

The chord of the flattened 7th and its potential

The chord on the flattened 7th occurs in folk music such as sea shanties, and has assumed an idiomatic role in the style of composers influenced by these as well as in popular music. It plays a normal part in the harmonic field of the minor mode, but it is in the major that it requires consideration, since it represents a remote destination in terms of normal circle-of-fifths access. For this reason, it has been provided with a special gestural representation, whether the prevailing tonic in the horizontal hand position across the chest is major (I) or minor (i). The left hand moves outwards across the chest to a position outside the body and clearly visible to participants, while the hand itself produces the Kodály sign for *ta*: the index finger pointing downwards and away. This position to the left of the chest complements and opposes that for accessing chord II in which, due to its significance to the chord, the hand position represents that of the sharpened 4th, *fi*.

The chord on the flattened 7th contains notes 2, 4 and flat 7 of the prevailing tonic. While the downward-pointing finger may suggest deepening, this only relates to its consequences for the 7th degree: in terms of voice-leading, chord flat VII is in fact higher in range than chord I.

Chord I: note 1 rises to note 2; note 3 rises to note 4; note 5 rises to note flat 7.

In terms of modulation, use of chord flat VII opens up potential movement that can lead via chord IV to employing the tonicizing sign to confirm 'old' chord flat VII becoming the new tonic. More radically, having moved as indicated to chord flat VII, the dominant 7th sign (the ring created by the index finger meeting the thumb) can be added to produce chord VII⁷ which, when followed by a clear indication employing the tonicizing sign, will take us to the new tonic of 'old' chord flat III. The novelty of this is that we can arrive on a new tonic in this manner without it having previously played a part in the musical flow. This illustrates some of the exciting new possibilities 'outside' the immediate orbit of the Primary Triads, introducing the kinds of modulation that were introduced expressively in the music of composers such as Schubert, Chopin and Brahms from the early 19th Century onwards.

See also:

- [Mixed-mode challenges such as *Greensleeves*]
- [Short cuts to alternative modulatory pathways]
- [Southern African influences on Harmony Signing and their potential]