

Part 5: Chords

A **CHORD** is a group of three (*) or more notes played together, either simultaneously or in quick succession. Chords are built from the notes of a scale; the addition of accidentals (sharps and flats) is used to construct various types of chords.

The basic chord consists of three notes and is called a “**TRIAD**”. It contains the **1st** note of a scale (aka the **ROOT** or the **TONIC**); the **3rd** note of that scale; and the **5th** note of that scale. These notes are spaced in intervals of a third.

For example:

C Chord = C - E - G

C is the **Root** of the C scale; **E** is the **3rd** note of the scale; **G** is the **5th** note of the C scale. **C-E** is a 3rd interval; **E-G** is also a 3rd interval

Other examples:

a **G Chord = G - B - D** and a **D Chord = D - F# - A**

(*) Note that a two-note chord is often referred to as a “partial chord”.

Consonance and Dissonance

Why the **1st-3rd-5th** combination? To European/Western ears it sounds “pleasant”, i.e. “harmonious”. This chord form has “**Consonance**” – it sounds “finished”. Some combinations of notes form “**Dissonant**” chords – they have “tension” and when played they sound like they should move on to a more-pleasing consonant chord (i.e. “**resolved**”).

Dissonant chords are often used to express anger, frustration, grief, etc. In most popular tunes they are seldom used as the final chord, rather they are used just prior to the ending measure(s) to build “tension” and then resolve to a concluding Consonant chord. For example: the Dominant 7th which resolves to the Tonic chord in many tunes (I will discuss this in more detail later). Think: a **D⁷** resolving to (played before) a **G**, or a **G⁷** resolving to (played before) a **C**.

Major, Minor, Augmented, and Diminished Chords

There are four types of “Triads” – **Major, Minor, Augmented, and Diminished**. The name of a triad consist of two parts. The first part, the letter-name, takes its name from the root note. Hence the triad **C - E - G** is a “**C**” chord and the triad **G - B - D** is a “**G**” chord.