3.10 Chromatic Harmony: Identifying the Key

Harmonic analysis is impossible if you can't *quickly* identify the current key of the chromatic passage. Here are four common clues:

Clue 1: <u>Raising</u> accidentals *might* be leading tones

If there are only a few accidentals, *examine any accidentals that **raise** notes to see if they could be **leading tones***. In the Mozart example below, the two "raising" accidentals are E♮ (LT to F) and B♮ (LT to C). Since C major wouldn't have B♭ and C minor needs A♭, F is the more likely key for the passage. Closer inspection confirms F major.

Mozart, Piano Sonata in B♭ Major, K. 333, I, mm. 23-26.

Clue 2: A P5 down OR P4 up in bass *might* be a V-I

The most obvious visual clue when there are many accidentals, as in the Beethoven example below, is often *a perfect 4th up or perfect 5th down in the bass*. Scanning the bass line, the B-E followed by rests jumps out as a possible V-I progression. Closer inspection confirms E major: notice the cadential second inversion chord and the Mm7 leading to E at the cadence.

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13, II, mm. 42-44.

E: V_3^4 I^6 V_3^4/V cad$_4^6$ V^7 I

Clue 3: A <u>lowering</u> accidental *might* be the 7th of the V7 chord

Sometimes the only accidental introduced at the modulation is a *lowering* accidental functioning as the *7th of the V7 chord* in the new key. In the example below, the introduction of F♮ changes the G major triad in the 3rd measure into a Mm7 chord leading to C as tonic.

Chopin, 24 Preludes, Op. 28, No. 6 in B minor, mm. 9-13.

b: i   VI V_2^4/N Neapolitan...

Clue 4: Cadential $_4^6$ chords *might* give away the tonic

A *second inversion chord on a downbeat* is very often a *cadential 6-4* chord. Cad. 6-4 chords embellish the dominant of the key, and use the same pitches as the tonic triad. Recognizing the 6--5, 4--3 voice leading of cad 6-4 chords can help speed key recognition, especially with many accidentals.

Brahms, Intermezzo in A Major, Op. 118, No. 2, mm. 61-65.

F#: cad$_4^6$ V^7