

THE DIMINISHED

The three-note chord built on the seventh degree of a major scale produces a diminished triad chord - in the key of C, the notes are B D F. It can be seen that the notes are a minor third apart. This chord is usually best used in its two inversions - D F B and F B D, allowing all three notes to resolve in the next chord.

Nowadays the diminished chord is usually taken to mean the diminished seventh chord, a four-note chord derived from the harmonic minor scale. In classical theory this is regarded as being a chord with a flattened ninth, minus its root-note. With enharmonic changes to some of the notes, the chord can be seen to belong to four different keys, or rather eight if major and minor keys are involved. (Only the major chords are shown here.)

The image shows a musical score for four diminished seventh chords in 4/4 time. The chords are: G7(b9) C, E7(b9) A, D♭7(b9) G♭, and B♭7(b9) E♭. Each chord is shown in its root position with notes on a grand staff.

The diminished chord can also resolve on to a major chord on the same bass-note. (The first two chords in *Spring is Here* illustrate this.) Or it can resolve on to a major chord on another of the notes in the diminished chord, thus a B diminished can resolve to B, D, F or Ab or to Bm, Dm, Fm and Abm. These may entail using inversions of the major or minor chord to sound best.

Furthermore, a diminished chord can resolve on to other major chords which have some notes in common, again using inversions if necessary. A B diminished (B D F Ab) could go to a G major chord as the first two notes belong to both chords. Similarly B diminished could go to a Bb, Db, or E (Ab=G#). Instead of a plain major triad, a major seventh or major ninth could be used effectively.

Notice that in all types of resolution outlined above, the root-notes themselves form another diminished chord.

The good news about all this is that there are only three diminished chords as all others are merely inversions of these three, so Do (the usual symbol for the diminished) is the same as Bo, Abo and Fo; Ebo is the same as Co, Ao and Gb; and Eo is the same as C#o, Bbo and Go.

The implication of all this is that the diminished chord was used a lot by classical composers for modulation purposes. From a jazz point of view, it could be used to conjure up some really interesting chord sequences, not necessarily for the purpose of long-term modulation.

To enrich the diminished chord it is possible to add up to 4 other notes which themselves for a diminished chord a semitone below the root of the original chord. One or two of these additional notes will usually suffice to create a 5 or 6-note chord on a par with other chords you have used. For a very rich texture, a full 8-note chord is possible.

to B \flat can be added 1 or more of these notes:



To avoid the chord sounding muddy, it is often advisable to replace one of the original notes with one of the extensions, rather than include both, eg. the B \flat can replace the A \flat in the first chord.

The diminished chord can sometimes be used as a substitute for other chords. A nice effect is to replace a major 9th with a diminished with the major 9th replacing the diminished 7th interval (just as in the example above). *There's a Small Hotel*, for example, could be harmonised this way with the root or root and fifth of the original chord in the bass.

It was once the custom to replace diminished chords with a II V sequence, in which the II could either be a minor seventh or half-diminished. In the first few bars of *It Could Happen to You* the original | E \flat | E \flat | Fm7 | F \sharp o | is sometimes replaced by | E \flat | G \flat C7 | Fm7 | A \flat D7 .

The opposite thing could also occur. In *I Got Rhythm* the original | B \flat G7 | Cm7 F7 | Dm7 Gm7 | Cm7 F7 | may be replaced by: | B \flat B \flat | Cm7 C \sharp o | Dm7 Gm7 | E \flat F7/E \flat |.

To generalise over this process, in the first example the II of the II V is a minor third below the original diminished chord. Bearing in mind that the diminished chord is like a dominant seventh with a flattened ninth, this makes perfect sense. In other sequences, it may be better to choose another of the missing root-notes of the quasi-dominant seventh . In the case of E \flat , the root-note could be a C, A, G \flat or E \flat . Use any of these as a dominant seventh and if required place a minor seventh a fifth above the dominant seventh.

In the second example, the B \flat is a major third above the G of the G7, so apply this interval to the chords in question. To replace the minor seventh too, you can turn the dominant seventh into a diminished chord and use it for the whole of the II V sequence.

Eg. The original first two bars of *Gone with the Wind* are | Fm7 Bb7 | Eb Δ |. This could be changed to | Bbo (add C) Bbo | Eb Δ /Bb |. Note the inversion.

The diminished scale is a very handy scale and comprises of alternate tone and semitone intervals. There are only three of them, being:

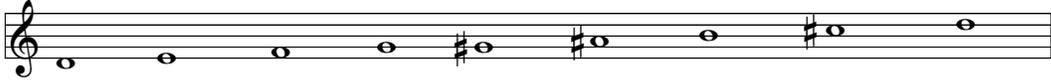
C diminished scale



C# diminished scale



D diminished scale



Other diminished scales are the same as these, eg. Eb=C, E=C#, F=D, etc. These scales fit over diminished chords which can be found within them. C diminished scale, therefore fits a Co, Ebo, Gbo and Ao.

The diminished scale is also applicable to a dominant 13th with altered ninth and flattened fifth based a semitone below the starting note of the chord.

Not so commonly, a C diminished scale could also be used over a Bo chord as well as the dominant seventh that follows in a sequence such as: | Bo | B13(b9) |. (The thirteenth may not actually be mentioned in the chord symbol.)

Harmonic minor scales can also often be used over diminished chords. Remember that the diminished is itself taken from the harmonic minor scale starting a major seventh below the root of the chord. So, a Db harmonic minor scale could be played over a Co chord. It may also be possible to use an E, G or Bb harmonic minor scale instead. (The Db E G and Bb form a diminished chord).

Composite scales formed by combining various notes from 2 diminished scales a semitone apart can also be used.

It can be seen then that the diminished has a wide range of possibilities which can be explored at length.