

6 The Twilight of the Tonal System

Example 1-4 provides a further illustration of chromatic mediant, and several other things besides. Chord roots, inversions, and qualities are indicated below the sample. The progression contains two circle-of-5ths progressions (D-G and C-f) and three chromatic mediant (C-Ab, G-Bb, and Bb-Gb). It also contains two *tritone relationships* (Ab-D and Gb-C), a root movement commonly found in earlier music in only a few progressions (IV-vii° in major, VI-ii° in minor, and N6-V). A listener could interpret Example 1-4 as a IV6-N6-V-I6 progression in G, followed by an identical progression in F, ending on a minor tonic. Except for the last chord, the excerpt illustrates a *real sequence*, a sequence in which the pattern is transposed exactly, as opposed to a diatonic sequence, where only the notes of a single diatonic scale are used, thus reproducing the pattern only approximately. A real sequence has the effect of quickly throwing the music out of one key and into another, even if only for the duration of a few chords. Real sequences contribute a good deal to the *brief tonicizations* that are typical of much chromatic harmony.

EXAMPLE 1-4 Wagner: *Siegfried* (1871), Act II, Scene I

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Durch Ver - tra - ges Treu - e Ru - nen band er dich Bb - sen mir nicht:

p *f*

C⁶ Ab⁶ D G⁶ Bb⁶ Gb⁶ C f

A real sequence begins Example 1-5 (mm. 1-4), using only dominant 7th chords (the last one enharmonically spelled) from the keys of Db, Bb, E, and Db again. The root movements involve two chromatic mediant relationships (Ab7-F7 and B7-Ab7) and one tritone (F7-B7). Notice that in each case the dominant 7th chords share exactly two pitch classes. This is true only of dominant 7ths whose roots are separated by a minor 3rd or a tritone. Example 1-5 illustrates two more characteristics of chromatic harmony—*suspended tonality* and *enharmonicism*. The first term is used to refer to passages that are tonally ambiguous. The dominant 7th chords in Example 1-5 do little to establish any key, because they are both unexpected and unresolved, and the Ab7-C-Ab progression that ends the excerpt is of little help. Presumably Liszt had the tonality of Ab in mind, since the piece ends similarly to mm. 5-6. Play through the example, and see what you think. The enharmonicism involves the chord in m. 4. We hear all of the chords in mm. 1-4 as dominant 7th chords, but the chord in m. 4 is spelled as a German augmented-6th chord in C, resolving to a 16