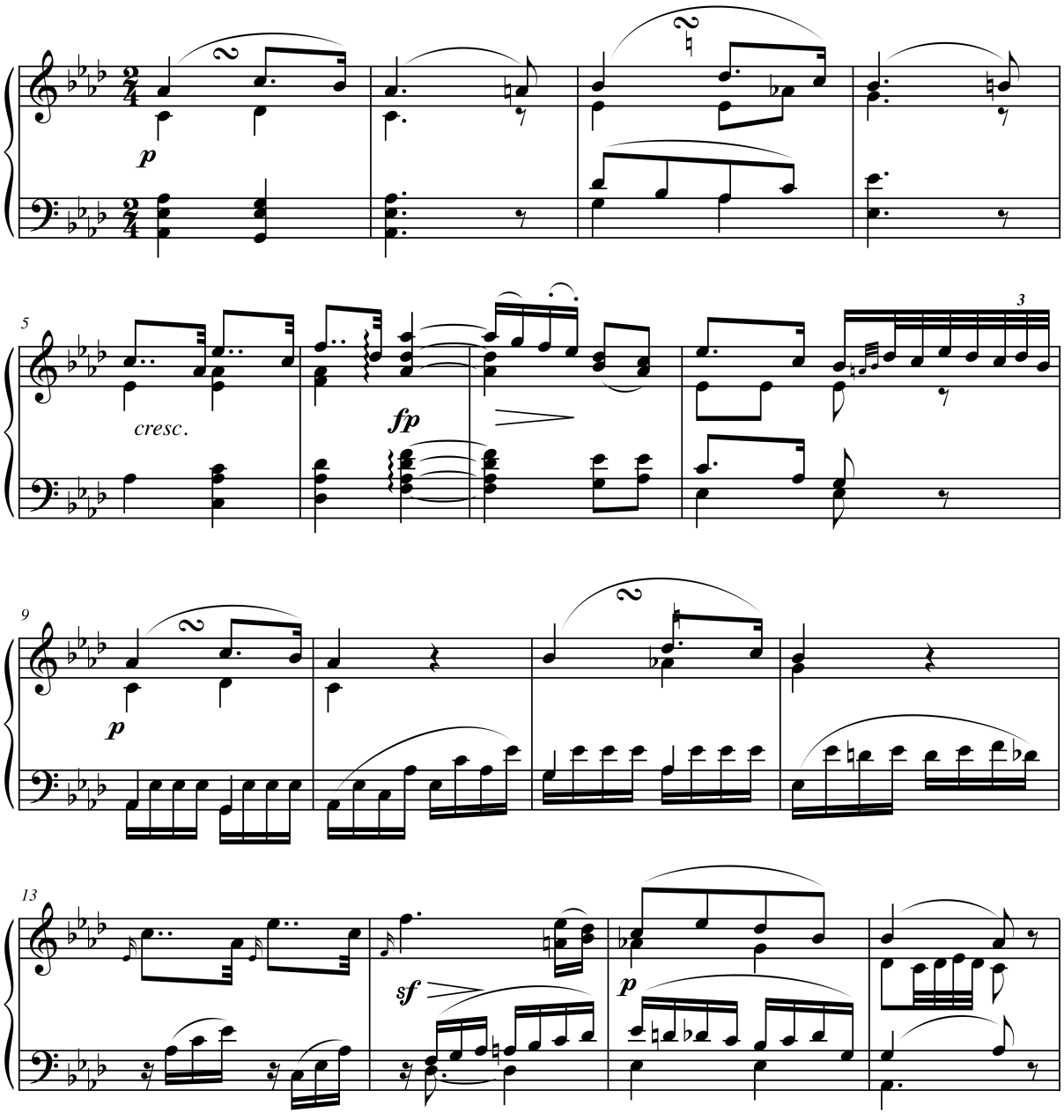
Web Feature 13.1

Prolongation in Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 5 (Op. 10, no. 1), 2nd mvt.

Study Web Example 13.1, the opening of the second (*Adagio molto,* or very slow) movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 5, op. 10 no. 1.



Web Example 13.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata no. 5, op. 10 no. 1 (2nd movement), measures 1–16.

Our first step is to determine which tones are non-chord tones and label them accordingly (we may disregard the non-notated ornaments, such as the turn in measure 1, in our non-chord tone analysis). To some extent analyzing the non-chord tones goes hand in hand with preparing the Roman numeral analysis; tones that are not part of the chord labeled with the Roman numeral are by definition non-chord tones.

The Roman numeral analysis is in turn informed by the harmonic function of a chord under consideration. For example, given the sonority that sounds on beat 2 of measure 1—G, E♭, D♭, and C—one might hastily conclude that the chord is a second inversion C minor triad with D♭ as a neighbor tone. This interpretation is incorrect for several reasons. First, C minor is a iii chord in the movement's key of A♭ major, and a iii^6_4 is very uncommon. A iii^6_4 resolving to I also makes no sense, since iii is a predominant chord that most often resolves to another predominant, vi, rather than directly to the tonic. If we consider the B♭ at the end of measure 1, the sonority of G, E♭, D♭, B♭ makes much more sense; it is a V^6_5, situated logically between the two I chords. The C, then, is our non-chord tone, an appoggiatura that receives an unusual degree of metric and agogic emphasis. Easier to account for is the A♮ at the end of measure 2, a chromatic passing tone that economically leads into the next two-bar subphrase.

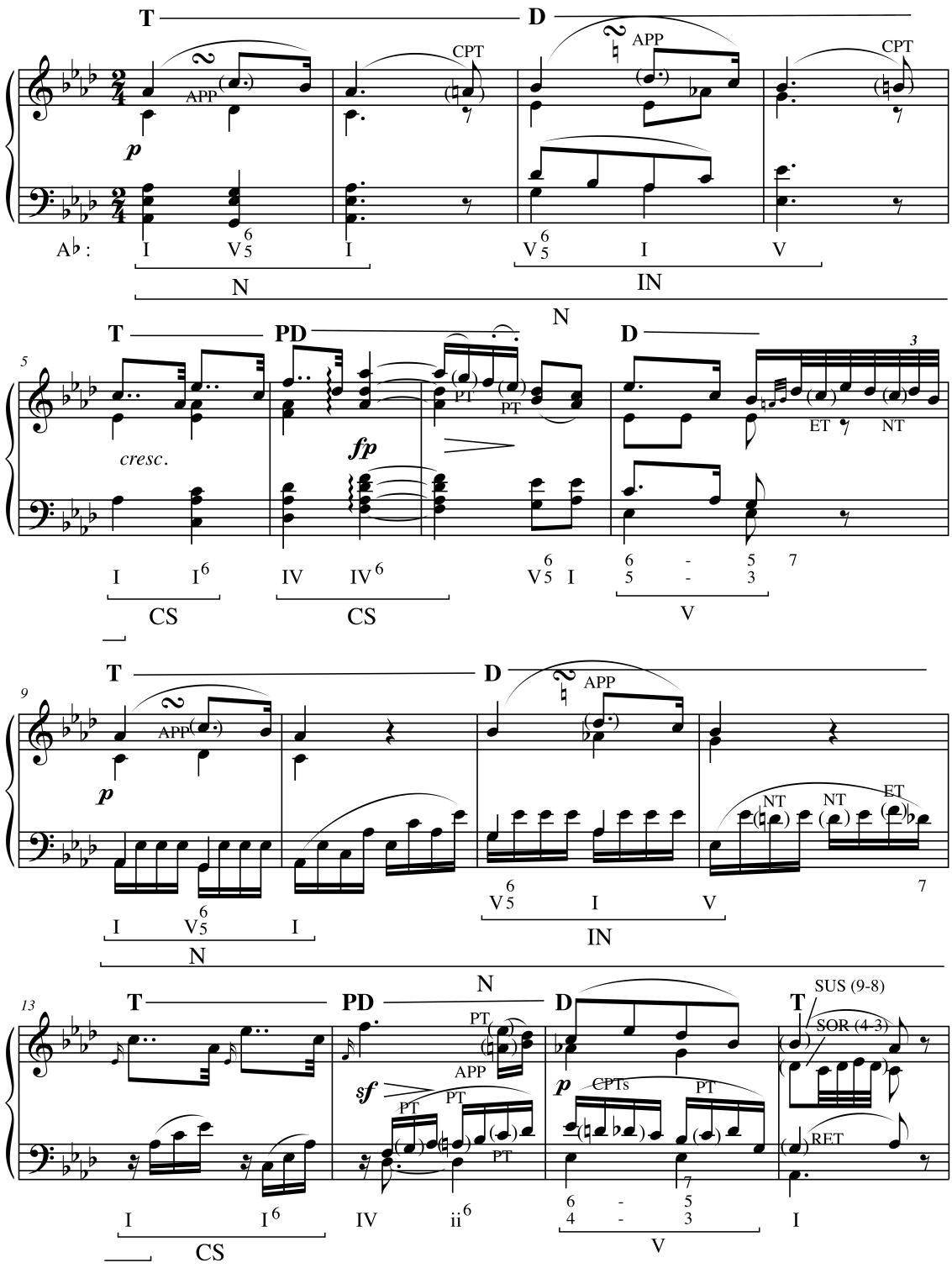
The melodic structure of the passage is such that in terms of non-chord tones measure 3 is similar to measure 1; the D♭ on beat 2 is another metrically and agogically emphasized appoggiatura, and the B♮ at the end of measure 4 is another chromatic passing tone. (When a passage involves melodic sequence, as this one does, it is a good idea to check to see if the pattern and role of dissonances is repeated as well.)
Thus, the opening antecedent phrase begins with a pair of two-bar subphrases. The I – V^6_5 – I progression that makes up the first two-bar subphrase is an example of a neighboring prolongation of the tonic (I). The second two-bar subphrase contains the progression V^6_5 – I – V; with the two V's in different inversions, plus the escape-tone-like motion of the bass, this is an example of an incomplete neighbor prolongation of the dominant (V).

With measure 5, the neat segmentation and repetition we found in the first four measures seems to disappear, replaced by a long arcing melodic line that finally concludes with the half cadence in measure 8. Also in contrast to the first four measures, measures 5 and 6 contain no non-chord tones; the I and I^6 chords in measure 5—a chordal skip prolongation—are followed by a IV and IV^6 in measure 6, another chordal skip prolongation. Significantly, measure 6 contains our first predominant function chords, setting up the arrival of dominant function chords in measure 8 (a cadential $^6_4$ on the downbeat, followed by V).

The turn and melodic decoration in the second half of measure 8 is a lead-in to the consequent phrase that begins in measure 9. Much of the consequent phrase is harmonically the same—although the texture is different—until measure 14. Comparing the consequent phrase with its antecedent, this was the point at which a predominant function chord (originally IV) was introduced. This time Beethoven seems to use a IV again in the first half of measure 14, but in the second half the presence of B♭s in both the accompaniment and the harmonized melody lead us to interpret the chord as a ii^6—still a predominant chord, and using the same bass note. Measure 15 presents us with another cadential-$^6_4$-to-V dominant progression, fulfilling the promise of the predominant.

What would be the most logical interpretation of measure 16? Is it a vii^o resolving to I over an A♭ pedal tone? Or, is it a I chord on the downbeat that is disguised by suspensions (9-8 and 4-3) in the right hand and a 7-8 retardation in the tenor voice? Both interpretations are explainable. In determining the best choice, one needs to evaluate the likelihood of a particular interpretation. For example, how often is one likely to find a root-position vii^o chord? Are there any other places in the passage where a harmony has been repeated across the bar line from a weak beat of a measure to the strong beat of the next measure? The answers to these questions lead us to interpret the chord in measure 16 as a I chord, with suspensions and retardations in the upper voices momentarily obscuring its tonic function. This kind of cadential dissonance was very common in the Classic era as well as the Romantic period; some theorists call the sonority that we see on the downbeat of measure 16 a **suspension chord.**

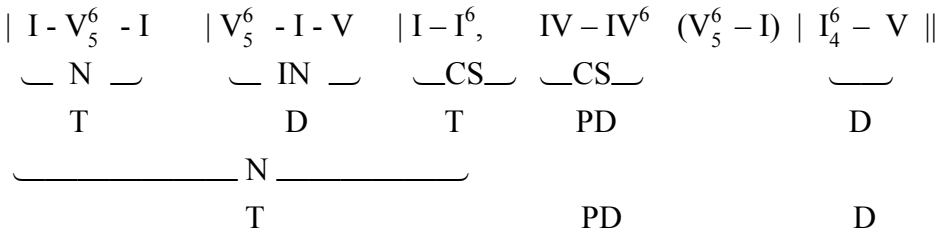
All of the previous analysis is shown in Web Example 13.2.



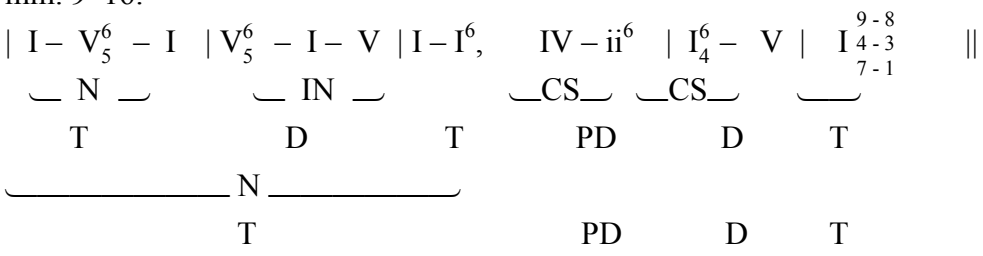
Web Example 13.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata no. 5, op. 10 no. 1 (2nd movement), measures 1–16, with harmonic and prolongational analysis.

We can summarize the harmonic structure of Beethoven's sixteen-measure theme as follows:

mm. 1–8:



mm. 9–16:



As the diagrams show, we can also interpret a still-larger-level prolongation of the tonic across the first four measures of each phrase. The opening chords of each gesture spell out a I, V^6_5, I progression—a neighboring tonic prolongation—with a rising 1-2-3 melodic line. When this higher-level prolongation is taken into consideration, both phrases neatly follow the phrase model.