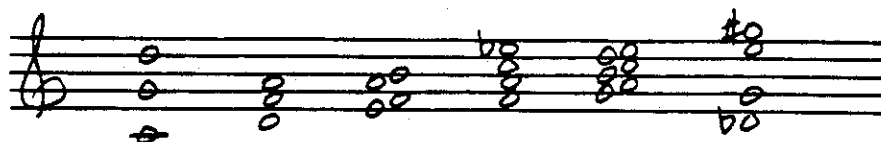


UNIT 4: TRIADS

The study of harmony is a complex one because it deals with the study of simultaneously sounding tones from the Middle Ages to the present day. Just as the music literature in the historic time span offers a wide range of styles, so the harmonic language is equally diverse. Also, to assume that the study of vertical sonority may begin with understanding of a chord, we must realize that, strictly speaking, a chord is a harmonic unit consisting of a minimum of three different pitches sounding simultaneously. That definition then encompasses a number of different sonorities.

Example 4.1



Our study of harmony begins with the TRIAD. the literal definition of the term, triad, is any three-note chord. However, since Western music of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries is tertian (that is, chords built in thirds), the term has come to mean a three-note chord built in super-imposed thirds.

A. DETERMINING THE NOTES IN A TRIAD

When building a triad, the bottom note is the ROOT from which the chord takes its name. The other two notes are called "the THIRD" and "the FIFTH" because of the interval which those notes form with the root.

Example 4.2

On Treble Staff

G	5th	Line Note	C	5th	Space Note
E	3rd	Line Note	A	3rd	Space Note
C	Root	Line Note	F	Root	Space Note

As in scales, there must be a consistency in the spelling of a triad. The names of the notes used must always be thirds apart.

Example 4.3

1	2	3	4	5	Root	3rd	5th
<u>C</u>	d	<u>E</u>	f	<u>G</u>	C	E	G

Example 4.4 illustrates a common error which could arise in the spelling of a triad.

Example 4.4

CORRECT	1	2	3	4	5	E	G#	B
	E	f#	G#	a	B			
INCORRECT	1	2	3	4	5	E	Ab	B
	E	f#	Ab	a	B			

Although both triads in Example 4.4 sound the same, the pitches must be written in thirds apart.

B. QUALITY OF A TRIAD

There are four qualities of triads: Major (M), Minor (m), Augmented (+), and Diminished (o). The abbreviations for them are in the parentheses. The interval between the various notes of the triad determines its quality.

A MAJOR triad consists of a Major 3rd (M3) between the root and the 3rd, and a Minor 3rd (m3) between the 3rd and the 5th, resulting in a perfect 5th (P5) between the Root and 5th.

Example 4.5

P5	[	G	m3	A	C#
		E	M3	F#	A#
		C		D	F#

A MINOR triad consists of a minor 3rd (m3) between the Root and the 3rd, and a Major 3rd (M3) between the 3rd and the 5th, resulting in a Perfect 5th (P5) between the Root and 5th

Example 4.6

P5	[	G	M3	A	C#
		E ^b	m3	F	A
		C		D	F#

An AUGMENTED triad consists of a Major 3rd between the Root and the 3rd (M3) and a Major 3rd (M3) between the 3rd and the 5th, resulting in an interval of an Augmented 5th (+5) between the Root and the 5th.

Example 4.7

A5	[	G#	M3	A#	CX
		E		F#	A#
		C	M3	D	F#

A DIMINISHED triad consists of a Minor 3rd (m3) between the Root and the 3rd and another Minor 3rd between the 3rd and 5th, resulting in a Diminished 5th (o5) between the Root and 5th.

Example 4.8

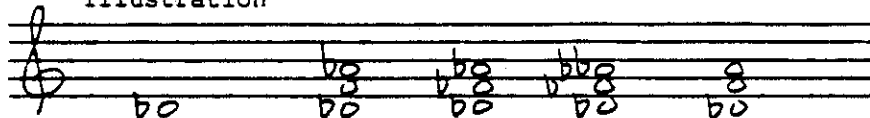
D5	[	Gb	]	m3	Ab	C
		Eb			F	A
		C			m3	D	F#

Note that in Examples 4.5 to 4.8 we have used the same letter names in writing the various qualities of triads and have achieved the correct distances with the use of the appropriate accidentals.

Drill 4.1

Write the four qualities of triads (Major, Minor, Augmented, and Diminished) on each of the following notes: A, Bb, B, C#, Eb, E, F, and G. The four triads on Db are completed as an illustration.

Illustration



Given Note Major Minor Diminished Augmented

C. MAJOR SCALE AND SCALE DEGREE TRIADS

In discussing the harmony of a composition, commonly referred to as harmonic analysis, chords or triads are referred to as a ONE (I) chord, a TWO (II) chord, and THREE (III) chord, etc., up through and including the SEVEN (VII) chord. This refers to triads or chords built on a specific degree of the scale system used in that composition. For instance, if the composition is in the key of C Major, the composer has used the C Major scale as the tonal basis for that piece, and if you refer to a ONE (I) chord, you are referring to a triad built on the first step of the scale, or a C Chord.

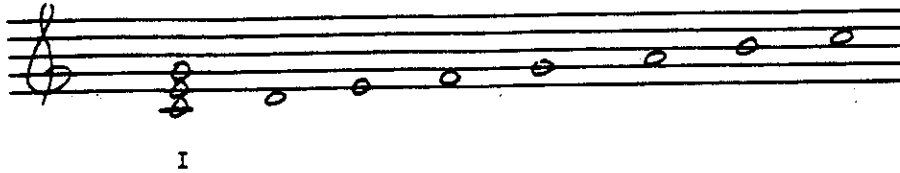
The following four examples illustrate the process of spelling triads in the scale. First, write the scale.

Example 4.9



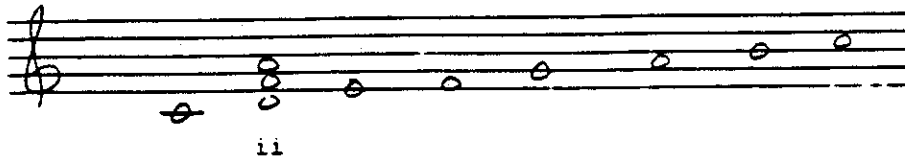
To construct the triad, you will use the 3rd and the 5th above the Root (C) as they are found in the scale.

Example 4.10



The ONE (I) chord in the key of C Major is spelled C-E-G, and is a Major triad. This is designated in the harmonic analysis by using a large ONE (I) in Roman numerals.

Example 4.11



The TWO (ii) chord, its root being the second degree of the C Major scale, is spelled D-F-A. By analyzing the intervals you will note that it is a minor triad, and a minor triad is designated by the use of small Roman numeral, in this case ii. See Example 4.11.

The remaining triads are written in Example 4.12 with the proper Roman numeral symbol.

Example 4.12



In all major scales, the I, IV, and V chords are Major. The ii, iii, and vi are minor, and the vii° is always a diminished triad. The vii chord is designated by a small Roman numeral with a small "degree" sign (o).

Drill 4.2

Write major scales in the following major keys: A, Ab, Bb, B, C#, Eb, F#, and G.

Construct triads on each step of the scale. Beneath each chord designate with Roman numerals the quality of each triad (Major, minor, Augmented and Diminished).

D. MINOR SCALES AND SCALE DEGREE TRIADS

The triad quality on each step of the minor scale varies according to the form of the minor, and a summary of triads in all three forms is given in the following chart. It is good to become acquainted with triads in all three forms. However, it is best to concentrate on the harmonic minor since that is the preferred system in compositional practice.

PURE FORM	i, iv, v ii° III, VI, VII	Minor Triads Diminished Triad Major Triads
MELODIC FORM (Ascending)	i, ii III+ IV, V vi°, vii°	Minor Triads Augmented Triad Major Triads Diminished Triads
MELODIC FORM (Descending)	Same as the Pure Form	
HARMONIC FORM	i, iv V, VI ii°, vii° III+	Minor Triads Major Triads Diminished Triads Augmented

Drill 4.3

Write the three forms of the minor scale on each of the following notes: A, B, C, C#, D, Eb, F, F#, and G.

Construct triads on each degree of the scale and identify the quality of each triad. The first one is completed as an illustration.

The image shows three staves of musical notation, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes on the staves are G, F, E, D, C, Bb, and A. Handwritten triads are placed above each note, with their Roman numerals written below. The first triad (i) is a minor triad (G-Bb-A) and is completed with a handwritten example. The other triads are: ii° (F-A-C), III (E-G-A), iv (D-F-A), v (C-E-G), VI (Bb-D-F), and VII (Ab-C-E). The Harmonic form uses III+ (E-G-A) and vii° (F-A-C). The Melodic Ascending form uses ii (F-A-Bb), III+ (E-G-A), IV (D-F-A), V (C-E-G), vi° (Bb-D-F), and vii° (Ab-C-E).

Melodic Descending is omitted since it is the same as the pure form.

E. POSITION OF TRIADS

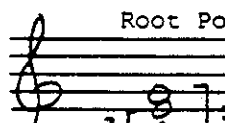
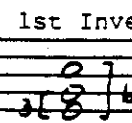
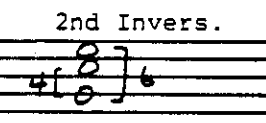
A triad is in **ROOT POSITION** when the root is the lowest sounding note.

A triad is in **FIRST INVERSION** when the third of the chord is the lowest sounding note.

A triad is in **SECOND INVERSION** when the fifth of the chord is the lowest sounding note.

Arabic numbers are placed beside the Roman numerals to show the position of the triad. These numbers are derived from the intervals formed between the lowest note and each of the two upper notes.

Example 4.13

Root Pos.	1st Invers.	2nd Invers.
		
C Maj. I (3) 5	I (6) 2	I ₄ ⁶ 4 6

While Example 4.13 gives the full information about interval position, common practice allows us to write only the most important numbers and requires us to assume the others. Therefore, the numbers in parentheses are usually omitted. In summary, root positions are so common, usually no number appears; the 6 alone is used for first inversion; and the $\frac{6}{4}$ is used for second inversion.

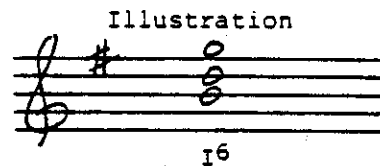
The use of arabic numbers to indicate triad position is part of a practice known as **FIGURED BASS**. This will be discussed more completely in Unit 5.

Drill 4.4

Write the triads and place them in the position indicated by arabic numbers in the keys requested.

- I⁶ in G Major - Illustrated
- ii⁶₄ in A minor (harmonic)
- V in F Major
- V in G minor (harmonic)
- iii⁶ in B \flat Major
- vi⁶ in A Major
- III+ in E minor (harmonic)

Illustration



I⁶

Drill 4.5

Write the chords in the position indicated by the figured bass (arabic numbers) and identify the key. Remember that the root of the chord is the scale step indicated by the Roman numeral. Find the tonic to determine the key. The first one is completed as an illustration.

Illustration

IV⁶ in ___ IV⁶ in A Major

D is the root of chord
and 4th scale step in
the key of A Major

V in ___ IV⁶₄ in ___ iii⁶ in ___

vii^o in ___ vi⁶₄ in ___ ii in ___