



Romantic Chromaticisms

This handout gives loads of examples of chromatic chord progressions in Romantic music. You can steal and adapt anything you like. It is also important to LISTEN to the examples. Once you are used to looking for chromatic stuff, you could look in any Brahms, Chopin, Schubert, Dvorak etc. and see what you can find.

Altered chord in circles of fifths

This is an easy way to spice up your harmony. Take any part of a circle of fifths and mess around with the thirds, fifths and sevenths to change the type of seventh chord.

Chopin Mazurka op. 17/1 (bar 37-40)



III⁷	VI⁷	II⁷	V⁷	I
(flat 5	(raised 3 rd	(raised 3 rd		
½ dim 7)	dom 7 th)	dom 7th)		



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Chromatically slipping seventh chords

This is a development on the familiar chain of 7-6 suspensions:

Romantic composers do the same trick but instead of using descending first inversion triads decorated by suspensions, they use descending diminished seventh chords (here in second inversion) decorated by suspensions:

There are two main interesting possibilities here:

- It allows you to modulate by resolving one of the diminished sevenths to a triad
- You can mess about with different types of seventh (diminished, half diminished and dominant).

Picking up on the last point, here we have diminished sevenths as the basic chord and the suspensions make half diminished sevenths, but a small change to the last chord in this example (A sharp turned into A natural) makes the last chord a dominant seventh instead:



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In this example, Chopin begins a series of chromatically slipping sevenths at the end of the first line. He uses a real mixture of dominant, half diminished and diminished sevenths.

Chopin op. 6 no. 1 (bar 5)

1^{er} livre de quatre mazurkas. Fr. Chopin, Op. 6.

M. M. ♩ = 132.

p *cresc.* *decresc.* *legato* *rubato* *cresc.*

In this example, Chopin has a series of descending sevenths. The spelling here is a bit stranger but the effect is similar!

Chopin Prelude in E (bar 13)

p *stretto*



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'Omnibus' progression

This is a chromatic progression based on the augmented sixth that is good for creating chromatic tension that just keeps on going!

The omnibus progression is a three chord progression that is then repeated at different transpositions to create a chromatic scale. In the example below, note the following:

- The key feature is the contrary chromatic motion, here in the outer parts
- The first interval is an augmented sixth and creates a German augmented sixth chord
- The second interval resolves as expected onto an octave. The chord is effectively IC
- The third interval is a second and is harmonised with a dominant seventh in its last inversion, creating a new tension
- This three-chord progression is then transposed so that the rising chromatic scale continues
- You can see this exact progression in a real example in Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* (for the rest, see Example D5 in *Dramatic Episodes* on Moodle)

The image displays two musical examples. The top example is a simplified piano accompaniment showing the 'Omnibus' progression in G major. It consists of six chords: Eb Aug. 6th, G min 2nd inv., Eb Dom. 7th, Gb Aug. 6th, Bb min 2nd inv., and Gb Dom. 7th. The bottom example is a more complex piano score from Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, showing the same progression transposed and repeated. Arrows point from the chord labels in the top example to the corresponding chords in the bottom example. The bottom example includes dynamic markings like *ff* and various articulation marks.



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The progression can also be sequenced so that the continuous chromatic line is in the bass, as in the example below:

The musical notation shows a chromatic bass line with the following chords:

Chord	Inversion
E \flat	Aug. 6th
G min	2nd inv.
E \flat	Dom. 7th
C	Aug. 6th
E min	2nd inv.
C	Dom. 7th



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Chromatic diversions

Romantic composers go on all sorts of weird and wonderful chromatic diversions. Max Reger once wrote that “any chord can follow any other chord”. It all depends on voice-leading and context. Look at this really weird modulation from C major via an F# chord to B major. Brahms makes it work by repeating a melodic figure that links the two chords.

Brahms Quartet No. 3, movement 1 (Letter E)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Brahms' Quartet No. 3, movement 1 (Letter E). The first system shows a melodic figure in the first violin part that is repeated in the second system. The second system is marked 'molto dolce sempre'.



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There are two really good examples of modulation in Schubert's Symphony No. 5. In this first example, we are in F major, but it diverts to D flat major:

The musical score illustrates a modulation from F major to D flat major. The score is arranged in seven staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass, and Piano. The music is in 3/4 time. The key signature changes from one flat (F major) to two flats (D flat major) during the piece. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *ff*. The modulation is achieved through chromaticism, with the key signature changing from one flat to two flats.



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In the development, Schubert keeps repeating the progression I – vi – ii – V first in Db major then Bb minor (he uses an interrupted cadence on Bb to get here) then in Gb major and then Eb minor. All from a start in F major!

The musical score consists of eight staves. The first four staves are for the vocal line, and the last four are for the piano accompaniment. The score is divided into two systems by a vertical bar line. The first system contains four measures, and the second system contains four measures. The key signature changes from F major to Db major, then to Bb minor, then to Gb major, and finally to Eb minor. The score features various chromaticisms, including chromatic scales and chromatic lines. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *ppp* (pianississimo). The piano part includes a prominent chromatic scale in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.



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Musical score for the first system of 'Romantic Chromaticisms'. It consists of seven staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a melodic line and a chromatic descending line. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with a similar chromatic descending line. The third staff is a bass line with a chromatic descending line. The fourth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The fifth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The sixth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The seventh staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4.

Musical score for the second system of 'Romantic Chromaticisms'. It consists of seven staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a melodic line and a chromatic descending line. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with a similar chromatic descending line. The third staff is a bass line with a chromatic descending line. The fourth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The fifth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The sixth staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The seventh staff is a grand staff with a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4.