# CHAPTER 5

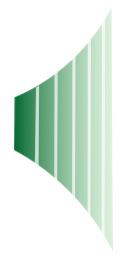
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Chapter Two introduced some of the basic elements of the major key, including the major scale, diatonic triads, and common chord progressions using the I, IV, V, and VIm chords. In this chapter the major key will be further developed, discussing the IIm and IIIm chords, chord inversions, sus2 and sus4 chords, and diatonic 7ths.

# Essential Concepts / Skills covered in chapter 5

- m7, maj7, m7b5, sus2, sus4 chord structures, chord inversions, diatonic sevenths in major keys
- Common chord progressions in the major key using IIm, IIIm, I/3, V/3, sus2, sus4, and diatonic 7th chords in pop song examples
- Descending bass progressions with inversions
- Signature major key riffs using full scale, songwriting devices for creating focal points
- Drones and drone riffs
- Ear training IIm, IIIm, I/3, V/3, I/7, sus2, sus4, and diatonic 7th chords

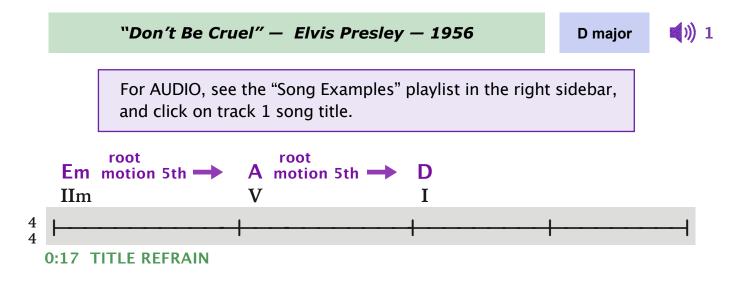


# IIm and IIIm Chords

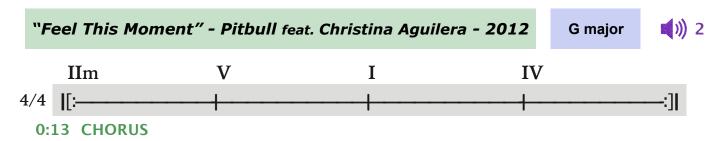
#### IIm - V - I SEQUENCE

The IIm chord is often followed by the V chord, then the I chord (Dm to G to C in the key of C). This sequence features a root motion of seven half-steps if figured in descending order from the Dm to the G - an interval usually described as a downwards 5th. This interval is repeated again when moving from the G to the C chord. **Root motion of a 5th** is fairly common in most styles of music, and is part of the important movement from the tension V chord to the home base I. (You will recall from previous chapters the discussion of V to I resolution at dramatic focal points, such as the transition from verse into chorus.) We will briefly talk about root motion of a 5th in this chapter, but greater detail on the subject will be saved for the discussion of secondary dominants in Chapter Twelve.

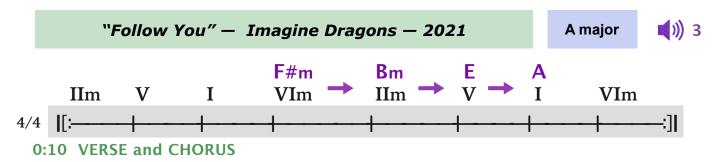
Our first example of the <u>IIm - V - I</u> progression comes from Elvis Presley's 1956 song "Don't Be Cruel." The song is in the key of D major, and the chord sequence occurs during the title refrain, immediately following the words "don't be cruel" at **0:17**.



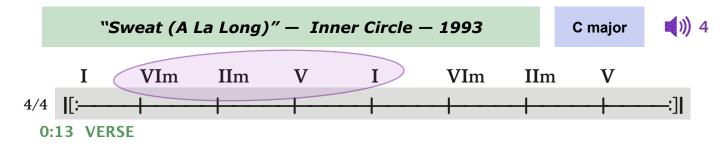
On the 2012 song "Feel This Moment," the **IV chord** is added after the IIm - V - I.



The following hit from Imagine Dragons adds a <u>VIm chord</u> to the sequence. You will notice that the four-bar progression IIm - V - I - VIm is repeated in a continuous loop. This creates a section where the root motion of a 5th is extended to four consecutive chords (VIm - IIm - V - I, highlighted in purple).



Here's another song with extended root motion of a 5th. Once again, a four-bar progression (this time the doowop variation I - VIm - IIm - V) is repeated in a continuous loop, creating another embedded VIm - IIm - V - I sequence (circled below).

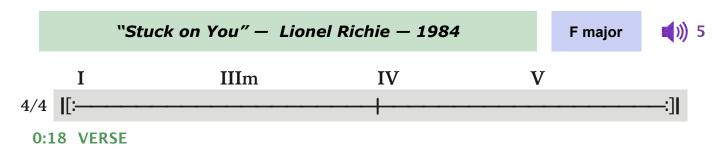


### Additional songs with Ilm - V - I PROGRESSION

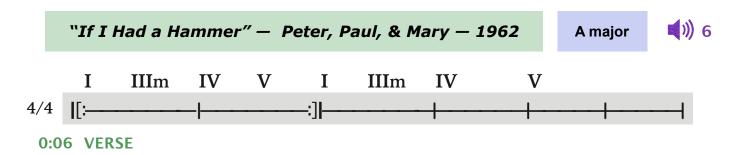
| 1957 | Come Go with Me                          | Dell-Vikings   | Ab major         |
|------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 1958 | Twenty-Six Miles                         | Four Preps     | Db major         |
| 1959 | Little Star                              | Elegants       | A major          |
| 1960 | A Summer Place                           | Percy Faith    | F major, D major |
| 1972 | It Never Rains in Southern<br>California | Albert Hammond | A major          |
| 1995 | Come and Get Your Love                   | Real McCoy     | Eb major         |
| 2015 | Can't Sleep Love                         | Pentatonix     | G major          |

#### ASCENDING I - IIIm - IV - (V)

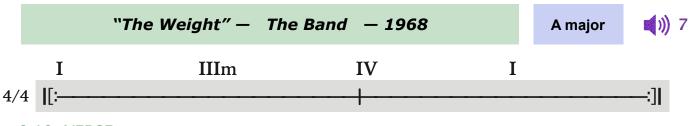
The IIIm chord is often used as part of an ascending sequence that moves <u>I - IIIm - IV - V</u>. Here's an example from 1984 by Lionel Richie:



This example from Peter, Paul, & Mary has a much faster tempo and features a slight variation on the third repeat of the sequence.

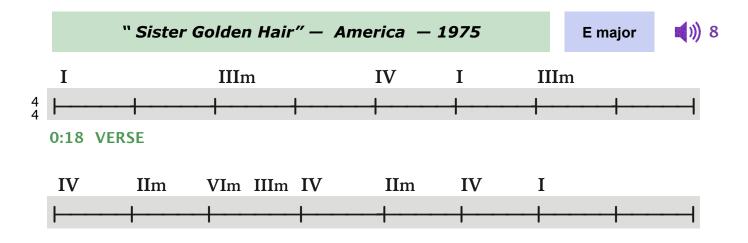


Sometimes the progression ascends only as far as the IV, and the V chord is not included, as heard in the next song.

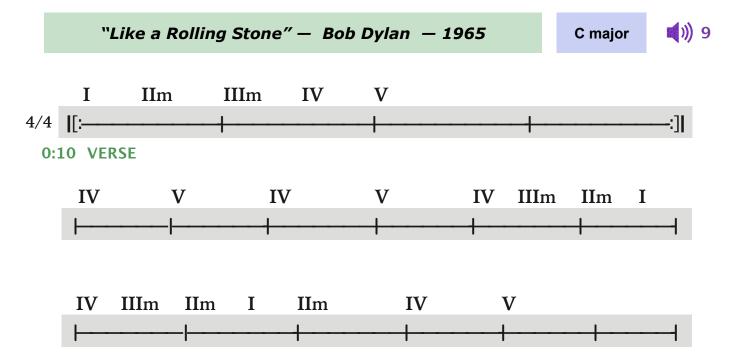


0:10 **VERSE** 

On the following 1975 hit "Sister Golden Hair," the sequence is the same, but the ascent is not as obvious because the chord movement is slower and not as uniform.



The next classic from Bob Dylan features a variation, stepping right up the scale by adding a <u>IIm</u> after the I chord. Later in the verse, the progression is reversed, descending IV - IIIm - IIm - I.

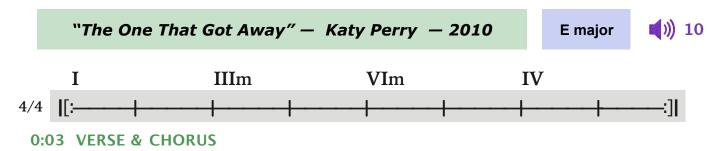


## Additional songs with ASCENDING I - IIIm - IV - (V)

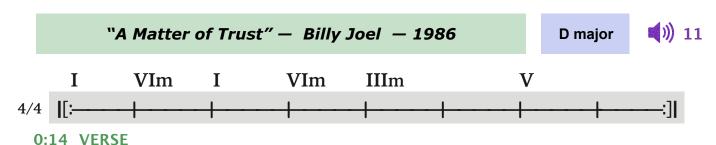
| 1966 | You Baby         | Turtles         | Bb major |
|------|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1980 | Against the Wind | Bob Seger       | G major  |
| 2008 | Human            | Killers         | Bb major |
| 2009 | All This Time    | OneRepublic     | C major  |
| 2013 | The River        | Imagine Dragons | Db major |

## OTHER PROGRESSIONS with IIIm CHORD

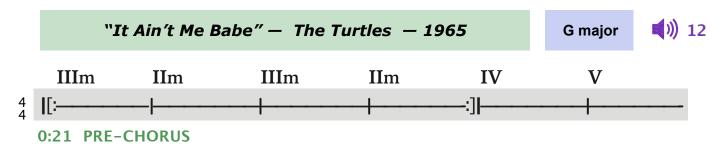
Of course the IIIm does not always have to ascend to the IV chord. Here's a slightly different sequence from Katy Perry:



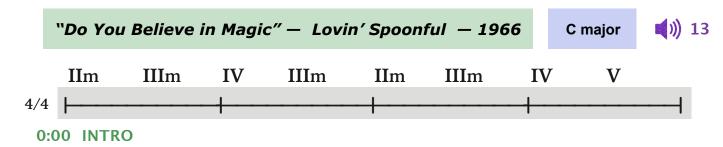
On this Billy Joel song, the IIIm is preceded by the VIm, then followed by the V.



In the pre-chorus (at **0:21**) of the next recording by The Turtles, the IIIm alternates several times with the IIm (notice repeat signs) to build up tension leading into the chorus.



The 1966 hit "Do You Believe in Magic" begins with a chord progression that pivots around the IIIm before moving to the V.



#### Additional songs with IIIm CHORD

| 1964 | Just Like Romeo and<br>Juliet | Reflections     | Eb major |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1968 | A Beautiful Morning           | Young Rascals   | Eb major |
| 1972 | Doctor My Eyes                | Jackson Browne  | F major  |
| 1981 | Don't Stop Believin'          | Journey         | E major  |
| 1983 | You Can't Hurry Love          | Phil Collins    | G major  |
| 2007 | Hey There Delilah             | Plain White T's | D major  |
| 2009 | Party in the USA              | Miley Cyrus     | F# major |
| 2018 | You Say                       | Lauren Daigle   | F major  |
| 2020 | Save Your Tears               | The Weeknd      | C major  |

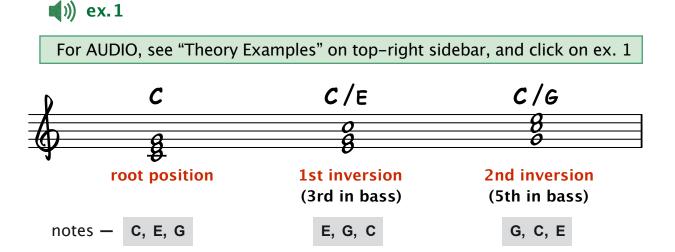
#### EAR TRAINING EXERCISES

For further practice identifying the IIm and IIIm chords in a major key, try **Exercises 5.1e - 5.4e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

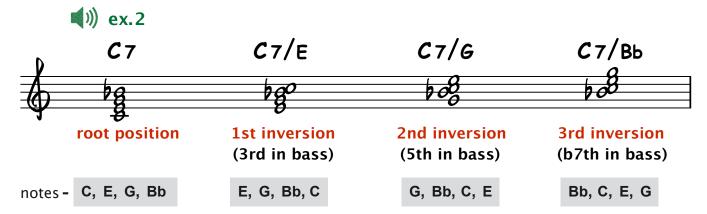
# **Chord Inversions**

Up til now, we have assumed that the lowest sounding note (bass note) of every chord has been the root note, ie. the naming note. For example, a C, Cm, or C7 chord would have a C in the bass, whereas a D, Dm, D7 would be anchored by a D, etc. Of course some songs in Chapter Two had a repeated pattern in the bass line, such as the active bass on "Ain't That a Shame," "Haunted House," and "Can't Turn You Loose." You will also recall the boogie bass patterns on some of the songs in Chapter Four. However, even on those songs with an active bass, beat one of every pattern always started with the root note of the chord.

While chords in root position are definitely most common in pop and rock, it is possible to place a different chord tone in the bass. For example, a C major triad could have a 3rd in the bass (written "C/E"), or the 5th in the bass (written "C/G"). These other options in the bass are called **chord inversions**, as labeled below.



Four-note chords like the dominant 7th discussed in the previous chapter (1, 3, 5, b7) will have **three** inversions as follows:



Try playing these on a chording instrument like the piano or guitar. In terms of ear training, the 3rd inversion (7th in bass) will be the easiest to recognize because the sound is distinctly different from the root position. First inversion (3rd in bass) is also fairly distinctive, but you may have trouble recognizing the second inversion (5th in bass) because it can sound very similar to root position. In this chapter, we will focus mainly on the major triad in first inversion and leave other inversion chords for later chapters.

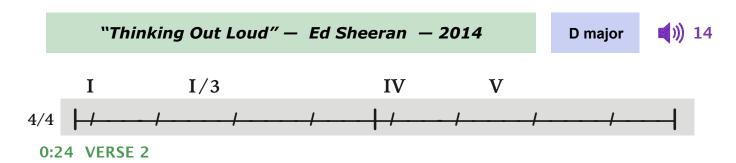
#### WRITTEN EXERCISE

Practice spelling some common first inversion triads by completing **Exercise 5.1** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Written Exercises").

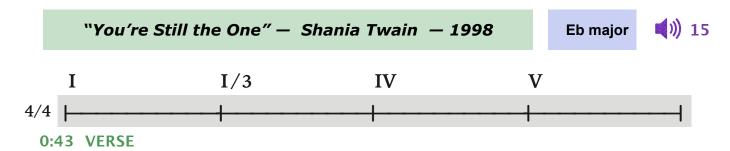
## ASCENDING I-I/3-IV-(V)

In the ascending progression I - IIIm - IV - (V) mentioned earlier, the IIIm is often replaced by a first inversion I chord (<u>I/3</u>). The bass note is unchanged (in the key of C, an E note in both chords), but the sound of the I/3 is not quite as dark as the minor quality of the IIIm. Here's a recent example from Ed Sheeran. (START LISTENING AT **0:24** to clearly hear the movement of the bass).

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



Shania Twain gives us another example of the same ascending progression. START LISTENING AT **0:43** because the bass is weak until this point.

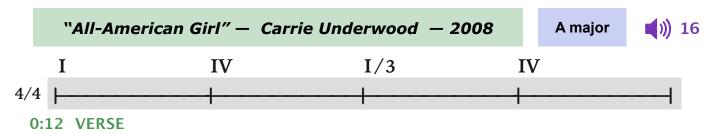


# Additional songs with ASCENDING I - I/3 - IV - (V)

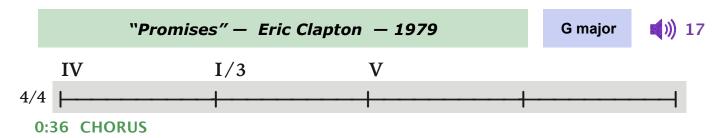
| 1962 | Do You Love Me       | Contours           | F major  |
|------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| 1986 | How Will I Know      | Whitney Houston    | F# major |
| 2000 | Come on Over         | Christina Aguilera | Eb major |
| 2012 | Leavin' in Your Eyes | Little Big Town    | A major  |
| 2013 | The Good Life        | Robin Thicke       | G major  |

#### OTHER PROGRESSIONS with 1st INVERSIONS

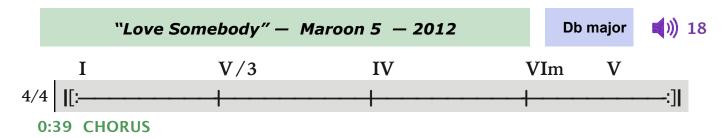
The 2008 hit "All-American Girl" contains an unusual dip from IV to I/3, then back up to IV, as shown below.



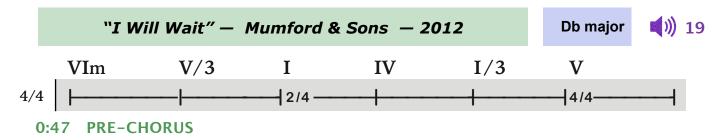
On the next song, the dip from IV to I/3 is followed by the V chord. START LISTENING AT **0:36**.



Not all examples of first inversion chords feature the I chord. Here's an example where the V chord is used in first inversion (V/3). START LISTENING AT **0:39**.



The following hit from Mumford & Sons contains both the V/3 and the I/3. Notice the switch to <u>2/4 meter</u>, then back to 4/4. START LISTENING AT **0:47**.



# Additional songs with 1/3 or V/3 CHORDS

| 1978 | Wonderful Tonight | Eric Clapton | G major |
|------|-------------------|--------------|---------|
| 1986 | True Colors       | Cyndi Lauper | C major |
| 1999 | Breathe           | Faith Hill   | G major |
| 2006 | Leave Me Alone    | Pink         | G major |

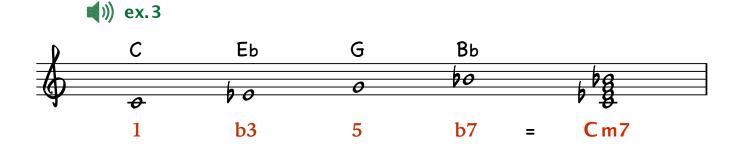
#### **EAR TRAINING EXERCISES**

For further practice identifying the I/3 or V/3 chords in a major key, try **Exercises 5.5e - 5.8e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

# m7, maj7, m7b5 Chords

#### m7 CHORD

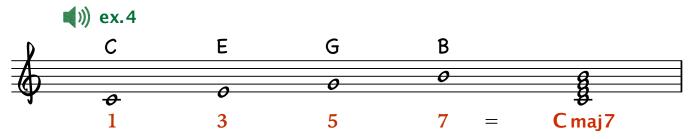
In the previous chapter we learned that adding a fourth note (the b7 scale degree) to the major triad (1, 3, 5) created the sound of the dominant 7th chord. When the b7 note is added to the minor triad (1, b3, 5), the resulting chord is called a <u>minor 7th</u>, written with the symbol "m7." The Cm7 chord is shown below.



The four-note m7 adds a little more "fullness," but doesn't sound that much different from the minor triad when placed in a chord progression. This is unlike the dom7 heard in Chapter Four, which can sound more distinct from the major triad it is built on, depending on the song.

## maj7 CHORD

A different four-note chord can be made by adding the <u>natural</u> 7th to the major triad. This chord is called a <u>major 7th</u>, written with the symbol "maj7." The Cmaj7 chord is shown below.



This time the addition of the extra note makes the four-note chord sound very different from the triad. Many people describe the maj7 as "mellow" or "bittersweet" — not as light and uplifting as the major triad, but yet not as dark and sad as the minor. This chord is great for evoking emotion in pop & rock ballads. Others hear a "jazzier" flavor, for it is commonly used in jazz music on the I and IV instead of the major triads.

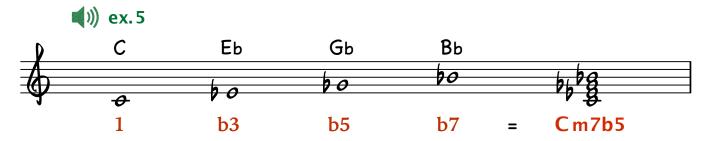
The unique sound of the maj7 comes from the dissonance between the 1st and 7th (C and B notes). These notes are almost an octave apart in the score above, helping to tone down the dissonance. But if the C is raised an octave, these two notes would be adjacent to each other, accentuating the clash.

#### WRITTEN EXERCISE

Use **Exercise 5.2** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Written Exercises") to practice spelling some common maj7 and m7 chords.

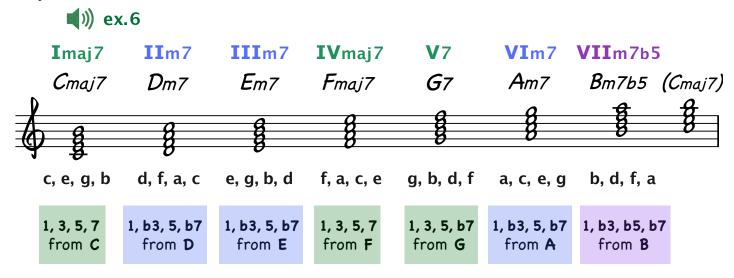
#### m7b5 CHORD

We have not talked much about the diminished triad, since it is much less common than the major and minor triads in pop and rock. However, it is a part of the overall diatonic tonal system (recall the chord chart from Chapter Two). When the b7 note is added to the diminished triad (1, b3, b5), the resulting chord is called a "**m7b5**." This chord will be part of the diatonic 7ths discussed in the next section below. While m7b5 chords are rarely used in pop music, they are fairly common in jazz and will be discussed in more depth in later chapters. The Cm7b5 chord is shown below.



# **Diatonic 7th Chords**

In Chapter Two, we saw how a set of diatonic chords could be generated from the major scale in any key. A triad chord was built on each step of the scale, stacking the notes in a specific order, and the chords were given roman numerals according to their placement in the scale. Now we will add a fourth note to each chord, as shown below for the key of C major.



#### p.15

(kev)

Notice that the three minor triads (IIm, IIIm, and VIm) all become m7 chords, but there is a difference among the major triads (I, IV, and V). The I and IV both become maj7 chords, but the V changes to a dominant 7. (You will remember from our discussion of blues in Chapter Four that the dominant 7 is usually written in chord charts with just the numeral "7"). Finally, the VIIdim triad becomes a m7b5 chord.

As with the triads in Chapter Two, the diatonic 7th chords for every key can be listed in a chart, highlighting the most common chords (**Ima7**, **IVma7**, **and V7**) in bold:

#### **DIATONIC 7ths - MAJOR KEYS**

| Imaj7  | IIm7 | IIIm7 | <b>IV</b> maj7 | <b>V</b> 7  | VIm7 | VIIm7b5 |
|--------|------|-------|----------------|-------------|------|---------|
| Amaj7  | Bm7  | C#m7  | Dmaj7          | E7          | F#m7 | G#m7b5  |
| Bbmaj7 | Cm7  | Dm7   | Ebmaj7         | <b>F</b> 7  | Gm7  | Am7b5   |
| Bmaj7  | C#m7 | D#m7  | Emaj7          | F#7         | G#m7 | A#m7b5  |
| Cmaj7  | Dm7  | Em7   | Fmaj7          | G7          | Am7  | Bm7b5   |
| Dbmaj7 | Ebm7 | Fm7   | F#maj7         | Ab7         | Bbm7 | Cm7b5   |
| Dmaj7  | Em7  | F#m7  | Gmaj7          | <b>A</b> 7  | Bm7  | C#m7b5  |
| Ebmaj7 | Fm7  | Gm7   | Abmaj7         | Bb7         | Cm7  | Dm7b5   |
| Emaj7  | F#m7 | G#m7  | Amaj7          | В7          | C#m7 | D#m7b5  |
| Fmaj7  | Gm7  | Am7   | Bbmaj7         | <b>C</b> 7  | Dm7  | Em7b5   |
| F#maj7 | G#m7 | A#m7  | Bmaj7          | <b>C</b> #7 | D#m7 | E#m7b5  |
| Gmaj7  | Am7  | Bm7   | Cmaj7          | D7          | Em7  | F#m7b5  |
| Abmaj7 | Bbm7 | Cm7   | Dbmaj7         | Eb7         | Fm7  | Gm7b5   |

tonic sub - dominant dominant

#### WRITTEN EXERCISE

Use **Exercise 5.3** (see "Textbook Contents"/
"Volume 1"/ "Written Exercises") to begin memorizing the diatonic 7ths in some common major keys.

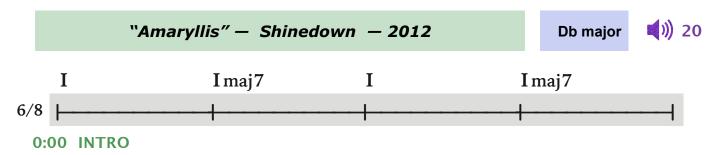
#### **EAR TRAINING EXERCISES**

Use **Exercises 5.9e - 5.13e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises") to practice hearing diatonic 7ths in a major key.

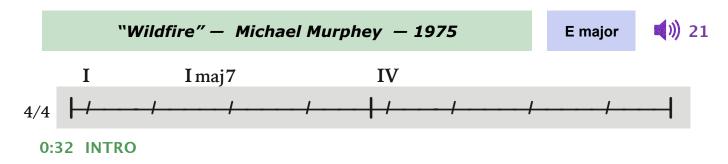
# PROGRESSIONS with Imaj7 CHORD

In terms of ear training, it should be fairly easy to recognize the unique sound of the individual maj7 chord, with the dissonance mentioned earlier. However, when trying to find the <u>overall</u> key note by ear (recall the exercise in Chapter Two) be careful. If the I chord is prominently heard as a maj7 and not as a triad, it may throw you off. In fact, on some songs the 7th degree is so strong that it may actually sound better than the true keynote.

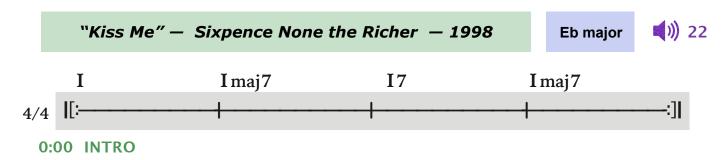
Our first example of the maj7 contains the I and Imaj7 chords back to back for easy comparison:



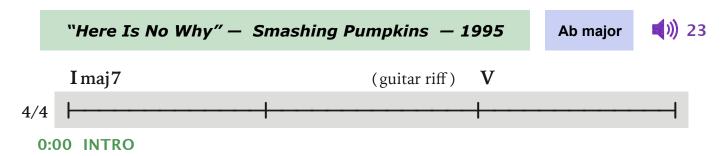
Here's a similar example, with the maj7 kicking in on the second upbeat. START LISTENING AT **0:32**.



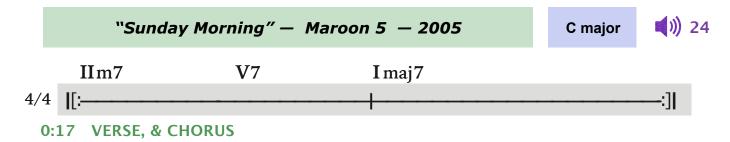
The intro of the 1998 hit "Kiss Me" allows us to compare not only the major triad and maj7, but also adds the **dominant 7th** to the mix.



In the early decades of the rock era, the maj7 chord was almost always heard on acoustic or soft electric guitar. But in the 1990s, groups like Smashing Pumpkins and Stone Temple Pilots started including maj7 chords in <a href="https://example.com/heavily/distorted">heavily distorted</a> guitar songs like the following hit from 1995:



Here's a good example of the IIm - V - I progression hear earlier, but with all **diatonic 7ths** (four-note chords), including the Imaj7.

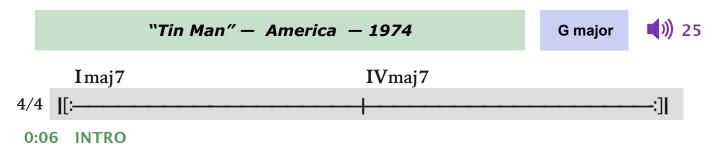


Additional songs with PROMINENT Imaj7 CHORD

| 1965 | It's Not Unusual    | Tom Jones                 | C major  |
|------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| 1972 | Ventura Highway     | America                   | D major  |
| 1996 | Key West Intermezzo | John Cougar<br>Mellencamp | F# major |
| 2001 | Jaded               | Aerosmith                 | A major  |
| 2005 | Cool                | Gwen Stefani              | D major  |
| 2009 | Fallin' For You     | Colbie Caillat            | E major  |

## PROGRESSIONS with IVmaj7 CHORD

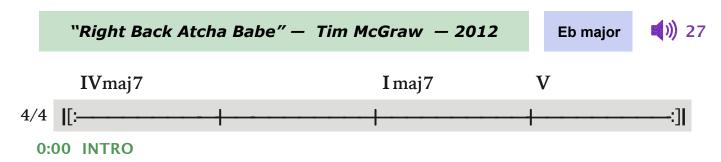
As mentioned, soft-rock guitar groups in the 70s relied heavily on these chords. Here's a classic from America that is essentially a two-chord vamp — <u>Imaj7 and IVmaj7</u> for 90% of the song.



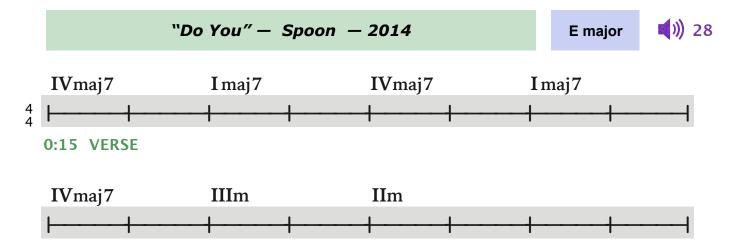
This 2024 duet from Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars features the same Imaj7 - IVmaj7 alternation during the intro and first half of the verse.



The next song by Tim McGraw provides a country-pop example with the maj7 chords:



The <u>IIm</u> and <u>IIIm</u> chords are added to the mix in the following recording from Spoon:



#### Additional songs with PROMINENT IV maj7 CHORD

| 1964 | Don't Let the Sun<br>Catch You Crying | Gerry and The<br>Pacemakers | Db major |
|------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| 2007 | Pictures of You                       | Last Goodnight              | D major  |
| 2008 | Free                                  | Zac Brown Band              | Db major |
| 2010 | Just the Way You Are                  | Bruno Mars                  | F major  |
| 2012 | Always Gonna Be You                   | Kenny Chesney               | D major  |
| 2013 | Entertainment                         | Phoenix                     | Ab major |
| 2018 | When We Drive                         | Death Cab For<br>Cutie      | D major  |
| 2023 | What Was I Made For?                  | Billie Eilish               | C major  |

# TWO CHORD VAMP, Imaj7 - IIm7

Often the Imaj7 is paired with the <u>IIm7</u> to create a two-chord vamp. Here's two songs where this Imaj7 - IIm7 alternation lasts throughout the entire recording:

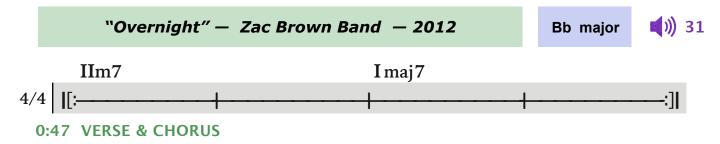
"Dream Lover" — Mariah Carey — 1993 F major (□)) 29

START LISTENING AT 0:19

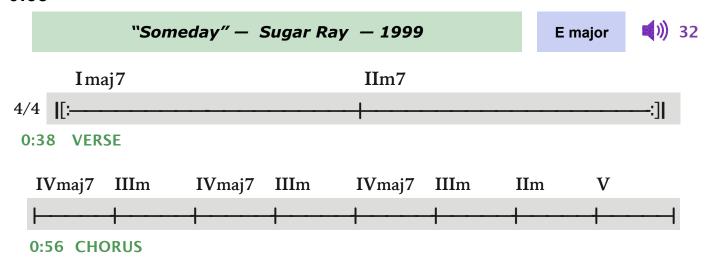
"Saturn" — SZA — 2024 Db major □)) 30

START LISTENING AT 0:32

Zac Brown's 2012 recording "Overnight" is built on the same vamp, but this time the alternation starts with the IIm7 chord. START LISTENING AT **0:47** 



On Sugar Ray's "Someday," the verse is based on the two chord Imaj7 - IIm7 vamp, and the chorus pairs the IVmaj7 and the IIIm7, as shown below. START LISTENING AT **0:38** 



# Additional songs featuring TWO-CHORD VAMP Imaj7 - IIm7

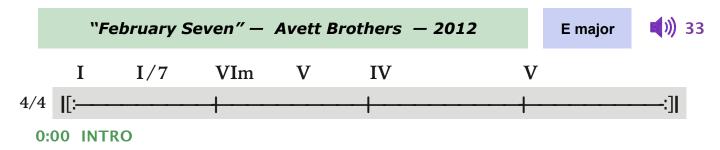
| 1974 | Best of My Love         | Eagles                         | C major  |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| 2016 | This Girl               | Kungs & Cookin<br>On 3 Burners | Eb major |
| 2017 | Kiss Me Like a Stranger | Thomas Rhett                   | Eb major |
| 2019 | Supalonely              | BENEE, Gus<br>Dapperton        | G major  |

# **Descending Bass Progressions with Inversions**

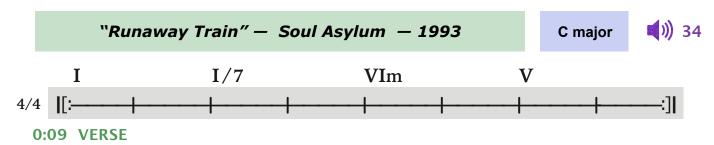
# DESCENDING BASS 1, 7, 6, 5 with I/7

Many pop & rock songs in a major key feature some variation of the chord sequence I - I/7 - VIm - V, which contains a prominent <u>descending bass line</u>. In the key of C, the progression is written C, C/B, Am, G. Notice that the second chord is technically a Cmaj7 chord in third inversion (with the 7th in the bass). However, in pop & rock the chord symbol is usually written as C/B, not Cmaj7/B.

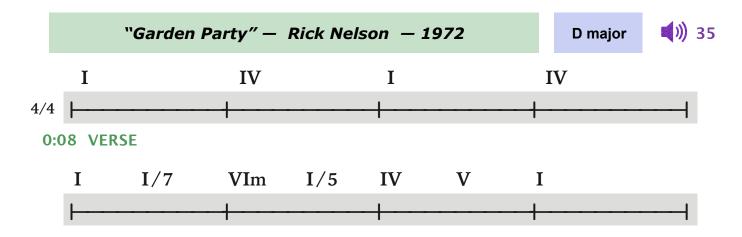
Here's an example from the Avett Brothers that continues one extra step, descending all the way to the IV chord:



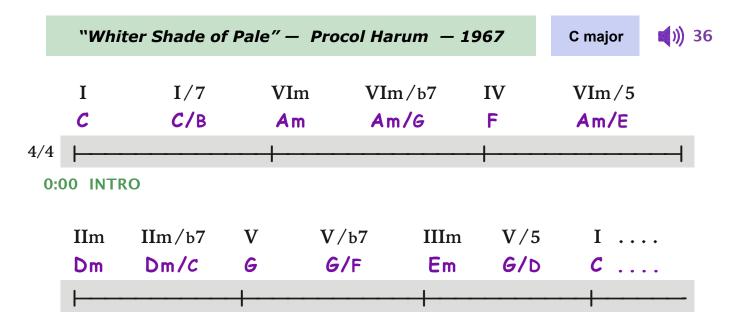
You will notice that the second chord (I/7) has quite a dissonant sound, but it usually lasts for only one or two beats, as the bass quickly passes through to the next chord. However, in the following song by Soul Asylum, the I/7 lasts for an unusually long time (8 beats), creating some tension before moving on.



As mentioned, there are often some slight variations to this descending bass progression. In the example below, a <u>I/5 chord</u> (D/A in the key of D) takes the place of the V chord (A), changing the sound ever so slightly, but preserving the same bass note in the overall sequence. The bass descent starts at **0:14** 

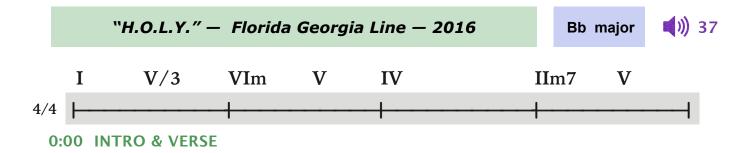


The next classic by Procol Harum extends the descending bass line over an entire octave, then tacks on another descent from the V to the I chord. You will notice that in keeping with pop & rock conventions, the fourth chord is written as Am/G, and the eighth chord as Dm/C, even though they technically could be written as Am7/G and Dm7/C respectively. Likewise, the chord following the G is written as G/F, not G7/F.

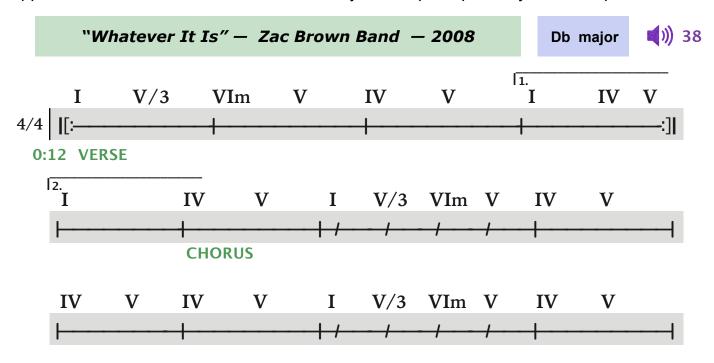


## DESCENDING BASS 1, 7, 6, 5 with V/3

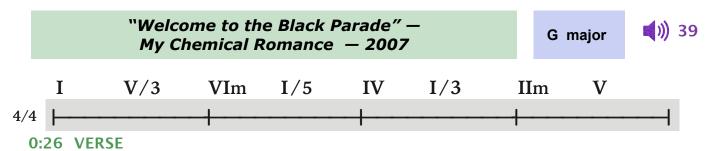
One common variation of the descending bass progression is to use a  $\underline{V/3}$  immediately after the I chord instead of the I/7. On the following example in the key of Bb, this would result in an F/A instead of a Bb/A.



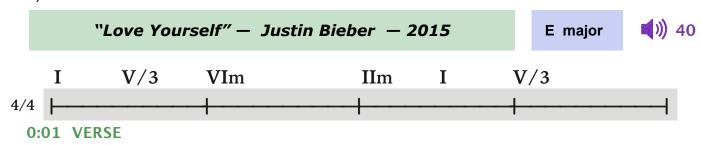
The next song also has the V/3 after the I. Notice when the descending sequence appears on the second line, the harmonic rhythm is sped up to only one beat per chord.



In this song the sequence continues descending through  $\,$  IV,  $\,$  I/3, and IIm. START LISTENING AT  $\,$  0:26



Here's an interesting variation — Justin Bieber's "Love Yourself" contains only a three chord descent (I - V/3 - VIm), then repeats the sequence a whole step higher (IIm - I - V/3).

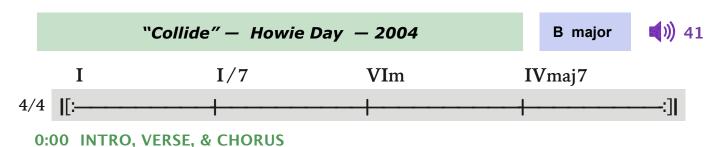


## Additional songs featuring DESCENDING BASS 1, 7, 6, 5

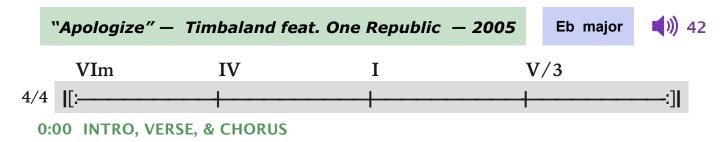
| 1966 | When a Man Loves a Woman        | Percy Sledge | D major  |
|------|---------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| 1969 | I Want You Back                 | Jackson 5    | Ab major |
| 2005 | Angel to You (Devil to Me)      | Click Five   | Ab major |
| 2008 | Shattered (Turn the Car Around) | O.A.R.       | B major  |
| 2016 | Up All Night                    | Charlie Puth | C major  |
| 2020 | Scared to Live                  | The Weeknd   | C major  |
| 2021 | Growing Up                      | Thomas Rhett | D major  |

# DESCENDING BASS 1, 7, 6, 4 (IV)

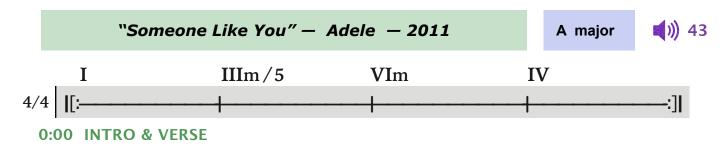
Another variation of the descending bass progression omits the V chord and lands on the IV instead. In the following song, the IV is heard as a maj7 chord.



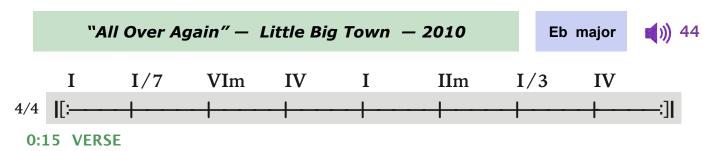
On the 2005 hit "Apologize," the sequence is metrically displaced, starting on the VIm as shown below:



Adele's piano chords on "Someone Like You" feature a <a href="IIIm/5">IIIm/5</a> instead of the V/3 chord. In the key of A major, this represents a C#m/G# instead of an E/G#.



Here's a song that not only descends, but also <u>ascends</u> from I to IV. START LISTENING AT **0:15** 



## Additional songs featuring DESCENDING BASS 1, 7, 6, 4 (IV)

| 2004 | Doin' Fine     | Jewel          | D major |
|------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| 2008 | Kids           | MGMT           | A major |
| 2011 | Like Yesterday | Colbie Caillat | D major |

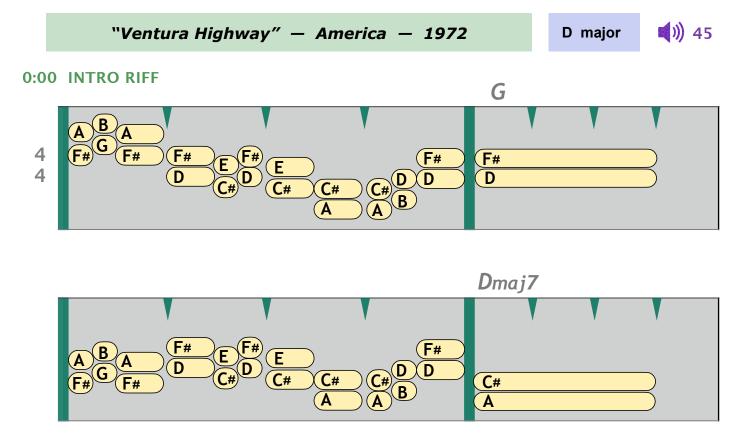
#### **EAR TRAINING EXERCISES**

For further practice hearing descending bass progressions in a major key, try **Exercises 5.14e - 5.17e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

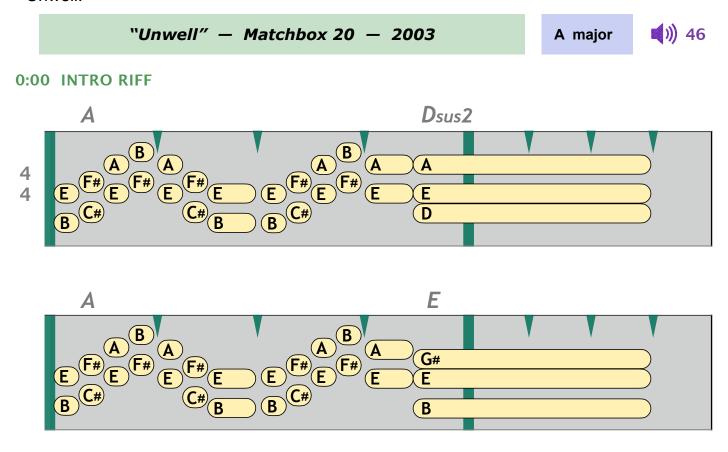
# **Signature Riffs**

#### **MELODIC FUNCTION RIFFS**

The 1972 song "Ventura Highway" by America features a signature riff made up entirely of <u>double-stops</u> (two-note combinations of the scale). This riff has primarily a melodic function - first heard in the instrumental intro, then used occasionally in the verse to punctuate the vocal melody with short "answering" phrases.



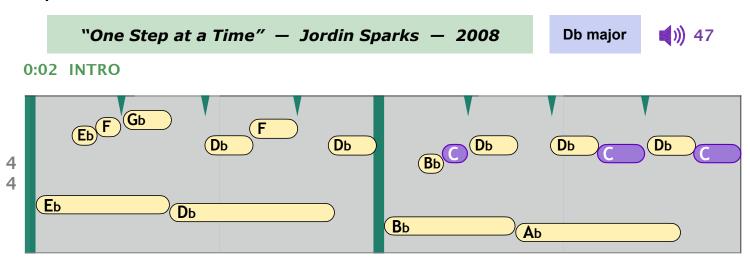
Some 30 years later, Matchbox 20 gave us a similar double-stop riff on their hit "Unwell."



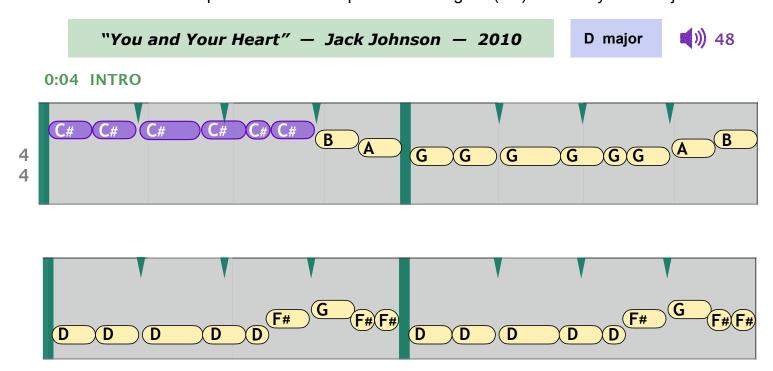
#### HARMONIC FUNCTION RIFFS

In Chapter Two, we listened to several signature or bass riffs based primarily on the major pentatonic scales, without the 4th or 7th degrees. In this chapter we have heard more of an emphasis on the sound of the <u>full</u> major scale, since many songs featured a prominent 7th degree in both the Imaj7 chord and the various descending bass progressions. Improvisers will notice that using the full major scale with these songs sounds especially good, compared to just the pentatonic. (For more on improvisation, see the supplemental guitar workbook that accompanies this main text.)

In keeping with this thought, the next two song examples both feature a **<u>prominent</u> <u>7th degree</u>** in their signature riffs. The riff on Jordin Sparks' "One Step at a Time" has several C notes (7th degree in Db major), as highlighted below in purple:



The next example starts with a repeated 7th degree (C#) in the key of D major:



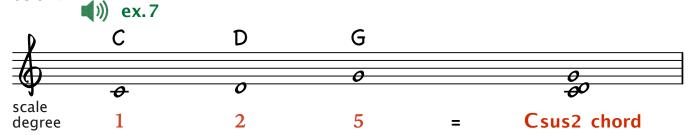
# Additional songs with HARMONIC FUNCTION RIFFS (major key)

| 1986 | Under African Skies | Paul Simon      | Eb major |
|------|---------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1988 | Fast Car            | Tracy Chapman   | A major  |
| 2002 | A Thousand Miles    | Vanessa Carlton | B major  |
| 2004 | The Reason          | Hoobastank      | E major  |

# Sus2 and Sus4 Chords

#### sus2 CHORD

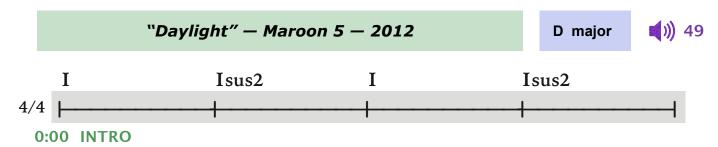
One signature of modern pop and rock (1980s and beyond) is the frequent use of the **sus2** chord instead of the more traditional major triad. The formula for the sus2 is shown below.



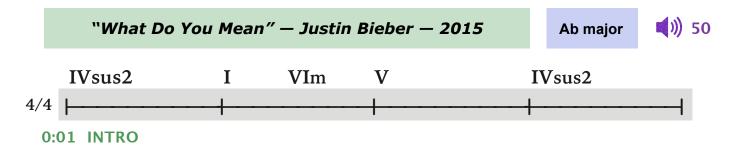
Since the 3rd degree is removed and replaced with the 2nd, this is technically a "neutral" chord — neither major or minor. However, the setting in which it is used, ie. the surrounding chords and melody notes of the song, will usually suggest its function as either major or minor. In the vast majority of cases, the sus2 chord substitutes for a major chord, typically found as the Isus2 or IVsus2 in a major key.

In this context, it may initially be hard to identify, for the ear is conditioned to expect major traids in a typical I, IV, V song. However, as many a guitarist has discovered, when you play straight triads on certain songs, it just doesn't sound quite like the recording.

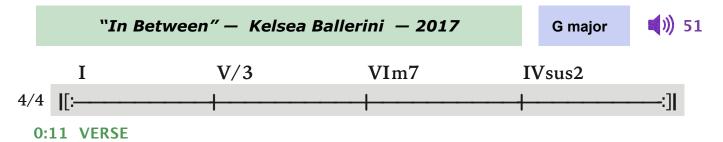
This is often why those online postings by amateur guitarists won't give you the right sound. In terms of training your ear, the most reliable way to recognize the sus2 sound is to compare it back-to-back with the matching major triad. You can easily pick up your instrument and do this yourself, but the band Maroon 5 has also provided some help — on their 2012 hit "Daylight," they conveniently alternate between the <u>I and Isus2</u> chords at the very beginning of the song.



The next song from Justin Bieber starts with an example of the <u>IVsus2</u> chord. This time the chord voicing on the sus2 is rather spread out with the 2nd degree placed on top, over an octave above the root note.



This 2017 song has the <u>descending 1, 7, 6, 4 bass progression</u> heard earlier in the chapter with a IVsus2 chord at the end.

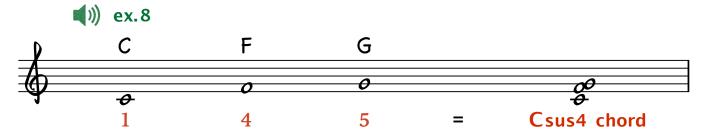


# Additional songs with PROMINENT sus2 CHORD (major key)

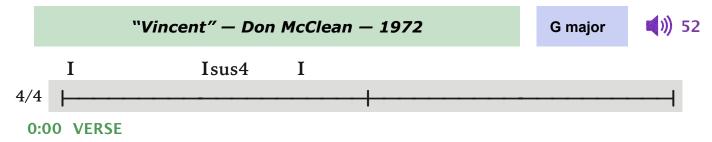
| 1984 | Purple Rain            | Prince        | Bb major |
|------|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1999 | She's So High (chorus) | Tal Bachman   | A major  |
| 2002 | Complicated            | Avril Lavigne | F major  |
| 2011 | Rescue Me              | Daughtry      | F# major |
| 2011 | Honey Bee              | Blake Shelton | E major  |
| 2012 | Walking Away           | Jason Aldean  | A major  |
| 2015 | Make You Better        | Decemberists  | D major  |

#### sus4 CHORD

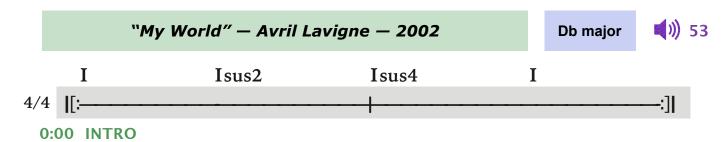
Like the sus2, the <u>sus4</u> chord is also fairly common in pop & rock. It has some of the same qualities as its cousin, including a "neutral" sound regarding major or minor, but it generally has a stronger feeling of dissonance or tension.



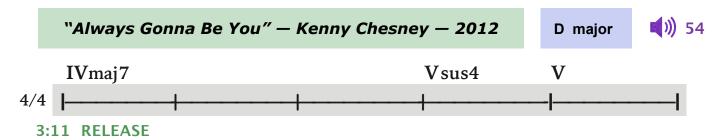
In traditional harmony, the sus4 is usually followed by the regular major triad, with the "suspended" 4th degree moving down a half step to the 3rd degree of the next chord, resolving the tension. This can also be true in pop & rock, as demonstrated in the intro to Don McClean's "Vincent." Listen as the tension is introduced by the suspended 4th, then resolved with the return to the sweeter-sounding 3rd degree.



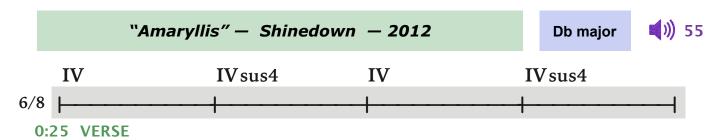
The next example features both the Isus2 and Isus4 chords in the intro, acting as embellishments for the I chord.



Often the sus4 comes on the  $\underline{V}$  chord, as heard on the following 2012 hit. START LISTENING AT **3:11** 



Earlier we listened to the Imaj7 chord on the 2012 hit "Amaryllis." This song also contains an example of the sus4 on the <u>IV</u> chord. START LISTENING AT **0:25** 



# Additional songs with PROMINENT sus4 CHORD (major key)

| 1970 | Your Song            | Elton John        | Eb major |
|------|----------------------|-------------------|----------|
| 1973 | Rosalita             | Bruce Springsteen | F major  |
| 1982 | Shadows of the NIght | Pat Benatar       | F# major |
| 2011 | We Are Young         | Fun.              | F major  |
| 2016 | Use My Heart         | Miranda Lambert   | A major  |

#### WRITTEN EXERCISE

Use **Exercise 5.4** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Written Exercises") to practice spelling some common sus2 and sus4 chords.

#### **EAR TRAINING EXERCISES**

For additional practice hearing the sus2 and sus4 chords, try **Exercises 5.18e - 5.21e** (see "Textbook Contents"/ "Volume 1"/ "Ear Training Exercises").

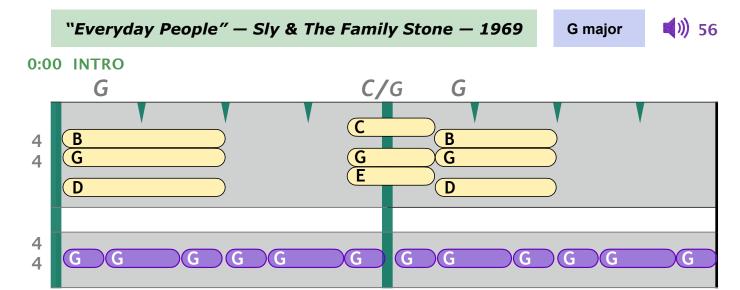
## **Drones**

Another signature of pop and rock accompaniment is the use of a **drone**. Basically a drone is one or more notes that remain constant on the same pitch for an extended period, while other notes or chords continue changing. These droning notes can be held for many measures or even an entire verse while different chords are played against them.

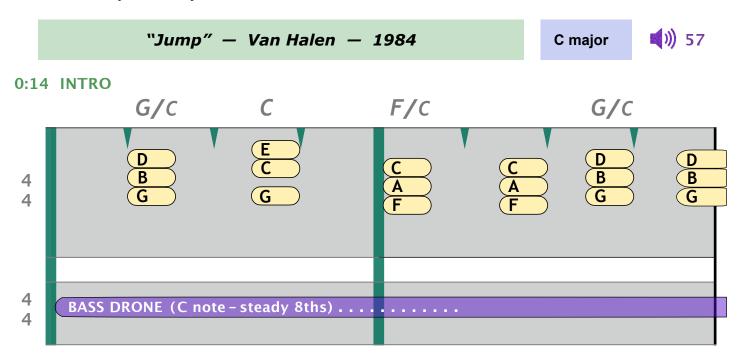
A drone can be in any range - high, middle, or low notes. Bass drones can be very effective for building tension and creating an ominous atmosphere, as in "Hells Bells" by AC/DC or Phil Collins' 1981 hit "In The Air Tonight." In up-tempo dance songs like "I Want You Back" (The Jackson 5), or "Ray of Light" (Madonna), a pulsing treble drone can help keep the driving rhythm moving forward. With the right electronic effect, drones can also create a hypnotic mood, as in Goldfrapp's 2008 hit "A & E," or The Beatles "Tomorrow Never Knows" (inspired by the drones in Indian music).

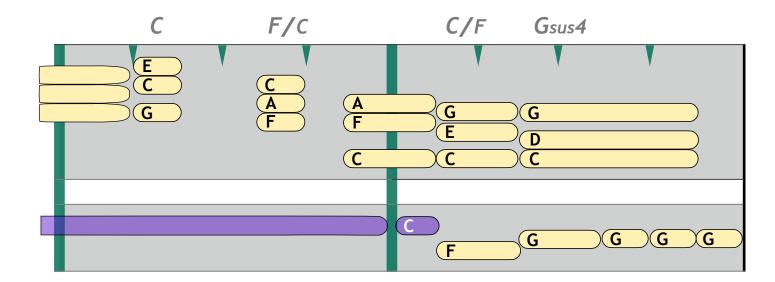
#### **BASS DRONE**

Sly & The Family Stone's 1969 hit "Everyday People" features a tonic **G bass drone** on the 8th-note pulse throughout the entire song. The piece is essentially a one-chord song — mainly on the I, with very brief sidesteps to the IV chord.



The synth intro to Van Halen's "Jump" is also supported by a tonic bass drone, this time in the key of C major:





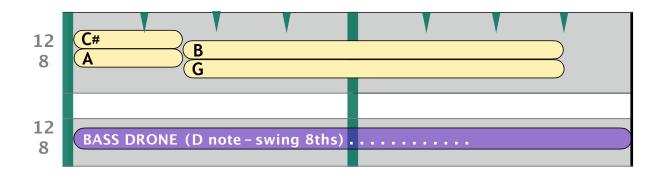
The following mid-80s classic by Tears for Fears features changing double-stops over a droning tonic D in the bass

#### "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" — Tears for Fears — 1985

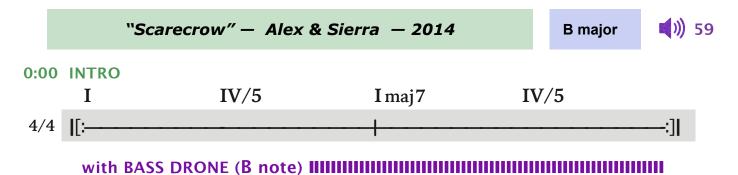
D major



0:09 INTRO



Here's another tonic bass drone, this time over a circular two-bar progression:



# Additional songs with BASS DRONE (major key)

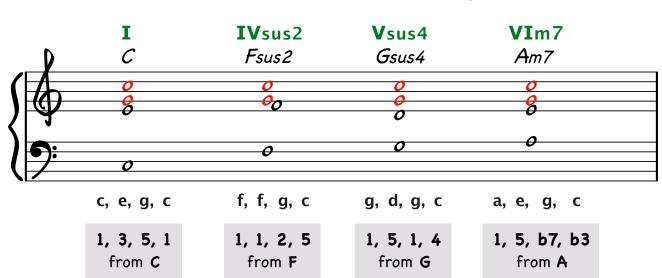
| 1971 | Love the One You're With | Stephen Stills | C major  |
|------|--------------------------|----------------|----------|
| 1978 | Running on Empty         | Jackson Browne | A major  |
| 2004 | One Thing                | Finger Eleven  | Ab major |

#### TREBLE DRONE 1 & 5

(a))) ex.9

As with the bass examples above, the tonic (1) note is usually used when employing a treble drone as well. Occasionally a 5th degree is used instead, but in pop & rock the <u>1</u> and <u>5 are most often used together in the treble</u>, while the bass and/or chords change underneath.

Some of the basic major-key chords like the IV, V, and VIm are often altered to create a constant 1 & 5 drone in the treble as shown below in the key of C. The droning 1 & 5 notes (C & G) are shown at the top of each chord in red.



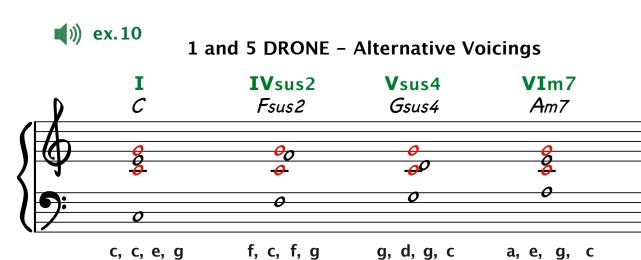
1 and 5 DRONE in TREBLE - key of C

The basic chords without the drone would have been C, F, G, and Am (I, IV, V, and VIm). To create the drone, the IV chord becomes a sus2, with the droning G note replacing the normal 3rd (A) of the chord. Likewise, the V becomes a sus4, with the droning C replacing the normal 3rd (B). The VIm becomes a m7 chord by simply adding the droning G note to the normal triad.

The voicings (mixtures of notes within a chord) may be slightly different for a particular song or instrument, but the voicings shown above are fairly common in pop & rock music with treble drones. Also, the droning notes don't always have to be the top two notes in every chord. For example, the same progression might be voiced as follows, with the G on top and the C in the middle of each chord:

1, 1, 3, 5

from C



from F

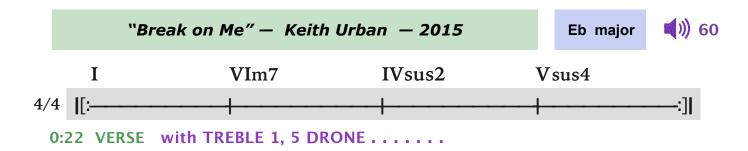
Keith Urban's 2015 song "Break on Me" shows us what the **doowop progression** (I - VIm - IV - V) sounds like with a treble 1, 5 drone:

1, 4, 5, 1

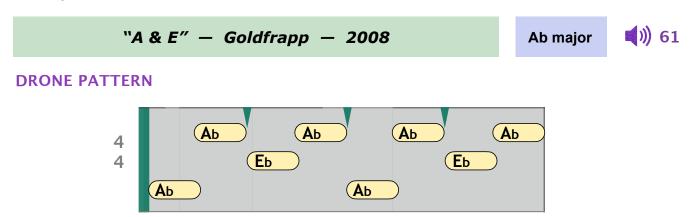
from **G** 

1, b3, 5, b7

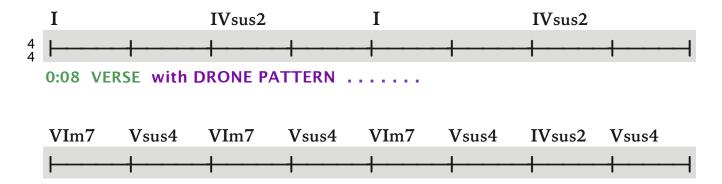
from A



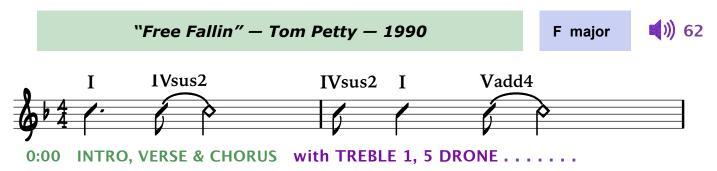
On the next example in Ab major, the 1, 5 drone notes (Ab and Eb) are played separately in the simple pattern shown below.



This 1,5 drone pattern continues for quite a while as the bass changes underneath to define the chord progression as follows:

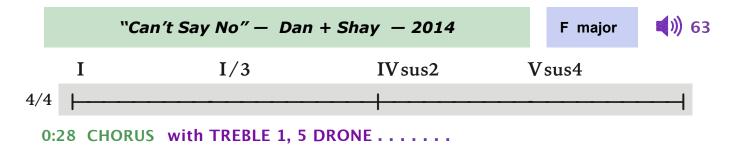


Tom Petty's "Free Fallin" is yet another song with a treble 1, 5 drone throughout (F and C notes in the key of F major). As before, the droning tonic note (F) represents the 4th degree of the V chord, creating a sus4 structure (chord tones 1, 4, and 5). However, it sounds like the regular 3rd is also present (E note). This would result in a more dissonant chord with four notes - C, E, F, and G, (chord tones 1, 3, 4, 5), which can be written with the symbol Vadd4 as shown below.

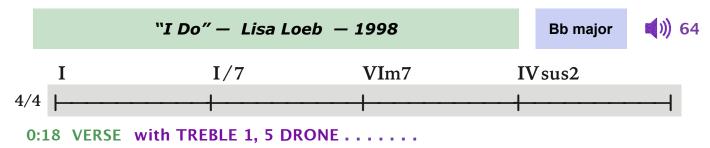


NOTE: The difference between a sus4 and an add4 chord is very slight, and in some songs it is hard to tell if the 3rd is actually present or not. The topic is presented here for those who want to be precise, but it is best to not become too distracted with this issue. Remember that in the song as a whole, the most important feature in these types of progressions is the droning quality of the 1 & 5 and the bass notes.

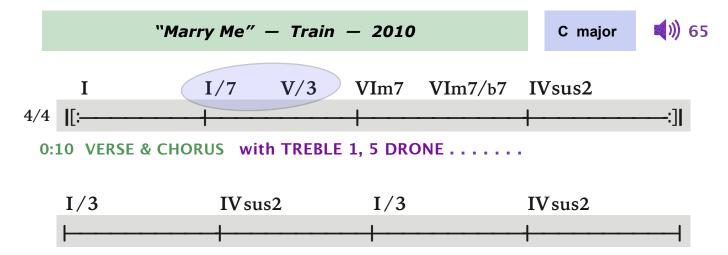
Our next example shows us what the <u>ascending I - I/3 - IV - V progression</u> heard earlier sounds like with a treble 1, 5 drone. START LISTENING AT **0:28** 



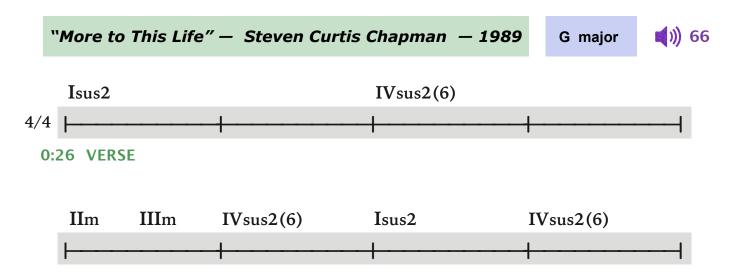
Here's an example of the <u>descending bass progression I - I / 7 - VIm - IV</u> with a treble 1, 5 drone.



Train's 2010 song "Marry Me" also features the drone with a similar descending bass, but notice the variation on the second bar (circled). Most of the previous descending bass examples had either the I/7 or the V/3 as the second chord in the progression. "Marry Me" uses **both**, as shown below. START LISTENING AT **0:10** 



Our final example of treble drones not only has the 1 & 5, but also adds the **2nd degree** during the verse, creating a 3-note drone from low to high of 2, 5, 1 (A, D, G in the key of G major). This drone briefly releases on the fifth bar of the verse, not affecting the IIm and IIIm chords. However, you will note that the tonic I chord is now a sus2 thanks to the droning A note. The IV chord is especially difficult to name, consisting of C, A, D, and G notes. These represent the 1, 6, 2, and 5 degrees figured from the C root. For now, we can use the name Csus2(6), which describes a Csus2 with an added 6th degree.



As you can see, adding drone notes to the sound of even basic chords can make for some interesting and often confusing chord symbols. The irony is that these chord progressions are often very easy to play on guitar or piano, yet hard to name. We will save further discussion on this topic for Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen, when we cover several varieties of 6th, 9th, and 11th chords with drones. Until then, we will generally make note of a prominent treble drone when describing a song, but stick with basic chord symbols for the underlying chord progression. This will especially apply to the next chapter when we talk about treble drones over minor key progressions.

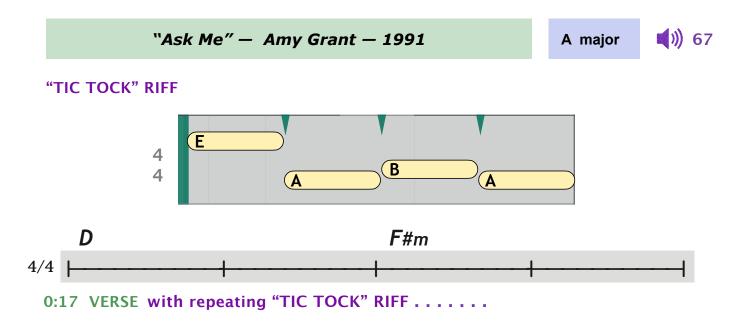
## Additional songs with TREBLE 1, 5 DRONE (major key)

| 1987 | I Still Haven't Found<br>What I'm Looking For | U2                 | Db major |
|------|---|--------------------|----------|
| 1999 | Slide   | Goo Goo Dolls      | Ab major |
| 2003 | Unwell  | Matchbox 20        | A major  |
| 2008 | Come on Get Higher                            | Matt Nathanson     | A major  |
| 2011 | Made in America                               | Toby Keith         | A major  |
| 2012 | Wide Awake                                    | Katy Perry         | F major  |
| 2015 | Lifted Up                                     | Passion Pit        | F major  |
| 2017 | Castle on the Hill                            | Ed Sheeran         | D major  |
| 2017 | Sixteen                                       | Thomas Rhett       | Db major |
| 2020 | Bury Us                                       | The Naked & Famous | A major  |

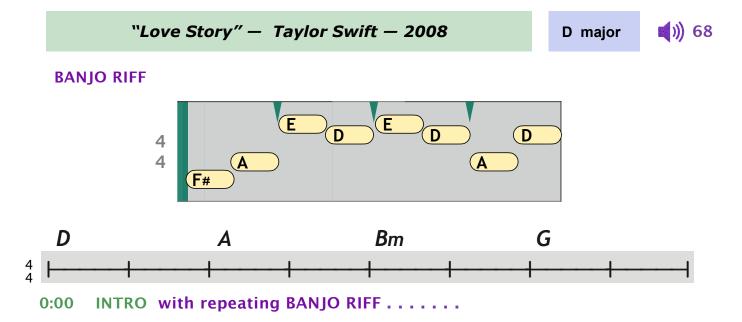
#### **DRONE RIFF**

Sometimes a riff can also function as a drone if it is short, has few pitches, and repeats over several bars while the underlying harmony (chords and/or bass) keep changing. In these cases, the riff tends to function like a single, constant pitch in relation to the changing bass and chords.

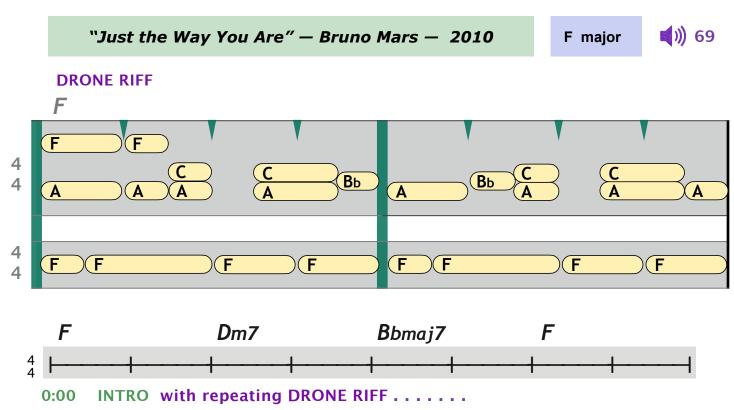
The <u>treble drone riff</u> on Amy Grant's "Ask Me" sounds a bit like the "tic tock" of a chiming clock, keeping time for virtually the entire song. The repeating, one-bar riff is shown below, featuring scale degrees 5 - 1 - 2 - 1 (E - A - B - A in the key of A major). START LISTENING AT **0:17** 



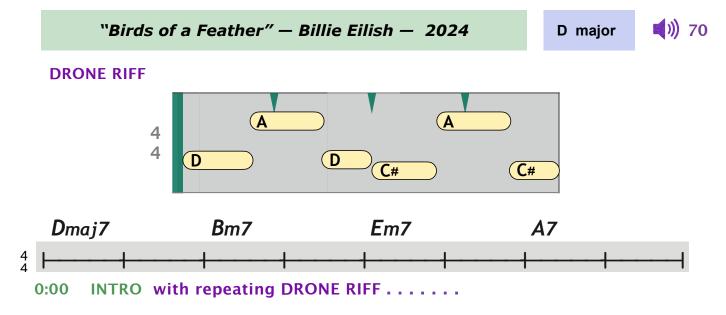
Here's another drone riff that prominently features the 1st and 2nd scale degrees (D and E in the key of D major). This time the riff is played on **banjo** and **changes slightly whenever the chords change**:



The following Bruno Mars song "Just the Way You Are" also has a drone riff that changes slightly as the accompanying chords change. This two-bar pattern features a prominent <u>3rd degree</u> (A note in the key of F major).



In this 2024 hit from Billie Eilish, the <u>7th degree</u> is prominently featured (C# note in the key of D major).



# Additional songs with DRONE RIFF (major key)

| 1987 | With or Without You             | U2              | D major  |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1988 | Hysteria                        | Def Leppard     | D major  |
| 2008 | River of Love                   | George Strait   | D major  |
| 2008 | Shattered (Turn the Car Around) | O.A.R.          | B major  |
| 2008 | Tattoo                          | Jordin Sparks   | D major  |
| 2008 | These Hard Times                | Matchbox 20     | D major  |
| 2013 | The River                       | Imagine Dragons | Db major |

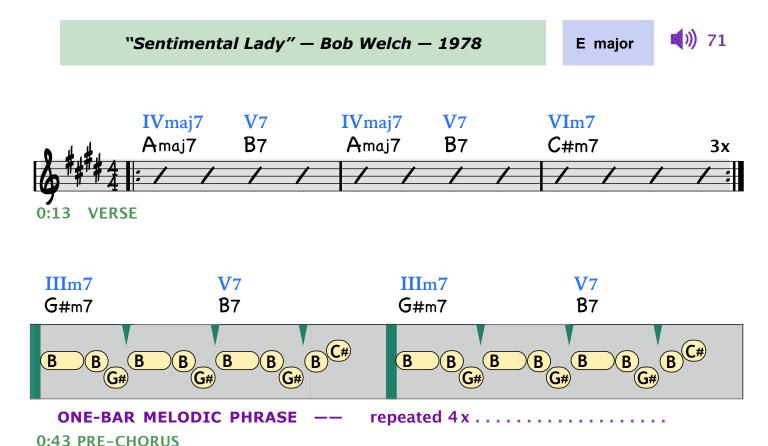
# **Songwriting Focal Points**

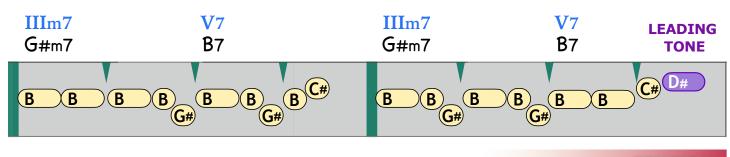
One fundamental way to create tension is to simply repeat something. If the same word is repeated several times, like now . . now . . now . . now . . tension begins to build, anticipating the moment the conversation can finally resume. Of course this can be overdone — too many repetitions just become annoying and lose their power. Another factor is the length of the phrase being repeated. A single word or sentence is short enough, but repeating an entire chapter or book is too long, making it difficult to recognize something is being repeated.

This is especially true with music, since many listeners are much less familiar with musical vocabulary than spoken language. To ensure the casual listener will recognize repetition in songs and feel the tension, the repeating musical segments must be short (a few beats or a few bars) to be effective. Repetition can then be used in many different rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic devices to create focal points. In this chapter, we will discuss repetition of **short melodic phrases** and **short harmonic patterns** on the 1978 hit "Sentimental Lady," written and recorded by Bob Welch.

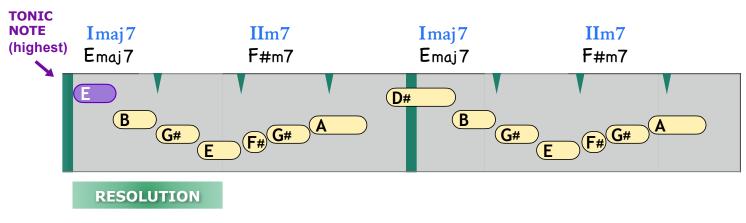
## **Repetition of Short Melodic Phrases**

The pre-chorus of "Sentimental Lady" contains a <u>one-bar melodic phrase</u> that repeats four times, as shown below in the key of E major. The last time the phrase is altered, with the melody line rising to the very unstable <u>leading tone</u> of the key (D# note). This adds extra tension, preparing for the entrance of the chorus when the melody is dramatically resolved up a half step to the <u>tonic</u> E note.





**TENSION** 



0:57 CHORUS

# **Repetition of Short Harmonic Pattern**

The repeated melodic phrases are accompanied by a short repeating <u>harmonic</u> pattern as well. Two chords ( G#m7 and B7 ) alternate throughout the pre-chorus, adding to the tension of the focal point.

You will notice that several previously discussed focal point devices were also used on "Sentimental Lady," including the following -

- V to I TENSION RESOLUTION is featured as the pre-chorus transitions into the chorus.
- The I CHORD is AVOIDED for the entire pre-chorus.
- The chorus / song title starts on the **HIGHEST MELODY NOTE**