

The Semantic Evolution of Chromatic Mediants: A Baroque Origin

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Narrative labels given to chromatic mediants (CMs) in published research:

Period	Genre and connotations
Modern times	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Film music: "Magic", events impossible in the real world (Heine 2018); "the fantastical" (Murphy 2013); "Genius" (Lehman 2013)Pop music (Forrest 2017): "dreams, memories, and hallucinations", "depression, shock, and the effects of drug use", "the supernatural"
19 th –20 th centuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Operas, songs, and instrumental works: "sublime, supernatural, or exotic phenomena" (Cohn 2012a); "moments of high drama", the "uncanny" (Cohn 2012b)Instrumental works by Tomášek (Taruskin 2010): "music trance"Italian operas by Rossini (Rothstein 2008): "outbursts of surprise, frustration, or rage", "dramatic contrast"
16 th –17 th centuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Madrigals and operas by Gesualdo and Monteverdi (Cohn 2004): "death's affliction", "magical actions and animate dead"

Research question:

How did CMs acquire their semantic significance by convention (rather than by homology [Cohn 2004, 2012a, 2012b])?

The Baroque origin:

1. CMs arise frequently in Baroque music as a result of combining Phrygian cadences and bifocal tonality, both of which were conventional compositional practices of the time.

Possible sequels to a Phrygian cadence:


(a) Resolution to the minor tonic

vi: iv⁶ V || i

(b) Resolution to the relative major (bifocal tonality)

vi: iv⁶ V || (III)
I: I

Example 1. J.S. Bach, *Brandenburg Concerto no. 3*, Movements II and III



Violins

Violas


Cellos

Adagio **Allegro**

e: iv⁶ V G: I

CM (B+ and G+)

Example 2. Corelli, *Trio Sonata op. 4 no. 1*, Corrente and Allemanda



Violins

Violone & Harpsichord

[Adagio] **Presto**

a: $\frac{5}{4}$ # i v⁶ iv⁶ V C: I

CM (E+ and C+)

2. The respective semantic imports of the two devices—Phrygian mode and its inflections connoting death and the bifocal transition to major modality representing positive emotional valence—are synthesized in bifocal transitions of Baroque vocal music to establish the distinct connotation of death-to-life transcendence, as well as other potentially relatable conceptions.

Example 3. Handel, *Messiah*, Part III, no. 46

CM (E+ and C+)

a: i [vii^o₃] IV⁶ [V₃] V C: I

Text: Since by man came death, _____ by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

Example 4. Domenico Scarlatti, *Stabat Mater*, mm. 178–85

b: VII⁴₂ v⁵₃ ——— 6 ——— 5
4 ——— 3

CM (F#+ and D+)

Text: ...dum emisit spiritum. _____ Eja Mater, fons amoris...
(...while he forsook his spirit. _____) (Ah Mother, fount of love...)

Example 5. J.S. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, Part II, nos. 62 and 63a

The image shows a musical score for SATB and B.C. (Basso Continuo). The SATB part consists of four staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with notes and rests. The B.C. part is a single staff with notes and figured bass notation: 6 5, 6, 8 7, 6 5, #, 6, 6. Below the B.C. staff is a Roman numeral analysis: a: i V C: I⁶. A bracket underlines the V and C: I⁶ chords, with the label 'CM (E+ and C+)' below it.

Text: ...kraft deiner Angst und Pein! Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel zerriß
in zwei Stück von obenan bis unten aus.
(...as empowered by your fear and pain!) (And behold, the veil in the Temple torn
into two pieces from top to bottom.)

3. The use of semantically endowed CMs is then dissociated from their formal origin and becomes an independent musical signifier fitting multiple syntactic contexts.

Different formal schemas of CMs:

(i) Formulation of CM by bifocal transition
(The Baroque origin)

vi: iv⁶ V || (III)
I: I

A bracket underlines the V and (III) chords, with the label 'CM' below it.

(ii) Formulation of CM as phrase prefix

I: V/vi I

An arrow labeled '(initiates)' points from V/vi to I. A bracket underlines the V/vi and I chords, with the label 'CM' below it.

(iii) Formulation of CM in predominant function

I: I (PD) bVI Ger₅⁶ V I

A bracket underlines the I and bVI chords, with the label 'CM' below it.

(iv) Formulation of CM as pivot chord

I: I bVI

New key: ?

A bracket underlines the I and bVI chords, with the label 'CM' below it.

(v) Formulation of CM by deceptive resolution
(Example in Rothstein [2008])

I: V (decep.) bIII

bIII: I

A bracket underlines the V and bIII chords, with the label 'CM' below it.

Example 6. Salieri, *Requiem, Dies irae*, mm. 30–39 [Type (ii)]

g: $V_4^6 \text{---} \frac{5}{3}$ i V/v _____
 F: V/vi _____ I
 CM (A+ and F+)

Text: ...*cuncta stricte discussurus.* _____ *Tuba mirum spargens sonum*
 (...strictly judges all beings _____) (The trumpet, scattering a marvelous sound)

Example 7. Salieri, *Requiem, Offertory*, mm. 79–86 [Type (iii)]

Ab: I V_5^6 I bVI Ger $\frac{6}{5}$ V I
 CM (Ab+ and Fb+)

Text: *fac eas, Domine,* _____ *de morte transire ad vitam.* _____
 (grant them, Lord,) (to pass from death to life.)

Example 8. Mozart, *Magic Flute, Act I finale* [Type (iv)]

D: I bVI
 g: III V_3^4 $\frac{6}{5}$ i

Text: [*Pamina retten ist mir Pflicht.*] *Zurück! Zurück? Zurück? So wag ich hier mein Glück!*
 [Saving Pamina is my duty.] Turn back! Turn back? Turn back? Then I shall try my luck here!

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