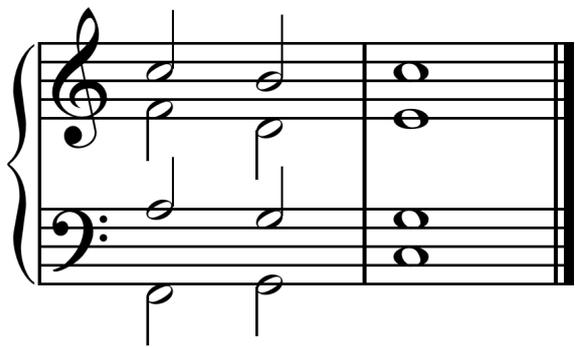


Chord progression

A **chord progression** (or **harmonic progression**) is a series of musical chords, or **chord changes** that "aims for a definite goal" of establishing (or contradicting) a tonality founded on a key, root or tonic chord^[1] and that is based upon a succession of root relationships.^[2] Chords and chord theory are generally known as harmony.

A chord progression can be thought of as a *harmonic simultaneity* succession: it offers an ongoing shift of level that is essential to many musical traditions. A change of chord, or "chord change", generally occurs on an accented beat, so that chord progressions may contribute significantly to the rhythm, meter and musical form of a piece, delineating bars, phrases and sections.^[3] This is known as harmonic rhythm.



IV-V-I progression in C  Play Wikipedia:Media helpFile:IV-V-I in C.mid

Basics

A chord may be built upon any note of a musical scale, therefore a seven-note scale allows seven basic chords, each degree of the scale becoming the root of its own chord.^[4] A chord built upon the note **A** is an **A** chord of some type (major/minor/diminished, etc.) The harmonic *function* of any particular chord depends on the context of the particular chord progression in which it is found. (See Diatonic function)

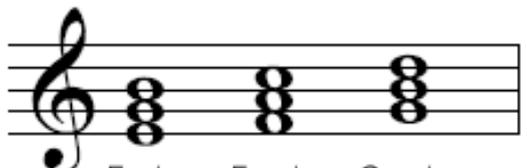
The diatonic harmonization of any major scale results in three major triads. They are based on the first, fourth, and fifth scale degrees (the tonic, subdominant and dominant^[5] – see *three-chord song*). These three triads include, and therefore can harmonize, every note of that scale.

The same scale also provides three relative minor chords, one related to each of the three major chords. These are based upon the sixth, second and third degrees of the major scale and stand in the same relationship to one another as do the three majors, so that they may be viewed as the first, fourth and fifth degrees of the relative minor key. Separate from these six common chords there is one degree of the scale, the seventh, that results in a diminished chord.^[6]

In addition, extra notes may be added to any chord. If these notes are also selected from the original scale the harmony remains diatonic. If new chromatic intervals are introduced then a change of scale or modulation occurs, which may bring the sense of a change of tonal center. This in turn may lead to a resolution back to the original key, so that the entire sequence of chords helps create an extended musical form.

Although all this allows for a large number of possible progressions (depending upon the length of the progression), in practice, progressions are often limited to a few bars' length and certain progressions are favored above others:

An ascending progression of triad chords in notation:



Chords by name: E minor F major G major

Figured chords (in the key of C): iii IV V

The key note or tonic of a piece of music is called note number one, the first step of the ascending scale. Chords built on each scale degree are numbered in the same way so that, for example, in the key of C, the progression E minor - F - G can be generally described as a three - four - five progression.

there is a certain amount of fashion in this and a chord progression may even define an entire genre.

In western classical notation, chords built on the scale are numbered with Roman numerals. A **D** chord will be figured **I** in the key of **D**, for example, but **IV** in the key of **A**. Minor chords are signified by lower case Roman, so that **D minor** in the key of **C** would be written **ii**. Other forms of chord notation have been devised, from figured bass to the chord chart. These usually allow or even require a certain amount of improvisation.

Simple progressions

Diatonic scales such as the major and minor scales lend themselves particularly well to the construction of common chords because they contain a large number of perfect fifths. Such scales predominate in those regions where harmony is an essential part of music, as, for example, in the common practice period of western classical music. In considering Arab and Indian music, where diatonic scales are used, there are also available a number of non-diatonic scales, the music has no chord changes, remaining always upon the key-chord, an attribute which has also been observed in hard rock, hip hop,^[7] funk, disco,^[8] jazz, etc.

Alternation between two chords may be thought of as the most basic chord progression. Many well-known pieces are built harmonically upon the mere repetition of two chords of the same scale. For example, many of the more straightforward melodies in classical music consist entirely or mostly of alternation between the tonic (**I**) and the dominant (**V**, sometimes with an added seventh), as do folk songs such as "Polly Wolly Doodle"^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and popular songs such as "Achy Breaky Heart".^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} Erik Satie's first *Gymnopédie* for piano^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} is built upon a repeated **I - IV**. The Isley Brothers' "Shout" uses **I - vi** throughout.^[9]

Three-chord progressions

Three-chord tunes, though, are more common, since a melody may then dwell on any note of the scale. Often the chords may be selected to fit a pre-conceived melody, but just as often it is the progression itself that gives rise to the melody.

- **I - IV - V - V**.
- **I - I - IV - V**.
- **I - IV - I - V**. (Common in Elizabethan music (Scholes 1977), this also underpins the American college song "Goodnight Ladies",^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} is the exclusive progression used in Kwela.^[10])
- **I - IV - V - IV**.



Beethoven imagined in the process of composing his *Pastoral* Symphony

Similar progressions abound in African popular music. They may be varied by the addition of sevenths (or other scale degrees) to any chord or by substitution of the relative minor of the **IV** chord to give, for example, **I - ii - V**. This sequence, using the chord based on the second scale degree, is also used cadentially in a common chord progression of jazz harmony, the so-called ii-V-I turnaround, on which are based the more ornate Coltrane changes.

Such progressions provide the entire harmonic foundation of much African and American popular music, and they occur sectionally in many pieces of classical music (such as the opening bars of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}). Any of these progressions may be transposed into any key so that, for instance, the progression **I - IV - V** in the key of **A** will be played **A - D - E**, while in the key of **C** the chords will be **C - F - G**.

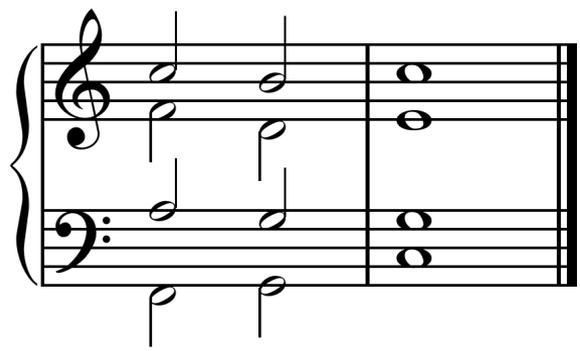
Where such a simple sequence does not represent the entire harmonic structure of a piece, it may readily be extended for greater variety. Frequently an opening phrase of the type **I - IV - V - V**, which ends on an unresolved dominant, may be "answered" by a similar version that resolves back onto the home chord, giving a structure of double the length:

I - IV - V - V

I - IV - V - I

Additionally, such a passage may be alternated with a different progression to give a simple binary or ternary form such as that of the popular thirty-two-bar form (see musical form).

Blues changes



IV-V-I progression in C  Play Wikipedia:Media helpFile:IV-V-I in C.mid

The twelve bar blues and its many variants use an elongated, three-line form of the **I - IV - V** progression that has also generated countless hit records, including the most significant output of rock and rollers such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. In its most elementary form (there are many variants) the chords progress as follows:

I - I - I - I

IV - IV - I - I

V - IV - I - I



Blues progressions influenced a great deal of 20th century American popular music

ii-V-I turnaround in C Play Wikipedia:Media helpFile:ii-V-I turnaround in C.mid

Again, blues progressions have formed the entire harmonic basis of many recorded songs but may also be confined to a single section of a more elaborate form, as frequently with The Beatles in such songs as "You Can't Do That", "I Feel Fine", and "She's A Woman".^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} They have also been subjected to densely chromatic elaboration, as in the Bird blues.

Steedman (1984) proposed that a set of recursive rewrite rules generate all well-formed transformations

of jazz, both basic blues chord changes and slightly modified sequences (such as the "rhythm changes"). Important transformations include:

- replacement of (or addition to) a chord with its dominant, subdominant or the tritone substitution.
- use of chromatic passing chords.
- extensively applying the ii-V-I turnaround.
- chord alterations such as minor chords, diminished sevenths, etc.^[11]

50s progression

Main article: 50s progression



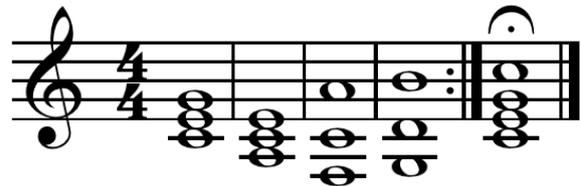
The Mills Brothers' recording of "Till Then" looked forward both to the end of World War II and to the popular music of the 1950s.
(Courtesy of the Fraser MacPherson estate c/o Guy MacPherson)

Another common way of extending the **I - IV - V** sequence is by adding the chord of the sixth scale degree, giving the sequence **I - vi - IV - V** or **I - vi - ii - V**, sometimes called the 50s progression.

In fact this sequence had been in use from the earliest days of classical music (used often by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}), but after generating popular hits such as Rodgers and Hart's "Blue Moon" (1934), ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields' 1936 "The Way You Look Tonight", ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and Hoagy Carmichael's "Heart and Soul" (1938), ^[12] it became associated with the black American vocal groups of the 1940s, The Ink Spots and The Mills Brothers ("Till Then"), ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and thus later became the entire basis of the 1950s doo-wop genre, a typical example being The Monotones' "The Book of Love". ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

Taken up into the pop mainstream, for example with Felice and Boudleaux Bryant's "All I Have to Do Is Dream", ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} a hit for The Everly Brothers, in the 1960s it continued to generate records as otherwise disparate as The Paris Sisters' "I Love How You Love Me" (written by Mann and Kolber) and Boris Pickett's "Monster Mash". ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

It continued to be used sectionally, as in the last part of The Beatles' "Happiness Is a Warm Gun", ^[13] and also to form the harmonic basis of further new songs for decades ("Every Breath You Take" by The Police, ^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

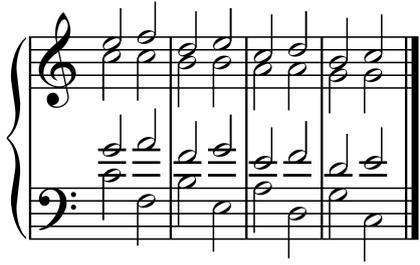


50s progression in C, ending with C  Play ^{Wikipedia:Media helpFile:50s progression in C.mid}

Circle progressions

Main article: Circle progression

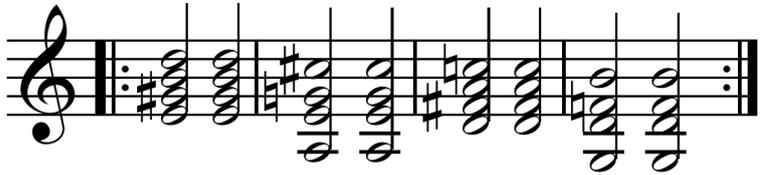
Introducing the **ii** chord into these progressions emphasises their appeal as constituting elementary forms of circle progression. These, named for the circle of fifths, consist of "adjacent roots in ascending fourth or descending fifth relationship"—for instance, the sequence **vi - ii - V - I** ascends with each successive chord to one a fourth above the previous. Such a motion, based upon close harmonic relations, offers "undoubtedly the most common and the strongest of all harmonic progressions".^[14] The succession of cadences gives an impression of inevitable return to the key-note of the piece.



Circle progression in C major 🔊
 Play Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Progresión quintas.mid.

Short cyclical progressions may be derived by selecting a sequence of chords from the series completing a circle from the tonic through all seven diatonic chords:

- **I - IV - vii⁰ - iii - vi - ii - V - I** (in C major) 🔊 Circle progression in C major Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Progression majeure en cercle.ogg
- **I - V - I** 🔊 Circle progression excerpt: I - V - I Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Progression en cercle I-V-I.ogg
- **I - IV - V - I** 🔊 Circle progression excerpt: I - IV - V - I Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Progression en cercle I IV V I.ogg



The ragtime progression (E7-A7-D7-G7) often appears in the bridge of jazz standards (🔊 Play Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Jazz standard bridge.mid).^[15] The III7-VI7-II7-V7 (or V7/V/V/V - V7/V/V - V7/V - V7) leads back to C major (I) but is itself indefinite in key.

This type of progression was much used by classical composers, who introduced increasingly subtle inflections. Particularly, substitution of major for minor chords giving, for example, **I - VI - II - V** allowed a more sophisticated chromaticism as well as the possibility of modulation. These harmonic conventions were taken up by American popular entertainers, giving rise to many variations on those harmonic staples of early jazz that have been dubbed the ragtime progression and the stomp progression. All such progressions may be found used sectionally, as for example in the much-used "rhythm changes" of George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm".

Harmonizing the scale

As well as the cyclical underpinning of chords, the ear tends to respond well to a linear thread; chords following the scale upwards or downwards. These are often referred to as step progressions because they follow the steps of the scale, making the scale itself a bassline. In the 17th century, descending bass lines found favour for "divisions on the ground", so that Pachelbel's canon, the Bach orchestral suites (the famous *Air on a G String* Wikipedia:Citation needed), and Handel's organ concerti all contain very similar harmonizations of the descending major scale. Wikipedia:Citation needed When this was reintroduced into mid-20th century pop music, it brought with it many baroque trappings (The Beatles' "For No One", Wikipedia:Citation needed Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale", Wikipedia:Citation needed and The Steve Miller Band's "Dear Mary" and "Baby's House" Wikipedia:Citation needed).

At its simplest, this descending sequence may simply introduce an extra chord, either **III** or **V**, into the **I - VI - IV - V** type of sequence described above. This chord allows the harmonization of the seventh step, and so of the bass line **I - VII - VI...** This strategy underlies Percy Sledge's "When A Man Loves A Woman"^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry".^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} The baroque examples descend for an octave, while "A Whiter Shade of Pale" manages a stately two octaves, before "turning around" through the dominant chord to recommence upon the key note.^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

Ascending major progressions are not as common but many exist: the verse of "Like a Rolling Stone" ascends by steps to the fifth, **I-ii-iii-IV-V** (or I-ii-I/iii-IV-V) before descending again to the key-note, **IV - iii - ii - I** (or IV-I/iii-ii-I)—the latter being another common type of harmonization of a descending major scale.^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} The Four Pennies' hit "Juliet"^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and The Beatles' "Here, There and Everywhere" both use similar ascending progressions.^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

The descending **chromatic** scale has also formed the basis of many progressions, from the *Crucifixus* of Bach's Mass in B minor,^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} through Beethoven's *Thirty-two Piano Variations*,^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} to songs such as Bob Dylan's "Simple Twist of Fate",^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} George Harrison's "Something",^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and Lucio Battisti's "Paradiso",^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} a hit for Amen Corner when translated as "(If Paradise Is) Half as Nice".^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

Minor and modal progressions

Similar strategies to all the above work equally well in minor modes: there have been one-, two- and three-minor-chord songs, minor blues. A notable example of a descending minor chord progression is the four-chord Andalusian cadence, **i - VII - VI - V**.

A typical Andalusian cadence *por arriba* (i.e. in A minor). G is the subtonic and G# is the leading tone. ♮ (Listen) ^{Wikipedia:Media helpFile:Figure_andalusian.ogg}

Folk and blues tunes frequently use the Mixolydian scale, which has a flat seventh degree, altering the position of the three major chords to **I - Flat VII-IV**. For example, if the major scale of C, which gives the three chords C, F and G on the first, fourth and fifth degrees, is played with G as the tonic, then the same chords will now appear on the first, fourth and seventh degrees. These "Mixolydian" harmonies also appeared in the pop music of the 1960s, notably with The Beatles' album *Help!*^{Wikipedia:Citation needed} and The Rolling Stones' *Beggar's Banquet*.^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

The minor-third step from a minor keynote up to the relative major encouraged ascending scale progressions, particularly based on an ascending pentatonic scale. Typical of the type is the sequence **i - III -IV (or iv) - VI**.

According to Tom Sutcliffe:

... during the 1960's some pop groups started to experiment with modal chord progressions as an alternative way of harmonizing blues melodies... This created a new system of harmony that has influenced subsequent popular music.

This came about partly from the similarity of the blues scale to modal scales and partly from the characteristics of the guitar and the use of parallel major chords on the pentatonic minor scale. This phenomenon is also linked to the rise in the use of power chords.

Chord progressions in classical music

Early European art music developed through embellishment of a single line of melody and classical theory still emphasizes the correct "horizontal" progress of single-note parts, sometimes known as "voice-leading". Generally, to the melody in the upper part is added first a bass line and then two inner lines to complete the chords in four-part harmony suitable for a choir or string section, terminating with cadences, avoiding some chord inversions and favoring others, maintaining an orderly and melodic conjunct, contrary and oblique motion of each part relative to the others in order to achieve unity of texture by avoidance of inappropriate intervals, parallel fifths and octaves etc. Much practice is given to the art of harmonic transition and development that is essential to classical music's use of harmony as a means of achieving unity in a large-scale form. While (as noted above) classical music has its cliché progressions, they are seldom named and discussed: Wikipedia:Citation needed perhaps only Schoenberg among the authors of popular text-books of harmony has made some attempt to do so.

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- Nettles, Barrie & Graf, Richard (1997). *The Chord Scale Theory and Jazz Harmony*. Advance Music, ISBN 3-89221-056-X.

External links

- Examples of Gospel Music Chord Progressions (<http://freegospelresource.com/progression/>)
- Google spreadsheet (<http://spreadsheets.google.com/pub?key=pVj6zNFKlh4MrcD2zdL68Nq>) of hundreds of 3 chord songs

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