

Creating Transitions in Worship at the Piano by Mark Hayes

In both contemporary and traditional worship settings occasionally there is a time when the pianist may need to provide background music to link congregational songs together or underscore a prayer, scripture or spoken words by one of the platform speakers. Keeping the music flowing creates an atmosphere that allows the worshiper to keep his or her heart open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Music is inherently emotional. We typically receive music more through our emotions than our intellects. Creating a mood of joy or reverence through an instrumental underscore supports this concept. Here are some tips on creating worship transitions.

1. Less is more. Fewer notes promote a more worshipful atmosphere during an underscore. If you are playing very floridly or rhythmically, you may draw attention to yourself. You want to be “felt” more than “heard” by the worshiper. It’s not about you. It’s about connecting people with God’s spirit.
2. If you are bridging two congregational songs, establish the tempo and key signature of the new song at the end of your transition, especially if the song is upbeat or rhythmic.
3. If you are not underscoring spoken words, keep the transition short. 4 – 8 measures should be adequate time to move to a new key or new tempo. Create transitions that use an even number of measures. We are used to hearing 4 bar transitions instead of 5 measures in our pop music culture. There’s just something odd about a 5-measure intro. It may confuse your band or congregation.
4. If you are playing with a band, make sure someone is the “leader” when it comes to establishing a new tempo. It’s OK for one person to do that, such as the pianist or guitarist. Not everyone in the band needs to play on the intro, especially if they can’t play well together or there is little time to rehearse. Discuss this in rehearsal, before the service. Have a plan!
5. If you are playing a transition that underscores spoken word, more than likely it will be an undetermined number of measures. You are improvising. When you need to finish or move to the next song, prepare the listener and other praise leaders or musicians by playing a IV/V chord or some dominant chord that signals it’s time for the next song. If you are playing something more meditative and slow, play that chord as a whole note to create space and signal that you are done improvising. Make eye contact with the main singer or leader at this point. Discuss this in advance at rehearsal.
6. If you are modulating to a new key as part of a transition, work this out in advance and write yourself a little chord chart if necessary. If other

musicians are playing with you, give them a chart, however modest it may be, and rehearse it before the service. Specify what the time signature is and how many beats per chord, even if you are just writing down letters and numbers.

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Two Quick Keyboard Transitions

by Mark Hayes

Transition 1 is made up of two different chords, so you are always just one chord away from being able to cadence and start the next song.

Transition #1

I - IV

Chord progression: C (I), F/C (IV), F/G (IV/V)

Example 1 - using transition as a vamp between two songs

Chord progression: $E\flat/G$, $Cm9$, $A\flat Maj7$, $E\flat/G$, $Fm7$, $B\flat7sus$, $E\flat$, $A\flat/E\flat$, $E\flat$, $A\flat/E\flat$, $E\flat$, $A\flat/E\flat$, $E\flat$, $A\flat/E\flat$

Labels: Last phrase of hymn, transition

Two Quick Keyboard Transitions - 2

17

E^b $\frac{A^b}{E^b}$ E^b $\frac{A^b}{E^b}$ E^b

22

$\frac{A^b}{E^b}$ E^b $\frac{A^b}{E^b}$ E^b2 $\frac{A^b m 6}{E^b}$

27

E^b2 $\frac{A^b m}{E^b}$ $\frac{A^b}{B^b}$ E^b

next song

Two Quick Keyboard Transitions - 3

Transition 2 is made up of four different chords, so you are always just three chords away from being able to cadence and start the next song. To add variety to this progression, add the second to the I or IV chord or a minor 9th to the VI chord.

Transition #2 I - VI - IV - IV/V

C	Am7	F	$\frac{F}{G}$
32			
I	VI ⁷	IV	IV/V

Example 2 - using transition as a vamp between two songs

36

G A7 D Bm7

Last phrase of song *transition*

40

G $\frac{G}{A}$ D2 Bm7

44

G2 $\frac{G}{A}$ D2 Bm7

Two Quick Keyboard Transitions - 4

48 G2 G/A D2 D Bm9

52 G²₆ GMaj9 G/A DMaj9 D Bm11 Bm7

56 GMaj9 GMaj7/A D2 Bm⁷₄

60 G²₆ Asus rit.

63 D F#m7/B Bm G/A A7 Dsus²₄ D

next song

Modulations for Congregational Worship Music

By Mark Hayes

This handout outlines the rudiments of modulation, which may serve you well in congregational playing. The first two half-step and whole-step examples can be used to modulate expediently between stanzas of a hymn or between hymns. There are other more complicated key relationships to consider, especially when working with a medley of praise and worship songs or hymns. This handout shows how to modulate between key signatures that are a minor third apart, a perfect fourth apart, a perfect fifth apart, a minor sixth apart, and a minor seventh apart.

A crucial element of modulation is the "pivot" or "transition" chord that leads the ear to the new key. In a conventional modulation, this will always be the V7 chord of the new key. For example, if we want to modulate from C to Db, then we will use an Ab7 (V7 of Db) as the transition chord as shown in Ex. 1.

Ex. 1 - Half-step modulation

Ex. 1 shows a half-step modulation from C major to Db major. The music is in 4/4 time. The right hand starts with a C major chord, then moves to an Ab7 chord (labeled "V7 of new key"), and finally to a Db major chord. The left hand starts with a C major bass line, then moves to a Db major bass line. The modulation is a half-step down from C to Db.

Sometimes it doesn't sound good to go directly from the old key to the V7 chord of the new key. You may want to use a sequence of two chords - the iim7 and the V7 of the new key. If you're modulating from C to D, you would use an Em7 chord first and then an A7 to set up the key of D as shown in Ex. 2. Notice how the voice leading in the RH makes the transition sound smoother.

Ex. 2 - Whole-step modulation

Ex. 2 shows a whole-step modulation from C major to D major. The music is in 4/4 time. The right hand starts with a C major chord, then moves to an Em7 chord, then to an A7 chord, and finally to a D major chord. The left hand starts with a C major bass line, then moves to a D major bass line. The modulation is a whole-step up from C to D.

When modulating to keys a minor third away, you have more than one option. You can use the iim7 - V7 combination shown in Ex.3 or use no preparatory chord at all as in Ex. 4. Notice how I modulate from C to Eb with no advance warning in the middle of "Jesus Loves Me." The reason why this modulation works is because of the common tone between the two keys - the note "G". It helps to connect the two keys, even though they are unrelated. I think this kind of surprise modulation is fresh and has a lifting quality to it. However, I would caution against using this in congregational singing because it doesn't give the listener any advance warning. Use it in solo piano arrangements or when accompanying a solo singer or instrumentalist who is not unnerved by the inherent "surprise" element.

Ex. 3 - Minor third modulation with preparatory chords

Chords: C, Fm7, B \flat 7, E \flat

Ex. 4 - Minor third modulation with no preparatory chords

Chords: F, C/G, Am7, Dm9, G7, C, Emaj7, E \flat 9, E \flat 7, A \flat , Fm7

Modulating a perfect fourth up is a snap because the V7 of the new key is based on the I chord of the old key. For example, to go from the key of C to the key of F, all you do is play a C7 chord to prepare the new key. In this instance just remember to add a dominant 7th to the tonic chord of the old key and you're all set, as shown in Ex. 5.

Ex. 5 - Perfect fourth modulation

Chords: C, C7, F, Dm

While Ex. 5 is easy and straight-forward, you may want to be more creative and add the iim7 - V7 combination to this particular modulation as shown in Ex. 6. With the addition of just one extra chord, it gives the transition more substance and style.

Ex. 6 - Perfect fourth modulation with iim7 chord

Chords: C, Gm7, C7sus, C7, F

While we have used the V7 chord to prepare the new key so far, in the next modulation it's better to use the IV/V chord of the new key when modulating a perfect fifth higher. If we modulate from C to G, the IV/V chord would be a C/D chord. As you can see by the chord symbol, this chord has a lot of common tones with the first key, C major. Notice how smoothly this transition works in Ex. 7.

Ex. 7 - Perfect fifth modulation

Musical notation for Ex. 7: Perfect fifth modulation. The piece is in 4/4 time. It starts with a C major chord in the right hand and a C major scale in the left hand. The right hand then moves to a C/D chord, which is the IV/V chord in G major. The left hand continues with a G major scale. The piece concludes with a G major chord in the right hand and a G major scale in the left hand.

When modulating up a perfect fifth, you can also use the IV/V by itself and not resolve to the V7 as shown in Ex. 8. Notice that the note "C" is in the RH top voice to connect the old key to the transition chord. However I like to finish the cadence by playing the "D" or "V note" in the top voice because it prepares the ear better for the new key.

Ex. 8 - Perfect fifth modulation using only IV/V

Musical notation for Ex. 8: Perfect fifth modulation using only IV/V. The piece is in 4/4 time. It starts with a C major chord in the right hand and a C major scale in the left hand. The right hand then moves to a C/D chord, which is the IV/V chord in G major. The left hand continues with a G major scale. The piece concludes with a G major chord in the right hand and a G major scale in the left hand.

The iim7 - V7 combination works nicely when modulating up a minor sixth. In Ex. 9, notice the use of melodic sequence in the transition. This masks the abrupt change in harmonies, because the ear is drawn to the repetitive motive in the RH. Always try to incorporate a melodic fragment that leads the ear somewhere. Your modulation will sound more creative and artistic.

Ex. 9 - Minor sixth modulation

Musical notation for Ex. 9: Minor sixth modulation. The piece is in 4/4 time. It starts with a C major chord in the right hand and a C major scale in the left hand. The right hand then moves to a Bbm7 chord, which is the ii chord in A-flat major. The left hand continues with an A-flat major scale. The piece concludes with an A-flat major chord in the right hand and an A-flat major scale in the left hand.

The iim7 - V7 progression also works well when modulating up a minor 7th. For instance, when going from the key of C to the key of Bb, there is not much commonality. However by using the iim7 chord in the key of Bb, which would be Cm7, there are at least 2 notes in common with the old key, those being C and G. They provide a link between the two keys. Add a little melody to mask the chord change and you can make a smooth transition as shown below in Ex. 10.

Ex. 10 - Minor seventh modulation

The musical notation for Ex. 10 is as follows:

- Measure 1: Key of C, Chord C. Treble clef: C4, E4, G4, A4. Bass clef: C3, E3, G3, A3.
- Measure 2: Key of Bb, Chord Cm7. Treble clef: Bb4, D5, F5, G5. Bass clef: Bb2, D3, F3, G3.
- Measure 3: Key of Bb, Chord F7sus. Treble clef: F4, A4, C5, D5. Bass clef: F3, A3, C4, D4.
- Measure 4: Key of Bb, Chord F7. Treble clef: F4, A4, C5, D5. Bass clef: F3, A3, C4, D4.
- Measure 5: Key of Bb, Chord Bb. Treble clef: Bb4, D5, F5, G5. Bass clef: Bb2, D3, F3, G3.

The art of modulation need not be complex. A rule of thumb is to play the V7 of the new key to prepare the I chord of the new key signature. If this simple progression doesn't sound good, try using the iim7 of the new key and then the V7 of the new key. It helps to craft a melody in your RH which gives the chord progression a natural sense of direction. You can often blend the most unlikely chords together if you craft an interesting melody.

Each transition should be 2-4 measures long if you are accompanying congregational singing. If it gets much longer than that, people may not be able to follow you. Another important aspect of modulation is the need to know different chord inversions. Don't play every chord in root position unless it's the best choice for that transition.

In order to gain confidence, you might want to write out each modulation in a simple form using a lead line and chord symbols. That way you won't go blank in the middle of a service. It's happened to me!