

# Chords for Modulation

by James M. Stevens

In a previous exercise, I demonstrated how to modulate from the key of C to any other key. Accompanists tend to be very strong in moving to keys that are distances up of a half step, whole step, and a perfect 4th. Most accompanists tend to shy away from modulating to other keys. However, with a little careful thought, pianists organists, and keyboard players can learn to make smooth transitions to any key.

The trick to modulation is in understanding the tendencies of different chords and in finding things are in common between the two keys, the one you are coming from and the one you are going to. First, look and see what notes are shared in common between the two keys and then use the common notes to move to the chords that lead to the I chord of the new key.

It is very important to recognize the natural leanings of the ii Chord, V Chord, and I Chord. The ii Chord (which is simply the triad or 7th chord that is built on the 2nd degree of the scale) very frequently is followed by the V Chord. The V Chord has a strong tendency to move to the I Chord or the "Home" chord. The I Chord is the chord that is built on the first note of the scale which also names the key you are in.

On the next page, I show the notes of the C scale and the F scale and show these chords with arrows indicating the most usual resolution of these chords. On the second lines of each of these examples, I show the ii7 Chord and three types of the V Chord. The V Chord always leads naturally to the I Chord. When moving from one key to another, determine what are the ii and V chords of the new key and then use the notes that are shared in common between the two keys to approach the V chord of the final key.

On pages 3 & 4, I have created a chart that shows the scales and the transition chords for all 12 twelve keys. This will allow you to look for common notes and chords between two keys. First, look at the notes of the scale of the key you are in and then look to the notes of the scale and ii and V chords of the key you are moving to. Here is an example.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for the piece 'Alleluia' and the bottom staff is for 'All hail the power of Jesus' name!'. Both staves show chord progressions above the notes. In the 'Alleluia' section, the chords are Ab, Fm, Bbm/Db, Ab/Eb, Eb7, and Ab. In the 'All hail the power of Jesus' name!' section, the chords are C/D, Dsus, G/B, G, D7, Em, D, and G. There are two boxes highlighting the transition from C/D to Dsus and from Dsus to G/B, illustrating the modulation from A-flat to G major.

The keys of A flat and G share only two notes in common, C and G. In the first box above, I emphasized the common C. On the second box I move to the 4/5 chord of G which is a C Chord with a D Bass. In this chord we find both common notes represented. In the third box, I move to the Vsus chord without even resolving it, but moving straight from it to the new key of G Major. This is an example of a difficult modulation (a half step down) that is made smooth the focusing on common notes and aiming towards the V variations that are the most supportive.

ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I

As I mentioned on the previous page, there is a strong tendency for certain chords to move to certain other chords. This is especially true with the ii, V, and I chords. The ii chord (2m) has a strong leaning towards the dominant V chord (5<sup>7</sup>) and the V<sup>7</sup> chord has an even stronger pull to the tonic or the I chord. There are different forms of the dominant chord that may be used to modulate to the I chord. My least favorite is the pure dominant 7 chord. Even though it is effective in modulation to the new key, it is somewhat abrupt in its sound. It is much smoother to use the 4/5 chord (IV chord with the V in the bass such as the F chord with the G in the bass as seen in the example above) or the V<sup>7</sup>sus (which contains the root, fifth, and minor 7th with the 3rd replaced by the 4th). I prefer to resolve the V<sup>7</sup>sus to the V<sup>7</sup> at the last possible moment to delay the resolution to the I chord. This has a smoother feel and gives a great sense of precision to the transition to the new key.

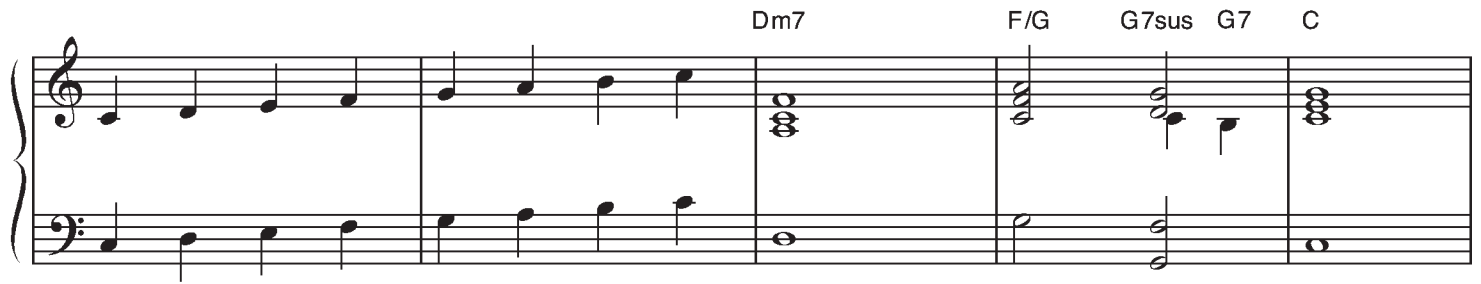
2m<sup>7</sup> → 5<sup>7</sup> → 1

# Modulation Chords

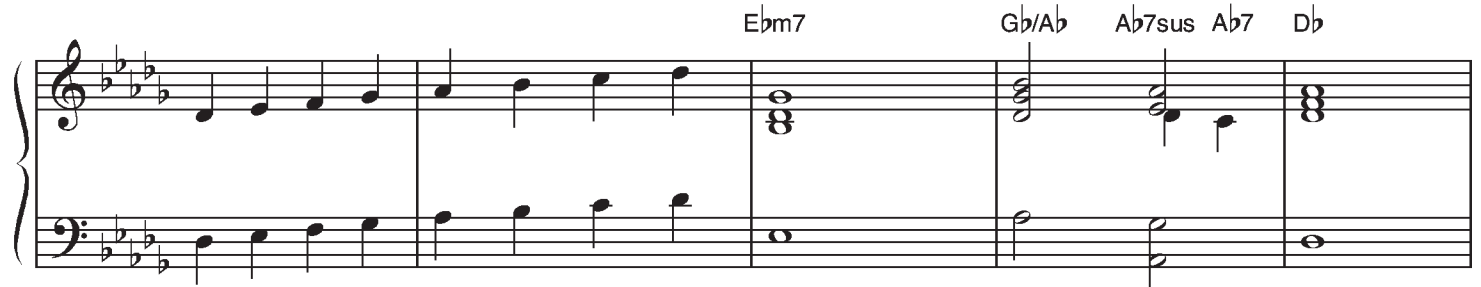
2m7, 4/5, 57sus, 57

by James M. Stevens

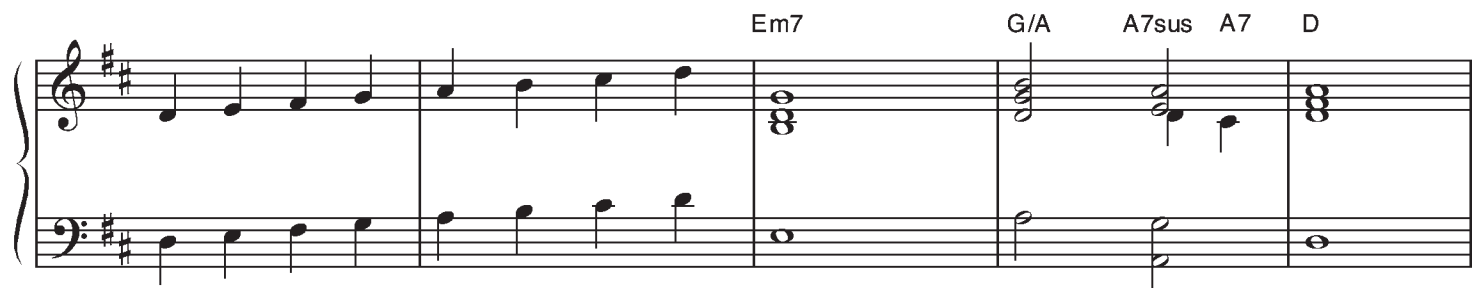
Dm7 F/G G7sus G7 C



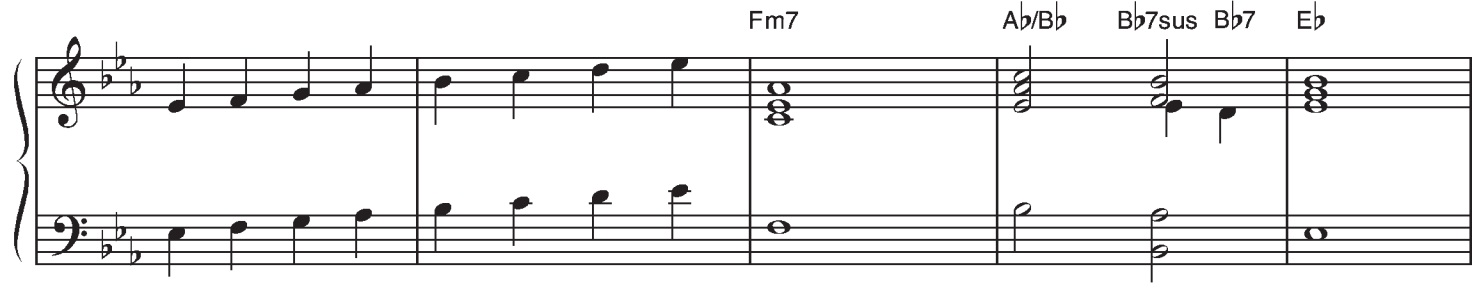
Ebm7 Gb/Ab Ab7sus Ab7 Db



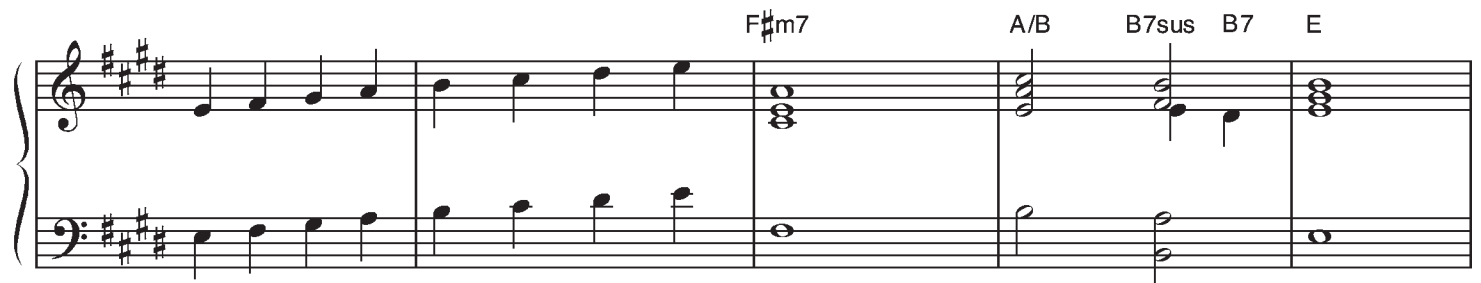
Em7 G/A A7sus A7 D



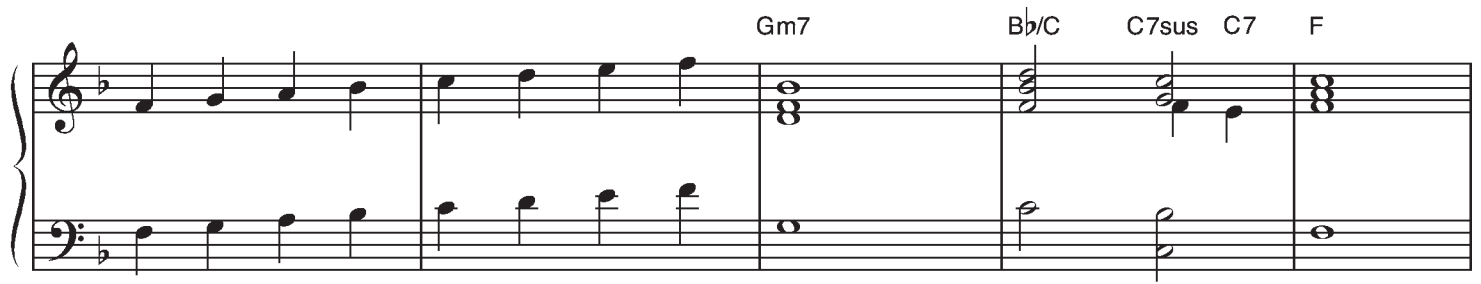
Fm7 Ab/Bb Bb7sus Bb7 Eb



F#m7 A/B B7sus B7 E



Gm7 Bb/C C7sus C7 F



Abm7                      Cb/Db    Db7sus   Db7    Gb

Am7                      C/D        D7sus    D7        G

Bbm7                    Db/Eb    Eb7sus   Eb7        Ab

Bm7                      D/E        E7sus    E7        A

Cm7                      Eb/F        F7sus    F7        Bb

C#m7                    E/F#        F#7sus   F#7        B