

Unaccented Six-Four Chords II: Passing

We learned that pedal six-four chords derive their name from a sustained bass and upper-voice motion. The **passing six-four chord** (P_4^6) derives its name from the bass passing motion that fills the interval of a third. Listen to Example 14.4 and locate the passing six-four chord. Measures 1-5 act as a tonic prolongation from i to i_6 featuring an arch-shaped bass line ($A-B-C-D-C$). Within the arch, the passing six-four chord occurs in m. 2, where it connects root-position tonic with first-inversion tonic by the stepwise bass line $A^2-B^2-C^3$. Notice that this passing six-four chord functions identically to the passing vii_6^o chord, which also fills the space between the tonic and its first inversion. On the second level of analysis, we label the chord a P_4^6 to reflect its passing function. Here, it is important to consider how this P_4^6 is unaccented. Unlike that of Example 14.2, which occurs on a weak *beat*, this chord occurs on a weak *measure* within a quickly moving four-bar group. Similarly, in very slow tempos such chords may occur on weak *parts of beats*.

EXAMPLE 14.4 Beethoven, Piano Sonata no. 3 in C major, op. 2, no. 3, Trio

The musical score consists of two systems of piano music. The first system contains measures 1 through 4, and the second system contains measures 5 through 8. The music is in C major and features a series of chords connected by a stepwise bass line. The harmonic analysis below the staves identifies the chords and their functions:

- Measure 1: $a: i$ (Tonic, T)
- Measure 2: V_4^6 (Passing six-four chord, (P))
- Measure 3: i^6 (First inversion tonic)
- Measure 4: V_2^4 (Dominant, (N))
- Measure 5: i^6 (First inversion tonic)
- Measure 6: ii_6^o (Supersustained, susp, PD)
- Measure 7: V^7 (Dominant, D)
- Measure 8: i (Tonic, T)

Passing six-four chords may be used to connect any five-three chord with its six-three inversion. Example 14.5 demonstrates a P_4^6 to extend both the tonic (d minor) and the subdominant (g minor). The Allegro opens with a series of restructured suspensions; once we remove them from the texture in Example 14.5B, we easily see the implied P_4^6 s connecting i to i_6 and iv to iv_6 .