

COLTRANE CHANGES

APPLICATIONS OF THE HARMONIC WHEEL

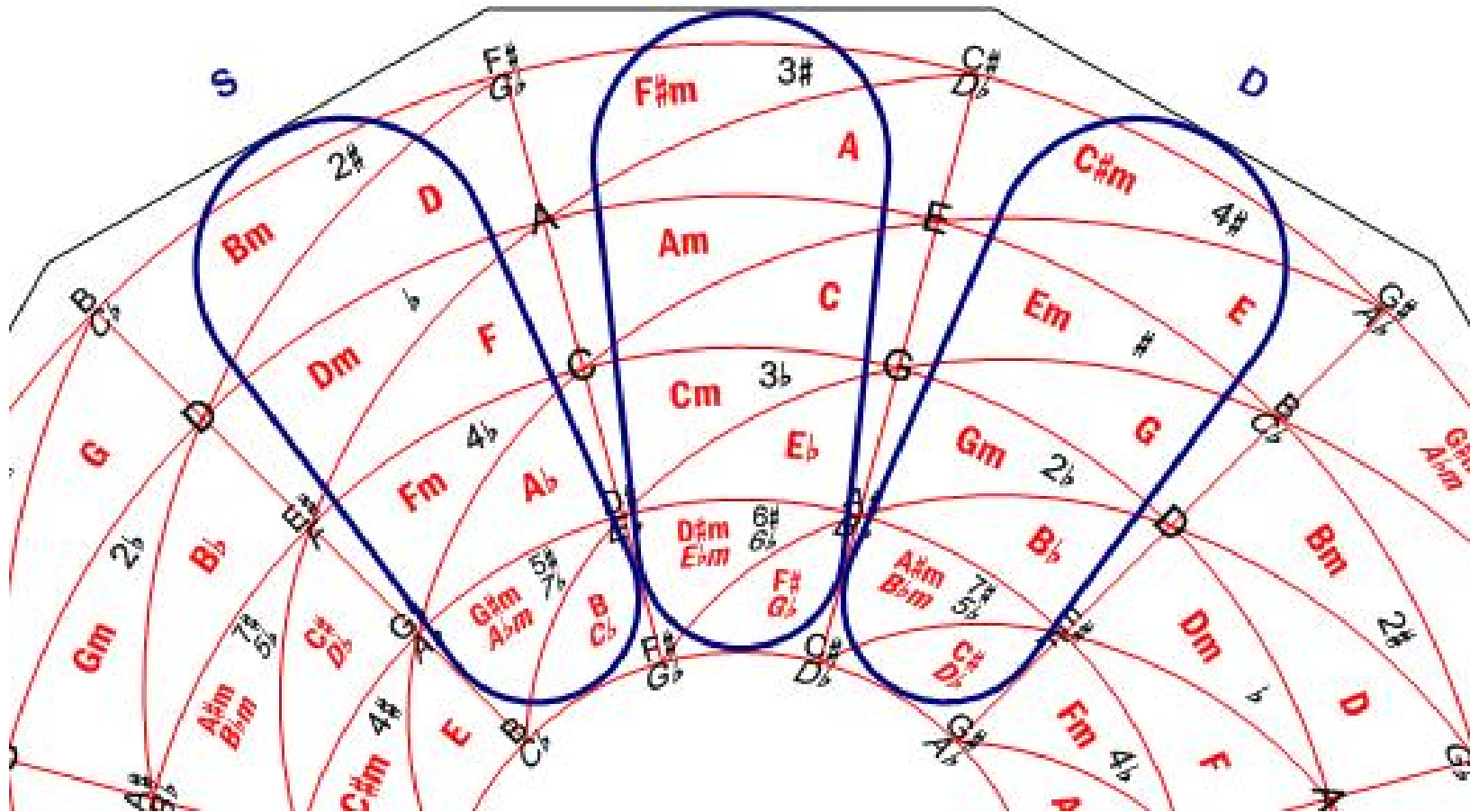
INTRODUCTION

- The Béla Bartók's axis system (see the corresponding presentation) gives us multiple options for choosing the Tonic, Dominant and Subdominant chords in each given key.
- On the other hand, as we have 12 notes and 3 harmonic functions, the “logical” way would be to choose the Tonic, Dominant and Subdominant chords by dividing the octave into 3 equal parts. This means that, between the roots of these 3 chords, there is always a Major 3rd interval (2 Steps).

BARTÓK'S AXIS SYSTEM

3

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COLTRANE CHANGES

4

- For example, if the tonic is C Major, we would take E Major as the Dominant and A \flat Major as the Subdominant. On the Harmonic Wheel, these 3 chords are placed following a spiral line.
- Since there are always 2 Steps between these 3 chords, the 3 harmonic functions show a perfect symmetry, thus limiting the concept of Tonic.
- This idea of dividing the octave into 3 equal parts was well developed by John Coltrane, the great Jazz saxophonist, without even knowing Bartók's axis system, which represents a great merit.

COLTRANE CHANGES

6

- The most famous example of using this technique by Coltrane is, without doubt, *Giant Steps*.
- In this tune, the basic chords are B Δ , G Δ , E \flat Δ and the transition from one to another is done by means of a V7, which is sometimes preceded by a IIm.
- Thus, the chord progressions go by descending thirds:

B Δ D7 G Δ B \flat 7 E \flat Δ

or by ascending thirds as well:

E \flat Δ Am D7 G Δ C \sharp m F \sharp 7 B Δ