**Chord Grammar Presented by Matt Holsen**

**Example1: Start of “Icarus.” an unfinished song by Matt**

**Why do I call this chord grammar?**

A chord progression is like a sentence.

You hear grammar even if you can’t diagram a sentence.

Grammar is different for different languages, dialects and even situations.

**So, what musical language am I talking about?**

Tonal Harmony -- What *I* mean by that

“Modal” and “Tonal” harmony. Confusion alert!

The **dominant-tonic move** and the **circle of fifths**

**The Circle of fifths -- what’s in it for *you*?**

**The Circle of fifth starts with (what else?) a single Dominant-Tonic move**

(5 Down or 4 up -- same thing)

You can write a song with just that

The active notes -- not a side effect but the essence of the V7-I move

**Two V-I moves, but *not* a circle: I - IV - V - I (C - F - G7 - C ):**

**Two linked fifths: II - V - I (Dm - G7 - C) -- Now we’re getting somewhere**

How about II Major? Secondary dominants (V7ofV - V)

The home scale is “softer”

**Three linked fifths: VI - II - V - I (Am - Dm - G7 - C and variations)**

Start anywhere

We want Cantor

Softer and harder versions -- Major or Minor on II and VI

One substitution (relative major) and you have a whole decade

**Four Linked fifths: III-VI-II-V-I (Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C and variations)**

Getting onto the cycle -- Why III7 is more common than IIIm

**Five Linked Fifths: VII - III-VI-II-V-I (Bø - Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C and variations)**

Bø ..? What? The half-diminished chord -- a different animal

**Six Linked Fifths: IV - VII - III-VI-II-V-I (F - Bø - Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C and variations)**

New Territory. The unholy interval (not a perfect 5th or 4th).

**Taking it to extremes: Example 2: Bridge of Paul Simon’s “Some Folks Lives”**

**Minor Keys: Same circle, different entry point: Example 3: “Autumn Leaves”**

**Substitutions**

**The relative Major/Minor substitution**

Why it works: Shared notes

Sounds like the same thing: Relative major of a minor chord

**Em - Am - Dm - G7 - C becomes**

**Em - Am - F - G7 - C**

**or**

**G - A7 - Dm - G7 - C**

Not so smooth: Relative minor of Major chord

**Em - A7 - Dm - G7 - C becomes**

**Em - A7 - Dm - G7 - Am**

More changed: Relative minor of a dominant 7 chord leading to major

**E7 - A7 - Dm - G7 - C becomes**

**E7 - A7 - Dm - Em - C**

(Although you can use it to take left:)

**E7 - A7 - Dm - Em - Am**

**Doesn’t Work:** Relative minor of a dominant 7 chord leading to minor

**Em - A7 - Dm - G7 - C becomes**

**Em - F#m - Dm - Em - C**

**The Tritone Substitution**

What it is: Flat II7 replaces V7 just before I

Why it Works: Shared active tones

Works with any Dominant 7 chord

**E7 - A7 - Dm - G7 - C becomes**

**E7 - Eb7 - Dm - G7 - C**

**Or**

**E7 - Eb7 - Dm - Db7 - C**

Sometimes you’ll see the straight chord, followed by the

substitute, then the target chord. So:

**E7 - A7 - Dm - G7 - C**

**becomes**

**E7 - Bb7 - A7 - Eb7 - Dm - Ab7 - G7 - Db7 - C**

**Example 4: “I can’t Complain”**