

Secondary chords

We have already seen that ii leads to V more strongly than IV does because of the circle-of-fifths relationship; because of the falling-fifth root motion, ii moving to V is similar to V moving to I.

This relationship can be intensified if ii is altered; if a seventh is added and the third is raised, ii moving to V will be just like V moving to I in the key of the dominant.

This is illustrated below; the first progression uses ii₇, and in the second, the third is raised, using F# in place of F; this creates a D major-minor seventh chord, which then resolves just like V moving to I in G major.

When this happens we say that the V chord has been *tonicized*, and we call the tonicizing chord a *secondary dominant*. (You will also hear such chords called *applied dominants*.) This is notated with a slash, with the chord being tonicized below the slash and the chord being imitated above the slash. Thus ii₇ turns into V₇/V.

Diagram illustrating two chord progressions in 4/4 time:

Progression 1: I - ii₇ - V₇ - I

Progression 2: I - V₇/V - V₈ — 7 - I

The motion from IV to V can also be intensified through tonicization, in this case altering IV to act like vii[♯]₇ in relation to the dominant.

Diagram illustrating two chord progressions in 4/4 time:

Progression 1: I - IV - V - I

Progression 2: I - vii[♯]₇/V - V - I

Notice the high initial voicing of IV in this example; this is in order to avoid parallel fifths in the resolution of the secondary chord. vii[♯]₇ may resolve to I with a doubled third, but when vii[♯]₇/V moves to V, a doubled third would be a doubled leading tone. So take special care with vii[♯]₇/V and vii[°]₇/V.

Basics:

Any chord that is diatonically major or minor may be tonicized. Add accidentals and sevenths as needed to form the chords that would be the dominant and leading-tone triads and seventh chords in the key in which the tonicized triad is the actual tonic.

Triads that are diatonically major may be tonicized using either secondary vii^{\flat}_7 or secondary vii°_7 , but triads that are diatonically minor should only be tonicized with secondary vii°_7 ; this simply follows the patterns for major and minor keys.

Note in particular that in minor, although the major V chord is almost universally used, and tonicizations of the dominant put V under the slash and not v, minor v is diatonic, and therefore only $\text{vii}^{\circ}_7/\text{V}$ (not also $\text{vii}^{\flat}_7/\text{V}$) should be used in minor.

Harmonic Function:

With very few exceptions, turning a chord into a secondary chord does not change its harmonic function. If you are trying to figure out the harmonic function of a secondary chord, remove any accidentals, in some cases remove the seventh, and the harmonic function of the diatonic chord will be the function of the secondary chord. This means, for example, that the secondary chords already shown were both DP chords.

Secondary Chords in Sequence:

Descending fifths progressions and sequences lend themselves well to chains of secondary chords:

The musical notation shows a sequence of secondary chords in a descending fifths progression. The sequence is: I, IV, V/iii, V/vi, V/ii, N/V, V, I. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, showing the chord voicings for each step.

In minor the secondary chords would be interrupted by the VI chord; because ii° is diminished, it cannot be tonicized (though it can be altered to form V/V).

Elided Resolution:

Elision occurs (not just in music) when something that is understood to be present is omitted in fact. The pronunciation of 'Worcester' as if it were 'Wooster' is an example of elision.

When one secondary dominant-seventh chord leads directly to another (or to the actual V7 in the key), elided resolutions are common. In an elided resolution, the leading tone of the first chord moves down a half step by chromatic alteration, becoming the seventh of the next, with the motion up by half step to the root of the second chord understood to provide the logic of the progression although it is omitted in fact. (Elided resolutions also occur between two leading-tone seventh chords, at least one of which is a secondary chord.)

In the following two progressions, the first provides the rationale behind the second, and the second is understood as an abbreviated version of the first, with the G on the second beat "present in spirit," so to speak.

I V₇/V V₈ — 7 I I V₇/V V₇ I

Elided resolutions can be chained together in sequence.

I IV₇ V₇/iii V₇/vi V₇/ii V₇/V V₇ I

Other Secondary-Chord Idioms:

Elided resolution is often used in chromatically-intensified lament bass lines (in which the bass makes a stepwise descent from tonic to dominant in the minor mode).

i V₆ V₂/IV iv₆ V

Secondary chords can be used as linear chords; in the following example, secondary vii°/ii is an intensified version of the passing "I₆".

I ii₆ (vii°/ii) ii V I

The Cross Relation:

A cross relation occurs when successive events contain two different versions of the same scale degree in different voices; in the first example below, the cross relation is between the C in the soprano and the C# in the bass.

Think of the cross relation as similar to direct fifths and octaves: it is only a problem between the outer voices, and only if the soprano moves by leap.

And there is a further exception: chromaticized voice exchanges often make cross relations quite effective, as shown in the second example.