

CHAPTER 1 - CHORD WRITING FOR CHOIR

This chapter gives a short historical introduction and describes how to write triad chords (of 3 sounds) in choral harmonic structures, for 4 voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass.

1. CHORAL WRITING

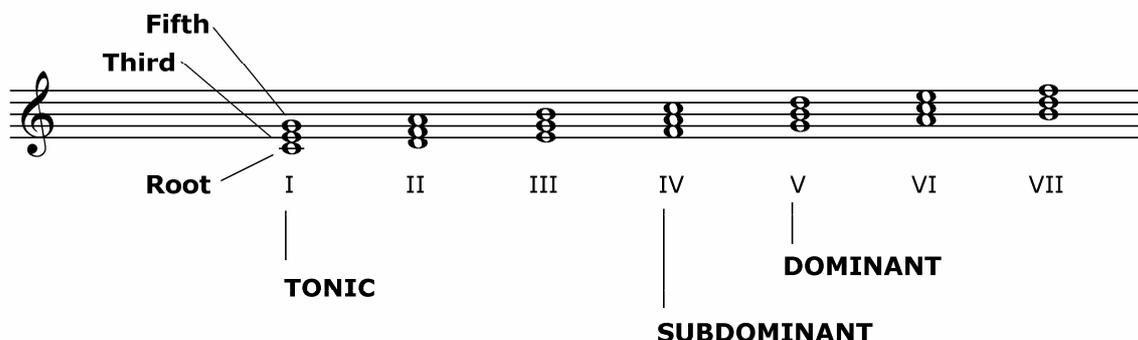
- What we know today as "Classical Music" is the result of centuries of evolution. The starting point is around the 11th century AD, and coincides with the appearance of musical notation. Thanks to notation, it was possible to explore the simultaneity of sounds, or polyphony, discovering what we call "chord ". And it is from the technique of combining different chords that the notion of "harmony" emerged.

- From its origin until the 16th century, polyphonic music, i.e. "classical" music, was almost exclusively performed through choral singing. This is where harmonic practice was born. In the subsequent centuries, instrumental music developed, whether chamber, orchestral or operatic. But all of it arose as an evolution of earlier choral music. In other words, in almost every instrumental piece there is a kind of inner structure of a choral nature, which governs the harmony, that is, the different chords that make up the piece.

- Therefore, the best way to begin the study of harmony is through the study of choral writing. If we master its secrets properly, we will be ready to create structures on which to develop any kind of instrumental piece.

2. TRIAD CHORDS WITHIN A KEY

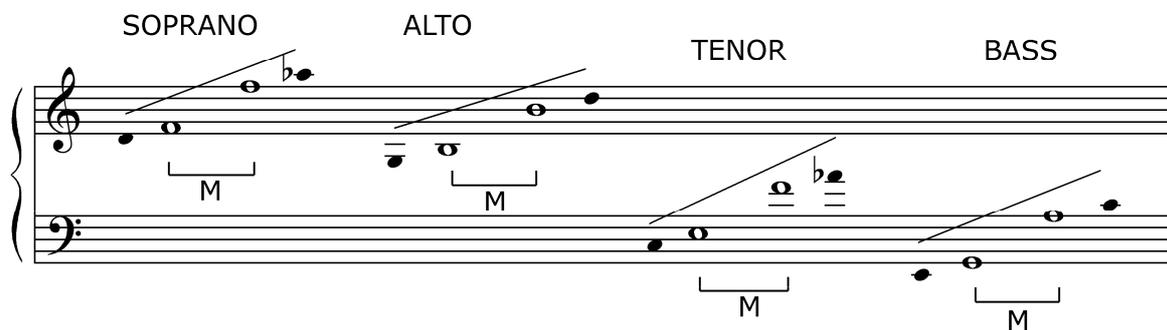
- The "triad" chord was the great discovery of those who shaped classical tonal music, and is really the foundation of all of it. The triads of a key are formed by superimposing a 3rd and a 5th on each of the notes of its scale. The base note of the chord is called the ROOT of the chord.



- As shown in the illustration, the resulting chords are numbered with a Roman numeral from I to VII. The chords of degrees I, IV and V are called Tonic, Subdominant and Dominant, respectively.

3. VOCAL RANGE

- When writing for choir, of course, the range of each voice must be respected. Most of what is written should be in the middle range of the voice (marked M) and only occasionally at the extremes, as this is the area where the voices of the singers are forced.



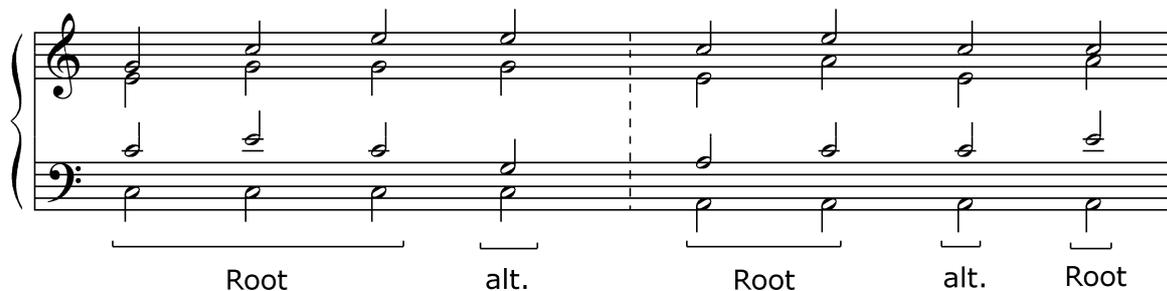
Im. 1.2

4. DOUBLING

- A triad chord consists of only 3 sounds, but the choir consists of 4 voices. This creates the need to double one of these sounds. To this end, the following guidelines are applied:

1 - The ROOT of the chord is preferably doubled.

2 - Except for the first and last chord of the structure, it is also possible, as an alternative, to double a strong note of the key (1st, 4th or 5th note of the key scale).



Im. 1.3

5. SPACING

- The most balanced sound in choral music is obtained when the upper voices (Soprano, Alto and Tenor) are relatively close together. Therefore, as a general rule, it is best to avoid exceeding the distance of an octave between:

- Soprano and Alto.
- Alto and Tenor.

- On the other hand, it is possible to apply as much distance as desired between the Tenor and the Bass. The musical result will always be acceptable.

- Finally, the voices should not cross.

NO NO YES YES YES NO

Voice crossing

Im. 1.4

6. SUGGESTED EXERCISES

- Based on the chords proposed below, write down as many different versions of the triads as possible, complying with the indications described in this chapter.

- VI in the key of C major.
- IV in the key of Bb major.
- V in the key of G major.
- II in the key of E minor.