

Chord Progressions

There are five kinds of chord progressions in music:

- Basic Harmony
- Scale Chords
- Substitute Chords
- Circle of Fifth Chords
- Chromatic Chords

In the last two months, we presented Basic Harmony, and Scale Chords. This month, we will be working with Substitute Chords. Over the next few months we will explain and demonstrate all five kinds of chord progressions. You will then be able to recognize them in the music you play. You will also be able to use the knowledge of chord progressions to change the music you play and make it more interesting.

Substitute Chord Harmony

As we saw last month, the motion of scale chords is often smoother than that of basic harmony, because the chords are next to each other. To continue making the motion of chords smooth and more interesting we use substitute chords.

Chords that have two notes in common can often be substituted for one another. For example:

Am = A-C-E subs for C = C-E-G They have C and E in common
Em = E-G-B subs for C = C-E-G They have E and G in common

Thus Dm and Am sub for F
And Bdim and Em sub for G.

Dm can also sub for G7, with notes D & F in common.

Sometimes, chords can substitute for one another when they only have one tone in common.

Usually it is when it is the melody note in common. For example:

In the key of C, with C in the melody, the usual chord is C. But, F can substitute because it is another Basic Harmony chord that also has C.

Below are three versions of Silent Night. The first is Basic Harmony for reference. Then Substitute 1 and Substitute 2 with some different substitutions. Play all 3 versions and listen for the differences. Then, take a simple fake song you know and try doing some substitute chords of your own. Your ear will tell you which you like best. Have fun!

Silent Night - Basic Harmony

1 C C

Musical staff 1: Treble clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords: C, C. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.

5 G7 C

Musical staff 2: Treble clef. Chords: G7, C. Notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5.

9 F C

Musical staff 3: Treble clef. Chords: F, C. Notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5.

13 F C

Musical staff 4: Treble clef. Chords: F, C. Notes: F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5.

17 G7 C

Musical staff 5: Treble clef. Chords: G7, C. Notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5.

21 C G7 C

Musical staff 6: Treble clef. Chords: C, G7, C. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.

Silent Night - Substitute 1

C Sub for C Am C

5 Sub for G7 Dm G7 C Sub for C Am

9 F Sub for F Dm C Sub for C Am

13 Sub for F Dm Subs for Dm G7 C Sub for C Am

17 Subs for G7 Dm G7 C Subs for C Am

21 C G7 Subs for C on common tone C F C

Silent Night - Substitute 2

5 1 2 3 4

C Subs for C Subs for C C
Am Em

5 6 7 8

Subs for G7 G7 C Subs for C
Dm Em

9 10 11 12

F Subs for F C Subs for C
Dm Am

13 14 15 16

F Subs for F Subs for C Subs for C
Dm Em Am

17 18 19 20

Subs for G7 G7 C Subs for C
Dm Am

21 22 23 24 25 26

C Subs for C Subs for G7 C
Em Dm