# Bridge to Basic Harmony

and

# Music for Analysis

## _Bridge to Basic Harmony_

Why a "bridge"?

Because music theory gets too difficult too soon. The typical "as advertised" path through music theory suggests a smooth and orderly progression from the study of rudiments to four-part harmony and analysis, but the unfortunate and bumpy reality is that many students are faced with a nightmarish disconnect the moment they attempt to move past the opening chapters.

The reasons for this are not difficult to pinpoint. The materials covered when one first begins to study music theory are based on a straightforward relationship between the sounds and the symbols used to notate them. Knowledge of such things as key signatures, time signatures, note durations, clefs, and transposition are necessary in order to represent the sounds in accordance with a universally agreed upon system of notation. Conversely, where the visual information is given and the student is required to say something about it, as in the identification of intervals and triads, there will be only one correct answer, an answer equally available to anyone who has properly understood the system.

With the study of harmony, the student is confronted with an entirely new situation. The most fundamental shift is that one is no longer dealing solely with the mechanical aspects of notation. From this point on, the student's focus is directed towards the way a musical passage, once notated, actually "works", and on how what one sees on the page represents what one hears. The notation is simply a given, an essentially neutral system capable of supporting musical utterances in a vast range of styles. The progression from rudiments to more advanced work in theory has its analogy in the study of written language, where the initial task may be merely to decipher one written character after the next, but where one soon realizes that all of the mysterious markings actually mean something.

As a specific branch of musical training, harmony attaches central importance to the mastery of four-part writing. The so-called SATB style (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) is essentially a pedagogical construct or distillation, one which finds its nearest "real world" equivalent in J.S. Bach's four-part chorale settings. These two idioms remain distinct, to be sure: a beginning student's SATB writing might correctly illustrate the use of a particular chord or harmonic progression without bearing any resemblance to a Bach chorale, especially with respect to the rhythmic independence of the voices. And if one moves beyond Bach, the distance separating the SATB world from actual music is typically judged to be even greater, no doubt because it can be difficult to see the relationship between strictly controlled SATB work on the one side and, on the other, music in freer textures, such as piano pieces or passages for full orchestra. Such a judgement is an inaccurate one, however. Indeed, one of the goals of the examples collected in these pages is to allow the student of harmony to draw the connection between the sort of

"apprentice level" SATB harmonizations required in their written work and the broader world of harmony as found in the music of master composers.

It might even be argued that the SATB style, like the equally artificial "species" approach to the study of counterpoint, owes its longevity precisely to its abstract quality, and to the distance safely insulating it from any living musical idiom. But even within the confines of the music theory curriculum itself, the subject of harmony is just as clearly set off and differentiated from the more primary levels by a complex body of rules which, in contrast to those controlling the notation system, often have to be interpreted flexibly, and on a case-by-case basis. In the SATB world, every decree has its small-print exception, and the student is often forced to decide which of two conflicting laws is better broken.

One result of this situation is that students progressing directly from training in the elements of the notation system to a study of four-part harmony often feel as if they are sailing into a fog. To be sure, part of this problem can and must be addressed through the development of musicianship skills, particularly singing. It is only by means of singing, whether or not this includes "sight singing", that one can learn to focus the musical imagination; without it, it is arguably impossible to have an adequate grasp of any music at all.

As crucial as vocalization may be, however, another important source of the problem in progressing to SATB work may simply be information overload. Given the way the subject is normally set out, there are simply too many new ideas, terms, and concepts to assimilate. This line of thinking leads one to question whether specific portions of the traditional harmony syllabus might not be more effectively presented beforehand and whether, to the extent that such a reorganization is achievable, it would then be realistic to see the earlier body of material as a bridge to the more challenging problems to come. For example, while a decision as to the best spacing and doubling of a C major triad can only be arrived at through experience and a consideration of the fuller musical context, the fact that the chord itself consists of the pitches C, E, and G is available to a complete novice. In general, the more one can separate the simpler orthographic and informational aspects from the more challenging "grammatical" ones, the easier it will be to familiarize oneself with the subject's overall terrain. A further advantage in this approach is that it may be easily extended to include the spelling of more challenging chords such as secondary dominants and diminished sevenths. Indeed, the process of learning to spell such harmonies, quite apart from voicing them and connecting them to each other, itself requires a competent grasp of the underlying concepts.

This in turn raises a problem with respect to chord labeling. Depending on whether one's primary interest is in classical music or in jazz / pop, there are two distinct approaches. Classically trained students have been taught to use Roman numerals to identify the scale-step of the root, with Arabic numerals added as needed to show the inversion (e.g. I, V7, ii6/5). This is in contrast to the more "hands-on" chord identification employed by pop and jazz musicians, in which one simply names the  root of the chord (A, Bb, C#, etc.), together with a term to show the intervallic

structure of the chord, and possibly an added indication of the bass note when not the root. Now, if one considers the respective virtues of naming, say, DFAC as either a "D minor seventh" in the pop dialect, or a "ii7 in C major" in the classical one, it is obvious that each approach has something to offer that the other does not. The pop system presumes a good working knowledge of intervals and a handful of basic chord structures, but it neither requires nor reflects any engagement with the underlying musical context. The Roman numeral system is at once more abstract and more analytical, since by avoiding letter names it necessarily reflects a deeper harmonic syntax which is not specific to the piece at hand and which thus serves as an important conduit for an understanding of specific music styles.

The suggestion that these vocabularies are the property of distinct constituencies is admittedly somewhat overdrawn. The more enlightened instructors on either side of the classical / pop divide (a divide alive and well, to our general detriment) will commonly ensure that their students are conversant with both, whichever they choose to emphasize. But in view of the very uneven quality of music education, but also the fact that the mutual benefits of these two approaches are so obvious, it seems inescapable that the intermediate level of theory being outlined here should incorporate a sufficient amount of work in this area of chord nomenclature, if only to establish a common knowledge base.

Finally, moving beyond matters of spelling and labelling chords to more challenging matters of voice leading, it might be argued that under sufficiently controlled circumstances, techniques for preparing and resolving sevenths and for spotting the most economical way of leading the upper voices should also be accommodated at this stage. As simple as the two- or three-chord exercises constructed for this purpose might be, they relate directly to principles underlying more extended and complex harmonic constructions.

The material presented in the following pages reflects the approach outlined above, in that it offers a body of exercises that overlap the traditional jurisdictions of fundamental notation-oriented theory on the one hand and standard courses in four-part harmony on the other. In attempting a redistribution of the subject matter in this way, it is hoped that more difficult assignments such as soprano harmonization and figured bass realization may become somewhat more manageable and, perhaps more important, that the overall process of acquiring a deeper understanding of musical composition will be rendered more coherent and logical.


A.L. (05/13)

# Contents

# *Music for Analysis*

This section contains over three hundred musical examples, ranging in length from a few measures to entire (short) pieces. These offer a rich resource for students wishing to explore the interaction of harmony and voice-leading in a variety of styles and contexts.

The immediate source for many of these excerpts, particularly the shorter ones, was the second edition of *Music for Study,* by Murphy, Melcher and Warch. There, the compilers attempted to order the materials so as to reflect a step-by-step presentation of the harmonic language, on a roughly chord-by-chord basis. The result, although appealing at first, is in fact problematical. Not only does this arrangement force the editors to include passages containing harmonic procedures that might more properly belong to later chapters, but it also compels them to juxtapose, simply on the basis of the shared use of a particular chord, music in very different styles. In one sense, this sort of eclecticism may be justified, but the overall impression is reminiscent of the days when what was known as harmonic analysis amounted to what might be aptly described as a "crossword puzzle" approach. The implied criticism is directly related to the efforts among most teachers of harmony, over the past two or three decades, to focus the students' attention on larger aspects of the musical structure and, to that extent, somewhat away from the labeling of individual triads, inversions, and so on. The forest rather than the trees or, even better, both the forest and the trees.

In contrast, the arrangement adopted here has been to group the examples by composer. To be clear, this is not put forward as any sort of ideal corrective to the older approach; indeed, it is debatable whether, when dealing with actual repertoire, such an alternative exists. Other changes to the examples borrowed from *Music for Study* include the correction of numerous editorial problems and errors, and more accurate attribution.

For this manual, however, dozens of longer examples and even entire short pieces have been added. It is hoped that the study and discussion of such passages will contribute to an understanding of the important role of harmony in structuring musical gestures on different levels and in articulating overall design. The additional pieces and excerpts are taken mainly from recognized masters of the European tradition. Although the link to Melcher and Warch has become increasingly attenuated over the years, it remains necessary to acknowledge *Music for Study* as an inspiration for this ongoing project.

39 - *Piano sonata in D major*, op.10, no.3, mov't I, m.23-20
40 - *Piano sonata in D major*, op.10, no.3, mov't II, m.1-9
41 - *Piano sonata in D major*, op.10, no.3, mov't III, m.1-16
42 - *Sonata in D major*, violin & piano, op.12, no.1, mov't III, m.1-8
43 - *Sonata in A major*, violin & piano, op.12, no.2, mov't II, m.1-32
44 - *Sonata in A major*, violin & piano, op.12, no.2, mov't III, m.1-16
45 - *Sonata in Eb major*, violin & piano, op.12, no.3, mov't II, m.1-8
46 - *Piano sonata in C minor*, op.13, mov't II, m.1-8
47 - *Piano sonata in E major*, op.14, no.1, mov't III, m.1-6
48 - *Piano sonata in G major*, op.14, no.2, mov't I, m.1-8
49 - *Piano sonata in G major*, op.14, no.2, mov't II, m.1-20
50 - *String quartet in F major*, op.18, no.1, mov't II, m.1-9
51 - *String quartet in F major*, op.18, no.1, mov't III, m.1-10
52 - *String quartet in G major*, op.18, no.2, mov't II, m.1-6
53 - *String quartet in D major*, op.18, no.3, mov't I, m.1-10
54 - *String quartet in D major*, op.18, no.3, mov't III, m.1-8
55 - *String quartet in C minor*, op.18, no.4, mov't III, m.1-8
56 - *String quartet in C minor*, op.18, no.4, mov't IV, m.1-16
57 - *String quartet in Bb major*, op.18, no.6, mov't II, m.1-8
58. *String quartet in Bb major*, op.18, no.6, mov't IV, intro.
59 - *Symphony #1 in C major*, op.21, mov't I, m.1-32
60 - *Sonata for violin and piano in F major*, op.24, mov't I, m.1-10
61 - *Sonata for violin and piano in F major*, op.24, mov't II, m.1-9
62 - *Piano sonata in C# minor*, op.27, no.2, mov't I, m.1-5
63 - *Piano sonata in D major,* op.28, mov't II, m.1-8
64 - *Sonata in A major*, vln & piano, op.30, no.1, mov't II, m.1-16
65 - *Sonata in G major*, vln & piano, op.30, no.3, mov't II, m.1-8
66 - *Piano sonata in D minor*, op.31, no.2, mov't III, m.1-8
67 - *Piano sonata in Eb major*, op.31, no.3, mov't I, m.1-8
68 - *Piano sonata in Eb major*, op.31, no.3, mov't II, m.1-9
69 - *Sonata in A major*, violin & piano, op.47 ("Kreutzer"), mov't II, m.1-18
70 - *Piano sonata in G major*, op.49, no.2, mov't II, m.1-8
71 - *Rondo in C major,* op.51, no.1, m.1-17
72 - *Piano sonata in C major*, op.53, mov't I, m.35-42
73 - *Symphony III in Eb major*, op.55, mov't II, m.1-8
74 - *Piano sonata in F minor*, op.57, mov't II, m.9-16
75 - *Piano sonata in F minor,* op.57, mov't III, m.308-315
76 - *String quartet in F major*, op.59, no.1, mov't III, m.1-16
77 - *String quartet in E minor*, op.59, no.2, mov't III, m.1-9
78 - *String quartet in C major*, op.59, no.3, mov't I, intro.
79 - *String quartet in C major*, op.59, no.3, mov't III, m.1-16
80 - *Sonata in A major,* cello & piano, op.69, mov't III, intro.

## Schumann (1810-1856)                                                426

## Verdi (1813-1901)

## Popular Standards - chord changes

## APPENDIX 1: Answers to exercises, pages 1-55.

## APPENDIX 2: Worksheets for *BHM* (plus material covered in class)

## APPENDIX 3: Tests from 2013

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Supplementary resources

Printed materials.
If you need more background on basic rudiments -- key signatures, intervals, etc. -- there are extensive printed and internet resources available. Your main text, "Basic Harmonic Progressions" -- which we'll be starting as of February -- was intended to follow their earlier "Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm and Meter", (John Clough and Joyce Conley, Norton Publishing, 1983). That one is also a programmed instruction text.

The Royal Conservatory has several publications related to their various Rudiments and Theory requirements. Look for things with the answers included.

Internet

The following four links are components of Professor Tim Smith's website. I can't recommend this resource enough - drills ad infinitum, free of charge.

http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/courseindex.html (which takes you to):
http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/harm2/7ths/7ths.html
http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/harm2/7ths/7thsb.html
http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~tas3/harm2/7ths/SecFuncb.html

Online theory links come and go. The following sites were all active when checked recently.

http://www.teoria.com
http://www.musictheory.net
http://www.easymusictheory.com
http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/music/admissions/prepare.html
http://www.musictheoryresources.com/members/FA_TOC.htm
http://www.tpub.com/harmony/

Software for purchase

There are several music theory programs available, most of them dealing with rudimentary aspects of notation and basic terminology. One of the better ones is Practica Musica, at http://www.ars-nova.com/home.html. Definitely worth a look. Also recommended, not only for basic theory but especially dictation and general ear-training: MacGamut, available (cheap!) from http://www.macgamut.com.