

Monteverdi Gloria for 8 voices M 23

Get to know some useful terminology that helps you to think and talk about chords, and learn 2 more chord facts. You need your keyboard and / or the online chord player so you can listen to the examples

1. When you need to think about things it is helpful to have words to do it with. Musicians use words to talk about chords. These words aren't the letter names of the notes - they describe the function of each note in the chord regardless of which chord it is. They describe the structure of the chord.

At the start of Activity 19, you learned that a basic chord has 3 notes - a starting note that gives the chord its letter name, a note that is next-door-but-one, and another that is again next-door-but-one. Each of these three notes has a special term.

The note on which the chord is built is called the **root**. In a C major chord, that is C. How nice it would be if the next note up were called the trunk and the top one the branch, but sadly, the terms we use are much less fun - but very practical.

The next note up from the root is called the **third**. This is because it is 3 notes higher than the root. (Remember that in music, when counting the distance between note in numbers, you count the lower note as 1.

Amazingly, the final note is called the **fifth** - because it is

Here's your old friend the C major chord, with the three notes named.

C, the root E, the third G, the fifth and together How you count the distance between notes

The note that is different between a major and a minor chord is the third

C minor C major D minor D major A major A minor G major G minor

2. Now you can use those terms to help you describe the way chords are arranged. In Activity 19, Step 3, you learned that a chord isn't always arranged so that the note which gives it its name is at the bottom. Now you know that note is the root. As each of the chords you're dealing with at the moment (and the ones that Monteverdi used) have three notes, there are three different notes that could be at the bottom.

Here are 3 versions of the C major triad. The first has the root at the bottom, the second has the third at the bottom, and the third version has the fifth at the bottom.

In music, you tend to get lots of chords in root position and some in first inversion, but very few in 2nd inversion.

root at the bottom	third at the bottom	fifth at the bottom	It doesn't matter how many notes are repeated, or how spaced out they are. It's which notes is at the bottom that matters. Here's the chord in its 3 positions.
root position	1st inversion	2nd inversion	

3. Sometimes a composer only wants to use 2 notes in the chord. The least important note is the fifth, so that's the one that will get missed out. Each of these chords made out of a root and a third acts almost as well as a full triad - play them and see what you think.

4. In Lord of the Dance (Activity 22) one note was coloured pale blue. It's an F, and it goes with a G chord even though it isn't one of the G triad notes. After the time of Monteverdi, composer often liked to strengthen their dominant chord by adding the note a seventh above the root. It's called a 7th chord (there's a surprise!). Play the G triad and then G7 to hear the difference. This time you can have a third inversion.