

Chords, Extension, Substitution & Alteration

Some thoughts and notes about them

Disclaimer: I didn't 'study' harmony so this is just what I've noticed & discovered

Chords

- 1 – 4 – 5 are the 'stars' of Western Harmony – especially Pop
- Family Relations in Major Keys (who's major, minor, diminished): I ii iii IV V vi vii°

Extension

- **Think:** The root is generally what defines a chord's 'function' and if you build on top of it with 3rds, you are extending it, first to a 'third,' then to a 'triad,' a 'seventh chord,' a 'ninth chord,' and so on
- **You can always replace an extended chord with a less-extended chord.** That doesn't mean it will sound as rich, but it can *function* the same. So you *could* replace a G7b9 with simply the NOTE "G"

Substitution (I/iv – IV/ii – vi/IV are probably most common)

- **Think:** Down by a 3rd so vi is a substitution for I; ii is a substitution for IV – you are retaining 2 of the notes (or more, if they're extended chords)
- **For V:** There are many substitutions, but iii isn't generally one of them (although sometimes I like it, but only if I then play a raised 9th ex: Em7#9: E-G-B-D-F#). Some I use are **bVII7** and **bII7** and **Sus chords** (ex: Gsus is a kind of substitution for G7). (*I can't explain – in harmonic terms – why bVII7 and bII7 work – they just often do.*) I also often ALTER the Dominant chord and/or the ii that leads to the Dominant (see "Alteration")

Alteration

I generally alter the 5th and/or 9th of chords in either the ii or V position. I say 'position' because in jazz, tunes modulate constantly, so you might find many different chords in ii-V positions in any one piece. But don't worry about that now.

- **I generally only alter the ii or the V chord** – and I think of alterations as simply enhancing the richness or dissonance of these chords and making them even more drawn to resolution
- **Which notes of a Dominant chord you can alter:** You can't alter the root, because then it's not the same chord; you can't alter the 3rd, because then you're changing how it 'works' in the harmonic system (you're neutralizing the 'leading tone'); you can't change the 7 because that takes its power away (wish I could explain that better!) – the alterations I most make are to raise or lower the 9th or the 5th.

OTHER THINGS I DO FOR FUN

- Think Clusters – I often gravitate towards a cluster with a 2nd on the bottom and a 3rd on the top
- Sometimes I build a chord in 4^{ths} instead of 3rds