated simply by the letter name of the *root* of the chord. The three major chords of the C major scale are C, F and G. They can also be referred to by number (scale number of the root). These three chords then are the *one chord*, *four chord* and *five chord*. The numbers can be written as Arabic (1, 4 and 5) or upper-case Roman numeral (I, IV and V).

Using every other note in the scale, the C major chord (1 or I chord) use notes 1, 3 and 5. The F (4 or IV chord) uses notes 4, 6 and 1. The G (5 or V chord) uses notes 5, 7 and 2.

Example 2. Major triads of the C major scale, built on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> scale steps:

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with the C major scale notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. Below the notes are scale degrees 1 through 7, then 1, 2, 3, 4. Three major triads are indicated with lines and labels: 'C major triad' connects notes C (1), E (3), and G (5); 'G major triad' connects notes G (5), B (7), and D (2); 'F major triad' connects notes F (4), A (6), and C (1).

### Numbering of Chord Notes

In the above example, we numbered chord notes in terms of the major scale. This numbering scheme is useful in describing the relationship between the major scale and its corresponding diatonic triads. However, chord notes are not normally numbered in reference to the scale, but rather to the chord itself, with the root always being "1." When we designate the root of any major triad as 1, the other two notes will be 3 and 5 (every other note above the root). So the notes of any major triad will always be numbered as 1-3-5.

Example 3. Numbering of chord notes of the major triads:

C major scale

major triads

C

F

G

### Minor Triads (m, mi, min or -)

There are also three *minor triads* that occur naturally, or *diatonically*, in the major scale. They are built on scale tones 2, 3 and 6. They're created the same way as the major triads. That is, using every other note above the root.

Minor chords are notated by the letter name of the root, followed most commonly by a lower case m. The three minor chords of the C major scale are Dm, Em and Am. Alternatives to the "m" suffix are mi, min or minus (-). Minor chords can also be referred to by number (scale number of the root). These three chords are the *two minor*, *three minor* and *six minor chords*. The numbers can be written as Arabic (2m, 3m and 6m) or lower-case Roman numeral (ii, iii and vi).

Using every other note in the scale, the Dm chord (2m or ii) use notes 2, 4 and 6. The Em chord (3m or iii) uses notes 3, 5 and 7. The Am chord (6m or vi) uses notes 6, 1 and 3.

Example 4. Minor triads of the C major scale, built on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> scale steps:

D minor triad

A minor triad

E minor triad

C D E F G A B C D E F

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4

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Like the major triads, minor triads are also numbered as 1-3-5.

Example 5. Numbering of chord notes of the minor triads:

C major scale

minor triads

Dm

Em

Am

1 3 5

1 3 5

1 3 5

Let's review the major and minor triads found diatonically in the major scale in four keys.

Example 6. Major and minor triads of the C, D, F and G major scales:

C Dm Em F G Am

1 major 2 minor 3 minor 4 major 5 major 6 minor

D Em F#m G A Bm

1 major 2 minor 3 minor 4 major 5 major 6 minor

F Gm Am B $\flat$  C Dm

1 major 2 minor 3 minor 4 major 5 major 6 minor

G Am Bm C D Em

1 major 2 minor 3 minor 4 major 5 major 6 minor

## Intervals

We're about to learn a couple of chords that are not built on every other note. This will be a good time to take a brief detour to gain a better understanding of intervals and the numbering of chord notes. It will simplify the further study of chords.

*Intervals* are quite logical and easy to understand. Take another look at the seven notes of the major scale. The interval between the first and second notes is a *second*. The interval between the first and third notes is a *third*. The interval between the first and fourth notes is a *fourth*, and so on. Pretty straightforward.

What if we want to identify intervals that don't include the first note of the scale? Nothing to it. Simply number the lowest of any pair of notes as 1, then count up the scale to the higher note. If we want to know the interval between D and G, D will be numbered as 1. Counting up from D (1), we have E (2), F (3) and G (4). Therefore, the interval between D and G is a *fourth*.

Example 7. Intervals:

When determining intervals, always number the lower of the two notes as 1.

from C: —	unison (1)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	octave	9 <sup>th</sup>
from D: —	unison (1)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	octave	
from E: —	unison (1)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>		
from F: —	unison (1)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>			
from G: —	unison (1)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>				

When we number the major or minor chord notes as 1-3-5, we're really saying that the interval between 1 and 3 is a third, and between 1 and 5 is a fifth.

Just as any note can be lowered by a half-step (flat) or raised by a half-step (sharp), the same is true with intervals. But don't sweat it. Nearly all of the terminology for the various intervals is the same as that for naming chord types (major, minor, etc.). In fact, the chords get their names from the intervals they contain.

The names of the intervals from the first note to each of the other seven notes in the major scale are as follows: 1 to 2 is a *major second*, 1 to 3 is a *major third*, 1 to 6 is a *major sixth*, and 1 to 7

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is a *major seventh*. The interval from 1 to 4 is a *perfect fourth*, 1 to 5 is a *perfect fifth*, and 1 to 8 is an *octave*.

This was not my idea. I would have been *perfectly* willing to label them all as major intervals. But someone a long time ago stayed up late one night to mess things up. Just remember, they're all major intervals, except the fourth, fifth and octave. Oh yeah, and two notes of the same exact pitch are called *unison*.

Now you know where the major chord gets its name. The interval between the root and third is a major third (four half-steps). Where does the minor chord get its name, you ask? Well, when we flat the top note of any major interval, we get a minor interval. Major second becomes *minor second*, major third becomes *minor third*, and so on. The interval between the root and third of a minor chord is a minor third (three half-steps). Also notice that a minor second is a half-step, and a major second is a whole-step.

Example 8. Unison, major, minor and perfect intervals:

The image shows two musical staves illustrating intervals. The top staff shows major intervals: unison (two notes on the same line), major 2nd (two notes, one on a line, one on a space), major 3rd (two notes, one on a space, one on a line), perfect 4th (two notes, one on a space, one on a line), perfect 5th (two notes, one on a line, one on a space), major 6th (two notes, one on a space, one on a line), major 7th (two notes, one on a line, one on a space), and octave (two notes, one on a line, one on the line above). The bottom staff shows minor intervals: minor 2nd (two notes, one on a line, one on a space, with a flat on the second note), minor 3rd (two notes, one on a space, one on a line, with a flat on the second note), minor 6th (two notes, one on a space, one on a line, with a flat on the second note), and minor 7th (two notes, one on a line, one on a space, with a flat on the second note). Vertical lines connect the labels to the corresponding notes on the staves.

### Suspended Fourth Triads (sus or sus4)

Next, we'll take a look at a few other triads. To make a *suspended fourth* or *sus4* chord, you simply raise the 3<sup>rd</sup> of any major triad by a half-step. Five sus triads can be found diatonically in the major scale: They are built on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> scale steps. They're called 1sus, 2sus, 3sus, 5sus and 6sus respectively. As with all chords, the sus chord can also be built on any note, including non-scale tones. We'll explore these other possibilities later.

The notes in a sus triad are numbered as 1-4-5, because the second note is an interval of a fourth (*perfect 4<sup>th</sup>*) above the root, and the top note is an interval of a fifth (*perfect 5<sup>th</sup>*) above the root. The sus4 chord usually *resolves* to either a major or minor triad of the same root or a fifth lower. Note: If a chord is notated as *sus* without a number, it is still a sus4 chord.

Example 9. Suspended (sus4) triads built on the notes of the major scale:

The 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 sus chords are diatonic in the major scale.

C sus      D sus      E sus      F sus      G sus      A sus      B sus

1            2            3                            5            6

### Suspended Second Triads (sus2 or 2 (no 3rd))

Another suspended chord that is quite popular in contemporary music is the *suspended second* or *sus2*. This triad has the notes 1-2-5. The 2 is substituted for the 3.

Example 10. Suspended 2<sup>nd</sup> (sus2) triads built on the notes of the major scale:

The 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 sus2 chords are diatonic in the major scale.

C sus2      D sus2      E sus2      F sus2      G sus2      A sus2      B sus2

1            2                            4            5            6

### Diminished Intervals

Remember that when we decreased a major interval by a half-step, we got a minor interval? Well, we can also lower a perfect interval by a half-step. I wish I could tell you that the result is another minor interval, but the guy who named the perfect intervals stayed up too late that night. So, when we lower the top note of a perfect interval by a half-step, we have a *diminished* interval. Since the word *diminished* means to become less, it properly describes the smaller interval.

Example 11. Diminished intervals:

perfect 4<sup>th</sup>      diminished 4<sup>th</sup>      perfect 5<sup>th</sup>      diminished 5<sup>th</sup>

The most important thing to remember about diminished intervals is that a lowered fifth is a *diminished fifth* (6 half-steps). That's where the diminished triad gets its name.

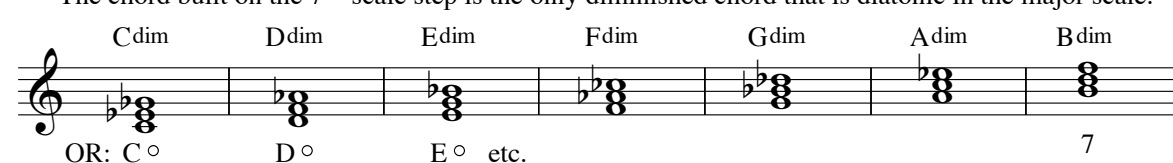
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### Diminished Triads (dim or o)

The *diminished triad* is created by lowering the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of any major triad by a half-step. The intervals between the root and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, are both *minor thirds*. The interval between the root and 5<sup>th</sup> is a *diminished fifth*, from which this chord gets its name.

Example 12. Diminished (dim) triads built on the notes of the major scale:

The chord built on the 7<sup>th</sup> scale step is the only diminished chord that is diatonic in the major scale.



The image shows a musical staff with seven chords. Above the staff are labels: Cdim, Ddim, Edim, Fdim, Gdim, Adim, and Bdim. Below the staff are notes for each chord: Cdim (C, Bb, Ab), Ddim (D, Cb, Bb), Edim (E, D, Cb), Fdim (F, Eb, D), Gdim (G, F, Eb), Adim (A, G, F), and Bdim (B, A, G). Below the staff, there is a note 'OR: C°' under Cdim, 'D°' under Ddim, 'E° etc.' under Edim, and '7' under Bdim.

### Augmented Intervals

We can also increase any interval by a half-step. When the top note of any major or perfect interval is raised by a half-step, it becomes an *augmented* interval. This name also makes sense, since the word *augmented* means increased or made greater.

Example 13. Augmented intervals:



The image shows a musical staff with four intervals. Above the staff are labels: perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, augmented 4<sup>th</sup>, perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, and augmented 5<sup>th</sup>. The notes are: perfect 4<sup>th</sup> (C, F), augmented 4<sup>th</sup> (C, F#), perfect 5<sup>th</sup> (C, G), and augmented 5<sup>th</sup> (C, G#).

The most important thing to remember about augmented intervals is that a raised fifth is an *augmented fifth* (eight half-steps). That's where the augmented triad gets its name.

### Augmented Triads (aug or +)

The *augmented triad* can be created by raising the 5<sup>th</sup> of any major triad by one-half step. The intervals between the root and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, are both major thirds. The interval between the root and 5<sup>th</sup> is an *augmented fifth*, from which this chord gets its name.

Example 14. Augmented (aug) triads built on the notes of the major scale:

♯ = double sharp (up one whole step)

There are no augmented chords that are diatonic in the major scale.

OR: C<sup>+</sup>      D<sup>+</sup>      E<sup>+</sup> etc.

Not all chords are diatonic. It's not uncommon to see chords whose root is a non-scale tone. And as you've seen, even when the root is a scale tone, the chord may contain non-scale tones. Frequently, the chords that are normally minor (2m, 3m and 6m) may also be major chords. Therefore, to be able to build any chord on any root, it is important to know the intervals for each chord. Of course, to play in *real time*, memorization of each chord is essential. Let's review the intervals in each of the triads we've discussed so far:

chord	intervals
major	1 to 3 = major third; 3 to 5 = minor third. (1 to 5 = perfect fifth)
minor	1 to 3 = minor third; 3 to 5 = major third. (1 to 5 = perfect fifth)
sus4	1 to 4 = perfect fourth; 4 to 5 = major second. (1 to 5 = perfect fifth)
sus2	1 to 2 = major second; 2 to 5 = perfect fourth. (1 to 5 = perfect fifth)
diminished	1 to 3 = minor third; 3 to 5 = minor third. (1 to 5 = diminished fifth)
augmented	1 to 3 = major third; 3 to 5 = major third. (1 to 5 = augmented fifth)

Example 15. Intervals in each of the triads:



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Example 15 continued:

## Inversions

So far, we've studied all the triads in *root position*. That is, the root is on the bottom (1-3-5). We can also rearrange the notes (3-5-1 or 5-1-3). These are called *inversions*. When the 3<sup>rd</sup> is on the bottom (3-5-1), it's called *first inversion*. When the 5<sup>th</sup> is on the bottom (5-1-3), it's called *second inversion*.

Example 16. C major diatonic chords and inversions:

## Why Inversions?

Examples 17 and 18 are written in the bass clef, to be played with the left hand, freeing the right hand to play the melody or add fills behind a vocalist. If not for inversions, the following *chord progression* would be played like this:

Example 17. Playing with root positions only:

C F G F C

Such large leaps from one chord to the next won't sound very musical. In order to limit movement between chords, we'll use inversions – like this:

Example 18. Playing with inversions:

Using inversions. Notice common tones between chords (dotted ties).

C F G F C

root position 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion root position 1<sup>st</sup> inversion

root 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> root 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> root root 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup>

C F G

\* \* \* \* \*

\* Inversions used in the above chord progression.

There will be times when you'll want to play chords with both hands. Generally you wouldn't duplicate the same inversions in both hands. That would sound too stiff and unmusical. You may even play chords and melody together with the right hand. In that case, the melody notes will determine the chord inversions below them.

For more on major scales, see Appendix A, page 156.

For more on triads and inversions, see Appendix B, page 157.

For more on intervals, see Appendix C, page 165.

### Since You Asked

#### Voicings – Closed and Open

*Voicings* are the arrangement of notes in a chord. Root position is a voicing. First and second inversions are two more voicings. The chords and inversions explained thus far are called *closed voicings*. This simply means that the notes within the chord are *close* together.

We can also spread the notes out over the keyboard to create *open voicings*. We've seen that a three-note chord can have three closed voicings: root position, first inversion and second inversion. The same three-note chord can also have three open voicings. To create an open voicing, we move the middle or inner note of a closed voicing either up or down one octave.

Example 19. Open voicings:

To change a closed voicing to an open voicing of the same inversion, move the middle note up an octave.

root position	1 <sup>st</sup> inversion	2 <sup>nd</sup> inversion
C		
D <sub>m</sub>		
E <sub>m</sub>		
F		
G		