

CADENCES AND PHRASES

A *cadence* is where the music reaches some kind of goal – often accompanied by a rhythmic pause. There are four basic types of cadences and each is defined by its specific use of harmony. The music between cadences is called a *phrase*. Cadences separate phrases and act very much like grammatical periods while musical phrases are like grammatical sentences. These devices are important in musical structure because they divide the music into smaller, bite-sized, manageable pieces. Imagine how difficult it would be to communicate if we only spoke or wrote in run-on sentences, or if our phone numbers and social security numbers were un-hyphenated. Humans generally have an easier time digesting things in small doses.

The four basic types of cadences are differentiated by the following types of harmonic motion:

- Authentic:** Dominant (V, V⁷ or vii^o) to Tonic (I or i) harmonic motion: the strongest type of cadence because it returns (re-stabilizes) the music back to the home (tonic) chord. Subtle degrees of strength can be determined by the inversion of the chords (root position is the strongest) or the melodic scale degree (the root is the strongest). $V/V^7/vii^o \rightarrow I/i$
- Plagal:** Subdominant (IV or iv) to Tonic (I or i) harmonic motion: strong because it goes to the tonic, but not as strong as the authentic cadence because the motion is "less progressive" (down by a 4th) and because there is no leading tone in the IV/iv chord. $IV/iv \rightarrow I/i$
- Half:** Non-dominant (i.e. just about anything) to Dominant (only V/V⁷) harmonic motion: strong, but inconclusive because it stops on the chord (V/V⁷) that inherently wants to resolve to the tonic (I/i). In this case, it doesn't resolve there. $X \rightarrow V/V^7$
- Deceptive:** Dominant (only V/V⁷) to vi/VI harmonic motion: weak because the expected tonic resolution is withheld. It creates the feeling that we need to hear more music, especially the withheld tonic. $V/V^7 \rightarrow vi/VI$

THE PERIOD

A musical paragraph is called a *period*. A period is a collection of phrases with the last phrase having the strongest (most conclusive) authentic cadence. Like the “bite-sized” notion behind cadences and phrases, the organization of a period helps to serve the larger sense of direction in music. By structuring cadences so that the weaker ones come first, the music is apt to feel like it is gradually unfolding and building up (*moving*) towards a more conclusive goal. In this sense, a period is a macrocosmic example of how scales and progressions operate: having a sense of logical motion that works towards an inevitable goal.

The number of phrases in a period can vary, but for our basic purpose, we will assume that there are four per period.

Here is a basic example of a four-phrase period (remember that a phrase ends with a cadence):

~~~~~phrase 1~~~~~ plagal cadence (IV→I)  
~~~~~phrase 2~~~~~ half cadence (X→V)  
~~~~~phrase 3~~~~~ deceptive cadence (V<sup>7</sup>→vi)  
~~~~~phrase 4~~~~~ authentic cadence (V→I)

While not all four-phrase periods need to be structured this way (with these exact cadences), here we have a nice logical sequence of events:

- The 1st phrase ends on the tonic, but it is a slightly weak because of the plagal cadence
- The 2nd phrase ends conclusively on the V chord, but the overall structure is not stable or conclusive because the cadence is on the V instead of the I
- The 3rd phrase is also inclusive because of the deceptive harmonic motion; we want to hear the I chord after the V⁷ chord, but the substituting vi chord is not ultimately fulfilling
- The 4th phrase sounds the most conclusive because of the authentic cadence: this cadence brings the structure of all four phrases back to a sense of maximum stability and the period is rounded-off nicely.

RHYTHM IN CADENCES

A cadence will usually complete itself on a rhythmically strong beat, which is the first beat of a measure. Nearly as strong (and an additional possible point for a cadence) is the beginning of the second half of a measure that can be divided into two equal parts: beat 3 of a four-four measure, or beat 4 of a six-eight measure, for example.

CADENCE, PHRASE, PERIOD SUMMARY

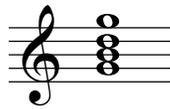
- A cadence signifies a pause or stop in the music
- A phrase is the music between cadences
- There are four kinds of cadences as characterized by their harmonic activity
 - Authentic: Dominant (V, V7, or vii^o) to Tonic (I or i)
 - Plagal: Subdominant (IV or iv) to Tonic (I or i)
 - Half: Non-dominant to Dominant (V)
 - Deceptive: Dominant (V) to vi/VI
- Groups of phrases and cadences can be organized into a period, where the last phrase has the strongest (most conclusive) authentic cadence

MELODIC ASPECTS OF CADENCES

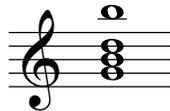
We have yet to study the rules of melody writing, but we can incorporate certain basic aspects of melody into our understanding of cadences. For now, we will understand melody note to be the top (highest) note in a given moment of music. We tend to hear the melody note more than the other notes in a chord. In a cadence, the melody note will be one of the notes that makes up the chord. For example, if the final chord in a cadence were a G major triad, the melody note would be either a G, B or D. If the chord were a G dominant 7th, there could additionally be an F in the melody.

In a cadence, the overall strength or stability of a chord can be varied based on which note is in the melody and also by which inversion the chord is in (root position is the strongest).

This GM chord:



is slightly more stable than this one:



or this one:



because the root note of the chord is also in the melody.

While this is a subtle distinction, composers were aware of these differences and used them in determining the long range build-up or diminution of cadences in a piece. We will see how this principle is effective even in *Puff the Magic Dragon*.