

BEAD Guides Chord Flow

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Goodbye, by Steve Earle, is a master class in using the stability and instability of chords to color how we hear a song's lyrics. The song uses Axis of Awesome chords in G. The chord to watch is D7/F#. It's the left neighbor of G but by rearranging the notes so F# is in the bass nearly becomes a diminished chord.

Making F# the lowest note in a D7 chord makes it pretty unstable

Left Chord Right Chord

G's Related Minor

The song starts out stable, with the words "I remember holdin' on..." That stability telegraphs the clearness of his memory. The chord changes to D7/F# on the word "you." It colors that word with instability, sadness, and regret.

I remember holdin' on to you

The verse's last line starts on a C chord, G's right neighbor, with the words "But I can't remember..." The D7/F# kicks in again on the words, "if we said," coloring those words with instability. When the G chord arrives at the end of the line, its stability locks in on the word goodbye, making all the regret and vulnerability of the verse, and the goodbye itself, feel final.

But I can't remember if we said goodbye.