

SEVENTH CHORD AND ITS TYPES. DOMINANT SEVENTH CHORD

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Abstract. This article examines the theoretical foundations and musical significance of seventh chords as one of the essential elements of harmonic language in music theory. The study provides detailed information about the structure of seventh chords, their intervallic composition, classification, and functional role within tonal harmony. Particular attention is given to the dominant seventh chord, which occupies a central place in classical harmonic systems due to its strong tendency toward tonal resolution. The article analyzes the formation of seventh chords through the addition of a third above triads and explains the specific characteristics of major seventh, minor seventh, dominant seventh, half-diminished seventh, and diminished seventh chords. Their acoustic qualities, emotional expressiveness, and practical applications in musical composition are discussed from both theoretical and artistic perspectives.

Keywords: seventh chord, dominant seventh chord, harmony, tonality, intervals, chord resolution, tonic, dominant, harmonic function, music theory.

In the art of music, harmony is considered one of the most important means of expression. As the harmonic system developed, music gradually evolved from simple triads to more complex multi-note chords. One of such chords is the seventh chord, which plays a significant role in enhancing the emotional richness of a musical work and in creating feelings of tension and resolution. In particular, the dominant seventh chord serves as one of the principal elements of the classical harmonic system, generating strong movement and tonal direction in music. Seventh chords are widely used in works of various genres and styles, functioning as an effective means for composers to express artistic ideas. Therefore, the study of this topic is highly relevant for both music theory and musical practice.

A seventh chord is a chord consisting of four notes arranged in intervals of thirds. It is formed by adding another third above a triad. The tones of a seventh chord are called the root, third, fifth, and seventh. The term “seventh chord” originates from the interval of a seventh formed between the root and the uppermost tone of the chord. For example:

C–E–G–BC–E–G–BC–E–G–B

This chord is known as the C major seventh chord. Seventh chords are generally considered unstable chords in music because they tend to resolve to a tonic chord.

Seventh chords are among the most widely used complex chords in the harmonic system of music. They are formed by adding another third to a triad, resulting in a four-note harmonic structure. The character and sound quality of seventh chords depend on their intervallic construction. According to the types of thirds and sevenths they contain, seventh chords are divided into several main categories.

The major seventh chord is formed by adding a major seventh to a major triad. Its structure consists of a major third, a minor third, and a major third.

C-E-G-BC-E-G-BC-E-G-B

This chord is distinguished by its bright, elegant, and smooth sonority. The major seventh chord is frequently used in jazz, pop, and contemporary music, where it adds lyricism and delicate emotional color to musical compositions.

The minor seventh chord is formed by adding a minor seventh to a minor triad. Its intervallic structure consists of a minor third, a major third, and a minor third.

A-C-E-GA-C-E-GA-C-E-G

This chord possesses a sorrowful, deep, and emotional sonority, making it especially effective in creating dramatic and lyrical moods. Minor seventh chords are widely used in both classical and contemporary music.

The dominant seventh chord is considered one of the most important seventh chords in music theory. It is formed by adding a minor seventh to a major triad and is usually built on the fifth degree of the scale.

G-B-D-FG-B-D-FG-B-D-F

The most significant characteristic of the dominant seventh chord is the presence of the tritone interval within its structure.

B-FB-FB-F

This interval creates strong instability and causes the chord to seek resolution to the tonic. The dominant seventh chord is one of the principal means of creating tension, movement, and a sense of conclusion in music.

The half-diminished seventh chord is formed by adding a minor seventh to a diminished triad. Its sonority is mysterious and somewhat unstable, producing a dramatic atmosphere within a musical composition.

B-D-F-AB-D-F-AB-D-F-A

This chord is frequently used in minor tonalities and in complex harmonic progressions.

The diminished seventh chord, on the other hand, is built entirely from minor thirds. As a result, its structure is symmetrical and its sound is extremely tense and unstable.

B-D-F-A ♭ B-D-F-A ♭ B-D-F-A ♭ B-D-F-A ♭

The diminished seventh chord is used to express drama, anxiety, and intense emotional states. It is widely employed in classical and Romantic music and serves as an important harmonic device for modulation and transitions between different tonalities.

The dominant seventh chord is considered one of the most important and active chords in musical harmony. It is built on the fifth degree of a major or minor scale and possesses a strong tendency toward the tonic chord. Due to its unstable sonority, the dominant seventh chord develops musical motion and creates tension within a composition. For this reason, it is regarded as one of the fundamental elements of the classical harmonic system.

In the key of C major, the dominant seventh chord is constructed as follows:

G-B-D-FG-B-D-FG-B-D-F

In this chord, G functions as the root, B as the third, D as the fifth, and F as the seventh. One of the most important characteristics of the dominant seventh chord is the presence of a tritone interval within its structure.

B-FB-FB-F

This interval is formed between the third and the seventh of the chord and creates strong instability and tension. It is precisely this instability that causes the dominant seventh chord to seek resolution to the tonic. During the resolution process, the third usually moves upward by a semitone to the tonic note, while the seventh moves downward. As a result, the dominant seventh chord resolves into the tonic chord.

This process may be represented as follows:

$G-B-D-F \rightarrow C-E-GG-B-D-F \rightarrow C-E-G$

The resolution of the dominant seventh chord to the tonic creates a sense of completion, stability, and finality in music. Therefore, this chord is widely used in classical, Romantic, jazz, and contemporary musical styles. Different forms and resolutions of the dominant seventh chord can frequently be found in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

The dominant seventh chord also has several inversions, which are formed through different arrangements of the chord tones. While preserving the main harmonic function of the chord, these inversions enrich its sonority and harmonic movement. The inversions of the dominant seventh chord include the first inversion, the second inversion, and the third inversion.

The first inversion of the dominant seventh chord places the third of the chord in the bass. This inversion has a smoother and more flexible sonority and is often used to create natural harmonic connections.

The second inversion places the fifth of the chord in the bass. This inversion creates greater tension and instability. It is widely used in transitional passages and cadential progressions.

The third inversion places the seventh of the chord in the bass. This inversion possesses a highly unstable character and usually tends to resolve to the tonic or another stable chord. The third inversion serves as an important harmonic device for creating dramatic and intense musical effects.

The dominant seventh chord and its inversions enrich the harmonic diversity of a musical composition, enhance voice movement, and add expressiveness to music. For this reason, they are widely used in both classical and contemporary musical practice.

The importance of the dominant seventh chord in music is extremely significant. It serves as one of the principal harmonic devices in classical, Romantic, jazz, and modern music. In particular, within the system of functional harmony, the dominant function is expressed most clearly through the dominant seventh chord. By means of this chord, composers create dramatic effects, emotional tension, movement, and resolution.

Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Frédéric Chopin skillfully employed dominant seventh chords in their compositions. In their works, the dominant seventh chord became an important means of musical development and emotional expression. In jazz music, the dominant seventh chord is considered one of the fundamental elements of improvisation and is widely used in creating complex harmonic progressions.

In conclusion, seventh chords constitute an essential component of musical harmony. They contribute to the richness, expressiveness, and emotional depth of musical thought. Among all seventh chords, the dominant seventh chord occupies a special place because of its strong functional character and its tendency to resolve to the tonic, thereby creating movement, tension, and a sense of completion in music. A thorough study of the dominant seventh chord and its inversions is of great theoretical and practical importance for music theory, composition, and performance practice.

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