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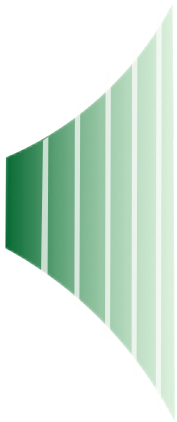
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CHAPTER 13

MODAL INTERCHANGE

Essential Concepts / Skills covered in chapter 13



Modal interchange chords in the following categories:

- Borrowed from minor (II m 7b5, IV m , bIII, bVI, bVII)
- Borrowed from mixolydian (V m , bVII m aj7)
- IV borrowed from dorian (while in a minor key)
- Songwriting devices for creating focal points
- Ear training: modal interchange chords listed above

The secondary, extended, and substitute dominants discussed in Chapter Twelve represent a group of chords that are **non-diatonic**. This means that they contain at least one note outside the key, and therefore were not included on the various diatonic chord charts introduced in earlier chapters (see chord charts in Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

This chapter will introduce another group of chords that are outside the key, called **modal interchange** or **modal mixture** chords. These are chords borrowed from a parallel key (same letter name for the tonic) that are “mixed in” with the diatonic chords, expanding the harmonic possibilities even further. For example, a song in the key of C major may briefly use an F m chord borrowed from the parallel C minor key, or a B b chord borrowed from parallel C mixolydian.

Of course we have already seen limited use of this idea in previous chapters when the Vm chord was sometimes altered to a V **major** triad in the minor, mixolydian, and dorian keys (Chapters 6, 7, and 8). In these situations, the V could be considered “borrowed” as follows:

MINOR KEY — V was sometimes borrowed from parallel harmonic minor.

MIXOLYDIAN KEY — V was sometimes borrowed from parallel major.

DORIAN KEY — V was sometimes borrowed from parallel harmonic minor.

In one sense, you could consider that all three situations represent a borrowing of the V from major. But with minor and dorian, the overall sound is still of a minor tonality, and referencing the V from harmonic minor is more appropriate, especially for improvisation (for more on improv scales, see the accompanying workbooks).

Modal Int. IVm Chord

One of the most common modal interchange chords is the **IVm**, used in a major key song. In this situation, the IVm is borrowed from the parallel minor key and like the secondary dominants, it could be thought of as a very brief modulation to an outside tonality.

IVm – Preceded by IV

When in the major key, the modal interchange IVm is often preceded by the “regular” (diatonic) **IV chord**. This is seen in our first song example, the Beatles’ “Nowhere Man,” where an Am (IVm) is preceded by the diatonic A chord in the verse:

“Nowhere Man” — The Beatles — 1966

E major



For AUDIO, see the “Song Examples” playlist in the right sidebar, and click on track 1 song title.

	I	V	IV	I	IV	IVm	I
	E	B	A	E	A	Am	E
4/4							

0:16 VERSE 2

The 2005 song “Wake Me Up When September Ends” offers another example of the IV chord “changing color” to the IVm. Also notice the familiar **descending bass progression I - I/7 - VIIm - I/5**, first heard in Chapter Five.

“Wake Me Up When September Ends” - Green Day - 2005

G major



4/4

I	I/7	VIIm	I/5	IV	IVm	I
G	G/F#	Em	G/D	C	Cm	G

0:09 VERSE

Radiohead’s “Creep” provides one more example of the IV to IVm chord. Note the deceptive V / VIIm chord on the third measure.

“Creep” - Radiohead - 1993

G major



4/4

I	(V/VIIm)	IV	IVm
G	B	C	Cm

0:00 INTRO & VERSE

IVm - Preceded by V/IV to IV

Sometimes the modal interchange IVm is preceded by not only the IV chord, but also the **secondary dom V / IV**. This is heard on the following Elvis Presley song from 1956. You will notice additional secondary dominants V / IIm and V / V on the second line.

“I Want You I Need You I Love You” - Elvis Presley - 1956

C major



12/8

I	VIIm	IIm	V	I	V/IV	IV
C	Am	Dm	G	C	C7	F

0:06 VERSE

IVm	(V/IIm)	V/V	V7
Fm	A7	D7	G7

Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" also has the V/IV - IV - IVm sequence. Looking at the second line, you will see four m7 chords in a row — three are diatonic, but the Dbm7 is not. The only function for the Dbm7 is as a **chromatic passing chord** between IIIIm7 and IIm7, so it is just labeled with the word "chromatic." START LISTENING AT **0:59**

To navigate within an audio track, first click on the song title, then slide the progress bar forward to the desired starting point.

"Blue Velvet" — Bobby Vinton — 1963 Bb major 5

4/4

IVmaj7	IVm	Imaj7	V/IV
Ebmaj7	Ebm	Bbmaj7	Bb7

0:59 RELEASE

IVmaj7	IVm7	IIIIm7	chrom.	IIm7	V7
Ebmaj7	Ebm7	Dm7	Dbm7	Cm7	F7

Additional songs with MODAL INTERCHANGE IVm preceded by IV

1958	<i>Lonesome Town</i>	Rick Nelson	B major
1958	<i>Twilight Time</i>	Platters	A major
1959	<i>Chipmunk Song</i>	David Seville	Ab major, Bb major
1963	<i>It's Up to You</i>	Rick Nelson	D major
1982	<i>Eye in the Sky</i>	Alan Parsons Project	D major
1991	<i>It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday</i>	Boyz II Men	E major
2006	<i>Irreplaceable</i>	Beyonce	Bb major
2009	<i>December</i>	Norah Jones	E major

(Pages 5 - 10 omitted from this sample)

Modal Int. **bVII7** Chord

Quite often the **bVII7** is used as a modal interchange chord, once again borrowed from parallel minor. Usually the interchange **bVII7** goes to the tonic I, functioning as a substitute for the V chord. When this happens the **bVII7** is often preceded by the IV chord.

bVII7 – Preceded by IV

Our first example of the interchange **bVII7** preceded by IV comes from the outro to Eric Clapton's 1970 classic "Layla," shown below. **START LISTENING AT 3:19**

"Layla" – Derek & The Dominos – 1970

D min, E maj,
C maj



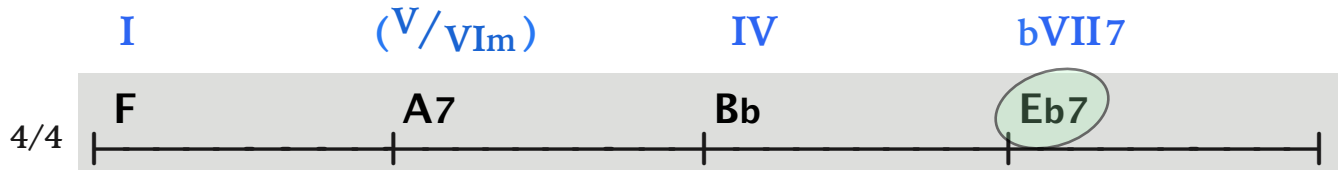
4/4

I	I/3	IV	bVII7	I
C	C/E	F	Bb7	C

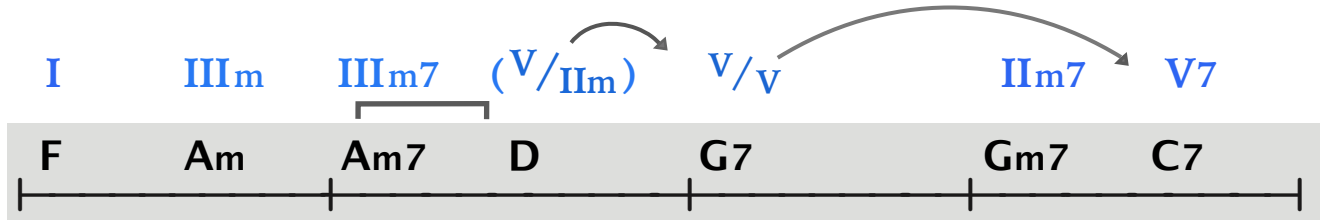
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3:19 OUTRO

The same IV - **bVII7** - I sequence can be heard on Brenda Lee's 1961 hit "Emotions." Also notice the numerous secondary doms (V/VIm, V/IIIm, V/V) and the interpolated IIIm7 (Gm7) on the second line.



0:15 VERSE



(Pages 12 - 19 omitted from this sample)

bVII(maj7) Chord from Mixolydian

All modal interchange chords discussed so far in this chapter have been borrowed from the parallel minor key. Now we will look at a different type of interchange chord, the **bVII or bVIImaj7 borrowed from parallel mixolydian**. This brings up a point that probably needs some clarification regarding the modal interchange bVII triad, because this triad exists in **both the minor and mixolydian keys**. (Check the diatonic chord charts in Chapters Three and Seven.) When you see an interchange bVII triad in a song, how do you know if it is borrowed from parallel minor or parallel mixolydian? From a songwriter's perspective, it might not matter. However, this is an important distinction if you are improvising a solo.

If the interchange bVII is preceded by another interchange chord from minor like the bVI or IVm, then it is considered to be borrowed from **minor**. We heard several examples like this previously, such as “Show Me the Way” (with a bVI to bVII), “Learn to Fly” (also bVI to bVII), and “Midnight Rider” (with a IVm to bVII). In fact, the last two songs were actually in the overall key of mixolydian where bVII is diatonic. However, when our ears are prepared by an interchange chord like the bVI or IVm from minor, we tend to hear the bVII as another interchange chord coming from minor.

If a song is in a major key and the interchange bVII is isolated (surrounded by otherwise diatonic chords), then it is considered borrowed from parallel **mixolydian**, not minor. This is because mixolydian is much closer in sound to the major key (they both have a “major” flavor with a natural third in the scale). In this case, there is no bVI or IVm preceding the bVII to suggest a minor tonality.

As mentioned earlier, recognizing where the interchange chord comes from is crucial if you are improvising a solo over the chord changes. Not surprisingly, improvisors will choose the parallel minor scale for an interchange bVII borrowed from minor and the parallel mixolydian scale for the bVII from mixolydian. If the interchange bVII appears in its four-note seventh form, then the choice is obvious — a bVII7 comes from parallel minor (see the chord chart in Chapter Six), and the bVIImaj7 comes from mixolydian (see the chord chart in Chapter Seven).

Our first example of the interchange bVII from mixolydian is found in the verse of The Shangri-Las’ 1964 hit “Leader of the Pack,” shown below. **START LISTENING AT 0:31**

"Leader of the Pack" — Shangri-Las — 1964 C major  8

4/4

I		bVII		V
C	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 0; right: 0; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 10px;"></div>	Bb	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 0; right: 0; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 10px;"></div>	G

0:31 VERSE

IV		III ^m		V		I
F	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 0; right: 0; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 10px;"></div>	Em	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 0; right: 0; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 10px;"></div>	G	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 0; right: 0; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 10px;"></div>	C

Here's another example of the interchange bVII from mixolydian, found in the Johnny Nash song "I Can See Clearly Now."

"I Can See Clearly Now" — Johnny Nash — 1972

D major



4/4

I	IV	I			IV
D	G	D			G

0:06 VERSE

V		I	IV	I	
A		D	G	D	

bVII	IV	I		bVII	IV	I
C	G	D		C	G	D

(Pages 23 and 24 omitted from this sample)

bVII - V - I SEQUENCE

Many times the interchange bVII from mixolydian will be part of a three-chord **bVII - V - I sequence**. This is heard on the 1992 song "To Be With You," where the bVII chord moves to the V at the end of the verse, followed by the resolution to the I chord at the entrance of the chorus.

4/4

VI _m	I	IV _{sus2}	I	VI _m	I	IV _{sus2}	I
C# _m	E	A _{sus2}	E	C# _m	E	A _{sus2}	E

0:07 VERSE

IV _{sus2}	I	IV _{sus2}	I	bVII	V
A _{sus2}	E	A _{sus2}	E	D	B

I	IV	V	I	IV	V	I
E	A	B	E	A	B	E

||: :||

0:29 CHORUS

On the 1971 song "Sunshine," the bVII and V are at the end of the refrain, resolving to the I chord to start the next verse.

"Sunshine" – Jonathan Edwards – 1971

Bb major

11

4/4

I	V	I	IV
B _b	F	B _b	E _b

||: :||

0:04 VERSE

IV	I	IV	I	IV	I	bVII	V
E _b	B _b	E _b	B _b	E _b	B _b	A _b	F

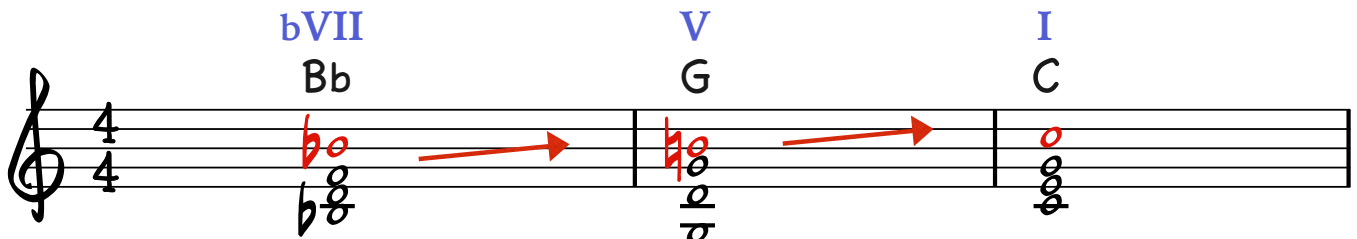
0:38 REFRAIN

0:55 Repeat VERSE

Part of what gives the bVII - V - I progression its strong forward motion is a chromatic ascending line hidden in the chord voicings. We can score out the progression in the key of C major below, and put the ascending line (Bb, B, and C notes) in the treble voice of each chord as follows:

CHROMATIC ASCENDING LINE  ex. 1

For AUDIO, see "Theory Examples" on top-right sidebar, and click on ex. 1



notes — Bb, D, F, Bb G, D, G, B C, E, G, C

On the Kenny Chesney song "This Is Our Moment," the bVII - V - I sequence helps create a strong tension/resolution focal point heading into the chorus. Notice that on the second line there is already an **ascending chord progression**, rising from IV to V to VI_m. As the excitement builds, the ascending line within the voices of the bVII - V - I sequence take over, continuing the upward movement all the way to the chorus and the resolution on the I chord. Also note the two additional tension devices at the hook — the **stop time rhythm** and the **extension of the tension V chord** for two measures (double the length of the previous four chords).

"This Is Our Moment" — Kenny Chesney — 2010

C major



4/4

IV F	I C	IV F	I C
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0:14 VERSE

IV F	V G	VI _m Am	bVII Bb	V G
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TENSION
STOP TIME

I C	IV F	V G	I C	IV F	V G
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RESOLUTION

0:38 CHORUS

Additional songs with MODAL INTERCHANGE bVII (maj7) - V - I SEQUENCE

1964	<i>I Get Around</i>	Beach Boys	G major, A blues (inst), Ab major
1967	<i>I Think We're Alone Now</i>	Tommy James and The Shondells	A major
1973	<i>Goodbye Yellow Brick Road</i>	Elton John	F major, brief Ab maj
1973	<i>Rocky Mountain High</i>	John Denver	D major
1995	<i>One Sweet Day</i>	Mariah Carey w. Boyz II Men	Ab major, B major

(Pages 28 - 33 omitted from this sample)

Songwriting Focal Points

Other Tension Chords

Up to now, the tension chord at most focal points has been the dominant V chord. However, other chords can also generate some tension besides the V. Sometimes a modal interchange chord will be used at the focal point. Since these chords are by definition outside the key, they can be quite striking if they are used sparingly — ie. isolated in only one spot of the form.

This is the case on Dionne Warwick’s 1983 recording “Heartbreaker,” (composed by Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb). You will notice below that the final chord before the chorus is a **modal interchange IVm chord** (Am in the key of E major). This arresting chord has not been heard anywhere in the previous bars of the verse or pre-chorus, so it functions as a kind of tension chord, focusing extra attention on the hook. **START LISTENING AT 0:59.**

“Heartbreaker” – Dionne Warwick – 1983 E, F# major  13

	III _{m7}	VI _{m7}	III _{m7}	VI _{m7}	III _{m7}		II _{m7}	V7
4	G#m7	C#m7	G#m7	C#m7	G#m7		F#m7	B7
4								

0:59 PRE-CHORUS

	III _{m7}		VI _{m7}	III _{m7}	VI _{m7}	III _{m7}
	G#m7		C#m7	G#m7	C#m7	G#m7

	IV _{maj7}		IV _m		
	Amaj7		Am		
					TENSION

slower chord changes - - - - -

	I		II _{m7}	V7	III _{m7}		IV	V7	
	E		F#m7	B7	G#m7		A	B7	
	RESOLUTION								

1:28 CHORUS

Two previously discussed focal point devices were also used on “Heartbreaker:”

- **I CHORD IS AVOIDED** throughout the entire pre-chorus (12 bars), adding more power to the chorus resolution.
- **CONTRAST in HARMONIC RHYTHM - SLOWER CHANGES** In the first two lines of the pre-chorus, the chords usually change every two beats. Then during the pre-chorus the chords slow down, changing every eight beats. When the chords begin moving again at a faster pace in the chorus, there is a sense of movement and excitement.

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