

Web Feature 11.1

Non-chord tones in score context

It is important to be able to recognize non-chord tones in a musical score and understand how they contribute to the expressiveness of a passage. One consideration is the prominence or emphasis that non-chord tones receive through their duration relative to the primary pulse stream of the meter. Thus far, most of the non-chord tones we have examined are **submetrical** dissonances—that is, they are shorter than the value of the primary pulse stream, and thus occur *within* the time span of the beat, on either the accented or unaccented portion of the beat. Non-chord tones can also be **metrical**—having the same duration as the primary pulse stream (a suspension lasting a quarter-note long in a passage of $\frac{4}{4}$ meter, for example)—or they can be **supermetrical**, longer than the durational value of the primary pulse stream.

One of the distinctive features of music of a particular historical period is the way in which dissonances are used. The following remarks about historical style are intended as generalizations, for which of course any number of exceptions can be found; every historical period has its “vanguard” composers who anticipated later styles, as well as more conservative throwbacks to earlier eras. Even within the work of a single composer one can easily find works that lie at stylistic extremes. In general, however, there seems to be a gradual acceptance of and freedom in the use of dissonances as one progresses through the common practice period. In this web feature we examine the stylistic differences in each historical period’s use of dissonance.

The Baroque era. In Baroque music, one will generally find passing, neighbor, and escape tones used in unaccented contexts along with suspensions or, less frequently, retardations; appoggiaturas are somewhat less common. In general such non-chord tones occur as submetrical dissonances. Web Examples 11.1 through 11.3 illustrate how dissonances are used in three different Baroque contexts: one of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerti, a chorus from a Handel oratorio, and a solo keyboard work by the English composer Henry Purcell, respectively.

G D/F# G D G D G D

G: I V⁶ I V I V I V

Web Example 11.1. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto #3 (iii), measures 1–2.

Am Em Am/E Em Am/E Esus4 B7

SUS (7-6 above bass voice part)

5 NT PT NT PT SUS (4-3) SUS PT

strength _____ of all their strength. _____ of all their

5 strength, the chief, the chief of all, _____ of all their

5 NT NT SUS (4-3)

The chief of all _____ their

5 PT PT

He smote all the first-born of E - gypt, the chief _____ of all their

The score consists of five systems. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics 'strength _____ of all their strength.' and piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with 'strength, the chief, the chief of all, _____ of all their' and piano accompaniment. The third system has the vocal line 'The chief of all _____ their' and piano accompaniment. The fourth system has the vocal line 'He smote all the first-born of E - gypt, the chief _____ of all their' and piano accompaniment. The fifth system shows the piano accompaniment for the final measure.

a: i v
 e: iv i iv⁶₄ i iv⁶₄ V⁷

E Am/E E Am/E E F Am/C Dm

NT NT PT NT PT NG NT (ET)

9 the chief of all their strength, of all their strength, of all their

9 strength, the chief of all their strength, the chief,

9 strength, the chief of all their strength, He smote all the first-born of E - -

9 strength, the chief of all their strength,

6 - 5 - 6 - 5
4 - # - # - #

a: V V V VI i⁶ iv
I

Web Example 11.2. George Frederick Handel, “He smote all the first born” (*Israel in Egypt*), mm. 1–12.

Em B/D# A/C# Am/C Em/B B7/A Em/G B7/F# Em/G F#dim/A B

PT PT PT PT PT APP PT

SUS (7-6) SUS (7-6) SUS (7-6)

e: i V⁶ IV⁶ iv⁶ i⁴ V² i⁶ V³ i⁶ ii⁰⁶ V

Em B/D# A/C# Am/C B7 B7/A Em/G B7/F# Em/G F#dim/A B

SUS (7-6) ANT PT NT PT NT PT APP PT PT PT

SUS (7-6) ----- (chain) -----

e: i V⁶ IV⁶ iv⁶ V⁷ V² i⁶ V³ i⁶ ii⁰⁶ V

Em B/D# A/C# Am/C Em/B B7/A Em/G B7/F# Em/G F#dim/A B Em

PT SUS (4-3) PT NT PT PT PT NT PT ANT

SUS (7-6) ----- (chain) -----

e: i V⁶ IV⁶ iv⁶ i⁴ V² i⁶ V³ i⁶ ii⁰⁶ V i

Web Example 11.3. Henry Purcell, “A New Ground in E Minor,” Z. T.682 (measures 22–31, ornaments omitted).

Certain genres tend to be richer in their use of dissonance; the religious works of J. S. Bach, for example, tend to have very chromatic and dissonant passages where scenes such as the Crucifixion are depicted. For example, consider the opening of the “Crucifixus” from Bach’s *Mass in B Minor* (Web Example 11.4). The first four measures can be analyzed as a series of 7–6 suspensions over a descending bass line that is itself elaborated with chromatic passing tones. As the voices enter, one by one, in measures 5–

9, other suspensions are introduced: a 4–3 suspension in the alto with the dissonant fourth flatted and, again, set over a chromatic passing tone in the bass (measures 6–7), and a 9–8 suspension in the bass (measures 8–9). Then, starting in measure 13, Bach introduces a different chromatic idea—an ascending augmented second, the interval that we have seen was associated with anguished emotional states. Such is the nature of this work’s chromaticism that assigning Roman numeral labels to each chord will not yield very illuminating results; remember, this is the product of more linear, contrapuntal thinking, before the “vertical” orientation of Rameau’s theory of triad inversions came into widespread use. However, figured bass can readily be employed, both for showing the intervals of specific dissonances and also the chromatic inflections applied to those dissonances.

The image shows a musical score for strings, measures 6 through 9. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The bass line includes figured bass notation: 7 - 6, 7 - 6, 6 - 5, 7, and 4 - #. The notation shows various suspensions and chromatic inflections in the bass line, while the upper staff shows chordal accompaniment.

5

Cru - ci - fi - xus,

Cru - ci - fi - xus,

Cru - ci - fi - xus,

Cru - ci -

5

9

cru - ci - fi - xus,

cru - ci -

cru - ci - fi - xus,

fi - xus,

cru - ci - fi - xus,

9

13

cru - ci - fi - - xus e - ti - am pro no - - bis,

fi - xus, cru - ci - fi - - xus e - ti - am

8 cru - - ci -

13

cru - ci - fi - - xus,

Web Example 11.4. Bach, “Crucifixus,” *B Minor Mass*, measures 1–16.

The Classic era. The Classic era was, in some respects, a simplification of the intricate and sometimes sprawling textures of the Baroque (in fact, the label “baroque” is also used to describe a misshapen pearl). Homophonic textures were emphasized, with accompaniment often provided by an arpeggiated figuration known as **Alberti bass**, named after the early-eighteenth-century Italian composer Domenico Alberti (1710–1740). Web Example 11.5 is a stereotypical case study in Classic texture; note the clarity and uncluttered register of the melodic line, Mozart’s use of the Alberti bass, and the way that individual tones in the Alberti bass move to their neighbors with subsequent chord changes, reflecting careful attention to contrapuntal voice leading principles.

Musical score for Mozart Sonata K.545 (i), measures 1-4. The score shows a piano (*p*) with an Alberti bass in the left hand and a treble staff with various ornaments. Labels include *p* (Alberti bass), PT (Passive Tone) with an upward arrow, and LN (Ligature Note) with an upward arrow.

Web Example 11.5. Mozart Sonata K.545 (i), measures 1–4, showing Alberti bass and sparing use of non-chord tones.

In general, dissonances in the Classic period are not as frequent, or as emphatic, as they are in music of the Romantic era (although, again, exceptions to this generalization can always be found). The Mozart excerpt in Web Example 11.5 has very few dissonances. The opening of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in F major, op. 10 no. 2 (Web Example 11.6) has some prominently placed neighbor groups “answering” the chords in measures 1 and 3; in measures 5 through 12 suspensions are used extensively.

Musical score for Beethoven Piano Sonata op. 10 no. 2 (i), measures 1-12. The score shows a piano (*p*) in 2/4 time. The left hand has chords and the right hand has melodic lines with ornaments. Labels include NG (Neighbor Group) with downward arrows, and SUS (Suspension) with downward arrows and numbers in parentheses (e.g., SUS (7-6), SUS (4-3)).

Web Example 11.6. Beethoven Piano Sonata op. 10 no. 2 (i), measures 1–12.

The Romantic era. In keeping with Romanticism's emphasis on the individual expression of the composer, dissonances are used more freely in Romantic music, occurring more frequently on accented beats and often as metrical or supermetrical dissonances. Web Example 11.7, from a nocturne by Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), shows a richer use of melodic embellishment (especially in measures 5–8) and of harmonic dissonance, so much so that sometimes it is an open question as to which tones to count as dissonances and which to count as consonances. For example, the notes in the left hand that make up the first and third dotted-quarter beats of measure 1 make up a tonic chord. But what about the second dotted-quarter beat? One could count the low E flat as a pedal point and the rest of beat 2 as a vii^{04}_3 , especially since the F in the melodic line also would fit the chord. On the other hand, the stepwise motion in the arpeggiations of the left hand from chord to chord would also invite a reduction in which the *first measure* is essentially a tonic chord; the " vii^{04}_3 " would thus be the product of neighbor tones. Neither interpretation is more "correct" than the other, because we can logically account for both interpretations by the evidence in the score. Ultimately, the choice is determined by larger factors, such as the prevailing harmonic rhythm of the piece and the amount of detail desired.

The musical score consists of four systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is E-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations and annotations:

- System 1 (Measures 1-2):** The right hand has a melodic line with ornaments labeled 'NT' and 'PT'. The left hand has a bass line with a chord marked '[viiO₄³]'. A 'PED' marking is above the first measure. A '5' is written below the left hand in the second measure.
- System 2 (Measures 3-4):** The right hand continues with ornaments. The left hand has a 'SUS (4-3)' marking above the bass line in the second measure. An '(ii)' is written below the right hand in the second measure.
- System 3 (Measures 5-6):** The right hand has a dense melodic passage with many ornaments. The left hand has chords with 'APP' markings above the bass line in the second measure.
- System 4 (Measures 7-8):** The right hand has a melodic line with ornaments. The left hand has a 'SUS (4-3)' marking above the bass line in the second measure.

Web Example 11.7. Chopin, Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 in E-flat major, measures 1-8.

Finally, dissonance itself became “emancipated” by the second half of the nineteenth century, as composers began to employ dissonances in ways that sometimes

did not take account of theoretical categories determined by such factors as how the tones were approached and resolved. A famous example is Wagner's Prelude to the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (Web Example 11.8). The A# in measure 3 is clearly a chromatic passing tone. What, however, are we to make of the first chord of the piece (measure 2)? This chord, because of its notoriety, has come to be known as the "Tristan Chord." It is generally accepted that the chord of measure 2 is actually F – B – D# – A (we will learn about what this chord is, and how it works, in Chapter 24); the G#—which is metrically accented on the downbeat and also sustained for a much longer duration than its resolution—is the dissonance. Fine enough, but then from where is the G# dissonance prepared? A silence? (From the direction of the stems it seems clear that the E at the end of measure 1 is moving to the D#, not the G#, in measure 2.)

The image shows a piano reduction of the first 11 measures of Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. The score is written in 3/8 time and consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 1 through 4, and the second system covers measures 5 through 8. The music is characterized by its complex harmonic language, including chromaticism and dissonance. The Tristan Chord (F-B-D#-A) is a key feature in measure 2. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *dim.*. The score shows the piano part with treble and bass staves, and the vocal line in the upper staff of each system.

Web Example 11.8. Wagner, Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* (piano reduction), mm. 1–11.

Of course, it is impossible to gain a thorough understanding of musical style from just one or two examples from each period. It is essential that you learn as much literature as possible—and not only music composed for your voice or instrument. Only by studying a wide cross-section of composers and genres from a particular period is it possible to gain a working knowledge of the stylistic norms of that era.