

The Neapolitan Chord (Phrygian II)

Definition

The Neapolitan chord is a major triad built on the lowered second scale degree (b2). It is indicated in analysis as N.

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is in E major and shows a major triad (E-G-B) and a Neapolitan chord (N) which is a major triad built on the lowered second degree (F-A-C). The second staff is in F major and shows a major triad (F-A-C) and a Neapolitan chord (N) which is a major triad built on the lowered second degree (E-G-B).

E major or minor: N F Major or minor: N

It is often found in minor mode but may also be found in major. It most often appears in first inversion, so is most often referred to as the Neapolitan (N) sixth (for $\frac{6}{3}$).

It can be thought of as a borrowed chord; borrowed from Phrygian mode on the same tonic as the key.

Phrygian mode

The image shows a musical staff in G major with the Phrygian mode scale: G-A-Bb-C-D-E-F-G. The Neapolitan chord (N) is shown as a major triad built on the lowered second degree (F-A-C). The Roman numeral II is written below the staff.

II

Function:

The Neapolitan chord is a pre-dominant chord (i.e., it leads to a dominant function chord).

It may also serve as a pivot chord in modulations where it is the N in one key and a major triad in the other key.

Resolution:

Being a pre-dominant chord, the N proceeds to a dominant functioning chord.

Direct to V:

d minor: N6 V7 i

To $V\left(\begin{smallmatrix} 6 & 5 \\ 4 & 3 \end{smallmatrix}\right)$:

D minor: N6 $V\left(\begin{smallmatrix} 6 & 5 \\ 4 & 3 \end{smallmatrix}\right)$ i

Less often, it resolves to other chords as part of a chromatic line.
It may be followed by a dominant of the dominant ($vii^{\circ}7/V$ or $V7/V$).

Part-Writing:

- Always double the third of the chord, since it is the unaltered tone.
- Try to use the chord in first inversion, so an unaltered tone is in the bass voice.
- Resolve the $b2$ down by step (in the direction of its inflection).

If resolving to the Cadential 6/4:

- Keep the root of the Neapolitan higher than the fifth of the chord in order to avoid parallel fifths.

A musical score in D minor, 3/4 time, showing three measures. The first measure is N6 (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The second measure is V(6-5) (F#4, A4, Bb4, C5). The third measure is i (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The bass line consists of quarter notes: F3, A3, Bb3, C4.

D minor: N6 V $\begin{pmatrix} 6 - 5 \\ 4 - 3 \end{pmatrix}$ i

If resolving directly to the V:

- It is permitted to write a diminished 3rd interval between the b2 and the 7 in the key; it is best to put this motion in an outer voice.

A musical score in d minor, 2/4 time, showing three measures. The first measure is N6 (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The second measure is V7 (F#4, A4, Bb4, C5). The third measure is i (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The bass line consists of quarter notes: F3, A3, Bb3, C4.

d minor: N6 V7 i

Be careful to avoid the A2 interval when approaching or leaving this chord. The N is usually preceded by a VI, IV, or II.

A musical score in d minor, 3/4 time, showing four measures. The first measure is iv (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The second measure is N6 (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The third measure is V (F#4, A4, Bb4, C5). The fourth measure is i (F4, A4, Bb4, C5). The bass line consists of quarter notes: F3, A3, Bb3, C4.

d minor: iv N6 V i

It may also be preceded by a secondary dominant (V/N = bVI).