

# MUSIC THEORY.aargh©

## What Harmony? A contest lurks! (Session 11)

By Dr. Ona Pinsonneault

Do you wonder why there are many notes for you to play in one composition and few in another composition? Some notes are critical to aiding in the aural establishment of tonality. These notes will appear more often in the composition than other notes.

Every note of the scale can be the basis (or "root") of a chord. A triad is a three note-chord. In tonal harmony triads consist of the "root" and two other notes. These are the chord letters: ACE, BDF, CEG, DFA, EGB, FAC, GBD. To these three letters we can add sharps or flats as the key signature indicates.

Put this together with the names of the scale degrees. Based on the ascending scale pitches 1-7:

Tonic = 1 • Supertonic = 2 • Mediant = 3 • Subdominant = 4  
Dominant = 5 • Submediant = 6 • Leading tone = 7

There are three chords in the scale that are important for defining tonality: tonic, subdominant and dominant. When you play music written in a definite key (major or minor) these three chords will be the ones used most often and will make the music sound like it is in a definite tonality. (Sometimes the supertonic is used in place of the subdominant.) The tonic chord is the most important.

If the composition is in the key of C Major the notes C, E, and G in any octave appear most often (seriously, you can count them if you want), with C the most important note because it is the root of the chord. Dominant notes appear next most often, especially G, the root, followed by subdominant notes.

C Major

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Tonic	Subdominant	Dominant
								1, 3, 5	4, 6, 8	5 7, 2

### Is this information important to you as a ringer and/or conductor?

The person(s) who sends me the best reasons to *know* or *not to know* this, will see their reasons published in the next Music Theory.aargh column in *Clapper Chatter!* **Please email your responses to the email address below.**

Until next time,

**Dr. P**

[ona.pinsonneault@normandale.edu](mailto:ona.pinsonneault@normandale.edu)

April 2013