

The Minor Seven Flat Five Montage

Philip Tagg (version 1, March 2004) [6m35s]

Langsam und schmächtend

oboe *

vic. *pp*

cresc.

dim.

p

alternative notation

$Fm7-5$

$G\#m6/6$

ad lib. (quasi cadenza)

Cm

$Cm7\flat5 (E\flat m6)$

ff

f

3

3

3

trem.

♯

Times of entries in montage

0:00	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)	2:55	Theme from <i>Bergerac</i> (Fenton)
0:16	Perry Mason Theme (F Steiner)	3:06	Dorian Toccata (J S Bach)
0:30	<i>Warsaw Concerto</i> (Addinsell)	3:14	<i>Dead End Street</i>
0:37	<i>The Dream of Olwen</i> (C Williams)		(R Davis, The Kinks)
0:43	Canzone senza parole, from <i>Tre Donne</i> (Morricone)	3:24	<i>Stella By Starlight</i>
0:56	Ridi Pagliaccio, from <i>Pagliacci</i> (Leoncavallo)	3:30	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)
1:10	Symphony #40 Gm K550 (Mozart)	3:39	<i>Strangers In The Night</i>
1:15	<i>Strangers In The Night</i> (B Kaempfert, Frank Sinatra)	3:47	Aria fr <i>Dido & Aeneas</i> (Purcell)
1:31	<i>Lachrymae Pavane</i> (Dowland)	3:53	Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini (Rachmaninov)
1:38	Conerto in F for Piano & Orchestra (Gershwin)	4:03	Gute Nacht fr <i>Winterreise</i> (Schubert) and Prelude Dm <i>Wohltemp. Klavier 1</i> (J S Bach)
1:51	Perry Mason Theme (F Steiner)	4:24	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)
1:57	Symphony #40 Gm K550 (Mozart)	4:27	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> (A North)
2:02	Prelude Dm <i>Wohltemperiertes Klavier 1</i> (J S Bach)	4:38	None But The Aching Heart (Tchaikovsky, Isaac Stern)
2:08	Dido's suicide aria fr <i>Dido & Aeneas</i> (Purcell)	4:48	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)
2:16	I Am Calling You fr <i>Baghdad Café</i> (Telson, Javetta Steele)	4:51	Brandenburg Concerto #6 (J S Bach)
2:29	<i>None But The Aching Heart</i> (Tchaikovsky, Isaac Stern)	4:58	<i>RAF - The Way to the Stars</i> (Brodzky)
2:36	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)	5:20	<i>Liebestraum</i> (Liszt)
2:41	Opening chorus, <i>Matthäuspassion</i> (J S Bach)	5:49	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)
2:48	<i>Tristan & Isolde</i> (Wagner)	6:04	<i>Warsaw Concerto</i> (Addinsell)
		6:13	Mars fr <i>The Planets</i> (Holst - no connection!) mixed with <i>Warsaw Concerto</i>

Why this m7b5 montage?

When working with *Ten Little Title Tunes* (New York, 2003, ISBN 0-9701684-2-X, see www.mmmssp.com), Bob Clarida and I had to deal with two tunes, in contrasting styles, both of which seemed to us to contain the same sort of chord. *The Dream of Olwen* (1942), one of those wartime big concerto movie love themes cloning pathos à la Rachmaninov or Tchaikovsky, spent a third of its time either on straight half-diminished chords (m7b5) or on minor triads with an added major sixth (m6), while a minor triad with added major sixth and ninth provided the harmony for almost half of Alex North's title music, in symphonic jazz vein, for Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar named Desire* (1951). We argue that m7b5 and m6 are effectively inversions of each other, as follows, for example.



We would be surprised if this view of 'half-diminished' chords were to gain much popularity among conventional music theorists who will no doubt object to our lumping Wagner's Tristan chord, that over-examined fetish of tertial harmonic ambiguity, with the same sonority's occurrence in such 'fluff' as the middle eight of Bert Kaempfert's *Strangers In The Night*. They will doubtless argue that Wagner's notational orthography (the enharmonic respelling of **ab** and **eb** as **g#** and **d#**) implies much greater sophistication of harmonic direction. The problem is that, by staring at the notation instead of listening to the first occurrence of the chord, for example, as an Fm7b5 or G#m6 (or Abm6), and instead of playing its various potential continuations anticlockwise, with or without tritone substitution, as ii (or iv) - V - I movement round the circle of fifths, Schenkerians and other academic musos, miss the full semantic charge of that half-diminished chord. By emphasising aspects of its notational syntax they miss the point *heard*, not seen, by over 600 respondents who independently agreed that *The Dream of Olwen* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, despite differences of location and narrative genre, were both pieces of music associated with trouble, with serious feelings, etc.

We write about this issue at some length in *Ten Little Title Tunes* (pp.180-204; 566-577), providing examples, extracts from some of which are included in this montage, ranging from Dowland to detective themes (see outside of this inlay). In the book we also present a typology of half-diminished chords whose categories include: (1) the *conjunctural*, usually in the middle of a chain of Baroque seventh chords round a tonal circle of fifths (as in montage at 3:06); (2) the *precadential*, usually as ii or iv in tonic-directed ii/iv - V - I movement (e.g. at 1:31 or 3:53); (3) the *departural*, as second chord preceded by an initial tonic (usually minor, e.g. at 1:57 or 4:03); (4) the *modulatory*, as pivot, often as second chord (departural) in a new period (e.g. at 0:00 or 4:51); (5) *initial*, or 'independent' (e.g. at 3:24, 4:27, 4:58).

Although the montage features only a small proportion of all the half-diminished chords mentioned in *Ten Little Title Tunes*, I hope it demonstrates the sonority clearly enough as a phenomenon of musical structure per se. It certainly doesn't *explain* much!

If you would like to know more about how the classical 'modulatory worry' aspect of half diminished chords conflates with the 'urban crime trouble' connotations of altered minor-triad jazz-influenced music, I'm afraid you'll just have to read the book...

Caveat

Most cross-fades and mixes in this montage work fine. A few of them are, however, a little rough. The reasons for such problems are as follows. (1) My old (vinyl) record player ran a little too fast and I was on two occasions unable to run a satisfactory Pitch Correction routine. (2) I still haven't managed to make all loops smooth without ruining the underlying tempo of the passage in which they occur. (3) The software's gating cuts out background noise at too high a dB level, so that if you listen at high volume there will be an audible difference between very low signal and no signal at all.

Philip Tagg, Montréal, March 2004.