

More Fun With The Magnificent 7th & Beyond



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Let's finish looking at the magnificent 7th chords discussed in the last issue (past articles are available at www.folkWorks.org). In that article you may have noticed a discrepancy between the text and the Figure 2 reference to the 7th chord built on the 7th degree of the scale. The text referred to it as a "minor 7th flat 5" while Figure 2 called it a "diminished 7th". Although this was due to an unfortunate mix-up during preparation for the printer, it fortunately uncovered a point that leads right into some final words about the 7th chords.

The 7th chord in question has the structure 1-b3-b5-b7. Compare this to the minor 7th chord 1-b3-5-b7. So the chord in question is essentially a minor 7th but with a flatted 5th. Having said that, follow what comes next carefully: A flatted 5th is also called a diminished 5th, so some people call this a diminished chord.

But a flatted 7th is a minor (not a diminished) interval, so this is sometimes referred to as a half-diminished 7th chord. If you flat the 7th again

it goes from a minor 7th to a diminished 7th. This structure, 1-b3-b5-bb7, is sometimes referred to as a fully-diminished 7th chord and is generally what people mean when they mention a "diminished chord." Since a doubly flatted 7th is essentially a 6th, the structure is more often listed as 1-b3-b5-6. And, since there is no 7th appearing in this structure, it may explain why people usually call it just a diminished chord instead of a fully-diminished 7th chord. If this seems confusing please look at Table 1 which reviews how we got to the five different types of 7th chords and then read this paragraph again.

If you recall last issue's column, you build a chord by playing every other note from the scale. But why stop at the 7th? It turns out that you don't have to. If you continue building chords by adding every other note in the scale you can take a 7th chord, 1-3-5-7 and add the next note to get 1-3-5-7-9. Now you have a 9th chord. But, you might ask, "aren't there only seven notes in the major scale?" Yes, there are. In fact, the note you play for a 9th has the same name as that played for a 2nd. Calling it a 9th tells you that it is a 2nd note but played an octave higher thus making the space between it and the one note a 9th interval. The interval that is truly a 2nd (1-2) is rather dissonant owing to the close proximity of two notes.

The 9th (1-9) interval has the same two note names as the 2nd but has enough space between them that the dissonance seems to go away. As with the 7th chords there are many different flavors of 9th's (major, minor, diminished, etc).

Don't stop yet. After adding the 9th you can also add an 11th. Now you have 1-3-5-7-9-11. Again, you might notice that an 11th is the same as a 4th only an octave higher. But wait, there's more. Add the next note and get a 13th or 1-3-5-7-9-11-13. At the risk of being repetitive, you should again notice that a 13th is the same as a 6th only an octave higher.

Should we stop there? Yes, we should. Why? Several reasons. First, we now have a chord that contains every note of the scale. If we continue we

will only repeat notes that already exist. Also we are up to seven notes in this chord. Let's take a moment while you count the fingers on your left hand. Go ahead—I'll wait. It can start getting pretty tough when you have more notes in the chord than fingers on your hand. So we can't allow chords to contain an endless number of notes. Even if we had enough fingers, the notes are not always reachable in a comfortable grouping. You will find that most versions of these very notey chords will have omissions. Only those notes that are needed to move gracefully through a piece of music are kept while other notes are simply dropped.

Table 2 is a quick review of these notey chords that we just discussed. Remember that they can come in different flavors (major, minor, diminished, etc) just like the 7th chords described above.

I hope that this article has helped to light up a part of your brain that you may have forgotten about. When I read for pleasure I am always delighted if I can find something that seems to be a universal truth or an underlying rule – hopefully like some of the things in this column. Such encounters are a source of fuel for the mind. So keep the lights on in your brain and, of course, stay tuned.

TABLE 1. THE FIVE TYPES OF 7TH CHORDS

Start from this Triad	Add this Interval	To get this Chord	With this Chord's Structure
Major triad	minor 7th	Dominant 7th	1-3-5-b7
"	Major 7th	Major 7th	1-3-5-7
Minor triad	minor 7th	minor 7th	1-b3-5-b7
Diminished triad	minor 7th	minor 7th b5	1-b3-b5-b7
"	diminished 7th	diminished	1-b3-b5-bb7 (1-b3-b5-6) half-diminished full-diminished

TABLE 2. THE 9TH, 11TH AND 13TH CHORDS

9th	1-3-5-7-9	1-2-5-7-(2)
11th	1-3-5-7-9-11	1-3-5-7-(2)-(4)
13th	1-3-5-7-9-11-13	1-3-5-7-(2)-(4)-(6)

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