The Harmonic Cadences

A cadence is generally considered to be the last two chords of a phrase, section or piece. There are four types of cadences, each with their own specific requirements and variations.

A perfect cadence consists of a dominant function chord (V or VII) moving to tonic.

\[ \text{G: V I} \]

A plagal cadence consists of a subdominant function chord (IV or II) moving to tonic.

\[ \text{G: IV I} \]

An imperfect cadence is any cadence that ends on the dominant chord (V).

\[ \text{G: I V} \]

A specific type of imperfect cadence is the phrygian cadence, which must meet the following criteria:

- It occurs only in minor.
- It uses a IV chord moving to V.
- The soprano and bass move by step in contrary motion.
- The soprano and bass both end on the fifth scale degree.

\[ \text{e: iv}^6 \text{ V} \]

An interrupted cadence is a cadence where the dominant chord (V) resolves to something other than tonic... almost always the submediant chord (vi).

\[ \text{G: V vi} \]

Really, it's the psych-out cadence, in that you expect it to resolve to tonic, but it doesn't.

And, in fact, it's more common to see this in the middle of the phrase rather than the end... where you might call it a "cadence-like structure"!

It's worth mentioning that American theorists call perfect cadences "authentic" cadences, and call imperfect cadences "half" cadences.

To be considered a perfect authentic cadence, a cadence must meet all of these criteria:

- It must use a V chord (not a VII).
- Both chords must be in root position.
- The soprano must end on the tonic.
- The soprano must move by step.

\[ \text{G: V I} \]

If the cadence doesn't meet all of those criteria, they consider it to be an imperfect authentic cadence!

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