

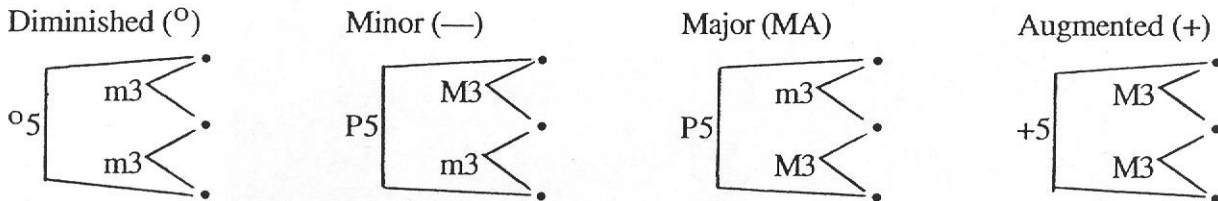
Triads

7

Any group of three different notes (three different *letter names*) are what's called a **trichord**. If the three notes can be arranged somehow in **stacked thirds** (root, third, fifth), this is called a **triad**.

In a **very generic way**, there are just seven different letter name groupings which form triads of some type: ACE, BDF, CEG, DFA, EGB, FAC, and GBD. This doesn't cover the **quality** of the triad (see below)--just note names. Any added accidentals **may** change the quality of the triad.

There are **four basic triad qualities** (note that the type of 5th and the 3rds are shown in each case):

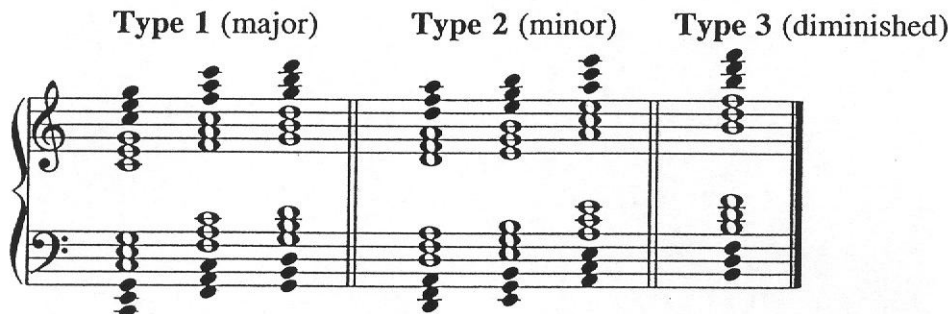


Another way of thinking about the four basic qualities:

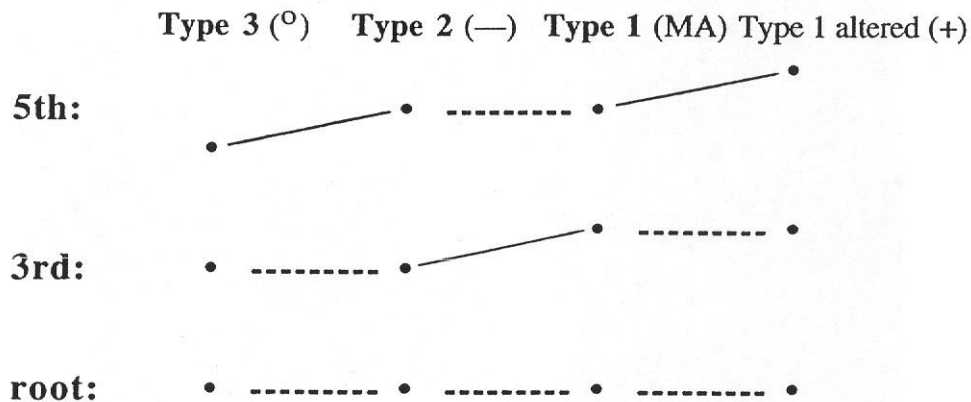
1. the **consonant** triads: major and minor. These take their names from their **lower third**; the interval from root to fifth is a P5. They have **non-identical** thirds (one M3 and one m3).
2. the **dissonant** triads: diminished and augmented. These take their names from the type of fifth: the diminished triad has a °5 from root to fifth, while the augmented triad has a +5 from root to fifth. Each of these contains **identical** thirds: the diminished triad is made up of stacked m3s while the augmented triad is made up of stacked M3s.

“Notational types” (not in the context of a particular key)

What this shows you is “white-note” triads (no accidentals or “black keys”) and their qualities. Note that augmented does not occur as a “white-note” triad. Note also that if you add **the same** accidental to all three notes in a particular type, you still end up with the same type. **Examples:** C E G is Major; so is C# E# G# (so is Cb Eb Gb). E G B is minor; so is Eb Gb Bb (so is E# G# B#). And so on.



Proportional architecture (note that this moves from smallest to largest span from the root up):



How to determine the “notational quality” of a triad containing accidentals:

1. “Look through” the accidentals to the underlying type (type 1, 2, or 3).
2. Determine how the accidentals affect the proportional architecture--that is, what kinds of thirds separate the triad’s notes.

How to build triads containing accidentals:

1. Start with a basic triad type (1, 2, or 3).
2. Supply the appropriate accidental to the triad *root*.
3. Apply accidentals to the 3rd and 5th in order to create the correct proportional architecture.

Eventually (by, say, next week), it is important to be able to recognize most all of these triads *instantaneously* at sight. Thus, begin to *memorize a core* of notated triads that will serve as visual anchors, such as all of the *major triads*, for example.

In addition to understanding triads as “**notational types**” (that is, not in the context of any particular key), we also need to know a little about **triads within a key**. Note that this parallels how we worked on intervals--isolated entities, then within a tonal (major or minor) framework.

Triads within a key

It’s possible to build a triad on any scale degree in a major or minor key. Here are the **most commonly encountered** triads in major and minor keys (**note**: the triads in minor are based on the **harmonic minor scale**, except for III, which you needn’t worry about for now). **Above the staff**, you see the chord qualities (notice: no augmented). **Below the staff**, you see **Roman numerals**. Notice that they correspond with the different scale degrees: $\hat{1} \leftrightarrow I$, $\hat{2} \leftrightarrow ii$, and so forth. Notice also that the Roman numerals show triad **qualities**: major triads (shown here in whole notes) get an upper-case (capital) Roman numeral while minor triads get lower case (small). Diminished triads get lower case and a $^{\circ}$ sign. (Augmented would get upper case with an + sign).

MA — — MA MA — $^{\circ}$ — $^{\circ}$ MA — MA MA $^{\circ}$

CM: I ii iii IV V vi vii $^{\circ}$ cm: i ii $^{\circ}$ III iv V VI vii $^{\circ}$

The tonic and dominant triads

Confused? Here’s a relief for you: the *only* triads that you need to know really, *really* well for now are the tonic and dominant triads (I and V in major; i and V in minor). Know *forever* that the tonic triad is do-mi-sol (or do-me-sol in minor) and that the dominant triad is sol-ti-re in major *or* minor.

A really picky but **VERY, VERY IMPORTANT POINT**: when you’re in a minor key and you’re writing a major V chord (and the V chord usually does have a major quality), you have to **THINK**. This chord is sol-ti-re. Ti--scale degree $\hat{7}$ --the **leading tone**--doesn’t get there by itself. You have to help it achieve its destiny by including an accidental: you have to **raise** the subtonic so that it becomes the **leading tone**--just a **half step** underneath the tonic. Put another way: when in a minor key, the *third* of the V chord will have an accidental. See the examples below. Focus really, **REALLY** hard on the V chord in minor keys.

DM: I V A \flat M: I V FM: I V em: i V gm: i V b \flat m: i V