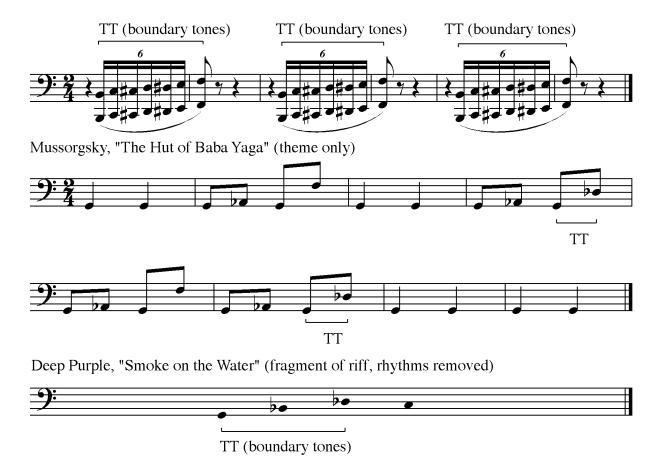
Web Feature 2.3

The tritone—The Devil in music

In the Middle Ages the tritone was referred to as *diabolus in musica* ("the Devil in music"). The first chromatically altered pitches—Bb and F#—were efforts to temper or correct this perceived evil. If the note B or F created a tritone with another part or voice, it was often "corrected" in performance even if no accidental was specified on the score, a practice referred to as *musica ficta*. In the nineteenth century, the tritone was a musical symbol for evil; for example, it is found prominently in Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830; the fifth movement, "Dream of a Witches' Sabbath"), "The Hut of Baba Yaga" (a portrayal of a Russian witch) from Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874), and the "Mephistopheles" movement of Franz Liszt's *Ein Faust Symphonie* (1856–63). Even today it is an ingredient in some hard rock and heavy metal (e.g., the tritone of G and Db marks the boundary tones of the iconic guitar riff in Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" [1972], and E and Bb are prominent tones in "Enter Sandman" [1991] by Metallica and "Sleepwalker" by Megadeth [2007]). Some of these uses of the tritone are shown in Web Example 2.5.

Liszt, "Mephistopheles" from Eine Faust Symphonie (opening, cellos and basses only)



Web Example 2.5. The tritone in various "evil" contexts.