CHAPTER 9 – THE MINOR MODE

The harmonic behaviour of the minor mode is very similar to that of the major mode. However, it has some peculiarities which give it a special harmonic richness and variety. These are described in this chapter.

1. GENERAL ISSUES

- The Minor Mode generally exhibits the same behaviour as the Major Mode. Therefore, everything described in the previous chapters, applied to the Major Mode, remains valid for the Minor Mode.

- However, the Minor Mode has some peculiarities which are specific to it and which are described below.

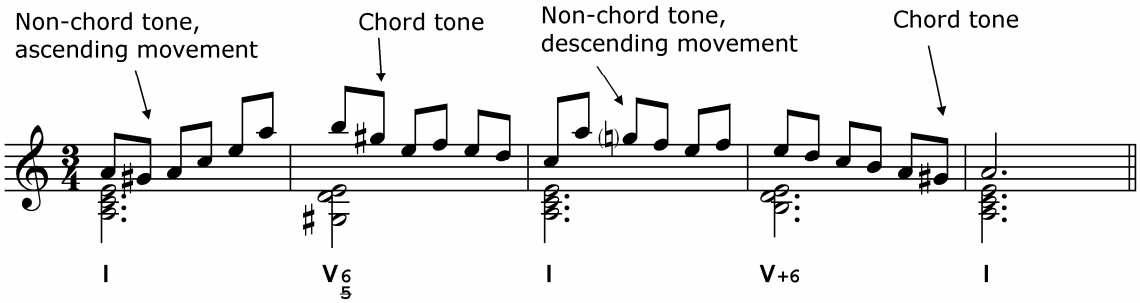
2. RAISING THE 7TH NOTE OF THE SCALE

- The 7th note of the minor scale is usually raised. In this way, the interval it forms with the tonic note is only one semitone, and it can thus perform the function of leading tone.

- Exceptionally, one finds it natural, unaltered, in the following situations:

A - If it is a non-chord tone, part of a descending melodic gesture.

B - When it belongs to a secondary dominant, where the accidentals corresponding to the secondary dominant are applied.

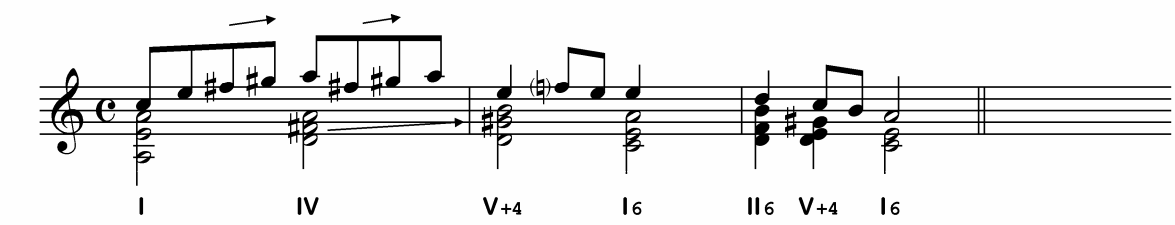


Im. 9-2

3. RAISING THE 6TH NOTE OF THE SCALE

- Sometimes the 6th note of the scale is also raised if it is followed by the leading tone. This is done to avoid the augmented 2nd interval, which sounded somewhat "exotic" to classical ears. The note can be either a non-chord tone or a chord tone. As a chord note it is only used on a subdominant chord, II or IV, never on the VI.

- Check it out in the following example. The arrows indicate the intervals that would result in an augmented 2nd if the 6th note had not been altered. Try listening to it without alterations as well.



Im. 9-3

4. SPECIAL TREATMENT OF THE II DEGREE

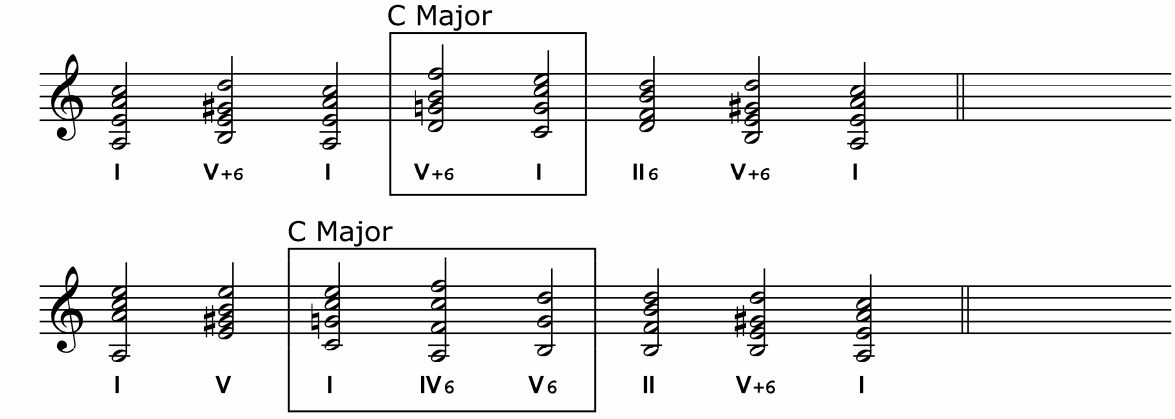
- The II degree is a diminished triad. This means that:

  - It is often used in 1st inversion, which softens the dissonance created by the diminished 5th.

  - The secondary dominant of the II is not used. Try it out and you will understand why.

5. TONICIZATIONS OF THE RELATIVE MAJOR MODE

- In a harmonic fragment in minor mode, it is common to find brief tonicizations (small modulations) of its relative major. There is no specific procedure for this. Simply, and at almost any time, a few chords from the Relative Major can be inserted. Check it out in the following examples.



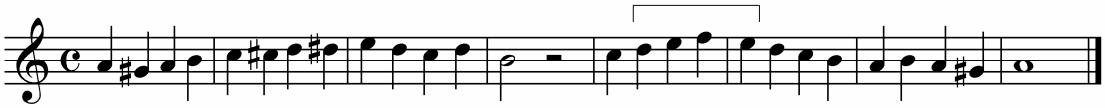
Im. 9-5

- It should be noted that, when a tonicization of the Major mode takes place, the 7th or 6th note of the (minor) scale are no longer raised, as we are for all intents and purposes within the Major mode.

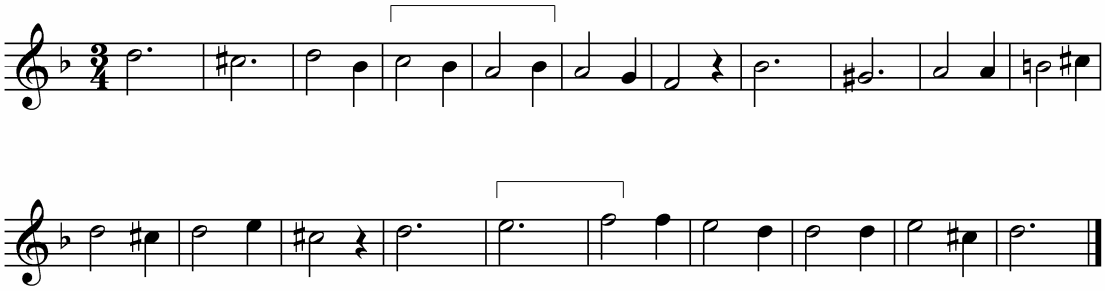
6. SUGGESTED EXERCISES

- Harmonise the following soprano lines in 4 parts, making a tonicization of the relative major mode in the spots marked with brackets:

1.

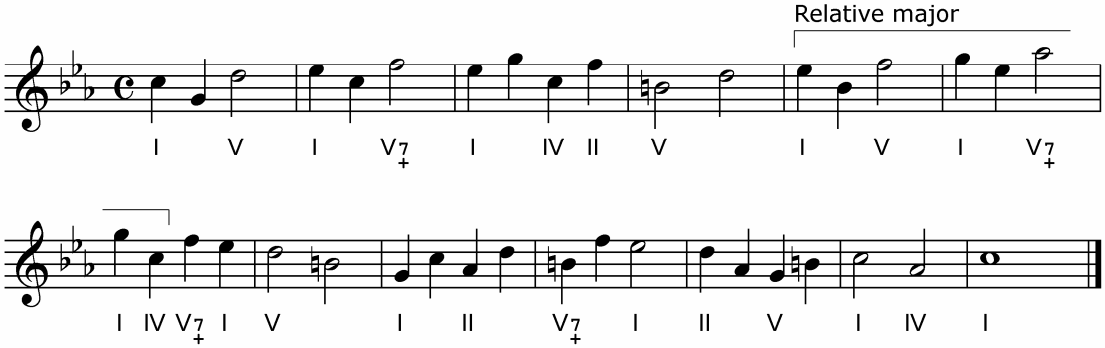


2.



3. Add non-chord tones to the following melody, so that:

- It is enriched and musically improved.
- The motivic coherence and cadential moments are respected.
- All the notes in the melody are either chord tones or non-chord tones of one of the types previously discussed.
- The different variants of the 6th and 7th scale degrees are present.



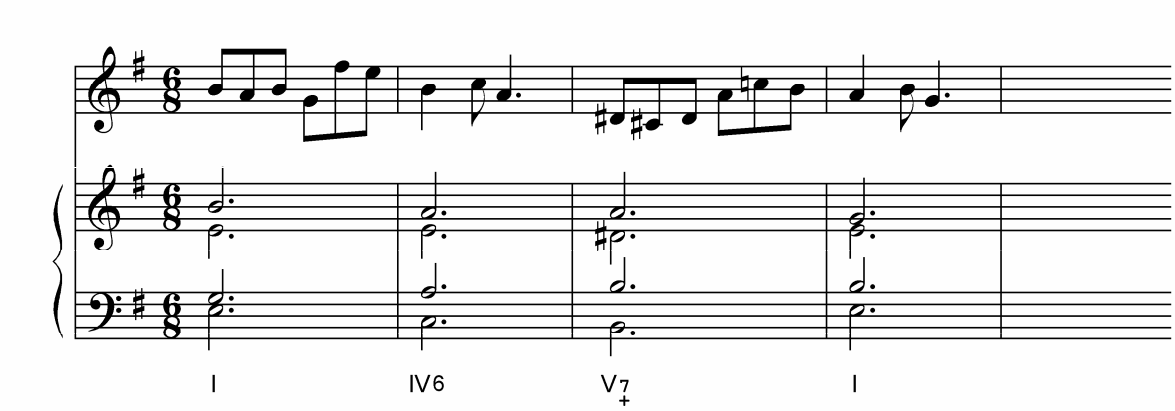
4. Write a harmonic structure and a melody with the following features:

- Key: F minor
- Time signature: 4/4
- Form: 4 phrases of 4 measures (16 measures in total)
- Cadences (at the end of each phrase): Imperfect, Half, Deceptive, Perfect
- Harmonic rhythm: half notes, with an acceleration before the cadences.
- Include, at least, 2 secondary dominants and a tonicization of the Relative Major Mode.

- Add a free melody which is motivically coherent..

5. Continue the music fragment below according to the following indications:

A - Complete the harmonic structure with the following characteristics:

- Form: 2 Phrases of 8 measures (16 measures in total)
- Cadences at the end of the phrase: Imperfect Cadence and Perfect Cadence.
- Harmonic rhythm: dotted half notes, with an acceleration to dotted quarter notes before the cadences.
- Include at least 2 secondary dominants and a tonicization of the Relative Major Mode.

B - Complete the melody, making sure it is coherent with the starting motive.