

## 23. More magic of threes, sensory dissonance, and the hot five notes

When the three notes of a triad are played together, a voodoo spell causes three things to occur: (1) the 3 notes meld together immediately into a chord and like the 3 pennies on the table--the listener has an immediate cognitive awareness of the group as a whole, (2) because of physics, these three notes are pleasing to the listener--and that's because of their harmonious relationships with each other, and (3) the structure of the song maintains its integrity.

Furthermore, when a note is missing from a triad, even more magic occurs. When two-thirds of a triad are played in the context of a song, the listener hears the missing note like an amputee feels a phantom limb. Again, it's that voodoo physics. It's overtone magic.

What happens when you add notes that aren't part of the triad? You create 3 issues: (1) your listener cannot immediately comprehend what is happening because he is presented with four or more notes rather than just three, which creates more work and confusion for the listener, (2) unless the right notes are played along with the triad, due to physics, the notes will not sound pleasing, and (3) the integrity of the song may be compromised. The voodoo spell might end up misfiring. So, the takeaway is that playing anything other than the three notes of the triad should only be done *with caution and intent*.

When you hear the notes of a triad being played correctly as part of a song, as a listener, everything is "right with the world." You do not have to think about the song--you can accept and cognitively understand it with ease, just like three pennies on the table. When you start hearing notes added to the triad, you start being required, as a listener, to think about what's happening. Your easy "all is right with the world" cognitive awareness starts to be questioned. You may not know what is different, but something is. You intuitively know something is not quite right. Too much emphasis on (or too many) notes played outside of the triad challenge your listener and make your music less readily accessible. And all this causes the listener to have to think. Thinking is not the same as emoting. Don't get me wrong; lush stacked chords can be incredible--but overuse of anything much beyond the triad causes the audience to lose its emotional, immediate connection to the music.

This again is where physics comes into play. Notes that are a half step above or below each of the three notes of the major triad create conflicting sound waves that are unpleasant to the listener. They just don't fit.