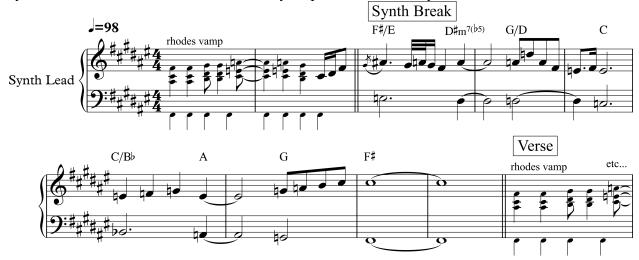Handout
"Hip-Hop Sampling as Analytic Act" (SMT 2023)
Jeremy Tatar, McGill University (jeremy.tatar@mail.mcgill.ca)
Please get in touch if you'd like to talk more; I'd enjoy that a lot.

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.

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.
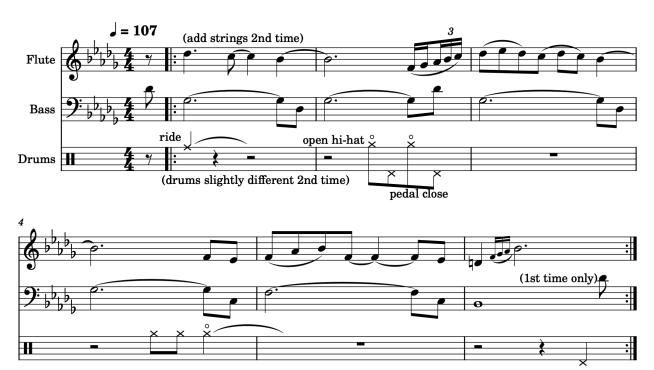

Example 3. Usher, "Lil' Freak" (2010), transcription of the chorus, 0:42–1:10. Listen at https://youtu.be/_6hEk6jIjxM?t=70. The "Living for the City" synth break is transformed by producer Polow da Don into an eight-measure, 4/4 phrase, with some resemblance to Example 2.

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 ♭II to I and engages with the associations of "hotness" and exoticism connected with this sonority (see Eron F. S. 2022).
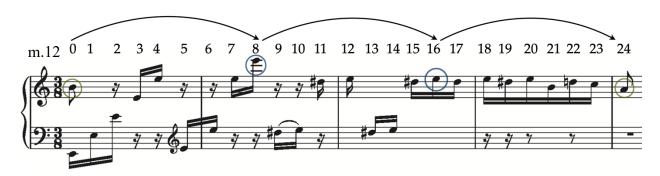

Example 5. Melba Moore, "I Don't Know No One Else to Turn To" (1977), introduction, 0:00–0:29. Listen at https://youtu.be/Iicp24jGxG4. Note the six-measure phrase length and sparse percussion accompaniment.

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.

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.

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).

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