

A "MINOR" DETOUR ON THE MUSICAL HIGHWAY

So far, our discussions have focused primarily on major chords. But, of course, there are many other types of chords and much more to learn about all of them. In this issue we'll take a look at two of these other chords, the minor and the diminished.

But first, a bit of important musical nomenclature, specifically, the term, "interval" as used in music theory. When you play two notes together they are separated by some space or "interval." Musical intervals are said to be either consonant (pleasing) or dissonant (rough). When we look at a major scale, the most pleasing musical intervals are the 1, the 4 and the 5 and these are referred to as "Perfect" intervals. The remaining musical intervals, the 2, 3, 6 and 7 are referred to as "Major" intervals. Why should we care if an interval is Perfect or Major? We care because once we know about Perfect and Major we can apply some convention for naming these and other intervals and build chords from that knowledge. You'll find some helpful rules about this later in the article.



BY ROGER GOODMAN

Most chords derive their names from the first interval of the chord. In a major chord (1-3-5) the first interval (1-3) is a major 3rd — hence the name, "Major," is applied to this type of chord. If we now flat the 3rd by lowering it one half-step (the equivalent of one guitar fret or one adjacent piano key) our major-third interval becomes a minor-third and our major-chord (1-3-5) becomes a minor-chord (1-3b-5). This is the easy way to think about major and minor chords.

If we were sticking strictly with the textbook version of music theory we would have a bit more work on our hands. The "official" way to construct a minor chord would be to first write out a MINOR scale and then select the 1-3-5 from that MINOR scale. Since the "3" in a minor scale is a half step lower than the "3" in a major scale, I find it easier to think of it as a flatted 3rd from a major scale. In fact, my method for getting to all other types of chords is to think of all chords as being modified major chords. In the case of the minor chord, I began with the major chord, 1-3-5, and modified it by "flating" the 3rd to produce the minor chord, 1-3b-5.

As previously stated, most chords derive their names from the first or lowest interval of the chord — MOST, but not ALL. Let's say we take our minor chord (1-3b-5) and then we flat the 5th as well (1-3b-5b). This chord has a flatted 3rd but we can't call this a minor chord since that name is already in use. So, we look to the next interval, the flatted 5th, and name it after that. In this case the interval is called a diminished 5th and the chord is therefore called a

diminished chord.

You may be about to ask, "How did we know to name one of the flatted intervals above as minor yet name the other flatted interval as diminished?" This is where we get to use our knowledge of Perfect and Major intervals and here are the rules for applying that knowledge.

Interval Naming Conventions - Rules

- When you flat a Major you get a Minor.
- When you flat a Perfect you get a Diminished.
- When you flat a Minor you get a Diminished.

Interval Naming Conventions - Applied

Intervals	Flat (b)	Double Flat (bb)
Perfect		
Fourth	Diminished	
Fifth	Diminished	
Major		
Second	Minor	Diminished
Third	Minor	Diminished
Sixth	Minor	Diminished
Seventh	Minor	Diminished

The following chart summarizes the application of these rules:

POP QUIZ:

If we start with the interval of a 6th and flat it we get what interval and why? If we start with the interval of a 4th and flat it we get what interval and why? (The answers are given at the end of the article. Try not to peek until after you answer.)

Get comfortable with this information and we'll learn more about naming intervals and chords in the next lesson. In the meantime, stay tuned...

P.S. I wrote this article almost entirely on my new Kyocera cell phone that is also an electronic organizer using a Palm operating system. If you have a Palm OS based handheld, play the guitar and are interested in the topics discussed in this series you might find the following free Palm compatible downloads to be useful and fun:

- Chord Buddy <http://store.yahoo.com/pilotgears/wandywade1.html>
- Palm Chord <http://www.pilotgear.com> Search for PalmChord at this site.

1. Minor 6th - because when you flat a major (M6) you get a minor (m6).
2. Diminished 4th - because when you flat a perfect (P4) you get a diminished (dim 4th).

ANSWERS TO THE POP QUIZ:



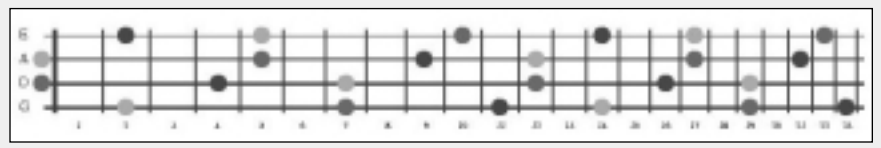
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CORRECTION

In the last issue the image for Figure 8 - Mandolin/Violin - D Major Chord was missing from the Keys to the Highway article. Below is the correct image.



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