

The Barry Harris Method of Piano Harmony

An introduction to the principles of
harmonic movement

New York Edition

So how DO you create harmonic movement?

- 1) Add passing chords (this is called reharmonization).
- 2) Re-voice the chord
- 3) Invert the chord
- 4) Slide the chord up and down a scale



- 5) Create and resolve suspensions (i.e. borrow).

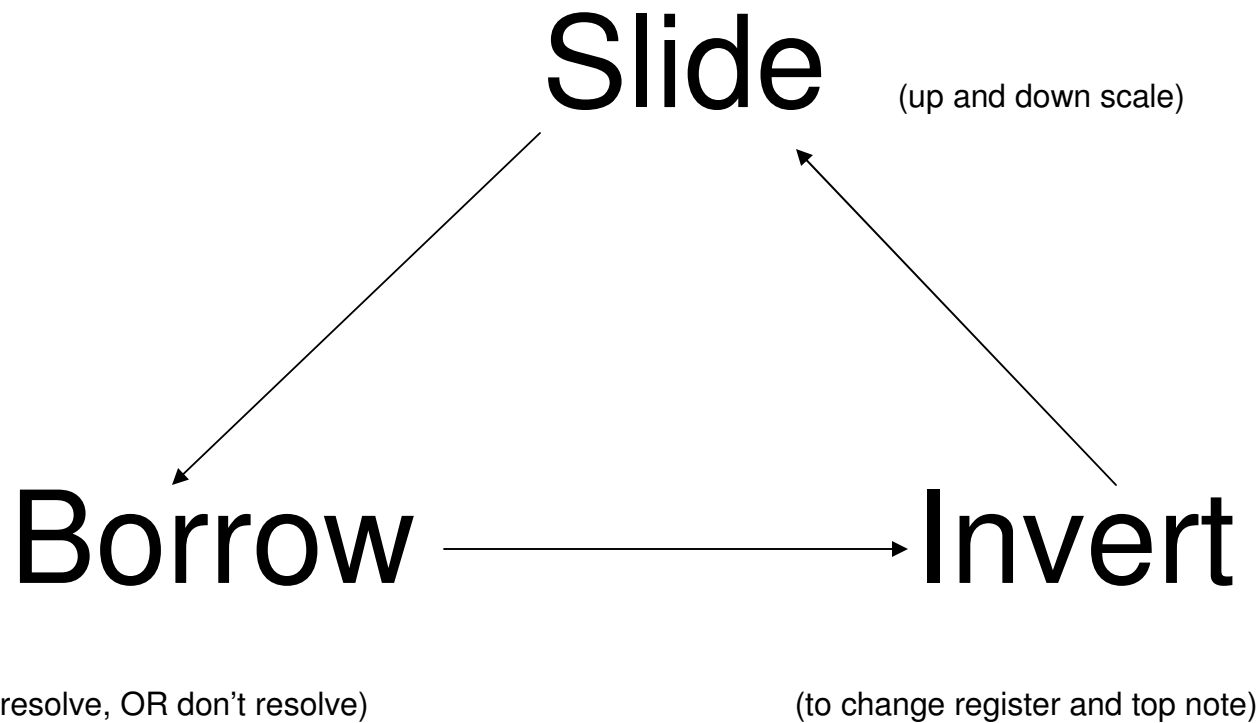
Suspensions can be diatonic or chromatic, from above or below



Barry's method of harmonic movement focuses primarily on points 3, 4 and 5:

- **Invert** chords up and down (in drop 2 position)
- **Slide** chords along a scale. Usually a major scale, minor scale or 6/dim scale (more later)
- **Borrow** notes outside the chord, but inside the scale
- **Borrow** notes outside the chord and outside the scale (usually chromatic approach tones)

Barry often uses the three techniques together



But before moving any chord:

- It must be in a 'moveable' voicing
(usually 4 notes, but sometimes 3)
- Drop 2 is the most useful, because:
 1. it's comfortable under fingers
 2. it's easy to slide up and down a scale;
 3. it's easy to invert 4 times
- Drop 3. Use it to:
 1. create shell voicings in left hand
 2. combine with Drop 2 to create contrary motion
- Drop 2 - 4. Highlights fifth intervals
- Doubling is OK
- None: Close position voicings are awkward to move, and sound too much like the 'block chord' style.

What NOT to do with a chord

(in Barry's system)



Interpret a chord symbol at face value

$C7 = C - E - G - Bb$

- Maybe add extensions, like 9, 13
- Maybe make it a bigger voicing by doubling notes
- Maybe use upper structure triads or chords

These structures don't have the potential to move

Let's talk about... Sliding

- This is sliding a 4 note chord up a major scale. 
- This is sliding a 4 note chord up a melodic minor scale. 

Now add Suspensions to Sliding

- Add the suspensions to each chord and resolve: for example, a chromatic note below the root.



- Barry would say we are 'borrowing' a note outside the chord and then returning it home

However...‘borrowing’ can be tricky:

- Suspensions may change the character of the chord, and even the quality.

For example:

1. C major 6 can become C minor 6
2. C major can become Ab major

- In other words, borrowing works best with specific chord tones and in certain directions.

For example: 2-1, 2-3, 4-3, #4-5, 6-5, 7-6

Fortunately, the sixth diminished scale makes borrowing much more
'fool proof'

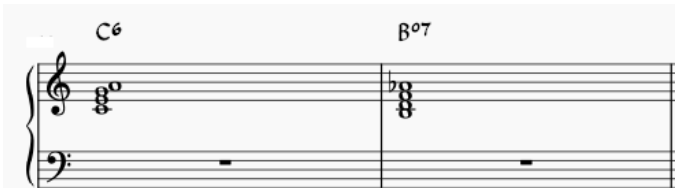
- Just learn two scales in 12 keys.
(no modes need to be learned)
- Any notes can be borrowed inside these scales. They always work! (all notes, all directions)

What is the sixth diminished scale?

- It is the sum of two chords: a major 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.

The result is a major scale with a #5

This is called the Major Sixth Diminished Scale



We can also have the Minor Sixth Diminished Scale

- It is the sum of two chords: a minor 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.

The result is a melodic minor scale with a #5

We will see that...

- All chords (major 6, minor 6, minor 7, half diminished, dominant, altered dominant, diminished) are associated with one of these two scales.
- Therefore, in Barry's system you only have to practice these 2 scales!

What's the challenge?

- You have to practice each scale in 12 keys.
- You have to associate every chord in a song with the appropriate 6/dim scale.

How do you get all the chords from these two scales?

- Start with either a major 6 or a minor 6 chord

- Notice that:

$$Dm7 = F6$$

$$Dm7b5 = Fm6$$

- Learn these superpositions

$$C9 = Gm6$$

$$C7 \text{ alt} = Dbm6$$

$$C \text{ major } 9 = G \text{ major } 6$$

Now SLIDE the 6 or m6 chords up
the sixth diminished scales

C9 = G minor 6 diminished scale

C7alt = Db minor 6 diminished scale

C major 7 = G major 6 diminished scale

Dm7 = F major 6 diminished scale

Dm7b5 = F minor 6 diminished scale

Each of the 8 chord positions works well
either as a resting chord or a passing
chord on the underlying chord quality!

Try this with C major

1. Play a C major 6 chord:

C major 6 = C E G A

2. Drop voice n. 2 (alto) down an octave

3. Visualize the C 6 diminished scale:

C D E F G G# A B

4. Move the voicing up the scale. 

Now add Suspensions from the 6/dim scale, i.e. 'borrow':

1. Add suspensions (using only scale notes) to the soprano, alto, tenor and bass in turn (both from above and below), and resolve them. (i.e. borrow neighboring notes).



2. Suspend notes in pairs, or triplets.

Things to notice about this scale:

- It's an 8 note scale (which has 4 + 4 symmetry).
- A major (or minor) 6 chord always alternates with a diminished 7 chord.
- Any note can be suspended, provided it's inside the scale.

Advantages?

- The practice routine is almost exclusively on these two scales.
- Endless combinations can be developed.
- Suspensions are easy to identify.
- Sliding chords up and down the 6/dim scale sounds like the alternation of Tonic – Dominant, so it works anywhere in the scale.
- Best results are with simple 4 notes chords (which are invertible).

Practicing is crucial

- The practice routine encodes your muscle memory with movements.
- When you see a chord, you play a movement. No rational thinking involved.
- The thinking, fingering, articulation etc. are all practiced ahead of performing a song.

Barry's exercises

- Over the years, Barry has developed hundreds of elegant exercises that can be used effectively in any performance.

Following are some examples on the main chord categories:

Major 6



Minor 6



Minor 7

(B \flat 6)
G-7

C7 \flat 9 \flat 5

The image shows a musical score for a piano in 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef and the second is in bass clef. The first measure of the first staff contains a G-7 chord, which is labeled as (B \flat 6). The second measure of the first staff contains a C7 \flat 9 \flat 5 chord. The bass staff has a continuous eighth-note line in the first measure, and a half-note in the second measure.



Dominant 7

- G7 = Abm6/dim
C Maj 9 = G6



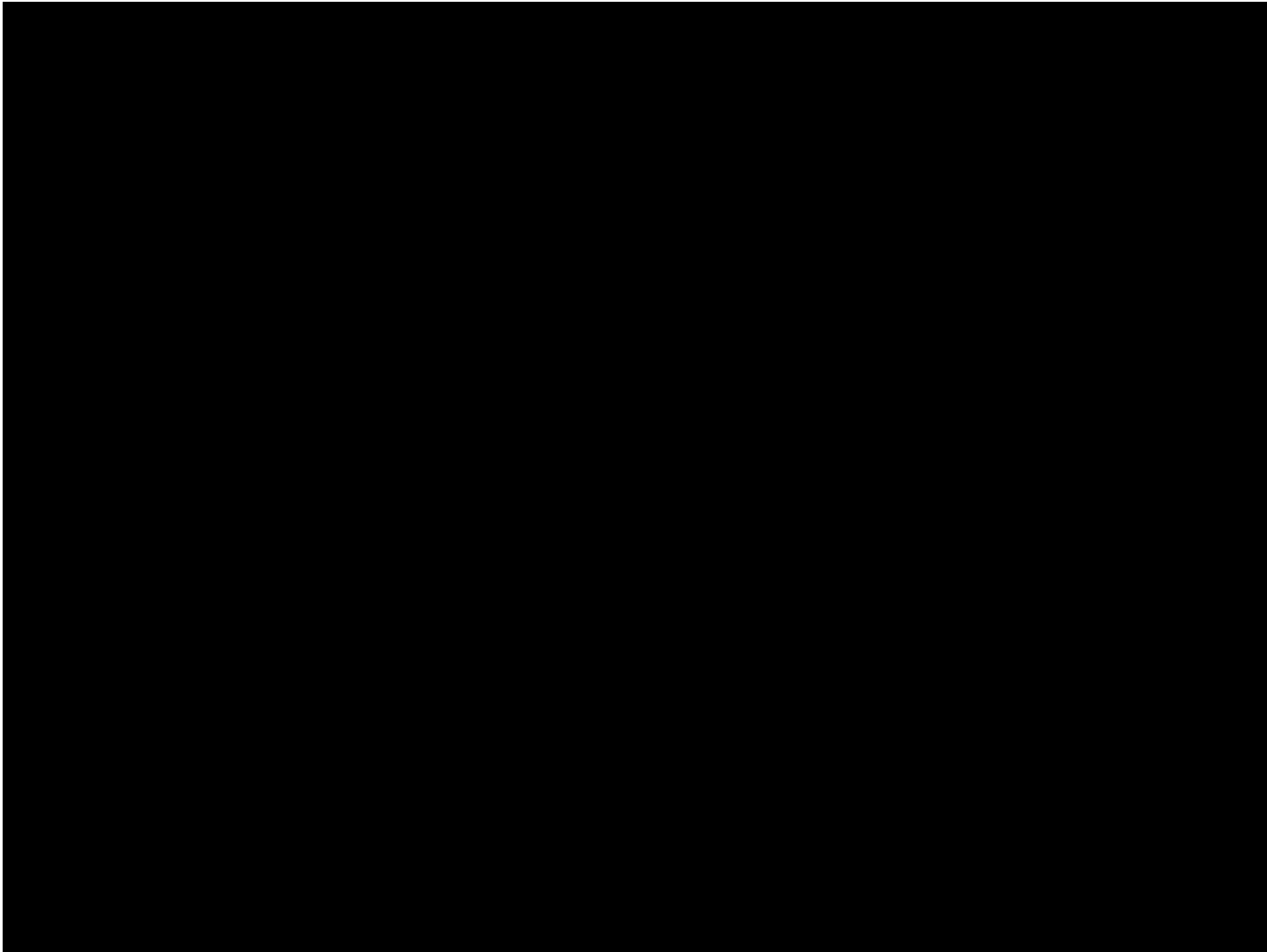
Minor 7 b5



Em7b5 = G-6 (G A Bb C D Eb E F#)

A7 = Bb-6 (Bb C Db Eb F Gb G A)

Barry illustrates:



Part 1

(one borrowed note) (one borrowed note)

F⁶ F-⁶/E C-⁶/*dim* E^b-⁶/D

3 3 3 3



Part 2



Part 3

(one borrowed note) (two borrowed notes)

F⁶ F⁷ ^{#5} B^{b9} E^{b7} A^{b6} A^{b-6}

The musical notation consists of two measures of piano accompaniment. The first measure is labeled '(one borrowed note)' and contains the chords F⁶ and F⁷ ^{#5} B^{b9} E^{b7}. The second measure is labeled '(two borrowed notes)' and contains the chords A^{b6} and A^{b-6}. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various notes, rests, and triplets.



Part 4

(two borrowed notes) (important major) (two borrowed notes)

Bb6/G Ab-6/G Bb6/G F6 C#07 Db-6/Gb

The second system of music continues the chromatic descent in the bass line. The chords are Bb6/G, Ab-6/G, Bb6/G, F6, C#07, and Db-6/Gb. The notation includes a treble clef and a bass clef, with various accidentals and note values.



- Thank you for attending!