Last Updated: Jan 5, 2024

Chapter 8: Cadence; Period; Phrase

1. Components of Musical Works

Music unfolds in time, and therefore is a temporal art. On the one hand, a musical work is a unified whole in terms of its musical thought and form. On the other hand, it can also be divided into smaller sections, which we call structures. Structures are separated by phrasing. Phrasing separates the end of one structure from the beginning of another, and this division is independent of the scale of the structure.

2. Period、Phrase

The simplest complete musical structure that uses only one theme and contains only a single musical idea is called a period. It is generally divided into two equal (4-bar) structures, called phrases. These two phrases are separated by phrasing and end with two different cadences that are functionally related.

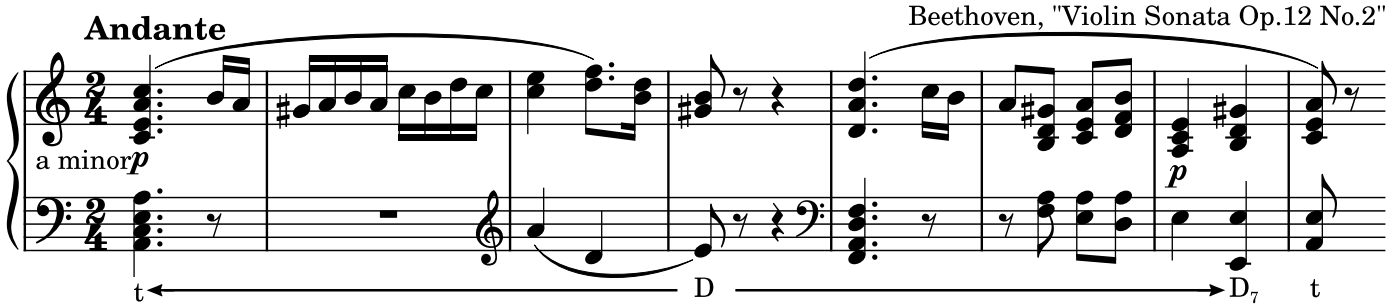
A period of 8 bars consisting of two equal phrases is generally called a symmetrical structure. It is extremely stable in terms of meter, so it is widely used in genres such as dances, scherzos, marches, and rounds. In practice, we mainly use this type of period.

In simple forms of periods, there are also single-structured periods without phrases (see Beethoven's *Sixth Sonata* scherzo and the theme of the second movement of the *Fifth Symphony*), as well as periods with equal-length phrases that are not symmetrical. (see the 12-bar period with two phrases in the chorus *Not Roses Are Burning* [Не розаи сверкает] from Glinka's opera *Ivan Susanin* [Иваи Сусанин]).

3. Cadences in Periods

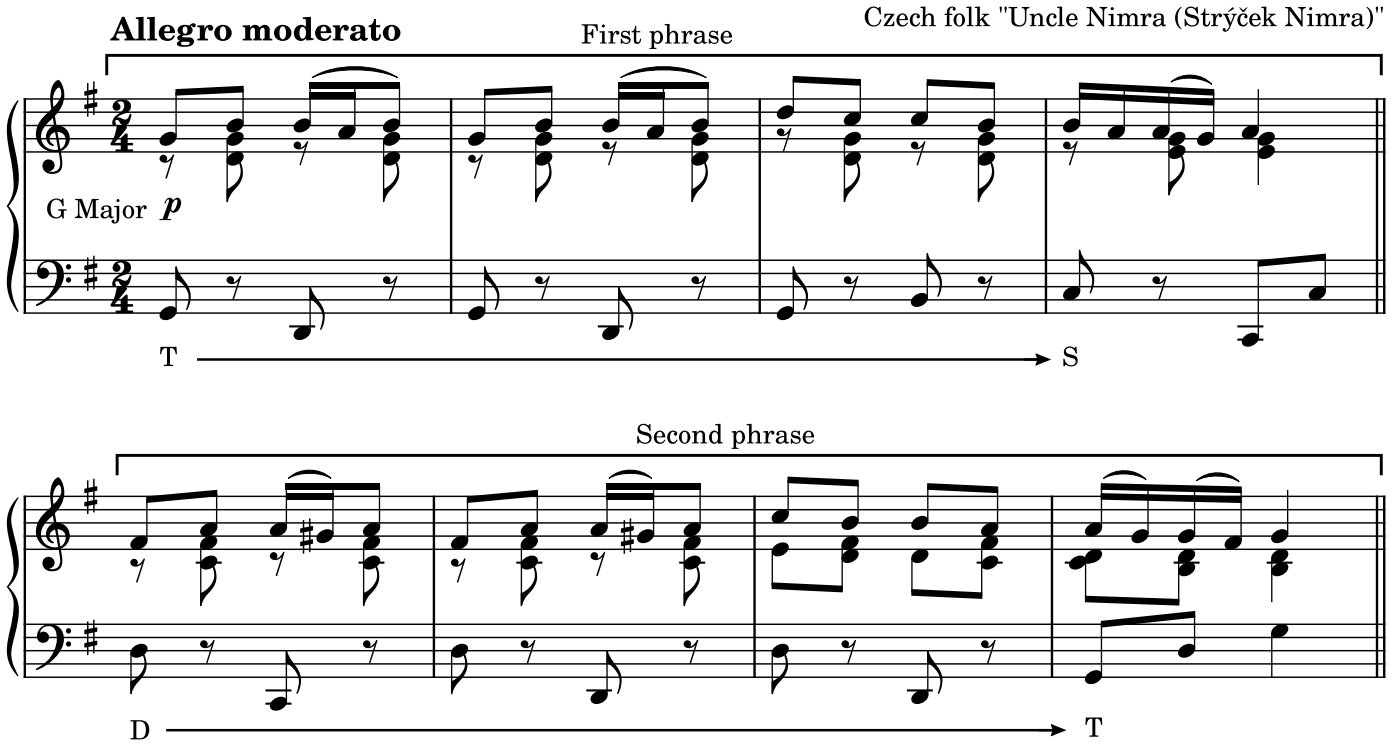
A cadence is a chord progression that ends a musical structure and ends the statement of a musical idea (or an independent part of it). According to its position in a period, a cadence can be divided into two types: the medial cadence (at the end of the first phrase) and the terminal cadence (at the end of the second phrase, the end of the entire period):

Example 8-88



In general, the medial cadence and terminal cadence in a period are also distinguished by the different functions of their last chords. For example, the first cadence ends on D or S (unstable function), while the second cadence ends on T (stable function). This creates a tendency for the first unstable cadence (D, S) to resolve to the second stable cadence (T) from a certain distance. This links the two cadences together and makes the two phrases, separated by phrasing, form a musical whole: ①

Example 8-89



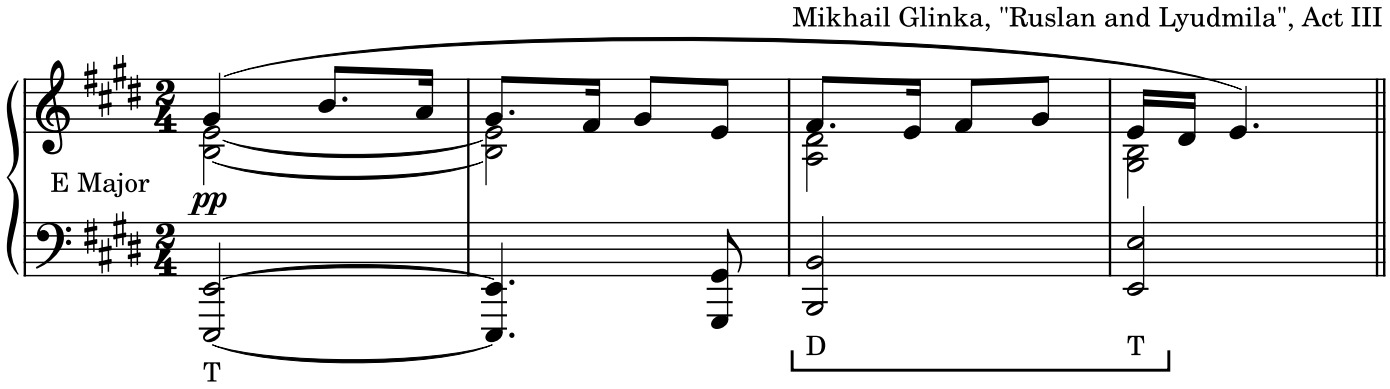
4. Basic Types of Cadences

From a harmonic perspective, all cadences can be classified into two fundamental functional types: (1) cadences ending on a stable chord T; (2) cadences concluding with an unstable chord D or S.

① The connection between musical structure and the development of musical themes, as well as their interrelation within the entirety of a musical piece, constitutes the semantics and syntax of the language of music (similar to language and its syntactic features).

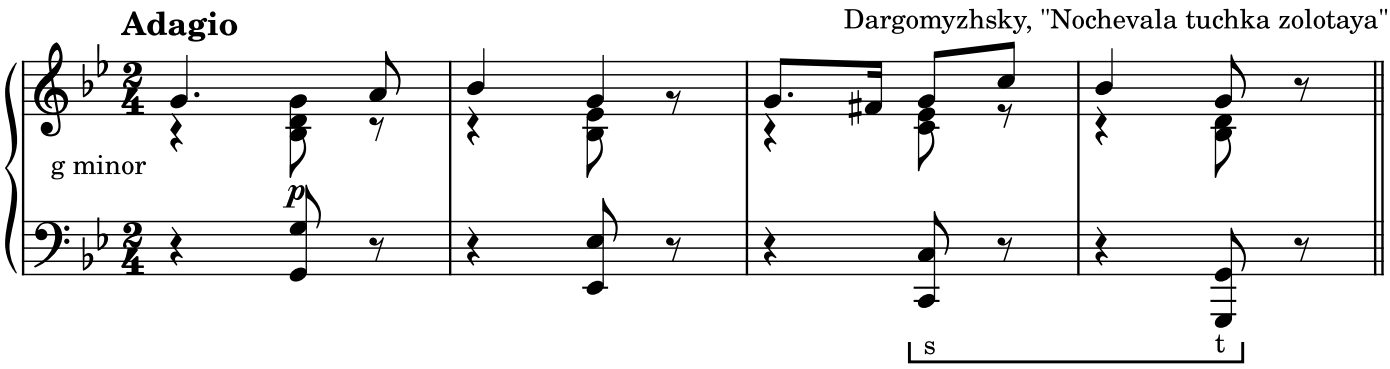
Stable cadences comprise three types: (1) Authentic Cadence; (2) Plagal cadence; (3) Complete cadence (another type of authentic cadence). The D—T progression at the end of a phrase or period is termed an authentic cadence:

Example 8-90



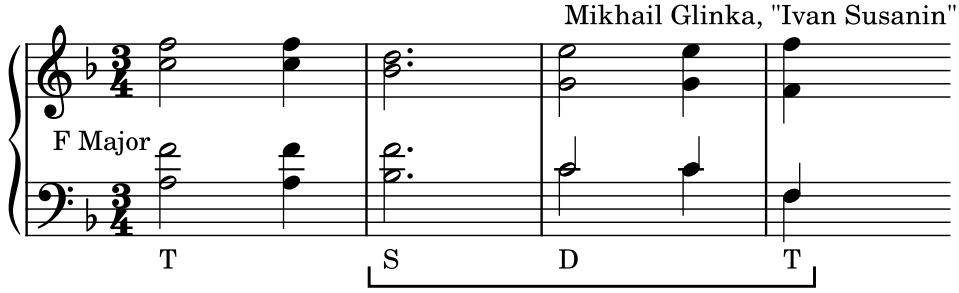
The S–T progression at the end of a phrase or period is referred to as a plagal cadence:

Example 8-91



The S—D—T progression at the end of a phrase or period, containing two unstable functional chords, is called a complete cadence:

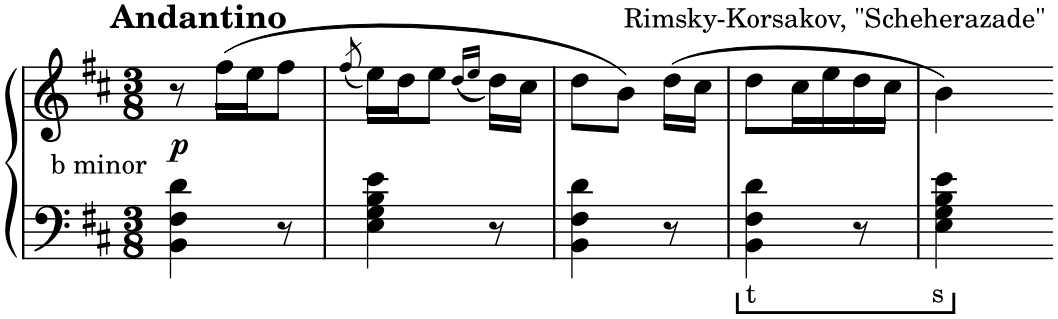
Example 8-92



Cadences that end on an unstable chord (D or S) are called half cadences. Half cadences can be further divided into: an authentic half cadence ending the

first phrase with a dominant harmony (see Example 8-88); a plagal half cadence ending the first phrase with a subdominant harmony.

Example 8-93



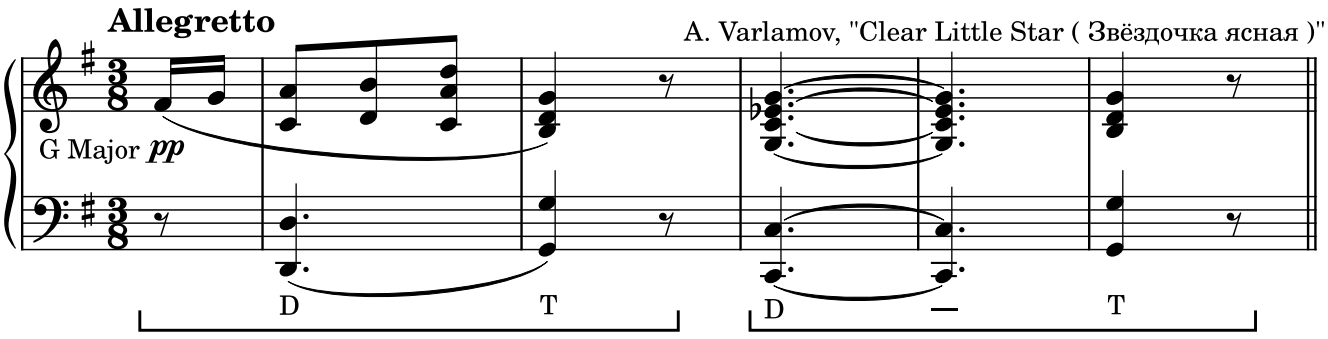
Across various eras and musical styles, using an authentic cadence to conclude a musical period has become a norm. Instances of concluding a section with an plagal cadence are less common; initially, they were not used as an independent progression but rather as a supplementary ending, either following a authentic cadence at the end of a period, expanding a section, or better reinforcing tonality (the tonic chord).

The following is a formula for such a musical period:

First phrase	Second phrase + supplementary plagal cadence	
（4 bars）	（4 bars）	（2 bars）
	（A period of 10 bars）	

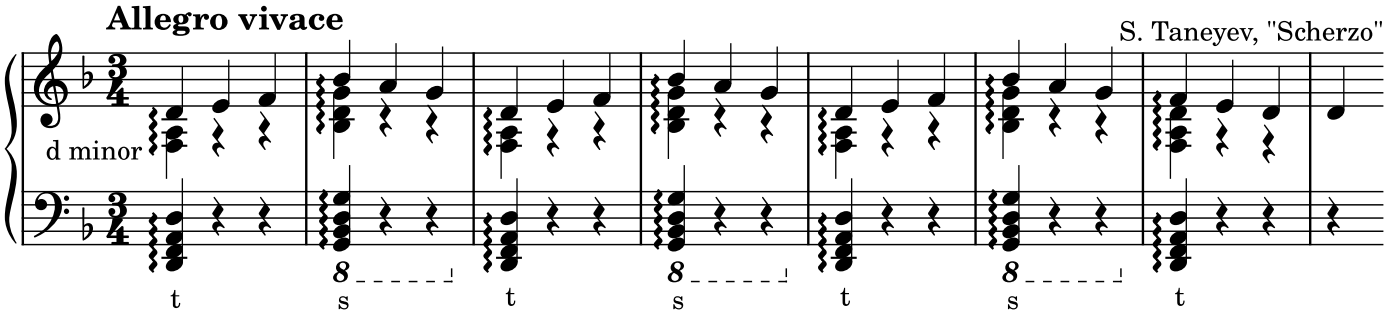
If the basic authentic cadence appears before the typical symmetrical structured period ending (for instance, at bar 7), then the plagal cadence serves as a supplementary element to complete its expected length (that is, to make up for 8 bars, such as in the first section of Beethoven's "*Funeral March*" from the *Third Symphony*).

Example 8-94



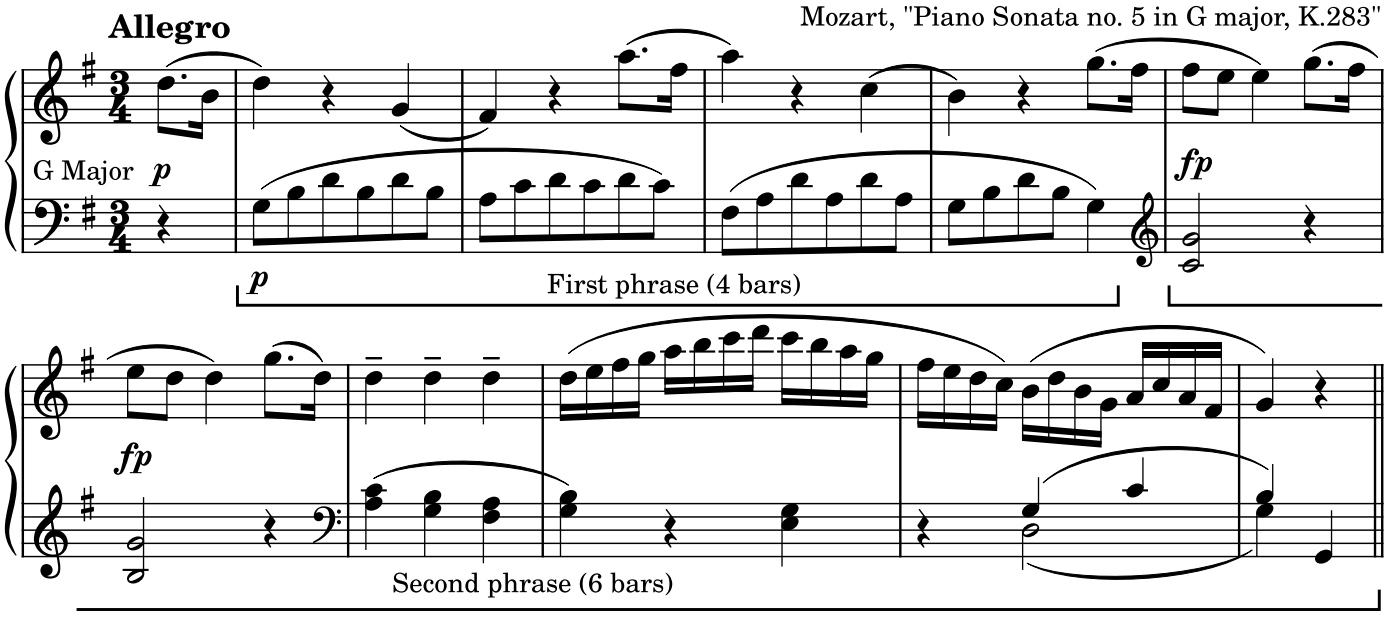
In the late Classical period of Western music, particularly in Russian music, the varied cadences held a relatively significant position and gained greater independence, partly replacing authentic cadences. This can be observed in various works such as Mussorgsky's *In the Village*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Song of the Varangian Guest* from the opera *Sadko*, Tchaikovsky's romances *Wild Nights* and *He Loved Me So*, Liadov's arrangement of the Russian song *Paradise in the Yard*, Kalinnikov's romance *On the Ancient Mound*, Tchaikovsky's main theme in the *5th Symphony* (1st movement), and the romance *Feat* (beginning).

Example 8-95



Forming unequal-length phrases within a musical period occurs not only due to the addition of supplementary plagal cadences but can also stem from the overall musical development. For instance, the first phrase might be 4 bars, while the second phrase could be a complete 6 bars. An example of this can be found in Mozart's *Piano Sonata in G major*, where a period spans 10 bars.

Example 8-96



The authentic half cadence is noticeably used more frequently than the plagal half cadence, a natural outcome due to the characteristics and function of the dominant chord.

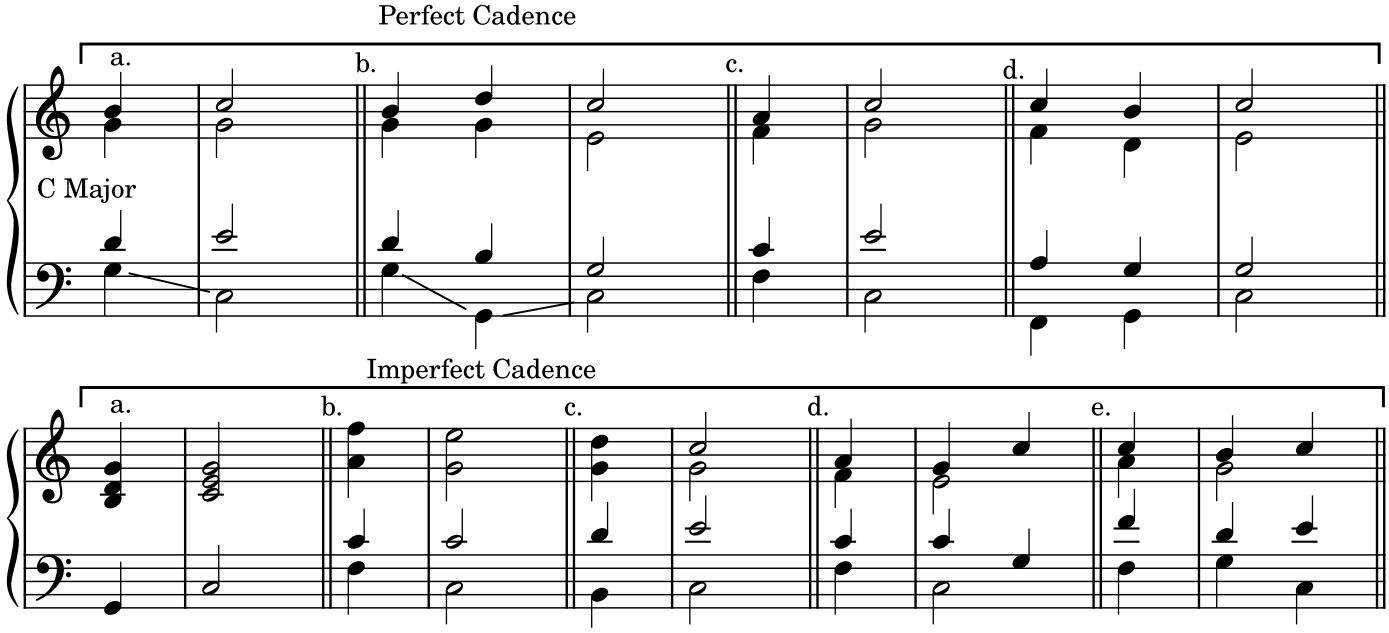
5. The Other Forms of Cadences (Perface and Imprefect)

The perfect cadence and imperfect cadence are categorized based on the completeness of their sense of resolution.

In a perfect cadence, the final tonic chord appears on a strong beat within the measure, in the melodic position of the root, and is a progression from the root position D or S to the root position T (the bass line follows the typical fourth or fifth interval movement of D—T or S—T cadence).

The final tonic chord appears on a weak beat within the measure, with the third tone or the fifth tone in the melodic position, or in an inverted form when D or S is involved in the progression (the bass line doesn't follow the typical fourth or fifth interval movement of a cadence). Such a cadence is termed as an imperfect cadence.

Example 8-97

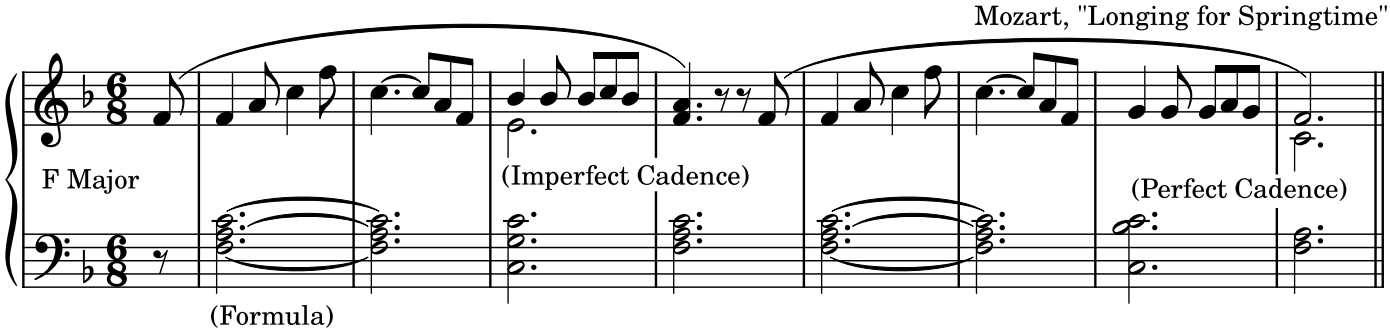


Evidently, under similar conditions, a perfect cadence carries a stronger sense of resolution compared to an imperfect cadence. Consequently, at times, an imperfect cadence is used to conclude the first phrase of a period, while the second phrase ends with a perfect cadence.② In such cases, what we hear isn't a simple repetition of the cadence. Due to the differing degrees of resolution in the final chords of the two

② The imperfect cadence and D occasionally serve as conclusions for entire musical passages, but this is less common. Instances can be found in Beethoven's "Adagio" from the *Fourth Sonata*, the "Minuet" of the *Eighteenth Sonata*, Tchaikovsky's opera "*Eugene Onegin*" in Triquet's strophes, and Schumann's "*Warum?*" (Op. 12, No. 3).

phrases, despite their chordal similarity, they establish a complementary subordinate relationship with each other:

Example 8-98



6. Pratice Guidelines

a. Firstly, determine the key (based on key signature, the final note of the melody, and its functional structure).

b. Then, define the divisions within the phrases of the period.

c. Next, establish the harmony and harmonic progressions for intermediate and final cadences.

d. Pay attention to phrasing characteristics. Essentially, phrasing creates an impression of interruption within interconnected harmonic progressions, resulting in no direct functional link between the final chord of the first musical phrase and the initial chord of the second phrase. Consequently, the second phrase can start from any harmony: D, T, or even S (following the plagal half cadence in D, see Example 8-88).

e. Supplementary plagal cadences might appear in exercises; it's crucial to distinguish them clearly from the final cadence of the period.

f. When harmonizing the bass, pay attention to the rhythmic patterns of the melodies in the first and second phrases. The melody in the second phrase can: ① match the rhythm of the first phrase; ② introduce contrast; ③ be more free-form, integrating both of the aforementioned methods.

g. To enhance clarity, it's advisable to use square brackets to indicate the division of phrases and supplementary cadences.