## 7<sup>th</sup> Chords in Tonal Harmony - Structural Concepts

- Fundamentally putting a 7<sup>th</sup> on a triad does not change its inherent function (meaning where we are going and where we are coming from). So we can easily have, for example a *vi-ii-V-I* or *vi7-ii7-V7-I* progression. The later is just an embellished version of the first.
- Frequency of 7<sup>th</sup> chords in tonal harmony: Though there are technically five types of 7<sup>th</sup> chords in tonal harmony, we encounter some more then others. Here is a list starting with the most frequently encountered to the least:
  - 1. Dominant
  - 2. Minor
  - 3. Fully and Half Diminished
  - 4. Major
- In this type of music, the 7<sup>th</sup> of the chord has an overwhelming tendency to resolve down by half/whole step. The larger idea behind this voice-leading tendency is that interval of a 7<sup>th</sup>, much like a 2<sup>nd</sup>, is somewhat dissonant in this particular canon, and often resolves to something more stable. (Also, remember that the leading tone has a tendency to resolve up. Sometimes in the alto and tenor voice, the leading tone can move down as opposed to move up towards the tonic. This is called falsifying the leading tone.)
- *The typical voicing of a 7<sup>th</sup> in a four part-style is as follows:* 
  - 1. Root, Third, Fifth, Seventh
  - 2. Two Roots, Third, Seventh (omit the 5<sup>th</sup>)
- *Other voice leading considerations:* 
  - 1. When voicing V7-I(i) we will often use an incomplete V7 chord moving to a complete I(i) triad (or vice-versa). Remember an incomplete one triad stylistically will be voiced as three roots and one third.
  - 2. Sequences of 7<sup>th</sup> chords: A very common way of connecting 7<sup>th</sup> chords in tonal harmony is to alternate inversions as we move from 7<sup>th</sup> chord to 7<sup>th</sup> chord. If we voice lead this smoothly and carefully, we will find that each voice stays by a common tone or moves down by whole/half step: See examples below: