

# Intro to Jazz Harmony

Lots of terminology and methods are shared between jazz and (small-c) classical music. Some of the most important differences are:

**Seventh Chords.** Though triads can be used, in most styles of jazz, especially from 1920-1970, every chord will be a seventh chord. We will focus on the four most common types of seventh chords:

1. **major 7**, abbreviated **M7** (Root - Major 3rd - Perfect 5th - Major 7th)
2. **dominant 7**, abbreviated just **7** (Root - Major 3rd - Perfect 5th - Minor 7th),
3. **minor 7**, abbreviated **m7** (Root - Minor 3rd - Perfect 5th - Minor 7th)
4. **half diminished 7** or **minor 7 flat 5**, abbreviated **m7b5** (Root - Minor 3rd - diminished 5th - Minor 7th)

**Chord Extensions.** One defining feature of jazz harmony is the use of chord tones higher than a 7th, which are referred to as "chord extensions." These add color or tension to a chord but do not alter its basic function. If we keep adding thirds above a chord's 7th, we can get a 9th, 11th, and 13th. Just as the default 7th chord identified by the symbol "7" is a dominant 7th chord, the default interval of the 9th is major, the 11th is perfect, and the 13th is major, and all imply a dominant 7th chord underneath unless they specify otherwise. Thus for example a G9 would be G-B-D-F-A: the G-B-D-F dominant 7, plus the major 9th above the root. For our purposes in class we will only deal with the most common chord extensions: the 9, the 13, and the b9 (with a minor 9th).

**ii-V Progressions.** One of the most prominent features of jazz harmony is the ii-V progression, which can be found numerous times in almost every jazz tune. The tricky thing is this: jazz tunes regularly have ii - V progressions that lead to very temporary "tonics" that are not the home key of the piece. When ii-Vs lead to a major key, the ii is a minor 7 and the V is a dominant 7. When they lead to a minor key, the ii is typically a half-diminished 7/minor 7 flat 5, while the V is still a dominant 7.

To find ii-V progressions, look for a m7 or m7b5 chord followed by a 7 rooted a fourth above or fifth below. Identifying these progressions will be useful in improvising.

One final note: we will use Roman numerals often in our discussions of jazz harmony, but we will seldom worry about inversions.