

Chord Table

Overview

The Chord Table illustrates how chords are actually extracted from scales. If you carry on through all the keys as well as C you will end up with 11 more pages like this one which should cover virtually all the common chords you will need to use plus a few unusual ones too.

How it works

Let's say you are working on a song and you want to find out which scales go on which chords. The song's first two bars has the following changes :

| Fmaj7 | Eb13 #11 | D7 #9 |

The first thing to do is look through your 12 pages and find out how many times Fmaj 7 appears. You should find it only once, and it will be in the F transposition page, appearing in the Major scale. This means that for Fmaj7 the scale that fits is, obviously enough, F major.

Okay, so far so good, but the second bar has a complicated looking chord symbol. However, don't panic, just repeat the same process as before and you will find Eb13#11 showing up in the Bb Transposition page, appearing in the Melodic Minor scale. So for this chord you can use the Bb Minor Melodic scale. Simple.

Now we are really flying. Or are we? The next chord poses a bit of a problem since if you look it up, you will find it appearing twice, once on the Eb Transposition page in the Melodic Minor scale and once in the D diminished scale (remember you only need to do three transpositions of this scale rather than 12). Oh dear, what are we going to do? Well unfortunately there are no fixed rules to tell you which scale to use and so you will have to use your ears to decide. However by looking at the melody line at that point in the song it is often fairly obvious which is the right scale to use. For example, if the melody line over the D7#9 was F, Gb ,Ab ,Bb then it would suggest that the Eb minor melodic scale is the one to use as there is no Bb in the D diminished scale.

That's Jazz

Unfortunately, the Jazz chord symbol language is not a precise art and so you will come across discrepancies quite often. Sometimes you may not really be given the whole story and you may need to fill in the gaps. Using the song example from before, it may be written like this:

| Fmaj 7 | Eb7 | Dm7 |

The melody line over the second bar is G,A,C. If you look up the Eb7 chord you will find it on the Ab Transposition Page in the Major Scale. However the melody line does not contain an Ab as you would expect from the chord symbol and so we have to conclude that the chord symbol is slightly wrong. We would really need to sharpen the Ab to an A natural in order to fit with the melody line. As Ab is the fourth note in the Eb major scale it would mean changing it to Eb7 #4 (or #11).

Also there are other chord symbol conventions. Here are a few.

C ◦	This means C diminished
C ∅	This means C half diminished or Cm7 b5
C +	This means C augmented (whole tone scale)
C Δ	This means C maj 7

The Altered Scale

This is the name of a scale commonly used in jazz. It is actually the same scale as the Melodic Minor starting on the 7th note. So if you look up B7 alt. You will find it in the C Melodic Minor scale in the seventh position. The fact that it is called the altered scale is simply a matter of labels. In other words, the B altered scale is exactly the same as C melodic minor starting on the B instead of the C.

Where do we begin ?

In a sense it is easier to think of a scale as a set of notes spanning the entire keyboard with no beginning and no end (except the ends of the actual piano of course!). If you can imagine the keyboard as having little lights on every key and when you come to say a C maj7 chord, all the notes in the C major scale light up on the keys from that scale. Now you can safely play any of those notes without fellow musicians in the audience grimacing at each other with a condescending smile! Then, if the next chord is a B7 alt , the imaginary lights corresponding to C minor melodic light up and you gracefully switch to that set of notes as your solo soars to even further heights.