

WHAT ARE AUGMENTED CHORDS AND HOW ARE THEY USED?

Hello friends,

And welcome back to Swiftlessons for another music theory tutorial! In today’s lesson we’ll be discussing the origins of augmented chords: how they are built from the major scale, and how they can be used in composition. Let’s get started!

Section #1: The C Major Scale - Open Position

The notes in and adjacent to the major scale are building blocks for chords. Each note within the scale receives a number 1-7 that can be used in a formula that creates a specific type of chord shape. For example, the basic major chord is always built from the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes of the major scale. In the tablature below, the notes that belong inside our open C chord are highlighted.

E	-----0-1-3-											
B	-----0-1-3-											
G	-----0-2-											
D	---0-2-3-											
A	-3-											
E	-----											
	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5

Section #2: Building the Augmented Harmony – 1, 3, #5

As seen in section #1, the notes within the major scale can be harmonized to create basic chords, but these notes can also be sharpened (#) and flatted (b) to achieve more exotic sounds. To create an augmented chord, we must sharpen the 5th scale interval of our major triad up one half step. The resulting harmony is one rich in tension, forcing the listener to anticipate a resolution.

Below we have the major scale “augmented” to highlight the tones that make up a common position of the C^{aug} chord. Notice how this altered major scale now has an exotic, eastern sound!

E	-----0--1--4-											
B	-----0-1-3-											
G	-----1-2-											
D	---0-2-3-											
A	-3-											
E	-----											
	C	D	E	F	G#	A	B	C	D	E	F	G#
	1	2	3	4	#5	6	7	1	2	3	4	#5



Section #3: Using the Augmented Chord in Blues

Augmented chords are great for creating a sense of tension in your music, and so they are often used at the end of a progression to set up a resolution back to the tonic, or first chord in a given key.

One of the most popular applications for an augmented chord is to use it as a substitute for the five chord in a given key. Here is an example of how it might be applied to the end of a blues progression in the key of F major:

F7 //// | **Bb7** //// | **F7** //// | **Bb7** //// | **F7** //// |

C7 //// | **Bb7** //// | **F7** // **Bb7** // | **F7** // **Caug** // |

Section #4: The Augmented Turnaround

In my original music, I often use the augmented chord as a means to “reset a verse.” Here’s an example of a verse I’ve written that contains two sets of stanzas. The augmented 5 chord is positioned between them so that the listener expects this repetition.

Gmaj

I use to ride my El Dorado

Am

Beneath the blazing sun

D7

Now my heart has lead me west bound

G

Daug

Toward a love that’s just begun

Gmaj

Left my pass lives in the valley

Am

And headed for the tracks

D7

For an angel who as saved me

G

G7

And I’m never coming back

