

(Book 4) Lesson 44a.

Examining the Resolution of the Dominant 7th Chord

The Dominant 7th chord, usually designated as a "V7" chord because of its position in the scale, has a strong gravitational pull back to the Tonic chord, usually designated as "I" chord. This complete motion is referred to as a "V7---I" progression. Progression may be defined as the mandatory motion of a dissonant chord to a consonant chord with specific motion of the parts or voices.

Conveniently, the major scale divides itself into two kinds of notes. "Active notes" are those notes that want to move in a specific manner and "non-active notes" which are quite happy to remain docile. Active notes generally move to non-active notes. This motion is called "resolution." The following examples may help to understand this motion.

1 3 5 8 or 1 All Non-active.  
Active notes: 2 4 6 7

Notice that tones 1-3-5 and 8 come from the Tonic chord and tones 2-4-6 and 7 favour the Dominant side of harmony. Because of their restless nature, the active tones have a tendency to return to the notes of the Tonic chord in the following manner.

"Tone 2" has a tendency to return to "Tone 1" or to move up to "Tone 3." It seems to be a free note, happy to move in either direction. The student should play these notes and experience their motion. (called resolution) The technical name for Tone 2 is "Super-Tonic" (above the Tonic)

2-----1 down  
2-----3 up

"Tone 4" on the other hand wants to return to "Tone 3."

The technical name for Tone 4 is the "Sub-Dominant" (below the Dominant)

4-----3 down

Incidentally, the technical name for Tone 3 is the "Mediant." (approximately half way between the Tonic and Dominant notes.)

"Tone 6" also falls, returning to "Tone 5."

The technical name for Tone 6 is the "Sub-Mediant." (approximately half way between the Sub-Dominant [4] and the upper Tonic. [1 or 8])

6-----5 down

"Tone 7" on the other hand wants to rise to "Tone 8."

The technical name for Tone 7 is the Leading Note or Leading Tone. This note gets its name mostly due to the fact that it has the strongest tendency to move upward to the Tonic note. Ending a composition on the leading note is nearly not an option.

7-----8 up