<u>Second Inversion</u> $\binom{6}{4}$ and Dominant Seventh Chords

As we have now seen a fourth is a dissonance, and needs to be prepared in the previous chord. This means that second inversion chords must treated with care.

One important thing to remember with all second inversion chords is, like suspensions, they create a strong metric stress. This means that putting one in the wrong place will sound very strange. As well as having to be prepared and resolved correctly, there are only two situations where they are commonly used, which we will examine separately.

First of all there are a few rules about 6/4 chords that should always be observed if possible:

1) The bass note of a second inversion chord should usually be approached by step.

2) The dissonant fourth must either be prepared (as a suspension) in the previous chord, or where this is impossible, be approached from above by step and then resolve downwards by step.

3) The bass note of a second inversion chord should usually be doubled in one of the other voices.

The most common use of the 6/4 chord is the cadential 6/4, when the chord is used as preparation for the dominant chord before a perfect cadence.

Example 1



You may notice above that the bass note drops down an octave after the 6/4 chord. This is also fairly common, and strengthens the cadence, although it is not necessary, and there are other cadential bass formulas that are just as acceptable (and you can try them if you like):

Example 2



Dominant Sevenths

In the above examples, a passing note has been inserted between the doubled bass in one of the upper parts of the dominant chord (after the second inversion) and the third of the tonic chord that follows (at * in example 1). This passing note is dissonant with the harmony of the dominant chord (it forms a seventh), but because is acceptable because it connects to consonances a third apart. It is not acceptable to leap away from a passing note. (It would not be a passing note at all then!)

What we have seen here is therefore one way of using a dominant seventh chord without breaking any rules. There are, however, other ways of using a dominant seventh chord.

One way is to treat the seventh as a suspension, and prepare it in the previous chord. It must also resolve downwards like all other sevenths:



However, as we have seen before, it is normal for chord V to fall on a weak beat at a perfect cadence, especially when preceeded by any other type of dissonance (a chord containing a suspension or a 6/4).

Another accepted way to approach a dominant seventh is by step from above, but it must still resolve dowards by step. Example 4



This is in fact no different from using a passing note. In fact it is a passing note that falls on the beat. This kind of passing note is known as an accented passing note. This is useful when you have a 6/4 chord before, and you don't want to have quaver motion at that point in the music.

It is also OK to use sevenths as passing note in other circumstances, but remember they must always connect two notes a third apart, and being sevenths, must fall downwards. (It is not acceptable to approach a seventh from below, or by leap.)



One final thing before we get back to other uses of 6/4 chords: when you have a dominant seventh chord it's OK for the leading note to fall by a third rather than rise up to the tonic (which means you get a full chord with the third and fifth), as long as it is not in the top voice (otherwise it sounds too obvious). If you do this, however, you must be remember never to put in passing note at this point (even though the voice skips down a third). This is because it draws attention to the 'incorrect' resolution of the leading note (ii).



The Passing ⁶/₄

There are two other uses for the $\frac{6}{4}$ chord, both of which are fairly common. The passing $\frac{6}{4}$ is most often found in the music of Haydn and onwards, although it does occur from time to time in Baroque music. It is used in the form V_4^6 in almost exactly the same way as vii $\frac{6}{3}$ with or without the 7th ($V_{\frac{4}{3}}^6$), usually as a means of passing between I and I $\frac{6}{3}$.

Example 7



In example 7, you can see in ii) and iii) that the passing ${}^{6}_{4}$ is an acceptable replacement for vii ${}^{6}_{3}$. However, you may notice that it sounds much better with the seventh ((iii)i.e. V_{4}^{6}). This is because in iii) the seventh forms a tritone with the leading note, which then resolves outwards. This relationship is very important in tonal music, particularly from the era of Haydn onwards. You may also have spotted that the seventh in unprepared (i.e. approached from below) in iii), which as we have seen is usually unacceptable. However, in the classical era, V^{7} (and its inversions) was used so frequently that it became accepted in its own right, almost as if it were a triad, often without any preparation. It is also impossible to prepare the seventh in this ascending progression! Note that the V_{4}^{6} chord almost always falls on a weak beat. Remember that ${}^{6}_{4}$ chords on a strong beat are used as preparation for a perfect cadence, and as such will undermine the sense of tonic if incorrectly used.

The passing $\frac{6}{4}$ may also be approached from other chords, often as a means of modulating from one key to another **but always leads to I or I** $\frac{6}{3}$ (in the new key), and from above, below are a few examples from the literature.

Example 8

Bach: R107



Beethoven: Piano Sonata in C minor: ii. Adagio cantabile, op. 13 (1798)



Don't worry if you don't understand how the music from one key to the next in example 8 (*modulation*). We'll be getting on with that starting with this lesson's homework.

The $\frac{6}{4}$ before an imperfect cadence

This is the only other common use of the ${}_{4}^{6}$, almost always in the form I_{4}^{6} - V. The dissonant fourth of I_{4}^{6} must usually be prepared as a suspension, or at least approached from above by step. It is better to think of I_{4}^{6} as a decoration of V in this situation.



In example 9 ii), I have used a diminished seventh chord to approach I_4^6 , don't worry about these for now. We will come back to them later.

Using the $\frac{6}{4}$ elsewhere

Though there are instances of the $\frac{6}{4}$ chord being used in other circumstances, these are very uncommon, and best avoided. Stick to the rules described above, which apply almost all the time in tonal music, and you will have never have any problems with the $\frac{6}{4}$!