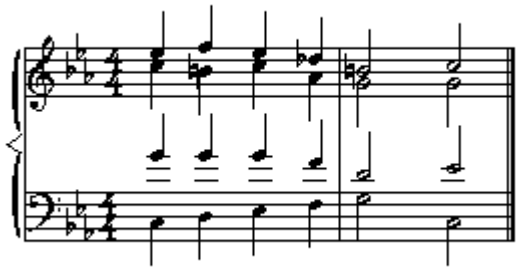
The Neapolitan Sixth Chord



The term 'Neapolitan' refers to the *major* chord built on the *lowered* second degree of the scale. The terminology is due to the technique's popularity with the so-called Neapolitan school (i.e., of Naples) of operatic composers in 18th century Italy (such as Alessandro Scarlatti, Pergolesi, Cimarosa, etc.).

It is most often found in the first inversion, where the third (in the bass) and root (usually in the treble) of the chord are a sixth apart, hence the commonly terminology of 'Neapolitan sixth'.

As can be seen in the example above, its most common usage is as a preparation for the dominant. It differs from chord IIb by only a semitone, but gives a rather more 'searing' or 'gruff' effect through the increased chromaticism (though it is itself a consonant chord!).

The very presence of the flattened super-tonic (most often in the treble part) is a good 'signal' for identification!