

More Substitute Triads

Keep in mind that the substitute triad will be most effective when superimposed against the originally intended accompaniment chord. ie: an Em chord with an E bass note would simply sound like an Em chord while with a C bass note, it will come across as a Cmaj7 chord. Perhaps the lesson to be learned here is that bass notes imply the harmonic structure. Bass lines also imply the fundamental rhythm of a song. Although it is not always an accepted concept, "the bass is the engine which drives the band."

Another point to be made is that chords which have a more active role in music such as the Dominant chord will usually have more substitute possibilities than a non-active chord such as the Tonic chord. A high degree of tension on the Tonic sound obliterates the restful quality of the Tonic chord.

C	(Em)	(G)
I Tonic	Cmaj7	Cmaj9
Dm	(F)	(Am)
ii Supertonic	Dm7	Dm9
Em	(G)	(?)
iii Mediant	Em7	questionable
F	(Am)	(C)
IV Subdominant	Fmaj7	Fmaj9
G	(Bdim)	(Dm)
V Dominant	G7	G9
Am	(C)	(Em)
vi Submediant	Am7	Am9
Bdim	(Dm)	(?)
vii Leading tone	Bm7b5	questionable

Although the substitute triads are all depicted here in Root Position, they can be played and used in any inversion. (some examples will follow in a subsequent lesson)

To get a good handle on the sounds involved, guitar players might sit down with friends to experiment or perhaps use some type of computer program to supply the fundamental chord structure.

Special note: The Bdim triad which is marked as questionable produces a strong argument with the Em triad. The note F at the top of the Bdim triad is a "flatted 9th" above the root of the original chord. Unfortunately, a flatted 9th is not compatible with an underlying minor structure.

There are many harmonic situations where a flatted 9th is perfectly acceptable. (see Lesson 8d on Substitute Triads in a Minor Key)

On the Dominant chord, the introduction of a Bdim triad as a substitute chord is a no-brainer because the Dominant chord most commonly is extended to the 7th degree even if all of the other chords are restricted to basic triads.

Special note: The Fmajor triad produces a particularly strong argument with the Bdim triad. Once again, the note C in the F chord is a "flatted 9th" above the root of the Bdim chord. The major triad superimposed on a diminished structure is not very compatible maybe due to the fact that the major chord attempts to take charge by countering the tension with its major quality.