

Substitute Triads in a Minor Key

The Key of A Minor in its Harmonic Minor mode is examined below. The substitute triads with the diamond shaped note heads are rather unlikely substitutes.

Minor keys of the 'musica ficta' variety are inherently very romantic in sound and composers and arrangers tend to use much more basic harmonies in these keys. This may be partly due to the romantic quality of the actual key and also because of the difficulties of good voice leading if the harmony extends too far beyond the basics.

Here is a short synopsis on the questionable substitute triads.

Am (C+) (?)

I Tonic Am(maj7) questionable

"E" major triad: the G# and B will do battle with the root and 3rd of the Am chord. The 3rd is the colour note in any major or minor chord. Generally this will be incompatible.

Bdim (Dm) (?)

ii Supertonic Bm7b5 questionable

"F" major triad: This same incompatible substitute situation occurs in the relative major key. Major triads do not sit well above a diminished chord form.

C+ (E) (?)

iii Mediant Cmaj7(aug5) questionable

"G#" diminished triad: This chord may very well extend the C+ to the 9th degree but would be generally a dubious substitute triad.

Dm (F) (Am)

IV Subdominant Dm7 Dm9

Special note: Notice that the "B diminished" triad extends the Dominant chord to the "flatted 9th" degree. While the flatted 9th is only a half tone above the root of the chord, it is totally compatible with the underlying major chord structure.

E (G#dim) (Bdim)

V Dominant E7 E7b9

F (Am) (?)

vi Submediant Fmaj7 questionable

"C" augmented triad: The note G# is an enharmonic Ab which would make the F chord into an Fm triad. An argument could be made for the G# to sound as a #9th.

G#dim (Bdim) (?)

vii Leading Tone G#dim7 questionable

"D" minor triad: Any diminished chord tends to resist the addition of any other type of triad aside from another diminished chord.

After all is said and done, there still remains the fact that if it sounds right, you can use it and if it is truly unpalatable, it most likely should stay in the recycle bin. The ear is always the final judge.