

Music 232

Second Inversion Triads

These notes are a distillation of Kostka/Payne's Tonal Harmony. They are in no way a substitute for reading and working through the actual text book.

Overview

- Not used as substitutes for root position chord
- Bass arpeggiation/melodic bass
- Cadential six-four
- Pedal six-four
- Passing six-four
- Part-writing practices

The six-four chord is considered dissonant and/or unstable due to the structure having a fourth above the bass (same as in counterpoint). Its uses are limited:

I. Bass arpeggiation and melodic bass

- A. The bass arpeggiates the chord, involving a root-position triad, first inversion or both
- B. Usually in a metrically weak (less emphasized) position
- C. The bass assumes a melodic role and incidentally "encounters" a six-four along the way
- D. This is not the same as keyboard-style arpeggiation

II. Cadential six-four

- A. A tonic chord in second inversion
- B. In a metrically strong position— occurring on a strong beat or stronger portion of the beat
- C. Immediately resolves to a V chord in root position
- D. Analysis: functions as a precursor to the dominant, delaying its arrival and analyzed as such
- E. The voice leading is smooth: scale tones 1 and 3 resolve down to 7 and 2, respectively

III. Passing six-four

- A. Used to harmonize the middle note of a three-note scalar figure in the bass (ascending or descending); the surrounding chords will not be six-four chords
- B. Can be any triad, but is most often a I/i six-four or a V six-four
- C. Usually on a weak beat
- D. Analysis: its harmonic function is weak and is analyzed with parentheses

IV. Pedal six-four

- A. Used to elaborate/ornament a static root position triad
- B. From root position, the 3rd and 5th move up by step and then directly back down (think of them as upper neighbors in their respective voices)
- C. Also called an embellishing or stationary six-four
- D. Falls on a weak or weaker part of the beat
- E. Analysis: put in parentheses
- F. Used to embellish a I/i or V root position triad
 - I – V 6/4 – I
 - i – V 6/4 – i
 - V – I 6/4 – V
- G. When the upper voices are moving back down after the six-four, the bass may move before the upper voices return to their original positions

V. Part writing

- A. In four-parts, double the bass (the 5th of the chord); exceptions are rare
- B. The other voices move smoothly—often by step into and out of the six-four chord
- C. In three parts it is best to have complete chords
 1. if the root or 3rd is omitted, the 5th will be doubled

Questions to Consider

What sets apart second inversion triads from their counterparts?

Aside from bass arpeggiation, what are the three kinds of six-four chords and what additional analytical symbol(s) does each one use?

Which six-four chord typically comes in a metrically stronger position?

Which six-four chords come in metrically weak positions?

What is the typical four-part doubling in six-four chords?