

## The Neapolitan Triad

### Preliminary Information

The *Neapolitan triad* is a chord built on the 2<sup>nd</sup> scale-degree and in which, in a minor key, the *root* is lowered and, in a major key, both the *root* and 5<sup>th</sup> are lowered.



The quality of the triad is always *major* in both major and minor keys. The chord is identified with the letter N and is more often used in its 1<sup>st</sup> inversion (Neapolitan sixth chord, N<sub>6</sub>).

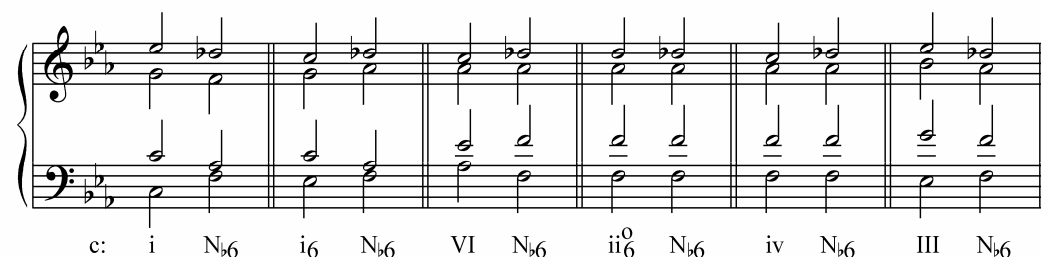
### The Neapolitan Sixth Chord. Doubling, Preparation and Resolution

The *Neapolitan sixth chord*<sup>39</sup> is the most widely used *altered* subdominant chord.

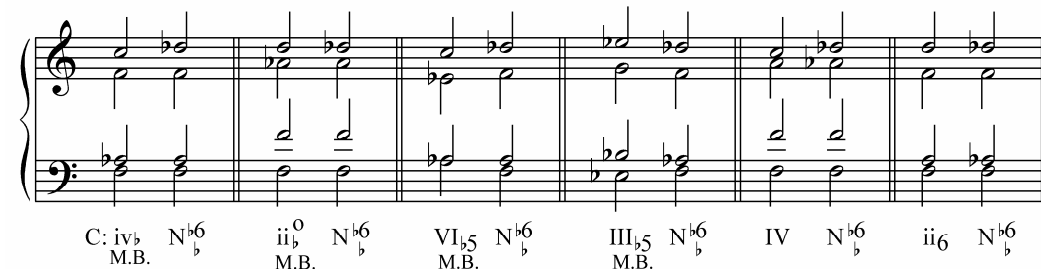


Similar to the diatonic ii<sub>6</sub>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (the note in bass) is usually *doubled* in N<sub>6</sub>, which is also the *root of IV*. Though, in order to have a smoother voice leading, the tone other than the 3<sup>rd</sup> may be doubled sometimes.

N<sub>6</sub> has the same function as ii. The chords, which can be used before and after ii, can be also used before and after N<sub>6</sub>. In minor keys the tonic and subdominant chords (i, i<sub>6</sub>, VI, ii<sup>o</sup><sub>6</sub>, iv and rarely III) can be used before it.



In major keys (where N<sub>6</sub> started to be used much later), the choice of chords is not as big as in minor keys. The normal IV, ii, vi and sometimes iii are not used as often as their equivalents borrowed from the parallel minor (iv, ii<sup>o</sup>, VI and III).



N<sub>6</sub> is usually followed by the cadential i(I)<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub> or V (V<sub>7</sub>, V<sub>9</sub>). The altered tones move in the direction of their *tendency*, i.e., downward. When resolving to the cadential i(I)<sup>6</sup><sub>4</sub>, the lowered (altered) root moves a *minor 2<sup>nd</sup>* down while when resolving to V or V<sub>7</sub>, it moves a *diminished 3<sup>rd</sup>*

<sup>39</sup> The chord is considered to be first introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the music of the Neapolitan operatic composers (Scarlatti, Pergolesi, Paisiello, Cimarosa, Stradella, and others), but seems to be found by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the music of such composers as Carissimi, Corelli, and Purcell.

down to the 3<sup>rd</sup> (leading tone) of V (V<sub>7</sub>). This diminished 3<sup>rd</sup> is often filled with a *passing tone*, which can be also understood as the 7<sup>th</sup> of N<sub>7</sub>.

c: N<sub>b6</sub> [i<sub>6</sub><sub>4</sub>] cad. N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>i</sub> N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup> N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>9</sub>

C: N<sub>b6</sub> [i<sub>6</sub><sub>4</sub>] cad. N<sub>b6</sub> V N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> N<sub>b6</sub> vii<sub>3</sub><sup>0</sup><sub>4</sub>

(Adagio sostenuto) Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 14, Op. 27, No. 2, I

c#: VI N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> i

Haydn, Keyboard Sonata No. 33 in C Minor, Hob. XVI: 20, I  
(Allegro moderato)

c: i N<sub>b6</sub> [i<sub>6</sub><sub>4</sub>] V<sub>i</sub> i cad.

In case the *lowered* root is doubled in N<sub>6</sub>, it usually moves down (mostly in soprano) in accordance with its tendency while its doubling (usually in an inner voice and less audible) may move upward. The cross relation, which may happen between N<sub>6</sub> and V, is acceptable.

c: N<sub>b6</sub> V<sub>i</sub> C: N<sub>b6</sub> vii<sub>3</sub><sup>0</sup><sub>4</sub> M.B.

(Allegretto) Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 17, Op. 31, No. 2, III

a (mod.):  $N_6$   $[i_6]_4$   $V_{4/2}$   $i_6$   
cad.

The connection of I with  $N_6$  in major keys should be done carefully with regards to the voice leading because, when moving from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of I to the lowered root of  $N_6$ , an *augmented 2<sup>nd</sup>* (A2) occurs, which is not allowed. The connection of  $N_6$  with the cadential  $i(I)_6^4$  should be also done carefully because, if the root of  $N_6$  is placed below the 5<sup>th</sup>, *parallel 5<sup>th</sup>*'s occur.

C: I  $N_6$   $N_6$   $[i_6]_4$   
cad.

$N_6$  may move to the cadential  $i(I)_6^4$  or V through a *normal or altered secondary dominant of V*.

c:  $N_6$  Ger.7  $[i_6]_4$   $V_7$  C:  $N_6$   $vii_7^0/V$  V  
cad. M.B.

(Tempo di valse) Tchaikovsky, 12 Pieces, Op. 40, No. 9

f#:  $N_6$   $vii_7^0/V$   $V_7$   $i$

### *$N_6$ in Plagal Cadences*

$N_6$  is sometimes used in plagal cadences and progressions in which  $N_6$  may move to I with a leap of the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> in bass.

c:  $N_{b6}$  i      C:  $N_{b6}^I$  I

Liszt, 3 Lieder aus Schillers "Wilhelm Tell", S. 292, Der Alpenjäger  
(Allegro con strepito) ♩ = 120

g: i       $N_{b6}$  i       $N_{b6}$  i

### The Neapolitan Seventh Chord

The passing tone used between the lowered root (2<sup>nd</sup> scale-degree) of  $N_6$  and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of V ( $V_7$ ) gave birth to *Neapolitan seventh chord* ( $N_7$ ).

c:  $N_7$       C:  $N_{b7}^5$

The chord usually resolves to V,  $V_7$  (and its inversions),  $vii^0_7$ , sometimes  $V_9$  and often to an altered dominant (altered common tone).

c:  $N_7$   $V_4^6$   $N_{b6}^5$   $V_7^b$   $N_{b2}$   $V_5^6$       C:  $N_{b5}^6$   $V_{b9}$   $N_{b5}^7$   $vii_{b5}^0$   
M.B.      M.B.

Scriabin, 24 Preludes, Op. 11, No. 10

(Andante) ♩ = 96-100

c#:       $N_7$   $V_4^6$

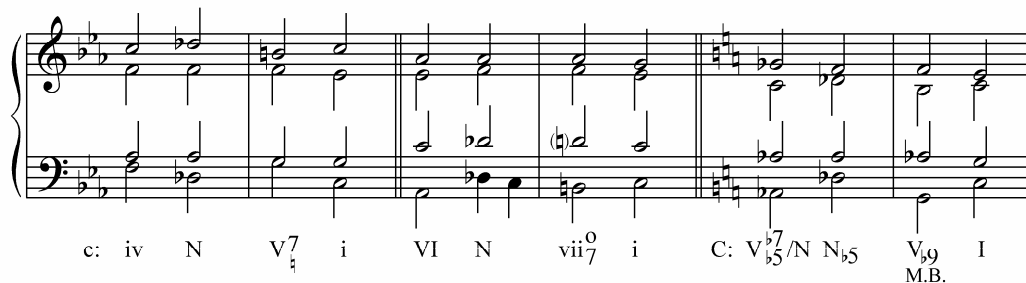
## The Neapolitan Triad in Root Position

Root position Neapolitan triad (N) started to be used later than N<sub>6</sub>.



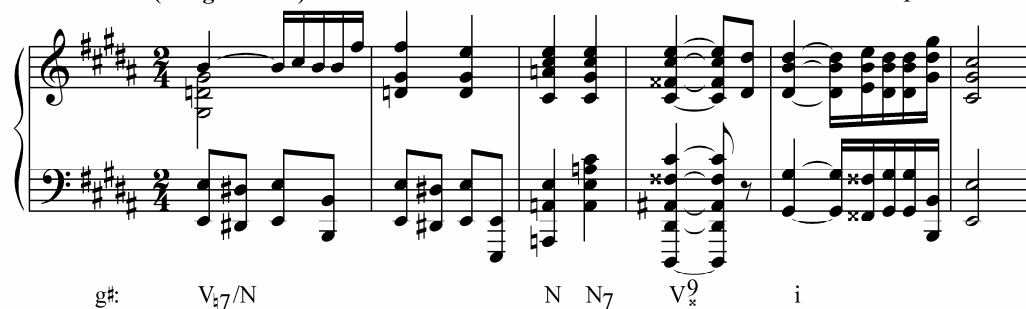
This chord is almost always prepared by the modally borrowed iv and VI (which can be also understood as V/N). It can also follow its secondary V<sub>7</sub>.

N can be followed by V<sub>7</sub>, V<sub>9</sub> (upward or downward leap of a tritone in bass), V<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup>, vii<sup>o</sup><sub>7</sub> (a diminished 3<sup>rd</sup> (d3) in bass which is often filled with a passing tone).



(Allegro ♩ = 80)

Scriabin, 5 Preludes, Op. 16, No. 2

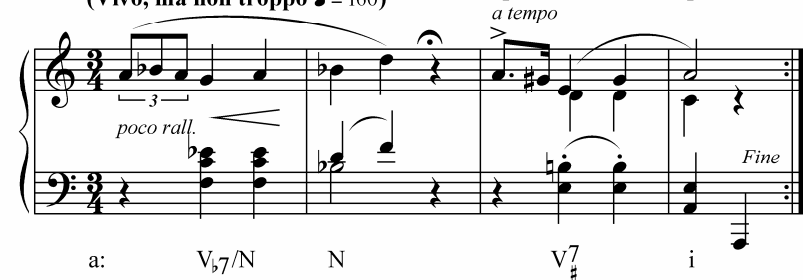


g#: V<sub>7</sub>/N

N N<sub>7</sub> V<sub>9</sub> i

(Vivo, ma non troppo ♩ = 160)

Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 7, No. 2



a: V<sub>7</sub>/N

N

V<sub>7</sub> i

## The Neapolitan Triad as VI/iv

Sometimes N can be understood as VI/iv and follow a *secondary dominant of IV (iv)* like in a deceptive progression. Such use of N can be found in both major and minor keys.

C: I   V<sub>7</sub>/IV   N<sub>5</sub> (VI/iv)   N<sub>6</sub>   [I<sub>6</sub>] cad.   V<sub>7</sub>   I

Liszt, Piano Concerto No. 1 in E<sup>b</sup> Major, S. 124

**Allegro maestoso. Tempo giusto**

E<sup>b</sup>: I   V<sub>2</sub>/IV   [N<sub>6</sub>] p.c.   V<sub>7</sub>

### Minor Neapolitan Triad

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the *minor* Neapolitan triad started to be used in a *minor key* which is based on the lowering (alteration) of the 4<sup>th</sup> scale-degree. Such minor Neapolitan triad can be rarely found in major keys.

c: n<sub>3</sub>   C: n<sub>5</sub>

(Moderato ♩ = 58) *poco a poco riten.* Rachmaninov, 15 Romances, Op. 26, No. 6 "Christ is risen"

f: iv<sub>6</sub>/iv   V<sub>6</sub>/iv iv<sub>6</sub>   n<sub>6</sub>   ii<sub>7</sub>   [i<sub>6</sub>] cad.   V<sub>6</sub>

### Secondary Neapolitan Triad

The Neapolitan triad in 1<sup>st</sup> inversion and root position can be sometimes used as a preparation for a secondary dominant.



C: N<sup>b</sup><sub>6</sub>/ii V<sup>#</sup><sub>7</sub>/ii ii      c: N<sub>5</sub>/iv V<sup>6</sup><sub>5</sub>/iv iv

### Exercises

#### 1. Analyze the following excerpts.

a)

Schubert, Die Schöne Müllerin, D. 795, Der Müller und der Bach

**Mässig** (Der Müller.)

Wo ein treu-es Her-ze in Lie-be ver-geht, da

wel-ken die Li-lien auf je-dem Beet; Da muss in die Wol-ken der

[ g: iv  
B<sup>b</sup>: ii

Voll-mond gehn, da-mit seine Thrä-nen die Men-schen nicht seh'n;

B<sup>b</sup>: V<sub>7</sub>      I      g:

— da hal - ten die Eng - lein die Au - gen sich zu und schluch - zen und

sin - gen die See - le zur Ruh.

b)

Andante

Mozart, Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488, II

Solo  
*mf e semplice*

*p* *pp* *p*

c)



Largo (♩ = 66)

Chopin, Preludes, Op. 28, No. 20

*ff*

*p*

*ritenuto*

*pp*

*cresc.*

d)

Grieg, Poetic Tone-Pictures, Op. 3, I

Allegro ma non troppo

*pp*

*p*

*p*

3

*f con fuoco*

*ff*

e)

(Andantino espressivo assai)

Liszt, Liebesträume, S. 541/1

*dolcissimo*

*ppp*

2. Harmonize the following sopranos and realize the figured basses. Use Neapolitan triad where appropriate.

