CHAPTER 14

# Six-Four Chords and Revisiting IV

You might have noticed that we have not discussed any six-four ($\frac{6}{4}$) chords in our studies (save for their simple definition in Part 1). They occur much less often than root-position and first-inversion chords because of their dissonant interval of a fourth above their bass; root-position and first-inversion triads contain only consonant intervals (octaves, thirds, fifths, and sixths). While their intervals stack into second-inversion triads, they rarely function as do their root-position and first-inversion cousins. In fact, we will see that six-four chords are often only apparent harmonies resulting from the coincidence of passing and neighboring tones in two or more voices. Thus, six-four chords require careful contextual analysis and writing. Six-four chords occur in either unaccented or accented contexts; we discuss them next, in that order.

## Unaccented Six-Four Chords I: Pedal

Unaccented six-four chords usually occur on weak beats within a measure or on weakly accented measures in four-measure groups. Listen to the short excerpt in Example 14.1, noting the six-four chord's function. You probably heard the opening of this famous Christmas carol as a single prolonged tonic harmony. If so, you would have interpreted the two $IV^6_4$ chords as sonorities that elaborate the much stronger-sounding tonic chords, rather than as some sort of structural chords. These six-four chords arise when the bass holds B♭ and the inner voices ascend from $D^4$ and $F^4$ to $E♭^4$ and $G^4$, followed by a return to $D^4$ and $F^4$. Thus, the apparent $IV^6_4$ arises through a neighbor figure exhibited simultaneously in two voices. Given the sustained bass over which the neighbor figure appears, we assign the name **pedal six-four chord** ($Ped^6_4$). We label pedal six-four chords at the first level as $IV^6_4$ and at the second level either as I-$Ped^6_4$-I or, with figured bass, $I^5_3$–$^6_4$–$^5_3$.