

Altered dominant chords and III in major

Altered dominant chords

Most commonly V+ or V+7 (i.e. root position), usually employed in major in order to make chromatic motion from raised scale-degree 2 to scale degree 3.

Beware: convergence of the 7th and the raised 5th of V+7 can look a lot like the double-leading-tone effect of an augmented 6th chord – but that's not what's going on!

In minor, can also use lowered 5th in a V or V7 chord.

Note that this creates a sonic structure identical to that of the Fr+6/4/3. This resemblance is highlighted when the chord is used 4/3 position; it's still a V4/3, and it goes to I, but it sounds just like a Fr+6/4/3; in second inversion, it is used in both major and minor. There's no very standard notation for this, and it's tricky with figured bass because the altered tone is in the bass and with quality because there's no standard notation for a chord with a major third and diminished fifth. I prefer FrV4/3.

See A/S 547-553

III in major

In the 19th century, composers wrote a new chapter in the long history of the III chord in major.

In the baroque, major-mode works often had slow movements in the relative minor that ended on Phrygian half cadences. From the standpoint of the global tonic, the relative minor is vi, and V/vi is III. These movements were generally followed by a return to the global tonic, creating a progression of III to I. (See the slow movement of Bach's 3rd Brandenburg concerto for an example.) In the classical period, development sections often had false retransitions near the end, usually suggesting an impending false recapitulation in vi (this possibility was realized much less frequently than it was suggested). This again resulted in heavily emphasized III chords, sometimes leading rather quickly (though generally not directly) to I. (See the first movement of Mozart's piano sonata in B-flat, K. 333, as an example.)

In the 19th century, composers often made prominent use of III chords within phrases sections that don't modulate. Sometimes the III would be a way station between I and V, much as iii is used. In other cases, III can seem to replace V, for example serving as the point of arrival for what seems to be a half cadence.

See A/S 398-400 for a perspective that emphasizes the subsidiary role that III plays in relation to I and V.