

Hit Song Harmony and Progressions

In 1722, *Jean-Philippe Rameau* defined **harmony** as "...the gathering together of several sounds which are agreeable to the ear." This "traditional" definition is still true today - but it needs a little "modern" updating.

Harmony *begins* with one sound (one letter with one number), and this first sound of harmony is called the root or tone 1. At the beginning, **key** is simply "the letter of tone 1".

Harmony then proceeds to "gather more sounds" by adding letters and tone numbers in a numerical order. The progressive harmonies that result are then given names. For example, "two sounds with the *same* or *different* letter names" is an **interval**, "three sounds with *different* letter names" is a **triad**, and "four sounds with *different* letter names" is a **tetrad**.

Theoretically, harmony proceeds to include all 12 sounds with 21 different letter names, but **dodecaphonic** harmony can't be played on the bass - thank goodness!

However, harmony *can* be played on the bass in two different ways: melodic and harmonic. **Melodic** means "one at a time" and **Harmonic** means "at the same time".

When harmony of three or more different letters and tone numbers are played *melodically* (one at a time) we call it an **arpeggio**, and when harmony of three or more different letters and tone numbers are played *harmonically* (at the same time) we call it a **chord**. *Intervals* (two sounds) may be played both melodically and harmonically but are not considered or called arpeggios or chords.

A traditional **harmony symbol**, such as **Cm**, is almost always referred to as a "chord symbol". However, this would not be true if that Cm harmony was played as an *arpeggio*. In that case, the Cm harmony symbol would have to be called an "arpeggio symbol" - but that sounds too weird. So, to avoid stating the way in which

the harmony is to be played, simply use the term "harmony symbol". That way, we are free to play the harmony however we wish, either as an arpeggio or as a chord.

Harmony is grouped into "types" based upon their 3rd and 5th intervals. The **3rds intervals** are: *major* 1 3, *minor* 1 \flat 3, and *suspended* 1 \sharp 3, and the **5ths intervals** are: *perfect* 1 5, *diminished* 1 \flat 5, and *augmented* 1 \sharp 5.

By combining the above "six interval types" we create **nine triads**: *major* 1 3 5, *major flat five* 1 3 \flat 5, *major sharp five* 1 3 \sharp 5, *minor* 1 \flat 3 5, *minor flat five* 1 \flat 3 \flat 5, *minor sharp five* 1 \flat 3 \sharp 5, and *suspended* 1 \sharp 3 5, *suspended flat five* 1 \sharp 3 \flat 5, and *suspended sharp five* 1 \sharp 3 \sharp 5.

By adding the remaining major scale tones: 6 7 9 11 13 (plus their chromatic sharps and flats) to the above nine triads, we create a "virtually infinite" number of harmonies. More harmony than anyone on Earth has time to play!

To **progress** means to "move forward". Therefore, a **harmony progression** is when an arpeggio or chord harmony moves forward in any *order* to the next harmony of any *type*.

Now, by combining the "virtually infinite" number of harmonies with an equally "infinite" number of harmony *types* and *orders*, the result is more "harmony progressions" than anyone in the Universe has time to play!!

Let's end this lesson with a few "hit songs". Notice that all of these famous harmony progressions use only **six** harmonies from the G major scale. Remember, keep it simple - less is more. **Figures 1 - 18.**

Next time, we'll explore minor scale harmony and its progressions, but before then, be sure to read the *free* online lesson "Bass Harmony Numerics". <http://www.bassbooks.com/shopping/shopcontent.asp?type=freestuff>

Till next time, have some harmony fun and don't forget to progress. I'll be listening...

Figure 1. The Young Rascals, "Groovin'"

G / / / Am G Am

Figure 2. The Beatles, "Don't Let Me Down"

Am / / / / G /

Figure 3. Joey Dee and the Starlites, "Shout"

G / / / Em G Em

Figure 4. The Temptations, "My Girl"

G / / / C G C

Figure 5. Isley Brothers, "Twist and Shout"

G / C / D G C D

Figure 6. The McCoy's, "Hang on Sloopy"

G / C / D C G C D C

Figure 7. Don McLean, "American Pie"

G / C / G D G C G D

Figure 8. The Who, "Baba O'Riley"

G / / D C G D C

Figure 9. Bob Dylan, "Knockin' on Heavens Door"

G / D / Am G D C

Figure 10. The Eagles, "Lyn' Eyes"

Am / / / C G /

Figure 11. The Beatles, "...Help From My Friends"

G / D / Am Am D G

Figure 12. Hall & Oates, "Everytime You Go Away"

G / / / Em Am D

Figure 13. The Beatles, "She Loves You"

G / / / Em Bm D

Figure 14. Gene Chandler, "Duke of Earl"

G / / / Em C D

Figure 15. Green Day, "When I Come Around"

G / D / Em C G D Em C

Figure 16. Neil Young, "Heart of Gold"

Em / C / D G Em C D G

Figure 17. Lionel Richie, "Stuck on You"

G / Bm / C D G Bm C D

Figure 18. Bob Dylan, "Like a Rolling Stone"

G / Am / Bm C D /

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