

Creating Modulations, Seques, Performing Pop Symbols Dr. Barry Liesch

Goals: ability to segue & provide flowing, non-distracting transitions; to intensify and add excitement thru modulation; to modulate within and between pieces; to create short as well as longer, meditative segues; to communicate effectively through pop symbols; to be able to teach other how to do these skills.

When Modulating, Think of Scale Degrees--Not Pop Symbols

We'll use roman numeral chords because they are more efficient than pop symbols, and they denote relationships within the key. For example, a chord sequence (below) is shown with pop symbols on line one and roman numerals on line two. The numerals indicate the scale degree on which the chord is based. Upper case refers to major chords, lower case minor chords. The advantage of Roman Numerals becomes clear when the same sequence of chords is transposed from C to E major.

Example 1

C Dm G C E F#m B E

I ii V I I ii V I

Obviously, for the chord progression I ii V I, a single set of numerals will serve for any key, whereas a new set of pop symbols is required for each new key. Moreover, the numerals tell us the chord function is the same for both keys whereas pop symbols don't. That's an important distinction. Finally, the V chord is crucial for modulations, So when we talk about a V chord, we will mean a chord based on the fifth degree of the scale.

Modulations Up a Whole Step Using V within the same Song

Modulations up a whole step occur frequently and can be used to stimulate congregational response and add excitement. Sometimes it's preferable to change keys (modulate) directly without any connecting chords between keys.

Example 2 (last four measures and first two measures of God is So Good)

C F C G C D Em

God is so good he's so good to me. I praise His Name

In other situations, though, a V chord in the new key is really needed to smooth out and stabilize the process. So, let's write a pop symbol (A) as our pivot chord.

Example 3

C F C G C A D Em
I D:V I ii

Notice that the A chord above (m4) is a V chord of the new key of D major.

On a keyboard, the realization could look like this (below).

Example 4

Dm C/G G⁷ C A D Em
V⁷ I D:V I ii

Also, the V chord can be substituted with a Vsus chord. Guitarists like them and frequently use them. Notice (below) the sus chord has a fourth (D) instead of a third (C#).

Example 5

Dm C/G G⁷ C Asus D Em
V⁷ I D:Vsus I ii

Here is the A sus chord the way guitarists usually play it:

Asus

Keyboardists can add a 7th and a 9th to the chord to give it more color (m1), then revoice the notes (m2,3). No clashes will result. The Vsus9 chord yields a smoother modulation and sounds more modern. Learn to play the two voicings of the Vsus9 - I progression (m2, 3) in all the keys.

Asus Asus D Asus D
Vsus⁹ Vsus⁹ I Vsus⁹ I

Another way to smooth out a modulation is to employ good voice leading. In the example below, the soprano part moves smoothly from C to C# to D.

Example 6

Example 6 shows a musical score for the phrase "He's so good to me I praise His Name". The score is in C major and modulates to D major. The soprano line has lyrics "He's so good to me" and "I praise His Name". The chords above the staff are C/G, Gsus, C, A⁷, D, and E_m. The chords below the staff are V_{sus9}, I, D:V⁷, I, and ii.

Note: If you have guitar players on your team, understand they prefer keys with sharps (open strings), and not a lot of flats. Whole step modulations from C to D, D to E, and G to A, therefore, are easy ones for them.

Modulations up a 1/2 step using V within Songs

Modulations up a 1/2 step are very similar to whole step modulations. In modulating from C to D (above), we employed a semi-tone movement in the soprano (C, C#, D). But in modulating from C to D_b, consider retaining the common tone (C) which belongs to both the C major and A_b⁷ chords. The movement then is C, C, D_b. Common tones help smooth modulations, so look for them and use them to advantage.

Example 7

Example 7 shows a musical score for the phrase "He's so good to me I praise His Name". The score is in C major and modulates to D_b major. The soprano line has lyrics "He's so good to me" and "I praise His Name". The chords above the staff are C/G, Gsus, C, A_b⁷, D_b, and E_b^m. The chords below the staff are V_{sus9}, I, D_b:V⁷, I, and ii.

Of course, we could use the V_{sus9} chord like we did in the modulation from C to D. Now, though, we will need a A_bsus 9, which is V of the new key of D_b.

Example 8

He's so good to me I praise His Name

C/G G_{sus} C $A_{b_{sus}}$ D_b $E_{b_{m}}$

V_{sus9} I $D_b:V_{sus9}$ I ii

We can add more color by adding a 13th (F) to the A_b chord.

Example 9

He's so good to me I praise His Name

C/G G_{sus} C A_b^{13} D_b $E_{b_{m}}$

V_{sus9} I $D_b:V_{13}$ I ii

Note on Guitars: Again, guitarists will be more comfortable modulating a 1/2 up from E major (4 sharps) to F major (1 flat), for example, than from C to D_b (because D_b has 5 flats). So, C to D_b is not a modulation to employ if you have novice guitar players. C to D major would be a safer choice.

Note on Hymns: If you are modulating within a hymn, start in a key lower than that published in the hymn book and then modulate up to the published key (otherwise the singing range may become too high for your congregation). This is a particularly good practise during early morning services, for when the congregation's voice is not warmed up yet, high notes are particularly daunting.

Modulations using ii7 V I of the New Key

Adding a ii or a ii7 before the V of the new key often smooths the modulation and contributes some harmonic sophistication:

E_m E_m^7

ii ii^7

Now let's apply the ii V I chord progression to a modulation from C to D.

Example 10

Chord symbols: C/G Gsus C Em A D Em

Lyrics: He's so good to me I praise His Name

Roman numeral analysis: Vsus9 I D:ii V I ii

Let's do the same thing, but now with a ii7 and a Vsus9 chord (below).

Example 11

Chord symbols: C/G Gsus C Em7 Asus D Em

Lyrics: He's so good to me I praise His Name

Roman numeral analysis: Vsus9 I D:ii7 Vsus9 I ii

We can create a descending line that yields a different voicing for the Em7 (below).

Example 12

Chord symbols: C/G Gsus C Em7 Asus D Em

Lyrics: He's so good to me I praise His Name

Roman numeral analysis: Vsus9 I D:ii7 Vsus9 I ii

Practise! To confirm that you understand these concepts, modulate a whole step from D to E major, from F to G major, and from G to A major, trying all the possibilities I've suggested. Also, try a number of 1/2 step modulations using the ideas expressed. Modulate from E to F major, or even from G to Ab major, or A to Bb major. Start with *God is so Good*, then test the ideas with some other song like *Amazing Grace*.

Longer, Reflective Modulations

You can insert some chords *before* coming to the ii V I modulation to D major. In the example below the vi and IV chords extend the modulation. This extra time can be helpful to giving worshipers time to reflect .

Example 13

The musical score for Example 13 shows a modulation from C major to D major. The vocal line starts in C major and moves to D major. The piano accompaniment features chords: C, Am, F², Em⁷, and Asus, leading to the final D major chord. Roman numerals below the staff indicate the chord functions: V, I, vi, IV, D:ii⁷, V^{sus9}, and I.

The modulation above, in fact, could have been much longer. Try to capture the mood of the piece and what the Spirit is doing during these extended improvisatory moments.

Modulating to the Other Keys

When modulating to keys other than up a 1/2 or whole step, the Vsus9 will result in a smoother modulation than a V7 chord. Also, look for common tones between chords & highlight them in the melody voice. The Vsus will always work, and usually a ii Vsus will work too. Below, we're modulating from C to G major.

Example 14

The musical score for Example 14 shows a modulation from C major to G major. The vocal line starts in C major and moves to G major. The piano accompaniment features chords: G^{sus}, C, Am⁷, D^{sus}, C²/E, D²/F[#], G, and Am. Roman numerals below the staff indicate the chord functions: V, I, G:ii⁷, V^{sus9}, IV⁶, V⁶, I, and ii.

Note that the C major and Aminor chords share the common note of C. I highlighted the note C, putting it in the soprano part. Notice, the bass part walks up (D, E, F[#], G)--a secure way to signal the leader when to enter in the new key.

Use with Discretion → More Modulation & Free Flowing Praise Resources

Use modulations sparingly--only when the words in your lyric or the particular feeling in the sequence of songs calls for it. Otherwise, it will lose its effectiveness. At worshipinfo.com see the *The New Worship* (Baker Books, 2001) which explains in detail how to organize and lead free-flowing praise effectively, and *The New Worship Musician Software*, a free, downloadable book (about 150 pages) on modulation.

