

The Neapolitan Six

IN ADDITION TO THE **ALTERED ROOT BORROWED CHORDS**, THERE IS ANOTHER **ALTERED ROOT CHORD** THAT FITS WELL WITH THE BORROWED CHORDS, EVEN THOUGH IT IS NOT ACTUALLY BORROWED FROM THE **PARALLEL MINOR**.

SINCE IT'S NOT A BORROWED CHORD, THIS CHORD CAN BE USED IN BOTH **MAJOR** AND **MINOR**.

THAT CHORD IS A **MAJOR TRIAD** BUILT ON THE **LOWERED SECOND SCALE DEGREE**.

THERE ARE A COUPLE OF INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT THIS CHORD. ONE IS THE FACT THAT IT IS **ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY** USED IN **FIRST INVERSION**.

SERIOUSLY! ALTHOUGH THIS CHORD IS **EXTREMELY COMMON** IN THE COMMON PRACTICE PERIOD, THERE ARE **VERY FEW** EXAMPLES OF IT USED IN **ROOT POSITION**. **SECOND INVERSION** IS EVEN **RARER**.

THE SECOND INTERESTING THING ABOUT THE CHORD IS ITS **NAME**: YOU MIGHT EXPECT IT TO BE CALLED A "**FLAT TWO**," IN KEEPING WITH THE OTHER ALTERED ROOT CHORDS.

BUT, IN FACT, THIS IS THE FIRST OF A FEW CHORDS THAT HAVE SPECIAL NAMES. THIS PARTICULAR ONE IS CALLED THE **NEAPOLITAN CHORD**.

"NEAPOLITAN" MEANS "**FROM NAPLES**," REFERRING TO THE CITY OF **NAPLES, ITALY**. THE CHORD ISN'T ACTUALLY **FROM** NAPLES, THOUGH; IT WAS JUST ASSOCIATED WITH THE OPERAS WRITTEN BY NEAPOLITAN COMPOSERS LIKE **ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI**.



NAPLES

FUNNY THING IS, THIS CHORD WAS USED PRETTY COMMONLY **BEFORE** SCARLATTI'S TIME, IN COMPOSITIONS FAR FROM THE COURTS OF ITALY.

IT'S ALSO WORTH NOTING THAT ALTHOUGH NEARLY EVERY THEORIST AND THEORY TEXTBOOK CALLS THE CHORD A "NEAPOLITAN **SIXTH** CHORD," IT IS MORE PROPERLY CALLED A "NEAPOLITAN **SIX** CHORD." THAT'S BECAUSE IN THE RARE SITUATIONS WHERE IT IS USED IN ROOT POSITION, IT IS SIMPLY CALLED THE **NEAPOLITAN CHORD**, AND WHEN IT IS FOUND IN SECOND INVERSION, IT'S CALLED THE **NEAPOLITAN SIX-FOUR**.

SINCE WE DON'T PRONOUNCE **I⁶** AS "**ONE SIXTH**," WE SHOULDN'T SAY "**NEAPOLITAN SIXTH**" FOR **N⁶**!

THE NEAPOLITAN SIX CHORD, SINCE IT IS BUILT ON A FORM OF THE **SUPERTONIC**, HAS SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A **SUBDOMINANT FUNCTION CHORD** IN THAT IT OFTEN RESOLVES TOWARD A DOMINANT FUNCTION. IN FACT, IT IS VERY COMMON TO SEE THE NEAPOLITAN CHORD RESOLVE TO A **DOMINANT SEVENTH** IN **THIRD INVERSION**, OR TO A **CADENTIAL SIX-FOUR CHORD**.

C: N⁶ → V₇ N⁶ → I⁶

(EVEN THOUGH THE NEAPOLITAN CHORD HAS A LOT IN COMMON WITH OTHER SUBDOMINANT FUNCTION CHORDS, IT IS MOST OFTEN REFERRED TO AS PART OF A LARGER GROUP OF CHORDS CALLED **PREDOMINANTS**, AND THE LABEL OF "SUBDOMINANT FUNCTION" IS GENERALLY LIMITED TO THE **SUBDOMINANT** AND **SUPERTONIC** CHORDS AND THEIR VARIANTS.)