

# LISTENING TO CLASSIC ROCK MUSIC

## MIXING DIFFERENT KEYS

One way that pop music accesses different and characteristic chords is to use a slightly different version (a mode) of the major scale. That allowed for the very important **I-bVII-IV-I** progression (using the *myxolydian* mode).

### Mode Mixing...

Another device that pop music utilizes, which was also used by Romantic-era composers like Beethoven and Chopin, is the mixture of parallel major and minor scales (from the same tonic) together. This is sometimes referred to as "mode-mixture", combining parallel major and minor keys.

The typical C-major scale is this:

C D E F G A B C ..with the harmonized chords: CM Dm Em FM GM Am B-dim

The typical C-minor scale is this (the different notes are bold):

C D **Eb** F G **Ab Bb** C ..with the harmonized chords: Cm D-dim EbM Fm Gm Abm BbM

Normally if a song is in C-major, it will mainly utilize its harmonized chords (listed above). These chords will all "fit-together" into the song because the chords are derived only from the seven notes of the scale.

If one of the notes from the C-minor scale is thrown into the mix, it will change the quality of one or more of the chords and more importantly will change the flow of the music. This "foreign" note and/or chord will stand out because it's not a part of the original set of major scale notes.

Just because something sticks out, doesn't make it a problem. When this mixing is done carefully (not overdone), it's like adding just the right amount of spice to a recipe; the flavor will be enhanced, but not out of balance.

When a "dash" of C-minor is added to a C-major song, it can give a passage a mild emphasis, or a different color, so to speak. Since we sometimes (simplistically) associate major keys with happy emotions and minor keys with sad ones, this is a way to add a dash of melancholy to the mainly happy state of the song. This is how songs that are ostensibly in major keys can emote a twinge of sadness—an effect felt in many Beatles songs.

Sometimes the reverse process is applied: a song that is initially in a minor key will momentarily use notes from the parallel major key. This will give the passage an expected moment of "brightness" as the parallel major key is briefly visited.

The Beatles: *She Loves You, Lady Madonna, You Won't see Me, Nowhere Man, In My Life, Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds, A Day In The Life, Here Comes The Sun, The End*

The Kinks: *Lola*

Led Zeppelin: *The Rain Song, Ten Years Gone*

Pink Floyd: *Echoes* (the reverse), *Remember A Day* (the reverse)

Traffic: *Low Spark Of High-Heeled Boys* (the reverse)

The Turtles: *Happy Together*

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### Secondary Dominants...

Another commonly used effect is to use a single chord in a passage that normally belongs in another key—specifically the dominant (**V**) of another key.

A typical chord progression in C-major could be: CM-Dm-GM-CM

It could be changed to: CM-**DM**-GM-CM

The DM chord (in bold) doesn't fit into the key of C-major (because the DM chord has an F# in it). The DM chord can be more commonly thought of as the dominant (**V**) in the key of G (the root of the chord that comes next in the progression).

This is a way of bringing an emphasis to the DM chord (because it doesn't fit into the key of C-major) and of bringing an emphasis to the GM chord because it follows the Dm chord very comfortably. The DM is acting like the dominant of G, so we call the DM chord a "secondary dominant". The primary dominant is still G, because the key (C-major) has not changed.

The Beach Boys: *Be True To Your School, I Get Around*

The Beatles: *Something, Here Comes The Sun, Golden Slumbers, All You Need Is Love, I want To Tell You, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*