

Harmonic System and Teaching Experience in the Teaching of Piano Improvisational Accompaniment

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Abstract: Different from formal scored accompaniment, piano improvisational accompaniment requires on-site creation of accompaniment parts based on single-line melodies and features distinct individual characteristics. Combining long-term teaching practice, this paper summarizes the teaching experience of piano improvisational accompaniment from the two dimensions of harmonic progression and accompaniment texture. the harmonic application in improvisational accompaniment can be divided into four core progressive stages. the primary triad stage, centered on T, S and D chords, serves as the foundational stage with easy learning and prominent harmonic functionality, yet it is limited by monotonous musical color. the secondary triad stage effectively compensates for the deficiencies of primary triads and enriches the auditory color of music through the complementarity of major and minor chords, which requires a balance between chord functionality and colority in practical application. the secondary dominant chord stage introduces extratonic altered notes to establish a chromatic harmonic system and strengthen the multi-directional tonal tendency of music, among which the double dominant chord is the most widely used. the independent color chord stage adopts various tonal color chords to deliver unique and fresh auditory effects, where the frequency of chord usage should be strictly controlled to avoid breaking the tonality of musical works.

Keywords: Piano Improvisational Accompaniment; Harmonic Progression; Teaching Experience

1. Stage of Primary Triads

Primary triads T, S, D (t, s, D) are triads built respectively on scale degrees I, IV, and V of a mode, encompassing all natural scale degrees within the mode. In major mode, all of them are

major triads; in minor mode, they are minor triads, with the dominant triad D also capable of existing as a major triad.

Primary triads in major mode:

5	1	2
3	^(b) 6	7
1	4	5
T	S(s)	D

Primary triads in minor mode:

3	6	7
1	4	^(#) 5
6	2	3
t	s	d(D)

Primary triads can be used to create suitable harmonic layouts for all melodies belonging to the diatonic system. They feature simplicity, accessibility for beginners and strong harmonic functionality, yet have the drawback of limited tonal colour variation, since primary triads are highly consistent and unified with the modal character. This stage represents the beginner level in learning impromptu accompaniment.

Examples: *Edelweiss* (Major key), *Katyusha* (Minor key)

Edelweiss

1=C $\frac{3}{4}$

3	-	5		2	-	-		i	-	5		4	-	-	
T				D				T				S			
3	-	3		3	4	5		6	-	-		5	-	-	
T				T				S				D			
3	-	5		2	-	-		i	-	5		4	-	-	
T				D				T				S			
3	-	5		5	6	7		i	-	-		i	-	-	
T				D				T				T			
2	-	5		7	6	5		3	-	5		i	-	-	
D				D				T				T			
6	-	i		2	-	i		7	-	-		5	-	-	
S				D				D				D			
3	-	5		2	-	-		i	-	5		4	-	-	
T				D				T				S			
3	-	5		5	6	7		i	-	-		i	-	-	
T				D				T				T			

Katyusha

1=C $\frac{2}{4}$

6. 7. | 1. 6. | 1. 7. 6. | 7. 3. |
t t t D

7. 1. | 2. 7. | 2. 2. 1. 7. | 6. - |
D D D t

3. 6. | 5. 6. 5. | 4. 3. 2. | 3. 6. |
t d s t

0. 4. | 2. 3. | 1. 7. 3. | 1. 7. | 6. - ||
s t D t

2. Stage of Secondary Triads

Secondary triads are introduced to address the monotonous tonal color produced by primary triads. They include TSVI, DTIII, SII and DVII in major keys, alongside tsVI, dtIII, sII and dVII in minor keys. Notably, TSVI, DTIII, SII and DVII in major keys are minor triads and diminished triads, whereas tsVI, dtIII, sII and dVII in minor keys consist of major triads and diminished triads. These secondary triads form perfect tonal complements to primary triads. Using minor triads within a major key brings inflections characteristic of the minor mode, and the reverse applies to minor keys. This tonal feature arises from the mutual interpenetration of major and minor modes. Accordingly, employing secondary triads remedies the lack of tonal variety associated with primary triads.

Triads of all scale degrees in a major key:

5	6	7	1	2	3	4
3	4	5	(b)6	7	1	2
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	SII	DTIII	S(s)	D	TSVI	DVII

Triads of all scale degrees in a minor key:

3	4	(#)5	6	7	1	2
1	2	3	4	(#)5	6	7
6	7	1	2	3	4	(#)5
t	sI	dtIII(DtII I)	s	D (D)	tsV I	dVII (DVII)

There are certain techniques involved in using a minor triad, and it should not be used blindly or aimlessly. Each chord has its own color and functionality. When using a minor triad skillfully, one should try to take both of these attributes into account as much as possible to achieve a potentially better effect. Take TSVI (tsVI) as an example: TSVI (tsVI) is an upper triad established on the VI degree of the scale. In major, it is a minor triad, and in minor, it is a

major triad. Since this chord has two common notes with T and S respectively, under certain conditions, it can replace T or S, but it will change the color of the harmonic sound.

TSVI in major:

5	3	1
3	1	6
1	6	4
T	TSVI	S

tsVI in minor:

3	1	6
1	6	4
6	4	2
t	tsVI	s

Due to the influence of functionality, the selection of chords before and after TSVI still needs to be paid attention to, and chords should not be arranged randomly. In front of the TSVI, the S chord is usually not arranged, while behind the TSVI, the T chord is not arranged. T→TSVI →S (Better), S→TSVI→T (Worse)

For example: "Song and Smile" (Minor)

Song and Smile

i i i 6. 7i | i i i 6. 7i | 2 2 2 2 i 2 | 7 - - - |
t t s D
tsVI

i i i 6. 7i | i i i 6. 7i | 2 2 2 i 7 5 7 | 6 - - - |
t t s D t
tsVI

Apart from TSVI (tsVI), other secondary triads also have their own principles for use.

For example: "Silk Flower" (in major)

1=F $\frac{2}{4}$

Silk Flower

i i i 2 3 | 5 5 5 | 6 6 5 | 4 5 6 5 4 2 | i - |
T DTIII S SII T TSVI

7 1 2 2 3 | 2 1 1 1 | 7 1 2 1 | 5 - |
D TSVI D DTIII

i i i 2 3 | 5 5 5 | 6 6 5 | 4 5 6 5 4 3 | 2 - |
T DTIII S SII D

5 1 1 2 3 | 3 6 6 | 7 6 7 6 5 | i - |
T S TSVI D T

3. Secondary dominant Chord Stage

Every consonant triad (except the tonic chord T) can be designed with its own dominant chord.

This dominant chord is called a subdominant chord. Among these secondary dominant chords, there is one common feature - major seventh chords (including major triads) that contain variations outside the mode scale. They (secondary dominant chords) established a semitone system and brought multiple tendencies to the music. In this semitone system, some are explicit and some are implicit. In explicit melodies, there are some variations within chords, while in implicit melodies, these variations are not included but appear in the accompaniment part.

Please refer to the table below for details

5	6	7	1	2	3	4
3	4	5	6	7	1	2
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	SII	DTIII	S	D	TSVI	DVII
4	5	6	$b7$	1	2	
2	3	$\#4$	5	6	7	○
7	$\#1$	$\#2$	3	$\#4$	$\#5$	
5	6	7	1	2	3	
D_7	D_7/SII	$D_7/DTIII$	D_7/S	$D_7/D(DD_7)$	$D_7/TSVI$	○

Among these subdominant chords, the dominant chord (DD) is one of the most frequently used. Its usage principles have the following characteristics: In the case where each note within:

The Underwater Girl

1 = C $\frac{4}{4}$

5 | 3 - - 5 6 | 3 3 2 1 · 3 | 2 · 3 2 1 6 6 1 2 1 | 2 - - 5 |

3 - - 5 6 | 3 3 2 1 · 3 | 2 · 3 2 1 5 5 2 | 1 - - 3 5 6 5 |

||: 6 - - 1 6 | 5 · 3 5 3 5 | 6 - 1 6 1 | 2 - - 5 | 3 - - 5 6 |

S T S DD D

3 3 2 1 · 3 | 2 · 3 2 1 6 6 1 2 1 | 2 - - 2 3 | 5 3 1 5 6 6 5 |

3 3 2 1 · 3 | 2 · 3 2 1 5 5 2 | I. - - 3 5 6 5 :|| II. - - - ||

1). Measure contains notes of scale II, VI, and I but does not include note of scale IV, the DD chord can be used.

2). Before the DD chord, it is usually not the dominant chord D, but S and SII chords are more common. After the DD chord, the dominant chord D is predominant. Of course, in some cases, it is possible to be the S chord, but it should not be the SII chord.

For example: "The Underwater Girl" (in major), "Anne" (in minor)

1 = C $\frac{4}{4}$

Anne

(3 - 3 1 7 6 | 5 - 4 - | 0 2 2 2 2 1 7 · 1 | 6 - - -) |

0 1 1 7 1 · 6 7 | 1 · 7 4 - 0 7 1 | 2 · 1 7 6 5 2 4 | 3 - - 0 3 4 |

t tsVI dVII dtIII

4 · 4 5 6 · 2 1 | 7 · 1 6 - 0 6 1 | 7 7 7 1 7 7 0 6 | 7 - - - :||

S t DD D

4. Independent Color Stage

At this stage, we can also choose other chords to add new colors to the harmonic progression during the accompaniment. Color, drawing on artistic terms, in music represents the acoustic characteristics emitted by chords themselves, and has nothing to do with the connection before or after the chords. In other words, when using colored chords, there is no need to consider their association with other chords (functional orientation). the sound emitted by the chord itself could be a bright major triad, a gentle minor triad, or a tense diminished seventh chord, and so on. the application of these bright and tense sound characteristics in musical accompaniment is an independent form of accompaniment outside the functional system, thus it can bring people an unexpected auditory functional progression effect.

1 = bA $\frac{6}{8}$
♩ = 130

Reed Catkins

(1 2 5 3 2 1 | 6 · 6 · | 1 2 5 3 2 1 | 2 · 2 · |

T TSVI S T TSVI SII D

dVII

1 2 5 3 2 1 | 6 1 6 · | 2 3 2 6 2 | 1 · 1 ·) |

T TSVI S SII D T

Yellow River Ballad

1 = E $\frac{2}{4}$

2 · 3 5 6 5 | 3 - | 2 · 3 2 · 1 | 6 - | 6 · 5 | 6 1 5 6 |

SII DTIII SII TSVI S

3 5 3 | 6 - | 5 3 5 | 6 1 5 0 | 1 2 3 6 1 |

T D/SII T S

2 - | 2 - | 5 · 6 | 1 3 0 | 5 6 3 2 | 1 - |

dVII T TSVI D T

1 = bB $\frac{4}{4}$

Song of the Yangtze River

3 4 | 5 - - 3 4 | 5 - - 2 3 | 4 - - 3 | 3 - - - ||

T dtIII D T

Such as "Reed Catkins", "Yellow River Ballad", "Song of the Yangtze River"

In conclusion, among the four aspects of harmonic progression, the major triad is the foundation, which can clearly, precisely and accurately establish the mode and tonality as well as the functional system. the minor triad is elevated and can replace the related major triads within a relatively clear functional system, giving the music an element of mutual penetration between major and minor keys. Secondary dominant chords can establish multiple harmonic tendencies within a mode. the use of chromatic chords, however, is non-functional and should not be used frequently; otherwise, it will undermine the functionality established within the tonality of the mode.

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