

## The Neapolitan Sixth Chord

## Neapolitan Sixth

- The Neapolitan sixth chord is a **colorful** predominant chord
- It is a *major triad* constructed on the lowered second scale degree (a  $\flat$ II chord)
- Unlike the  $\flat$ III,  $\flat$ VI, and  $\flat$ VII chords, the  $\flat$ II chord is *not* borrowed from minor—it is altered for purposes of **color**
- Instead of  $\flat$ II, we will use the symbol N to represent the Neapolitan (or more commonly,  $N^6$ )

## Origin of the Neapolitan Sixth

- The Neapolitan Sixth chord probably originated as a more consonant substitute for  $ii^{\flat 6}$
- (The Neapolitan is thus most often found in minor)
- *Why is it called a “Neapolitan”?*
  - It was associated with composers of the so-called Neapolitan school—a group of eighteenth-century opera composers in the city of Naples, Italy (such as Scarlatti and Pergolesi)
- *Why is it a Neapolitan “Sixth”?*
  - Because it is usually found in first inversion

## Spelling the $N^6$

- The  $N^6$  chord is spelled  $\flat 2 - 4 - \flat 6$
- In minor, scale degree 6 is already lowered, so you just need to lower scale degree 2 by a half step
- In major, you need to lower both the root and the fifth of the chord by a half step
- You can think of Neapolitan ice cream:
  - Scale degree  $\flat 2$  is the rich, “chocolately” sound of the sonority
  - Scale degree 4 is white because it is unaltered
  - Scale degree  $\flat 6$  is also colorful, particularly in major

## Voice-Leading the $N^6$

- *Where does the Neapolitan sixth chord go?*
  - It is a predominant chord, so it always goes to V (or at least eventually)
- *How does the Neapolitan sixth chord resolve?*
  - Scale degree  $\flat 2$  (which in solfège, is RA) always needs to resolve DOWN—its goal is the leading tone (TI)
  - $\flat 2$  should NOT resolve up to  $\sharp 2$ —although this might seem smooth, it just does not work
  - The other voices can move by step or by a third
- The characteristic sound of the Neapolitan’s resolution is RA – TI – DO ( $\flat 2 \Rightarrow 7 \Rightarrow 1$ )

## More Voice-Leading Tidbits

- *What should we double?*
  - A good rule of thumb is to never double a tendency tone (an altered tone)—so don’t double  $\flat 2$  or  $\flat 6$
  - Doubling the third is best (which is usually the bass)
- *Does the  $N^6$  have to go directly to V?*
  - No! We can use a passing chord to fill in the diminished-third gap from RA to TI
  - The  $i\sharp$  chord will fit in nicely before the V
  - Another option is using a  $vii^{\flat 7}/V$  before the V
- *What can go before a  $N^6$  chord?*
  - Anything that can go before a  $ii^{\flat 6}$  chord (VI, iv, or i)



### Less Typical Uses of the Neapolitan

- 1. The Neapolitan may occur in root position
- 2. The Neapolitan may occur in a major key
- 3. The Neapolitan may be tonicized
- 4. The Neapolitan might have a seventh
- 5. The Neapolitan can be used as a pivot chord in a modulation
- 6. You can even modulate to the key of the Neapolitan