

Introduction to Secondary Dominants

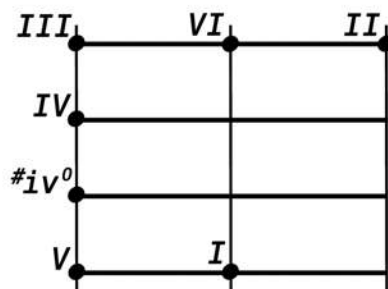
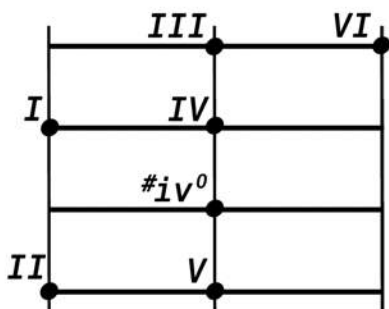
Music theory is just that, theory. There are many examples in music where the theory does not “add up” in terms of how things fit together. One of the most common alterations to “the rules” is the use of secondary dominant chords. The only place the dominant chord naturally occurs in major key harmony is as the V chord of each major key and as the VII chord in each minor key. Dominant chords are very flexible, and all six chords in each key that are not naturally dominant are one alteration away from being a secondary dominant chord. All it takes is a root, a major 3rd, and a flatted 7th to make a dominant chord.

Secondary Dominants in Major Keys

I_{maj^7}	R 3 5 7	Lower 7th = I^7	R 3 5 $b7$
$ii-7$	R $b3$ 5 $b7$	Raise 3rd = II^7	R 3 5 $b7$
$iii-7$	R $b3$ 5 $b7$	Raise 3rd = III^7	R 3 5 $b7$
IV_{maj^7}	R 3 5 7	Lower 7th = IV^7	R 3 5 $b7$
V^7	R 3 5 $b7$	Unaltered = V^7	R 3 5 $b7$
$vi-7$	R $b3$ 5 $b7$	Raise 3rd = VI^7	R 3 5 $b7$
$vii^{\phi 7}$	R $b3$ $b5$ $b7$	Raise 3rd = VII^{7b5}	R 3 $b5$ $b7$

Once the chords have become dominant, you can employ a variety of dominant modes and other scales due to the incredibly flexible nature of dominant chords. Major progressions that use secondary dominant chords tend to employ the Mixolydian mode. Indeed, musical styles are largely defined by which chords are altered into secondary dominants! Check out these examples:

Old Time and Ragtime music in major keys often keep the I and IV chords triadic and unaltered with an implied major 7th, and frequently make the II, III, and VI chords dominant as shown:



Major blues progressions will tend to almost always make the I and IV chords dominant while frequently leaving at least some of the ii, iii, & vi chords minor and unaltered like this:

Staff 1: I^7 IV^7 I^7 $v-7$ I^7

Staff 2: IV^7 $\#iv^{07}$ I^7 $iii-7$ VI^7

Staff 3: $ii-7$ V^7 I^7 $vi-7$ $ii-7$ V^7

Notice that the vi-7 chord is made dominant in measure 7 but left minor in measure 11.

Minor keys generally employ the secondary dominants on the v and VI chords. The mode for the V dominant is called Phrygian Dominant or Spanish Phrygian, and the mode for the VI dominant is called Lydian Dominant. The other chords are usually left unaltered. We will learn more about secondary dominant chords and modes used in minor keys later in this book.

Secondary Dominants in Minor Keys

$V-7$ $R \flat 3 5 \flat 7$ Raise 3rd = V^7 $R 3 5 \flat 7$
 VI^{maj7} $R 3 5 7$ Lower 7th = VI^7 $R 3 5 \flat 7$

Phrygian Dominant (V^7)
"Spanish Phrygian"

Lydian Dominant (VI^7)

Check out some examples of the uses of these two secondary dominants in minor chord progressions on the following page.