

HARMONY 7 - CHROMATIC HARMONY

A chromatic chord is one which contains at least one note foreign to the key, yet does not modulate. In other words, it threatens to modulate, and we must avert this threat. More in a minute.

TONIC MINOR

According to theory, C minor is not related to C major, yet the ear and commonsense can see a very positive relationship. Certainly one may pass from one to the other; yet this is not normally done during a passage, as the five related keys are; rather it is used for a new self-contained section.

Notwithstanding all that, here are some ways in which the tonic minor and major are interchangeable:

- 1) Tierce de Picardie: Tonic major chord used at the end of a minor key piece or phrase. This does not constitute a modulation.
- 2) In the major key, borrowing notes or chords from the tonic minor. The commonest note is the flat 6th, the flat 3rd being used less (we don't borrow the minor tonic chord into the major key, but we can borrow chords II IV and VI, provided we slide gracefully back into the major immediately.)

Time for a list of chromatic chords.

CHROMATIC CHORDS

1) IN MAJOR KEY:

- a) I7 with flat 7th. Take the 7th up a semitone to chord V.



- b) IV with minor 3rd. Follow it by I. (or IV with major 3rd)



- c) VI with flattened root and 5th. Follow it by V. Watch for consecs. (Easily avoided by doubling 3rd of VI - you should know this already.)



- d) V with flat 9th (and VIIa with flat 7th which is really same), Go to I.



e) II with flattened Root and flattened 5th. A major chord, yes: very seldom used in root position, normally in 1st inversion, It is then known as the Neapolitan 6th, has its 3rd doubled and resolves on to V, or Ic V. The flat root (Db in C major) drops to B (V) , or C B (Ic V). Try it!



f) II (or II7 or II9) with sharpened 3rd. (Known as the Chromatic Supertonic). In order not to modulate to dominant key, must be immediately followed by V7, or I in some form, even Ic going to V. (I like Ib here.)



g) Chord of the Augmented 5th. Sharpen the 5th of V. This note must resolve up a semitone on to chord Ia. Similarly, sharpen the 5th of I and it resolves on to IV.



h) Chord of the augmented 6th. This is a corker - follow the reasoning:
Take the Dominant 7th, 2nd inversion and flatten its 5th (bass). In C major this would give us Db F G B. (Db to B is an Aug 6th.) Resolve it on to Ia.



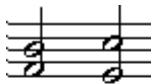
There are actually 3 forms of this chord:

Italian 6th:



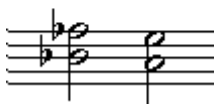
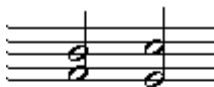
(incomplete Dom7 7th. Note doubled 7th!)

French 6th:



(dom7 7th)

German 6th:



(dom7 min 9th) The consec 5ths are permitted.

The way to remember the terminology is to watch the tenor part rising F G Ab in the forms Italian, French, German. The mnemonic is: I For- Get.

Italian 6th French 6th German 6th

Now transpose all the above up a perfect 5th, and the basic chords are II7 (chromatic) V. National terminology the same. This latter group of progressions, especially the German form, is far more common than the resolution on to I. In other words it is easier to imagine the above spellings as being in F rather than in C.

2) IN MINOR KEY

There are not so many chromatic chords available as in the major. Apart from the Tierce de Picardie, there is only one borrowing from the major, and that is the Supertonic Chromatic. (Can't imagine raising its 3rd without also raising its 5th.)

But the Neapolitan 6th and Augmented 6th chords are available, for the simple reason that it was in the minor key that they originated!

3) THE DIMINISHED 7TH

Pile three minor seconds on top of each other and you have the diminished 7th chord. Depending how you spell it, this chord at any chromatic pitch can be considered part of any key! That makes it useful as a pivot chord for modulation. In C (maj or min) take C Eb F# A. This is Chromatic Supertonic 9th. Raise it a semitone to C# E G Bb. This is Tonic min 9th, but you have to spell the C# as Db. Up again: D F Ab B. Dominant 9th. Up again and we are back where we started. In other words the Diminished 7th chord is an incomplete min 9th on either the Tonic, Supertonic, or Dominant in every key. Lovely.



SUMMARY

There was a lot to learn above, and it probably doesn't include some abstruse chromatic chord I've forgotten. Grasp that unless the resolution is firmly in your tonic key, it wasn't a chromatic chord, it was a modulation. Ah, that leads me to another point: you can modulate using chromatic chords!

Approach a pivot chord as chromatic in the old key, diatonic in the new; or diatonic in the old, chromatic in the new; or even chromatic both ways. Phew! Practice makes perfect, but before anything else, hunt out examples in standard music. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven are full of them.

TIP: When analysing chords, don't fall for the "sharpened root" fallacy. We never sharpen a root. A chord like F# A C Eb is not a Dominant 7th with raised root, it is a minor 9th on D with the root omitted. Believe it. The secret rule is this: The sharpest note is the 3rd of the chord. Hang on to that.

Pupil: How do I tell the sharpest note in a chord like G Bb Db E, which has no sharps? Or G# B D E#?

Teacher: The sharpest note is the one which would have the most sharps (or least flats) in the key signature, if it were the leading note of the key. So in B D F Ab, B is the sharpest note, and thus G is the missing root. But spell the same chord as B D F G# and now the root is E.

ENHARMONIC MODULATION

You've just seen how a spelling change can alter the situation. This is often used to do a conjuring trick. Example: Beethoven's 5th Symphony, 2nd mvt, bars 27-31. Look it up! Because of the previous key (Ab) we hear the F# in bar 29 as Gb, and expect to modulate to Db. But the "Gb" turns out to be F# as part of a German 6th, and modulates to C major!! So he approached the chord as diatonic in Db, quitted it as chromatic in C.