Multiple Phrases I: The Period

When two phrases that occur back-to-back have a certain kind of relationship, we say that they constitute a period. The criteria for the period are as follows.

1) The phrases must constitute a grouping unit – they must belong together with each other more than the first phrase belongs with the preceding music and more than the second phrase belongs with the music that follows.

2) The phrases must cohere together into a unified whole – they should sound like question and answer, or like statement and counterstatement. If the second phrase sounds like something of a non sequitur, then the phrases do not constitute a period.

3) The second phrase should have a more conclusive ending than the first, so the second cadence should be stronger than first. The most common patterns, then, are the following: HC-PAC, HC-IAC, IAC-PAC.

    Periods never end with half cadences – half cadences do not provide a conclusive enough ending. A period will generally not have a PAC as a first cadence, as it is then impossible for the second cadence to be stronger.

The first phrase of the period is called the antecedent phrase. The second phrase is called the consequent phrase.

Example 1 from the previous set of notes is a period; mm. 1-4 form the antecedent phrase and mm. 5-8 the consequent.