

TRIADS IN ROOT POSITION

the intervals that appear above the lowest note. In root position triads, these intervals are a third (indicated by a 3) and a fifth (indicated by a 5). However, numerical superscripts for chords in root position are normally omitted since root-position triads are far more common than triads in inversion.

Illustration 4.11

G_3 $f\#_3$ d_3 $F+_3$
 or more commonly:
 G $f\#^\circ$ d F+

TRIADS IN FIRST INVERSION

For triads in first inversion, the superscript $\frac{6}{3}$ or its abbreviated form 6 is used.

Illustration 4.12

$G_{\frac{6}{3}}$ $f\#_{\frac{6}{3}}$ $d_{\frac{6}{3}}$ $F+_{\frac{6}{3}}$
 or more commonly:
 G^6 $f\#^{\circ 6}$ d^6 $F+^6$

Note on Illustration 4.12:

The use of this symbol differs from that in popular music, where the “6” indicates a sixth added to a root-position triad.

TRIADS IN SECOND INVERSION

For triads in second inversion, the superscript $\frac{6}{4}$ is used.

Illustration 4.13

$G_{\frac{6}{4}}$ $d_{\frac{6}{4}}$

Practice Assignment A on page 115 can be completed at this time.

Superscripts are used with seventh chords in much the same way as with triads. Although they are given here in order to complete the introduction of this topic, further consideration of seventh chord inversion symbols will be deferred until Chapter Thirteen.

SEVENTH CHORDS

Illustration 4.14

or more commonly:

This numerical method of symbolizing chords is derived from a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practice called **figured bass notation**—a system of musical shorthand devised for keyboard parts, consisting of a bass line along with numbers below the notes to indicate the intervals to be added above. Known as the **continuo**, this part was interpreted (**realized**) by keyboard players who filled in the indicated harmonies according to their musical taste and skill. The basic rules of figured bass notation follow.

FIGURED BASS

1. The numbers appearing under a given bass note indicate the intervals to be added above that note. (The composers and performers of the time thought in terms of intervals only—*not chord inversion*, a concept unknown to all but the last generation of figured bass composers.)
2. The absence of a number under a bass note implies that a third and fifth are to be added above that note (i.e., a root-position triad).
3. The intervals to be added are diatonic—that is, *found within the key*—unless otherwise indicated through the presence of accidentals.

Illustration 4.15

6 indicates B \flat and F \flat 6 indicates B \sharp and F \sharp

As with chord symbols, figured bass symbols give no indication as to *how* the notes are to be disposed above the bass, although occasionally a symbol is expanded in order to show a desired doubling or omission of a chord member.