Tissimo

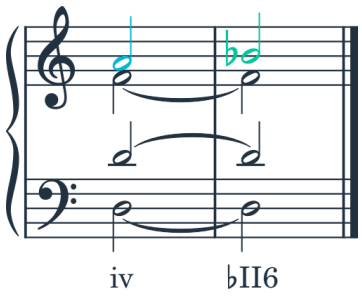
LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/neapolitan-sixth

The Neapolitan sixth

In a minor key, one major chord has a dark, dramatic color all its own: the chord on the **lowered 2nd degree**, **B♭ major** in A minor. It usually has its 3rd in the bass, so it is called the **Neapolitan sixth**, after the opera composers of 18th-century Naples.

ONE NOTE AWAY FROM IV

Play **iv** in A minor: D–F–A, with the bass D sung twice. Now raise the **A** a half step to **B♭**. Stacked in thirds, the new notes read B♭–D–F: a B♭ major chord on the lowered 2nd degree, **♭II**. Its 3rd, D, is in the bass, so the figure is 6 (Handout 388): **♭II6**, often written **N6**. The *Moonlight Sonata* uses it in bar 3 and again in bar 50 (Handout 378).



Only the soprano moves: **A** → **B♭**

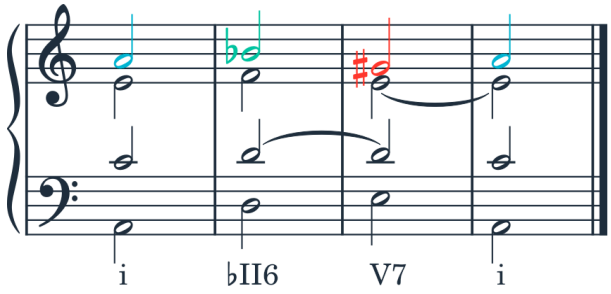
Double the bass
In four parts, sing the **D** twice, never the B♭: the B♭ has somewhere to go.

The same move in any key
C minor: iv is F–A♭–C, so N6 is **F–A♭–D♭**. Major keys borrow it from the minor (Handout 384).

WHERE IT GOES: DOWN TO V

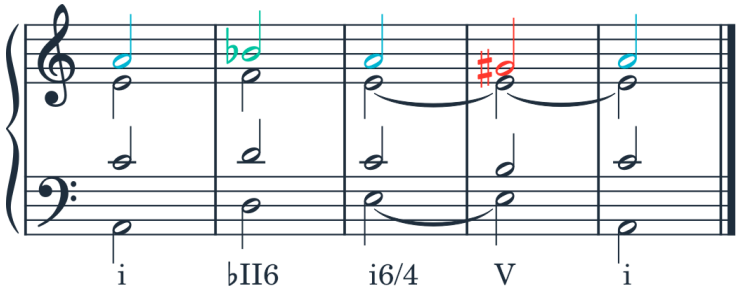
Like iv, **♭II6** leads to **V**, and its **B♭** falls toward the leading tone. There are two classic ways down.

Straight to V7



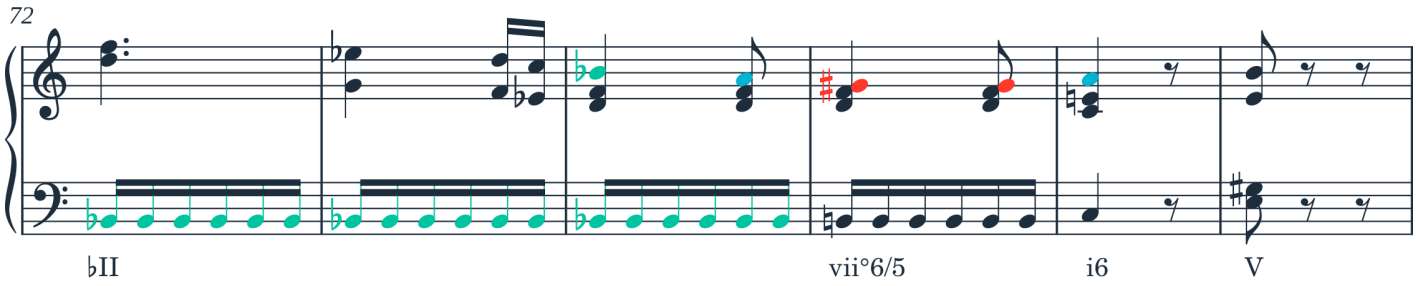
B♭ drops two half steps to **G♯** (a diminished 3rd). The D holds and becomes the 7th of V7. That V7 leaves out its 5th: a B in another voice right after the B♭ would clash (a **cross relation**).

Through the cadential 6/4



The cadential 6/4 of Handout 383 sits in between, so the top line moves by half steps: **B♭** – **A** – **G♯** – **A**.

IN FÜR ELISE



In the dark C episode (bars 61–82, Handout 342) the drumming low A climbs a half step to **B♭** while the right hand holds D–F: **B♭ major**, **♭II**. Beethoven keeps B♭ itself in the bass, so this Neapolitan is in root position; bar 73's E♭ chord only visits. Then follow the top note: **B♭** – **A** in bar 74, **G♯** over **vii°6/5**, then **A** over **i6**, while the bass keeps climbing to B and C. After **V**, the arpeggios of bar 78 land on **i**.

Try it Play both examples (treble staff in the right hand, bass staff in the left) and sing each top line: A–B♭–G♯–A, then A–B♭–A–G♯–A. Then play **i – ♭II6 – V7 – i** in C minor, where N6 is F–A♭–D♭. More practice: Exercise 73.

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