

Grade Six

Complete Course, Exercises & Answers

PREVIEW

(ABRSM Syllabus)

Preview

This is a preview document and does not contain the whole music theory course, but a selection of lessons and exercises for your perusal.

If you have any questions prior to purchasing, please email info@mymusictheory.com

Preview

A1 INTRODUCTION TO HARMONY

What is harmony? The first three questions in the ABRSM Grade Six Music Theory Exam are all about **harmony** - but what exactly do we mean by "harmony"?

When we look at music with our analytical hats on, we can think about it in two different ways. We can look at it from left to right - this is the **melody** and **rhythm**. Or, we can look at it from top to bottom - this is the **harmony**.

For example, here are a few bars by Bach from his "*O haupt voll Blut und Wunden*". There are 4 melodic lines (or "voices") here, the soprano, alto, tenor and bass.

Soprano:

Alto

Tenor

Bass

On each beat of the bar, those four voices combine to make chords. The science of how we combine notes into chords, and how the chords work together, is called "harmony".

(Note that some chords above have been simplified).

TONAL HARMONY

For Grade 6, we are going to study **Tonal Harmony**. This just means that we're going to focus on the kinds of chords used by composers from roughly the 17th to the 19th centuries - composers like Bach, Mozart, Haydn and Schubert.

GRADE SIX HARMONY

In this part of the course we're going to study:

- How chords are built
- Different naming systems to describe chords
- Chord inversions
- Chord progressions and cadences
- How to choose chords to harmonize a melody (Q.1a in the exam)
- How to understand "figured bass" (which is a chord short-hand system)
- How to complete a bass line and add a suitable figured bass (Q.1b in the exam)
- How to recognise "melodic decoration" (which means notes which aren't part of the main chords)
- How to realise a figured bass (Q.2 in the exam)

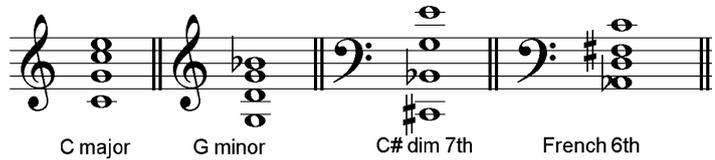
A2 TRIADS AND CHORDS

A chord is any group of notes which are played at the same time.

Chords can have any number of notes in them, as long as there is more than one!

Chords can have any combination of notes in them, but our ears usually prefer listening to chords which are built to the rules of harmony, rather than just a random selection of notes.

These chords are built according to the rules of "tonal harmony". (Don't worry about the names of the chords for now!)



Whereas these chords were created by my cat walking across my piano keyboard (he's never studied harmony).



As we just saw, chords built using the rules of tonal harmony have **names**. There are a few different methods we can use to describe chords in words, and we'll take a look at these shortly. Before that, we'll go back to the basics of how to build chords in tonal harmony - using **triads**.

TRIADS

A triad is a 3-note chord. Take a note (call it the "root"), add a third and a fifth above it, and you have created a triad. (All triads are chords, but not all chords are triads.)

Take a note: We'll take an F:



Add a major third above it:



or a minor third:



Add a fifth above it to make a **major triad**:



or a **minor triad**:



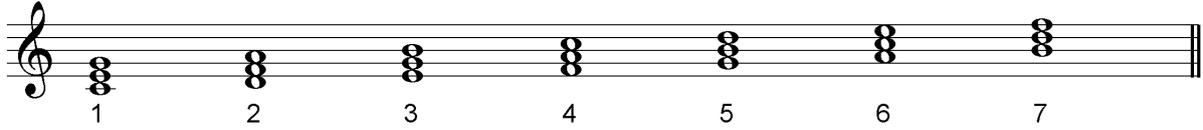
We can also build a triad with a minor 3rd and a **diminished** 5th, like this:



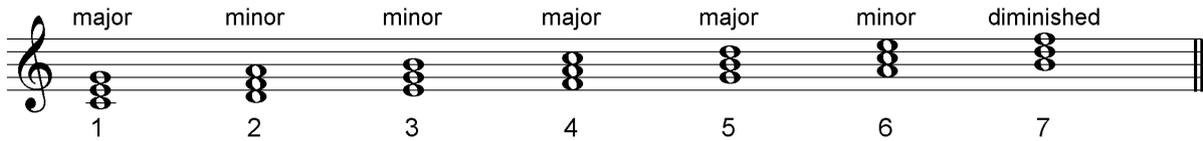
This is called a **diminished triad**.

SCALES AND TRIADS

Each scale has a series of triads built from each degree of the scale.

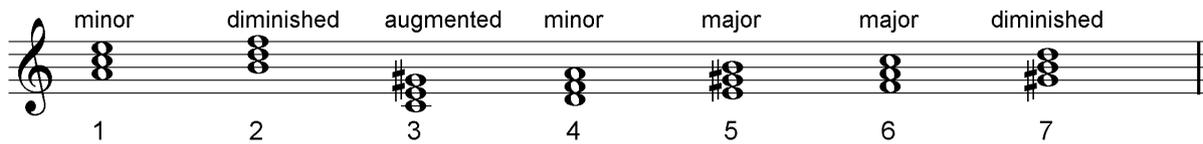


Look at each degree of the major scale and see if it produces a **major, minor or diminished** triad.



This pattern is the same for all major keys.

Let's do the same with a minor scale. Here's the group of triads which exist in A minor:



We normally use the harmonic (not melodic) variety of the scale to work out triads in music theory. Watch out! Chord 3 is an augmented triad- rarely used in practice.

NAMING TRIADS

Here are three methods we can use to name triads:

1. We can use the **letter name of the root** of the triad, and then add either "major", "minor" or "diminished" (or "augmented") to it.

E.g. C major (or just "C" for short), E minor (or "Em") and B diminished ("B dim").

2. We can use **Roman numerals**. Each degree of the scale gets a Roman numeral. We use capitals for major, small letters for minor, and a small circle ° for diminished. (Augmented chords have a + sign, but we don't use them in grade 6.)

Major Scales:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°

Minor Scales:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i	ii°	-	iv	V	VI	vii°

3. We can use the **technical name** of the degree of the scale, plus major/minor/diminished as needed.

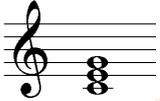
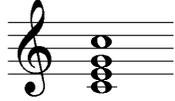
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tonic	supertonic	mediant	sub-dominant	dominant	sub-mediant	leading note

The Roman numeral system is the most useful, because it lets us understand the triad in relation to the key of the music, and it's a nice, short way of writing triads. Make sure you learn the Roman numerals!

NAMING CHORDS

Triads are very "theoretical" things - we use them a lot when we analyse music, but we don't see them so often in practice. Triads only have 3 notes, but in real life, chords usually have more than 3 notes. Very often they have 4 notes, but can have many more.

The simplest kind of 4-note chord is a triad with the root repeated in a higher octave. (Sometimes the third or fifth of the triad is repeated instead of the root.)

The triad of C major:  The chord of C major: 

Chords which contain only the notes which **already** exist in the triad use the same naming systems as triads, so this is C major, or I (in the key of C major).

Another kind of 4-note chord is one which has a note **added** which doesn't exist in the triad, for example this one:



Here we've got a G major triad, with an F at the top. F is an interval of a 7th above the root, G, so we call this chord G7, or V7 (in C major). Or we can use the technical name of "dominant seventh" (in C major). Dominant seventh chords are extremely common. You've probably come across lots of them in your music making, but in fact for grade six music theory, you only need to be able to recognise them - you don't have to actually **write any!** :)

A2 TRIADS AND CHORDS EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1: TRIAD QUALITY

Identify the following triads as major, minor or diminished:

EXERCISE 2: NAMING TRIADS

Name the following chords using the Roman numeral System (e.g. I, ii, iii etc).

Use capitals for major chords, lower case letters for minor chords, and lower case plus a small circle (°) for diminished chords.

Also give the key name of the chord (e.g. C major). The first one has been done as an example:

Key: a. D major b. Eb major c. Bb minor d. C# minor e. B major

Chord: A major - V

f. Gb major g. A minor h. F# minor i. F major j. F minor

EXERCISE 3: WRITING TRIADS

Add two notes to make the named triads, with the root in the bass. An example is given.

A flat major a. D minor b. A major c. G# minor d. Bb major

A2 TRIADS AND CHORDS ANSWERS

EXERCISE 1

- a. Minor
- b. Diminished
- c. Major
- d. Major
- e. Major
- f. Minor
- g. Diminished

EXERCISE 2

- b. F minor – ii
- c. Gb major – VI
- d. G# major – V
- e. A# dim – vii°
- f. Ab minor – ii
- g. B dim – ii°
- h. F# minor – i
- i. D minor – vi
- j. F minor – i

EXERCISE 3

a. D minor b. A major c. G# minor d. Bb major

The image shows four triads on a single staff, each with its Roman numeral label below it. Triad a is D minor (V) in treble clef with two sharps. Triad b is A major (vi) in bass clef with two sharps. Triad c is G# minor (ii°) in treble clef with three sharps. Triad d is Bb major (IV) in bass clef with two flats.

The image shows a musical score for piano in 3/4 time, featuring a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand with figured bass notation. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb).

First System:

- Right Hand: Treble clef, 3/4 time. Melody: Bb4 (quarter), A4-Bb4 (eighths), G4-A4 (eighths), F4-G4 (eighths), E4-F4 (eighths), D4-E4 (eighths), C4 (half), D#4 (quarter).
- Left Hand: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Bass line: Bb3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter), Bb2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), E2 (quarter), D2 (quarter), C2 (quarter), Bb1 (quarter).
- Figured Bass: * 6, * —, * 6, * 6 4, * 5 3#, * —, * —, * 6, * #.

Second System:

- Right Hand: Treble clef, 3/4 time. Melody: Bb4 (quarter), A4-Bb4 (eighths), G4-A4 (eighths), F4-G4 (eighths), E4-F4 (eighths), D4-E4 (eighths), C4 (half), D#4 (quarter).
- Left Hand: Bass clef, 3/4 time. Bass line: Bb3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter), Bb2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), E2 (quarter), D2 (quarter), C2 (quarter), Bb1 (quarter).
- Figured Bass: * 6, * 6 —, * —, * —, * —, * 6, * # —, * 6 —, * —.