

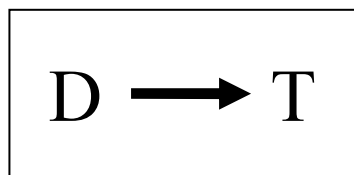
CHAPTER 17 - EXCEPTIONAL RESOLUTIONS

A dominant chord is said to perform an "Exceptional Resolution" when it does not lead exactly to the tonic chord that corresponds to it. The procedures for this are very varied. The most common ones are described in this chapter.

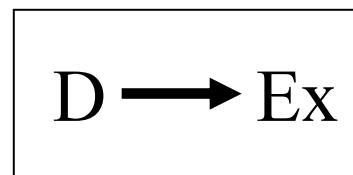
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Dominant chords have a special energy which is released when they move to their tonic chord. This tension (Dominant) - relaxation (Tonic) pairing is often insistently repeated in tonal harmony, constitutes its essence and is what gives it its characteristic drive.

- However, this couple, which we can represent as D-T, is sometimes altered if D is not followed by its T. When this situation arises, we are faced with what we call **Exceptional Resolution**. We will refer to it schematically as D-Ex, where "Ex" represents the chord other than the tonic that usually follows the dominant.



Typical resolution



Exceptional resolution

There are many different procedures for making Exceptional Resolutions. Here we will simplify them by classifying them into two groups, A and B.

- GROUP A: includes those cases in which the **Ex chord is also a chord with dominant function**.

- GROUP B: includes those other cases in which the **Ex chord is not a dominant** (with the exception, of course, of the typical tonic resolution).

- Within each group there are, in turn, several types. We will label them with a number: A1, A2... B1, B2, etc...

- Finally, it should be pointed out that Exceptional Resolutions can involve the principal dominant of the key but also **secondary dominants**, both in the V and VII degree versions. The different types of Exceptional Resolutions are described below, ordered within each group from most to least frequent. The examples include cases with the VII degree and also with secondary dominants.

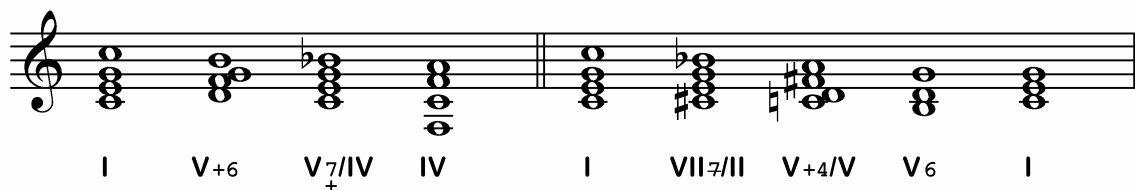
GROUP A (Ex is a dominant chord)

A1 - EX IS THE TONIC CHORD, BUT WITH DOMINANT FUNCTION

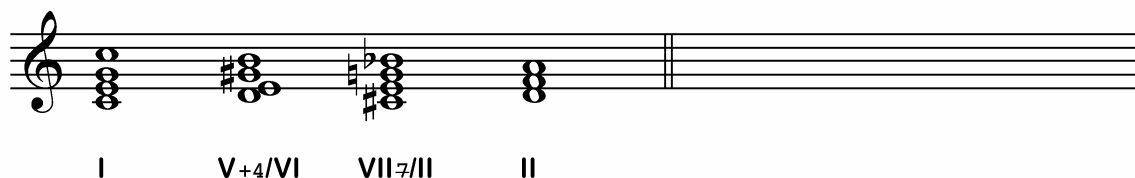
- This is the most common of all the exceptional resolutions. In this case, the exceptional chord (Ex) is the tonic of the preceding dominant chord, but transformed in turn into another dominant chord. To transform it, the third of the chord is altered to make it major (if necessary), and the minor seventh is added.

- This can be seen in any of the three examples below, but we will focus on the second one. In this example, VII/II leads to V/V. That is, VII/D leads to a D chord, which is its "tonic". But instead of being a D minor chord (II degree in C major), it is a D major chord and it also has a 7th (D dominant 7th). That is why it is not a II degree, but a V/V.

- In this chord connection it is typical that the leading tone of the first dominant chord moves to the 7th of the second dominant chord, as can be seen in the examples.



I V+6 V₇/IV IV I VII₇/II V+4/V V₆ I



I V+4/VI VII₇/II II

- The third example presents a special case. The V/VI would lead to an A minor chord. If we make the chord major and add a 7th to it, we would have a dominant for D.

- In the example, the V/VI actually leads to a dominant for D, but in its VII degree version. It follows the logic (and the sound perception!) that a VII degree can be interpreted as a V degree with a missing root. In this case the missing root would be the note A, but even so this VII can be interpreted aurally close to the expected "tonic" or resolution chord of V/VI.

- This set of exceptional resolutions of type A1 are the most frequent of all and the most convincing to the ear. Even if their connection is not particularly careful, or if they occur rather quickly or abruptly, the ear usually accepts them without hesitation.

A2 - EX DOES NOT MATCH THE EXPECTED TONIC

In this group, two dominants are connected to each other without any Dominant-Tonic relationship, as is the case in the previous group. This is illustrated by the following examples:

The first example shows a sequence of chords: I, V+6, VII₃+4/VI, VI₆, I₆, VII+2/V, V+6/II, and II. The second example shows: I, VII_{b3}+4/IV, VII₅7/IV, and IV.

Such resolutions are more abrupt to the ear than those of the previous group. But there are three "tricks" to make them convincing:

- Try to make the voice-leading as smooth as possible, keeping common notes and with stepwise movements.
- Keep chromatic lines in the same voice. As an example, in the second case above you can see the movement C-C#-D in the upper voice.
- Increase the length of the two chords forming the exceptional resolution.

A3 - EX IS NOT A DOMINANT CHORD BELONGING TO THE KEY

By "Dominant belonging to the key" we mean, for the present purpose, the set comprising the main dominant and all the secondary dominants of that key. That is, V, V/V, V/II, V/IV and V/VI.

This case (A3) includes those situations in which Ex does not coincide at all with any of these dominants. Therefore, as can be seen in the following example, it cannot be analysed as a secondary dominant, so we simply indicate which chord it is the dominant of.

The example shows a sequence of chords: I, V+6, V₅6/Eb, Eb, I, II₆, V+6/II, VII₃+4/Bb, and Bb.

This kind of resolution is usually the most difficult of all for the ear. For this reason, and in order to soften them, the voice-leading procedures indicated above must be applied to the greatest extent possible.

Exceptional resolutions of this kind would, in principle, lead to modulating to a distant key, as can be seen in the previous example. However, it is possible, and does happen in the musical repertory, to make a chain of several resolutions in a row. In this way, as shown below, it is possible to return to the starting key after the chain of exceptional resolutions.

The musical notation shows a sequence of seven chords on a treble clef staff. The chords are: I (C major), VII+2/IV (F# minor), V+6/B (C major), VII+2/E (G minor), VII+4/IV (F# minor with a flat on the third degree, Eb), V_{6/5} (C major), and I (C major). An arrow points to the Eb in the fifth chord.

Finally, a remark that can be applied to all types. Triad chords in 2nd inversion are also used in chains of exceptional resolutions. In this situation, the ear interprets the chord as if it were a cadential 6/4, i.e. as a Dominant. It is therefore susceptible to being a chord in which an exceptional resolution is made. Or, on the contrary, it can be the cadential 6/4 the chord with dominant function which performs an exceptional resolution into the next chord. Both situations can be seen in the following example:

The musical notation shows a sequence of seven chords on a treble clef staff. The chords are: I (C major), V+4/V (F# minor), E_{6/4} (C major), V+4 (F# minor), IV₆ (F major), V_{6/5} (C major), and I (C major). The E_{6/4} chord is labeled with (V/E) below it.

GROUP B (Ex is NOT a Dominant Chord)

B1 - EX IS VI OR IV₆

Indeed, the V-VI progression can be considered as a certain exceptional resolution, as the Dominant chord does not really resolve into its authentic Tonic. In principle, this is a basic procedure that would not require further comment. However, there are some nuances that do require it.

The first nuance has to do with a variant of the V-VI progression. This is the **V-IV₆** progression. This connection is remarkably similar in sonority to the previous one, differing only by one note, and appears relatively frequently in the musical literature, especially in deceptive cadences resting on IV₆. We can see the progression below, in which it is usual to double the fifth of the IV₆ chord in order to reinforce the somewhat "tonic" role that it would be performing:

The image shows two musical examples on a single staff. The first example shows a V₇⁺ chord (G-B-D-F) resolving to a VI chord (A-C-E). The second example shows a V₇⁺ chord (G-B-D-F) resolving to an IV₆ chord (C-E-G-C). The IV₆ chord has a double C in the bass.

And the second nuance is related to secondary dominants. Because a secondary dominant can also resolve on its VI or its IV₆, an apparently unjustified progression arises which in fact can be explained by this exceptional resolution, as shown in the example:

The image shows a sequence of chords on a single staff: I (C-E-G), V₇⁺/VI (D-F-A-C), IV (C-E-G), V₇⁺/III (F-A-C-E), V₆⁻ (D-F-A), V₆₅ (D-F-A-C), and I (C-E-G). Arrows point from the V₇⁺/VI chord to the IV chord, labeled (VI / VI), and from the V₇⁺/III chord to the V₆⁻ chord, labeled (IV₆ / II).

As shown in the examples, these procedures are only applied with dominant chords in their V₇ version and in root position, never as a VII degree.

B2 - EX IS VI OR IV₆ OF THE PARALLEL MINOR KEY

Practically the same options described in the previous section apply if a Dominant leads to the VI or IV₆ of the parallel minor key (which we label as VI⁻ and IV₆⁻, see Chapter 16: section 3). For the main Dominant of the key, the link would be as follows:

A musical staff in treble clef showing four chords. The first chord is V₇⁺ (G major triad with a sharp sign below). The second chord is VI⁻ (E-flat major triad with a flat sign below). The third chord is V₇⁺ (G major triad with a sharp sign below). The fourth chord is IV₆⁻ (D-flat major triad with a flat sign below). Vertical bar lines separate the chords.

And for secondary dominants the logic is also similar, as can be seen in the following examples:

A musical staff in treble clef showing five chords. The first chord is I₆ (C major triad with a 6 below). The second chord is V₇⁺/V (F major triad with a sharp sign below, with an arrow pointing to the text (VI⁻/V)). The third chord is Eb? (E-flat major triad with a flat sign below). The fourth chord is V₊6 (C major triad with a sharp sign below). The fifth chord is I (C major triad). Vertical bar lines separate the chords.

A musical staff in treble clef showing six chords. The first chord is I (C major triad). The second chord is V₇⁺/IV (F major triad with a sharp sign below, with an arrow pointing to the text (IV₆⁻/IV)). The third chord is Bb m? (B-flat minor triad with a flat sign below). The fourth chord is II⁻ (D minor triad with a flat sign below). The fifth chord is VII₇ (G minor triad with a flat sign below). The sixth chord is I (C major triad). Vertical bar lines separate the chords.

B3 - EX IS A MINOR 7TH CHORD

A minor chord, with or without a 7th, can never have a dominant function. To make a convincing exceptional resolution of this type, it is only necessary to apply the voice-leading recommendations given in point A2. The example below shows the connection between V/IV and VI₇:

A musical staff in treble clef showing seven chords. The first chord is I (C major triad). The second chord is V₊4/IV (F major triad with a sharp sign below). The third chord is VI₇? (E-flat major triad with a flat sign below). The fourth chord is VII₅⁺6/V (G minor triad with a flat sign below, with an arrow pointing to the text II₇/V). The fifth chord is (I₆)₄ (C major triad with a 6 below and a 4 below). The sixth chord is V₇⁺ (G major triad with a sharp sign below). The seventh chord is I (C major triad). Vertical bar lines separate the chords.

B4 - V/V (OR VII/V) LEADS TO II7

A rather frequent case of the exceptional resolution described in the previous point consists in the progression from the Dominant of the Dominant to II7. The Dominant of the Dominant can be found in any of its versions: V/V or VII/V (also possible with augmented 6th). The II7 can also appear in its modal mixture version (borrowed from the parallel minor key). Here are a couple of examples:

The first example shows a progression of chords in a treble clef: I (C major), V_{6/IV} (F#7), II₆ (D minor), V₊₄ (C7), and I₆ (C major). The second example shows a progression: I (C major), VII^{#6}/V (F#7), II₄ (D minor), (I₆) (C major), V₇₊ (C7), and I (C major). The (I₆) chord is shown in 4th inversion with a 'V' below it.

The effect of this exceptional resolution is as if the Dominant of the Dominant suddenly loses its strength. This lost strength is then restored if the resulting Subdominant chord moves to the Dominant, which is the most common situation, as can be seen in the examples.

B5 - VII/V LEADS TO TONIC OVER A TONIC PEDAL

This resolution appears when VII/V leads to I over a Tonic Pedal. Its origin and its aural effect are to be found in the progression from VII/V to the "I" as a cadential 6/4. However, since in this case the Tonic chord is in root position instead of in 2nd inversion, it lacks any Dominant quality. The effect is peculiar, as the VII/V chord loses all its energy by leading directly to I:

The example shows a progression of chords in a treble clef: I (C major), VII_{+4/V} (F#7), I (C major), VII^{#6}/V (F#7), and I (C major). A dashed line labeled "Pedal" is drawn under the bass line, indicating a constant C note. An arrow points to the Eb note in the VII_{+4/V} chord, labeled "(Eb)".

Exceptional Resolutions in Music Literature

Exceptional resolutions appear in musical literature from the beginnings of tonality. Bach himself makes regular use of them, but it is in the Romantic and especially the Post-Romanticism period that they are used intensively.

Largo F. Chopin

The score consists of four systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-4) features a bass line with chords: I₆, V₊₆, VII₊₆/₅, V_{#6}, VII₊₄/VI, VII₊₄/E_b. Annotations include 'Susp.', '(D#)', and '(Ab)'. The second system (measures 5-7) includes chords: V₇/A₊, II₇/D, VII₊₆/D, A₆(=IV), II₂, VII₇(=VII/G). Annotations include 'Neigh. Tone'. The third system (measures 8-11) includes chords: V₇/G₊, IV₇, II₆/₅, VII₊₄/₃, I₆, (=IV₆), V₇₊, IV₆. Annotations include 'A m' and 'E m'. The fourth system (measures 12-14) includes chords: V₇₊, IV₆, V₇₊, I₆. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

As an example, we present here two fragments corresponding to two major composers of the romantic period, Chopin and Wagner. The first of them shows the first half of Chopin's Prelude for piano in **Em**, particularly relevant with regard to the use of exceptional resolutions.

The first conventional Dominant-Tonic resolution in the main key does not take place until measure 14. Prior to this, there is a chain of exceptional resolutions, the type of which is marked with a circle. Initially, those of **Type A** predominate (the resolution chord is another dominant), followed later by those of **Type B** (the resolution chord is not a dominant).

In the following example, **Type A** is the absolute protagonist. It is an excerpt from a piano piece by Richard Wagner, "Ankunft bei den schwarzen Schwänen" ("Arrival with the black swans") WWV 95, in **Ab Major**. Prior to this, a harmonic "excursion" takes place in which different exceptional resolutions are linked together, as the analysis of the score shows. During this excursion, an allusion is made to the keys of **Gb** and **Cb**. Neither of them is really confirmed, as only their dominants appear, which are stressed several times, but without clearly resolving into their respective tonics.

R. Wagner

Musical score for measures 43-48. The system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 43 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The key signature has three flats. Measure 43 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 44 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 45 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 46 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 47 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 48 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Chord symbols below the staff are: I₆, II₇, V₇ +, V_{6/V}₅, and I₆₄.

Musical score for measures 49-55. The system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 49 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 50 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 51 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 52 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 53 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 54 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 55 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Chord symbols below the staff are: V₉, I₆₄, VII_{7/V}₅, (A₃) VII_{7/Gb}₅, and (A₃).

Musical score for measures 56-59. The system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 56 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 57 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 58 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 59 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Chord symbols below the staff are: VII_{7/V}₅ (A₃), VII_{7/Gb}₅ (A₁), V_{7/Cb} (+) (=Gb), and (VII_{7/Gb})₅.

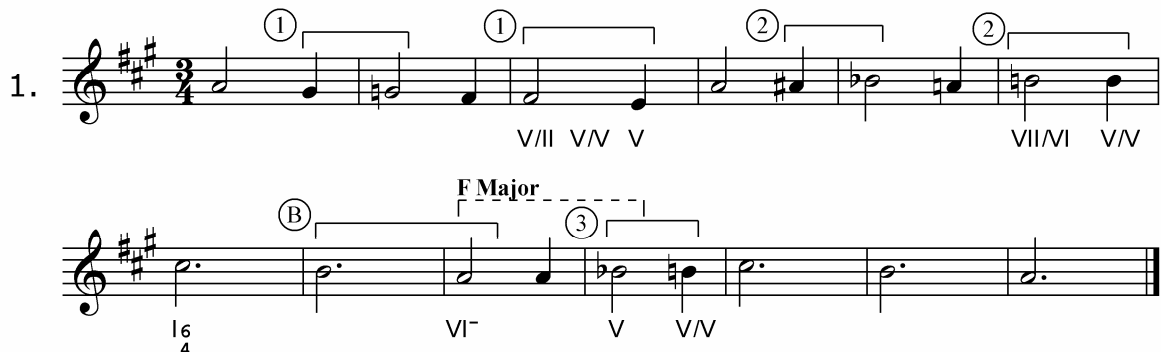
Musical score for measures 60-63. The system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 60 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 61 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 62 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 63 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Chord symbols below the staff are: V_{7/Cb} (+) and (A₃) V₉.

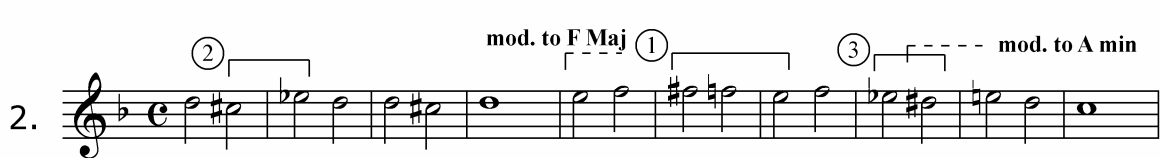
Musical score for measures 64-67. The system shows a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measure 64 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 65 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 66 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. Measure 67 has a triplet of eighth notes in the treble. The bass line consists of chords and single notes. Chord symbols below the staff are: V_{6/V}₅, I₆₄, V₉, and I.

Suggested Exercises

- Harmonise the following soprano lines, applying the exceptional resolutions of the type indicated by the numbers. All those with only numbers correspond to Group A (a Dominant connects with another Dominant). The only one marked with the letter B corresponds to type B2.

- In exercise No. 3, add at least another 8 bars, in which the music modulates back to the original key, and in which exceptional resolutions are used.

1. 

2. 

3. 