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Getting Inside Harmony 2

Lesson 1:
Melodic and Harmonic Tensions

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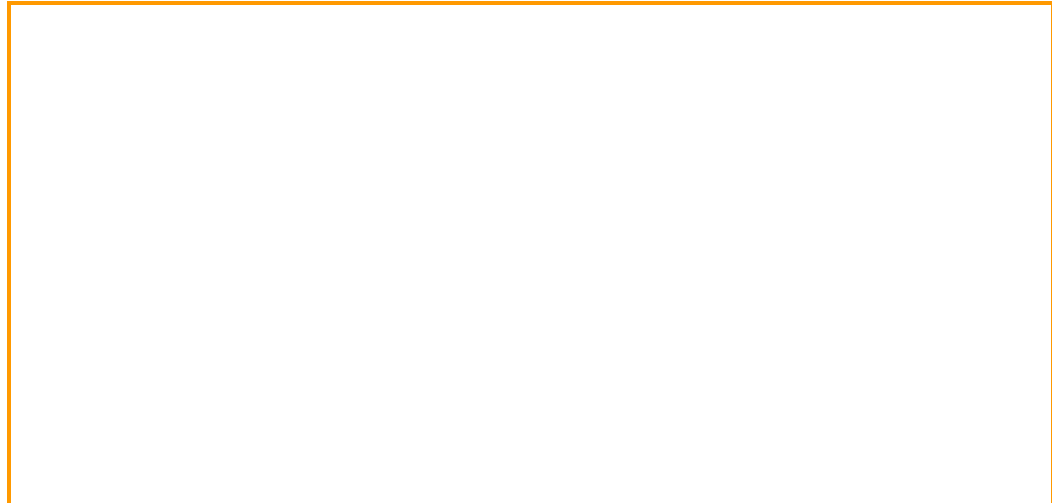
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G 7(b9) T_{b9} CMaj7(9)

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C6 C6(9)

or it may be a note that conflicts with the chord sound.

C6 C6(?)

(In that case, the note—a valuable part of the scale—is used as an **approach note**, a note that wants to move by step into a chord tone.) Although used in melody, such a conflicting note is avoided in supporting harmony because it distorts the chord sound. With regard to the harmony, then, we call it an **avoid note**.

C6

Whether or not a non-basic chord tone is available as a tension is an important concern—one we'll look at closely.

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Is the richness fairly moderate?

Or is the richness level minimal?

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Let's look at tension names, taking the chord scale for Fmaj7 in the key of C as an example. Instead of lining up the notes in intervals of seconds, we'll stack up the notes in intervals of thirds.



Notice that the lower four notes are the triad notes of Fmaj7: 1, 3, 5, 7. The upper three notes are tensions 9, #11 (i.e., "raised" 11), and 13. (As with the scale in linear position, accidentals in the stacked chord scale reflect alterations from the *parallel* major scale: scale degree #4 = tension #11, etc.)

Throughout our study, we'll label tensions using a capital T, as in T9, T#11, T13, etc. When these intervals are melodic *approach* notes, we'll call them S2, S#4, S6, etc., meaning "Scale note 2, Scale note raised 4, Scale note 6."

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Melodic Tensions

A melodic tension is one that appears in the melody, in such situations as these:

Non-chord tones longer than a beat's duration.

Non-chord tones followed by a leap.

Non-chord tones on strong beats moving down to chord tones on weak beats.

Note in the examples above that the melodic tension is *not* identified in the chord symbol. This implies that it's not expected to appear elsewhere in the harmonic accompaniment, although many rhythm section players, following their ear and musical judgment, might choose to include it anyway.

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Harmonic Tensions

A harmonic tension is one that appears in the accompaniment, i.e., the voicings played by supporting instruments and by rhythm section players. Here are a few points about harmonic tensions:

- They may sound just as long as chord tones do.
- If they are part of the chord symbol, e.g., $B\flat 7(13, \#11)$, they need to be included in the accompaniment voicings.
- When including altered tensions in the accompaniment, *include them in the chord symbol*. This will help the rhythm section conform to the arrangement!

Notice that the first eight bars in this example contain two chords that are not diatonic to the key. How do we get the right chord scales for them? That will be coming up in a few pages.

Also, please don't be concerned about how the supporting harmony voicings were built. That's a subject we'll tackle in the next two lessons. For now, you must examine—by playing on your keyboard, of course—what the voicing for each chord *looks* like (in notation), *sounds* like, and *feels* like. (Remember the six input activities we reviewed earlier?)

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