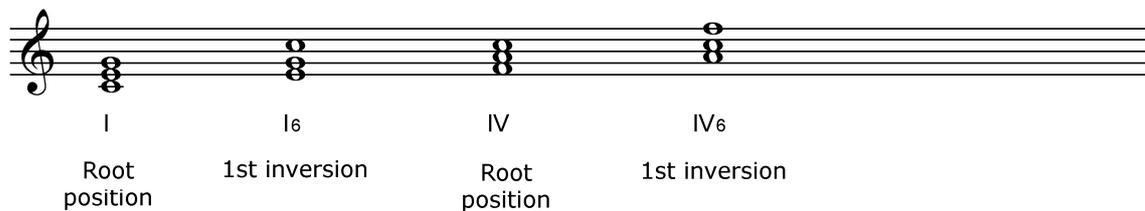


CHAPTER 4 - CHORDS IN 1ST INVERSION. THE UNISON

The 1st inversion of consonant triads (major and minor) is widely used in Classical Tonal Harmony. In this section, we describe how it is commonly employed. This chapter also includes a discussion of how to get to or out of a Unison.

1. DEFINITION, NOTATION AND APPLICATION

- We say that a chord is in 1st inversion when the 3rd of the chord is located in the bass. To show that it is a triad in first inversion, it is marked with a 6 next to the roman numeral.



Im. 4.1a

- In the classical style, chords in 1st inversion are frequently used. Their use allows:

a - To improve the bassline, providing fluidity and avoiding the typical leaps generated by root position chords.

b - To facilitate the connection of the chords.

c - To provide a different, more vibrant and unstable sonority to the chord, and therefore to the harmonisation as a whole.

- Compare the characteristics and sound of this fragment, harmonised without using inversions in the first case and with them in the second.



Im. 4.1b

2. APPLICATION IN 4-PART WRITING. DOUBLINGS

- The rules for doubling regarding 1st inversion chords are exactly the same as in root position. In other words, **THE ROOT IS DOUBLED** (or a strong note of the key). Just keep in mind that:

- the root of the chord is **NOT** in the bass. Therefore,
- the bass note is **NOT** doubled (unless it is a strong note of the key).

NO YES YES YES NO YES

I₆ I₆ II₆ II₆ V₆ V₆

Im. 4.2

3. WHEN TO USE FIRST INVERSION CHORDS

- In general, a chord in 1st inversion can be used at any point in a piece or exercise, **EXCEPT** in the following situations:

- In the initial chord.
- In the 2 last chords (V-I).
- In the 2 chords of the V-VI progression.
- At resting points (cadences).

- Moreover, for a piece or exercise to sound "classical", chords in 1st inversion must necessarily be present, as their sound is very characteristic of music in that style (without them, the music does not sound entirely "classical"). Therefore, you should try to ensure that:

AT LEAST 30% of the chords in the exercises are in 1st inversion.

4. THE UNISON

- The unison between 2 voices is a situation that, in general, should be avoided, as it reduces the polyphony from 4 to only 3 sounds. However, if at some point it is necessary to make use of it in order to make a chord connection, the following procedure applies:

A unison will not be reached or left by similar motion.

- If unisons are employed, do not overuse them (no more than 2 or 3 in an exercise, better none at all), and try to place them preferably in a weak beat.

The diagram shows two staves with chords and arrows indicating voice movement. The first two measures show 'NO' because similar motion leads to a unison. The last two measures show 'YES' because contrary motion avoids a unison.

Im. 4.4

5. SUGGESTED EXERCISES

- Harmonise the following melodies using the tools presented in this section.

1.

2.

3.