

# *The Functions of Chords*

## *for Pop, Jazz, and Modern Styles*

by Peter Lynn Sessions

### A Chromatic Theory of Harmony

A broad-based theory of music requires a chromatic explanation, not based on keys. Peter Lynn Sessions's analysis of chords defines chordal effects and explains how the listener responds to them.

### Abstracts of the Theory Chapters

#### CHAPTER 1— A MODEL OF THE LISTENER

The listener experiences music through a number of musical or chordal **effects**.

The effects include expectation, a sense of return, mood, stability, tritones, and conflict. All of these effects, combined with functional types of chords, determine the direction of expectation the listener finds.

Each subsequent chapter in the first half of the book addresses an effect.

#### CHAPTER 2— RETURN

Understanding the sense of return in a chord starts with understanding a crucial musical element— the interval. The interval, it turns out, is more than the sum of its parts. It has an emerging sound the author calls the **natural fundamental**. This natural fundamental gives rise to the natural root of a chord. This discovery redefines Rameau's theory of natural roots.

The natural root gives a chord an identity and contributes to a feeling of completion— the sense of return.

The listener seeks a natural root that fulfills the direction of the musical piece. That root is called the **root of return**.

#### CHAPTER 3— EXPECTATION

While the listener selects a chord tone to be the root of the chord, the listener also develops expectation for the root of the *next* chord. Peter Lynn Sessions (PLS) shows how these expectations emerge from families of tones in a chord. The families arise from interactions between the harmonies of tones in intervals. Each family acts as tension tones to develop expectation for the next chord. From any given chord, listeners can develop multiple possible expectations.

#### CHAPTER 4— FUNCTIONAL CHORD TYPES

This chapter shows how the composer can generalize about expectation and return from the

root and type of a chord, using a structural view of the chord. The listener, in contrast, employs a functional view of the chord that involves expectation and the root of return.

The composer needs to predict how the listener hears each chord— how the functional view relates to the structural view. The author's answer is functional chord types. He delineates those types and how they combine the structural and functional views.

#### CHAPTER 5— MOOD AND STABILITY

PLS explains a new phenomenon called **melodic tendency** that gives rise to both mood and stability (resistance to change).

Mood is set by the melodic tendency of tones with respect to the root of return as definer. Stability, on the other hand, arises out of the melodic tendency of tones with respect to the lowest tone as definer.

Both of these factors affect the feelings of movement and finality in a musical piece.

#### CHAPTER 6— TRITONES AND CONFLICTS

In this chapter PLS talks about two significant features of a chord, the tritones it contains and the conflicts inherent in it.

Tritones affect expectation. PLS analyzes the ways a tritone can be resolved. He then defines a new effect in music theory— **chordal conflict**, as distinct from dissonance in intervals. PLS identifies the types of conflicts to explain most of the disturbing effects of chords.

When tritones and conflicts are present in chords, they demand the listener's attention. Resolving conflict becomes a new challenge for the 21st century composer.

#### CHAPTER 7— THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE

This chapter ties together all the chordal effects that contribute to the musical experience. It does so by developing two concepts— **local prediction**, from chord to chord, and **global prediction**, for the overall progression.

The listener determines which tone in a progression is global Do and, from there, develops expectations for movement, ambiguity, and finality.

## Structure of Chord and Progression Analysis Chapters

### Pop, Jazz, and Modern Chords and Progressions

The second half of *The Functions of Chords* applies the chromatic theory to chords and progressions. Each chapter analyzes the effects of chords in Pop, Jazz, and Modern styles.

#### Pop Chords and Progressions

The chapter on Pop chords and progressions is:

- Chapter 8— Pop Chords and Progressions

#### Jazz Chords and Progressions

Chapters on Jazz chords and progressions are:

- Chapter 9— Jazz Chords Based on the Major Triad
- Chapter 10— Jazz Chords Based on the Minor Triad
- Chapter 11— Jazz Chords Based on the Dominant 7th Tetrad
- Chapter 12— Jazz Progressions

#### Modern Chords

The chapter on Modern chords is:

- Chapter 13— Modern Chords

## Abstracts of Chord and Progression Analysis Chapters

### CHAPTER 8— POP CHORDS AND PROGRESSIONS

“Pop” chords refer to eight chord types that encompass the periods from Mozart and Bach to folk, rock, and country music of present times. In a word, they are the chords of “popular” music, in the broadest sense of the term.

Pop chords and progressions have a way of being easy to be with, comfortable to listen to. This chapter analyzes those chords and some common popular progressions.

### CHAPTER 9— JAZZ CHORDS BASED ON THE MAJOR TRIAD

The Jazz chords are all the chords that can be made by alterations and additions to the major and minor triads as base chords. The Jazz chords envelop all the Pop chord types.

This chapter analyzes the chordal effects of twenty-seven Jazz chords that are based on the major triad.

A complete analysis of each chord, one by one, summarizes the natural roots, mood, functional chord type, conflicts, and tritones, as well as any enharmonics (alternative names) for the chord.

### CHAPTER 10— JAZZ CHORDS BASED ON THE MINOR TRIAD

This chapter analyzes the chordal effects of thirty-seven Jazz chords that are based on the minor triad.

### CHAPTER 11— JAZZ CHORDS BASED ON THE DOMINANT 7TH TETRAD

This chapter analyzes the chordal effects of twenty-nine Jazz chords that are based on the dominant 7th tetrad.

The chord analysis chapters become a vital reference for the composer or musician, especially the soloist. The Index provides a quick look-up system for finding any chord that comes to mind. You’ll refer to it again and again, until you have absorbed it into your system.

### CHAPTER 12— JAZZ PROGRESSIONS

This chapter gets to the heart of some common sequences in Jazz progressions, then analyzes familiar jazz pieces that employ those sequences of chords.

### CHAPTER 13— MODERN CHORDS

The chapter on Modern chords does not contain any progressions, because the progressions are literally limitless, depending on your taste. The challenge posed by this chapter is that of putting together progressions that are unique, but still convey to the listener the information needed to “make sense” of the music.

### Final Conclusions and Comments

### CHAPTER 14— THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

The effects in the theory communicate information about the musical piece to the listener. Music without this information has no meaning in the same way that words without ideas have no meaning. In this theory, music is beautiful because it is *meaningful*.

The theory’s main accomplishment is to analyze the musical experience in terms of chords and the information contained in them. It explains how the listener interrelates that information to produce an overall musical effect. It also opens a window to chromatic music that composers have long been seeking.