

The 7-4-2 chord in early Italian recitative

The 7-4-2 chord is an auxiliary/neighbour chord that decorates a sustained bass note:

There has been a recent vogue to sprinkle these chords liberally throughout early 17th-century recitatives, although some continuo players are now restricting their use in music of the very earliest Baroque composers such as Monteverdi.

Common continuo notation for this progression is as follows:

Easiest to understand	Confusing	Most confusing
7	4	7
4	2	
2		

The second form is confusing because it normally refers to a bass suspension, in which the upper voices remain stationary while the bass descends a step. The third form is the most confusing because it suggests the very common 7th used in a 7-6 progression or the cadential “dominant” seventh used in the *giro*.

Upper voices in the 7-4-2 chord always resolve to the notes that immediately preceded them (the actual order in the upper voices may change at the resolution, if good voice-leading is maintained). **The moment of resolution of this chord is rarely notated** (it should be 8-5-3). **The 7th is always a raised seventh**, even though this is frequently not notated either.

Despite the potentially confusing notation, this progression is not difficult to play. In modern terms, the 7-4-2 can be thought of as a **dominant 7th chord played with the tonic note in the bass. It is approached from, and resolves to, a tonic triad.** The first example below shows the simple dominant 7th cadence on which the 7-4-2 progression is based:

The four examples after the double bar show the possible arrangements of the upper voices. The last example shows how it is possible to start and end with a different order of the upper voices.

When a recitative passage dwells upon notes a 2nd, 4th or 7th above a sustained bass note, a 7-4-2 chord might be used, which resolves once the recitative reaches a unison, 3rd or 5th with the bass. The chord and its resolution usually land on a strong beat.

Practice playing the 7-4-2 and its resolution (even where not indicated) in several different ways.

7 8 / 4 5 / 2 3 #7 8 / 4 5 / 2 3 7 / 4 / 2 7 / 4 / 2 7 / 4 / 2

In the next two examples, determine where to play a 7-4-2 and its resolution.

There were shep- herds a - bi- ding in the field, keep- ing watch o - ver their flocks by night.

Ahi — ben hav-reb-be un cor di Ti-gre o d'Or - sa Chi non sen-tis - se del tuo mal pie - ta - te,