

Marpurg's Galant Cadence in Mozart: Theoretical Perspectives, Formal Implications and Voice Leading

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Abstract

In the second volume of his *Kritische Briefe* (Berlin, 1763) Wilhelm Friedrich Marpurg points at a very specific cadential formula, which he considers to be typical for the galant style. This 'Marpurg's Galant Cadence' has 1-2 ascending melodic pattern above a cadential 6/4. From a conventional eighteenth-century point of view it is not a common contrapuntal device. Instead, the 1 was supposed to resolve by descending.

In the second half of the 18th century Marpurg's galant cadence became one of the stylistically most characteristic cadences, especially in Mozart's music. A detailed study of the use of Marpurg's galant cadence in Mozart's string quartets demonstrates how Mozart reserves this cadential scheme for formally and tonally decisive moments. He integrated it in his pedagogical approach as well. Because of the contrapuntal peculiarity of this cadence even one of Mozart's most gifted pupils, Thomas Attwood, encountered many problems to fully master it. Mozart used to provide the two outer voices of a string quartet as a first stage towards free composition and his corrections show how he prevailed good contrapuntal motion above completeness of the tonic harmony.