

## HARMONIC PROGRESSIONS

In Western music, **harmony** is the use of different pitches and chords implied in the musical line. In **barbershop music** harmonic progression is the movement from one chord simultaneously to another. This chapter will discuss the structural principles that govern such progressions.

Barbershop music is based on consonant intervals. Chords built on consonant intervals produce a sensation of relaxation and chords built on dissonant intervals a sensation of tension. Consonant intervals are considered to be the Unison, Octave, Fifth, Fourth and Major and Minor Third. All the other intervals in a scale are considered Dissonant and require resolution. A basic chord consists of three notes: the root, the major third above the root and the major fifth above the root. So in a C chord, the notes in a basic chord are C, E and G.

A seventh chord (also called a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> or barbershop 7<sup>th</sup>) is a basic chord plus a minor 7<sup>th</sup>. (Ex: C, E, G, Bb) This chord resolves to a consonant chord – in this instance, to an F major chord.. The chart shown below of Beethoven's Circle of 5ths shows the harmonic resolution of chords built on the dominant (or 5<sup>th</sup>) scale tone with the 7<sup>th</sup> tone added which resolve to the tonic.

Also included are examples of the circle of 5ths using female barbershop voicings. Notice that each chord first functions as tonic and when the minor 7<sup>th</sup> interval is added it becomes the dominant (or barbershop 7<sup>th</sup>) chord leading to the next tonic. In addition, note that the voicing on the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> (barbershop 7<sup>th</sup>) chords show the 5<sup>th</sup> of the chord in the bass which makes for good voice leading as the bass can then move down one step to the new tonic.

## RESOLUTIONS

Dominant to Tonic (In Key of C: Dominant (G7) to Tonic (C Major))

The strongest resolution is from dominant to tonic. Adding the minor 7<sup>th</sup> interval to the dominant (5<sup>th</sup> note of scale) triad produces a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord. This dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord when voiced with the 5<sup>th</sup> tone of the scale in the bass moves easily to the tonic.

Alternative Dominant to Tonic (In Key of C: G7 resolving to "a" minor)

This resolution has the strongest pull when the bass moves from the 5<sup>th</sup> tone of the scale to the 6<sup>th</sup> tone of the scale (the relative minor.)

Chromatic Resolutions Key of C: ( B – D# - F# - A resolving to C Major )  
or (Db – F – Ab – Cb)

These resolution have the strongest pull when the bass moves from the 7<sup>th</sup> tone of the scale to the tonic tone of the scale when resolving up to the tonic and when the flatted 2<sup>nd</sup> of the scale moves down to the tonic.

Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> Chord based on the Flatted 6<sup>th</sup> Step of the Scale Resolution

(In Key of C: Ab7<sup>th</sup> moving to C.) This often works well when the bass moves from the Ab tone to the G tone (the fifth tone of the C scale) and then moves up to the tonic tone (C).

Minor 6<sup>th</sup> Chord Resolution (In Key of C: Fm7 moving to C)

This resolution is often used in tags and has a strong pull to the tonic. This is a minor 6<sup>th</sup> chord which is built on the 4<sup>th</sup> tone of the scale (sub-dominant).

This resolution has the strongest pull with the bass moves from the 6<sup>th</sup> tone of the minor 6<sup>th</sup> chord to the tonic.

Sub-dominant to Tonic Resolution (In Key of C: F Maj moving to C Maj)

The sub-dominant (IV) serves as one of the primary tonal degrees. Movement from a tonic triad (I) to the subdominant triad (IV) and back to tonic is useful in barbershop harmony. The movement from sub-dominant IV to Tonic (I) forms the amen in most hymns.

Knowledge of the chord movements based on the Circle of Fifths, the substitutions which can be used, and the strongest voicings of the substitution chords will be very helpful when the melody line uses many notes which wander away from the intended harmony of the melody line. However, the movement of the bass in these substitutions must be addressed so that voice leading is smooth and the chords flow easily into each other.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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