

Chromatic Chords

Diminished Seventh

Diminished sevenths create tension that can either be used briefly to emphasize the arrival on the dominant or another chord. Alternatively, diminished seventh chords can be extended to create more dramatic tension by delaying or even denying their resolution.

A diminished seventh is a diminished triad with a diminished seventh (this creates a stack of minor thirds). They usually resolve to a major or minor chord a semitone up from their root note. The diminished seventh is a diatonic chord when it is **vii⁷** in a minor key (resolving to **I** as in the first example here in C minor). However, like the secondary dominant, it is often 'borrowed' to resolve to other diatonic chords, most often **V**. The second example shows **vii⁷** of **V** (i.e. of A) in D minor.

1. 

2. 

The next part of this handout explains how to create a diminished seventh and there are some examples over the page that you can use as influences to help you use these chords effectively. Choose an example that best matches the circumstances in your own piece.

How to create a diminished seventh (step-by-step instructions)

1. decide on the chord to which your diminished seventh will resolve
in this example an E major chord (V of A major)
 2. write down the note below the root of this chord
in this example D – one note below E
 3. then add a sharp or a natural if necessary so that it is a **semitone** below the note it will resolve to
in this example add a sharp to the D
 4. add three thirds above the root of your diminished seventh
in this example, F#, A, C#
 5. add appropriate accidentals to ensure that each third is a **minor** third
in this example, you need to change the C# to a C natural
- the bottom note of the diminished seventh must resolve up a semitone and the top note must resolve down, as in the example (i.e. if a violin had the C natural it should follow it with a B)



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Examples

1. Mozart – Sonata in C (K. 545)

The F# diminished seventh resolves to **V** (G) here, but the resolution is delayed by **IC** in the second bar. It still works, however, as it has the same root as **V**.



C: F# dim. 7th IC (I)
 (vi^o7 of g)

2. Mozart – Sonata in Bb K. 333 (in the anthology, p. 255)

Here an F# diminished seventh in the fourth full bar resolves to a G minor chord (chord **ii** in F) and a B diminished seventh in the second bar of the second line resolves to **IC** (which resolves to the C dominant chord implied by the diminished seventh).



3. Haydn – Symphony No. 26 bars 69 and 71 (in anthology, p. 36)

Haydn uses G# diminished sevenths in bars 69 and 71 to emphasize the arrival on the dominant minor before D minor finally returns on the next page.

[cont. over]

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4. Beethoven – Storm from Beethoven VI

In this much more dramatic example, Beethoven uses diminished sevenths to create the rumbling tension of a storm. In the second line a D diminished seventh pulls the music up from its starting point of Db up onto Eb. In the third line an E diminished seventh pulls it up again onto F minor. This is Liszt's piano transcription of the orchestral original – see the Dramatic Episodes in the Narrative Music section of Moodle for the full score.

Donner, Sturm. 31
Allegro, Mtr. $\text{♩} = 80$.
Violin
Hornb. et Basson, Flaut.
Basson.
Flaut.
Orchestra
Ped. *pp*
Ped. *cres.*
Ped. *crescendo*
Ped. *molto*

5. Brahms, Symphony No. 4, fourth movement, bars 33-38

Allegro energico e passionato
Orch.
f
f
D# dim. 7 to I
D# dim. 7
A# dim. 7 to V

The first two diminished sevenths here are diatonic and resolve onto the tonic of E minor. The third (A#) raises the tension by pushing up onto the dominant (B)