

CHAPTER 8

OTHER TENSION CHORDS



Most songs in previous chapters used the dominant V chord at focal points to create tension. One exception was En Vogue's "Free Your Mind" (Chapter Five), where we heard a sub V resolving down a half step to the tonic I chord. In this final chapter, we will listen to a few other examples of unusual tension chords, including the #IVdim7, V7#9, V7b9, and two isolated modal interchange chords.



We'll start with the 1985 hit "Every Time You Go Away." This song features a **#IVdim7** chord as the tension chord at the end of the pre-chorus. The dim7 chord has a unique and arresting sound, which makes it quite effective as a lead-in to the hook. Adding to the pre-chorus tension is the strong ascending motion in the chords, a prominent drum fill, and the avoidance of the I chord before the chorus. Start listening at **0:26**.

"Every Time You Go Away" — Paul Young — 1985

F major



For AUDIO, see the "Song Examples" playlist in the right sidebar, and click on track 1 song title. To navigate within the audio track, slide the progress bar to the desired starting point.

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4 4

I ^{add9}	III ^{m7}	IV ^{maj7}	V
F ^{add9}	A ^{m7}	B ^{maj7}	C

0:26 VERSE

VI ^m	(V/VI ^m)	IV	#IV ^{dim7}
D ^m	A7	B ^b	B ^{dim7}

0:50 PRE-CHORUS ASCENDING PROGRESSION DRUM FILL

TENSION

I	VI ^m	II ^m	V
F	D ^m	G ^m	C

1:02 CHORUS w song title

RESOLUTION

The following 2021 song has a **#IV^{dim} triad** before the chorus, instead of the four-note dim7 heard on the previous song. Start listening at **0:20**.

"On the Ground" — ROSE — 2021

Db major



4/4

I	II ^{m7}	IV ^{maj7}	IV ^m
Db	E ^b m7	G ^b maj7	G ^b m

0:20 PRE-CHORUS

I	II ^{m7}	IV ^{maj7}	#IV ^{dim}
Db	E ^b m7	G ^b maj7	G ^{dim}

TENSION

I
Db

0:40 CHORUS

RESOLUTION

The **V7#9** is sometimes used as a tension chord in a minor or blues key. This is seen on the 2007 song “Between the River and Me,” where the arresting sound of the V7#9 is used to set up the chorus entrance. Also contributing to the tension at the focal point is stop time (with some dramatic chord hits), and the avoidance of the Im chord throughout the pre-chorus. Start listening at **0:26**.

“Between the River and Me” — Tim McGraw — 2007

B minor



Im

4/4 **Bm**

0:26 VERSE 2

bVI bIII bVII bVI bIII V7#9

G D A G D F#7#9

0:38 PRE-CHORUS **STOP TIME**

Im bIII bVII Im

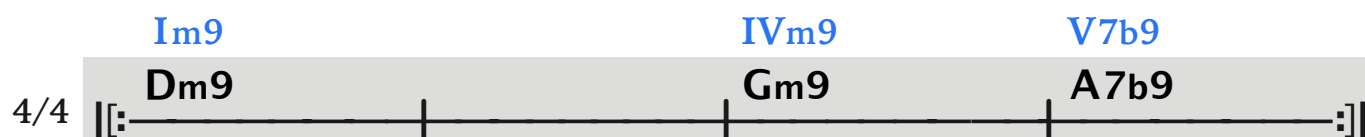
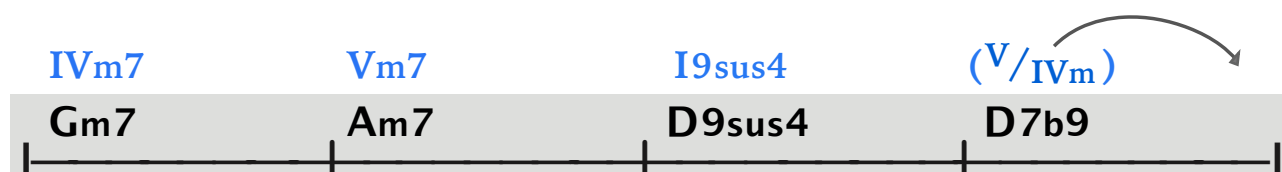
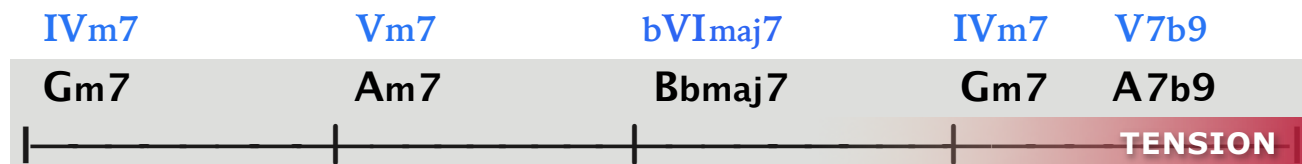
Bm D A Bm

0:50 CHORUS

Minor key songs also sometimes use the **V7b9** chord, another variant of the dominant V. This chord helps create the focal point in the following example from the Spice Girls. Other devices are also at work to highlight the hook on this song, including a drum fill and the avoidance of the Im chord leading up to the chorus. Adding to the distinctive sound of the chorus is the introduction of a high drone note played by orchestral strings (or synthesizer). Start listening at **0:20**.

"Love Thing" — Spice Girls — 1997

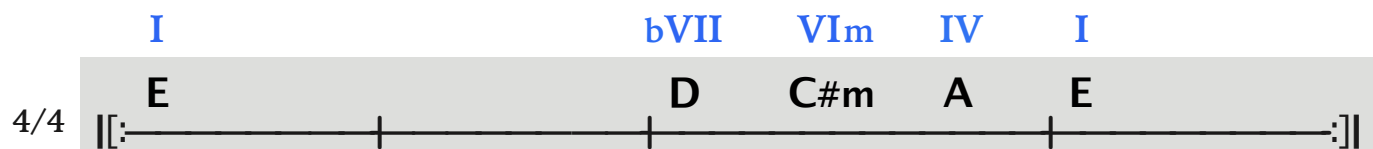
D minor

**0:20 VERSE****0:37 PRE-CHORUS****DRUM FILL****0:55 CHORUS**

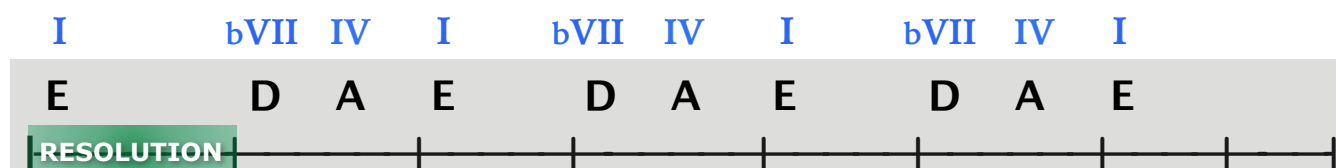
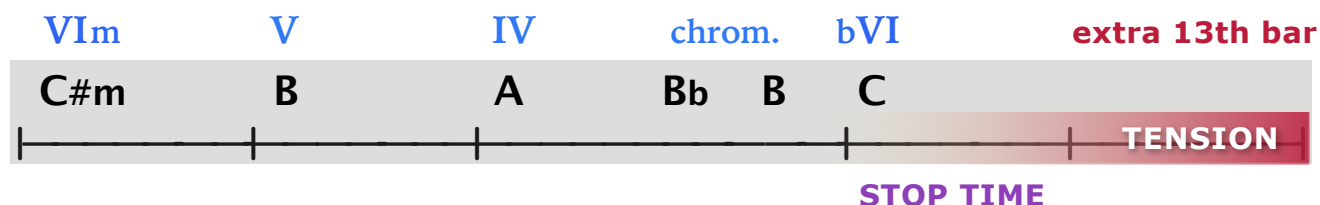
Sometimes a **modal interchange chord** will be used at the focal point. Since these chords are by definition outside the key, they can be quite striking if they are used sparingly - ie., isolated in only one spot of the form. This can be seen on the Doobie Brothers' "China Grove," where an **interchange bVI** (C chord in the key of E mixo) is used at the end of the verse, right before the refrain. The arresting C chord is used nowhere else in the form, and tension is increased by ascending chromatic motion in the preceding Bb and B chords. (These chords have no function in the key and are simply labeled as chromatic passing chords.) Also note other tension devices at the end of the verse, like stop time in the rhythm and the addition of an extra 13th bar, extending the form. Start listening at **0:28**.

"China Grove" — Doobie Brothers — 1973

E mixo



0:28 VERSE

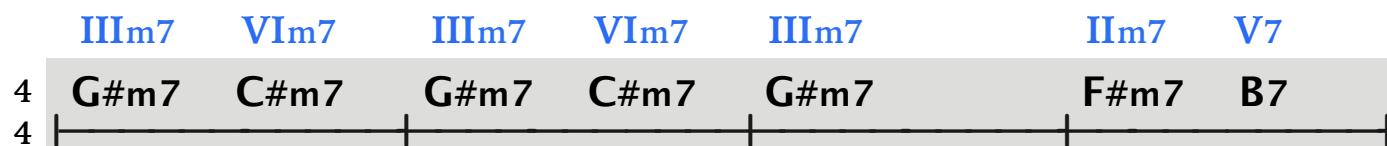


0:49 REFRAIN

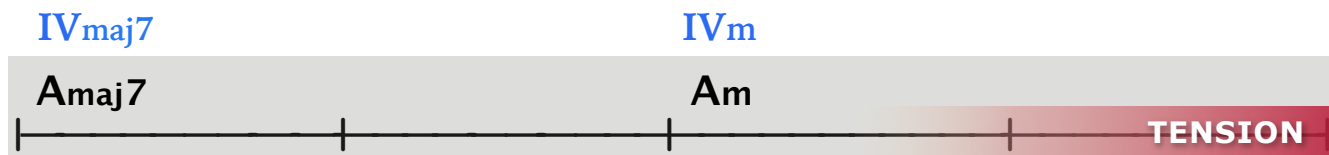
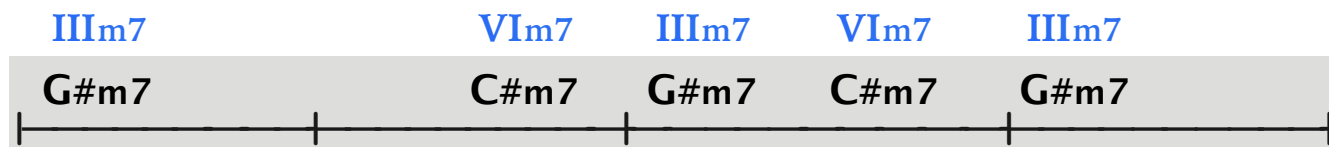
Dionne Warwick's recording of "Heartbreaker" also features an isolated modal interchange chord right before the chorus — this time it is the **IV_m chord**. You will also hear that the harmonic rhythm (rate of chord change) slows down at the end of the pre-chorus, something discussed earlier in Chapter Six. This creates some tension as we wait for the chords to begin moving at their previous pace. Also notice that the I chord has been avoided for the entire pre-chorus, making the resolution at the chorus entrance even more powerful. Start listening at **0:59**.

"Heartbreaker" — Dionne Warwick — 1983

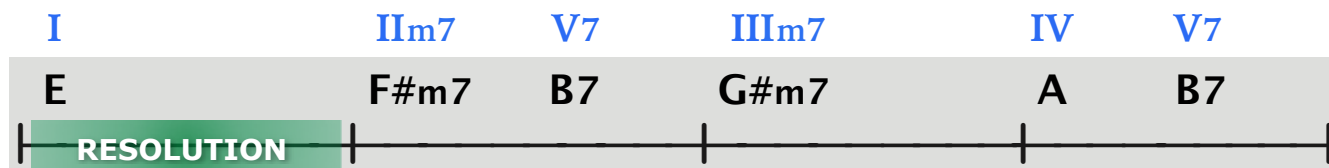
E, F# major



0:59 PRE-CHORUS



SLOWER CHORD CHANGES



1:28 CHORUS