

Redesigning the Harmony

Tonicization involves the process of preceding a chord with harmony that establishes this new chord with the feeling of being the tonic. This is most commonly done with adding a "secondary Dominant 7th chord" although it can also be accomplished in other ways.

An already existing "V" chord is commonly preceded by a "ii" chord. A "V7" chord tonicization is often added to emphasize the newly found "ii" chord. This process can quickly escalate to a musical comedy.

This is not to be confused with chord substitution because now the accompaniment chords and bass lines are also changed. The newly found chords bring their own family of substitute triads and such so one can quickly open a pretty large can of worms.

Here is a modest example of "Fishing For New Chords" It is now imperative to tell your partners that you have changed the original harmony and that they should comply.

original harmony

The first system of music shows three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in C major with notes C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Above it are original chords: C, C7, F, C, G7, C, G7, C. The middle staff shows the redesigned harmony with chords: C, Gm7, C7, F, C, G7, C, Dm7, G7, C. The bottom staff is a rudimentary bass line with notes C3, E3, G3, A3, B3, C4.

The second system of music shows three staves. The top staff has notes C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Original chords above are: C, G7, C, G7, C, G7, C, G7. The middle staff shows redesigned harmony: C, Dm7, G7, C, G7, C, A7, Dm7, G7, C, D7, G7. The bottom staff is a rudimentary bass line with notes C3, E3, G3, A3, B3, C4.

The third system of music shows three staves. The top staff has notes C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Original chords above are: C, C7, F, C, G7, C, G7, C. The middle staff shows redesigned harmony: C, D7, Gm7, C7, F, C, Dm7, G7, C, A7, Dm7, G7, C. The bottom staff is a rudimentary bass line with notes C3, E3, G3, A3, B3, C4.

When done tastefully, tonicization can be very beautiful. Wandering too far afield just sounds like you "got some new running shoes and are eager to show everyone how fast you can run."