

The Barry Harris Method of Piano Harmony

An introduction to the principles of
harmonic movement

Before we start, remember:

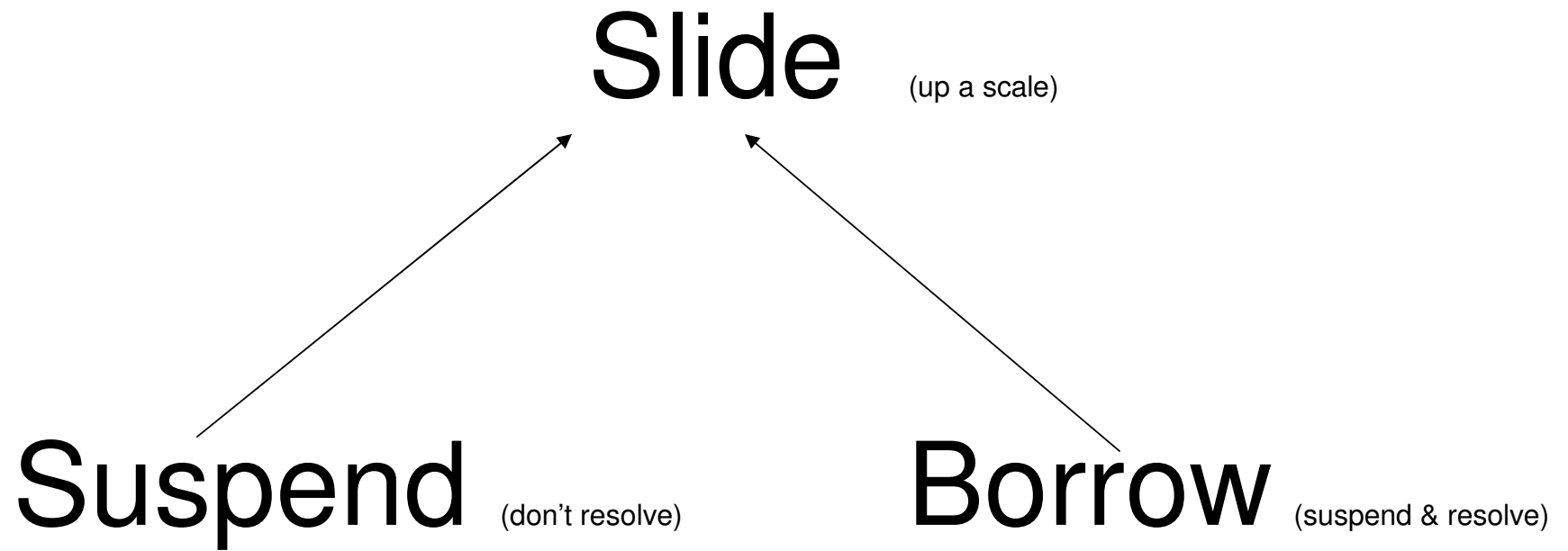
- Building blocks are 4 note chords

(sometimes there is some doubling)

Then:

Drop (2, 3, 2-4)

Invert (4 times)



Static Approach



Interpreting 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

Whatever you add or change, it doesn't move

Ways to move a chord

- 1) Add passing chords (this is called reharmonization).
- 2) Move between different inversions and voicings of the chord.
- 3) Slide the chord shape down a mode, till it lands on the chord (sliding).  
- 4) Add and resolve suspensions (borrowing).
Suspensions can be diatonic or chromatic, from above or below



The challenge with method 3 (sliding)

- You have to remember a different mode for each chord type.
- Sliding chords can sound very different from the target chord.
- Sliding only works in very specific situations (for ex., major 7 and minor 7)
- You cannot apply this technique indiscriminately.

The challenge with method 4 (borrowing)




- Suspensions may change the character of the chord, and even the quality (for example, a major 6 becomes minor 6).
- Suspensions work best with specific chord tones and in certain directions.

(2-1, 2-3, 4-3, #4-5, 6-5, 7-6)

Barry's system simplifies all four methods for moving a chord

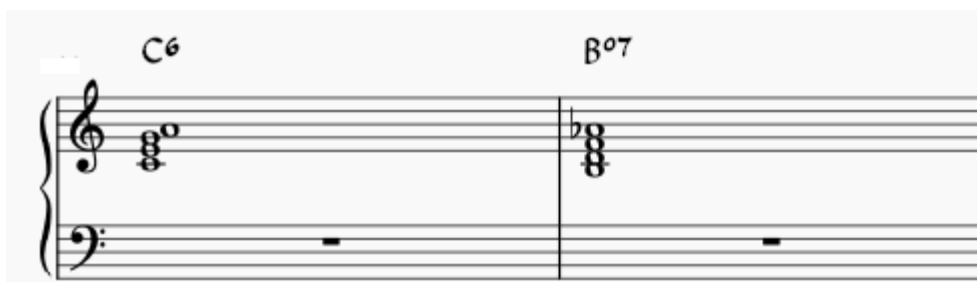
- Only two scales need to be learned.
(no modes need to be learned)
- Sliding chords always work with target chord.
- All notes can be suspended, indiscriminately. (all notes, all directions)

Preparatory exercises

- Practice moving a 4 note chord up a major scale. 
- Practice moving a 4 note chord up a melodic minor scale. 
- Add the suspensions to each chord and resolve: for example, a chromatic note below the root. 

The magic scale: The sixth diminished scale

- By adding a #5 to a major scale you get a major 6 diminished scale.
- It is the sum of two chords: a major 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.



- By adding a #5 to a melodic minor scale, you get a minor 6 diminished scale.
- It is the sum of two chords: a minor 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.
- All chords (major 6, minor 6, minor 7, half diminished, dominant, altered dominant, diminished) are associated with one of these two scales.
- 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.
- The movements inside the 6/dim scales are tricky. You have to practice them all ahead of time. First in C, then in all the other 11 keys.

Therefore...

- Barry's method requires lateral thinking (which can be confusing).

For example:

C7 = Gm6

C7 = Dbm6

C major 7 = G major 6

Dm7 = F6

Dm7b5 = Fm6

- This is similar to thinking of upper structure triads, BUT...

...you think of upper structure scales, NOT chords!

C7 = G minor 6 diminished scale

C7 = 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

Furthermore...

Everything must move on the 'upper structure' 6 diminished scales.

The best way to start is to practice the C 6 diminished scale:

C D E F G G# A B

Next, play a C major 6 chord:

C major 6 = C E G A

Make the C6 chord move.

Two ways:

1. Slide the chord up and down the scale.



2. Add suspensions (using only scale notes), and resolve them... (it's called borrowing).
...from above, from below, in singles, in pairs, in 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.

Developing a practice routine

- Choose a major 6 chord (4 notes).
- Open it up by dropping the alto note an octave. (drop 2)
- Move it up its 6/dim scale.
- Apply one suspension to the soprano, alto, tenor and bass in turn (both from above and below).

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 contains a series of eighth notes in the first measure and a half note in the second measure.



Dominant 7

- G7 = Abm6/dim
C Maj 9 = G6



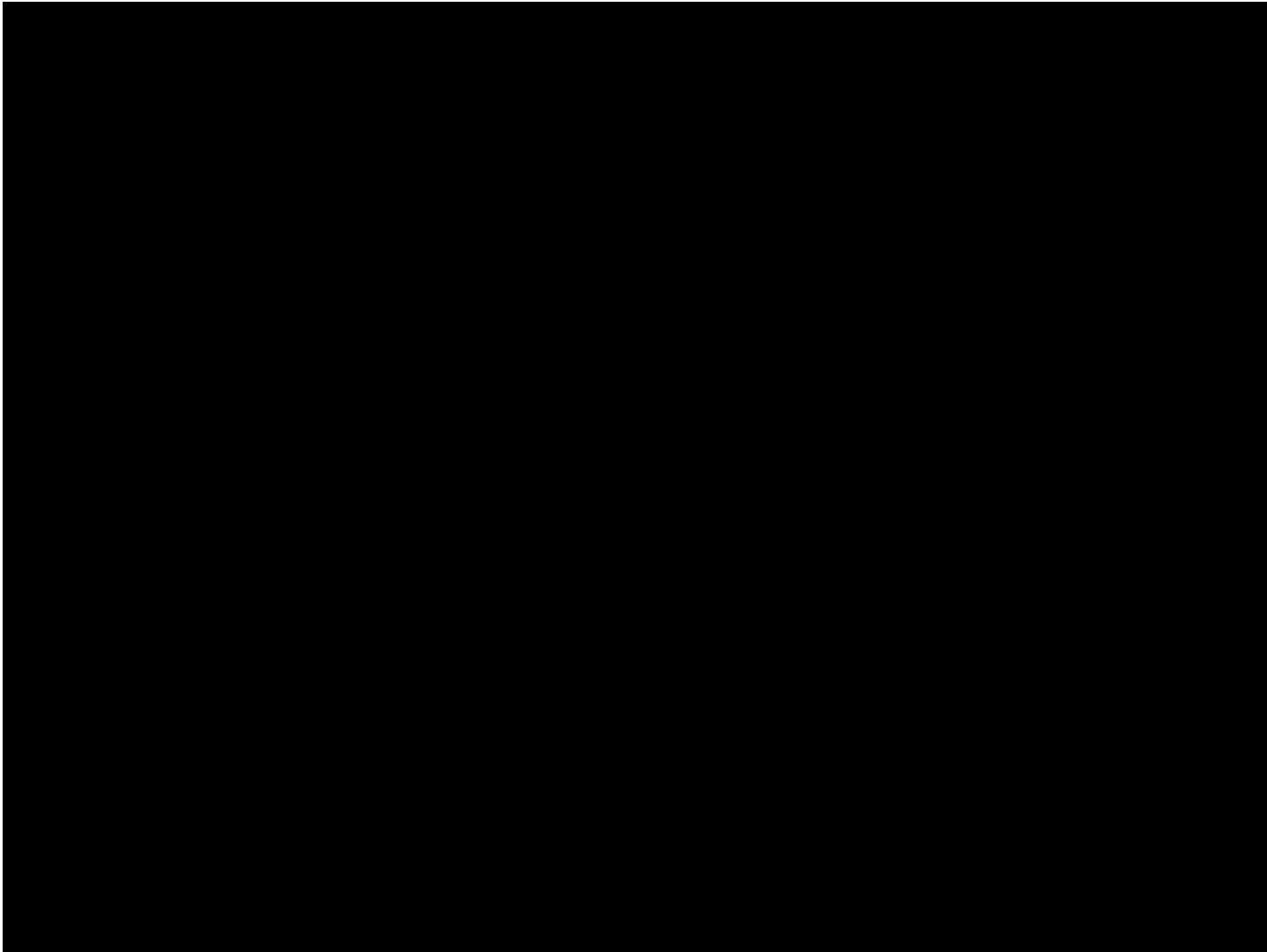
Minor 7 b5



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) F^6 $F7^{\sharp 5}$ $B^{\flat 9}$ $E^{\flat 7}$ (two borrowed notes) $A^{\flat 6}$ $A^{\flat -6}$

The musical notation consists of two measures of piano accompaniment. The first measure is labeled "(one borrowed note)" and contains the chords F^6 , $F7^{\sharp 5}$, $B^{\flat 9}$, and $E^{\flat 7}$. The second measure is labeled "(two borrowed notes)" and contains the chords $A^{\flat 6}$ and $A^{\flat -6}$. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various notes, rests, and triplets.



Part 4

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

B \flat 6/G A \flat -6/G B \flat 6/G F6 C \sharp 07 D \flat -6/G \flat

The musical score is written for piano in two staves. Measure 1 contains a blue quarter note G4 in the treble and a whole note chord of B \flat 2 and G2 in the bass. Measure 2 contains a whole note chord of A \flat 3 and G2 in the treble and a half-note ascending scale from F2 to G3 in the bass. Measure 3 contains a half-note descending scale from G3 to F2 in the treble and a half-note ascending scale from G2 to A3 in the bass. Measure 4 contains a whole note chord of B \flat 3 and G2 in the treble and a whole note chord of F3 and C \sharp 3 in the bass. Measure 5 contains a half-note descending scale from G3 to F2 in the treble and a half-note ascending scale from G2 to A3 in the bass. Measure 6 contains a whole note chord of D \flat 3 and G \flat 2 in the treble and a whole note chord of B \flat 2 and G2 in the bass. Measure 7 contains a whole note chord of B \flat 3 and G2 in the treble and a whole note chord of F3 and C \sharp 3 in the bass. Measure 8 contains a whole note chord of D \flat 3 and G \flat 2 in the treble and a whole note chord of B \flat 2 and G2 in the bass. Measure 9 contains a whole note chord of B \flat 3 and G2 in the treble and a whole note chord of F3 and C \sharp 3 in the bass. Measure 10 contains a whole note chord of D \flat 3 and G \flat 2 in the treble and a whole note chord of B \flat 2 and G2 in the bass.



- Thank you for attending!