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Chord Extensions

The C Scale Extended:

1	3	5	7	b9	9	#9	11	b5/#11	#5	13						
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D ^b	D	D [#]	E	F	G ^b	G	G [#]	A

A C chord, which is a major tonic triad, is made of the notes C E G, or 1 3 5, and can be said to be extended by adding other notes to it. These notes are called extensions because you have added some note or notes beyond the C E G, or 1 3 5, triad.

The numbers that follow the chord's root name denote what other notes are to be sounded. Say you add the note B, which is a 7th away from the root C. Since chords are named after their farthest extension, you would therefore call it C Major 7. (By convention, the word "major" in a chord signifies the presence of the major 7th, hence Cmaj7). Among the notes C E G and B, there are no b5 relationships; it is therefore a tonic chord.

Now, take the chord C E G and B^b (instead of B). The notes E and B^b have the relationship of a b5, and B^b is the b7th tone away from C. Therefore, this is a dominant chord, and its name is C7.

Nomenclature—The Names of Chords

E and B^b are three whole steps apart (E-F[#]-G[#]-A[#]=B^b); that relationship is called a tritone. Using the tritone like a pivot—that space or relationship around which a chord revolves—you can harmonize with any notes your imagination can conjure up. That is, you can construct all of your dominant chords around the tritone. The resultant name of the chord will basically depend on which notes are added.

So, say you want to add the notes G[#] (because that's the melody note at that moment) and D^b (because you feel that creates a pleasing harmony); you have added a #5 and a b9 to an existing C7 chord. It is therefore known as C7(#5, b9). In it there are C E G, the major triad; B^b, the b7th, which, because of its relationship to E, defines the chord as dominant; G[#], the #5; D^b the b9th. That makes six notes, but because a #5 is called for, usually the natural 5th, G, is abandoned. (Although look at measure 8 in "Day Dream" for an exception to this rule.)

