

Monteverdi's Gloria for 8 voices M 28

Learn about cadences - musical punctuation

You need the keyboard and / or the online chord player.

A cadence in music is the last two chords in a piece or a section. We're so used to the sound of them, that we take them for granted - they are a formula. If the music stopped before the final chord, though, we'd be shocked. The penultimate chord sets up an expectation, which has to be met by the last one.

There are different types of cadence, depending on the two chords that make them up. Monteverdi uses one, which has been the most popular one for ending pieces for centuries. It's the dominant chord going onto the tonic chord. It's so good at being the ultimate full stop, that it's called the **Perfect Cadence**.

The opposite of the perfect cadence, when you go from the tonic chord to the dominant chord is called the **Imperfect Cadence**. It's really good at acting like a comma.

When students are learning about cadences they often work with hymn tunes. They have really clear phrases and a chord for every note. Here's a straightforward hymn tune that uses the imperfect and perfect cadences just where you'd expect them to be. It's in C major, so the tonic chord is C and the dominant chord is G.

C F C F C G
 Now the day is o - ver, night is draw - ing nigh,

C G C F C C G C
 sha - dows of the eve - ning steal a - cross the sky.

And here's another. The harmonies are a bit more complex, so this time just the cadence chords are given. Each phrase ends with a perfect cadence. Phrases 2 and 3 end in different keys from C major - the music has modulated. The strongest way for a composer to establish a change of key is to use a perfect cadence. Monteverdi does this a lot.

G⁷ C
 A - bide with me; fast falls the e - ven - tide;

D⁷ G
 the dark - ness deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide.

A⁷ D^m
 When o - ther hel - pers fail, and com - forts flee,

G⁷ C
 help of the help - less, O a - bide with me.