

Guitar and Music Theory Classnotes

VICTOR PICÓN
June, 2020



Contents

I	Music Theory	5
1	Intervals and Scales	7
2	Chords: Triads and Seventh	9
2.1	Triads	9
2.2	Seventh Chords	9
2.3	Chord Inversions	10
3	Types of Resolutions of Dominant Seventh Chords	11
II	Guitar Theory	13

Part I

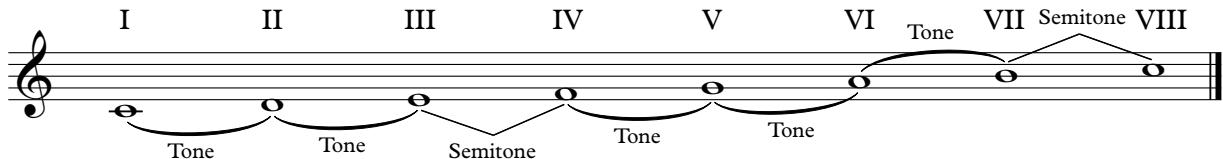
Music Theory

1. Intervals and Scales

We begin with the treatment of intervals, as done in Walter Piston, *Harmony*. Check the tome for a deeper treatment. We also assume the notion of semitone (and tone) as a starting point, also working in the twelve-tone equal temperament system.

The basic unity of harmony is the *interval*, which describes the distance between two tones (notes). When the tones are sounded simultaneously the distance is a *harmonic* interval; if the tones are heard consecutively, the distance is a *melodic* interval.

Tones that form an interval are drawn from *scales*. We present here the major scale, other scales will be presented later throughout the notes. As an example consider the C-major scale.



Above each note, there is a roman numeral which numerates each *degree* of the scale, another notation which comes handy when the keynote of the scale is not important. All major scales, have the same distribution of whole tones and semitones, regardless of the keynote. Below presented all possible major scale key signatures, this arrangement is called the *circle of fifths*, since each keynote is the fifth note of the scale to the left of it.

Intervals are named with a number and quality, for example in the Major Third interval, the former refers to the quality, and the latter to its number. The number is found by counting the number of lines and spaces enclosed between the notes of the interval. The quality of the interval is found by referring to the major scale starting on the lower note. If the note coincides with a note of the scale the interval is *major*, except in case of octaves, fifths, fourth and unisons, for which the term *perfect* is used. If the note does not coincide with a note of the scale, the following guidelines apply:

- i) A *minor* interval is obtained by lowering a major interval a half step (a semitone).
- ii) An *augmented* interval is obtained by augmenting a major or perfect interval a half step.
- iii) An *diminished* interval is obtained by augmenting a minor or perfect interval a half step.

It is also useful to know the specific distance (in terms of tones or semitones) of some (if not all!) intervals.

Interval	Distance
Major 2 nd	1 T
Minor 3 rd	$1 + \frac{1}{2}$ T
Major 3 rd	2 T
Perfect 4 th	$2 + \frac{1}{2}$ T
Tritone	3 T
Perfect 5 th	$3 + \frac{1}{2}$ T
Perfect 8 th	6 T

The special name *tritone* is given to the Augmented 4th (or Diminished 5th) interval, a special interval which will be covered in depth in future sections.

Compound intervals are those greater than an octave. Their naming rules are the same as for “normal” intervals before mentioned.

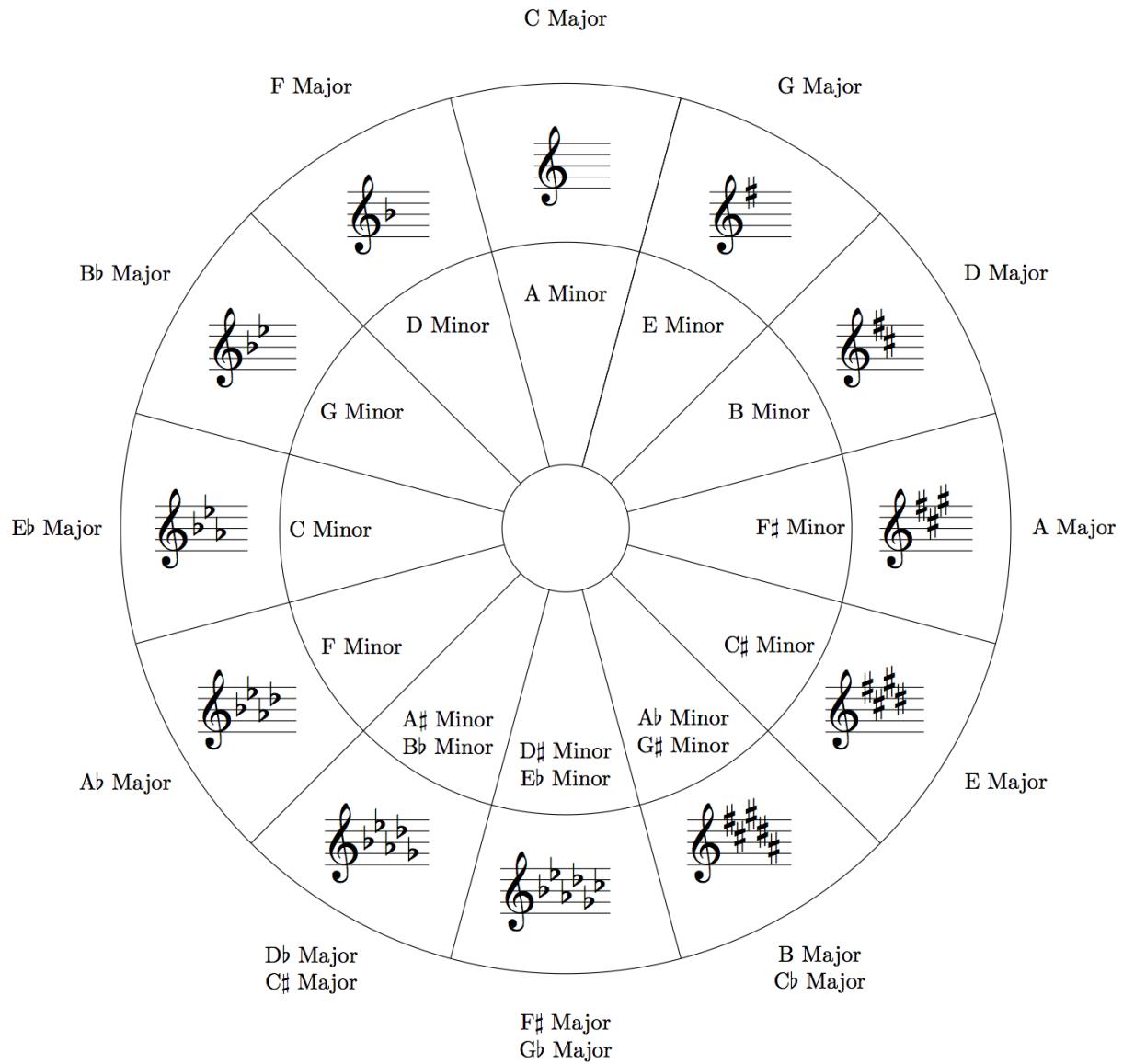


Figure 1.1: Circle of Fifths.

2. Chords: Triads and Seventh

We begin studying chords with triads, in the same way as done in Walter Piston's tome. We continue with seventh chords, extremely used in modern harmony.

2.1 Triads

The combination of two or more harmonic intervals makes up a *chord*. The basic chord of common-practice harmony is the *triad*, a group of three tones (called *chord tones*) obtained by placing one third on top of another.

The names *root* (R), *third* (3) and *fifth* (5) are given to the different tones of the triad, regardless of their arrangement. Any degree of the scale may serve as the root of a triad. For example, on the C major scale we obtain the following triads:

As depicted above, the triads are denoted by the same roman numeral as their respective roots, but some notation is used depending on the kind triad occurring, as follows. The quality of the thirds conforming the triad, generate four kinds of triads, each of these having a different quality in their sound.

- i) A major third plus a minor third make a *major* triad -denoted in capital roman letters, I.
- ii) A minor third plus a major third make a *minor* triad -denoted in lowercase roman letters, i.
- iii) A minor third plus another minor third make a *diminished* triad -denoted in lowercase roman letters, i^o.
- iv) A major third plus another major third make an *augmented* triad -denoted in capital roman letters as I⁺.

In major and minor triads, it is the third which gives the chord its main flavor (major or minor), the fifth gives more saturation to the chord, but defines no quality. This is not true with diminished and augmented triads, where the fifth generally adds tension to the chord: look for example the diminished triad, where we have a tritone between the root and the fifth.

It is worth studying the kinds of triads that generate from the major scale (i.e. figure tal). Note that in the major scale there is augmented triad, this one will appear once we study the minor mode in further chapters.

2.2 Seventh Chords

Seventh chords are obtained appending another third interval on top of a triad, this tone is called the *seventh* of the chord. As in triads, different combinations in the quality of the triads generate different chords, each with its own quality in their sound. We present the basic combinations of these, in a more schematic (to aid memorization), with all intervals referring to the root of the chord.

Major Seventh (I^{maj7}): Root + Maj. 3rd + Perf. 5th + Maj. 7th Figure

Dominant Seventh (I⁷): Root + Maj. 3rd + Perf. 5th + min. 7th Figure

Minor Seventh (i^{min7}): Root + min. 3rd + Perf. 5th + min. 7th Figure

Half Diminished (i^ø): Root + min. 3rd + dim. 5th + min. 7th Figure

Diminished Seventh (i^o): Root + min. 3rd + dim. 5th + dim. 7th Figure

First, the name is given, followed by the roman notation, then the intervals which form the chord and an example figure. There are much more seventh chords (such as minor major seventh, or augmented major seventh chords), just the common ones are shown in the above table.

In the same way as with triads, any degree of any (in our case diatonic) scale can serve as a root for a seventh chord. We give the resulting chords for the major scale, in particular the C major scale; the minor mode will be explained later.

It is worth learning the chords occurring in each degree of the scale. Note that the diminished seventh chord did not appear in the set of chords of the major scale, it will later appear in minor modes, and it is so special it deserves a chapter in its own.

2.3 Chord Inversions

Chords are defined just by the notes which conform them, whatever the arrangement. However, when we play a chord with its bass (the lower note) on a different note than the root, we refer to it as an *inversion* of the chord. Other than the form with the root on the bass, we have three more inversions: with the bass on the 3rd, bass on 5th and bass on 7th, called *first*, *second* and *third* inversions, respectively. Consider for example the different inversions of the C^{maj7} chord.

Though all forms are inversions of the same chord, each one has a particular sound and quality which can be taken into account when playing them. Other than its quality, we may use them to write bass lines when concatenating several chords together. Chord inversions are better felt when playing them with the specific instrument.

3. Types of Resolutions of Dominant Seventh Chords

As we know, the power of the dominant chord comes from the resolution of its tritone to the following chord. Depending on the chord that follows the dominant we have three kinds of transitions of the tritone, which receive their name from the relative movements of the voices in the tritone.

- i) *Contrary Movement*: Both notes of the tritone move in opposite directions.
- ii) *Oblique Movement*: One voice moves while the other keeps still.
- iii) *Parallel Movement*: Both notes move in the same direction.

Some of these resolutions may appear in different kinds of resolutions. We provide all examples with a G^7 as the dominant chord, remind the tritone of such dominant is found in the $3^{\text{rd}} - 7^{\text{th}} \equiv B - F$.

- i) *Contrary Movement*: It is the strongest kind of resolution. We study four scenarios where this kind of resolution occurs.
 - Dominant resolves down a fifth to a I major chord. Such as $G^7 \rightarrow C$, with the resolution being $B \nearrow C | F \searrow E$.
 - Dominant resolves to the the minor relative (vi) of a I major chord (or also the 1st substitute). Such as $G^7 \rightarrow A^{m7}$, with the resolution being $B \nearrow C$ (why not A?) | $F \searrow E$.
 - When the dominant V resolves to the second substitution of the minor i chord. For example, when the i chord is C^m then the 2nd substitution is $A\flat^{maj7}$. In this case the voice moves go as $B \nearrow C | F \searrow E\flat$.
 - When we take the tritone subsitution of the dominant (subV) and resolve to the I major chord. In this case the tritone is inverted, and we have the same resolution as a (V-I): $B \nearrow C | F \searrow E$; but the third of the subV resolves to the 3rd of I and the seventh of subV resolves to root of I (the opposite of a V-I).
- ii) *Oblique Movement*: When the dominant V resolves to the second substitution of the I major chord. For example, when the I chord is C, then the 2nd substitution is E^{min7} . In this case the voice moves go as $B = B | F \searrow E$.
- iii) *Parallel Movement*: Dominant resolves to the the major relative (VI) of a i minor chord (or 1st substitute). Such as $G^7 \rightarrow E\flat^{maj7}$, with the resolution being $B \searrow B\flat | F \searrow E\flat$.

Part II

Guitar Theory

