

CHAPTER 6 - CADENCES

Cadences are one of the main mechanisms for the organisation of musical form. In this unit we study the main types of cadences that take place in classical tonal music, according to the harmonic colour that characterises them.

1. WHAT IS A CADENCE.

- A cadence is a resting point in the musical discourse. They are equivalent to punctuation marks in text (in fact, this is their origin to a certain extent). In tonal music, they are essential to delimit the phrases, parts and sections within a piece of music.

- Cadences are basically a rhythmic process. In order to produce a resting point, all you have to do is.... to rest !, that is, lengthen a note, or write a rest, so that the musical discourse can come to a pause at that point. As simple as that.

- However, it is common to make cadences still more effective. The technique lies in heightening the musical tension before the resting moment. In this way, the repose is more striking, by contrast with the previous agitation. This can be clearly seen in this example from the first movement of Mozart's Sonata No. 5:

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Mozart's Sonata No. 5. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a melody in the right hand, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, and D5. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords. The score is divided into two sections: 'Agitation' and 'Repose'. The 'Agitation' section starts with a half note G4 in the treble and a half note G2 in the bass, marked *fp*. This is followed by a half note A4 in the treble and a half note A2 in the bass, marked *fp f*. The 'Repose' section begins with a half note B4 in the treble and a half note B2 in the bass, marked *f*. The score ends with a half note C5 in the treble and a half note C2 in the bass, marked *f*.

Im. 6.1

- It is therefore clear that a cadence is basically a rhythmic process. However, harmony also plays an important role, as it can modify the character of the pause, depending on which chord we place at the end. We will see this in the following sections.

2. CADENCES WHICH END ON THE TONIC.

- There are several types of cadences that end on the tonic, depending on the chord that precedes it and their (possible) inversion. We see all of them and their features in the following table.

Name	Previous Chord	Resting Chord	Indications	Features
Perfect	V	I	Both chords are in root position	This is the strongest cadence of all. It is used at the end of a piece or section.
Imperfect	V	I	At least one of the chords is inverted	The sound is similar to the perfect cadence, but lacking such sense of conclusion.
Deceptive	V	VI	Both chords are in root position	It sounds like a perfect cadence which is thwarted. That is why it is called "Deceptive".
Plagal	Other chord than V	I	The tonic is in root position	The most common plagal cadence is IV - I. It is normally used at the end of a piece, as a reinforcement of a previous cadence.

- Pieces or large sections usually end with a perfect cadence (or, exceptionally, with a plagal cadence).

- Here you can see some examples of these cadences. Note one important aspect: the last chord is always placed on the strong beat.

The image shows four musical examples of cadences in 3/4 time, each consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef) with chords indicated below. Brackets above the notes group the chords for each cadence.

- Perfect Cadence:** V₇⁺ I. The final chord (I) is on the strong beat.
- Imperfect Cadence:** V₆₅ I. The final chord (I) is on the strong beat.
- Deceptive Cadence:** V₇⁺ VI. The final chord (VI) is on the strong beat.
- Plagal Cadence:** Previous Cadence (Imperfect) V₊₄ I₆ IV I. The final chord (I) is on the strong beat.

3. CADENCES WHICH DO NOT END ON THE TONIC. HALF CADENCES.

- Any repose on a chord without tonic function is a Half Cadence. In any case, half cadences end almost exclusively on the V degree.

- In half cadences, any chord can precede the last chord and, unlike cadences that end on the tonic, the half cadence to the V degree is a "tense" cadence, because the V degree is a degree with harmonic tension. Therefore, it does not create relaxation, but a distinct musical tension that urges the musical discourse to continue.

- Observe the half cadence in this minuet by Haydn (Hob. XVI:7):

The image shows a musical score for a half cadence in 3/4 time. The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef starts with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4-G4, B4-A4, and C5-B4. The bass line starts with a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, B3, and C4. The chords are labeled below the staff: I (C major), V₇ (F major 7), I (C major), II₆ (D minor 6), and V (F major). A bracket above the final V chord is labeled "Half Cadence".

Im. 6.3

4. ACCELERATION OF THE HARMONIC RHYTHM BEFORE THE CADENCE.

- Harmonic Rhythm is the rate at which the harmony changes.

- In the same way that the melodic rhythm is usually altered in this "agitation" phase prior to the cadence, the harmonic rhythm is also frequently accelerated. This can be clearly observed in the example above.

5. SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

1. 

- Write two versions of this exercise, creating different cadences in each of them:

- Version 1: a- Imperfect cadence, b- Half cadence, c- Perfect cadence, d- Plagal cadence

- Version 2: a- Perfect cadence, b- Imperfect cadence, c- Deceptive cadence, d- Plagal cadence

2. - Write a harmonic structure with the following features:

- Key: D major
- Time signature: 4/4
- Form: 3 phrases of 4 measures (12 measures in total)
- Cadences (at the end of each phrase): Imperfect, Half, Perfect
- Harmonic rhythm: Half notes, with an acceleration before the cadences.

3. - Write a harmonic structure with the following features:

- Key: F major
- Time signature: 3/4
- Form: 3 phrases of 4 measures + 2 ending measures (14 measures in total)
- Cadences (at the end of each phrase): Half, Imperfect, Deceptive + Plagal
- Harmonic rhythm: Dotted half notes, with an acceleration before the cadences.