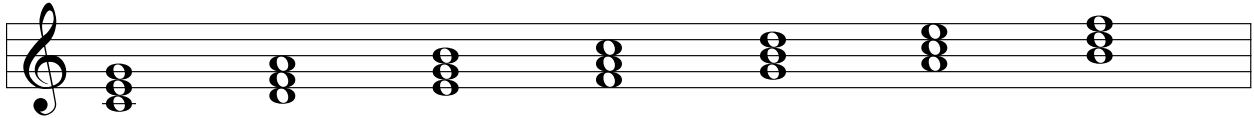
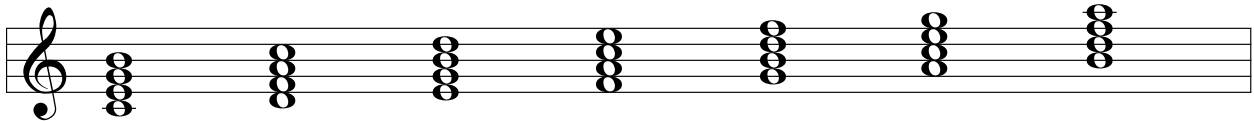


Unit 11 ~ 7th Chords

Using a major scale, you can build seven triads. Triads consist of a root note, plus a 3rd and a 5th above the root. In C major, that gives you the following seven triads:



Now, in addition to adding a 3rd and 5th, we can also add a 7th above the root, like this:



The resulting chords are called "7th chords" and are extremely common in many kinds of music, including Classical and Jazz.

Types of 7th chord

You will recall that there are four different types of triad: major, minor, diminished and augmented. The different types of triad are defined by the intervals in them. For example, the major triad had a major 3rd and a perfect 5th, while the minor triad has a minor 3rd and perfect 5th, etc.

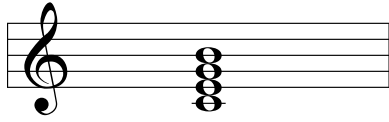
In the same way, we have five different types of 7th chord. These are:

- the major 7th chord (or 'major major')
- the minor 7th chord (or 'minor minor')
- the dominant 7th chord
- the half-diminished 7th chord
- the diminished 7th chord

The interval structures of these chords are described on the next page:

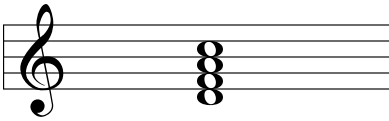
The major 7th chord

This chord contains a major 3rd, a perfect 5th, and a major 7th above the root.



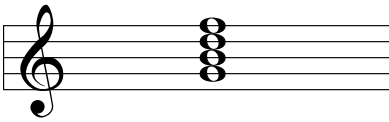
The minor 7th chord

This chord contains a minor 3rd, a perfect 5th, and a minor 7th above the root.



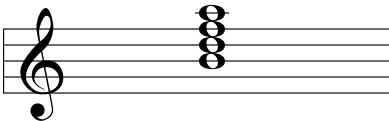
The dominant 7th chord

This chord contains a major 3rd, a perfect 5th, and a minor 7th above the root.



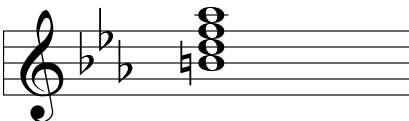
The half-diminished 7th chord

This chord contains a minor 3rd, a diminished 5th, and a minor 7th above the root.



The diminished 7th chord

This chord contains a minor 3rd, a diminished 5th, and a diminished 7th above the root. We can't build one of these only using notes of a major scale. The chords actually come from minor keys. So for this example we'll build the chord using notes from C harmonic minor:



Here are the seven 7th chords of C major, labelled with their type:

major minor minor major dominant minor half-diminished

and here are the seven 7th chords of C harmonic minor, labelled with their type (remember that the B natural in the first chord applies to the entire bar, so every B in the following bar is natural):

n/a half-dim. n/a minor dominant major diminished

(I have labelled the first and third chords "n/a" because neither of those chords has a structure that is one of the five common types that I'm describing in this chapter.)

Uses of triads and 7th Chords

I stated in an earlier unit that triads are the building blocks of harmony. We can widen that statement now to include 7th chords: we can use both triads and 7th chords to harmonize melodies and tunes*.

There are 'rules' (more like guidelines) as to how to use triads and 7th chords to create coherent and interesting chord progressions. I won't discuss these here but if you are interested in learning more about how to string chords together, check out the Four-Part harmony textbooks on my website, www.vancouvermusictheory.com. My books are based on the Classical tradition though many of the principles in those books apply to other genres such as Jazz and Pop. If you are very interested in Jazz, try to find yourself a good Jazz theory book.

*In fact, it doesn't stop there. You can go on adding more notes to chords, creating 9th, 11th and 13th chords as well. 13ths are the limit, as a 13th chord contains all seven notes of the scale!