

Adding Non-Harmonic Tones

Sheri Peterson, MM, CAGO

Execution

- Addition of tones that are not included in the harmony of the moment
- Especially useful in an introduction or last stanza of a hymn

Passing tone: Most common non-harmonic tone

- A tone approached and left by step in the same direction
- Usually fills in between 3rds, especially in the bass but also works on inner voices (alto and tenor)
- For congregational hymn, do not add passing tones in the soprano
- For prelude or postlude, passing tones in soprano are fine
- Adds variety without disturbing those singing in parts

Neighbor tone

- A tone approached and left by step with a change of direction (going above or below the note and back again)
- Especially useful at cadences
- May produce a I-IV₆-I (plagal) cadence
- Avoid using it in the soprano voice
- Especially effective in preludes and postludes

Pedal tone (pedal point)

- A pitch is sustained in the pedal while the harmonies are changing in the voices surrounding it. Sometimes, it may be a chord tone while sustained. Other times it creates dissonance.
- Usually, most effective to play a pedal point on tonic (first degree of the scale of the key the hymn is in) or on dominant (fifth degree of the scale of the key the hymn is in)
 - A dominant pedal point is most common
- Adds variety
- Creates a feeling of anticipation and excitement
- Useful for introductions and the singing of congregational hymns
- Also effective for preludes and postludes

Suspension

- Approached by the same tone and left by step (upward or downward)
- Add them at the end of phrases, especially the final phrase of a hymn
- Typically found in tenor or alto voices
- 4-3 is most common. To execute sustain the fourth above the bass and resolve to the third above the bass.
- Other suspensions to consider: 6-5 or 2-1
- Can add a sense of anticipation and finality
- Use for congregational hymns, preludes, and postludes