

## ALTERED PREDOMINANTS

There are two important kinds of altered dominants. In major keys, one finds minor iv and half diminished ii<sup>o7</sup>: these are often called “borrowed dominants.” (Sometimes, they are described as examples of “modal mixture.”) In minor keys, one finds bII<sup>6</sup> substituting for ii<sup>o6</sup>—this is the “Neapolitan sixth” chord.

**1. iv and ii<sup>o7</sup> in major.** In a standard IV-I progression, scale degree  $\hat{6}$  moves by two semitones to  $\hat{5}$ . Nineteenth century composers often substituted  $b\hat{6}$  for  $\hat{6}$ , creating semitonal motion. This substitution changes IV into iv and ii or ii<sup>7</sup> into ii<sup>o</sup> or ii<sup>o7</sup>. These altered dominants are very common in the 19th century, and mark one of the main differences between the classical and the romantic styles. Altered dominants are also common in many genres of popular music.

These chords can progress either to I or to V. The whole point of the alteration is to increase the possibilities for semitonal motion:  $b\hat{6}$  “wants” to go to  $\hat{5}$ .  $b\hat{6}$  is usually treated as a neighbor tone. But it can also appear as a passing tone between  $b\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{5}$ .

**NOTE:** an altered ii<sup>o7</sup> can progress *directly* to I. The unaltered ii<sup>7</sup> cannot.

C: I    iv    I    IV<sup>6</sup>   iv<sup>6</sup>   V<sup>7</sup>   I    I    ii<sup>o6</sup><sub>5</sub>   I    I    ii<sup>o6</sup><sub>5</sub>   V<sup>8-7</sup>   I

### VOICE-LEADING NOTES:

- $b\hat{6}$  is an “active” tone. Although it can be doubled, you should try to avoid doing so. In a progression such as the second one above, doubling the  $A^b$  could have the effect of undermining the very strong bass line.

- If you do double the altered tone, remember that it cannot progress to the leading tone, since that would create an augmented second.

- $b\hat{6}$  should not progress to  $b\hat{6}$ . This is because the altered dominant has a very strong tendency to go to I or V. Unaltered dominants are weaker chords, with less tendency to resolve; thus moving from the altered pre-dominant to the normal dominant can create a weak, unsatisfying progression.

- Take care to avoid cross-relations.

**TERMINOLOGICAL NOTE:** These chords are sometimes said to be “borrowed” from the parallel minor. They are also described as examples of “modal mixture,” or mixing of the major mode with its parallel minor. I don’t think this is the

most useful way to think about these chords. It is much simpler, and more logical, to think of them as chromatic alterations. On the other hand, we need a name for the chords and “borrowed predominants” and “modal mixture” are as good as any. Just don’t take the name too seriously!

These same principles lead to alterations of the tonic chord. In the I-V chord progression, scale degree  $\hat{3}$  typically moves downward to by whole step to  $\hat{2}$ . Classical and romantic composers often substituted  $b\hat{3}$  for  $\hat{3}$ , creating a i-V chord progression. This is exactly the same progression as the iv-I progression we have just been studying, only transposed downward by perfect fourth: iv-I creates smooth voice leading from the subdominant to the tonic, as  $b\hat{6}$  moves down by semitone to  $\hat{5}$ ; i-V create smooth voice leading from the tonic to the dominant, as  $b\hat{3}$  leads downward by semitone to  $\hat{2}$ .

C: I    i    V    I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>    i<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>    V    I    i    V<sup>7/V</sup>    V

Usually, a minor i chord serves as an intensification of V. The  $b\hat{3}$  reverses our harmonic expectations, making I sound like it "wants" to go to V.) Often, this progression occurs over a dominant pedal as part of a cadential six-four. In the third example above, i progresses to V by way of an applied dominant. This progression is fairly common.

Whereas the altered predominants described in the preceding section are found only in the nineteenth century, the minor tonic chord was used by classical composers: examples can be found all over the music of Haydn and Mozart.

## 2. The Neapolitan sixth chord.

In minor, the  $ii^{\circ 6}$  chord often resolves to  $i_4^6$ , with scale-degree  $\hat{2}$  moving down by two semitones. Classical composers sometimes lowered  $\hat{2}$  to  $b\hat{2}$ , creating a semitonal upper-neighbor to the tonic. This chord is called the “Neapolitan chord” (or just “the Neapolitan”) and often written with an “N” instead of a Roman numeral  $bII$ . The Neapolitan is almost always in first inversion. When it is, it is called the “Neapolitan sixth,” and written  $N^6$ .

i   ii<sup>°6</sup>   i<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>   V<sup>7</sup>   i   i   N<sup>6</sup>   i<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>   V<sup>7</sup>   i   i   N<sup>6</sup>   V<sup>7</sup>   i

As the third example above shows, the Neapolitan can resolve directly to V. Here,  $b\hat{2}$  moves down by *diminished third* to the leading tone, which then resolves upward. Think of this as a process of encircling the tonic with its upper and lower semitonal neighbors.

Though the Neapolitan is usually in first inversion, it can be used in root position, if the voice leading makes sense. (In 20<sup>th</sup>-C tonal styles where smooth bassline motion is less prioritized, root position is common.) Since it is a major chord, it can also be tonicized. Though the Neapolitan is usually used in minor, it can appear in major. However, it can sound jarring when used carelessly.

i   V<sup>7</sup>/N   N   V<sup>7</sup>   i   I   V<sup>7</sup>/N   N   V<sup>7</sup>   I

The dominant of the Neapolitan is enharmonically equivalent to the German augmented sixth chord, and this can lead to some fun: