

CHAPTER VI

CLASSIFICATION OF CHORDS

If we were to ask the average musician to describe harmony, more often than not the answer will be "chords". This can be very misleading to a creative musician and is a common misconception shared by many of them. As you will eventually see, the best definition of harmony is MOTION. A chord is simply "arrested motion".

For example, ask yourself what key an Am7 chord is in? There is really no correct answer to this question since we can't tell if it is the Am7 III chord from F Major or the Am7 II chord from G Major. Perhaps it could be a VI chord in C Major. The point here is that unless we can see the motion into and out of this chord, there is no way to determine what function it is performing, or to which key it belongs.

So you see, there is very little we can glean from the single chord other than the fact that the tones of the structure seem to "harmonize" with each other. This, however, has more to do with whether it is a chord than harmony, or the understanding of harmony. Trying to

understand the harmony of a piece from a single chord would be as impractical as trying to determine the story line from a movie by cutting out one of the frames and studying it. Unless this frame "links up" with the others in its progression through the projector, there is no way to determine what the scene is about. The same is true of chords. Unless they are moving in a progression with other chords, there is very little we can tell about the harmony of a phrase. This is what we mean by describing harmony as motion. Harmony has more to do with the manner in which chords move in and out of each other as they progress towards some "target" than with the vertical spelling of a single chord or voicing. It is this particular motion between the seven functional chords in a key that will come under discussion now.

During the 18th century, Jean P. Rameau set about to classify the 7 diatonic chords produced by the Major and Minor scales. He attempted to classify them according to their strength in "pulling" to the tonic chord or key center chord. In other words, what chord or chords have tones in them which cause the chord to "pull" or resolve to the tonic chord? These would be called the "first class" in terms of strength. The "second class" would be chords

that "pull" to the "first class" chords, and so forth.

The method used by Rameau for determining this was to analyze several pieces of music from the period in terms of their chord progression. First he located all the tonic chords in several pieces and made note of what chord immediately preceded them. What he found most often in front of a tonic chord was a V or VII chord. He then labeled these two chords as "first class" chords. (Ex. 41.) First Class = V or VII.

In order to establish the second class chords, all the V and VII chords were located and the chord or chords immediately preceding them were noted. The chords most often found in front of a V or VII chord were found to be II or IV. Rameau labeled these two chords as chords of the "second class". (Ex. 42.)

First Class = V or VII
Second Class = II or IV

In establishing the third class chords, all the II and IV chords were located and the chords found immediately preceding them were noted. Most often, it was found, the chord in front of a II or IV chord was a VI chord and sometimes an altered tonic. (Ex. 43.)

First Class = V or VII
Second Class = II or IV
Third Class = VI (altered I)

The fourth and last class was established the same way -- by noting the chord or chords most often found in front of a VI chord. It was discovered that the VI chord is most often preceded by a III chord. (Ex. 44.)

Key of C Major:

- First Class = V or VII.....G7 or B^o
- Second Class = II or IV.....Dm7 or Fm7
- Third Class = VI or (altered I).....Am7 (C+)
- Fourth Class = III.....Em7

CHAPTER VII
CHORD PROGRESSION

In the music of the 18th and 19th centuries, chord progression was of four types:

1. Normal (most frequent)
2. Repitition (frequent)
3. Elision (infrequent)
4. Retrogression (rare)

Type 1. Normal chord progression occurs when the chords progress according to class. For example, a 4th class III moves to a 3rd class VI, to a 2nd class II, a 1st class V to the tonic I. (Ex. 45.)

EX. 45

Emi Ami Dmi GMA CMA Emi Ami FMA B^b CMA

III IV II V I III IV VII I

.III, VI, II, V, I or III, VI, IV, VII, I. If you play the progressions in Ex. 45, you will notice that normal chord progression has a "sound" to it which you may recognize from a lot of music you have heard.

This is the most frequent type of chord progression heard. Another interesting feature of normal chord progression is that the tonic chord may come anywhere in between the other chords without disturbing the sound of normal chord progression. (Ex. 46.) III, VI, I, V, I or III, I, VI, IV, I, V, I, etc.

EX. 46

EX. 46 shows two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of chords: Em, Am, C, Gm, CMA, Em, CMA, Am, Fm, C, GMA, CMA. The bottom staff is an alto clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. It contains the Roman numeral equivalents: III, VI, I, V, I, III, I, VI, IV, I, V, I. The second system is identical to the first but uses Roman numerals for the chords: III, VI, I, V, I, III, I, VI, IV, I, V, I.

Type 2. REPETITION: There are two types of repetition.

1. Literal
2. Class

A literal repetition occurs when a chord is followed by a repeat of the same chord. An example would be a III chord followed by another III chord.

A class repetition occurs when a chord is followed by another chord in the same class. An example would be a II chord followed by a IV chord. Both the II and IV chords are 2nd class chords and if you play them one after the other in a progression, the feeling of not having moved any place occurs. (Ex. 47.)

EX. 47

Em Am (Dm Fm) B^b CMA

III VI II IV VII I
6

Type 3. ELISION: Though infrequent, elision does appear in some tunes. Elision takes place when a class is skipped.

An example would be a 4th class III moving directly to a 2nd class II, leaving out the VI chord. (Ex. 48.)

EX. 48

CMA (Em Dm) GMA CMA

I III II V I

Type 4. RETROGRESSION: Although rare, retrogression occasionally appears in some tunes. Retrogression occurs when the chords progress backwards through class. Usually it will appear in a form similar to the following: (Ex. 49.)

EX. 49

Em Am Dm A- D- GMA CMA

III VI (II VI) II V I

If you will notice when you play Ex. 49, that the retrogression heard when the II chord returns to the VI chord is a recognizable sound and like the other chord progressions, they

should be learned by the "ear" and not the "eye" from the printed page.

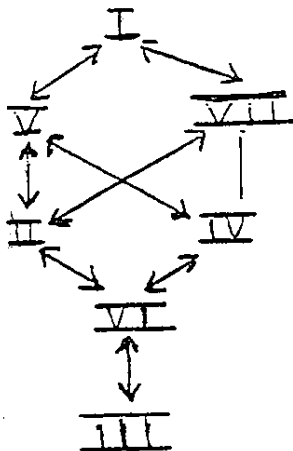
All chord progressions in major or minor tunes will be one of these four types in the order of frequencies mentioned earlier. The chord progressions in modal tunes behave from a different logic which will be discussed in a later chapter on modes.

A simple way to understand chord progression would be to view the seven functional chords as members of an imaginary basketball team in which each chord has a position to play and a function or job to perform. This is why they are referred to as the functional chords. (Ex. 50.)

EX. 50	I	
	V	VII
	II	IV
		VI
		III

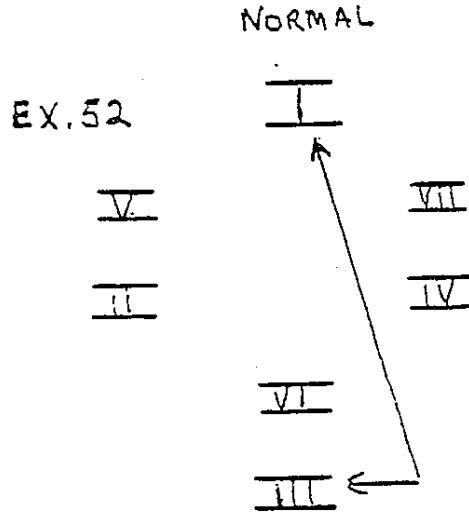
Example 50 is a diagram which represents this "imaginary basketball team" with the "players" lined up in their respective positions ready to "do their job". For instance, the job of a III chord is to "throw the ball" to the VI chord. The VI chord in turn "throws it" to II or IV which then "throws it" to V or VII and into "the basket". (Ex. 51.)

EX. 51

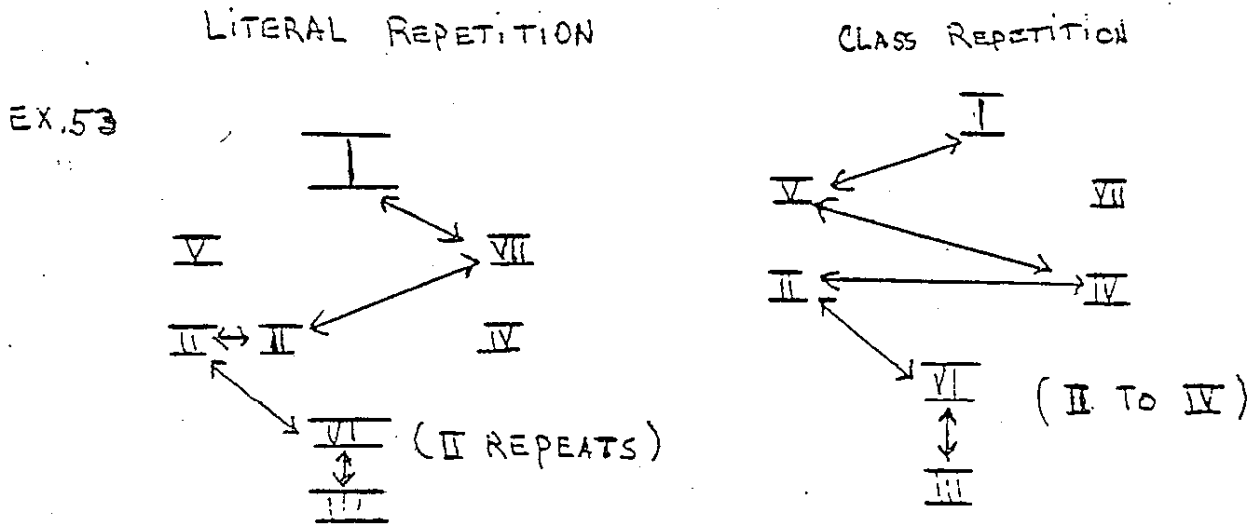


Occasionally a III chord will "shoot directly to the basket" from his position. This would correspond to the statement made earlier in this chapter pertaining to

the tonic chord appearing at any point without disturbing the flow of normal chord progression. (Ex. 52.)

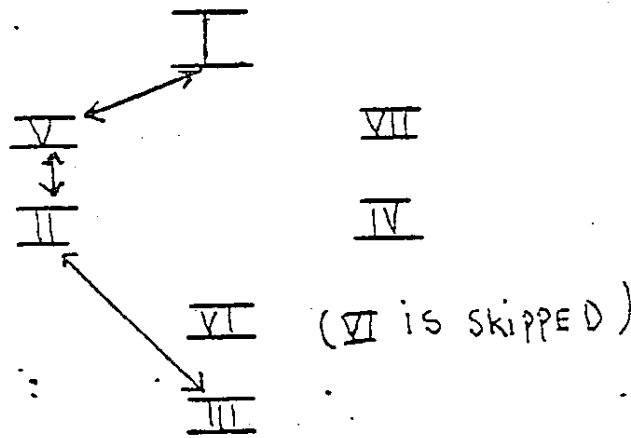


The following illustration is a diagram of both types of repetition. (Ex. 53.)



Elision, which skips ahead, is illustrated in the following diagram. (Ex. 54.)

EX. 54 ELISION



Retrogression would look like the following: (Ex. 55.)

EX 55 RETROGRESSION

