



The Diminished Seventh Chord

The diminished seventh chord is built by three consecutively 'stacked' minor thirds:



The diminished seventh is extremely versatile – it can be used with good effect based on any degree of the scale. Two of its most common uses are explored below.

i) To prepare the tonic:



- When based on the leading note of the scale (as in the C major example above, bar one), the diminished seventh (VII⁷) chord is only one note different to chord V⁷, hence its strong functionality as a secondary dominant.
- The diminished seventh has a strong pull 'inwards' to a perfect fifth – the resolution by semitone on either side of the fifth is a good 'signal' for the identification of these chords. For instance, in the example above – in bar one the B-natural to A-flat diminished seventh formed between bass and treble resolves 'inwards' by semitone to the perfect fifth of C to G; similarly in bar two, but between tenor and alto.

ii) To prepare the dominant:



- When preparing the dominant, the diminished seventh (above, G-sharp, B-natural, F, D) is often used in place of II^{7b} (G-natural, B-flat, E, D) or IV^{7a} (G-natural, B-flat, F, D)
- Note the 'tell tale' inwards resolution to a perfect fifth between bass and alto.

In the context of a particular key, try experimenting with the diminished seventh chord based on each degree of the scale in turn, noting to where they can lead.