Towards a Music Algebra: Fundamental Harmonic Substitutions in Jazz

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Abstract—In this paper the most common harmonic substitutions, at least as far as jazz music is concerned, are unconventionally addressed. The novelty consists in introducing a new method finalized to formally defining and logically applying all the fundamental harmonic substitutions, by exploiting an unusually rigorous notation. After defining the substitutions and discussing their applicability, we resort to them in order to modify some simple harmonic progressions substantially based upon a banal major turnaround. As explicitly suggested by the title, the modifications are carried out by following an extremely formal line of reasoning: all the logic passages are accurately described by resorting to a notation so similar to the one commonly employed in mathematics and physics, that the harmonic analysis of a song turns out to be de facto comparable to the demonstration of a theorem.

Keywords—Music Algebra, Unconventional Notation, Harmonic Substitutions, Ionian Scale, Turnaround.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, all the fundamental harmonic substitutions [1] [2] are discussed by resorting to a notation, generally employed in fields such as mathematics and physics, extremely formal and rigorous. We herein exclusively refer to a single harmonization, the *Ionian* one: consequently, for the sake of clarity, we reveal in advance that the so-called "*Modal Interchange*" is not addressed in this article. Obviously, the line of reasoning we exploit can be equally followed starting from other scales, such as the *Natural Minor Scale* (that can be obtained from the *Ionian Scale* by means of a banal translation), the *Ipoionian Scale* (*Bach Minor Scale*), the *Harmonic Scales* (Major and Minor).

II. DIATONIC SUBSTITUTIONS

Two chords that arise from the harmonization of the same scale are interchangeable if the distance between them (between the roots) is equal to a diatonic third (both ascending and descending). [1] [2] Exclusively referring to the *Ionian Harmonization*, the *Diatonic Substitutions* in

their entirety can be effectively summarized by means of the following relations:

$$VIm7 \leftrightarrow Imaj7 \leftrightarrow IIIm7 \tag{1}$$

$$VII\phi \leftrightarrow IIm7 \leftrightarrow IVmaj7$$
 (2)

$$Imaj7 \leftrightarrow IIIm7 \leftrightarrow V7 \tag{3}$$

$$IIm7 \leftrightarrow IVmaj7 \leftrightarrow VIm7 \tag{4}$$

$$IIIm7 \leftrightarrow V7 \leftrightarrow VII\emptyset \tag{5}$$

$$IVmaj7 \leftrightarrow VIm7 \leftrightarrow Imaj7$$
 (6)

$$V7 \leftrightarrow VII\emptyset \leftrightarrow IIm7$$
 (7)

If we set, for example, I = C, from the foregoing relations we immediately obtain the following:

$$Am7 \leftrightarrow Cmaj7 \leftrightarrow Em7$$
 (8)

$$B\emptyset \leftrightarrow Dm7 \leftrightarrow Fmaj7 \tag{9}$$

$$Cmaj7 \leftrightarrow Em7 \leftrightarrow G7$$
 (10)

$$Dm7 \leftrightarrow Fmaj7 \leftrightarrow Am7$$
 (11)

$$Em7 \leftrightarrow G7 \leftrightarrow B\emptyset$$
 (12)

$$Fmaj7 \leftrightarrow Am7 \leftrightarrow Cmaj7$$
 (13)

$$G7 \leftrightarrow B\emptyset \leftrightarrow Dm7$$
 (14)

The *Diatonic Substitutions* can be described, with obvious meaning of the notation, by resorting to a matrix of chords (that represents the *Diatonic Tensor*):

$$Dia^{Ion}(I) = \begin{bmatrix} I^{\Delta} & 0 & IIIm7 & 0 & 0 & VIm7 & 0 \\ 0 & IIm7 & 0 & IV^{\Delta} & 0 & 0 & VII0 \\ I^{\Delta} & 0 & IIIm7 & 0 & V7 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & IIm7 & 0 & IV^{\Delta} & 0 & VIm7 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & IIIm7 & 0 & V7 & 0 & VII0 \\ I^{\Delta} & 0 & 0 & IV^{\Delta} & 0 & VIm7 & 0 \\ 0 & IIm7 & 0 & 0 & V7 & 0 & VII0 \end{bmatrix}$$
(15)

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Evidently, the *Diatonic Substitutions* can be summarized exploiting the following simple relation:

$$Dia_{ij}^{lon} \leftrightarrow Dia_{ji}^{lon}$$
 (16)

From (15), by setting, for example, I = C, we obtain:

$$Dia^{Ion}(C) = \begin{bmatrix} C^{\Delta} & 0 & Em7 & 0 & 0 & Am7 & 0 \\ 0 & Dm7 & 0 & F^{\Delta} & 0 & 0 & B\phi \\ C^{\Delta} & 0 & Em7 & 0 & G7 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & Dm7 & 0 & F^{\Delta} & 0 & Am7 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & Em7 & 0 & G7 & 0 & B\phi \\ C^{\Delta} & 0 & 0 & F^{\Delta} & 0 & Am7 & 0 \\ 0 & Dm7 & 0 & 0 & G7 & 0 & B\phi \end{bmatrix}$$
(17)

In *Figure 1* a useful graphic representation of the *Diatonic* Substitutions is provided.

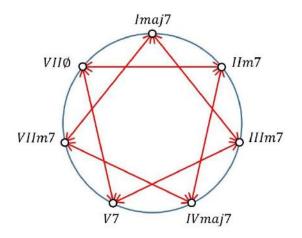


Figure 1. Diatonic Substitutions

SECONDARY DOMINANTS III.

Any chord, even if it arises from a previous harmonic substitution, can be converted into a Dominant Seventh Chord. [1] [2] [3] [4] Referring, once again, to the chords obtained from the Ionian Harmonization, we have:

$$Imaj7 \to I7 = V(IV) \tag{18}$$

$$IIm7 \to II7 = V(V) \tag{19}$$

$$IIIm7 \to III7 = V(VI) \tag{20}$$

$$IVmaj7 \to IV7 = V(bVII) \tag{21}$$

$$V7 = V(I) = Primary Dominant(I)$$
 (22)

$$VIm7 \to VI7 = V(II) \tag{23}$$

$$VII\phi \to VII7 = V(III) \tag{24}$$

If we set, for example, I = C, from the foregoing relations we immediately obtain the following:

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$Cmaj7 \rightarrow C7 = V(F)$	(25)
$Dm7 \rightarrow D7 = V(G)$	(26)
$Em7 \rightarrow E7 = V(A)$	(27)

$$Fmai7 \to F7 = V(B^b) \tag{28}$$

$$G7 = V(C) = Primary Dominant(I)$$
 (29)

$$Am7 \to A7 = V(D) \tag{30}$$

$$B\phi \to B7 = V(E)$$
 (31)

From (28) we immediately deduce that the dominant seventh chord obtained from the fourth degree (F7, in thespecific case) leads towards a note, to extremely simplify, that does not belong to the C Ionian Scale (Bb, in the specific case). Consequently, the Secondary Dominant that arises from the forth degree is to be regarded as nonfunctioning (or non-functional).

IV. TRITONE SUBSTITUTION

Any Dominant Seventh Chord, especially in the case it is altered and even if it arises from a previous harmonic substitution, can be replaced by a chord of the same kind (a dominant seventh chord) distant three whole tones from the initial chord. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] Generally, if we denote with X a generic note belonging to the Chromatic Scale, and with t a Whole Tone Interval, we can write:

$$X7 \to Y7$$
 (32)

$$Y = X + 3t \tag{33}$$

If we set, for example, X = C, from the foregoing relations we immediately obtain the following:

$$C7 \to G^b 7 \equiv F^\# 7 \tag{34}$$

DIMINISHED SUBSTITUTION V.

Any Dominant Seventh Chord, especially if it is provided with the flat ninth and even if it arises from a previous harmonic substitution, can be replaced by a Diminished Chord distant a major third, a perfect fifth, a minor seventh or a flat ninth from the initial chord. [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] All the above-mentioned intervals are implicitly regarded as ascending. In other terms, we can concisely write, with obvious meaning of the notation, as follows:

$$X7^{(b9)} \rightarrow Ydim7$$
 (35)

$$Y = X + 2t + \frac{3n}{2}t \qquad n = 0,1,2,3 \tag{36}$$

More explicitly, we have:

 $X7^{(b9)} \rightarrow \begin{cases} \langle X+2t \rangle dim7 & n=0, major third \\ \langle X+\frac{7}{2}t \rangle dim7 & n=1, perfect fifth \\ \langle X+5t \rangle dim7 & n=2, minor seventh \\ \langle X+\frac{13}{2}t \rangle dim7 & n=3, flat ninth \end{cases}$ (37)

By setting, for example, X = C, from (37) we obtain:

$$C7^{(b9)} \rightarrow \begin{cases} Edim7 & n = 0, major third \\ Gdim7 & n = 1, perfect fifth \\ B^{b}dim7 & n = 2, minor seventh \\ D^{b}dim7 & n = 3, flat ninth \end{cases}$$
(38)

VI. EXPANSION

The *Dominant 9sus4* and *b9sus4 Chords* can be expressed by resorting to the so-called *Slash Chords*. In very formal terms, with obvious meaning of the notation, we can write:

$$V7^{9sus4}(X) = \frac{II - 7(X)}{\langle X + \frac{7}{2}t \rangle}$$
(39)

$$V7^{b9sus4}(X) = \frac{II - 7b5(X)}{\langle X + \frac{7}{2}t \rangle}$$
(40)

By virtue of (39) and (40), we can state that, in a certain measure, any *Dominant Seventh Chord* can be imagined as being preceded by a *Minor Seventh Chord* or a *Half-Diminished Chord* distant a descending perfect fourth. [3] Consequently, employing a vertical line to separate two consecutive beats or bars, we have:

$$V7 \to \begin{cases} II - 7 & | V7 \\ II - 7b5 & | V7 \end{cases}$$
(41)

If we set, for example, X = C, from (39) and (40) we obtain:

$$G7^{9sus4} = \frac{Dm7}{G} \tag{42}$$

$$G7^{b9sus4} = \frac{D\emptyset}{G} \tag{43}$$

Coherently with the setting (X = C), from (41) we have:

$$G7 \rightarrow \begin{cases} Dm7 \mid G7\\ D\emptyset \mid G7 \end{cases}$$
(44)

VII. SOME NOTEWORTHY CASES

Case 1: Rhythm Changes (Bridge)

Let's consider the following simple harmonic progression:

Imaj7	Imaj7	VIm7	Vm7
IIm7	IIm7	V7	V7

Harmonic Progression 1.1

If we set $I = B^b$, we immediately obtain:

B ^b maj7	B ^b maj7	Gm7	Gm7
Cm7	Cm7	F7	F7

Harmonic Progression 1.2

Taking into account the previous progression, let's carry out the following substitutions:

bars 1,2:
$$B^b maj7 \xrightarrow{diat.} Dm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} D7$$
 (45)

bars 3.4:
$$Gm7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} G7$$
 (46)

bars 5,6:
$$Cm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} C7$$
 (47)

From the *Harmonic Progression 1.2*, by virtue of (45), (46) and (47), we finally obtain:

D7	D7	G7	G7
C7	C7	F7	F7

Harmonic Progression 1.3

Case 2: I'm Getting Sentimental Over You (first 8 bars) Let's now consider the following harmonic progression:

Imaj7	V7	Imaj7	IVm7
IIm7	V7	Imaj7 VIm7	IIm7 V7

Harmonic Progression 2.1

By setting I = F, we immediately obtain:

Fmaj7	C7	Fmaj7	Dm7
Gm7	C7	Fmaj7 Dm7	Gm7 C7

Harmonic Progression 2.2

Taking into account the foregoing progression, let's carry out the following substitutions:

bar 2:
$$C7 \xrightarrow{diat.} E\emptyset \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} E7 \xrightarrow{exp.} Bm7 \mid E7$$
 (48)

bar 3: Fmaj7
$$\xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}}$$
 F7 = V(B^b) $\xrightarrow{\text{diat.}}$ AØ (49)

bars 4,6:
$$Dm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} D7$$
 (50)

bars 5,8:
$$Gm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} G7$$
 (51)

From the *Harmonic Progression 2.2*, by virtue of (48), (49), (50) and (51), we immediately obtain:

Fmaj7	Bm7	E7	Am7 ^{b5}		D7	
G7	C7		Fmaj7	D7	Gm7	C7

Harmonic Progression 2.3

It is worth underlining that, in some cases, a desired chord (or a harmonic progression in its entirety) can be obtained by following various lines of reasoning. Just to provide an example, it is easy to verify how the third bar of the *Harmonic Progression 2.3* could have been alternatively deduced by resorting to the following simple substitutions:

bar 3: Fmaj7
$$\xrightarrow{\text{diat.}} Dm7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} D7$$
 (52)

bars 4:
$$Dm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} D7$$
 (53)

bars 3,4:
$$D7 \xrightarrow{exp.} A\emptyset \mid D7$$
 (54)

Case 3: Stella by Starlight (first 8 bars)

Let's consider the following harmonic progression:

IIm7	IIm7	V7	V7
Imaj7	Imaj7	IIm7	V7

Harmonic Progression 3.1

If we set $I = B^b$, we immediately obtain:

Cm7	Cm7	F7	F7
B ^b maj7	B ^b maj7	Cm7	F7

Harmonic Progression 3.2

Taking into account the progression we have just obtained, let's carry out the following substitutions:

bars 1,2:
$$Cm7 \xrightarrow{diat.} A\emptyset \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} A7 \xrightarrow{exp.} E\emptyset \mid A7$$
 (55)

bars 3,4:
$$F7 \xrightarrow{exp.} Cm7 \mid F7$$
 (56)

bars 5,6:
$$B^b maj7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} B^b7 \xrightarrow{\text{exp.}} Fm7 \mid B^b7$$
 (57)

$$bar \ 7: \ Cm7 \xrightarrow{diat.} E^b maj7 \tag{58}$$

bar 8:
$$F7 \xrightarrow{diat.} Dm7 \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} D7 \xrightarrow{trit.} A^b7$$
 (59)

From the *Harmonic Progression 3.2*, exploiting (55), (56), (57), (58) and (59), we finally obtain:

Em7 ^{b5}	A7	Cm7	F7
Fm7	B ^b 7	E ^b maj7	A ^b 7

Harmonic Progression 3.3

The chord obtained in the eight bar (A^b7) leads towards B^bmaj7 (ninth bar, not displayed in the *Harmonic Progression 3.3*). The progression ^bVII7 / Imaj7 is commonly named "Back-Door Solution". [5]

Case 4: Easy Living (first 8 bars)

Let's consider the following banal harmonic progression:

Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7	Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7
Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7	Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7

Harmonic Progression 4.1

If we set $I = A^b$, from the foregoing progression we obtain:

A ^b maj7	Fm7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7	A ^b maj7	Fm7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7
A ^b maj7	Fm7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7	A ^b maj7	Fm7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7

Harmonic Progression 4.2

Taking into account the previous harmonic progression, let's carry out the following substitutions:

$$bar 1: Fm7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} F7 \xrightarrow{\text{dim.}} Adim7 \tag{60}$$

$$bar 2: E^b 7 \xrightarrow{diat.} G \emptyset \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} G 7 \xrightarrow{dim.} Bdim 7 \tag{61}$$

bars 3.6:
$$A^b mai7 \xrightarrow{diat.} Cm7$$
 (62)

$$bar 3: Fm7 \xrightarrow{diat.} A^b maj7 \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} A^b7$$
(63)

$$bar 4: B^b m7 \xrightarrow{diat.} D^b maj7 \tag{64}$$

bar 4:
$$E^{b}7 \xrightarrow{diat.} Cm7 \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} C7 \xrightarrow{trit.} G^{b}7$$
 (65)

$$bar 7: Fm7 \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} F7 \tag{66}$$

From the *Harmonic Progression 4.2*, taking into account (60), (61), (62), (63), (64), (65) and (66), we finally obtain:

A ^b r	naj7	Ao7	B ^b m7	Bo7	Cm7	A ^b 7	D ^b maj7	G ^b 7
A ^b n	naj7	Fm7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7	Cm7	F7	B ^b m7	E ^b 7

Harmonic Progression 4.3

The second chord in the fourth bar (G^b7) leads towards A^bmaj7 : once again, a typical "Back-Door Solution".

Case 5: Giant Steps

Let's now consider the following harmonic progression:

Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7	Imaj7	VIm7
IIm7	V7	Imaj7	V7	Imaj7	V7
Imaj7		VIm7		IIm7	V7
Imaj7		V7		Imaj7	V7

Harmonic Progression 5.1

By setting I = B, we immediately obtain:

Bmaj7	G [#] m7	C [#] m7	F#7	Bmaj7	G [#] m7
C [#] m7	F#7	Bmaj7	F#7	Bmaj7	F [#] 7
Bmaj7		G [#] m7		C [#] m7	F#7
Bmaj7		F#7		Bmaj7	F#7

Harmonic Progression 5.2

Taking into account the previous progression, let's carry out the following substitutions:

$$bar \ 1: G^{\#}m7 \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} G^{\#}7 \equiv A^{b}7 \xrightarrow{trit.} D7$$
(67)

bars 2,5,11:
$$C^{\#}m7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} C^{\#}7 \equiv D^b7 \xrightarrow{\text{trit.}} G7$$
 (68)

bars 2,5:
$$F^{\#}7 \xrightarrow{diat.} A^{\#} \emptyset \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} A^{\#}7 \equiv B^{b}7$$
 (69)

bars 3,6,9,15:
$$Bmaj7 \xrightarrow{diat.} D^{\#}m7 \xrightarrow{sec. \ dom.} D^{\#}7 \equiv E^{b}7$$
 (70)

bars 4,10:
$$G^{\#}m7 \xrightarrow{\text{sec. dom.}} A^b7 \xrightarrow{\text{trit.}} D7 \xrightarrow{\text{exp.}} Am7 \mid D7$$
 (71)

bars 8,14:
$$F^{\#}7 \xrightarrow{diat.} A^{\#}\emptyset \xrightarrow{sec. dom.} B^{b}7 \xrightarrow{exp.} Fm7 \mid B^{b}7$$
 (72)

bars 12,16:
$$F^{\#7} \xrightarrow{exp.} C^{\#}m7 \mid F^{\#7}$$
 (73)

From the foregoing harmonic progression, by virtue of (67), (68), (69), (70), (71), (72) and (73), we obtain:

Bmaj7	D7	G7	B ^b 7	E ^b 7	Am7	D7
G7	B ^b 7	E ^b 7	F#7	Bmaj7	Fm7	B ^b 7
E ^b 7		Am7	D7	G 7	C [#] m7	F#7
Bmaj7		Fm7	B ^b 7	E ^b 7	C [#] m7	F#7

Harmonic Progression 5.3

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The Harmonic Progression 5.3, clearly, does not represent the desired result yet. In order to obtain the original Coltrane progression, we have to further modify all the chords written in red. On this purpose, we introduce a banal harmonic substitution (often simply named "Quality Substitution") that allows to instantly transform a Dominant Seventh Chord into a Major Seventh, without resorting to the so-called "Modal Interchange". In this regard, suffice it to bear in mind that the two abovementioned chords are characterized by the same triad (the same chordal notes): in other terms, they only differ in the seventh (that can be considered, at least in a certain sense, as being a fundamental tension). It is worth highlighting how, by exploiting this very method, the well-known "Tadd Dameron (or Coltrane) Turnaround" [4] [8] can be obtained. Ultimately, we can write:

bars 2,5,11:
$$G7 \xrightarrow{dom. \ to \ maj.} Gmaj7$$
 (74)

$$bar \ 3,6,9,15: E^b 7 \xrightarrow{dom. \ to \ maj.} E^b maj7 \tag{75}$$

Taking into account (74) and (75) we finally obtain:

Bmaj7	D7	Gmaj7	B ^b 7	E ^b maj7	Am7	D7
Gmaj7	B ^b 7	E ^b maj7	F#7	Bmaj7	Fm7	B ^b 7
E ^b maj7		Am7	D7	Gmaj7	C [#] m7	F#7
Bmaj7		Fm7	B ^b 7	E ^b maj7	C [#] m7	F#7

Harmonic Progression 5.4

VIII. FINAL REMARKS

Let's start from a banal sequence of four bars (or beats, or sets composed of an equal number of beats) characterized by the same chord (in our case, a *Major Seventh Chord*):

Imaj7	Imaj7	Imaj7	Imaj7
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Harmonic Progression 6.1

Although it cannot be formally regarded as a harmonic substitution, we are clearly allowed to resort to the so-called *"Tonicization"* [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] in order to create a first, simple harmonic motion (nothing but an *Authentic Cadence*):

Imaj7	Imaj7	V7	V7
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Harmonic Progression 6.2

Let's now carry out the following substitutions:

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bars (beats) 3,4: $V7 \xrightarrow{exp.} IIm7 \mid V7$ (76)

bar (beat) 2: Imaj7
$$\xrightarrow{\text{diat.}}$$
 VIm7 (77)

From the *Harmonic Progression 6.2*, by virtue of (76) and (77), we immediately obtain:

Imaj7	VIm7	IIm7	V7
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Harmonic Progression 6.3

It is evident that, starting from a single Major Seventh Chord, we can easily obtain a Major Turnaround. In other terms, we are implicitly stating that all the harmonic progressions we have obtained in the previous section may be imagined as arising from a single chord. In a certain sense, we could even state that, net of some progressions explicitly based upon the so-called "Pure Plagal Cadence" (IVmaj7 / Imaj7), all the Popular Jazz Songs, as far as the harmonic structure is concerned, may be considered as originating from a single chord (a Major Seventh Chord or, exploiting the harmonization of whatever minor scale, a Minor Seventh). It is worth underlining that we have explicitly referred to the "Pure Plagal Cadence", since the "Authentic" or "Extended" one (IVmaj7 | V7 | Imaj7) can be immediately deduced, by simply resorting to a banal Diatonic Substitution, from a IIm7 / V7 / Imaj7 harmonic progression which, in turn, can be obtained from a single Major Seventh Chord by exploiting a "Tonicization" and, taking into account (76), an Expansion.

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