

# CHAPTER 11

## The Dominant Seventh Chord

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### TOPICS

Seventh Chord

Dominant Seventh Chord

Major-Minor

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### IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The *seventh chord*—a triad with an added note a third degree above the fifth—is so named because in root position it has a characteristic interval of a seventh between the root and the added note. This chapter is devoted to the most common type of seventh chord in tonal music, the dominant seventh.

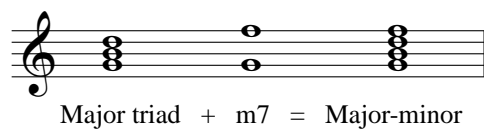
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### Dominant Seventh Chord

The *dominant seventh chord* is a diatonic seventh chord built on the fifth scale degree of the major, harmonic minor, and ascending melodic minor scales. The major triad (root, third, fifth) and minor seventh (from root to seventh) create a distinctive sound that is universally linked to the dominant function.

All seventh chords have a particular sound or quality determined by two characteristics—the type of triad (major, minor, diminished, or augmented) and the type of interval from the root to the seventh (m7, M7, or d7). Since the dominant seventh chord consists of a major triad and a minor seventh, its quality is described as *major-minor* (abbreviated as “Mm”).

Figure 11.1



The  $V^7$  is found almost as frequently as the dominant triad. Figure 11.2 is typical of the widespread use of the  $V^7$ .

**Figure 11.2**

Louise Reichardt: “Die Blume der Blumen” (“The Flower of Flowers”), mm. 1–4.

Es blüht ei - ne schö - ne Blu - me in ei - nem wei - ten Land,

*p*

Ab Eb<sup>7</sup> Ab Eb<sup>7</sup> Ab Eb

Ab: I V<sup>7</sup> I V<sup>7</sup> I V

**Inversions of the V<sup>7</sup>**

The various positions of V<sup>7</sup> are illustrated in Figure 11.3. The numbers you see designate the various positions of the chord and indicate intervals above the bass note. Interpret the first example in the chart as:





- 7 = Interval of a seventh above the bass.
- 5 = Interval of a fifth above the bass.
- 3 = Interval of a third above the bass.

Viewing Figure 11.3, you will see that the 7 (seventh above G) is F, the 5 (fifth above G) is D, and the 3 (third above G) is B.

Baroque period composers often deleted some of the numbers to make manuscript copying less tedious. In Figure 11.3, the column on the right shows the symbols in the simplified form we will use throughout this text.

**Figure 11.3**

Position	Analysis Showing All Intervals Above the Bass Tone	Analysis as Simplified for Conventional Use
Root Position	<p>C: V<sub>3</sub><sup>7</sup></p>	<p>C: V<sup>7</sup></p>
First Inversion	<p>C: V<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup></p>	<p>C: V<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup></p>

Second Inversion		
	C: V <sub>3</sub> <sup>6</sup>	C: V <sub>3</sub> <sup>4</sup>
Third Inversion		
	C: V <sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup>	C: V <sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup> or V <sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>

## Macro Analysis Symbol

In the macro analysis system, dominant seventh chords are handled in the same manner as dominant triads. When labeling dominant seventh chords, include a superscript <sup>7</sup> along with the triad letter name (G<sup>7</sup>, for example). The purpose of macro analysis is to expose root relationships and harmonic gestures throughout a composition. Therefore, some individual chord details are not emphasized in the system. Do not include inversion indications with your dominant seventh chord labels.

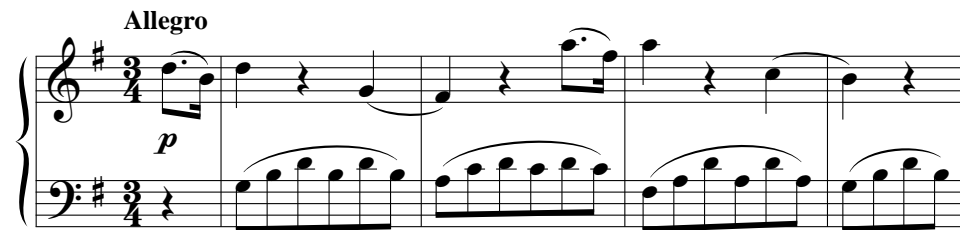
One of the most common circle progressions is the dominant to tonic resolution. The macro analysis system requires you to add the slur symbol to indicate the circle progression when a dominant seventh chord is followed by the tonic (G<sup>7</sup>–C, for example).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, macro analysis symbols are typically positioned below the score. When appearing in conjunction with Roman numerals, the macro analysis will occupy the higher level and the Roman numerals will be positioned below.

**Figure 11.4**

Mozart: Sonata in G Major, K. 283, I: Allegro, mm. 1–4.

**Allegro**



Macro analysis: G                      D<sup>7</sup>                      G

(G: I                      V<sub>3</sub><sup>4</sup>                      V<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup>                      I)

## History

In music of the Renaissance period, the dominant seventh chord was foreign to the style. The seventh chord developed when nonharmonic tones gradually assumed the importance of a chord tone. In the sixteenth century, the sound, but not the function, of seventh chords came into existence.

Early baroque period composers, such as Monteverdi and Scheidt, introduced the V<sup>7</sup> chord, as well as functional harmony in general. In early seventeenth-century music, examples of dominant seventh chords are scarce and the chords are treated very conservatively. In Figure 11.5, the seventh is prepared and resolved as a suspension, clearly indicating its dissonant status.

## Figure 11.5

Monteverdi: “Lasciatemi morire” (“Oh, Let Me Die”) from *Lamento d’Arianna*, mm. 6–8.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. A box highlights a section of the music from measure 6 to 8. In the bass clef staff, the notes are G2, Bb2, D3, and F3, which form a dominant 7th chord. Labels 'Prep.', 'Sus.', 'Res.', and 'etc.' are placed above the notes in the bass staff. The label 'Dominant 7th Chord' is centered below the box. The label 'etc.' appears in the vocal and piano treble staves.

Later in the baroque period,  $V^7$  chords were more plentiful and became an integral part of the musical language.

The dominant seventh chord was in constant use throughout the classical period. Its treatment was similar to that of the baroque period.

In the romantic period, dominant seventh chords were plentiful, but freer voice-leading treatment gradually developed. In Figure 11.6, note the descending nature of the bass and the absence of resolution of the seventh factor. In this example tonality is temporarily suspended so no Roman numeral analysis is provided. The seventh factor does not resolve in any of the three major-minor seventh chords, showing that the chord had achieved nearly consonant status.

## Figure 11.6

Chopin: Mazurka in F Minor, op. posth. 68, no. 4, mm. 1–4.

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Mazurka in F Minor, op. posth. 68, no. 4, mm. 1–4. The score is in 3/4 time and F minor. The tempo is marked 'Andantino'. The top staff is the right hand, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with trills. The left hand has a bass line with chords. Three major-minor seventh chords are identified in the left hand: Fm7, Bbm7, and Ebm7. The label 'sotto voce' is written in the left hand. The label 'Mm 7th' is written below each of the three chords. The label 'Andantino' is written above the first measure. The label 'sotto voce' is written below the first measure. The label 'tr' is written above the trills in the right hand.

In the post-romantic and impressionistic periods, the functional use of the dominant seventh chord was on the wane. Chords weighted more heavily with dissonance (9ths, 11ths, and 13ths) became common, and as divergent musical styles multiplied during this period, the major-minor seventh chord declined in use as a dominant function.

In most contemporary music written for performance in concert halls or opera houses, the  $V^7$  chord ceases to exist except in those styles that make conscious use of functional harmony. Nonetheless, throughout both Europe and America, popular music continued to use functional harmony. Folk and popular songs, as well as the earlier forms of jazz and blues, were laced with dominant seventh chords. Even into the 1960s, folk and popular songs, mainstream jazz, and blues had changed little in regard to the dominant seventh. In-

deed, at the present moment,  $V^7$  is alive and well in the hands of rock and rock-derivative styles.

Figure 11.7, from a jazz composition by Charlie Parker, composed in the early 1950s, illustrates straightforward circle progressions involving  $V^7$ . Note that the popular music symbol for the dominant seventh is shown as a capital letter with a superscript 7 ( $C^7$ ).

**Figure 11.7**

Parker: *Au Privave*, mm. 1–3.

Chords reduced to simple position:

F: I      ii<sup>7</sup>      V<sup>7</sup>      I

## APPLICATIONS

Unlike the dominant triad, the dominant seventh chord contains a dissonance—the seventh factor. Musical style is much affected by the way in which the seventh of the seventh chord is treated.

## Resolution of the Dominant Seventh Chord

From the dissonant seventh's emergence in the sixteenth century until the post-romantic and impressionistic periods, composers routinely resolved downward by step in the succeeding chord and followed the  $V^7$  with the tonic triad. The dominant seventh chord can be resolved in a number of ways, but the most common resolution is by a circle progression ( $V^7-I$ ).

## Circle Progression

1. The seventh of the  $V^7$  resolves down one scale step to the third factor of the tonic triad. The seventh factor may be in any voice (soprano, alto, tenor, or bass).
2. When the seventh is the bass note ( $V^4_2$ ), it must resolve to the third factor of I, and the tonic triad must automatically be in first inversion ( $I^6$ ).
3. Noting the illustrations in Figure 11.8, you will observe that if you first resolve the seventh down a step, the three remaining voices will move smoothly to notes of the I triad. In the first, second, and third inversion examples, the common tone (G) is retained in the same voice, whereas in the root position example, all three upper voices move in similar motion to the nearest chord tones.
4. In all four examples, all four factors of the  $V^7$  are present. In unusual instances, an incomplete  $V^7$  may be necessary. In such cases omit the fifth factor.

**Figure 11.8**

Resolution of the Dominant Seventh Chord in C Major:

Root Position:  $V^7$  → I

First Inversion:  $V^6_5$  → I

Second Inversion:  $V^4_3$  → I

Third Inversion:  $V^4_2$  →  $I^6$

The excerpts in Figure 11.9 show typical V<sup>7</sup> resolutions in circle progressions. Note that although the chord sevenths resolve downward, the leading tones resolve upward.

**Figure 11.9**

L. Viola Kinney: *Mother's Sacrifice*, mm. 15–21.

F C<sup>7</sup> F B<sup>b</sup> (F) C<sup>7</sup> F

F: I V<sup>7</sup> I IV (I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>) V<sup>7</sup> I

Joplin: *Maple Leaf Rag*, mm. 77–80.

E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

A<sup>b</sup>: V<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup> I V<sup>7</sup> I

5. In Figure 11.10, the seventh of the chord and the leading tone are both resolved. In such cases omit the fifth factor of the tonic triad and triple the root.

**Figure 11.10**

C: V<sup>7</sup> I V<sup>7</sup> I

## Noncircle Progressions with Resolution

Sometimes a  $V^7$  is diverted temporarily from its normal resolution to I. In these cases root movement will usually progress by second or third (see Figure 11.11). A typical example of this progression type is  $V^7$  to vi (or VI in the minor). Notice the doubling of the third in the vi chord, which avoids parallel perfect fifths.

Figure 11.11

Root Position      Root Position      Third Inversion

7th resolves      7th resolves      7th resolves

C:  $V^7$     vi       $V^7$     vi       $V^4_2$     iii

The Bach chorale phrase in Figure 11.12 demonstrates the resolution of the seventh factor in a noncircle progression using common stylistic practice. The seventh resolves one scale degree down to the fifth factor of the vi chord, and the third of the vi chord is doubled.

Figure 11.12

Bach: “O Herre Gott, dein göttlich Wort” (“O God, Our Lord, Thy Holy Word”), BWV 184, mm. 1–2.

7th resolves

G    e    b    C    D<sup>7</sup>    e    D    G

G:    I    vi    iii    IV    V<sup>7</sup>    vi    V    I

Root ascends one step

## Nonresolution of Seventh Factor

In rare instances the seventh factor of the  $V^7$  chord cannot be resolved in the same voice. This typically occurs when the resolution note is not part of the succeeding chord. In most instances, however, the resolution of the seventh is only delayed and eventually occurs in the appropriate manner after a few intervening chords.

No standard voice-leading pattern has been established for nonresolution of seventh factors. Observe good voice-leading principles and avoid parallel perfect intervals.

**Figure 11.13**

Root movement by step    Roots ascending by P5

C: V<sup>7</sup>    IV<sup>6</sup>                  V<sup>7</sup>    ii

The following illustration by Mozart shows the iv<sup>6</sup> triad as an embellishment of the V<sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 11.14**

Mozart: Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Major, K. 379, I, mm. 70–73.

*f*

7th does not resolve

Chord root descends one step

f<sup>#o7</sup>    D    E<sub>b</sub>    f<sup>#o7</sup>    D    c    D<sup>7</sup>    c    D<sup>7</sup>  
g:    vii<sup>o7</sup>    V<sup>6</sup>    VI<sup>6</sup>    vii<sup>o7</sup>    V<sup>6</sup>    iv<sup>6</sup>    V<sup>7</sup>    iv<sup>6</sup>    V<sup>7</sup>

**Stylistic Practices  
for Voice Leading  
in V<sup>7</sup> Chords**

We now add the following stylistic practices to the list that begins in Chapter 9 (also see Appendix A):

10. Resolve the seventh of the V<sup>7</sup> chord down one scale degree in the same voice. In the few instances where the resolution tone is not present, either keep the seventh as a common tone or move it by the smallest melodic interval possible.
11. All four factors of the V<sup>7</sup> chord are usually present, but for smoothness of voice leading, the fifth may be omitted and the root doubled.

Unstylistic departures, listed on pages 201–203, also apply to V<sup>7</sup> chords and inversions.