

Augmented Sixth Chords

Augmented sixth chords are chords which contain the interval of the *augmented sixth* (A6). Augmented sixth chords are *altered* (chromatic) chords.

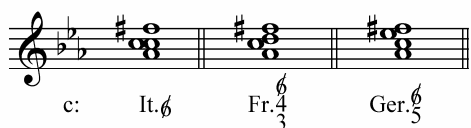
There are various types of augmented sixth chords but those that can be found more often are called *altered secondary dominants of V*.

Altered Secondary Dominants of Dominant

In the altered secondary dominants of V, the interval of the A6 is formed between the 6th scale-degree and the raised 4th scale-degree in a minor key or the lowered 6th scale-degree (modal borrowing) and the raised 4th scale-degree in a major key.

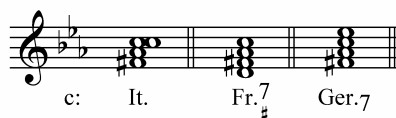


Various altered secondary dominants of V can be built by adding one or two notes to this A6. The most used of them have the following names: Italian (It.), French (Fr.), German (Ger.) and Enharmonic German (En.Ger.)³⁴.



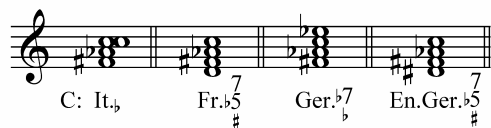
The chords are mostly found in the given above inversions, that is, with the lowest note of the A6 (the 6th scale-degree) being in bass (It.₆, Fr._{4/3}, Ger._{5/5}, and En.Ger._{4/3}).

In the following example the altered secondary dominants of V are shown in their root position.



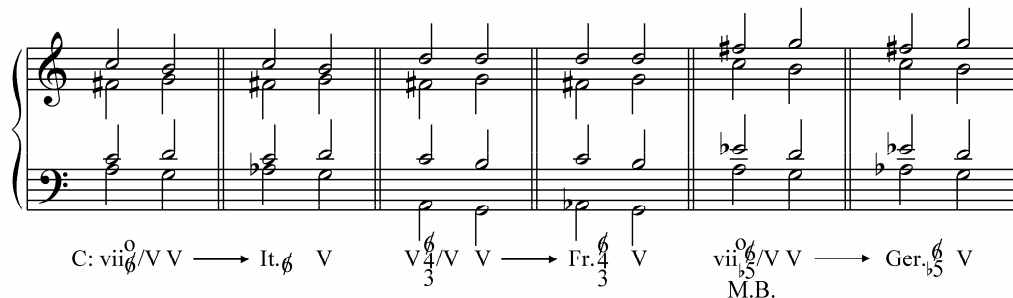
³⁴ There is a number of other augmented sixth chords which can be built using this A6 (A-flat, F-sharp) but those have no names and can be found rather rarely.





As seen from the example, the chords are structurally identical in both major and minor keys. The enharmonic German chord (sometimes called “the chord of the doubly augmented fourth”³⁵) can be found only in a major key. The Italian chord is a triad in which the 5th is normally doubled (the tonic scale-degree).

These augmented sixth chords are similar to secondary dominants of V and, thus, function in the same way. Due to such similarity they are called *altered* secondary dominants of V in which one note is *altered*.



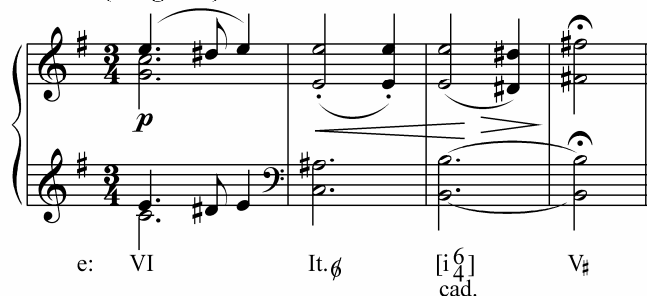
The Italian and German chords are like vii°/V and vii°/V respectively, both with a lowered (altered) *third*; the French chord is like V₇/V with the lowered *fifth*.

Preparation

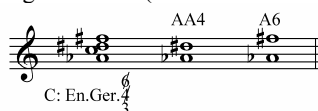
The altered secondary dominants of V can follow I, its inversions and subdominant chords (vi, IV, ii, ii₇, etc.).

The subdominant chords are normally used in such inversion in which the 6th or *lowered 6th scale-degree* would be in bass. In such case the altered secondary dominants of V would be in their normal inversion.

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 14, No. 1, II
(Allegretto)



³⁵ In its usual inversion (En.Ger.₃) the enharmonic German chord contains two augmented intervals, that is, the doubly augmented 4th (A-flat and D-sharp in the example below) and the augmented 6th (A-flat, F-sharp).



Mozart, Piano Sonata No. 6 in D Major, K. 284, I

(Allegro)

D: IV_6 Ger. \flat_5 V

The subdominant chords can be sometimes used with the 4th scale-degree in bass. In such case the note would be raised in the same voice (bass) making the altered secondary dominant of V to be in its less often inversion (d3 instead of A6).

Bach, Mass in B Minor, BWV 232, No. 16

G: ii_6 Ger. \flat_7 V V_7 I

The altered secondary dominants of V have stronger tendencies to move to V than the normal secondary dominants of V, that is why they can be used right after them with the chromatic alteration often in bass like in the following example.

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 4, Op. 7, II

(Largo, con gran espressione)

C: $vii_0/VFr. \frac{6}{3}$ $[1 \ 2]$ cad. V_7 I

Resolution

The altered secondary dominants of V are more often found in cadences resolving to dominant chords (the cadential I^6_4 , V, or V_7).

The resolution of the chords is based on the *resolution of the A6*. When resolving to the cadential I^6_4 or V, the A6 resolves outward by step to a P8 (or its inversion (d3) to a P1). The other voices move smoothly, the common tone(s) remaining stationary.

Resolution to Cadential I^6_4

Two musical examples illustrating the resolution of an A6 chord to a cadential I^6_4 chord. The first example shows the resolution in C major: C: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ [i^6_4] cad., Fr. $\frac{4}{3}$ [i^6_4] cad., Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ [i^6_4] cad. The second example shows the resolution in C major: C: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ [I^6_4] cad., Fr. $\frac{6}{3}$ [I^6_4] cad., En. Ger. $\frac{6}{3}$ [I^6_4] cad., Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ [$I^{(b)}_4$] cad. (M.B.).

(Allegro) Mozart, Piano Sonata No. 15 in F major, K. 533, I

F: fz Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ [I^6_4] cad. V

The enharmonic German chord normally resolves almost only to the cadential I^6_4 . V subs. 6th or V_7 subs. 6th may be sometimes used instead of the cadential I^6_4 .

C: En. Ger. $\frac{6}{3}$ V_{6th}^{subs} En. Ger. $\frac{6}{3}$ $V_7^{subs}_{6th}$

Resolution to V

c: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ V_7 Fr. $\frac{4}{3}$ V_7 Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V_7

C: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ V Fr. $\frac{4}{3}$ V Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 10, No. 1, I

(Allegro molto e con brio)

E♭: Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V

As seen from the examples above, *parallel 5th's* occur when resolving the German chord to V. Such parallel 5th's (sometimes called “Mozart fifths”) are *allowed* if used between bass and an inner voice. Anyway, these parallel 5th's can be avoided if the German chord moves to the French chord before its resolution or if it is resolved to V subs. 6th (or rarely to the altered V).

C: Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ Fr. $\frac{4}{3}$ V c: Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V_7 $\frac{6}{6th}$ i C: Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V_7 5

When the altered secondary dominants of V resolve to V_7 , the raised 4th scale-degree often moves by a half step *down* to the seventh of V_7 (i.e., the altered scale-degree moves back to its diatonic variant).

Resolution to V_7

c: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ V_7 Fr. $\frac{4}{3}$ V_7 Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V_7
 C: It. $\frac{6}{8}$ V_7 Fr. $\frac{6}{3}$ V_7 Ger. $\frac{6}{5}$ V_7

Here again, one can find parallel 5ths in the resolution of the German chord.

As mentioned before, the chords can be sometimes found in the inversions different from the one usually used. No matter what inversion the chords are in, they resolve using the same voice leading as in their normal inversion.

Exercises

1. Spell the Italian, French and German chords in various keys. For major keys, add the enharmonic German chord.
2. Analyze the following excerpts.
 - a)

(Langsam) Schumann, Romanzen und Balladen, Op. 146, Der Traum

pp

Zwei Glück-lein klan-gen hel - le, der Traum verschwand zur Stund, sie
 lag in der Klo - ster - kel - le, er fern in Thur - mes Grund.

ritard.

b)

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 8, Op. 13, III

(Allegro)

3. Identify and resolve the following augmented sixth chords.

4. Harmonize the following sopranos and realize the figured basses. Use an augmented sixth chord where indicated by an asterisk.