STANDARD HARMONY
In Four Parts

A set of Harmony Exercises for SMMS/RSAMD

Tom David Wilson

Set 2

Student Name…….....

5 x 1 hour lessons

Date for completion of Set……

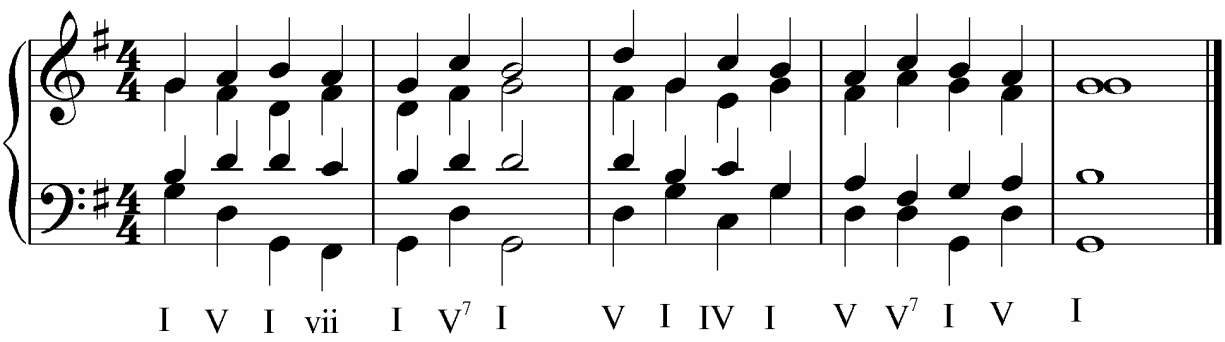
Lesson1: Construction of a Four Part Texture.
Lesson 2: Construction of a Four Part Texture; Exercises.
Lesson 3: Construction of Perfect and Imperfect Cadences.
Lesson 4: Construction of Interrupted and Plagal Cadences.
Lesson 5: Class Test.

1.Construction of a Four Part Texture.

Standard Harmony is conventionally studied by imitating the aesthetic and texture of the Victorian and Edwardian Hymn Tune. That is in four parts, Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass, without accompaniment. For this reason each part will remain within the range of that particular voice and the texture will be essentially homophonic. You would do well to remember that you are writing harmony for singers who would sing the same syllable at the same time and all breathe at the same time. You may question the validity of studying what might appear to be a narrow aesthetic but it is generally considered to be an excellent way of learning how functional harmony works, and the purity of this style renders it applicable and adjustable to a whole host of other styles and textures. This is a splendid subject for class discussion and it would be worth your while asking your teacher to talk about these issues.

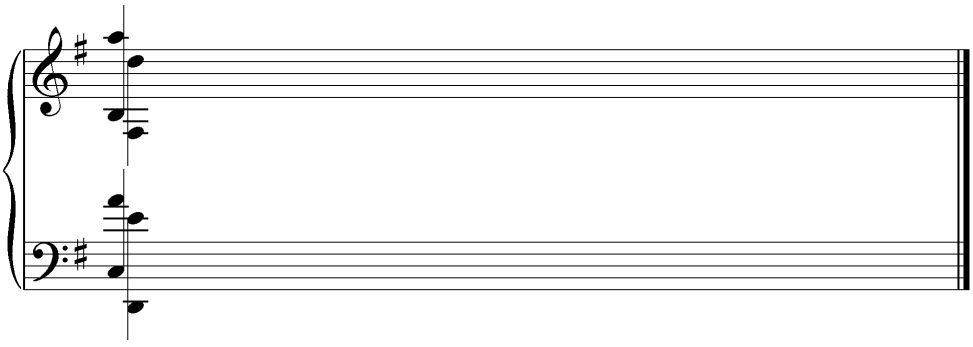
The conventional way of writing Four Part Harmony is to use two staves, Treble and Bass, with the Soprano Part sounding the tune (usually given to you so that your standard exercise is to add to a given Soprano tune, Alto, Tenor and Bass parts), written with stems up on the Treble Stave. The Alto part shares the Treble Stave with the Soprano but is written with stems down. The Tenor and Bass parts share the Bass Stave with the stems of the Tenor up and the stems of the Bass down. Here is an example:

Eg 22



You will notice that from time to time two parts will share the same note. Even though only three pitches are being sounded at these points, the harmony is still in four parts. You will also notice that each part stays within the range of that voice. The following ranges are generally considered to be the extremities at which a part can be written and you should write your parts well within them.

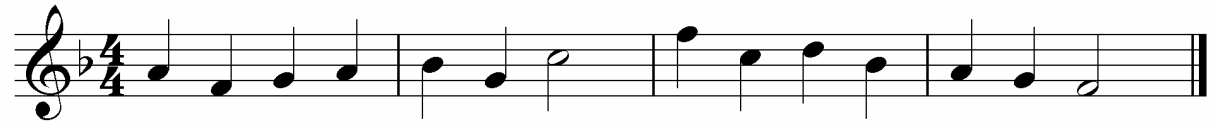
Eg 23



The construction of a Four Part Texture as in the example above is a relatively short step from the Chord Choice Exercise you did in Set 1. Consider the following procedure as an example.

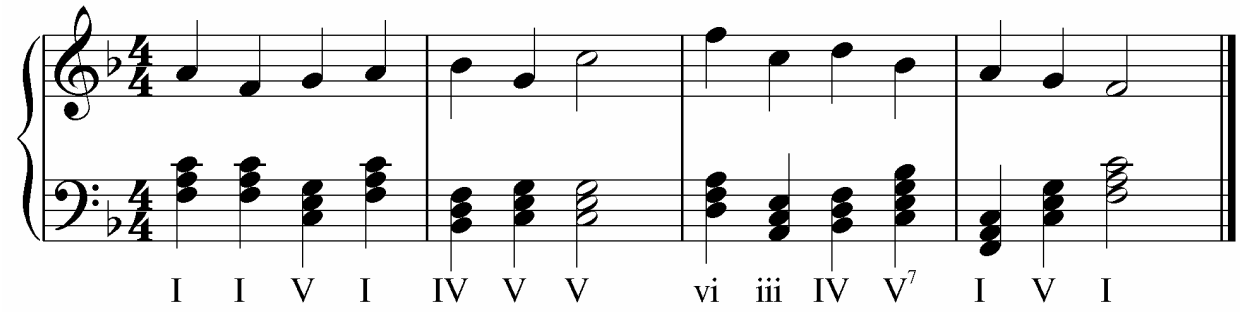
A tune is given for harmonisation which is allocated to the Soprano:

Eg 24



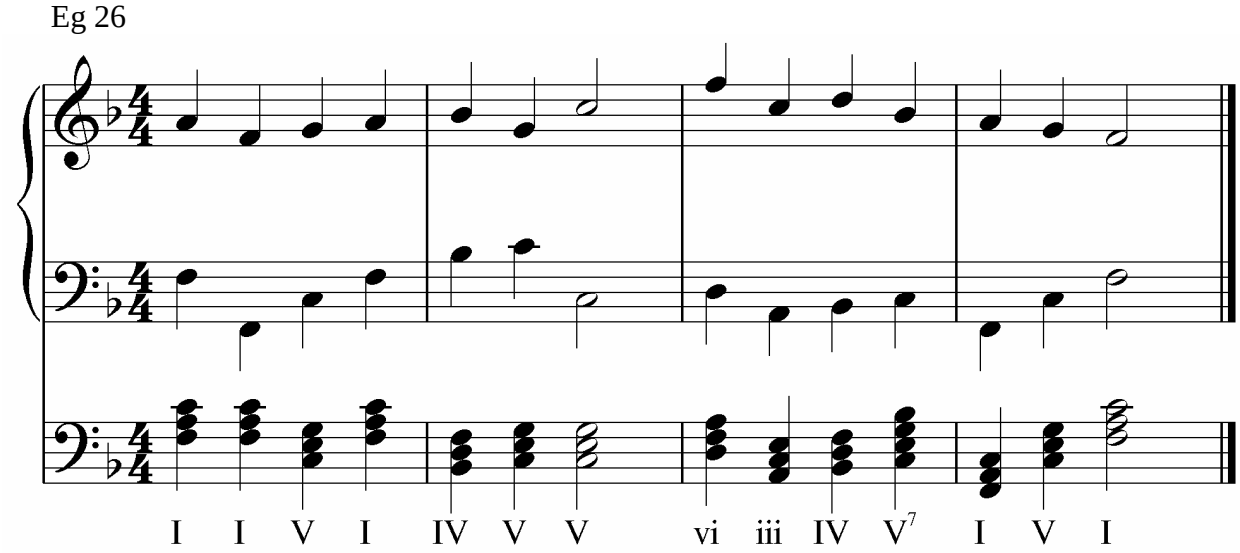
On a Bass Stave below this tune you will indicate which chords you will choose to harmonise each note:

Eg 25



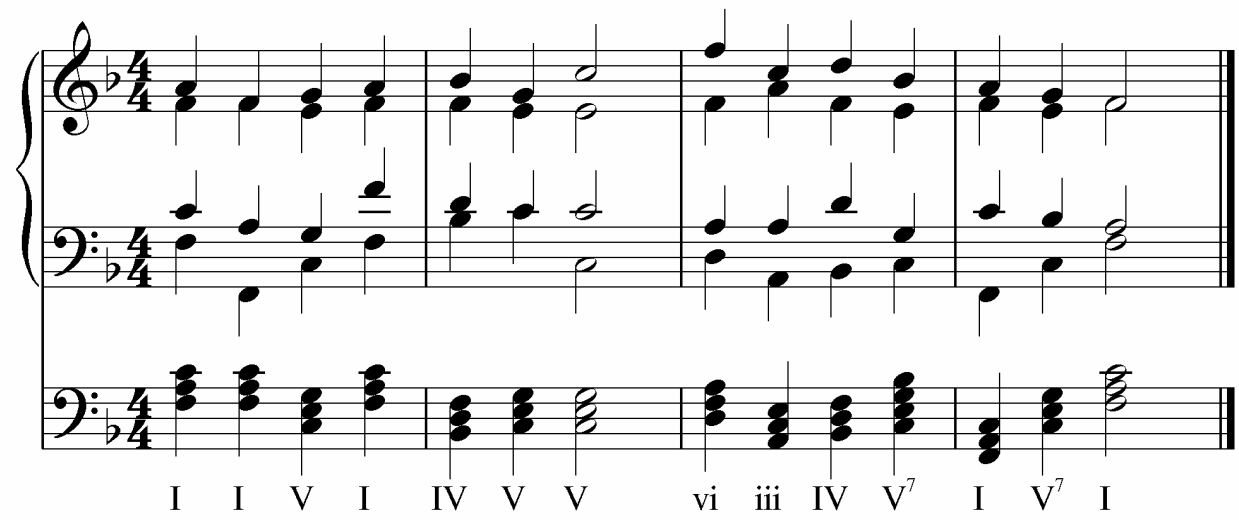
On another Bass Stave below the Soprano you will now generate a Bass Part which will consist of the Roots of the Chords you have just chosen:

Eg 26



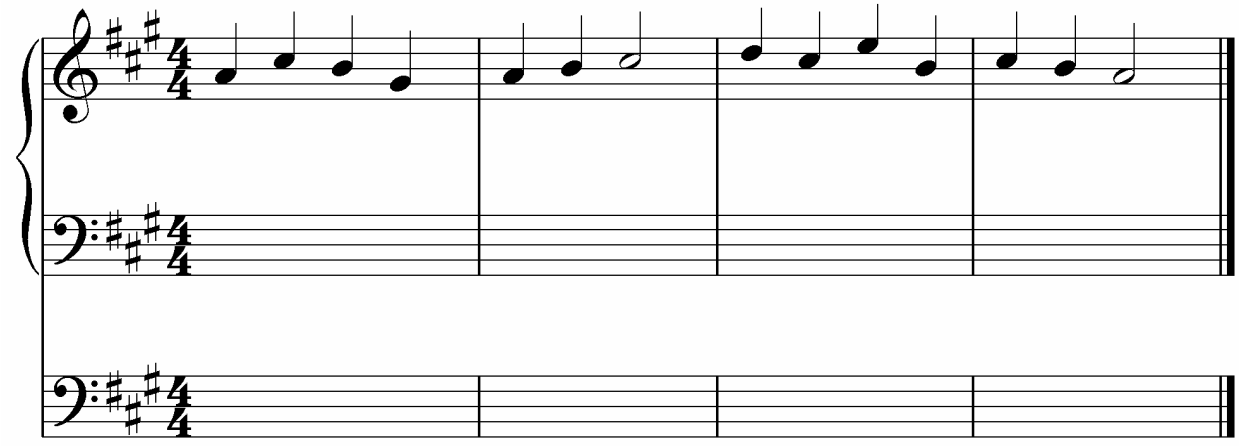
The Alto and Tenor parts can now be completed by referring to the Chords you have chosen and indicated on the extra Bass Stave. However, care must be taken at this stage when deciding which note from the Chord to allocate to these inner parts. You must make sure that the Root of the Chord is sounding (the Bass will be doing this) but you must also make sure that the Third is being sounded. It is possible to omit the Fifth but you will probably want as full a chord as possible. You will realise that, with Sevenths being used but sparingly, most of the Chords chosen are pure Triads and so have only three notes. With a Four Part texture to generate you must sound one of the notes of the Triad in more than one part. This is called “Doubling” and must be done carefully. The best note to double is the Root but if this can not be done easily then the Fifth can be doubled. The Third should be doubled only rarely and you should avoid doing so at this stage. Here, then, is the above example with the inner parts completed:

Eg 27



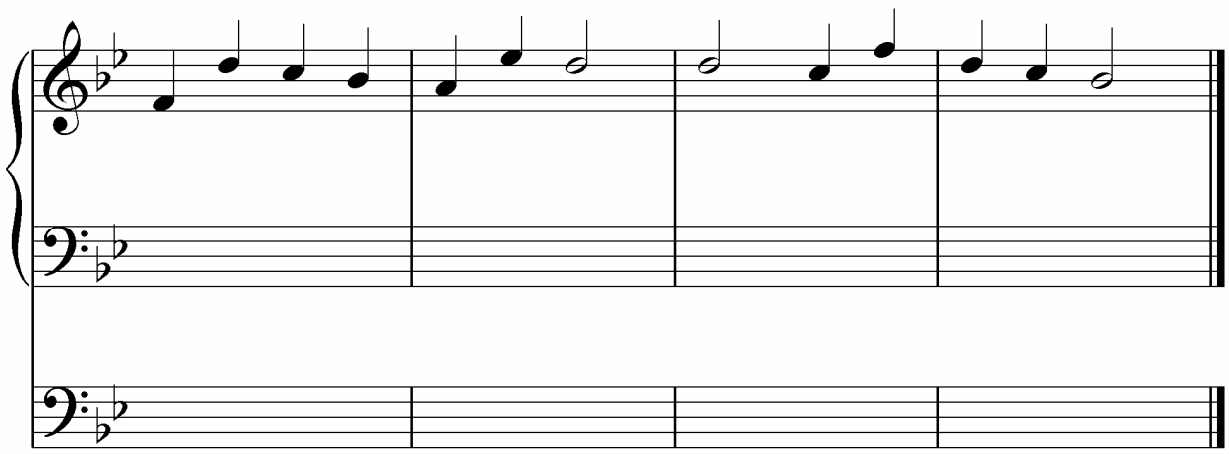
Now complete the following exercise using the same procedure. Use the bottom stave to figure and write out your chords.

Eg 28

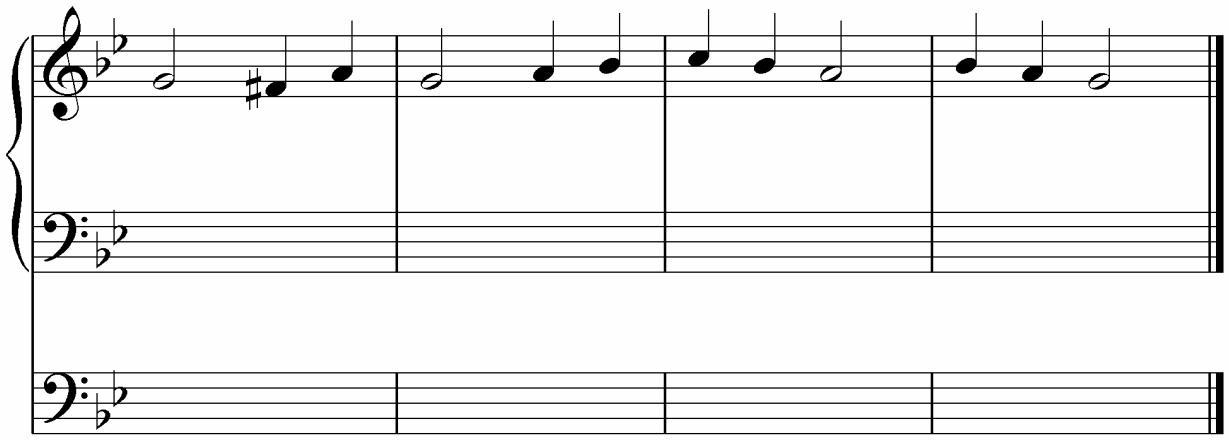


2. Here are three more exercises for you to complete in the same way:

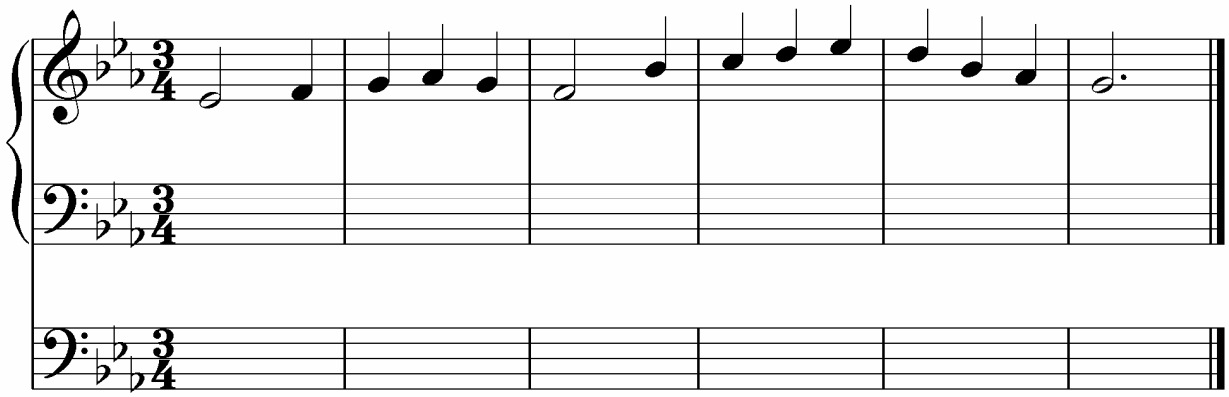
Eg 29



Eg 30



Eg 31



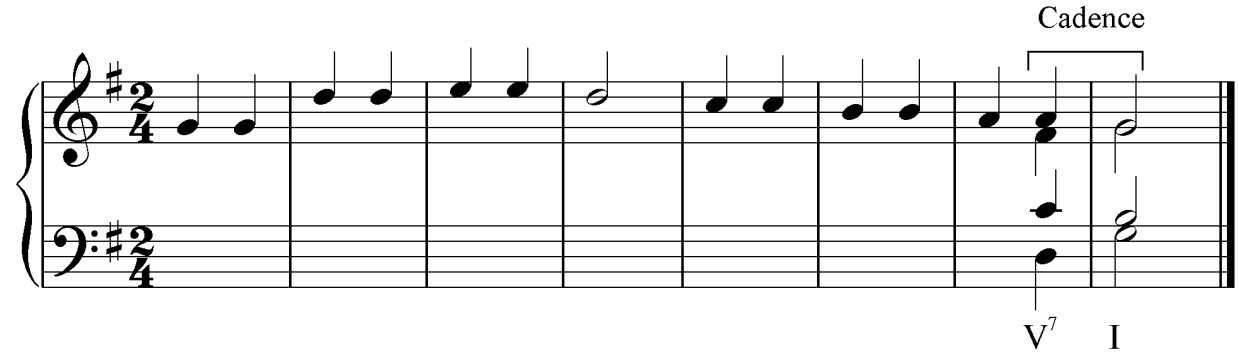
3. Construction of Perfect and Imperfect Cadences.

Performing musicians must think very carefully about how the music they are performing is phrased. So too must the Composer, Arranger or Harmoniser. The rise and fall of tension within a piece of music is expressed through the ebb and flow of its phrases and these phrases are articulated one and all by a cadence at their conclusions.
(It is worth remembering that this may not apply to Musics out-with the Western European Mainstream Tradition or to the music of composers whose interests lie elsewhere.)

So cadences are very much the punctuation of music. You will need to identify the phrases in the tunes you will be harmonising and make sure that one of the four valid cadences is placed properly at their conclusions.

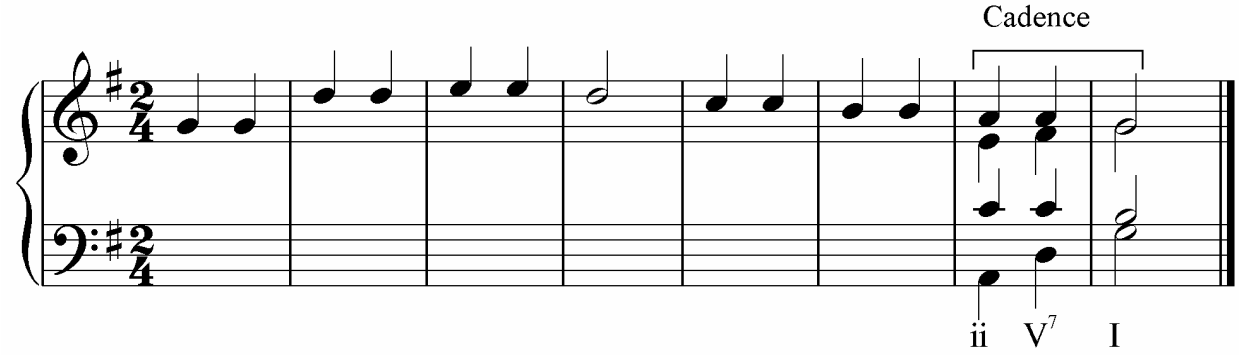
The most common and the strongest cadence is the Perfect Cadence which is expressed by the progression of Chords V to I:

Eg 32



It is the musical equivalent of a full stop and provides a strong close to a phrase. However, it must be approached well and the best approach chords to Chord V are I, ii or IV. In the tune above the best approach chord to Chord V is ii:

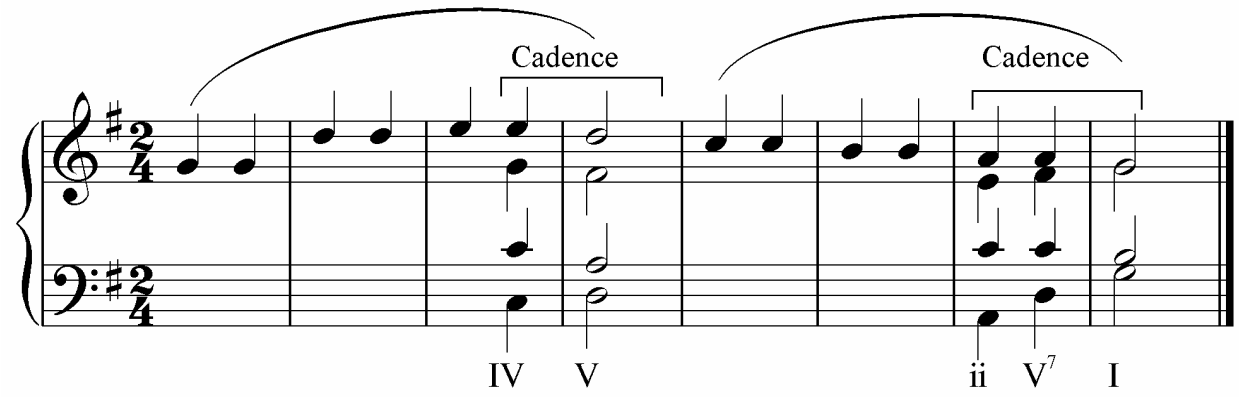
Eg 33



You will notice that this extract of “Twinkle, twinkle” has two phrases. Our Perfect Cadence has been placed at the end of the second phrase but a cadence is required at the end of the first. This would be a good place for an Imperfect Cadence.
The Imperfect Cadence is usually defined as “any chord moving to Chord V” but in practice the best approach chords to Chord V are, as with the Perfect Cadence, I, ii or IV. In fact, if you think of the Perfect Cadence as being a three chord progression, then the Imperfect Cadence is the same but

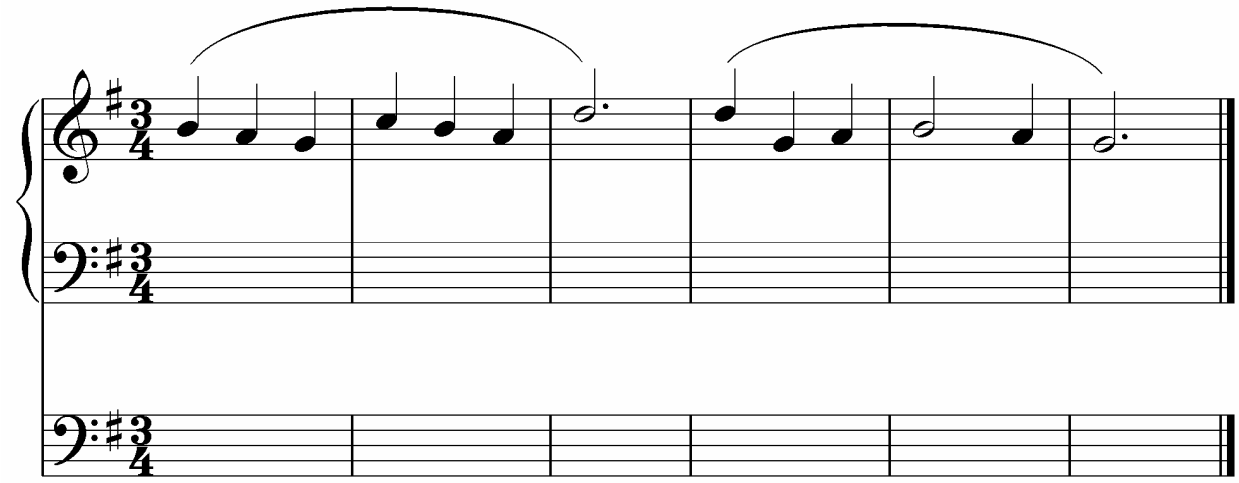
without the final Chord I. Indeed, this is how the Imperfect Cadence works in music. It is the musical equivalent of a commer, it poses a question for which there should be an answer. It is very common for a phrase which ends with an Imperfect Cadence to be followed by a phrase ending with a Perfect Cadence. This kind of musical couplet is often referred to as a "Question and Answer."

Eg 34

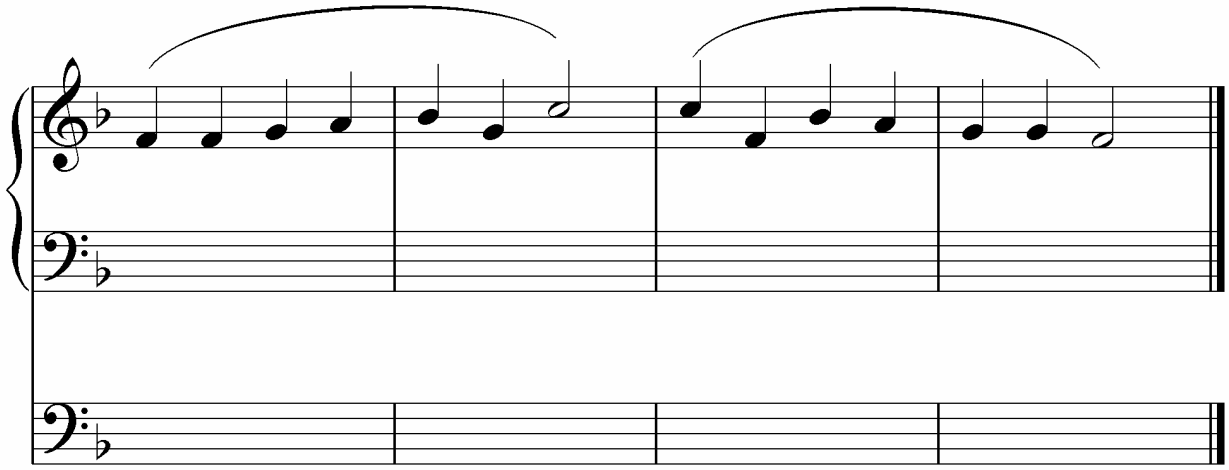


The following tunes have each two phrases which require either a Perfect or an Imperfect Cadence at their conclusions. Decide which cadence is most appropriate and then write it in in full (you need not complete the rest of the harmony). As with the last exercise an extra bass stave has been provided for you to write out your Triads or Chords if you wish.

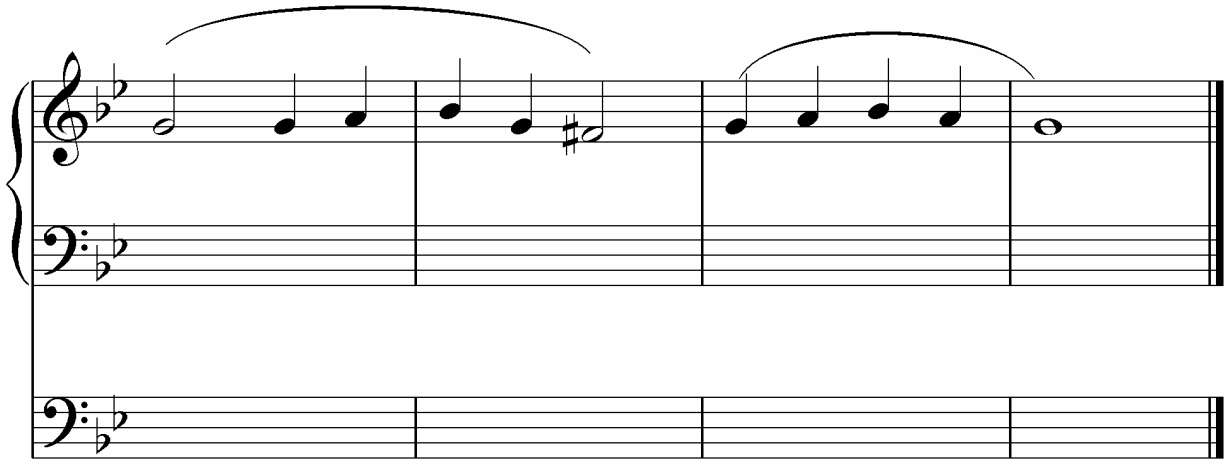
Eg 35



Eg 36



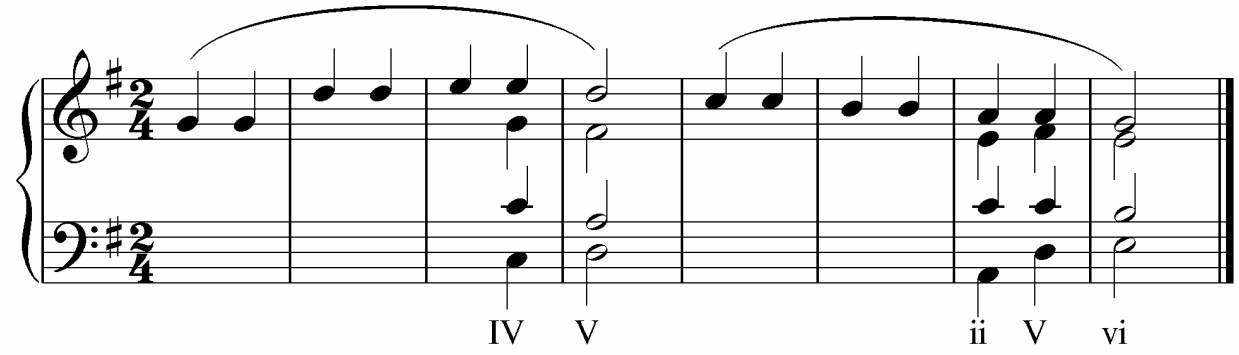
Eg 37



4. Construction of Interrupted and Plagal Cadences.

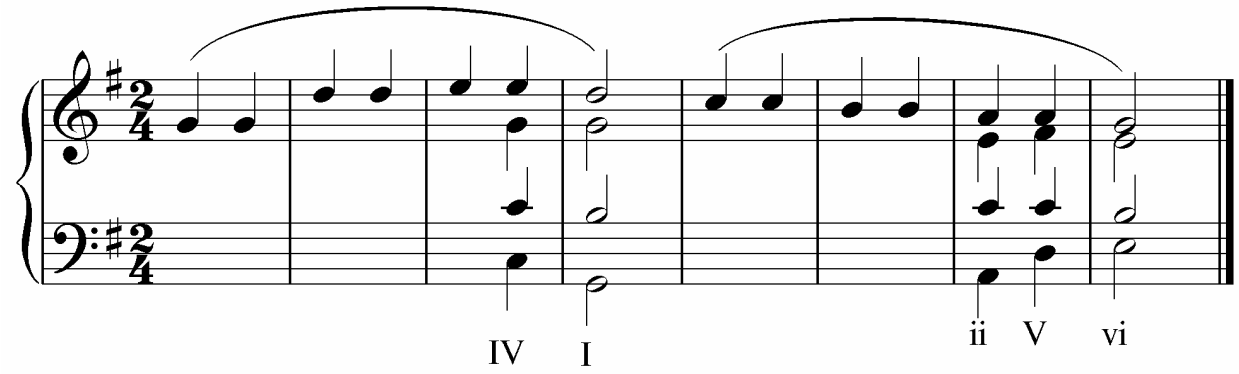
There are two more cadences in common use which may be used at the completion of phrases. They are not as common as the Perfect and Imperfect Cadences but they are essential punctuators nonetheless.
The first is the Interrupted Cadence which is almost identical to the Perfect Cadence but substitutes Chord vi for Chord I at the end. Its effect is similar to the Imperfect Cadence in as much as it poses a question for which the music must provide an answer. Its appearance should always be a surprise and, in context, would lead to an extra phrase the listener would not have expected.

Eg 38



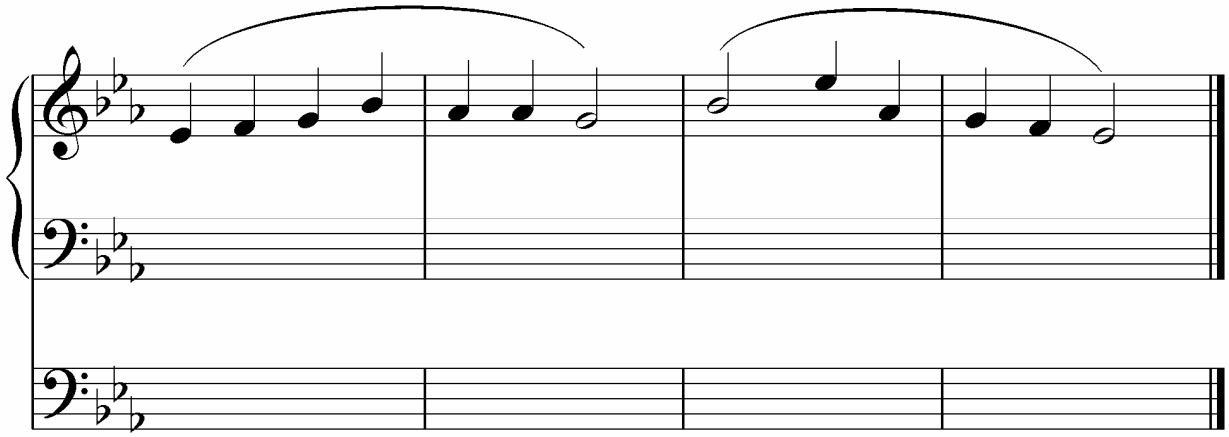
The last cadence is the Plagal Cadence which does provide a definite close to a phrase although it is not as strong as the Perfect Cadence. It is most commonly heard as the harmonisation of the extra "Amen" at the end of many hymns. It is expressed by the progression of Chords IV to I and in the example tune of "Twinkle, twinkle" it can provide an alternative to the Imperfect Cadence at the end of the first phrase.

Eg 39

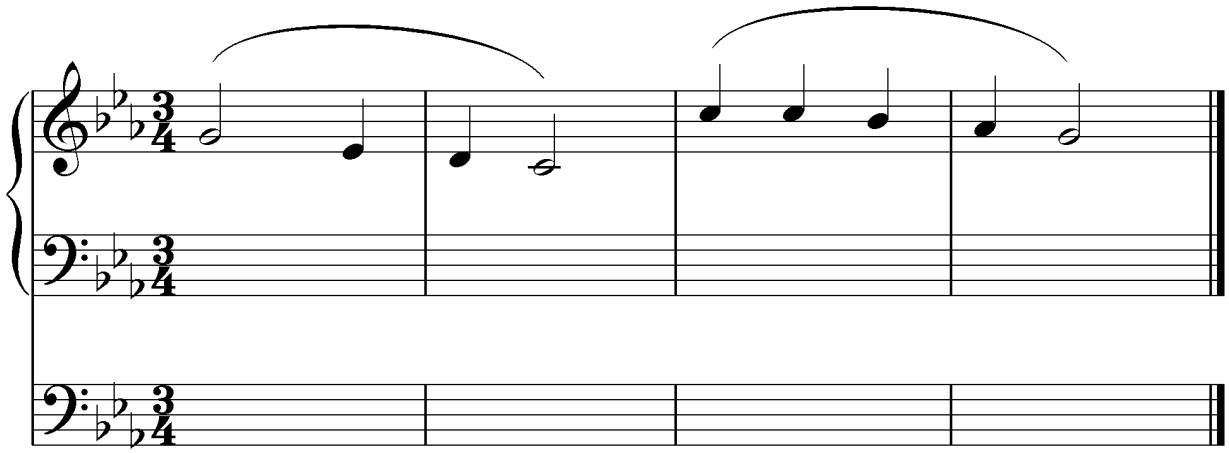


The following tunes have each two phrases which require either an Imperfect or an Interrupted Cadence at their conclusions. Decide which cadence is most appropriate and then write it in in full (you need not complete the rest of the harmony). As with the last exercise an extra bass stave has been provided for you to write out your Triads or Chords if you wish.

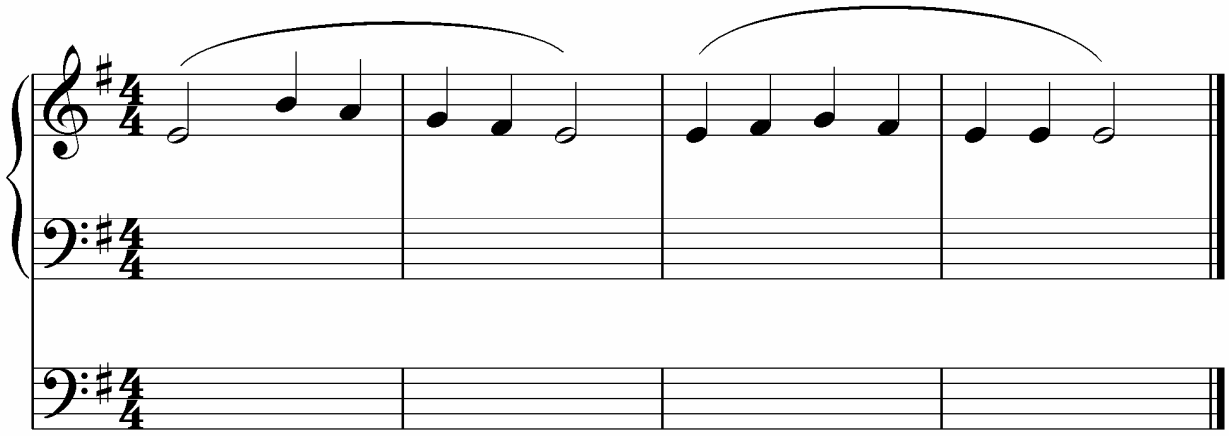
Eg 40



Eg 41



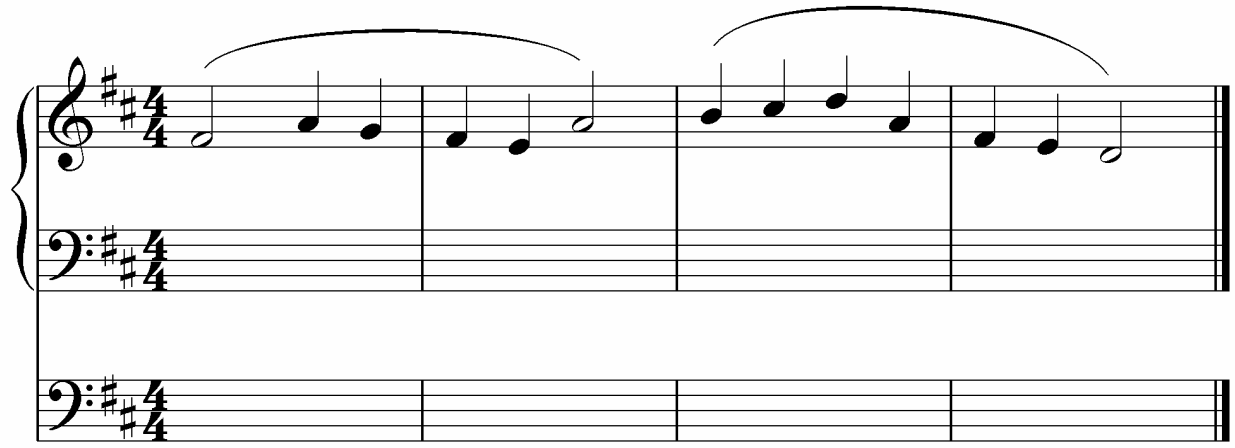
Eg 42

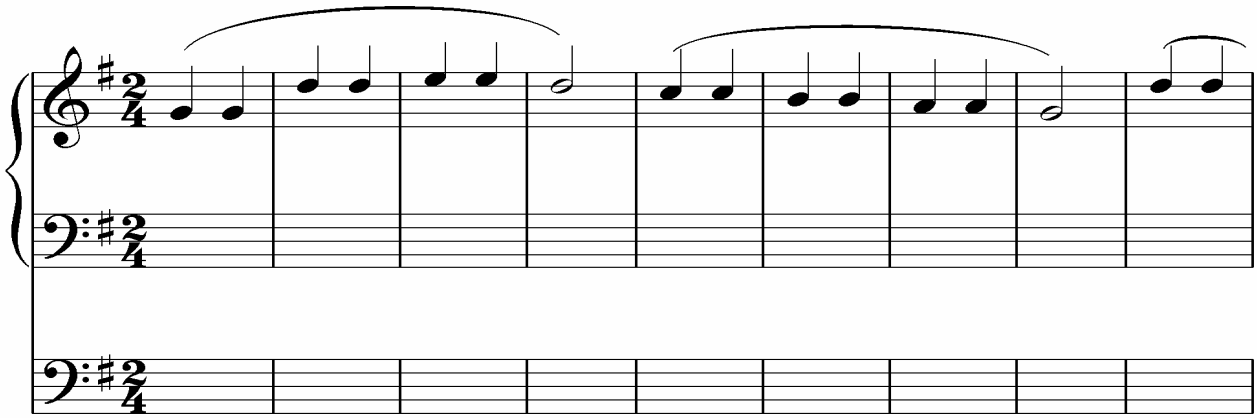
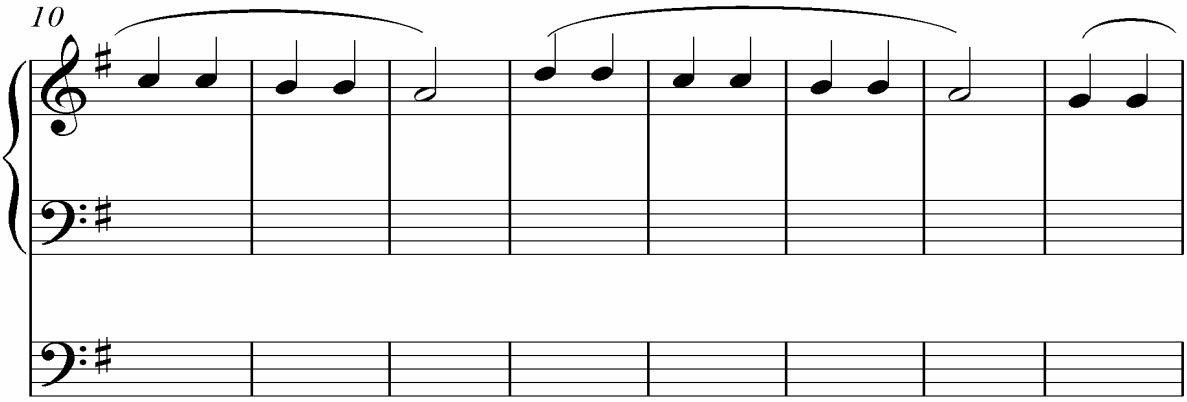
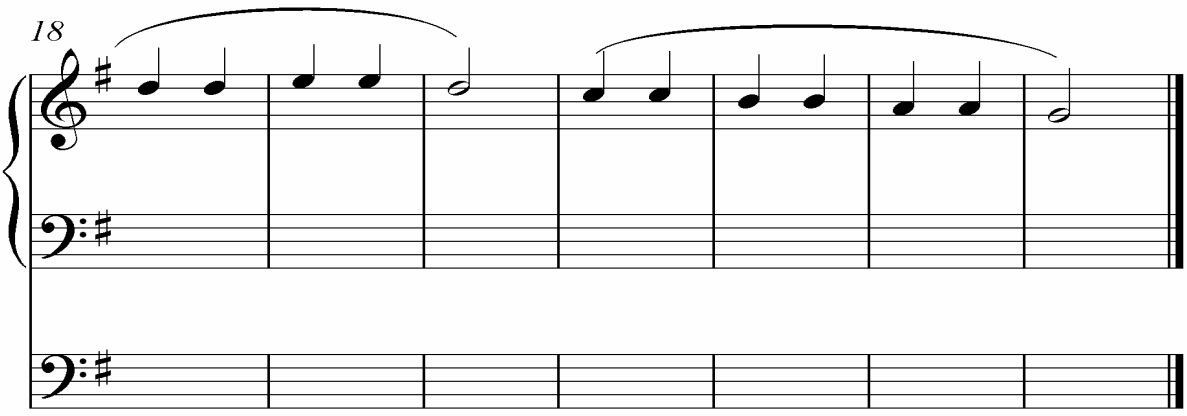


5.Class Test.

Add Alto, Tenor and Bass parts to harmonise the following tune. (An extra Bass Stave has been provided for you to write out your Triads or Chords if you wish.)

Eg 43



The complete tune “Twinkle, twinkle” has six phrases, each requiring a cadence at its completion. It is printed out on the following page. Write in a cadence at the end of each phrase. Chose your cadences carefully and try not to be too repetitive. (An extra Bass Stave has been provided for you to write out your Triads or Chords if you wish. You need not harmonise the notes out-with the cadences.)

Eg 44