

Handout

“Hip-Hop Sampling as Analytic Act” (SMT 2023)

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Please get in touch if you’d like to talk more; I’d enjoy that a lot.

Example 1. Stevie Wonder, “Living for the City” (1973), simplified keyboard and drum transcription of synth break, 1:05–1:29. Listen at <https://youtu.be/rc0XEw4m-3w?t=64>. The harmonic rhythm and change in drum pattern suggest that the synth break switches to 3/4, returning to 4/4 two measures before the next verse.

Synth Break

The musical score is divided into three sections:

- Synth Break:** This section begins in 4/4 time with a tempo of 98. The Rhodes piano part is labeled "rhodes vamp" and features a sequence of chords: F#/E and D#m7(b5). The drum part shows a pattern of eighth notes with a backbeat. A box labeled "Synth Break" is placed above the first measure.
- 2/4 Section:** This section consists of four measures in 2/4 time. The Rhodes piano part features chords G/D, C, C/Bb, and A. The drum part continues with a similar eighth-note pattern. A box labeled "Synth Break" is placed above the first measure of this section.
- Verse:** This section begins in 2/4 time with chords G and F#. The Rhodes piano part is labeled "rhodes vamp" and "etc...". The drum part shows a change in pattern, including a measure with a backbeat. A box labeled "Verse" is placed above the first measure.

Example 2. Hypothetical “conservative” hearing (after Imbrie 1973) of the “Living for the City” synth break, which remains in 4/4 with a syncopated harmonic rhythm. Drums not shown.

Synth Break
 Tempo: ♩=98
 Chords: F#/E, D#m7(b5), G/D, C
 Instrument: Rhodes vamp

Verse
 Chords: C/Bb, A, G, F#
 Instrument: Rhodes vamp etc...

Example 3. Usher, “Lil’ Freak” (2010), transcription of the chorus, 0:42–1:10. Listen at https://youtu.be/_6hEk6jIjxM?t=70. The “Living for the City” synth break is transformed by producer Polow da Don into an eight-measure, 4/4 phrase, with some resemblance to Example 2.

Chorus
 Tempo: ♩=140
 Chords: F#/E, D#m7(b5), G/D, C, G

Sampled synth
 Synth Bass
 Drums: handclaps

Chords: F#, G, F#

Example 4. Comparison of the 3/4 and 4/4 hearings of “Living for the City” with the chorus of “Lil’ Freak.” Note the repetition of the G-A-B-C# material at the end of the “Lil’ Freak” phrase, which emphasises the motion from bII to I and engages with the associations of “hotness” and exoticism connected with this sonority (see Eron F. S. 2022).

Musical score for Example 4. It consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled '3/4 hearing' and the middle staff is labeled '4/4 hearing'. Both are in the key of F# major (three sharps). Above the 3/4 staff are the following chords: F#/E, D#m7(b5), G/D, C, C/Bb, A, G, F#. The bottom staff is labeled '"Lil' Freak"' and is in the key of G major (one sharp). It features a G chord with a fire icon above it, followed by an F# chord. The melody in all staves is a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C#5, B4, A4, G4.

Example 5. Melba Moore, “I Don’t Know No One Else to Turn To” (1977), introduction, 0:00–0:29. Listen at <https://youtu.be/Iicp24jGxG4>. Note the six-measure phrase length and sparse percussion accompaniment.

Musical score for Example 5. It consists of three staves: Flute, Bass, and Drums. The key signature has three flats (Bb major) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 107. The score is divided into two systems. The first system is a six-measure phrase. The Flute staff has a first ending bracket over measures 4-6, with a '3' above it. The Bass staff has a first ending bracket over measures 4-6. The Drums staff has a first ending bracket over measures 4-6. The second system is a four-measure phrase. The Flute staff has a first ending bracket over measures 2-4, with '(1st time only)' written below it. The Bass staff has a first ending bracket over measures 2-4. The Drums staff has a first ending bracket over measures 2-4. The score includes various drum notations: 'ride', 'open hi-hat', and 'pedal close'. There are also notes like '(drums slightly different 2nd time)' and '(add strings 2nd time)'. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 6. Destiny’s Child, “Is She the Reason” (2004), introduction, 0:00–0:25. Listen at <https://youtu.be/6gQxEi4HZD4>. Produced by 9th Wonder. The original sample from Moore’s song (Example 5) has been reinterpreted with a different tactus and expanded via internal repetition to now span four measures. Furthermore, 9th Wonder reverses the textural/timbral buildup of the sample: in Moore’s song, the first pass through the material is relatively sparse, and several additional layers (notably strings) are added the second time through. 9th Wonder presents the denser version of the sample *first*, before later using the sparser sample to support the verses (presumably to allow greater focus on the vocals). The denser version returns as the backing of the song’s chorus.

Flute

Bass

Drums

$\text{♩} = 75$

3

3

Example 7. Ludwig van Beethoven, Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor, WoO 59, “Für Elise” (1810), mm. 12–16, as annotated by Cohn (2015, 19). Numbering the sixteenth notes from 0 starting from the downbeat of m. 12, Cohn superimposes a half-note pulse that drives toward the A on the downbeat of m. 16. This reading suggests that the piece’s opening should also be understood as a two-beat anacrusis.

m.12 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

Example 8. Nas, “I Can” (2002), piano and drum transcription of introduction and verse pattern, 0:00–0:27. Listen at https://youtu.be/y14A_5QEvjA. The producer, Salaam Remi, adapts Beethoven’s “Für Elise” (transposed down a minor 3rd) for a 4/4 setting and orients the opening sixteenth-note motive as a two-beat anacrusis, just as Cohn (2015) recommends. The drums are sampled from The Honey Drippers, “Impeach the President” (1973).

The image displays a musical score for piano and drums. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 95$. The score is in 4/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The piano part begins with a two-beat anacrusis of a sixteenth-note motive, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. A dynamic marking of 8^{va} is indicated above the piano part. The drum part features a consistent pattern of eighth notes on the snare and bass drum, with occasional hi-hat patterns. The score is divided into three systems, with measures 4, 8, and 12 marked at the beginning of each system.

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