

Augmented Sixth Chords

Augmented Sixths

- The *augmented sixth* creates a strong motion towards scale degree 5 by approaching it by **half steps** both from **above** and from **below**
- Raised scale degree 4 ($\sharp 4$) leads up to 5 from *below*
- Lowered scale degree 6 ($\flat 6$) leads down to scale degree 5 from *above*
- $\flat 6$ (LE) and $\sharp 4$ (FI) are like “double leading tones” to scale degree 5
- LE and FI combine to make an **augmented sixth**, which expands outward by half steps to an octave

Augmented Sixth Chords in General

- Augmented sixth chords are **predominant** chords (because they lead to V)
- The $\flat 6$ is almost always found in the lowest voice (the bass) and the $\sharp 4$ is found in an upper voice
- Because of its “double-leading-tone” effect, augmented sixth chords are perhaps the *strongest* approach to the dominant

Italian Sixth Chords



- There are different “nationalities” of augmented sixth chords: Italian, French, and German
- All augmented sixth chords use the pitches $\flat 6$ and $\sharp 4$ (LE and FI)
- Another scale degree shared by all augmented sixth chords is the tonic (DO)
- The **Italian** sixth chord uses just these three pitches: $\flat 6$, $\hat{1}$ and $\sharp 4$

(LE-DO-FI)

More on Augmented Sixth Chords

- Unlike most other chords, augmented sixth chords are **NOT** created by stacking thirds
- The augmented sixth interval in the chord inverts to a diminished third, so it does not create a nice familiar triad
- Also, augmented sixth chords have **NO ROOT!** (thus, they cannot be inverted)
- They are linear chords—their purpose is to *move* forward to V

Analysis Hints

- Analysis hints:
 1. If you find a chord with a *diminished third* in it, remember that it is actually an augmented sixth
 2. If you find a lowered note and a raised note *moving in opposite directions to the same pitch by half steps*, that is an augmented sixth chord
 - (the pitch that they move to should be scale degree 5)
- The only remaining step would be to figure out what “nationality” the chord is

French Sixth Chords



- The French augmented sixth chord adds scale degree 2 (or RE) to the three pitches of the Italian Sixth chord

$$It^{+6} + \hat{2} = Fr^{+6}$$

(LE – DO – RE – FI)

German Sixth Chords



- The German augmented sixth chord adds scale degree $\flat 3$ (or ME) to the three pitches of the Italian Sixth chord

$$It^{+6} + \flat 3 = Ger^{+6}$$

(LE – DO – ME – FI)