Lesson RRR: Dominant Preparation

Introduction:

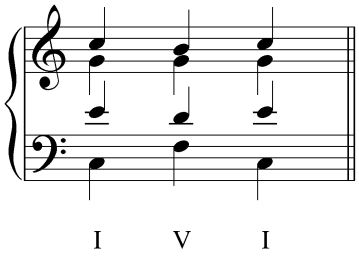
Composers tend to put considerable emphasis on harmonies leading to the dominant, and to apply noteworthy creativity in shaping and modifying those harmonies as a way of highlighting the arrival of the dominant, after which the tonic follows soon as a foregone conclusion. In addition to diatonic pre-dominant harmonies such as ii and IV (ii^{o} and iv in minor), applied chords can appear before the dominant, emphasizing it through tonicization (see Lesson 10). Other harmonies, like the Neapolitan sixth (Lesson MMM) and augmented sixth chords (Lesson NNN), dramatize the arrival of the dominant with chromaticism.

All of these chords and sonorities have a similar function in that they typically introduce and raise anticipation for dominant harmony. Though they share certain characteristics in makeup and purpose, each has a unique identity. The subtle differences between these chords allow for a wide variety of expression and individuality in works with fundamentally similar harmonic structure.

In this lesson, we will summarize the various pre-dominant chords discussed so far. We will compare them and track elements that regularly appear in pre-dominants, while making note of the characteristics that make each unique.

The dominant preparation function:

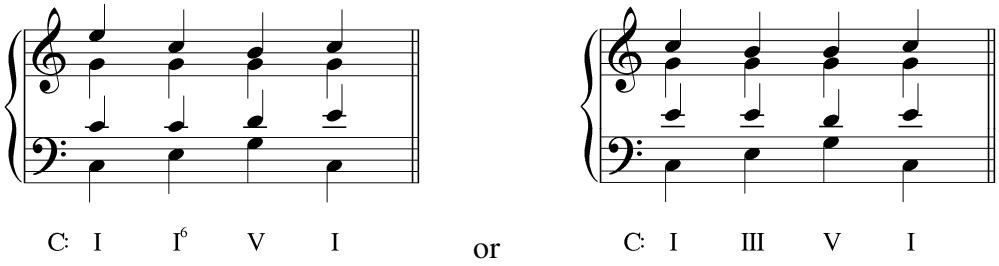
Example 1:



We might think of the succession of chords in Example 1 as the most basic tonal progression: it begins with the tonic, a point of initial repose; moves to the dominant, a moment of poised contrast; and then resolves back to the tonic, confirming its function as goal. Indeed, this very progression is at the root of all tonal harmony. But for such a foundational progression, by itself, it isn't very exciting! The beauty of tonal music lies in how composers adjust, embellish, and—most importantly—expand this progression.

One of the fundamental ways in which composers expand this basic progression is by delaying the arrival of the dominant, thereby heightening the contrasting tension. One way to do that would be to complete an arpeggiation of the tonic triad in the bass with I^{6} or III:

Example 2:



Both of these progressions delay the arrival of the dominant, but are heard as expansions of the initial tonic harmony rather than as mediations between tonic and dominant. Chords built on scale degrees $\hat{2}$ or $\hat{4}$ are more effective in that regard since they contain active scalar elements. Each of those chords—ii and IV—contains scale degrees with strong tendencies to lead to pitches of a dominant chord. Chords that introduce dominant harmony in this manner are collectively known as pre-dominant chords.

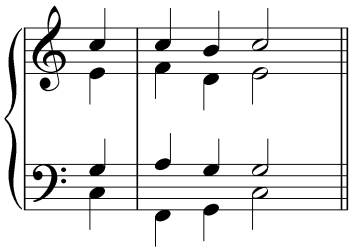
Note: We refer to the subjects of this lesson as pre-dominant chords. You may occasionally encounter other terminology as well. Some teachers and texts refer to such chords as intermediate harmonies or dominant preparation chords. Others, noting that occasionally several different pre-dominant chords may appear alongside one another, refer to a subdominant *area*. All of these terms are valid and you should recognize their interchangeability.

In discussing the commonalities and differences between various pre-dominant chords, it is useful to divide the list into diatonic chords—those built exclusively of pitches native to the key—and chromatic chords—those that contain pitches foreign to the key, whether through mixture or other sources. Among the scale degrees comprising various pre-dominant chords, $\hat{4}$ is central. In the following sections we will take a more nuanced approach to classifying pre-dominants. We will first discuss those pre-dominants that use diatonic $\hat{4}$, and then those that replace $\hat{4}$ with $\sharp\hat{4}$.

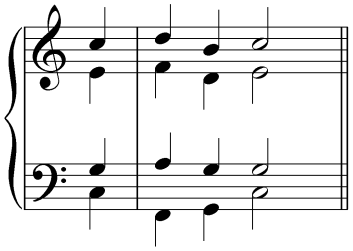
Pre-dominant chords with diatonic $\hat{4}$:

The most common pre-dominant chords are those composed of diatonic pitches: $ii^{(7)}$ and $IV^{(7)}$ in major, $ii^{o(7)}$ and $iv^{(7)}$ in minor. These chords are particularly useful as pre-dominants since each of their scale degrees leads smoothly to the pitches of a dominant chord.

Example 3:



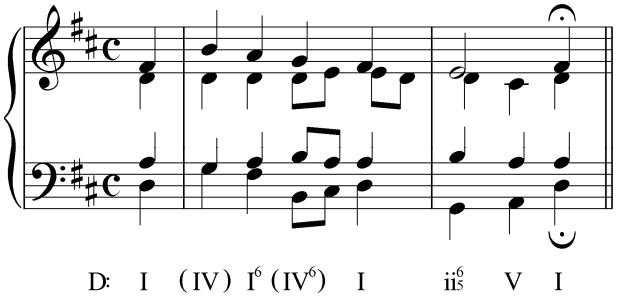
Example 4:



Note the resemblance of these two progressions. The IV chord has C in the soprano while the ii chord has D, but otherwise the two examples are identical. This similarity in makeup explains the interchangeability of ii and IV as pre-dominant functions.

Keep in mind, however, that not all ii and IV chords function as pre-dominants. They frequently appear in various other capacities—as auxiliary sonorities, for example:

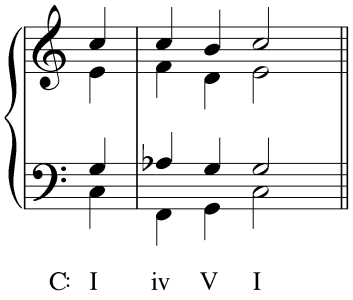
Example 5 (J.S. Bach, "Herzlich tut mich verlangen," BWV 244.44, mm. 1-2):



At first glance, it may appear that the excerpt shown in Example 5 has three pre-dominant chords: two IV chords in m. 1 and a ii^6_5 in m. 2. Of these, only the third has a pre-dominant function. The chords on beats one and three of the first full measure are auxiliary sonorities expanding the initial tonic. It is essential that you be able to distinguish such functional differences between similar chords.

As discussed in Lesson LLL, mixture chords retain the harmonic functions of their unaltered forms. In other words, a pre-dominant harmony that incorporates tones borrowed from the parallel key will still be pre-dominant. The following example alters the IV chord of Example 3:Example 3:

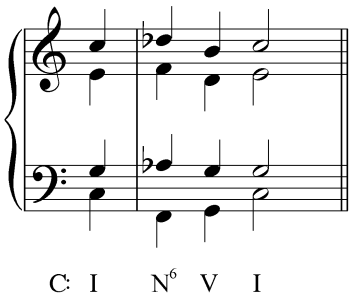
Example 6:



Despite the inclusion of A♭, the iv chord is still a pre-dominant.

The Neapolitan chord also has a pre-dominant function. Like ii or IV, it too has diatonic $\hat{4}$ (usually in the bass). As discussed in Lesson MMM, the Neapolitan can be derived in two ways: by substituting the fifth of a iv chord with a chromatic upper neighbor or by lowering the root of a ii^o chord. The following example replaces the pre-dominant chords of Examples 3 and 4 with a Neapolitan:

Example 7:



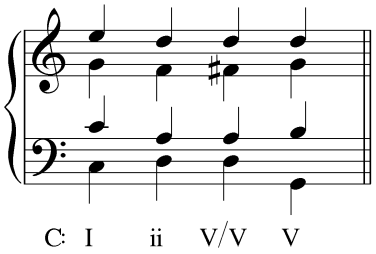
Compare Example 7 with Examples 3 and 4. As you can see, the Neapolitan is closely related to diatonic ii and IV chords. Regardless of how it is derived—whether by embellishing a iv chord, or by altering a ii^{o} chord—the Neapolitan retains pre-dominant function.

Pre-dominant chords with ♯$\hat{4}$:

Other pre-dominant chords feature ♯$\hat{4}$: applied chords and the special case of augmented sixths. As discussed elsewhere, ♯$\hat{4}$ functions as a temporary leading tone and urges strongly toward $\hat{5}$. The presence of ♯$\hat{4}$ in a predominant chord makes it less stable and drives it toward the dominant.

As discussed in Lesson 10, applied chords that tonicize the dominant can be thought of as chromatically altered ii or IV chords. The following example demonstrates:

Example 8:



Here we see a diatonic pre-dominant (ii) leading to an applied chord (V/V). The only difference between these chords is at scale degree $\hat{4}$: raising F to F♯ makes an applied dominant out of the ii chord. (Note that the same progression in minor would require two accidentals to make an applied dominant out of the diminished ii^{o} chord.) Any applied chord tonicizing V—V^{7}/V, vii^{o}/V, vii^{o7}/V, and so on—can be derived in this manner. Again, the similarity in makeup is responsible for the similar function.

Augmented sixth chords, as discussed in Lesson NNN, are defined by the "dual leading tones" surrounding scale degree $\hat{5}$: ♯$\hat{4}$ and ♭$\hat{6}$. Like applied dominants, they feature leading-tone chromaticism (♯$\hat{4}$ invariably resolves to $\hat{5}$). But the presence of ♭$\hat{6}$ (a semitone above the dominant) prevents them from being heard as applied dominants. Augmented sixth sonorities, as chromatic pre-dominants, highlight the arrival of the dominant but do not tonicize it.

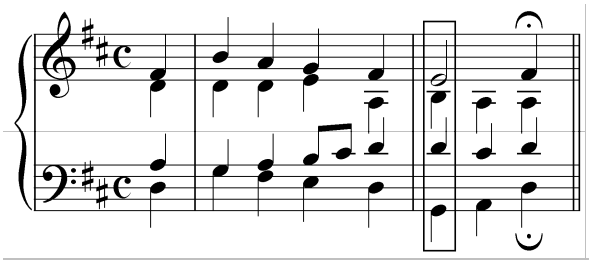
In this sense, augmented sixths may be regarded as further alterations of diatonic pre-dominants. Applied chords add ♯$\hat{4}$ and augmented sixths add ♭$\hat{6}$ in addition. The increased chromaticism enhances the pre-dominant function rather than undermining or changing it.

Activity RRR.01:

It is essential that you be able to distinguish true pre-dominant chords from other sonorities that appear very similar. In each of the following excerpts, identify whether or not the boxed chord is a pre-dominant. (Hint: Always look to the following chord or chords to see where the harmony is headed.)

Exercise RRR.01a

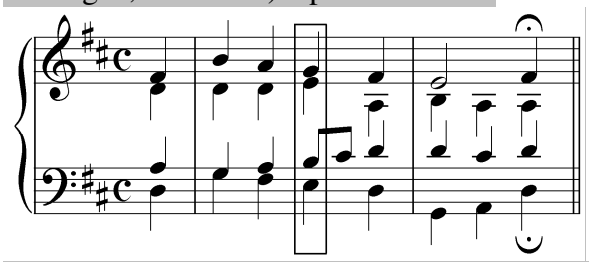
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from a Bach chorale (BWV 271, "Herzlich tut mich verlangen," mm. 1-2) a pre-dominant?



[Answer: yes. Response if correct: “Correct!” Response if incorrect: “Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)”]

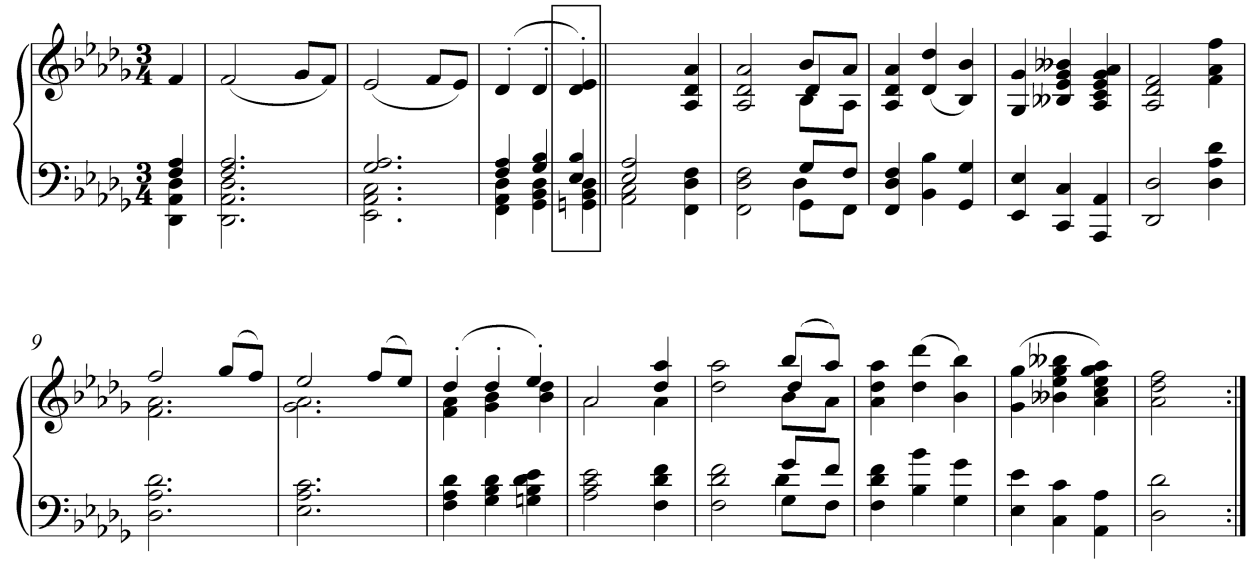
[Follow-up question:]
What type of pre-dominant chord is it? (Provide your answer as a Roman numeral.)
[Answer: ii^6_5. Response if correct: “Correct!” Response if incorrect: “Incorrect. Try again.”]

Exercise RRR.01b
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from a Bach chorale (BWV 271, “Herzlich tut mich verlangen,” mm. 1-2) a pre-dominant?



[Answer: no. Response if correct: “Correct! The boxed chord is a passing auxiliary sonority.” Response if incorrect: “Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)”]

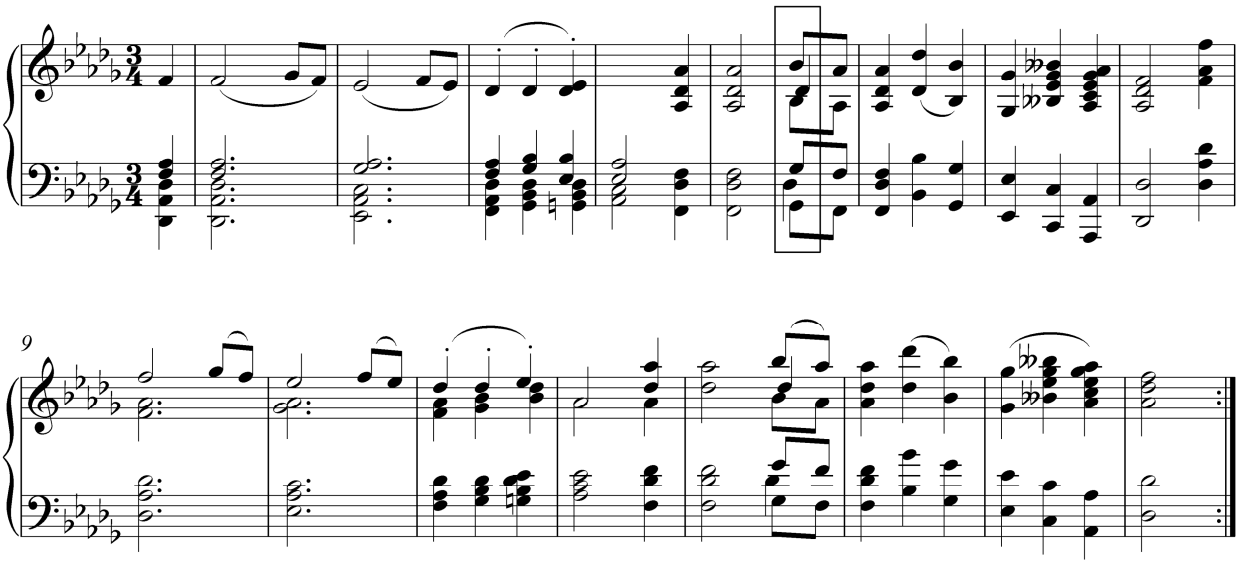
Exercise RRR.01c
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from Schubert (Moment Musical No. 6, Op. 94, D. 780, mm. 78-93) a pre-dominant?



[Answer: yes. Response if correct: “Correct!” Response if incorrect: “Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)”]

[Follow-up question:]
What type of pre-dominant chord is it? (Provide your answer as a Roman numeral.)
[Answer: V^6_5/V. Response if correct: “Correct!” Response if incorrect: “Incorrect. Try again.”]

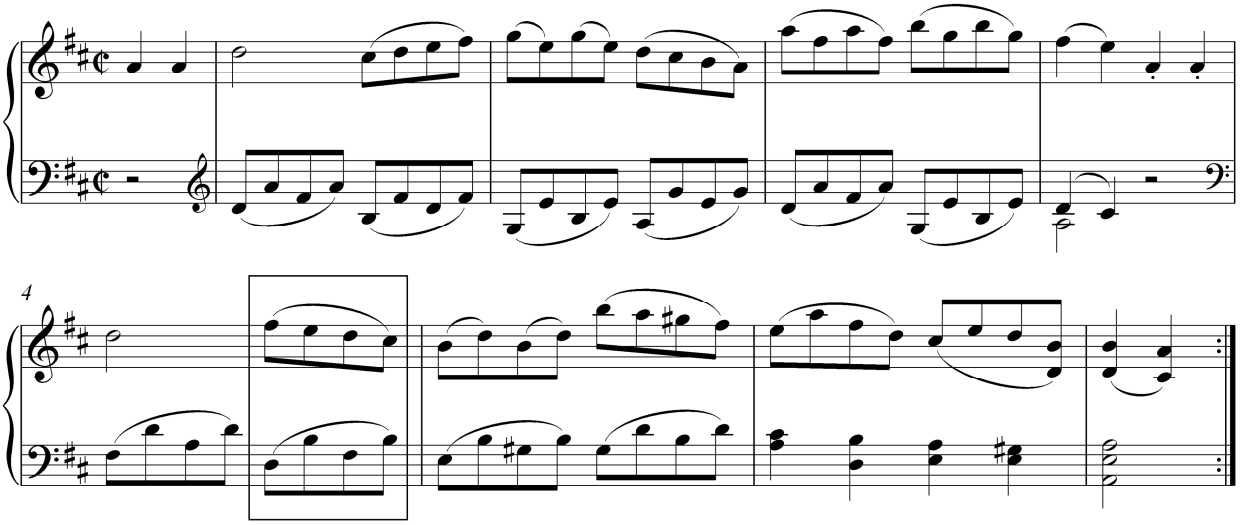
Exercise RRR.01d
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from Schubert (Moment Musical No. 6, Op. 94, D. 780, mm. 78-93) a pre-dominant?



[Answer: no. Response if correct: "Correct! The boxed chord is a neighboring auxiliary sonority." Response if incorrect: "Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)"]

Exercise RRR.01e
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from Mozart (Theme with Variations from Piano Sonata in D Major, K. 284, mm. 1-8) a pre-dominant?

(Note: The harmony in question is a pivot chord which initiates a modulation to the key of A major. Analyze the second half of m. 4 through the cadence in m. 8 as A major.)

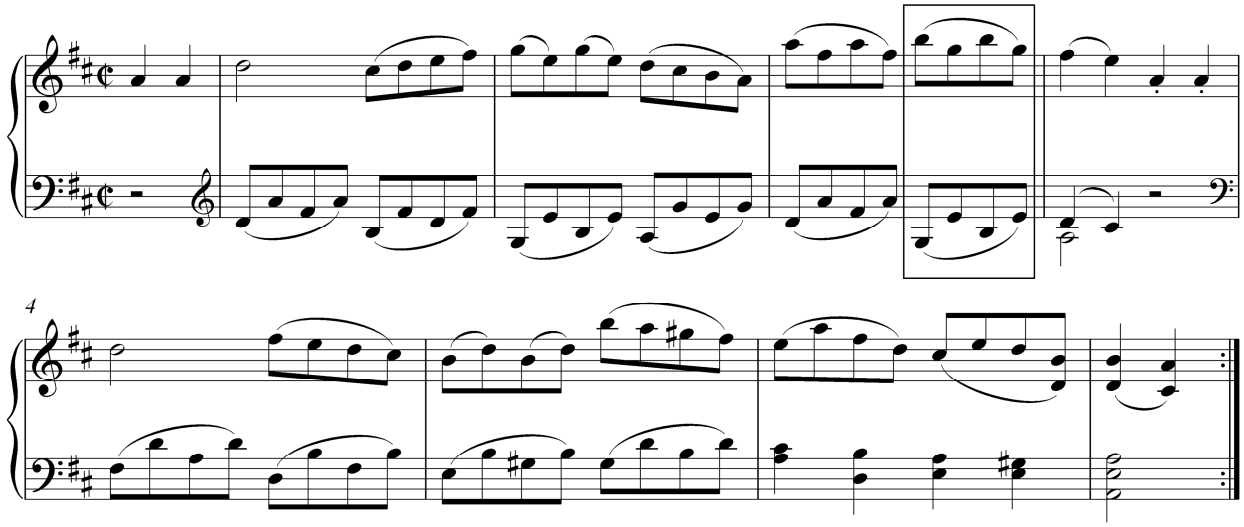


[Answer: yes. Response if correct: "Correct!" Response if incorrect: "Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)"]

[Follow-up question:]
What type of pre-dominant chord is it? (Provide your answer as a Roman numeral.)
[Answer: ii^6. Response if correct: "Correct! Although the chord is initially heard as vi^6 in D major, the subsequent modulation to A major causes us to retroactively reinterpret the chord as ii^6. As discussed in the lesson on modulation (Lesson 11), this sort of pivot chord (vi^6 becoming ii^6) is a very common

method for modulating to the dominant." Response if incorrect: "Incorrect. Remember to analyze the chord in the key of A major."]

Exercise RRR.01f
Is the boxed chord in the following excerpt from Mozart (Theme with Variations from Piano Sonata in D Major, K. 284, mm. 1-8) a pre-dominant?



[Answer: yes. Response if correct: "Correct!" Response if incorrect: "Incorrect. (Hint: What harmony follows the boxed chord?)"]

[Follow-up question:]
What type of pre-dominant chord is it? (Provide your answer as a Roman numeral.)
[Answer: ii^6. Response if correct: "Correct!" Response if incorrect: "Incorrect. Try again."]

Conclusion:

One of the most common ways that composers expand the I-V-I progression is through the use of pre-dominant harmonies. These chords mediate between the initial tonic and the dominant, thereby building dramatic tension. Chords built on $\hat{2}$ or $\hat{4}$ are particularly useful in this regard since they contain active scalar elements that lead smoothly to the pitches of the dominant.

Diatonic ii (ii^o) and IV (iv) chords (and their respective seventh-chord versions) are the most common pre-dominant harmonies. Neapolitan chords and can be thought of as chromatic alterations of ii or IV chords. They also contain $\hat{4}$ and retain pre-dominant function.

Other pre-dominants use $\sharp\hat{4}$ instead of $\hat{4}$. Chords applied to the dominant—V/V, V^7/V, vii^o/V, vii^{o7}/V—are derived by chromatically altering ii or IV chords, but have a noticeably different effect than their diatonic forebears. Augmented sixths go one step further by adding further chromaticism with $\flat\hat{6}$. Augmented-sixths as pre-dominants are similar to tonicizing applied chords (V/V, V^7/V, vii^o/V, vii^{o7}/V) in that they contain $\sharp\hat{4}$, but differ from them in that they are not agents of tonicization. Augmented-sixths highlight the arrival of the dominant but do not tonicize it.