

Harmonising Melodies

By Grade 5 level, students understand what is meant by a cadence, and can recognise chords at cadences. In Grade 6, you will learn more about cadences, and plan chord progressions that lead to the cadences. You will discover which chord progressions tend to be strongest – in particular the Ic-V progression which eighteenth-century composers often used at cadences.

In grade 5, students have to recognise diatonic chords (particularly chords I, II, IV and V). In Grade 6, you will be introduced to the dominant seventh chord (V⁷), and secondary seventh chords (mainly II⁷). You will learn how to use the dominant seventh when modulating (changing key). You will also find how effective pivot chords can be in making modulations work well. You will learn to recognise when tunes are changing key, and to write short tunes that modulate.

Many notes in tunes do not “fit” the chords they are played with. Most of these are notes of “melodic decoration”. In grade 5, students meet two types of melodic decoration – passing notes and auxiliary notes. In grade 6 you learn about other types of non-harmony note (appoggiaturas, suspensions and anticipations) that composers use to decorate melodies; you need to be able to recognise these so that you know which notes are harmony notes – and so which chords to use to harmonise them.

There are several midi files that you can listen to so you can hear how the theory points you are learning about affect the sound of the music.

Below are some extracts from files that you will study.

- 1 In grade 6, candidates have to recognise where cadences are in a given passage. There are various ways to tell where the cadences are in a tune. Usually they are marked by a longer note. Sometimes the phrase marks show us the place. Often we can tell from the parts of the tune that are repeated. In simple melodies the cadences often come at the end of each four or eight bars. All these features can be seen in the music below. The two cadences are marked by circles.



Here is an extract from a piece which changes key from C major to G major. It uses the standard form of modulation: pivot chord (a chord which belongs to both keys), dominant seventh (in the new key), then chord I in the new key.



I in C major vi in C major
ii in G major V7 in G major I in G major

- 5 Which key does this melody begin in? Which key does it end in?
Hint: Not all the accidentals belong to the key signature. (Are the keys major or minor?)

