

Triadic Equal Rights

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If you ask just about any guitarist which of the four triad types they know best, many will say they know the major and minor types better than diminished or augmented types. There is a statistical reason for this. If you examine all of the diatonic triads occurring in the major, melodic minor, and harmonic minor scales, you'll discover that major and minor triads occur 66.7 percent of the time. Diminished and augmented triads occur about 23.8 percent and 9.5 percent of the time respectively.

In order to develop our skills with diminished and augmented triads, we need to change the bias. This can easily be accomplished with a little bit of math. Table 1 lists 24 different sequences using the four triads. Since each triad type appears only once in each of the sequences, the bias is changed so that each one occurs 25 percent of the time. I guess you could see this as a move toward triadic equal rights.

Let's look at line 11 on table 1. Its pattern is diminished, minor, augmented, major. To become more familiar with all triad types, we can take this sequence through various root progressions, tonic systems, and scale cycles. The objective is to voice lead the triads using common tones, stepwise motion, or the smallest possible leaps as each individual voice moves to the next chord. The upper staff shows the sequence in close-voiced chords; the lower staff shows the same sequence with open voicings.

Example 1 shows sequence number 11 (diminished, minor, augmented, major) moving through a root progression of ascending perfect fourths starting on C.

For example 2, let's work with sequence number 6 (minor, augmented, major, diminished).

This time we will use the harmonic minor scale with a cycle three root progression (roots ascending diatonically in thirds). Notice that you have to move through the cycle four times before the first chord, C minor, returns.

In addition to the 24 sequences that use all four triads, you can make another 12 sequences of three triads that include both the augmented and diminished chords and either a major or minor chord (see table 2). Example 3 shows sequence 10 with a cycle five root progression (roots ascending in diatonic fifths) moving up the melodic minor scale.

In addition to finding these to be great theoretical exercises, you may find that these triad sequences (or parts of them) actually sound pretty interesting. Personally, I favor the sonority of the open triads, but the close position voicings are equally useful.

Good luck!

Table 1

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. maj, min, dim, aug 2. min, dim, aug, major 3. dim, aug, maj, min 4. aug, maj, min, dim 5. maj, dim, aug, min 6. min, aug, maj, dim 7. dim, maj, min, aug 8. aug, min, dim, maj 9. maj, aug, min, dim 10. min, maj, dim, aug 11. dim, min, aug, maj 12. aug, dim, maj, min 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. maj, dim, min, aug 14. min, aug, dim, maj 15. dim, maj, aug, min 16. aug, min, maj, dim 17. maj, min, aug, dim 18. min, dim, maj, aug 19. dim, aug, min, maj 20. aug, maj, dim, min 21. maj, aug, dim, min 22. min, maj, aug, dim 23. dim, min, maj, aug 24. aug, dim, min, maj
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Table 2

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. maj, dim, aug 2. dim, aug, major 3. aug, maj, min 4. maj, aug, dim 5. aug, dim, maj 6. dim, maj, aug 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. min, dim, aug 8. dim, aug, min 9. aug, min, dim 10. min, aug, dim 11. aug, dim, min 12. dim, min, aug
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Example 1: Table 1, #11 (diminished, minor, augmented, minor) through cycle 4

C°
F-
B^{b+}
E^b
A^{b°}
D^{b-}
F^{#+}
B
E°
A-
D⁺
G

Example 2: Table 1, #6 (minor, augmented, major, diminished) through harmonic minor, cycle 3

C- E^{b+} G B^o D- F⁺ A^b C^o E^b G⁺ B D^o F- A^{b+} C E^b^o

C- E^{b+} G B^o D- F⁺ A^b C^o E^b G⁺ B D^o F- A^{b+} C E^b^o

G- B⁺ D F^o A^b- C⁺ E^b G^o B- D⁺ F A^b^o C-

Example 3: Table 2, #10 (minor, augmented, diminished) through melodic minor, cycle 5

C- G^o D⁺ A- E^b^o B⁺ F- C^o G⁺ D- A^o E^b⁺

C- G^o D⁺ A- E^b^o B⁺ F- C^o G⁺ D- A^o E^b⁺

B- F^o C⁺ G- D^o A⁺ E^b- B^o F⁺ C-