

Chromatic Chords

Augmented Sixth

Augmented sixth chords lead onto the dominant, with the French sixth adding the most exotic colour of the three types.

The augmented sixth resolves outwards by semitone onto an octave. The simple augmented sixth plus a third above the bass is called an Italian sixth as in the first example. A French sixth (plus an aug. 4th) and a German sixth (plus a perfect 5th or equiv.) are also shown.



The next part of this handout explains how to create an augmented sixth and there are some examples over the page that you can use as influences to help you use these chords effectively. Choose an example that best matches the circumstances in your own piece.

How to create an augmented sixth (step-by-step guide)

1. decide on the chord to which your augmented sixth will resolve
in this example a C major chord (V of F)
2. write down the note above the root of this chord
in this example a D – one note above C
3. flatten or natural this note so that it is a **semitone above** the note it will resolve to
in this example the D needs a flat
4. write down the note below the root of the original chord (an octave up)
in this example a B – one note below C
5. if necessary, natural or sharpen this note so that it is **semitone below** the note it will resolve to
not necessary in this example
6. add a **major** third to the chord to make an Italian augmented sixth
7. add an additional augmented fourth to make a French sixth or a perfect fifth to make a German sixth
8. the top and bottom notes must resolve up and down a semitone respectively



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Examples

1. Mozart, *Piano Sonata in Bb*, K. 333, movement I, bars 79-81 (in anthology, p. 255)
The Eb (Italian) augmented sixth at the end of bar 80 resolves onto D (V) at the beginning of the next bar.



V7B i (vb) vi Aug. 6 V

2. Wagner, *Prelude to Tristan and Isolde*, bars 36-41 (in anthology, pp. 70-71)
The augmented sixths here are in the context of lots of yearning chromatic harmony. In the strings in bar 36 a Db augmented sixth resolves to C (echoed in wind). This is sequenced up, raising tension in bar 37, with an Eb augmented resolving to D. Finally in bar 40 there is an F augmented sixth which seems to continue the pattern but this time resolves unexpectedly to B.

3. Grieg – *Lyric Pieces Op. 57 (D minor)*
A drawn-out Bb augmented sixth that eventually resolves to A.



An Eb augmented sixth (not in root position) at the end of the first full bar that resolves to D.



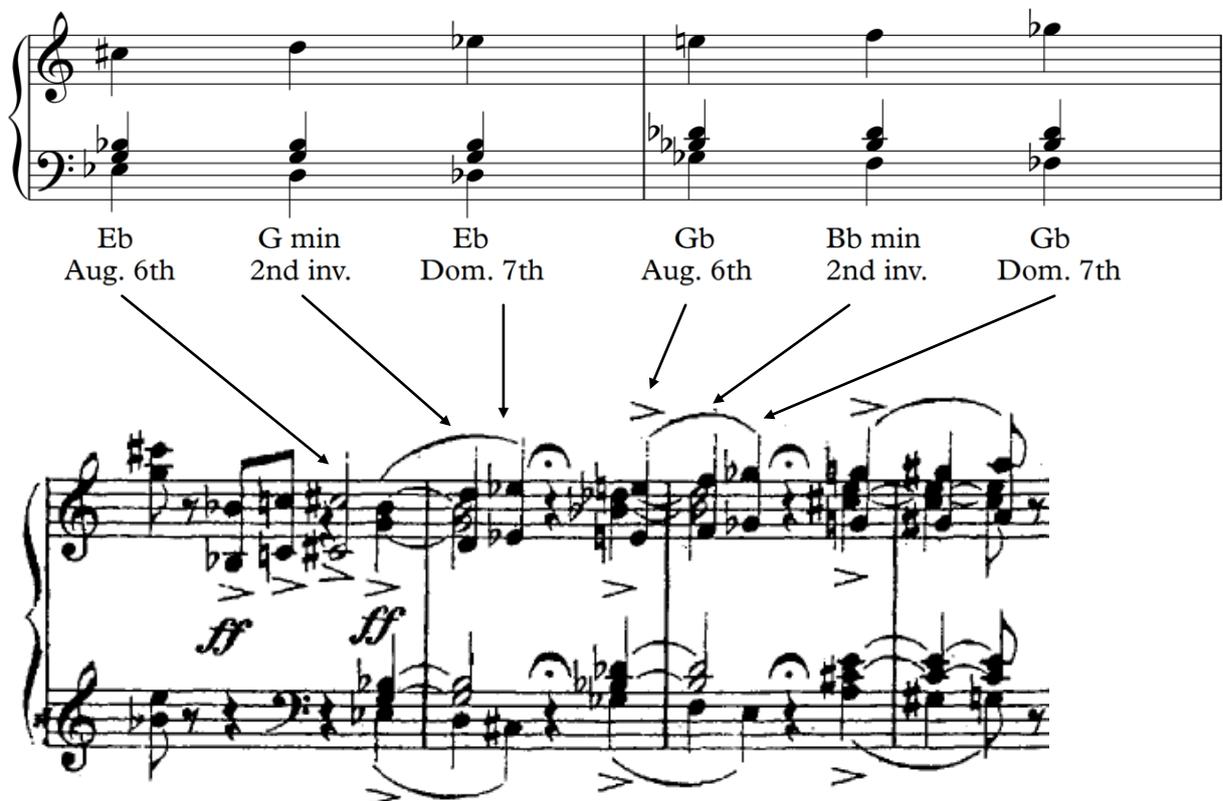
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'Omnibus' progression

This is a chromatic progression based on the augmented sixth that is good for creating chromatic tension that just keeps on going!

The omnibus progression is a three chord progression that is then repeated at different transpositions to create a chromatic scale. In the example below, note the following:

- The key feature is the contrary chromatic motion, here in the outer parts
- The first interval is an augmented sixth and creates a German augmented sixth chord
- The second interval resolves as expected onto an octave. The chord is effectively IC
- The third interval is a second and is harmonised with a dominant seventh in its last inversion, creating a new tension
- This three-chord progression is then transposed so that the rising chromatic scale continues
- You can see this exact progression in a real example in Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* (for the rest, see Example D5 in *Dramatic Episodes*)



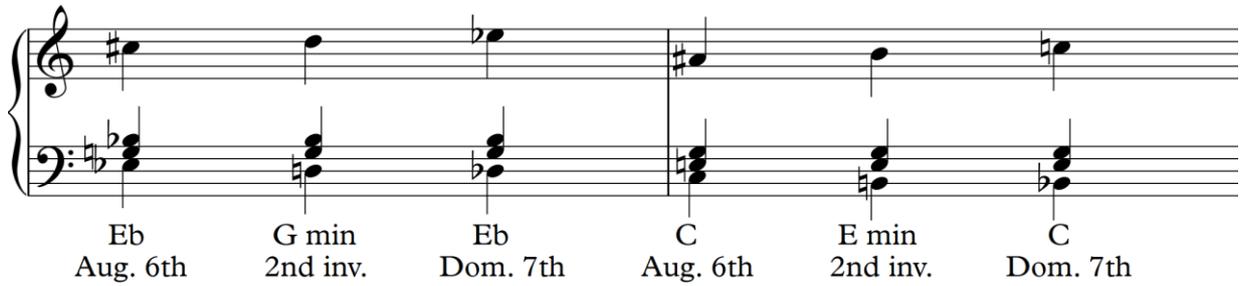
The image displays two musical examples of the 'Omnibus' progression. The top example is a simplified chord progression in two staves (treble and bass clef). The bottom example is a more complex musical score with dynamics like *ff* and accents, with arrows pointing from the labels to the corresponding chords in the score.

Labels for the simplified progression:

- Eb Aug. 6th
- G min 2nd inv.
- Eb Dom. 7th
- Gb Aug. 6th
- Bb min 2nd inv.
- Gb Dom. 7th

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The progression can also be sequenced so that the continuous chromatic line is in the bass, as in the example below:



Chromatic chord progression in the bass:

Chords: Eb Aug. 6th, G min 2nd inv., Eb Dom. 7th, C Aug. 6th, E min 2nd inv., C Dom. 7th