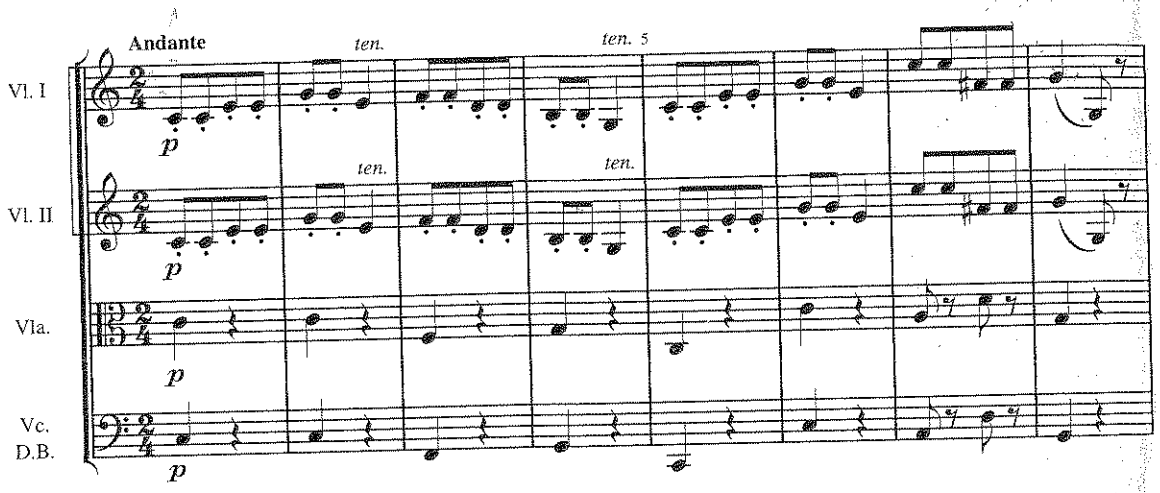
Secondary Functions

By far the most common sort of altered chord in tonal music is the **secondary function.** A chord whose function belongs more closely to a key other than the main key of the passage is called a secondary function. Listen to Example 16-2, paying special attention to the ending. Although the two-part texture means that incomplete chords will have to be used, it is clear that the F♯4 in m. 7 is not an NCT. In fact, the last two chords are D and G, and they sound like V–I in the key of G.

Example 16-2 *Haydn, Symphony No. 94, II*



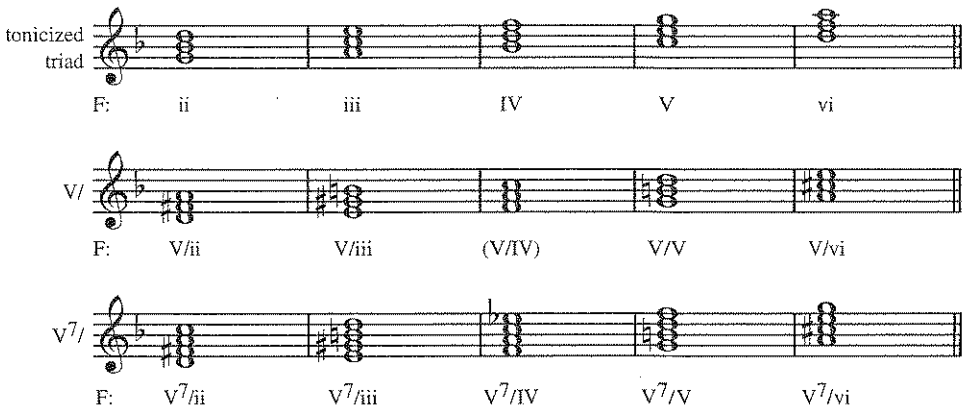
If our ears were to lose track of the original tonic at this point, or if the music were to continue in the key of G, employing F♯s and centering on G, we would analyze this as a change of key (a modulation). However, because we still hear the G chord as a V, and because the next phrase is a repeat of the first one, we label the G chord as V and call the D chord a *V of V* (the symbol is V/V). We say that the D chord has *tonicized* the G chord, giving it special emphasis, but that a change of tonic has not taken place.

Most secondary functions are either secondary dominants (*V of* and V^7 *of*) or secondary leading-tone chords (*vii*° *of*, $vii^{\circ 7}$ *of*, and $vii^{\varnothing 7}$ of).

Secondary Dominant Chords

Because tonic triads are always major or minor, it makes sense that only major and minor triads can be tonicized by secondary dominants. This means that you would not expect to find V/ii° in minor or V/vii° in either major or minor. All other diatonic chords (other than I, of course) may be tonicized by secondary V or V7 chords. Example 16-3 illustrates the possibilities in F major. Notice that most of the accidentals create a leading tone to the root of the chord being tonicized.

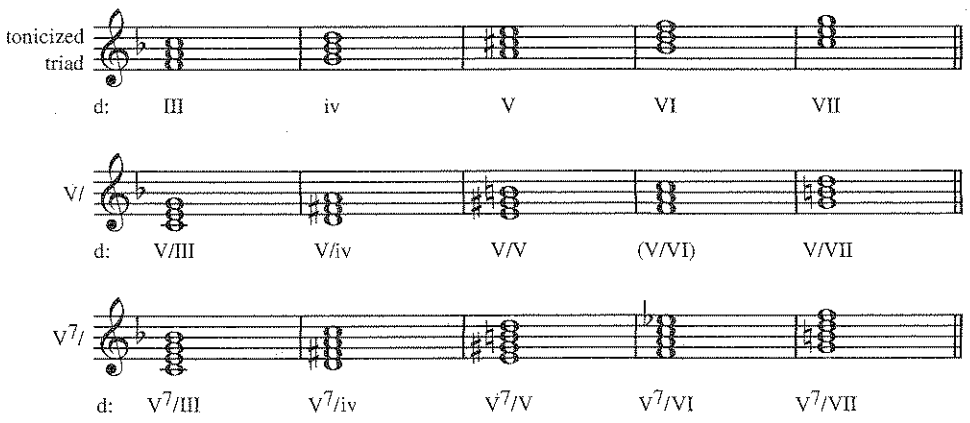
Example 16-3 *Secondary dominants in F major*



Only one of these chords, V/IV, is identical to a diatonic chord in F. Because V/IV sounds like I, composers most often use V^7/IV instead of V/IV to make the secondary function clear.

The secondary dominants in d minor are illustrated in Example 16-4. Here three chords are identical to diatonic chords in d minor. The V/III (= VII) and the V^7/III (= VII^7) are both usable, even though they are not altered chords, because VII and VII^7 usually function as dominants of III anyway. The V/VI, however, would usually be analyzed as III instead of as a secondary dominant.

Example 16-4 *Secondary dominants in D minor*



The major or minor triad that is tonicized by a secondary dominant may occur with its 7th, or the tonicized chord may itself be altered to become a secondary dominant. This means, for example, that any of the following progressions might be encountered.

V^7/ii–ii V^7/ii–V/V
V^7/ii–ii^7 V^7/ii–V^7/V

Spelling Secondary Dominants

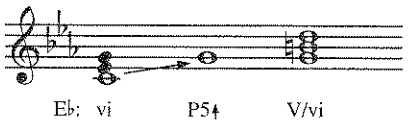
There are three steps involved in spelling a secondary dominant.

1. Find the root of the chord that is to be tonicized.
2. Go up a P5.
3. Using that note as the root, spell a major triad (for V of) or a major-minor seventh chord (for V^7 of).

For example, to spell a V/vi in E♭, the steps are the following (Ex. 16-5).

1. The root of vi in E♭ is C.
2. A P5 above C is G.
3. A major triad on G is G–B♮–D.

Example 16-5



Or, to spell a V^7/V in b minor (Ex. 16-6),

1. The root of V in b is F♯.
2. A P5 above F♯ is C♯.
3. A Mm^7 on C♯ is C♯–E♯–G♯–B.

Example 16-6

Recognizing Secondary Dominants

If you encounter an altered chord in a passage, there is a good chance that it will be a secondary dominant. These steps will work in most cases.

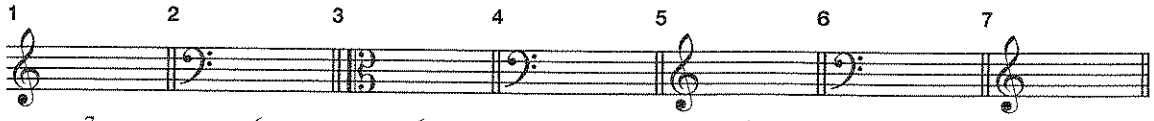
1. Is the altered chord a major triad or major-minor seventh chord? If not, it is not a secondary dominant.

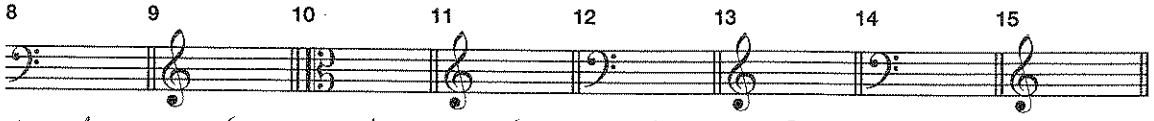
2. Find the note a P5 below the root of the altered chord.
3. Would a major or minor triad built on that note be a diatonic triad in this key? If so, the altered chord is a secondary dominant.

Self-Test 16-1

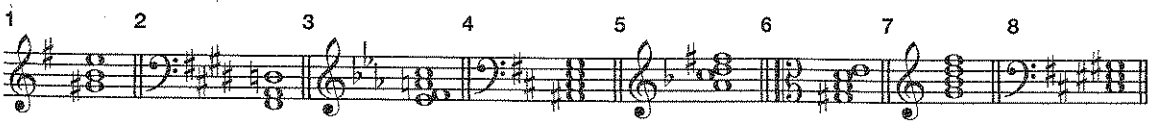
(Answers begin on page 609.)

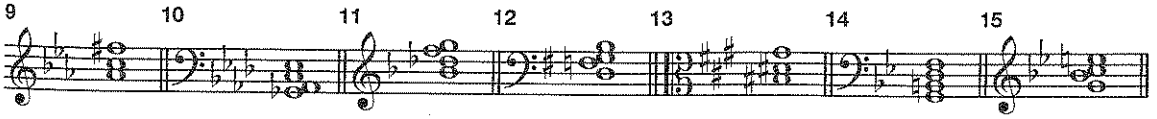
A. Review how to spell secondary dominants (p. 248). Then notate these secondary dominants in the specified inversions. Include key signatures.





B. Label any chord that might be a secondary dominant according to the steps outlined above. Label all others with an X.





Exercise 16-1 See Workbook.

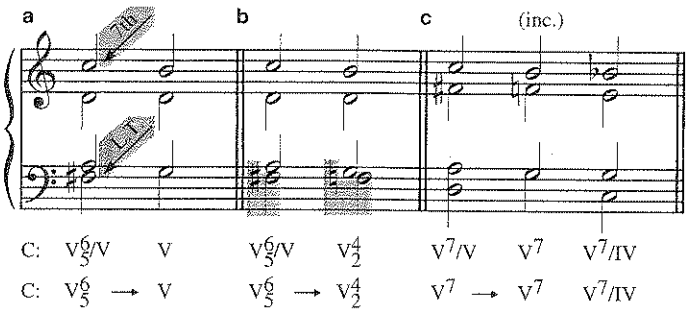
CHECKPOINT

1. What is the definition of a secondary function?
2. Most secondary functions are either secondary dominants (*V of* and *V7 of*) or _____.
3. Why is a V/IV in major less convincing than a V7/IV?
4. The root of a secondary dominant is how far above the root of the chord being tonicized?

Secondary Dominants in Context

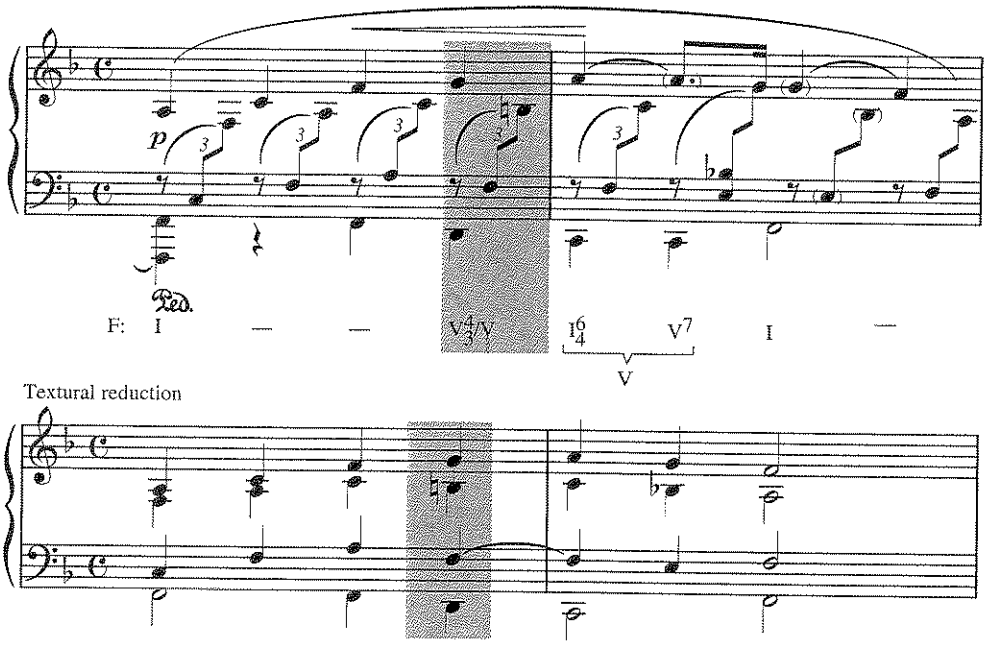
Secondary dominants generally resolve just as primary dominants do. That is, a V^6_5/V in C will resolve the same way as V^6_5 would in the key of G (Ex. 16-7a). The only exception is that sometimes the chord of resolution contains a 7th. In that case, the leading tone may need to slide down a half step to become the 7th of the chord of resolution (Ex. 16-7b). Notice that complete seventh chords in root position alternate with incomplete ones in Example 16-7c. This part-writing principle should be familiar to you from the discussion of circle-of-fifths sequences in Chapter 15 (pp. 237–238). The arrow notation shown on the second line of the analysis is an acceptable method of abbreviation.

Example 16-7



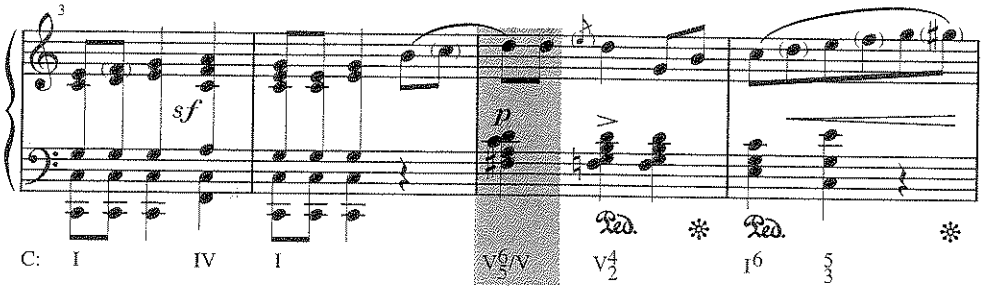
The V7/V is the most frequently encountered secondary dominant. In Example 16-8 the V is delayed by a cadential six-four. This is not an irregular resolution of the V7/V because, as we know, the I^6_4–V together stands for V.

Example 16-8 *Schumann, Noveletten, Op. 21, No. 1*



In our discussion of Example 16-7b above, we pointed out that the leading tone of the secondary dominant will sometimes move down by half step if the chord that follows contains a 7th. This is illustrated in Example 16-9.

Example 16-9 *Chopin, Mazurka Op. 68, No. 1*



The common deceptive progression $V^{(7)}$–vi is often given added impetus by inserting a dominant of vi between the V and the vi, as in Example 16-10.