

Augmented 6th Chords

Introduction: a historical account of how A6 chords were born

Behold, the diatonic Phrygian cadence:

i^6 V_3^4 i iv^6 V

Composers would often slip in a chromatic passing tone between the root of iv and V :

i^6 V_3^4 i iv^6 V

Eventually they figured out they could just use \uparrow^4 and leave out diatonic $\hat{4}$ altogether. An A6 chord was born, here an Italian. Why do you think it's called an A6 chord?

i^6 V_3^4 i It^6 V

Summary of function: There are three augmented 6th chords (Italian, German, and French).

In Harmony 3 you'll learn other uses, but for now...

- only in minor
- only as predominant
- only with $\hat{6}$ in the bass - always use a "Phrygian bass line" ($\hat{6} \rightarrow \hat{5}$)



Begin learning the *shape* of each chord:

You can think of each A6 chord three ways:

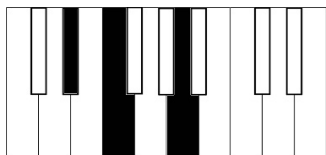
- 1) Each A6 chord is like a diatonic predominant chord you already know from Harmony 1, but with the addition of raised $\hat{4}$.
- 2) Which scale degrees make up the chord (including raised $\hat{4}$)
- 3) Its shape!

Each one of these is a brand new shape of chord you've not encountered until now!

They aren't any triad (or 7th chord) shape you've seen.

There are three different A6 chords, each a different and brand new shape to get a *feel* for.

here's the Italian (in a minor):



You probably literally know how a triad *feels* - your body knows it on some intuitive level because it is encoded in different kinds of memory and senses: your hands physically feel it on your instrument of choice; your eyes and mind know its shape as you look at it on your instrument and look at the snowman written on the page; your ears know it as a color of sound.

It's pretty remarkable because you probably could call up the shape of diminished, minor, major, and augmented triads given any root, whether C, or A, or G \flat - anything at all. Then, you probably can mostly do the same with the shapes of first and second inversions for all these qualities too! Furthermore, the same is probably true for the different qualities of 7th chords, adding one more snowball on your snowman, and inversions of these 7th chords.

So, here's the point: in addition to knowing how to spell the A6 chords on paper, it is a very good idea to actually **start acquiring a *feeling* for each new shape by playing them on your air piano, air clarinet, or air instrument of choice, and let your mind marinate about that shape.** Yes, only use them for now with $\hat{6}$ in the bass and those are not the root position A6 chords. **However, why not *know the root position shape* just as you learned the feel of a root position triad first.** (and then invert)

On the following pages, each root position A6 shape is shown on a keyboard (in 'a minor', but you will get to know these as shapes that can be transposed anywhere).

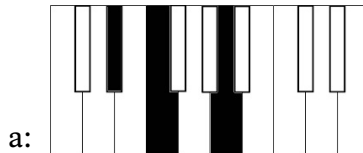
The Italian



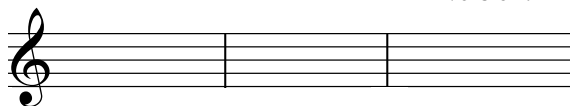
Think of it as iv but with raised $\hat{4}$ (the A6 chord with only three notes)

...and as $\uparrow \hat{4} \hat{6} \hat{1}$

...and as this shape...



And, again, only use it with $\hat{6}$ in the bass; thus the analysis is first inversion:



a: iv

It

It⁶

d# is the root,
just like d was the root of iv

Remember this shape, because the German and French each contain this and add something. In other words, every A6 chord contains $\uparrow \hat{4}, \hat{6},$ and $\hat{1}$.

Summary of voice leading and doubling for all A6 chords

Doubling: all must be complete. German and French are 4-note chords; in the Italian, double $\hat{1}$

As usual, if your compass is polished and you know your basic voice leading, doubling rules follow intuitively. Why would you only double $\hat{1}$ in the Italian?

Voice leading: (resolving to V)

The official story goes that you are supposed to resolve the interval of the A6 in stepwise contrary motion. But you don't actually need to think of the A6 specifically to resolve these correctly. Instead...



Again, all must be complete.

When moving to V, simply *move everyone by step or keep a common tone - no leaps allowed*.

If you simply follow that, the A6 interval will resolve correctly anyway, and you'll naturally figure out the rest.

(approaching)

Bass will often approach from above ($\hat{1} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$), often with a passing chord to fill in the gap ($\hat{1} - \hat{7} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$)



Just don't leap up into $\uparrow\hat{4}$.

Ex: use the It^6 as your predominant:

i It^6 V i

You can have A6 chords in a string of predominants.

If doing a chromatic switcheroo from regular iv to It^6 , the It^6 must be in a weak position:

i iv It^6 V

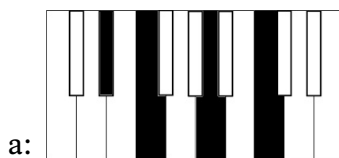
The German



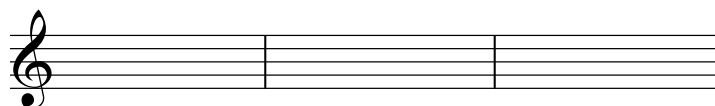
Think of it as iv^7 but with raised $\hat{4}$

...and as $It + \hat{3}$

...and as this shape...



And, again, only use it with $\hat{6}$
in the bass; thus the analysis is
first inversion:



a: iv^7

Ger^7

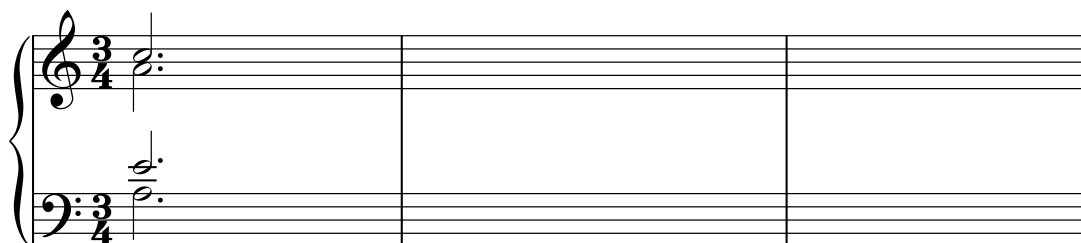
Ger^6_5

Interesting thing relevant to Harmony 3:

What's the shape look similar to? _____

But it's spelled differently, and functions differently.

Ex: use the Ger^6_5 as your predominant:



i

Ger^6_5

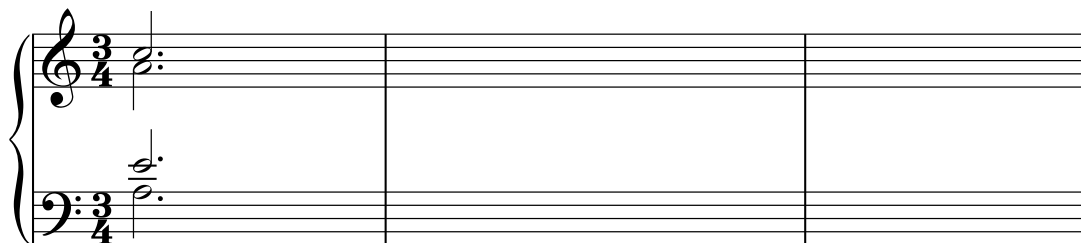
V

i

What's the inevitable problem above of going from the Ger^6_5 to V?

In the literature, you will sometimes see these //5ths occurring, often disguised in texture, or just leaving a voice out to avoid it.

But for you....always resolve the Ger^6_5 through the cad. 6_4



i

Ger^6_5

$V^6_4 \text{ — } ^5_3$

i

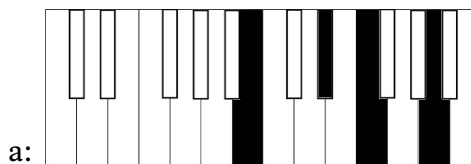
The French



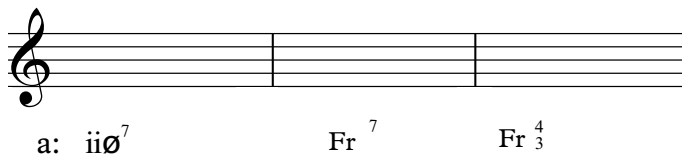
Think of it as $ii\emptyset^7$ but with raised $\hat{4}$

...and as $It + \hat{2}$

...and as this shape...



And, again, only use it with $\hat{6}$
in the bass; thus the analysis is
second inversion:



The French is the only A6 with a common tone when moving to V, which you'll want to keep in the same voice.

It is made up of two tritones like vii^{o7} , but if you (once again) merely keep the common tone and move by step, you don't have to think about the tritones as with vii^{o7} .

Ex: use the Fr^4_3 as your predominant:

i Fr^4_3 V i



Note: for the French and the German (which are altered 7th chords), you might be wondering whether you must prepare the 7th when possible. You actually do not have to for A6 chords.

I cannot provide a sufficient reason why not, but it was not practiced as a necessity. (note: above, in the French, we said the best voice leading is to keep the common tone when moving *to* V, but common tone preparation isn't necessary when preceding from i.)