

Chord Connections, Part-Writing, Voice-Leading

Ted Greene - 1974-02-17

As related to earlier periods of harmony (such as the Baroque period) which, if grasped first, lay a rock-solid foundation upon which to add the more modern devices in harmony. Some important thoughts to keep in mind: 1) The outer voices are the most important.

Common Tones: one if roots are 4th or 5th apart

Hundreds of years ago music began to be written in 4 parts for voices which were named from the bottom up: Bass, Tenor, Alto, and Soprano (instrumental music also adopted these now widely-accepted terms). Four-part writing has been highly regarded ever since for its ability to achieve a balance between a full, rich texture, and one that still allows some ease of manipulation of the individual voices. Therefore we will be working in this type of context for awhile, that is, with four parts. (The terms *voices* and *parts* are both used to indicate the separate notes in chords.) The art of writing and connecting chords is, logically enough, called *Part-Writing*, and the art of moving the voices smoothly from chord to chord is called *Voice-Leading*.

Movement is essential to music as we know it. Therefore, the movement from one chord to another is of primary interest, and the ability to connect chords is very important to almost any guitarist. The first chords you should learn to connect are the simplest ones known to mankind, the *triads*. We will work in the 4-part triads with root in the bass first (remember, there are three “positions” of this chord, so named for whichever note is in the soprano (R, 3, or 5th)).

1) Do not repeat the same position twice in a row. (This creates too “parallel” of a feeling which is not usually desirable with 4-part triads).

2) In many cases, keeping any notes that are “common” (contained in both chords) in both chords in the same voice(s) and moving the other notes of the 1st chord to the closest possible notes in the 2nd chord will give a good result. This is known as the *minimum movement principle*. (This too is a carry-over from vocal music – they didn’t want all the singers to get in each others’ way by leaping about.)

You will be able to observe these principles in action on the upcoming pages.

[Ted’s notes to himself:] Definitely give non-harmonic tones (P.T. [[passing tones](#)] and N.T. [[neighbor tones](#)]) before 1st inversion triads, then later show how to connect successive 1st inversion using five voicings that have 3-to-root compass.

[Regarding this last statement, here Ted is referring to successive first-inversion voicings with the third in the bass (naturally) and the root in the highest voice (compass referring to the space from lowest to highest voice). In a three-voice texture you can write successive first-inversion voicings without creating parallel fifths or octaves; but in a texture that contains more than three voices, doubling of one or more notes becomes necessary and the possibility of “forbidden parallels” arises, which must be handled carefully. One or more of the inner voices would not be able to move in parallel motion but will have to skip around instead. – Editor’s note.]

(Converging voices) Sometimes two voices sing the same pitch.

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2-17-74

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Common tones: one if root with a 5th apart.
Hundreds of years ago music began to be written in 4 parts for voices (instrumental music also adopted these now widely accepted terms) which were named from the bottom up: BASS, TENOR, ALTO, + SOPRANO. Four part writing has been highly regarded ever since for its ability to achieve a balance between a full rich texture, and one that still allows some ease of manipulation of the individual voices. Therefore we will be working in this type of context for awhile, that is, with 4 parts (the terms voices and parts are both used to indicate the separate notes in chords). The art of writing for voices or parts is, logically enough, called PART WRITING and the art of moving the voices smoothly from chord to chord is called VOICE LEADING.

Movement is essential to music as we know it. Therefore, the movement from one chord to another is of primary interest and the ability to connect chords is very important to almost any guitarist. The first chords you should learn to connect are the simplest ones known to mankind, the triads. We will work in the 4 part triads with Root in the bass first (Remember, there are three "positions" of this chord, so named for whichever note is in the soprano (R, 3, or 5th)) At first some general guidelines might prove helpful:

- ① Do not repeat the same position twice in a row (This creates too "parallel" of a feeling which is not usually desirable with 4 part triads).
- ② In many cases, keeping any notes that are "common" (contained in both chords) in both chords in the same voices and moving the other notes of the 1st chord to the closest possible notes in the 2nd chord will give a good result. This is known as the minimum movement principle (This too is a carry-over from vocal music - they didn't want all the singers to get in each others' way by leaping about).

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(Converging voices) Sometimes 2 voices sing the same pitch

definitely give non-harmonic triad (P, T, + M, T) before 1st inv. triad then show how to connect successive 1st inv. using five voices that have 3 to Root compass