

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 $I \rightarrow CT^{97} \rightarrow V_3^4 \rightarrow CT^{97} \rightarrow I^6$ progression (CT^{97} 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^{97} 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. ♩ = 92 *Monisha.*

One Au - tumn night in

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

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

dim. *mp*

cresc. *mf*

mp

Fr¹⁶ I₃⁵=₂ i⁶

I₃⁴ I⁷ i I⁷/I

I₃⁶=₂ i⁶ I₃⁴ I⁷ i

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

cry - ing seemed to be some - where

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

cry - ing seemed to be Some - where

f *dim.* *p*

V⁷ *i* *vii^{o7}/iv* *iv* *E^b/ii* *ii⁶*

vii^{o7}/V *V⁴* *I* *ct^{o7}* *I* *vii^{o7}/ii* *ii*

ii^{o7} *ii^{ob}5* *V⁸4*

near that sa - cred tree.

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

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

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

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Handwritten musical annotations in purple ink:

- First system: $\dots \frac{7}{(3)}$, I , scm , V^4_3 , i^6 , V
- Second system: i^6 , V^5_3 , $\frac{4}{2}$, i^6 , V^4_3 , V^7
- Third system: V^7/V , V^5_3 , $\frac{4}{2}$
- Fourth system: i^6 , V^4_3 , V^7 , i , V^7

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

seemed... to be... some - where near that...

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

seemed to be some - where near that

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sa - cred tree. It was

mf rit.

*I*⁵ = *b*⁶ = *5* = *G*: *I* *ct*⁰⁷ *I*⁵ = *b*⁶ = *5* *ct*⁰⁷ *I*

B

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

mf a tempo

*V*⁷ *I* *I*⁶ *V*⁶/*vi* *vi*

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

*IV*⁶ *iv*⁶ *V*⁸/₄ = ...

more,..... It had gone to sleep... at last..... And

I *I*⁶ *vi* *vi*¹⁰⁷/_{*I*} *V*⁸/₄ = ... *I* *V*⁴/_{*IV*}

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

ben marcato

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

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

cresc. *mp*

Ten o' - clock next

p

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em: i Y' i Y' i Y⁴₃

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

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

cresc.

I was bu - sy in the cab - in,

p

When to my sur - prise, I

rit.

a tempo
mf

plain - ly heard a noise, It was the

p

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

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

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

tree. I came out in the

cred Tree 14

yard to see,..... And find out where the child could

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

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

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

Handwritten musical analysis:

- ct607* (under first system)
- iv6* (under second system)
- V4* (under second system)
- i* (under third system)
- III* (under third system)
- V7/III vii4/5 = d:iv* (under third system)
- V4* (under fourth system)
- i6* (under fourth system)
- V3* (under fourth system)
- i = bbm: V7* (under fourth system)
- V2 I6 I* (under fifth system)

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

side that sa - cred tree. I

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

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

Y⁶/IV_p (IV_{rit.} iv) I⁶ V⁷/II V⁷/V

rit. f a tempo mf

I =G: ii⁰⁴₃ V⁷ I cb⁰⁷ I⁵-⁶₃-⁴₃ cb⁰⁷ I

V⁷ I I⁶ V⁶/vi vi IV⁶ iv⁶

V⁶₄ I I⁶ vii⁰⁷/V

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.

ben marcato

p

cresc.

mp

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Handwritten annotations in purple ink:

- $V_{4/4}^{3/4}$
- I
- $V_{IV}^{3/4}$
- $V_{II}^{7/ii}$
- $\hat{3}$
- $\hat{4}$
- $\hat{5}$
- ii
- ii^b
- $V_{III}^{7/iii}$
- I^6
- ct^{67}
- $V_{3/4}^4$
- I^6
- ii^b
- ii
- V^7
- I
- iv^b
- I^6
- $vii^b/5$
- ii

A'

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

mp *cresc.*

$iv^6 = c\bar{m}: Fr+6$ $V_3^5 = \frac{4}{2}$ i^6 V_3^4 V^7 i

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

mf *dim.* *mp*

V^7/V $V_3^5 = \frac{4}{2}$ i^6

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

V_3^4 V^7 i V^7 i

..... So now with me..... you must..... a -

$vii^{\circ 7}/iv$ iv ii $vii^{\circ 7}/V$ $V_4^8 = \frac{8}{4}$

gree, Not to harm that sa cred

tree; So now with me you must a

gree, Not to harm that sa cred

tree.

p *mp* *f* *dim.* *pp* *morendo*

The Sacred Tree 14

Tree 14

3 4 5 6 7 8 V I