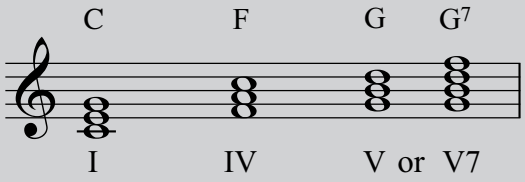
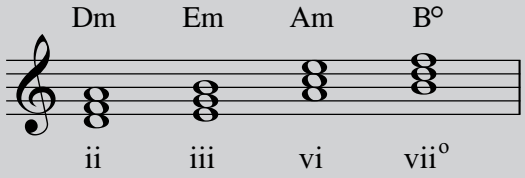
Using Secondary Chords in Harmonization

To make harmony more interesting, it is possible to break away from using just chords I, IV and V7 and start using some of the secondary triads from the key.

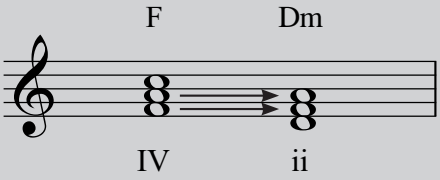
C major primary chords:



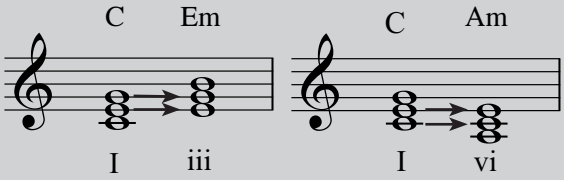
C major secondary chords:



Chord ii can be used in place of chord IV, as it shares two of the same notes.

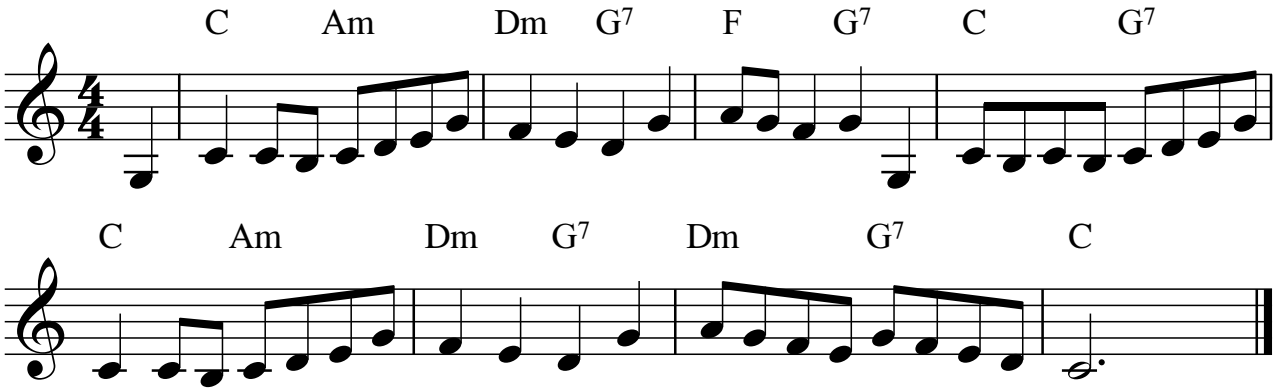


Likewise, chord iii or chord vi can be substituted for chord I, as they both contain common notes.



Secondary chords are just that - secondary. Therefore they should never take over completely from the primary chords, and most pieces will still start on chord I, and end with a V-I or V7-I perfect cadence.

Circle the chord symbols of the secondary chords in the tune below:



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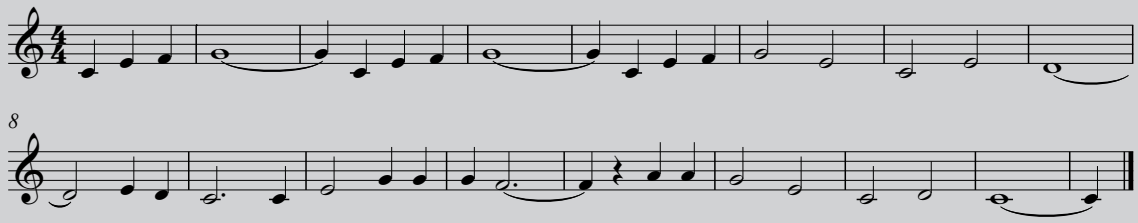
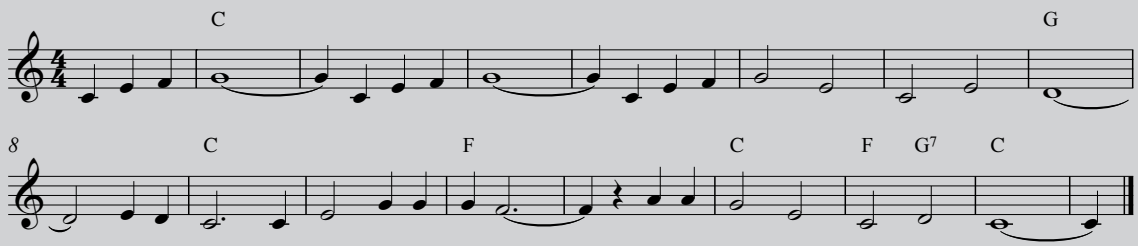
Using Secondary Chords - A Worked Example

Here is an example of how secondary chords can be subsituted for primary chords to vary or add interest to a piece of music.

When the Saints Go Marching In



Simplest harmonization - primary chords only:

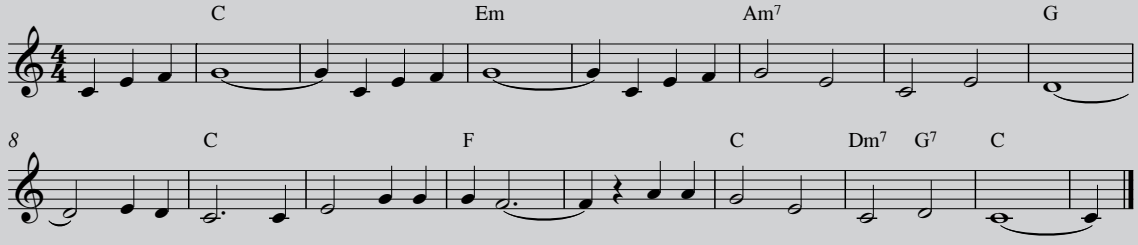


Substitutions:

Chord ii7 (Dm7) in this example can be substituted for the chord IV (F) in the second last bar. This makes one of the strongest possible progressions of ii7-V7-I.

To add more variety, chords iii and vi can be employed in bars 3 and 5 respectively. This does change the character of the tune. Play the chords on the piano so you can hear the effect of these substitutions.

When the Saints Go Marching In



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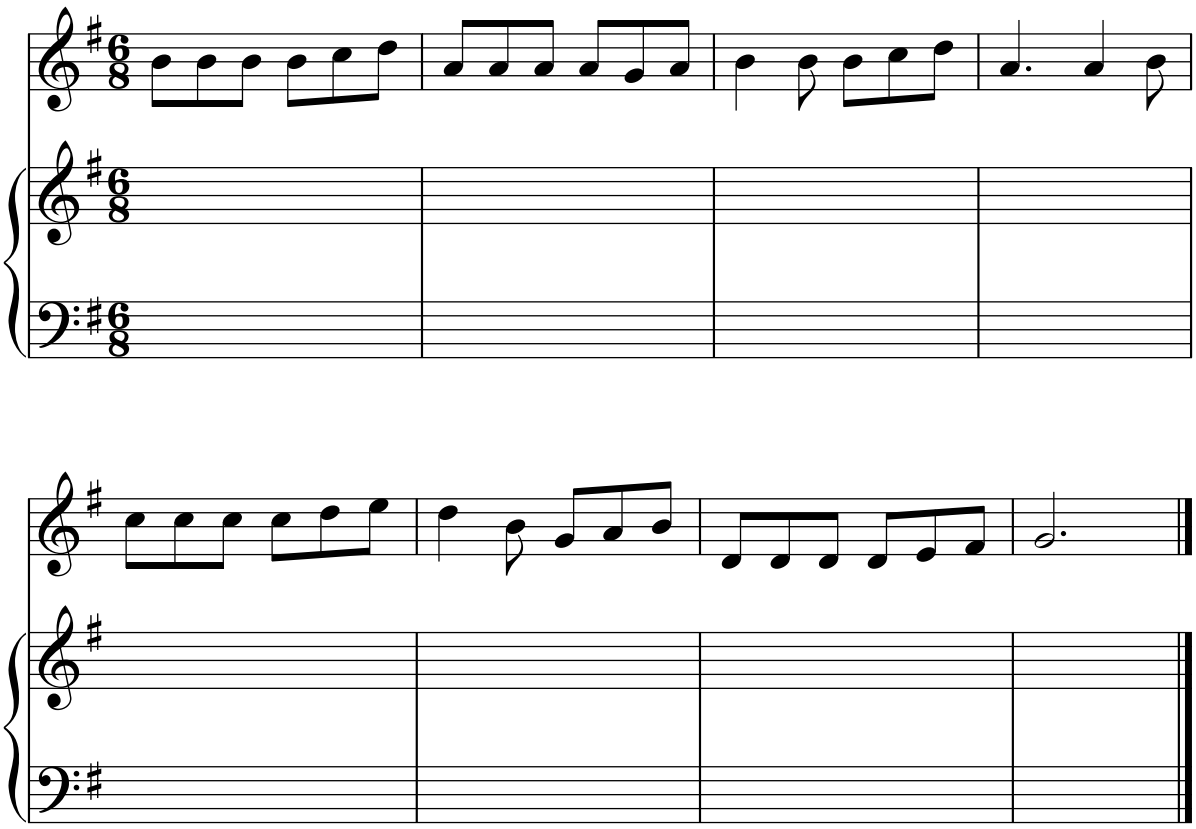
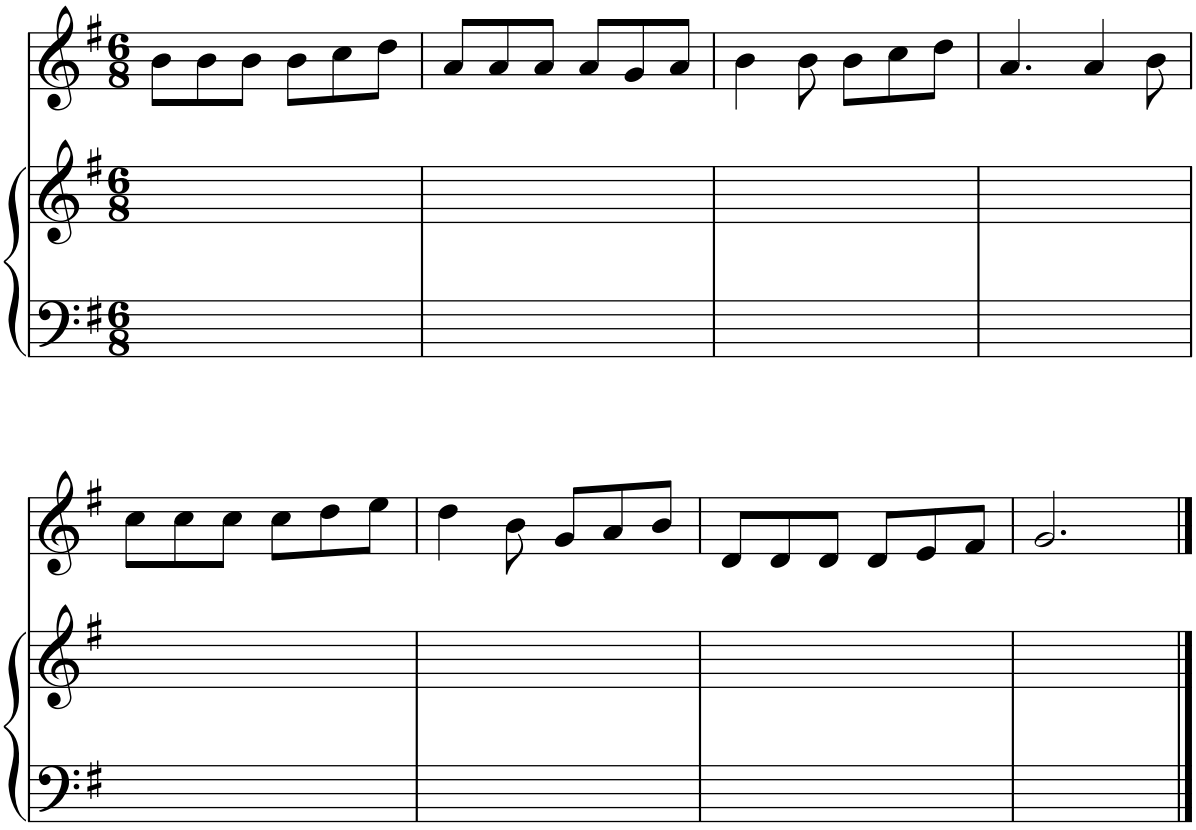
Using Secondary Chords

Harmonize this traditional tune ("Hey Diddle Diddle") using just primary chords, with one chord per measure:



Harmonize the same tune again using up to two chords per bar, incorporating some secondary chords:



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