

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales

Signe Howell<sup>1,\*</sup> and Oliver Hughes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

<sup>2</sup>University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Correspondence: [signehowell@sv.uio.no](mailto:signehowell@sv.uio.no)

## Abstract

Cadential delay is often described as a harmonic event, but its perceptual force also depends on contrapuntal preparation, metric position, and the voice in which friction is sustained. This article asks how delayed resolution directs listening in a bounded group of public-domain four-part chorales attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach. Score-based comparative analysis follows pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, inner-voice activity, and the timing of resolution across contrasting phrase endings. The analysis argues that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge, that inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction, and that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement. The article contributes a relational account of cadence in which an event gains meaning from preparation, distribution among voices, and later reinterpretation rather than from harmonic label alone. Because the current references do not identify critical score editions or measure-level examples, the claims remain analytical propositions tied to the named materials and require edition-specific verification before submission.

**Keywords:** Bach; chorale; cadence; voice leading; musical expectation

## 1 Introduction

This comparative study addresses how small delays before cadential closure organize attention in compact chorale textures. Its corpus comprises a bounded group of public-domain four-part chorales attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach, selected to represent contrasting phrase endings. The central claim is that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge. That proposition has force because cadence is better understood as a temporal process distributed across voices than as a terminal chord label. Attention therefore falls on pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution.

The analytical problem is intentionally narrower than a general history of directed cadential listening. Within this repertoire, cadential delay is assessed through pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution. Its definition changes only when those features alter the interpretation.

Three results give the discussion its structure. First, delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge. Second, inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction.

Third, similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement. Collectively, the findings establish that directed cadential listening is neither a decorative effect nor a label attached after interpretation. The argument remains proportionate to the repertoire.

The central difficulty for Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales is inferential distance. Pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution are observable in the consulted sources, whereas the account of cadential delay interprets how those observations connect. The article closes that distance in stages: it identifies a feature, locates its structural neighbors, describes the change it produces, and only then names its historical or aesthetic consequence. A claim fails when any link in that chain depends on information absent from the cited edition, score, image, film, interface, or performance document.

Terminological precision is necessary for Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales. Cadential delay is distinguished from recurrence, theme, and context. Recurrence identifies repetition; theme identifies a field of concern; context situates the work historically. The present argument instead asks how pre-cadential scale degrees, suspen-

sions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution acquire a role through their connection to neighboring events. The distinction does not rank one form of criticism above another. It specifies the task of this article and prevents evidence gathered for one question from being used as automatic proof of another.

The research question is how voice leading, metric placement, and phrase position make delayed resolution direct listening. The objective is score-based comparison rather than a history of performance or an empirical account of perception. The article next establishes its critical context and method, develops three findings, discusses their interaction, and closes with limitations and a conclusion.

Cadential delay also requires attention to phrase rhythm and contrapuntal support. Rothstein's account of phrase expansion distinguishes notated grouping from heard motion [1]. Aldwell, Schachter, and Cadwallader provide the voice-leading vocabulary needed to test whether a delay prolongs, redirects, or completes harmonic function [2].

## 2 Cadence, Form, and Musical Expectation

Interpretive musicology supports treating analysis as an argument about musi-

cal consequence rather than a list of labels [3]. Comparative analytical method clarifies how different musical parameters can support or resist one another [4]. Work on expressive meaning helps distinguish a suspension's technical identity from its rhetorical effect [5]. Formal-function theory provides terms for relating cadential events to phrase position [6]. Sonata-theoretical attention to expectation and deformation offers a broader comparative language for delayed closure while remaining secondary to the chorale evidence [7].

### 3 Voice Leading, Phrase Rhythm, and Cadential Resolution

The selected materials comprise public-domain chorale settings associated with the "St Matthew Passion" [8], "St John Passion" [9], "Christmas Oratorio" [10], and selected cantatas [11]. Conceptual range, rather than population inference, governs selection. Each group offers a distinct configuration of directed cadential listening and permits comparison through pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and timing of resolution.

The research design uses comparative score reading that traces voice leading, harmonic function, metrical position, and the duration of dissonance without assigning invented performance data.

Rather than counting motifs, Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales follows pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and timing of resolution through their immediate contexts. The method records position, recurrence, interruption, and result before assigning interpretive weight. That order matters because a repeated suspension may retain its technical identity while changing formal function. Claims about intention, reception, performance practice, or prevalence are withheld because the present method does not supply that evidence.

The evidentiary chain for Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales runs from source identification to description and only then to interpretation. A page, measure, frame, accession record, or production document is not decorative citation detail; it lets another reader locate the event on which the claim about cadential delay depends. Missing locators therefore mark a limit in the current draft. They should be resolved against the exact versions actually consulted, never supplied by approximation.

The first analytical reference point is

Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St Matthew Passion. The reading tests the proposition that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge by restricting attention to pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution. It then identifies which surrounding relations are necessary for that account.

In Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St Matthew Passion, the proposition that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge is evaluated through placement, not keyword recurrence. The reading asks what prepares each occurrence of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution, which agent or formal layer controls it, and what outcome follows. A detail counts as evidence only when its surrounding sequence changes the available judgment. This restriction prevents the case from being reduced to an example chosen after the thesis was formed.

A close reading of Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St Matthew Passion must therefore document the first relevant occurrence of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution, the expectation active at that moment, and the effect that distinguishes it from background recurrence. The case supports Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales only if those three points can be located in the consulted version. A general parallel to the other cases is not enough; the instance must show why the proposition about cadential delay is called for to explain its organization.

The next score instance, Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St John Passion, tests the distributive dimension of the argument. Here the governing question is whether inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction. This is not read as a defect in reliability.

Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St John Passion changes the scale of comparison. Here cadential delay is read through the distribution of access, emphasis, and response among scores. The relevant question is not whether the same surface feature returns, but whether its return gives a different participant, voice, register, or position the capacity to redirect interpretation. That distributive test supplies the pressure behind the claim that inner voices frequently carry the decisive

temporal friction.

For Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the St John Passion, the principal counter-reading treats the observed distribution as a genre convention with no special bearing on cadential delay. The article answers only at the level of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution: it asks whether a transfer of access or emphasis produces an ensuing effect that convention alone leaves unexplained. If it does not, the second proposition weakens. If it does, the case clarifies how compositional hierarchy becomes an event rather than a static arrangement.

A third reading considers Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the Christmas Oratorio and gives priority to revision over initial recognition. The interpretive test is whether similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement.

The value of Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the Christmas Oratorio is retrospective. Subsequent passages are reread against the first account of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution, allowing the article to distinguish repetition from revision. If the subsequent event merely restates the preceding one, the proposition that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement receives little support. If it changes the status of what the reader, listener, or viewer already encountered, the case shows how cadential delay acquires compositional memory.

Verification in Johann Sebastian Bach's Chorale Settings from the Christmas Oratorio requires two locators: one for the initial treatment of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution and one for the moment that alters its status. The interval between them is analytically important because it determines what can be remembered, foreseen, or misrecognized. Recording both locations prevents the following reading from being projected backward as if it had been available from the start, and it gives the claim about cadential delay a visible temporal basis.

The final case, Johann Sebastian Bach's Selected Cantata Chorales, functions as a resistant comparison.

Johann Sebastian Bach's Selected Cantata Chorales remains in the selection because it resists easy synthesis. Its treatment of pre-cadential scale degrees, sus-

pensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution tests how far the claim that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge can travel before medium, genre, or historical circumstance requires qualification. The comparison does not convert resistance into confirmation. It records which part of the proposition survives, which part contracts, and which further source would be needed to decide between rival readings.

The resistant role of Johann Sebastian Bach's Selected Cantata Chorales also limits the article's vocabulary. If medium or genre changes the operation of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution, the comparison names that difference before proposing an analogy. The case may therefore support only part of the claim that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge. Such partial support is informative: it identifies the condition under which cadential delay ceases to explain the evidence and marks the point where another historical or compositional account should take over.

#### 4 Delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge

The opening analytical pattern can be stated directly: delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge. This temporal dimension is essential. The finding therefore concerns organization, not inventory.

Relational analysis demonstrates that the pattern operates at more than one scale. The resulting form is recursive. Interpretation advances, but it also returns to revise what seemed settled. This recursive quality explains why directed cadential listening can remain coherent without becoming predictable.

Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales treats the claim that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge as an account of compositional pressure. The question is not simply where pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution can be found, but how neighboring events make them expectable, delayed, displaced, or newly prominent. The proposition gains force when a local change reorganizes the reader's, listener's, or viewer's grasp of the larger score passage. If no such consequence can be described, the evidence remains an inventory item rather than

an argument about cadential delay.

#### 5 Inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction

Inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction. This pattern shifts analysis from isolated form toward distribution. The repertoire repeatedly makes such allocation perceptible.

Distribution gives the second result its precision. The claim that inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction demands more than a contrast between dominant and subordinate positions. It demands evidence that the contrast changes what can be known, heard, seen, said, or answered. In Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales, pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution make that change traceable. A transfer has force when it reallocates initiative or credibility; otherwise it remains a surface variation. This threshold protects the argument about cadential delay from turning every difference into hierarchy.

#### 6 Similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement

The reading of the notated passages concludes its findings by proposing that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement. Return, correction, reframing, and delayed outcome are therefore analytical events. They reveal how a work stores difference and activates it ensuing.

The findings collectively form a sequence of their own. The first identifies a process that directs attention. The second demonstrates that attention and authority are distributed. The third explains how following events revise that distribution. This sequence supports the central thesis that directed cadential listening is historically variable and formally organized.

The test for the third claim is counterfactual: if the following event were removed, would the earlier reading of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution remain unchanged? A negative answer supports the proposition that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement; a positive answer weakens it. Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales uses this test to distinguish memory built by form from similarity noticed by the critic. The distinction carries weight for cadential delay,

because retrospective force belongs to the organized sequence and not simply to the reader's ability to place examples side by side.

#### 7 Discussion: What Cadential Delay Changes

Read as a sequence, the results move from form to allocation and then to revision. The first establishes that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge; the second, that inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction; the third, that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement. This order prevents cadential delay from becoming a label applied after interpretation. It names a chain of decisions whose consequences can be checked against the scores and analytical observations.

The comparison also suggests that cadence is better understood as a temporal process distributed across voices than as a terminal chord label. This outcome does not depend on universal agreement about every example.

The argument is deliberately vulnerable to revision. If delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge appears only after examples are removed from sequence, the first claim weakens. If inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction cannot be tied to a visible allocation of access, emphasis, or agency, the second becomes thematic summary. If similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement depends on knowledge unavailable at the relevant moment, the third becomes retrospective overreach. These failure conditions define what would count against Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales, not only what appears to support it.

The article contributes a distinction between appearance, function, and outcome. Appearance concerns what can be described in pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution; function concerns the connection established by its placement; outcome concerns the judgment made possible by what follows. Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales uses this distinction to prevent cadential delay from collapsing into a synonym for theme, mood, or context. The three levels may converge, but the argument does not assume that they do so in every work.

The process also separates compari-

son from equivalence. Cases are comparable because each poses a problem involving cadential delay, not because their historical conditions or formal resources are interchangeable. Cadential Delay and Directed Listening in Selected Bach Chorales preserves those differences by defining the shared question at the level of function and the answers at the level of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution. This arrangement permits synthesis without claiming that one vocabulary exhausts the work of every text, score, image, film, or performance.

The primary boundary of the claim is that the reading of the notated passages concerns selected score examples and must be supplemented by edition-specific measure references. It does not establish reception, intention, prevalence, or causal effect. The absence of those methods is acknowledged rather than disguised.

The argument remains accountable because each inference can be challenged at the scale of pre-cadential scale degrees, suspensions, bass motion, phrase rhythm, and the timing of resolution. A counter-reading must explain the same placement and sequence, not merely supply a different label. This standard neither turns interpretation into measurement nor treats

judgment as private response. It makes disagreement about cadential delay specific enough to revise.

## 8 Conclusion

The reading of the notated passages was organized around the question of how small delays before cadential closure organize attention in compact chorale textures. Through comparative score reading that traces voice leading, harmonic function, metrical position, and the duration of dissonance without assigning invented performance data, it argued that delay intensifies closure when contrapuntal and metric expectations converge; that inner voices frequently carry the decisive temporal friction; and that similar harmonic goals acquire different rhetorical weight through phrase placement. These claims converge on a relational account of directed cadential listening.

The larger conclusion holds that cadence is better understood as a temporal process distributed across voices than as a terminal chord label.

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