

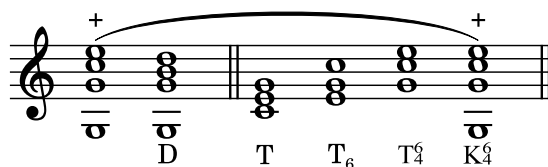
Last Updated: Jan 5, 2024

Chapter 9: Cadential Six-Four Chord

1. Definition and Notation

In cadences, the dominant chord often directly follows a chord that appears on the surface to be the second inversion of the tonic triad.

Example 9-102

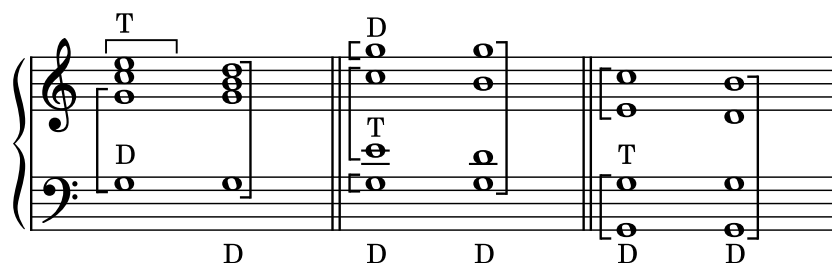


Based on the position of this chord within the musical structure and the intervallic relationship between its upper two tones and the bass (which is the bass note of the dominant chord), this chord is called the cadential six-four chord. It is marked by the letter K (cadence) followed by the intervallic distance of each of its tones from the bass tone.

2. Functional Characteristics of K⁴

Although the cadential six-four chord appears similar on the surface to the second inversion of the tonic triad, its functional characteristics differentiate it—it is not the tonic harmony. The distinctive feature of this chord lies in its functional aspect: it encompasses two functional tones: the bass tone being D, while above it is T, with D serving as the foundation of the harmony and holding precedence.

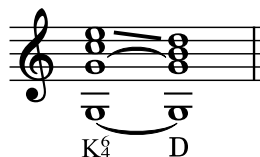
Example 9-103



A chord containing elements of two functionalities is termed as bifold function. This attribute grants K⁴ its unique tension and instability, distinct from the inherent stability of the tonic function (T).

The cadential six-four chord delays the arrival of D, yet progression to D becomes necessary; this progression is referred to as resolution.

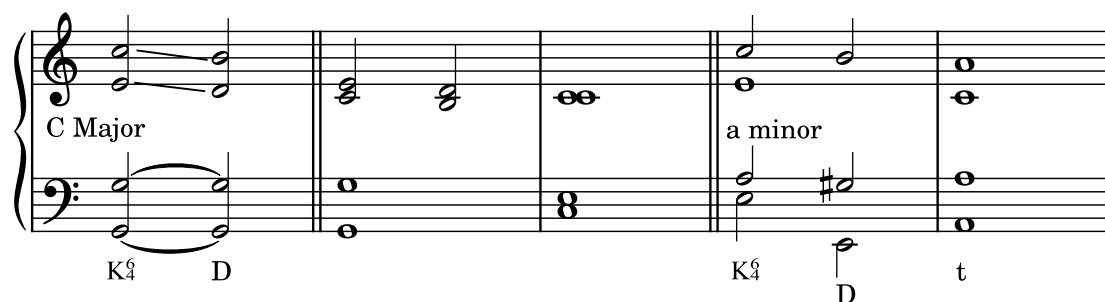
Example 9-104



3. Voice Leading

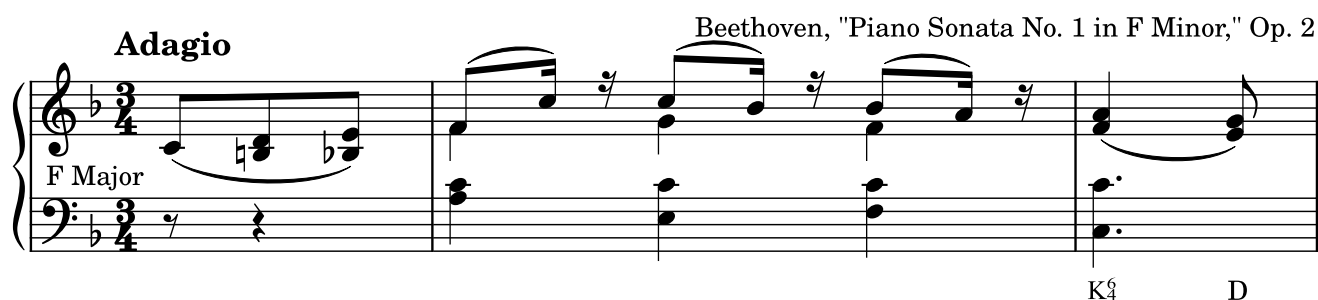
To emphasize the dominance of the dominant function within K_4^6 , it usually repeats the root tone of D. When the cadential six-four chord resolves to D, the root tone of the dominant chord and its doubled tone typically remain unchanged, while the tones of the tonic chord step downwards to the third and fifth tone of the subsequent D.

Example 9-105



In a half cadence, when K_4^6 resolves, these two tones from the tonic chord must progress smoothly:

Example 9-106



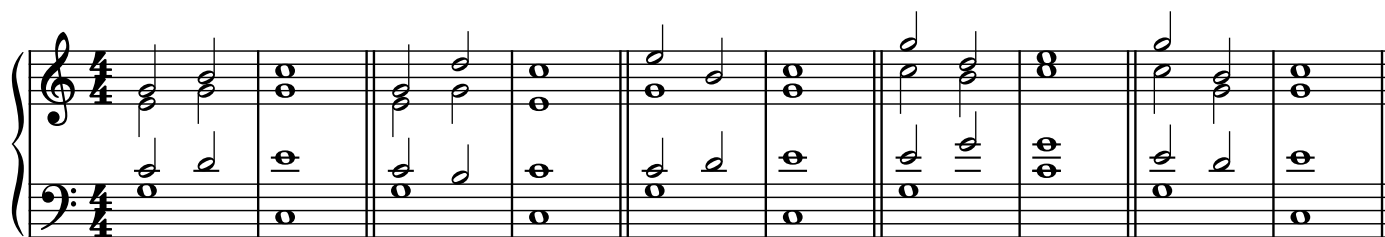
Example 9-107



3 Chapter 9: Cadential Six-Four Chord

In a final cadence, as K^6_4 resolves to D, the upper voice often leaps to the third or fifth tone of the dominant chord.

Example 9-108a



Example 9-108b

Allegro molto Mozart, "Piano Sonata in C Minor"

Musical notation for Example 9-108b in 3/4 time, marked "Allegro molto". The piece is in E Major. The first measure shows a triad (T) in the right hand. The next four measures show a cadential six-four chord (K6/4) in the right hand, with the left hand providing a steady bass line. The last measure shows the resolution to the dominant chord (D) in the right hand, with the left hand continuing its bass line. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo is "Allegro molto". The source is "Mozart, 'Piano Sonata in C Minor'".

When the cadential six-four chord resolves to D, its bass tone either remains stationary or leaps by an octave (usually descending).

4. Beat Conditions

The application of the cadential six-four chord has certain beat conditions. In a single beat, it should occur on the strong beat, while in four or six beats, it should be on the secondary strong beat. Under any other beat conditions, K^6_4 always needs to be placed on a stronger beat compared to the subsequent D.

In triple meter, K^6_4 sometimes appears on the second beat, while the following D is placed on the weaker third beat (see Example 8-96).

Example 9-109

Andante Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 26

Musical notation for Example 9-109 in 6/8 time, marked "Andante". The piece is in A Major. The first measure shows a triad (T) in the right hand. The next four measures show a cadential six-four chord (K6/4) in the right hand, with the left hand providing a steady bass line. The last measure shows the resolution to the dominant chord (D) in the right hand, with the left hand continuing its bass line. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo is "Andante". The source is "Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 26".

Example 9-110

A. Gurilev, "To the Bitter Bird (Горько птишке)"

g minor

K₄ D₇ t

5. Preparation of K₄ Chord

The most natural preparation for K₄ is with a subdominant harmony. The subdominant chord shares common tones (the fifth tone of S) with K₄, allowing them to connect with method of harmonic connection, providing a conventional preparation for the dissonant interval in K₄ (the fourth). This is why this method is most widely employed:

Example 9-111

Moderato assal

P. Tchaikovsky, "What has stopped the voice of joy" (Что смолкнул веселия глас)

g minor

S K₄ D T

However, in cadences, K₄ is often placed directly after the tonic chord without a preceding subdominant chord. This progression is most typical for a half cadence but can to some extent be used in final cadences as well:

Example 9-112

Mozart, "Piano Sonata in F Major"

C Major

T₆ T K₄ D Half Cadence

Example 9-113

Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 11 No. 2

Final Cadence

6. Transition

Similar to all other chords, the cadential six-four chord can also undergo transitions. During this, the bass tone remains stationary or leaps by an octave (ascending or descending), K_4^6 alters its melodic position or spacing, and subsequently, the dominant chord can similarly transition:

Example 9-114

Allegro con anima Mendelssohn, "Songs Without Words", No.28

T K_4^6 D_7 T

7. The role of K_4^6

K_4^6 , as a harmonically unstable chord, introduces new tonalities and additional tension to both half cadences and full cadences. In the conclusion of a musical period, K_4^6 maximizes the delay of the tonic chord's arrival, utilizing the existing harmonic means. The stronger the inclination towards the tonic chord, the greater the overall tension of the cadence. In the half cadence of a phrase, the K_4^6 uses its own tension to reinforce the temporary stability of the dominant chord, which is its resolution. This is the role of the cadential six-four chord in various cadences and the reason for its widespread use.