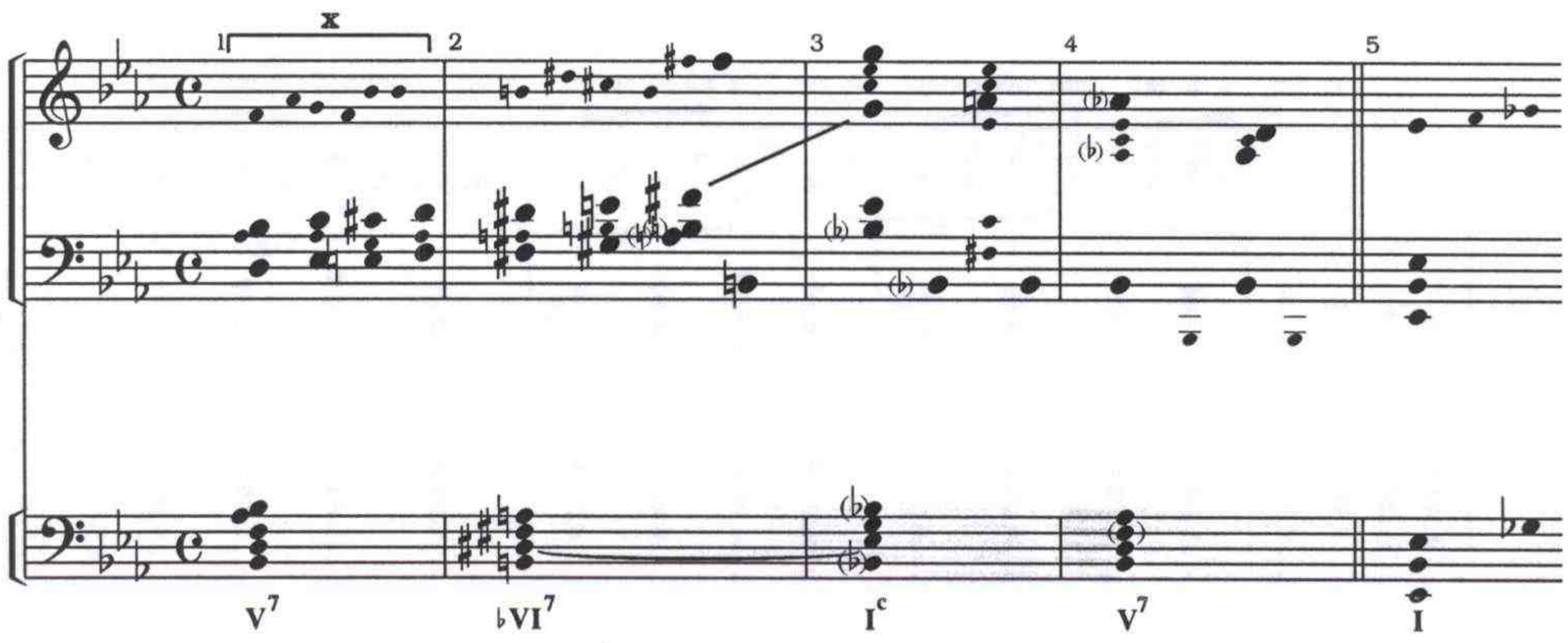
**Ex. 2.10**

## Two-Stage Voice-Leading Reduction of the Introduction



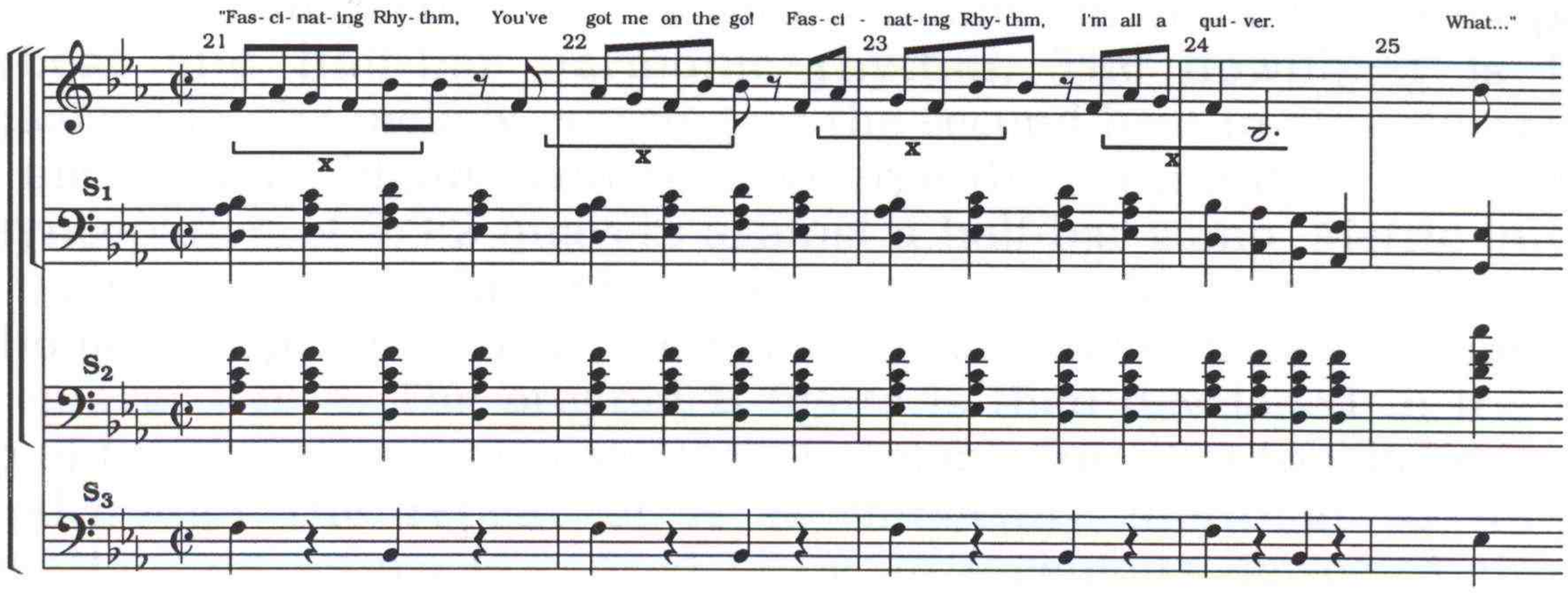

The refrain is in deceptively simple thirty-two bar form: George's genius lying in the avoidance of banality within an outwardly easily-cognitable structure of **ABAC**. Motivically, the refrain consists of two main ideas; the "fascinating rhythm" itself, making up **A**, and a contrasting section of new material, **B**. **C** is a conflation of both.

The success of "Fascinating Rhythm" relies, as do most Gershwin songs, on the potency of the motivic germ and its subsequent development. To have as that germinal idea a cyclic repetition of seven quavers duration (**x**) is of remarkable rhythmic complexity for popular music theatre of the period. But here lies a problem of authenticity; on the Krasker reconstruction[3], a tonic-dominant vamp invariably accompanies the refrain, whereas on the published sheet music, a cycle of four crotchets opposes the seven quavers:

[3] *Lady, Be Good!*, restored by Tommy Krasker, conducted by Eric Stern, Elektra Nonesuch LC0286, 1992.

## Ex.2.11

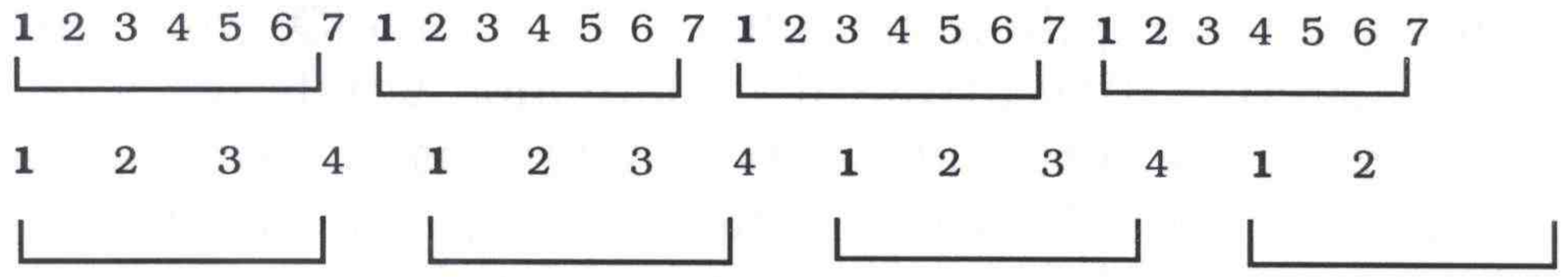
## Three Different Accompaniments to the Refrain




**S1** = piano left hand, as printed in the published sheet music.
**S2** = solo guitar, accompanying first verse only in the Krasker reconstruction.[4]
**S3** = double bass vamp throughout the rest of the Krasker reconstruction.[5]

In reverse order, the dominant-tonic vamp (of the global dominant) **S3** provides both a firm tonality and an unambiguous metre; thus, motif **x** has to be interpreted as a syncopation against the metre, with strong beats falling later and later in each repetition. Due to the lack of root in the chords of **S2**, its tonal description is weaker, despite implying the same **V**$^{\mathbf{V}}$ to **V** as **S1**. That there is now much less of a tonal journey between the two chords means the metre is less prescriptive. With a weaker metre to syncopate against, **x** now possesses a metric ambiguity, strengthening the motif. The ambiguity hinted at in **S2** becomes paramount in **S1** because there is no longer any tonal journey in the cyclic chords, just a pseudo-improvisation on **V**. No harmonic downbeat means that there is no strong metre for **x** to syncopate against. Syncopation relies on a strong metre to play against; what exists instead is a complex relationship of near equals between cycles of four crotchets and seven quavers:

### Relationship of Seven-Quaver and Four-Crotchet Cycles




The implication is that the cycles phase in and out of one another creating a teasing ambiguity of fundamental metre. This seems to be precisely the "fascinating" aspect of the motif: an ambiguity only maximised when accompanied by **S1**. George Gershwin exercised more control over the publication of his sheet music than any of his contemporaries; we can thus

[4] Orchestrated by Russell Warner, based upon the Astaires' 1926 [presumably London] recording (source not quoted); see booklet of ibid. for details.
[5] ibid.

be fairly sure that **S1** is what George intended, at least for part of the song. The 'authentic' reconstruction thus seems to misunderstand George's intuition.

**B** immediately contrasts **A** with a totally unambiguous root-position downbeat and half-bar harmonic rhythm. The downbeat is further emphasised by the melody entering on the second beat in straight crotchets. With metric unambiguity achieved, George then introduces an archetypal jazz syncopation of 3:3:2 quavers against a half-bar vamp. Metric interest is thus maintained even throughout comparatively relaxing moments; as if to drill home this point further, the following bar (32)[6] has a new parenthetic eight quaver figure. The original **B** figure is then developed in the second group of four bars, serving a strategic harmonic function (see below).

Although the repeat of **A** is musically identical to its initial incarnation, its return is coaxed in by an ingenious device. A three-beat anacrusis is appended to the repeat of **A**, combining the dual functions of sliding back into the all-controlling rhythm (via a close-voice-leading harmonic progression), and also developing the 'opening rest followed by three crotchets' rhythmic device of **B**. Instead of the previously firm downbeat, this now occurs a bar before the start of the new four-bar phrase, and is thus not as strong; it is an example of George Gershwin's developing variation technique:

**Ex. 2.12**

**Developing Variation on the Crotchet Rest Motif**



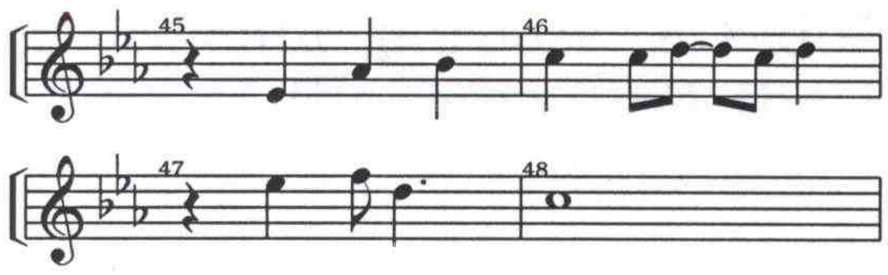

The final eight bars (**C**) contain a conflation of all previous material, bringing the refrain to a satisfying conclusion. It starts with a repeat of the first bar of **B**, with identifying three-crotchet anacrusis and strongly-metred half-bar vamp. The 3:3:2 rhythm is then continued as before except for a melodic change that sets up the developed repetition of the three-crotchet figure in the next bar through voice-leading:

[6] This bar numbering regards the start of the verse as bar 5, and the refrain as bar 21.

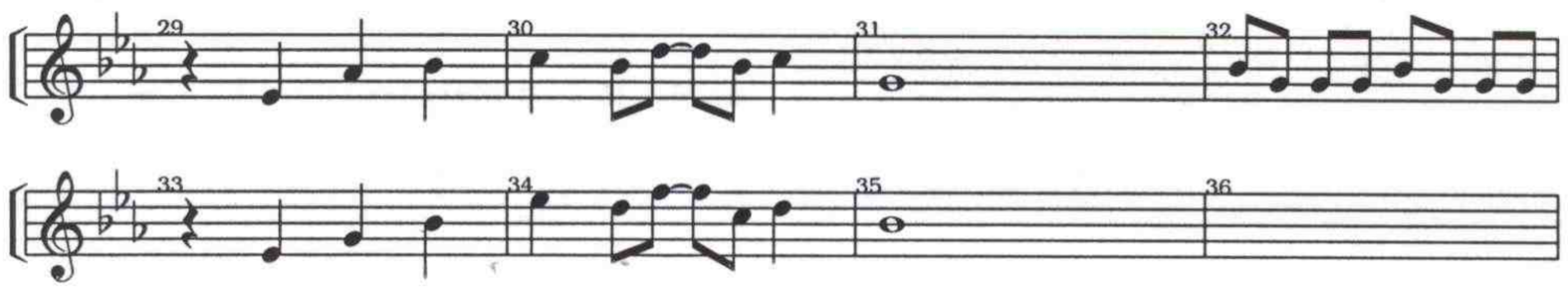
**Ex. 2.13**

## Increased Use of the Three Crotchet Motif

**First four bars of "C"**



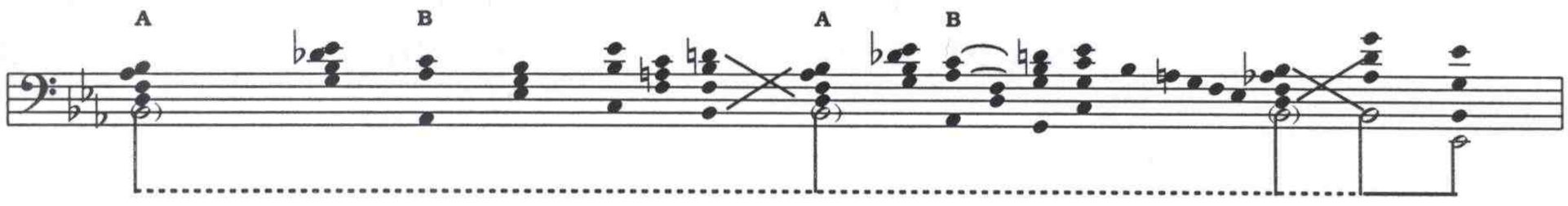

**"B": bars 29-35**




The impending-cadence effect here is heightened because the repetition of the crotchet-rest figure is carried out after two bars rather than the previous four. The harmony of the second bar is also subtly modified to further the sense of impending conclusion by avoiding the tonic and passing through the relative minor instead. Through returning to the initial version of the "fascinating rhythm" in the concluding four bars, George uses the very property that drove the piece forward: a dominant prolongation. Before this is resolved onto the tonic, a final reference to the 3:3:2 rhythm from **B** ties up the form. What makes the cadence so conclusive is that i) it is the first time that the "fascinating rhythm" is resolved to the tonic – all previous occurrences were dominant prolongations; and ii) it is the first place that the motives of **A** and **B** confront each other. The use of such formal devices to unite motivic ideas so conclusively elevates George Gershwin above many of his peers in terms of musical composition.

**Ex. 2.14**

## Voice-Leading Reduction of the Refrain




In contrast to the sustained tonic avoidance of the refrain, the verse consists of eight bars tonic prolongation followed by a developed repetition on the dominant. This repetition should not be regarded as dominant prolongation though because it is juxtaposed (via an unexpected *sforzando*) with the preceding tonic prolongation, not prepared in a structural sense. This serves a musico-dramatic purpose, to be outlined later.

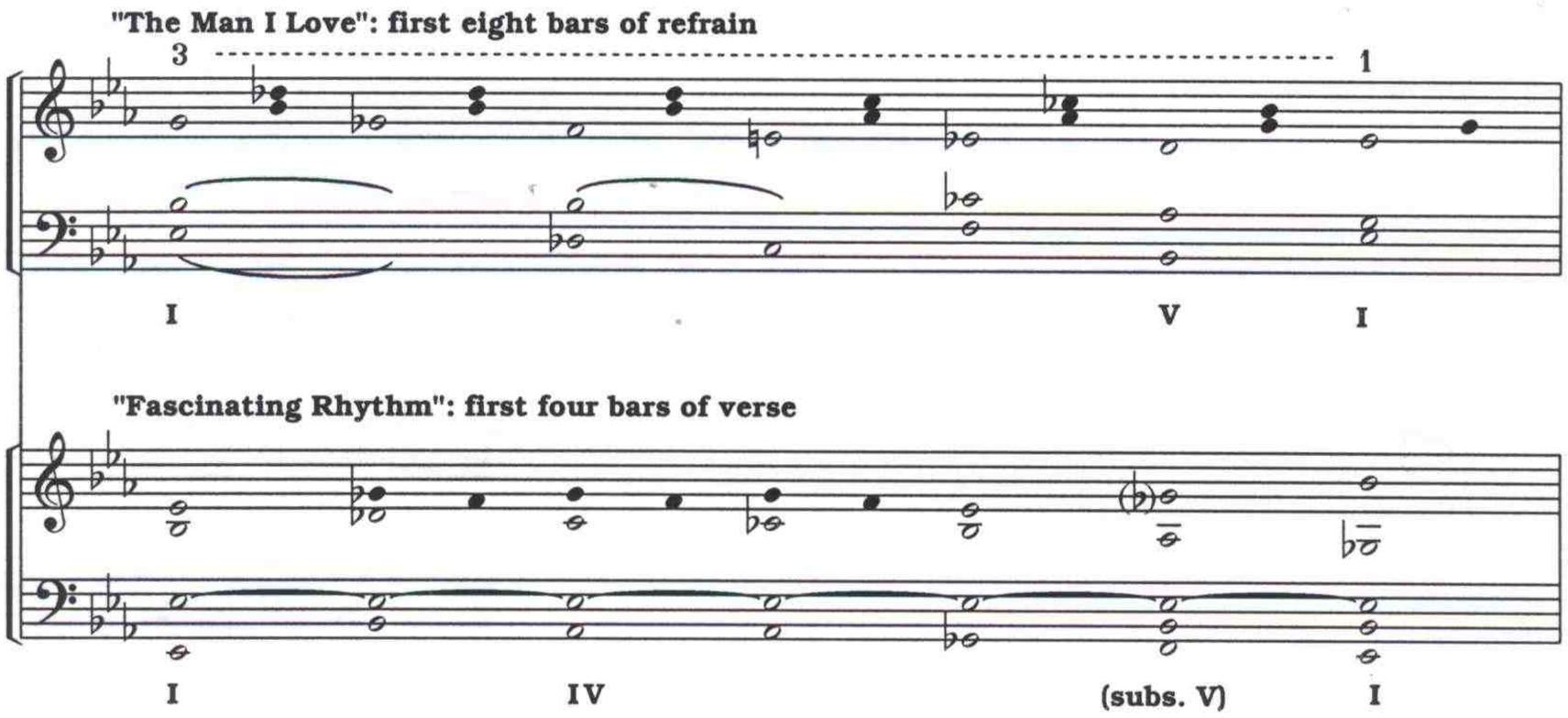
That the first eight bars prolong the tonic is not, by itself, remarkable; what adds the stroke of formal genius is that there is so much harmonic

interest within such a tonally-static section.

Descending chromatic lines are a feature of jazz harmony, and often appear in Gershwin's music (e.g. "The Man I Love"). The effect here, coupled with the half-bar harmonic rhythm and lack of vamp, is oppressive: again, with musico-dramatic purpose. A reductive comparison of the chromatic descending line of the verse and the refrain from "The Man I Love" is instructive:

**Ex. 2.15**

**A Comparison of Descending Chromatic Lines**




Whereas the former chromatic line is tonally-functional (by momentarily digressing from the tonic), the latter is non-functional, being harmonic filigree around the tonic. It is this fact that gives the verse the musico-dramatically-required monotony.

The motivic content of the verse is as ingeniously minimal as the refrain: minimal to reflect the persistent nature of the song's subject, yet sufficiently developed to prevent tedium. Thus, it is the musico-dramatic content of the melody that is monotonous, not the musical content. As demonstrated by the vertical-alignment of the example beneath, no two phrases are identical; even in the most likely repetition (bars 5 and 9), a rest has been introduced at the start of the latter phrase:

**Ex. 2.16**

**Developing Variation in the Verse**




## *The Lyric*

The song is initially sung as a diagetic, by "Ukelele Ike", a hired act at a socialites' party but is also used in the finale where the four wedding couples use it to delineate their reconciliations after argument: "Rhythm" becoming a metaphor for relationship. The song therefore initially serves an indirect musico-dramatic purpose (via a third person, as a diagetic) and then a direct one. This dramatic coherence was constructed only after the song was written: when the book was constructed around sketched script ideas and mainly extant songs, following common practice of this period.

With the exception of the finale, the lyric of the song is not related to the plot: it utilises entirely unspecific language. Ira uses the general to express the specific: a rare quality that ensures the song's success both within the play and on its own. Because of this, the following analysis is justified in not taking the plot into consideration.

In his book, Ira Gershwin states[7] that George had written the first eight bars of the song (presumably the refrain) before a title or lyric was arrived at. If we understand from this that it was Ira who created the song's concept, then it demonstrates how well-paired the brothers were, for Ira

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[7] Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (1959), 173.

recognised that George had created a truly fascinating rhythm. Taking this as the title for the refrain lyric, he proceeded to write a quatrain dominated by that phrase: as if the rhythm was controlling the protagonist's life.

> Fascinating rhythm,
> You've got me on the go!
> Fascinating rhythm,
> I'm all a-quiver.

The language is full of motion: "on the go" and "quiver" depicting the physicality of the all-embracing rhythmic force.

> What a mess you're making!
> The neighbors want to know
> Why I'm always shaking
> Just like a flivver.

Avoiding the title-line, the sentiment now moves away from the self-reported effects on the protagonist to third-party observations of him. There is also a subtle formal variation on the opening quatrain; instead of a pair of couplets, we are presented with a single-line statement followed by a three-line run-on. This could be considered synonymous to George Gershwin's developing-variation technique. The language is again full of energetic images. "Flivver" is a slang word, unfamiliar to contemporary British audiences, of obscure origin having two equally-relevant definitions. Firstly, it means a cheap motor car or aeroplane, which in the 1920s, as the lyric amplifies, would have given a rough ride. The word is also defined as something of damaging or deleterious influence: overtones put to good use in the lyric. Use of slang in lyric-writing has two opposite effects; whilst it benefits the vernacularity of songs, it also ties them to their period of composition: something all too apparent here.

Constantly changing the method of address, Ira returns to self-reported effects in the succeeding quatrain:

> Each morning I get up with the sun –
> Start a-hopping,
> Never stopping –
> To find at night no work has been done.

This lyric shows Ira Gershwin at this best, through his combining of chronological journey with global representation of the entire song. The inner couplet is entirely parenthetic, amplifying the outer couplet to comic effect. This pair covers the all-encompassing time period from sunrise to sunset, containing its own subject, yet extending its definition through simultaneous use of the inner couplet as subject. The density of the inner couplet's rhyme gives the quatrain a fitting momentum.

The next stanza is purposefully ambiguous in its grammatic form:

> I know that
> Once it didn't matter –

But now you're doing wrong;
When you start to patter
I'm so unhappy.

With the printed punctuation, it is in similar couplet form to the first stanza (with an added prefix); in this instance, "you" is interpreted as the rhythm itself. However, by regarding upto the long dash as a self-contained suffixed statement, the middle lines form a run-on with a colon-induced concluding statement ("But know you're doing wrong when you start to patter: I'm so unhappy"). "You" therefore also refers to the protagonist. The ambiguity becomes even more apparent when mated with the music; we can use the fact that the music was written before the lyrics as evidence that the ambiguity is intentional.

In the following stanza, the syntax is developed from the second stanza's 1+2+1 form; the method of address also changes to refer to the protagonist addressing the rhythm, further increasing the urgency of the song:

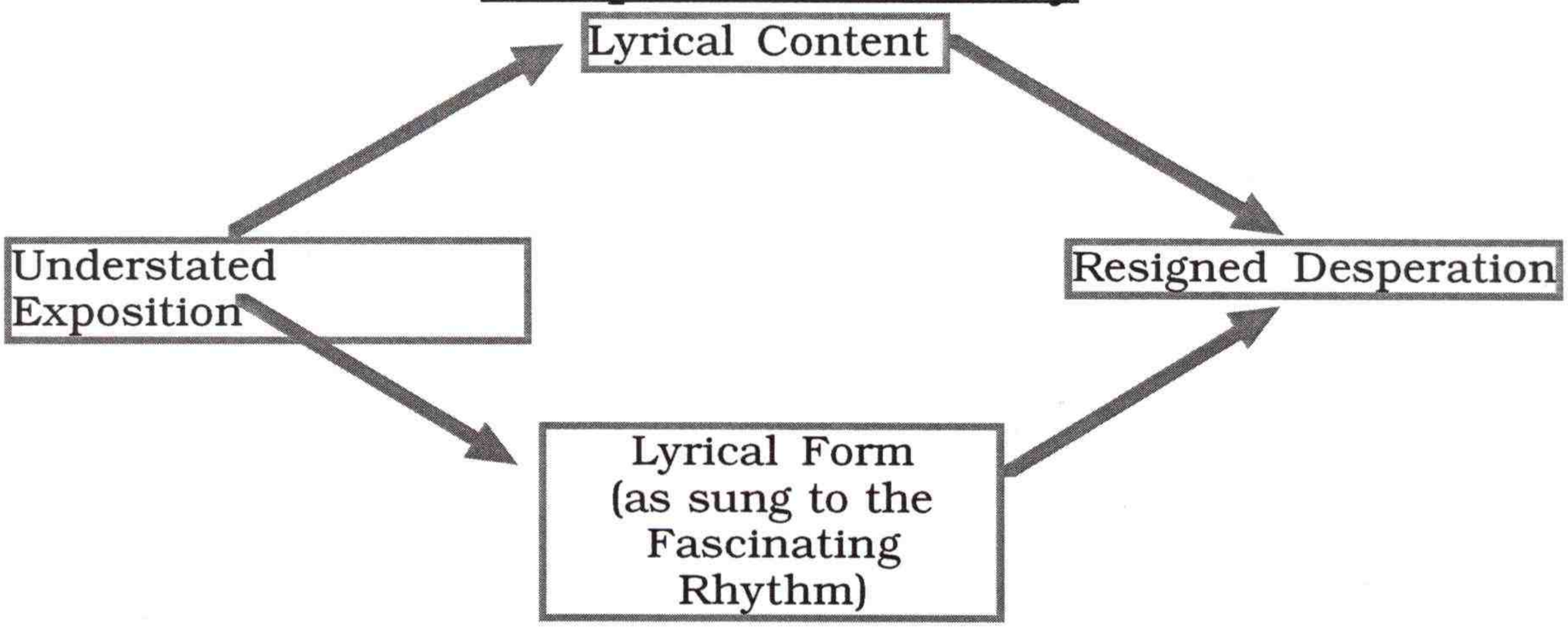
Won't you take a day off?
Decide to run along
Somewhere far away off –
And make it snappy!

Again, energetic motion is suggested when referring to the rhythm: the final word having a dual meaning of both instantaneousness and rhythmic precision.

Oh, how I long to be the man
I used to be!
Fascinating Rhythm,
Oh, won't you stop picking on me.

This final stanza ingeniously completes the refrain by both repeating the title line and completing the journey of the protagonist's sentiment from understated exposition to resigned desperation. The lyric is thus reflexive, because not only does it describe the journey to desperation, but the words themselves (melopoetically through the all-controlling fascinating rhythm) also make the protagonist more weary:

**Melopoetic Reflexivity**




The developing variation used by Ira Gershwin is demonstrated by the grammatical counterpoint between syntax and rhyme in the refrain's lyric. Whilst the rhyme is consistent between stanzas 1/2 and 4/5, the syntax of the lyric is varied in the fifth stanza. It is also of note that the final stanza returns to the syntax of 1 and 4:

**Ex. 2.17**

**Grammatical Counterpoint between Syntax and Rhyme in the Refrain**

| | Syntax | Rhyme |
|---|---|---|
| Fascinating rhythm, | | |
| You've got me on the go! | | |
| Fascinating rhythm, | | |
| I'm all a-quiver. | | |
| What a mess you're making! | | |
| The neighbours want to know | | |
| Why I'm always shaking | | |
| Just like a flivver. | | |
| Each morning I get up with the sun – | | |
| Start a-hopping, | | |
| Never stopping – | | |
| To find at night no work has been done. | | |
| I know that Once it didn't matter – | | |
| But now you're doing wrong; | | |
| When you start to patter | | |
| I'm so unhappy. | | |
| Won't you take a day off? | | |
| Decide to run along | | |
| Somewhere far away off – | | |
| And make it snappy! | | |
| Oh, how I long to be the man | | |
| I used to be! | | |
| Fascinating Rhythm, | | |
| Oh, won't you stop picking on me. | | |

Right from the start of the verse's lyric, Ira exposes the nature of the song, with the persistent "rhythm":

> Got a little rhythm,
> A rhythm, a rhythm,
> That pit-a-pats through my brain;
> So darn persistent,
> The day isn't distant
> When it'll drive me insane.

Alliteration (particularly the prominent "d" and "p" plosives) is used as a dramatic tool to convey the unavoidable monotony of the rhythm. This end is amplified by the tight internal rhyming and lack of personal pronoun at the start of the first phrase.

> Starts in the morning,
> Without any warning,
> And hangs around me all day.
> I'll have to sneak up to it
> Someday, and speak up to it.
> I hope it listens when I say:

Matching the first stanza, its successor omits the subject from the start: restatement of the lyric's sentiment now being unnecessary because the subject is so musically pervasive. An important chronological journey and yet more alliteration exists here. Through the protagonist announcing – in the future tense – that he will address the rhythm as an animate concept, we become aware that the rhythm is a life force he wishes to escape from. In the last line, the protagonist then states that what follows is his future-present address to the rhythm; Ira Gershwin has thus set up the refrain to be in metaphorical quotes: a diagetic within a diagetical song.

Unlike many of Ira's verses written in the 1920s, which were sole introductions and poor-relations to the all-important refrain, this verse achieves much more. On its own, the verse delineates the entire situation, whilst the refrain merely adds weight through a complementary method of address. The verse can stand alone, but the refrain requires the verse to give it credence as a diagetic.

## *The Melopoetics*

When Ira came up with the lyric to the first phrase of the refrain (and consequent title), it took him some time to be convinced as to its quality; he is quoted, "I didn't think I had *the* brilliant title in Fascinating Rhythm but A, it *did* sing smoothly, and B,—I couldn't think of a better."[8] Posterity has proved him correct. George's melodic first quatrain contains the repeated seven-quaver motif three times in total. Ira's solution to the stanza was to use his title lyric on only the first and third phrases as antecedents, with

[8] Quoted by Ira Gershwin in *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, from Isaac Goldberg, *George Gershwin* (1931).

the second and forth phrases being independent consequents. The effect is to amplify the metric ambiguity in the music:

## Melopoetical Metric Ambiguity

*either:*

| Beat: | 3 | | 4 | | **1** | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | **Fas-** | ci- | nat- | ing | Rhy- | thm, | |
| | | | | You've | **got** | me | on | the | go! | | |
| | | | Fas- | ci- | **nat-** | ing | Rhy- | thm, | | | |
| | | I'm | all | a | **qui-** | - | ver. | | | | |

*or:*

| Beat: | | | | **1** | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **Fas-** | ci- | nat- | ing | Rhy- | thm, | |
| | | | | **You've** | got | me | on | the | go! | |
| | | | | **Fas-** | ci- | nat- | ing | Rhy- | thm, | |
| | | | | **I'm** | all | a | qui- | - | ver. | |

The most likely cognitive interpretation (and indeed performance practice) would be a combination of the two:

| | | | **Fas-** | ci- | nat- | ing | Rhy- | thm, |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | You've | **got** | me | on | the | go! | |
| | | | **Fas-** | ci- | nat- | ing | Rhy- | thm, |
| I'm | all | a | **qui-** | - | ver. | | | |

This adds even more ambiguity to the phrase when using the printed sheet music accompaniment:

**Ex. 2.18**

**Metrical Multi-interpretations of the Verse's First Phrase**




where the accents are drawn from:

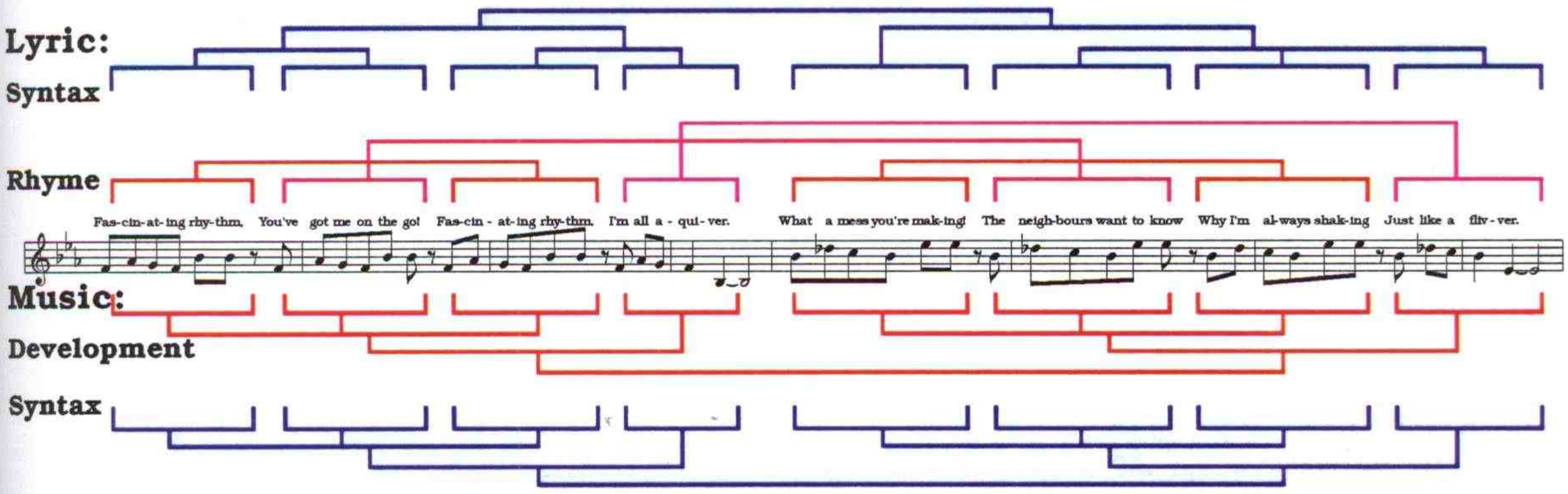
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **T1** | = | the prescribed barlines as accents |
| **T2** | = | the start of each seven-quaver motif |
| **T3** | = | a combination of **T1** & **T2** as determined by the lyric |

The displaced accent at the start of the third phrase is crucial, because it is on the repetition of the title-phrase: mirroring its persistence. Now that a song-internal leitmotif has tied the title-phrase with the key motif, other lyrics are used in its many repetitions, in the knowledge that the "fascinating rhythm" controls all of them; it is ever pervading, yet needs no textual repetition.

The Gershwins have thus set up a melopoetic counterpoint with the rhyme scheme in the first pair of quatrains:

**Ex. 2.19**

**Melopoetics of "A"**

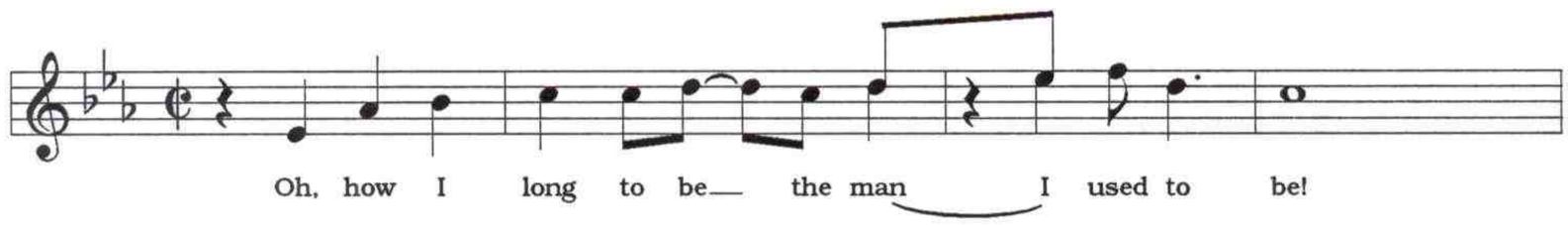



George's musical style again means that motivic development and melodic syntax are unified. Whilst the music is always based on three antecedent phrases to a single consequent, the lyric possesses a conventional binary syntactic hierarchy and a staggered cross-stanza rhyme scheme. Such cross-discipline contrapuntal activity is partly what makes **A** so aurally interesting. In contrast to this counterpoint, the music and lyric to **B** and **C** are unified in their syntax and rhyme.

An example of how much the Gershwins complemented each other artistically is the following voice-leading sequitur that over-rides the crotchet rest to befit the run-on lyric:

**Ex. 2.20**

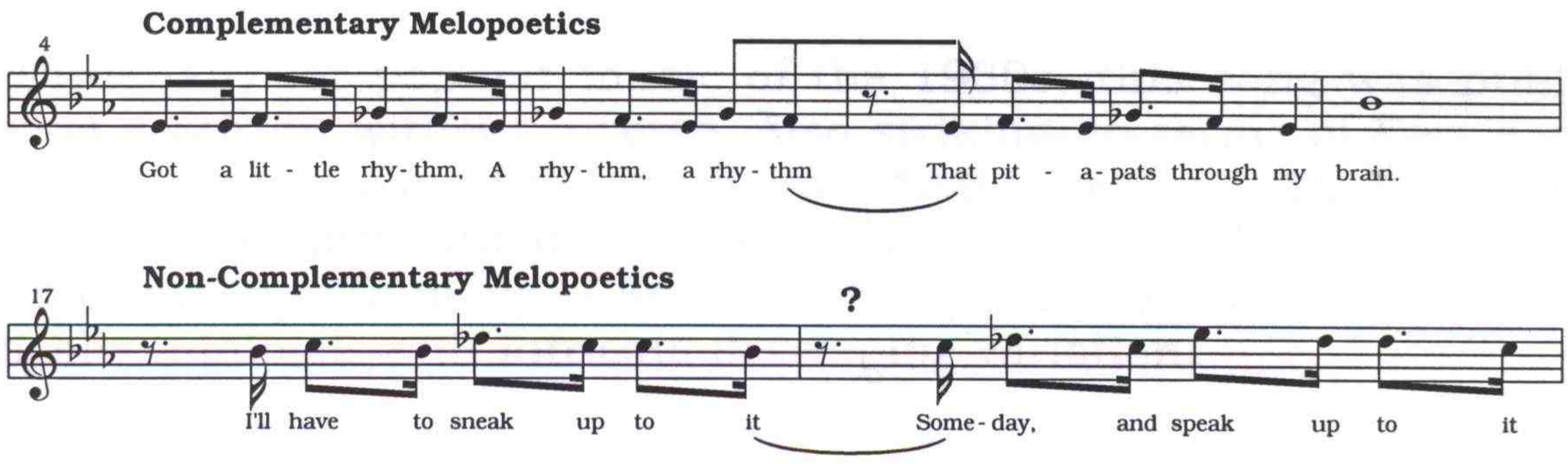
**Complementary Melopoetics**




In the verse, complementary melopoetics again solves the connectivity problem of a musical rest separating run-on text at the start of bars 7 and 11, through good voice-leading. A similarly prominent rest at the start of bar 18 is not so fortunate, with only the chromatic accompanimental inner-voice providing connection; the effect being disappointingly comic:

**Ex. 2.21**

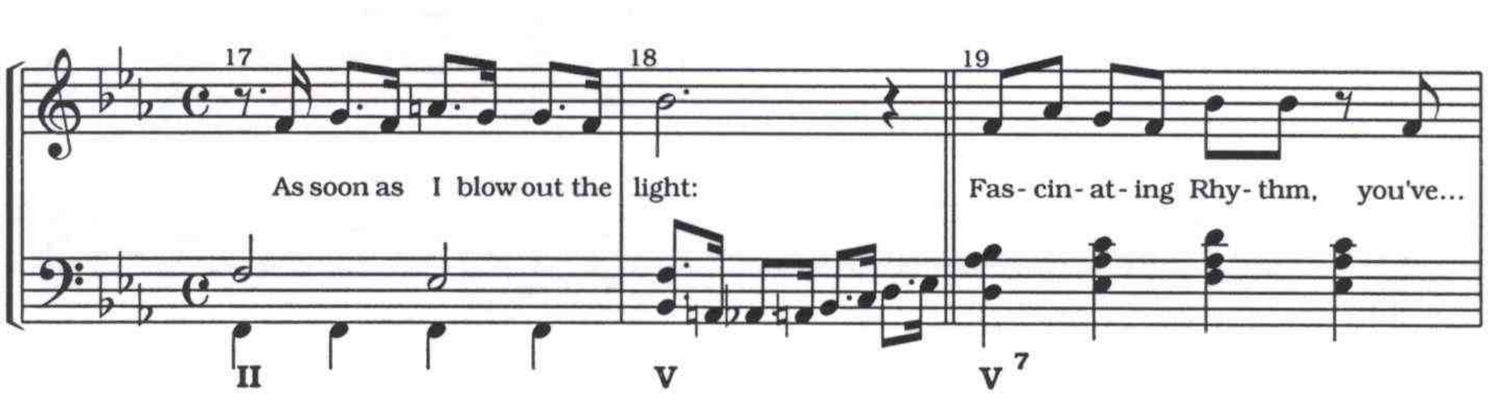
## Positive and Negative Examples of Melopoetic Counterpoint




As a final example of where all the melopoetical connections reinforce one another to perfection, the lyric colon that introduces the diagetic text matches the dominant chord in the music, and its release to the dominant seventh:

**Ex. 2.22**

## Lyrical and Musical Colons




A major achievement of "Fascinating Rhythm" is that the Gershwin brothers wrote a song that is musico-dramatically monotonous without being either musically, lyrically or melopoetically monotonous. From the above analyses, it should also be noted that, although the music and lyrics are individually of exceptional standard in the Gershwins' repertory, the melopoetical connections of the verse are not as carefully composed as the refrain. This is commonplace in Broadway songs, and points to the refrain being more highly compositionally regarded than the verse.

# Jerome Kern & Otto Harbach

## "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"

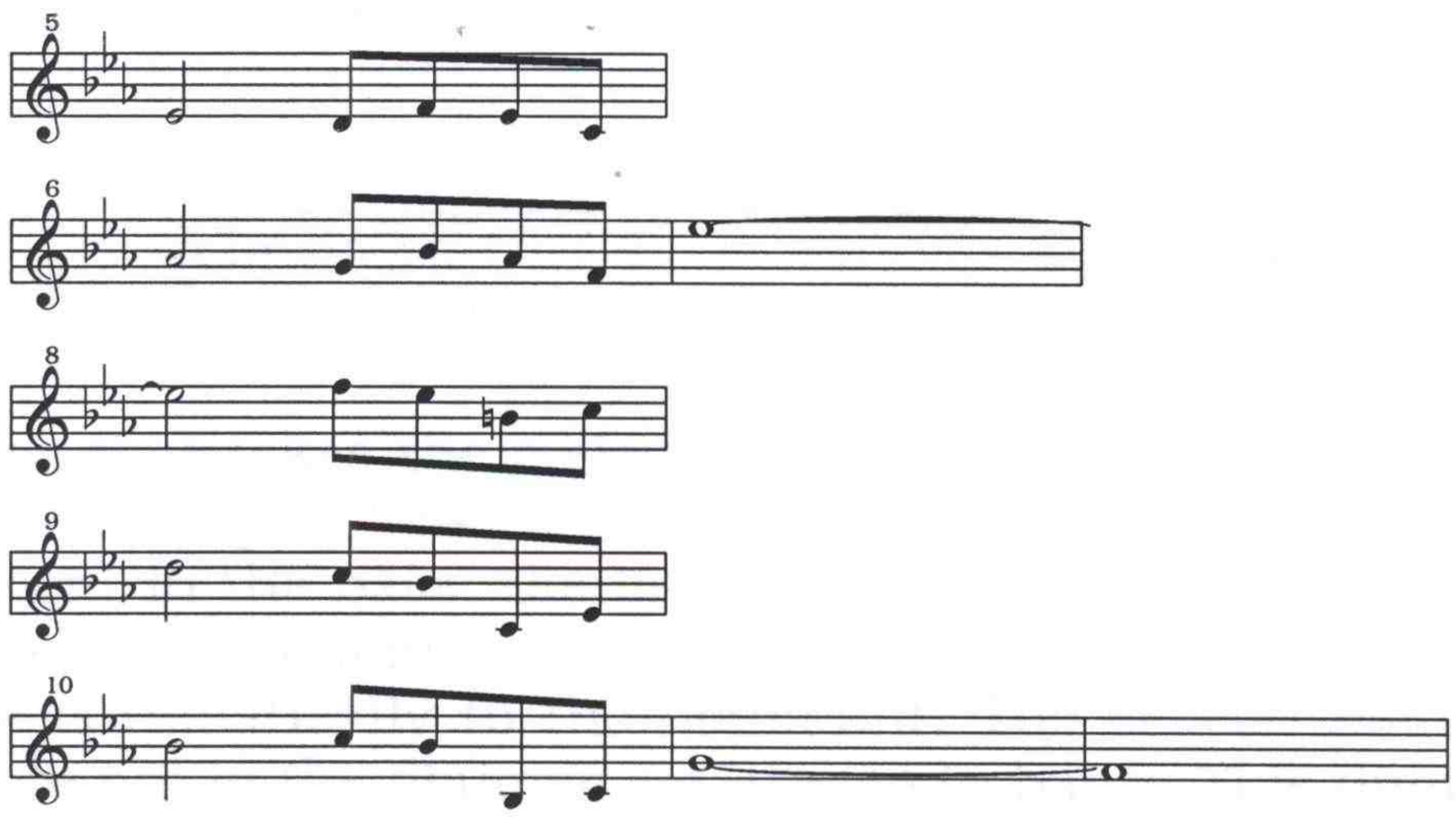
*Roberta* (1933)

Unusually for popular music of the 1930s, this song was published purely as a refrain without a verse. Also striking, in terms of Kern's canon, is the formal simplicity of the music: an **AABA'**, where both **A** sections are identical, and **A'** varies the pattern only through the addition of one note.

In common with many of Kern's melodies, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" is motivically minimal, with intricate developing variation:

**Ex. 3.1**

**Developing Variation of "A"**




The leaping intervals and obsessive rhythm put the melody among the more unusual of Kern's; what puts it among his finest is the underlying tonal structure:

Ex. 3.2

## Tonal Scheme of "A"




The sequence that takes the melodic contour from lower to upper tonic via subdominant note parallels, or, more accurately, expands away from the stepwise ascent in the bass; the interval thus increases from octave unison through minor third to minor sixth. From this first-inversion tonic chord, the bass climbs chromatically to the dominant. The crucial point here is the first bass note not in the diatonic set: the A♮ in bar 8. This diminished chord acts as interface between the initial and concluding tonic prolongations; the dissonant appoggiatura, being the highest point in the melody, thus coincides with apogees of both tonal and harmonic tension, and point of quickest harmonic rhythm.

The **B** section provides a large contrast, which offsets **A**'s minimal motivic material. It is accomplished with an enharmonic shift from E♭ to B major.[9] Although both the *Un poco piu mosso* annotation and the greater quantity of notes/syllables fitted into each bar give the impression of a faster middle section, the harmonic rhythm slows down to almost stasis. The link between the **B** and **A'** sections is weak, with the return of the tonic being achieved before the end of **B**; this adds to the feeling of sorrow implied by the text at this point:

[9] Enharmonic shifts are a commonly-used contrasting device in Kern's canon.

**Ex. 3.3**

## Reduction of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"



## *The Lyric*

**A** They asked me how I knew
My true love was true.
I of course replied,
Something here inside,
Cannot be denied.

**A** They said someday you'll find,
All who love are blind,
When your heart's on fire,
You must realize
Smoke gets in your eyes.

**B** So I chaffed
Them and I gayly laughed
To think they could doubt my love.
Yet today
My love has flown away
I am without my love.

**A'** Now laughing friends deride
Tears I cannot hide,
So I smile and say,
"When a lovely flame dies,
Smoke gets in your eyes."

Casting doubts upon authenticity, the punctuation is somewhat incoherent in the above text. For example, why are the last two lines of the first stanza and last four lines of the second stanza not in inverted commas when an equivalent quote in the final stanza is? Also, commas seem astray in the second stanza, and a colon lacking after the penultimate line in the third stanza.

Harbach's lyric is unusual for the period in several respects. To enlighten its qualities, a useful comparison is another "They..." song, the Gershwins' "They All Laughed" from the film *Shall We Dance* (1937):

Verse: The odds were a hundred to one against me,
The world thought the heights were too high to climb.
But people from Missouri never incensed me:
Oh, I wasn't a bit concerned,
For from hist'ry I had learned
How many, many times the worm had turned.

Refrain1: They all laughed at Christopher Columbus
When he said the world was round;
They all laughed when Edison recorded sound.

They all laughed at Wilbur and his brother
When they said that man could fly;
They told Marconi
Wireless was a phony –
It's the same old cry!

They laughed at me wanting you,
Said I was reaching for the moon;
But oh, you came through –
Now they'll have to change their tune.

They all said we never could be happy,
They laughed at us – and how!
But ho, ho, ho –
Who's got the last laugh now?

Both songs deal with the protagonist being derided for being in love with a particular person. "They All Laughed" takes the digressive route to saying how wrong they were – the love being greater than ever. "Smoke Get In Your Eyes" is not so positive; the protagonist is instead defending his love, when the antagonists were right from the start.

The two songs differ in the large-scale forms. Ira Gershwin's refrain needs the verse to explain the first two stanzas, because it is only at the "catalytic line"[10] at the start of the third stanza that the song is defined as a love song. The lyric twist comes in the reinterpretation of who "laughs" in the last line. In contrast, Harbach's lyric gets straight to the point, or rather, what we are led to believe is the point. By convention of 1930s musical comedy, we expect the song to have a happy conclusion, therefore a conventional ending would have the protagonist winning against all the odds by staying in love. This is not the case here. At a similar catalytic point, the drama turns back on itself, when the last half of the third stanza hints that his love is lost: affirmed by its "death" in the penultimate line in the final stanza. The lyric twist in the concluding quotation is the protagonist's last defence against his antagonists; their "smoke" metaphor for a love-'burning' heart clouding one's vision is turned back on itself by bringing in the metaphor of love as a candle flame: extinguished candle flames giving off smoke. The protagonist thus rejects the hackneyed qualities of the smoke cliché through negating it with another one.

The repetition of "smoke gets in your eyes" at the song's conclusion works on two levels. For the attentive listener it gives the elegant negation of clichés outlined above. For the audience who doesn't listen avidly to the lyric - popular music, more so than many other types of music, must cater for both types – it provides formal symmetry, and a reminder of the song's title: important qualities for Tin Pan Alley.

Harbach's protagonist acts both as balladeer and ballad-subject, narrating a journey from past to present, with considerable irony. In addition to the aforementioned poetic clichés, a dipole of more triteness is used: laughing and tears. Laughing is another idea in common with the Ira Gershwin lyric, and in both cases, its subject is reversed; in the Gershwin, the protagonist glibly – and literally – has the last laugh, whilst Harbach's antagonists have the laugh at the expense of the previously-humoured protagonist. But, the protagonist comes through it all, and, if not exactly wins, then has one last romantic thought. He engages sympathy from an audience made empathetic by the romanticised 'underdog should win' mentality of popular culture.

10 Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (1959) 259.