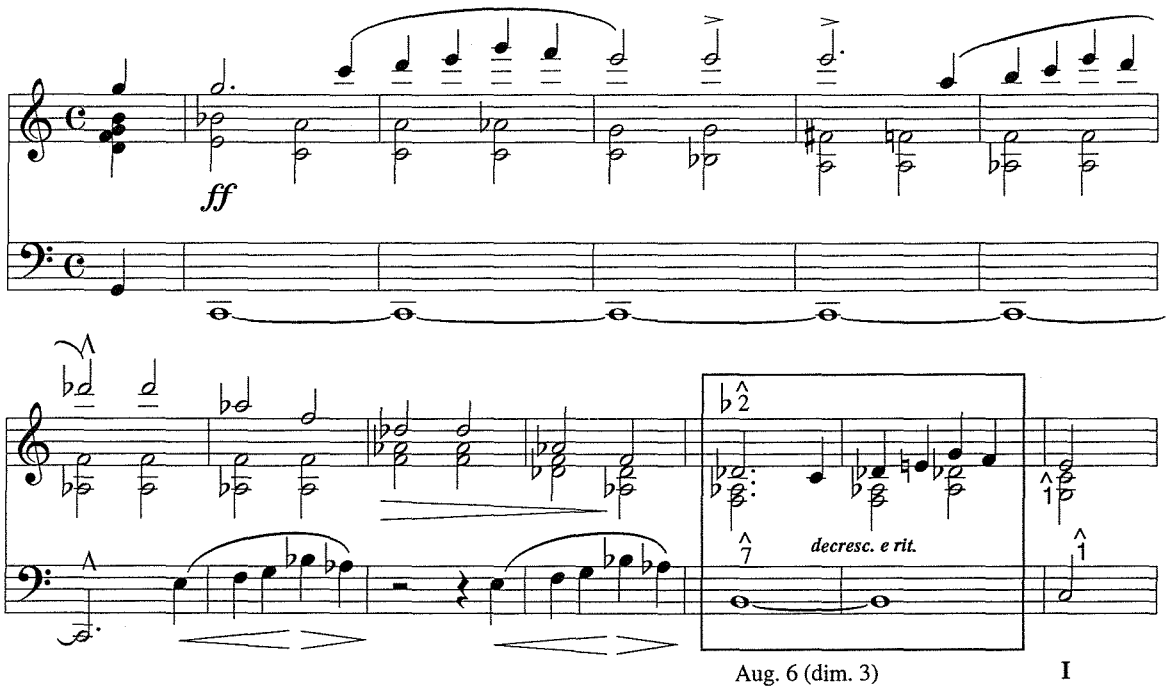
Communications

To the Editor:

Daniel Harrison, in his recent article "Supplement to the Theory of Augmented-Sixth Chords,"[1] successfully tames all but one of the feral augmented-sixth chords, the Neapolitan-hued one. He correctly says that "$\flat\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ is another friendly visitor, responsible for Neapolitan effects," but does not tell how this friendly, nay effusive, visitor influences cadential behavior of the augmented-sixth. The lacuna shows in example 1 (Harrison's ex. 6), Liszt's 1854 symphonic poem *Orpheus*, about which he remarks, "here the placement of $\hat{7}$-$\hat{8}$ in the bass emphasizes the dominant-to-tonic character of the progression" (176).

Example 1. Liszt, *Orpheus*, mm. 194–206



[1]Daniel Harrison, "Supplement to the Theory of Augmented-Sixth Chords," *Music Theory Spectrum* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 170–95.

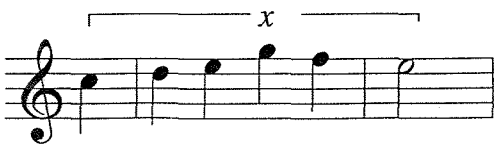
I question not the tonic resolution in mm. 204–206 but rather its dominant preparation. Before discussing example 1, however, let us review Harrison's figure 4:

Functional types of augmented-sixth chords

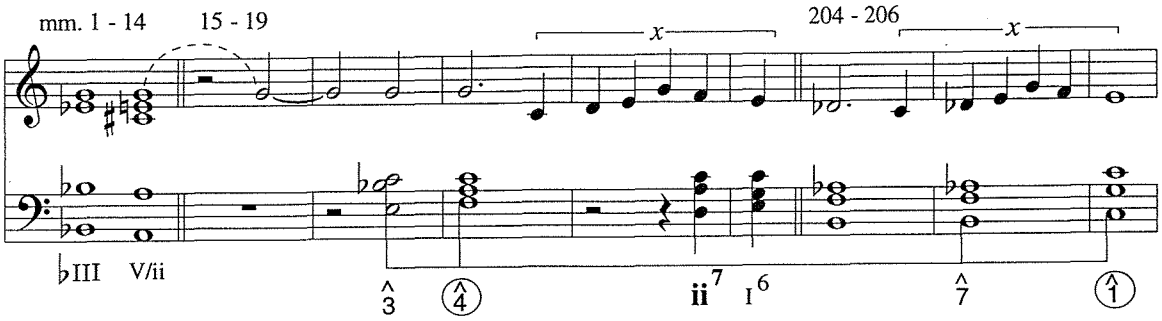
Augmented-sixth	Resolution	Functional Type
Dominant	Tonic	Authentic
Subdominant	Tonic	Plagal
Subdominant	Dominant	Predominant

In figure 4 he pairs tonic-resolving augmented sixths with either authentic or plagal function. Example 1, however, I interpret as a hybrid, one that might be dubbed the "Orphic" (or more toponymously, the "Hades") sixth. Would that Liszt had banished that nagging A♭ in mm. 204–205, replacing it with a G! Ditto for the troublesome C and E. The snag is that pitch classes A♭, C, and E are structural and so must be accounted for. A♭, deriving from a middleground prolongation of the I^7 (V^7 of IV) in mm. 195–196, is octave-transferred downward in m. 199, then changed into $\hat{5}$ of the Neapolitan, which persists to the end of m. 205. And pitch classes C and E stem from prolongation of I^7 beginning from the soprano's motive *x* in m. 195 and descending towards m. 203 (see ex. 2). As can be readily seen, both prolongations clash in mm. 204–205, with the Neapolitan (sub)dominating. Here, C neighbors D♭, and both E and G neighbor F. Moreover, the linear C-E-G projects a nested V of IV, which reduces the dominant's dominance.

Example 2. Germinal motive *x* from *Orpheus*



Example 3. The larger plagal structure of $\hat{7}$-$\hat{1}$ in mm. 204–206



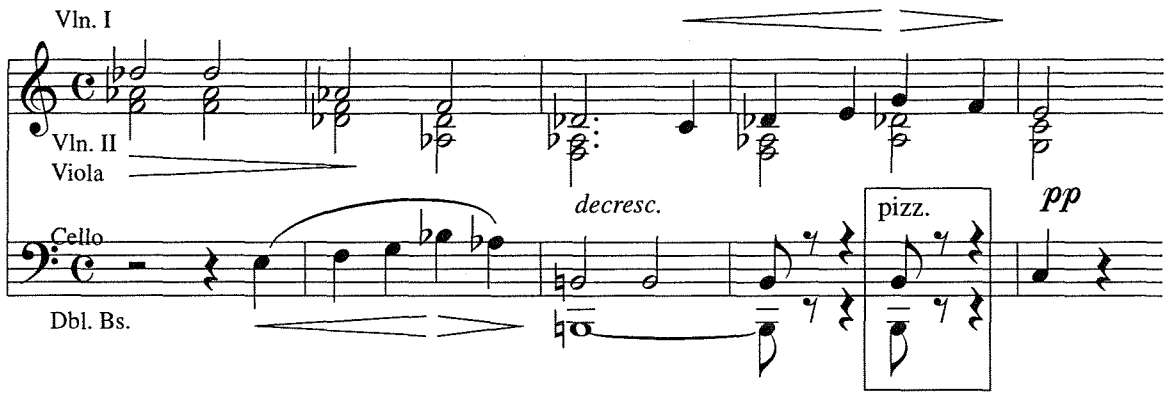
Harrison's $\hat{7}$-$\hat{1}$ bass is more motivically than harmonically driven. If we trace the voice leading of the *x* motive from m. 200, we find that the A♭ ultimately resolves, or dissolves, to F ($\hat{3}$ of the Neapolitan). So the compositional dilemma arises as to whether one is to choose F or some other note in the bass. F is undesirable, since it would overstate the plagal element and so make the resolving C a retrogressive dominant of F. Liszt chooses B, using tritone equivalence.

But there is a richer explanation for the B. One can hear $\hat{7}$-$\hat{1}$ as fulfilling the $\hat{3}$-$\hat{4}$ (C: V/IV→IV) marking the first harmonic arrival in the piece, which is itself an oblique resolution of the opening Andante moderato (♭III→V/ii). Example 3 graphs this connection. First, we see that pitch class G, the dominant scale step, has its harmonic function suspended, literally; and second, the $\hat{3}$-$\hat{4}$ (mm. 15-19) is balanced by $\hat{7}$-$\hat{8}$ mm. (204–206). Since the dominant step is marginally functional in both cases—and throughout the whole piece until the last phrase, for that matter—we must conclude that the cadence in mm. 204–206 discharges more plagal than authentic tension. I have circled $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{1}$ in the bass to expose the plagal pillars of the work's structure. Harrison, in contrast, suggests that B3 appears merely to supply the dominant gene necessary to support the logical implications of his figure 4.

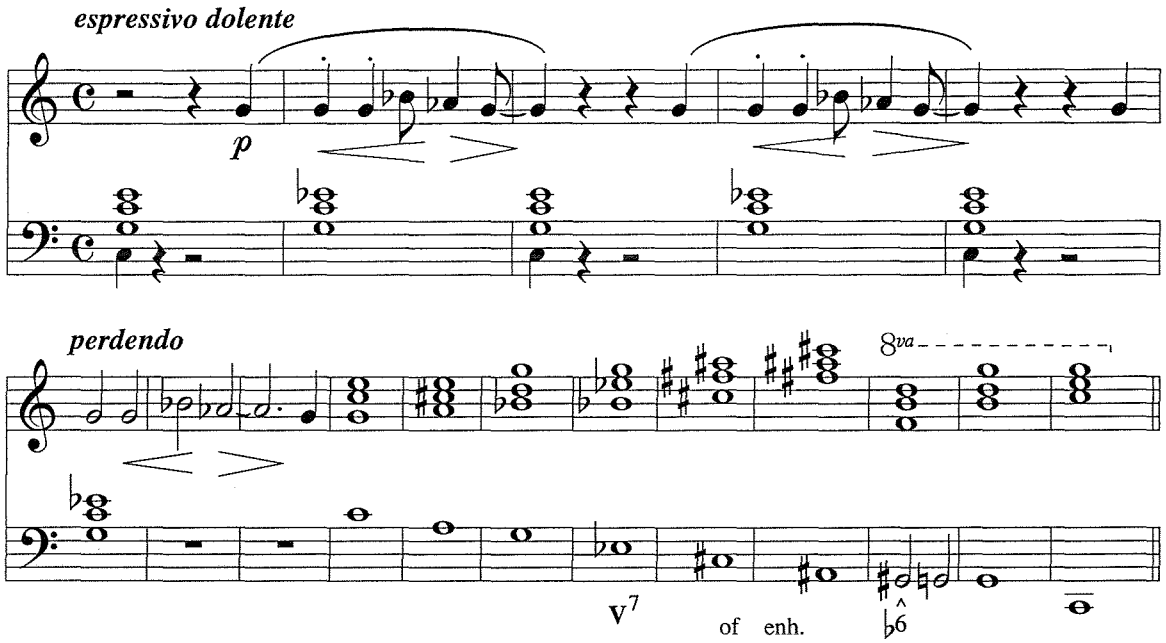
The mixture of authentic and plagal functions in mm. 204–206 is further corroborated by the discrete (*pizzicato*) Bs of the low strings under the soprano G (ex. 4). To be sure, Liszt wants us to feel the dominant's presence here, but he accents the subdominant more, not

only through the Neapolitan complex in the upper parts but also through the iterated English horn pitches B♭-*A*♭-G immediately following, a transformation of *x* (ex. 5). And in the last phrase of the piece, the dominant element unfolds in the chromatic passing motion of the upper voices, while residue of the Neapolitan (that is, its $V^7/V \rightarrow V$) infiltrates the dominant preparation of the cadential bass (ex. 5). For all the above reasons, then, the Orphic sixth falls *between* Harrison's authentic and plagal functions.

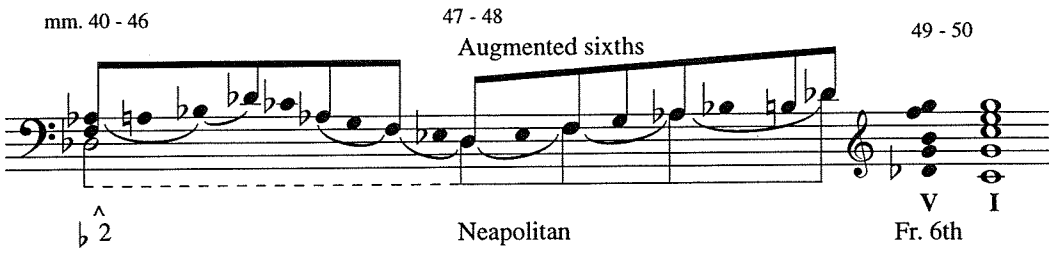
Example 4. Articulation of $\hat{7}$ in mm. 204–205 as Liszt wrote it



Example 5. Subdominant coloration from m. 206 to the end



Example 6. Composite Neapolitan and augmented-sixth scale preparing for dominant-function French sixth in Liszt's *Festvorspiel* for piano, mm. 40–50



Let us put the augmented sixths in *Orpheus* into perspective by examining a Liszt piano work of the same vintage, *Festvorspiel* (1857), also in C major. In *Festvorspiel* Liszt makes a Neapolitan bridge between the last thematic statement and the coda (mm. 40–50, see sketch in ex. 6). The pitch content of mm. 47–48 is little more than a scale integrating the Neapolitan and the three "ethnic" sixths. The first vertical after the scale filters out all the previous pitches save for those of the French sixth, which then goes on to articulate an unambiguous V-I function.

Finally, the Neapolitan harmony colors not only the augmented sixths of Liszt's symphonic poem but its programmatic aspect as well. Euridice is of the subdominant world, Orpheus the dominant world. Their longed-for reunion hinges upon Orpheus's not beholding Euridice until they have safely reached the upper world. Tragically, Orpheus succumbs to impulse, as signaled by the $\hat{7}$-$\hat{1}$ bass and the G of motive *x* abrading the Neapolitan (mm. 205–206). G, which helps to transform *x* into the *espressivo dolente*, motivates Euridice's fading sighs. And as Orpheus ascends to Earth, so Euridice must finally and forever descend to Hades.

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