

Revisiting the Tritone

The tritone in the Dominant 7th chord is formed from the two most active tones in the key of the chord. (G7=dominant 7th in the key of C) The 3rd of the G7 chord is the leading tone in the key and the flatted 7th is the fourth note in the scale. The leading tone generally resolves upward to the note C and the fourth scale tone generally drops a semitone to the note E which is the third of the C chord. This is the classic resolution of the tritone regardless of its inversion. Observe that the tritone in its diminished 5th form resolves inward and in its augmented form it resolves by expanding.

The classic resolution of the tritone will always sound musically correct even if it does not necessarily produce any great excitement.

If the chord progression is from one dominant 7th chord to another one, the tritone is usually resolved in this manner. Notice that both notes of the tritone now fall a half tone and produce a new tritone. This might not always be possible to do on the guitar when you inject harmonies into your arrangement because the melody note will dictate the chord inversion.

The resolutions below are totally playable on the guitar but the examples have the melody note either being static or moving a scale step.

If the melody makes a leap, the chord inversion generally does the same. However, notice that in this case one possible solution is to play one chord in three parts and the other in a four voice form.

The melodic leap shown below would be a bit unlikely but notice that the 3 note to 4 note chord solution seems to work pretty well.

Special note: In a sequence of dominant 7th chords, a rhythm guitarist might just play a series of falling tritones rather than playing big fat 7th chords. This would be particularly effective in an ensemble with a bass instrument supplying the root bass notes.

The "F#" in the D7 chord is a part of the tritone. Notice that in the last measure, it appears as is the F# has not only leapt to the note D in the G7 chord but it has also fallen a half tone to the note "F".