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# HARMONIA

The Journal of the Graduate Association of  
Musicologists and Theorists (GAMuT)

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# HARMONIA

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Volume 12 • 2013-2014

The Journal of the Graduate Association of  
Musicologists and Theorists at the  
University of North Texas

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Congratulations to Jayson Smith, whose paper “Memory, Repetition, and Recontextualization in Debussy’s ‘Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir’” was the winner of the 2013–2014 Graham H. Phipps Paper Award.

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# Memory, Repetition, and Recontextualization in Debussy's "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir"

JAYSON SMITH

The titles of many of Debussy's piano preludes originated in nature-inspired poetry; however, these titles are appended onto the end of the scores as a footnote, almost as if they were afterthoughts. Stefan Jarocinski believes that the titles came after the compositions, but the fact that the compositions relate to the poems in numerous ways casts doubt on this assertion.<sup>1</sup> A relationship is certainly evident in the case of the fourth prelude of the *First Book of Preludes*, "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir," which shares its title with a single line of Charles Baudelaire's pantoum, "Harmonie du soir." The exact extent to which Debussy was influenced by Baudelaire's poem is unclear, but the parallels between poem and prelude provide an opportunity to uncover a critical influence on the work. Indeed, as Paul Dukas claimed, "The strongest influence which Debussy ever came under was that of the writers of his day, and not that of the musicians."<sup>2</sup> The prelude, "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir," is the only piano piece in which Debussy acknowledged the source of the title. "Ch. Baudelaire" appears after the title, affirming the significance of Baudelaire's influence.<sup>3</sup> Paul Roberts believes that Debussy's prelude only reflects the beginning of the poem, stating:

Nothing in Debussy's prelude suggests parallels with this intense, almost violent imagery, borrowed from mystical Catholicism. Debussy... focuses on the starting point of Baudelaire's vision, where memory is invoked through the complex responses of the senses to sounds and perfumes.<sup>4</sup>

However, the prelude mirrors aspects of the entire poem—namely, repetition, recontextualization, and the overarching idea of memory. This is achieved through the obsessive use and development of the recurring opening thematic material, the recurrence of the 4-27(0258) motive (characterized by the half-diminished seventh chord), and the alternations between octatonic motives and other significant motives.

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1976), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Jarocinski, 93.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, 78.

I will begin this study by exploring the pantoum form and providing an overview of the imagery and its recontextualization in Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir." Next I will examine the opening themes' content, context, and use in relation to the poem. This is followed by a discussion of a fragment of the theme (4-27(0258) motive), how it is recontextualized, and how it is used to symbolize the overarching idea of memory presented in the poem. Following is a consideration of significant musical alternations and their relationship to the poem, including octatonic collections/subsets among other significant harmonic alternations. I end my investigation with an evaluation of the culmination of musical and poetic ideas presented in the prelude's coda.

### The Pantoum

Since I am comparing Debussy's "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir" to Baudelaire's poem, it is necessary to briefly discuss the pantoum form. Pantoums originated in fifteenth-century Malaysia as short folk poems consisting of two rhyming couplets that were recited or sung. As the popularity of the pantoum spread, Western writers adapted and altered the form. Pantoums were especially popular with French writers in the nineteenth century, including Charles Baudelaire.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 outlines the typical pantoum form. The left column represents the stanzas, and the right column represents the lines that are repeated and recontextualized throughout the poem.

**Table 1. Typical Pantoum Form**

Stanza 1	A B C D
Stanza 2	B E D F
Stanza 3	E G F H
Stanza 4	G I H J

<sup>5</sup> Michael Tilmouth, "Pantoum," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed August 21, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20836>.

Debussy took interest in Baudelaire's modified pantoum poem, "Harmonie du soir," which uses images of nature to elaborate on the fall of evening as a metaphor for the shifting between two worlds: the dualities between dark and light, day and evening, which reflect a memory-driven engagement of past and present (Table 2). The poem, though not strictly observant of the conventional pantoum form, nevertheless states the original lines in the first stanza and gradually reprises lines throughout the remaining stanzas, ultimately reflecting the recursiveness of human thought.<sup>6</sup> This reflection upon human thought especially relates to repetitive or recurring memories.

**Table 2. Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir" and English Translation<sup>7</sup>**

"Harmonie du soir"

1	Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
2	Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
3	Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
4	Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
5	Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
6	Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige;
7	Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
8	Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.
9	Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige,
10	Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
11	Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
12	Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.
13	Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
14	Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!
15	Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
16	Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!

"Evening Harmony"

1	Here comes the time when, vibrating on its stem,
2	every flower fumes like a censer;
3	Noises and perfumes circle in the evening air;
4	O melancholy waltz and languid vertigo!
5	Every flower fumes like a censer;
6	the violin shudders like an afflicted heart;
7	O melancholy waltz and languid vertigo!
8	The sky is sad and beautiful like a vast station of the Cross.
9	The violin shudders like an afflicted heart,

<sup>6</sup> See Ignace Feuerlicht, "Baudelaire's 'Harmonie du Soir,'" *The French Review* 33, no. 1 (1959): 17-26.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Routley, "Debussy and Baudelaire's Harmonie du Soir," *Musicology Australia* 15 (1992): 78.



- 10 a tender heart that hates the great dark void!  
 11 The sky is sad and beautiful like a vast station of the  
 Cross;  
 12 The sun is drowned in its own congealing blood.  
 13 A tender heart that hates the great dark void,  
 14 gathers up every remnant of the bright past!  
 15 The sun is drowned in its own congealing blood...  
 16 Your memory shines within me like a monstrence!

Lines in the poem are not only repeated but recontextualized in various ways. Table 3 maps the imagery of the poem and suggests ways in which the repetitions of lines are recontextualized.

**Table 3. Baudelaire, “Harmonie du soir,” Imagery and Recontextualization<sup>8</sup>**

Lines	Imagery	Recontextualization
1-2	The flowers vibrate and emit fragrances. Fragrances allow the reader to call flowers to mind without seeing the actual flowers, as in memory.	
3-4	The sounds and fragrances in the air, which recall the flowers, produce a melancholy waltz.	
5-7	The sounds (of the violin specifically) and fragrances produce a melancholy waltz.	The new connection of lines adds clarity to the phrase “melancholy waltz,” which is now played by a violin that is shuddering like an afflicted heart. This draws a connection between the violin and flowers as well, as music acts like fragrances in the sense that it allows the observer to call to mind objects, people,

<sup>8</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the poem see Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 82-86; Roberts, chapter 3.

		and events without actually seeing them.
9-10	The violin shudders and the heart detests the dark void.	The addition of the new line (line 10) and the use of a comma rather than a semicolon after line 9 work to clarify that the violin is the metaphorical “heart.” Since the sounds and perfumes represent the flowers and violin and the violin is the heart, the sounds and perfumes of the melancholy waltz relate to the heart.
13-14	The tender heart now “gathers up every remnant of the bright past.”	The tender heart, which was originally introduced by the violin, is pursuing “bright” memories. The heart is tormented by the loss of light through the “drowning” of the sun.
16	Transferring to the informal second person pronoun, <i>tu</i> , signifies a shift or awakening after dreaming of “shining” memories.	

The last line, “Your memory shines within me like a monstrence,” reflects upon the memories as light transforms to darkness and past transforms to present. Baudelaire’s poem emphasizes the role of memory as the lines of the poem are recontextualized, recalling specific events through textual fragments and remnants—the perfumes and the sounds that inspire memory. Ultimately, the poem progresses from the “noises and perfumes” to the “great dark void” through which the memory referred to in the last line shines.

### Themes and Context

Just as the origin of the “vibrating” sounds in the first stanza of the poem is not specified, the original theme in the first measure in 5/4 meter represents a “melancholy waltz” with an ambiguous, unspecified pulse. The opening theme can be understood to function within a modified sentence structure. The first statement, Theme a at m. 1, is answered by the statement in m. 2, Theme b (a modified

repetition of Theme a), followed by two measures with fragments from both themes in 3/4 meter (Example 1). Themes a and b are identical in the following ways: in both themes A<sub>1</sub> is struck on the downbeat, an A-major triad appears on the second beat, the pitch A appears in octaves on the second eighth note of the second beat, and a 4-27(0258) chord is struck on the third beat. The first two beats of each theme are identical in terms of rhythm, and the first two and a half beats are identical in terms of melody. Theme b is a development of Theme a; in Theme b, the F# in octaves on the second eighth of beat three is added and the dominant-inflected E is replaced by the tonic-expanding C# (which is now repeated).

**Example 1. Debussy, “Les sons,” mm. 1-4**

Beats three and four of Theme a rhythmically correspond to beats four and five of Theme b. Beat three of each of the 5/4 measures presents a metrical elision with an agogic accent on the harmony 4-27(0258), suggesting either a waltz with the first three beats of each measure or with the last three beats of each measure. As Roberts cleverly states in his book, “The irregular beat of five-four is subtly different in each measure. The eye reading the score detects a pleasingly delicate visual balance, but the ear detects a rhythmic conundrum.”<sup>9</sup> Example 2 illustrates two possible recompositions of these measures.

**Example 2. Debussy, “Les sons,” Recompositions of mm. 1-2**

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, 76.

b)

The musical score for Example 2b is a piano accompaniment in G major. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The score shows four measures. The first measure has a whole rest in the treble and a half note G in the bass. The second measure has a quarter note G in the treble and a half note G in the bass. The third measure has a quarter note A in the treble and a half note G in the bass. The fourth measure has a quarter note A in the treble and a half note G in the bass. A 4-27(0258) chord is indicated in the second measure, and a decrescendo hairpin is shown over the final two measures.

Example 2a shows a recomposition in which the accent occurs on the downbeat of the prelude. A quarter note is added in the second measure to allow the E in the bass to act as an anacrusis to the A downbeat in the third measure. Example 2b also shows the original accent on the downbeat, but the first set of eighth notes acts as an anacrusis to the second measure, during which the 4-27(0258) chord is accented. Considering the written decrescendo after the 4-27(0258) chord and the chord's importance throughout the piece, Debussy may have considered something like Example 2b as the framework for his opening theme. Regardless, the original theme, and particularly the use of the 4-27(0258) chord, foreshadows motivic recurrences to come.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the two possible re-hearings of the opening reflect the ambiguous “vibrating” and “fuming” described in the beginning of the poem.

**Example 3. Debussy, “Les sons,” mm. 24-38**

The musical score for Example 3 is a piano accompaniment in G major, divided into two parts. The first part, labeled 'Theme a' and 'Theme b', covers measures 24-26. The second part, labeled 'Theme b', covers measures 27-28. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The score shows two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first part (measures 24-26) is marked *pp* and *mp*. The second part (measures 27-28) is marked *pp* and *mf*. The tempo markings are 'Plus lent' and 'En animant'. The 4-27 chord is highlighted in both parts.

<sup>10</sup> See “Appendix B: Outline of Motives” at the end of this article.

The musical score consists of four systems of piano music. The first system (measures 29-30) shows a transition from 3/4 to 4/4 time, marked 'Cédez' and 'pp'. The second system (measures 31-33) includes 'Rubato' markings and a boxed section labeled 'Theme b Serrez' with a circled motif and '4-27' written below. The third system (measures 34-36) features another boxed section with '4-27' and 'Rubato' markings. The fourth system (measures 37-38) is marked 'Theme b Serrez' and 'mf', with a boxed section containing a circled motif and '4-27' below.

Theme a and Theme b repeat and occur in differing contexts throughout the prelude, ultimately mirroring repetitions and recontextualizations within the poem. Dora Hanninen points out that “recontextualization” in music should not be confused with mere repetition, as musical recontextualization “indicates a (listener’s perception of) phenomenal transformation of repetition (of some thing—a musical idea) induced by a change in musical context.”<sup>11</sup>The

<sup>11</sup> Dora A. Hanninen, “A Theory of Recontextualization in Music: Analyzing Phenomenal Transformations of Repetition,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (2003): 61.

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following examples show how the recontextualizations of the musical lines (not just their repetitions or development) lead to a new effect or a new understanding of them in the prelude. As shown in Example 3, a literal repetition of the themes occurs at m. 24. The clarity of the opening theme is retained through its first reiteration at mm. 24-25, just as the pantoum repeats lines from the first quatrain in the second. Further statements of the theme in the music are not so literal, however, as they develop the original theme in terms of metrical displacement and changing pitch levels, as well as by contracting from the original theme (longer note values and the absence of beats). This is similar to the means by which each stanza of the poem develops from previous stanzas while removing lines. At m. 27, Theme b is stated twice and transposed a major third down, and the note values in the lower voices are elongated. Another statement of Theme b at m. 31 occurs a semitone lower, is metrically displaced, and is missing the last beat. Only two beats of Theme b occur at m. 39 before it is interrupted by 4-27(0258) motives (Example 4).

As with metrical displacements, abbreviations of the themes elided with other musical ideas may parallel with a recontextualization of lines in the poem. Over time, the themes become so fragmented and transformed that they are left as memories, just as the memories from the poem fade into reality at the last line, "Your memory shines within me like a monstrance!"<sup>12</sup> Regarding recontextualization in the poem, the first appearance of the line "The violin shudders like an afflicted heart" at line 6 is punctuated with a semicolon, indicating a complete thought. When this line occurs again in the next stanza, it is punctuated with a comma and is followed by "A tender heart that hates the great dark void!" at line 10 which, in effect, clarifies the violin's position as the metaphorical "heart." Line 10 is also recontextualized in the fourth stanza at line 13, as the exclamation mark is removed and precedes line 14, "Gathers up every remnant of the bright past!" The transformations and recontextualizations of the theme in the prelude reflect the process of recontextualization and transformation of repeated lines in the poem.

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<sup>12</sup> See "Appendix A: Thematic Appearances" at the end of this article.

## Example 4. Debussy, “Les sons,” mm. 39-44

The musical score for Debussy's "Les sons" (mm. 39-44) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 39-41) features Theme b' starting at measure 39, marked *p*. Measure 40 includes the instruction "Cédez". The second system (mm. 42-44) features Theme a starting at measure 42, also marked *p*. A specific harmonic motive, 4-27(0258), is highlighted with a box and a circle in both themes. The score includes various dynamics (*p*, *pp*) and articulation marks (accents, slurs).

## The Fragment's Context

While the transformations and fragmentations of the themes in the music reflect the structure of the poem, the recurring motives between statements of the themes suggest connections to the dualities within the poem, namely through the 4-27(0258) harmonic motive and Debussy's use of planing. In addition to its prominent placement within the themes and its frequent recurrence outside of thematic restatements, the 4-27(0258) motive often appears in an alternation with other significant motives from the prelude. The organic treatment of the motive reflects aspects of the poem, as memories develop and shift into reality. Recurrences of the 4-27(0258) motive recall the themes in the prelude without their actual presence—just as the flowers from the poem are recalled via “perfumes.”

As the recurring themes of the prelude parallel transformations of the poetic lines from stanza to stanza, the use and development of the 4-27(0258) motive also signify the recurrence and recontextualization of the poetic lines. In lines 13-14 of Baudelaire's poem, the tender heart—which was originally introduced with the violin—pursues “bright” memories as it is tormented by the loss of light. The musical manifestation of the 4-27(0258) motive and its breaking away from the original theme into new contexts reflect this recontextualization of the lines in the poem. The motive first occurs in m. 1 as a fragment of Theme a at an agogic accent. Immediately after the first statement of the themes, the motive breaks away from the themes and is implemented in planing

motions in mm. 3-4. The sonorities continue as vertical entities in the accompaniment for a third bar (m. 5) (Example 5). Planing minor thirds interrupt the 4-27(0258) motive from mm. 5-8, immersing the sonorities into a new context. This intermingling of musical ideas mirrors the form of the poem as the lines of the poem that reappear are separated by intervening lines which change the context.

**Example 5. Debussy, "Les sons," mm. 1-8**

The 4-27(0258) motive also symbolizes the overarching idea of memory and even obsession as it persistently recalls the themes in the prelude even when it is not part of those themes. The musical texture is nearly saturated with this motive in mm. 38-40. After a metrically displaced statement of Theme b at mm. 37-38, three 4-27(0258) chords are struck, followed by the abbreviated version of Theme b, and then by those same three 4-27(0258) chords. The progression continues with six more chords, all 4-27(0258) or those with nearly identical invariance, such as 4-20(0158) chords (Example 6). The 4-20(0158) chords serve the same purpose as the 4-27(0258) chords as they are offset by one semitone and appear in the same context of consecutive block chords. Another "obsessive" use of the motive begins at m. 45, during which 4-27(0258) chords and 4-28(0369) chords appear before a set of alternations between 5-22(01478) and 4-27(0258) chords (Example 7). Admittedly, these 4-28(0369) harmonies are not of nearly identical invariance to the 4-27(0258) chords as the 4-20(0158) chords were in the previous example. Nevertheless, the frequent usage of 4-27(0258) chords throughout suggests an obsessive recall of the opening theme, as though the entirety of the theme has been reduced to its most essential element. Just as the "Tender heart that hates the great dark void gathers up every remnant of the bright past," the 4-27(0258)



motive is used frantically, even obsessively, in an attempt to gather the remnants of the memory or, in the case of the prelude, the theme.

Example 6. Debussy, "Les sons," mm. 36-40

36 Rubato Theme b Serrez 38 4-27

39 Theme b' 40 Cédez 4-27 4-27 4-20 4-27

Example 7. Debussy, "Les sons," mm. 45-49

45 pp En retenant 46 4-27 4-28 4-28 5-22

47 4-27 48 49 5-22 5-22 5-22 5-22 4-28 4-27 4-28

## (Example 7. Cont.)

## Alternations in Context

Just as the 4-27(0258) motive alternates with planing ideas, alternating octatonic collections/subsets and other significant harmonic alternations occur throughout the prelude. This also relates to the structure of the poem in terms of the intermingling of lines and, in some cases, recontextualization. A chart of these alternations is shown in Table 4. While several octatonically-structured fragments occur earlier than m. 9, more salient octatonic subsets appear in alternation with non-octatonic subsets beginning at m. 9 (Example 8). These subsets and alternations contain all three complete octatonic collections as well as two harmonic subsets, 6-22(012468) and 5-34(02469) (a superset of 4-27(0258)). The alternations may reflect the intermingling of lines from the poem, but the sharing of underlying octatonic material while shifting actual collectionality can be linked to the recontextualization of individual poetic lines—the poetic lines retain a connection with their initial statements, but they are changed by aspects of the poetic surface.<sup>13</sup>

Table 4. Outline of Alternations

Measures	Alternations
14-23	Oct <sub>(0,1)</sub> – 5-34(02469) – Oct <sub>(1,2)</sub> – 5-34(02469) – Oct <sub>(0,1)</sub>
31-38	5-27(01358) – Theme b – 4- 26(0358) – Theme b – Interruption (planing in 3rds) – 4-26(0358) – Theme b
41-44	4-16(0157) – 6-34(013579) – 4- 16(0157) – 6-34(013579)
46-48	5-22(01478) – 4-27(0258) – 5- 22(01478) – 4-28(0369) – 5-

<sup>13</sup> More alternations are shown in Example 9 and Example 10. It should be noted in Example 9 that 4-26(0358) is a subset of 5-27(01358), yet another example of recontextualization.

	22(01478) – 4-27(0258) – 5-22(01478) – 4-28(0369) – 5-22(01478)
50-53	A major – planing – A major – planing

Example 8. Debussy, “Les sons,” mm. 9-23

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with specific annotations:

- System 1 (mm. 9-12):** Labeled "En animant un peu" above the staff. The first measure (m. 9) is annotated with "Oct(0,1)". The second measure (m. 10) has a dynamic marking of *p*. The third measure (m. 11) is annotated with "6-22". The fourth measure (m. 12) has a dynamic marking of *p*.
- System 2 (mm. 13-16):** The first measure (m. 13) is annotated with "Oct(2,3)". The second measure (m. 14) is annotated with "Oct(0,1)". The third measure (m. 15) is annotated with "5-34". The fourth measure (m. 16) is annotated with "En retenant" and has a dynamic marking of *p*.
- System 3 (mm. 17-20):** The first measure (m. 17) has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The second measure (m. 18) is annotated with "a Tempo". The third measure (m. 19) is annotated with "Oct(1,2)". The fourth measure (m. 20) is annotated with "5-34".
- System 4 (mm. 21-23):** Labeled "Serrez un peu" above the staff. The first measure (m. 21) is annotated with "Oct(0,1)". The second measure (m. 22) has a dynamic marking of *p*. The third measure (m. 23) has a dynamic marking of *p*.

Example 9. Debussy, "Les sons," mm. 30-38

30 Cédez *pp* 37 Rubato Theme b Serrez *p*

5-27

7

Detailed description: This system shows measures 30 to 38. Measure 30 is marked 'Cédez' and 'pp'. Measure 31 is marked 'Rubato'. Measure 32 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 33 is circled and labeled '5-27'. Measure 34 is circled and labeled '4-26'. Measure 35 is circled and labeled '6'. Measure 36 is circled and labeled '7'. Measure 37 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 38 is circled and labeled '6'. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex chordal textures.

32 4-27 Rubato 33 Theme b Serrez *p*

4-26

6

Detailed description: This system shows measures 32 to 38. Measure 32 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 33 is circled and labeled '4-26'. Measure 34 is circled and labeled '6'. Measure 35 is circled and labeled '7'. Measure 36 is circled and labeled '6'. Measure 37 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 38 is circled and labeled '6'. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex chordal textures.

Planing in 3rds

34 4-27 35 36 Rubato

Detailed description: This system shows measures 34 to 38. Measure 34 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 35 is circled and labeled '6'. Measure 36 is circled and labeled '7'. Measure 37 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 38 is circled and labeled '6'. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex chordal textures.

37 Theme b Serrez *p* 38 *mf* 4-26 4-27 6

Detailed description: This system shows measures 37 to 38. Measure 37 is circled and labeled '4-27'. Measure 38 is circled and labeled '6'. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex chordal textures.

Example 10. Debussy, "Les sons," mm. 40-49

The musical score is divided into five systems, each with annotations for harmonic analysis:

- System 1 (mm. 40-42):** Starts with the instruction "Cédez" and a piano (*p*) dynamic. A bracket labeled "4-16" spans measures 41 and 42. A second bracket labeled "6-34" spans measure 42.
- System 2 (mm. 43-44):** A bracket labeled "4-16" spans measures 43 and 44. A second bracket labeled "6-34" spans measure 44. The section ends with the label "Theme a".
- System 3 (mm. 45-46):** Features a piano (*pp*) dynamic. A bracket labeled "4-27" spans measures 45 and 46. A bracket labeled "4-28" spans measure 46. A bracket labeled "5-22" spans measure 46. The instruction "En retenant" is placed above measure 46.
- System 4 (mm. 47-48):** A bracket labeled "4-27" spans measures 47 and 48. A bracket labeled "5-22" spans measure 48. A bracket labeled "4-28" spans measure 48. A bracket labeled "4-27" spans measure 48. A bracket labeled "4-28" spans measure 48. A bracket labeled "5-22" spans measure 48. A bracket labeled "4-28" spans measure 48.
- System 5 (mm. 49):** Starts with the instruction "Plus retenu" and a piano (*pp*) dynamic. A bracket labeled "4-27" spans measure 49.

### Culmination at the Last Line

The coda represents a culmination of the theme and a reminder of alternating ideas from earlier in the prelude. This hints at a time shift where past meets present and darkness meets light. The last appearance of the 4-27(0258) motive is at m. 49 (Example 10). It is one quarter note in length—the last quarter note before the coda, as if the motive is a final attempt at recall before time shifts to the present. The coda has its own alternations with the A-major chord, followed by planing sixteenth and thirty-second notes (Example 11). This point in the music symbolizes the last line of the poem, “Your memory shines within me like a monst’rance!” The poem has shifted from memory to reality, but the memory, with its repeated, recontextualized ideas, still “shines” within these final alternations. Like the final line of the poem, the coda retrospectively points to how far the music has developed organically from the original theme.

Example 11. Debussy, “Les sons,” mm. 50-53

Comme une lointaine sonnerie de Cors

AM

pp

50

51

Planing

AM

pp

Encore plus lointain et plus retenu

52

53

Planing

AM

(...“Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir”)

### Conclusion

Many of the musical characteristics of the prelude may be seen as simple text-paintings of a single line of the poem, “Noises and perfumes circle in the evening air.” The prelude’s title can be explained by the aforementioned motives in the prelude “circling” and recurring, such as the 4-27(0258) motive with its recurrences in different contexts. However, the ideas of memory and recontextualization in the prelude relate more to Baudelaire’s poem as a whole. “Harmonie du soir” represents fading memories as the

images of light progress into darkness, as ideality meets reality. Just as memory fades over time, this pantoum gradually leaves behind its original ideas—the vibrating of flowers and the whirling of the sounds and fragrances. Likewise, the theme and its 4-27(0258) motive traverse into darkness through significant alternations and recontextualizations, followed by their eventual absence. The prelude ends with an abrupt shift into reality at the coda which parallels the poem's last line.

Debussy obsessively returns to the themes and their fragments in the form of alternated motives, suggesting the decay of memory over time. The clarity of the opening theme and the subsequent obscuring of that theme over time reflect the repetitive structure of Baudelaire's poem and also adopt the poem's shifting engagement with the memories of the past. Debussy's use of the 4-27(0258) motive parallels the recurrence and recontextualization of lines in the poem and the overarching idea of memory as it becomes a stand-in—a memory—of the theme itself. Alternations within the prelude, which include alternations of significant octatonic subsets, also relate to recurrence and recontextualization within the poem. Finally, the coda retrospectively points to the extent to which the music has developed since the opening statement of the prelude's first theme.

Perhaps Debussy embraced the repetitive, even obsessive nature of the pantoum form. According to a July 24, 1909 letter to André Caplet (around the time Debussy composed the *First Book of Preludes*), Debussy experienced an obsessive madness that he was forced to control:

There is no point in denying it: I am in the state of mind in which it would be better to be a sponge at the bottom of the sea or a Japanese vase on the mantelpiece, anything rather than a man of thought, that fragile piece of mechanism which only functions when it wishes to and against which the will of man is as nothing. Orders are given to someone who does not obey you, and this someone is yourself. Since one does not wish frankly to be called an idiot, one goes on creating illusions in an empty circle—like abandoned wooden horses at a merry-go-round without music and with no one to ride them. Perhaps this is the punishment reserved for those who are too much addicted to thinking or who persist in following a single idea: hence the *idée fixe*, which is a prologue to madness.<sup>14</sup>

Debussy was struggling with his own existence and agonized over his “addiction” to an obsessive devotion with a single idea. He felt

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 191-92.

powerless to the point of impending madness. His own *idée fixe* and his helpless state of mind may or may not have contributed to the composition of this prelude, but the numerous, obsessive musical repetitions, recontextualizations, and references to memory in “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir,” along with their relation to the structure and imagery of Baudelaire’s poem, call for further investigation into the genesis of this prelude.

### Appendix A. Thematic Appearances

Measure(s)	Theme(s)	Context
1-2	a & b	Beginning
24-25	a & b	After octatonic alternations, begins new set of planing alternations
27	b- transposed down minor ninth, longer rhythmic values in lower voices	After planing 4-27(0258), before a second statement of the theme
28	b- transposed down minor second, last note omitted	After statement at m. 27, before more planing at m. 29
31(beat 3)-32	b- transposed down minor second, metrically displaced, last note omitted	Within alternations involving 5-27(01358), 4-26(0358) (subset), and planing in thirds
33(beat 3)-34	b- transposed down minor second, metrically displaced, last note omitted	Second statement of theme within same set of alternations
37(beat 3)-38	b- metrically displaced, last note omitted	End of the set of alternations
39	b- only contains second and third beat, metrically displaced	Precedes frantic 4-27(0258) and 4-20(0158) chords
44 (beginning at beat 3)	a- transposed up major sixth, metrically displaced	After alternations between 4-16(0157) and 6-34(013579), last statement of the theme



## Appendix B. Outline of Motives

Measures	Characteristics
1-2	Theme (a, b)
3-8	Planing 4-27(0258) Planing minor thirds
9-10	Octatonic <sub>(0,1)</sub>
11-12	6-22(012468)
13	Octatonic <sub>(2,3)</sub>
14	Octatonic <sub>(0,1)</sub>
15-18	5-34(02469)
19	Octatonic <sub>(1,2)</sub>
20	5-34(02469)
21-23	Octatonic <sub>(0,1)</sub>
24-25	Theme (a, b)
26	Planing 4-27(0258)
27-28	Theme (b, b)
28-29	Planing with extra doubling and more octatonic pitches
30	New material with 4-27(0258)
31	5-27(01358)
32	Theme (b)
33	4-26(0358)
34	Theme (b)
35-36	Planing in thirds
37	4-26(0358)
38	Theme (b) 4-27(0258)
39	Octatonic <sub>(1,2)</sub> 4-27(0258)
40	4-27(0258) with alterations
41	4-16(0157)
42	6-34(013579)
43	4-26(0358)
44	6-34(013579) Theme (a)
45	5-35(02479) Statements of 4-27(0258) with alterations (4-28(0369))
46	4-28(0369) 5-22(01478) sextuplet
47	4-28(0369) 5-22(01478) sextuplet
48	4-27(0258) and alterations, alternating with 5-22(01478) sextuplet

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49-50	New idea, 4-27(0258) leads into A-major triads at m. 50
51	Planing
52	As in m. 50
53	Planing

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# Motive and Meaning in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* Act II Scene 15

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Motives play a central role in the musical construction of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. The opera is framed by motivic use; the opening bars present both the motive associated with Don Giovanni's name, and the rhythmic heartbeat pattern that accompanies the Commendatore's condemning sentence near the opera's close. Academic literature is often concerned with motive in Mozart's music as well as meaning in Mozart's music, but seldom are the two effectively combined.

The goal of this essay is to join motive and meaning by examining a specific motive (hereafter referred to as the "counting motive")<sup>1</sup> from Act II, Scene 15 of *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," (see Example 1). The counting motive functions to enrich the dialogue among the characters of Don Giovanni, Leporello, and Donna Elvira, revealing underlying aspects of their personalities. First, I establish the counting motive's identity through its appearance in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, composed one year prior to *Don Giovanni*. Then, I show how the counting motive's reappearance in *Don Giovanni* informs meaning in "Ah taci, ingiusto core." Further, I contrast the counting motive with two other motives (Examples 11 and 13) from "Ah taci, ingiusto core" in order to demonstrate the degree to which motivic recontextualization affects and informs the music's meaning. These additional motives contrast with the counting motive through their relative semiotic stasis.

**Example 1. Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," violin I, m. 9.**



## Preliminaries

Wye Allanbrook's book, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, presents expression, imitation, and meaning through topical readings of Mozart's music.<sup>2</sup> Allanbrook and others,

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Beth Hartman and Sumanth Gopinath for this insightful assessment of the figure.

<sup>2</sup> Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago:University of Chicago, 1983).

however, do not always fully capture the meanings of individual motives often subsumed in their assessments of the overarching musical topic. Julian Rushton's "'*La Vittima è Idamante*': Did Mozart Have a Motive?," collates academic discussions of a motive, 'C', from *Idomeneo*, but does not reconcile differing opinions of the motive's dramatic interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

I define motive as a rhythmic, melodic, and/or harmonic musical idea that is brief and aurally or visually comprehensible, and identifiable in multiple contexts. This definition may draw comparisons with topic theory. Leonard Ratner defines the musical topic as a subject for musical discourse appearing as complete pieces (e.g. minuet) or stylistic figures and progressions within a piece (e.g. fanfare), and associated with feelings, affections, and visual images.<sup>4</sup> V. Kofi Agawu notes that although topic theory offers hints to the narrative content of a piece of music, topics fail to "sustain an independent and self-regulating account of the piece."<sup>5</sup> I examine Act II, Scene 15 of *Don Giovanni* from a motivic perspective in conjunction with topic theory to offer a more detailed interpretation.

The counting motive consists of an ascending melodic "pickup" of several notes and a descending scale spanning an octave or more. This motive might be subsumed under the musical topic of the "brilliant style"<sup>6</sup> or French overture. Turnarounds and scalar patterns are a common compositional technique of the classical era. Perhaps the motive is merely a compositional device employed to execute registral transfers, fill-in octave traversals, or unfold compound chordal thirds and fifths. The identity of the figure, however, as a motive rather than as a compositional tool or an embellishment is asserted by its selective employment throughout the opera and its presence at contextually related moments.

### **The Counting Motive in *Le Nozze di Figaro***

The counting characteristic of the counting motive is informed in part by its appearance in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In the duet from Act I, "Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta," Figaro is measuring the space for his bridal bed— "*Cinque...dieci...venti...trenta...trentasei...quarantatre* [Five...ten...twenty...thirty...thirty-six...forty-three]." The motive appears twice, once in m. 15 and once in m. 85, acting as a framing gesture for the entire duet. Both times it appears as part of a

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<sup>3</sup> Julian Rushton, "'*La Vittima è Idamante*': Did Mozart Have a Motive?," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3.1 (1991): 1-21.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9.

<sup>5</sup> V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classical Music* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Ratner characterizes the "brilliant style" as "the use of rapid passages for virtuoso display or intense feeling." Ratner, *Classic Music*, 19.

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cadential extension, the first time occurring five measures prior to Figaro's entrance and the second time coinciding with the close of the duet, emphasizing Susanna and Figaro's final syllable (see Example 2a and 2b).

**Example 2a. Mozart. *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, "Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta," violin I & II and viola, m. 15-16 (downbeat).**

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, and Viola. The score is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The tempo is marked 'f' (forte). The music consists of two measures. The first measure features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The second measure features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The Viola part follows the same rhythmic pattern as the Violin parts.

**Example 2b. Mozart. *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, "Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta," mm. 85-86 (downbeat).**

Musical score for various instruments in Example 2b. The score is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The tempo is marked 'f' (forte). The music consists of two measures. The Flauto I, II, Oboe I, II, and Fagotto I, II parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The Violino I, Violino II, and Viola parts follow the same rhythmic pattern as the Violin parts. The Susanna and Figaro parts are marked 'fe.' (fermata) and have a whole rest in the first measure. The Violoncello y Basso part has a whole rest in the first measure and a quarter note G3 in the second measure. The score includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'a 2' (accia 2).

Similar to the Catalog Aria in *Don Giovanni*, the text of “Cinque, dieci, venti, trenta” explicitly involves counting for measurement purposes. The emotional context is also similar to *Don Giovanni*. Concupiscence is afoot as Susanna sings of her unexpressed concern over her knowledge of the desires of Count Almaviva, who had only recently renounced his *droit de seigneur*, but appeared ready to reverse his decision.

### **The Counting Motive in the “Notte e giorno faticar”**

The counting motive appears early in *Don Giovanni*, immediately preceding Leporello’s entrance in “Notte e giorno faticar” (see Example 3a). Here, the counting motive encloses Leporello’s opening phrase, leading to a half cadence in both appearances (mm. 8-10, 17-19, see Example 3b). He sings:

<i>Notte e giorno faticar</i>	Night and day I slave
<i>per chi nulla sa gradir;</i>	for someone who does not appreciate;
<i>piova e vento sopportar,</i>	rain and wind I endure,
<i>mangiar male e mai dormir...</i>	eating poorly and never sleeping ...

The framing of this passage connects the counting motive to Leporello's relationship with Don Giovanni. Leporello laments his lowly position, eventually vowing to leave the Don's service. He lies to himself. Despite recognizing Don Giovanni's deficiencies, Leporello cannot bring himself to leave his master's side permanently. Much like Sancho Panza's relationship with Don Quixote, Leporello remains by Don Giovanni's side hoping to eat the crumbs which fall from his master's table. In Act I, Scene VIII, as Don Giovanni seeks to seduce Zerlina at her own wedding party, Leporello states, “*Fra tante per mia fè, vi sarà qualche cosa anche per me* [For my faith, there will be someone among the many for me].”

In “Notte e giorno faticar,” Leporello is pacing outside of the Commendatore's home keeping watch for Don Giovanni to reappear. Allanbrook characterizes Leporello as a clumsy sentinel, marching to a 4/4 beat while emphasizing beats three and one in a clumsy, stiff-legged fashion. The counting motive is suggested as a musical representation of Leporello scurrying back to his post having strayed too far away.<sup>7</sup> The counting motive at mm. 17-18 is thus also attached to Leporello's physical gestures.

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<sup>7</sup> Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 202.

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Example 3a. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Notte e giorno faticar," mm. 8-10.

Oboe I, II

Fagotto I, II

Corno I, II  
in Fa

Violino I

Violino II

Viola I, II

Leporello

Violoncello e Basso

Not - te e

Example 3b. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Notte e giorno faticar," mm. 17-19.

Oboe I, II

Fagotto I, II

Corno I, II  
in Fa

Violino I

Violino II

Viola I, II

Leporello

Violoncello e Basso

ma - le e mal dor - mir



### The Counting Motive in “Ah chi mi dice mai”

The counting motive’s next appearance, in Donna Elvira’s aria, “Ah chi mi dice mai,” again emphasizes the dominant harmony. The scalar descent adds staccato accents (see Example 4) and often coincides with Donna Elvira’s text.<sup>8</sup> She trails Don Giovanni seeking to exact vengeance on him for his empty promises of love.

#### Example 4, Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah chi mi dice mai,” mm. 5-6.

The musical score for Example 4 shows measures 5 and 6 of the aria "Ah chi mi dice mai" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Clarinetto I, II in B; Fagotto I, II; Corno I, II in Es; Violino I; Violino II; Viola; and Violoncello e Basso. The music is in common time (C) and B-flat major. The counting motive is a scalar descent starting on G4 in the strings and woodwinds. Dynamics include piano (p) and piano fortissimo (pff).

Leporello is connected to Donna Elvira through the counting motive. He paces while watching for Don Giovanni to reappear; meanwhile Donna Elvira marches onto the scene.<sup>9</sup> Both characters are further connected by the verbal context in which the motive appears. Each is expressing anger towards Don Giovanni, attempting to convince themselves that they do not need him. Donna Elvira states:

*Ah! chi mi dice mai  
quel barbaro dov'è,  
che per mio scorno amai,  
che mi mancò di fé?*

Ah! who will tell me  
where the barbarian is,  
that I loved to my shame,  
and who was unfaithful?

<sup>8</sup> The counting motive appears in measures 5-6, 7-8, 16-17, 18-19, 62-63, and 64-65. Only the appearances in mm. 5-6 and 7-8 are without Donna Elvira’s accompanying text.

<sup>9</sup> Stage direction indicate Donna Elvira appears “*in abito da viaggio* [in traveling dress].”

Allanbrook observes that Donna Elvira's entrance is as clumsy as Leporello's nervous pacing.<sup>10</sup> The first four measures set a two-measure harmonic rhythm which is disrupted as the counting motive accelerates the harmonic rhythm to a single measure. Violin flourishes punctuate her awkward arrival. Despite their mutual disdain for Don Giovanni, Leporello continues to serve his master, while Donna Elvira continues to desire Don Giovanni's embrace.

### The Counting Motive in "Madamina, il catalogo è questo"

The counting motive next appears in "Madamina, il catalogo è questo" in m. 16 as Leporello attempts to convince Donna Elvira of the futility of her endeavor to exact vengeance (see Table 1 and Example 5). Coinciding with a pause in Leporello's pronouncements, his text relates the specific numbers of Don Giovanni's conquests (e.g. "*In Italia seicento e quaranta* [in Italy, six hundred forty]"). The counting motive is associated again with movement, though speaking about travel rather than on-stage action. Further, the motive again associates itself with counting as the women that Don Giovanni has seduced during their travels through Europe are totaled up.

**Table 1, The Counting Motive in "Madamina, il catalogo è questo"**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Instrumentation</u>
16-17	flute, bassoon
20-21	flute, first violin
24-25	flute, bassoon
71-72	flute, bassoon
73-74	flute, bassoon
94-96 (partial)	bassoon, violins, viola, cello, bass

**Example 5. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Madamina, il catalogo è questo," flute mm. 16-18.**



The staccato articulation with the *allegro* tempo marking add an element of laughter to the counting motive. Leporello laughs at Donna Elvira's foolishness. She is too blinded by rage to see that Don Giovanni has used her just as he has 2,064 other women (so far!), and she has equated his temporary seduction with a substantive relationship. Don Giovanni also laughs at Donna Elvira, easily escaping her wrath, as Leporello stalls her with his aria of accounting.

<sup>10</sup> Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 233-234.

Donna Elvira remains either oblivious or unaccepting of her role as statistic rather than beloved.

Leporello's recitation of his careful record keeping leads to another characterization. Connected to his pacing from "Notte e giorno faticar," Allanbrook titles Leporello a Harlequin<sup>11</sup> stage-managing a harlequinade. The counting motive now becomes an "acrobatic turn or caper"<sup>12</sup> connected to the brilliant style topic. Leporello continues to be attached to physical gesture as well as tabulation through the counting motive.

The counting motive precedes two more accountings: "*in Almagna duecento e trentuna* [in Germany two hundred and thirty-one]" and "*cento in Francia, in Turchia novatuna* [one hundred in France, in Turkey ninety-one]." In m. 28 (see Example 6), a chorale topic appears accompanying the final account, "*ma in Ispagna son già mille e tre* [but in Spain, there are already a thousand and three]." The chorale topic condones Don Giovanni's conduct<sup>13</sup>, soon to be affirmed by Leporello's emphasis that he loves *all* types of women. The counting motive returns in mm. 71-72 and 73-74, these iterations underscoring an accounting of the numerous types of women that Don Giovanni loves (see Example 7).

The counting motive is recontextualized in conjunction with the shift at m. 85 to  $\frac{3}{4}$  time and *andante con moto* tempo (see Example 8). The scalar descent is now a downward arpeggio (see Example 9). The ease of the counting motive's adaptation to the simple triple meter is reflected by the topical context. The minuet topic here might suggest the Don's ability to move at ease within the courts or salons where minuets would be performed. The topic could also suggest his deft wooing abilities as illustrated by his skillful engagement in the seductive dance with all of the types of women that Leporello continues to describe.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Dent describes the origins of Leporello's name. German critics ascribed the trait of cowardice to Leporello. The etymology of his name came from the Latin *lepus*, a hare, and the German word for coward, *Hasenfuss* (hare-foot). However, Lorenzo Da Ponte seems to have created the name as it does not appear in earlier versions of the play. It seems more likely that Leporello is an "Italianization of the German *Lipperl* (Austrian diminutive of *Philipp*), a name sometimes given to that comic figure more generally known as *Kasperl* or *Käspelerle*, the German Harlequin." Edward J. Dent, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 156.

<sup>12</sup> Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 241-242.

<sup>13</sup> A chorale topic carries "implications of archaicness, age, authority, and a certain purity." Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 140-141.

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Example 6. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Madamina, il catalogo è questo," mm. 28-33.

Oboe I, II  
 Fagotto I, II  
 Corno I, II in Re  
 Violino I  
 Violino II  
 Viola I, II  
 Leporello  
 Violoncello e Basso

u-na, ma in I - spag-na, ma in I - spag-na son già mil-le e tre.

Example 7. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Madamina, il catalogo è questo," flute, mm. 71-74

*f* *p* *f* *p*

Example 8. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Madamina, il catalogo è questo," mm. 85-86.

Andante con moto

Violino I  
 Violino II  
 Viola I, II  
 Leporello  
 Violoncello e Basso

Nel - la bion - da

**Example 9. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Madamina, il catalogo è questo,” violin I, mm. 94-95.**



### The Counting Motive in “Ah taci, ingiusto core”

In the *recitativo secco* preceding “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” Leporello again decides to leave his master’s side after another threat on his life by Don Giovanni. Leporello’s own words inform the audience that he lacks the conviction to carry out his own decision. As he turns to leave, Don Giovanni calls Leporello by name to which he immediately responds, “*Signore* [Lord].” The servant still serves. Leporello fails to convince Don Giovanni that he must give up his lascivious ways and is immediately ordered to assist in the next conquest, Donna Elvira’s maid, Donna Anna. Fearing that the servant girl will be put off by his high social standing, Don Giovanni becomes the proverbial wolf in sheep’s clothing by exchanging cloaks and hats with Leporello. Leporello’s deceptive assignment is to distract Donna Elvira and lead her away for a false tryst, leaving Don Giovanni free to serenade and seduce Donna Anna.

The trio, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” begins with Donna Elvira appearing at a window. She is conflicted within, struggling with her feelings of love for Don Giovanni. Having emphatically stated after the Catalog Aria, “*Ah! Vendicar vogl’io l’ingannato mio cor* [Ah! I will repay vengeance for my deceived heart!],” her text belies the previous condemnation. The events of the past have been mentally buried by the characters or mitigated by the passing of time. The music attempts to help Donna Elvira remember the duplicitous dealings of Don Giovanni through the reappearance of the counting motive. Despite all that has taken place before, Donna Elvira now states

*Ah taci, ingiusto core!*  
*Non palpitarmi in seno!*  
*È un empio, è un traditore*  
*È colpa di aver pietà.*

Oh silence, unjust heart!  
 Do not beat your breast!  
 He is a wicked man, a traitor  
 It is the fault of pity.

“Ah taci, ingiusto core” is the only explicitly labeled trio in the opera, reuniting Donna Elvira, Leporello, and Don Giovanni after their initial, unbalanced grouping in Donna Elvira’s aria “Ah chi mi dice mai.” The  $\frac{6}{8}$  meter, in conjunction with the trumpets, pedal tones, and parallel thirds, invokes a pastoral topic. The topic sets a space for contemplation, philosophizing, and thoughtful internal reflection. This is appropriate as Donna Elvira is again struggling with indecision

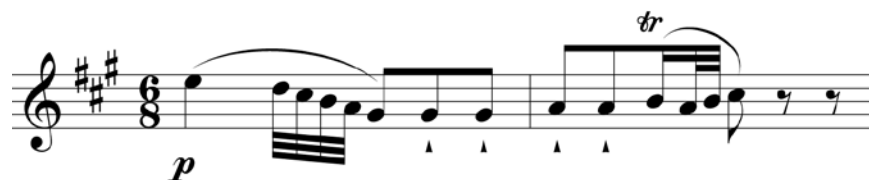
about her feelings for Don Giovanni just as she was in the Catalog Aria. The counting motive appears several times between mm. 9-76, always in the first violin.<sup>14</sup>

Given its exclusive presentation of the counting motive, the first violin's part further strengthens the connection to Donna Elvira. Superficially, the counting motive suggests Donna Elvira's indecision merely by its shape, initially starting upward before quickly changing direction. The counting motive's association with indecision is substantiated by its three-stage development and the first violin's imitation of Donna Elvira's melodic line.

The counting motive initially takes shape in m. 1, descending a minor sixth (see Example 10a). In mm. 2-4, the first violin almost exactly doubles the melody of Donna Elvira's first two lines (see Example 10b). The counting motive's next stage of development appears in m. 5, now ascending a whole step before descending a major seventh (see Example 10c). In mm. 7-8, the first violin's part follows Donna Elvira's melody, but waivers in its exact imitation, doubling six of her ten pitches (see Example 10d). When Donna Elvira exclaims, "*È un empio, è un traditore* [he is a wicked man, a traitor]," the first violin counters with the full counting motive seeming to contradict rather than complement her thoughts (mm. 9-10, see Example 10e). The development of the counting motive frames Donna Elvira's questioning of her ambiguous feelings for Don Giovanni.

The counting motive's association with Don Giovanni reminds Donna Elvira of his previous expressions of love even though they were only seductive. In mm. 11-14, the first violin no longer strictly imitates her melody as it did in mm. 2-4 and 7-8 (see Example 10f). It now takes an intermediate path, doubling some notes pitch for pitch and others via octave displacement. The violin begins to reflect Donna Elvira's struggle with inconclusive feelings.

**Example 10a. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," violin I, mm. 1-2.**



<sup>14</sup> Measures 9, 10, 27, 28, 62, 63, 64, 74, 75, and 76.

**Example 10b. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” violin I and Donna Elvira, mm. 2-4.**

Violino I

Donna Elvira

Ah ta - ci, ingiu - sto co-re,

**Example 10c. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” violin I, mm. 5-6.**

**Example 10d. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” violin I and Donna Elvira, mm. 7-8**

Violino I

Donna Elvira

pal - pi - tar - mi in se - no; è un

**Example 10e. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” violin I and Donna Elvira, mm. 9-10**

Violino I

Donna Elvira

em - pio, è un tra - di - to - re, è

**Example 10f. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, “Ah taci, ingiusto core,” violin I and Donna Elvira, mm. 11-14 (downbeat).**

Violino I

Donna Elvira

col - pa a - ver - pie - tà, è col - pa a - ver - pie - tà.

## VAGTS

Leporello enters the trio in m. 14 with Don Giovanni not far behind (m. 16). The two stall for time to process Donna Elvira's surprise appearance.

Leporello: <i>Zitto! di Donna Elvira, signor, la voce io sento!</i>	Leporello: Be quiet! Donna Elvira, my lord, I hear her voice!
Don Giovanni: <i>Cogliere io vo' il momento; tu fermati un po' là!</i>	Don Giovanni: Give me a moment, you must stall a little!

Mozart musically frames the pause as the two work to respond to the scorned lover's nighttime aria. In m. 14, preceding Leporello's mid-measure entrance, the orchestra hesitates. The bassoon moves in stepwise motion from the tonic (A) down to the dominant (see Example 11). This "stalling" motive is then taken up by Leporello, as well as by the viola, cello, and double bass. The flute and clarinet immediately counter in m. 16, doubling at the third. After this statement, Don Giovanni repeats Leporello's same notes with the orchestra, providing identical doublings. The music expands the tonic, and is harmonically stagnant. The equivocating tonic undulations fit neatly with the trio's contemplative mood. The stalling motive, unlike the counting motive only appears in "Ah taci, ingiusto core."

### Example 11. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," mm. 14-18 (downbeat).

The musical score for Example 11 consists of the following parts and lyrics:

- Flauto I, II**: Flute parts, starting in m. 16.
- Clarinetto I, II in La**: Clarinet parts, starting in m. 16.
- Fagotto I, II**: Bassoon parts, starting in m. 14.
- Corno I, II in La**: Horn parts, playing sustained notes.
- Violino I**: Violin I part.
- Violino II**: Violin II part.
- Viola I, II**: Viola parts, playing a rhythmic pattern.
- Donna Elvira**: Singing "Ah taci."
- Don Giovanni**: Singing "Cogliere io vo' il mo - men - to, tu fer - ma - ti un po' là!"
- Leporello**: Singing "Zit - to! di Donna El - vi - ra, si - gnor, la voce io sen - to!"
- Violoncello e Basso**: Cello and Double Bass parts, playing a rhythmic pattern.



The phrase rhythm of mm. 1-18 also promotes indecisiveness by avoiding a clearly delineated cadence (see Table 2). The embellished repetition of mm. 1-4 beginning at m. 5 sounds as though it will culminate in a parallel period. The expected cadence at m. 8 is avoided and the continuation and extension that follow (mm. 9-12 and 13-14 respectively) create a larger sentence structure. The authentic cadence at m. 14 is elided with Leporello's entrance. Don Giovanni's entrance in m. 16 continues the new phrase initiated by Leporello. The clear cadence, expected with Donna Elvira's part in m. 14, instead arrives at m. 18 with Don Giovanni's part; he has taken her cadence. Leporello's interruption at m. 14 prevents Donna Elvira from concluding her reflective thought, giving Don Giovanni time to work his seductive charm.

Don Giovanni is only temporarily halted, managing to smoothly incorporate the unexpected appearance into his nefarious plan. He quickly improvises a contingency plan to continue the masquerade. As Leporello attempts to make appropriate gestures with limited success, Don Giovanni sings with a confident voice, "*Elvira, idolo mio* [Elvira, my idol]." The orchestra repeats mm. 1-8 (in the tonic key of A major) in mm. 19-26 (in the key of the dominant, E major).

Both the orchestral music and Donna Elvira's response indicate that Don Giovanni's romantic overtures are skillfully honed. The statement "*Non è costui l'ingrato?* [Is it thou, ungrateful?]" is accompanied by the appearance of the full motive (mm. 27-28). Wasting no time, Don Giovanni quickly responds in mm. 28-32. His melodic line is a variation on the first stage of the motive from m. 5 and m. 23. The melody works with Don Giovanni to persuade Donna Elvira.

**Table 2. Mozart. Don Giovanni, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," mm. 1-32**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Description</u>
1-4	Antecedent
5-8	Consequent
9-11	Continuation
12-14	Cadential extension and elision
14-15	Leporello enters
16-18	Don Giovanni enters, continuation, cadence in E major
19-26	Repetition of mm. 1-8 in E major
27-28	Full counting motive, Donna Elvira's accusation
28-32	Don Giovanni responds to Donna Elvira's accusation

Don Giovanni's last note aligns with Donna Elvira's next note on the downbeat of m. 32, the first time in the trio that two voices overlap (see Example 12). Both Donna Elvira and Leporello make intrapersonal remarks.

## VAGTS

Donna Elvira: *Numi, che strano affetto mi si risveglia in petto!*

Donna Elvira: Ye gods, what a strange affection wakes in my breast!

Leporello: *State a veder la pazza, che ancor gli crederà!*

Leporello: Do you see the Mad, she still will believe him!

Their thoughts are more internalized. The stalling motive used initially for the interpersonal remarks between Don Giovanni and Leporello now accompanies intrapersonal thought. Harmonically, the stalling motive is employed as part of another dominant prolongation, further impeding the progress of time, that is, continuing to delay the tonic arrival. Thus, the stalling motive's function remains fixed unlike the changing meaning of the counting motive.

### Example 12. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni, and Leporello, mm. 32-35.

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The top system shows Donna Elvira's vocal line in the treble clef, Don Giovanni's in the bass clef, and Leporello's in the bass clef. The bottom system continues the vocal lines. The lyrics are as follows:

Donna Elvira: Nu - mi, che stra - no af - fet - to mi - si ri - sve - glia in pet - to,  
 Don Giovanni: -tà!  
 Leporello: Sta - te a ve - der la paz - za, che an - cor gli cre - de -  
 Donna Elvira: mi - si ri - sve - glia in pet - to!  
 Don Giovanni:  
 Leporello: rà, gli cre - de - rà, gli cre - de - rà.

As Leporello and Donna Elvira conclude their duet passage in m. 35, the trio is suddenly transported to the remote key of C major. Don Giovanni recognizes that he has Donna Elvira's attention and launches into his full discourse of fallacious flattery and insincere repentance. The shift to C major anticipates the key and motive of Don Giovanni's forthcoming *Canzonetta*. He sings a nearly identical melody in both passages (see Example 13). The second violin's sixteenth-note arpeggiations beginning at m. 36 are precursory to the forthcoming mandolin texture. The flattering words directed toward Donna Elvira are not intended for her, but rather prepared for Donna Anna. Don Giovanni is merely warming-up, rehearsing material that will be soon employed to seduce a different woman.

Don Giovanni: *Discendi, o gioia  
bella,  
Vedrai che tu sei quella  
Che adora l'alma mia  
Pentito io sono già.*

Don Giovanni: Descend, O  
Lovely Joy  
You'll see that you are the one  
Who adores my soul  
I'm sorry already.

**Example 13. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, Don Giovanni's "Seduction" Motive  
"Ah taci, ingiusto core," mm. 35-37.**

Don Giovanni 

Di - scen - di, o gio - ia bel-la, o

**"Deh vieni alla finestra," mm. 4-6.**

Don Giovanni 

Deh vic - nial-la fi - ne - stra, o

The key change in m. 35 parallels the key change in the duet of the Count and Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*.<sup>15</sup> In both cases, the harmonic shift to C major coincides with a lie. In *Figaro*, Susanna falsely promises to meet the Count in the garden. In *Don Giovanni*, the Don lies about his love for Donna Elvira. The similarities between the two passages extend beyond the dramatic. Both passages share an ascending perfect fourth between two eighth notes, G to C (compare Example 14a and 14b).

**Example 14a. Mozart. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, "Crudel! Perchè finora ferm,"  
Susanna, mm. 10-14.**



Si - gnor, la don-na o - gno - ra tem-poha di dir di si.

**Example 14b. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," Don  
Giovanni, mm. 35-37.**



Di - scen - di, o gio - ia bel-la, o

<sup>15</sup> Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, 138.

This “seduction” motive, found in both *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, maintains a relative semiotic stasis in comparison to the counting motive. Suzanna has no interest in the Count and desires Figaro. Don Giovanni has no interest in Donna Elvira and desires Donna Anna. In both operas, the seduction motive is associated with a deception between two characters.

Donna Elvira responds strongly to Don Giovanni’s false flattery and apology, “*No, non ti credo, o barbaro* [No, I cannot believe you, barbarian].” Joining Donna Elvira’s statement of disbelief (m. 46, see Table 3), the orchestra communicates the romantic tension and anger between the two former lovers by reaching its loudest dynamic marking thus far, *fp*. The tension builds as the descending bass line in mm. 46-50 moves from C major to an E dominant-seventh harmony en route to A major, the tonic key. In m. 50, Leporello reminds the audience of Don Giovanni’s deceitfulness, “*Se seguitate io rido* [I’ll laugh if he continues].” As the bass resumes its descent towards a tonic arrival in m. 54, Don Giovanni continues his deception, lamenting that without Donna Elvira’s love, he will die. Meanwhile, Leporello tries to keep from laughing.

Having safely arrived back at A major in m. 54, the orchestra restates the partially developed counting motive from mm. 5-6. In m. 56, all three voices join for the first time. After their first line, the orchestra again presents the partial counting motive from mm. 5-6 (mm. 58-59). The trio reenters simultaneously, repeating the melodic content of their initial entry with slight elaboration. Donna Elvira and Leporello enter again on the downbeat of m. 62 with Don Giovanni entering a half-measure later assisted by the counting motive which continues to work its deceptive charm on Donna Elvira. Having appeared twice in succession both in mm. 9-10 and 27-28, the counting motive is now presented three times in succession in mm. 62-64.

The triple statement of the counting motive coincides with another display of Don Giovanni’s deft wooing. Still up to his charming ways, Don Giovanni’s melody from mm. 62-67 is intervallically and rhythmically similar to Donna Elvira’s melody from their argument in mm. 46-49. Donna Elvira and Leporello sing in rhythmic unison. Mozart is in on the joke as he pairs the “correct” two. After all, it is Leporello who gesticulates and whom Donna Elvira sees serenading her from below.

The orchestra reiterates the stalling motive in m. 67, again filling out a cadential extension. In succession, Donna Elvira, Leporello, and Don Giovanni take up the stalling motive in stretto, each making intrapersonal remarks.

Donna Elvira: <i>Dei! che cimento è questo!</i> <i>Non so s'io vado, o resto.</i> <i>Ah! proteggete voi la mia credulità.</i>	Donna Elvira: God! What an ordeal this is! I do not know if I'll go down, or not. Ah! protect me from credulity.
Don Giovanni: <i>Spero che cada presto!</i> <i>Che bel colpo è questo;</i> <i>più fertile talento del mio, no, non si dà.</i>	Don Giovanni: I hope you give in soon! What a great joke this is; most fertile talent of mine, no, she does not give.
Leporello: <i>Già quel mendace labbro torna a sedur costei; deh! proteggete, oh Dei, la sua credulità.</i>	Leporello: Yes that deceitful lip returns to seduce this woman; O please! Protect her, oh God, from credulity.

The melodic and motivic content of mm. 62-67, including the triple statement of the counting motive, is reiterated in mm. 74-79. Don Giovanni's deception finally proves successful as Donna Elvira leaves the window for the false tryst with Leporello.

**Table 3. Mozart. Don Giovanni, "Ah taci, ingiusto core," mm. 46-84**

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Description</u>
46-50	Descending bass line moves to V7 of A major, Donna Elvira's statement of disbelief
50-54	Leporello's reminder, tonic arrival at m. 54
54-55	Restatement of counting motive, mm. 5-6
56-59	All voices together, restatement of mm. 5-6
60-62	Elaboration of mm. 56-59
62-67	Counting Motive stated three times, Don Giovanni imitates Donna Elvira
67-73	Stalling Motive
74-79	Reiteration of mm. 62-67
80-84	Cadential extension

### Conclusion

The counting motive has now appeared in several different, though similar contexts. Its first appearance in "Notte e giorno faticar" tied it to Leporello. In Donna Elvira's aria "Ah chi mi dice mai," the motive attaches itself to her and links her with Leporello through kinesthetic movement. The Catalog Aria further strengthens the counting motive's relationship with Donna Elvira and Leporello, while also connecting it with Don Giovanni's conquests. The counting motive's appearance in the trio further intertwines the three characters. In observing the counting motive's recontextualization, Allanbrook's consideration of the motive as an acrobatic turn or caper seems limiting. The use of the motive unites Leporello and Donna Elvira in their relationship with Don Giovanni. Both remain close to

him despite his abuses. The motive articulates the physical characteristics of Leporello's pacing and Donna Elvira's traveling. While the two are united through the motive in their proximity to Don Giovanni, they are juxtaposed in function. Leporello remains a necessity in carrying out Don Giovanni's plans. Donna Elvira is expendable, an inhibitor to his next seduction. Simultaneously, the motive functions as both an aural counting mechanism and as a laughing figure. In this way, the motive groups the three characters differently. Don Giovanni and Leporello now laugh at Donna Elvira, a number in the catalog.

I have shown how the counting motive is united with meaning in Act II, Scene 15 of *Don Giovanni*. Through multiple contexts, the counting motive is shown to be imbued with complex meaning accomplished through recontextualization. Ultimately, the counting motive unites Donna Elvira, Leporello, and Don Giovanni in "Ah taci, ingiusto core," while contrasting their relationships with one another. Leporello counts, Donna Elvira is accounted, while Don Giovanni seeks to add to the count.

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# Hybrid Forms in Top 40/EDM Songs

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Although the origins of electronic dance music (EDM) can be traced to the late 1970s, only recently has the influence of EDM been so pervasive in mainstream/top 40 songs.<sup>1</sup> To date, however, only two studies, those by Mark Butler and Devin Iler, have addressed EDM from a formal-analytical perspective.<sup>2</sup> Butler examined rhythmic and metrical characteristics of EDM. He maintained that formal organization is modular and open-ended, stating that repeating entities function as building blocks, which can be combined with flexibility. Butler argued that the structure of electronic dance music is different from popular song form, however, and showed that the typical EDM track consists of buildup, core, and breakdown sections. Devin Iler cataloged specific techniques used to create these sections in the EDM subgenres of house and trance music. The labels of breakdown, buildup, and anthem<sup>3</sup> point to the nature of this music, which creates a sense of energy, expectation, and arrival. Many house and trance songs follow the traditional sections of popular songs (i.e. verse, chorus, bridge), yet Iler noted that the breakdown-buildup-anthem devices create a separate sense of formal boundaries, which redefine the large-scale structure of the music. How these sections are arranged and interact with popular song forms has yet to be explored. Through an investigation of five EDM-influenced songs that have charted on the *Billboard Hot 100* since 2010, I will demonstrate that the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections work in a variety of ways with traditional popular song

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<sup>1</sup> EDM is an umbrella term that includes a number of genres including house, trance, techno, dubstep, and drum and bass, which each have their own subgenres. The influence of EDM itself is so widespread that a Google search will find articles such as <http://www.thembj.org/2012/10/the-rise-of-edm/> or <http://www.idolator.com/7498367/2013-best-music-edm-dance-pop>. See Andrew Rice "RA Roundtable: EDM in America," *Resident Advisor*, September 11, 2012, Accessed September 24, 2014.

<http://www.residentadvisor.net/feature.aspx?1709> for a discussion of the term and its history. See Kembrew McLeod, "Genres, subgenres, sub-subgenres and More: Musical and Social Differentiation Within Electronic/Dance Music Communities," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 13, 1 (Spring 2001): 59-75 for a brief history and description of the genres.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Butler, *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006). Devin Iler, "Formal Devices of Trance and House Music: Breakdowns, Buildups, and Anthems" (Master's Thesis, University of North Texas, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Butler uses the terms breakdown and buildup but uses "core" instead of anthem. Iler notes that this section is also known as the arrival or the drop (11). While arrival and drop designate a specific point, I agree with Iler who recognizes the anthem as a section, and so I use the same term.



forms.<sup>4</sup> They either coincide and reinforce expectations of traditional popular song form, or contradict these expectations, thus creating hybrid forms in which the sense of energy and the expectations of listeners and dancers are manipulated.

In EDM, DJs, as they perform at clubs or live events, both control and react to the energy level and dancing of the audience and create tension and release in the music through the manipulation of a variety of parameters, most notably the presence of the bass drum. In turn this affects the audience's dancing. Butler gave a description of the power of the bass drum in the creation of tension and release and its effect on dancing.

Sometimes [the DJ] cuts the bass drum out. The audience turns to him expectantly, awaiting its return....As the energy level increases, he gauges their response...with an instantaneous flick of the wrist—he brings the beat back in all its forceful glory. As one the crowd raises their fists into the air and screams with joy, dancing even more energetically than before.... When [the DJ] removes the beat, the audience's dancing changes dramatically. Some people stop dancing altogether, whereas others continue, albeit hesitantly, as if awaiting the beat's return. In some of these passages there is no reason why the crowd cannot continue to dance, as the sounds that remain continue a present and steady pulse. Yet without the emblematic beat the audience's dancing begins to dissipate.<sup>5</sup>

His description of the music is commonly described as breakdown-buildup-anthem. Although the breakdown-buildup-anthem can be seen as one large section or cycle, each part can be identified on its own.

The breakdown, or break, is most often identified by the removal of the bass drum.<sup>6</sup> However, more often than not, this is not the case. When the bass drum is not removed, then the breakdown is identified as the section with the thinnest texture and instrumentation. The breakdown may be seen as a specific point that immediately becomes the buildup, rather than a section of its own. In these cases I will use Break/Buildup in my analysis. However, the breakdown may also be seen as its own section when there are no buildup techniques that immediately follow. As Butler described, the

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<sup>4</sup> By EDM-influenced songs, I refer to songs that show many if not all of the characteristics and production common to EDM, particularly house and trance genres. All five songs demonstrate the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections characteristic of these genres.

<sup>5</sup> Butler, 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Definitions of these terms are from Butler and Iler.

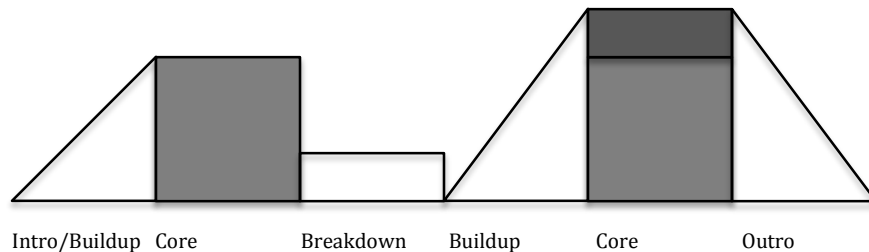
breakdown is associated with the least amount of energy and dancing.

The buildup, or build, is identified by gradual layering and changes of texture, increased dynamics, faster or fragmented rhythmic figures, and other strategies. These include bass drum hits, snare rolls, percussion leads, synth sweeps and rest measures. These driving elements and additive features increase the tension in the buildup.<sup>7</sup> With the increase in tension, there is an anticipation of the arrival of the bass drum and an increase in energy and dancing. Through this buildup of tension, the listener and the dancer expect a sense of arrival or resolution.

The anthem then is the point where the tension is resolved and is typically defined by the arrival of the bass drum and the fullest texture. However, because the bass drum is often present in the breakdown and buildup sections, Iler more accurately defined the anthem as the point at which the regular rhythms *and* melodic figures return. It is associated with the greatest energy and dancing.

Figure 1 reproduces Butler’s example of the proto-typical form of an EDM track.<sup>8</sup> Notice that there are two cycles of buildup-anthem and that the second is more intense. Also notice the presence of an intro and outro. In dance music in particular, DJs use these sections to match the tempo from one song to the next and overlap the songs in order to keep the audience dancing. This diagram gives the most general form and shape of the music in terms of energy and intensity, but I will show many other possibilities.

**Figure 1. Prototypical form of an EDM track**



Although many of the terms of popular song sections are commonly known, I will provide definitions and characteristics of them here that inform my analysis.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Iler establishes these and other terms and techniques.

<sup>8</sup> Butler, 222. Butler’s diagram is a reproduction of a drawing by an EDM producer describing the form of a typical track. As previously noted, Butler uses the term core, while I use anthem.

<sup>9</sup> These definitions and characteristics summarize the work of the following authors and sources: John Covach, “Form in Rock Music: A Primer,” in

The verse is a section that recurs a number of times and most often features new lyrics with each repetition. It is often used to tell a story or describe a situation.

The prechorus leads from the verse to the chorus. It builds expectation and is associated with particular momentum-building features such as changes in groove, lyric phrasing, and length of rhythmic units as well as dynamic level, instrumentation, harmonic progression and harmonic rhythm.

The chorus is usually the focus of the song. It is the most important or easily remembered section containing the title and catchiest musical material. It occurs numerous times with a fixed text. Its importance is reinforced by intensifying features such as a more dense or active instrumental texture, prominent background vocals, and/or a higher register melody. It is often the final section, or culmination, of a formal cycle.

The bridge provides contrast. It usually appears after the second chorus and is used to lead back to the verse or, more often, the final chorus. Although it provides interest, it is rarely the focal section.

From these definitions, it is easy to see similarities between the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections of EDM and the verse-prechorus-chorus sections of popular songs. One can almost see a one-to-one correlation of between verse with and breakdown, prechorus with and buildup, and chorus with and anthem in terms of their function and building of momentum and energy. However, I will demonstrate that this is not often the case. Instead, the interaction of these formal sections often leads to hybrid forms where the characteristics of one may contradict those of another, thus manipulating the sense of energy and the expectations of listeners and dancers.

The songs selected for this study are radio hits. Unlike songs played at clubs or live events, where DJs may manipulate the form and react to the audience, these songs are fixed entities with the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections predetermined by the songwriters and producers. The issue of the DJ controlling and reacting to the dancing audience is no longer a factor. In the past

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*Engaging Music: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. Deborah Stein, 65-76 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Walter Everett, *The Foundations of Rock: From "Blue Suede Shoes" to "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen for in Rock: A Stylistic Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Jason Summach, "Form in Top-20 Rock Music, 1955-89," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2012.

many songs had an album version, a possible radio edit, and a dance remix, but these songs are the album and radio versions, not dance remixes, and therefore demonstrate the influence of EDM on top 40 songs. Four of the songs selected for this study were the highest charting EDM-influenced songs on the *Billboard Hot 100* year-end charts for 2011 and 2012, which ranked songs by national airplay and sales data. Figure 2 shows the title, artist, ranking and year of these four songs.<sup>10</sup> The final song selected was “Work Bitch” performed by Britney Spears, which peaked at #12 on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart in fall of 2013 but failed to make the year-end chart.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2. Songs in Study from Billboard Hot 100 year-ends charts**

<u>Title</u>	<u>Artist</u>	<u>Ranking/Year</u>	
Party Rock Anthem	LMFAO ft. Lauren Bennett and GoonRock	#2	2011
Firework	Katy Perry	#3	2011
Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You)	Kelly Clarkson	#7	2012
We Found Love	Rihanna ft. Calvin Harris	#8	2012

Example 1 compares the form of “Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)” with traditional section labels above and EDM labels below. The shapes are aligned with the traditional section labels above and represent the expectations of the functions of these sections. Triangles represent the expectation that the chorus is the peak, or focus of the song. Wedges represent the increased momentum associated with the prechorus. Ovals represent the contrasting nature of the bridge.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the line below indicates the energy and momentum associated with the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections. Gradual increases in texture and energy of the buildup are represented by a slanted line. Sudden changes in instrumentation and energy are represented by a vertical line. This vertical drop represents the drop of energy through the removal of the bass drum or thinner texture of the breakdown. The opposite occurs on the entrance of a drum beat and groove. The line reaches the highest point at the arrival of the anthem. The line remains flat through breakdown and anthem sections where the texture does not significantly change or where the energy is sustained. Measures and

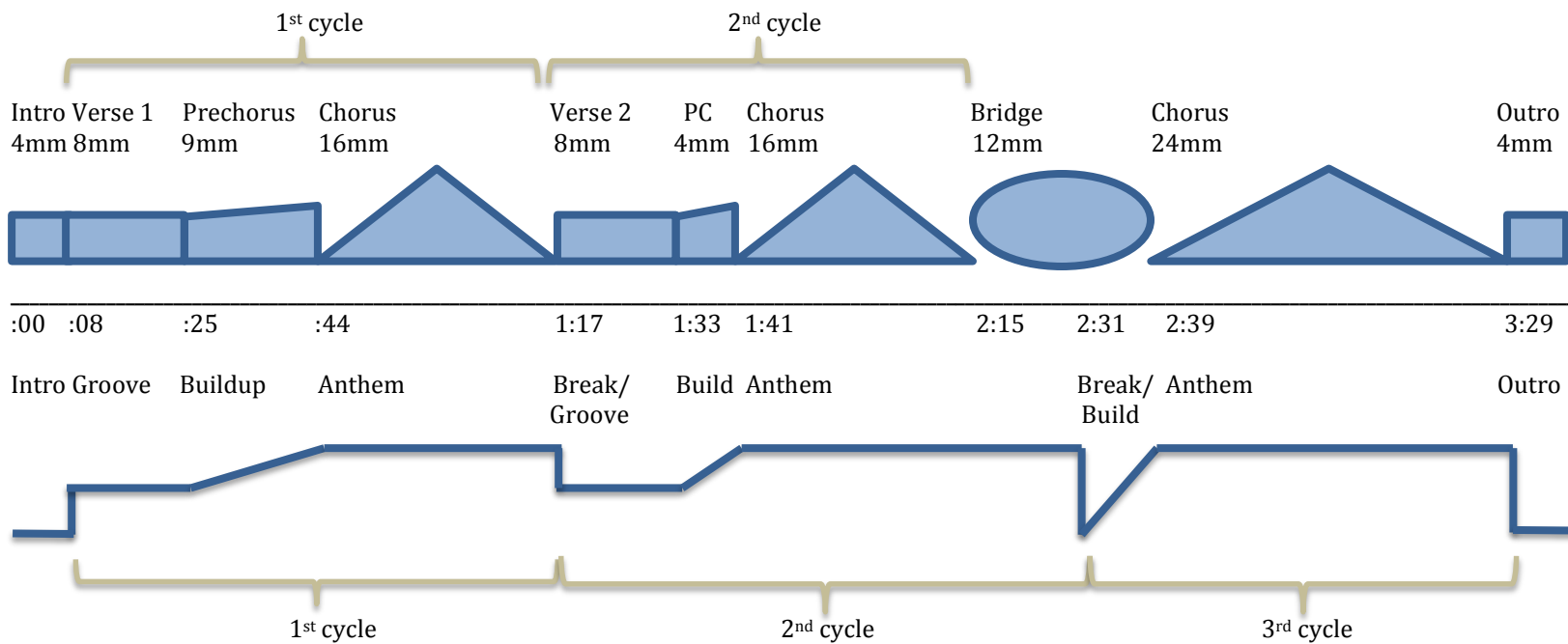
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<sup>10</sup> Refer to fn 4 regarding EDM-influenced songs. Bibliographic information for these songs including songwriters, producers, and release date can be found at the end.

<sup>11</sup> “Work Bitch” was the impetus for this study because of its intriguing mix of EDM and popular song forms.

<sup>12</sup> Summach uses shapes to represent song sections and cites Sheila Davis who uses similar shapes in *The Craft of Lyric Writing* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1985).

**Example 1. "Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You)" form comparing traditional sections above and EDM sections below**



timing are provided as well.<sup>13</sup> Cycles of verse-prechorus-chorus are shown with brackets above; cycles of breakdown-buildup-anthems are shown with brackets below. The song consists of an intro, two cycles of verse-prechorus-chorus, a bridge, chorus, and outro. In terms of EDM sections, there are three cycles of breakdown-buildup-anthems. The label “groove” indicates the presence of the percussion groove. Verses correspond to breakdowns or grooves, prechoruses with buildups, and choruses with anthems.

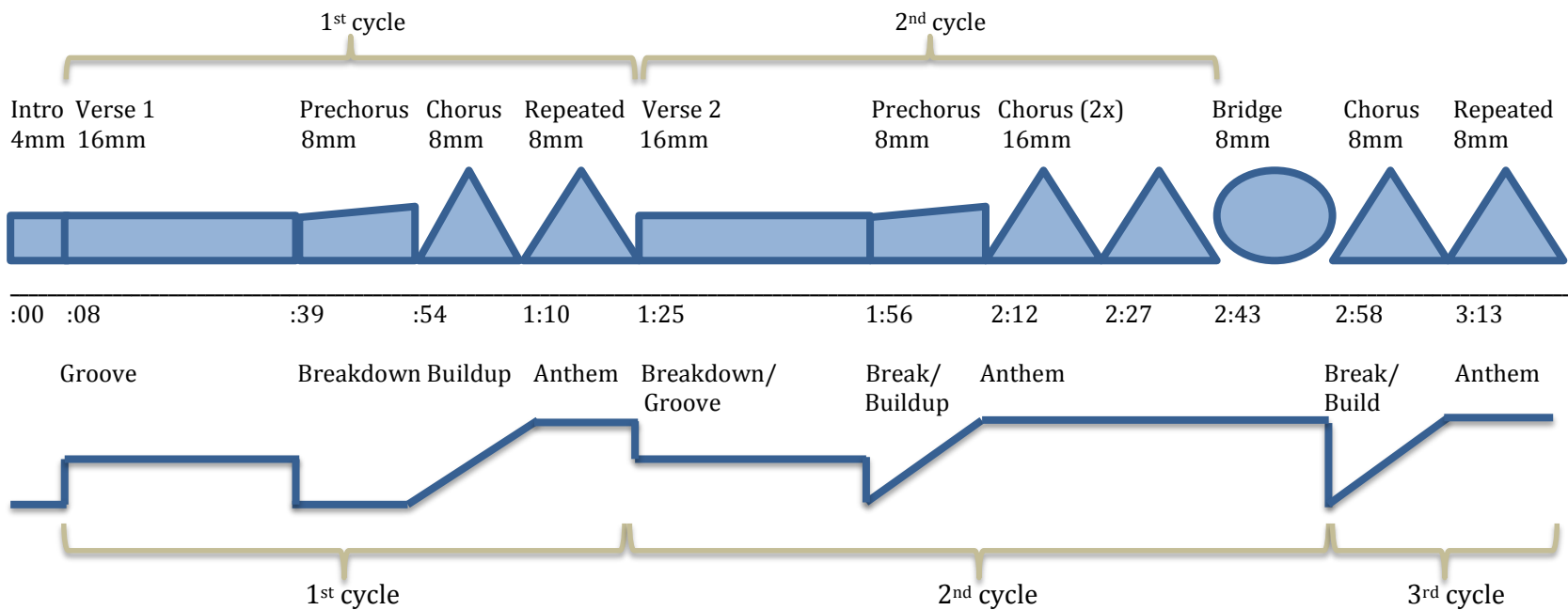
The song begins with a four-measure introduction that features a guitar, bass, and synthesizer. The verse is defined by the lower melodic tessitura, simple texture, and the nature of the lyric telling a story. The percussion enters here at :08 with quarter notes. The slightly higher range, thicker texture, and shorter phrasing contribute to the sense that the prechorus is building momentum. The prechorus coincides with the buildup, where a typical groove of quarter notes in the bass, snare on two and four, and eighth notes in the high hat is established. A synth sweep leads up to what is expected to be the anthem, but there is an extra rest measure. The rest measure is a common technique in trance and house styles in preparation for the anthem. The absence and delay of percussion heightens the anticipation of the arrival even more. At :44 the music fits the previous definition of a chorus in that it contains the title, is catchy, and has a denser texture with background vocals and a melody higher in register. It coincides with the arrival of the anthem identified by the release of tension, the fullest texture, and loudest dynamic level.

The second cycle of verse-prechorus-chorus aligns with the second cycle of breakdown-buildup-anthem. There is a reduction in the energy at the second verse, but the percussion groove continues, so it does not fit the definition of a breakdown with the removal of the bass drum. At 2:15 the bridge provides contrast with a slower harmonic rhythm and change of harmonies. The most significant breakdown of the song occurs at the end of the bridge at 2:31 when all percussion is removed, leaving only the intro material. This immediately becomes another quick buildup. There is no rest measure, but instead there is a premature bass drum hit on beat 4 before the last anthem and chorus arrive at 2:39. The final chorus is repeated in part before a final outro. “Stronger” provides a textbook example of form and definitions of traditional sections as well as EDM devices of breakdowns, buildups and anthems. The sections reinforce each other and do not contradict the expectations of the listener or dancer.

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<sup>13</sup> Measures are assumed to be four beats in length, with the beat of the songs approximately 120 bpm. Timings are based on versions available for free from the online digital music service Spotify. For a full understanding of the examples, the reader is encouraged to find the songs on Spotify and listen while following the charts.

**Example 2. "Firework" form comparing traditional and EDM sections**



Example 2 shows the form of “Firework.” Notice that its form is very similar to “Stronger”. It begins with a 4-measure intro without a strong percussion groove.<sup>14</sup> Then there are two cycles of verse-prechorus-chorus, followed by a bridge that leads back to the final chorus. There are also three cycles of breakdown-buildup-anthems. “Firework,” however ends fairly abruptly at the end of the first verse. At the first prechorus, however, where one would expect a building of energy and momentum, there is actually a breakdown. The prechorus is distinct from the verse in its melody, rhythm, and rhyme scheme. The rising melodic line leads to the building of momentum to the chorus, and yet the bass drum is removed here leaving just the string orchestra. It is somewhat unusual to have a breakdown here before there has been a buildup. Instead, the buildup occurs during the first chorus, which is recognizable by its title line and the highest register of the song. The buildup of this section is defined by the increase in texture with more bass, sweeps, hi-hat, and snare leads that crescendo into the anthem, which does not arrive until the chorus is repeated at 1:10. The arrival of the anthem is identified by the thumping bass drum, full texture, and increased dynamic level.

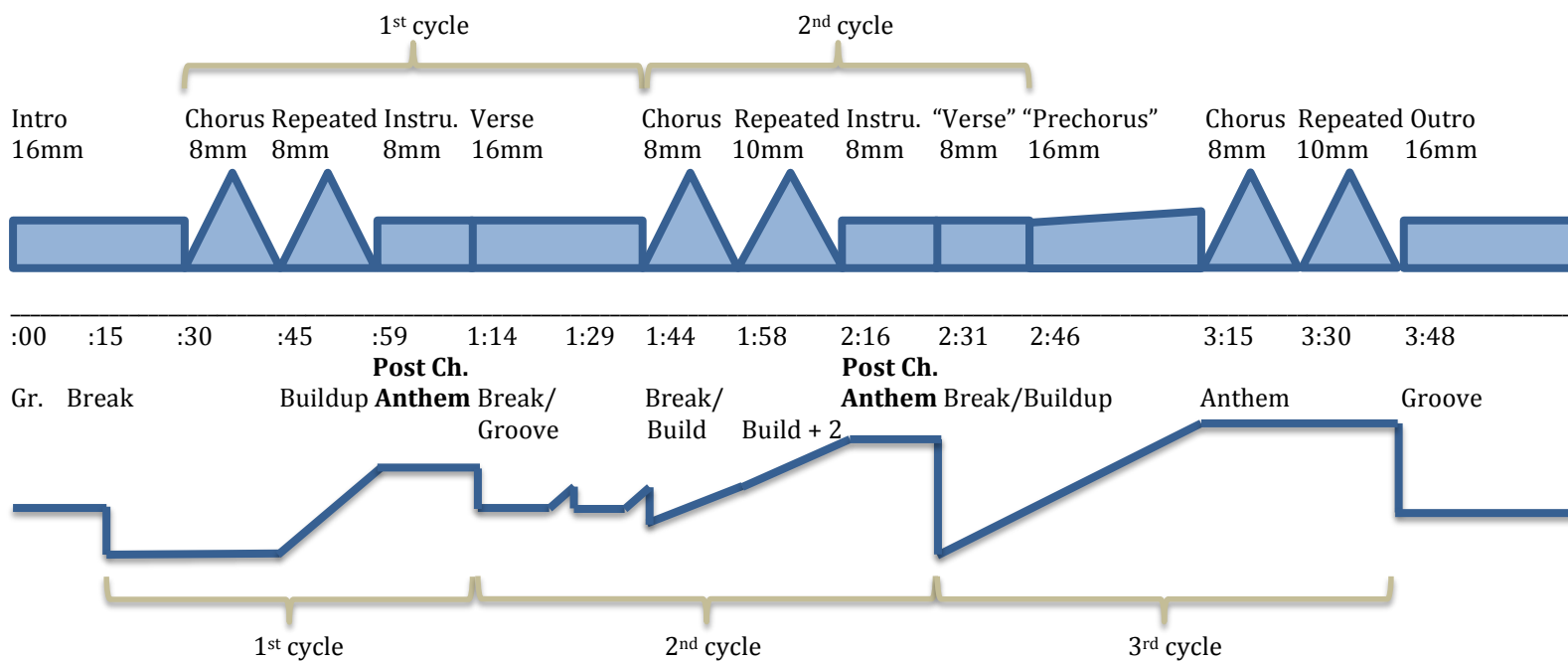
Comparing the EDM and traditional forms, one can see that the breakdown-buildup-anthem sections do not align with the song’s verse-prechorus-chorus form. The one-to-one correspondence seen and heard in “Stronger” is no longer evident on this first cycle. Instead, the first prechorus (traditionally associated with the building of energy and momentum toward a chorus) coincides with the breakdown (associated with the least amount of energy). The first chorus (the primary formal section defined in part by its thicker texture) coincides with the buildup. It is only when the chorus is repeated that the peak energy of the arrival of the anthem corresponds to the chorus. This first cycle is followed by a breakdown on the second verse, and like “Stronger” the bass drum is not completely removed. Instead, it returns to the opening groove. Notice, however, that the second cycle of breakdown-buildup-anthem better aligns with the verse-prechorus-chorus sections in terms of expectation of energy and momentum. As in “Stronger”, the anthem continues through the bridge, but the third and final break/build does not occur until the final chorus at 2:58. This analysis shows how traditional form and EDM devices work both with and against each other to create a hybrid form, in which the characteristics of energy and momentum of traditional sections do not always coincide with the characteristics of the EDM sections.

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<sup>14</sup> In traditional popular songs this is not unusual as the arrangements of many songs tend to build layers of instruments. As used in a dance club these intros could be overlapped with the end of the previous song. On the radio, these introductions are often spoken over.



**Example 3. "Party Rock Anthem" form**



Example 3 shows the form of “Party Rock Anthem.” Of the songs discussed so far, it is the most EDM influenced. Unlike the previous examples, there is a much longer introduction and outro.<sup>15</sup> In this way, “Party Rock Anthem” is more like the prototypical form in Figure 1 than “Stronger” and “Firework.” There are three cycles of breakdown-buildup-anthems with the final anthem as the most intense. In terms of traditional song form, however, “Party Rock Anthem” is very different. Although two cycles are labeled, notice that they actually begin with the chorus, which is followed by an instrumental section, and completed by a verse. This shows a rotation of the formal cycle such that the chorus is not the culmination as defined above. Also notice that the brackets marking cycles of verse-prechorus-chorus do not align with the cycles of breakdown-buildup-anthem.

Other features of this song make the labeling of traditional sections problematic. Except for the chorus, the terms verse and prechorus do not work in this song because they do not fit the definitions. The lyrics are rapped in the “verses” and the music for each is not the same. Although the “prechorus” builds momentum between the verse and the chorus, its one and only placement so late in a song is atypical. Verse and prechorus certainly may be used to label these sections of the song, but one can listen and sense that they do not function the same way as the verses and prechoruses in the previous, more traditional examples. Therefore, the form of this song seems to be better-described using breakdown-buildup-anthem sections.

Although the chorus is easily identified by the sung title and background vocals, it is not paired with the anthem until the very end. The first chorus occurs after a breakdown. The second chorus at 1:44 coincides with the breakdown and buildup. Despite the fact that the groove returns, I do not hear this as an anthem. I attribute this to the fact that the synth riff associated with the breakdown and buildup continues and that there are no other buildup techniques in this section. Instead, I hear both choruses coinciding with a buildup. This is confirmed by the fact that there are two rest-measures at the end of the second chorus that serve as both a mini-breakdown and build anticipation of the anthem. The third and final chorus finally coincides with the anthem following an extended buildup, which features all the typical techniques such as fragmentation of melody and synth, sweep, snare rolls, layering of textures, and crescendo. This ultimate buildup creates the most intense building of tension in the song, which is finally released at the arrival of the last anthem at 3:15. There is no rest-measure here but only a bass drum on the downbeat. The rest of the groove enters on beat two with an

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<sup>15</sup> As noted, in clubs DJs use these longer intro and outro sections to match tempo and overlap songs for continuous dancing. As a radio song, these longer sections are not necessary.

explosion. Finally, we have the ultimate arrival when the anthem and the chorus coincide. This is what the song seems to have been building toward and includes almost all the elements previously heard together.

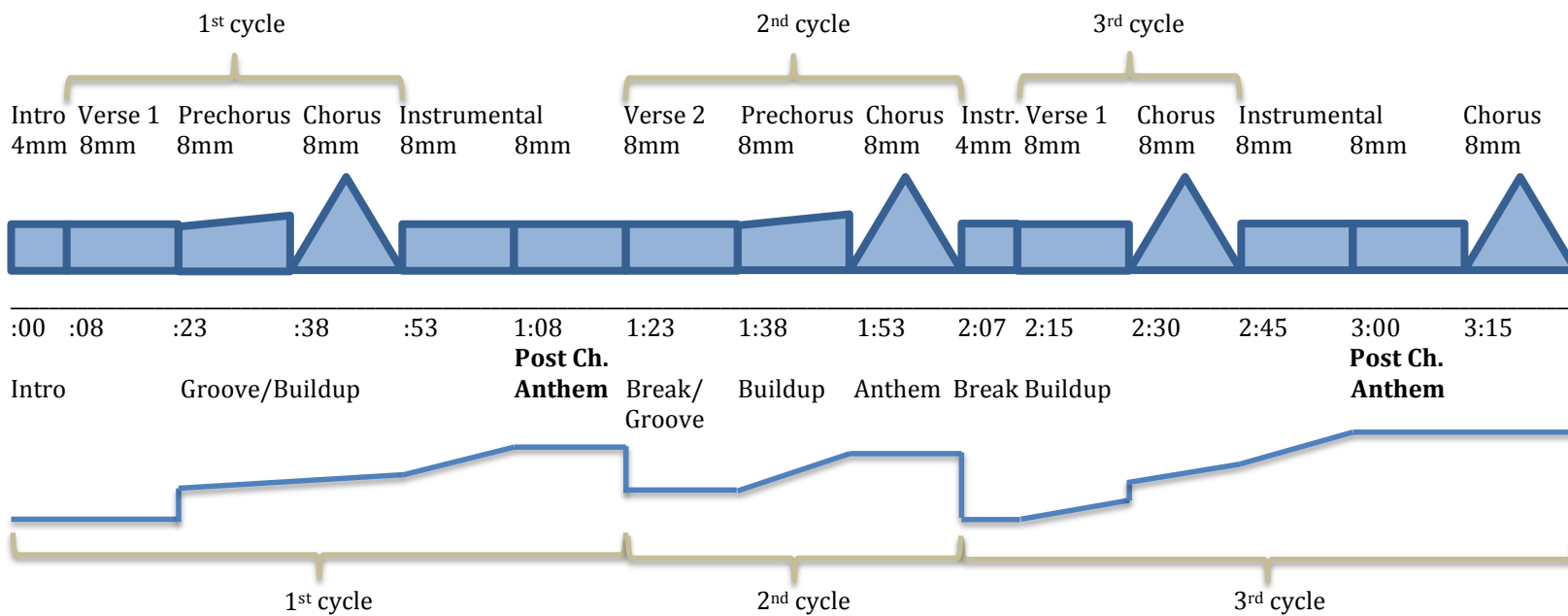
“Party Rock Anthem” also features what I call the “post-chorus anthem”, which occurs twice in the song. The post-chorus anthem is identifiable and distinguished by (1) its location after a chorus (2) its clear arrival after a buildup, (3) its length, and (4) its texture and instrumentation. The first anthem occurs at :59 after the buildup of the chorus section. Here the pulsating groove enters with a rhythmic synth melody. This section represents the highest energy so far but is completely instrumental. It is its own important section - separated from both the previous chorus by the rest measure and from the following verse by the change of texture and instrumentation. Although it is not as intense as the final anthem, it still qualifies as being an anthem based on the return of regular rhythmic and melodic figures. The post-chorus anthem occurs again at 2:16. This feature of an instrumental section after the chorus serving as a high intensity moment in a song is not unique to “Party Rock Anthem.” In fact, the post-chorus anthem section occurs in many EDM-influenced top 40 songs since 2010 and will be seen in the next two examples.

While the form of “Party Rock Anthem” does not neatly follow traditional terms, except for the chorus, the breakdown-buildup-anthem cycles give a better sense of the rise and fall of energy throughout. It is when these sections are examined together, however, that one can appreciate the hybrid form that leads to a satisfying climax on the final anthem.

In terms of form, “We Found Love,” shown in Example 4 is more similar to “Stronger,” and “Firework,” than to “Party Rock Anthem” in that it consists of an introduction, verse-prechorus-chorus cycles, and ends with a chorus. The second cycle of the verse-prechorus-chorus even aligns with the second cycle of the breakdown-buildup-anthem. As can be seen from the graph, however, this song features both long instrumental sections and sustained buildup sections that cross the boundaries of prechorus, chorus, and those instrumental sections.

The introduction consists of a one-measure, syncopated synth riff with no percussion, looped four times. The voice enters above this riff for the verse. The longer, more melismatic phrases in a slightly higher register suggest a pre-chorus at :23. At the same time, the texture thickens with quarter note claps and additional synthesizers so that the prechorus coincides with the buildup. When the lyric “We found love in a hopeless place” is sung four times beginning at :38, it would indicate that this section is the chorus. It is melodically the same as the verse, however. Texturally this section

**Example 4. "We Found Love" form**



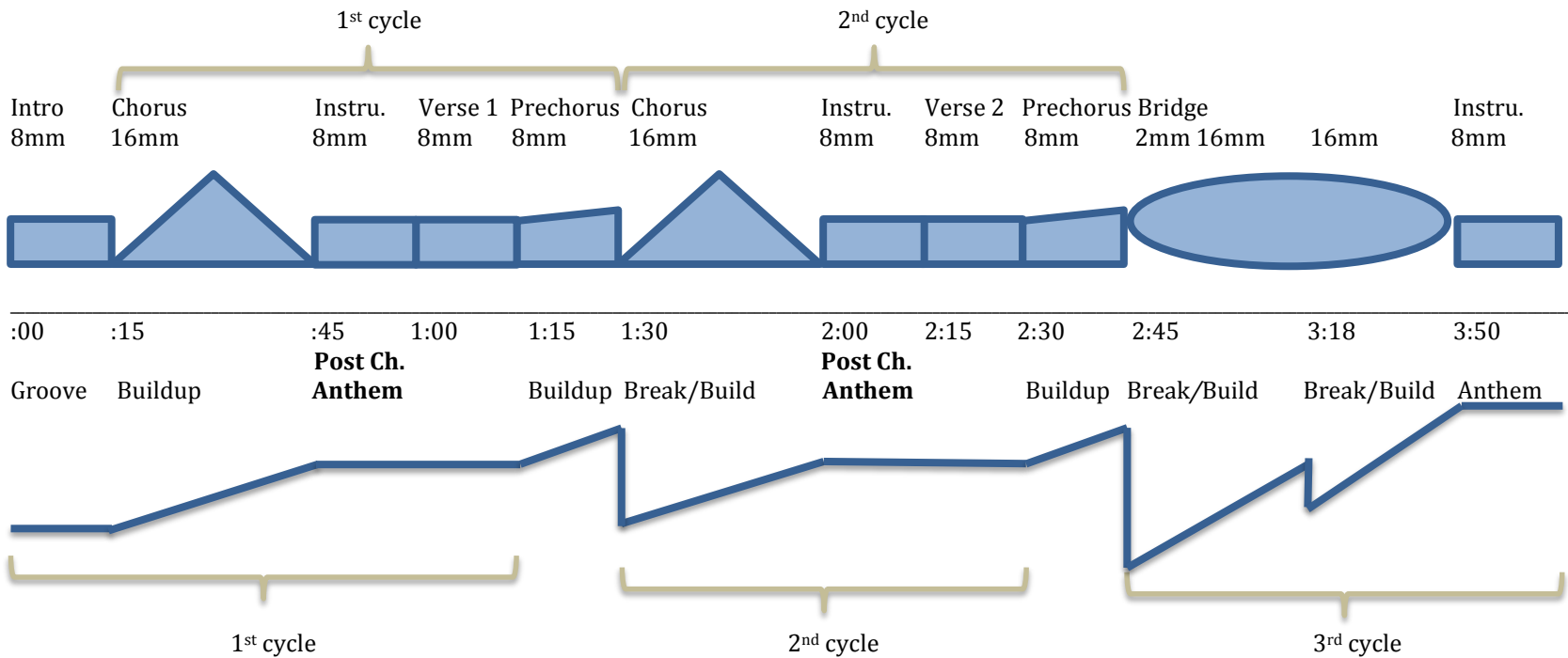
does not fit the definition of a chorus as the primary formal section; nothing changes besides a cymbal crash on the downbeat. In the next section, starting at :53, the buildup is more pronounced. The addition of drums with a 2-beat syncopated rhythmic figure in conjunction with an ascending synth line, a siren effect, synth sweep, and snare drum roll all contribute to the crescendo effect. This 8-measure build-up, however, is purely instrumental. This long rise in tension anticipates the arrival of the anthem, which occurs at 1:08 with the entrance of a booming bass in quarter notes. The opening synth groove continues and the entire section remains instrumental. These two instrumental sections point to the influence of EDM formal devices. From a traditional perspective they would be labeled instrumental with the anthem section as merely introduction material. From an EDM perspective, however, we are able to understand their functions as buildup and anthem sections and gain greater insight into the form of the song.

What is unique about this song and what makes it interesting, despite its simple melodic and harmonic construction, is its sustained buildup sections that cross the boundaries of verse-prechorus-chorus and instrumental sections. These instrumental sections function as post-chorus buildups and anthems. The fact that there is only one full breakdown in the song at 2:07 highlights the sustained energy maintained throughout. While traditional labels of verse-prechorus-chorus may be appropriate, they only show part of the formal picture. It is only when we examine the form through EDM devices that we are able to see the hybrid nature of this song.

The final song I will address is “Work Bitch”, shown in Example 5, which is organized more explicitly by EDM techniques. It is distinct from other top 40 hits in that it does not have clearly defined verse or chorus sections. This is because those sections do not fit traditional definitions or expectations. Example 5 shows the form.

After an introduction of the pounding quarter-note drum groove, the song begins with a spoken section that includes the title repeated several times; while the title line implies that this is the chorus, the spoken lyric suggests that this could be a verse. A buildup coincides with this section. It is followed by an instrumental section, which is the anthem, recognizable from the increased percussion and thicker synthesizer texture. Here again, as in “Party Rock Anthem,” is what I call the “post-chorus anthem.” It is worth noting that there is no breakdown after the anthem and that the next section at 1:00 is sung. On first hearing one might expect this to be a chorus because of its higher register, but this interpretation will change as the song continues. Another buildup coincides with what may be heard as a prechorus at 1:15, which is finally followed by a

**Example 5. "Work Bitch" form**



breakdown at 1:30.<sup>16</sup> It is at this point that the lyrics of the first section repeat, identifying it as the chorus, and thus the section at 1:00 is retrospectively recognized as a verse, especially when the same melody is heard later at 2:15 with different lyrics.

The second verse is followed by another buildup/prechorus, but instead of leading to the chorus, there is a complete breakdown at which the groove completely stops; this is the bridge – a formal surprise since it usually occurs after the second chorus as in “Stronger” and “Firework,” but as we have seen, the normal order of sections has been rotated as in “Party Rock Anthem” such that the chorus initiates the cycle and the prechorus ends it. The bridge consists of two parts. The first part fits the traditional definition in that it provides contrast with a change of lyric and harmony. When the lyric of the bridge is repeated, the percussion groove reenters making the buildup even more prominent. One would expect this buildup to lead to an anthem and perhaps a chorus. Instead, a false arrival occurs with a mini-breakdown at 3:18. This is the second part of the section, which can really only be described in EDM terms because it is purely an extended buildup comprised of layering fragmented vocal and synth riffs, percussion, synth sirens and sweeps, and snare rolls. This 16-measure extended buildup leads to the final instrumental anthem with no final chorus.

While the EDM devices coincide more consistently with the traditional sections in “Work Bitch” (as evidenced by the buildup/prechorus sections), the traditional energy and climax of the chorus is instead paired with the breakdown-buildup section, and it is the instrumental section, the post-chorus anthem, that carries the most sustained energy. Of the songs addressed in this paper, “Work Bitch” seems to be the most complex. Formal sections and EDM devices are rearranged such that anthems can buildup without breakdowns, and buildups can breakdown instead of leading to anthems, challenging the expectations of the listener and/or dancer.

In this paper, I addressed five songs that show the recent influence of EDM on mainstream top 40 songs. “Stronger” presented a textbook example of an almost one-to-one correlation between verse-prechorus-chorus sections with breakdown-buildup-anthem sections. “Firework” showed that these sections do not always align, but still had anthems that aligned with chorus sections. “Party Rock Anthem,” demonstrated that the climax of the song was achieved through the final pairing of chorus with anthem that could be better understood only by examining the form from both traditional and EDM perspectives. It also highlighted the use of what I call the “post-chorus anthem,” a common instrumental section in recent EDM top

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<sup>16</sup> This is an example of a “false arrival” where the expectation of a more intense arrival is thwarted.

40 songs. “We Found Love,” although simple melodically and harmonically, showed prolonged buildup techniques that could cross the formal boundaries of verse-prechorus-chorus and instrumental sections. Finally, “Work Bitch” presented a complex form in which traditional verse-prechorus-chorus labels could be used, but these labels did not fit the traditional definitions and, furthermore, even the breakdown-buildup-anthem devices did not occur in the order expected. This analysis shows a possible swing of the pendulum from the traditional sections of popular songs to the more energy-based techniques that are well established in EDM music. Through this investigation, I aimed to show that these hybrid forms manipulate the sense of energy and expectations of listeners and dancers and are best understood using both traditional and EDM analysis.



### Songs Selected

“Firework.” Performed by Katy Perry. Written by Katy Perry, Mikkel S. Eriksen, Tor Erik Hermansen, Sandy Wilhelm, and Ester Dean. Produced by Stargate and Sandy Vee. Released 10/18/10. #3 *Billboard* year-end chart for 2011.

“Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You).” Performed by Kelly Clarkson. Written by Jörgen Elofsoon, David Gamson, Greg Kurstin, and Ali Tamposi. Produced by Greg Kurstin. Released 1/17/12. #7 *Billboard* year-end chart for 2012.

“Party Rock Anthem.” Performed by LMFAO featuring Lauren Bennett and GoonRock. Written by Stefan Gordey, Skyler Gordey, Jamahl Listenbee, and Peter Schroeder. Produced by Redfoo and GoonRock. Released 1/25/11. #2 *Billboard* year-end chart for 2011.

“We Found Love.” Performed by Rihanna featuring Calvin Harris. Written and produced by Calvin Harris. Released 9/22/2011. #8 *Billboard* year-end chart for 2012.

“Work Bitch.” Performed by Britney Spears. Written by Britney Spears, William Adams, Otto Jettman, Sebastian Ingrosso, Anthony Preston, and Ruth-Anne Cunningham. Produced by Sebastian Ingrosso, Otto Knows, will.i.am and Anthony Preston. Released 9/17/2013. #13 *Billboard Hot 100*.

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**JEFFREY S. ENSIGN** is a PhD Candidate in Music Theory at the University of North Texas, where he is currently working on his dissertation, "Form in Popular Music since 1990" under the direction of Tom Sovik. Ensign also received his Master's degree at UNT, writing his thesis on Aaron Copland's *Inscape*. At UNT Ensign has taught a wide range of classes including Aural Skills, Theory, Form, and his favorite, Sixteenth-century counterpoint. His research interests include pedagogy and popular music, and he has presented his research on EDM and popular song forms at various conferences, including Rocky Mountain Society for Music Theory, Florida State Music Theory Forum, and Yale Graduate Music Symposium. Originally from Wisconsin and Iowa, Ensign attended the University of Northern Iowa, where he played tuba and majored in Music Education. Prior to his time at UNT, he was the band director in Boyd, Texas for four years and he continues to teach private lessons at the Dallas School of Music.

