

The Three Primary Triads

Music would be much less interesting if it had not progressed beyond the *monophonic* stage (where only one note is played at a time). Fortunately, through skill and creativity as well as through trial and error, *harmony* (the mixture of simultaneous sounds of different pitch) has been established over several centuries. Of course, it is still evolving, with what listeners and performers deem acceptable or not changing over the decades.

Triads (3 notes built from 3rds played at the same time) can be constructed from any note. In every key there are three primary triads and these are built from the *tonic* (1st degree of the scale), *subdominant* (4th) and *dominant* (5th). Normally Roman Numerals (I, IV, V) are used as the shorthand for this. The tonic triad is built from the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale. You might think of it as finding the tonic note, then missing the next (2nd) note of the scale, including the next one (3rd), missing the next (4th) one and needing the next (5th) one. The triads based on IV and V are built in the same way. In the first example below (Ab Major), the tonic is Ab. To discover the tonic triad you start with the tonic, miss out the next note of that scale (Bb), use the 3rd (C), ignore the 4th (Db) and utilise the 5th (Eb). This means that the tonic triad of Ab Major is Ab, C and Eb. For chord IV you find the 4th note of the scale (Db) and then miss the next note of the scale (Eb), use the next (F), miss the next (G) and have the next (Ab): Db, F and Ab. For chord V you find the 5th note of the scale (Eb) and then miss the next (F), have the next (G), ignore the next (Ab) and use the next (Bb): Eb, G and Bb.

You might notice that the middle note of the dominant triad for every Minor key has an accidental in front of it. This is because it is the 7th (or leading-note) of the scale and as such needs to be pushed up a semitone. It is known as the *sharpened 7th* or *raised 7th*. Whether you play this triad or write it down, you will need to remember this important fact.

Many songs have been written that only use the three Primary Triads. How many can you think of?

Let me know if there is anything you don't understand here.

Ab Major

Musical notation for Ab Major triads. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb). The triads are: I (Ab, C, Eb), IV (Db, F, Ab), and V (Eb, G, Bb).

G# Minor

Musical notation for G# Minor triads. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The triads are: I (G#, B, D), IV (C#, E, G#), and V (B, D, F#).

A Major

Musical notation for A Major triads. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The triads are: I (A, C#, E), IV (D, F#, A), and V (E, G#, B).

A Minor

Musical notation for A Minor triads. The key signature has no sharps or flats. The triads are: I (A, C, E), IV (D, F, A), and V (E, G, B).

Bb Major

Musical notation for Bb Major triads. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb). The triads are: I (Bb, D, F), IV (Eb, G, Bb), and V (F, Ab, C).

Bb Minor

Musical notation for Bb Minor triads. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb). The triads are: I (Bb, D, F), IV (Eb, G, Bb), and V (F, Ab, C).

B Major

Musical notation for B Major triads. The key signature has two sharps (F#, C#). The triads are: I (B, D#, F#), IV (C#, E, G#), and V (F#, A, C#).

B Minor

Musical notation for B Minor triads. The key signature has two sharps (F#, C#). The triads are: I (B, D, F), IV (C, E, G), and V (F#, A, C#).

C Major

Musical notation for C Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (C-E-G), the second shows the IV chord (F-A-C), and the third shows the V chord (G-B-D).

C Minor

Musical notation for C Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (C-Eb-G), the second shows the IV chord (F-Ab-C), and the third shows the V chord (G-Bb-D).

Db Major

Musical notation for Db Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (Db-Fb-Ab), the second shows the IV chord (G-Bb-Db), and the third shows the V chord (Ab-Cb-Eb).

C# Minor

Musical notation for C# Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (C#-E-G#), the second shows the IV chord (F#-A#-C#), and the third shows the V chord (G#-B#-D#).

D Major

Musical notation for D Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (D-F#-A), the second shows the IV chord (G-B-D), and the third shows the V chord (A-C#-E).

D Minor

Musical notation for D Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (D-F-A), the second shows the IV chord (G-Bb-D), and the third shows the V chord (A-C#-E).

Eb Major

Musical notation for Eb Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (Eb-Gb-Ab), the second shows the IV chord (Bb-Db-Eb), and the third shows the V chord (Cb-Eb-Gb).

Eb Minor

Musical notation for Eb Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (Eb-Gb-Ab), the second shows the IV chord (Bb-Db-Eb), and the third shows the V chord (Cb-Eb-Gb).

E Major

Musical notation for E Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (E-G#-B), the second shows the IV chord (A-C#-E), and the third shows the V chord (B-D#-F#).

E Minor

Musical notation for E Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (E-G-B), the second shows the IV chord (A-C#-E), and the third shows the V chord (B-D#-F#).

F Major

Musical notation for F Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (F-A-C), the second shows the IV chord (Bb-Db-F), and the third shows the V chord (C-E-G).

F Minor

Musical notation for F Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (F-Ab-Cb), the second shows the IV chord (Bb-Db-F), and the third shows the V chord (C-E-G).

F# Major

Musical notation for F# Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (F#-A#-C#), the second shows the IV chord (B-D-F#), and the third shows the V chord (C#-E#-G#).

F# Minor

Musical notation for F# Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (F#-A#-C#), the second shows the IV chord (B-D-F#), and the third shows the V chord (C#-E#-G#).

G Major

Musical notation for G Major triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (G-B-D), the second shows the IV chord (C-E-G), and the third shows the V chord (F#-A-C#).

G Minor

Musical notation for G Minor triads: I, IV, V. The first measure shows the I chord (G-Bb-D), the second shows the IV chord (C-E-G), and the third shows the V chord (F#-A-C#).