Harmonic Mechanisms

Exercises for Improvisation and Composition

Dan Siegel

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Introduction

For the last three decades of writing, playing, and studying music, I have been compiling information on my observations and discoveries on the way notes interact with each other when they are combined linearly in sequence and vertically into chords. Some of these observations are superficial, some not. Relationships can be diatonic or avoid diatonic principles altogether and abide only by the logic of symmetry. Once a structure is identified, it can be analyzed and applied as a mechanism in composition and improvisation. The process of observation, analysis, and documentation is how this work came to be.

This material can serve multiple purposes. Some of the exercises could be vehicles or inspiration for improvisation and composition, or they could function simply as practice regimens. Some of the exercises are duplicated in different sections, due to the overlap of their content. While it is written from a pianistic perspective on two staves, the information can easily be applied and played on any instrument.

Playing through these exercises, new observations, patterns, and structures will reveal themselves. The goal is to transpose the exercises to keys that you're less comfortable in, by melodically and harmonically analyzing the numeric relationships between the notes. Thinking numerically will free you to see all keys equally and allow you to form a deeper understanding of the way the components fit together. Some of the exercises will require more calculation than others and therefore require more concentration and focus, and perhaps a slower tempo.

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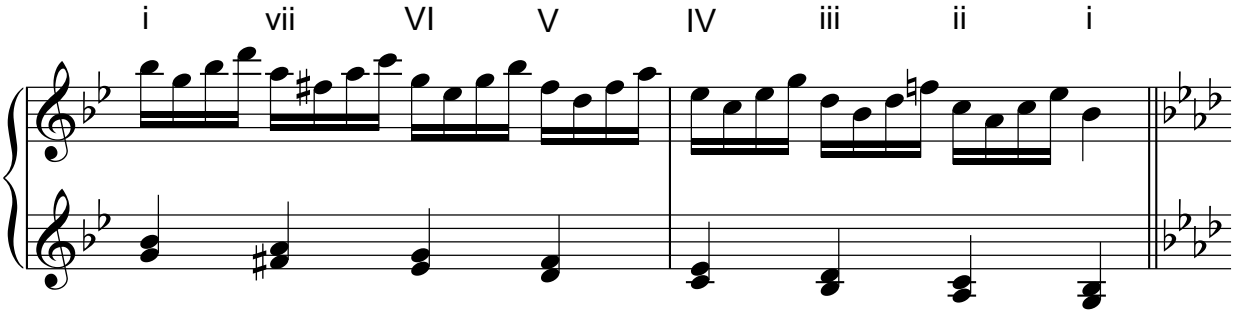
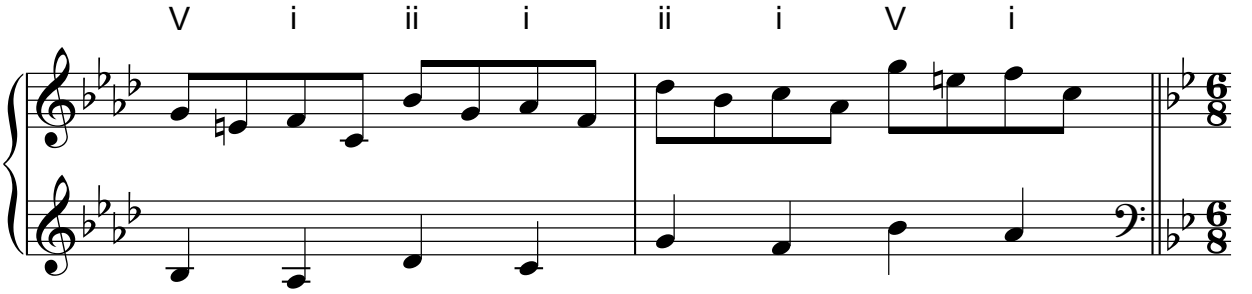
Gm: Descending Scale Degrees

Repeat in all keys



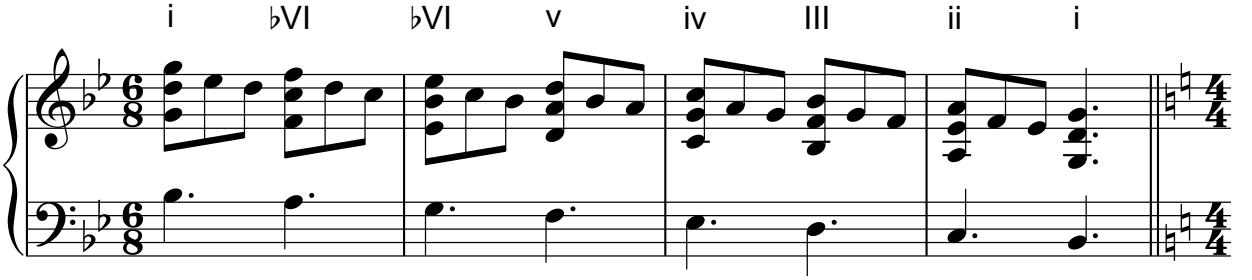
Fm: Scale Degrees In 6ths

Repeat in all keys



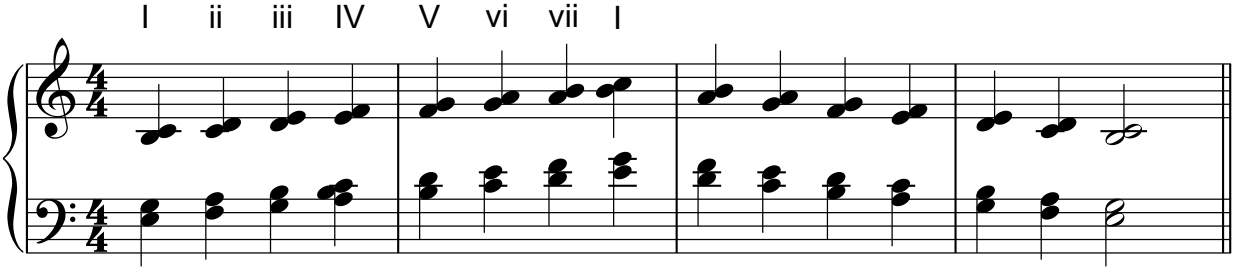
Gm: Descending Scale Degrees

Repeat in all keys



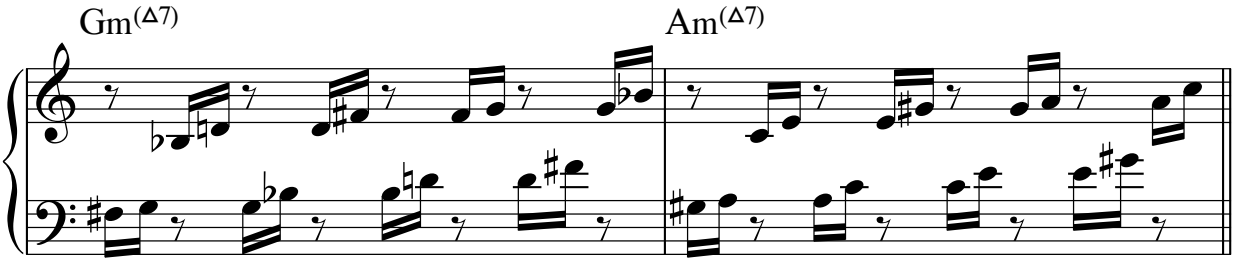
C: Scale Degrees 7th Chords - 1st Inversion

Repeat in all keys



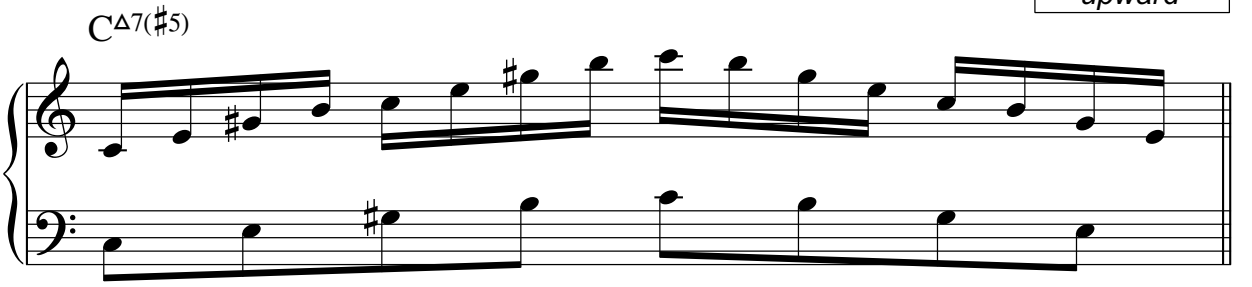
Ascending Minor Major 7ths

Continue chromatically



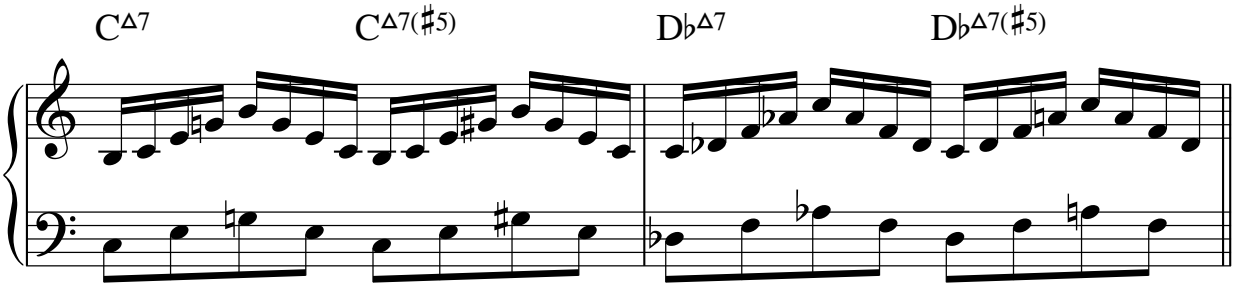
Ascending Major 7ths (♯5)

Repeat chromatically upward



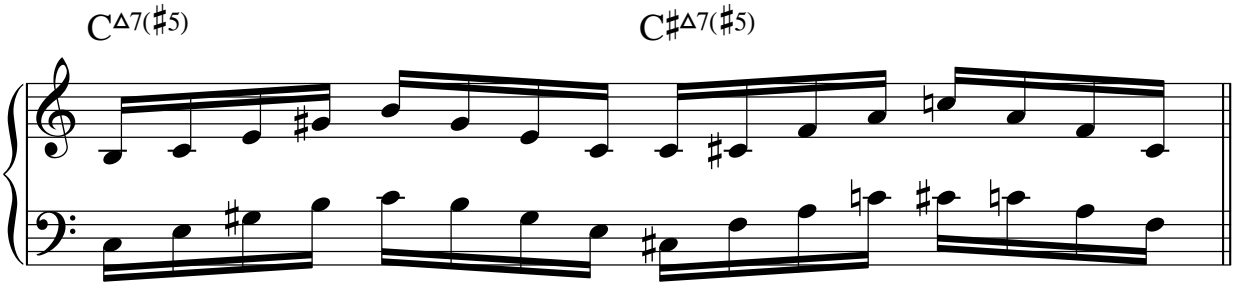
Ascending Major 7ths (♯5)

Continue chromatically



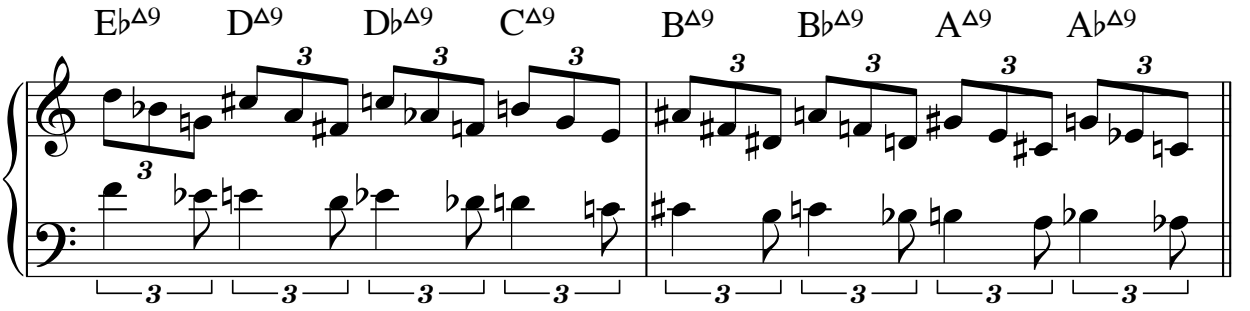
Chromatic Major 7ths (#5)

Repeat chromatically upward



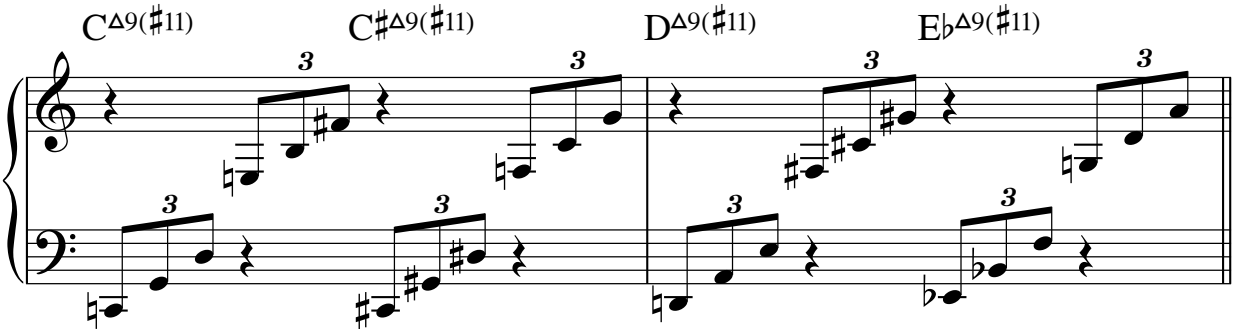
Descending Major 9ths

Continue chromatically



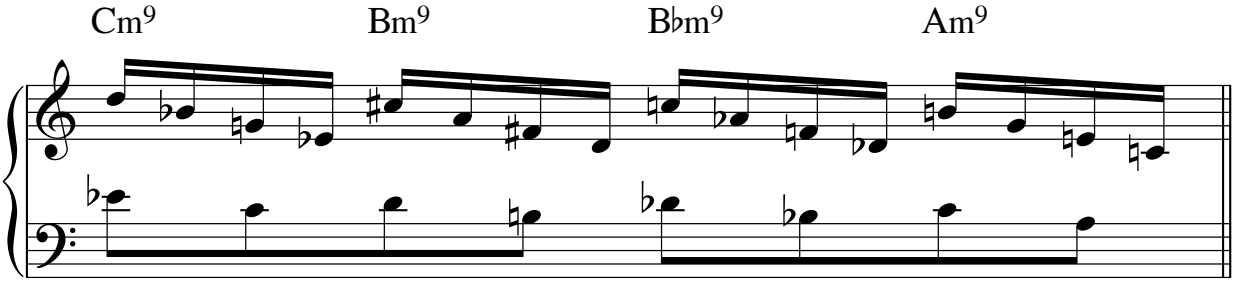
Ascending Major 9ths In 5ths

Continue chromatically



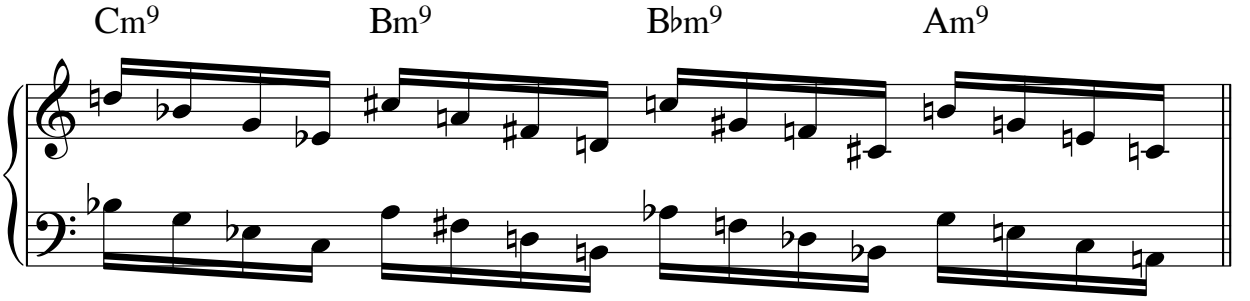
Descending Minor 9ths

Continue chromatically

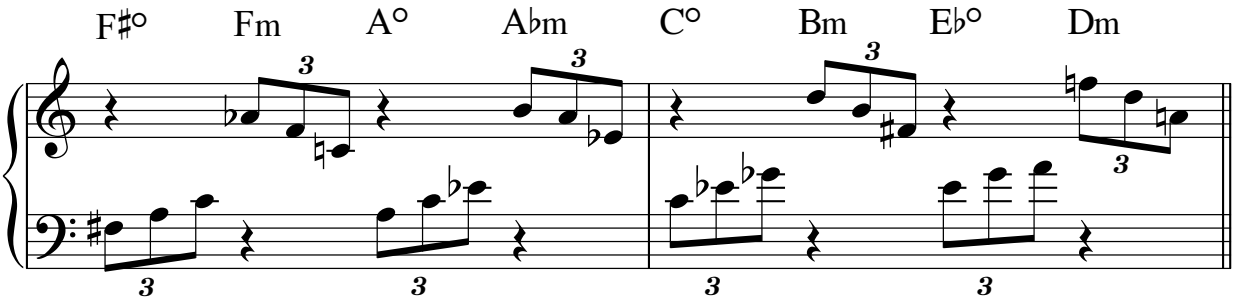


Descending Minor 9ths

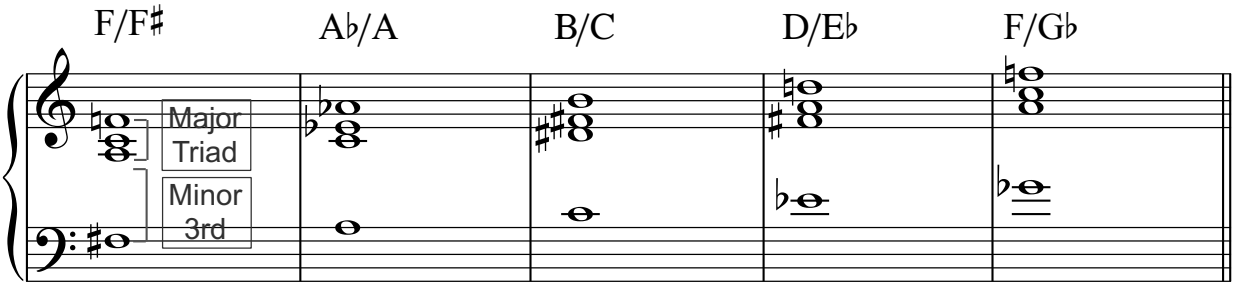
Continue chromatically



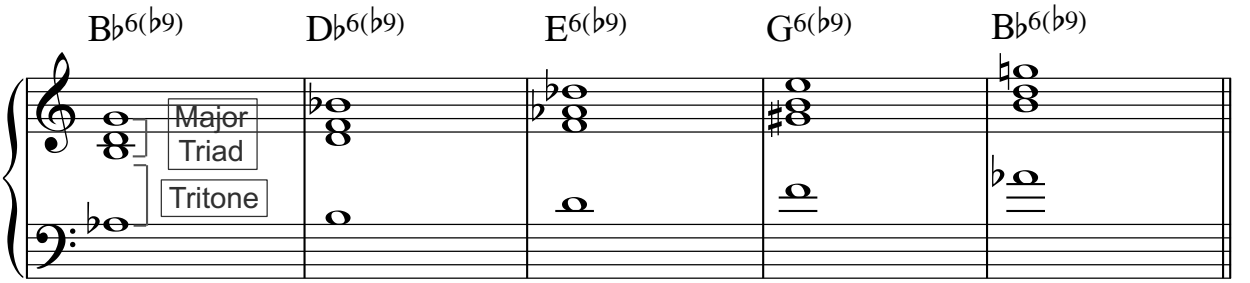
Ascending Diminished and Minor Triads



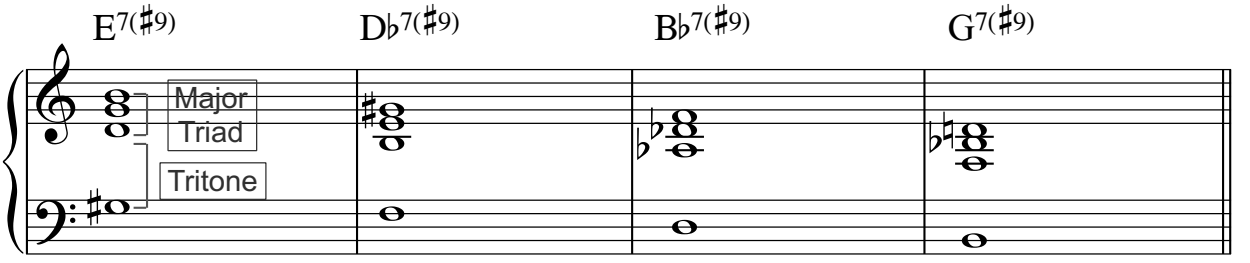
Ascending Major Triads in 1st Inversion | ♭9 on the Bottom



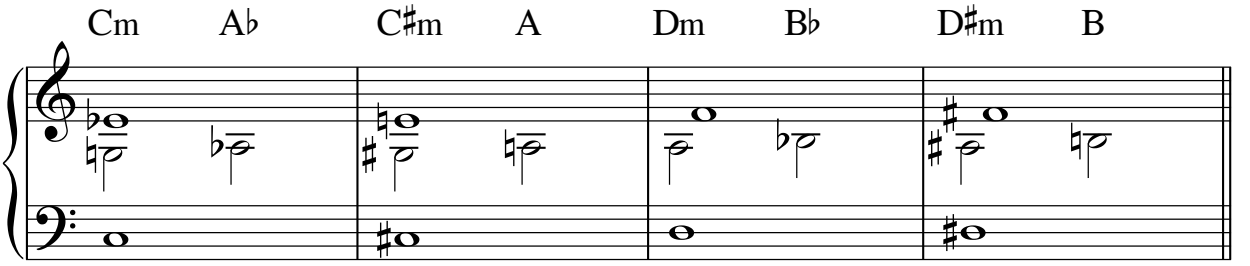
Ascending Major Triads in 1st Inversion (Built on the 6th)
7th on the Bottom



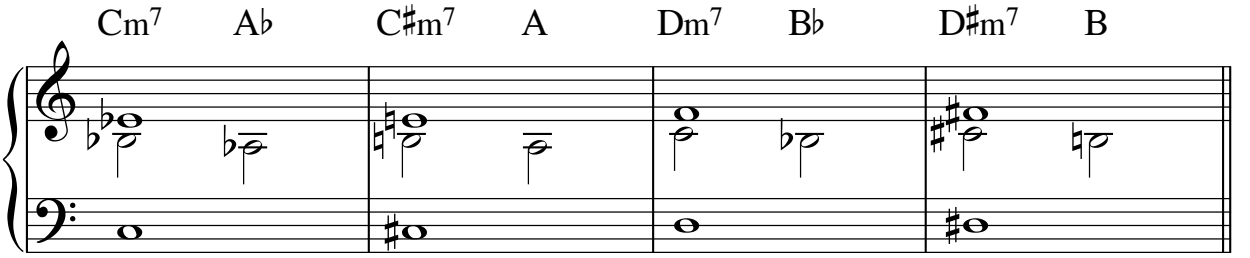
Descending Major Triads in 2nd Inversion (Built on the ♭3)
3rd on the Bottom



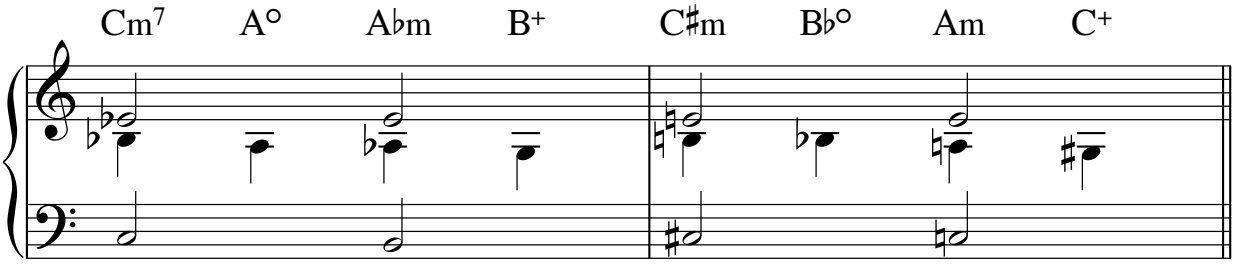
Minor To Major



Minor To Major



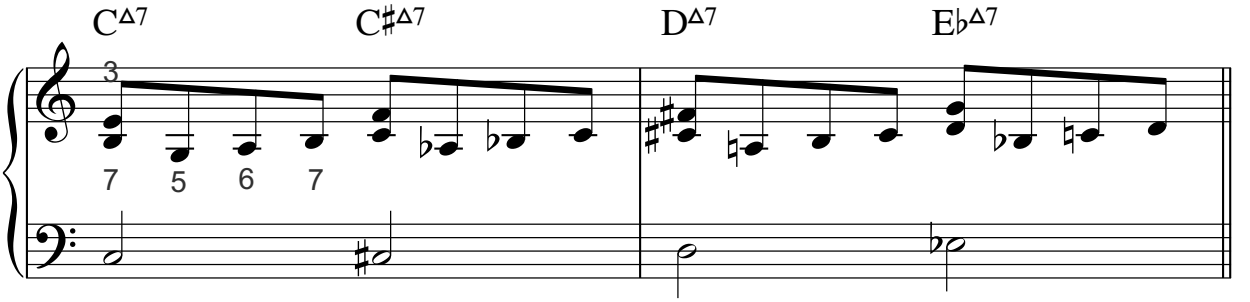
Minor To Major



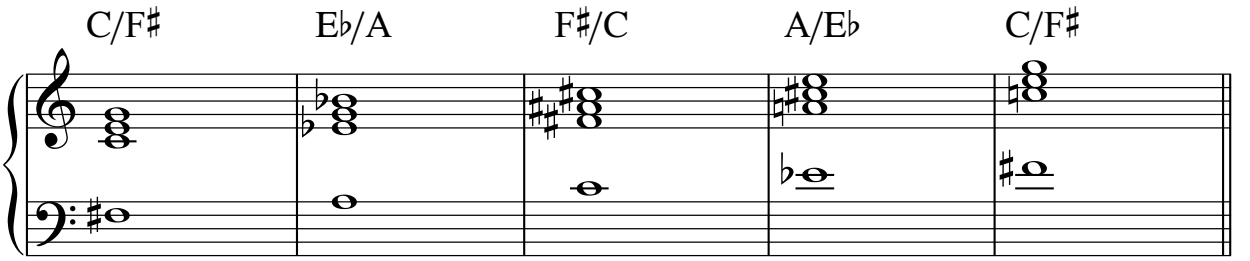
Can also be played with a ♯5th

Parallel Major 7ths

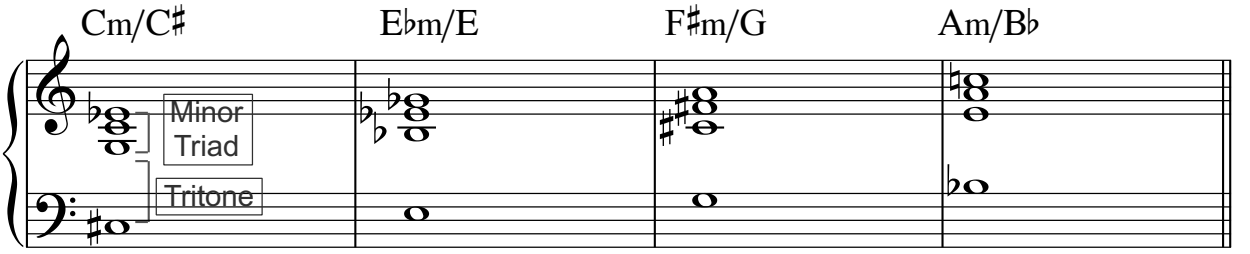
Continue with different roots



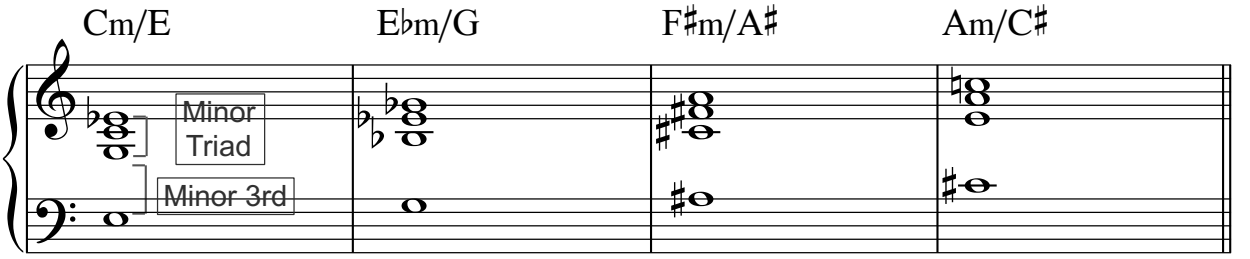
Ascending Major Triads at Minor 3rds



Minor Triad Variety - 2nd Inversion



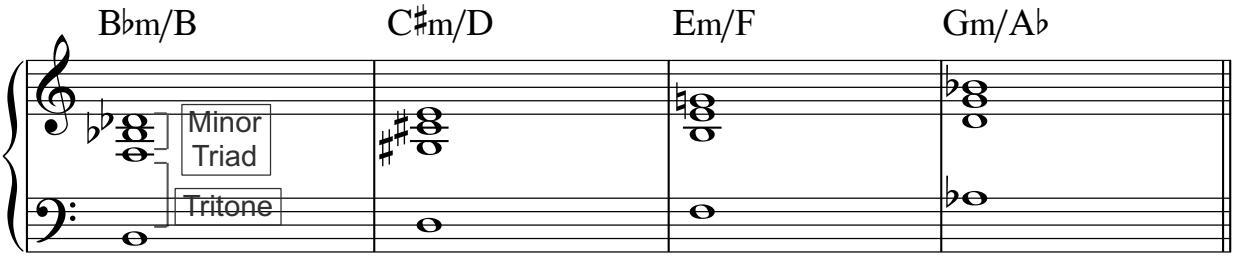
Minor Triad Variety - 2nd Inversion



These voicings can be applied to a G/B♭/D♭/E dominant 7th chord

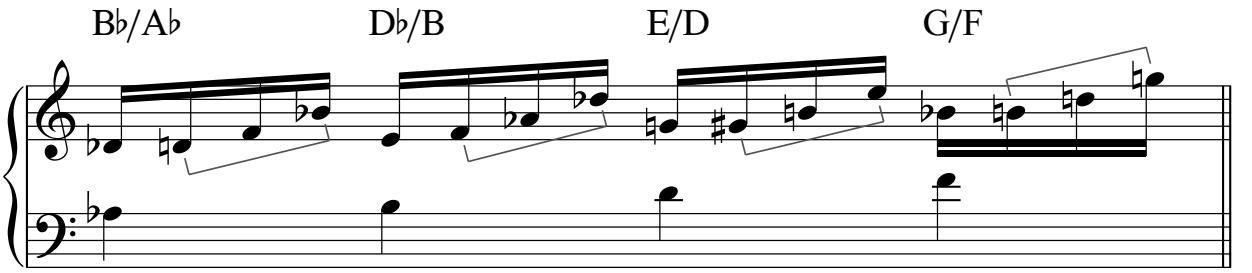
Minor Triads - 2nd Inversion

Transpose chromatically



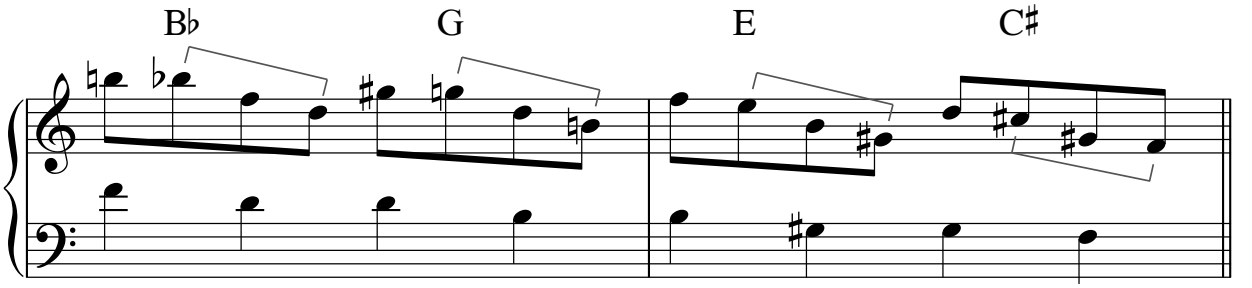
Ascending 1st Inversion Major Triads - with Lower Neighbor Tone
at Minor 3rds

Repeat Chromatically



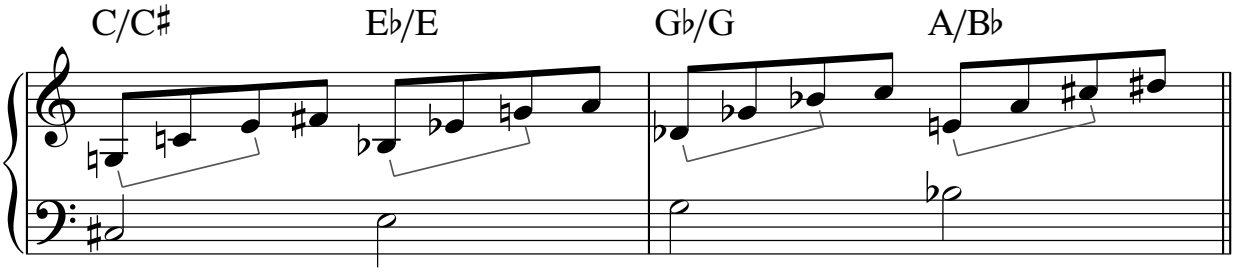
Descending Major Triads - with Upper Neighbor Tone
at Minor 3rds

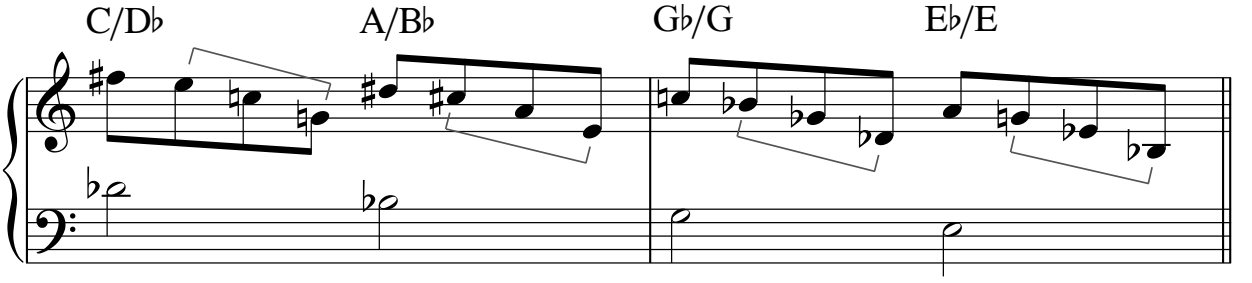
Repeat Chromatically



Ascending 2nd Inversion Major Triads - with Whole Step Upper Neighbor
at Minor 3rds

Repeat Chromatically



Descending 2nd Inversion Major Triads - with Whole Step Upper Neighbor
at Minor 3rds

Repeat Chromatically