CANON PROJECT – MODULE ELEVEN

SUSPENSIONS

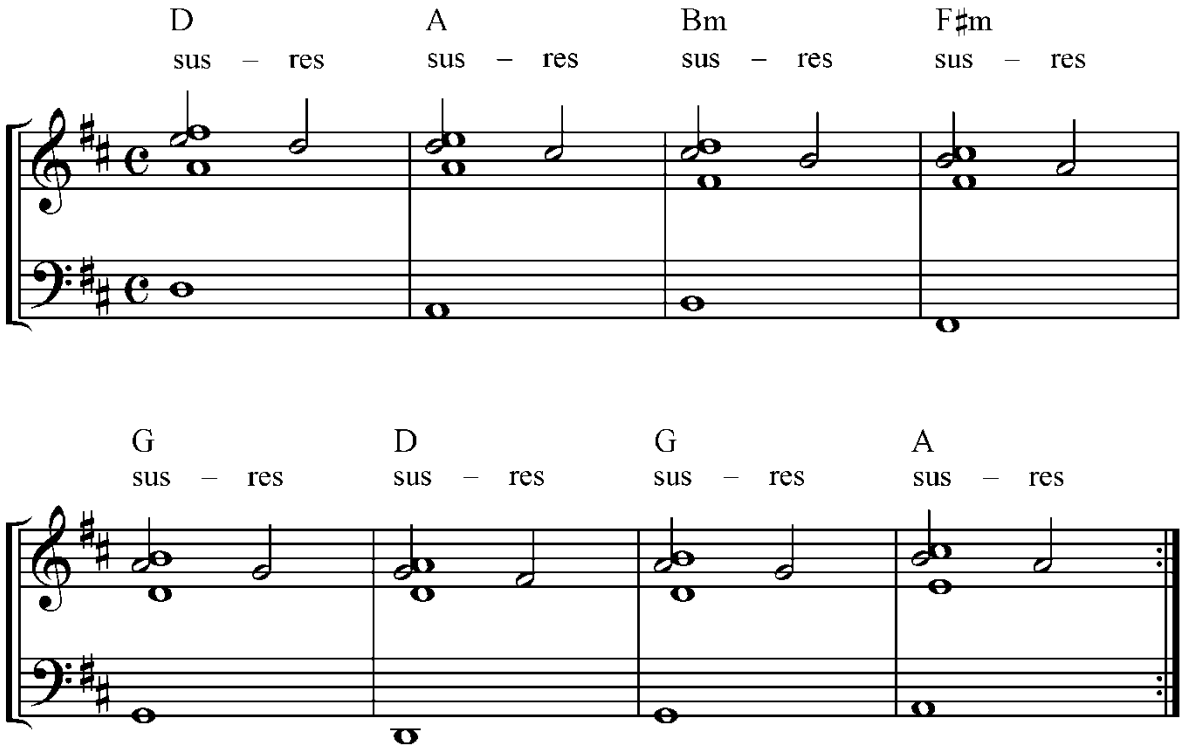
You can easily get more out of any chord sequence by pulling some of the chord tones up one scale step temporarily, then letting them fall back. In music theory, this is called ‘suspension and resolution’.

Here is the performance you will learn in this module. CPM_M11_01

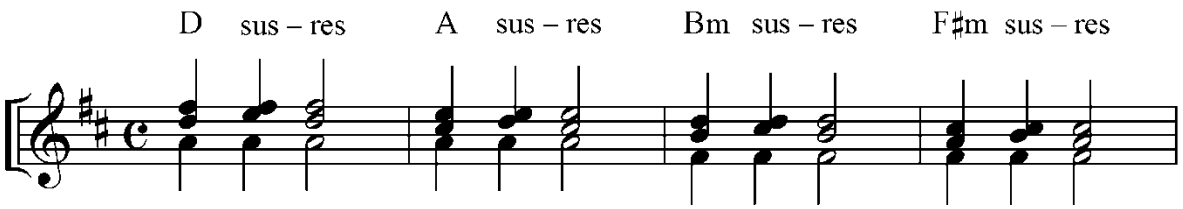
Suspensions in the Canon chord sequence

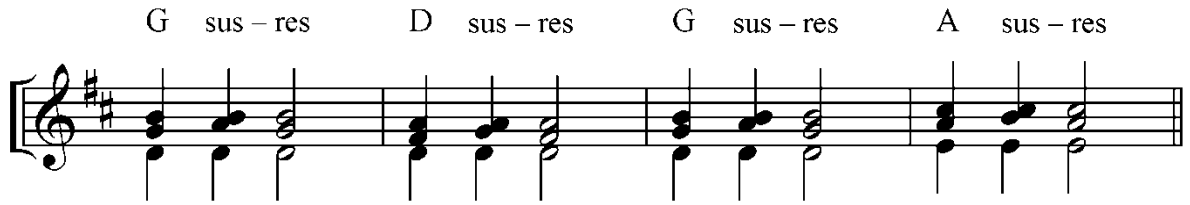
If you listen carefully to any classical Canon recording, about two thirds of the way through you will hear the music do something like this. CPM_M11_02

What is happening is that the middle note of each right hand triad is being pulled up a step (the ‘suspension’ – ‘sus’) and then let drop back down to its original position (the ‘resolution’ – ‘res’).



To make this quite clear, copy the next audio clip. Use two hands, as in the music (left hand stems down, right hand stems up) and the MIDI file, so you can concentrate on what’s happening to the chord instead of wrestling with the fingering.

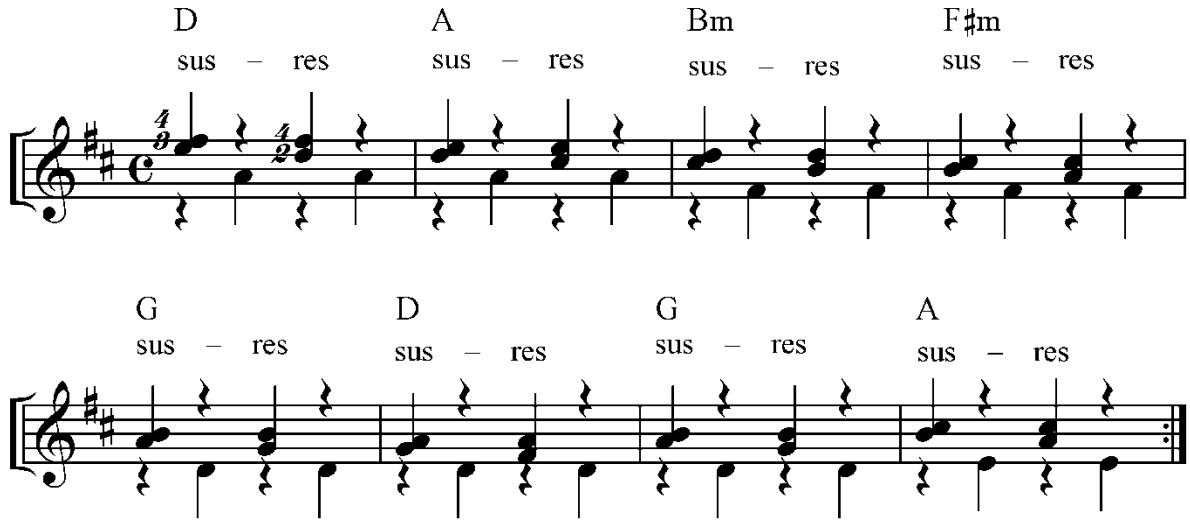




CPM_M11_03

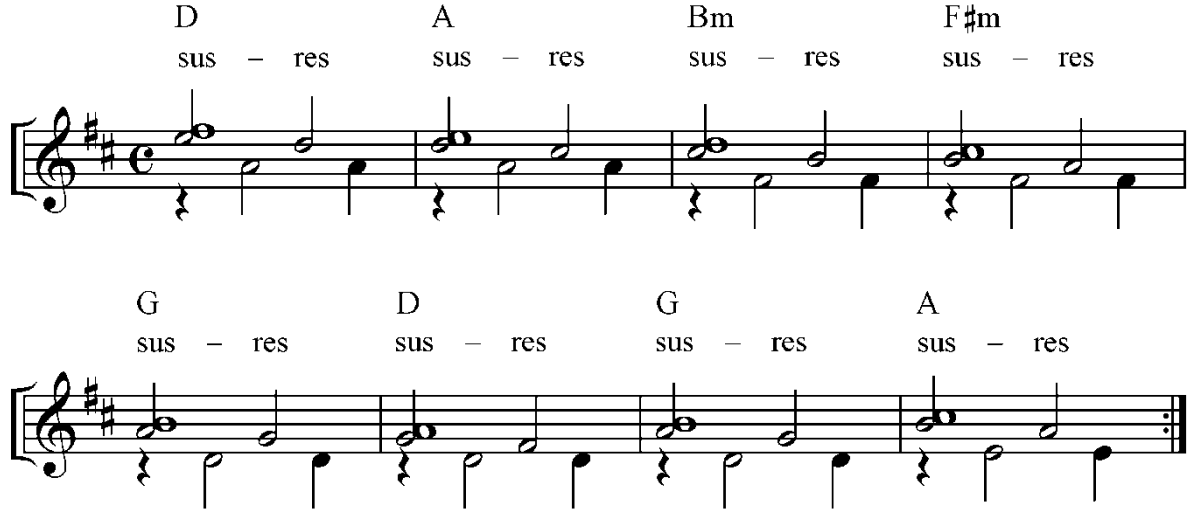
Pachelbel's Canon goes straight into the 'suspension' chord – the second chord in each of the groups above. Technically speaking, this is called an 'unprepared' suspension.

You can 'roll' the 'sus – res' chords using two hands.



CPM_M11_04

Note that the music above is written as simply as possible and the audio and MIDI files play it exactly as written. In practice, you make your fingers 'sticky' and hold the notes as long as possible, like this:



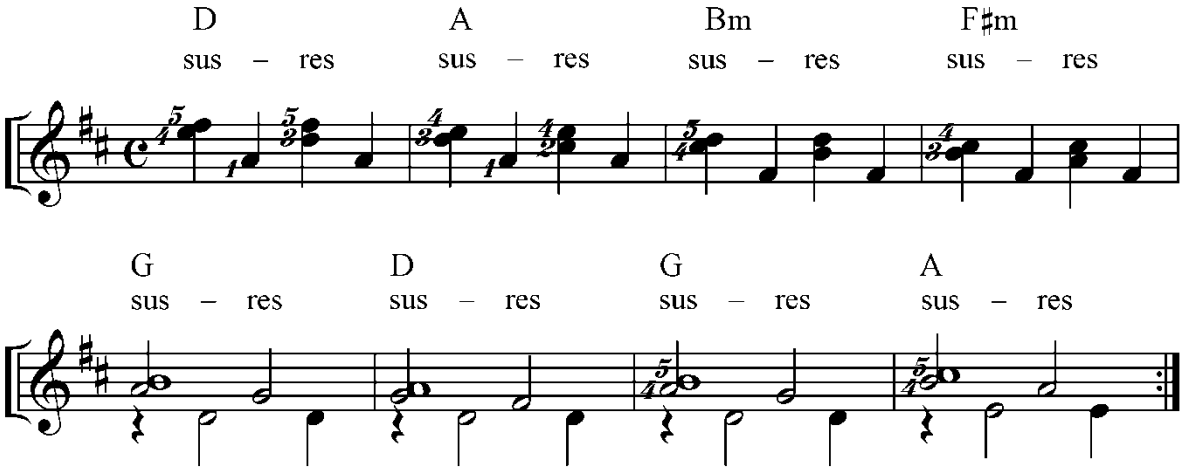
The top note of the triad is even held for the whole bar, not played twice. The result is a more lush sound, as in the demo audio file.

CPM_M11_05

This would sound good as the ‘primo’ (upper) part of a duet performance. What accompaniment pattern would you ask your ‘secondo’ to play?

A solo performance

Learn to play the rolled chords with just the right hand:

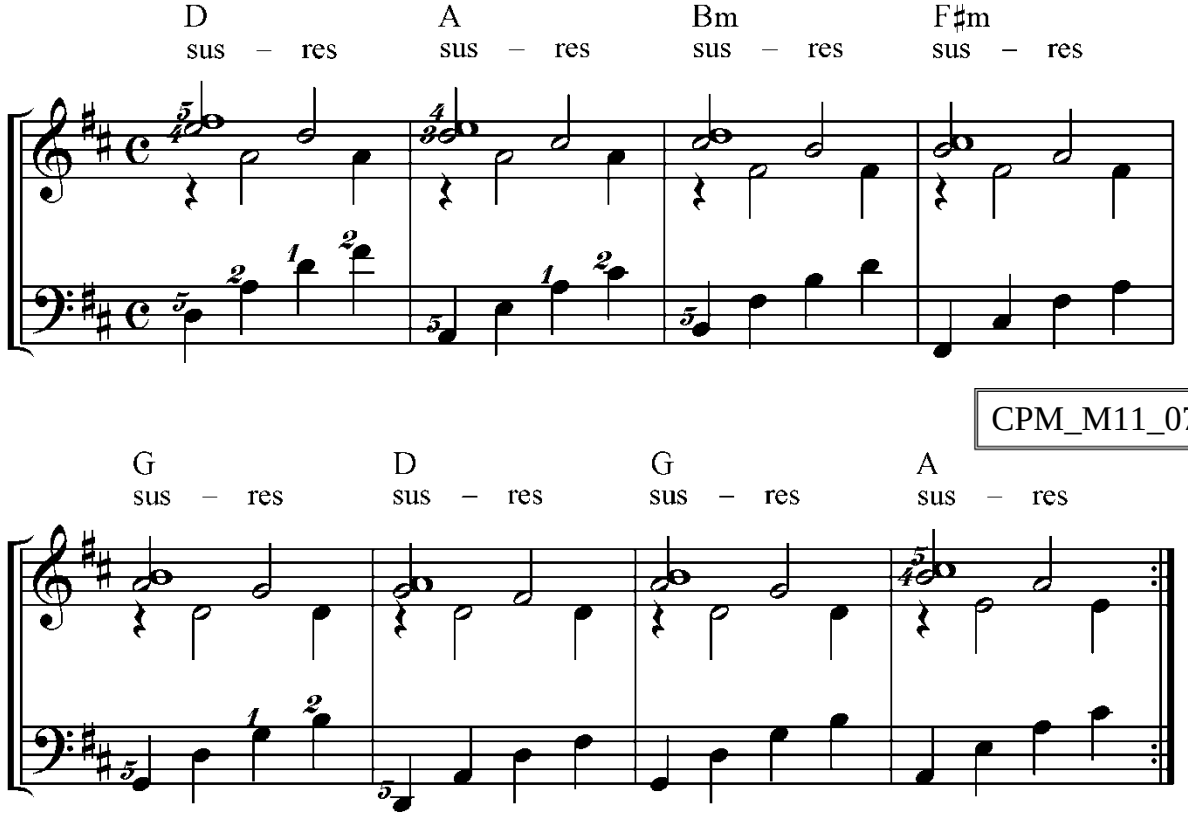


The top line of music shows the music written as simply as possible. It would be quite all right for you to play this version.

CPM_M11_06

The bottom line shows a really ‘legato’ performance, with tied notes (as in the audio and MIDI performances). Study the fingering options – the fingering makes more advanced effects like these possible.

Then play this right hand over the standard R, 5, 8, 10 left hand accompaniment.

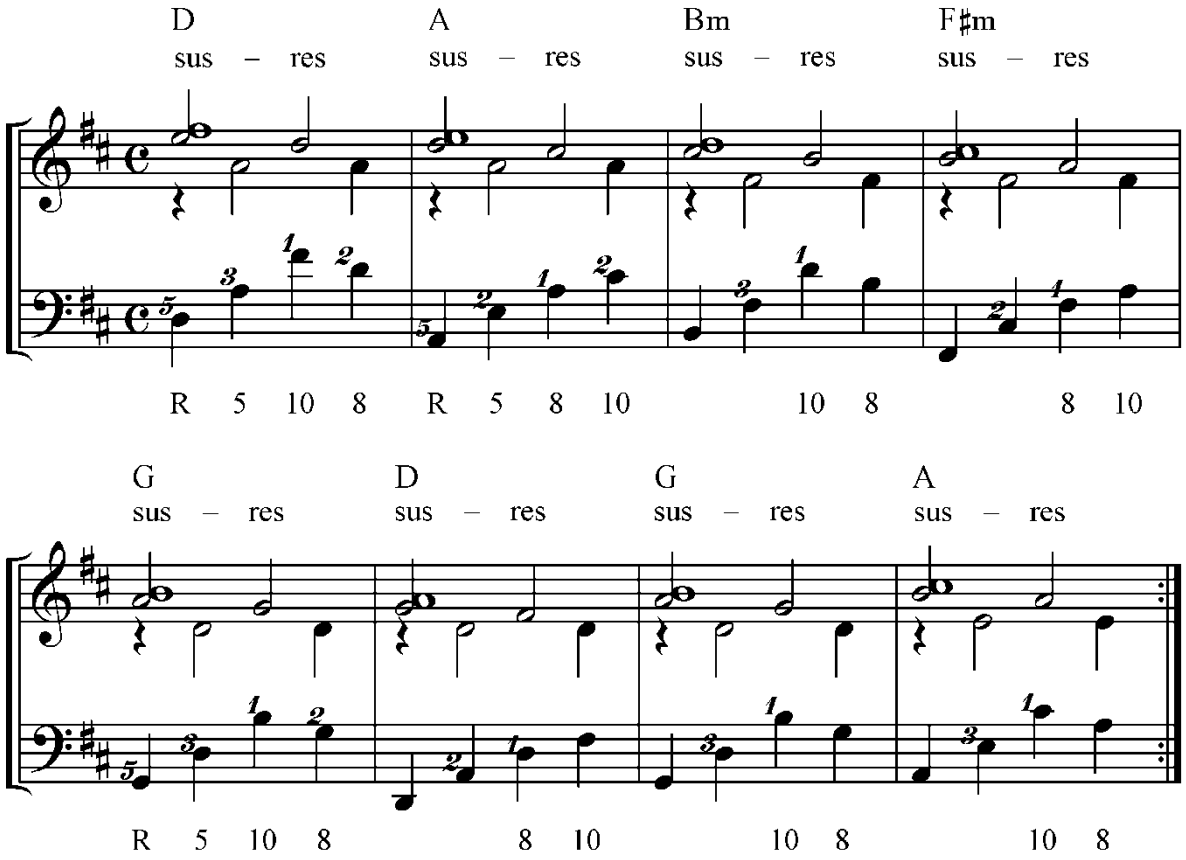


CPM_M11_07

Suspensions with mixed accompaniment

If you listen carefully to the previous audio clip, you can hear a ‘bald spot’ in the odd-numbered bars, where both hands play the fifth and the root at the same time.

This is easily fixed by playing a R, 5, 10, 8 accompaniment pattern in the odd-numbered bars and the standard R, 5, 8, 10 pattern in the even-numbered bars. (You learnt this mixed-type accompaniment in Module Ten.)



CPM_M11_01

Compare this with the original, ‘bald spot’ version, listening hard for the improvement.

CPM_M11_07

Most of the recorded music you hear will have had many, many of these little improvements incorporated. Start training your ear to hear where an arrangement needs this kind of attention.

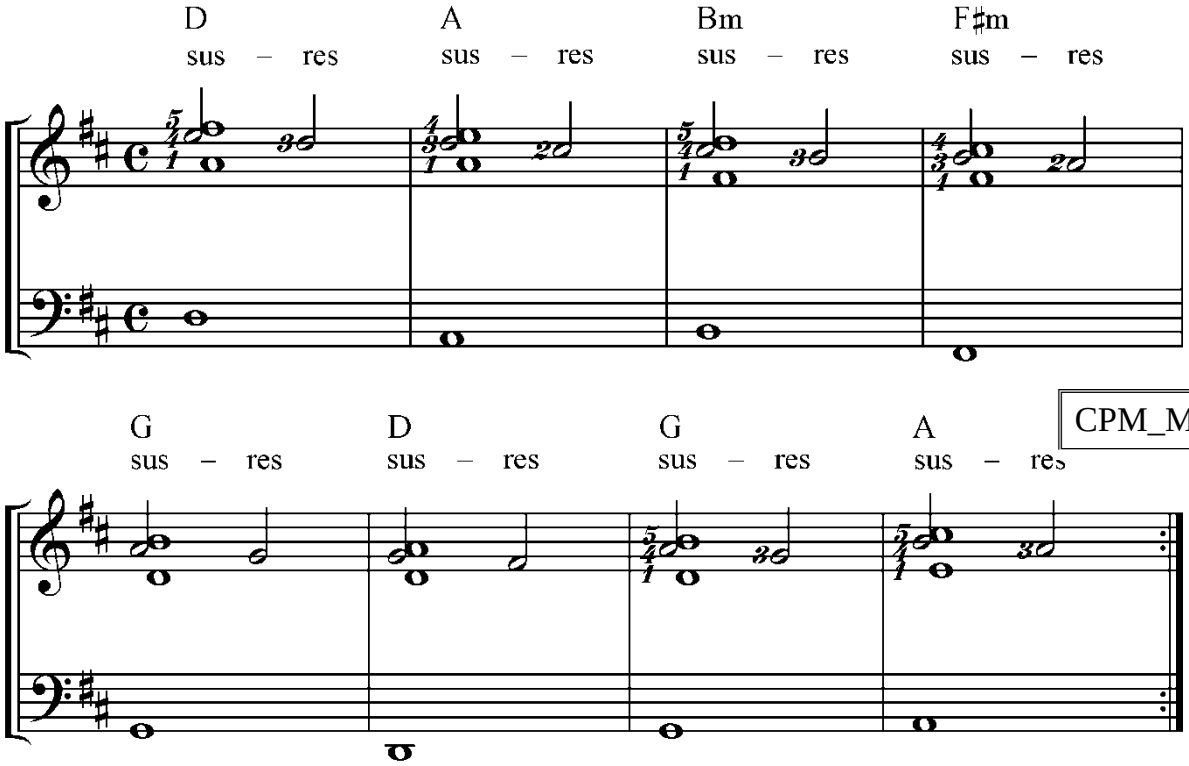
A duet version

You can use the mixed-types two-handed accompaniment as a secondo duet part. The MIDI file indicated in the table below shows both the primo and secondo correctly assigned to left and right hands. It will sound just like the module audio performance.

CPM_M11_11

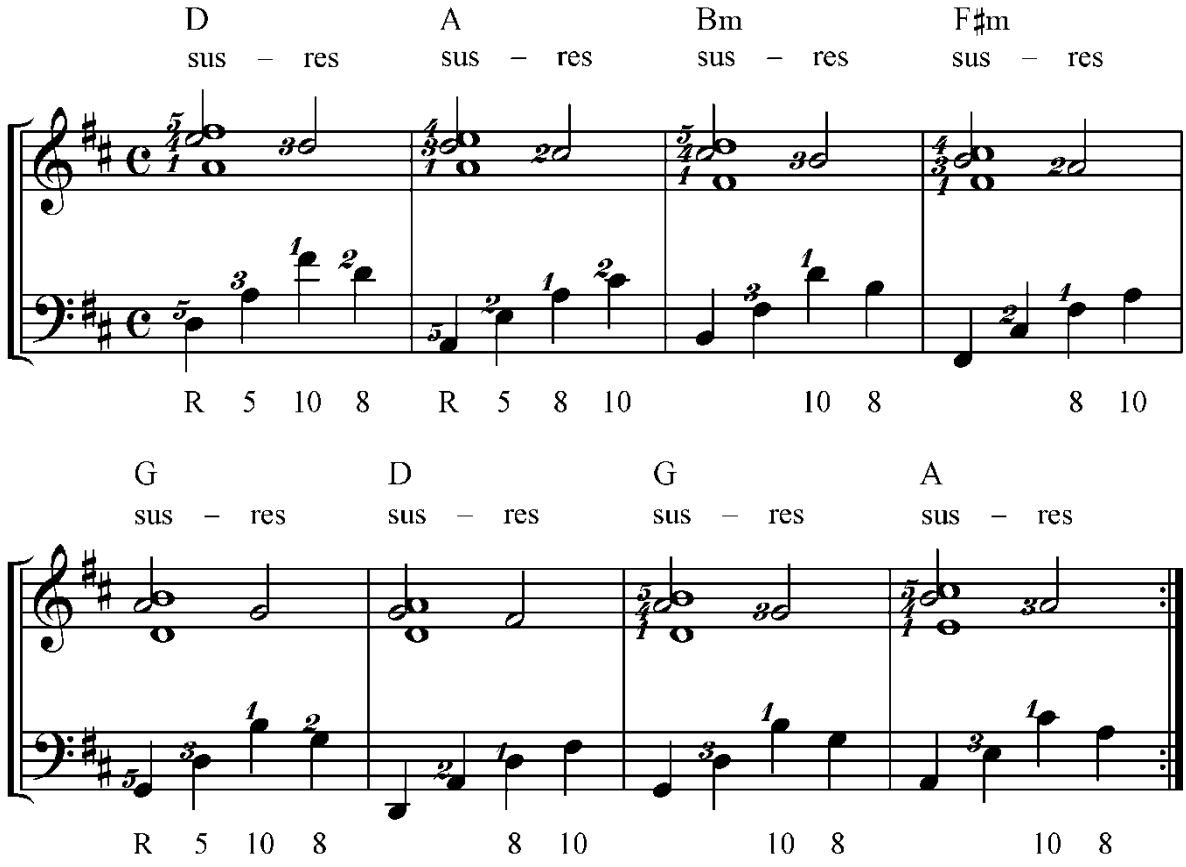
The suspensions played ‘straight’

Most pupils find it more difficult to play the suspensions ‘straight’ (three notes all together) than it is to roll them. See if you can finger the three-note suspension-resolutions as shown here.



CPM_M11_02

You notice that, when we’re learning something new like this, we simplify things by, for example, playing just a single-note bass line first. Now for the accompaniment.



You will get more practice playing the three-note suspension-resolution chords in the module audio and transposing challenges which follow.

CPM_M11_10

Audio challenge

Here is a build-up to a simple but catchy riff using just the D and A major suspension-resolutions in the centre of the keyboard with a simple bass line.

See if you can learn it by ear. The suspension – resolution pairs are just the same as in the first two bars of Canon, but an octave lower.

Remember that both Windows Media Player and MidiPiano can be set to repeat (and slow down) the performance file, giving you lots of time to learn the riff by simply copying.

CPM_M11_12

Use the written-out music and the MIDI file in the 'Answers' section to check your performance. Use a backing track to support your performance.

Transposing challenge

Listen to this performance of the Canon chord sequence – with suspensions – in F. Your challenge is to copy it.

CPA_M11_13

Here is a D to F Roman numeral system (RNS) transposing table:

Key: D	D	Em	Fím	G	A	Bm	Cídim
RNS	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii^{o}
Key: F	F	Gm	Am	Bë	C	Dm	Edim

In the Roman numeral system, the Canon chord sequence is:

Canon (RNS)	I	V	vi	iii	IV	I	IV	V

Use the step-by-step transposing process you used in Module Nine.

- Read the Roman numerals off in the bottom row of the transposing table to get the Canon chord sequence in F. Find the correct right hand inversions – the ones that look like the 'usual RH triad string'.
- Find the familiar-shaped single-note bass line (roots – the notes of the chord symbol letters). Play it with the right hand triads.
- Pull the middle note of each triad up one F major scale degree to create the suspension, then let it drop to its original position (the resolution).
- Copy the feel of the F major audio performance, especially the slightly funky bass line 'kicks'.

Check your performance against the written-out music and the MIDI file in the 'Answers' section below.

Suspensions in popular music

This is a very brief introduction to suspensions. For example, if you look at the Canon suspensions closely, you will see that the chord tone that is being 'suspended' is not always the same one. In the D, B minor, G and final A chords, it is the root that is pulled up and then released. This is called a 2–1 suspension. In the other bars, it is the third which is suspended. These are 4–3 suspensions – the more common type.

In popular music, suspensions are usually indicated by 'sus' in a chord symbol – Dsus, for example. This would usually indicate a 4–3 suspension/resolution. (Sometimes you will see 'sus4' in the chord symbol, which is more informative.) A 2–1 suspension will sometimes be indicated loosely (if at all) by 'add 9' or 'add 2'.

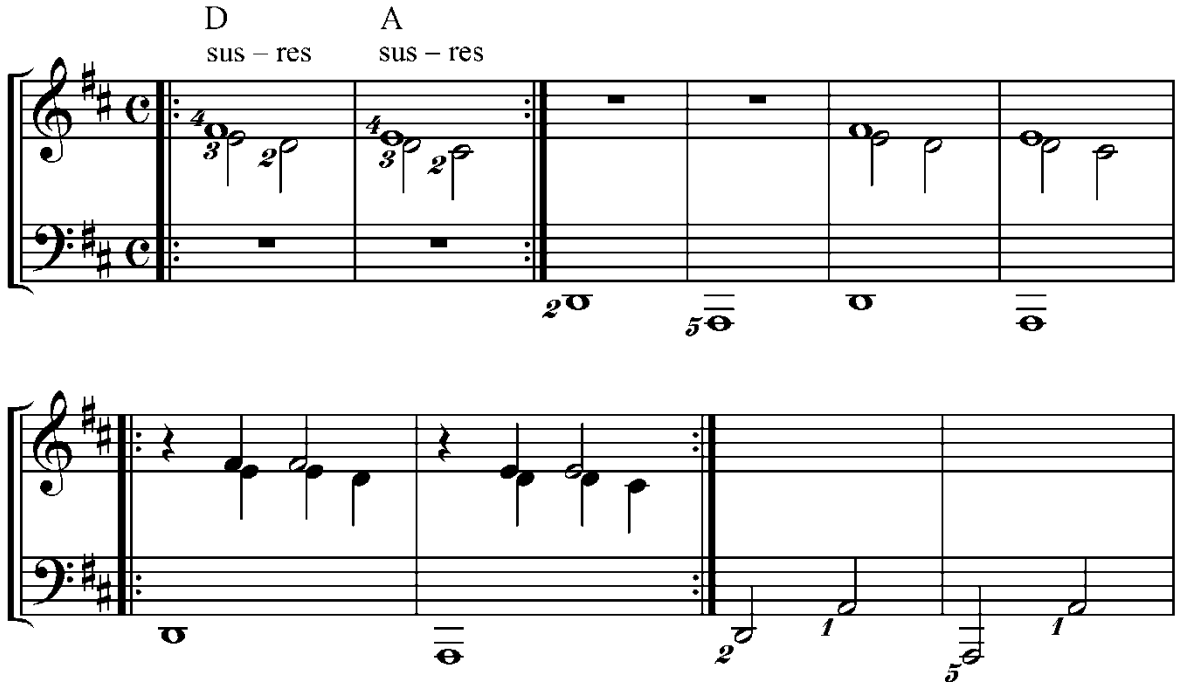
In popular sheet music, the resolution is not normally indicated with the 'res' provided in this Musicarta module, although sometimes a plain 'D' chord symbol (in our example) would show that the suspension had resolved.

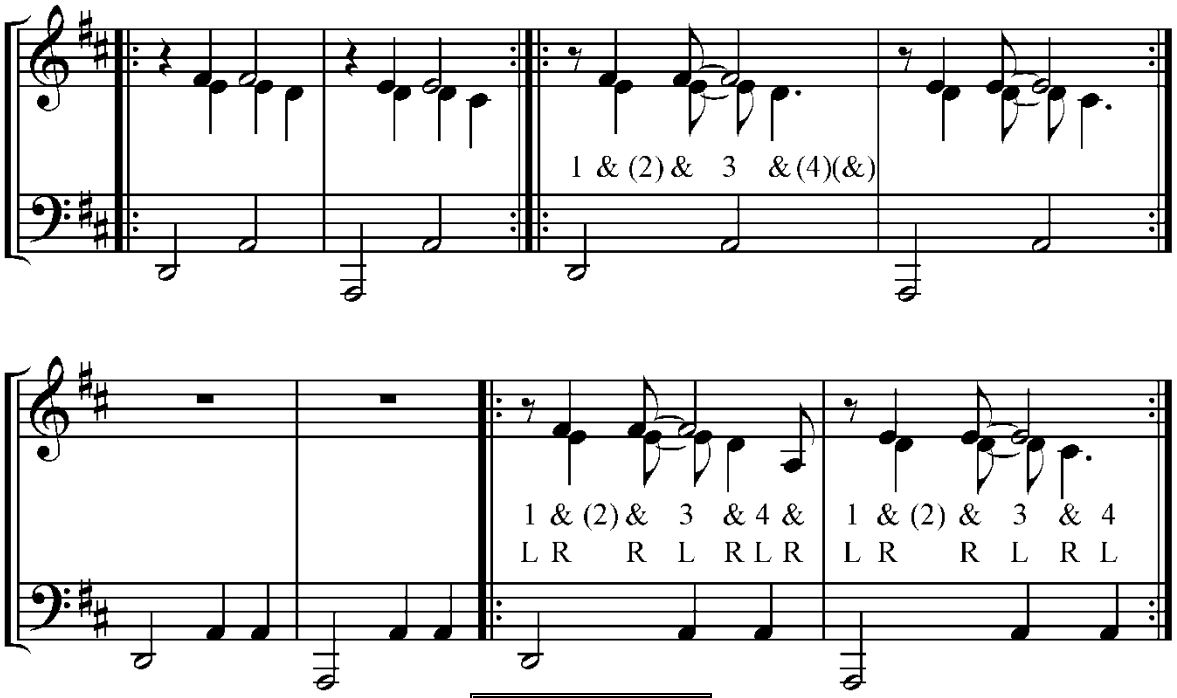
Keep working at bringing your theory knowledge to bear! Experiment with suspensions in a general way. Move your chord tones about, one scale-tone either side. Naturally, you need to be staying on the one chord for a few beats for there to be enough time for a suspension/resolution pair. You will find a wealth of new sounds in any chord progression. Use the voice movement diagrams on page 32 to think about and notate your experiments.

Answers: Module Eleven

The suspension riff

Here is the music for the build-up to the Module Eleven sample suspensions riff.





CPM_M11_12

Where the syncopation starts, you see the counts written in and together, left, right (TLR) analysis. By all means, just 'have a go', but meticulous counting and TLR analysis are the methodical way to build two-handed syncopation skills.

Remember that both Widows Media Player and MidiPiano can be set to repeat (and slow down) the performance files, giving you lots of time to learn the riffs by simply copying.

Transposing challenge

Here is the music for the Module Eleven suspensions in F transposing challenge. Copy the left hand in-between notes and syncopation from the audio.

CPM_M11_13