**Bard Conservatory Seminar I-Basic Theory Review**

## I. Identifying Functional Harmonies

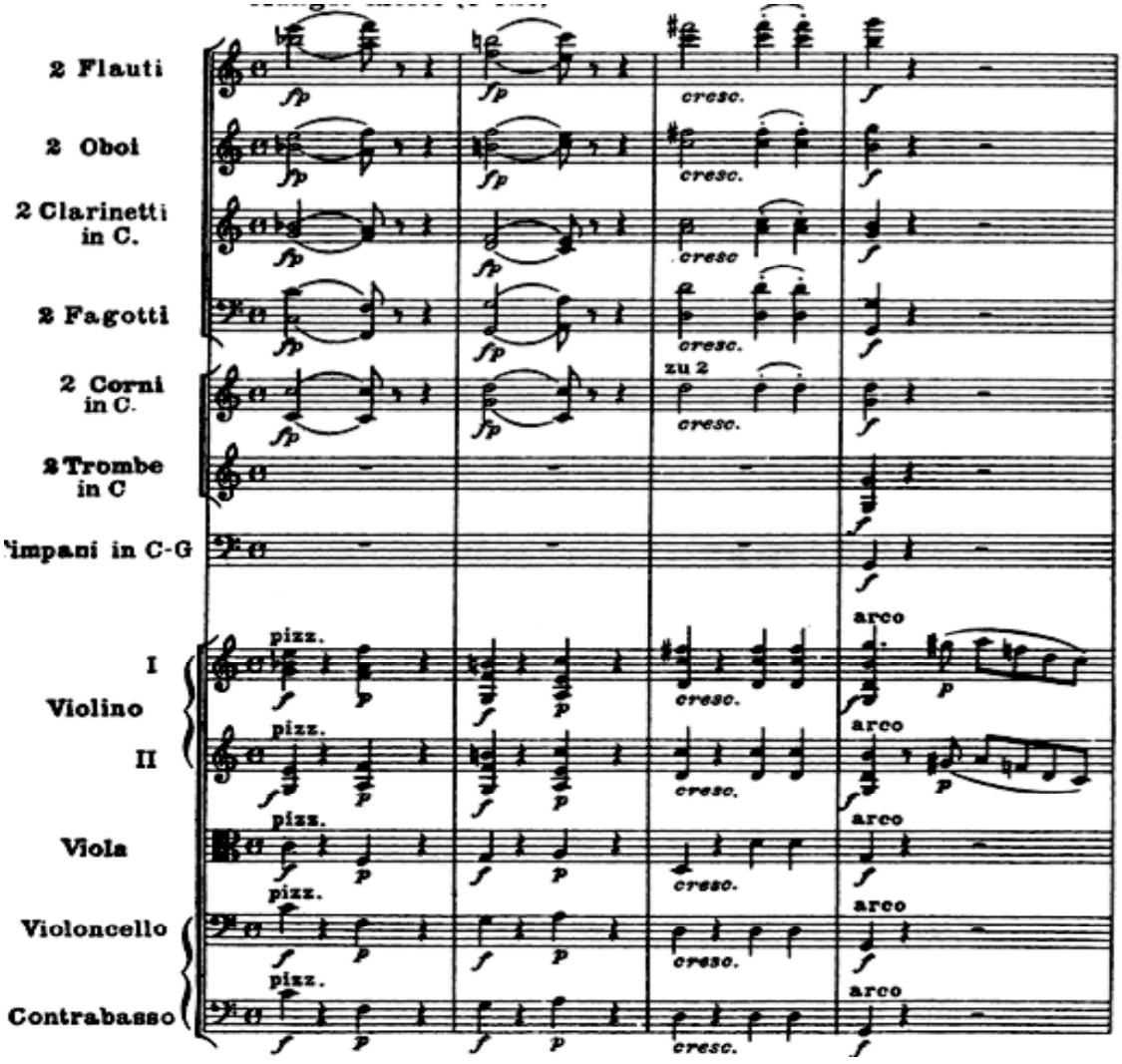
The diatonic triads and seventh chords we have been discussing so far account for a fairly large fraction of the harmonies you will encounter in the standard repertoire. Not all chords are equally common, so it is a good idea to become particular familiar with the most common harmonies so that you can easily identify them and also to be aware of the musical contexts in which you are likely to encounter them.

### Tonic Harmony-I

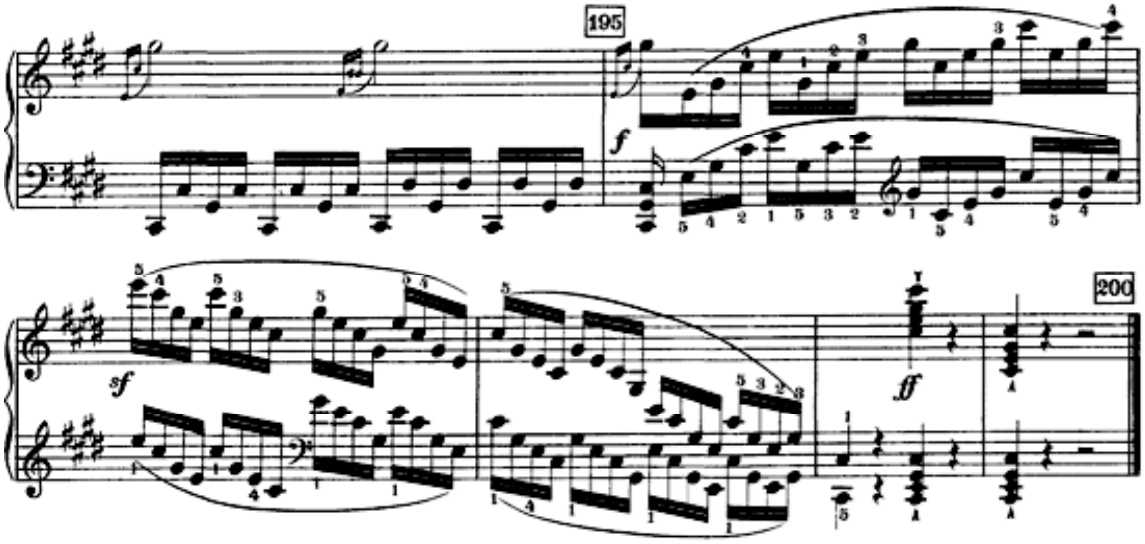
The most common harmony is the **tonic** triad, I. The tonic appears in initial locations in the piece where the basic key of the piece is established.

However, it is important to bear in mind that pieces are not required to begin on the tonic:

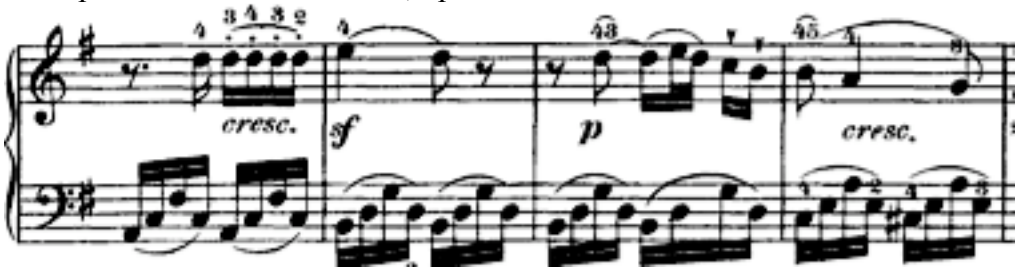
Example 1.1 Beethoven, Symphony no. 2 C major



Tonal works are, however, required to end on the tonic. A I harmony is sure to appear as the final chord of the piece (within the **final cadence** as we will explain shortly)
Example 1.2 Beethoven Sonata, op 27. no 2

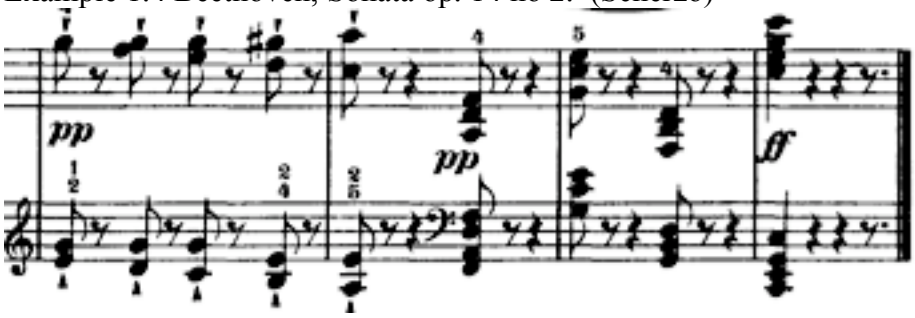



The tonic harmony will frequently appear in first inversion. I6 characteristically functions within a phrase as supporting a bass progressing from the third scale degree to the fourth scale degree
Example 1.3 Beethoven Sonata, op. 14 no. 2




The most characteristic and common use of the second inversion tonic, I64, is at cadences preceding the V chord tonic. When it does so, it always appears in a rhythmically strong position, generally on the downbeat, resolving to a dominant harmony on the successive weak beat followed by a strong tonic chord. When it does so it is known as the **cadential six-four chord.**

Example 1.4 Beethoven, Sonata op. 14 no 2. (Scherzo)

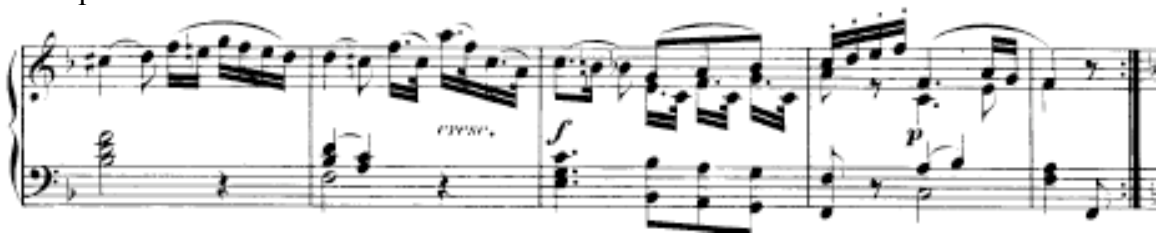



**Dominant harmony-V, V7, viio or viio7**

The V chord, also known as the **dominant**, is nearly as common as the tonic I triad. It may appear in all inversions, either as a triad or as a seventh chord when it is referred to as the **dominant seventh**. Note that the third of the V chord is the seventh scale degree. In minor keys, the leading tone will need to be raised resulting in an accidental in the score. Note also that this chord remains a diatonic, scale degree, chord since it derives from the harmonic and melodic forms of the minor scale as discussed previously.

As mentioned above, the dominant tends resolve to the tonic even when it does not appear at cadences, and when it is not in root position. When the dominant appears in root position in cadences, its attraction to the tonic is most pronounced. In inversion, the attraction remains but is somewhat reduced:

Example 1.5 Mozart: Sonata K.330

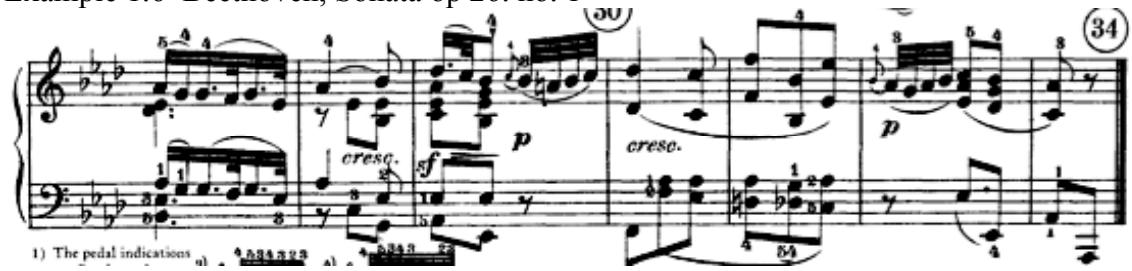



Since it contains the upper three notes of the dominant seventh chord, the viio or viio7 can occasionally function as a replacement for a dominant harmony. Usually this occurs when it is functioning not as a dominant in the context of a cadence but as an **applied** or **secondary dominant**, a topic we return to in section II.

**Subdominant Harmony IV and II (and II7)**

The IV chord is referred to as the subdominant in that it characteristically precedes the dominant chord at cadences. The progression which defines the cadence, IV-V-I firmly establishes the key and while the subdominant chord IV is sometimes omitted (or is replaced by the I64 as discussed above), generally one can find a subdominant chord in the near vicinity of cadences.

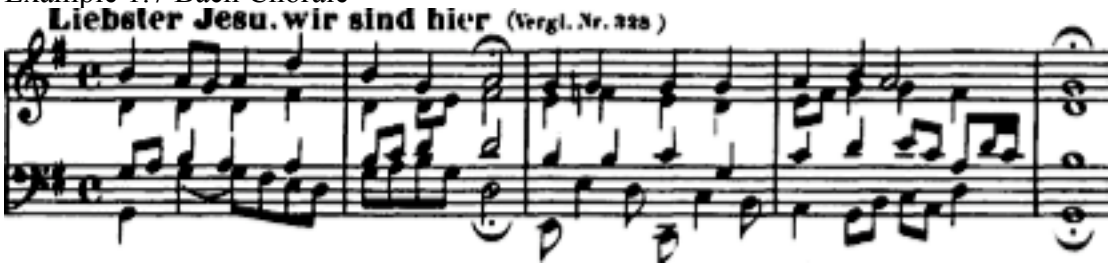
Example 1.6 Beethoven, Sonata op 26. no. 1




IV I64 V I

Referred to in some texts as the "supertonic", the II chord shares two notes with the IV. Thus, it is best seen as another form of the subdominant and frequently precedes V in cadences:

Example 1.7 Bach Chorale




ii65 V I

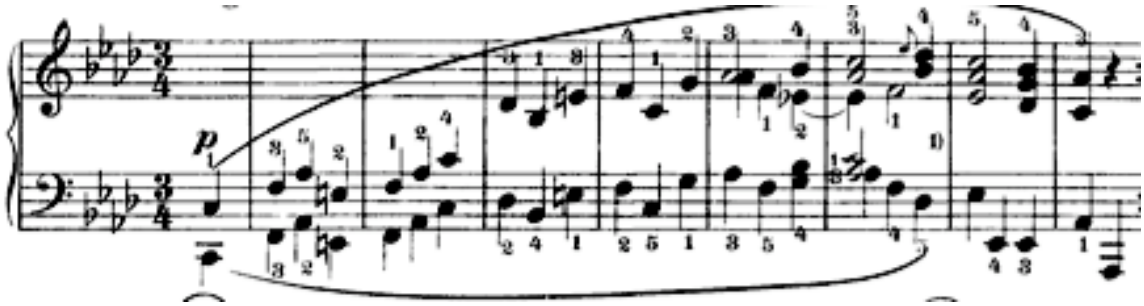
The subdominant II chord frequently appears as a seventh chord. major. This is generally the at cadences. The ii chord also Most common is the ii65, either in major or minor keys.

**Other harmonic functions**

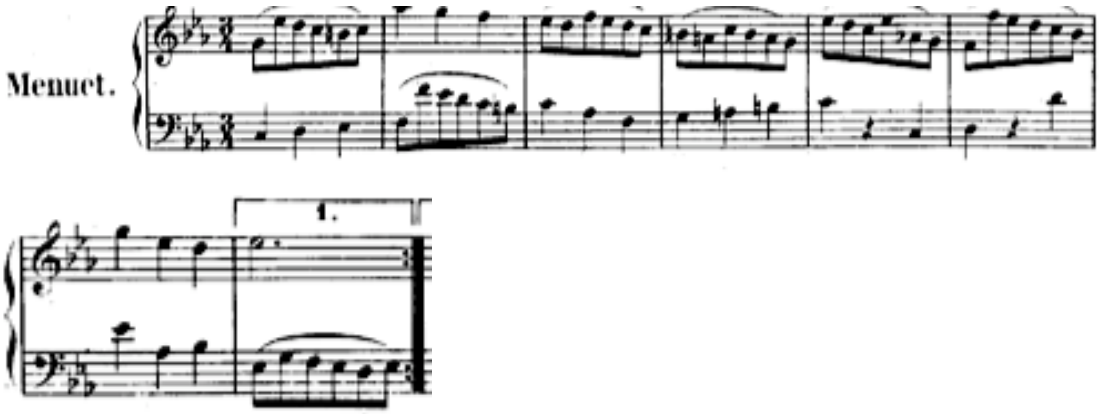
Of the remaining functional harmonies, VI functions commonly as what is known as the **deceptive** resolution of the dominant chord. The "deception" results from two separate expectations 1) that the dominant V resolve to the tonic I but also 2) that the resolution of the dominant chord in major keys will resolve to a major chord or a minor chord (in minor pieces). By contrast, the VI is a minor chord in major keys and a major chord in minor keys. (Please convince yourself of this.)

III is relatively uncommon in major keys but quite common as a functional harmony in major keys. Most notably, the first modulation of minor pieces is most often to III, the relative major.

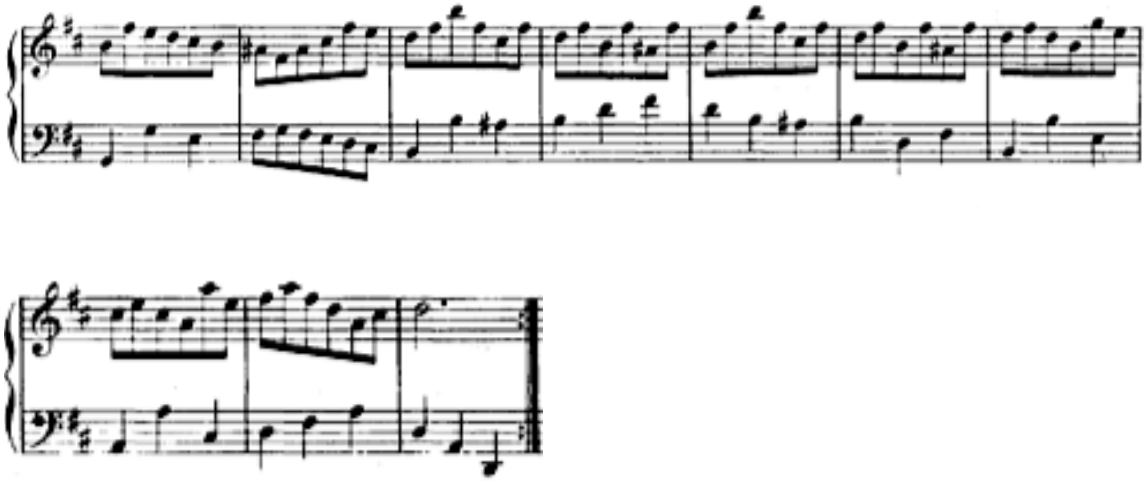
Example 1.8 Beethoven, Sonata op. 10 no 2.



Example 1.9 Bach, Minuet from C minor French Suite




Example 1.10 Bach, Minuet B minor French Suite



V/III = VII III

Note that the chord preceding the final III can be analyzed either as a triad built on the lowered seventh degree or as a dominant chord within the relative major. If we analyze it as the former we can refer to it as a diatonic VII chord. If we choose to hear it as the

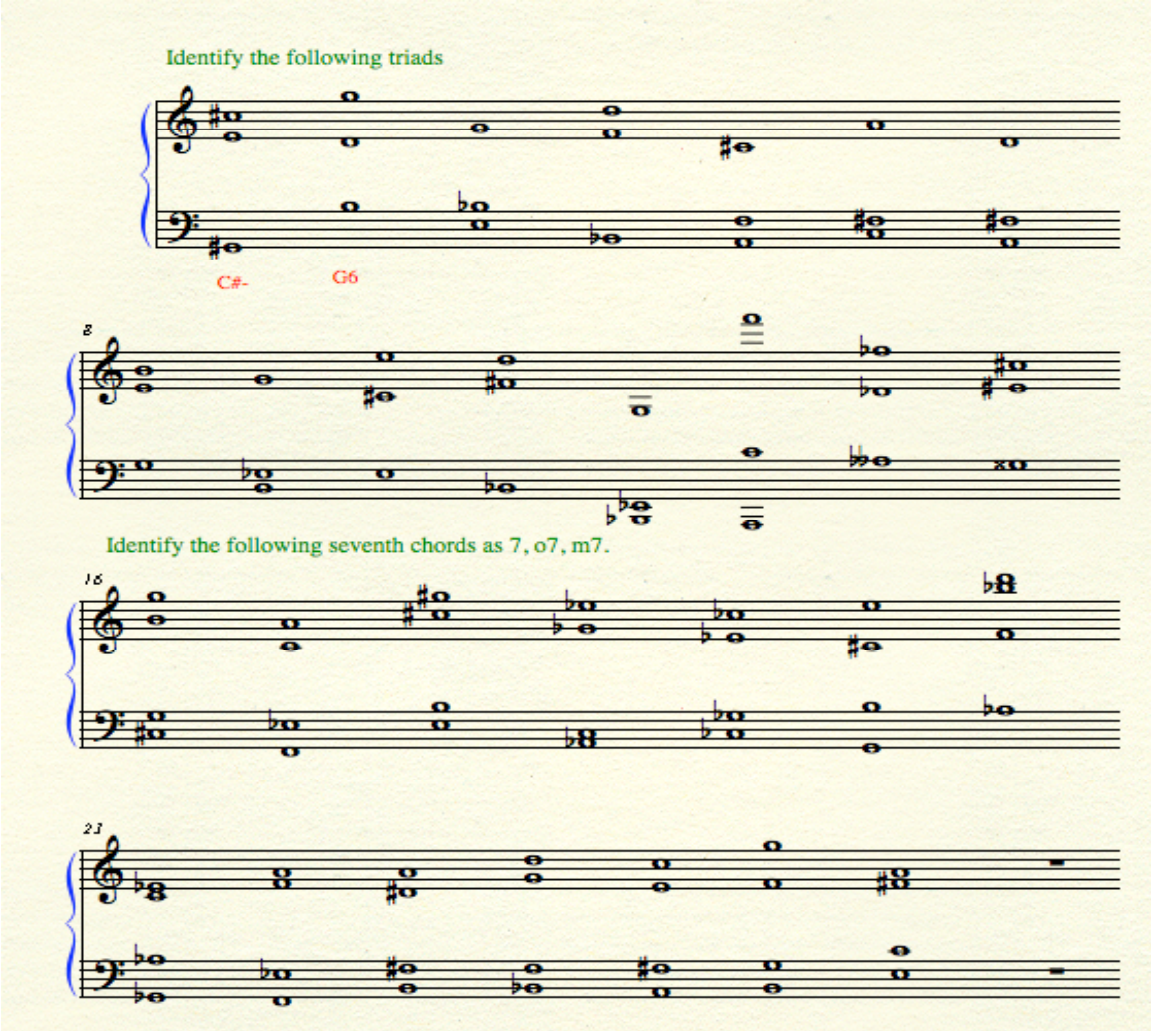
latter, we will refer to it as an applied or secondary dominant, V/III. We will return to this topic in the next section.

**----Digression on harmonic identification.**

The previous discussion should provide you with a sense of the kinds of chords you are likely to expect in particular contexts and provide you with the ability to make an educated guess as to what chord in on the page. However, you should practice so that you are able to identify most chords as independent chords (and sounds) divorced of their musical context. In some cases this is quite easy. For example, most would have little trouble recognizing the following as dominant seventh chords.

When seventh chords are inverted and displaced, identifying them can be somewhat more difficult.

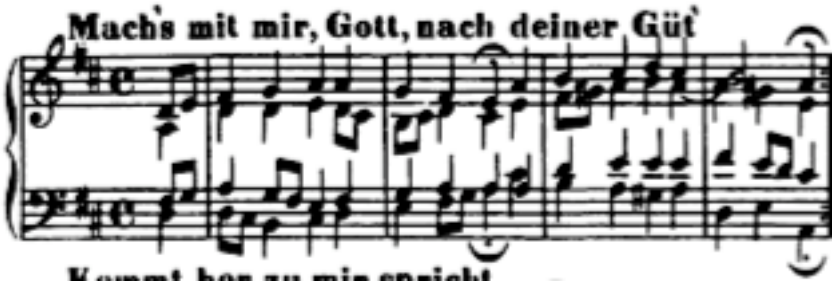
Exercise: You should be able to identify the following-despite their odd spacing.



## II. Secondary Dominants

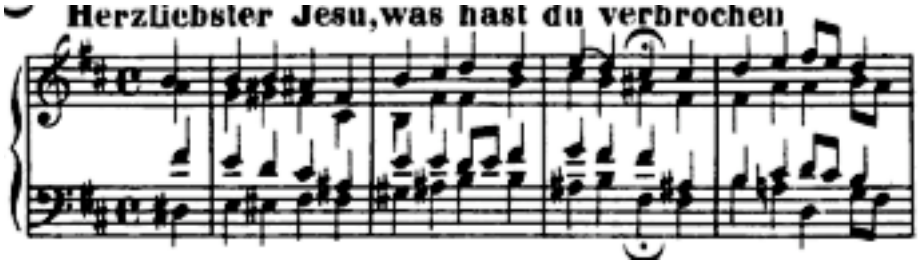
The diatonic harmonies (triads and sevenths) we have outlined above account for most but not all of what you will encounter in standard repertoire works. As we just mentioned, one source of alterations of the scale result from a particular harmony functioning as a kind of local tonic which is preceded by a dominant triad or seventh. When this occurs, a chord is said to be "tonicized" and the dominant which precedes it is referred to as a secondary dominant. Probably the most common tonicization is III in minor keys as we saw above in example 1.8-1.10. However, V is also frequently tonicized in major keys:

Example 2.1 Bach Chorale




V/V V

Example 2.2
Other diatonic functions can be tonicized.

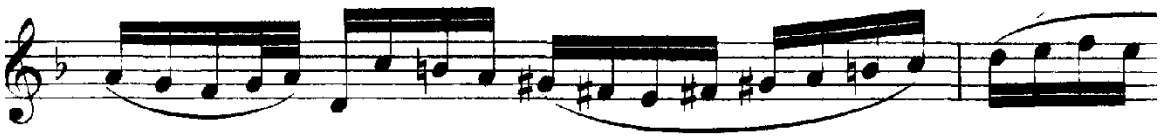



V65/IV viio/V V/III

## III. Non Harmonic tones.

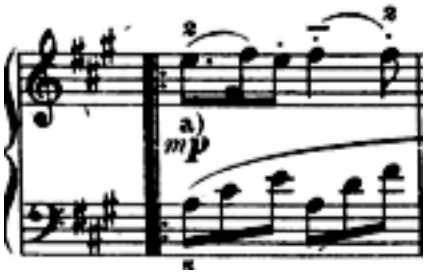
It should be fairly obvious that if music only consisted of chord tones, melodies would be predominantly skips with only occasional melodic steps. In fact, most melodies tend to be predominantly conjunct (i.e. stepwise) rather than disjunct thus only some of the following notes will be chord tones:

Example 3.1 Bach D minor solo Partita



In some cases, non-harmonic tones are easily identified. Thus, the F# in the first measure is not a chord tone: it is a step above the tonic harmony outlined in the lower part, resolving immediately back to the chord tone.

Example 3.2 Mozart Sonata K 331.




Two chord tones can be filled in by non-harmonic tones as occurs in the next measure of the Mozart. The melody "passes" from one consonance to another through a dissonance. This is known as the passing tone.

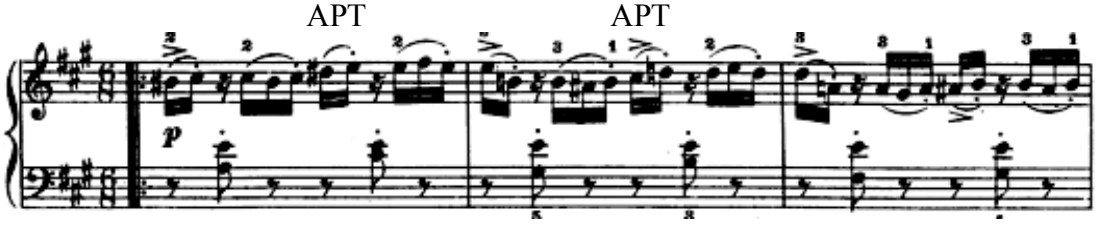
Example 3.3 Mozart, ibid.

PT

Passing tones are most common in weak positions of the measure as in the above. They may also appear in strong metrical positions in which cases they are known as accented passing tones.

Example 3.4 Mozart, ibid.

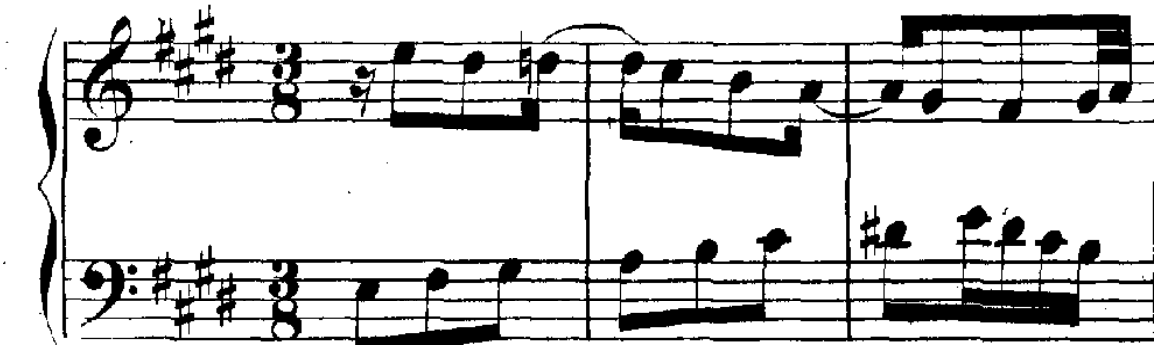
APT APT



Notice also in example 3.3 a harmonic changes makes the F#, which was previously a consonant chordal tone  a dissonance.  Since it occurs on a strong beat and resolves downward by step, we refer to this as an appoggiatura.

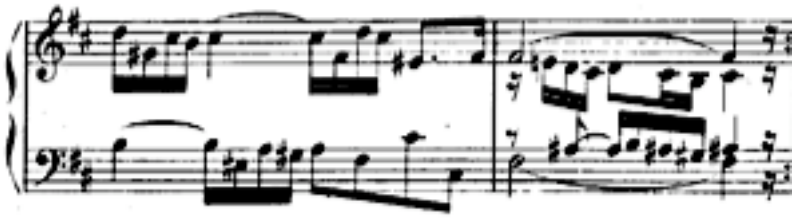
When a dissonance results from a change in harmony and is tied over rather than reattacked this is known as a suspension.  Suspensions generally resolve downward by step:

Example 3.5 Bach E major Invention



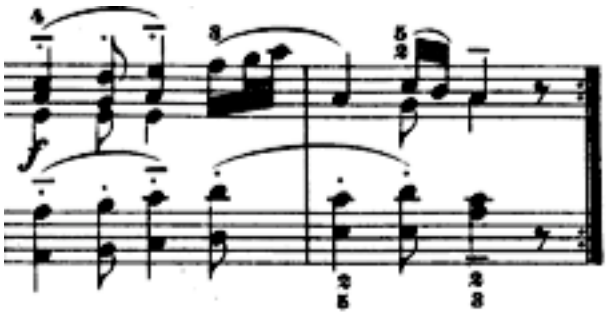
Finally, when what will be a chord tone arrives immediately before (anticipates) a change in harmony and is reattacked on the beat this is known as an anticipation. Anticipations frequently occur in cadences in baroque works

Example 3.5 Bach B minor French Suite



Most nonharmonic tones will be of these types.  The cadential C# in the following is a harmonic dissonance and neither a passing tone, a neighbor, nor an anticipation. It does, however, resolve downward by step and is in a relatively strong position.  It can there be somewhat problematically defined as an appoggiatura:

Example 3.6 Mozart, K. 331



The term escape tone has been suggested to apply to dissonances arrived at by leap and resolved by step such as the cadential C# above.

Note that while dissonances can be leapt to and resolved by step, they are much less commonly leapt from. If your analysis indicates a dissonance resolved by leap, it may be wrong so be careful! Often, contrapuntal textures allow for several different harmonic analyses, one of which will allow for a simpler identification of non-harmonic tones.