The Fundamentals of Composition
Melody & Theme Writing
Lecture Review Handout | **4.2 Love Themes**

Summary & Terms

Chapter 4.2 focuses on composing love themes, looking specifically at melodic form, pitch content, harmonic content, and the relationship between melody and harmony.

Common Features of Love Themes

1. Slow tempo (quarter note = approx. 35-76 bpm)
2. Simple or Compound Meters, but no irregular or mixed meters
3. Use either major or minor keys (with a clear tonal center). Love themes in major keys feature extended tertian chords and/or suspended harmonies. Love themes in minor keys tend to feature diatonic harmonies.
4. Pickup notes before the first melodic downbeat.
5. Begin theme with a striking / important interval (4^{th} or larger)
6. Begin with a presentation phrase
7. Conclude with a continuation phrase that features fragmentation and an increase in tension
8. Harmonic and Melodic **tension and resolution** (see tension and stability chords on page 2)
9. Chromaticism in both melody and harmony
10. Ornamental melodic writing, wide dynamics, idiomatic instrumental writing

Harmony

Major / Minor Keys are common

Duality (Stability vs. Tension)

Functional Chromaticism

Extended Tertian Harmony

Melody

Pickup Notes & Large Interval Leap

Simple Rhythms with Ornamentation

Balance (Ascending vs. Descending Motion)

Mostly Stepwise Motion

Phrase Structure

Sentence Structure / Compound Periods are common

Introduction is common

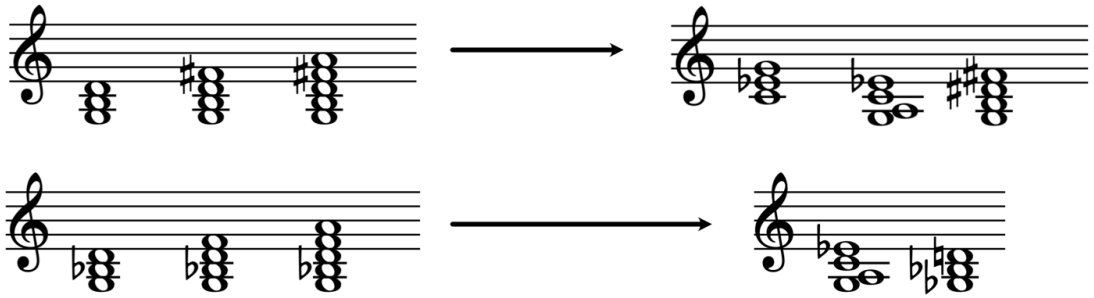
Binary / Ternary is common (short B Theme)

Stable Chord

major / minor tonic triads and extended chords

Tension Chord

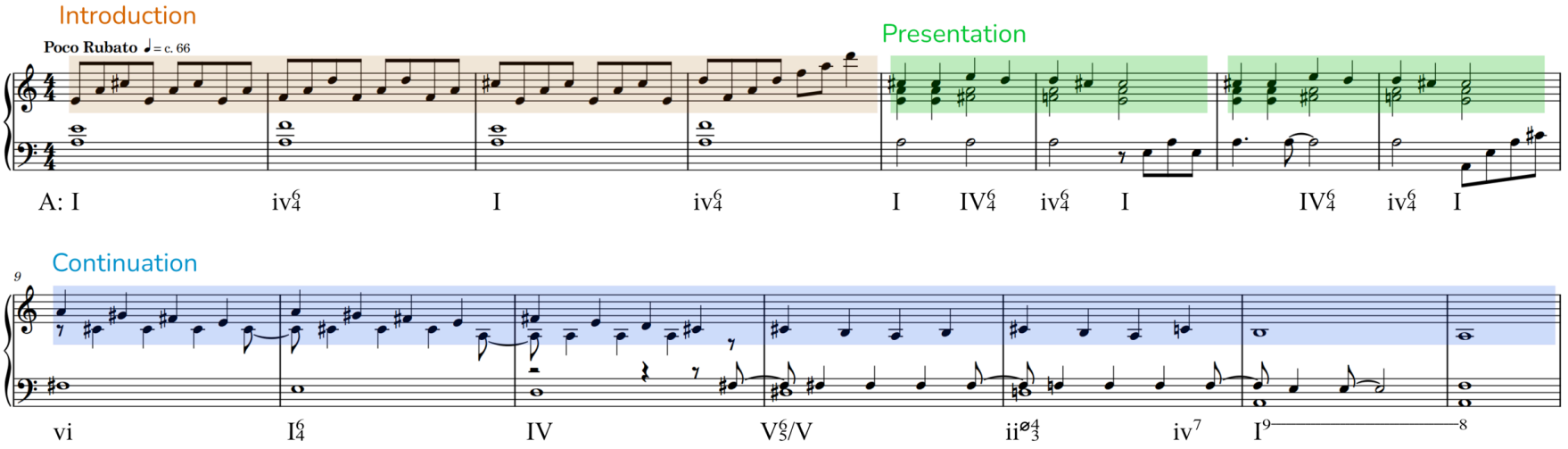
iv, $ii^{\varnothing 7}$, aug. chords, chromatic chords



One of the most prominent features of the common Love Theme is the alternation of stability and tension, often in the form of a stable chord and a tension chord. In this example (top of page 3) from the film "Love Actually" (Craig Armstrong), the presentation phrase alternates stable chord (tonic) and tension chord (minor iv) with a major IV chord (passing chord) in between. The presentation phrase is harmonically static, as it stays close to the tonic, while the continuation phrase is full of more harmonic motion.

In the following example (from "The Shape of Water"), Alexandre Desplat similarly alternates stable (CM^7) and tension (D half dim^7) chords, throughout the entirety of the A theme. The shorter B theme moves away from the tonic (to the subdominant), but also alternates between two chords (FM and Am).

"Glasgow Love Theme" from *Love Actually* | Craig Armstrong



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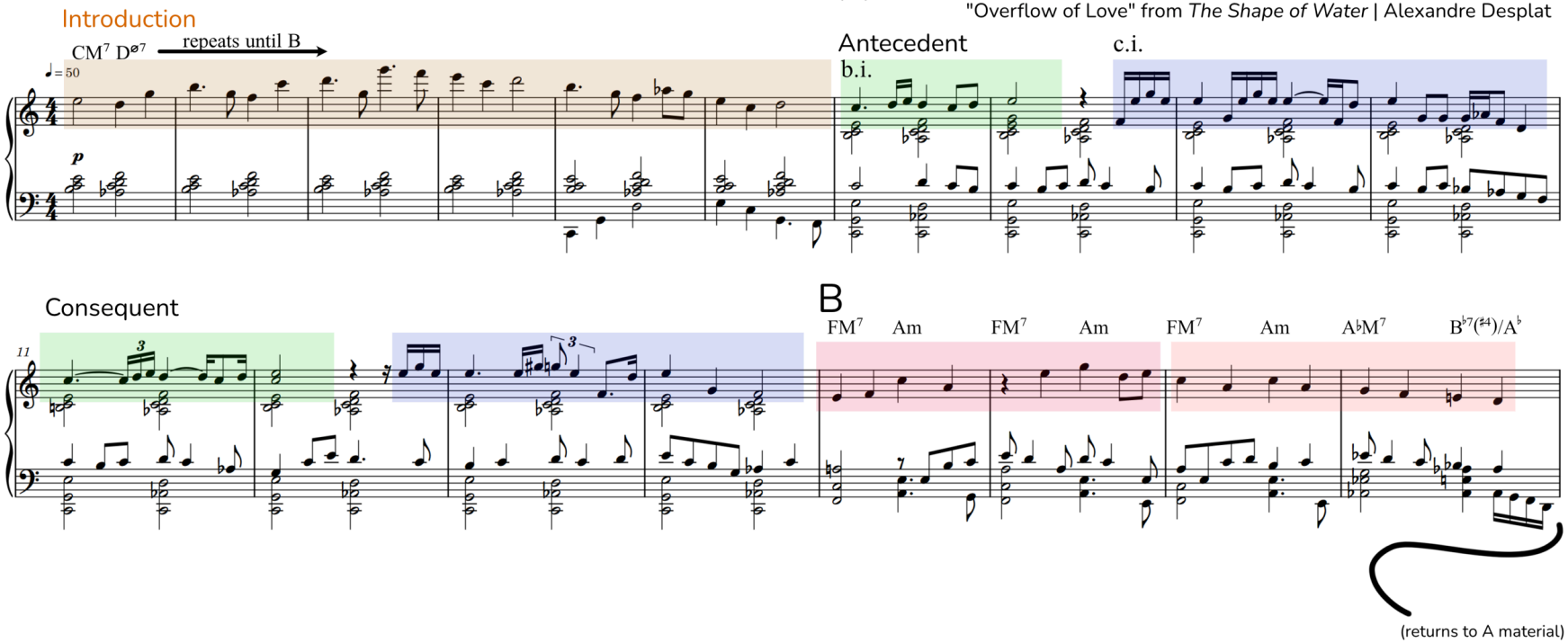
"Overflow of Love" from *The Shape of Water* | Alexandre Desplat