

## The Impact of the Plagal Cadence on Nineteenth-Century Music

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**Abstract :** Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, hymns in the Anglo-American tradition often ended with the congregation singing 'amen,' most commonly set to a plagal cadence. While the popularity of this tradition is well-known still today, this research presents the origins of this custom. In 1861, Hymns Ancient & Modern deepened this convention by concluding each of its hymns with a published plagal-amen cadence. Subsequently, hymnals from a variety of denominations throughout Europe and the United States heavily adopted this practice. By the middle of the twentieth century the number of participants singing this cadence had suspiciously declined; however, it was not until the 1990s that the plagal-amen cadence all but disappeared from hymnals. Today, it is rare for songs to conclude with the plagal-amen cadence, although instrumentalists have continued to regularly play a plagal cadence underneath the singers' sustained finalis. After examining a variety of music theory treatises, eighteenth-century newspaper articles, manuscripts & hymnals from the last five centuries, and conducting interviews with a number of scholars around the world, this study presents the context of the plagal-amen cadence through its history. The association of 'amen' and the plagal cadence was already being discussed during the late eighteenth century, and the plagal-amen cadence only grew in attractiveness from that time forward, most notably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout this research, the music of Thomas Tallis, primarily through his Preces and Responses, is reasonably shown to be the basis for the high status of the plagal-amen cadence in nineteenth- and twentieth-century society. Tallis's immediate influence was felt among his contemporary English composers as well as posterity, all of whom were well-aware of his compositional styles and techniques. More importantly, however, was the revival of his music in nineteenth-century England, which had a greater impact on the plagal-amen tradition. With his historical title as the father of English cathedral music, Tallis was favored by the supporters of the Oxford Movement. Thus, with society's view of Tallis, the simple IV-I cadence he chose to pair with 'amen' attained a much greater worth in the history of Western music. A musical device such as the once-revered plagal-amen cadence deserves to be studied and understood in a more factual light than has thus far been available to contemporary scholars.

**Keywords :** amen cadence, Plagal-amen cadence, singing hymns with amen, Thomas Tallis

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