

## Figured Bass

- Figured bass is a system of describing a chord above a given bass note. The numbers in figured bass refer to the diatonic intervals above the bass note in accordance with the key signature:

Root Position (a)	Figured Bass	Abbrev.
	3rd 5th 5 3	To nothing! So common!
First Inversion (b)	3rd 6th 6 3	6
Second Inversion (c)	4th 6th 6 4	6 4 always written in full

## Figured Bass

- The figured bass stays the same**, regardless of which triad is being described. In the key of C major, this is how each triad in each position would be analysed:

**I**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$     **ii**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$     **iii**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$     **IV**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$

**V**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$     **vi**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$     **vii<sup>o</sup>**  $\begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$   $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$

## Open Chords & Figured Bass

- Given that all the open positions chords below contain C in the bass, they can all be described as  $I \begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$

All  $I \begin{smallmatrix} 5 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$

## Open Chords & Figured Bass

- The same also applies to open chords in first and second inversions:

All  $I \begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \end{smallmatrix}$

All  $I \begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 4 \end{smallmatrix}$

# Chromatic Notes in Figured Bass

- Remember that the numbers in figured bass refer only to the diatonic intervals above the bass note in accordance with the key signature.

In a key signature with two flats, a  $\overset{6}{\underset{3}{}}$  written beneath a G in the bass tells us that a B $\flat$  and an E $\flat$  would be part of the chord. If you wanted an E $\natural$  you would have to write  $\overset{\natural 6}{\underset{3}{}}$ .

6 3

$\natural 6$  3

In the same key a  $\overset{6}{\underset{4}{}}$  written beneath a C in the bass indicates an A and F are part of the chord. If you wanted an F $\sharp$  (e.g. to signify G minor) you would have to write  $\overset{6}{\underset{\sharp 4}{}}$ .

6 4

6  $\sharp 4$

# Chromatic Notes in Figured Bass

- An accidental on its own always refers to third above the bass note. So  $\sharp$  =  $\sharp 3$  (implying  $\overset{5}{\underset{\sharp 3}{}}$ ), and  $\overset{\natural 6}{\underset{\sharp}{}}$  =  $\overset{6}{\underset{\sharp 3}{}}$ .
- These chromatic alterations usually occur in modulations and frequently in minor keys. The **tonic**, **subdominant**, and **dominant** are the most likely affected and can be either major or minor chords depending on the context.

6 —  $\sharp$

continuation line

$\sharp$  6 6 6  $\sharp 6$   $\sharp$