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Chapter I

NOMENCLATURE

One of the first things that an aspiring jazz musician must do is learn to read and interpret chord symbols. The six chord types are major, minor, dominant, diminished, augmented, and half diminished.

An alphabetical letter indicates the root on which a chord is built. The tertian system is usually employed, that is, chords are built in consecutive thirds (i.e., C-E-G-B-D-F-A). For the uninitiated two short cuts to aid in chord construction follow: (1) build the chord using alternating letters of the musical alphabet (i.e., F-A-C-E-G-B-D-etc.) and (2) build the chord using either the lines E-G-B-D-F or the spaces F-A-C-E.

In the major chord types all notes are indigenous to the major scale of the root tone, i.e. C major is spelled C-E-G-B-D-etc., Eb major is spelled Eb-G-Bb-D-F-etc., and so forth. Numerically this can be expressed 1-3-5-7-9-11-etc. A letter standing alone usually indicates a major triad, which is a chord consisting of the root, the major third, and the perfect fifth, i.e., C-E-G, F-A-C, Gb-Bb-Db, etc.

All major type chords have the word "major" or one of the symbols of abbreviation in the title with the exception of the triad (i.e., C-E-G) and the chord of the added sixth (i.e., $C_6=C-E-G-A$). The term extension refers to the notes higher than the seventh in a tertian structure, i.e., the ninth, eleventh, thirteenth, etc. We may extend the major chord by using the letter names of the major scale built on the root of the chord (i.e., Ab major 13, which is spelled Ab-C-Eb-G-Bb-Db-F) or by using the unaltered odd numbers (1-3-5-7-9-11-13). The most commonly used symbols and abbreviations for major are Maj, Ma, M, Δ , a letter by itself, and a letter plus the number six, i.e., the following: C Maj, C Ma, C M, C Δ , C, and C_6 . In abbreviations for major use a capital letter M for the first letter of the abbreviation.

All minor type chords have the word minor (use small letter m) or one of the symbols or abbreviations for minor in the title with the exception of the half diminished chord. For our purposes the half diminished chord is better called a minor seventh with a flat five ($mi_7^{(b5)}$). The most commonly used symbols and abbreviations for minor are min, mi, m, and -, i.e., the following: C min, C mi, C m, and C-. To this we may add the numbers which indicate the members of the scale to be added, i.e., C mi 11, which is spelled C-Eb-G-Bb-D-F.

In constructing a minor chord we again think of the root of the chord as being the tonic note of a major scale. We then lower the third of the chord one half step. The resultant triad is indicated by a letter plus the word minor or one of its abbreviations. To this triad we may add the lowered or minor seventh. The spelling is then 1-b3-5-b7; if we use the note C as the root of the chord, C mi_7 is spelled C-Eb-G-Bb. Any extensions added to the minor chord are indigenous to the major scale of the root tone; C mi 11 is spelled, for example, C-Eb-G-Bb-D-F or 1-b3-5-b7-9-11.

An altered chord tone or extension is indicated by a plus (+) or sharp (#) for raised and by a minus (-) or flat (b) for lowered. Altered and added notes are best parenthesized to avoid confusion, i.e., $C_7^{(b9)}$, $C_7^{(add 4)}$, and $Cmi_7^{(b9)}$.

The dominant seventh chord is constructed as follows: 1-3-5-b7, or, in other words, lower the seventh of the major scale of the root one half step (using C as the root, the chord is spelled C-E-G-Bb). The number seven, unless accompanied by the word major or minor, means to add the minor seventh to the triad. Any letter plus a number other than six signifies a dominant seventh chord, i.e. the following: C_9 is spelled C-E-G-Bb-D; C_{13} is spelled C-E-G-Bb-D-F-A. All extensions are indigenous to the major key of the root tone, i.e. the following: C_{13} is spelled C-E-G-Bb-D-F-A.

The diminished chord is constructed 1-b3-b5-6; using C as the root the chord is spelled C-Eb-Gb-A. In jazz all references to a diminished chord mean diminished seventh. In this chord all adjacent members are a minor third apart. The symbol for diminished is a circle; its abbreviation is dim. (small letter d).

The augmented chord is constructed 1-3-#5; using C as the root the chord is spelled C-E-G#. In this chord all adjacent members are a major third apart. The symbol for augmented is a plus sign (+); its abbreviation is aug.

The half diminished chord is also known as a minor seventh with a flat five ($mi_7^{(b5)}$) and is constructed 1-b3-b5-b7; using C as the root the chord is spelled C-Eb-Gb-Bb. The half diminished chord is symbolized \emptyset and abbreviated $mi_7^{(b5)}$.

All chords that are neither major nor minor function as dominant seventh chords, i.e., C+, C_{13} , Co_7 , C_{11} , etc. The augmented chord usually functions as the dominant seventh chord with the same root name, i.e., $C+=C_7(+5)$. Diminished chords are usually derived dominant seventh chords. The root tone is found a major third below the bottom tone of the diminished chord, i.e., $Co_7=Ab_7$.