

CHAPTER 5

Cadences

A phrase of music ends the way a sentence does: with a pause that tells the listener how much has been said. Harmony marks that pause with a cadence, a short chord progression at the end of a phrase. Some cadences close the thought, others leave it open and ask for the next phrase. Hearing the difference is the first step towards writing phrases that end where you mean them to end.

This chapter works in G major, in three upper voices in close position. The bass is not written: it takes the root of each chord, as the Roman numeral under the staff says, upper case for a major chord and lower case for a minor one. Play every example at the keyboard, the right hand on the staff and the left hand on the bass note, and sing the top voice before you read on.

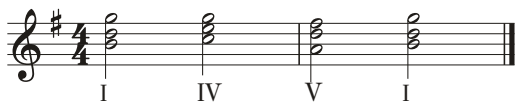
KEY TERMS

Cadence: the last two chords of a phrase. **Soprano:** the top voice.

Leading tone: the seventh degree of the scale, a semitone below the tonic, which wants to rise to it.

THE PERFECT AUTHENTIC CADENCE

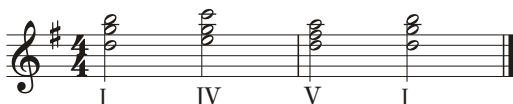
The strongest close is dominant to tonic, V–I, with both chords in root position and the tonic in the soprano at the end. The leading tone (F-sharp in G major) rises a semitone to the tonic.



The approach to the dominant matters as much as the cadence. Here IV prepares V: the upper voices hold G, then step down, and nothing jumps. A phrase that reaches V by leap sounds hurried, as if it had skipped a word.

THE IMPERFECT AUTHENTIC CADENCE

Keep the same chords and end with the third of the tonic in the soprano, and the close softens. The progression is still V–I, but the melody stops on B instead of G and the ear expects more. Composers use this cadence in the middle of a period and save the perfect one for its end.



THE HALF CADENCE

A phrase may stop on the dominant itself. The half cadence ends on V, reached from I, ii or IV, and it sounds like a comma: the music has said something and owes us the rest. Most folk songs and hymns put a half cadence at the end of their first line and an authentic cadence at the end of the second.



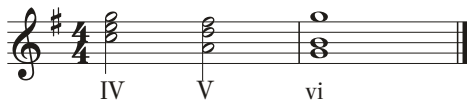
THE PLAGAL CADENCE

IV–I closes without the leading tone. It is the cadence of the *Amen* sung after a hymn, and it usually follows an authentic cadence that has already ended the phrase: the plagal one adds a coda, not a conclusion.



THE DECEPTIVE CADENCE

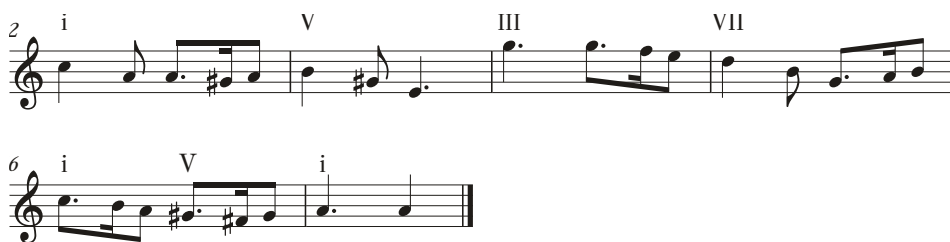
When V moves to vi instead of I, the listener gets a chord that shares two notes with the tonic but is not the tonic. The leading tone still rises to G, so the voice leading keeps its promise while the harmony breaks it. The other two upper voices step down, and the chord doubles its third, G, which keeps the bass and the inner voices out of parallel octaves. The phrase has to go on, and it usually ends with an authentic cadence a few bars later.



CADENCES IN A MELODY

A melody shows its cadences even without chords. *Greensleeves*, an English tune from the sixteenth century, is written here in A minor with a Roman numeral over each bar, the chords a guitarist would play. Its first phrase stops on E, the dominant, over a half cadence; the second ends on A over V–i, the leading tone G-sharp rising to the tonic. The same plan returns in the refrain, which starts on a high G over C, the relative major, and comes back to A minor for the final close. Sing it, mark each cadence and say which kind it is before you check the numerals over the staff.





The four phrases follow the plan of most folk songs: open, closed, open, closed. Notice where the leading tone appears. In the half cadences G-sharp sits inside the dominant chord and goes nowhere; in the authentic cadences it is the note before the last, and it resolves.

EXERCISES

1. Write each cadence of this chapter in D major and in F major, in three voices, and play it with the bass in the left hand.
2. Turn the imperfect authentic cadence into a perfect one by changing a single note of the soprano.
3. Find the cadences of a hymn you know. For each phrase, write the last two Roman numerals and name the cadence.
4. Harmonize the first phrase of *Greensleeves* again, ending it with an imperfect authentic cadence instead of a half cadence. What changes in the second phrase?