Diatonic Common Chord Modulation

Modulation is the process of changing to a different key within a piece of music.

There are several different ways to modulate; perhaps the simplest is the Unprepared Modulation, where the music pauses and suddenly changes key, often up a half-step.

Common Practice Period composers, however, preferred a particular type of modulation that required a little more planning: the Diatonic Common Chord Modulation. As the name suggests, this uses a chord which is diatonic in both the outgoing key and the new key.

Let's say we're starting off in C Major... here is a list of all the keys which have chords in common with C Major (the specific chords are highlighted):

For instance, the I chord in G Major is G-B-D...

...which is the V chord in C Major!

Notice how these keys are all close to one another on the Circle of Fifths.

To use this type of modulation, a composer would pivot the harmony around the chord that fit into both keys. As theorists, we show this pivot chord by analyzing the chord in both keys.

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Hey... what is this portrait doing here?

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