

Common Tone Diminished 7th Chords

Until now we have dealt with the diminished seventh chord consistently as a leading tone chord, with its root acting as leading tone to a particular tonic note. There is another type of diminished seventh chord, quite different in function that was very much used by the Romantic period masters.

It is referred to as the common tone diminished seventh chord, or embellishing diminished seventh chord. Its use is quite restricted:

- it is used primarily in major keys and has only two variations (see A)
- and it resolves only to I or V
- when resolving to I, the tone common to both chords is the tonic note (see B)
- when resolving to V, the tone common to both chords is the dominant note (see C)

In C major, the two variations are D[♯]-F[♯]-A-C (resolving to I) and A[♯]-C[♯]-E-G (resolving to V). In modern theory, both chords may be analyzed merely as CT[◦]7 (common tone diminished 7th). In traditional theory, they are analyzed as [♯]ii[◦]7 (for D[♯]-F[♯]-A-C) and [♯]vi[◦]7 (for A[♯]-C[♯]-E-G).

Diagram illustrating three variations (A, B, C) of common tone diminished seventh chords and their resolutions:

Chord progressions shown:

- A: C: [♯]ii[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → I
- B: C: [♯]vi[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → I
- C: C: V [♯]vi[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → V

Quite often the resolution is to V7 chord. There are several possibilities for approach chords.

Diagram illustrating resolutions to V7 and I:

Resolution to V7:

- A: C: I [♯]vi[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → V7
- B: B^b: I⁶ [♯]vi[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → V⁶₃

Resolution to I:

- C: C: ii7 [♯]ii[◦]7 CT[◦]7 → I⁶
- D: D: iii [♯]vi⁶₃ V⁴₃ → I
- E^b: E^b: I V⁴₃ [♯]vi⁴₃ V⁴₂ → I

Occasionally, they are found in minor keys, though this is quite rare:

C: i i6 CT°7 V₂⁴ d: i iv6 IV6 V₃⁶ CT°7 V₃⁴ V7 i

Common tone diminished seventh chords and leading tone diminished seventh chords can function as pivot chords in modulation. This may or may not require enharmonic notation. Any leading tone diminished seventh chord might be reinterpreted as common tone diminished seventh chord and vice versa. Any leading tone diminished seventh chord might be secondary as well as primary chords. A few examples should clarify:

C: I V₂⁴ I6 CT°7 V₃⁴ CT°7 V₂⁴ CT°7

C: vii^{°3} I6 IV I₆ V I

F: V I V₂⁴/V V6 vii^{°6}/₃/V V6 vii^{°7}/V

Db: CT°7/V V₅⁶ I V₆⁶/V V V7 I