

Secondary Dominants

Music

Borrowing a chord's own dominant to strengthen the move to it.

A secondary dominant is the V7 of a chord that is not the tonic, written V7/x.

V7/V in C = D7 → G · V7/vi in C = E7 → Am

Approaching G in the key of C

D7 → G

D7 is the V7 of G. It needs an F[♭].

Approaching Am in C

E7 → Am

Requires a G[♯].

Approaching F in C

C7 → F

The tonic borrows a flat 7th.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

✗ Thinking the accidental means the key has changed

✓ It is a borrowed chord inside the same key

A secondary dominant lasts one chord. A modulation establishes a new tonic and stays there.

The accidental is always the raised third of the new dominant — the leading note of its target.