

# Embellishing Tones, Broken Chords, and Decoration

Ted Greene, 1974-12-24

Composers and musicians have not been content to just play chords without adding some decoration so as to produce smoother music, as well as variety and richness. Compare the following:

I    vi    ii    V    I                    I    vi    ii    V    I  
A    F#m   Bm   E    A                    A    F#m   Bm   E    A

The circled notes are examples of one type of use of *Embellishing Tones* (also called *Decorating Tones* or *Accessory Tones*). Also, they are often “non-harmonic tones” for a given era.

This particular type is called *Diatonic Passing Tones*. Their function is to fill in a diatonic skip from one chord tone to another. There are also *Non-Diatonic Passing Tones*, but you needn’t concern yourself with them now.

There are many other forms of decoration used, and they are usually given specific names, but for simplicities’ sake, most will just be listed and, rather than know the specific names, it is hoped that you will try to familiarize yourself with the *sound* of them (exercises will follow soon) for now.

Analyze them carefully to see why they all sound slightly different.

## Filling in Melodic Leap

Given:    D            A            Decorated:

Parallel double embellishing tones usually happen in 3rd, 6th, or 10th intervals (see end of line above).

Notice the delaying of one of the chord notes – this technique is called *Broken Chords* and is commonly used to decorate.

Stationary Embellishment

Given: **A**      Decorated:

Neighbor note

Neighbor note

5th fret

Decorated Step-wise Melody

Given: **A**    **D**      Decorated:

This is called an anticipation

A harmonic device that is pretty common is the “freezing” of an embellishing tone right onto a chord, replacing one of the normal chord tones which is then resolved to. These “frozen tones” are called *Appoggiaturas*.

I            V            I                    i    iv    i            V            I

(D/A)            (D)

Examples: A            E7            A                    F#m   Bm   F#m   C#   F#

Notice the delayed resolution

Notice that the third chord above can be analyzed also, as a D (IV) chord in 2nd inversion; also, the 1st chord in the 2nd example can be called a D (VI). The determining factors are basically up to each individual, but certain clues will become apparent as you go on.

Another type of frozen tones are the “prepared” kind, that is, those that are sounded first in another chord – they are called *Suspensions*.

Look at the F# note in the third chord, 2nd example. In the next chord it becomes a frozen tone, resolving to the E# chord tone – all this is the tenor voice. This is the abovementioned *Suspension* device. Suspensions are even more effective, in many cases, if the second note is not struck again, but rather, tied over or held.

Examples:

**Suspensions**

i            v            iv            V            I                    vi    iii    IV    I            ii            V            I

F#m   C#m   Bm   C#   F#                    F#m   C#m   D   A   Bm   E   A

Examples:

Tied or held notes that are chord notes to both chords involved sound quite a bit like suspensions.

I            V            vi            iii            IV            V            I

A            E            F#m   C#m   D   E   A

Tied or held notes that are chord notes to both chords involved sound quite a bit like suspensions.

etc.

Notes can be inserted between a suspension (delayed resolution) and its resolution.

I    iii    IV    V    I    VI    III    v    iv    i    V    I  
 A    C#m    D    E    A    D    A    C#m    Bm    F#m    C#    F#

Sometimes suspensions are prepared from an embellishing tone instead of a chord tone.

A suspension can resolve normally while the other notes move to a new chord.

