



Lesson 21 - More Choices! Vol. 1 - Diatonic Substitutes

Chord Melody Mastery

Often times it can be difficult to decide how to harmonize a particular melody note. What if I need to stay on the same chord, but it feels weird to repeat that same voicing again, right? What if the melody note is a nonchord tone? What if I feel like I need more emotion in this passage, et cetera? Well it never hurts to have more options to play the same chord, so let's talk about different types of chord substitutions and substitutes. To begin, let's go and let's get one-- Sorry, let's go ahead and let's get one thing straight. A harmonic progression is all about getting from one place in a scale to another. If we can find multiple paths to get to the same place, then there's no right or wrong way to do it. We can look at the entire song from beginning to end in this way, or even just for the duration of one bar. So what are the different paths we can take to arrive at our destination or target chord? Well to begin with let's look at diatonic substitutes in this video. These are two chords that exist with the same key as each other, and also share the majority of each other's notes. It's like marriage, basically. As a rule, these are any chords within a key that are a third apart from each other. So, take the C major triad, for example, ♯ C, E, G ♯ You can substitute it for a chord that's a third above, and it gives C major its E minor. E, G, and B, right? So check the spelling for both of these chords in the exercise sheet entry for this lesson, and you'll see that both chords share the same two notes, so they have the E and the G notes in common. In fact, when it comes to the seventh chords, such as C major seven, you might notice that the upper structure of that chord spells out E minor triads.

The same goes with the chord that starts a third below C major. In this case, that A minor triad. It's composed of A, C, and E, while C major is composed of C, E, and G. So, take a look, they share both the C and E notes. Because the chord a third above C, and the chord a third below C, share so many notes with the chord C itself, you can easily substitute either of these chords for C with no real problems. Depends on the context, depends on the melody, but that's a big rule of thumb. The same goes for any chord in the C major scale, say, whose roots are a third apart. So say you have your G seventh chord, and a B minor seventh flat five, the F major, and the D minor seventh, the A minor, and the F, and so on, so check out the PDF. There's another way to look at these chord substitutions, and that's by grouping them according to function. That's really more academical, and it really has way more sense. There are three chord families that you can sort the chord of a major scale into, based on what kind of functions they will fulfill within that scale of the harmonic progression. These chord families generally correlate with the patterns we mentioned before. For example, the one, the three, and the six chord, are part of the tonic chord family. So the C major seven, E minor seven, and A minor seven. These are the chords that are natural resting places in the scale, and sound sort of like arriving home. Then there are the predominant chords, such as a two chord, the four, so the D minor seven, and the F major seven, respectively in C major. These chords are good for moving through the scale before setting up a dominant function chord. And finally we have the dominant chord family, consisting of the dominant itself. So G seven, or sometimes the seven diminished, or minor seven flat five. In the key of C, these are G seven, D minor seven flat five, and any chords in the same family can now easily be substituted out for one another. If you have ample time to play multiple chord voicings, feel free to create motion in your chords, by playing the original chord, and then one of the substitutes. So take a look at the list of chords in C major, and their diatonic substitutes. It's a good idea to practice them and get used to how they sound similar, as well as how they differ a tiny bit from each other. In the next lesson, we're going to play two short, simple chord melodies as an exercise.

One with the chords as-is, and the other making use of diatonic subs, so diatonic substitutions. I'll see you then.