Words and Music: the Vocabulary of Cole Porter

by

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# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Chapter 1: “Night and Day” (Identity) ................................................................................................. 6
   I. Wealth, Privilege, and Education.......................................................................................... 6
   II. Religion ......................................................................................................................... 13
   III. Sexuality ..................................................................................................................... 17
   IV. Travel ......................................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 2: “A Tune to the Moon Above” (Melody) .......................................................................... 28
   I. Chromaticism ............................................................................................................... 29
   II. Repeated Notes .......................................................................................................... 38
   III. Melodic Development .............................................................................................. 46

Chapter 3: “How Strange the Change” (Harmony) ............................................................................ 56
   I. Major, Minor, and Deceptive Resolution .................................................................. 57
   II. Modulation .................................................................................................................. 69
   III. Withholding Resolution ......................................................................................... 76

Chapter 4: “Skip the Darn Thing and Sing the Refrain” (Form) .................................................... 79

Chapter 5: “I Get a Kick” (Rhythm) ............................................................................................... 97
   I. Triplets .......................................................................................................................... 99
   II. Rhythmic Motifs and Syncopation ........................................................................ 106

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 112

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................... 114

Thanks ............................................................................................................................................. 119

Selected Scores ................................................................................................................................. 120
Introduction

In his biography of Cole Porter, Charles Schwartz quotes Porter saying, “I like to begin with an idea and then fit it to a title. I then write the words and music.”¹ This account of his process illustrates a crucial fact about Porter’s songwriting, one that set him apart from most of his contemporaries. Where Rogers and Hart, Gershwin and Gershwin, Kern and Hammerstein, Arlen and Mercer, and numerous other such composer-lyricist duos collaborated to write most of the enduring American theater music between the 1920’s and 1950’s, Cole Porter wrote both music and lyrics himself. This gave him a freedom not available to songwriting duos—he could write music and lyrics simultaneously, allowing each to shape the other. Because music and lyrics were mutually influential in Porter’s composition process, he was able to build a symbiotic relationship whereby each gained from its coexistence with the other from conception through performance. Porter was by no means the first songwriter to forge a strong relationship between music and lyrics, and indeed many other practitioners have taken advantage of music-text relationships both before and since. However, this essay seeks to demonstrate that for Porter, these intersections—both momentary and extended—were an integral part of the songwriting process and have contributed to the wide appeal of his songs in the decades since he wrote them.

The fact that Porter began with what Schwartz calls a “nonmusical concept,” fashioning it into a title before writing complete music or lyrics illustrates another equally important fact about Porter’s songwriting: it was primarily driven by lyrical rather than musical goals.² Given his focus on concerns of narrative, character, and

² Schwartz 72
emotion, it is no coincidence that Porter is more often recognized for his lyrics than his music. However, the enduring popularity of his songs among singers, jazz musicians, and audiences alike is evidence of the fact that his lyrics, however clever or sophisticated, do not succeed in a vacuum, and indeed are, as Alec Wilder says in his book *American Popular Song*, “softened and warmed by his music.”

Cole Porter invariably wrote songs to be sung by particular characters in musical comedies, and yet generations of singers—from Nat Cole to Stacey Kent—have removed them from this context and interpreted them from their own subjectivity. Cole Porter did not write jazz per se, and yet generations of jazz musicians—from James P. Johnson to Brad Mehldau—have been captivated by his music just as I have. They have fallen in love with his soaring melodies, his ambivalent harmonies, his adventurous forms, and his buoyant rhythms even in the absence of the lyrics for which he is so famous. If these singers and instrumentalists are anything like me (as I sometimes greedily hope), it is not any one of these elements, but their summation that makes the music of Cole Porter so entrancing to them. It is Porter’s ability to tell a story with his music as well as his words, to create character and emotion, drama and humor, simplicity and sophistication, ecstasy and pain through words and music alike that makes his songs so deserving of study.

This essay focuses on the ways in which Porter relates musical qualities to lyrical content, demonstrating Wilder’s assertion that “Porter saw the value of allowing a lyric phrase to determine the musical phrase.” Chapters 2 through 5 each explore the intersection of music and lyrics within one of four fundamental aspects of

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4 Wilder 235
composition: melody, harmony, form, and rhythm. Within each of these broad categories, I have identified a handful of techniques that recur throughout Porter’s oeuvre. Taken together, these devices can be seen to form a musical vocabulary of Cole Porter, one that relates directly and meaningfully to his lyrical vocabulary. Before examining the specifics of Porter’s vocabulary, however, it is necessary to understand the role that the circumstances of Porter’s life had in shaping his creative output. To that end, Chapter 1 seeks to locate his musical and lyrical vocabularies within the context of his own identity through examination of the aspects of Porter’s life that distinguished him from his contemporaries or from the population at large.

The analysis in this paper will follow the example of Allen Forte and others in considering the piano-vocal score to be the “definitive text” in examining popular song. In an effort to remain as faithful as possible to Porter’s original intentions, all musical examples cited in this essay were transcribed from scores published during Porter’s lifetime. I was also able to examine some of Porter’s own manuscripts during a visit to the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library at Yale University in October of 2012. While melodies and piano accompaniments are transcribed exactly from published versions, the chord symbols that appear in this essay come from my own analysis of the scores, and may or may not match the guitar chords published in the original versions for the sheet music market. All lyrics are reproduced as they appear in the earliest available published score, although punctuation and line breaks may be modified from the original version for the sake of readability. Unless otherwise noted,

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all melodic, harmonic, formal, rhythmic, and lyrical analysis represents my own interpretation of the songs of Cole Porter.
Chapter 1: “Night and Day” (Identity)

Several book-length biographies have been written about Cole Porter, including those by Charles Schwartz and Stephen Citron (a dual biography of Porter and his friend and contemporary Noel Coward), which serve as two of this essay’s principal sources. For this reason, the goal of this chapter is not to rehash what has already been stated with regard to the chronology and minutiae of the life of Cole Porter. Rather, it seeks to locate Porter’s musical language within the context of his life in order to give grounding to chapters 2 through 5, which delve deeply into the specifics of that musical language. Rather than following a chronological organization, this chapter will focus on a series of qualities about Porter’s life and circumstances that set him apart from others, qualities that in some cases privileged him and in other cases placed him at the margins of the world of Broadway. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that these qualities inexorably influenced his musical and lyrical output.

I. Wealth, Privilege, and Education

Where most early 20th century Broadway songwriters were either immigrants or the children of immigrants, born into the urban working class, Cole Porter was born in the small town of Peru, Indiana in 1891 to a wealthy family. Porter’s grandfather, J.O. Cole, made a fortune during the California gold rush in the 1850’s, a fortune that he would expand over the ensuing decades through entrepreneurship and investment.\(^6\) Although Cole Porter’s father, Samuel Porter, was “a shy druggist of limited means,” J.O. Cole’s fortune was sufficiently large for his grandson to be

\(^6\) Schwartz 7-8
raised in luxury. Porter’s 1919 marriage to Linda Thomas, who had gained her own fortune in a divorce settlement, would only add to his financial security. As Porter’s career as a songwriter developed in the 1930’s, he added his own wealth to this pool. While it is easy to overstate the effect luxury had on Porter’s creative output, there is no denying that it granted him certain allowances not available to the likes of George Gershwin or Irving Berlin, for whom financial security was not always a given.

Beginning early in his childhood, Porter’s family wealth gave him access to high-quality formal education. Due in part to the insistence of his mother, Kate, who was, as Citron puts it, “a frustrated singer” herself, Porter received musical education from an early age, alongside traditional nonmusical education. Kate “spoiled him shamelessly,” doting on Cole both in material objects and affection. Additionally, she nourished—and at times exaggerated—his early aptitude for music. Porter received instruction on piano and violin from age five, beginning with piano lessons from his mother. Although he would become proficient on both instruments, Citron points out that Porter was “not a prodigy,” a fact that Kate sought to disguise by modifying his birth certificate to state his birth year as 1893 rather than 1891.

In 1905, when Porter was fourteen (though the school’s records list him as only twelve), Porter was sent to the Worcester Academy, an elite prep school in Massachusetts whose alumni include a wide variety of entertainers, politicians, and athletes. While at Worcester, Porter received not only academic but also social

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7 Schwartz 10-12
8 Schwartz 50-54
10 Citron 2
11 Citron 13
12 Citron 8-13
education, as the student body was comprised largely of “wealthy boys ... from the Eastern social register.”\textsuperscript{14} He also continued his development as a musician, entertaining classmates and faculty alike on the piano he was allowed to keep in his dorm room. He soon discovered that one of the keys to entertaining his classmates was writing “suggestive songs,” which made use of allusion and innuendo.\textsuperscript{15} Although his musical activities were largely informal while at Worcester, the school’s curriculum included English, Greek, Latin, and French, all of which nourished Porter’s innate facility with language. The school’s headmaster and Greek instructor, Dr. Daniel Abercrombie, became a mentor for Porter, and Citron points out that Porter “was often to credit Dr. Abercrombie with making him realize the match between the rhythm of words in a good song and the beat of the music,” a characteristic of Porter’s songwriting which will be discussed in depth in chapter 5.\textsuperscript{16}

After being named valedictorian of Worcester, Porter went on to enroll at Yale University, where his wealth and his music became all the more important to his identity. Porter made a point of associating with what he called the “rich-rich,” as opposed to the nouveau riche, out of a desire to climb the social ladder. He continued his studies in the humanities, as well as adding formal courses in music during his junior and senior years at Yale, although he viewed academic success as being of secondary importance when compared to social success. He discovered that fitting the names of people of social standing into his song lyrics was one way to get the elites at Yale to take notice, a practice that he would continue throughout his career. During his time at Yale, Porter wrote hundreds of songs, including several that are still sung

\textsuperscript{14} Citron 13
\textsuperscript{15} Citron 15
\textsuperscript{16} Citron 13-14, see also Schwartz 19
there today. Porter also headed Yale’s glee club, and was involved in every step of the production of four original musicals, honing his technique as a songwriter along the way.

After leaving Yale, Porter moved on to Harvard Law School, although he did so half-heartedly. Shortly after arriving at Harvard, Porter’s grades began slipping. He was allowed by the school’s dean to transfer to the School of Arts and Sciences, where he again studied music formally. As before, his focus was on his songwriting rather than on his studies, and it would not be long before he left Cambridge for New York and a career writing for Broadway. Once there, he again studied formal composition, this time with Italian composer Pietro Yon. However, as before, his studies in European classical music rarely held his interest. Years later, while living in Paris with his wife in the early 1920’s, Porter studied orchestration and counterpoint again with Vincent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum. Although his enthusiasm was often elsewhere, and, as Schwartz points out, Porter wrote only one “serious composition,” (the ballet *Within the Quota*, which he did not orchestrate himself) Porter’s education in European classical music was more substantial than that of any of his contemporaries on Broadway. This education, along with the informal education he gathered through entertaining friends and classmates at Worcester and Yale, made Porter knowledgeable in both the techniques of “serious” music (meaning art music in the European classical tradition) and the ways to appeal

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18 Citron 29, Schwartz 23-27
19 Citron 35-37
20 Hyland 165
21 Schwartz 56-57
22 Wilder 223
to a contemporary audience by the time he began writing professionally. Whether or not musical education enhances creativity is a question too broad for this essay to answer. However, there is little doubt that Porter’s thorough knowledge of the techniques of classical composition, his education in English, French, and other languages, and his keen sense of what entertained his audience broadened the palette of words and sounds available to him, helping him build sophisticated musical and lyrical vocabularies.

Among the characteristic devices of Porter that will be explored in the later chapters of this essay, his exploratory use of song form can most readily be traced to his education in European classical music. One of the most marked differences between European art music of the classical era and American popular music of the 20th century is the two traditions’ use of form. European classical music is characterized by forms that develop over a comparatively long period of time, often with individual works being comprised of several movements, each with subsections of various lengths. Twentieth-century American theater music, on the other hand, is characterized by comparatively short, systematic song forms, with 32-measure AABA and ABAC forms together constituting the vast majority of the repertoire. Cole Porter often experimented with unconventional, extended forms, with some of his most famous songs spanning well over twice the conventional 32-measure length (see chapter 4 for examples and analysis of Porter’s exploration of song form). It seems no coincidence that the Broadway composer most thoroughly educated in the realm of European classical music would also be the one most keen to subvert and extend the prevailing song forms in favor of longer ones more reminiscent of
European classical music. Like symphonic and especially operatic composers before him, Porter saw the value of taking his time in developing both musical and lyrical ideas, and in allowing lyrical material to motivate this development, as songs like “Begin the Beguine” and “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” clearly demonstrate.

Naturally, Porter’s landmark 1948 musical *Kiss Me, Kate*, which is a play-within-a-play based on Shakespeare’s *The Taming of The Shrew*, finds him imitating European classical music more deliberately than usual, both in style and form. Several songs written for that show, including “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” and “Were Thine That Special Face” follow the example of their quasi-Shakespearean lyrics and “smack musically of an earlier century,” certainly drawing on the education in European classical music that Porter gained in his youth and young adulthood.\(^23\) The success of *Kiss Me, Kate*, which was unmatched in Porter’s career—the show ran over 1000 performances on Broadway—can thus be seen at least partially as a result of the formal musical training he was privileged to receive.\(^24\)

In addition to his access to both musical and nonmusical education, Porter’s wealth also gave him the luxury of developing his craft over a relatively long formative period. As late as 1927, when Porter was in his mid-thirties, he was confronted with the fact that his output to this point included nothing to indicate “more than amateur standing.”\(^25\) It was not until 1934’s *Anything Goes*, which opened when Porter was forty-three, that Porter achieved a reputation to rival the other great composers of the Broadway stage at the time, including the notably younger Richard

\(^{23}\) Citron 218
\(^{24}\) Citron 219
\(^{25}\) Citron 72
Rodgers and George Gershwin. Beyond the simple fact—articulated boldly by the critics of the day—that his early songs were generally not of remarkable quality, Porter’s ambition for professionalism took time to develop. In discussing Porter’s summer spent entertaining tourists for free on a boat in Lake Maxinkuckee, Citron writes:

Cole was too torn between dilettantism – the reluctance to take money for his work – and the desire to feel professional, to be paid. This was to cause him much anxiety. Perhaps if he had truly needed a job he might have turned professional, as did Gershwin, Kern, Berlin and Coward, and found his true songwriting niche and the acceptance of his peers he had sought so desperately many years earlier.

Not needing income and unsure whether selling his songs would enhance or cheapen their personal value for him, Porter disregarded broad commercial appeal and focused on entertaining a small niche audience. Even after his graduation from Yale, much of his early music would concern not only the wealthy urban elite, but specifically “Yalies”, as the show We’re All Dressed Up and Don’t Know Huerta Go, whose archaic and problematic plot features Yale undergrads as protagonists and Mexican revolutionaries as villains, readily demonstrates.

It was only much later, with 1936’s Red, Hot and Blue, which Porter conceded to a reporter was written “for the understanding and enjoyment of about eighteen other people, all of whom are first-nighters anyway,” that Porter would acknowledge and begin to counteract his tendency to cater to narrow audiences. Somewhat paradoxically, however, many of Porter’s most popular songs to this day are the ones

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26 Citron 135
27 Wilder 224-225, Citron 38
28 Citron 15
29 Citron 36
30 Citron 141
so often described as “sophisticated” or “urbane,” which were written about and for his own social set. As Wilder points out, “Porter’s most quoted lines are all the East Side New York sophisticated kind.”31 The success of these songs would not have been possible without Porter’s lifelong financial security, which allowed him to write for a small group of peers rather than for a mass audience. In both his allusion- and innuendo-filled lyrics and his intricate melodies, harmonies, and song structures, Porter’s music is complex, at times even arcane. However, due in part to the narrow audience for whom he often wrote, Porter was free to write unabashedly sophisticated music and lyrics, a freedom available to him because his primary goal was self-fulfillment rather than self-sustainment.

II. Religion

Cole Porter’s religious background was another quality that set him apart from the majority of his contemporaries in musical theater. Irving Berlin, the Gershwin Brothers, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Harold Arlen, and numerous other successful Broadway composers and lyricists of Porter’s generation were raised Jewish. Porter, on the other hand, was raised Episcopalian. Although he occasionally mentions God or gods in his lyrics (“Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” and “What Is This Thing Called Love?” are two examples), there is little indication that religion was a central part of his adult life, and Citron notes that Porter took religion “with a grain of salt.”32 However, whether or not he bought into the belief system, Porter’s identity as a non-Jew is important in understanding his relationship to his time period and his contemporaries.

31 Wilder 223
32 Citron 5
There has been considerable speculation as to Porter’s relationship to Jewish people and Jewish music, much of which stems from a story in Richard Rodgers’ autobiography in which Porter told Rodgers that he had found writing “Jewish tunes” to be the key to success on Broadway. Rodgers then asserts, “It is surely one of the ironies of musical theater that, despite the abundance of Jewish composers, the one who has written the most enduring ‘Jewish’ music should be an Episcopalian millionaire who was born on a farm in Peru, Indiana,” naming several minor-key Porter songs as evidence.33 Interpretations of this statement vary widely, from those who take Porter at his word (including Rodgers himself) to the likes of Stephen Citron, who asserts that Porter’s ostensibly Jewish sound—especially the fluctuation between major and minor tonalities—bears a greater resemblance to “the ambivalent French chansons popular around Pigalle than true Yiddish music.”34 Indeed, any wholesale generalization that a certain musical feature necessarily hails from a particular culture is inherently problematic. However, it is worth examining the qualities often seen to represent a Jewish sound in Porter’s music in order to elucidate some of the wide variety of musical styles that influenced his songwriting.

Jack Gottlieb argues in his book Funny, It Doesn’t Sound Jewish that the melodic use of augmented seconds and the appearance of the flat-sixth scale degree in the music of Porter are evidence of his imitation or appropriation of the Ahavara baba mode and its “ghettolike connotations.”35 Gottlieb posits that songs including “My Heart Belongs to Daddy”, “Love for Sale”, “Begin the Beguine”, and “What Is This

34 Citron 101-102, see also Schwartz 118
Thing Called Love?” all bear elements that can be traced to Yiddish and Hebrew musical traditions and can be seen as evidence of Porter’s attitude toward Jews, which he asserts was a combination of anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism.  

Perhaps his strongest example is the song “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” whose bridge ends with a melisma on the word “daddy” that moves between the major seventh, minor sixth, and fifth of the song’s key of G minor, a moment which Gottlieb argues plays on the “unsavory rich-Jew-with-mistress caricature.”  

Given that Porter’s relationship with Jews was questionable—although he shared a mutual admiration with his Jewish contemporaries, Schwartz notes that “Cole’s really close friends were invariably not Jewish”—it is certainly possible that this moment was indeed playing on stereotype.  

However, as Citron asserts, observers of Porter’s use of minor-key melodies “may have confounded ‘Jewishness’ with ‘Russianness’ or ‘Frenchness’.”  

Indeed, the elements that Gottlieb and others use as examples of Porter’s integration or appropriation of Jewish music can often be seen just as easily as evidence of other aims entirely. As section III of this chapter will explore, the oscillation between parallel major and minor tonalities in “What Is This Thing Called Love?” can be seen to bear as much resemblance to African-American blues-based musics as it can to Jewish musics. As chapter 2 will illustrate, the augmented second at the end of the verse of “Love for Sale” can be seen as an example of Porter’s association between chromaticism and sexual content as much as it can be seen to

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36 Gottlieb 191  
37 Gottlieb 187  
38 Citron 84  
39 Schwartz 118  
40 Citron 167
reflect the “stereotype impression of small Jewish businessmen.”\textsuperscript{41} According to Porter’s own account, the chief melodic influence on “Begin the Beguine” came from Kalabahi, Indonesia, a decidedly non-Jewish locale.\textsuperscript{42} Gottlieb uses the song “So In Love” as an example of the use of the flat-sixth scale degree, asserting that the F-flat that appears over an Eb7 chord accompanying the word “joy” in measure 42 contains implications of a Jewish sound.\textsuperscript{43} However, that is a single isolated note within a lengthy and melodically varied song, one whose lyrics have nothing to do with Jewish people, religion, or stereotypes. Additionally, as chapter 2 will show, that note can be understood as a part of the steady melodic development of that song, whereby new apex notes are gradually introduced as the song progresses and gains intensity.

Cole Porter did not write music in a vacuum, and he was certainly influenced by a wide range of musics, as the examples throughout this essay illustrate. But Porter’s claim that the secret to success on Broadway was writing “Jewish tunes” reflects above all that Porter was a student of the Broadway literature. He was influenced by the music that surrounded him, be it the music he encountered during his education, the music he discovered while traveling around the world (see section IV), or—of course—the American popular music of the day. This last category necessarily included the music of the numerous Jewish composers who lived and worked during the same period that Porter did. To extrapolate from the specifics of Porter’s musical language that he harbored resentment for Jews is no easy task. However, like his wealth, his religious background made him an outlier among

\textsuperscript{41} Gottlieb 187
\textsuperscript{42} Citron 136
\textsuperscript{43} Gottlieb 99
American theater composers of the day, and should thus be understood as an element of his individual identity, musical and otherwise.

III. Sexuality

Although it may not have made him as much of an outlier among the world of Broadway as his religious or financial background, Cole Porter’s sexuality was another defining element of his identity. He was homosexual during a period when homosexuality was grounds not only for social rejection, but even prosecution in the United States. Although the legality of homosexuality varied in France and elsewhere among Porter’s global travel locations, the social climate was still such that it was necessary for Porter and others like him to keep their sexuality hidden from the public. Although he engaged in covert affairs throughout his life with a wide variety of men, as Joseph Morella and George Mazzei’s book Genius & Lust outlines in detail, Porter spent most of his adult life in what was by all accounts a loving (though platonic) marriage with his wife, Linda. That Porter’s sexuality influenced his music is inevitable given that unlike his wealth and religion (both of which placed him in positions of power and security in 20th century American society) his sexuality represented a threat to his livelihood and—even more important to Porter—a threat to his acceptance in society at large.

The influence of Porter’s sexuality on his songwriting can be seen perhaps most clearly in his lyrics. Although popular attitudes toward sexuality dictated that the characters for whom he wrote were necessarily heterosexual, reflections of

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Porter’s own attitudes can often be seen in his lyrics, including his opinions on love, sex, marriage, and relationships. His songs were invariably written for specific musicals or films, but they were often recycled from one show to the next, and the most enduring ones tend to be those whose topics concern romance in general terms, songs that are easily applicable to a wide variety of situations and personages. “What Is This Thing Called Love?”, “Night and Day”, “I Love You”, and “True Love” are but a few obvious examples. Because of this, the content of Porter’s songs can often be seen to reflect his own identity. As Citron asserts, “[Porter’s] songs never revealed his characters in the way they illuminated himself.”47 To that end, Porter’s lyrics contain many references to love and sex, often treating these topics with ambivalence. As Morella and Mazzei assert, his songs “always exhibit a delicious foreboding, a tortured longing and a wretched suffering over the thing that must always be just out of reach.”48 The distinction between daytime longing and nighttime passion is one common way that Porter expresses this ambivalence, as the following lines from “All Through the Night” illustrate:49

When dawn comes to waken me,
You’re never there at all.
I know you’ve forsaken me,
Until the shadows fall.
Then all through the night,
I am lost in your love...

Other Porter songs, including “Let’s Misbehave”, “Experiment”, “My Heart Belongs to Daddy”, and “But in the Morning, No” all similarly sanction nocturnal transgressions from diurnal virtue. In many of these songs, Porter reinforces this

47 Citron 74
48 Morella & Mazzei 43
49 Morella & Mazzei 7
lyrical content through melodic chromaticism, as section I of chapter 2 illustrates. Although they need not necessarily be interpreted as such by a listening audience, these lyrics can be seen as a reflection of Porter’s own position as a man whose public persona as a married man was based at least in part on the need to cover up his forbidden homosexual affairs. The longing in Porter’s lyrics can certainly be seen to reflect his identity as a closeted homosexual man; however, it is a longing that is not exclusive to homosexuals. As Morella and Mazzei put it, “The emotions he writes about are universal ... his songs are like beautiful blank cards that let you fill in your own personal message.”  

Thus, although his sexuality influenced the content of his songs, it did not narrow, but rather widened the scope of his audience.

As section I of this chapter illustrates, Porter was deeply concerned with achieving the approval of his peers. Beginning in his youth at Worcester Academy, it became clear to Porter that it was music, rather than athletics (the more common means to acceptance at Worcester) that gave him the best opportunity to impress his classmates. This behavior continued through his time at Yale, and throughout his life, as his desire to entertain people with his words and music remained an essential element of his personality. Morella and Mazzei argue that his homosexuality fueled this desire for acceptance through music:

He had something to hide, something that made him rejectable if discovered. Therefore he had to derail any possible suspicions and make a big splash in another area so the subject of his gayness would never come up. He would be “in” and no one would start looking for reasons to reject him.

\[50\] Morella & Mazzei 153
\[51\] Citron 14-15
\[52\] Morella & Mazzei 4
Although it was certainly not his sexuality alone that fueled this desire, the constant risk of rejection that was unavoidable for any homosexual person in early 20th century America certainly contributed to the insecurity that drove Porter to hone his craft and become a respected songwriter.

Porter’s sexuality had another important, if indirect, effect on his life and music in that it significantly widened the range of people with whom he interacted. As Morella and Mazzei point out, “being homosexual meant belonging to a special private underground club, a secret fraternity.”\(^53\) Unlike the narrow, elite social set with whom Porter interacted publically, this community included “people from all walks of life ... rich or poor, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, or sex.”\(^54\)

Although many of Porter’s lyrics do deal with the elite, he also wrote songs which critiqued the behavior of this group, including “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” and “Well, Did You Evah?” both of which disparage the effete wealthy class’s materialism through satire. The 1930 song “Love for Sale” provides an even clearer example of Porter’s lyrical engagement with those at the margins of society. Sung by a prostitute who is both advertising her services and subtly decrying her profession, having “been through the mill of love,” “Love for Sale” demonstrates the influence of Porter’s dealings with people far outside the socialite community to which he publicly belonged. Cole Porter was no stranger to the world of prostitution, frequenting at least one Harlem brothel, and generally seeking out for his covert affairs men of “a class lower than his own.”\(^55\) Despite the implicit segregation of the time, many of Porter’s partners were African-American, and compared to the rampant racism of the time,

\(^{53}\) Morella & Mazzei 11
\(^{54}\) ibid.
\(^{55}\) Morella & Mazzei 6
Porter was relatively kind toward African-Americans. This was particularly true in Porter’s interactions with fellow entertainers like Ada “Bricktop” Smith and Leslie Hutchinson.56 Perhaps due in part to his interactions with and predilection for African-Americans, Porter’s music can be seen to borrow elements from African-American music culture.

For example, the 1929 song “What Is This Thing Called Love?” begins with the performance note, “Slow (in the manner of a “blues”)”. It then continues to include several musical elements which are often associated with the styles that fit under the umbrella of blues-based musics, including a tonality that is neither distinctly major nor minor, frequent use of the flatted third and seventh, seventh-chord harmony based on the first, fourth, and fifth scale degrees, and a sorrowful lyric (see examples 13-15). However, the term “blues” encompasses more than simply musical devices. As Amiri Baraka points out in his article “The ‘Blues Aesthetic’ and the ‘Black Aesthetic,’” blues-based musics reflect the history and culture of African-Americans that began with centuries of slavery and oppression. Baraka asserts that blues is more than merely a 12-bar song form, but rather that “blues is first a feeling, a sense—knowledge.”57 Whether Cole Porter’s “What Is This Thing Called Love?” reflects this aesthetic or merely appropriates elements of it is difficult to say with certainty. However, the fact that of all of Porter’s compositions “What Is This Thing Called Love” is the one that has appealed most to African-American musicians from Leslie Hutchinson to Bobby Short, and from James P. Johnson to Charlie Parker,

becoming the eighth-most recorded standard of all time according to JazzStandards.com, may indicate that it does reflect a more than superficial understanding of African-American music and culture.\textsuperscript{58} Either way, it is clear that Porter’s exposure to people outside his own peer group, due at least in part to his homosexuality, also contributed to his musical identity.

IV. Travel

Cole Porter was born in Peru, Indiana, making him one of the only Broadway composers of his generation to be born and raised in the rural Midwest rather than the urban Northeast. His birthplace was a fact about which Porter was often less than enthusiastic. Once he left Indiana to enroll at Worcester Academy, he would return to Peru only when absolutely necessary and never for a significant amount of time. As Citron notes, “So rarely did he mention his family and life in Peru that most of his classmates in the Academy thought he was an orphan.”\textsuperscript{59} Porter’s reluctance in mentioning his hometown can be seen as a result of his desire to live outside the reach of his grandfather’s expectations (which had little place for music) as well as his desire to fit in with the urban elite he encountered on the East Coast. However, it can also be seen as a result of his insatiable appetite for travel. As Citron notes, beginning with Porter’s 1909 trip to Paris, “there was hardly a year when he did not travel or a part of the globe he did not visit, take notes on and chronicle in lyrics and song.”\textsuperscript{60} Moss Hart, who wrote the “book” (libretto) to Porter’s 1935 musical \textit{Jubilee}, writes, “He was an indefatigable sightseer, a tourist to end all tourists. Everything held an

\textsuperscript{58} "What Is This Thing Called Love?" \textit{Jazz Standards Songs and Instrumentals (What Is This Thing Called Love?)}. JazzStandards.com, n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2013.
\textsuperscript{59} Citron 13
\textsuperscript{60} Citron 16
interest for him.” The music he encountered on his travels was, of course, no exception. Indeed, his music often bears the influence of the places he visited, and although he was in his background perhaps the most prototypically middle American of his generation of composers, Hyland argues that “there was little of the quintessential American music in Porter’s work that could be found in Berlin or Gershwin.” Again, it is difficult to say with certainty what musical features qualify as “American,” or as relating to any specific nationality or identity group. However, by Porter’s own accounts, his lyrical and musical content often stems at least in part from the music and culture that he encountered during his many trips to a wide variety of distant locales.

Porter often told stories recounting the specific geographic origins of his songs. However, as Schwartz points out, these stories vary from one telling to the next, even when referring to a single song. For example, Porter once claimed that the song “Night and Day” was inspired by music he heard in Morocco. However, he later claimed that the song’s composition took place over two days in his Ritz-Carleton apartment and on a beach in Newport, Rhode Island. It is certainly possible that Porter, ever the entertainer, told these stories for their entertainment value as much as their accuracy. It is equally possible that he forgot or misremembered the circumstances of some of his songs’ composition. However, more important than the anecdotal specifics of his songwriting is the fact that his stories reveal, whether or not

62 Hyland 175
63 Schwartz 143
64 Schwartz 142
65 ibid.
they are inconsistent: that Porter had a strong curiosity for the music of people and places outside his own cultural sphere, as his music often demonstrates.

Likely the most characteristic evidence of these influences on Porter’s music can be seen in his frequent use of the beguine rhythm. Beginning, fittingly, with his 1935 song “Begin the Beguine,” Porter would write numerous songs whose accompaniments followed that song’s template of bass notes on beats 1, 3, and 4, with every offbeat emphasized in the right hand.

![Ex. 1: “Begin the Beguine” (1935) Intro mm. 1-4.](image)

Citron asserts that Porter was alone responsible for the term “beguine” becoming part of the vocabulary of Broadway, with many of his songs after 1935 having “languorous melodies that were invariably performed in ‘tempo di Beguine’.”

Allen Forte agrees, asserting, “Among the population at large—the informed population, that is—the latter title [“Begin the Beguine”] is practically synonymous with Porter.”

Schwartz notes the hybrid origin of the song by quoting several somewhat different stories that Porter provided in letters and interviews. By all accounts, Porter

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67 Citron 136
wrote the song during his trip around the world in 1935, although the idea behind the title and the central rhythm seems to date from significantly earlier. Porter wrote in a more than one personal letter that the song’s origin can be traced to Paris, where he saw a group of Martiniquais dancers perform a “native dance called The Beguine, in a remote nightclub on the left bank of the Seine.” Porter wrote that he was “very much taken by the rhythm of the dance,” and that he immediately thought of “Begin the Beguine” as a good song title. It was only a decade later, travelling around the world while writing Jubilee, that he would revive the title after seeing another “native dance,” this time in Kalabahi, Indonesia. Inspired by the melody he heard in Kalabahi, Porter thought again of his old title and wrote the song, “Begin the Beguine,” drawing on the rhythm he had heard earlier in Paris. This story of hybridity of influence is illustrative of more than this single song. It demonstrates a significant part of the reason that Porter’s stories about the origin of his songs often vary: his music (as any) was necessarily the result not only of the particular location in which he composed it, but of a combination of varied musical influences, which included but were certainly not limited to music he was exposed to while travelling.

Whether Porter’s integration of the Beguine rhythm or any other “exotic” musical element constitutes deference to or cooptation of the cultures of the peoples from whom the music originates is not entirely clear. On the one hand, both the rhythm and melody of the song are, by Porter’s own admission, taken directly from other sources, and although he acknowledges that fact, authorship credit (and the financial and historical implications thereof) is given to Porter alone. Additionally, as

69 Schwartz 143
70 ibid.
71 ibid.
many of Porter’s beguine songs illustrate, his use of the rhythm often coincides with exoticized lyrics evoking a glamorous locale that in most cases has little to do with the actual origin of the style. For example, in *Jubilee*, “Begin the Beguine” is sung in the midst of a show about the British royal family, with the song referencing “tropical splendor” in the way Porter himself experienced it: as a sightseer. The 1936 song, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” also with a beguine accompaniment, is sung by the doomed love interest Lucy, who functions as the femme fatale counterpart to the main love interest, Nora. Again, there is no reference to the geographic or cultural roots of the sound, but the contrast between the unusual beguine rhythm of Lucy’s ballad and the conventional foxtrot of Nora’s ballad “Easy to Love” reinforces Lucy’s role as the “other,” and foreshadows her ultimate failure to woo the protagonist, Ted. Although the 1944 beguine song “I Love You” contains a more direct tie to a specific geography, it is an erroneous one, with the song being sung by an American man to a Mexican woman in the midst of a score that is a hodgepodge of varied styles, including standard Broadway fare as well as the occasionally tango-tinged “Sing to Me Guitar”. Clearly, Porter was more concerned with the abstract feeling that the beguine evoked than the accuracy of its use as a cultural reference.

At the same time, however, there is no indication of Porter holding any animosity or disparagement toward the music cultures from which he borrowed. In fact, by every account, he was captivated by them, as his lifelong desire to visit new places shows. Additionally, his use of lyrical and musical references to various peoples and cultures made them accessible to a broad worldwide audience who might otherwise never have been exposed to them. In this way, Porter’s relationship with
the beguine and other exoticized musical and lyrical references ought not to be viewed purely as one of cultural appropriation, but rather as one more of the wide range of influences that together constituted his individual musical identity.
Chapter 2: “A Tune to the Moon Above” (Melody)

In his 1977 biography, Cole Porter, Charles Schwartz writes of Porter’s compositional process:

Cole, unlike most popular composers of his generation, did not start out by doodling at the piano. He generally first thought through the basic lyrics and melody of a song away from the piano. Only after he was satisfied with his material did he try it out at the piano. Cole could work this way because of his rather substantial musical training and experience—for a popular songwriter, that is—and his good ear.72

This description once again illustrates the lyric-centric tendency of Porter’s songwriting as well as another equally important fact: after forming an initial idea, Porter would write melody and lyrics simultaneously. This was a freedom not available to many of his contemporaries, who wrote in teams, making a truly synchronized approach to melody and lyrics impossible. The simultaneous composition of lyrics and melody allowed Porter to use them as two parts of a unified whole whose aim was always communicating narrative and emotional substance to an audience. It also led to a primacy of melody as compared to other musical qualities, an inclination that was perhaps first instilled in him during his studies with Vincent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, who “emphasized subordination of harmony to the melodic line.”73 Any discussion of Cole Porter’s music, then, must begin as Porter began when writing it—with the melody. This chapter will examine the ways in which some of Porter’s most characteristic melodic techniques—chromaticism, repeated notes, and melodic development—help create and strengthen meaning in some of his best and most popular songs.

72 Schwartz 170
73 Hyland 165
I. Chromaticism

Cole Porter is well known for his risqué lyrics, which led in multiple cases to his songs being banned from radio play or otherwise censored. Songs like “Love for Sale” were deemed too suggestive to be heard on the air, a fact that, according to Wilder, “pleased Porter highly.”⁷⁴ In an era in which overt sexual content was too edgy for Broadway but covert sexual content was crucial to selling tickets, Porter used every tool in his arsenal to keep writing the outrageous songs for which he would become famous. However, with lyrics falling under scrutiny, Porter relied in part on the interplay between melody and lyrics to convey sexual content. Using a technique employed earlier by European classical composers, particularly in opera, Porter equated melodic chromaticism with sexuality. Susan McClary asserts in her book *Feminine Endings* that opera composers often used melodic chromaticism to characterize the usually feminine “other” as opposed to the masculine, diatonic protagonist. She uses Bizet’s *Carmen* and its title character as an example of chromaticism contributing to the portrayal of a sexualized outsider.⁷⁵ In addition to his education in European classical music (outlined in chapter 1), Porter was “an ardent operaphile,” making it all but certain that he encountered this technique in Bizet’s music or elsewhere.⁷⁶ Sure enough, as Wilder notes, “One of the most marked characteristics of Porter’s style is the use of chromatic lines in both his melodies and harmonies.”⁷⁷ The use of chromaticism in the songs of Cole Porter is, in fact, more

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⁷⁴ Wilder 229
⁷⁶ Citron 296
⁷⁷ Wilder 235
than merely a stylistic trait—it is a crucial tool that Porter uses in achieving his goal of communicating meaning to his audience.

“Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love,” written in 1928 for the musical Paris, was one of Porter’s first hits, and a song that helped establish him as a songwriter of great sophistication and wit. Early manuscripts of this song show that its title went through several transformations, including the plain double-entendre “Let’s Do It.” It is likely that the extended title, “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love,” came from an effort to soften the song’s sexual connotation, which is clearly evident despite the fact that the lyric reads literally as an ode to falling in love. As biographer William McBrien points out, Porter cleverly makes the sexual content implicit: “Porter plays a trick on the audience: we first think the antecedent of ‘it’ is sex, but the faux naïf speaker is more loftily proposing not sex but love.” Porter underscores the comic double-entendres that fill the lyric by making extensive use of chromaticism in the melody.

“Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” begins with a verse whose melody is entirely diatonic. For the first sixteen measures, every note in the melody fits into the tonic major scale (Bb major), as the lyrics outline a simple setting of the scene:

When the little blue bird who has never said a word
Starts to sing, “Spring, spring”
When the little blue bell in the bottom of the dell
Starts to ring, “Ding, ding”
When the little blue clerk in the middle of his work
Starts a tune to the moon above
That is nature, that’s all, simply telling us to fall in love.

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78 Hyland 166
79 See the Cole Porter Collection at the Yale University’ Irving S. Gilmore Music Library
80 McBrien 121
81 Porter 12-13
When the refrain arrives, the chromaticism of the melody creates an immediately noticeable contrast. The refrain’s melody is built around a motif that Stephen Citron describes as “three sly descending chromatic pitches” (G, Gb, and F), which accompany the many lines listing types of animals and people who “do it.” As ex. 2 illustrates, this motif appears starting on G in the first, second, fifth, and sixth bars of the A sections of this AABA song. In the third measure of the refrain (and again in m. 11 and slightly varied in m. 27), the lyric “Even educated fleas” is set with an ascending line that includes several chromatic neighbor and passing tones, together containing all but one chromatic pitch between F# and the C above it. After climbing to C in the fourth measure, the three-note chromatic motif is repeated, transposed up a perfect fourth.

Ex. 2: “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” (1928) Refrain mm. 1-8.

Within each phrase, the melody is entirely stepwise until the seventh measure of the refrain, when a descending minor third appears between F and D. It is no coincidence that the first non-stepwise melodic motion appears at an important structural moment in the lyric: “let’s fall in love,” where it is revealed that the speaker is referring to love rather than sex. This D is also the lowest note in this section, giving it even greater

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82 Citron 286
83 Porter 14
structural significance. Thus, where innuendo is accompanied by largely chromatic stepwise melodic motion, discussion of love is set with broader diatonic motion. The apex notes of each short phrase in the bridge likewise form a descending chromatic line, beginning on Bb and continuing to A, Ab, G, Gb, and finally F, as the innuendos continue to escalate:  

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Ex. 3: “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” (1928) Refrain mm. 17-24.  
Sung by a prostitute in the musical The New Yorkers, “Love for Sale” uses the word “love” to signify sex, in much the same way the earlier “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” did, since a direct reference would have been unacceptable at the time. In fact, even the song’s indirect references were grounds for censorship. Like the earlier song, “Love for Sale” begins with a verse whose melody avoids chromaticism. Although in this case the melodic pitches are not all in a single key, the wandering harmony makes this all but impossible. Instead, Porter creates contrast with the forthcoming chromaticism by using almost exclusively chord tones, with only two notes in the first eight measures of the melody being anything but the root, third, or fifth (or at one point in m.5, the seventh) of the accompanying chord. This fits with
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84 Wilder 226
85 Porter 15
the lyric, which like the verse of “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” is merely setting the scene:

When the only sound in the empty street
Is the heavy tread of the heavy feet
That belong to a lonesome cop… 86

The first non-chord tone is an insignificant pickup F over an Ab7 chord in m. 5, which although it is not in the chord is short in duration and is diatonic to the key that the chord implies. The next non-chord tone is more significant: in m. 8, the first syllable of “open” in the line “I open shop” is accompanied by a Gb over an F7 chord. This dissonant note, whether viewed as a chromatic upper neighbor or an altered extension (flat ninth) of the F7 chord, is foregrounded by its duration (a dotted quarter note) and rhythmic position (the downbeat of beat three) and makes the otherwise innocuous line “I open shop” into a reference to the particular sort of shop the speaker is referring to in the song. The refrain is mostly diatonic, perhaps contributing to what Wilder describes as an “attempt to prettify a rather drab profession.” 87

The chromaticism returns, however, at the most important lyrical moment in the song, the last four bars of the bridge, whose lyrics, “Old love, new love, any love but true love,” are accompanied by an entirely chromatic melody, moving downward from Db to Bb. This is an important moment because it is the only place where the lyric acknowledges that equating love with sex is not entirely accurate, and that the love the speaker of the song is selling is not of the pure, diatonic kind.

86 Porter 25
87 Wilder 230
“Night and Day” is another enduring example of Porter’s early songwriting, and another instance of his alternate use of chromatic and diatonic melodic movement to reinforce lyrical content. The lyric revolves around the speaker’s obsession with the subject. Unlike the previous examples, the lyrics of “Night and Day” focus on a visceral evocation of attraction rather than a declaration of love. This makes “Night and Day” a strong example of Porter’s sexualized use of chromaticism. The melodic motion of this song generally fits into three categories: ascending leaps, descending chromatic lines, and repeated notes (see Section II of this chapter for a discussion of repeated notes in this and other Porter songs). After a verse of almost entirely repeated notes, the refrain makes frequent use of chromaticism in the melody, most noticeably in the descending phrase shown below in example 5. This phrase begins on a G and descends to Gb, F, E, Eb, D, C, and B, before resolving to a low Bb. With the exception of Db, this phrase includes every chromatic note in the minor sixth span from G to Bb. At the same time, the root motion descends chromatically as well, from Ab to F, intensifying the chromatic effect. (The root motion at the end of the verse similarly descends through the chromatic scale, serving the same purpose).

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88 Porter 27-28
Ex. 5: “Night and Day” (1932) Refrain mm. 9-16.

As in the earlier examples, melodic movement is here used to imply a shade of meaning beyond what is stated literally in the lyric, creating a darker side to the speaker’s obsession. This melodic phrase recurs in the second A section for the lines “In the roaring traffic’s boom, in the silence of my lonely room, I think of you,” and in the last A section for the phrase shown in example 6 below. In this case, the melody is varied slightly to include all chromatic pitches between G and C (including the D, Db, and C, which are displaced up by an octave).

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89 Porter 31-32
The 1934 musical *Anything Goes* was the pinnacle of Porter’s early popularity, producing a number of standards including “I Get a Kick Out of You,” “All Through The Night,” “You’re the Top,” and the title song “Anything Goes.” As Hyland points out, Porter (who would continue publishing music for over twenty years) would “suffer by comparison with his own record” since *Anything Goes* was “not easy to equal.” Of the handful of well-known songs to emerge from *Anything Goes*, easily the most melodically adventuresome is “All Through the Night,” which Wilder describes as “fearfully complex for a theater song, unexpectedly moving into new keys and of twice the conventional length” and with an “almost totally chromatic melody.” The verse is built from a Porter trademark that will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, the interplay of parallel major and minor. As with some of the earlier songs that employ melodic chromaticism, the melody of the verse to “All Through the Night” is comparatively conventional – the first twelve measures use only the notes F and C, and contain a large number of repeated notes despite the shifting harmony. Although the song modulates to F minor (the parallel minor of the home key, F major) in the last eight measures of the verse, the melody remains conservative:

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90 Porter 33
91 Hyland 174
92 Wilder 235
completely diatonic and built of mostly repeated notes. Again, Porter describes an affair using “love” as a stand-in for sex, although the intended meaning is never obscure, a fact which chromatic melodic movement again helps to communicate. The main theme of the refrain is a pure chromatic scale descending from A to C shown below.

Ex. 7: “All Through The Night” (1934) Refrain mm. 1-8.\(^{93}\)

Wilder points out that “In the course of its sixty-four measures there are only eight melodic steps that are not chromatic,” and as this song focuses almost entirely on physical attraction, this emphasis on chromaticism seems to be a natural choice by Porter.\(^{94}\)

Although the above examples are limited to Porter’s early career, this pattern persists through his later songs as well, including “It’s All Right With Me,” written for one of Porter’s last stage musicals, 1953’s Can-Can. This song has no verse, consisting entirely of a 72-measure chorus. However, it still follows the earlier pattern of diatonic melodic material giving way to chromaticism as the song progresses.

\(^{93}\) Porter 39
\(^{94}\) Wilder 235
The melody in the first seven measures is entirely diatonic to C minor, as the speaker assures himself that the woman he is considering is wrong for him: “It’s the wrong time and the wrong place / though your face is charming, it’s the wrong face.”

However, as the mood shifts from persistent morality to resigned self-indulgence (“It’s not her face, but such a charming face that it’s all right with me”), non-diatonic notes are introduced, first in the lower neighbor B natural which sets the word “it’s,” and then more emphatically with the phrase “but such a charming face,” which uses stepwise chromatic movement and includes B natural again, as well as the decidedly non-diatonic C#.

Cole Porter’s oeuvre is rife with other examples of chromaticism underlining sexual content. His clever, ribald lyrics are often heralded as his trademark, but is clear from the close association between these lyrical ideas and chromatic melody that his lyrics are strengthened by their melodic setting, creating a unified work with a precision of meaning beyond what the lyrics alone could accomplish.

II. Repeated Notes

Wilder identifies repeated notes (along with quarter-note triplets) as “stylistic devices of Porter” to the extent that the use of them in other composers’ songs causes

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95 Porter 190-91
him to mistake them for Porter songs.\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, the songs of Cole Porter include numerous examples of melodic repetition, to the point that it can be an identifier of his work. Although Wilder tends to discuss repeated notes as a weak point of Porter’s (and other composers’) songs, it is clear from an examination of the lyrics that accompany repeated notes that their use is not lazy melody-writing, but rather another technique that Porter used to create and reinforce meaning.\textsuperscript{97} Porter’s use of repeated notes tends to create a feeling of stasis, which is then interrupted by the departure to the more adventuresome melodic movement that follows, usually emphasizing a moment of lyrical contrast.

Porter’s flair for wit and allusion made the list song a natural form for him, and indeed he wrote some of the most famous list songs in the history of musical theater. The early list song “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” helped establish Porter’s reputation as a lyricist of great sophistication early in his career. After “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love,” likely Porter’s next-best-known list song is “You’re the Top,” which premiered in 1934 in \textit{Anything Goes}. Like “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love”, “You’re the Top” is a love song whose central aim is humor rather than sincerity. The lyrics have a tendency toward the absurd, revolving around a list of escalating comparisons between the subject of the song and various historical, geographical, and fashionable superlatives:

\begin{quote}
You're the top!
You're the Coliseum.
You're the top!
You're the Louvre Museum.
You're a melody from a symphony by Strauss.
You're a Bendel bonnet, a Shakespeare sonnet,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{96} Wilder 79-80
\textsuperscript{97} Wilder 242-243
You're Mickey Mouse.  

The logic of escalation to a punch line that is so essential to the comedy of this lyric is reinforced through the use of repeated notes in the melody. The melody for the line, “You’re a Bendel bonnet, a Shakespeare sonnet, you’re…” consists of ten D naturals in a row. Thus, when Porter departs from D and jumps up to F, the last item in the list (in this case Mickey Mouse) is highlighted, and the comic effect of the increasing farcicality of the comparisons is strengthened.

![Ex. 9: “You’re the Top” (1934) Refrain mm. 13-15.](image)

Although the lyric itself does much of this work by building anticipation for the punch line, the repeated notes lull the listener into a melodic expectation paralleling the lyrical expectation. When the two expectations are violated simultaneously, the humor of the lyric is intensified.

An important formal quality of list songs like “You’re the Top” that distinguishes them from most love ballads is their length – although list songs tend to be no longer in their basic form, their wordier lyrics necessitate repetition, and multiple settings of the same music. If it is not clear from examining only the first chorus of “You’re the Top,” the subsequent choruses make it clear that Porter was keenly aware of the relationship between the melodic phrase and comic timing and escalation. In each repetition, the pattern established in the first chorus repeats, with the punch lines always appearing at the moment of melodic departure after a string of

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98 Porter 45-46  
99 ibid.
repeated notes sets comparatively less surprising references. Where most of the list items are superlative examples of art or popular culture, the punch lines (“cellophane,” “broccoli,” and “camembert”) are all relatively commonplace household products, intensifying the surprise even further.

“Get Out of Town,” which premiered as part of the musical Leave it to Me four years after Anything Goes opened, demonstrates a very different application of the same principle. Where “You’re the Top” is comic, “Get Out of Town” is dramatic; where “You’re the Top” deals with a speaker who is head over heels in love, “Get Out of Town” deals with one who is distrustful of love. However, in both songs, repeated notes are used to highlight the moment of departure when the melody finally does move. In the case of the latter song, the refrain begins with eight consecutive D’s, under the lyrics “Get out of town before it’s too…” The melody then moves up a major second to the non-diatonic E natural (in the key of G minor) as the phrase continues, “…late my love.” By delaying any melodic motion until the word “late,” Porter places emphasis on that word, and by setting it with a major sixth over a minor chord, he underlines the ominous flavor of the lyrics. Without the repeated notes preceding it, this lyrical moment would have less power. In the measures 9 and 10 of the refrain, where the same melodic material recurs, the moment of departure also emphasizes the multi-syllabic rhyme of “much too much” with “touch too much.”

This is one example of another way in which Porter takes advantage of repeated notes—reinforcing rhyme. Indeed, although Porter is famous for his rhyming ability, it is not only his facility with words, but also his ability to set them both

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100 Porter 114-116
rhythmically and melodically that makes his rhymes stand out among his contemporaries.

“Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” serves as another example of the role repeated notes play in reinforcing rhyme in Porter’s songs. This song’s refrain again begins with a single note being repeated several times. In this case, a G is repeated 8 times accompanying the title lyrics: “Ev’ry time we say goodbye, I…” The motion up a minor second to Ab that follows the series of G’s places emphasis on the word “die.” In contrast to the steady repeated notes that preceded it, the rhythmically weak falling eighth notes that accompany “a little” reinforce the meekness hinted in the lyric. These words are subordinated in importance not only to underline their mood, but also because they are repeated without modification in the consequent rhyming phrase “Ev’ry time we say goodbye, I wonder why a little.” By emphasizing the words “die” and “why” and deemphasizing “a little,” Porter turns an otherwise relatively simple rhyme (“die” with “why”) into a more complex multi-syllabic one (“die a little” with “why a little”).

Ex. 10: “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” (1944) Refrain mm. 1-8.101

101 Porter 142
The subtle internal rhyme between the consecutive words “I” and “die” is also emphasized by the use of repeated notes, since the unstressed “I” is given greater significance by its being the last in a series of repeated notes.

The feminine rhyme of “above me” with “of me” in measures 10 and 14 is similarly reinforced through the use of repeated notes. The rhyming syllable is not only emphasized rhythmically by its position on beat 1 of the measure, it is also in both cases foregrounded since it is the last in a series of repeated notes. In fact, both function as a sort of suspension, where a passing chord harmonizes an otherwise dissonant note held over from the previous measure (Eb over Bb7 or Cb over Eb major), which then resolves to a chord tone on the second beat, under the repeated word (“me”). Porter thus uses a combination of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic tools in order to make a conventional rhyme appear more inventive.

The verse from “Were Thine That Special Face,” written in 1948 for Kiss Me Kate, which Porter referred to as his “second perfect show” (after Anything Goes) is yet another example of the way repeated notes create stasis and highlight important moments of departure. The verse is marked “Quasi recitativo,” a natural choice given the lyrics:

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102 Citron 218

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The first 25 syllables of the lyric (mm. 1-8 above) are all set with the same melody note (G), creating a parallel between form and content, as the speaker discusses poetry in a manner that is as suggestive of reciting poetry as it is of singing. The quasi recitativo introduction also helps to smooth the ever-problematic transition in musical theater between spoken dialog and song. At the same time, the repeated notes also create the same sort of stasis and departure found in the aforementioned songs. After the insistent repetition of the same note for the first eight-plus measures, the moment of departure, when the melody ascends diatonically from G to D (“but of late my poem”), becomes a pivotal moment. This coincides with a marked shift in the mood of the lyric, from the speaker describing writing a tongue-in-cheek love poem to the realization that it “suddenly applies” to the subject of the song, an unexpected and uncynical realization of love.

The verse of “Night and Day” is also notable for its use of repeated notes, although in that case, they serve a mostly narrative rather than structural purpose. As

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103 Porter 164-65
was mentioned earlier in this chapter, “Night and Day” is a song about obsession. Citron notes that “its lyric ideas would have had to dictate the static quality of its melody,” as it begins by listing examples of unrelenting repetitive sounds with a highly repetitive melody:  

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Like the beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom
When the jungle shadows fall
Like the tick, tick, tock of the stately clock
As it stands against the wall
Like the drip, drip, drip of the raindrops
When the summer shower is through…
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Over mostly inconclusive, wandering harmony, Porter begins the song with 35 consecutive Bb’s in the melody. This recreates for the listener the experience being described in the lyric, especially since the grammatical structure of the single sentence that constitutes the entire verse creates tension through withholding meaning. By beginning with “like,” Porter creates an expectation of an object being compared with the beat of the tom-tom, the tick of the clock, and the drip of the raindrops, withholding the lyrical resolution until measure 13: “So a voice within me keeps repeating, ‘You, you, you.’” Through a combination of lyrical tension and repeated note melody, Porter thus creates anticipation for the upcoming chorus while simultaneously evoking musically the experience being described verbally.

It is not difficult to see why Wilder identifies repeated notes as a stylistic device of Cole Porter. He does indeed use them frequently across many of his best known and most often recorded songs from all stages of his career. Although in these moments unorthodox harmony or (more often) lyrics may be foregrounded, it is clear that it is not at the expense of melody. Rather, melodic stasis and movement are used

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904 Citron 298
905 Porter 30-31
to reinforce moments of structural importance, be they moments of transition, important rhymes, or moments whose narrative content makes repeated notes particularly relevant. Although Porter’s lyrical and chromatic pyrotechnics may get more attention among those who study his music, it is at times his restraint, his willingness to allow one element to recede into a supporting role, that resonates most with audiences, as the lasting popularity of many of the songs cited in this section demonstrates.

III. Melodic Development

The previous two sections have focused largely on melodic moments—devices unfolding over the course of anywhere from a few notes to a few measures. However, as Allen Forte points out in his essay “Secrets of Melody: Line and Design in the Song of Cole Porter,” Porter was also adept at creating larger-scale melodic structures across whole sections or even an entire song. An examination of local and global extremes of register (the apex [high point] and nadir [low point]) is but one way to demonstrate Porter’s dexterity at this practice. Although Forte touches on the relationship between melody and lyrics, his aim is an examination of the “‘purely musical substance’ of the songs of Cole Porter,” borrowing a term from Schoenberg. However, Porter’s music and lyrics are always linked, and melodic development in the songs of Cole Porter can often be seen to have a meaningful relationship to the lyrical content and intended meaning of the song, as the following examples show.

106 Forte 1993
107 Forte 1993: 607
Although it is not one of Forte’s examples in “Line and Design,” Porter’s 1948 ballad, “So In Love” is a prime example of the way Porter uses melodic development over the course of a song to create a gradual escalation of intensity. As Citron points out, the apex notes of each successive phrase in the song move steadily upward over the course of the song’s 72 measures.\(^\text{108}\) Despite Wilder’s personal dislike of the song, he cannot help but concede that it is “a perfectly written dramatic ballad, a treasure for any singer.”\(^\text{109}\) Indeed it is a precisely constructed song, one whose deliberate development compensates for its unusual length in sustaining listener interest. The song has no verse, consisting only of a 72-bar chorus whose form is an extended version of the standard AABA template. The first A section begins on middle C, before ascending rapidly to the section’s apex note, the Db a minor ninth higher, which sets the word “fill” in the line “the stars fill the sky, so in love with you am I.” The word “love,” in the title lyric that follows, which Forte notes is “always a keyword in a Porter song,” is set with a Bb.\(^\text{110}\) In the second A section, although it appears in the same structural location, the local apex note is pushed a whole-step higher to an Eb in m. 26, setting the first syllable of “darling.” When the word “love” recurs, it is also moved up a major second from Bb to C natural. Eight measures later, the apex of the bridge is another whole step higher, an Fb, which accompanies the word “joy.” The last A section is the most different from the original statement, including an 8-measure tag which repeats and extends the title lyric multiple times. However, the apex again appears in the same structural location within the section, and is again higher than the previous section’s apex. This time it is

\(^{108}\) Citron 306
\(^{109}\) Wilder 250
\(^{110}\) Forte 1993: 613
an F natural, which accompanies the word “till” in the line “I’m yours till I die.” The word “love” appears multiple times in the tag, first at its highest point anywhere in the song (Db), then descending chromatically to the same note on which it first appeared (Bb).

It is possible to interpret the melodic development in “So In Love” as “purely musical substance,” to use the Schoenberg term. However, there is strong evidence that these melodic design features do not exist in a musical vacuum, and in fact have a great deal to do with the lyrical content of the song. Although the song’s lyrics (below) contain no dramatic shifts in mood, they do gradually intensify as they unfold, from (in the first A section) the speaker’s love making her metaphorically see stars to (in the second A) the speaker embracing the subject even when he is not present, eventually to the more extreme assertion in the most dramatic last A section that the subject could taunt, hurt, deceive, or desert the speaker without diminishing her love.

Strange dear, but true dear,
When I’m close to you, dear,
The stars fill the sky,
So in love with you am I.

Even without you,
My arms fold about you,
You know darling why,
So in love with you am I.

In love with the night mysterious,
The night when you first were there,
In love with my joy delirious,
When I knew that you could care.

So taunt me, and hurt me,

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111 Forte 1993: 607
Deceive me, desert me,
I'm yours till I die
So in love, so in love,
So in love with you, my love, am I.\textsuperscript{112}

This gradual build in intensity is supported by the mounting melodic development, making the character’s subtle emotional intensification more authentic. At the end of the song, when the title lyric is repeated at chromatically descending pitch levels, Porter is able to shift the mood from passion to resignation without introducing any new lyrical ideas, fortifying the lyric even further.

The earlier song, “It’s De-Lovely” demonstrates a similar gradual melodic development, demonstrated by its progression of local apex notes. Although it has a more conservative 36-measure $AA_1BA_2$ form than “So In Love,” “It’s De-Lovely” has four complete sets of lyrics, which together tell the story of a romance from acquaintance all the way through to married life. As Citron notes, Porter, a keen entertainer, adhered to the notion that “each succeeding [chorus] must be more amusing” than the previous one.\textsuperscript{113} In a song like “It’s De-Lovely,” which covers so much narrative ground in such a short time, equivalent musical development is necessary to make the song both entertaining and believable. As in “So In Love,” Porter builds his melody from low to high to create this escalation. The first A section rises from its nadir, middle C, to the C an octave above it. The second A section ($A_1$) is transposed up a step from the home key of F major to G minor, with the melody spanning from D4 to D5 an octave above it. The bridge continues the upward climb (tonicizing the key of the subdominant B♭), with the widest range of any section to this point, from middle C to Eb5 a minor tenth above it. The last A section ($A_2$)

\textsuperscript{112} Porter 160-63
\textsuperscript{113} Citron 3
returns harmonically to the home key of F, although the melody is slightly altered to
include a wider range than the first A, reaching the D a ninth above middle C.
Although it does not reach an apex as high as the bridge, this last section can be seen
as climactic, spending seven consecutive bars alternating between A and C before
resolving down to the tonic, F. This downward resolution makes the transition back to
the lower tessitura of the first A section smoother. The pattern of melodic escalation
continues for the additional sets of lyrics. The final time the form is repeated, the
cadence to F4 is replaced with one to F5, an octave above, establishing a new apex
note at the very end of the song. Although the mood and purpose of this song are far
different from “So In Love,” “It’s De-Lovely” thus demonstrates the way that the
techniques of melodic escalation found in Porter’s great ballads were also applied
with success to his more upbeat comic songs, creating a musical arc to match its
narrative arc.114

“Begin the Beguine,” which was written in 1935 for the musical Jubilee, is in
many ways a similar song to “So In Love”. Both are dramatic love ballads, each with
a hint of despair. Both lack verses and have choruses of unusual length for theater
songs of the era (“So In Love” is 72 measures long and “Begin the Beguine” is 108,
as compared to the conventional 32-bar length). Additionally, both are excellent
examples of Porter’s precise melodic development. The form and lyrics of “Begin the
Beguine” are more complex than “So In Love,” thus it is natural that the melodic
development in “Begin the Beguine” is not as measured or mathematical as the
gradual climb described above. However, it is apparent that once again lyrical

114 Porter 80-85
meaning is closely supported by melodic development. The basic form of “Begin the Beguine” is $A_A, B_A, C_C, C_C$, with all but the last section being 16 measures long. Before delving into the melodic design of the song, it is necessary to understand the narrative progression of the lyrics. The first A section finds the speaker experiencing nostalgia for a lost love in reaction to others dancing the Beguine:

When they begin the beguine,
It brings back the sound of music so tender,
It brings back a night of tropical splendor,
It brings back a memory ever green.\textsuperscript{115}

Locally, the phrases in this section build in their melodic span and intensity as they become more specific and immediate, with the first phrase spanning from the nadir, middle C, to the G a perfect fifth above it, the next from C to the A a major sixth above it, and the next from D\textsuperscript{4} to the D an octave above it. The final line is nearly identical to the first, as the lyrics return from their imagistic digression and summarize the section in a single phrase. Each of the A sections—as well as the B section—follow this basic pattern of gradually building in range before a comparatively rapid melodic anticlimax. In a song as long as this, internal climaxes and anticlimaxes like these go a long way in keeping the listener’s interest.

A similar arc of rising and falling intensity occurs globally over the course of the entire song. The second A section ($A_i$) is lyrically related to the first, but intensified:

I’m with you once more under the stars,
And down by the shore, an orchestra’s playing,
And even the palms seem to be swaying,
When they begin the beguine.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Porter 68-73
\textsuperscript{116} ibid.
Here, the speaker is directly drawn into the memory that before was experienced only indirectly. This increase in immediacy is accompanied by melodic modifications that create a similar intensification: the phrase “even the palms seem to be swaying” (the furthest departure from reality) is transposed diatonically up a step from the equivalent phrase before, making the apex of this section (E) a step higher than the previous apex (D). The B section represents a shift in tone:

To live it again is past all endeavor,
Except when that tune clutches my heart,
And there we are swearing to love forever,
And promising never, never to part.\footnote{ibid.}

As the speaker recalls what the audience knows to be broken promises, the mood shifts from warm nostalgia to longing. This shift is underlined by a harmonic shift as well as a shift in melodic structure, especially in the second half of this section, where instead of returning to a phrase similar to the section’s opening phrase, Porter uses a descending sequence to create a sense of deflation in an otherwise less melancholy lyrical moment. Naturally, the apex of this section (Eb) is not a build, but a regression when compared to the previous sections, and the total range of this section (a minor tenth) is smaller than that of the previous section.

The last A section (A$_2$) makes explicit what was implied in the previous section, namely that these memories are vestiges of a long-gone past:

What moments divine, what rapture serene,
Till clouds came along to disperse the joys we had tasted,
And now when I hear people curse the chance that was wasted,
I know but too well what they mean.\footnote{ibid.}
The apex up to this point (E) is repeated, this time as the dissonant major seventh over an F minor chord, setting the strongest (or at least the most negative) verb in the lyric thus far, “curse.”

Although a typical theater song would end at this point, at the completion of the AABA form, Porter continues into perhaps the most distinctive portion of this song, the twin C sections. Both of these sections begin on C, the same note that the A and B sections began on (counting pickups). However, in the C sections, it is not middle C, but the C an octave above it, treble C. This section marks a shift in perspective for the speaker from observer to active participant, pleading that the dancers ought not to “begin the beguine” after all, thus preserving the memory recounted in the first part of the song:

So don’t let them begin the beguine.
Let the love that was once a fire remain an ember.
Let it sleep like the dead desire I only remember,
When they begin the beguine.\textsuperscript{119}

Where the use of the apex note E was previously limited to a single moment, it is repeated relentlessly in this section (12 times in 6 measures, shown in italics above). This reinforces the amplified urgency of this section. However, unlike the previous sections, which all had a generally ascending melodic arc, this section’s prevailing motion is downward, foreshadowing the speaker’s forthcoming relent from this request.

The final section of “Begin the Beguine” represents a change of heart. The speaker now concedes:

\textsuperscript{119} ibid.
Oh yes, let them begin the Beguine, make them play,
Till the stars that were there before return above you,
Till you whisper to me once more, “Darling, I love you”
And we suddenly know what heaven we’re in,
When they begin the Beguine.\(^{120}\)

But the melody tells us that the speaker is passionate rather than resigned in the desire
to restore the romance. It is the dramatic peak of the song, containing a new apex, F,
which sets the second syllable of the key word “before.” The length of this 28-
measure extended section allows Porter to diffuse the energy of the song’s climax as a
series of phrases imitative of the opening motif set the lyrical refrain, “when they
begin the beguine.” This is a song of extreme length and symphonic sweep, but due to
the careful melodic development, it never loses its energy.

With Porter’s tendency to follow primarily lyrical motives in his songs, it is
no surprise that his songs are popular among singers, both within and outside their
original staged contexts. However, their popularity as instrumental vehicles is less
predictable. Nevertheless, JazzStandards.com lists twenty-nine Porter songs among
the top one thousand most-recorded jazz standards—staples of the instrumental and
vocal repertoire—with eighteen of those falling in the top five hundred. (For
comparison, Irving Berlin, the other major composer-lyricist of the era, has twenty-
four songs in the top one thousand, although only eight of those are among the top
five hundred; the Gershwin Brothers have twenty-five songs listed in the top one
thousand).\(^{121}\) Despite Porter’s primary goal of communicating lyrical meaning to his
audience, his songs have been favorites among jazz musicians as well as singers, with

\(^{120}\) ibid.

\(^{121}\) Wilson, Jeremy. "Jazz Standards, Jazz History, Musicology, Biographies and Books.
many becoming standards of the instrumental repertoire. With the harmonic and rhythmic structures varying among jazz interpretations, it is a testament to the primacy and quality of his melodic writing that Porter’s songs have had such broad appeal.
Chapter 3: “How Strange the Change” (Harmony)

As chapter 1 outlined, Cole Porter had greater access to musical education than most of his contemporaries, including instruction in harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. It is thus somewhat surprising that Porter’s compositional process unfolded in a manner not dissimilar to that of Irving Berlin, who composed dozens of standards without ever learning to read music or play piano in more than one key, depending on assistants to write the harmony. According to Schwartz, Porter took a similar approach, composing complete lyrics and melody himself before calling on the assistance of any of several “musical secretaries” to notate the accompaniments for his melodies. It could be surmised based on his process that harmony was not a compositional concern of great importance for Porter, and indeed it is often subordinate to lyrics and melody alike in his classic songs. However, Schwartz also notes that Porter “was quite precise in what he wanted, and his instructions would be closely followed.” As Wilder asserts for Berlin, “it is very nearly impossible, upon hearing some of these melodies, to believe that every chord was not an integral part of the creation of the tune.” Like Berlin, Porter was highly selective in the harmony and accompaniment supplied by his assistants, and like Berlin’s melodies, Porter’s often “contain the implication of specific chord progressions.” As Forte points out, in the songs for which manuscripts in Porter’s own hand still exist, “the copyists’ copies are virtually identical to the Porter manuscript[s],” implying that harmony may

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123 Ibid.
124 Schwartz 171
125 Wilder 93
126 ibid.
have had a more central role in Porter’s composition process than Schwartz’s description alone might indicate.\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, although he worked with several musical assistants over the course of his career, the harmony in the songs of Cole Porter has a distinctive and consistent style throughout his career. Thus, it is safe to assume that his harmonic trademarks are indeed reflections of his own harmonic concept. Porter’s harmonies are often adventuresome, and like his melodies, they demonstrate a strong relationship with his lyrics.

In analyzing harmony, this paper will employ the system outlined in Berklee College of Music’s *Harmony 2, Harmony 3* and *Harmony 4* texts by Barrie Nettles and Alex Ulanowsky. This system differs somewhat from the Roman numeral analysis typically used in examining European classical music, a musical language related to but certainly distinct from Porter’s music. In the Berklee system all roman numerals are capitalized, with suffixes (maj, m, m7b5, etc.) differentiating chord qualities. Arrows indicate dominant-tonic resolution, and dotted arrows indicate resolution from a substitute dominant to the tonic. Dominant chords in parentheses resolve deceptively, and brackets under chord symbol pairs indicate a II\textsubscript{m7}-V\textsubscript{7} relationship. Since this system was developed specifically for analyzing 20\textsuperscript{th} century American music, I believe it provides the greatest possible clarity in examining the music of Cole Porter.

I. Major, Minor and Deceptive Resolution

As Forte points out, “In Porter’s songs, the opposition of major and minor modes is absolutely essential to the aesthetic quality of the text setting and the

\textsuperscript{127} Forte 1993: 611
structural unfolding of the music.” Porter’s songs demonstrate time and time again the interplay between major and minor chord qualities and tonalities and a keen awareness of the differential associations audiences familiar with European classical and American popular music had with major and minor chords. It is important to note, as Forte does, that “this contrast extends to individual notes and chords and is not limited to ‘key change’ in the textbook sense.” In fact, it is his affinity for momentary harmonic underscoring that serves his lyrics most directly and most often.

The song “At Long Last Love,” written for Porter’s 1938 musical You Never Know, is a particularly clear example of his meticulous moment-to-moment attention to harmony. The lyrics of this song’s refrain are built from contrasting alternating phrases, each asking the same basic question: “Is it a fancy not worth thinking of, or is it at long last love?” Each phrase is a comparison between two ideas, and in each case one denotes something fleeting and artificial, the other something lasting and genuine:

- Is it an earthquake or simply a shock?
- Is it the good turtle soup or merely the mock?
- Is it a cocktail, this feeling of joy?
- Or is what I feel the real McCoy?

- Is it for all time or simply a lark?
- Is it Granada I see or only Asbury Park?
- Is it a fancy not worth thinking of?
- Or is it at long last love?

Read without the music, it is a simple lyric. However, through his precise use of major and minor chords, Porter is able to strengthen the intended meaning. In the first line, “Is it an earthquake or simply a shock?” Porter uses a tonic major chord (C6)

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128 Forte 1993: 625
129 Ibid.
130 Porter 110-12
under the word “earthquake,” the strong object, which is paired with the comparatively weak and fleeting “shock”. The V7 chord that follows creates an expectation of a return to the tonic. However, Porter instead resolves deceptively to the VIIm (Am), as the lyric arrives at the point of contrast. The pattern of accompanying the grand love images with major chords and the meager infatuation images with minor chords recurs through much of the song.


In measure 5, a major IV chord accompanies the lyric “good turtle soup,” where its counterpoint two measures later, “the mock” is given a minor II chord. In measure 11, Porter uses deceptive resolution again, this time creating an expectation of minor and surprising the listener with a major chord, as an A dominant seventh chord moves not to the expected D minor, but instead to its relative, F major. This corresponds,

131 ibid.
fittingly, with the lyrics arriving on the word “joy”. In measure 17, the words “all time” appear over a major tonic chord (C6), where the contrasting image, “lark” is set with a VIIm chord (Am). Without ever modulating, Porter is thus able to elucidate musically the central goal of his lyric—the distinction between love and infatuation—through a consistent contrast between major and minor chord qualities.

Although it is perhaps less obvious in its harmonic interpretation of its lyrics than “At Long Last Love,” the 1929 song “What Is This Thing Called Love?” demonstrates a similar awareness of the narrative power of contrasting chord qualities. Although the song is mostly in C major, Porter frequently flirts with the parallel minor key of C minor, creating a sense of ambiguity, which emphasizes the inherent ambiguity in a song whose lyric is built largely out of rhetorical questions. The verse begins in the song’s home key of C major. Despite the harmony remaining mostly within the major key for the first eight measures, the melody draws from a decidedly minor collection of pitches: C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, A, and Bb. The confused sense of tonality is compounded by the fact that both times the tonic chord, C major, appears, it moves directly to a dominant C7 chord, implying the key of F. The bass note, a pedal point on C, which resolves to F in the fifth measure of the verse, solidifies this implication further. The second half of the verse is based around a series of extended dominants beginning on A7 and continuing through D7, G7, C7, and F7, bypassing the expected resolution to C. When the cadence finally arrives at the end of the sixteen-measure verse, it is a minor cadence (Dm7(b5) to Gaug7), which resolves deceptively to C major. The harmony of the verse thus avoids clear resolution, maintaining a vagueness of mood that is fitting given the lyrics, which
describe a past love affair in a detached and emotionless way, referring to love as a zoomorphic entity flying in and out of the speaker’s life of its own volition:

Ex. 13: “What Is This Thing Called Love” (1929) Verse mm. 1-16.132

This lyrical and harmonic ambiguity persists throughout much of the chorus as well. The first chord is a C dominant seventh, with the melody falling on the minor seventh (Bb). This chord resolves to F minor rather than the expected F major,

132 Porter 21-22
accompanying the title question. The word “love” arrives on F minor, a non-diatonic IV minor chord, borrowed from the parallel minor. Porter moves to G7 and then Gaug7, creating a strong expectation of a cadence in the parallel minor, before resolving deceptively to C major, using the decisive major third (E) in the melody for the recurrence of the word “love”. Over the space of just eight measures, Porter has suggested harmonically two very different answers to the question posed in the lyrics, leaving the audience to ponder whether love is to be seen as sweet, sour, or some combination of the two.

Ex. 14: “What Is This Thing Called Love” (1929) mm. 17-18, Refrain mm. 1-8.\textsuperscript{133}

In the entire 32-bar form of “What Is This Thing Called Love?” there is only one place in which Porter uses an authentic cadence that resolves decisively as expected. It is also the only place when Porter modulates outside the key of C. This

\textsuperscript{133} Porter 22-23
moment of harmonic conclusiveness (in measure 19, when F7 resolves to Bb major) coincides with the most declarative and upbeat moment in the entire lyric: “I saw you there one wonderful day.” But Porter does not let it last long, returning yet again to a minor cadence (bVI – IVm – V7) that resolves deceptively, in this case to C7, as the lyrics shift to a darker tone: “You took my heart and threw it away.”

Ex. 15: “What Is This Thing Called Love” (1929) Refrain mm. 17-24.¹³⁴

The lyrics to “What Is This Thing Called Love?” are in many ways uncharacteristic of Porter, with little of his typical wit and deliberate rhyming prowess. Instead, Porter allows the harmony to work in tandem with the lyrics to tell a more nuanced emotional story than lyrics alone could accomplish, making “What Is This Thing Called Love?” deservedly one of his most admired songs.

¹³⁴ Porter 23-24
Although it came from a show that was met with disapproval by critics in the midst of a creative slump for Porter, the 1944 song “I Love You” has become one of his most enduring compositions. Bing Crosby’s recording spent multiple weeks at the top of the charts, and singers and instrumentalists alike have recorded the song frequently ever since.\(^{135}\) As his biographers have noted, “I Love You” was born of a bet Porter made with his friend Monty Woolley, who wagered $25 that Porter could not write a successful song with “so banal a title as ‘I Love You’.”\(^{136}\) Porter won the bet, and with the exception of the verse, which hints at the satirical nature of the song, Porter wrote an unflinchingly banal lyric to match the title, making its enduring popularity a testament to the way that Porter’s music colored his words, creating a song far more sophisticated and distinctive than the lyrics alone suggest.

The verse of “I Love You” is built from two 16-bar sections, which share a basic melodic contour despite markedly different harmony. The first sixteen-measure section is in F minor, and uses conservative harmony completely diatonic to that key. The next sixteen measures are somewhat more harmonically adventurous, but tend to revolve around the parallel major (F major). Given the lyrical contrast between the two sections, a conventional harmonic treatment might find the ebullient first section set in a major key, and the comparatively humble second section in a minor key:

If a love song I could only write,  
A song with words and music divine,  
I would serenade you every night,  
Till you’d relent and consent to be mine.

\(^{136}\) McBrien 276; see also Citron 190-91, Schwartz 216
But alas, just an amateur am I,
And so I’ll not be surprised, my dear,
If you smile and politely pass it by,
When this, my first love song, you hear.\textsuperscript{137}

Porter does the opposite, and in so doing, he adds an element of satire to the lyrics, making his character into a songwriter confined to trite expressions of affection. However, his character is restricted not by a friendly challenge as Porter was, but by his own self-proclaimed clumsiness with words and music. The use of major and minor keys in situations opposite what convention would dictate reinforces this “amateur” feeling. Given this perspective, the inventiveness of the melody and harmony of the refrain become even more apparent. The refrain (also in F major) begins on a non-diatonic chord, Gm7(b5), a modal interchange chord borrowed from the parallel minor. It then moves to an altered V7 with the b9 in the melody, which furthers the expectation of resolution in minor. In measure 3, Porter resolves instead to a major chord, using a common-tone diminished chord (Fdim) on the first two beats to delay the resolution further, with the melody flirting with the decisive would-be minor third (Ab), before landing on the major third (A natural). Porter’s use of deceptive resolution thus makes a straightforward lyric more nuanced, and ultimately more meaningful than a conventional purely major harmonization would have allowed. Often known as an expert lyricist, Porter demonstrates with “I Love You” his skill as a composer, elevating an intentionally weak lyric through the expressive power of harmony and melody.

\textsuperscript{137} Porter 145-46
Written four years later, when Porter emerged from his slump with *Kiss Me, Kate*, “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” is a very different song from “I Love You”. Where “I Love You” is a ballad with spare lyrics and a conventional form, “Where Is the Life That Late I Led” is far longer, wordier and more lyric-driven (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of its form). The later song’s lyrics are more overtly clever, with no shortage of signature Porter rhymes, including “puberty” with “Schubert-y” and “Pretty itty bitty Pitti Palace.” However, like the earlier song, “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” makes use of the contrast between parallel major and minor for expressive purposes. This takes place most notably in the middle section marked “Patter,” where the lyrics express nostalgia for the speaker’s newly absent prenuptial freedom:

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138 Porter 147
Where the chorus remains within the home key of F major except for brief tonicizations of the relative minor, the patter modulates fully to the key of D minor, giving the lyrics a lament-like quality. As the patter continues, the lyrics remain wistful, listing more examples but remaining tonally consistent:

Ex. 17: “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” (1949) Patter mm. 1-8.139

Ex. 18: “Where Is the Life That Late I Led” (1949) Patter mm. 9-16.140

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139 Porter 174-75

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Despite the similar lyrics, Porter modulates to the parallel major key (D major), and
the song moves from lamentation to warm reminiscence, reaching its climax as the
melody climbs to its apex (E). The fact that Porter is able to make this transition
without changing anything in the witty, rhyme-heavy lyrics shows yet again the way
that Porter’s grasp of major and minor tonalities widened his narrative and emotional
palette.

If there is any doubt as to the intentionality of Porter’s contrasting major and
minor chords and tonalities, the classic moment of self-consciousness in “Ev’ry Time
We Say Goodbye” is an obvious counterexample. As Forte and Wilder alike point
out, Porter makes explicit his strategy concerning major and minor chords at the end
of this song about the sorrow of parting.\footnote{ibid.}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Ex.19.png}
\caption{“Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” (1944) Refrain mm. 25-32.\footnote{Ex. 19: “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” (1944) Refrain mm. 25-32.\footnote{Forte 2001:149, Wilder 248 \footnote{Porter 143-44}}} }
\end{figure}
Naturally, a minor chord (here in first inversion) accompanies the word “minor,” which is used as a metaphor for the experience of departure from one’s beloved. In the key of Eb, it is an Ab minor triad borrowed from the key of the parallel minor. When compared with the major key within which the song largely remains (including an uncharacteristically high fifteen instances of the tonic chord), this minor chord stands out. Forte posits that the major chord that appears in the same structural location 16 measures earlier is the point for comparison in the lyric, but the time between these two moments is great enough that the contrast is really only discernible on the written score. It seems likely that Porter, always aiming to entertain and never shy about his wit, was referring to a more immediate chord, perhaps the major-quality IV chord that immediately precedes the phrase. Regardless of which major chord is being referred to directly, the implication is the same: Porter used major and minor harmony from moment to moment and over the course of larger structures as a means of reinforcing lyrical meaning.

II. Modulation

In addition to his use of parallel and relative major and minor tonalities, Porter’s songs often contain modulations between more distant keys. While it was common for theater composers in the early 20th century to use modulation in their songs, it was most often limited to systematic structural locations, such as the beginning of the bridge. Having simultaneous control over both lyrics and music allowed Porter to modulate more freely for purposes of narrative and mood.

The 1935 song, “Why Shouldn’t I?” written for the musical Jubilee, demonstrates Porter’s tendency to modulate to distant keys in lyric- rather than form-
driven moments within a song. The song is written in the key of C, remaining largely within that key through much of its form through repeated use of the conventional IIIm7-V7-I and IV-V7-I progressions. The first eight measures include only one chord that is not part of one of these cadences, an A minor triad in the fifth measure, which is still diatonic to the home key. The second A section begins with the same melody and harmony for the two measures corresponding to the lyrics, “why wait around,” before modulating unexpectedly to the distant key of E major.

Ex. 20: “Why Shouldn’t I?” (1935) Refrain mm. 9-16.

Where convention would have dictated repeating the A section in the home key with only minor modifications, “waiting around” until the bridge to modulate, Porter wastes no time, modulating in the third measure of the second would-be A section. By moving from the tonic (C) to a pivot chord (A minor) and then to B7 instead of

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143 Porter 66
the expected D minor, Porter moves smoothly and quickly into the distantly related key. An examination of the lyrics makes it clear that this modulation was motivated by a lyrical transition. Porter highlights the shift in perspective from the speaker’s own to the words of sages by modulating momentarily for the boldest statement anywhere in the lyric, “Upon this earth love is all that is really worth thinking of.” This line has a markedly different tone from the almost blasé mood of much of the lyric. Immediately after this line, Porter begins modulating back to the tonic key, briefly tonicizing D minor in the process, as the lyrical tone lightens again:


144 Porter 66-67
“Why Shouldn’t I?” thus reveals Porter’s ability to use modulation in unconventional places within sections rather than only between them to highlight tonal and perspectival shifts in the lyrics.

The harmony in “I Love You” follows a similar pattern. Despite often hinting at the parallel major and minor keys of F and F minor, the refrain of this song only truly modulates one time. Like in “Why Shouldn’t I?” the moment Porter chooses to modulate is not at the beginning of a section, but in the middle of the second eight-bar section. The lyrics of the chorus begin simply: “‘I love you,’ hums the April breeze / ‘I love you,’ echo the hills.” As he becomes more detailed in his description, Porter modulates up a major third just as in “Why Shouldn’t I?” in this case moving to A major. The accompanying lyrics, “‘I love you,’ the golden dawn agrees as once more she sees daffodils,” despite their clichés and the non-conversational emphasis on the last syllable of “daffodils,” sound like a revelation due to their being sung in a new key. The modulation is in fact so unexpected that when Porter returns to the home key of F via the subdominant-functioning Gm7, it sounds unexpected, as if he is moving to yet another new key rather than simply back from whence he came.

The verse of the 1948 song “Always True to You in My Fashion” is another example of Porter’s modulation reinforcing lyrical content. The character Lois Lane, an actress in the show-within-a-show, is conflicted because her boyfriend “gives her joy but not a cent.” The tonal shifts between sentimental and pragmatic are underscored by corresponding shifts between C major and E minor tonalities. The song begins in C, with simple harmony consisting of more than eight measures of

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145 Porter 177
tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords within the home key. The lyrics that accompany this section focus on the positive, barely hinting at the conflict between Lois’ desire for Bill and her desire for financial security:

Ex. 22: “Always True To You In My Fashion” (1948) Verse mm. 1-10.\textsuperscript{146}

The straightforward major harmony creates an implication that this might be a straightforward love song, rather than the comedic number it turns out to be. As the lyrics shift in tone, the harmony follows them from major to the minor key built on the mediant. As the word “frank” is held, Porter modulates, using A minor as a pivot chord. It initially seems to function as VIm in the home key of C, but after moving to a B7, it can also be seen to function as IVm in the new key of E minor, which is firmly established by two V-I cadences in measures 13 and 15.

\textsuperscript{146} ibid.
Ex. 23: “Always True To You In My Fashion” (1948) Verse mm. 11-16.¹⁴⁷

At the end of the phrase, the song returns to the key of C as the lyrics become affectionate again, repeating the earlier material:

Each time we try
Romantic flights
He begs for my
Exclusive rights.
My reaction is to give in…¹⁴⁸

The same structural location in the second half of the verse accompanies another shift to the minor key, as Lois laments the “Rising cost of livin’,” further cementing the opposition between the two keys: where her feelings toward Bill are affectionate and major, her insecurity about his ability to provide for her causes her to slip into uncertain minor moods.

Although the above examples deal with modulations of two measures or more, Porter’s use of this technique can be seen to extend to even momentary shifts within

¹⁴⁷ Porter 177-78
¹⁴⁸ ibid.

74
the larger harmonic structure of his songs. The beginning of the refrain of “Easy to Love,” from the 1936 film *Born to Dance*, serves as one example. The lyrics of the verse find the speaker conceding that his love for the subject of the song is unrequited. After a verse that begins in Bb major and ends in D, a transitional Eb7 chord resolves deceptively to A minor at the beginning of the chorus. At this point, there has been no indication of the song’s eventual home key of G major. In fact, the first three measures of the refrain, which move from A minor to D minor and back, imply the key of A minor. The D7 chord that appears in measure 4 of the refrain makes the preceding A minor into a pivot chord, functioning both as Im in A minor and IIm in G major.

![Chord diagram](image)

*Ex. 24: “Easy to Love” (1936) Refrain mm. 1-4.*

The previously amorphous key is suddenly clarified to be G major at the exact moment when the ever-central word “love” clarifies the tone of the previously ambiguous lyrics, “You’d be so easy to…” Although this is only a momentary gesture, it strengthens the meaning of the song, by serving as a buffer between the deflating tone of the verse and the comparatively buoyant refrain.

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149 Porter 93
III. Withholding Resolution

Whether or not he was modulating between distant keys, Porter’s music often displays restraint in the use of cadential harmonies, with authentic cadences often reserved for important lyrical moments and perfect authentic cadences often appearing only at the very end of a song. One of Porter’s most immediately noticeable harmonic techniques is his preference for what Forte calls “non-tonic beginnings.” By beginning on a chord other than a song’s tonic, Porter allows the ultimate arrival there to become all the more surprising, and ultimately more impactful.

“So In Love” is the main love ballad from *Kiss Me, Kate*, and the best-known individual song from what is perhaps Porter’s best-known show. It is also among the most illustrative examples of Porter’s tendency for non-tonic beginnings and withholding resolution until key lyrical moments. This lengthy song (whose form is an extended version of the conventional AABA) ends in Ab major, but it spends nearly as much time in the relative minor key of F minor, including the first eight measures. During these eight measures, the lyrics are ambiguous, withholding both the main subject (“stars”) and verb (“fill”) of the sentence that corresponds with the first sixteen-measure phrase. As in the beginning of “Easy to Love,” the lyrics begin uncertain and only gain emotional clarity as the starting key gives way to the home key of Ab. After the amorphous lyrics, “Strange, dear, but true, dear, when I’m close to you, dear, the…” in F minor, the illuminating phrase, “stars fill the sky” arrives just as Eb7 functions as a pivot chord, resolving in an authentic cadence to Ab major.

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150 Forte 1993: 624
on the word “sky.” When the A section repeats with modifications, Porter withholds resolution even further, waiting until the 13\textsuperscript{th} rather than the 11\textsuperscript{th} measure and the crucial word “love” in the second appearance of the title phrase to arrive on the tonic chord.

There are only two perfect authentic cadences in “So In Love”, and both fall at structurally important points: the end of the second A section (m. 31) and the very end of the song (m. 69). Both of these cadences set the word “I” in versions of the title lyric, “So in love with you am I.” Along with the melodic development discussed in chapter 2, Porter’s choice to withhold this most definite sort of resolution until these two pivotal moments helps build tension throughout the song, and makes the final arrival more powerful than would be possible in a song that uses resolution less judiciously. (It also demonstrates the importance Porter placed on title lyrics, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4).

Although it was written over a decade earlier, and is an up-tempo production number rather than a love ballad, the 1935 song “Just One of Those Things” is strikingly similar to “So In Love” in its harmonic and formal construction, demonstrating the consistency of Porter’s musical language throughout his career. Both songs’ choruses are expansions of the 32-bar AABA form, both begin in a minor key and ultimately resolve to the relative major, and both resolutely avoid decisive resolution until moments of lyrical importance. “Just One of Those Things” is in the key of F major, but as Forte notes, that chord is “cadential only in the final phrase.”\textsuperscript{151} Other examples of Porter using non-tonic beginnings and withholding the

\textsuperscript{151} ibid.
most definitive sort of resolution until the final cadence abound, including “I Love You” and “Easy to Love,” both of which begin on non-tonic minor chords (IVm and IIm respectively), and despite resolving to the tonic multiple times, only employ perfect authentic cadences at the very end of the form as their lyrics resolve as well.

Although harmony was not as intrinsic a part of Porter’s composition process as melody was, it is nevertheless a vital part of the way his songs continue to connect with audiences. Porter’s masterful but sometimes esoteric lyrics are, to once again borrow Wilder’s phrase, “softened and warmed by his music,” a process in which harmony plays a crucial part. The inventiveness and intricacy of the harmony in the songs of Cole Porter may not be as immediately noticeable as his clever rhymes or distinctive melodies, yet it often reinforces the content of the lyrics, at times even adding shades of meaning that the lyrics alone cannot convey. Despite the harmony being largely driven by the melodic and lyrical content of the song, the classic “What Is This Thing Called Love?” has spawned not only hundreds of recordings but also multiple “contrafacts,” new melodies written over its harmonic structure. Tadd Dameron’s “Hot House” and John Coltrane’s “Fifth House,” are two examples, and although both are aesthetically very different from the original song, the fact that they use Porter’s song as a harmonic template is evidence of the lasting influence of Porter’s harmony.

\[152\] Wilder 224
Chapter 4: “Skip the Darn Thing and Sing the Refrain” (Form)

In terms of song form, American theater music of the 1920’s through the 1950’s is dominated by convention. The majority of songs written for Broadway during this time period consist of a verse of approximately 16 measures and a chorus or refrain of 32, with the chorus divided into four eight-measure sections. The second and fourth of these eight-measure sections are melodically and harmonically similar to the first, sometimes with slight modifications, with the third eight-measure phrase, the bridge, being the only unique section. The 32-measure chorus can thus be analyzed as AABA, which Wilder refers to as “the principal form” of the period beginning in the mid 1920’s. Though not quite as ubiquitous, the other common forms during this period are the closely related ABAC and ABAB₁, in which the first section alternates with contrasting material in eight-bar sections. Together, these thirty-two bar forms constituted the vast majority of theater songs for decades. Forte asserts that these formal blueprints served a “practical purpose in the production and performance of the musical,” with the formula making songs easier to write. This would be especially true for composer-lyricist duos, for whom convention meant the possibility of greater independence in the separate creation of music and lyrics. Forte also argues that conventional song structure served another end: “making the music more accessible to the amateurs who constituted the sheet music market.” Indeed, with only sixteen total measures of unique harmonic and melodic material, an AABA song is necessarily easier to learn than one with thirty-two or more measures of unique material.

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153 Wilder 56
154 Forte 1993: 626
155 ibid.
Cole Porter was no stranger to convention, and indeed, confirming Forte’s assertion, many of his most popular songs did make use of one of the conventional 32-bar formats. However, Porter also wrote a significant number of songs that resisted this convention. Especially in the later part of his career, Porter often stretched and varied the formulaic 32-bar form. As William Zinsser points out in *Easy to Remember*, Porter’s songs tended to make use of shorter phrases than some of his contemporaries, such as Jerome Kern and Jimmy Van Heusen. Where these other composers’ eight-measure sections tended to be a single “continuous line,” Porter was less comfortable working within the eight-bar phrase, often building sections of 16 or more measures from shorter melodic phrases, which were repeated and varied within a section. It is clear from analyzing Porter’s use of song form that, as with melody and harmony, his song forms are driven primarily by lyrical rather than musical goals, with his freedom as a composer-lyricist allowing him to craft more complex and spontaneous narrative material than the conventional form would allow. As Hyland notes, “He would usually work out the entire structure of [a] song before approaching the piano,” a practice which further implies the lyrical focus in his use of song form. This chapter includes analyses of several Porter songs that defied convention and achieved commercial and critical success despite—or perhaps partly due to—their unusual song forms.

Early in his career, Porter’s experiments with form were relatively modest. His initial breakthrough hits such as “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love” (1928), “You Do Something to Me” (1929), and “What Is This Thing Called Love?” (1929) tended

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156 Wilder 224
to make use of the conventional 32-bar AABA form. All three of these early songs have verses of the conventional 16-measure length and 32-bar AABA choruses (“What Is This Thing Called Love” does have an added two-measure instrumental transition between the verse and chorus, but it is incidental to the vocal phrase structure, which remains conventional). However, hints of Porter’s tendency for formal experimentation emerge even among his early output. For example, although “You Do Something to Me” can be analyzed as AA₁BA₂, its second A section contains significant variations when compared to its first. Although these two sections’ lyrical structures and melodic contours are similar enough for them to be viewed as repetitions of the same basic material, they are different enough that they could equally be interpreted as contrasting sections, making the overall form ABCA₁. In fact, although the first two eight-bar sections are nearly identical rhythmically, these two sections have no melody notes in common, and harmonically overlap only in the dominant chord on which both end. Though the two sections are closely related, and even share rhyming syllables with one another, the musical departure highlights the transition made in the lyrics from matter-of-fact to inquisitive:

A: You do something to me, (mm.1-8)
    Something that simply mystifies me.

A₁/B: Tell me, why should it be, (9-16)
    You have the power to hypnotize me?¹⁵⁷

This creates a sense of development and forward momentum that would have been difficult to achieve had the two sections been more similar, as convention would dictate. Although this sort of experimentation is minor and by no means unique to

¹⁵⁷ Porter 18-19
Porter, it foreshadows his later experiments with form, and points to the ever-central lyrical motivation behind them.

Composed three years later, “Night and Day” represents a more deliberately unconventional use of form. Although the verse is the typical sixteen measures, split into two eight-bar phrases, the 48-measure chorus represents a departure. The form of the chorus can be analyzed as follows, where each lowercase letter represents a new eight-bar section and each capital letter represents a longer structural unit:

\[
\begin{align*}
A: & \quad a: \quad \text{Night and day, you are the one} \\
& \quad \text{Only you beneath the moon and under the sun,} \\
& \quad b: \quad \text{Whether near to me or far} \\
& \quad \text{It’s no matter, darling where you are,} \\
& \quad \text{I think of you, night and day.} \\
A_1: & \quad a_1: \quad \text{Day and night, why is it so} \\
& \quad \text{That this longing for you follows wherever I go?} \\
& \quad b_1: \quad \text{In the roaring traffic’s boom,} \\
& \quad \text{In the silence of my lonely room,} \\
& \quad \text{I think of you, night and day.} \\
B: & \quad c: \quad \text{Night and day, under the hide of me,} \\
& \quad \text{There’s an, oh, such a hungry yearning burning inside of me,} \\
A_2: & \quad b_2: \quad \text{And its torment won’t be through,} \\
& \quad \text{Till you let me spend my life making love to you} \\
& \quad \text{Day and night, night and day.}^{158}
\end{align*}
\]

Although the overall structure can still be viewed as AABA, the form is extended to a length of forty-eight measures rather than the usual thirty-two. The first two A sections are twice the normal length, with each being built from two contrasting eight-bar sections. This draws attention to the lyrical relationships among these sections—where the \(a\) sections express desire in general and in mostly positive terms,

\[^{158}\text{Porter 31-33}\]
the \( b \) sections become more specific and are grounded in examples of desire becoming problematic. Despite the overall structure falling under the umbrella of AABA, these first 32 bars \((A, A_1)\) could equally be analyzed as a complete chorus of the second-most common song form of the American popular song at the time, ABAB\(_1\). However, the song continues past measure 32, introducing new material in the harmonically adventuresome and melodically climactic bridge, which runs only the typical eight measures, contrary to the pattern of sixteen-measure sections set up before it. It is thus clear that Porter was working narratively rather than mathematically—once a section said what he wanted it to say, asymmetry was no reason to delay moving on to the next idea.

This thread continues when at the end of the song, rather than returning to an entire sixteen-measure A section, Porter uses only the second half of one, \( b_2 \), because it is all that is needed to make the song lyrically complete. Thanks to the title phrase, “night and day,” which (along with its counterpart, “day and night”) becomes a lyrical refrain, appearing seven times in forty-eight measures, the song is able to resolve lyrically with less literal repetition of musical material than the conventional AABA form would dictate. Thus, although “Night and Day” contains features of both of the conventional forms of the day, it is able to avoid adhering slavishly to either. This allows Porter to strike a difficult balance, crafting an asymmetrical lyric-driven song while remaining accessible to a popular audience. Despite its unusual structure, “Night and Day” is sometimes considered Porter’s most famous song, and Forte
asserts that it may even be the most popular of all American ballads, a strong indication that Porter’s experiment was a success.\textsuperscript{159}

The 1935 song “Begin the Beguine” can be seen as a turning point for Porter in terms of song form. It marked a radical departure from the conventional 32-bar form, with its 108-measure refrain constituting what Wilder calls “the longest popular song ever written.”\textsuperscript{160} Although the song has its detractors, Wilder among them, it is impossible to deny that it was a bold experiment for its time. The chorus-only song is broken into mostly 16-measure sections, with the extended final section (28 measures) being the only exception. An analysis of the way these sections correspond with the lyrics is shown below.

\begin{align*}
A: & \quad \text{When they begin the beguine} \\
& \quad \text{It brings back the sound of music so tender,} \\
& \quad \text{It brings back a night of tropical splendor,} \\
& \quad \text{It brings back a memory ever green.} \\
A_1: & \quad \text{I’m with you once more under the stars} \\
& \quad \text{And down by the shore an orchestra’s playing,} \\
& \quad \text{And even the palms seem to be swaying} \\
& \quad \text{When they begin the beguine.} \\
B: & \quad \text{To live it again is past all endeavor} \\
& \quad \text{Except when that tune is clutching my heart.} \\
& \quad \text{And there we are, swearing to love forever,} \\
& \quad \text{And promising never, never to part.} \\
A_2: & \quad \text{What moments divine, what rapture serene,} \\
& \quad \text{Till clouds came along to disperse the joys we had tasted,} \\
& \quad \text{And now when I hear people curse the chance that was wasted,} \\
& \quad \text{I know but too well what they mean.} \\
C: & \quad \text{So don’t let them begin the beguine!} \\
& \quad \text{Let the love that was once a fire remain an ember.} \\
& \quad \text{Let it sleep like the dead desire I only remember} \\
& \quad \text{When they begin the beguine.}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{159} Forte 1995:3
\textsuperscript{160} Wilder 240
C₂: Oh yes, let them begin the beguine, make them play! (81-108)
Till the stars that were there before return above you,
Till you whisper to me once more, “Darling, I love you!”
And we suddenly know what heaven we’re in
When they begin the beguine.
When they begin the beguine.¹⁶¹

Clearly, this is not Porter at his most concise. However, despite its length and density, this song still appealed to audiences: it appeared on the pop charts on five separate occasions, including the 1938 Artie Shaw recording, which reached number one.¹⁶² That Porter was able to remain accessible in such an unconventional song structure demonstrates his prowess for storytelling, combining music and lyrics into a cohesive unit.

Although all six of the sections are sung by the same character and in reference to the same central topic, Porter maintains interest by avoiding exact repetition. None of the sections are literal repeats in terms of melody or harmony, and each one is unique in terms of perspective or tone. Where A evokes a memory, A₁ finds the speaker thrust directly into it. Where B seeks to relive a past romance, A₂ acknowledges its temporariness. Where C pleads for the beguine not to be danced so the speaker can preserve a memory, C₁ asks for the opposite so that same memory can be relived. This is a song whose form wanders through a series of related but not altogether coherent perspectives because it is being sung by a character that is not altogether coherent emotionally.

¹⁶¹ Porter 68-73
Always aware of his audience, Porter used in “Begin the Beguine” a technique that is visible in nearly all of his formal experiments: where exact musical repetition is avoided, lyrical and motivic repetition is commonplace, giving otherwise unusual songs immediacy and approachability. The lack of literal repetition of sections helps lend “Begin the Beguine” its epic sweep. At the same time, the repetition of the title phrase grounds the song and makes it nearly impossible not to notice and remember the title pun that motivates the entire lyric. Over the 108 measures of the song, the title phrase, “begin the beguine” appears seven separate times. With the exception of measures 29-31 and 97-99 (which share the same melody), each instance of the title phrase is set with a unique melody. Additionally, although the phrase appears in structurally important locations, usually falling at the beginning or end of a section, these locations vary, with some sections containing multiple instances and others containing none. By repeating the title phrase this often, Porter is making an attempt to assure the song’s accessibility, while at the same time he avoids the sort of predictability that would make the repetition immediately noticeable. Like in “Night and Day,” “Begin the Beguine” contains an internal AABA form, with the first 64 measures representing the conventional 32-bar form doubled in duration. However, Porter then continues building new material for 44 additional measures. This device was surprising enough at the time that even Porter’s collaborator Moss Hart assumed the song had ended after the first 64 bars upon first hearing it.\textsuperscript{163} Porter here defies convention, but he does so not because of a desire to experiment musically, but rather

\textsuperscript{163} Hart 6
because the content of the song calls for it, retaining enough of the typical practice of the day to avoid losing his listener along the way.

It is worth noting that the famous Artie Shaw recording of “Begin the Beguine” was an instrumental rendition played by a big band of brass, saxophones, and a rhythm section. Swing music was experiencing a peak of popular interest in the 1930’s, so this in itself is not surprising. However, unlike most mid-tempo big band recordings of popular songs at the time, this recording includes only one time through the form of the song. The prevailing practice in big band arranging at the time was to repeat a song’s form several times, with subsequent choruses consisting of through-composed and improvised material gradually increasing in complexity and dynamics until the climactic “shout chorus”. The 108-measure length of “Begin the Beguine” made it too long to be repeated in this manner. However, the structure of the song itself contains elements of big band song structure, including several contrasting sections and a gradual build in intensity to the final section, which is climactic like a shout chorus. Thus, a single time through the form of “Begin the Beguine” could be arranged much like several choruses of an AABA tune would be, leading to a radio-acceptable recording with a duration just over three minutes.

“Begin the Beguine” is also notable in that it is an early example of Porter’s “verseless” writing. Where his early songs followed the convention and tended to begin with introductory verses, as his career progressed, Porter would often forgo the verse in favor of longer or more intricate chorus forms. Wilder compares the quality of Porter’s verses unfavorably to Richard Rodgers, asserting, “Porter wrote verses as
if they were a necessary evil.”\textsuperscript{164} Indeed, Porter alludes to his own negative feelings about song verses in the verse of his 1936 song “It’s De-lovely”:

\begin{quote}
  I feel a sudden urge to sing  
  The kind of ditty that invokes the spring,  
  So control your desire to curse,  
  While I crucify the verse.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
  This verse I’ve started seems to me  
  The Tin Pan-tithesis of melody,  
  So to spare you all the pain  
  I’ll skip the darn thing and sing the refrain.\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

These lyrics make it clear that Porter considered verses to be of lesser importance when compared to refrains, a fact corroborated by his substantial verseless output. This verse satirizes the role that the verse typically plays in bridging the gap between spoken dialog and song, relying on the most cliché of starting lines, “I feel a sudden urge to sing,” before disparaging its own quality and the quality of its performance. This verse ends with the straightforward concession “I’ll skip the darn thing and sing the refrain.” Indeed, although Porter’s verses are often distinctive and melodic (this one is no exception), in the era after “Begin the Beguine” he would often spare his listeners the pain, and write songs that consisted only of an extended refrain.

The 1936 song, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” written for the film \textit{Born to Dance}, is similar to “Begin the Beguine” in its avoidance of literal repetition of musical material. The song begins with a more or less conventional 32 measures, which can be analyzed as \textit{ABA}_1C if divided into 8-measure phrases. Rather than ending the song here, however, Porter continues to build intensity for another 24 measures, and as Wilder notes, he avoids returning to the material stated in the first

\textsuperscript{164} Wilder 245  
\textsuperscript{165} Porter 80-81
32 measures. The movement between various melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic motifs within these 24 measures can once again be seen as a result of the lyrical content. The speaker in this song is Lucy, a secondary character, who is inexplicably and attracted to Ted, the film’s protagonist. Both Lucy and the audience seem to know that Ted will end up not with her, but with the film’s female lead, Nora. Lucy’s oscillation between attraction and defeatism within “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” makes this song’s asymmetrical form a natural choice. However, Porter was also aware that too much unique material makes a song less accessible to a wide audience, and as in “Begin the Beguine,” he used a lyrical refrain to compensate for the song’s unexpected form. Although it only repeats four times in this song, the title phrase begins and ends the song and helps balance distinctiveness and conventionality in this asymmetrical form. Additionally, the melodic motif that sets the title lyric, three descending diatonic pitches with the syncopated rhythm eighth, quarter, eighth, appears far more frequently (in measures 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30, 42, 44, 46, and 54), reinforcing the title lyric more subtly.

A:  I’ve got you under my skin,
    I’ve got you deep in the heart of me,
    So deep in my heart you’re really a part of me.
    I’ve got you under my skin.

A₁:  I’d tried so not to give in,
    I said to myself, “This affair never will go so well.”
    But why should I try to resist when, darling, I know so well
    I’ve got you under my skin.

C:   I’d sacrifice anything, come what might,
    For the sake of having you near,
    In spite of a warning voice that comes in the night,
    And repeats, repeats in my ear,
D: “Don’t you know, little fool, you never can win,  
Use your mentality,  
Wake up to reality.  
But each time that I do just the thought of you  
Makes me stop, before I begin  
‘Cause I’ve got you under my skin."  

Forte speculates that the greater freedom in form that is visible here was at least partly a result of “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” being a film song, which had a wider audience less rigid in its expectations than did theater music. Porter’s film songs certainly do often exhibit his tendency for formal experimentation, but it is by no means limited to his work for film, as the final two examples in this section will show.

The following year, Porter wrote another verseless extended ballad, a 72-measure song called “In the Still of the Night,” which appeared in the film musical Rosalie. Like the aforementioned songs with extended forms, “In the Still of the Night” strikes a balance between convention and experimentation. It begins with two sixteen-measure A sections, which are closely related lyrically, with straightforward if poetic expressions of the omnipresence of the speaker’s love:

\[
\begin{align*}
A: \quad & \text{In the still of the night,} \\
& \text{As I gaze from my window,} \\
& \text{At the moon in its flight,} \\
& \text{My thoughts all stray to you.} \\
A_1: \quad & \text{In the still of the night,} \\
& \text{While the world is in slumber,} \\
& \text{Oh, the times without number,} \\
& \text{Darling, that I say to you...}
\end{align*}
\]

\[167\text{Porter 95-98}\]

\[168\text{Porter 100-104}\]
The bridge that follows represents a departure lyrically whereby the speaker reveals his doubts that his love is reciprocated, and thus it moves from a quiet section marked “Mysteriously” to an urgent one marked “Appassionato.”

B: “Do you love me, (33-48) As I love you?
    Are you my life to be,
    My dream come true?”

At this point, convention would dictate a return to a (possibly modified) version of the first section, completing the AABA form. However, Porter’s character shows further progression rather than regression, coming to doubt the validity of his own love in addition to that of his beloved:

C: Or will this dream of mine (49-72)
    Fade out of sight,
    Like the moon growing dim,
    On the rim of the hill,
    In the chill, still of the night?

Given the progression of the lyrics, it is only fitting that Porter avoids literal repetition, building the 24-measure C section out of melodically related but otherwise unique material. Again, Porter’s form follows function, creating a song that is at once both innovative and accessible.

In 1948’s landmark musical *Kiss Me, Kate*, the 32-bar form became the exception rather than the rule among Porter’s most popular songs. Written in the wake of the Rogers and Hammerstein hit *Oklahoma!*,* Kiss Me, Kate* was Porter’s first entirely “integrated musical,” a term which John Mueller defines in his essay “Fred Astaire and the Integrated Musical” as a show in which musical numbers “advance

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169 ibid.
170 ibid.
the plot by their content."\textsuperscript{171} This puts the show in contrast with the majority of Porter’s oeuvre, in which songs were less directly related to the plot, with Porter preferring to write the songs only after text of the play (the “book”) had already been completed.\textsuperscript{172} Naturally, \textit{Kiss Me, Kate} finds Porter at his most narrative and lyric-driven, a fact that the varied song forms from this show substantiate. Few of the songs use 32-bar forms, although as with Porter’s earlier songs, many borrow from and extend the concepts that underlie that convention.

“Why Can’t You Behave,” is sung by the character Lois Lane to her boyfriend, Bill, whose ill-advised gambling becomes the catalyst for the conflict of the song, and eventually for much of the conflict of the show. Like many late Porter songs, it has no verse, and consists only of an extended 48-measure chorus. This song is built from four-measure phrases that combine into sections of mostly sixteen measures. Although the song is not conventional in its form, it can be analyzed as an overarching AABA form whose A and A\textsubscript{1} sections contain internal AABA forms:

\begin{align*}
\text{A:} & \quad a \quad \text{Why can’t you behave?} & (1-16) \\
& \quad a\textsubscript{1} \quad \text{Oh, why can’t you behave?} \\
& \quad b \quad \text{After all the things you told me,} \\
& \quad \quad \text{And the promises that you gave,} \\
& \quad a \quad \text{Oh, why can’t you behave?} \\
\text{A\textsubscript{1}:} & \quad a \quad \text{Why can’t you be good?} & (17-32) \\
& \quad a\textsubscript{1} \quad \text{And do just as you should?} \\
& \quad b \quad \text{Won’t you turn a new leaf over,} \\
& \quad \quad \text{So your baby can be your slave?} \\
& \quad a \quad \text{Oh, why can’t you behave?} \\
\text{B:} & \quad c \quad \text{There’s a farm I know near my old home town,} & (33-40) \\
& \quad c\textsubscript{1} \quad \text{Where we two can go and try settling down.}
\end{align*}


\textsuperscript{172} Citron 6
A₂:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b</th>
<th>There I’ll care for you forever, (41-48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Well, at least till you dig my grave,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, why can’t you behave?¹⁷³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lyrical content of this song is closely related to the song’s structure. The melody is built entirely of three four-bar sections of unique material (a, b, and c), each of which is repeated and varied as the song progresses. Each of these phrases corresponds to a different lyrical idea. The a sections all contain broad, almost rhetorical questions (most often the title phrase, “why can’t you behave?”). The b sections, which contrast the a sections within the larger sections A and A₁, have a faster melodic and harmonic rhythm, and find Lois delving deeper into her history with Bill and pleading with greater specificity. After the A and A₁ sections, the song has reached thirty-two measures, and could be seen as a complete ABAB form. However, rather than ending the song, Porter introduces another new section, the bridge (B or c, c₁ in the analytical sketch above). Where the A sections consisted entirely of mildly scolding questions, the bridge becomes declarative, as Lois proposes a concrete alternative to their urban life in Baltimore: settling down on a farm near her hometown. Like “Night and Day,” “Why Can’t You Behave?” has a bridge of half the length of its A sections and returns to a truncated A section—since eight measures is enough for the character to say what is necessary, there is no reason to add more material. Porter is also freed from repeating an entire A section due to the highly repetitious nature of the song to this point. The four-measure title phrase appears five times in the song, together constituting over forty percent of the duration of the song (twenty of forty-eight measures). Thus, despite its unusual form, the song

¹⁷³ Porter 152-54
is accessible, with its bluesy title phrase making the song musically memorable while
the lyrics become the foundation of the audience’s understanding of these two
characters’ tenuous relationship.

Another song that shows Porter’s tendency for extension of form in *Kiss Me, Kate* is the comic song “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” This song exists in the show-within-a-show, a musical version of William Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, and as such, it allows Porter to be showier and more melodramatic than the songs that deal directly with the real characters in *Kiss Me, Kate*. The newlywed Petruchio, who is being played by the character Fred Graham, sings this song mourning the constraints of married life. The form is complex, with several contrasting sections combined into a song whose lyrics move through a series of contrasting tones. Citron asserts, “its mercurial change of mood accounts for much of its humor.”

The verse begins with a nostalgic braggadocio in two related eight-bar sections:

A: Since I reached the charming age of puberty,  
And began to finger feminine curls,  
(1-8)

A₁: Like a show that’s typically Shuberty,  
I have always had a multitude of girls.  
(9-16)

These two sections together constitute a conventional sixteen-measure verse.

However, Porter moves not directly to the refrain, but rather to an eight-measure interlude, marked “Molto meno (much broader).” This section, also broken into two phrases of equal length, uses new musical material to introduce the notion behind the remainder of the song, namely that Petruchio misses the freedom of single life:

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174 Citron 307  
175 Porter 170-176
B: But now that a married man at last am I, How aware of my dear, departed past am I.\textsuperscript{176}

The refrain that follows is a conventional AABA form albeit with the A section modified each time it appears. Nevertheless, it is notable for one line that draws attention directly to the issues of form and repetition. Beginning in measure 25 of the refrain, the lyrics are, “So I’ll repeat what first I said: where is the life that late I...”\textsuperscript{177} By explicitly acknowledging that he is repeating what he said earlier, Porter seems to be poking fun at the artifice of the AABA form, which finds characters (and lyricists) repeating themselves as a song proceeds. At the same time, this lyric serves another purpose: by not only repeating the title phrase but also divulging that he is doing so, Porter strengthens the already significant expectation that the song is reaching its end. Thirty-two measures have passed, and Porter has returned to the initial lyrical phrase, implying an ending. However, Porter chooses to leave the question incomplete and a measure short of the expected eight, never getting to the implied rhyming word “led”. The “Patter” section that follows is not unlike a verse in its loose rhythmic feel, but unlike a verse, it contains the song’s most climactic material. Here, the tone moves from sharp comedy to melodramatic longing, as the performance notes (“Slowly, with overemphasized expression”) suggest.\textsuperscript{178} As mentioned in Chapter 2, a modulation between the two eight-measure sections of the patter section adds yet another momentary tonal shift. The entire refrain and patter are then repeated twice, with the last repetition of the refrain finally completing the incomplete title question and the eight-measure phrase to end the AABA form. An eight-measure coda is added at the

\textsuperscript{176} ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} ibid.
very end. This song is inextricably tied to the plot and characters of *Kiss Me, Kate*, and is less often performed outside the show than most of Porter’s popular songs. However, it represents the culmination of his lyric-driven use of song form. “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?” still retains elements of conventional form, even satirizing it, but it goes far beyond AABA, and is therefore able to tell a more involved, more surprising, and ultimately more interesting story.

The issues of memorability and distinctiveness are crucial to any music aiming to appeal to a wide audience. Managing repetition in song form is one of the central challenges presented to songwriters aiming to achieve these sometimes-contradictory aims. On the one hand, music that lacks repetition tends to be more difficult for an audience to connect with upon a single listening. At the same time, music that is too predictable or lacks distinctiveness can easily become monotonous. Cole Porter’s use of song form can be seen as a constant effort to strike the balance between these pitfalls, using elements of the prevailing song structures of the period and lyrical refrains within otherwise distinctive and intricate structures to create songs that are at once both accessible and innovative.
Chapter 5: “I Get a Kick” (Rhythm)

When compared to melody, harmony, and form, rhythm is of lesser importance in understanding the music of Cole Porter. This is true for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that of the four musical categories discussed in this essay, rhythm is the one that is most frequently varied from one performance or recording to the next in American popular song. As Forte notes, “For the most part, notated pitch is more or less faithfully rendered by singers. Notated rhythm, however, is fair game and has been for some time, but especially so with the proliferation of recording artists and recordings that began in the late twenties.”179 In addition to being true of vocalists, a tendency to vary accompaniment rhythms as compared to originally published versions can be seen in most arrangers’ interpretations of the songs of Porter and others, especially in performances separated from their original theatrical productions. The scores of small and large ensemble recordings with vocalists in the decades during and after Porter’s career provide many examples—even the relatively traditionalist Ella Fitzgerald album, Sings the Cole Porter Songbook (1956), which was unusual in its inclusion of the verses of many of Porter’s songs, contains loose rhythmic interpretation of vocal melodies from Fitzgerald and little of the ubiquitous foxtrot rhythm in Buddy Bregman’s arrangements.

Indeed, it is not entirely coincidental that rhythm has been preserved less in the songs of Cole Porter—where he often stretched or defied conventions with respect to melody, harmony, and form, Porter’s use of rhythm was, on the whole, more conventional. Indeed, the entire idiom of popular song in the 1920’s through ‘50’s

179 Forte 1995: 23
was dominated by rhythmic convention. As Forte points out, “the alla breve (“cut
time”) meter signature is virtually universal in songs of the popular ballad
repertoire.”

Wilder narrows this assertion in referring specifically to Porter: “The
best-remembered Porter songs, most quickly recognizable as his, are not notey and
are mostly in alla breve rhythm: cut time.” The majority of Porter’s enduring songs
employ not only cut time, but also the foxtrot rhythm, namely the alternation of bass
notes on beats one and three and chords on beats two and four. This figure serves as
the rhythmic foundation for Porter’s songs from his earliest hits in the late 1920’s
(“Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love”, “What Is This Thing Called Love?”) to songs he
wrote well into the 1950’s (“It’s All Right With Me”, “All of You”).

Of course, this is not to say that Porter ignored rhythm. In fact, there are
rhythmic features that recur throughout his work and can be seen as parts of his
individual musical vocabulary just as there are melodic, harmonic, and formal ones.
With few exceptions, the quarter note served as the basic rhythmic unit in Porter’s
music. This chapter will explore the two most characteristic ways Porter defied the
expectation of quarter notes: triplets and syncopated rhythmic motifs. As the previous
chapters have shown for melody, harmony, and form, lyrical meaning again provided
the foundation upon which rhythm sought to build, and Porter’s experiments with
rhythm can nearly always be traced to lyrical goals, whether reinforcing the poetic
rhythm of the text, highlighting important rhymes, or evoking an action or setting
alluded to or suggested in the text.

\footnote{Forte 1995:18}
\footnote{Wilder 228}
I. Triplets

Among the most frequently recurring rhythmic devices employed by Cole Porter is the use of quarter note triplets. Many of his best-known songs (“Night and Day”, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin”, “Begin the Beguine”, “I Get a Kick Out of You”, and “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” to name a few) contain quarter note triplets in their vocal melodies, and they are often echoed in the accompaniments. As the following examples will illustrate, most instances of triplets in Porter’s songs serve one of two purposes. First, they help give certain passages a fluid character, often in contrast to earlier or later material. As Forte points out, the quarter-note triplet can function as the “smoothed-out counterpart” to the “classic ragtime figure” of eighth note, quarter note, eighth note.\(^{182}\) Second, they often reflect and reinforce the inherent rhythm and meter of Porter’s lyrics. As Forte notes of Porter’s vocal rhythms, “rhythmic patterns are informed by the natural flow and accentuations of spoken language.”\(^{183}\) Although the distinction between spoken language and poetic language is an important one, as Porter’s characteristic use of rhyme and poetic rhythm (as well as non-standard word order) distinguishes his lyrics from rhetorical speech, this assertion proves true in examining the role of triplets in the songs of Cole Porter. In setting his lyrics to music, Porter paid close attention to the internal rhythm of the words themselves, again “allowing a lyric phrase to determine the musical phrase.”\(^{184}\)

“Night and Day” serves as an early example of Porter’s use of quarter-note triplets. In the opening line (“Night and day, you are the one”), the words, “you are the” are set with a quarter-note triplet. The triplet allows for three syllables of more or

\(^{182}\) Forte 1995: 20
\(^{183}\) Forte 2001: 161
\(^{184}\) Wilder 235
less equal emphatic weight, something that no other two-beat rhythmic setting of three syllables could accomplish. This may seem a minor detail, but a phrase as straightforward as “you are the one” takes on a different meaning if emphasized differently. Excessive emphasis on the word “you” (as the quarter-eighth-eighth rhythm would create) implies a contrast between “you” and some other person. Excessive emphasis on “are” (as the syncopated eighth-quarter-eighth rhythm would create) implies that the subject’s being “the one” is specific to the present time and perhaps is new, fleeting, or both. Excessive emphasis on “the” (as the eighth-eighth-quarter rhythm would create) robs the phrase of its conversational balance, since “the” is usually unstressed in speech and poetry alike. By using the triplet, Porter is able to avoid any of these pitfalls of nuance, and place the emphasis on the forthcoming word, “one,” which resolves both the musical and lyrical phrase. This triplet becomes a motif, recurring twice in each A section for phrases like “why is it (so)” and “(where-) ever I (go),” which similarly benefit from the evenness that the quarter-note triplet allows.

The 1934 song, “I Get a Kick Out of You,” written for Porter’s breakout musical Anything Goes, is rife with examples of Porter’s use of triplets, and illustrates a crystallization of the ideas that were employed more subtly in “Night and Day”. This is a list song of sorts, with the central topic of the lyrics being built from contrast between a series of things that fail to thrill the speaker (the character Reno Sweeny), and the subject of the song (Billy Crocker), who gives her “a kick” despite failing to reciprocate her feelings. This contrast is underscored through the rhythmic contrast
between triplets and more conventional rhythms containing quarter and half notes.

The central motif of the refrain is an ascending diatonic line illustrated in example 25.

Ex. 25 “I Get a Kick Out of You” (1934) Refrain mm. 1-15.\textsuperscript{185}

Lines dealing with the list elements, a series of things from which Reno would be expected to “get a kick,” generally include half-note triplets, an unusual rhythm which cuts across the conventional cut time signature. These triplets serve a dual purpose. First, they preserve the largely anapestic (stressed, unstressed, unstressed) poetic rhythm of the lyrics through the use of three notes of equal length over a four-beat measure. Second, as Wilder notes, these half-note triplets “further the flow of the melody” and “provide contrast” to the title phrase which follows.\textsuperscript{186} Indeed, after several measures containing half-note triplets, which verge on superimposing a 3/4 waltz over the prevailing cut time, the title phrase, “I get a kick out of you,” which emphasizes the quarter note, and accents the downbeat of beat four for the word

\textsuperscript{185} Porter 35
\textsuperscript{186} Wilder 238
“kick,” becomes rhythmically grounded again. As Wilder notes, “Here the song has a strict feeling of four, and so ‘kicks’. This pattern intensifies as the song continues. In the second A section and again in the last A section, five consecutive measures of half-note triplets appear under the unenthusiastic lyrics “(I’m sure that) if I took even one sniff, it would bore me terrifically” and “(flying too) high with some guy in the sky is my idea of nothing to do.” In addition to repeating the rhythm, the last measures in the earlier example repeat the same melody verbatim, directly evoking the boredom being described. The later example is not melodically static, since it is instead evoking “flying too high” by ascending to the song’s apex, but in both cases, when the title phrase returns, and Reno mentions Billy again, the rhythm becomes steady and danceable.

“I’ve Got You Under My Skin” uses a similar juxtaposition of even subdivisions and triplets. The first twenty measures of the song contain syncopated and “straight” rhythms, but no triplets, while the lyrics have a comparatively idealistic tone:

I’ve got you under my skin,
I’ve got you deep in the heart of me,
So deep in my heart you’re really a part of me
I’ve got you under my skin.
I tried so not to give in…

The transition in tone that follows is marked not only by movement to a modal interchange minor chord borrowed from the parallel minor, but also by the introduction of quarter-note triplets.

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187 ibid.
188 Porter 95-98
As Chapter 4 illustrated, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” avoids literal repetition by continuing to introduce new material for 24 measures after the end of its initial 32-bar form. In this way, it takes on a frenetic character, as the speaker, Lucy (Virginia Bruce) vacillates between various conflicting points of view. Quarter-note triplets are one of several techniques Porter employs to mark these transitions, the most distinct of which comes in measures 33-40, when Porter verges on switching from duple to triple meter with eight measures of uninterrupted triplets in the melody, shown below.

189 ibid.
190 Wilder 243
This rhythm has a clear lyrical motivation, as the poetic meter of these lines is largely anapestic (*sac-ri-vice an-y-thing come what might for the...*). Additionally, the distinctive rhythm (as well as the pedal Eb in the bass) helps set this section apart from the surrounding sections, while relating it to the earlier moments of triplets seen above in ex. 26, which share a similar tone. This eight-measure phrase coincides with perhaps the most explicit statement of the song’s central idea, namely that despite her best intentions, Lucy has an inexplicable (and ultimately doomed) attraction to the film’s protagonist, Ted. Immediately after these eight bars, the melody returns to even subdivisions as she shifts in perspective from first person to directly quoting the “warning voice that repeats and repeats in [her] ear.” Triplets thus play a central role in establishing character as well as creating a conversational setting of this lyric,

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191 ibid.
which according to Forte has a “looser” rhyme scheme than is typical of popular song.\textsuperscript{192}

In addition to literal triplet rhythms, Porter also uses hemiola, the superimposition of triple meter over duple meter, in order to highlight lyrical moments of significance. The 1934 song Anything Goes” is a particularly illustrative example of this technique. At the beginning of the refrain, the rhythm of the vocal melody is as simple as it gets: a quarter note on each downbeat. This conventional rhythm accompanies the lyric: “In olden days, a…” As the lyrics turn to a more provocative image, “glimpse of stocking,” syncopation is introduced, with the two syllables of “stocking” falling on the upbeats of beats 2 and 3 respectively. In the next two measures, the rhythmic unrest increases further, with Porter employing hemiola. Rather than changing chords at the beginning of each measure, the harmonic rhythm is accelerated to be every three beats, first on beat 1 of measure three, then on beat four of the same measure, and finally on beat three of measure 4, making the subdivision 3, 3, and 2 beats rather than 4 and 4. This device reinforces the lyric, violating our rhythmic expectations just as “something shocking” is alluded to verbally.

\textsuperscript{192} Forte 2001: 98
Thus, Porter is able to tie a listener’s experience in hearing the song with the experience being explained in the lyrics. Throughout this wordy song, this pattern recurs, with an escalation of lyric absurdity occurring within each line that proceeds from quarter notes to syncopation and then to the superimposition of triple meter. For example, in the second A section of the first chorus, “Good authors, too, who” is set squarely with quarter notes, “once knew better words” is syncopated, and the punch line, “now only use four-letter words” violates expectation through the superimposed meter.

II. Rhythmic Motifs and Syncopation

Syncopation, the rhythmic emphasis of off-beats, was common among the theater and film music of the 1920’s through 1950’s. Forte describes a series of “idiomatic rhythmic figures,” including the Charleston rhythm (dotted quarter note,

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93 Porter 50-51
eighth note) and what he calls the “short-long-short pattern” (eighth-quarter-eighth), both of which recur often in the music of the period. Many such figures can be traced to ragtime, but by the time of Porter’s career they had become part of the standard rhythmic language of Broadway. When syncopation occurs in Porter’s music, it tends to appear in tandem with motivic rhythmic writing. These techniques serve primarily lyrical goals, most often reinforcing rhyme scheme. Indeed, many of Porter’s signature rhymes are bolstered by the use of syncopated motifs, which draw attention to the rhyming syllables.

The 1929 song “You Do Something to Me,” Porter’s second major hit after “Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love,” is often noticed in part for the four-measure phrase that ends the bridge. Wilder says of this section: “At this point both the lyric and melody are unmistakably Porter with ‘do do,’ ‘voodoo,’ and you do’.” However, it is not only the lyric that makes this line effective—the harmonic, melodic, and especially rhythmic support are just as important. As example 29 illustrates, measures 21 (“do do”), 22 (“voo doo”), and 23 (“you do”) are supported by a rhythmic motif that repeats verbatim in all three measures. This syncopated motif places strong emphasis on the rhyming syllables. First, it creates a parallel between “do”, “voo-”, and “you,” all of which are on beat 1 of their respective measures. A secondary emphasis is placed on the following syllables, “do”, “-doo”, and “do”, whose homonymic and direct repetition is overshadowed by the fact that so many rhyming syllables come in such quick succession. In contrast to the rest of the song, whose

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194 Forte 1995: 19
195 Wilder 227
melody is built entirely of whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes, this passage stands out, temporarily turning this romantic ballad into a comic song.

In addition to the rhythmic motif, this passage also contains a melodic sequence, which repeats the same melodic contour starting on B natural, then transposed down to Bb and then to Ab. Thus, although the lyrics here are self-conscious and far from conversational, their context makes them innovative and memorable. In fact, this line resurfaced over fifty years after “You Do Something to Me” was released, in the 1993 song “Shoop” by the hip-hop trio Salt-n-Pepa, in a slightly modified form: “You do the voodoo that you do so well,” demonstrating the breadth of its influence and appeal.

Wilder refers to the lyrics to the 1934 list song “You’re the Top” as, “a true tour de force.” Indeed, the many choruses of comic lyrics that Porter wrote for the song showcase his predilection for rhyme through a series of allusions to popular culture. However, as with “You Do Something to Me,” the rhymes in “You’re the Top” do not exist in a vacuum, and gain much of their strength from their musical, and particularly their rhythmic setting. The success of this song depends not only on

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196 Porter 20
the absurdity of the images being described, but also on the surprising juxtapositions that occur through Porter’s use of rhyme. The rhyme scheme is complex, with some rhyming words occurring as far as four measures apart and others occurring within a single measure. Keen on drawing the audience’s attention to his unusual rhymes, Porter draws rhythmic parallels between nearly every pair (or group) of rhyming words in this song. This begins in the verse, where the words “poetic” and “pathetic” (as well as “parading” and “serenading” eight measures later) are both set with the same syncopated rhythm, as shown below in example 30.

Ex. 30: “You’re the Top” (1934) Verse mm. 1-8.\(^{397}\)

This rhythm preserves the spoken rhythm of the words while also relating the two words to one another. In the refrain, this practice becomes more transparent, with rhythmic placement within a measure nearly always coinciding with rhyme. In fact, over the course of the thirty-two-measure refrain, the only pair of rhyming words that do not share the same rhythmic placement within their respective measures is that between “Strauss” and “mouse.” In all seven other rhyming pairs (“Colloseum” and “Louvre museum”, “melody” and “symphony”, “bonnet” and “sonnet”, “Nile” and “Smile”, “Pisa” and “Lisa”, “check” and “wreck”, “flop” and “top”), the two words share the same rhythmic placement. The majority of these rhyming pairs fall on the

\(^{397}\) Porter 43-44
upbeats of beats two and three, giving them extra emphasis since, as Citron points out, “syncopation creates accent.”  

The 1938 song, “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” demonstrates a similar kinship between rhyme and rhythm. Here, Porter uses contrasting rhythmic motifs to distinguish internal rhymes from the rhymes that unfold over longer periods of time. The rhyme scheme in the eight-measure A sections of this AABC song is quite dense: AABBCDDC. As example 31 illustrates, the internal rhyming syllables corresponding to A (“off” and “golf”) and D (“do” and “through”) in this rhyme scheme all fall in the same rhythmic position—the upbeat of beat two—in measures 1, 2, 5, and 6. On the other hand, the “B” rhymes (“may” and “play”) are set with quarter-note triplets on beat 1. The “C” rhymes in each A section of the song involve the title word “daddy,” which Pamela Oland acknowledges in The Art of Writing Great Lyrics as “a terribly difficult word to rhyme.” These significant rhymes have yet another unique rhythm, a pair of eighth notes on beat one.

Ex. 31: “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” (1938) Refrain mm. 1-8.  

The only rhyme in the bridge (between “bad” and “dad”) similarly occurs between two words that fall on the downbeats of beat one in measures 20 and 24. The direct

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98 Citron 310  
200 Porter 118-19
correspondence between rhyme and rhythm throughout this song thus foregrounds the ingenuity of Porter’s rhymes, adding to the effect of comedy in a song whose success depends largely on a series of thinly veiled innuendos.

Although the specifics of notated rhythm may sometimes be disregarded in performance, the consistent rhythmic vocabulary illustrated in the above examples demonstrates at the very least an awareness of the effect of rhythm in Porter’s compositional process. It is apparent in Porter’s songs that he used triplets and rhythmic motifs for a number of reasons, including making his lyrics mirror spoken language as nearly as possible, reinforcing important lyrical moments, and at times forging literal connections between form and content.
Conclusion

I was not born early enough to have seen the opening of a Cole Porter musical on the Broadway stage, or to hear him entertain guests at a Paris cocktail party (nor would I likely have been invited). His songs have only been accessible to me divorced from their original context through the magic of recorded and printed music. For years before embarking on this project, I listened to recordings of his songs by singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra and by instrumentalists like Bill Evans and Charlie Parker. I played his songs from the lead sheets in the Real Book or the Real Vocal Book, thinking much of the notes on the staves and comparatively little of the note in the top corner of the page, which—unlike most pages in those books—listed only one name. It was in researching this project that it became clear to me that Porter was truly a master of the craft of songwriting. The deeper I dug into his music and lyrics, the more there was to see. Indeed, prose is thoroughly inadequate in expressing the power of song, and I urge anyone who might read this essay to do as I have done and explore the music for themselves.

In addition to this paper, my engagement with the music of Cole Porter also extended into my honors thesis recital, which was held on March 30th of this year in Wesleyan’s Crowell Concert Hall. Entitled “Words and Music: the Songs of Cole Porter and Zack Sulsky,” my concert included performances of six of my own original songs, as well as six of Cole Porter’s classic songs, all newly arranged for an ensemble of vocalists, saxophonists, and a rhythm section. I performed as a part of each of these three sections at various points during my recital, singing and playing both piano and baritone saxophone. In terms of melody, harmony, and rhythm, my
arrangements bear a strong influence from the world of jazz, especially the big band tradition exemplified by the orchestras of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Although my arrangements are in many ways different from the way Porter initially envisioned his songs, I was first and foremost motivated by a desire to capture the elements of narrative, emotion, and character intrinsic to Porter’s musical and lyrical material. My own compositions were also informed by various aspects of the musical and lyrical vocabularies of Cole Porter, including some of the techniques discussed in the analytical portions of this essay. More broadly, however, my songs share with Porter’s a desire to communicate meaning to an audience through the collaboration of words and music.

In an era in which music and lyrics were so often written separately, Porter was unusual in that he created both. As this essay has shown, music and lyrics were deeply connected in Porter’s compositions, and together they created an incredible range of sounds, stories, characters, and emotions. Although Cole Porter is most often praised for his lyrics, it is not only the musicality of his words but also the lyricality of his music that allows both elements to coexist so effortlessly. It is the symbiosis of words and music that makes Porter’s music an indispensible part of the history of the craft of songwriting.
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Easy to Love

Score

Voice

Soprano Sax.

Alto Sax.

Tenor Sax.

Baritone Sax.

Guitar

Bass

Drum Set

Vibraphone

Swing

P

Zack Sulsky

Cole Porter

Cole Porter

Zack Sulsky
Easy to Love

You'd be so easy to love so easy to love all others above.
Easy to Love
Easy to Love

So grand at the same time
So free to breathe that it does seem a shame that
Easy to Love

You can't see your future with me 'cause you'd be oh so easy to love.
Easy to Love
Easy to Love
### Easy to Love

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<th>Eaug7</th>
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<td>A. Sn.</td>
<td>F foothall</td>
<td>Aaug</td>
<td>Eaug7</td>
<td>Gdim</td>
<td>Gdim7</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>C#dim7</td>
<td>F#dim9</td>
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<td>Eaug7</td>
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<td>B7</td>
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<td>C7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>C#dim7</td>
<td>F#dim9</td>
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<td>C9</td>
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<td>B7</td>
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<td>Am7</td>
<td>D7</td>
<td>G6</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Bm7</td>
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<td>C7</td>
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<td>E7(9)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Easy to Love
Easy to Love
gain complete control of you and handle even the heart and soul of you so
love at least a small percent of me don't for I love all of you

love at least a small percent of me don't for I love all of you

love at least a small percent of me don't for I love all of you

for I love all of you

for I love all of you

for I love all of you

for I love all of you
At Long Last Love

Cole Porter
Zack Sulsky

SCORE

Voice
Alto Sax. 1
Alto Sax. 2
Tenor Sax.
Baritone Sax.
Guitar
Bass
Drum Set

Rubato
q = 70

F
t7

Bb
Bb7
d7

ebm7

ebm7

F

A

Fm7

D

A7

F

D

A7

Fm7

A7

D7

Ebm7

A7

D7

Ebm7

A7

D7
At Long Last Love

I'm so in love
although it gives me joy intense
I can't decipher if I'm a sufferer or if it's just a first offense

At Long Last Love

Guitar

Piano

Bass

Drums
At Long Last Love

EARTH-WAKE OR SIMPLY A SHAZIK?
IS IT THE GOOD TUR-TIE SOUP OR MERELY THE MUCK? Is it a

Bb0 Cm7 F7 Gm7 Dm7 F7 Eb0 G7 Cm

At Long Last Love
At Long Last Love

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Cm6

E♭6

Cm

E♭6, C/E

C/E F7

F7

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.

Cm6

E♭6

Cm

E♭6, C/E

C/E F7

F7

B♭6

F7

F7

F7

F7
At Long Last Love

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Gtr.

Pho.

Bass

D. S.
At Long Last Love

To Coda

Cm7 F7

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.
At Long Last Love

\[ B^b_6 \quad C_m7 \quad F_7 \quad G_m \quad C_m7 \quad F_7 \quad B^b_7 \quad G_/B \quad C_m7 \quad D_(05) \quad E^b_6 \quad A_m7(b5) \quad D^7 \]

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Gtr.

Pno.

D. S.
At Long Last Love

Gm7    E♭m6    B♭6    G7    C7    F7    B♭6    Cm7    F7

A. Sx. 1

A. Sx. 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx

Gtr.

Bass

D. S.
At Long Last Love
I Get a Kick Out of You

Score

Intro

Voice

Alto Sax. 1

Alto Sax. 2

Tenor Sax. 1

Tenor Sax. 2

Baritone Sax.

Vibraphone

Guitar

Bass

Drum Set

Cole Porter
Zack Sulsky

I Get a Kick Out of You

Cole Porter
Zack Sulsky
I Get a Kick Out of You

Faster Rubato

STORY IS MUCH TOO SAD TO BE TOLD
BUT PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING LEAVES ME

A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx. 1
T. Sx. 2
B. Sx.
Vn.
Gt.
Bsn.
D. 3
I Get a Kick Out of You

I Know Is the Case
I Get a Kick Out of You
I Get a Kick Out of You

Med. Swing

AND I SUB-DI-LY TURN AND SEE YOUR FAB-U-LOUS FACE
I Get a Kick Out of You

I get no kick from champagne
Here alcohol doesn't thrill me at all so

A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx. 1
T. Sx. 2
B. Sx.

Vv.

Gt.

Bn.

D. S.
I Get a Kick Out of You

Tell me why should it be true

That I get a kick out of you
Some get a kick from co - caine

I'm sure that if I took e - ven one sniff it moved

I Get a Kick Out of You

A. Sax. 1
A. Sax. 2
B. Sax.
Vib.
Gtr.
Bass
D. S.
I Get a Kick Out of You

Bore me ter - ri - fically too
Yet I get a kick out of you.
I Get a Kick Out of You

I GET A KICK EVERY TIME I SEE YOU STANDING THERE BEFORE ME

A. Ex. 1

A. Ex. 2

B. Ex.

Vln.

Gtr.

Bass

D. 3
I Get a Kick Out of You

Get a kick out of me

Through it all

Clear to me

Obedient

Wore it out

I'd wear it out

Yes, I'd wear it out

Regardless

A - done

And done

A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx. 1
T. Sx. 2
B. Sx.
Vib.
Gtr.
Bass
D. S.
Fm7
Fm7
Gm7
(5)
Gm7
(5)
C7
C7
F7
F7
F7
B7
B7
B7
B7
I get no kick out of you

A.Sx. 1

get no kick in a race

A.Sx. 2

fly - way too much

T.Sx. 1

nearly cup

T.Sx. 2

in the cap

D.S.

morn.
I Get a Kick Out of You

```
F

A. Ex. 1

A. Ex. 2

T. Ex. 1

T. Ex. 2

B. Ex.

Vln.

Gtr.

Bass

D. S.

105

Fm

B7

Emaj7

G7

C7

Fm7

B7

Emaj7

G7

C7

Fm7

B7

Emaj7

G7

C7

D. S.
```

```
I Get a Kick Out of You
I Get a Kick Out of You
I Get a Kick Out of You

Coda

D.S. al Coda

You...