

## 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 three months, we presented Basic Harmony, Scale Chords, and Substitute Chords. This month, we will be working with Circle of Fifth Chords. Next month we will complete the series with Chromatic Chords. 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.

### Circle of Fifths Chord Harmony

The circle of fifths is one of the most common chord progressions in music, with the chords usually progressing counter-clockwise around the circle. The “pure” circle, which goes around all twelve chords, is very useful for practicing chords and patterns when you’re first learning them.

The sequence of chords is: C F B $\flat$  E $\flat$  A $\flat$  D $\flat$  G $\flat$ /F $\sharp$  B E A D G C

But actually the chords usually change type more often within an actual song. Usually there is a mixture of major, minor, and dominant.

Within a key, the scale chords frequently move in the circle of fifths progression. Diatonic means staying within one key, so the diatonic circle of fifths is quite different from the “pure” circle, which is often printed in theory books. The diatonic circle always goes in the sequence B E A D G C F. The starting chord and the type of each chord is determined by the key.

Here is the diatonic circle of fifths, in C, using the scale chords starting on C.

C - F - Bdim - Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C

An example of exactly this progression is found in Mozart Sonata in C K 545 1<sup>st</sup> movement shown below:

## Mozart Sonata in C Fragment - Diatonic Circle

The image displays a musical score for a fragment from Mozart's Sonata in C major, K. 545, first movement. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows the first four measures, with chords C, F, Bdim, and Em indicated above the notes. The second system shows the next four measures, with chords Am, Dm, G, and C indicated above the notes. The music features a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line of eighth notes in the left hand, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure of the second system.

The diatonic circle is frequently used in music in partial form, using fewer than the entire group of eight scale chords. Sometimes the major or minor sevenths are changed to dominant sevenths, but the chord roots are still in the original key. This is called an “altered diatonic circle” progression. An example of that is in Londonderry Air shown below. The circle progression portions are marked.

# Londonderry Air - Circle

Circle Progression-----  
C C<sup>7</sup> F

Musical staff for measures 1-3 in 4/4 time. The melody consists of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Chords are C, C7, and F.

Circle Progression-----  
4 C Am D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

Musical staff for measures 4-5. Measure 4 has a half note C4. Measure 5 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are C, Am, D7, and G7.

Circle Progression-----  
6 C C<sup>7</sup> F Fm

Musical staff for measures 6-7. Measure 6 has a half note C4. Measure 7 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are C, C7, F, and Fm.

Circle Progression-----  
8 C G<sup>7</sup> C F G<sup>7</sup>

Musical staff for measures 8-9. Measure 8 has a half note C4. Measure 9 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are C, G7, C, F, and G7.

Circle Progression-----  
10 C Em F C E<sup>7</sup>

Musical staff for measures 10-11. Measure 10 has a half note C4. Measure 11 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are C, Em, F, C, and E7.

Circle Progression-----  
12 Am F Em Am D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

Musical staff for measures 12-13. Measure 12 has a half note C4. Measure 13 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are Am, F, Em, Am, D7, and G7.

Circle Progression-----  
14 C C<sup>7</sup> F C Fm

Musical staff for measures 14-15. Measure 14 has a half note C4. Measure 15 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are C, C7, F, C, and Fm.

Circle Progression-----  
16 Am Dm G<sup>7</sup> C

Musical staff for measures 16-17. Measure 16 has a half note C4. Measure 17 has quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4. Chords are Am, Dm, G7, and C.

## **The 2 – 5 – 1 Progression**

One of the most common sequences of chords in music is 2 – 5 – 1. In the key of C and using seventh chords, the progression would be Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj 7. These three chords are from the diatonic circle of fifths. If you look at a jazz fake book, more than half of the songs will end with a 2-5-1 chord progression. You will also find it within the songs. Take a look.

Sometimes you can find longer sequences around the circle ending in 2 – 5 – 1. In fact, you can sometimes find 3 - 6 - 2 - 5 - 1. In C that would be: Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C.

Look through some of the pieces you play and see if you can find circle progressions within the song. You will also find scale progressions and substitute chords and basic harmony as you learned in the last 3 Tips of the Month. (Sept – Oct – Nov)

In Mendelssohn's Spring Song, shown below, the circle progressions are marked.

To complete your collection of Silent Night Variations, we have also included a Circle of Fifths version of Silent Night following the Spring Song.

Enjoy! Play them all!

# Mendelssohn Spring Song

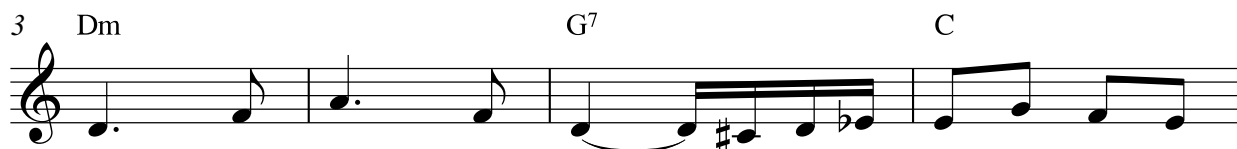
C



Musical notation for the first staff, starting with a C chord. The melody begins with a half note C, followed by a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F# (marked with a sharp sign), and a quarter note G. The second measure contains a half note A and a half note G.

Circle Progression-----

3 Dm G<sup>7</sup> C



Musical notation for the second staff, starting with a Dm chord. The melody begins with a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F, and a quarter note G. The second measure contains a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C. The third measure contains a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F# (marked with a sharp sign), and a quarter note G. The fourth measure contains a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C.

Circle Progression-----

7 D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C



Musical notation for the third staff, starting with a D7 chord. The melody begins with a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F, and a quarter note G. The second measure contains a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C. The third measure contains a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F, and a quarter note G. The fourth measure contains a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C.

10 Dm



Musical notation for the fourth staff, starting with a Dm chord. The melody begins with a quarter note D, a quarter note E, a quarter note F, and a quarter note G. The second measure contains a quarter note A, a quarter note B, and a quarter note C. The third measure contains a quarter note D, a quarter note E, and a quarter note F. The fourth measure contains a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B.

Circle Progression-----

12 A<sup>7</sup> Dm G<sup>7</sup> C



Musical notation for the fifth staff, starting with an A7 chord. The melody begins with a quarter note A, a quarter note B, a quarter note C, and a quarter note D. The second measure contains a quarter note E, a quarter note F# (marked with a sharp sign), a quarter note G, and a quarter note A. The third measure contains a quarter note B, a quarter note C, a quarter note D, and a quarter note E. The fourth measure contains a quarter note F, a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. The fifth measure contains a quarter note C, a quarter note D, and a quarter note E. The sixth measure contains a quarter note F, a quarter note G, and a quarter note A.

# Silent Night - Diatonic Circle

Circle Progression -----


C Am Dm<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C



Circle Progression -----

5 Dm G<sup>7</sup> C Scale Chords-----


Em



Circle Progression -----


9 F Dm G<sup>7</sup> C Circle Progression ----

Am



Circle Progression -----

13 Dm G<sup>7</sup> C F



Circle Progression -----

17 Bm<sup>7(b5)</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C F



Circle Progression -----

21 C Dm<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C

