

Theory Sheet 10 davejonesguitar.co.uk

Transposition

Transposing a chord progression means to re-write the original progression but change the key it is written in. The type of chords [major, minor, dominant, etc] stay exactly the same. Their relationship to each other and to the key centre also remain exactly the same, only the overall pitch changes.

Transposition is an essential skill for musicians as it means you can change the key of any song to suit, for example, a singers voice or a particular instrument.

The best way to transpose is to use the roman numeral numbering system. The first thing to do is establish the key of the chord progression, for example:-

C | Dm | G | C |

Notice the progression starts and ends with a C major chord, this gives a clue. However, there are two major chords in this progression C and G, there are three major chords in a major key, the I, IV and V. The IV and the V chord are always next to each other in the musical alphabet, so the key cannot be G as that would make C the IV chord and D the V. Therefore D would be a major chord not a minor. The key must, therefore, be C major.

The next thing to do is find the roman numbers of each chord in the key:-

I | II^m | V | I

C | Dm | G | C |

Notice the minor [m] After the II chord, this is used by musicians to identify the fact that it is a minor chord.

To transpose this progression into the key of G, for example, you would have to find the corresponding roman numbers in G.

The I is G, the II^m is Am, the V is D, so the transposed progression is:-

I | II^m | V | I
G | Am | D | G |

Transposition works with any type of chord, for example:-

I | III^m | VI^m | II^m | V⁷
Gmaj7 | Bm7 | Em7 | Am7 | D7 |

Transposed into D is:-

I | III^m | VI^m | II^m | V⁷
Dmaj7 | F#m7 | Bm7 | Em7 | A7 |

Notice that the chord type remains the same it is just the letter name that changes, and all the chords continue to relate to each other in the same way.

Exactly the same method is applied when transposing in minor keys.