Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Melody and harmony

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Melody

- **Conjunct** melody moves by step (next-door notes); **disjunct** melody moves by leaps.
- Scalic melodies run up or down a scale; arpeggios play the notes of a chord one after another.
- A **sequence** repeats a phrase at a higher or lower pitch. A riff or **ostinato** is a short, repeated pattern.
- Ornaments decorate a melody: a trill (rapid alternation of two notes), a mordent, a turn, an appoggiatura and an acciaccatura (a very quick "crushed" note).
- Phrases can be balanced as question and answer, like a conversation.

Harmony and chords

- A **triad** is a three-note chord built from a root, third and fifth. Chords I, IV and V are the primary chords.
- Consonant harmony sounds settled; dissonant harmony sounds clashing and tense.
- Diatonic harmony uses notes from the key; chromatic harmony adds notes from outside it.
- A pedal note is a held or repeated note (usually in the bass) under changing harmony; a drone is a held note or chord, often two notes a fifth apart.

Cadences

- A cadence is a pair of chords at the end of a phrase.
- **Perfect cadence**: V to I. It sounds finished.
- Imperfect cadence: ends on chord V. It sounds unfinished.
- **Plagal cadence**: IV to I. It sounds finished and is called the "Amen" cadence.
- **Interrupted cadence**: V to VI. It sounds surprising, as if it's going to finish but doesn't.

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Key terms

Conjunct	A melody that moves by step.
Disjunct	A melody that moves by leaps.
Sequence	A phrase repeated at a higher or lower pitch.
Ostinato	A short pattern repeated many times.
Triad	A three-note chord of root, third and fifth.
Perfect cadence	Chord V to chord I, sounding finished.
Plagal cadence	Chord IV to chord I, the "Amen" cadence.
Interrupted cadence	Chord V to chord VI, sounding surprising.
Dissonance	Notes that clash and sound tense.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is a conjunct melody?
2. Which cadence is chord V to chord I?
3. Which cadence is known as the "Amen" cadence?
4. Which cadence ends on chord V and sounds unfinished?
5. Which cadence goes from chord V to chord VI?
6. What is a sequence?
7. What is an ostinato?
8. Which ornament is a rapid alternation of two neighbouring notes?

Answers

1. A melody that moves by step
2. Perfect cadence
3. Plagal cadence
4. Imperfect cadence
5. Interrupted cadence
6. A phrase repeated at a higher or lower pitch
7. A short pattern repeated many times
8. A trill

What to do next

Practise 11 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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