PEDALS IN MUSIC

Pedals are very useful devices. The accelerator pedal makes the tempo of the music get faster, whereas the brake pedal slows the tempo down. As for the clutch, this is used when you're sitting next to a sax player of the opposite sex and the bandleader isn't looking. Not really. Read on

PEDALS

Pedals are notes which keep sounding while other notes change. The pedal note may be sustained or reiterated (played over and over again).

Pedals are encountered most often in the bass. Think of a tune played by bagpipes where one note, the drone, is sustained while the tune is played over it.

But the moving notes do not have to be limited to a single line of melody. Whole chords can be played against this pedal note, producing interesting results.

This relates to the concept of **concordance** and **dissonance** (discordance).
A discord is a chord which can range from being mildly irritating to one which makes you want to tear your hair out. The opposite - a concord - is a chord which is restful in itself and contains no element of stress. In the key of C, a C major triad would be the most concordant chord you could get.

Chords that are dissonant sound as if they need to be *resolved* - that is, they need to be followed by a chord that is concordant.

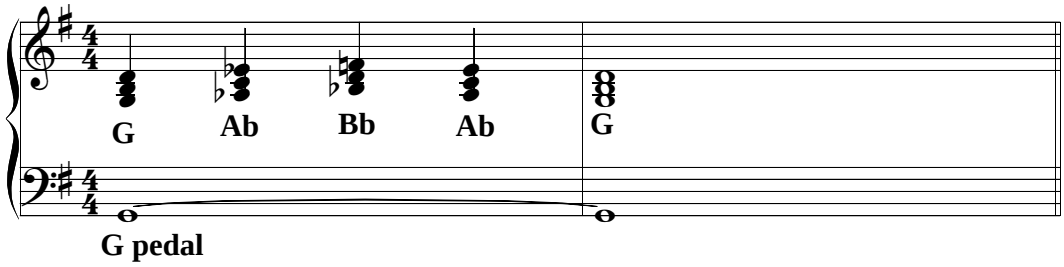
Over the centuries, things have changed. People's acceptance of discordant sounds has developed. That is why the harmony of hymn tunes is so bland to us today.
Different levels of dissonance are tolerated by different people in different ways.
Some people cannot stand even mild dissonance; others seem to thrive on it.
Even individual people's acceptance of discords change over time.

So what is the point of discords. Discords help to create tension, excitement, fear, etc. - in fact just about any emotion, other than the feelings you get when you are perfectly relaxed and sleeping peacefully.

It is the job of musicians to conjure up different emotions by using notes as a tool. Even melodies themselves can do this by playing on the interplay between rest and stress in the choice of notes. On a larger scale, pieces of music need to develop within themselves by creating a series of climaxes, alternating with calm passages.

Returning to pedal notes, these can be used to create tension through the use of discordant notes between the pedal note itself and the other notes.

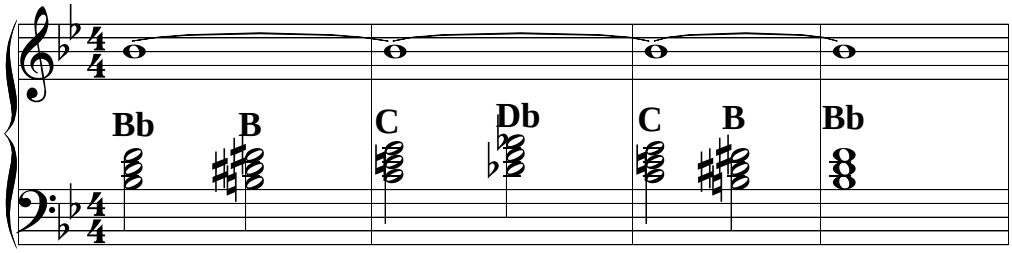
Take this Spanish sounding phrase for example:



The first and last chords are concords - G major triads. The second chord is dissonant

in comparison and the third chord is very mildly dissonant. (Try playing the G along with each chord to feel the effect.) So what we have here are concords and discords. Usually a pedal note - often the 1st note of the scale (the *tonic*) or the fifth note of the scale (the *dominant*) - starts with a chord that is consonant to it, as in the example above, and then the chords move to produce more dissonant sounds before returning to a more consonant chord again. (Again, as above.) To test whether the chords are dissonant, see if you can stop and walk away when you've reached a certain chord. If you feel you can't and you need to resolve it, then you've arrived at a dissonant chord.

Pedal notes can also be found at the top of the harmony, instead of below.
They are not so common but still can be found. For example, the verse of *Night and Day*, by Cole Porter is a case in point where the singer sings "Like the beat beat beat of the tomtoms..." on the one note while the underlying chords change. Another example is the Bossa Nova tune *One Note Samba.*
This is the sort of thing that happens:



You can also get pedal notes in the middle of the harmony but this is much rarer.

Finally you may also come across dual pedals - tonic and dominant notes in the bass.

Now try experimenting yourself. The chords can be played together or as arpeggios.