

Teaching notes: Scott Joplin, "The Sacred Tree," from *Treemonisha*

Overview

As with many of Joplin's works, "The Sacred Tree" from *Treemonisha* contains a plethora of common-tone diminished seventh chords, making it an ideal candidate for in-class examples of that chord. Since Joplin uses diminished-seventh chords of all types in close proximity to one another, this might be an ideal practice exercise to show students the functional differences between common-tone diminished seventh chords and secondary leading-tone chords. The work also contains numerous examples of secondary dominants and a prominent French augmented-sixth chord in the opening measures of the work.

Specific examples

Each of the following is numbered on the score (in orange):

1. (and 2. and 3.): On page 2 of the score, you'll find a secondary leading-tone chord (1.), another secondary leading-tone chord that functions as a passing chord (with a harmonic elision, 2.), and a common-tone diminished seventh chord (3.).
4. On page 2 of the score, you'll find a common-chord modulation from the home key of C minor to the relative major, Eb.
5. On page 5 of the score, you'll find a pedal $\frac{6}{4}$ chord that contains modal mixture.
6. On page 5 of the score, you'll find a common-tone diminished seventh chord that illustrates the neighboring function. It's missing its seventh so this probably isn't the clearest example to use, but the "neighborliness" here is obvious.
7. On page 6 of the score, you'll find an altered version of the typical $I \rightarrow CT^{\circ 7} \rightarrow V_3^4 \rightarrow CT^{\circ 7} \rightarrow I^6$ progression ($CT^{\circ 7}$ acting as a passing chord). Here, Joplin substitutes a mediant triad for the initial tonic and leaves out the second common-tone diminished seventh chord, but the voice-leading is almost the same: it contains scale-steps $3 \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 5$ in the soprano.
8. On page 6 of the score; this is another great example of a $CT^{\circ 7}$ acting as a neighboring chord.

Ambiguities, or things that might not work so well in a pedagogical context

1. Though it's likely that the overall form of the aria is ternary, there are some relatively ambiguous spots at the phrase level, particularly in the B section of the work. Some places contain conflict between the melodic/textual and the harmonic trajectory of the phrase (for example, at the bottom of p. 4).
2. Likewise, there are spots in the B section that are somewhat ambiguous; the material on p. 11 is one such spot.

TREEMONISHA

No. 6. "THE SACRED TREE."

By SCOTT JOPLIN

A

Andante con espressione. M.M. $\text{♩} = 92$

Monisha.

One Au - tumn night in

mp

Cm: i *F#m* *IV⁵/₃ - II*

bed I was ly - ing,..... Just eigh - teen years a -

cresc. *mf*

IV⁴/₃ *I⁷/₁*

go,..... I heard a dear lit - tle ba - by cry - ing,..... While

dim. *mp*

I⁴/₃ *I⁷/₁*

4

loud - ly Ned did snore. And the ba - by's

vii⁰⁷ *iv* *iv* *E⁷* *ii*

V⁷

cry - ing seemed to be *p* some - where

1 *2*

vii⁰⁷ *IV* *V⁴*

near that sa - cred tree, And the ba - by's

3

I *C⁷07* *I* *vii⁰⁷* *ii*

cry - ing seemed to be Some - where

dim. *f* *p*

ii⁰⁷ *ii⁰⁶* *V⁸* *6* *5* *3*

near that sa - cred tree.

sf *scm:* V_3^4 i $\text{ii}^6 5 \text{ V}$

I called to Ned and said, "Wake up, A

sf *mp* *cresc.* V_3^4 V^7

$\text{ii}^6 5 \text{ V}_3^5 = 4 \text{ i}^6 \text{ V}_3^4 \text{ V}^7$

ba - by is cry - ing out - side the door." But

mf *dim.* V^7/V $\text{V}_3^5 = 4 \text{ i}^6$

Ned said, "You have dreamed e - nough," And went to

mp

$\text{ii}^6 \text{ V}_3^4 \text{ V}^7 \text{ i} \text{ V}^7$

sleep once more; Yet the ba - by's cry - ing

vii⁰⁷ *iv* *vii⁰⁷* *ii*

seemed to be some - where near that

p

IV *IV*

sa - cred tree, Yet the ba - by's cry - ing

f *dim.*

I *ct⁰⁷* *I* *vii⁰⁷* *ii* *ii⁰⁷* *ii⁰⁶*

seemed to be some - where near that

mp *f*

sa - cred tree. It was

(5) (6)

$I_3^5 - b_4^6 - I_3^5$ = G: I ct^{o7} I₃₋₄⁵⁻⁶ I₃⁵ ct^{o7} I

B

twelve o'clock, or just be - fore, When the rain fell

mf a tempo

V^7 I I^6 IV^6_5/vi vi

hard and fast, The ba-by's cries I heard no

IV^6 iv^6 VI^6_4 ...

more, It had gone to sleep at last. And

I I^6 vi vii^o7 VI^6_4 VI^6_4 I VI^4_2/IV

ve - ry qui - et it seemed to be, Some - where

ben marcato

I'/ii ii ii⁶ V'/iii

near that sa - cred tree, And ve - ry qui - et it

V'/ii V'/iii

V'/ii V'/iii V'/ii V'/iii

V'/ii V'/iii V'/ii V'/iii

V'/ii V'/iii V'/ii V'/iii

seemed to be, Some - where near that sa - cred tree.

cresc. *mp*

I' ct^{b7} I' VII'/iii II' ct^{b7} II' V'/ii I

Ten o' - clock next

p

The Sacred Tree 14

em: i V' i V' i V'/ii

Sheet music for "The Sacred Tree" (14). The music is in G major, 2/4 time. The vocal line is in soprano range, with piano accompaniment. The lyrics are as follows:

morn - ing, The hot sun was shin - ing, And the
dar - ling lit - tle ba - by I real - ly had for -
got - ten; But I could hear the hum - ming bee,
Some - where near that sa - cred tree, But I could hear the hum - ming

Annotations in blue ink include:

- Measure 1: "rit." above the piano part.
- Measure 2: "mf a tempo" above the piano part.
- Measure 3: Roman numerals VI, Fr⁶ IV, ct⁶ I, i⁶ above the piano part.
- Measure 5: Roman numerals IV, V, iv, V, 4 above the piano part.
- Measure 6: "p" above the piano part.
- Measure 7: Roman numerals I, II, III, IV, V, VI above the piano part.
- Measure 8: "cresc." above the piano part.
- Measure 9: Roman numerals I, II, III, IV, V, VI above the piano part.
- Measure 10: "a tempo" above the piano part.
- Measure 11: "ct⁶ I" above the piano part.

bee,..... Some - where near that sa - cred tree.

cresc.

I VI = $\frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{4} \frac{1}{2}$ Fr + b V

I was bu - sy in the cab - in,

p

II' III' IV' VI' IV' $\frac{1}{2}$

When to my sur - prise,..... I

a tempo
mf

rit.

VI Fr + b IV $\frac{1}{2}$

plain - ly heard a noise,..... It was the

p

ba - by's cries..... And as I list-ened, it seemed to

cresc.

I^7 i $=G: I^7-6$ $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{6}{4}$

be, Some - where near that sa - cred tree; And as I

f p a tempo

ct^7 I V^7 I I^7 I^7-6

list - ened, it seemed to be,.... Some - where- near that sa - cred

cresc.

mf p

$\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ vii^6 $5/ii$ ii^6 ct^7 ii V^7

tree. I came out in the

mf v mp

The Sacred Tree 14

I $=G: i$ ii^6 V^7 i i

yard to see, And find out where the child could

ctd *iv⁶* *IV⁷*

be; And there, in rags, the ba - by laid,

i *III* *IV⁷/III* *vii⁶* *=d: iv*

Sheltered by that tree's cool shade..... I found it

IV⁴ *f* *p* *IV⁷* *=BbM: IV⁷*

where I thought 'twould be, There be - side..... that sa - cred

p *IV⁴* *I⁶* *I*

tree; I found it where I thought 'twould be, There be -

cresc.

V_3^6 / IV (IV) iv I^6 IV_{ii} IV_{I}

side that sa - cred tree. I

rit. f a tempo mf

V $=\text{G: ii}_{\text{3}}^6$ V^1 I ctd. $\text{I}_{\text{3-4}}^{\text{s-b}} - \text{I}_{\text{3}}^{\text{s}}$ ctd. I

took the child in - to our home, And now the dar - ling girl is

mf

V^1 I I^6 IV_{vi} IV^6 iv^6

grown, All I've said to you is true, The child I've

told you of..... is you..... Take not a
 leaf, but leave them be On that dear old
 sa - cred tree; Take not a leaf but leave them
 be..... On that dear old sa - cred tree.

The Sacred Tree 14

I⁶ vii⁵ ii⁶ ii I⁷ I iv^b

The musical score consists of eight staves of music for voice and piano. The vocal line is in soprano C-clef, and the piano line is in bass F-clef. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The music is in common time. The vocal part has lyrics in capital letters. The piano part includes dynamic markings (p, mp, cresc., decresc.) and performance instructions (ben marcato). Handwritten Roman numerals in blue ink are placed above the piano part to indicate harmonic progressions, such as I, II, III, IV, V, and VI. The score is numbered 63 at the top right.

A'

The rain or the burn-ing sun, you see,.....

mp *cresc.*

IV^6 = $C\bar{m}$: $F\bar{r}+6$ IV^5_3-4 i^6 IV^4_3 IV^7

Would have sent you to your grave,..... But the sheltering leaves of

mf *dim.* *mp*

IV^5_3-4 i^6

that old tree,..... Your pre - cious life did save.

IV^4_3 IV^7 i^6

So now with me you must a -

vii^{67} iv

$=E^b:$ ii

vii^{67}/I

IV^8_4

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gree, Not to harm that... sa cred

tree; So now with me you must a

gree, Not to harm that sa cred

tree.