

Harmonic Progression

HOW DID COMPOSERS OF THE **COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD** DECIDE WHICH ORDER TO PUT **CHORDS** IN? DID THEY JUST THROW THEM DOWN ON PAPER **HAPHAZARDLY**?



AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE ARE CERTAIN CHORD PROGRESSIONS THAT APPEAR **MORE FREQUENTLY**, AND THERE ARE OTHERS THAT ARE **AVOIDED** PRETTY CONSISTENTLY. WHILE THE CHOICES WERE ALWAYS BASED ON WHAT **SOUNDED GOOD** TO THE COMPOSER, THEORISTS CAN FIND A **PATTERN** IN THEIR CHOICES THAT WE CAN USE TO EASILY REMEMBER WHICH CHORD PROGRESSIONS **WORK** AND WHICH ONES **DON'T**.

ONE WAY TO UNDERSTAND THIS PATTERN IS TO THINK IN TERMS OF **ROOT MOVEMENTS**. A ROOT MOVEMENT IS THE BASIC INTERVAL BETWEEN THE ROOT OF ONE CHORD AND THE ROOT OF THE NEXT CHORD. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE INTERVAL'S **INFLECTION**, JUST ITS **DISTANCE** AND **DIRECTION**.

FOR EXAMPLE, TO DETERMINE THE ROOT MOVEMENT HERE, WE LOOK AT THE **ROOT** (NOT **BASS**) OF EACH CHORD AND FIGURE THE **INTERVAL** BETWEEN THEM.



A TO B IS **DOWN A SEVENTH**, BUT SINCE OCTAVES DON'T MATTER, WE INVERT IT TO **UP A SECOND**.

SO HERE'S THE PATTERN: COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD COMPOSERS GENERALLY USED ROOT MOVEMENTS OF **UP A SECOND**, **DOWN A THIRD**, AND **DOWN A FIFTH**!



THAT'S NOT SAY THAT THEY **NEVER** USED OTHER ROOT MOVEMENTS, BUT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN VERY OFTEN.

REMEMBER... SINCE **INFLECTION** DOESN'T MATTER, WE CAN IGNORE **ACCIDENTALS** WHEN WE FIGURE THE ROOT MOVEMENTS.



SEQUENCES OF CHORDS THAT **DON'T** FOLLOW THIS PATTERN ARE CALLED **RETROGRESSIONS**, AND THEY ARE CONSIDERED **UNSTYLISTIC**.

SO, FOR EXAMPLE, A **G CHORD** TO AN **E CHORD** IS DOWN A THIRD, BUT SO IS **G** TO **E FLAT**, AND **G SHARP** TO **E FLAT**!



"**UNSTYLISTIC**" IS A POLITE WAY OF SAYING "THE **COMPOSERS DIDN'T** DO IT SO YOU **SHOULDN'T** DO IT EITHER!"



THERE ARE ALSO FOUR SIMPLE EXCEPTIONS TO THIS PATTERN:



ANY CHORD CAN MOVE TO TONIC,



TONIC CAN MOVE TO ANY CHORD,



ANY CHORD CAN MOVE TO DOMINANT,



AND THE LEADING-TONE TRIAD MUST MOVE TO TONIC.



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LET'S TRY IT... SAY YOU HAVE A SUPERTONIC CHORD AND YOU ARE TRYING TO DECIDE WHAT CHORD TO USE TO FOLLOW IT.

YOU CAN MOVE UP A **SECOND** TO A **MEDIAN** CHORD...



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YOU CAN MOVE DOWN A **THIRD** TO A **LEADING-TONE** CHORD...



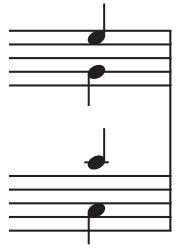
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YOU CAN MOVE DOWN A **FIFTH** TO A **DOMINANT** CHORD...



V

OR YOU CAN USE THE FIRST EXCEPTION AND GO TO A **TONIC** CHORD!



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