



at King Ed's

## Secondary Chords

If the primary chords of **I**, **IV** and **V** are the meat and two veg of common practice harmony, the other chords (the secondary chords) are the gravy! You can make your harmonic language more flavoursome by using them, but if you want to follow the broad conventions of the harmonic language of common practice music, the following guidelines will help. In general, chords whose roots are a third apart are better in descending than ascending progressions (i.e. **VI** to **IV** is better than the other way round).

### The supertonic (chord **II**)

Chord **II** is most often used as a way of approaching the dominant (chord **V**) as in the Haydn example below. Here it simply adds a bit of colour to the cadence and, as is common, it is approached here from the tonic (chord **I**). It is commonly used in root position and first inversion (although it is a diminished chord in minor so more often first inversion then).

*Haydn, Quartet Op. 33 No. 2, fourth movement Mov. 4 (the rest of this movement is in the anthology)*

Eb: **I**      **ii** **V** **I**

In this example the first chord **ii** is reasonably straightforward and treated as a straightforward approach to **V** in bars 4-5. In bars 6-7, however, Schubert expands on the same idea, but preceding turning the chord **ii** into a very brief modulation into the key of that chord (i.e. A minor) before again progressing to **V** in the next bar.

NB: that the **V** of **ii** (E major) is a secondary dominant (**V** of A) as explained in the notes on chromatic chords.

*Schubert, String Quartet No. 7 in D major (D. 94), second movement*

G: **I**      **ii**      **V**      (**V** of **ii**) **ii**

**V**      **I**



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### The Mediant (Chord III)

This is the least commonly used of the secondary chords, only found regularly before the submediant (VI) as part of a circle of fifths progression (or part of one) and even less commonly rising by step to the subdominant (IV). It is almost always in root position. In minor keys, a diatonic chord III would be augmented and so the leading note is not usually raised. That is the case in this example from Vivaldi – the excerpt shown completes a circle of fifths.

*Vivaldi, Concerto Op. 3 No. 8, first movement*

A minor: III VI ii V i

In this more complex example, Beethoven uses chord III (F#) as part of a mini-modulation into B minor (vi) in D major. A D# diminished chord spices up the approach to chord ii.

*Beethoven, String Quartet Op. 18 No. 2, first movement, bar 56 onwards.*

D: I III vi III vi III vi (D# dim) ii V I



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### Submediant (chord VI)

This is one of the most flexible secondary chords, working well either before the supertonic (chord II), the subdominant (chord IV) or the dominant (chord V). As a weaker chord, it is usually in root position. In this example, Schubert uses the submediant as part of a cadential circle of fifths in the dominant key of D major

*Schubert, String Quartet No. 6 (D. 74), second movement*

Andante.

G: I                  vi                  ii                  V                  I

### Leading note chord (chord VII)

This chord is the top part of a dominant seventh chord (i.e. without the root) and usually functions like a dominant as an approach to the tonic. As a diminished chord, it is most often found in first inversion and usually progresses to I. In this example it forms a sandwich between two tonic chords.

*Bach, 'Ach Gott, vom Himmel' (Riemannschneider No. 3)*

a: V                  i                  viib                  ib



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In this example from Beethoven, the usage is very similar, with chord **viib** again sandwiched between two tonics.

*Beethoven, Piano sonata Op.2 No. 1 in F minor, first movement*

f:      viib              Ib      iib      V