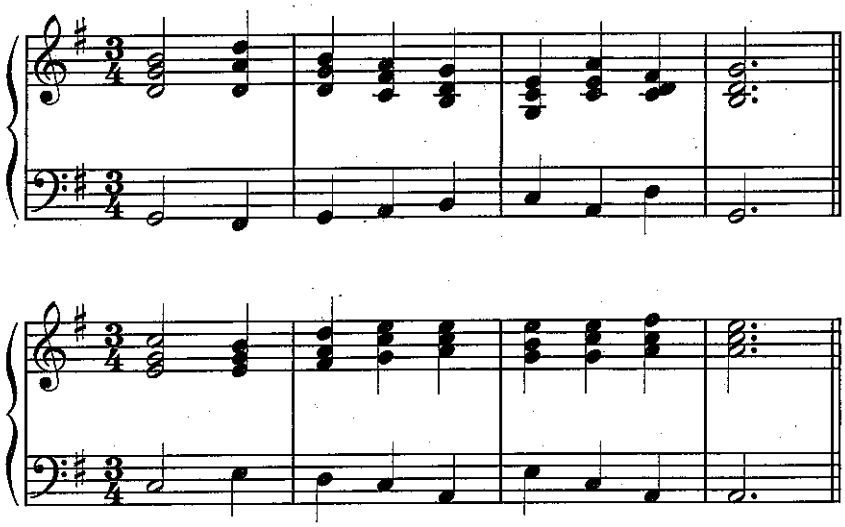
# Chapter Seven
# Harmonic Progression

## Introduction

Before you can begin to compose convincing tonal music or to learn anything from harmonic analyses, you must learn which chord successions are typical of tonal harmony and which ones are not. Why is it that some chord successions seem to "progress," to move forward toward a goal, while others tend to wander, to leave our expectations unfulfilled? Compare the two progressions in Example 7-1. The first was composed following the principles that will be discussed in this chapter, but the chords for the second were selected randomly. Although the random example has a certain freshness to it, there is no doubt that the first one sounds more typical of tonal harmony. This chapter will explore this phenomenon, but first we must turn to a topic that concerns melody as well as harmony.

**Example 7-1**

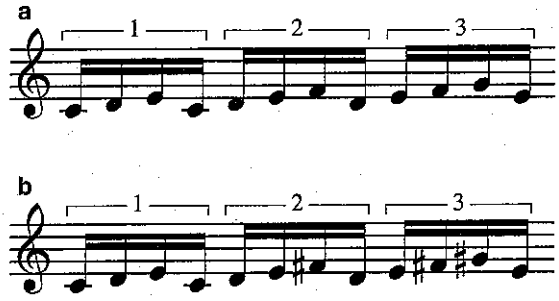


## Sequences and the Circle of Fifths

One of the important means of achieving unity in tonal music is through the use of a **sequence**, a pattern that is repeated immediately in the same voice but that begins on a different pitch class. A **tonal sequence** will keep the pattern in a single key, which means that modifiers of the intervals (major, minor, and so on) will probably change, as in Example 7-2a. A **real sequence**, as in Example 7-2b, transposes the pattern to a new key.

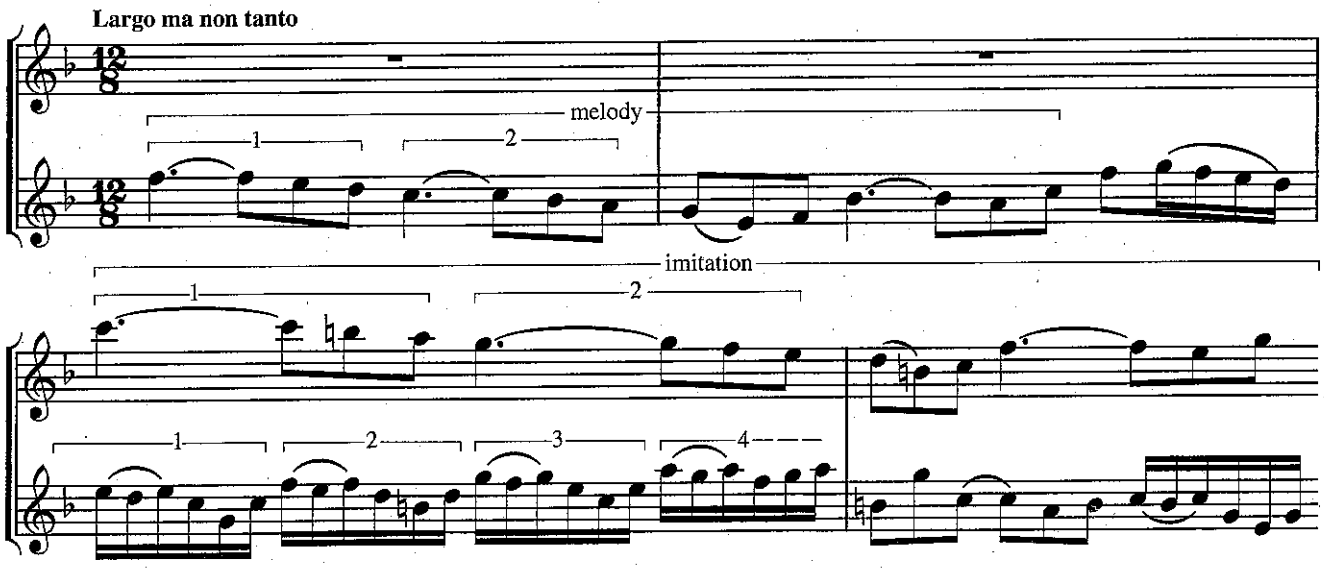
Real sequences (also known as modulating sequences) will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

## Example 7-2




It is important to understand the difference between sequence and **imitation**. In Example 7-3 the first violin (top staff) plays an exact transposition of the melody first heard in the second violin (bottom staff), but this is an example of **real imitation**, not a real sequence, because the repetition of the pattern occurs in a different voice.

## Example 7-3 *Bach, "Double" Concerto, II (solo violins only)*



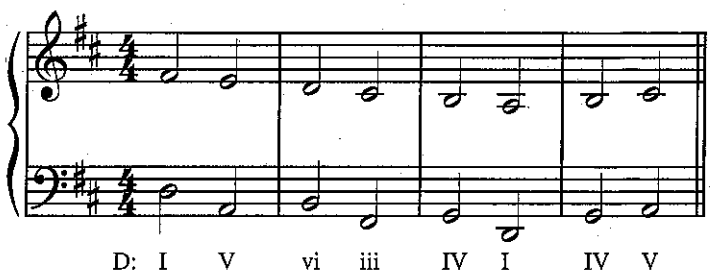

However, in addition to imitation, there are also sequences in Example 7-3. There is a sequence in m. 1 (the ♩. ♪♪♪ pattern) that is imitated by the first violin in m. 3. Another sequence occurs in the second violin in m. 3 (the ♪♪♪♪♪♪ pattern), but notice that the interval of a 4th in the first occurrence of the pattern becomes a 3rd in the second and third occurrences. A sequence such as this, where the repetitions of the pattern are neither tonal nor real, is called a **modified sequence**.

A sequence may be melodic or harmonic or both. One common sequential harmonic pattern is:

I - V - vi - iii - IV - I

This forms the basis of the famous Pachelbel "Canon" (Ex. 7-4). As you can see, the root pattern consists of a descending 4th (an ascending 5th would be the same thing), and the pattern is shifted down a third each time.

**Example 7-4** *Pachelbel, Canon in D*

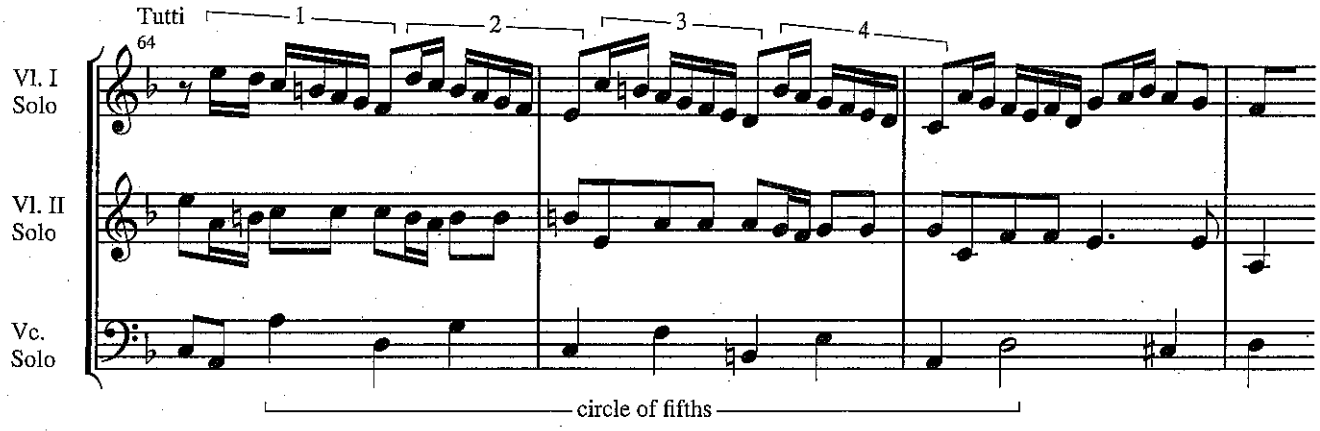



However, a sequential harmonic pattern that is far more significant to this chapter is the **circle-of-fifths progression**, which consists of a series of roots related by descending 5ths (and/or ascending 4ths). Although most of the 5ths (and 4ths) will be perfect, if a diatonic circle-of-fifths progression goes on long enough, a °5 (or +4) will appear (Ex. 7-5).

**Example 7-5**


Progressions of this sort often appear in connection with melodic sequences, as in Example 7-6. (The bass notes within the sequence have the root of the chord in each case.)

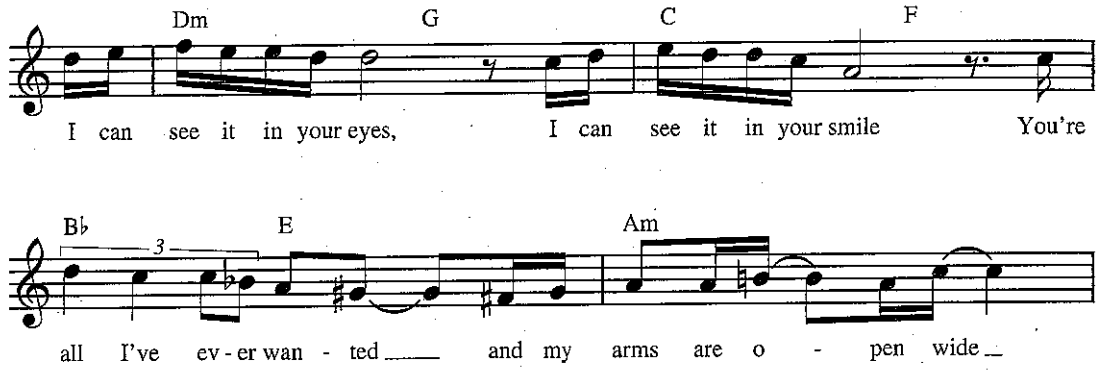
**Example 7-6** *Vivaldi, Concerto Grosso Op. 3, No. 11, I (soloists only)*



Although the chords in Example 7-6 are all in root position, if some or all of them were inverted, the progression would still contain a circle-of-fifths harmonic sequence.

Sequential progressions involving the circle of fifths are frequently found in twentieth-century popular music and jazz (see Ex. 7-7). Notice that both Example 7-6 and Example 7-7 include a °5 (or +4) in their root movements, which is not at all uncommon in circle-of-fifths progressions. In Example 7-6 the °5 occurs between the chords on F and B, and in Example 7-7 it occurs between the chords on B♭ and E.

**Example 7-7** *Richie, "Hello"*



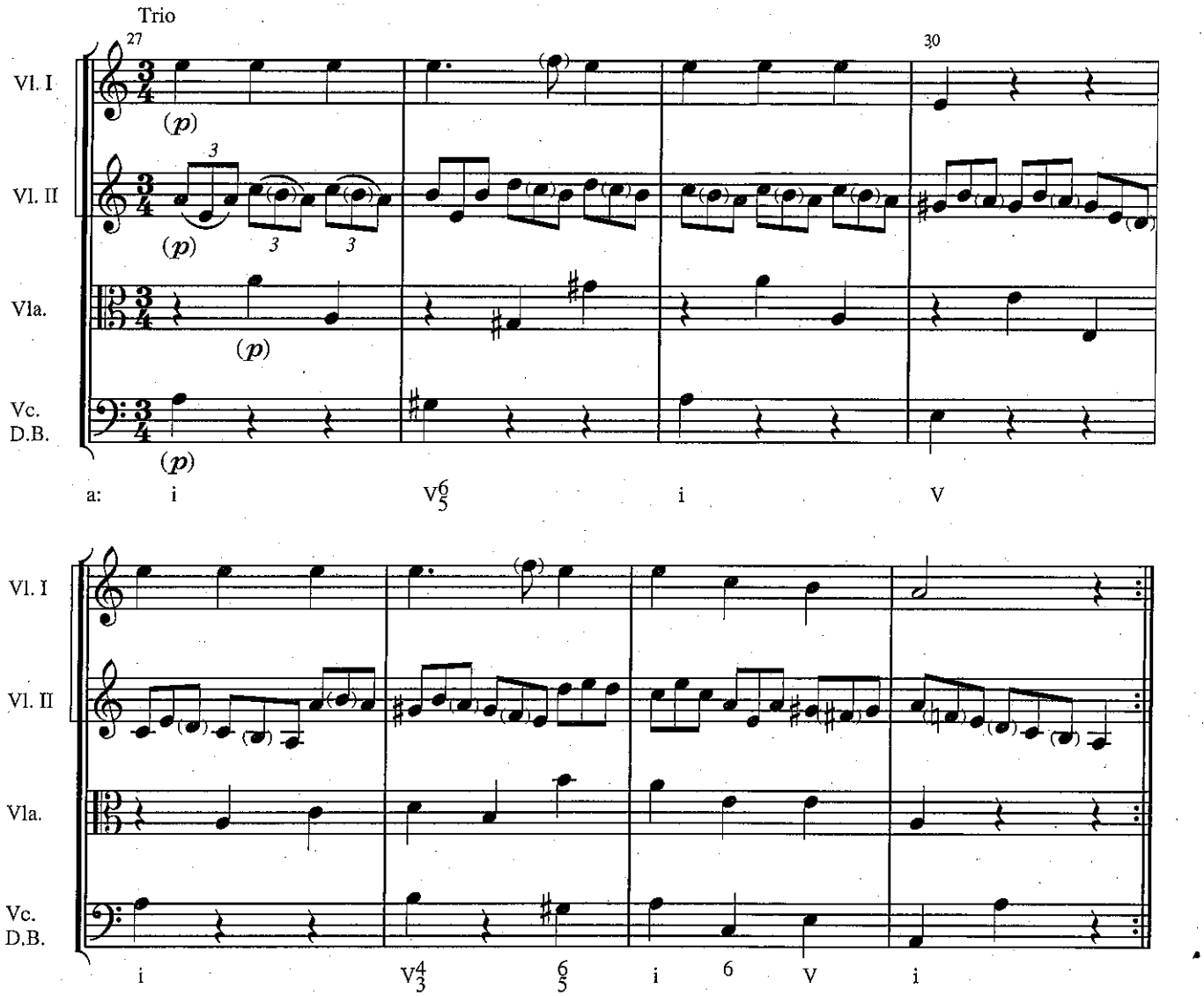

*HELLO,* by Lionel Richie. © 1983, 1984 Brockman Music and Brenda Richie Publishing. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The root progression of a 5th down (or 4th up) is the most basic progression in tonal harmony, whether or not it occurs in the context of a sequence. Still, the circle-of-fifths progression offers a useful memory aid in learning harmonic function, and we will organize the rest of the chapter around it. We will begin with the strongest of all root movements by a descending 5th, the V—I progression. (The following discussion applies equally to progressions in major and minor modes, except as noted.)

# The I and V Chords

The ultimate harmonic goal of any tonal piece is the tonic triad, and this triad is often also the goal of many of the formal subdivisions of a composition. The tonic triad is most often preceded by a V (or $V^7$) chord, and it would be safe to say that $V^{(7)}$ and I together are the most essential elements of a tonal work. It is not difficult to find examples in which the harmony for several measures consists only of I and V chords, as in Example 7-8, which Mozart composed at the age of fifteen. (Notice in the analysis that we do not repeat the roman numeral when only the inversion changes, as with the $V^6_5$ in m. 32 and the $i^6$ in m. 33. This is an acceptable method of abbreviation.)

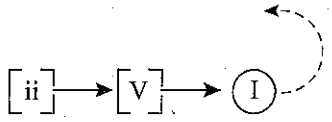
**Example 7-8** *Mozart, Symphony K. 114, III*




It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the I–V–I progression at all levels of musical structure, from the phrase on up. In fact, a complex theory developed in the first third of the twentieth century by Heinrich Schenker takes the position that any tonal composition can be understood as an elaborated I–V–I progression. As the harmonic progression diagrams are developed in the course of this chapter, remember that chords other than I and V serve important but supporting roles.

# The II Chord

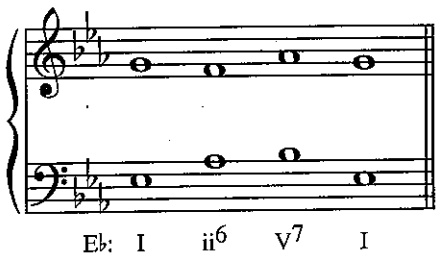
If we extend our circle-of-fifths progression backward one step from the V chord, we have the following progression:



This diagram illustrates the normal function of ii to progress to V and of V to progress to I. The dotted line after the I indicates that if the piece continues, the I chord might be followed by anything.

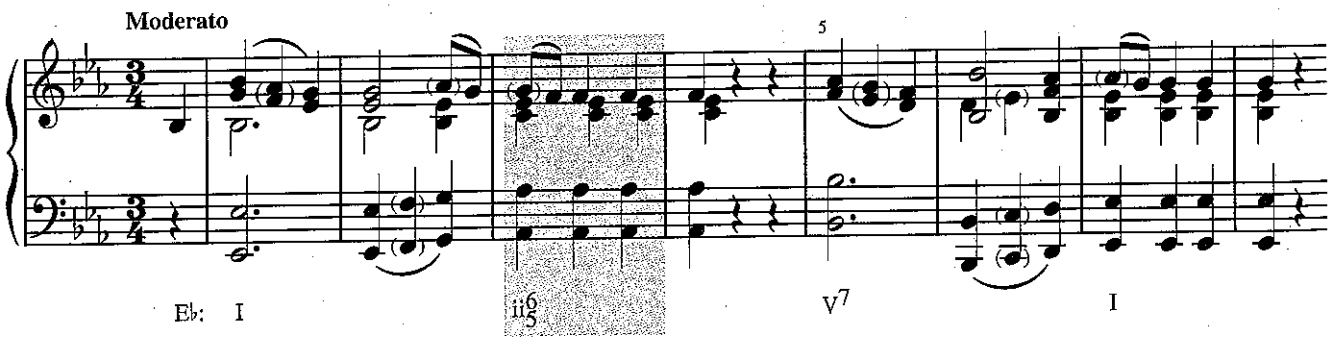
Many phrases contain only a I–ii–V–I progression. Example 7-9 shows a typical soprano/bass framework for such a progression.

**Example 7-9**



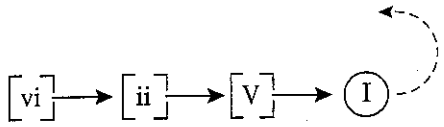

Play Example 7-9 and then compare it with Beethoven's version of this progression in Example 7-10. Here Beethoven uses a $ii^6_5$ instead of a $ii^6$.

**Example 7-10** *Beethoven, Minuet*



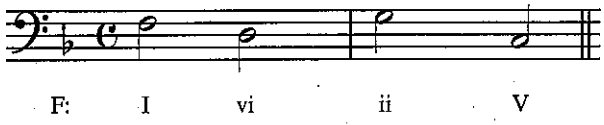

# The VI Chord

One more step in the circle of fifths brings us to the vi chord.



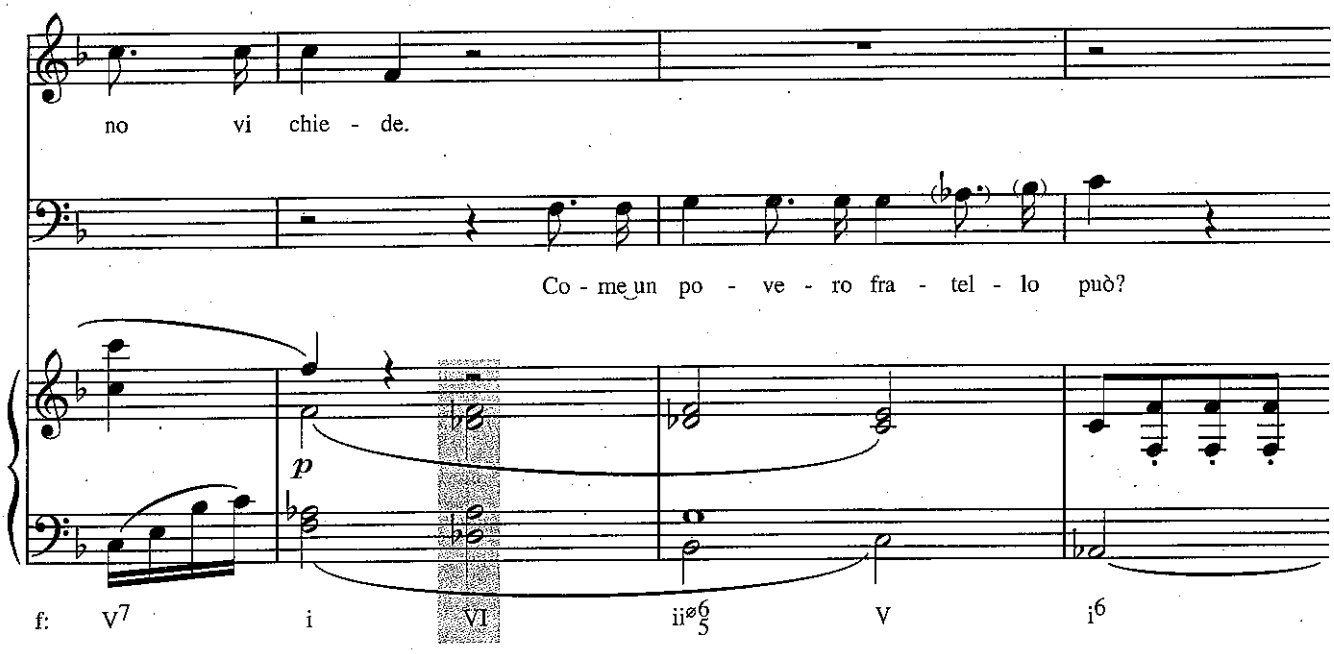

Put in root position, this progression illustrates an ostinato (repeated) bass pattern often found in popular tunes. Play example 7-11 and see whether it sounds familiar.

**Example 7-11**



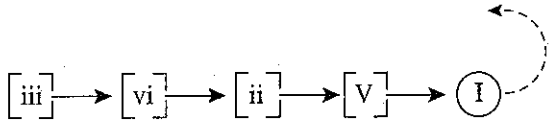

The same progression, but in minor, is seen in Example 7-12. As we will demonstrate in a later section, chord functions in minor are almost identical to those in major. (The key signature here is correct. Verdi uses accidentals to create the minor mode.)

**Example 7-12** *Verdi,* La forza del destino, *Act II (piano-vocal score)*




# The III Chord

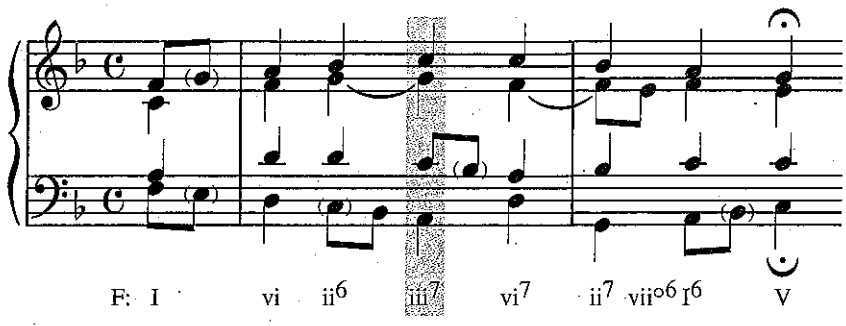
Another 5th backward brings us to the iii chord, far removed from the tonic triad.




Beginning theory students often assume that the iii chord is frequently encountered and that they should be sure to include at least one iii chord in each exercise they write. This is not at all the case, at least not in the major mode. When $\hat{3}$ is found in a major-mode bass line, the chord above it is almost always a $I^6$ rather than a iii. The iii chord does occur

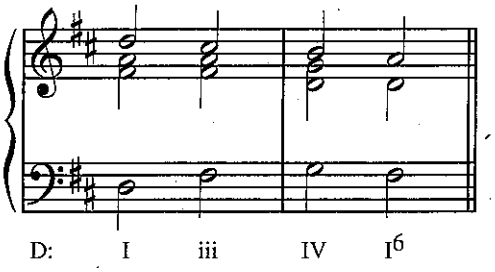
occasionally, of course. When it follows the natural descending 5ths progression, it will go to vi, as in Example 7-13. The III chord in minor is used more frequently and is discussed further on p. 109.

**Example 7-13** *Bach, "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort"*



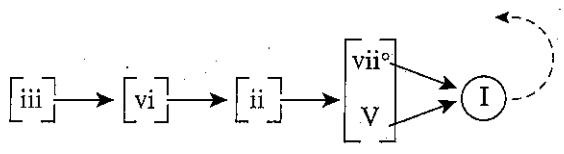

Also, the iii chord is useful for harmonizing a $\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$ soprano line, as in Example 7-14, although $\hat{7}$ is usually harmonized by V or vii° in other contexts.

**Example 7-14**




# The VII Chord

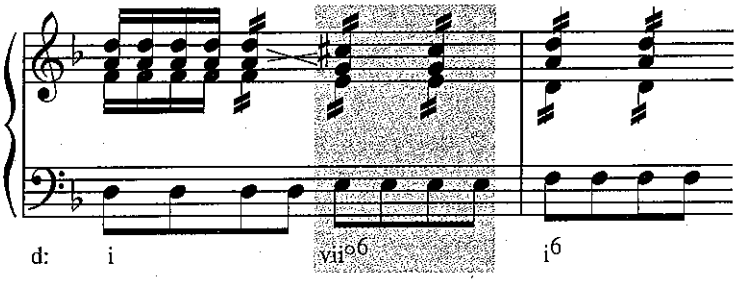
Continuing the circle of fifths backward from iii brings us to vii°. Although the vii°–iii progression does occur in sequential passages, the vii° usually acts instead as a substitute for V. In fact, vii°, V, and $V^7$ are all so closely related that moving from one to another is not considered to be a "progression" at all. This is because they all share the dominant function, which is to define the tonality by resolving to the tonic triad. Therefore, the customary goal of the vii° (except in circle-of-fifths sequences) is not iii or III, but instead is the tonic triad.



If vii° and V are used next to each other, V will usually follow the vii° because the V is the stronger sound.

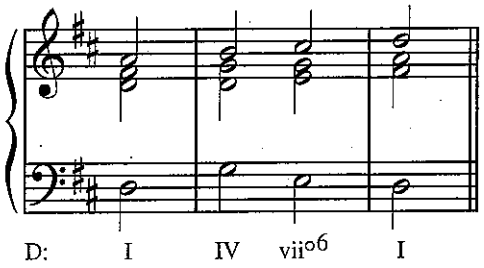
The most common use of vii° is in first inversion between two positions of the tonic triad: I–vii°$^6$–I$^6$ or I$^6$–vii°$^6$–I (Ex. 7-15).

**Example 7-15** *Handel,* Messiah



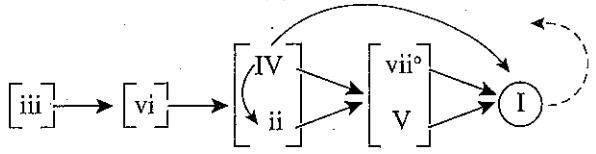

The vii°$^6$ is also useful in harmonizing a $\hat{6}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$ soprano line. Compare Examples 7-14 and 7-16.

**Example 7-16**



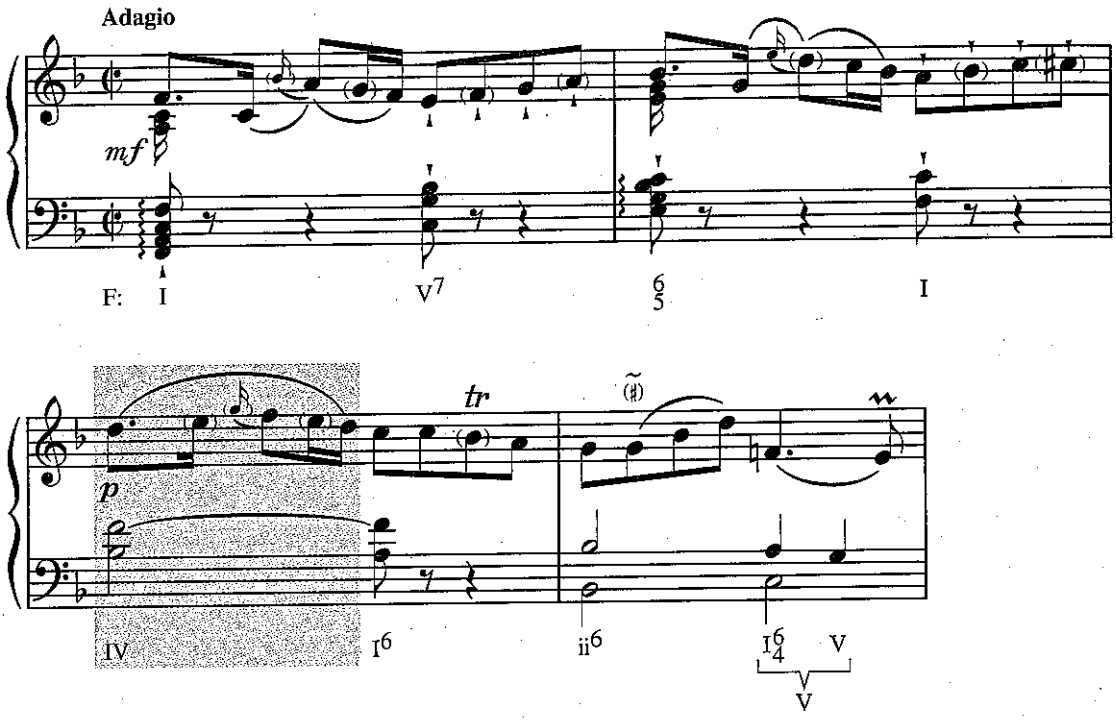

# The IV Chord

Still missing from our diagram is the IV chord, which lies a P5 *below* the tonic. The IV is an interesting chord because it has three common functions. In some cases, IV proceeds to a I chord, sometimes called a **plagal** progression. More frequently, IV is linked with ii; IV can substitute for ii (going directly to V or vii°), or IV can be followed by ii (as in IV–ii–V). These three common uses of the IV are summarized in the chord diagram.



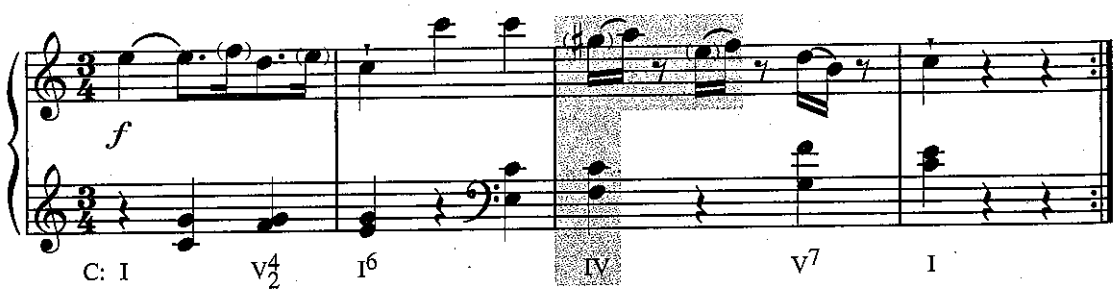
In Example 7-17 the IV appears in a plagal progression. (The $I_4^6$ in the last measure indicates that the notes of the tonic triad are present at that point. However, the bracket with the V under it means that everything within the bracket functions as V. The $I_4^6$ is actually a kind of embellishment called a **cadential six-four**, which will be explained further in Chapter 9.)

**Example 7-17** *Haydn, Sonata No. 35, II*




Later on in the same sonata in which Example 7-17 appears, IV is used in its predominant function (Ex. 7-18).

**Example 7-18** *Haydn, Sonata No. 35, III*

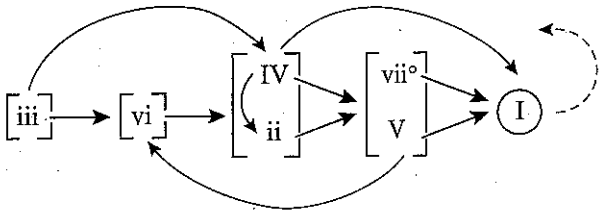


# Common Exceptions

The chord diagram on page 107 includes all the diatonic triads and gives a reasonably accurate picture of the chord progressions most often found in tonal music. However, to make our chart of chord functions more complete, we must include two commonly encountered exceptions to the norms discussed so far.

1. V–vi (the deceptive progression)
2. iii–IV (see Ex. 7-14)

These additions are included in the diagram below, which may be considered complete for the **normative** harmonic functions in major keys. Remember that the dotted line after the I chord means that any chord may follow it. Likewise, when vi substitutes temporarily for I in a deceptive progression, it may be followed by any chord. To see some examples of this, turn ahead to Examples 8-5 (p. 119) and 8-19 (p. 128), where vi is followed by $V^6$ and $I^6$, respectively.



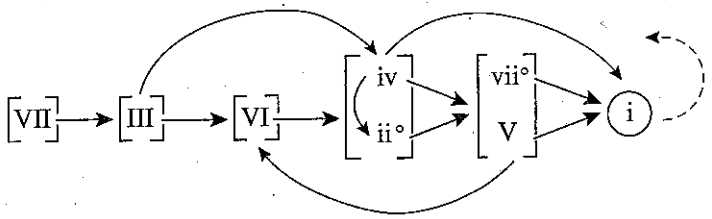

# Differences in the Minor Mode

Most chords function the same way in minor as in major. However, the mediant triad, so seldom found in the major mode, is a common feature of the minor mode: it represents the relative major key, and minor-key music has a decided tendency to drift in that direction.

In addition, the variability of $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ will occasionally produce chords of different quality and function. The most important of these are the following:

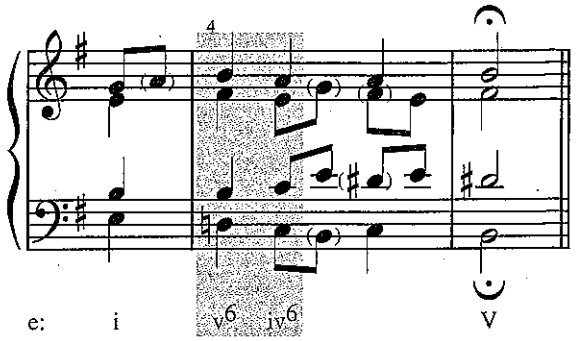
1. The subtonic VII, sounding like the V in the key of the relative major—that is, a V of III.
2. The minor v, usually $v^6$, after which the $\downarrow\hat{7}$ will move to $\downarrow\hat{6}$, usually as part of a $iv^6$ chord. The minor v chord does not have a dominant function.

The first of these possibilities is included in the chord diagram below.




The second possibility, $v^6$–$iv^6$, is illustrated in Example 7-19.

**Example 7-19** *Bach, "Als vierzig Tag' nach Ostern"*




# Progressions Involving Seventh Chords

We will not be using seventh chords in part-writing or composition exercises for a while, but they will occur in examples and in analysis exercises. You will see that in almost every case seventh chords function in the same way as triads; for example, both V and V7 tend to be followed by the I chord (or sometimes by the vi chord). The only exception is the tonic seventh chord ($I^{M7}$ or $i^{7}$), which loses its stability as a harmonic goal. In most cases a tonic seventh is followed by a subdominant chord, although other possibilities will be discussed in Chapter 15.

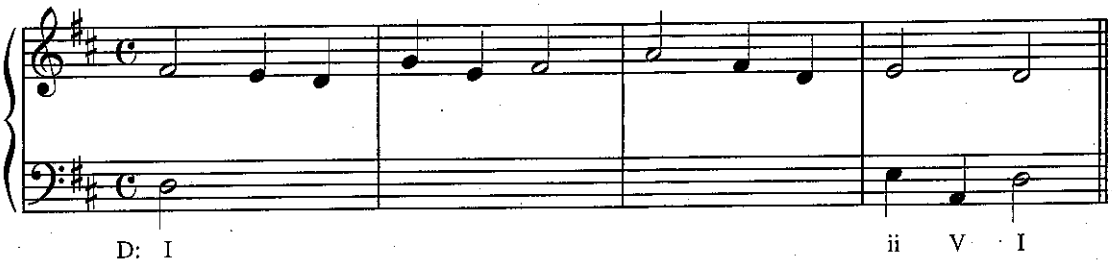
## CHECKPOINT

1. What is the difference between a tonal sequence and a real sequence?
2. Does a circle-of-fifths sequence use descending fifths or ascending fifths?
3. What are three conventional uses of the IV chord?

# Harmonizing a Simple Melody

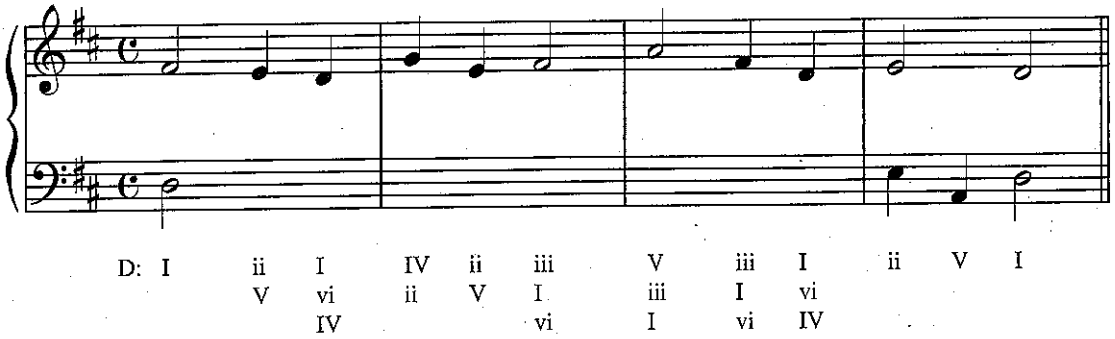
Because we have so far discussed part writing only of root position chords, any melody harmonization exercises will have to be restricted to root position. For the best results, avoid using any root position diminished triads (this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Your first step should be to select the chords for the very beginning and for the last two or three chords, as in Example 7-20.

## Example 7-20



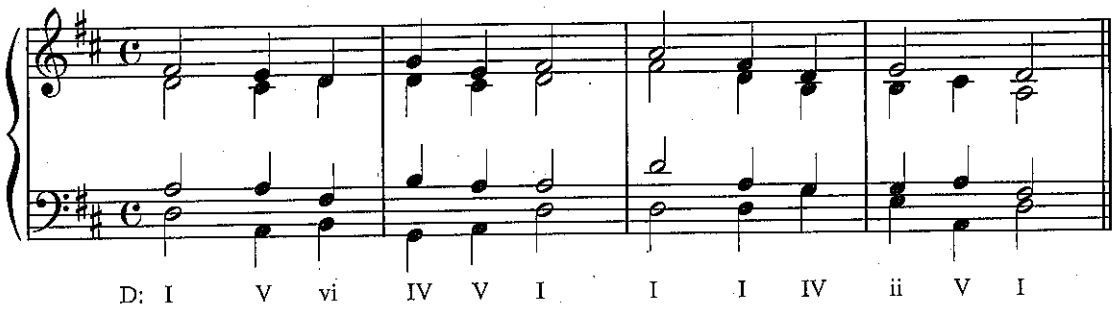

Next, write out the possibilities for each remaining chord, remembering that every melody note can serve as the root, third, or fifth of a triad, as in Example 7-21. Notice that we have not included the vii° chord as a possibility because we want to avoid root position diminished triads.

## Example 7-21




The next step is to compose the rest of the bass line. The challenge here is to try to create a good harmonic progression while avoiding creating parallel or direct 5ths and 8ves with the melody. For example, parallel fifths would result if we began the third measure with a I–vi progression. Once you are satisfied with both the bass line and the progression, the final step is to add one or two inner voices, following as much as possible the conventions that you learned in Chapter 6. A possible harmonization is given in Example 7-22.

## Example 7-22



# Conclusion

The last two chord diagrams on page 109 are somewhat complex, but both are based on the circle-of-fifths progression. Keep this in mind while you are learning them. At the same time, be aware that Bach and Beethoven did *not* make use of diagrams such as these. They lived and breathed the tonal harmonic style and had no need for the information the diagrams contain. Instead, the diagrams represent norms of harmonic practice observed by theorists over the years in the works of a large number of tonal composers. They do not represent rules; they are just guidelines for your use in analyzing and composing tonal music.

## Self-Test 7-1

(Answers begin on page 581.)

A. Complete each progression to conform with the last two chord diagrams presented (p. 109). The chord in the blank should be different from those on either side of it. In most cases there is more than one correct answer.

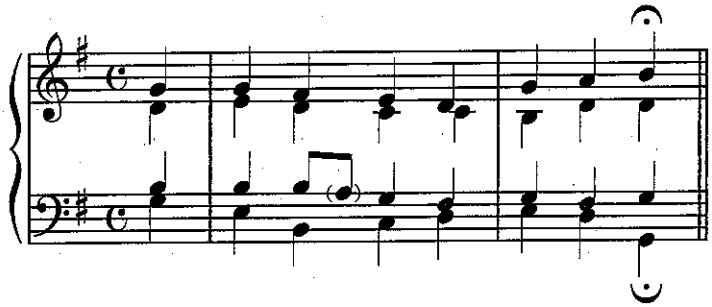
1. I ___?___ vi (____ or ____)
2. IV ___?___ V (____ or ____)
3. V ___?___ IV (____ or ____)
4. I ___?___ IV (____ or ____)
5. vi ___?___ V (____ or ____)
6. vii$^6$ ___?___ V (____)

B. Bracket any portions of these progressions that do not conform to the complete major and minor chord diagrams (p. 109).

1. I V ii vii° I
2. i iv i VII i V i
3. I IV iii vi ii V I
4. I IV ii V vi ii V I

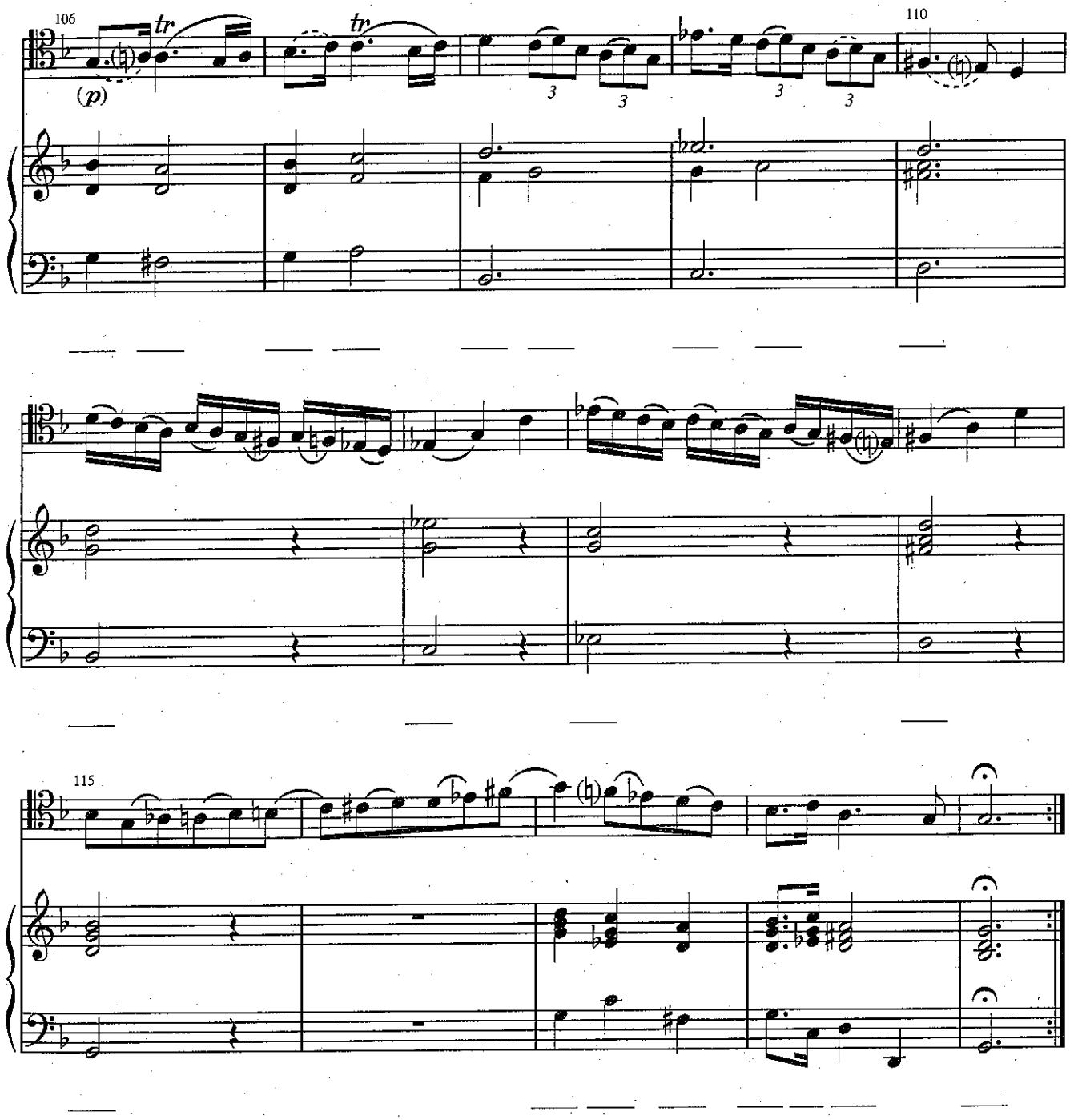
C. Analysis. Label all chords with roman numerals, and bracket any successions of chords that do not agree with the complete major and minor chord diagrams.

1. Bach, "O Herre Gott, dein göttlich Wort"



2. Vivaldi, Cello Sonata in G Minor, Sarabande*

In addition to labeling the chords, bracket any melodic sequences (including modified sequences) in the cello part. Non-chord tones in the solo part have not been put in parentheses, but the harmonic analysis can be done by concentrating on the accompaniment. The key is g minor despite what appears to be an incorrect key signature. Key signatures had not yet become standardized when this work was composed.

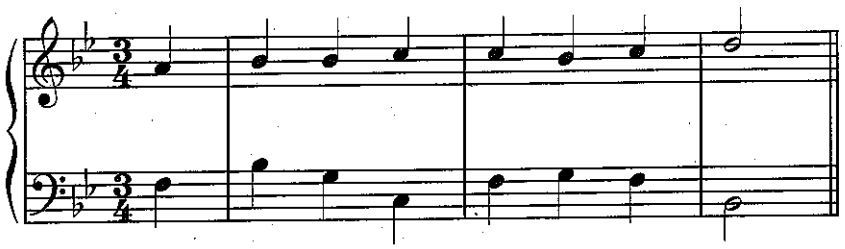


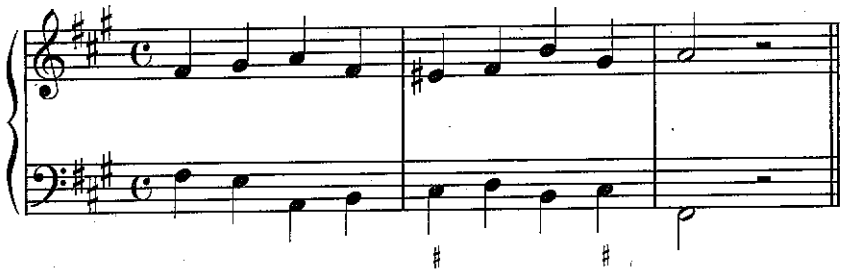

* Unfigured bass realization by S. Kostka.

3. Play through Example 3-10 (p. 48), supplying the chords in your left hand as well as you can. Then fill in blanks below with roman numerals in the key of e minor. Finally, bracket the longest circle-of-fifths sequence that you can find.

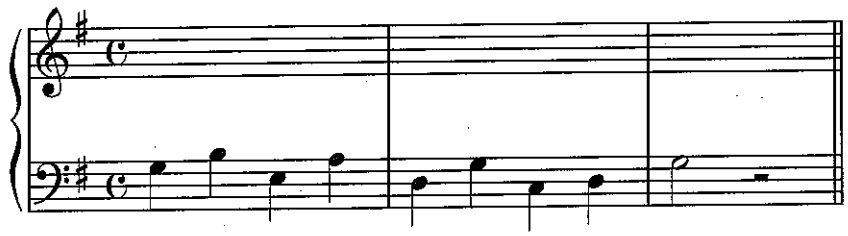
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |

D. Analyze the chords specified by these figured basses and add inner voices to make a four-part texture. Bracket all circle-of-fifths progressions, even those that contain only two chords. Before beginning, review the partwriting for deceptive progression on pp. 92–93.



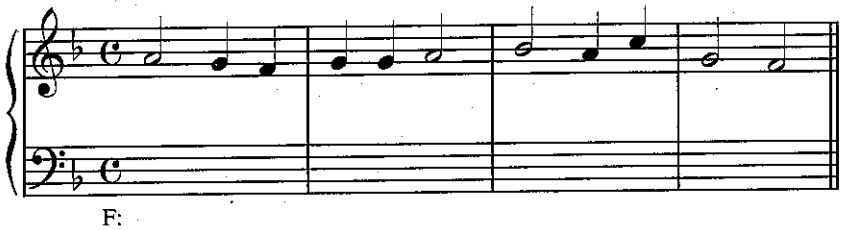


E. Analyze this figured bass, then add a good soprano line and inner voices. Bracket all circle-of-fifths progressions.

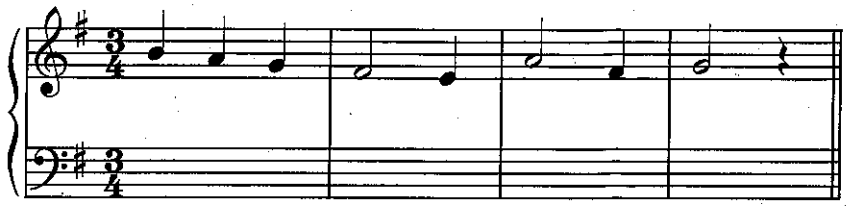


F. Harmonize the melodies below by using root position major or minor (not diminished) triads in an acceptable progression. Try to give the bass a good contour while avoiding parallel and direct 5ths and 8ves with the melody. Be sure to include analysis. Finally, add one or two inner parts to make a version for SAB three-part chorus or SATB four-part chorus, as indicated.

**1.** SAB

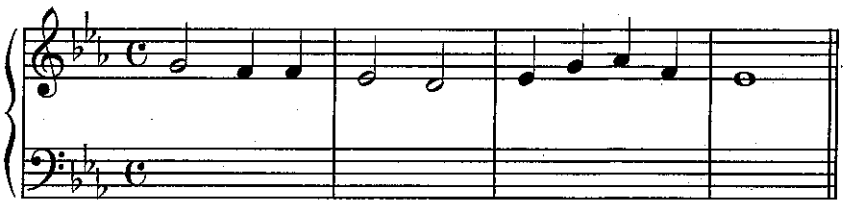


**2.** SATB



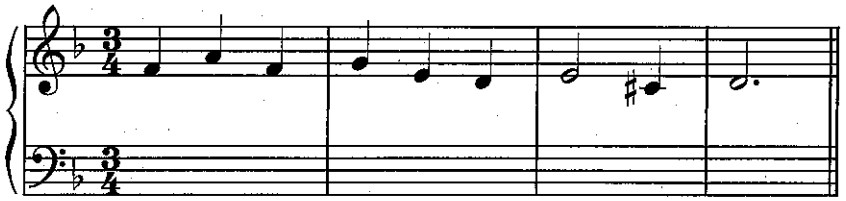
e:

**3.** SATB



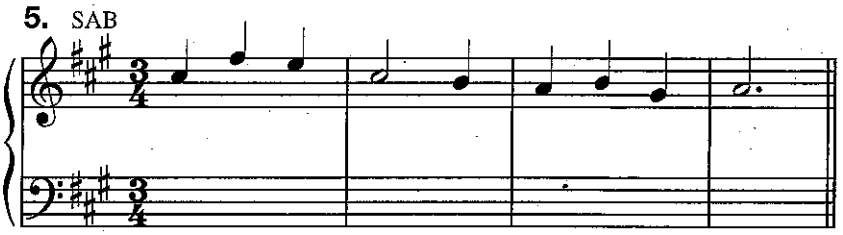
E♭:

**4.** SATB



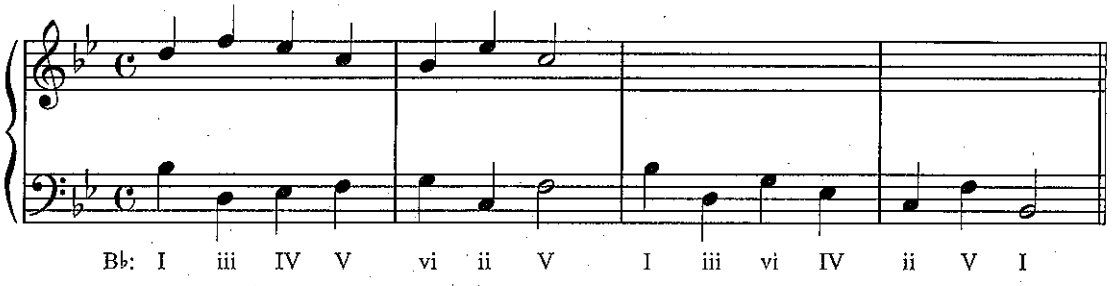
d:

**5.** SAB

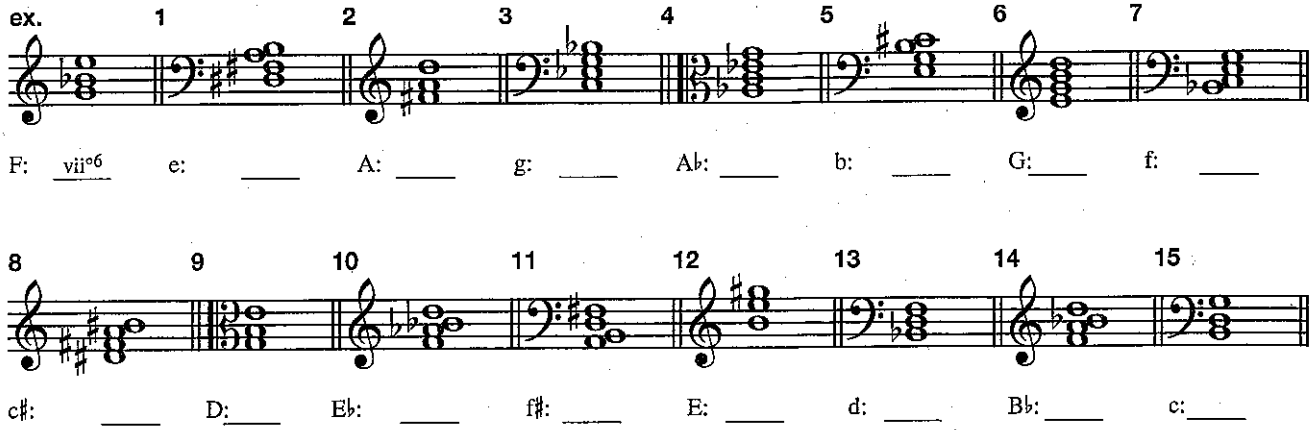


A:

G. Add an alto part (only) to mm. 1 to 2. Then compose a good soprano line for mm. 3 to 4 and fill in an alto part.



H. Review. Label the chords with roman numerals and inversion symbols (where needed).




Exercise 7-1 See Workbook.

# Summary

A **sequence** is a pattern that is repeated immediately in the same voice but beginning on a different pitch class. A **diatonic sequence** keeps the pattern within a single key, whereas a **real**, or **modulating, sequence** transposes the pattern to a different key.

A sequential pattern may be melodic, harmonic, or both. A harmonic sequence that is very important in tonal music is the **circle-of-fifths sequence**, which consists of a series of root movements down a 5th (and/or up a 4th). The most important circle-of-fifths progression is the V–I (or V–i) progression, but the circle-of-fifths progression also forms the basis of the diagrams given on page 109 illustrating normative harmonic progressions in major and minor modes.