

# The Basics of Diatonic Harmony

CHAPTER

6

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

### Minor Dominants

Perhaps the most important feature of tonal music is the movement of the leading tone to the tonic. Since the minor dominant does not contain a leading tone, it is not possible to use it to create this crucial function. Therefore, the minor dominant is not commonly found in tonal music.

However, minor dominants are found in music that is not tonal. The most typical style of music in which minor dominants occur is *modal* music. To review the concept of *modes*, see the Looking Ahead section on page 37 of the textbook. Modes were the precursors of scales and were widely used as the basis of both sacred and secular music in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Modes are most easily thought of as natural-note or white-key patterns starting on any letter of the musical alphabet.

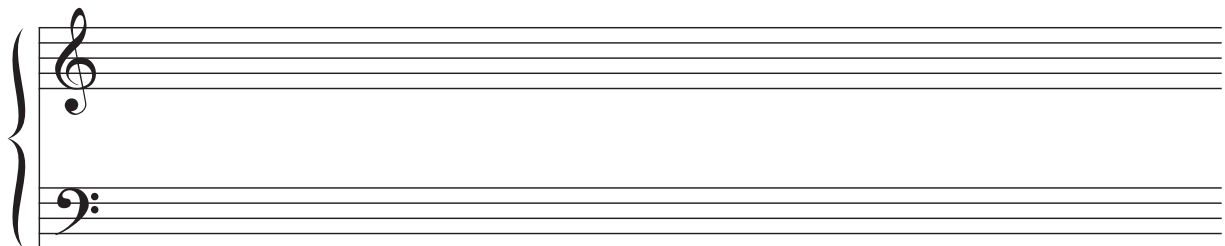
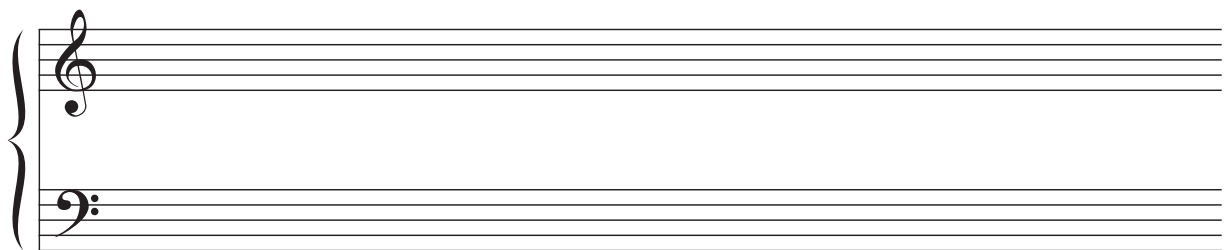
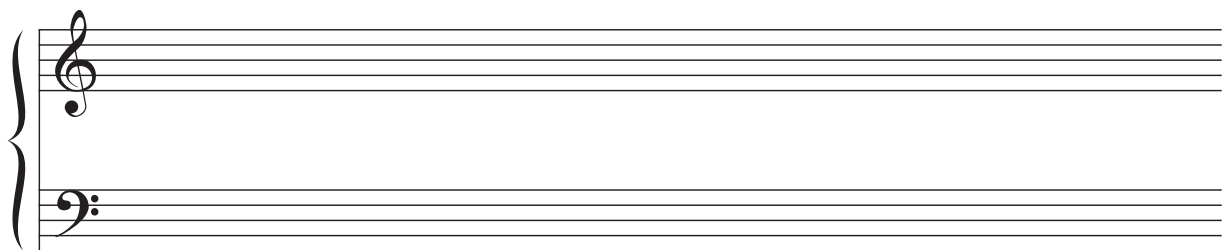
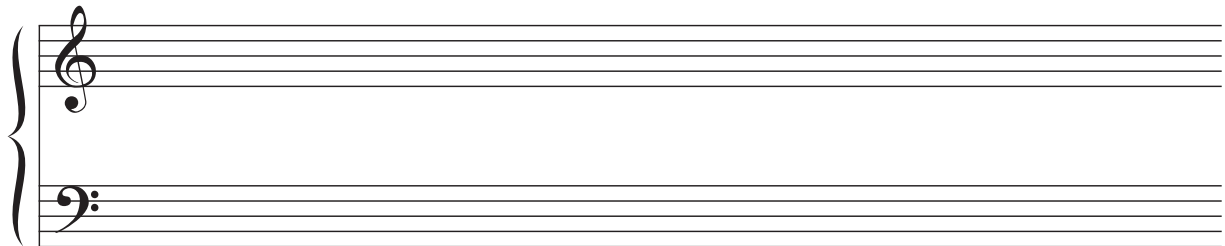
Although the concept of harmony did not develop until the end of the Renaissance period, chords resulted from the interplay of lines of melody that were sung or played simultaneously. In several of the modes, the chord that occurs on the fifth note of the pattern is a minor triad. In tonal language (which is not truly appropriate for this style of music), this chord could be interpreted as a minor dominant. It is important to be aware of the style period of the music that you analyze, because in early music, you might expect to find this chord when certain modes are used. Conversely, if you analyze an unfamiliar piece of music and discover a minor dominant, you should consider the possibility that the work was written in the Renaissance period (or earlier).

Even though Johann Sebastian Bach is considered one of the greatest composers of the Baroque period, as a young man he was trained in the traditions of modal music. Therefore, it is possible to find minor dominants in his music, even though he was a master of tonal music.

The modes experienced renewed popularity in early 20th-century art music. Compositions by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, such as the Fifth Symphony, prominently feature the use of modes. In addition, French Impressionism as found in the music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel (see Chapter 34) demonstrates extensive use of modes.

## Compose Music in Major Keys

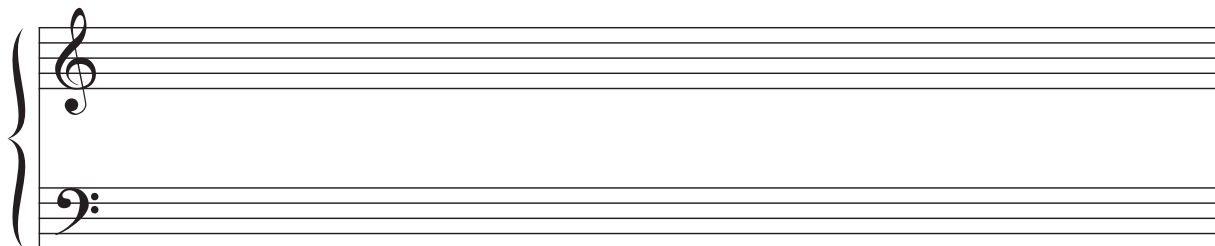
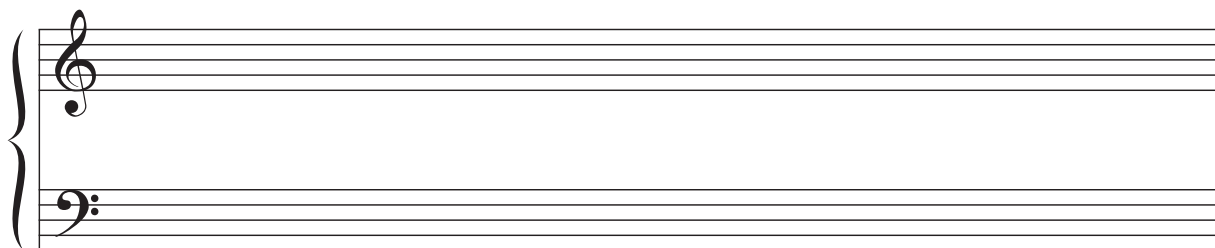
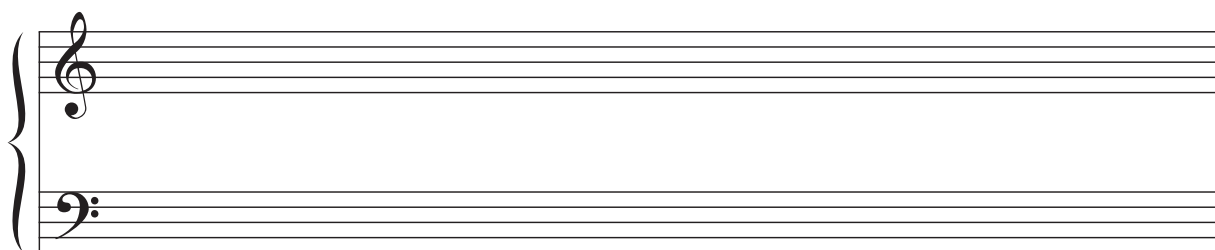
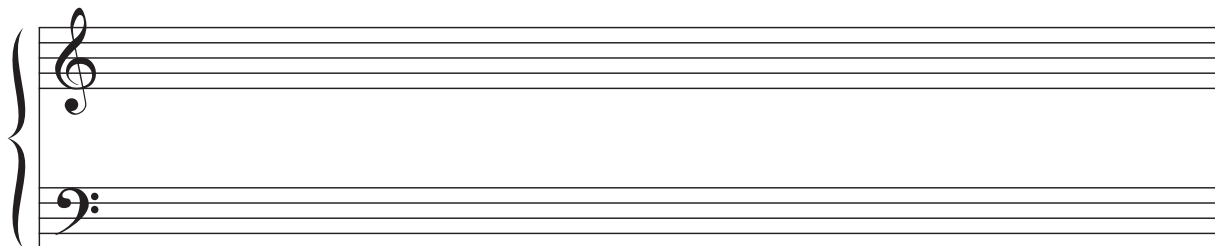
Using the key signature and time signature of your choice, compose several melodies in major keys. Use only the notes of the diatonic major scale that you have chosen. For assistance writing melodies, see the Book-Level resource chapter titled “Melody and Form.” Write your melodies on the treble staff of the grand staves that follow. Your melodies should be 2-4 measures in length.



Return to each melody that you wrote. Experiment at the piano, playing the melody with your right hand. As you play, try to harmonize the melodic line with the diatonic triads of your chosen key, using your left hand to play the chords. Generally, you should start and end with the tonic triad. The dominant triad should precede the tonic triad at the cadence. Try to use chords in the circle of fifths sequence, following one of the major patterns from Table 13 on page 99.

## Compose Music in Minor Keys

Using the key signature and time signature of your choice, compose several melodies in minor keys. Use either harmonic or melodic minor. In general, when the melody ascends, you should use the raised scale degrees and when it descends, use the lowered ones. Write your melodies on the treble staff of the grand staves that follow. Your melodies should be 2-4 measures in length.



Return to each melody that you wrote. Experiment at the piano, playing the melody with your right hand. As you play, try to harmonize the melodic line with the diatonic triads of the minor scale, using your left hand to play the chords. Generally, you should start and end with the tonic triad. The dominant triad should precede the tonic triad at the cadence. Try to use chords in the circle of fifths sequence, following one of the minor patterns from Table 13 on page 99.