

LESSON - CHORDS

FROM THE MAKERS OF AURALIA & MUSITION MUSIC SOFTWARE

Rising Software

Introduction

Chords are two or more notes that are played simultaneously or thought of as being in a group. Chords are defined by their tonic note (the note considered to be the basis of the chord), their quality (Eg Major, minor), and their inversion (which note of the chord is placed in the bottom of the voicing).

The image shows three chords on a single staff in 4/4 time. The first chord is C Major, consisting of the notes C4, E4, and G4. The second chord is C Minor, consisting of the notes C4, E♭4, and G4. The third chord is C Major 1st Inversion, consisting of the notes E4, G4, and C5.

Major Chords

Major chords, are based on the first, third and fifth degrees of the major scale and consist of the interval of a major 3rd followed by the interval of a minor 3rd.

The image shows the C Major Scale on a single staff in 4/4 time, with notes numbered 1 through 8. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The notes C, E, and G are highlighted in red. To the right of the scale is a C Major chord, consisting of the notes C, E, and G.

Minor Chords

Minor chords, like major chords, are based on the first, third and fifth notes of a scale, but for minor chords it is the minor scale. You can also think of a minor chord as being the same as a major chord but with the third (middle note) being lowered a semitone.

The image shows the C Natural Minor Scale on a single staff in 4/4 time, with notes numbered 1 through 8. The notes are C, D, E♭, F, G, A♭, B♭, C. The notes C, E♭, and G are highlighted in red. To the right of the scale are two chords: C Minor, consisting of the notes C, E♭, and G, and C Major, consisting of the notes C, E, and G.

1st Inversion Chords

All chords can be played in several different ways (without using more than one octave or doubled notes) by placing a different note of the chord at its base. A first inversion chord has the third of the chord at its base.

A first inversion chord is also known as a 6/3 chord since the interval between the third and the fifth is a 3rd and the interval between the third and the tonic is a 6th. The example below shows a root position major chord and then a 1st inversion major chord with the 3rd at the bottom of the chord.

The image shows two chords on a single staff in 4/4 time. The first chord is C Major Root Position, consisting of the notes C, E, and G. The second chord is C Major - 1st Inversion, consisting of the notes E, G, and C. Below the second chord is the Roman numeral notation I₃⁶.

2nd Inversion Chords

A second inversion chord places the fifth at the base of the chord thereby forming the interval of a 4th and a 6th with the tonic and the third. Hence it is also known as a 6/4 chord. The example below shows a root position major chord and then a 2nd inversion major chord with the 5th at the bottom of the chord.

C Major Root Position C Major - 2nd Inversion

I₄⁶

Diminished Chords

The diminished chord is similar to a minor chord, but the top note (the fifth) is also flattened. The interval between the bottom and middle, and middle and top notes of a diminished chord is a minor 3rd.

C Diminished Chord

Augmented Chords

The augmented chord is similar to the major chord, but the fifth is raised by a semitone. The interval between the bottom and middle, and middle and top notes of an augmented chord is a major 3rd.

C Augmented Chord

Adding 7ths

A 7th can be added to any basic triad to bring some additional colour to the chord. Common use of 7th extensions include dominant 7th, diminished 7th, major 7th and minor 7th chords.

C Dominant 7th C Diminished 7th C Major 7th C Minor 7th

Dominant 7th Chords

The structure of a dominant 7th chord is very similar to that of a major chord, with the addition of a flattened (minor) seventh above the root note of the chord. In the following example we can see that B is the major 7th of C major. In order to get a dominant 7th chord based from C we have to flatten the 7th thereby making it a Bb.


C Major Scale C Dominant 7th (C7) Chord

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

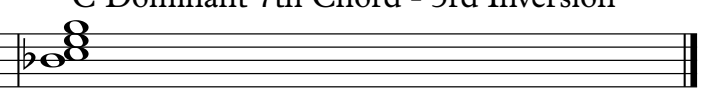
3rd Inversion Chords

Since a dominant 7th chord has four notes, it also comes in a 3rd inversion where the flattened 7th is at the root of the chord. This could also apply to any other chord with 4 or more notes.

C Dominant 7th Chord



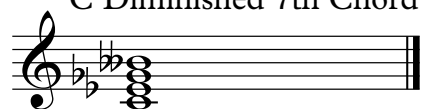
C Dominant 7th Chord - 3rd Inversion



Diminished 7th Chords

The diminished 7th chord is similar to a diminished chord, with the addition of a doubled flattened (diminished) seventh above the root note of the chord. The interval between all consecutive notes of a diminished 7th chord is a minor 3rd.

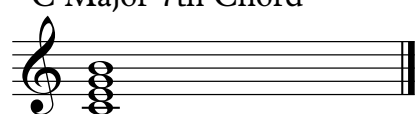
C Diminished 7th Chord



Major 7th Chords

The Major 7th chord is similar to a major chord, with the addition of a major 7th.

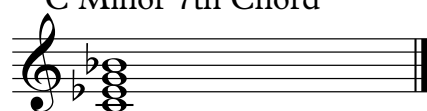
C Major 7th Chord



Minor 7th Chords

The Minor 7th chord is similar to a minor chord, with the addition of a minor 7th.

C Minor 7th Chord



Suspended Chords

Another commonly used chord is the suspended 4th chord which replaces the major 3rd of the chord with the 4th. A minor 7th can also be added to a suspended 4th chord to create a dominant 7th chord with a suspended 4th.

C Suspended 4th Chord



C Dominant Suspended 4th Chord



Other Extensions

9ths, 11ths & 13ths can be added to any chord to provide extra colour & density. Common use of 9th extensions include dominant 9, major 9 and minor 9 chords

Musical notation showing three chords on a single staff in C major: C⁹, C^{maj9}, and C^{m9}. Each chord is represented by a vertical stack of notes on a five-line staff. The C⁹ chord has notes C, E, G, Bb, D, F. The C^{maj9} chord has notes C, E, G, B, D, F. The C^{m9} chord has notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D, F.

Altering Extensions

9th, 11th & 13th extensions can also be raised or flattened to create extra tensions. Common alterations to extensions may include a b9, #9, #11 or b13, or any combinations of these.

Musical notation showing three altered chords on a single staff in C major: C^{7(b9)}, C^{maj7(#11)}, and C^{7(b9, #13)}. Each chord is represented by a vertical stack of notes on a five-line staff. The C^{7(b9)} chord has notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D, F. The C^{maj7(#11)} chord has notes C, E, G, B, D, F, Ab. The C^{7(b9, #13)} chord has notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D, F, Ab.