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A closer look at authentic cadences

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Up until now, in this course, I have always given you one part of music, and asked you to compose an accompaniment to it. But our eventual goal is for you to begin with a blank piece of paper, composing all parts from scratch. Where to begin such a task? We will begin by composing cadences.

As you've already learned, the indispensable feature of "authentic" cadences is the root-position progression V-I. And an additional necessary feature of a "perfect" authentic cadence is that $\hat{1}$ should be in the melody on the tonic chord. (In the style we are studying, the strongest cadences are always perfect authentic cadences.)

Another feature may not rise to the level of being *definitional* of cadences, but it is still strongly associated with them: **authentic cadences *usually* feature a $\hat{8}$–$\hat{7}$ suspension**. There are **three main harmonies** that can accompany this suspension:

- **V5/4** (possibly with an added seventh)
- **ii6/5**
- **cadential 6/4** (in this last case, $\hat{8}$ can also be an accented passing tone, as we saw when discussing 6/4 chords)

If you think about it, it makes sense that the $\hat{8}$–$\hat{7}$ suspension is associated with cadences. It creates a dissonance that "wants" to resolve to the leading tone ($\hat{7}$), which in turn "wants" to return to the tonic. Thus it creates a chain of "tendency tones" that lead us forward, through the cadence to its ultimate resolution.

Harmony

V is very often preceded by a pre-dominant chord. Thus, as we've already observed in this course, **many authentic cadences feature a $\hat{4}$–$\hat{5}$ bass**.

In Baroque cadences, **the other main chord that precedes V is simply the I chord**, in either root position or first inversion. (Remember though that we don't consider the cadential 6/4 chord to express tonic harmony.) In this case the bassline approaching the V chord would be either $\hat{1}$-$\hat{5}$ or $\hat{3}$-$\hat{5}$.

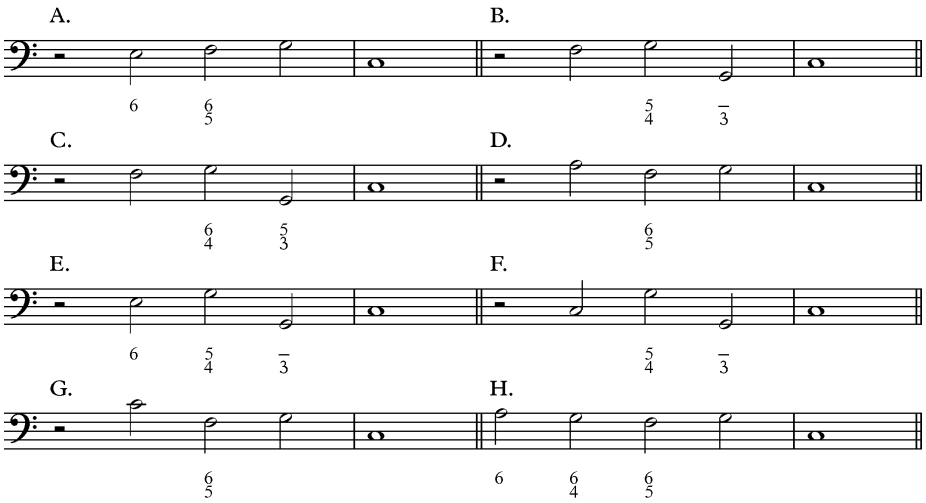
Other possible bass approaches to the cadential dominant include $\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ and $\hat{2}$–$\hat{5}$. At this point in the course, you should be able to work out what the most likely harmonies would be for each of these bass notes.

Formulas

Its useful to understand the above principles, but it's also useful to know some cadential formulas that you are ready to apply/adapt whenever you need to write a cadence.

Below I have provided a few examples of such formulas. You should be able to identify how they instantiate the points explained above. I encourage you to **choose two of the following cadence formulas, including the first one, and learn them by heart**. If you have a keyboard available, I would strongly encourage you to try realizing them upon it.

The cadences are all given in C major, but they would work in any key, including minor keys (just remember to raise the leading tone). I encourage you to investigate how these formulas correspond to the guidelines above.



Notes on the idioms above:

- I have not indicated a meter because these cadences can work in a variety of metric contexts. Indeed, it's important to note that the rhythms could be changed. The most important rhythmic consideration is that the final tonic chord should arrive on a strong beat (usually the downbeat, but sometimes beat 3 in 4/4 time).
- Cadential 6/4 chords can be substituted for the 5/4 chords.
- The 6/4 chord in H. is a passing 6/4.
- There are many relations between the cadences. For example, A. is the same as G., except that the first chord is inverted.

The above formulas by no means exhaust the authentic cadences you are likely to find in Baroque music. But in general, you should be able to see how other cadences are related to the above, perhaps by the omission or substitution of one or more chords.