

Rhythm and Vocal Expression in Hip Hop Soul

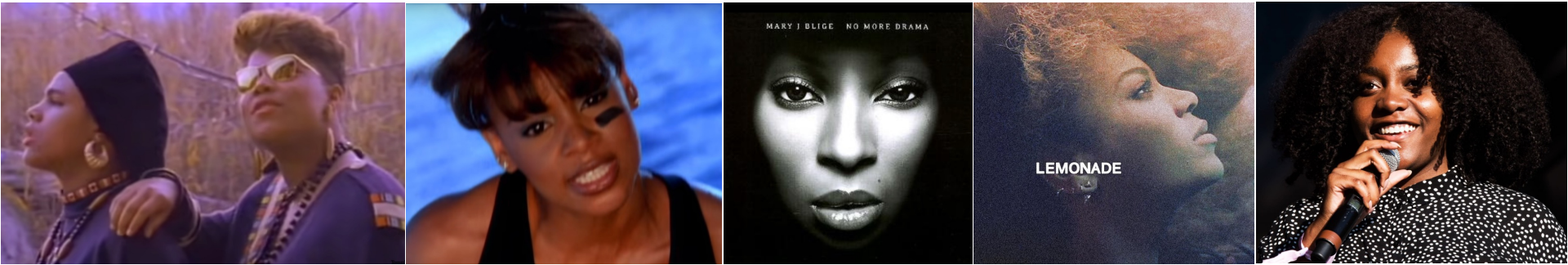
Timothy Koozin

University of Houston

tkoozin@uh.edu

AMS-SMT Meeting

Denver 2023



The evolution of a marginalized, wild woman character, who must go from object of the gaze to subject of her own destiny to obtain individual freedom and agency.

– Patricia G. Lespinasse, 2022

A mothering subjectivity that runs counter to gendered stereotypes in popular media.

– Shannon M. Cochran, 2021.

Subject position

Flow, groove, and song

Vocal timing, articulation, and phonetics

Metrical projection shift (Robin Attas, 2015)

Example 1. Queen Latifah. “Ladies First” (featuring Monie Love), *All Hail the Queen* (1989)



Vocal prosody (Victoria Malawey, 2020)

(1) Phrasing, (2) Metric placement, (3) Motility, (4) Embellishment, (5) Consonantal articulation

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
															<i>Latifa:</i>	The
1	la-	dies	will	kick		it,		the	rhyme	that	is	wick-		ed.		Those
2		that	don't	know	how	to	be	pros		get	e-	vict-		ed.		A
3	wo-	man	can	bear		you,		break		you,		take		you.		Now
4		it's	time		to	rhyme			Can	you	re-	late		to		a
1	sis-		ter	dope		e-	nough		to	make	you		hol-	ler	and	
2	scream.	<i>Love:</i>	A	yo	let	me	take	it	from	here		Queen.				Ex-
1	cuse	me	but	I	think	I'm	a-	bout	due			to	get	in-	to	pre-
2	cise-	ly	what	I	am	a-	bout	to	do.	I'm	con-	ver-	sa-	ting	to	the
3	folks	that	have	no	what-	so-	ev-	er	clue.			so	list-	en	ver-	y
4	care-	fly	as	I	break	it	down	for	you.		me-	ri-	ly	me-	ri-	ly



Example 1. Queen Latifah. “Ladies First” (featuring Monie Love), *All Hail the Queen* (1989)



Queen Latifah has creatively positioned her body in spaces that have previously been hostile to larger and nonconforming bodies... challenging Eurocentric constructions of the corpulent Black female body.

Shannon M. Cochran. 2021. “Give Me Body! Race, Gender, and Corpulence Identity in the Artistry and Activism of Queen Latifah.” *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 8/1: 14–34.

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
															Latifa:	The
1	la-	dies	will	kick		it,		the	rhyme	that	is	wick-		ed.		Those
2		that	don't	know	how	to	be	pros		get	e-	vict-		ed.		A
3	wo-	man	can	bear		you,		break		you,		take		you.		Now
4		it's	time		to	rhyme			Can	you	re-	late		to		a
1	sis-		ter	dope		e-	nough		to	make	you		hol-	ler	and	
2	scream.	Love: A	yo	let	me	take	it	from	here			Queen.				Ex-
1	cuse	me	but	I	think	I'm	a-	bout	due			to	get	in-	to	pre-
2	cise-	ly	what	I	am	a-	bout	to	do.	I'm	con-	ver-	sa-	ting	to	the
3	folks	that	have	no	what-	so-	ev-	er	clue.			so	list-	en	ver-	y
4	care-	fly	as	I	break	it	down	for	you.		me-	ri-	ly	me-	ri-	ly



Example 2. TLC. "Waterfalls,"
CrazySexyCool (1994)

a. Verse 1



Swing 16ths 

Voice


A lone - ly mo - ther gaz - ing out of her win - dow star - ing

Guitar
(wah-wah)

B^b barre chord:

xxx766

xxx768



E. piano

E^bmaj9

B^badd9



Bass



With drum machine, brass




at a son that she just can't touch. If at an - y

-2 → A^b barre chord:

xxx544

xxx546



D^bmaj9

A^b

B^b







Example 2. TLC. “Waterfalls,”
CrazySexyCool (1994)

b. Verse 3, flow accentuation

Swing sixteenths

	→ x	y	→ z		→ x	y	→ z		→ x	y	→ z		→ x	y	→ z
1		I	seen	a	rain-	bow	yes-	ter	day	but	too	ma-	ny		
2	storms	have	come	and	gone,	leav-	in'	a	trace	of	not	one	God	giv-	en
3	ray.	Is	it	be-	cause	my	life	is	ten	shades	of	gray?	I	pray	all
4	ten	fade	a-	way.		Sel-	dom	praise	Him	for	the	sun-	ny	days.	



Example 3. Mary J. Blige. "Family Affair," No More Drama (2001)

a. Chorus

(Even 16ths) G#-B-C# (pentatonic)


Let's get it crunk; we're gon' have fun up on it (in this danc-e - ry). We got ya'll o-pen; now ya

Synth strings C#m (even 16ths) G#m

With drums, bass

Detailed description: This musical score for the chorus is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The vocal line is written in a treble clef and consists of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Let's get it crunk; we're gon' have fun up on it (in this danc-e - ry). We got ya'll o-pen; now ya". Above the vocal line, a dashed line indicates a "pentatonic" scale of G#, B, and C#. The accompaniment features a synth string line in a treble clef and a bass line in a bass clef. The synth strings play a sequence of chords: C#m, followed by a section of "even 16ths" (eighth notes) in G#m, and then G#m. The bass line provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

b. Verse

Swing 16ths 

C#m G#m

Come on, eve-ry-bod-y get on up, — 'cause you know we gots to get it crunk. Mar-y J. is in the spot to-night and I'm a

Detailed description: This musical score for the verse is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps. The vocal line is in a treble clef and features a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Come on, eve-ry-bod-y get on up, — 'cause you know we gots to get it crunk. Mar-y J. is in the spot to-night and I'm a". The accompaniment consists of a synth string line in a treble clef and a bass line in a bass clef. The synth strings play a sequence of chords: C#m, followed by a section of "Swing 16ths" (eighth notes), and then G#m. The bass line provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Example 4. Beyoncé. "Hold Up," Lemonade (2016).


a. Opening Chorus

Diatonic, C-triad focused



Hold up, they don't love you like I love you, Slow down, they don't love you like I love you.

Chromatic chord changes



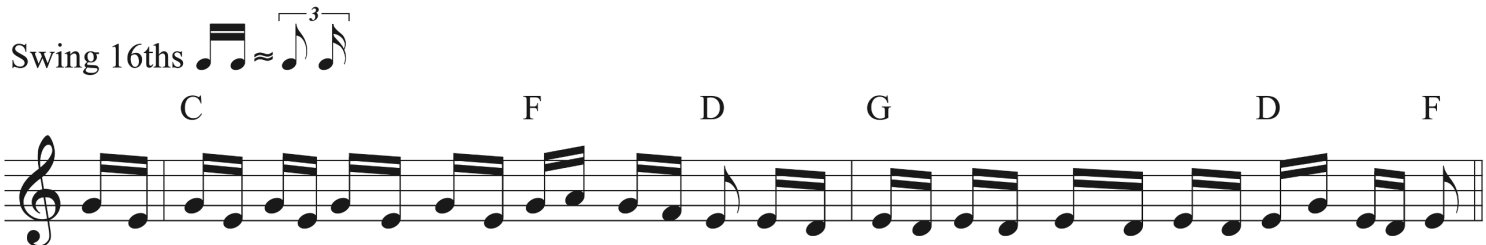
Sample: "Can't Get Used to Losing You" (Andy Williams, 1963)
Pizzicato strings, guitar, bass, percussion. With drum machine, air horn, bass.

b. Second Verse



What's worse, look-in' jeal-ous or cra - zy? Jeal-ous or cra - zy? —

b. Third Verse



Let's im - ag - ine for a mo - ment that you ne - ver made a name for your - self or mas - ter wealth, they had you la - beled as a king.

Example 5. Noname. “Self,” Room 25 (2018)

Instrumental reduction

B^bmaj7 A7 A^bmaj9 G B^bmaj7 A7 D11 G B^bmaj7 D7(^b9) Em11 Am9 B^bmaj7 D^bmaj7([#]11) A^bmaj7 G

“V” substitution I V I vi ii “V” substitution I

(Song ends. “Blaxploitation” begins.)

First verse

(One line equals approximately two measures.)

May-be this the al-bum you lis-ten to in your car when you driv-ing home late at night. Real-ly ques-tion-ing ev’-ry god, re-li-gion, Kan-ye, bit-ches. May-be this is the int’-rest be-fore you get to the ri-ver. I had him be-fore the **hea-then** no **rea-son** for you to like me. May-be this your life he just want-ed a clean div-orce. The ba-by ain’t real-ly **yours**. That’s real-ly for ba-by’s **teeth-ing**, the chick-en wings un-der-**sea-soned**. (pause) Y’all real-ly thought a bitch could-n’t rap huh?

Expanded third verse

Mis-ter mon-ey man, Mis-ter ev’-ry day he got me, Mis-ter wife-ing me down, Mis-ter me love, Mis-ter Mi-ya-gi, mis-cel-la-ne-ous, Mis-ter **mol-ly** in-side my **sak-e**. In-cred-i-ble, in-cre-di-ble, emp-ti-ness in my **bod-y**. (pause) Heav-en’s on-ly four-feet tall, I set my ring-er to it. Fucked a rap-per hom-ie now his ass is mak-ing bet-ter mu-sic. (pause) My pus-sy teach-in’ ninth grade Eng-lish. My pus-sy wrote a the-sis on co-lo-ni-al-ism in con-ver-sation with a mar-gin-al sys-tem in love with Je-sus. (pause) And y’all still thought a bitch could-n’t rap huh? (pause) May-be this your an-swer for that. Good pus-sy, I know nig-gas only talk about mon-ey and good pus-sy.

“Blaxploitation”: *What happened to my hundred dollars, Joe?*



Example 6. Noname. “No name,” Room 25 (2018)

a. Noname (1:31)

No name for peo-ple to call small or col-o-nize op-ti-**mism**.
No name for in-mate reg-is-tries that they put me in **pris-on**.

b. Noname (2:13)

'Cause when we walk into heav-en, no-bod-y's name gon' ex-**ist**.
Just bound-less move-ment for joy, na-ked-**ness** ra-di-ates.



c. Yaw (2:25)

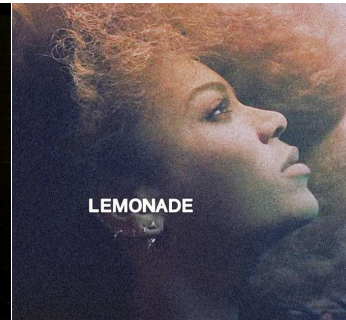
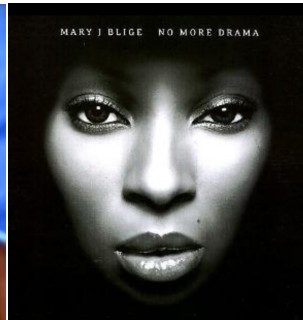


Through all the joy and all the pain, Don't for - get from where you came.

d. Adam Ness (2:48)



Your life, your life, your life._____ Ya,___ Don't let it pass you by.



Selected Bibliography

Adams, Kyle. 2020. "Harmonic, Syntactic, and Motivic Parameters of Phrase in Hip-Hop." *Music Theory Online* 26/2.

Ammirante, Paolo, and Fran Copelli. 2019. "Vowel Formant Structure Predicts Metric Position in Hip-Hop Lyrics." *Music Perception* 36/5

Attas, Robin. 2015. "Form as Process: The Buildup Introduction in Popular Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 37.2: 275–296.

Bradley, Regina N. 2021. *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South*. University of North Carolina Press.

Burns, Lori and Alyssa Woods. 2018. "Rap Gods and Monsters: Words, Music, and Images in the Hip-Hop Intertexts of Eminem, Jay-Z, and Kanye West." In *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*, ed. Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse, University of Michigan Press.

Cochran, Shannon M. 2021. "Give Me Body! Race, Gender, and Corpulence Identity in the Artistry and Activism of Queen Latifah." *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 8/1.

Cooper, Brittney C., Susana M. Morris, and Dobin M. Boylorn, eds. 2017. *The Crunk Feminist Collection*. New York: Feminist Press.

Duinker, Ben. 2022. "Functions of Expressive Timing in Hip-Hop Flow." *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 34/1: 90–117.

Joseph, Ralina L. 2018. *Postracial Resistance: Black Women, Media, and the Uses of Strategic Ambiguity*. NYU Press.

Koozin, Timothy. Forthcoming in 2024. *Embodied Expression in Popular Music: A Theory of Musical Gesture and Agency*. Oxford University Press.

Krims, Adam. 2000. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lespinasse, Patricia G. 2022. *The Drum Is a Wild Woman: Jazz and Gender in African Diaspora Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Malawey, Victoria. 2020. *A Blaze of Light in Every Word: Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice*. Oxford University Press.

Ohriner, Mitchell. 2019. *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music*. Oxford University Press.

Pough, Gwendolyn D. 2004. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*. Northeastern University Press.

Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Wesleyan University Press.

Shelley, Braxton D. 2021. *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination*. Oxford University Press.

Timothy Koozin
tkoozin@uh.edu