

# AABA, REFRAIN, CHORUS, BRIDGE, PRECHORUS – SONG FORMS AND THEIR HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Why form analysis?

Most literature that analyzes popular music deals with song forms only peripherally. The few essays and chapters that have been written on the form of pop songs exist largely in isolation, without making reference to one another. Songwriting guides aimed at musicians (e.g. Perricone 2000, Braheny 2006, Citron 2008, Blanton 2010, Murphy 2011) often include their own chapter on song forms, but just as the scholarly literature are by and large limited to categorical overviews of three or four common formal models, listing them without differentiation according to historical or stylistic criteria. We are not aware of studies that examine the historical development and dissemination of various song forms in greater depth, which gives the impression that popular music is limited to a few conventional standard forms. This might lead some to view the analysis of form as banal and irrelevant to interpretations of musical meaning.

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1 An earlier version of this study was published in German in *Black Box Pop. Analysen populärer Musik*, ed. by Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phleps (Beiträge zur Populärmusikforschung 38, Bielefeld: transcript 2012). For this publication it has been extended and revised considerably. Chapter 3.2 has been newly written. We are deeply thankful to David Brown for the translation and to Franklin Bruno who instigated it and not only offered valuable comments but also helped to finance the translation substantially. We also thank Thomas Phleps, Dietrich Helms, Walter Everett, and Allan F. Moore for their support.

Our studies have shown quite the contrary, however, and we have identified a number of important desiderata for an intensive scholarly analysis of song forms.

First, the nomenclature currently in use contains countless internal contradictions (see Section 1.2). There is a need for a critical discussion of this terminology with the objective of examining the origins and transformations of terms currently in use. A terminology based on sound scholarly research is an indispensable foundation for any discussion and understanding of music and its analysis.

Second, an analysis of the architecture of songs should not be limited to mere description. Rather, making song forms the *object* of analysis, and not just the *basis* for orienting the analysis in the song, is a promising approach, because song forms provide an impetus for interpretation on the semantic, symbolic, and functional levels. While song forms do not usually have as close a semantic relationship with lyrics as harmony, melody, or sound, anyone involved in the enterprise of interpreting songs should be aware that expressive content such as tension and boredom, calm and impatience, departure and homecoming, order and impudence, chaos, change, surprise, satisfaction, or unease can be both reinforced and undermined by song forms. While such interpretive approaches are based on a direct relationship of similarity between form and content, it is also possible to conceive of a mode of interpretation that derives symbolic meaning from the form itself—that is, which is based on meanings more or less arbitrarily assigned to a certain formal model and which cling to it by convention: Thus, song forms may be heard as parodistic, ironic, or nostalgic when they are placed into an atypical context (see Section 6), just as any conscious break with convention challenges us to interpret it. In addition, form may also be interpreted with regard to the song's functional applications, because formal elements—e.g., the length and type of the introduction, the length of the lyrics, the position and frequency of refrains or choruses—allow us to draw conclusions about the intended use of the song, for example on the radio, for dance, or political purposes.

Third, everyone who seeks to understand music of the past and the present based on its historical development needs knowledge of the respective historical standards and innovations. What was typical for a given time, and what was extraordinary? How did song forms change, and under what influences? How did innovations and adaptations arise? How and when did various forms merge with one another?

Questions like these demand a terminological and historical foundation, which we hope to be able to lay in the following section.

## 1.2 Terminological basis

At the most general level, the majority of popular songs can be assigned to one of the following three form models.

### 1. Verse/chorus forms

Verse/chorus forms encompass two formal components (in addition to optional introductions, soli, or codas): a chorus, which is repeated largely without change in harmony, melody, or lyrics, and several verses, which remain more or less identical with respect to harmony and melody but are differentiated by the lyrics. Within the larger category of verse/chorus forms, we can distinguish with John Covach (2005, 73) between »simple« and »contrasting« verse/chorus forms. In the latter, the verse and chorus differ from one another in terms of harmony and/or melody. In the »simple verse/chorus« form, both components have the same harmonic progression but not necessarily the same melody.

### 2. AAA, strophic, or »simple verse« form

In this form model, one formal component (A) is repeated several times with different lyrics. This A-section may end or begin with the same line of text, the refrain, but there is no second discrete section as in the verse/chorus model. Narrative ballads or folk songs may be counted among the examples of the AAA model, as may songs that consist of a blues progression repeated several times. There is no standard term for the individual A-sections: Depending on the author and genre, they may be called »verses«, »choruses«, »stanzas«, or »strophes«.

### 3. AABA or the »American Popular Song Form«

This formal model is based on an A-section, typically 8 measures in length, which often contains the title lyric at the beginning or end and is immediately repeated with different lyrics after its first appearance. Following the initial two iterations of the A-section comes a contrasting B-section, also typically 8 measures in length, which is followed by an additional repetition of the A-section with varied lyrics to complete the 32-bar unit. This AABA sequence started off at the beginning of the 20th Century as the internal structure of a chorus presented in alternation with verses. Over the years, these verses declined in importance and often ended up as a single and even negligible verse which served as an introduction (see chapter 2.3 for a more detailed description). In some cases, the first complete AABA sequence is followed by an additional complete iteration of the AABA

sequence, but more often the final 16 measures (BA) are repeated before the song ends with a coda.

There is no standard terminology for the individual components of these three basic form models. Common terms like »chorus«, »verse« or »bridge« are subject to historical transformations. Accordingly, they are often assigned contradictory definitions in the literature. Due to the organic evolution of these terms, it is not possible to assign authoritative definitions to them, so there is no way around subjecting them to historical analysis.

The following overview is intended not so much to establish clarity as to document the contradictory use of these terms and thus create an awareness of the numerous ambiguities in the terminology.

### *Chorus*

»Chorus« is, first and foremost, the term used to describe the independent section within the verse/chorus form, which is usually repeated with identical lyrics<sup>2</sup> as well as harmonic and melodic structure and often ends harmonically closed. The lyrics of the chorus often contain the song's title or another lyrical hook, which serves to make the tune more recognizable and, in many cases, to inspire the audience to sing along.

With regard to the AAA form, however, the term »chorus« also refers to a single iteration of the harmonic and melodic structure, i.e., one A-section, although the lyrics will vary from section to section. Accordingly, the AAA Form is also known as the »chorus Form«: »Blues form is a type of chorus form: the structural unit carrying one stanza (which musically may be referred to as a verse or chorus) is repeated for subsequent stanzas« (Middleton 2003, 503, cf. also 508).

The term, »chorus« can also refer to a single iteration of the entire 32-bars of the AABA form, especially among jazz musicians, who improvise over multiple repetitions of such choruses (ibid. 505). However, with respect to popular songs of the Tin Pan Alley era, Allen Forte (1995, 38), uses the term »chorus« to refer not to a full iteration of the form, but only to the A-sections. He labels the first two A-sections jointly »chorus 1« and the third A-section »chorus 2.«

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2 Cf. Neal (2007) for many examples in country music that alter the lyrics in the choruses.

### *Refrain*

In German, the term, »Refrain,« is used synonymously with »chorus« when referring to a chorus within the verse/chorus form. At least one English-language author, Richard Middleton, (2003, 508) uses the term in the same way.

In English usage, however, the term, »refrain« typically refers to what in German is more precisely called the »Refrainzeile« (refrain line): a lyric at the beginning or end of a section that is repeated in every iteration. In this usage, the refrain does not constitute a discrete, independent section within the form.

Nevertheless, there are also authors that refer to an iteration of the entire 32-bar AABA form as a »Refrain,« according to Forte (1995, 36) and Covach (2005, 70), who suggests the term »sectional refrain« to avoid misunderstandings. In this way »refrain« was apparently commonly used by the song authors themselves; in the introductory verse of the song »It's De-Lovely« by Cole Porter (1936), the lyrics begin:

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!  
 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.

### *Verse*

As in the preceding example, in the context of the AABA form, the recitative section that often precedes the first A-section is called the »verse.«<sup>3</sup> Covach (2005, 69f.) labels this sort of introduction a »sectional verse,« since he considers the individual A-sections within the AABA form to be the actual »verses.«

In AAA forms, the individual A-sections are sometimes referred to as »verses« and sometimes as »choruses.« Accordingly, what Middleton (2003, 508) calls the »chorus form,« Covach (2005, 68f.) calls the »simple verse« form. These verses may include a refrain line.

Within the verse/chorus form, the verse is the first discrete section that is repeated with different lyrics.

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3 Cf. also the verse of »Catch Em Young, Treat Em Rough, Tell Em Nothing« (Krantz/Colby 1951): »This verse is short / and so's this song / Follow my advice and you can't go wrong«).

### *Bridge*

The term »bridge« is primarily used to refer to the B-section in the AABA form. Other common designations for this section include »release,« »channel,« and (mostly in England) »middle eight.« In addition, »bridge« can refer to a third, discrete section within a verse/chorus form that introduces new material which provides a point of contrast within the final third of the song. This type of bridge is not usually repeated.

A third usage of the term, »bridge,« common among musicians, refers to a transitional part between the verse and the chorus, which is alternatively referred to as the »prechorus« (see section 5 and fn. 75). The terms »transitional bridge« (to refer to the prechorus) and »primary bridge« (to refer to the middle eight) have been proposed at the Berklee College of Music to differentiate between these terms, (cf. Perricone 2000, 87), but they remain seldom used in practice.<sup>4</sup>

Only in Ken Stephenson's (2002, 138) nomenclature does »bridge« also refer to a section between several verses of songs that are neither in AABA nor verse/chorus form.

It is obvious that the terms as used by Forte, Covach, and Middleton are not compatible with one another. The same 32-bar AABA form would consist of three verses of equal length and one bridge according to Covach or two choruses of different length and a bridge according to Forte. Following Middleton, the bridge would just be part of one overarching chorus. In order to use these terms in scholarly analysis, an investigation into the development of this terminological confusion and the historical origins of these formal components and their respective names is essential.

## **1.3 On the structure of this article**

Our core thesis is that the disappearance of the verse in the American Popular Song Form of the Tin Pan Alley era was accompanied by the emergence of AABA choruses with increasingly sophisticated interior structures, from which a new, more complex verse-(prechorus)-chorus form emerged, in which the bridge existed as a formally discrete middle section.

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4 Neither Middleton (2003) nor Stephenson (2002) mention the prechorus as a formal section within their surveys of song forms. Even Covach offers no designation for this formal component, although he does analyze »Be My Baby« (Spector/Barry/Greenwich 1963), a song that contains prechoruses (see Covach 2005, 71).

The analysis in the following section begins with the introduction of the term »chorus« for the refrain in the minstrel songs of Stephen Foster (section 2.1). In the 1890's, the typical verse/chorus form of the early Tin Pan Alley era emerged as these formal components were expanded and subjected to musical and lyrical variation. In this new form, a chorus consisted of a 16- or 32-measure cycle based on an ABAC structure (section 2.2). Following World War I, the 32-measure AABA form, in which the A-section now began or ended with a refrain, prevailed as the standard (sections 2.3 and 2.4). Employing various styles of harmonization from the »Tin Pan Alley« bag of tricks for the A-sections became an important method of differentiating these sections from one another (section 2.5 and 2.6). Section 2.7 describes the bridge as »the other« within the AABA form. New methods for filling the A-section were explored in the R&B ballads, country music, and Doo Wop tunes after World War II. The standardization of harmonic loops in Doo Wop was an important prerequisite for the emancipation of discrete verses within the AABA form (section 3).

Section 4.1 tracks how the closing refrain line evolved into a discrete chorus in blues of the 1920s, and later in R&B. The same process then took place within the AABA form (section 4.2), which morphed into the »verse – chorus – verse – chorus – bridge – verse – chorus« model in the 1950s. Section 5 considers the evolution of the prechorus as a formal component. Its origins lie in the 32-measure AABA forms of DooWop (section 5.1), but in Brill Building pop it became a fixture of longer A-sections within the AABA form (section 5.2). The prechorus became established as a discrete formal component around 1962, now outside the AABA form entirely. Section 6 describes the renaissance of AABA forms in the Beatles' early songs and the subsequent decline of a formal model that had dominated for over 40 years. Since the mid-1960s, a greater diversity and individuality of song forms can be observed (section 7). Our analysis ends here, the point at which all common song forms had been established and authors began to freely combine them with one another.

For this investigation, we analyzed the forms of c. 3000 songs. This sample was not selected systematically (for example, based on chart placement during certain years), but rather was initially based on the body of music we had access to in the collection of the Institute for Musicology and Music Pedagogy at the Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen. Subsequently, we conducted a targeted search for additional examples in order to test the theses arrived at through this study. Finally, in order to quantitatively validate the study, we analyzed all the non-instrumental Billboard Top 100 number one hits from each even-numbered year between 1952 and 1982 to

identify and classify their underlying formal models. Our study focused on popular music from the United States, because all the important developments could be identified there first. We made every effort to cite songs that contain the first manifestation of each development described in our analysis. However, given the limited sample size, we cannot guarantee that the cited examples are in fact the very first occurrence of a given formal characteristic.

## 2. Chorus and refrain

### 2.1 The refrain becomes the chorus

As far as we can tell, the confusion around the terms »chorus,« and »refrain« begins in the mid 19th century in sheet music editions of parlor songs and the so-called »Plantation Songs« that authors such as Stephen Foster composed for the minstrel stage.<sup>5</sup> Songs like »Old Folks At Home« or »Oh! Susanna« have a simple verse/refrain form. The verses consist of two eight-measure periods in which the phrases differ only slightly to form half cadences and authentic cadences. The refrain is a similar eight-measure period, but the antecedent phrase introduces new material. In our example, it includes the title lyrics, »Oh! Susanna,« and distinguishes itself harmonically through a shift to the subdominant. The consequent phrase returns to the opening line of the first strophe (but this time resolves fully in an authentic cadence, of course).<sup>6</sup>

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5 cf. Hamm (1979, 255): »The verse-chorus pattern, one of the most distinctive features of these songs, had developed first in songs of the singing families of the 1840s and '50s and in minstrel songs of the same period. By this time it was an almost universal pattern and was one of the most uniquely American features of this body of song. It was equally appropriate for performance at home, where the better singers could take the solo verses and all others could join in the chorus, and on the minstrel stage, where the entire troupe could echo the verses sung by one of the stars.«

6 Tawa's analysis of 230 songs published between 1866 and 1910 led him to the conclusion that the verse and chorus typically had the same melody before 1890, and differing melodies thereafter (Tawa 1990, 97). In the songs published after 1890 in which the verse and chorus melodies varied, the chorus typically returned to one of the phrases from the verse (ibid., 110); only seldom did they consist of entirely new material (ibid., 117), cf. also Hamm (1979, 254f.). However, there are earlier minstrel songs that followed a different pattern, such as the famous »Dixie« (credited as »I Wish I Was In Dixie's Land« to Daniel Decatur Emmett, copyrighted in 1860), which contains verses and choruses of eight bars each with different melodies. Another notorious example is »Jump Jim Crow« (Rice 1830) with contrasting verses and refrains of four bars each.



| Stephen Foster: »Oh! Susanna« (1848) |   |      |  |
|--------------------------------------|---|------|--|
|                                      | Lyrics  | Line | Musical phrases<br>(2/4 measures each) |
| Verse 1                              | I came from Alabama<br>Wid my banjo on my knee,<br>I'm g'wan to Lousiana,<br>My true love for to see.                         | A    | a <sup>D</sup>                         |
|                                      |   | B    | a <sup>T</sup>                         |
| Verse 2                              | It rain'd all night the day I left,<br>The weather it was dry,<br>The sun so hot I frose to death;<br>Susanna, don't you cry. | C    | a <sup>D</sup>                         |
|                                      |   | D    | a <sup>T</sup>                         |
| Refrain<br>(Chorus)                  | Oh! Susanna,<br>Oh! Don't you cry for me,<br>I've come from Alabama,<br>Wid my banjo on my knee.                              | E    | b <sup>S-&gt;D</sup>                   |
|                                      |   | A    | a <sup>T</sup>                         |

Songs with refrain lines which are sung, often in unison, by the entire minstrel troupe to the same melody as the lines in the verse existed before Foster's. The novel aspect of Foster's minstrel songs was that the refrain was distinguished by four or five voice harmony in the sheet music editions published in the mid-19th century (Hamm 1979, 210).<sup>7</sup> This differentiation between the strophes presented by a solo voice and the refrain, sung by a chorus or in four-voice harmony, ushered in the term »chorus« for this part of the form. This designation stuck, resulting in the synonymous use of the terms »refrain« and »chorus.«<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Tin Pan Alley standard No. 1: ABAC

»After The Ball« (Harris 1891), the landmark hit of early Tin Pan Alley<sup>9</sup>, with its 64-measure verse and a 32-measure chorus, is gigantic in its proportions compared to »Oh! Susanna.« While the length of the two-part verse is also atypical of the new age of songwriting (cf. Tawa 1990, 163, and Hamm

7 These editions are available online at <http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu>. In the editions based on the performances by Christy's Minstrels, the chorus is arranged for five voices. In the edition subtitled »As Sung by the Ethiopian Serenaders,« it was arranged for four voices.

8 Tawa (1990, 106) refers to such refrains sung by a choir as »chorus refrains.« Hoerbuerger (1998, 124) states in his *MGG* article, »Refrain«—unfortunately without citing any evidence—that the term »chorus« was also commonly used to refer to the refrain in English folk songs. Hamm (1979, 210), in contrast, points out that the most apparent differentiating characteristic between Foster's »Ethiopian melodies« and his »English« songs was that the former always had a chorus, while the latter never did.

9 Hamm (1979, 297) labels its success »the first spectacular demonstration of the market potential of popular song.«

1979, 293), »After the Ball« served as a model in many other respects. The refrain is still referred to as a »chorus« in this period, but an arrangement calling for this section to be sung by an actual chorus had become the exception rather than the rule by this point.<sup>10</sup> Unlike »Oh! Susanna,« this chorus shares no common material with its verse. Rather, its sumptuous waltz melody provides a distinct contrast to the plainer ballad-like tone of the verse. The chorus of »After the Ball« consists of a 32-measure period based on two 16-measure phrases, four eight-measure lines or eight four-measure phrases. Until the 1920s, when this layout became the dominant template, it existed alongside various other popular chorus models, which were 16 measures in length but otherwise shared the same characteristics.

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10 The terminology used with regard to these forms was far from settled. Even two editions of »After The Ball« released in 1892 by Harris' own publishing houses do not agree on terminology. The edition published in Milwaukee refers to the section beginning with the lyrics »After the ball...« as the »chorus,« while the New York edition calls it the »refrain« (cf. the joint online music archives of various libraries in the state of Indiana at <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/welcome.do>). Songs like this were typically performed in Vaudeville shows, and it was customary for the public to join in on the choruses, singing in unison with a chorus of voices from the stage. However, this was a matter of performance practice, and not composition. An arrangement of the chorus for multiple voices singing in harmony had become optional at best: »Although the chorus no longer sports a soprano-alto-tenor-baritone harmonization, an unaccompanied vocal-quartet harmonization of this section is sometimes included in the sheet music to accommodate the many amateur and professional quartets, particularly male ones, active during these years. In instances where optional harmony is omitted, the possibility of improvised vocal harmony was probably assumed« (Tawa 1990, 169f.).

| Charles K. Harris: »After The Ball« (1891) with its ABAC-Chorus |  |              |                                   |
|---|--|--------------|-----------------------------------|
|   | Lyrics   | Rhyme scheme | Musical phrases (8 measures each) |
| Verse 1   | A little maiden<br>climbed an old man's knee             | a            | {A <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
|   | Begged for a story –<br>»Do Uncle, please.«              | a            | {B <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
|   | Why are you single;<br>why live alone?                   | b            | {A' <sup>Verse</sup> }            |
|   | Have you no babies;<br>have you no home?«                | b            | {C <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
|   | »I had a sweetheart,<br>years, years ago;                | c            | {D <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
|   | Where she is now, pet,<br>you will soon know             | c            | {E <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
|   | List [sic] to the story,<br>I'll tell it all,            | d            | {A' <sup>Verse</sup> }            |
|   | I believed her faithless<br>after the ball.«             | d            | {C <sup>Verse</sup> }             |
| Chorus  | After the ball is over,<br>After the break of morn,      | e            | <b>A</b> <sup>Chorus</sup>        |
|   | After the dancers' leaving,<br>After the stars are gone; | e            | <b>B</b> <sup>Chorus</sup>        |
|   | Many a heart is aching,<br>If you could read them all;   | d            | <b>A'</b> <sup>Chorus</sup>       |
|   | Many the hopes that have vanished<br>After the ball.     | d            | <b>C</b> <sup>Chorus</sup>        |

In contrast to the simple period of »Oh! Susanna,« the phrases in the chorus differ not only in their final chords, but in their harmonic and melodic structure as well. The resulting ABAC chorus form would predominate until 1920 and even produced a number of hits later.<sup>11</sup>

11 Examples: »Alexander's Ragtime Band« (Berlin 1911), »Swanee« (Caesar/Gershwin 1919), »Tea For Two« (Caesar/Youmans 1924), »I Can't Give You Anything But Love« (Fields/McHugh 1928), »White Christmas« (Berlin 1942), »Ev'ry Time We Say Good Bye« (Porter 1944), »Cry« (Kohlman 1951), »Mr. Sandman« (Ballard 1954), »Spanish Eyes« (Kaempfert/Singleton/Snyder 1965/66). Even as late as 1952, the top 20 songs on the Billboard Year End Charts included seven songs with this form. ABAC was also a popular form in country music, for example in Hank Williams' »Half As Much« (Curley Williams 1951) or Pee Wee King's »Slow Poke« (Price 1951).

|      | Sentimental Songs |        | Waltz Songs |        | Coon and Rag Songs |        | March and other Rhythmic Songs |        |
|------|-------------------|--------|-------------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
|      | Verse             | Chorus | Verse       | Chorus | Verse              | Chorus | Verse                          | Chorus |
| ABAC |                   | >50%   | 27%         | 31%    |                    | 60%    | 40%                            | 53%    |
| AABA |                   |        | 34%         | 13%    |                    |        | 20%                            | 20%    |

Table 1 Distribution of verse and chorus forms in various types of songs published between 1890 and 1910 according to Tawa (1990, 170, 179, 190 and 196); empty cells = no information stated

Irrespective of the harmonic and melodic complexity of the 32-measure period, recognizing the musical form of the chorus is sometimes very challenging. For instance, there are often variations at the level of the four-measure phrases. This is especially common of the second A-section, which results in an ABA'C form, as in »After The Ball« to cite an early example.<sup>12</sup> The dividing line between a ABAC form with variations and unusual forms such as ABB'A or ABCD is often blurred, but the lyrics can provide an aid in parsing this form, providing formal signposts through repetition or analogy when the musical presentation of a passage varies. The most prevalent model through which the lyrics serve to state the form can already be seen in »After the Ball,« in which the title hook bookends the lyrics of the chorus. Quoting a single word or element of the hook—in this case the word »after«—at the beginning of the first four phrases is another common means of indicating the form.<sup>13</sup>

One important aspect of the »After The Ball« model is that the lyrics in the chorus make no direct reference to the poignant story told in the three verses and thus do not really require the verse narrative to make sense. The chorus can stand on its own, and later it would do just that, as redacting

12 In »Come Rain Or Come Shine« (Mercer/Arlen 1946), for example, the second phrase of the second A-section (measures 21-24) begins a major second higher relative to the first. In »Who« (Harbach/Hammerstein II/Kern 1925) the first phrase of the second A-section (measures 17-20) is transposed up a perfect fourth. Gerald Mast (1987, 53f.) emphasizes Jerome Kern's fondness for these variations.

13 Examples: »For Me And My Gal« (Meyer/Leslie/Goetz 1917), »Who« (Harbach/Hammerstein II/Kern 1925), »If« (Evans 1934), »Because Of You« (Hammerstein/Wilkinson 1940). This technique is especially popular in *list songs*, whose lyrics list examples, evidence, or associations, typically loosely connected to the title hook. It is also particularly suited for *comedy songs* (e.g., »Always True To You (In My Fashion)«, Porter 1948), but it is employed in *love ballads* as well.

the narrative verses became the norm for performances of songs in venues other than the stage or musical films.

### 2.3 Tin Pan Alley-Standard No. 2: AABA

As the following figure shows, ABAC was eclipsed in the 1920's (although by no means completely replaced) as the leading chorus-form by the AABA form, which would eventually come to be considered the classic song form of Tin Pan Alley.<sup>14</sup>

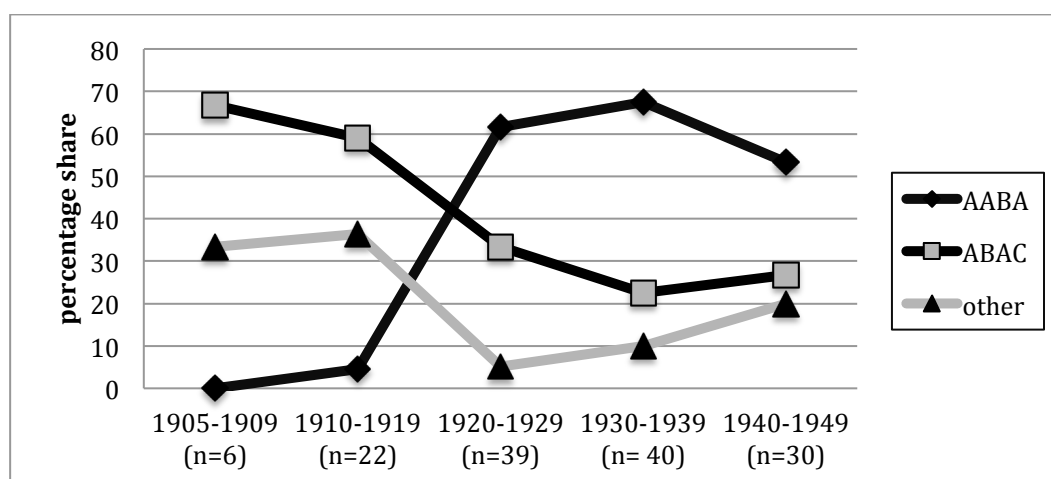


Figure 1: Chorus Form Models in the Sample »Tin Pan Alley-Songs«

The earliest example of an AABA chorus-form in our core sample is the song »Someday Sweetheart« by the brothers Benjamin and John Spikes from 1919. Earlier AABA forms without verses existed in the 19th century, e.g.,

14 [1] This chart is based on a survey of 137 songs published between 1905 and 1949. The core sample is based on the rankings in Charles Hamm's (1979) book *Yesterdays*, which identify these songs as hits. While the validity of a sample selected thus may be debatable, the clear trends in the distribution of formal models may very well accurately depict the actual developments, at least in the Tin Pan Alley mainstream. [2] We interpret the term »Tin Pan Alley« very broadly. We did not differentiate the songs according to their origins or intended uses, e.g., for the sheet music market, for radio, or songs composed in connection with a Broadway show or Hollywood film. If one removed the songs composed for Broadway from the sample, then works by songwriters such as Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, or Lorenz Hart would go uncounted. Shows from the »Golden Era« of Broadway typically generated between two and four hits in the American Popular Song Form (i.e., with an AABA or ABAC Chorus), which were sung on stage to accompaniment by the *pit orchestra*, published as sheet music (on Tin Pan Alley), plunked out on pianos in homes across America, arranged for dance orchestras, recorded by large orchestras and small combos, and used by bebop musicians as a template for improvisation and composition.

Friedrich Silcher (»Muss i denn,« 1827) or Foster (»I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair,« 1854). »Silver Threads Among The Gold« (Rexford/Danks, 1873) and »There's A Chicken Dinner Waitin' Home For Me« (Van Alstyne 1904) offer an AABA verse<sup>15</sup>, and AABA choruses can be found in the songs »I Love My Wife, But Oh You Kid« (Harry von Tilzer 1909) and »Let's Go Into A Picture Show« (Albert von Tilzer/McCree 1909), as well as in songs composed by Irving Berlin in the 1910s.<sup>16</sup> However, this form's breakthrough in American Popular Song does not become evident until 1920 (also according to Middleton 2003, 515). Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that this new 32-measure form has more to do with the ABAC form, based on a 32-measure period as it is, than with »Muss i denn.«

Given that the AABA form would come to be considered the pop song form par excellence, especially as distinct from all types of blues-derived forms, it is astonishing that this »new« chorus-form initially appeared very often in African American contexts. Jelly Roll Morton, for instance, claimed he was the author of »Someday Sweetheart« (cf. Pastras 2001, 125 and Schafer 2008, 54). Some years before that, »I Ain't Got Nobody« (1915), written by the African-American composer Spencer Williams and lyricist Roger A. Graham, was first popularized by the white vaudeville singer Marion Harris, who was promoted as »The Queen of the Blues« (Wald 2004, 18). By the 20s recordings by Bessie Smith und Fats Waller followed and 1938 it was on the set list of the Count Basie Orchestra at the »From Spirituals to Swing« concert, which showcased the achievements of African-American music. What in retrospective may seem to be a song in typical Tin Pan Alley AABA-design with a certain blues tinge, actually preceded both the era of recorded ›real‹ blues<sup>17</sup> and the heyday of the AABA form. Irving Berlin's AABA song »Everybody Step« from 1921 was considered overtly »jazzy« by his contemporaries, including George Gershwin (cf. Magee 2006, 698ff.). And Jerome Kern also linked African American musical idioms with the AABA form in the 1920s. One of his first songs in this form was »Left All Alone Again Blues« from 1920, a blues song<sup>18</sup> with a ragtime rhythm. With a

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15 The 64 bars of the verses of »After The Ball« build an AABA form as well.

16 For example, »Araby,« 1914, and »From Here to Shanghai,« 1917. At this time, Berlin also made more frequent use of the hybrid form AABC (e.g., »The Syncopated Walk,« 1914, »I'm Going Back To The Farm,« 1915, and »I Lost My Heart In Dixieland,« 1919), which later became much less prevalent.

17 Cf. Wald (2004) for a profound discussion of what was and is considered ›real blues‹, as well of the reliability of such considerations.

18 Blues songs, in this context, are Tin Pan Alley songs whose titles or lyrics contain the word »Blues.« Their lyrics and music contain veiled or overt blues topoi, but their forms follow the usual verse-chorus progression. They only use the 12-bar-structure for either the verse (as in »The Tennessee Blues,«

I-IV shuttle in the A-section and a melody based on alternating perfect fourths and tritones, it demonstrates two characteristic blues colorations. In the epochal musical *Show Boat* from 1927, Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II reserve the AABA form for the world of the black characters. »Ole Man River,« sung by the dockworker Joe, laments the difficult lives of and discrimination against blacks in the south over a harmony sophisticating the I-IV-shuttle to I-vi<sup>7</sup>-I-IV | I-IV-I-vi<sup>7</sup>. The second song in AABA form, »Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man,« is sung by the vaudeville performer Julie, who emphasizes that she learned it from Afro-Americans, but still unwittingly outs herself as a mulatto by singing this tune larded with blue notes, which results in her being fired from the *Show Boat* soon afterward.<sup>19</sup> Around 1930, Andy Razaf wrote the lyrics for several hits in AABA form with music by Fats Waller (»Honeysuckle Rose« 1928, »Ain't Misbehavin'« 1929, and »(What Did I Do To Be So) Black And Blue« 1929, the latter composed with Harry Brook), Don Redman (»Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good To You« 1930), and Eubie Blake (»Memories Of You« 1930 and »My Handyman Ain't Handy Anymore« 1930) popularized by singers like Alberta Hunter and Louis Armstrong. Other AABA standards written and/or prominently performed by African-Americans were »Stormy Weather« (Koehler/Arlen 1933), »I Ain't Got Nothing But The Blues« (George/Ellington 1937), and »Don't Get Around Much Anymore« (Russell/Ellington 1940).

So while the AABA form was also associated with Afro-Americans, especially in the first decade of its popularity, later on it stood quite exclusively

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Warner/Holt 1916) or the chorus (»The Alcoholic Blues,« Albert von Tilzer/Laska 1918). Muir gives two reasons for this: »One reason seems to be that using the same melody and chord sequence as the basis for an entire composition was firmly at odds with the conventions of Tin Pan Alley, which assumed that the piece needed musical variety in order to hold the attention of listeners. [...] Furthermore, popular songs and instrumental compositions of the period were structured around the easy-on-the-ear symmetry of sixteen and thirty-two bar structures. Building a piece entirely on an asymmetrical twelve-bar structure [...] was considered too commercially risky (Muir 2010, 67). For an introduction to this repertoire, see this page at the website, »The Parlor Songs Academy« (<http://parlorsongs.com/issues/2007-4/thismonth/feature.php>; last retrieved on April 3, 2011). The songs cited here were all published between 1919 and 1922 and all have ABAC choruses. Three of the songs further included a so-called patter section, which was common primarily among comic vaudeville acts. It is symptomatic of the general terminological confusion that this section, whose dense lyrics and parlando delivery make it distinctly verse-like, was sometimes called a »patter chorus« (cf. e.g., »Wabash Blues,« Ringle/Meinken 1921).

19 While Julie's second song, »Bill,« does have a chorus in ABAC form, it originates in an older show from 1918 and thus from a period during which Kern was not yet writing in the new form.

for the Tin Pan Alley-repertoire, predominantly written by white Jewish songwriters. This separation was going to be confirmed by new genres of popular music emerging in the twenties: while the country blues made no use of the AABA form, it was becoming a standard in country music (see chapter 3.2).

## 2.4 The AABA chorus gets a refrain

While the term »chorus,« initially denoted a refrain sung by a »choir« of some kind and then became synonymous with a multi-line refrain in general, in »Someday, Sweetheart« (and many other songs from the post-WWI era) the term, »chorus« refers to the song itself. This new type of song often included an introductory verse, which served to lead from the dialog to the »actual song,« the chorus, in the context of the musical. While this section can function as a kind of fully composed introduction in other types of live performance, it was typically omitted from recordings.<sup>20</sup> If the Tin Pan Alley chorus had not enjoyed a second life as a harmonic template for improvisation in jazz, then the term would be, strictly speaking, obsolete because its meaning would be identical to that of the word »song.« On most of these recordings, the chorus is by definition no longer a refrain, since the latter refers to an element that recurs in the same form each time and differentiates it from an element that is mutable. The terminology is rendered meaningless if the chorus has multiple sets of lyrics.<sup>21</sup> However, this also makes it clear that the terms »verse« and »chorus« do not merely denote

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20 [1] Ella Fitzgerald in particular often deviated from this custom and included the verse on her recordings. Although the verse, especially in Broadway songs, often serves to bridge the dialogue and the »actual song« (the chorus), the best songwriters wrote many songs with verses that are well worth listening to, for their lyrics as well as music. [2] The older form which usually had two verses and often a shorter (16-measure) abac chorus persisted alongside this newer form in the 1920s.

21 This was not uncommon on the stage and in printed editions; given the limitations of 78rpm records, however, choruses were seldom repeated on recordings with different lyrics unless the song had a fast tempo. Especially comedy songs, drawing their attraction largely from the lyrics and usually having a vivid tempo, need space to unfold their wit. While early novelty songs did this in several verses, later on repeated choruses often became the vessel of comic lists or narrations as in »To Keep My Love Alive« (Rodgers/Hart 1927), which starts with a verse and then lets the protagonist tell in two choruses about all the husbands she murdered. »Let's Call The Whole Thing Off« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1937) has a similar layout, albeit a less brutal content. And especially list songs like Porter's »Anything Goes« (1934) and »Always True To You (In My Fashion)« (1948) might be considered strophic AAA forms with AABA verses were it not for the introductions claiming the verse parts for themselves.



syntactic functions, but that different characters are ascribed to each; there is apparently a verse-like quality that is distinct from a chorus-like quality.

The verse/AABA-chorus form proved very versatile, as evidenced by its use in musicals, in which it was often expanded into an entire scene. For instance, in the stage version of *Show Boat*, »Ole Man River« has the form: verse – AABA' – verse2 – B2 – verse3 – AABA'. The lone bridge (B2), with a new text, as well as the A-sections of the final chorus—but not its bridge—are sung by the choir. Thus, the original meaning of the term »chorus« no longer plays any role here. Recordings tend to excise the opening verse while expanding the form through (partial) repetitions. First, this served to fill the side of the record no matter what the tempo. Second, beginning with the chorus and ending with repetitions was more likely to generate a hit than beginning with a musically nondescript verse that is never repeated anyway. The most common form was AABA – A(instrumental) – BA – Coda.

From the beginning of Tin Pan Alley's dominance of the market, composers and lyricists were well aware of the value of a clear, catchy, and prominent hook for enhancing the memorability and thus the marketability of a song. Accordingly, there is hardly an AABA song (or chorus) without a refrain.<sup>22</sup> The phrase, »someday, sweetheart,« was apparently insufficient to serve as such a hook on its own, however. Thus, this song uses the same parenthetical technique that served the ABAC form so well; it bookends the lyrics with the title hook (xA A<sub>0</sub> B<sub>0</sub> A<sub>x</sub>). A few later songs arrived at the same solution—e.g., »The Man I Love« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1924) and »Symphony« (Alstone 1945)—but it was never established as a standard technique in the songwriter's toolkit.

| »Someday, Sweetheart« (Spikes/Spikes 1919) |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Someday, sweetheart, you may be sorry...   | Hook A <sup>1</sup> |
| And you may regret...                      | A <sup>2</sup>      |
| Oh, you're happy now...                    | B                   |
| ...make you weep, someday, sweetheart.     | A <sup>3</sup> Hook |

22 As Tawa (1990, 107) ascertains, song titles did not receive any special treatment in the lyrics before 1890, when the commercial exploitation of songs was not as professionally organized as it would later become. Sometimes the song title would appear at the beginning of the verses. Sometimes it would appear at the beginning or end of the chorus, and sometimes it introduced both sections. It could also begin the verse as well as end the chorus, or it could be »hidden« in several inconspicuous places within the lyrics.

The vast majority of the AABA songs in the sample use one of two other models. One example of the first model is »Over The Rainbow« (Harburg/ Arlen 1939). In this song, the three A-sections are melodically and harmonically identical (a half cadence is arrived at »artificially« by inserting a ii-V cadence after the first line), and each opens with the lyrical hook »somewhere over the rainbow.« (It is no coincidence that this hook is often cited as the title, even though it does not contain the word »somewhere«). The bridge is typically free of hooks or refrains (one exception is »What'll I Do«, Berlin 1923). It does not contain the hook in this example either, although it is surely no coincidence that it references the hook with the opening word, »some« (»someday I'll wish upon a star«).

| »Over The Rainbow« (Harburg/Arlen 1939)        |      |                |
|--|------|----------------|
| Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high...    | Hook | A <sup>1</sup> |
| Somewhere, over the rainbow, skies are blue... | Hook | A <sup>2</sup> |
| Someday I'll wish upon a star...               |      | B              |
| Somewhere, over the rainbow, bluebirds fly...  | Hook | A <sup>3</sup> |

Alongside this model ( $x_A x_A B_o x_A$ ) a second model exists, in which the hook closes each A-line ( $A_x A_x B_o A_x$ ).<sup>23</sup> One later example of this is the song »Till There Was You« (1957) from Meredith Willson's Musical *The Music Man*. The two A-lines differ only in their closing chord (half/authentic cadence).

| »Till There Was You« (Willson 1957)     |  |                     |
|---|--|---------------------|
| There were bells... till there was you. |  | A <sup>1</sup> Hook |
| There were birds... till there was you. |  | A <sup>2</sup> Hook |
| Then there was music...                 |  | B                   |
| There was love... till there was you.   |  | A <sup>3</sup> Hook |

Only seldom do AABA songs dispense with the refrain entirely, as in »My Funny Valentine« (Hart/Rodgers 1937). The title only appears once at the beginning of the song and is referenced again at the end—in another example of the now familiar »bookend« technique—through the repetition of the word »valentine« from the hook.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The ballad »At Last« (Gordon/Warren 1941) combines both models, thereby starting and ending with the title in the bookends manner ( $x_A x_A B_o A_x$ ). It thus lets the listener wait for the title at the beginning of A3 vainly until it arrives »at last.«

<sup>24</sup> Another major hit without a refrain is Nat King Cole's signature song »Stardust« (Parish/Carmichael 1927/29). Here, the title can be heard practically *en passant* in three inconspicuous locations, namely during the verse and the chorus-lines A1 and A3. Maybe Parish meant to make ironic reference to the fact that

Having started as a refrain, the chorus now had become a formal component with its own internal refrain. Granted, its refrains have a completely different character than the chorus of »After The Ball« and they also differ clearly from the responsorial choruses of 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel songs. They are not only decidedly brief (usually just one or two measures), but also syntactically integrated into the flow of the melody and lyrics. Lyrically, the »hook refrains« in the cited examples are adverbials that modify the place in one case and the time in another. Their full meaning is only evident in conjunction with other syntactic elements—a subject, predicate or other grammatical construction. Melodically, the refrains are integrated into the structure of the lines as phrases. The »completeness« of the A-section—or »A-line,« as we call it in this case—is typical for the classic AABA love ballad of the Tin Pan Alley era. The line, which is merely opened or closed with the refrain, has a discrete, unitary character because it frequently consists of an individual sentence (or two sentences, which, for example through repetition of the hook, are clearly connected to one another) and a melody typically derived through classic techniques like transposition, sequence, or variation on a motif. Lyricists and composers working in this style seem to have been driven by an ambition to create the impression that such refrains occurred as if by coincidence again and again.

To understand better what we mean by the term »A-line« in contrast to »A-section,« consider more narrative songs or comedy songs, which tend to have less unitary A-sections like e.g. »My Defenses Are Down« from *Annie Get Your Gun* (Berlin 1946). Lyrically as well as musically here is a clear »period« after measure 4, dividing the section in two parts:

My defenses are down,  
She's broken my resistance  
And I don't know where I am.

I went into the fight as a lion,  
But I came out like a lamb.<sup>25</sup>

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he dispensed with a lyrical hook by ending his chorus with the word »refrain« (»...the memory of love's refrain«).

25 Cf. also the discussion of the R&B-ballad »Need You Love So Bad« below (p. 31).

## 2.5 Harmony of the A-section

Various concepts of harmonic organization played a role in the formation of various styles and song genres during the Tin Pan Alley era. We will provide a brief overview of these in the following, since they were of critical importance to the further development of the A-section. Of course the use of different chord forms and progressions were not the only means for differentiating these sections. At least as important in this regard are instrumentation and arrangement, as well as the relationship between the harmony and the melody.

### a) »Wandering« harmony

In this first type, the harmony supports the unity of the line. Typically, it is clearly subordinate to the melody; it is either derived from the melody or works in interplay with the melody and colors it. For example, the melody of the A-section of »Till There Was You« is based around the central tone g (in C major), and the harmony wanders to present this note as a perfect fifth (I), a diminished 5th ( $\#i^7$ ), a suspended fourth ( $ii^7$ ), and a suspended ninth ( $iv^7$ ) in succession. Throughout, the harmony seldom gives the impression of a preexisting context. This is especially common among classic love ballads with orchestral accompaniment, whose typically wandering harmony is rich in mixed chords, avoids repetition, varies the harmonic rhythm, and seeks a tight voice leading, namely in chromatic movement.

| »Till There Was You« (A <sup>1</sup> ) (Willson 1957) |                    |                 |                          |          |                             |                   |                       |          |                |         |                   |        |                |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------------|---------|-------------------|--------|----------------|
| Measures  | 1                  | 2               | 3                        | 4        | 5                           | 6                 | 7                     | 8        |                |         |                   |        |                |
| Lyrics  | (There were) bells | (on the) hill,  | (but I) never heard them | ringing, | (No, I) never heard them at | all,              | (Till there was) you. |          |                |         |                   |        |                |
| Motifs  | $\alpha$           | $\alpha$        | $\alpha$ -B              |          | $\alpha'$ -B'               |                   |                       | $\gamma$ |                |         |                   |        |                |
| Harmony   | I <sup>maj7</sup>  | $\#i^{\circ 7}$ | $ii^7$                   | $iv^7$   | bVII <sup>7</sup>           | I <sup>maj7</sup> | $\#ii^{\circ 7}$      | $ii^7$   | V <sup>7</sup> | $iii^7$ | bIII <sup>7</sup> | $ii^7$ | V <sup>7</sup> |
| Chromatic movement                                    | B                  | Bb              | A                        | Ab       |                             |                   | D#                    | D        |                | B       | Bb                |        |                |
|   | C                  | C#              | D                        |          | Bb                          | B                 | C                     |          |                | E       | Eb                | D      |                |

Arrangers like Robert Russell Bennett further veil their harmonic progressions with liberal use of contrapuntal composition techniques; they split the chords across multiple instrumental lines and make frequent use of suspensions, passing tones, and alterations. These subtleties are not reflected in the shorthand used in jazz lead sheets, Tune-Dex cards and fake books,<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For the history of sheet piracy cf. Kernfeld (2011).

where they typically petrify into the usual tensions. Whether or not the voice leading will be restored in a performance based on lead sheets depends on the aesthetics, ambition, and ability of the performing musicians.

In Peggy Lee's recording<sup>27</sup> of »Till There Was You,« the flowing orchestra arrangement of the Broadway version is reduced for a small combo augmented by woodwinds and set to a continuous rumba groove. The instrumentation of the A-lines still varies in this version, and the harmony is still derived from the confluence of melodic lines. In the Beatles' version, the sole remaining melodic element aside from the vocals is George Harrison's guitar licks; the rest of the harmonic movement has congealed in the guitar chords strummed by John Lennon. It may not be inconsequential that the Beatles knew nothing of the songs origins at first. They also believed that »Over The Rainbow« was a song by Gene Vincent.<sup>28</sup> Through this type of colportage, the songs not only gained a new image; they lost the sound originally imagined by their composers and arrangers along the way.

Thus, the harmony of the versions performed by Broadway or studio orchestras and the versions in which the hits from the Broadway or Hollywood productions were later recorded with accompaniment by combos or big bands was not really identical, even if they were based on the same scale degrees.

#### b) Loops / »Rhythm Changes«

The same is true of the second important, completely different type of harmonization of the A-section, on which the gradual differentiation of the A-sections into a new verse/chorus form would be based. In the Tin Pan Alley repertoire, it was primarily used at higher tempos, for example in *charm*, *comedy* and *novelty songs*.<sup>29</sup> The harmony was typically arranged in compact, repeated progressions, usually two measures in length. Although they are sometimes called »patterns,« »turnarounds,« or »vamps« (all terms that also coincide with other phenomena), we will call these progressions »loops« in accordance with Philipp Tagg's (2009, 199) terminology. Tagg's

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27 It first appeared on the album, *Latin à la Lee!*, recorded in August 1959, and released by Capitol Records in 1960.

28 »I didn't know that was from the musical *The Music Man* until many years later« (McCartney in *The Beatles* 2000, 22). On the Beatles' early recording of »Over The Rainbow,« sung by John Lennon, cf. *ibid.*, 67.

29 Examples beside »I Got Rhythm« are »I Won't Dance« (Kern/Hammerstein/Harbach 1935), »The Lady Is A Tramp« (Rodgers/Hart 1937), »They All Laughed« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1937). Amongst the ballads using loops are »They Didn't Believe Me« (Kern/Reynolds 1914), »These Foolish Things (Remind Me Of You)« (Marvel/Stratchy/Link 1935), and »My Ship« (Weill/Gershwin 1941).

image of a loop emphasizes the chugging, motor-like movement of these chord progressions which expand the horizon of time and invite continuation through repetition. Since the AABA form demands a discrete, independent A-section, the chugging must be interrupted at the end of the line. This is achieved through a cadence, which can be plagal or authentic, a half-cadence, or a full cadence. Traditional changes such as I-V(-I), I-IV-I and, most commonly, ii-V(-I) are often expanded into turnarounds through addition of further turns through the circle of fifths and/or chromatic lines that lend them a sense of closure in contrast to the loops. The prototypical example of this type of harmonization is what is known as »rhythm changes.« These changes owe their name to George and Ira Gershwin’s charm song, »I Got Rhythm« (1930), even though they do not appear in their now standard form in that composition:

|                | Loop                               |                                  | Loop                                |                                  | Turnaround                        |  |                    |              |
|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------|--------------|
| rhythm changes | I <sup>maj7</sup> -vi <sup>7</sup> | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>maj7</sup> - vi <sup>7</sup> | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> | I - I <sup>7</sup>                | IV - #iv <sup>°7</sup>                             | I - V <sup>7</sup> | I - [ii - V] |
| »I Got Rhythm« | I - I <sup>6</sup> / <sub>5</sub>  | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> | I - i <sup>°7</sup> / <sub>5</sub>  | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> | I - I <sup>6</sup> / <sub>5</sub> | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> - i <sup>°7</sup> | I - V <sup>7</sup> | I            |
|                | Loop                               |                                  | Loop'                               |                                  | Loop''                            |  | Cadence            |              |

Certainly, this is not a case of later musicians simplifying Gershwin’s more varied harmony into a handier form. Rather, it is more likely that Gershwin (or whoever arranged the harmony into the form in which the song was eventually performed and published as sheet music) took a harmonic template that was more or less in the air and reharmonized it in keeping with one of (jazz) music’s finest traditions. Interestingly, the second chord in measure 1 does not differ between the two versions with respect to its constituent tones. In F major, both chords contain the notes *d-f-a-c*; only the voicing differs. Gershwin puts the fifth of the tonic, *c*, in the bass as part of an alternating bass line, while standard rhythm changes insert the vi<sup>7</sup> here. This difference is significant, as the bass line would come to play an increasingly important role in the development of the loop harmony.

c) Chord schemes The third type of harmony is the chord *scheme*. This refers to a harmonic progression that is fixed according to convention and thus one in which the listener can anticipate the motion. Unlike the loop, the harmony of entire lines or even blocks of lines is static. It is rare in Tin Pan Alley songs but can be called the default mode in country music where standard periods like I-I-I-V | V-V-V-I or the ‘passamezzo moderno’ (I-I-IV-IV | I-I-V-V | I-I-IV-IV | I-V-I-I) are used for the A-sections (see chapter 3.2).

When Tin Pan Alley songwriters use such chord schemes with main chord functions these songs often clearly allude to country, blues, or folk styles, e.g., in »Don't Fence Me In« (Porter 1944), »Vaya Con Dios« (Russell/James/Pepper 1953), and »Buttons And Bows« (Livingstone/Evans 1947). The question as to whether the latter is a country song in AABA form or a Tin Pan Alley novelty song with a country sound has less to do with its musical qualities than with the images of its interpreters, Bop Hope or Dinah Shore.

In Swing, eight-measure blues schemata are sometimes used to fill the A-sections e.g. in Glenn Miller's »Blueberry Hill« (Lewis/Stock/Rose 1940), which employs a bluesy eight-measure chord progression (IV-IV-I-I | V-V-I/IV-I) that relies on the tonic, dominant, and subdominant.

## 2.6 Variations of the A-section

The dramaturgy of the AABA form is simple, but powerful. The first repetition of the A-section reaffirms the meaning of the material exposed in the first eight measures and anchors it in the mind of the listener, with considerable help from the refrain. The bridge brings variation and contrast, while A<sup>3</sup> offers a longed-for return to the familiar. Composing a Tin Pan Alley song is, to use an apt expression, »the art of saying, 'I love you' in thirty-two bars.«<sup>30</sup> Indeed, there are many songs (and many good ones) that stick very strictly to the simple AABA form. However, this model also stands up to considerable variation.

The first two sections typically follow the classic period form, on which the ABAC form is also based; most A<sup>1</sup> sections end in a half cadence, while A<sup>2</sup> ends in a full cadence. This first period, typically 16 bars in length, may vary in structure and design. For example, in »Over The Rainbow,« both sections are melodically identical, and the half cadence is achieved through the insertion of an additional cadence (ii-V in this case). In other cases (e.g., »Till There Was You«) the last phrase is harmonically adapted for the transition into the bridge. In both cases however, further analysis will lead us to differentiate between A<sup>D</sup> and A<sup>T</sup>.<sup>31</sup> The first two sections may also contain the old standby, ABAC, in miniature. We refer to the four measure units that comprise this form within a form using lowercase letters, or, in

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30 As one proof, Doris Day as Grace LeBoy Kahn may be cited, advising Danny Thomas as Gus Kahn in the film biography *I'll See You in My Dreams* (1951): »Gus, ya gotta learn to say ,I love you' in thirty-two bars« (cf. Furia 1992, 14).

31 Further examples: »It's Only A Paper Moon« (Harburg/Arlen 1933), »The Lady Is A Tramp« (Hart/Rodgers 1937).

this case, »abac.« »Someday, Sweetheart« has just such a form based on variation; its first two sections are thus best referred to as AA'.<sup>32</sup> A<sup>3</sup> may be identical with the harmonically and melodically closing A<sup>2</sup> (AA'BA') or differ in a through-composed AA'BA'' form that emphasizes the sense of closure at the end of the form. One example of this latter form is the ballad »So In Love« from *Kiss Me Kate* (Porter 1948), in which the highest note in the melody of the A-sections increases by a semitone with each iteration. The third A-section is also longer than the first two by half. The same is true of »All The Things You Are« (Hammerstein II/Kern 1938) and »My Funny Valentine« (Hart/Rodgers 1937), whose A-sections are also varied by means of transpositions. The use of extensions or of melodic variations within the A<sup>3</sup> section to create a sense of closure can also be seen in songs that are otherwise less through-composed, e.g., »They Can't Take That Away From Me« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1937).

## 2.7 The bridge

While the A-sections *may* vary, variation is the essential purpose of the bridge. The fact that contrast is possible and necessary at this point, the third section of the chorus, is the main factor that differentiates AABA from the ABAC form. While the C-section is also characterized by »differentness« and frequently brings a dramatic climax, it is subject to the burden of bringing closure to the entire form; thus, the opportunities for using this section to provide contrast are considerably restricted. In AABA form, the presence of a final A<sup>3</sup> section offers composers and lyricists alike much more freedom in the bridge. The contrast may be encapsulated in the lyrical content through a change of perspective or subject<sup>33</sup>, through commentary of any kind, through exemplification, irony<sup>34</sup>, or other literary means. In narrative songs, the bridge may contain the decisive turning point in the story<sup>35</sup>.

32 Further examples: »From Here To Shanghai« (Berlin 1917), »In The Still Of The Night« (Porter 1937), »Old Black Magic« (Mercer/Arlen 1942); a full-length 32-measure ABAC form comprises the AA' of a (56-measure) AA'BA'' chorus in »The Man That Got Away«: (Gershwin/Arlen 1954).

33 »Smoke Gets In Your Eyes« (Harbach/Kern 1933): A<sup>1</sup> »They asked me..., A<sup>2</sup> »They said someday...,« Bridge »So I chaffed...,« A<sup>3</sup> »Now laughing friends...«. In »Ole Man River« the bridge changes the perspective for the rest of the song: A<sup>1</sup> und A<sup>2</sup> »Ole Man River...,« Bridge »You and me...,« A<sup>3</sup> »I get weary...«.

34 The bridge of »Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate The Positive« (Mercer/Arlen 1944) offers examples and a dose of irony at once: »To illustrate my last remark, / Jonah in the whale, Noah in the ark...«.

35 »Rudolph The Rednosed Reindeer« (Marks 1949): »Then one day at Christmas eve...«.



In *list songs*, the bridge may increase the tempo at which items are listed<sup>36</sup>, reflect on the list<sup>37</sup> or offer explanations<sup>38</sup>. The bridge provides a space for questions<sup>39</sup>, hypotheticals<sup>40</sup>, detailed descriptions<sup>41</sup>, and day-dreams<sup>42</sup>. It may darken<sup>43</sup> or brighten<sup>44</sup> the mood.

Bridges tend to be more prosaic than the A-sections so that the latter's lyrical qualities can come to the fore. Bridges with a pronounced chorus character, like those the Beatles later composed<sup>45</sup>, are rare in Tin Pan Alley songs.<sup>46</sup> In rare cases songs end in a citation or a reprise of the bridge.<sup>47</sup>

The bridge also offers numerous opportunities for composers to shape the song. They can use the bridge to add motion (and by extension increase the numbers of syllables available to the lyricist)<sup>48</sup>, or juxtapose a recitative declamation against a more *cantabile* A-line, and so forth. All of the classic techniques for adding contrast can be employed in the bridge. The beginning of the bridge is a decisive moment within the AABA form; in most cases it is signaled with a chord change that expands the harmonic landscape of

36 »Anything Goes« (Porter 1934): »The world has gone mad today, / And good's bad today, / And black's white today, / And...«.

37 »Let's Call The Whole Thing Off« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1936): »But, oh, if we call the whole thing off...«.

38 »It's All Right With Me« (Porter 1953): »...there's someone I'm trying so hard to forget...«.

39 »Who Do You Love I Hope« (Berlin 1946): »Is it the baker who gave you a cake? / I saw that look in his eye...«.

40 »Just One Of Those Things« (Porter 1935): »If we'd thought a bit, at the end of it...«.

41 »The Surrey With The Fringe On Top« (Hammerstein II/Rodgers 1943): »The wheels are yellere, the upholstery's brown...«.

42 »Over The Rainbow«: »Some day I'll wish upon a star...«.

43 »They Can't Take That Away From Me« (Gershwin/Gershwin 1937): »We may never, never meet again...«.

44 »I Didn't Know What Time It Was« (Hart/Rodgers 1939): »Grand to be alive to be young...«.

45 »Thank You Girl« (1963), »Can't Buy Me Love« (1964), »Eight Days A Week« (1964, all Lennon/McCartney).

46 Among the exceptions is »You Can't Get A Man With A Gun« from Irving Berlin's Musical *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) with the rare form of A<sub>x</sub> A<sub>x</sub> B<sub>x</sub> A<sub>x</sub>. The bridge, just four measures in length, has the lyrics »With a gun, / With a gun, / No, you can't get a man with a gun.« In this *comedy song*, a four-line verse is followed by three wordy chorus »strophes.« The bridge serves to add variety and state the form with a moment of release.

47 As in »Over The Rainbow« with its coda citing the melody of the bridge. John Lennon's »Imagine« (1971) concludes in the utopian quintessence formulated in the bridge »And the world will live as one«.

48 Some examples of an uneven proportion in the number of syllables between the A<sup>1</sup>-section and the bridge: »Over The Rainbow« 23:40; »Body And Soul« (Heyman/Sour/Eyton/Greene 1930) 30:40; »Top Hat, White Ties And Tails« (Berlin 1935) 18:33.

the song. While the wandering harmony of the A-sections favors fluid transitions and harmonic progressions in which each chord seems to result naturally from the previous chord and the use of the circle of fifths in the harmony at the end of each loop makes for smooth transitions between the sections, the bridge is typically intended to give a clear sense of departure, hence the term »take off.« One common harmonic move—although not nearly as common at this stage as it would later become in genres like Doo Wop—is to shift to the IV or the ii chord (in terms of their harmonic function, the subdominant or the subdominant parallel). The »take-off« effect of the IV is enhanced by the fact that this degree is seldom prominent in the A-section (as it would be at the beginning or end of a two- or four-bar phrase) and thus remains, to a certain extent, reserved for the take-off at the top of the bridge.<sup>49</sup> As the examples in the table below show, other scale degrees in addition to the IV and the ii are also used in take-offs. The strength of the take-off effect does not depend exclusively on its harmonic distance from the tonic/tonality of the A-section. Characteristic dissonances, which, for example contextualize the take-off chord as the new tonic or secondary dominant, or which obscure their own harmonic function and with it the direction of harmonic movement<sup>50</sup>, also have a major impact. This demonstrative step beyond the previously established harmonic realm is often accompanied and reinforced by arrangement and orchestration techniques that heighten the contrast. Thus, the take-off is primarily, but not exclusively, a harmonic moment.

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49 »Over The Rainbow« is an exception in two regards: The second two-measure phrase of the A-lines begins on the IV, while the bridge begins on the I, which is very unusual. However, the short range of the bridge's melody contrasts with the impetus of the signature octave leap at the opening of the A-lines. Moreover, the impact of the harmonic opening that first occurs in measure 6 of the bridge is thus heightened.

50 An example: The bridge in »All The Things You Are« begins with a minor seventh chord on *a*, or the mis-notated enharmonic equivalent of the *bii*<sup>7</sup> relative to the tonic of Ab major. The fact that this chord is launching a cadence that will resolve to G major is unclear at the moment of the take-off; therefore a (*bii*) is identified here as the 'take-off-chord' and not G (VII), the target of the bridge cadence.

| Degree                          | Title                      | Author(s)                | Year |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|
| I <sup>7</sup>                  | »They All Laughed«         | Gershwin/Gershwin        | 1937 |
| ii                              | »I Love You«               | Porter                   | 1943 |
| bii <sup>7</sup>                | »All The Things You Are«   | Kern/Hammerstein II      | 1939 |
| bII                             | »Body And Soul«            | Greene/Heyman/Sour/Eyton | 1930 |
| bIII                            | »The Way You Look Tonight« | Kern/Field               | 1936 |
| iii <sup>7</sup>                | »I Hear A Rhapsody«        | Fragos/Baker/Gasparre    | 1941 |
| III (in minor mode)             | »My Funny Valentine«       | Rodgers/Hart             | 1937 |
| IV                              | »Oh, Lady Be Good«         | Gershwin/Gershwin        | 1924 |
| iv <sup>7</sup> (in major mode) | »Lost In The Stars«        | Weill/Anderson           | 1946 |
| V                               | »Let It Snow!«             | Styne/Cahn               | 1945 |
| v <sup>7</sup> (in major mode)  | »Crazy Rhythm«             | Kahn/Caesar/Meyer        | 1928 |
| v (in minor mode)               | »Cry Me A River«           | Hamilton                 | 1953 |
| vi                              | »Dinah«                    | Lewis/Young/Akst         | 1925 |
| bVI                             | »Smoke Gets In Your Eyes«  | Kern/Harbach             | 1933 |
| bVII                            | »My Defenses Are Down«     | Berlin                   | 1946 |

Table 2: Examples of take-off harmonies at the opening of the bridge in Tin Pan Alley songs

### 3. New material for the A-section

The AABA form remained prevalent in the era following World War II. Although the sentimental Tin Pan Alley ballad was on the decline<sup>51</sup>, the form enjoyed a second life in songs performed by swing bands, vocal groups, and in country music. The following section introduces three new models for the A-section. The R&B ballad lent that genre a new sound that no longer merely cited the blues. Building on older works, this genre developed its own harmonic formulas and replaced the »classic« melodic development of Tin Pan Alley with one derived from the blues (Section 3.1). In country music, songwriters also found their own ways to fill the A and B lines relying on chord schemes approved by long traditions. Besides, they created variations of the AABA form hardly found in other genres. Doo Wop laid the groundwork for the eventual subdivision of the A-line by placing the

51 The war years produced a crop of ballads that were more sentimental than ever and which offered solace to separated families and lovers (cf. Smith 2003, 22f./164). The ballad's decline in the post-war years may be attributable to an overly strong association with loss and sorrow forged during the war.

loop-harmony in the foreground and thus dissecting the A-section (Section 3.2).

### 3.1 The R&B-Ballad

As outlined above, the AABA form began to appear in the Tin Pan Alley repertoire after WWI linked in unexpected ways with African-American themes and connotations. Conversely, in the next post-war period, the R&B ballad emerged as a genre that seemed to originate from the blues but made use of the popular song form. This genre played only a secondary role in the development of a new verse/chorus model based on variation of the A-section because its syntax followed that of the standard refrain model of Tin Pan Alley, in which the refrain opens or closes a discrete melodic and syntactical line that fills the entire A-section. Nevertheless, it deserves mention because it gave birth to an independent new model for the AABA form that was by no means marginal. Furthermore, a careful study of this genre is instructive because it illustrates the insufficiency of too sharply defined dichotomies such as »black/white,« »pop/blues« etc.

In fact, the very assumption that the R&B Ballad derives from the blues is dubious. Two aspects complicate this issue: First, the borders between Tin Pan Alley-pop, jazz, and blues were permeable long before the Second World War began, as shown above. Second, the same repertoire was performed in a highly diverse spectrum of venues and arrangements. Every venue—whether it was a stage, dancehall, recording studio, nightclub, or juke joint—every cast of players, and every occasion left a unique imprint on a song. And of course it should not be forgotten that even blues musicians were seldom »blues-only« musicians.<sup>52</sup> On the jazz scene as well,

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52 For good measure, we cite the following statements on the issue: Peter Townsend (2007, 196) wrote of the early career of Muddy Waters, who would become an icon of the Chicago blues, that »[h]is repertoire contained [...] songs like ›Red Sails In The Sunset‹, ›Dinah‹ and ›Bye Bye Blues‹ as well as cowboy or hillbilly tunes like ›Home On The Range‹, ›You Are My Sunshine‹, ›Boots And Saddles‹, and [...] ›Deep In The Heart Of Texas‹. [...] Waters sang traditional blues numbers, his own compositions, and those of Walter Davis, but also ›Dark Town Strutters' Ball‹, and [...] ›Chattanooga Choo-Choo‹ [...]. Waters also told Lomax that his favorite artist on the radio was Fats Waller« (2007, 196). Second, Lonnie Johnson once said the following of his own »blues career,« which began when he won a record contract as first prize in a music competition: »I guess I would have done anything to get recorded – it just happened to be a blues contest, so I sang the blues« (<http://www.musicanguide.com/biographies/1608004726/Lonnie-Johnson.html>, last retrieved April 1, 2011). For further proofs and a broader discussion cf. Wald (2004).

mastery of a broad array of styles was the rule rather than exception. Ella Fitzgerald could render Tin Pan Alley songs note-for-note with free, »jazzy« phrasing and then use them as the basis for her scat improvisations. And it belongs to the favorite narratives of Broadway history, that the orchestra for the Broadway production of Gershwin's Musical *Girl Crazy* (1930) included jazz heavyweights Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Jack Teagarden and Gene Krupa.

In the following we differentiate between two harmonic concepts which we call »blues« and »jazz« harmony, while noting explicitly that these concepts should be viewed as prototypical and by no means constitute adequate analytical tools for determining a work's style or genre. Blues harmony is characteristically confined to the primary major chords based on the scale degrees I, IV and V (minor blues were exceedingly rare until the 1960s) overlaid with minor-hued melodic elements, which results in the characteristic friction between major and minor thirds on the one hand and »functionless,« i.e., non-dominant, minor sevenths on each scale degree on the other hand. Even in the blues songs popular in the 1920s, a favorite trick in the composer's toolkit for adding a bluesy character was to expose the fourth scale degree through a clear harmonic step at a key moment in the form. Jazz harmony, by contrast, is closely related to classical functional harmony. Its primary characteristics are the reliance on the circle of fifths and its foil, mediant relationships, dissonances frozen into persistent tensions, chromatic guide tone lines, and the use of diatonic seventh chords as the basic chord form

It bears repeating: Whether one type of harmony or another appears in a piece does not determine what the piece *is*. Other criteria, such as melody formation, intonation, rhythm, instrumentation, tempo, and texture are just as important as harmony or form. A tune sung by an established blues singer like Bessie Smith is much more likely to be categorized as a »vaudeville-number« if it includes a loop or turnaround that follows the circle of fifths and starts on the mediant or submediant (e.g., »Nobody Knows You, When You're Down And Out«).

In 1949, Ruth Brown scored a hit right of the bat for the fledgling label Atlantic Records, with her first recording, »So Long.« The song's form is AABA, and Brown's rendering makes it sound thoroughly like an R&B number. Actually, it is a 1940 Tin Pan Alley composition by the songwriters Harris, Melsher, and Morgan. Ella Fitzgerald's recording from the year the song was written presents a melody built of segments with similar diatonic motion beginning on different notes in the scale. Composed in the classic

method, the melody is clearly in the foreground while the harmonization of the rhythm-changes loop seems to result mostly coincidentally (perhaps just as coincidentally as the unmistakable echoes of Rodgers and Hart's »Blue Moon« from 1934). The rhythm-changes loop, with its Major 7 tonic, secondary minor chords, and harmonic progression based on the circle of fifths, contains precisely those elements whose absence characterizes the blues. The form is AABA, and the horns in Brown's version are no less mellow than in Fitzgerald; nevertheless, Arnold Shaw (1983, 500) presumes it is an »old blues ballad.« It is unlikely that Shaw's estimation is based on the fact that the Brown's version uses a »bluesier« line to replace the jazzy turnaround in the Fitzgerald version. (Where the Fitzgerald original appends to the basic loop a line descending to the tonic by means of alteration and tritone substitution (I-vi<sup>7b5</sup>-ii<sup>7</sup>-SubV<sup>7</sup>), Ruth Brown's version inserts a chromatic line that ascends by way of the IV (I-I<sub>3</sub>-IV-#iv<sup>°7</sup>-I<sub>5</sub>-ii<sup>7</sup><sub>5</sub>-V). Instead, his categorization was more likely based on the slower tempo, the more pronounced shuffle rhythm, and the more improvisatory accompaniment. However, it is Ruth Brown's vocal performance first and foremost that strips the Tin Pan Alley character from the song. She does not defer to the carefully composed correspondence melody in the slightest; instead of ending her freely phrased lines on the rising central tones of the composition, she uses metrically unaccented, melodically descending licks. The vocals satisfy all the requirements of an R&B ballad, while the arrangement, and especially the substance of the A-section, remain indebted to the pop style of the 1940s.

There were certainly models for a signature variation on the A-section for the R&B ballad.<sup>53</sup> Five years after »So Long,« Ruth Brown recorded »Oh What a Dream« (Willis 1954), whose A-section featured the prototypical harmonic progression of the R&B ballad. In fact, this harmonic template had emerged with the R&B ballad around 1950, although it rarely appeared in such an unadulterated form as in this recording by Brown.

| »Oh What A Dream« (Willis 1954) |   |                |    |    |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| Ruth Brown<br>(1954)            | I | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV | I | V | I | V |

The standard A-section of the R&B ballad (in the following, the R&B line) contains two important harmonic events. In the first four bar phrase, the

<sup>53</sup> The authors thank Thomas Phleps for this insight, which originated in his comprehensive, yet-unpublished research into song forms of pre-war blues. Phleps differentiates between six classes of 8-measure schemes, which use the three basic (seventh) chords almost exclusively.

harmony shifts to the fourth scale degree, a change that is rarely introduced as neutral motion within a harmonic progression, but which is rather portended through the use of a secondary dominant seventh chord.<sup>54</sup> The second half describes motion from the tonic to the dominant which either takes place once over four measures, or, in the case of »Oh What a Dream,« twice in two-measure segments. In contrast to »Oh What a Dream,« this harmonic motion is typically achieved through the use of a turnaround based on the circle of fifths. The leap from the tonic to the mediant or submediant at the beginning of the turnaround (in the following examples, measure 5 or measure 5→6) is the second distinctive harmonic event in the R&B line.

| »Please, Send Me Someone To Love« (Mayfield 1950) |                       |                |    |                   |                      |                                  |                                   |                                  |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|----|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Percy Mayfield (1950)                             | I                     | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | #iv <sup>°7</sup> | I - vi <sup>°7</sup> | ii <sup>7</sup>                  | V <sup>7</sup> - bVI <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup>                   |
| »Drown In My Own Tears« (Glover 1951)             |                       |                |    |                   |                      |                                  |                                   |                                  |
| Lula Reed (1951)                                  | I <sup>8 - maj7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | iv                | I                    | vi <sup>7</sup>                  | II <sup>7</sup>                   | V <sup>7</sup>                   |
| Ray Charles (1956)                                | I - V <sup>#5</sup>   | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | #iv <sup>°7</sup> | I - III <sup>7</sup> | vi <sup>7</sup>                  | II <sup>7</sup>                   | V <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>#5</sup> |
| »Need Your Love So Bad« (John 1955)               |                       |                |    |                   |                      |                                  |                                   |                                  |
| Little Willie John (1955)                         | I                     | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | #iv <sup>°7</sup> | I                    | VI <sup>7</sup>                  | II <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup>  | I - V <sup>7</sup>               |
| Fleetwood Mac (1968)                              | I                     | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | #iv <sup>°7</sup> | I - vi <sup>7</sup>  | ii <sup>7</sup> - V <sup>7</sup> | I - IV                            | I - V                            |
|   | 1                     | 2              | 3  | 4                 | 5                    | 6                                | 7                                 | 8                                |

These two harmonic events are characterized by multiple variations that form the core repertoire of harmonic formulas in the genre.

1. The IV chord is usually reached in the third measure and followed by a minor iv or #iv<sup>°7</sup> chord in the fourth measure; »Oh What a Dream« is a

54 This »I<sup>7</sup>« has nothing to do with blues harmony in its original application, but rather operates within the context of functional harmony. However, this can be obscured through the use of licks or riffs based on the blues scale that make the minor seventh appear to be part of the key of the tonic. Compare, for instance, the Little Willie John and Fleetwood Mac versions of ».« John plays the blues scale in the intro and embeds the appearance of the minor seventh in a riff that accompanies the vocals in the second measure. Peter Green's intro, in contrast, uses (almost) exclusively a major pentatonic scale and thus keeps the minor seventh in reserve. In the first A-section after the vocals begin, the minor seventh appears in the organ part before the change, quietly, but clearly indicating the harmonic function of the chord. Accordingly, the original version appears »bluesier,« while the cover seems more »ballad-like.«

notable exception to this rule. In this context, the diminished seventh chord does not function as the incomplete dominant ninth chord described by the functional theory of harmony, since the progression disregards possible leading-tone functions and the bass leaps downward to the first scale degree. The bass note in this progression outlines the blues scale, settling momentarily on the intermediate chromatic step between the fourth and fifth degrees of the blues scale, which underscores the originality of the R&B line.

2. The motion toward the mediant in the second half of the line can vary in both the direction of the leap—a major third up to the iii or a minor third down to the vi—and in the voicing and tonality of the mediants. In addition to the chords that diatonically appear in the scale,  $iii^{(7)}$  and  $vi^{(7)}$ , diminished seventh chords ( $vi^{\circ 7}$ ) and major mediants ( $VI^{(7)}$  und  $III^{(7)}$ ) can also make appearances. Within the framework of functional harmony, the major chords on the mediant and submediant are easily explained as secondary dominants that propel motion around the circle of fifths. At the same time, however, the progression from the I to the  $III^7$  has become an established harmonic formula in its own right. It is the distinctive turn in the classic tune, »Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out,« as well as the R&B-line precursors »Tain't Nobody's Business if I Do« and »Georgia on My Mind,« in which it defines the first half of the line.

| »'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do« (Grainger/Robins 1922) |   |         |        |                         |                      |              |                |                |
|--|---|---------|--------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| Anna Meyers (1922)   | I | $III^7$ | vi     | $\#iv^{\circ 7}$        | I                    | V            | I - IV         | I - V          |
| Jimmy Witherspoon (1949)                                   | I | $III^7$ | IV     | iv                      | I - vi               | ii - V       | I              | ii - V         |
| Freddie King (Studio 1970)                                 | I | $III^7$ | IV     | iv                      | I - vi               | ii - V       | I - IV         | I - V          |
| Freddie King (Live 1975)                                   | I | $III^7$ | IV     | $\#iv^{\circ 7}$        | I - vi               | ii - V       | I - IV         | I - V          |
| »Georgia On My Mind« (Gorrell/Carmichael 1930)             |   |         |        |                         |                      |              |                |                |
| Hoagy Carmichael (1930)                                    | I | $III^7$ | $vi^7$ | $\#iv^{\circ 7} - iv^7$ | I - $biii^{\circ 7}$ | $ii^7 - V^7$ | I - $vi^7$     | $ii^7 - V^7$   |
| Ray Charles (1960)   | I | $III^7$ | $vi^7$ | $IV^7 - \#iv^{\circ 7}$ | I - $VI^7$           | $II^7 - V^7$ | $III^7 - VI^7$ | $II^7 - bII^7$ |
|  | 1 | 2       | 3      | 4                       | 5                    | 6            | 7              | 8              |



»Tain't Nobody's Business if I Do« defies convention in two ways with respect to form: First, through its idiosyncratic 16-bar blues »verse«<sup>55</sup>, which places it in the realm of the Popular Song Form, and second, through its omission of a bridge, which distances it from the Popular Song Form.<sup>56</sup> In the context of our analysis, the song is important despite the lack of a bridge (which was eventually cured by The Ink Spots, who added a bridge in their recording from 1936), because it is a very early specimen that contains characteristic elements of the R&B line. Jimmy Witherspoon's successful (and, again, bridgeless) cover from 1949 retains the distinctive use of the major III chord, but takes a detour from the circle of fifths to the »bluesier« IV chord, thus relieving the III<sup>7</sup> of its function as a secondary dominant entirely. On the other hand, Witherspoon replaces the original cadence in the second half of the line, which uses the basic major chords in the key, with a ii-V-I turnaround that is typical of the R&B line.<sup>57</sup> Freddie King also uses this harmonic progression in his studio recording from 1969, but in his live version from 1975, he replaces Witherspoon's move to the minor iv with the 'original' #iv<sup>7</sup>. The bass line of the first four measures thus now results in an ascending, incomplete blues turnaround (fig. 1a).<sup>58</sup>



Notation figure 1a



1b

- 55 Cf. the earlier recordings with Anna Meyers (original recording from 1922) or Bessie Smith (1923). This verse, like its Tin Pan Alley counterparts, would eventually be discarded.
- 56 Putting aside for the moment the question of whether it is the verse, the motion to the mediant, or Anna Meyer's silly »doo-doo-doo-doodelam-doo-doo« at the end of the line on the original recording that characterizes this number as a »vaudeville blues song« (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ain%27t\\_Nobody%27s\\_Business](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ain%27t_Nobody%27s_Business); last retrieved on April 2, 2011).
- 57 This usage of the term »turnaround« stands in direct contradiction with Tagg's definition. While we agree with Tagg when he differentiates between the loop and the turnaround, stating that »its original meaning is *a short progression of chords played at the end of one section*« (Tagg, 2009: 200 emphasis in original), the blues turnaround's original function as a primarily melodic line descending or ascending to the fifth scale degree is so significant that it is recognized as such anywhere within a discrete section—even when it does not serve to mark the end of the formal unit.
- 58 This line also forms the basis of the first half of the A-section of Ray Charles' »Hallelujah, I Love Her So« (Charles 1956)—one of the rare uptempo R&B numbers in AABA form—however, Charles uses the tonic in 1st inversion as the harmony for the third degree of the scale in the bass.

Another common harmonic progression found in R&B lines, I-I<sup>7</sup>-IV-iv[-I], also contains a blues turnaround (Notation figure 1b)—in this case descending. Thus, the R&B line consists of a blues turnaround involving the IV fused with a jazz turnaround based on the classic circle of fifths. Whether the turnaround is built on the harmonic building blocks of »IV-iv« or »IV-#iv<sup>7</sup>« on the one hand or »I-vi,« »I-VI« or »I-III« (as well as all the possible alterations and substitutions) on the other is a composer's choice which is likely to be revised by later arrangers and interpreters.<sup>59</sup> Remarkably, none of the R&B Ballads analyzed for this study include a progression from V-IV, which is otherwise so characteristic of the blues. In contrast to the »standard« 12-measure blues progression, the harmonic step from V-IV is in no way reserved exclusively for the closing phrase of an 8-measure blues progression.<sup>60</sup>

The prevalence of R&B-lines divided neatly into halves becomes especially evident upon hearing a song that diverges from this template. In 1948 Lonnie Johnson covered »Tomorrow Night,« a Tin Pan Alley swing number by Sam Coslow and Will Grosz, popularized by Horace Heidt & His Musical Knights in 1939. While adapting the song's Tin Pan Alley harmony with its guide tone lines and the prominent use of the ii<sup>7</sup> in bars 3 and 4 to the harmonic formulas of the R&B line, Johnson located the step from the IV to the iv in an entirely unusual position, between the fourth and fifth measures, which obscures the bisection of the line.<sup>61</sup> LaVern Baker's recording of the same song from 1954 reharmonizes the line and thus clarifies the division somewhat:

59 In addition to the development of »It Ain't Nobody's Business if I Do« over multiple versions outlined here, cf. also the two versions of »Drown In My Own Tears« in the table. Lula Reed's original progress from the IV to the iv, while Ray Charles goes instead to the #iv<sup>7</sup>. Reed begins the circle-of-fifths-turnaround on the vi, while Charles begins on the III, which appears half-way through the 5th measure.

60 The classification system devised by Phleps (see fn. 53) for blues progressions identifies four classes of eight-measure blues in which the V<sup>7</sup>-IV<sup>[7]</sup> progression occurs in the first half. The best-known blues of this type (today) is probably »Key To The Highway« (Jazz Gillum 1940) I-V<sup>7</sup>-IV<sup>7</sup>-IV<sup>7</sup> – I-V<sup>7</sup>-I-I.

61 In the second A-section, this step is returned to its normal position (measures 3 and 4), but the absence of a chord change going into measure 5 still obscures the midpoint of the line, which in Heidt's version was stressed by the secondary dominant (VI<sup>7</sup>).

| »Tomorrow Night« (Coslow/Grosz 1939), A <sup>1</sup> -line |                         |                |                 |                                  |                     |                  |                                  |                |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Horace Heidt<br>(1939)                                     | I-V <sup>#5(add9)</sup> | I              | ii <sup>7</sup> | ii <sup>7</sup> -VI <sup>7</sup> | ii <sup>7(b5)</sup> | V <sup>6/9</sup> | I <sup>6</sup> -#i <sup>°7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> |
| Lonnie Johnson<br>(1948)                                   | I                       | I <sup>7</sup> | IV              | IV                               | iv                  | V <sup>7</sup>   | I-vi-ii                          | V <sup>7</sup> |
| LaVern Baker<br>(1954)                                     | I                       | I <sup>7</sup> | IV              | IV-iii <sup>°7</sup>             | II <sup>7</sup>     | V <sup>7</sup>   | I - II <sup>9</sup>              | V <sup>7</sup> |

The construction of the R&B line from two successive turnarounds divides the »unitary line« of Tin Pan Alley into two recognizable sections. How strongly this division is perceived depends—as usual—on multiple factors, of which the quality of the step to the mediant or submediant is only one. The length and form of the lyrics, the arrangement, agogics, and the trajectory of the melody may also lead the listener to perceive the line as a unit despite its two-part harmonic structure. Alternatively, the same factors may give the impression of a kind of take-off in measure five, comparable to the beginning of a bridge. »If I should take a notion to jump into the ocean, ain't nobody's business if I do,« can easily be sung within a single line, and Anna Meyers does just that (at a tempo of c. 130 bpm).<sup>62</sup> Bessie Smith separates each phrase of the lyrics from the others clearly (at c. 80 bpm), and Jimmy Witherspoon, who tackles much more existential material (at c. 65 bpm)<sup>63</sup>, delivers this single sentence as if it were a full »strophe« of multiple lines of verse. In Little Willie John's »Need Your Love So Bad,« (at 72 bpm) this is quite clearly the case. Across 37 syllables and seven lines of text, the first and third of which begin identically, the A-line is clearly subdivided and thus becomes an »A-section«:

I need someone's hand  
 To lead me through the night.  
 I need someone's arms  
 To hold and squeeze me tight.  
 When the night begins  
 And the dew remains,  
 I need your love so bad.

The beginning of the second half has a pronounced take-off character—even more so in the much slower version by Fleetwood Mac (50 bpm)—and serves to set up the arrival of the title refrain. The string arrangement, unusual for a British blues band, underscores the differences between this ballad and

62 »'Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do«: »If I should take a notion / To jump into the ocean, / It ain't nobody's business if I do.«

63 »One day, we got ham and bacon, / Next day ain't nothing shakin', / Ain't nobody's business if I do.«

the blues. In the genre's nascence this distinction was not always so clear. For instance, in addition to distinctively slow blues numbers (e.g. »Ray's Blues,« Charles 1953, and »Black Jack,« Charles 1954) and R&B ballads (»Drown In My Own Tears,« outlined in the table above, »Funny, But I Still Love You,« Charles 1953, and »The Midnight Hour,« Sweet 1952), Ray Charles' repertoire also included bridgeless eight-measure blues and ballads with harmonic progressions typically found in the R&B line.<sup>64</sup>

As late as the 1960s, the AABA form would remain the standard for R&B ballads.<sup>65</sup> For instance, Sam Cooke put forth an unusual variation on the form in his civil-rights ballad, »A Change is Gonna Come« (Cooke 1964), adding an extra A-section, possibly to accommodate additional lyrics. Subsequent cover versions by the Supremes (1965), Otis Redding (1966), and Aretha Franklin (1967) reverted from Cooke's AAABA original to the AABA norm. Aretha Franklin even appended a brief introduction to the song, although it contained only the faintest echo of Tin Pan Alley.

### 3.2 Country Music

AABA songs can also be found among early recordings of what was then called Hillbilly or Old-Time Music. Some of these are in fact of Tin Pan Alley origin (e.g. »My Name Is Ticklish Reuben,« recorded during the famous Bristol Sessions in 1928 by the Smyth County Ramblers but written by Cal Stewart in 1900). Others have been composed by country musicians but behave like Tin Pan Alley songs (as Carson Robison's »The Little Green Valley,« 1928). Like in the Tin Pan Alley repertoire such songs often have an AABA chorus while their verses follow a different design. However, country verse/chorus-songs sometimes start with the chorus instead of an introduc-

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64 »The Sun's Gonna Shine Again« (Charles 1952); a piano solo stands in for the bridge here. The extent to which the standard position of an instrumental solo in the blues genre—i.e., in the third (albeit harmonically identical to the preceding parts) section—echoes the template established by the AABA form is a question we will put aside for the moment), »Come Back Baby« (Charles 1954).

65 Occasionally with modifications, some of which we will address below. Cf. e.g., Buddy Guy: »My Love Is Real« (1963), James Carr: »The Dark End Of The Street« (Moman/Oldham/Penn 1967), Percy Sledge: »When A Man Loves A Woman« (Lewis/Write 1966) or Brook Benton: »Rainy Night In Georgia« (White 1962; Benton's recording is from 1970). Other prominent R&B or soul ballads actually originated from Tin Pan Alley, e.g. Etta James' »At Last« (Gordon/Warren 1941, first recorded by the Glenn Miller Orchestra) or Otis Redding's »Try A Little Tenderness« (1966, Campbell/Connelly/Woods 1931, first recorded by the Ray Noble Orchestra). The A-sections of both examples are based on the I-vi-ii-V-Loop and do not show the R&B line's typical use of the IV.

tory verse, a sequence that we did not come across in the Tin Pan Alley repertoire.<sup>66</sup> Similar to the development in Tin Pan Alley, fewer and fewer songs featured verses in the mid to late 1930s. From 1938 on there are hardly any verses to be found in AABA country recordings.

A lot of songs recorded in the 1920s and 30s use the periodic passamezzo moderno chord scheme that goes back to a renaissance Italian ground bass scheme. Stephen Foster used it in 20% of his songs (Gombosi 1944, 135) and it is also found in many hymns composed around 1900 (e.g. »Sweeping Through The Gates,« Owen/Sanders 1872; »I Am Resolved,« Hartsough/Fillmore 1896; »I'll Be Ready When The Bridegroom Comes, Winsett 1908). Some of these songs vary the pattern after 16 or 32 bars by changing the order of the I and IV chords in measures 1-4. Stoa (2013, 222) calls this a contrasting strain:

|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |  |
|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|--|
| I  | I  | IV | IV | I | I | V | V | Passamezzo moderno scheme                  |
| I  | I  | IV | IV | I | V | I | I |  |
| IV | IV | I  | I  | I | I | V | V | Contrasting strain                         |
| I  | I  | IV | IV | I | V | I | I | Closing half of passamezzo scheme repeated |

Depending on the lyrics and the melody, this structure can be heard as strophic (if the progression is repeated over and over with different lyrics as in »The Two Soldiers,« a traditional ballad from the Civil War, recorded by Carl T. Sprague in 1926), or as AA'BA' (»Jesus My All,« recorded by the Carlisle Brothers in 1934), and even as a verse/chorus song (when the A-lines do not contain a refrain, the contrasting strain sections start with the title and are sung by a chorus in »When It's Lamplightin' Time In The Valley« [Lyons, Hart & The Vagabonds] as recorded by Tex Ritter 1933). All three options seem to work in the Delmore Brothers' 1935 recording of »I Believe It For My Mother Told Me So« (Dresser 1887).

In many of these passamezzo/AA'BA'-songs the BA' parts use the same lyrics upon repetitions whereas the lyrics of the AA' periods differ. Usually, both A2 and A3 end with the title hook, making it hard to decide whether the song is in AABA or verse/chorus form (such as in the hymn »Hallelujah Side,« Oatman/Enwisle 1898, recorded by Ernest Stoneman and the Dixie Mountaineers in 1926). This variant dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Minstrel

66 Carson Robison & Frank Luther: »In The Cumberland Mountains« (1931); Gene Autry's »Ridin' Down The Canyon« (Burnette 1935); Sons of Pioneers' »Song Of The Pioneers« Tim & Glenn Spencer (1935), »Over The Santa Fe Trail« (Tim Spencer 1935) and »Echoes From The Hills« (Nolan 1935).

Songs: »The Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane,« recorded by Fiddlin' John Carson in 1923 and often cited as one of the very first country recordings from the south, was first published credited to Will S. Hays in 1871. It repeats the opening half of the passamezzo scheme three times before the closing half and the contrasting strain follow. As the lyrics of the BA-sections are not varied and end with the title line it is easy to hear this part as a chorus and that is how it is marked in the sheet music. »Jesse James,« an often-recorded folk ballad from the 1880s, is a similar case. Here the 16-bar passamezzo scheme is fully repeated with different lyrics (functioning as verse 1 and 2) before the contrasting strain appears, taking the function of a chorus—a design already used in Foster's »Massa's In The Cold Ground« (1853).

Presumably, recording artists of the 1930s tended to choose this harmonic progression to accompany lyrics that dealt with nostalgia (Cliff Carlisle: »The Little Dobie Shack,« 1933; The Delmore Brothers: »Carry Me Back To Alabama,« 1936) or to come up with songs that fulfilled the talent scout's demand for songs that seemed old but weren't because they wanted to profit on the copyright (cf. Neal 2013, 38). For the same nostalgic reason, Bluegrass musicians often relied on this chord scheme to create songs that sounded traditional (Shannon Grayson & His Golden Valley Boys: »I Like It The Old Way,« 1950; Jim Eanes & His Shenandoah Valley Boys: »Tomorrow Will Be Different,« 1951).

What is important for our study is that, first, the chord progression of the passamezzo's contrasting strain IV-IV-I-I / I-I-V-V or the slight variation / II-II-V-V would from then on provide the default harmonic schema for bridges in countless country AABA songs of the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s, no matter if the A-sections follow the passamezzo scheme or not. Second, the passamezzo with contrasting strain is the origin for many later compositions in which the AA'BA' layout is not easily recognizable because AA and BA are each tied together tightly, thus evoking a hint of a verse/chorus separation (cf. Neal 2013, 484).

A prototypical example would be »I Can't Seem To Say Goodbye« (Robertson) as recorded by Hawkshaw Hawkins in 1961.

| »I Can't Seem To Say Goodbye« (Robertson, 1961) |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |
|---|----|----|----|---|---|----|---|---|
| A <sup>D</sup>                                  | I  | I  | IV | I | I | II | V | V |
| A <sup>T</sup> <sub>x</sub>                     | I  | I  | IV | I | I | V  | I | I |
| B   | IV | IV | I  | I | I | I  | V | V |
| A <sup>T</sup> <sub>x</sub>                     | I  | I  | IV | I | I | V  | I | I |

Here the AA' lines are rather heard as one unit instead of two separable sections because a) melody and harmony only come to a rest after 16 bars, b) the title appears not in both A-lines but only at the end of A2, and c) the lyrics use an alternate rhyme that ties both A-lines together (before / lie / door / goodbye). In the same way many listeners probably perceive BA' as one unit: B ends on the dominant and thus needs the following A' to get to the tonic, and again, the lyrics interlock due to the overarching rhymes (B: somehow / cry; A': die / goodbye). When A3 begins it seems as the logical consequence of B; it is not necessarily recognized as the arrival of another A-line although it is harmonically identical to A2.

Most of the songs built this way then repeat the whole AA'BA' unit with a new set of lyrics in the AA' part while the BA' part's lyrics remain the same. This adds ambiguity as to whether we hear an AABA or verse/chorus song. With 15 examples between 1960 and 1975 this seems to be a favorite device of Loretta Lynn's. Table 3 gives further examples and shows both their common as well as specific features.

|   |  |                |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |                |    |    |   |     |   |   |   |   |
|---|--|----------------|----|----|---|---|----|---|---|----------------|----|----|---|-----|---|---|---|---|
| »Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain«<br>(Rose), rec. by Roy Acuff 1945            | I  | I              | I  | I  | V | V | I  | I | I | I              | I  | V  | V | I   | I |   |   |   |
|   | IV   | IV             | IV | IV | I | I | V  | V | I | I              | I  | V  | V | I   | I |   |   |   |
|   | A <sub>x</sub> A BA <sub>x</sub> - instr. [AABA] - AA <sub>x</sub> BA <sub>x</sub> [new lyrics for the whole 2 <sup>nd</sup> unit] |                |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |                |    |    |   |     |   |   |   |   |
| »You Win Again«<br>(Williams), rec. by Hank Williams 1952                   | I  | I              | IV | IV | I | I | V  | V | I | I              | IV | IV | I | I-V | I | I |   |   |
|   | IV   | IV             | I  | I  | I | I | V  | V | I | I              | IV | IV | I | I-V | I | I |   |   |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> BA <sub>x</sub> - instr. - AA <sub>x</sub> BA <sub>x</sub> [new lyrics for the whole 2 <sup>nd</sup> unit]         |                |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |                |    |    |   |     |   |   |   |   |
| »Another«<br>(McAlpin/Drusky), rec. by Roy Drusky 1961                      | I  | I              | IV | IV | I | I | V  | V | I | I              | IV | IV | I | I   | I | V | I |   |
|   | IV   | IV             | I  | I  | I | I | V  | V | I | I              | IV | IV | V | V   | V | V | I | I |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' - instr. - BA <sub>x</sub> ' [BA lyrics identical]   |                |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |                |    |    |   |     |   |   |   |   |
| »It Keeps Right On A-Hurtin'«<br>(Tillotson), rec. by Johnny Tillotson 1962 | I  | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV | I | I | V  | V | I | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV | V | V   | I | I |   |   |
|   | V  | V              | IV | IV | V | V | IV | I | I | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV | V | V   | I | I |   |   |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> ' <sub>x</sub> BA <sub>x</sub> ' - AA <sub>x</sub> ' <sub>x</sub> BA <sub>x</sub> ' [BA lyrics identical]          |                |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |                |    |    |   |     |   |   |   |   |

|   |  |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
|---|--|----|----|---|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| »Happy Birthday«<br>(Kitson), rec. by<br>Loretta Lynn<br>1964                                       | I  | I  | I  | I | IV | I  | II | V | I  | I  | I  | I  | IV | I  | V | I |   |
|   | IV   | I  | V  | I | IV | I  | II | V | I  | I  | I  | I  | IV | I  | V | I |   |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' - Instr. - AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' [BA lyrics identical]                           |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
| »Don't Come<br>Home A-Drinkin'«<br>(Lynn/Webb),<br>rec. by Loretta<br>Lynn 1966                     | I  | I  | V  | I | I  | I  | II | V | I  | I  | V  | I  | IV | I  | V | I | I |
|   | IV   | IV | IV | I | IV | IV | I  | V | I  | I  | V  | I  | IV | I  | V | I |   |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> ' xBA <sub>x</sub> ' - instr. - AA <sub>x</sub> ' xBA <sub>x</sub> ' [BA lyrics identical]                         |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
| »Fist City« (Lynn),<br>rec. by Loretta<br>Lynn 1968   | I  | I  | V  | I | IV | I  | I  | I | IV | IV | I  | IV | I  | I  | V | I | I |
|   | IV   | I  | V  | I | IV | I  | II | V | V  | I  | I  | I  | IV | IV | I | V | I |
|   | AB <sub>x</sub> xCD <sub>x</sub> ' - instr. - AB <sub>x</sub> xCD <sub>x</sub> ' [CD lyrics identical, very chorus-like]           |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
| »There Must Be<br>More To Love<br>Than This«<br>(Taylor/Thomas),<br>rec. by Jerry Lee<br>Lewis 1970 | I  | I  | V  | V | V  | V  | I  | I | I  | I  | IV | IV | I  | V  | I | I |   |
|   | IV   | IV | I  | I | I  | I  | V  | V | I  | I  | IV | IV | I  | V  | I | I |   |
|   | AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' - instr. - AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' [new lyrics for the whole 2 <sup>nd</sup> unit] |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
| »Bob Wills Is Still<br>The King«<br>(Jennings), rec.<br>by Waylon<br>Jennings 1975                  | I  | I  | IV | I | I  | I  | I  | I | I  | I  | I  | I  | V  | V  |   |   |   |
|   | IV   | IV | I  | I | I  | I  | I  | I | I  | I  | I  | V  | I  | I  |   |   |   |
|   | A <sub>x</sub> A <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' - instr. - BA <sub>x</sub> ' [new lyrics on repetition]                          |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |
| »My Eyes Can<br>Only See As Far<br>As You«<br>(Martin/Payne),<br>rec. by Charlie<br>Pride 1976      | I  | IV | I  | I | I  | I  | V  | V | I  | I  | IV | IV | V  | V  | I | I |   |
|   | IV   | IV | I  | I | I  | I  | V  | V | I  | I  | IV | IV | V  | V  | I | I |   |
|   | x - AA <sub>x</sub> ' BA <sub>x</sub> ' - instr.[B] - A <sub>x</sub> '   |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |

Table 3: Examples for Country AABA songs in which both AA and BA are tied together, sometimes seeming like verse and chorus units

Depending on the extend to which A and A' differ it is sometimes more appropriate to label the unit ABCB as in George Jones' songs »Things Have Gone To Pieces« (Payne 1965), »If My Heart Had Windows« and »I Can't Get There From Here« (both Frazier 1967).

After World War II country music crossed over more and more to mainstream pop, culminating in the »Nashville Sound« that eliminated traditional stylistic markers such as fiddles and steel guitars as well as explicit southern, cowboy, or hillbilly images. This began around 1950 when Mitch



Miller, influential pop producer and head of A&R at Columbia Records, scored big hits with pop versions by mainstream stars like Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Jo Stafford, or Patti Page of country songs by Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell and others (cf. Wald 2009, 160). The hugely successful songwriter and publisher Fred Rose who had come to Nashville from Tin Pan Alley in 1933 also played a pivotal role in this development. It is not surprising that the number of AABA songs found in these years increases significantly (e.g. 48 out of 100 songs on the Proper Records compilation box »The Nashville Sound,« covering the years 1955-1962, are in the AABA design<sup>67</sup>; see also Neal 2013, 480). A large part of these songs sticks to a highly standardized formula (seen in table 3): chords are usually confined to I, IV, V and II, A-sections start with the tonic, lead to a half cadence after eight bars and close with a full cadence at the end of A2, coinciding with the title hook. Bridges almost always take off with the IV chord, lead to a half cadence, and are often tied to A3 in the way described above. But two new »inventions« that are not common in other genres are worth mentioning.

First, a number of songs cut the length of both the B and A3 lines half while keeping the lengths of A1 and A2 intact. Thus, B and A3 are bound together even stronger and listeners well-conditioned to the standard 32 bars will be slightly irritated when the scheme is already over after only 24 measures. This abbreviation is usually accomplished by using only the second half of A2 for A3.

| Wilma Lee & Al Terry: »We Make A Lovely Couple« (Worth, 1955) |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |
|---|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| A <sup>1</sup> <sub>x</sub>                                   | I  | I  | IV | IV | V | V | I | I |
| A <sup>2</sup> <sub>x</sub>                                   | I  | I  | IV | IV | V | V | I | I |
| B   | IV | IV | I  | I  |   |   |   |   |
| A <sup>3</sup> <sub>x</sub>                                   |    |    |    |    | I | V | I | I |

More often, we find this trick in songs whose A1 and A2 sections are 16 measures each, resulting in an overall 48-bar AABA' scheme.<sup>68</sup> Although this

67 23% are strophic (AAA), 20% verse/chorus, 6% have an individual design, and 3% are instrumentals.

68 Ernest Tubb: »Letters Have No Arms« (Gibson/Tubb 1950); Skeeter Davis: »Am I That Easy To Forget« (Belew/Stevenson 1960); George Jones: »Accidentally On Purpose« (Jones/Edwards 1960); Porter Wagoner: »I've Enjoyed As Much As I Can Stand« (Anderson 1962); Willie Nelson & Shirley Collie: »Willingly« (Cochran 1961); Patti Page: »Go On Home« (Cochran 1962); George Jones: »Your Angel Steps Out Of Heaven« (Ripley 1968); Loretta Lynn: »I Wanna Be Free« (Lynn 1971) and »The Pill« (Allen/McHan/Bayless 1975); Tammy Wynette: »Til I Can Make It On My Own« (Richey/Sherrill/Wynette 1976). There is also

device is very rarely used in country music before 1950 it is nothing newly invented then: Foster applies it in »Old Folks At Home« (8A 8A<sub>x</sub> / 4B 4A<sub>x</sub>, marked verse/chorus in the sheet music).

A second trick that seems specific for country music is to keep the 8 bar length of all sections, but to blur the lines between B and A3 in other ways. In both Hank Williams' »I Can't Help It« and Loretta Lynn's »Success« for instance, B and what is supposed to be A3 use the same harmonic progression—resulting in AABB, if one only regards the harmonic structure. In Williams' song the B melody starts to repeat in bars 25-28 but bars 29-32 melodically close with the second half of A2 and its title hook. What is first perceived as a continuation of the bridge ends as a mash-up of the B and A.

| Hank Williams: »I Can't Help It« (Williams, 1951) |        |    |    |   |   |   |   |                |
|---|--------|----|----|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| A <sup>1</sup> <sub>x</sub>                       | I - IV | I  | IV | I | V | V | I | I              |
| A <sup>2</sup> <sub>x</sub>                       | I - IV | I  | IV | I | V | V | I | I <sup>7</sup> |
| B   | IV     | IV | I  | I | V | V | I | I              |
| B'/A' <sup>3</sup> <sub>x</sub>                   | IV     | IV | I  | I | V | V | I | I              |

| Loretta Lynn: »Success« (Mullins, 1962) |    |    |   |   |   |    |   |   |
|---|----|----|---|---|---|----|---|---|
| A <sup>1</sup>                          | I  | I  | I | I | V | IV | I | I |
| A <sup>2</sup> <sub>x</sub>             | I  | I  | I | I | V | IV | I | I |
| B                                       | IV | IV | I | I | V | IV | I | I |
| B'/A' <sup>3</sup> <sub>x</sub>         | IV | IV | I | I | V | IV | I | I |

While Williams sings new lyrics over the repetition of the B'/A<sub>x</sub> part, Lynn's song has new words for AA' but the same for B'/A<sub>x</sub>, letting it appear as a chorus.

In Patsy Cline's hit song »I Fall To Pieces« the final 8 bars of the 32-bar unit are deceptive as well. While B does not start with IV, bar 25 does, thus repeating the full cadences that A1 and A2 closed with. These 8 bars present a new melody as well so that we should dub it C although melodically it seems to belong to B and closes with the title hook that we would expect at the end of an A-line. In the lyrics B and C are interlocked through rhymes (B: never kissed / forget ... never met; C: haven't yet / fall to pieces).

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one earlier example for this from Tin Pan Alley in Porter's »Always True To You In My Fashion« (1948).

| Patsy Cline: »I Fall To Pieces« (Howard/Cochran, 1961) |                |                |    |       |    |   |   |   |
|--|----------------|----------------|----|-------|----|---|---|---|
| $\times A^1$   | I              | IV             | V  | V..bV | IV | V | I | I |
| $\times A^2$   | I              | IV             | V  | V..bV | IV | V | I | I |
| B  | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV    | V  | V | I | I |
| C <sub>x</sub>   | IV             | V              | I  | I     | IV | V | I | I |

Summing up, AABA country songs differ from the other kinds covered in this study in the following characteristics:

- they use chord schemes exclusively (often derived from the passamezzo moderno) using mostly I, IV, V and II. Chords often change every two bars. Minor chords hardly ever occur, III and VI might be used as secondary dominants.
- title hooks are often placed at the end of A-lines; it is not unusual for A1 not to include the title.
- songs often repeat the whole AABA unit instead of only BA.
- bridges almost always lead from IV to V.
- songwriters like to create ambiguity by blurring the lines between AABA and verse/chorus forms or between the four sections within AABA.

Generally, AABA songs can be found among all county styles from Hillbilly and Cowboy Songs via Western Swing, Bluegrass, and Honky Tonk. They mushroom in the more mainstream styles of the 1950s, 60s and 70s while they are rarer (but anything than unknown) in more »rebellious« or »hard« styles such as the Bakersfield Sound or the Outlaw movement and can still be found in the new millennium (»Three Minute Positive Not Too Country Up-Tempo Love Song,« Jackson 2000; »Miss Being Mrs.,« Lynn 2004; Joe Nichols' »Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off,« Hannan/Wiggins 2005; Brad Paisley's »This Is Country Music,« Paisley/DuBois 2011; Clare Bowen and Sam Palladio's »When The Right One Comes Along,« Davis/Middleman/Zimmerman 2012; Nickle Creek's »21<sup>st</sup> of May,« Watkins 2014; Angaleena Presley's »Ain't No Man,« 2014).

### 3.3 Doo Wop

The transformation of the unitary, discrete A-line into a complex A-section and the elevation of the erstwhile refrain into a new chorus necessarily progressed via a crucial intermediate process in which the A-section became more clearly subdivided than it had been in Tin Pan Alley songs. The start-

ing point for this transformation was the loop harmonization, which we have already examined in the context of rhythm changes. The wandering harmony that worked to ensure the unity of the line in the Love Ballad played practically no role whatsoever in the new styles of the 1950s. Rather, it remained associated with a sound that was now considered old-fashioned and from which the new styles and their increasingly youthful audience sought to differentiate themselves.

The further segmentation of the R&B line beyond the bisection evident in R&B ballads would take place in Doo Wop, or, more precisely, that sub-genre of Doo Wop that was more closely related to pop on account of its use of the AABA form, two-measure harmonic loops, and melodies based largely on the major heptatonic scale.<sup>69</sup> The late phase of this genre is sometimes referred to as »milksap music.«<sup>70</sup> The prerequisite for this segmentation is the emancipation of the bass line, which places the harmonic loop in the foreground. Just as a constantly plucked double bass emerges more clearly as a harmonic and rhythmic foundation from the soundscape of a small jazz combo than a bowed bass does from the complex textures of an orchestra, the bass line became recognizable as a distinct part of music for many untrained listeners for the first time in Doo Wop (aside from the more conspicuous walking and boogie bass lines, which had existed in older genres for some time). A comparison of three versions of »Blue Moon« (Hart/Rodgers 1934), perhaps the best-known Tin Pan Alley ballad based on harmonic loops, serves to illustrate this.

The A-section of Rodgers' composition is based on the I-vi-ii-V-loop of rhythm changes. The melody consists of a two-note incantation of the title hook followed by a repeated phrase that is harmonically transposed down a third with each iteration. The central pitches of this sequence (*Bb*, *G* and *Eb*) make up the tonic triad, and as the final note of each iteration of the three phrases, they are positioned with respect to the loop such that they always fall on the tonic chord (*Eb*<sup>maj7</sup> or *Eb*<sup>6</sup>). The need for a cadence at the end of the A-section is obviated by the motion of the melodic sequence toward *eb* in measure 7, which provides a sufficient sense of closure.<sup>71</sup>

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69 By contrast, the sub-genre of Doo Wop more closely related to Boogie, Jump Blues, or R&B is based on blues progressions, employs blues intonation in the lead vocals, and features arrangements reminiscent of horn-dominated combos like Louis Jordan's Tympany Five.

70 Tagg (2009, 204) uses this term in reference to a quote attributed to Jerry Lee Lewis and points out that it is more correctly spelled *milksop* (babyface).

71 However, the re-harmonization suggested in the notation figure, which replaces the last two loops with a chromatic turnaround, is illuminating. If this chorus were to be used as a harmonic basis for jazz-improvisation—and this is the pri-

Blue moon, you saw me stand - ing a - lone  
with - out a dream in my heart, with - out a love of my own.  
Blue moon, you knew just what I was there for.

Notation figure 2: Lorenz Hart / Richard Rodgers: »Blue Moon,« first A-section and beginning of the second A-section. *The New Real Book*, Vol. 3. Ed. Chuck Sher. Petaluma 1995, p. 47

In the 1935 original recording featuring Connee Boswell and the Victor Young Orchestra, the rhythm section, and thus the harmonic loop as well, can be heard relatively clearly. Superimposed on the loop, however, are riffs performed by the strings and horns; they answer the vocal melody, which remains clearly in the foreground without competition. In Mel Tormé's successful version from 1949, however, the loop is largely obscured by a dense, contrapuntal orchestral arrangement. In the (later) Doo Wop version by the Marcells from 1961, the loop is introduced by the (sung) bass and then reinforced by a vamp sung in harmony using the words of the title hook. It remains prominent even after the entrance of the lead vocals, playing a role virtually of equal importance to the melody.<sup>72</sup> Although the harmonic and melodic substance is little changed, the relationship between melody and harmony has been inverted. While in Mel Tormé's interpretation the harmony (veiled as it is by the arrangement) seems to be derived from the sequencing of the phrase, the pre-existing loop in the Marcells' version—which quite literally »pre-exists« in the form of

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many intended use of the *real books*—the AABA form would be difficult to recognize given the continuous repetition of the loop-harmony.

<sup>72</sup> Ivory Joe Hunter's recording from 1951 provided an intermediate step. It uses the loop, stated first by a baritone saxophone playing the bass line and then by sax section chords, as an intro. Behind the vocals, the horns play a two-measure pattern that emphasizes the loop.

the introductory vamp<sup>73</sup>—delineates the tonal space in which the melody operates. Whether Richard Rodgers composed a phrase and then harmonized it or chose a popular harmonic device and furnished an accessible melody, the result functions the same way.

Although the I-vi-ii-V-Loop of rhythm changes was also used verbatim in Doo Wop songs, a slight modification of that successful formula, to I-vi-IV-V, would become the unmistakable signature of the genre. The extent to which this loop is identified with the genre itself is only truly comparable to the way the 12 bar scheme is linked to the blues, and the prominence of this chord progression contributed considerably to the subdivision of the A-line into four two-measure loops and the transformation of harmony into a predetermined framework into which the vocal melody must fit. While vocal harmony groups of the 1940s as well as early Doo Wop formations worked with a variety of harmonic progressions (wandering Tin Pan Alley harmony, blues topoi, simple T-D-T periods, etc...), innumerable Doo Wop songs composed beginning in the mid-1950s made do with this single formula in the A-sections, although the repetition was typically broken up with a cadence (often plagal) in the last two measures of the A-sections.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.4 The title hook and refrain in Doo Wop

Many Doo Wop songs follow the practice of Tin Pan Alley ballads, in which the refrain that ends the A-line is (or contains) the title. Other songs in the genre, whose most important mode of dissemination was now the radio,

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73 Ruth Brown's »Oh What a Dream« (1954), cited above, uses the same device with a »ballad A-line«; the Drifters' accompaniment vocals state the harmonic progression of the eight-measure line (I-VI-I-V) in a four-measure intro.

74 Tagg (2009, 206) states that he found 137 songs with I-vi-ii-V- or I-vi-IV-V loops in the Billboard Hot 100-Charts between 1957 and 1963, and he cites 57 of those as examples. He names the Mello-Moods' »Where Are You (Now That I Need You)« (1951) as an early example of a song that uses the I-vi-IV-V-loop exclusively. The song was composed by none other than Frank Loesser, who was best known as a songwriter for Hollywood films and the Broadway stage.

In fact, Tagg (2009, 205) tends to view this loop as merely another variation, since the frequent extensions of the triads result in chords that are identical in content to the chords in question ( $ii^7 \approx IV^6$ ), differing 'only' with respect to which note is in the bass. While the two formulas are undoubtedly related (in the genetic sense as well), there are three important reasons to consider it a discrete formula in its own right. [1] I-vi-ii-V may be Tin Pan Alley, jazz or Doo Wop, I-vi-IV-V is (certainly and exclusively) Doo Wop, [2] the new formula disrupts the circle-of-fifths-logic that underpins the old one, replaces a secondary function with a primary one and thus inserts a clear IV-V-I cadence, and [3] the new style is defined largely by the prominent bass line, which means a change in the bass line is unlikely to be incidental.

sought to distinguish themselves and thus heighten their memorability through two additional methods. First, they explored other ways of integrating the title in the song, and, second, they occasionally used a second refrain. The former was often achieved through using lyrics instead of the typically wordless vocalizations of the background harmony or introductory vamp.<sup>75</sup> In pieces more closely related to R&B like Leiber & Stoller's blues-based »Mainliner« (for Little Esther 1952), »Whadaya Want« (for Jack Cardwell 1955), »Smokey Joe's Cafe« (for The Robins 1955), and »Ruby Baby« (for the Drifters 1956), the way that the background harmony vocals respond to the lead vocals reflects the direct influence of R&B and Swing, which treat the horns in the same way. Pop-oriented Doo Wop numbers were more likely to use the title hook in the vocal harmony vamps that introduced the song, thus further increasing the memorability of the title. Examples of this include the Drifters' »Adorable« (Ram 1955), the Valentines' »Lily Mae Belle« (Briggs/Barrett 1955), and the Rainbows' »Mary Lee« (Robinson/Robinson 1955). Probably the most famous exponent of this method is the song »Lollipop.« In 1958, the Chordettes scored a crossover hit with this song, which placed in the top-ten of the US pop and R&B charts.<sup>76</sup>

The separation of the refrain from the title hook through a sort of »double refrain« can also be observed in the song »Been So Long« by the Pastels from 1958. This song combines both of the refrain models used in Tin Pan Alley ballads: The A-sections of the AABA form open with the title hook, which is repeated by the background vocals, and end with the refrain line »the blues are mine« in the lead vocals.<sup>77</sup> In addition to strict double re-

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75 Conversely, sometimes the syllables used in the vocal harmony make it into the title: The Chords: »Sh-Boom« (Keyes/Feaster/Feaster/McRae/Edwards 1954), The Charms: »(Bazoom) I Need Your Loving« (Leiber/Stoller 1954), Lewis Lymon & The Teenchords: »I'm So Happy (Tra-La-La-La-La-La)« (Robinson 1956), The Edsels: »Rama Lama Ding Dong« (Jones 1957).

76 In fact, the harmonized vocals that repeat the text, »Lollipop, lollipop, ooh lolli-lolli-lolli« over a Doo Wop cadence that changes chords twice per measure make up the actual substance of the song, which is constructed as a Rondo with eight-measure lines, as follows (»T« stands here for »title vamp«): T T A T B T A T T. It is primarily the harmonic shift of the B-section to the IV that allows the AABA form to shine through, even though one of its A-sections is dispensed with to make room for the catchy »vamp-refrain.«

77 Further examples include: The Moonglows: »Sincerely« (Fuqua 1954), refrain: »please, say you'll be mine«; The Danleers: »One Summer Night« (Webb 1958), refrain: »under the moon of love.« One special case is the placement of the title hook at the beginning and end of the lines: The Spaniels: »Goodnite, Sweetheart, Goodnite« (Carter/Hudson 1953) and Norman Fox & The Rob Roys: »Tell Me Why« (Martinée 1957).

frains, there exists another model in which one of the two refrains is varied but remains recognizable as a refrain. For instance, the A-section of the song »Devil or Angel« by The Clovers (Carter, 1956) begins with the title hook, while the line endings have a clear refrain character despite the variation of the text.

A1: »Devil or angel [...] I miss you, I miss you, I miss you.«

A2: »Devil or angel [...] I need you, I need you, I need you.«

[Bridge]

A3: »Devil or angel [...] I love you, I love you, I love you.«

The converse also occurs in some songs, such as Sam Cooke's »You Send Me« (Paul/Townsend/Cooke 1957). Here, the title hook is varied in A2 (»You Thrill Me...«), while the refrain remains »honest you do.«

## **4. The refrain line becomes an independent chorus**

The refrain line is apparently an indispensable element of the AABA form. It fosters unity, links the principles of repetition and variation over multiple A-sections, enhances catchiness and memorability, and affixes an easy-to-remember label to the song, so that a customer in the shop knows what to search or ask for. As we will show in this section, songwriters during the timeframe under investigation increasingly took advantage of these benefits of the refrain, and not only within the context of the AABA form. Over the course of the 1950s, the refrain line was expanded and enhanced until it became an independent chorus within the AABA form (section 4.2). Crucial impetus for this development came from hokum blues and rhythm & blues, styles in which lengthy refrains had been integrated in blues progressions for some time already (section 4.1).

### **4.1 From refrain to chorus in blues progressions**

Blues overwhelmingly follow a »simple verse« or strophic AAA form. The individual A-sections, however, may be subdivided into an extremely diverse array of lyrical and chordal structures, which we will not analyze in detail here. The most prominent harmonic progression today, the twelve-bar blues, is used primarily in the context of a full band, which permits less spontaneity and requires prior agreement among the performers on the structure. Solo performers, however, have abundant room for variation (cf.



e.g. the formal structure of »Blue Yodel No. 1,« p. 51). There were also numerous alternatives to the *aab* phrase-structure of the text and vocal melody, which is the closest association with the blues today. While the lyrics vary within each A-section according to the *aab* lyrical structure, early recordings that might be considered blues also include eight, ten, twelve, and 16-measure forms with refrains (examples of eight-bar forms with refrains include e.g. »Papa’s Lawdy Lawdy Blues« and »Salty Dog Blues,« both Papa Charlie Jackson, 1924; »You Got To Reap What You Sow,« Leroy Carr, 1928; »Sitting On Top Of The World,« Vinson/Chatmon from the Mississippi Sheiks, 1930; cf. Stoa 2013 for an overview of »common stock schemes« in early »race« and »hillbilly« records). The most influential variation in the context of our investigation is a model in which the lyrics only vary in the first four measures of each A-section and a refrain is sung over measures five through twelve. The twelve-measure harmonic framework remains constant. This lyrical and harmonic structure is known as the »Tight Like That« model after the hokum blues of the same name by Tampa Red and Georgia Tom (1928) (Middleton 2003, 504), although it appeared earlier in Papa Charlie Jackson’s »Shake That Thing« (1925; cf. Wald 2004, 38) and »Jim Jackson’s Kansas City Blues« (Jim Jackson, 1927). This model spread rapidly thanks to the enormous success of the original version of »Tight Like That« and countless cover versions.<sup>78</sup>

|                        |                                | Verse-like |   |   |   | Refrain |    |   |   |   |                 |   |   |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|---------|----|---|---|---|-----------------|---|---|
| »It’s Tight Like That« | Tampa Red & Georgia Tom (1928) | I          | I | I | I | IV      | IV | I | I | V | V <sup>#5</sup> | I | I |

Verse:

Listen here, folks, I’m gonna sing a little song;  
Don’t get mad, we don’t mean no harm.

78 The song’s formal model was further disseminated in additional versions recorded by Tampa Red as well as adaptations by artists including Jimmie Noone (»Tight Like That« 1928), McKinney’s Cotton Pickers (»It’s Tight Like That« 1928), Walter Barnes’ Royal Creolians (»It’s Tight Like That« 1928), Lonnie Johnson & Spencer Williams (»It Feels So Good« Parts 1 through 4, all 1929), Cow Cow Davenport & The Southern Blues Singers (»It’s Tight Like That« 1929), Alura Mack (»Loose Like That« 1929), Slim Barton & Eddie Mapp (»It’s Tight Like That« 1929), Jim Jackson (»Hey, Mama, It’s Nice Like That« 1929), Clara Smith (»Tight Like That« 1929, and »What Makes You Act Like That« 1930), Bogus Ben Covington aka Ben Curry (»It’s Tight Like That« 1929), Charlie McKoy (»It’s Hot Like That« 1930) and Ed Bell (»I Don’t Like That« 1930).

Refrain:

You know, it's tight like that, beedle-um-bum,

Boy, it's tight like that, beedle-um-bum,

Don't you hear me talkin' to you?

I mean, it's tight like that.<sup>79</sup>

The Tight-Like-That-model spread from the blues to the Jump Blues and Rhythm & Blues of the 1940s and 1950s (Sister Rosetta Tharpe: »That's All,« 1941; Louis Jordan: »Caldonia« 1945), but also to Western Swing (e.g., Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys: »What's The Matter At The Mill,« 1936, which is based on the eponymous Memphis Minnie & Kansas Joe-Song, 1930) and country (Hank Williams: »Move It On Over,« 1947; Hank Snow: »I'm Moving On« 1950).

In Rhythm & Blues, and later in Rock 'n Roll, three modifications of the Tight-Like-That-model became very popular, and each of them helped draw a bolder line between the verse and chorus:

- The first modification lengthens the verse section to eight measures and thus results in a 16-bar form. The refrain begins as usual with the shift to the fourth scale degree, which now occurs in measure nine. This results in a longer verse and not a longer refrain, but this expansion of the form may have played a role in the deepening distinction of these two sections as discrete and independent formal components. This approach can be observed as early as 1929 in Clara Smith's version of »Tight Like That« as well as in the song »Dirty Butter« by the Memphis Jug Band, in which the refrains are also sung by a chorus and some of the verses are performed in stop time, which further distinguishes them from the refrains. In addition to eight-measure verse sections, later recordings include verses of 12 measures (Ray Charles' »Greenbacks,« Charles/Richard 1954) or which increase in length with each iteration (e.g., 8, 10, and 16 measures in Willie Mabon's »I Don't Know,« 1952; one conspicuous feature of which is the complete interruption of the meter before the refrain begins). Chuck Berry later expanded the verse section to 16 measures across the board before continuing the blues progression in the refrain (»No Money Down« 1956). Verses that increase in length with each iteration can also be observed in »You Can't Catch Me« (1955), a Berry tune whose third verse cruises for a full 48 measures before the refrain returns.

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<sup>79</sup> Authors' transcription of the original recording from October 24, 1927. The four later versions include additional verse material while the refrain remains the same.

- The second modification affects only the introductory A-section of a song: in order to expose the refrain, it is repeated throughout the first A-section, resulting in an »Intro-Chorus.« Only beginning in the second iteration do measures one through four of the form assume the character of a verse as varying lyrics are sung over them. Charley Patton used a similar kind of trick as early as 1929 in »Going to Move to Alabama,« in which he does not sing over the first four measures of the song and introduces the lead vocals with the refrain. »Whiskey Head Woman« by Tommy McClennan (1939) and »Rock Me Mama« by Arthur Crudup (1944) are examples of songs in which the lyrics of the refrain are sung over the entire twelve bars of the first full iteration of the form. This technique helps to establish the independence of the verse and refrain from one another, and would subsequently contribute to a complete separation between the two.
- Third, the division of the form into verse and refrain is often reinforced through the use of stop-time in the verse measures, as in Clara Smith's »Tight Like That« and »Dirty Butter« by the Memphis Jug Band. Later, this would become especially common in Jump Blues, R&B, and Chicago Blues, e.g., in Sister Rosetta Tharpe's »That's All« (1941), Julia Lee's »Gotta Gimme Whatcha Got« (1946), Lionel Hampton's »Hey! Ba-Ba-Re-Bop« (1946), Willie Mabon's answer-song »I'm Mad« (1953) and Willie Dixon's »Hoochie Coochie Man« (1954).

Arthur Crudup combined all three variations in his 1946 recording of »That's Alright,« as did Gene Vincent in »Be-Bop-A-Lula« (Vincent/Graves 1956).

In a parallel development, country music artists found ways of adding a refrain to blues progressions that went beyond the Tight-Like-That-model. While the examples cited above integrate a refrain into 12 or 16-measure blues progressions, the following songs insert a refrain after the conclusion of the full blues progression.

|                    |                       | Verse-like |   |   |          |    |    |   |          |                |                |                |                |    |    | Yodel-Refrain |    |    |           |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------|---|---|----------|----|----|---|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----|----|---------------|----|----|-----------|
| »Blue Yodel No. 1« | Jimmie Rodgers (1927) | I          | I | I | I        | IV | IV | I | I        | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I  | I  | I             | V  | I  | I         |
|                    |                       | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4<br>6/4 | 5  | 6  | 7 | 8<br>6/4 | 9              | 10             | 11             | 12             | 13 | 14 | 15            | 16 | 17 | 18<br>6/4 |

|            |                       | Verse-like |   |                |                |    |    |   |   |                |                | Refrain |    |    |    |    |
|------------|-----------------------|------------|---|----------------|----------------|----|----|---|---|----------------|----------------|---------|----|----|----|----|
| »TB Blues« | Jimmie Rodgers (1931) | I          | I | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV | IV | I | I | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I       | I  | V  | I  | I  |
|            |                       | 1          | 2 | 3              | 4              | 5  | 6  | 7 | 8 | 9              | 10             | 11      | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |

|                            |                      | Verse |   |   |   |                 |                 |   |   |                |                | Refrain / Chorus |    |    |    |    |                |    |    |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-------|---|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|---|---|----------------|----------------|------------------|----|----|----|----|----------------|----|----|
| »Long Gone Lonesome Blues« | Hank Williams (1950) | I     | I | I | I | IV <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I | I | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I                | I  | I  | IV | I  | V <sup>7</sup> | I  | I  |
|                            |                      | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5               | 6               | 7 | 8 | 9              | 10             | 11               | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16             | 17 | 18 |

These appear to be hybrid forms that emerged from an attempt to fuse blues progressions with the verse/chorus form that had been common in country music (unlike country blues). In general, innovations in song form and the resulting diversity of forms were largely a product of encounters and mutual influence between »black« and »white,« rural and urban, musics, which despite the best efforts of those who sought to enforce purity through segregation, were commonplace. This exchange took place in traveling minstrel and vaudeville shows and was further fueled by the radio, where Tin Pan Alley dominated. It was a result of the close proximity of black and white musicians living in the South and the migrations of black musicians and audiences to Northern cities. From the 1920s on blues and country music would also reach and influence wide audiences through records and radio broadcasts. Thus, it is not surprising that even the (by now) putatively »whitest« song form, AABA, melded with the »blackest« structure, the blues progression. A very early example is »Jitterbug Jive« (Payne/Boyd), recorded by the Dallas based Western Swing outfit Bill Boyd and His Cowboy Ramblers in 1941. In the following decade we could only spot two 12-bar-blues songs with B-sections—»That’s The Stuff You Gotta Watch,« Buddy & Ella Johnson 1944, and »Route 66,« Troup 1946—but their »bridges« feature no harmonic contrast. Almost ten years after »Jitterbug Jive« we find the combination of 12-bar-blues A-sections with a contrasting 8-bar bridge in Red Foley’s »Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy« (Stone/Stapp 1950<sup>80</sup>), a formal crossover that became a commercial crossover when it

80 The song is credited to WSM’s station owner Harry Stone and its program director Jack Stapp but it remains unclear if they actually wrote it or if it was rather a Fred Rose composition (cf. Birnbaum 2013, 408, fn 47).

placed number one on the pop and country charts. The Clovers' number one R&B hit, »One Mint Julep«, also makes use of this song structure.

| »One Mint Julep« (Toombs 1952; Bridge and A <sup>3</sup> are repeated with variations) |                |                 |                |                |                 |                 |                |                |                |                |                |                                 |
|--|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
|  |                |                 |                |                |                 |                 |                |                | Refrain        |                |                |                                 |
| A <sup>1</sup>   | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | ii <sup>7</sup> -V <sup>7</sup> |
| A <sup>2</sup>   | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I              | I                               |
| Bridge   | III            | III             | bIII           | bIII           | II              | II              | V              | V              |                |                |                |                                 |
| A <sup>3</sup>   | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | V <sup>7</sup> | I              | I                               |

In the early 1950s, the diversity of song forms took on a new dimension in the pieces written by the white, Jewish, and urban songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who wrote specifically for African American artists. Initially, they were exclusively interested in Black music (»We were two guys looking to write songs for black artists with black feelings in black vernacular,« Leiber/Stoller 2009, 94f.). Accordingly, they employed a repertoire of various blues models in their first songs: 12-bar blues progressions without a refrain, or with a refrain beginning in measures five or nine, as well as 16-bar forms with a refrain beginning in measure nine.

|     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| AAA | A=12-measure blues, no refrain   | »Real Ugly Woman« (1951)<br>»Gloom & Misery All Around« (1951)<br>»Mainliner« (1952)<br>»Lovin' Jim« (1952)  |
|     | A=12-measure blues, refrain beginning in measure 5 (Tight Like That-model) | »Hard Times« (1952)<br>»Wailin' Daddy« (1952)<br>»Flesh, Blood And Bones« (1952; first A as Intro-Chorus)<br>»Kansas City« (1952; refrain only in the 1st, 3rd, and 5th iterations of the A-section) |
|     | A=12-measure blues, refrain beginning in measure 9                         | »That's What The Good Book Says« (1951)  |
|     | A=16-measure blues, refrain beginning in measure 9                         | »Nosey Joe« (1952)<br>»Riot In Cell Block #9« (1954, with Stop Time)<br>»Jailhouse Rock« (1957, with Stop Time)<br>»I'm A Hog For You« (1959, first A as Intro-Chorus)                               |
|     | A=32-measure blues, refrain beginning in measure 17                        | »Searchin'» (1957)   |

Table 4: Various blues forms including refrains in songs by Leiber/Stoller

In »Riot In Cell Block #9,« the contrast between verse and refrain is highlighted through the use of stop-time and further intensified by the fact that the verse lines are nearly spoken, while the choruses are sung by the ensemble. The division is so clear that the refrain can be viewed as an independent formal section—a chorus. Leiber and Stoller refer to the song’s formal components accordingly: »The chorus was sung by all the Robins, but the verses were spoken« (Leiber/Stoller 2009, 70). At the same time, the integration of both parts in the same 16-measure blues progression creates an impression of unity.

Leiber and Stoller also explored ways of emphasizing the refrain within the blues format beyond the Tight-Like-That model and its three variations. »Nosey Joe« (1952) repeats measures 5-8 of the conventional blues progression to create a 16 bar form.<sup>81</sup> The first eight bars make up the narrative verse with its rhyming couplets. In this song as well, measures 9-16, set up by stop-time in measures 7 and 8 and featuring background vocals and fixed lyrics that contain the title, give the impression of a discrete chorus rather than a refrain.

|             |                          | Verse |   |   |   |    |    |   |   | Refrain / Chorus |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|------------------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| »Nosey Joe« | Leiber/Stoller<br>(1952) | I     | I | I | I | IV | IV | I | I | IV               | IV | I | I | V | V | I | I |

Leiber and Stoller seldom used unambiguous verse/chorus forms. »The Chicken And The Hawk« written in 1955 for Big Joe Turner, sticks to the 12-bar blues form throughout, but like Turner’s earlier hit »Shake, Rattle, and Roll« (Calhoun 1954), it uses the 12-bar form as the basis for separate verse and chorus sections (resulting in a »simple verse/chorus« form according to Covach’s terminology). The verse follows the *aab* lyrical template, while the chorus is distinguished by the repetition of the choral refrain, »up, up, and away.«<sup>82</sup> The division between the verse and a (more or less con-

81 The same 16-bar harmonic progression had already been used in »Midnight Blues« (William (Bill) Moore 1928, although sans refrain) and »Try Me One More Time« (Marshall Owens 1931, with a refrain beginning in measure 5).

82 It is characteristic that Turner withholds the »Shake, Rattle, And Roll« chorus until after the third verse, while the far more successful version by the white artist Bill Haley (also in 1954) introduces it immediately after the first and second verses. Leiber and Stoller had already used the same »simple verse/chorus« in »Hound Dog« (1952) and »Yeah, Yeah, Yeah« (1954). The practice of singing the verse and chorus over the same chord progression is not unusual in folk or country ballads (such as »Bury Me Under The Weeping Willow« as recorded by the Carter Family, 1927, which even uses the same melody for verses and choruses, or Woody Guthrie’s »Ain’t it Hard,« 1940), and it could

trasting) chorus is more fully realized in »I Want To Do More« (for Ruth Brown 1955). The 8-measure verse in stop time suggests a Tight Like That model, but a complete 16-measure chorus (which also served as the introduction) follows instead of the expected completion of the blues form and progression.

|                     |                       | Verse |   |   |   |   |   |      |      | Chorus |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|---|---|---|---|---|------|------|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| »I Want To Do More« | Leiber/Stoller (1955) | I     | I | I | I | I | I | I.C. | I.C. | I      | V | I | I | I | I | V | V | I | I | IV | IV | I | V | I | I |

## 4.2 From refrain to chorus within the AABA form

Initially, Leiber and Stoller seldom employed the AABA form. When they did use it, it was for slow ballads exclusively. They apparently eschewed the AABA form entirely until using it in 1953 for »Love Me.« Apparently, their objective was irony—«Actually we’d written it as a parody of a corny hill-billy ballad» (Leiber/Stoller 2009, 105)—and the AABA form lent itself to this pastiche. Nevertheless, numerous artists, white and black, recorded successful covers of the song, so the songwriting duo offered it—«corny or not» (ibid.)—half-jokingly to Elvis Presley, who scored a top ten hit in the pop and R&B charts with it in 1956.

|      |                         |
|------|-------------------------|
| AABA | »Love Me« (1953)        |
|      | »Tears Of Joy« (1953)   |
|      | »It’s A Miracle« (1954) |
|      | »Don’t« (1957)          |

Table 5: Leiber/Stoller songs in AABA form

Thus, the AABA form was demonstrably suited for an effort to score hits that were not limited to a black audience. This may also be a reason why Leiber and Stoller, after initially concentrating on variously structured AAA forms, began in the mid-fifties to compose bridges for uptempo R&B songs as well. They favored using internal blues structures for the A-sections, thus combining (like »Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy« some years earlier in the country genre) R&B and Pop song forms.

also be observed in early Doo Wop, where it was used in conjunction with a blues progression (The Ravens: »Bye Bye Baby Blues,« Biggs 1946; without a blues progression: The Larks: »I Ain’t Fattening Frogs For Snakes,« Perryman/Snead 1951).

|      |  |                                      |
|------|--|--------------------------------------|
| AABA | A=14-measure blues with refrain beginning in measure 9 | »Bazoom (I Need Your Lovin')« (1954) |
|      | A=12-measure blues without refrain                     | »Smokey Joe's Café« (1955)           |
|      | A=12-measure blues, chorus beginning in measure 5      | »Charlie Brown« (1959)               |

Table 6: AABA/blues combinations in songs by Leiber/Stoller

The various blues progressions were just *one* among many fonts of material for the A-section. In their biggest commercial hits, especially for The Coasters, Leiber and Stoller instead relied on A-sections that, while they clearly showed a blues influence harmonically, increasingly diverged from the blues progression, at least in the refrain. One early attempt in this direction was »Ten Days In Jail« (The Robins 1954), a song whose familiar chord changes (see table 7) at first lead the listener to expect a 12-measure blues progression. Instead of a shift to the V in measure 9, however, additional bars on the I with repeated choral singing of the title line function as the chorus. Other songs that work the same way are »Bazoom (I Need Your Lovin')«, performed by the white band The Cheers, which was Leiber and Stoller's first No. 1 hit in the pop charts, as well as »Treat Me Nice« and »(You're So Square) I Don't Care«, written for Elvis Presley (both 1957, see Table 7). The relative increase in harmonic motion in the refrain sections contrasts with the verses, which merely switch between the I and the IV. In each case, the song title appears just as the resolution to I arrives in the refrain section.

|                                      | Verse-like |   |      |   |                 |                 |      |                   | Refrain    |             |    |   |   |                |
|--------------------------------------|------------|---|------|---|-----------------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------------|-------------|----|---|---|----------------|
| »Ten Days In Jail« (1954)            | I          | I | I    | I | IV              | IV              | I    | I                 | I          | I           | I  | V |   |                |
| »Bazoom (I Need Your Lovin')« (1954) | I          | I | I    | I | IV <sup>7</sup> | IV <sup>7</sup> | I    | I                 | V-bV-IV-bV | V-bV-IV-iii | I  | V | I | V <sup>7</sup> |
| »Baby I Don't Care« (1957)           | I-IV       | I | I-IV | I | I-IV            | I-IV            | I-IV | I                 | IV         | V           | I  | I |   |                |
| »Treat Me Nice« (1957)               | I          | I | I    | I | IV              | IV              | IV   | #iv <sup>o7</sup> | V          | I           | ii | V | I | I              |

Table 7: A-sections with refrains in AABA songs by Leiber/Stoller



Even more prominent refrains and further departure from the blues can be observed in The Coasters' songs, »Down In Mexico« (1956), »Young Blood« (Leiber/Stoller/Pomus 1957), »Poison Ivy,« and »Love Potion No. 9« (both 1959). The A-sections of these songs advance the narrative in eight-bar units that remain mostly on the I. These are followed by eight measures of increased harmonic motion over which the entire band sings the song title repeatedly. This part is especially distinct in »Young Blood«; the band rests for two measures before the refrain begins, and the saxophone is introduced for the first time in the refrain. In »Poison Ivy,« the key shifts to the parallel minor for the contrasting refrain. These sections can surely be heard as independent choruses, even though the AABA form remains perceptible.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Leiber and Stoller have arrived here at a fourth template for the A-section that is distinct from the wandering harmony of the Tin Pan Alley-ballad, Doo Wop-loops, or the double turnaround of the R&B ballad. The first scale degree is no longer the »tonic« in the sense of a tonal center from which the harmony departs and to which it eventually returns, but rather a harmonic »zero level« from which »the other« distinguishes itself through a harmonic departure.

|                            | Verse-like |   |    |   |   |   |    |   | Refrain / Chorus |     |                  |                  |    |    |    |                |
|----------------------------|------------|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|------------------|-----|------------------|------------------|----|----|----|----------------|
| »Down In Mexico« (1956)    | i          | i | i  | I | i | i | V  | V | i                | i   | iv               | iv-i             | i  | iv | iv | i              |
| »Young Blood« (1957)       | I          | I | I  | I | I | I | I  | I | IV               | IV  | I                | I                | IV | IV | V  | V              |
| »Poison Ivy« (1959)        | I          | I | I  | I | I | I | I  | I | vi               | vi  | III <sup>7</sup> | III <sup>7</sup> | vi | ii | vi | V <sup>7</sup> |
| »Love Potion No. 9« (1959) | i          |   | iv |   | i |   | iv |   | III              | III | iv               | V                | i  | i  |    |                |

Table 8: A-sections with refrains/choruses in AABA songs by Leiber/Stoller

In some pieces, Leiber and Stoller's differentiation of the A-sections corresponds with the elevation of the bridge, otherwise typically subordinate to the verse/chorus pairs, to the locus of the »narrative climax« of the stories told in their »playlets,« e.g., in »Smokey Joe's Cafe« (1955), »Down In Mex-

83 Other songwriters would soon employ a similar tactic, integrating six, eight, and ten-measure refrains within the AABA form, including, e.g., »A Lover's Question« (Benton/Williams 1958), »Please Don't Touch« (Kidd/Robinson 1959), »Angel Face« and »Hushabye« (both Pomus/Shuman 1959), »Save The Last Dance For Me« und »Hound Dog Man« (both Pomus/Shuman 1960) as well as »Kiddio« (Benton/Otis 1960).

ico« (1956) and »Little Egypt« (1961; see Covach 2010, 7, who refers to this as the »dramatic AABA form«).

In 1957, with twelve hit-singles on the pop-charts and numerous additional placements on the R&B charts under their belts, Leiber and Stoller were the most successful songwriters in the US (Emerson 2005, 1 and 63). Naturally, a host of non-musical factors contributed to the success of these crossover hits, but the duo's creative use of language, instrumentation, harmony, and melody was key to their success. However, even a purely formal analysis such as ours begins to offer possible explanations for the enormous popularity of Leiber and Stoller's songs. These include their strong emphasis on refrains/choruses and the maximum integration of »black« and »white« formal models. Economic interests certainly played a role in this melding of forms:

»No matter how much they prided themselves on being ›race men‹ and how little they identified with white teenagers, they recognized rhythm & blues was beginning to appeal to a larger audience that it would be folly to ignore – especially as they began to settle down and assume adult responsibilities. They had a record company to run, partners to please [...], pressing plants to pay, and distributors to dun [...]. Leiber and Stoller's greatest contribution to Atlantic Records was to make black music more alluring to white kids, and to help make the transition from an R&B-specialty label to a rock 'n' roll powerhouse. Leiber and Stoller straddled and synthesized both strains of music« (Emerson 2005, 13 and 15).

By expanding the refrain into a chorus in the context of AAA forms and subsequently applying this concept to AABA forms, Leiber and Stoller laid the foundation for the combination of verses, choruses, and bridges that remains popular to this day.

In the early 1960s, other songwriters adopted the strict distinction between verse and chorus of songs like »Poison Ivy« within the AABA form, resulting in an overarching form organized as »verse – chorus – verse – chorus – bridge – verse – chorus.« Even when viewed without regard to the preceding historical analysis of the origins of these forms, it seems plausible that this structure developed from the AABA form and not, for example, from the verse/chorus form, for one because the early exponents of the form consistently employ the formal components in precisely this order and number (rather than, for example, introducing the bridge after three verse/chorus pairs, see Table 9, p. 60). Only later would songwriters start placing the chorus at the top of the song (a development that had already taken place in R&B) or inserting an additional chorus directly following the bridge before the final verse/chorus pair completed the form. These developments served to reinforce the new independence of the chorus as a for-

mal segment. Leiber and Stoller were not the first to use these variations. Rather, they can be first observed in the songs of their somewhat younger colleagues from the Brill Building-scene (who revered Leiber and Stoller as role models) and later more prominently in England. It is interesting that while the verse/chorus/bridge-model was firmly established in pop music in the early 60s country music songwriters did not adopt it until the early 80s (Neal 2013, 482). In country, the AABA form was still in use many years after pop songwriters had turned their backs on it.

In most of these examples, the AABA form can only be recognized on paper and is scarcely perceived as such in the song. What was once a B-section thus became a C-section, although it was still commonly called the bridge, which refers to its origins in the Popular Song Form. English bands, on the other hand, more frequently referred to it as the »Middle Eight,« regardless of how many measures it encompassed.<sup>84</sup> The advantage of the term, »Middle Eight,« is that it is not used to refer to two different things: The term, »Bridge,« is often used to refer to the prechorus<sup>85</sup>, which has a completely different, and much younger history.

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84 »We used to call everything a middle eight, even if it had thirty-two bars or sixteen bars. George Martin used to point out, ›Paul, hasn't this got sixteen bars?‹ ›Yes, George, it has.‹ ›But you're calling it a middle eight?‹ ›Yes, George, we are.‹ ›I see. Super!‹ We called them middle eights, we had heard musicians say ›That's a nice middle eight‹ and we didn't get the significance of the word ›eight‹. We just learned the word for it and that was what we called it: there were verses, choruses and middle eights« (Paul McCartney in Miles 1997, 177).

85 For instance, in »Strong« (Chambers 1999) Robbie Williams sings the following line at the transition from the verse to the prechorus: »And that's a good line to take it to the bridge.« Similarly, Timberland announces the part that links the verse to the chorus in Justin Timberlake's song »SexyBack« (Timberlake/Mosley/Hills 2006) with »Take it to the bridge.« Both are presumably consciously quoting James Brown's »Get Up« (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine« (Brown/Byrd/Lenhoff 1970), in which Brown instructs his band to »Take 'em to the bridge!«, indicating a shift to a sort of B-section that interrupts the main vamp for the first time in over two minutes and launches a new vamp on the IV. Led Zeppelin parodies this in »The Crunge« (Bonham/Jones/Page/Plant 1973), a funk-influenced number without a bridge, in which Plant calls out near the end of the song: »Take it, take it, take it! Oh excuse me! Oh will you excuse me? I'm just tryin' to find the bridge. Has anybody seen the bridge? Please! Have you seen the bridge? I ain't seen the bridge! Where's that confounded bridge?« (By the way, the fact that this shows up at the *end* of »The Crunge« suggests that Led Zeppelin were referencing the original 45 release of »Sex Machine« in which »Pt. 1« (the A-side) ends just before the transition back to the original vamp, rather than later releases on which the whole performance is presented uninterrupted.) Thanks to Walter Everett for bringing up this example.

| Song   | Form   |                  |           |          |                  |
|--|--------|------------------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| »Witch Doctor«<br>(Bagdasarian 1958)   |        | V(6) - Ch(8)     | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | V - Ch - Ch      |
| »Little Egypt«<br>(Leiber/Stoller 1961)  | Intro  | V(12) - Ch(8)    | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | V - Ch - Coda    |
| »Find Another Fool«<br>(Weil/Mann 1961)  | Intro  | V(16) - Ch(8)    | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | V - Ch - Coda    |
| »Roses Are Red (My Love)«<br>(Evans/Byron 1962)  | Ch'(4) | V(7) - Ch(8)     | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | Ch - V - Ch      |
| »You Can't Compare With<br>My Baby«<br>(Weil/Mann 1962)                                | Intro  | V(16) - Ch(10)   | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | Ch - Coda        |
| »Please Please Me«<br>(Lennon/McCartney 1963)  | Intro  | V(8) - Ch(8)     | V - Ch    | Br(10)   | V - Ch - Coda    |
| »Tell Me Why«<br>(Lennon/McCartney 1964)   | Ch     | V(12) - Ch(8)    | V - Ch    | Br(10)   | Ch               |
| »When I Get Home«<br>(Lennon/McCartney 1964)   | Ch     | V(8) - Ch(8)     | V - Ch    | Br(10)   | V - Ch           |
| »Ferry Cross The Mersey«<br>(Marsden 1964)   | Intro  | V(8) - Ch(6)     | V - Ch    | Br(8)    | V - Ch - Coda    |
| »Hubble Bubble (Toil And<br>Trouble)«<br>(Hugg/Jones/Mann/<br>McGuinness/Vickers 1964) | Ch     | V(16) - Ch(16+4) | V - Ch    | Br(16+4) | Ch - Ch - Coda   |
| »Sha La La«<br>(Mosley/Taylor 1964)  | Ch     | V(10) - Ch(8)    | V - Ch    | Br(9)    | Ch - Coda        |
| »Baby I Need Your Lovin'«<br>(Holland/Dozier/Holland<br>1964)                          | Intro  | V(12) - Ch(8)    | V(8) - Ch | Br(8)    | V(12) - Ch       |
|  |        | A                | A         | B        | A <sup>var</sup> |

Table 9: Relationship between AABA and verse/chorus/bridge forms

## 5. The evolution of the prechorus

The prechorus began to appear as an independent formal section with increasing frequency beginning c. 1961 in songs by the composer teams located in the Brill Building in New York.<sup>86</sup> Considerable evidence suggests

<sup>86</sup> The Brill Building (1619 Broadway) and the neighboring Aldon publishing company (1650 Broadway) represented the continuation of the organizational structures of Tin Pan Alley in the 1960s (Emerson 2005, 20 et. seq.). As was the case on Tin Pan Alley, these two buildings were home to countless publishers, producers, songwriters, band-leaders, and demo-studios, etc., but their target audience was now first and foremost teenagers. The songs published by the Brill Building and the Aldon companies are often interpreted as the reaction of

that it was not, as Everett (2009, 146) presumes, »invented« in 1964, but rather that its roots lie in the expansion of the AABA form described above.<sup>87</sup> The earliest proto-prechorus is in fact a phenomenon typical of Doo Wop, in which the »take off« effect described above is moved back from the beginning of the bridge to the A-section.

## 5.1 Take off

Most loop-based Doo Wop songs fill the entire A-section by repeating the harmonic progressions, I-vi-IV-V or I-vi-ii-V. In some cases, however, the harmony shifts to a new scale degree after the first iteration of one of the standard progressions. Due to the strong emphasis on the I in the first section, this harmonic shift is perceived as a departure from the tonal center, or a »take-off,« from which the harmony returns to the I in the last two bars of the A-section. The take-off is typically accompanied by new, higher melodic phrases as well as changes in the background texture, such as a shift in the vocal backing harmony from rhythmic phonemes to sustained »oohs.« This results in an A-section with an internal structure of its own that follows an aaba' or aabc pattern. The b-section functions as a departure from the familiar that prepares the listener for the ultimate destination—the refrain line—which is then sung over the return to the I in the last two bars of the section.<sup>88</sup> In this sense, the take-off is no longer purely a

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the major labels to Rock 'n Roll, with which numerous independent labels had put a serious dent in the market share of the major labels. While the highly professionalized environment and strict division of labor itself echoes Tin Pan Alley, the biographies of important Brill Building/Adlon songwriters also offer direct references to that earlier era (and thus the AABA form as well): »As a child he [Gerry Goffin, \*1939] developed a taste for Broadway musicals and began writing songs of his own in his head. [...] With a plan to one day write a musical of his own« (Patrick 2007, 2, see also Emerson 2005, 86f.); »Cynthia Weil was born in 1941, in Manhattan, New York. As a teenager she loved Broadway show tunes and thought that Rock & Roll was stupid. Cynthia: »[...] When I first saw musical theatre I knew instantly that was what I wanted to do« (Patrick/Baumgart 1999, 10, see also Emerson 2005, 93). Leiber and Stoller established an office in the Brill Building in 1961; Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, and Phil Spector all viewed them as role models (Emerson 2005, 137, 152).

87 Jay Summach's (2011) highly recommended study »The Structure, Function, and Genesis of the Prechorus« that basically comes to the same conclusions was not known to the authors when this article was originally written in 2010/11.

88 There are also examples in which the take-off occurs only at the level of the melody or arrangement, while the harmonic loop proceeds unchanged: »Heart And Soul« (Carmichael/Loesser 1938, although there is no refrain in the last two measures); »Diana« (Anka 1957); »A Teenager In Love« (Pomus/Shuman

guidepost within the form, but an (internal) formal component itself. Table 10 shows examples of A-sections that exhibit this kind of internal structure.<sup>89</sup>

|  | Verse-like         |                     |                    |                        | Take off                          |                      | Refrain         |        |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------|
| »Just For You«<br>(Davis 1943)                               | I - I <sub>5</sub> | ii - V              | I - I <sub>5</sub> | ii - V                 | IV                                | ii                   | ii - V          | I - V  |
| »Count Every Star«<br>(Coquatrix/<br>Gallop 1950)            | I - vi             | ii - V              | I - vi             | ii - V                 | I <sup>7</sup>                    | IV - iv              | I - vi          | ii - V |
| »I'm Just A Fool In Love«<br>(Chessler 1951)                 | I - vi             | ii - V              | I - vi             | ii - iii <sup>o7</sup> | vi - iii                          | IV - iii             | ii <sup>7</sup> | V      |
| »Since You've Been Away«<br>(Glover 1951)                    | I - vi             | ii - V              | I - vi             | ii - V                 | I <sup>7</sup>                    | IV - V               | I - vi          | ii - V |
| »Goodnite Sweet-heart, Goodnite«<br>(Carter/Hudson 1953)     | I - vi             | ii - V              | I - vi             | ii - V                 | I - I <sup>7</sup>                | IV - iv <sup>7</sup> | I               | I      |
| »Devil Or Angel«<br>(Carter 1955)                            | I - vi             | ii - V              | I - vi             | ii - V                 | I <sup>7</sup> - #I <sup>o7</sup> | ii - V               | I - IV          | V      |
| »Adorable«<br>(Ram 1955)                                     | I - vi             | ii - V <sup>7</sup> | I - vi             | ii - V <sup>7</sup>    | I <sup>7</sup>                    | IV - iv              | I - vi          | ii - V |
| »Since I Don't Have You«<br>(Rock/Beau-<br>mont/Martin 1958) | I                  | iv - V <sup>7</sup> | I                  | iv - V <sup>7</sup>    | I                                 | iv                   | ii              | V      |
| »My Last Date (With You)«<br>(Cramer/Davis/Bryant 1960)      | I                  | IV                  | I                  | IV                     | I                                 | IV                   | I - V           | I - V  |

Table 10: AABA songs with (typically) 8-bar A-sections divided into verse-like, take-off, and refrain subsections

These A-sections always begin on the I. A two-measure melodic phrase corresponds with a harmonic pattern that essentially shuttles between the I and the V, and these elements are each repeated for two iterations. The take-off expands the harmonic horizon by setting course for the IV, either directly or by way of a leading tone in the secondary dominant, I<sup>7</sup>.<sup>90</sup> In nearly every case, a return to the tonal center by way of an authentic

1959). Everett (2009, 140) is more oriented toward melody than harmony in his formal analysis, and he describes the structure of the corresponding phrases as a »Statement – Restatement – Departure – Conclusion«-Form (SRDC).

89 This table shows the first A-section in each case. In the second and third iterations of the A-section, the half cadence at the end is replaced by an authentic cadence.

90 One notable example is »I'm Just A Fool In Love« by the Orioles (see Table 10), which clearly belongs in the Doo Wop genre by virtue of its form and sound, but whose chromatic motion nevertheless offers echoes of Tin Pan Alley.

cadence occurs in measure 7 or 8. The first iteration of the A-section ends, in accordance with the Tin Pan Alley period, with an open cadence on the  $V^7$ , which then leads to the I at the top of the next iteration of the A-section. The second A-section either ends on the I or modulates by way of a secondary dominant to the first chord of the B-section.

## 5.2 The take off as a pre-refrain

This compositional principle is at the root of a similar 16-measure model, which emerged around the same time that songwriters began appending an eight-measure refrain to the A-section (see Section 4.2). Instead of introducing the refrain directly after the first eight measures, this approach follows a template that is analogous to the eight-measures-with-take-off model described above; after eight verse-like measures follow four measures that lead to the refrain and then four measures of refrain. This model was especially favored by Gerry Goffin and Carol King between 1961 and 1963; however, our earliest examples are once again from Leiber and Stoller (see Table 11).

The harmonic and formal relationship with the take-off model is readily apparent, since this 16-measure approach applies the same proportions: Following eight measures of repetition of two or four-measure shuttles or loops that firmly establish the tonal center, a take off occurs, in which the IV and (more frequently than in the earlier eight-measure model) secondary chords are employed to open up the harmony. The refrain is connected with the »authentic« return to the I in the 13th, or at the latest, the 15th measure, and the sense of arrival is reinforced by lingering on this scale degree for four (or two) measures. Despite the expansion to 16 measures, the A-section remains recognizable as a formal unit by virtue of its harmonic arc. While the take off and refrain have not yet been established as independent formal sections, however, they have become more prominent as a result of the doubling of their length. Given the fact that the prechorus would later emerge from this model as an independent formal section, one could teleologically term this take off a »proto-prechorus,« since it serves the same function. Everett (2009, 146f.), explains, »In songs that do not contain a chorus [...] the Departure-gesture that precedes each refrain [...] has the same formal function as a prechorus, but clearly the stage is smaller.« Since it is not followed by a chorus that can be identified as a discrete formal

|  | Verse-like       |                  |                   |                  |                  |                  |                   |                | PreRefrain     |                  |     |                 | Refrain          |                |                  |                 |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| »It's A Miracle«<br>(Leiber/Stoller 1954)                    | I                | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV                | I                | I                | I <sup>7</sup>   | V ii              | V              | I <sup>7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | ii              | I-vi             | ii V           | I-IV             | I               |
| »Sorry, But I'm Gonna Have To Pass« (Leiber/Stoller 1958)    | I                | I                | V                 | V                | I                | I                | V                 | V              | I              | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | V               | IV               | V              | I                | I               |
| »Dream Lover«<br>(Darin 1959)                                | I                | I                | vi                | vi               | I                | I                | vi                | vi             | I              | V                | I   | IV              | I-vi             | IV V           | I                | V <sup>7</sup>  |
| »I Count The Tears«<br>(Pomus/Shuman 1960)                   | I                | I                | vi                | vi               | IV               | IV               | V                 | V              | vi             | iii              | vi  | lii             | IV               | V              | I                | I               |
| »How About That«<br>(Augustus/Payne 1960)                    | I                | I                | V <sup>7</sup>    | V <sup>7</sup>   | I                | I                | V <sup>7</sup>    | V <sup>7</sup> | I              | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | IV              | I                | V <sup>7</sup> | I IV             | I               |
| »First Taste of Love« (Spector/Pomus 1960)                   | I                | I                | V <sup>7</sup>    | V <sup>7</sup>   | V <sup>7</sup>   | V <sup>7</sup>   | I                 | I              | I              | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | IV              | I                | V <sup>7</sup> | I                | I               |
| »Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?«<br>(Goffin/King 1961)     | I                | I                | IV                | V                | I                | I                | V                 | V              | III            | III              | vi  | Vi              | IV               | V              | I                | I               |
| »Heaven Is Being With You« (Goffin/King/Weil 1961)           | I                | I                | I                 | I                | I                | I                | V                 | V              | I              | vi               | I   | Vi              | IV               | V              | I                | I               |
| »It Might As Well Rain Until September« (Goffin/King 1962)   | I                | IV <sub>/5</sub> | I <sup>maj7</sup> | IV <sub>/5</sub> | I                | IV <sub>/5</sub> | I <sup>maj7</sup> | I <sup>7</sup> | IV             | iv               | I   | vi <sup>7</sup> | bVI <sup>7</sup> | V              | I                | ii <sup>7</sup> |
| »Point Of No Return« (Goffin/King 1962)                      | I                | I <sup>6</sup>   | I <sup>maj7</sup> | I <sup>6</sup>   | I                | I <sup>6</sup>   | ii                | V              | I              | I <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | Iv              | I-IV             | I-IV           | I-V              | I               |
| »It Started All Over Again«<br>(Goffin/Keller 1963)          | I                | I                | bVII              | V                | I                | I                | bVII              | V              | I              | i <sup>7</sup>   | IV  | Iv              | I                | V              | I                | V               |
| »Then He Kissed Me« (Spector/Greenwich/Barry 1963)           | I                | V                | I                 | I                | I                | V                | I                 | I              | IV             | I                | IV  | I               | I                | V              | I                | I               |
| »The Kind Of Boy You Can't Forget«<br>(Greenwich/Barry 1963) | I                | IV               | I                 | IV               | I                | IV               | I                 | IV             | IV             | IV               | I   | Vi              | V                | IV             | V                | IV              |
| »Things We Said Today« (Lennon/McCartney 1964)               | i-v <sup>7</sup> | i                | i-v <sup>7</sup>  | i                | i-v <sup>7</sup> | i                | i-v <sup>7</sup>  | i              | III            | III <sup>9</sup> | VII | bII             | i-v <sup>7</sup> | i              | i-v <sup>7</sup> | i               |

Table 11: AABA songs with (typically) 16-bar A-sections divided into verse-like, pre-refrain, and refrain subsections



section, however, it is more correct to speak here of a »pre-refrain.« This term is hardly used however.<sup>91</sup>

Since virtually none of the songs in our sample with forms other than AABA contained a pre-refrain or prechorus before 1960, it is reasonable to conclude that these formal components did not, as one might otherwise assume, evolve from the AAA form with a refrain or from the verse/chorus form, but rather from the expansion and subdivision of the AABA form described above.<sup>92</sup> The fact that those few examples of pre-refrains that did appear in non-AABA songs (primarily in country music beginning in 1958) function harmonically as described above is further evidence of the origination of the pre-refrain within the AABA form.

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91 Fitzgerald (2007, 121f.) uses the term, »pre-hook,« strangely, in the context of a »verse-pre-hook-chorus.«

92 It was, however, not unusual for early Tin Pan Alley and British Music Hall songs to have 20-bar-verses with two eight-bar periods and one (often) four-bar passage that builds tension for the following chorus by ending on V<sup>7</sup> with a fermata (cf. Tawa 1990, 167 and 188). Examples from the Music Hall repertoire include »Hello, Hello, Hello! It's A Different Girl Again,« Arthurs/Scott 1906; »I've Told His Missus All About Him,« Tate/Harrington 1907; »Has Anybody Seen Kelly?,« Murphy/Letters 1909; its answer-song »They Can't Find Kelly,« Merson 1911; »I'm Henery The Eighth,« Murray/Weston 1911. Tin Pan Alley examples are »All Coons Look Alike to Me«; Hogan 1896 (featuring a six-bar recital); »San Antonio,« Van Alstyne 1907; »I Want A Girl Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad,« Harry von Tilzer/Dillon 1911. Further examples can simultaneously be found in Vienna (»Nur A Bier Will I Hab'n,« sung by August Juncker 1907). Later on such prechorus-like structures are also used in the verses of songs by Berlin (»Always« 1925) and especially Gershwin (»Boy Wanted« 1921; »'S Wonderful« and »Funny Face,« both 1927; »I Got Rhythm,« »Embraceable You,« »Could You Use Me,« »Cactus Time In Arizona,« all 1930; »A Foggy Day« 1937). These short sections are not independent from the verses as they never appear without the antecedent verse and the following chorus. Thus, we assume that what we call prechorus in the early sixties has not developed out of these older verse/chorus structures. Besides, we could find only very few prechorus-like structures in folk or country verse/chorus-songs: Carl T. Sprague's »The Club Meeting« (1925), Sons of the Pioneers' »Song Of The Bandit« (Nolan, 1937), and Woody Guthrie's »Do Re Mi« (1940).

|  | Verse-like |    |    |    |    |    |   |    | PreRefrain |    |                |                 | Refrain |    |      |     |
|--|------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|------------|----|----------------|-----------------|---------|----|------|-----|
| »It's Only Make Believe« (Nance/Twitty 1958)   | I          |    | vi |    | IV |    | V |    | IV         | V  | I <sup>7</sup> | IV              | V       | IV | I-IV | I-V |
| »Why I'm Walking« (Endsley/Jackson 1960)       | V          | V  | I  | I  | IV | V  | I | I  | IV         | V  | IV             | IV              | V       | V  | I    | I   |
| »I'll Have Another Cup Of Coffee« (Brock 1961) | I          | V  | I  | I  | I  | IV | I | I  | IV         | IV | I              | I               | I       | IV | I    | I   |
| »Locomotion« (Goffin/King 1962)                | I          | vi | I  | vi | I  | vi | I | vi | IV         | ii | IV             | II <sub>3</sub> | I       | V  |      |     |
| »Six Days On The Road« (Montgomery/Green 1963) | I          | V  | I  | I  | I  | I  | V | V  | IV         | V  | I              | IV              | I       | V  | I    | I   |

Table 12: Three-part internal forms of A-sections in songs without a bridge

### 5.3 The prechorus as a discrete formal section

After the expansion of the A-section to 16 measures encompassing the subsections, verse, pre-refrain, and refrain in the late 1950s, songwriters began composing even lengthier A-sections in the early 1960s. While the verse-like sections remained eight measures in length, the pre-refrain and refrain sections, for example in »Tell Him« (Berns 1962), grew to eight measures each, resulting in a 24 measure A-section. At this length, however, the characteristic unifying arc is barely perceptible. Rather, the formal elements verse, prechorus, and chorus appear to be discrete sections. Most importantly, this process confers on the chorus once again the significance that it always had in verse/chorus forms. As the examples in 4.2 demonstrate, the chorus is, in contrast to the refrain, no longer the brief conclusion of a larger unit, but the focal point of the song, which enhances its recognizability and memorability. In addition to the increased length, the addition of new instruments, lyrical repetition, unison background vocals, preceding general rests, and a discrete harmony that comes to a resolution within the chorus all contribute to this new effect.

The prechorus and chorus are also perceived as discrete formal sections (at least upon repeated listens) when they occur independently of one another in the song, i.e., not always in the same order. For instance, it is common, as demonstrated in section 4.2, for a chorus to follow immediately after the bridge or a solo; it is not necessary for the verse and prechorus to precede it. Some songs also use material from the chorus as an intro, or

begin with an entire chorus. Analogously, the independence of the pre-chorus is heightened when it can be inserted directly after a solo or bridge without the need for a preceding verse (»Baby, It's You,« Bacharach/Davis/Williams 1962; »She's Not There« Argent 1964; »Downtown,« Hatch 1964), or when the first verse-prechorus sequence is followed by another before the chorus is introduced (»She Loves You,« Lennon/McCartney 1963, which also begins with a variation on the chorus). The character of the prechorus, however, remains the same as that of the take-off and pre-refrain; the distance from the I offers variety and produces harmonic instability and tension that is subsequently resolved in the chorus.

The expansion of the A-section up to 26 measures (»Walking In The Rain,« Mann/Weil/Spector 1964, with an internal structure of 8+8+10) apparently creates a situation in which the A-section offers enough variety for the entire song. Accordingly, songwriters would often dispense with the B-section entirely, a decision that was likely also dictated by the customary limitations on song duration at two and one-half minutes. Although some songs with fully expanded A-sections still adhered to the AABA form, (in addition to »Tell Him« e.g., »You Beat Me To The Punch« (Robinson/White 1962) with 8+7+7 measures; »The First Time« (Andrews 1963) with 8+5+4 measures; »Baby Baby I Still Love You« (Weil/Titelman 1964) with 8+4+8 measures), an increasing number of songs written 1963 or later had no bridge (primarily in the US):<sup>93</sup>

| Song   | V  | PCh | Ch | Form   |
|--|----|-----|----|--|
| »He Knows I Love Him Too Much«<br>(Goffin/King 1961)   | 8  | 5   | 8  | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Instr(=V/PCh) - Ch |
| »The Beggar That Became A King«<br>(Barry/Powers 1962) | 16 | 8   | 8  | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - Solo - V/PCh/Ch               |
| »Baby, It's You«<br>(Bacharach/David/Williams 1962)    | 8  | 9   | 8  | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Solo(=V) - PCh/Ch  |
| »What Do I See In The Girl«<br>(Goffin/King 1963)      | 8  | 6   | 4  | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Instr(=V) - PCh/Ch |
| »She Loves You«<br>(Lennon/McCartney 1963)             | 8  | 8   | 8  | Intro(=Ch') - V/PCh - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch        |

<sup>93</sup> Another very interesting example is »Runaway« (Del Shannon/Crook 1961), a song discussed by Summach (2011, 20-21).

| Song   | V | PCh | Ch  | Form   |
|--|---|-----|-----|--|
| »(Love Is Like A) Heat Wave«<br>(Holland/Dozier/<br>Holland 1963)      | 8 | 4   | 8   | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Inst (=V/PCh/Ch) - V/PCh/Ch - Coda |
| »Be My Baby«<br>(Spector/Greenwich/<br>Barry 1963)                     | 8 | 8   | 8   | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Inst(=V) - Ch - Break - Ch         |
| »Baby I Love You«<br>(Spector/Greenwich/<br>Barry 1963)                | 8 | 8   | 8   | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Instr(=V) - Ch                     |
| »Surf City«<br>(Wilson/Berry)  | 8 | 5   | 12  | Intro - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch' - Outro                  |
| »Downtown«<br>(Hatch 1964)   | 8 | 4+5 | 6+4 | V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Instr(=V) - PCh/Ch                         |
| »Don't Worry Baby«<br>(Wilson/Christian<br>1964)                       | 8 | 4   | 9   | V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Instr(=V) - V/PCh/Ch                       |
| »The Girl's Alright With Me«<br>(Holland/Kendricks/<br>Whitfield 1964) | 8 | 8   | 8   | V/PCh/Ch - V/PCh/Ch - Solo - V/PCh/Ch                            |

Table 13: Songs that follow the verse/prechorus/chorus-form

This development can also be demonstrated quantitatively through an analysis of the No. 1 hits on the Billboard Hot 100. While in 1964 52% of all No. 1 songs had an AABA form and only 9% were constructed from verses, prechoruses, and choruses, the share of hit songs with prechoruses in subsequent years climbs rapidly as AABA declines.<sup>94</sup>

|        | 1960 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1968 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| AABA   | 35%  | 30%  | 40%  | 52%  | 26%  | 19%  | 15%  |
| V/PC/C | 0%   | 5%   | 5%   | 9%   | 22%  | 19%  | 20%  |
|        | n=20 | n=20 | n=20 | n=23 | n=27 | n=27 | n=20 |

Table 14: Share of AABA and verse/prechorus/chorus forms among No. 1 hits of the 1960s

Just as with bridges within verse/chorus songs, country music songwriters started to use prechoruses many years later, in the pop-oriented »Country-politan« style around 1980 (cf. Neal 2013, 339). Examples are Dottie West's

<sup>94</sup> Purely instrumental titles were not considered in this analysis. If fewer than 20 songs reached the top-position in a given year, then the top-placing songs on the Billboard Year End Charts were included in order to achieve a sample size of at least 20.

»A Lesson In Leavin'« (Goodrum/Maher 1979) or Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton's »Islands In The Stream« (1983)—notably written by the Bee Gees. Lynn Anderson's 1970 crossover hit »Rose Garden« (South 1969) preceded this trend by 10 years.

## 6. Renaissance and decline of the AABA

While the AABA form did away with itself in the United States, as its A-section mushroomed and spawned new formal components, it remained the go-to form in England, usually in its classic 32-bar manifestation, for a few years longer. This state of affairs is reflected in the »British Invasion« of the Billboard-Charts in 1964/1965 (see Table 14 and Figure 2 on p. 73, which shows that AABA forms peaked in 1964). All seven number one hits from 1965 with an AABA form came from British bands.

Even in light of the fact that the Beatles' early live repertoire included a large proportion of covers of AABA songs<sup>95</sup>, it is remarkable just how much John Lennon and Paul McCartney relied on this formal model in their own compositions for years to come. Although the early Beatles had at least 54 songs based on 12-bar blues formats in their repertoire according to Everett (2001, 54), there were only two such songs published by Lennon/McCartney through 1964, and those used the 12-bar blues form in the context of a larger AABA form (»You Can't Do That« and »Can't Buy Me Love,« both 1964). According to Fitzgerald (1996, 42), 76% of the 34 US Top 40 hits by Lennon/McCartney published from 1963-66 used an AABA form (the remaining 24% used a verse/chorus form). These numbers offer convincing evidence for the influence, and corresponding ambition, that Lennon himself acknowledged when he said, »Paul and I wanted to be the Goffin and King of England« (quoted by Inglis 2003, 221). In fact, Lennon/McCartney used the AABA form much more frequently than Goffin/King (54%) or Barry/Greenwich (47%) did during the same period (Fitzgerald 1996, 42). Our own analysis of all the Beatles' compositions published through 1966

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95 These included, for example, songs by Leiber/Stoller (»Kansas City,« »Young Blood«), Goffin/King (»Don't Ever Change,« »Take Good Care Of My Baby,« »Chains,« »Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow«), Felice and Boudelaux Bryant (»All I Have To Do Is Dream,« »Raining In My Heart«), Buddy Holly (»Crying, Waiting, Hoping,« »Everyday«), and Tin Pan Alley era compositions (»Red Sails In The Sunset,« »Ain't She Sweet,« »Over The Rainbow,« »Till There Was You«). According to Everett (2001,50), at least 46 of the songs the Beatles covered before 1960 included a contrasting bridge that ended on the V. Everett (ibid., 86-90) and Laing (2009, 27-32) offer inventories of the pre-1960 and pre-1962 Beatles repertoires respectively.

leads to a similar conclusion, although it is also clear that the AABA form became less important for the Beatles over time:<sup>96</sup>

|                 | AABA | AAA | Verse/chorus forms | Other |
|-----------------|------|-----|--------------------|-------|
| 1963 (22 Songs) | 73%  | 0%  | 14%                | 14%   |
| 1964 (24 Songs) | 67%  | 0%  | 29%                | 4%    |
| 1965 (29 Songs) | 48%  | 14% | 31%                | 7%    |
| 1966 (16 Songs) | 50%  | 13% | 31%                | 6%    |

Table 15: Formal models of all Beatles' compositions officially published between 1963 and 1966

This dynamic was reversed in the case of the Rolling Stones. Although they were more influenced by the blues than the Beatles, a majority of the early Jagger/Richards compositions functions according to the AABA principle. However, the Rolling Stones did not release recordings of these songs. Instead, they passed most of their AABA songs to other artists<sup>97</sup>, and the early repertoire of the band consisted almost entirely of blues and verse/chorus forms<sup>98</sup>, while such songs were in constant rotation in the Beatles' live sets, but did not appear among their compositions. The song »I Wanna Be Your Man,« which Lennon/McCartney handed off to the Rolling Stones in 1963, is not coincidentally one of the few early Beatles songs without a middle eight.<sup>99</sup> AABA

96 For deeper analysis of the form of Beatles songs and their relationship to Brill Building pop, see Fitzgerald 1996 and Everett 2001 (primarily 48-51).

97 »It Should Be You« and »Will You Be My Lover Tonight« were interpreted by George Bean, »Shang A Doo Lang« by Adrienne Posta, »So Much In Love« by The Mighty Avengers, »Give Me Your Hand« by Teddy Green, and »That Girl Belongs To Yesterday« by Gene Pitney (all 1964). »We Were Falling In Love,« »We're Wasting Time,« »(Walkin' Thru The) Sleepy City« »I'd Much Rather Be With The Boys« and the Bill Wyman-penned »Goodbye Girl,« which all follow the AABA form, remained unpublished. »Congratulations« (Jagger/Richards 1964) is an AABA song if one focuses on harmony and melody. Its handling of the lyrics, however, is very untypical as A1 und A2 do not include the song's title whereas A3 does hardly anything but repeat it as if it was a chorus.

98 Thus, their recording of one of the few Chicago blues numbers with a bridge, Muddy Waters' »I Just Want To Make Love To You« (Dixon 1954) is all the more remarkable due to the fact that the Stones standardized the A-sections and moved the solo to a second iteration of the B-section after the completion of the entire form, thus rendering it entirely in an AABA BA form.

99 In light of this, the following rumor about the origin of this cover, peddled by Miles/Badman (2001, 107), is curious: After the two bands ran into one another coincidentally, Lennon and McCartney said they would give the Rolling Stones a song: »There was only one problem: the song didn't have a middle eight. After a quick conference John and Paul told them that if they really liked the song, they would finish it off for them. They disappeared into a side room and reappeared a few minutes later. »Forget something?« asked Bill Wyman. »No,« said

compositions by Jagger/Richards would not find their way onto Rolling Stones records until 1966 (e.g. »I Am Waiting,« »Stupid Girl,« and »Mothers Little Helper,« all by Jagger/Richards).

| Rolling Stones          | AABA | AAA | Verse/chorus forms | Other |
|-------------------------|------|-----|--------------------|-------|
| 1963-1967<br>(60 Songs) | 15%  | 48% | 27%                | 10%   |

Table 16: Formal models used in 60 Rolling Stones originals released between 1963 and early 1967

Thus, Jagger and Richards apparently connected AABA with a musical tradition with which they consciously sought to avoid associating their own band at first (which did not stop them from composing such music for others): »We wrote loads of airy-fairy silly love songs for chicks and stuff that didn't take off. We'd give them to Andrew [Loog Oldham, Manager] and, amazing to us, he got most of them recorded by other artists. Mick and I refused to put this crap we were writing with the Stones. We'd have been laughed out of the goddamn room« (Richards 2010, 143).

This musical difference between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, which is so apparent even at the level of form, can also be observed between other English bands of the era: The pop-oriented bands used the AABA form frequently in covers, their own compositions, and works by other songwriters<sup>100</sup>, while The Who and more Rhythm & Blues-oriented groups like the Yardbirds, the Animals, and the Kinks largely, though not entirely, avoided that model.<sup>101</sup> They saw in the blues something that would set them

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Paul. »We've just finished the middle eight.« It is not known whether the Rolling Stones intentionally redacted the bridge (and the Beatles followed suit on their own recording) or there was never any bridge to begin with (or the entire story is a fabrication).

100 AABA forms can be found in: Freddie & The Dreamers (»I'm Telling You Now,« Garrity/Murray 1964, »I Understand (Just How You Feel),« Best 1953); Gerry & The Pacemakers (»How Do You Do It« and »I Like It,« both Murray 1963; »Ferry Cross The Mersey« and »I'm The One,« Marsden 1964), Billy J. Kramer & The Dakotas (»Bad To Me,« »I'll Keep You Satisfied« (both Lennon/McCartney 1963); »From A Window« (Lennon/McCartney 1964), »Little Children,« McFarland/Shuman 1964), Dave Clark Five (»Can't You See She's Mine,« Clark/Smith 1964), Herman's Hermits (»I'm Into Something Good,« Goffin/King 1964; »Mrs. Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter,« Peacock 1963), Peter & Gordon (»A World Without Love,« Lennon/McCartney 1964), Searchers (»When You Walk In The Room,« De Shannon 1964), Hollies (»Yes I Will,« Goffin/Titelman 1965).

101 The following songs are some of those that follow the AABA form: Yardbirds: »I Ain't Got You« (Carter 1964); Animals: »Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood« (Benjamin/Caldwell/Marcus 1965), The Kinks: »I Took My Baby Home« and

apart from the pop-mainstream of the time. »We'd had a diet of crooners. Y'know, good singers, but their singles were exactly two minutes with a middle eight, it was really kitsch. [...] I mean and even people like Tommy Steele and Cliff Richards were just poor pastiches of the real thing, y'know, it just didn't, do it for me [...]« (Yardbirds Guitarist and -Bassist Chris Dreja in Priestley 2010, 28 min 23 sec).<sup>102</sup>

The AABA form was also encumbered with negative connotations in the folk revival of the '50s and '60s in the United States, where it was considered taboo. Apparently, the AABA signified a mass-produced commercial entertainment commodity and thus vitiated the claim to authenticity that they felt obligated to uphold. Instead, they wrote songs in the tradition of narrative ballads, blues, and early country in the AAA or »simple verse« form.<sup>103</sup> The forms used by Bob Dylan between 1961 and 1964, for instance, give the impression that even verse/chorus forms must have been scorned as too commercial, since he often wrote refrain lines within the verse, but never independent choruses. Not until 1965, when he broke another taboo by performing with an electric guitar and a rock combo, did Dylan begin to write verse/chorus songs (»Mr. Tambourine Man,« »Like A Rolling Stone,« »Tombstone Blues,« »Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window«).<sup>104</sup> Dylan also released his first song with a kind of bridge in 1965, although it appears in an AAABAAA form that hardly offers the faintest echo of Tin Pan Alley (»Ballad Of a Thin Man«).

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»Stop Your Sobbing« (both Davies 1964). The Kinks' »Lola« (1970) stresses the form to its limits with its irregular verse/refrain units and three sections competing for being »the« bridge. The Who's songs were quite experimental in their formal structure, even on their debut album. Nevertheless, »The Kids Are Alright« and »La La La Lies« (Townshend 1965) adhere to the AABA schema, whereas »Instant Party (Circles)« (Townshend 1966) starts off with AABA but goes into a completely different direction afterwards.

102 The original quote, in English, was obscured by the overdubbed German translation and impossible to transcribe accurately.

103 The Brothers Four broke the same taboo with their No. 2 hit, »Greenfields« (Gilkyson/Dehr/Miller 1959).

104 The Witmark Demos, however, include the song »Farewell« (1963) which clearly features a chorus (thanks to Franklin Bruno for pointing this out). The verses of »A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall« (1963), »It Ain't Me Babe,« and »The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll« (both 1964) include longer refrain sections consisting of up to four lines but we would not consider them independent from the overarching structure.



| Bob Dylan             | AABA | AAA | Verse/chorus forms | Other |
|-----------------------|------|-----|--------------------|-------|
| 1962-1967<br>84 Songs | 4%   | 81% | 10%                | 5%    |

Table 17: Formal models in 84 compositions by Bob Dylan, 1962-1967

By 1966 at the latest, the AABA form no longer dominated pop-music, and its role in rock was even more diminished. Nevertheless, Lennon and McCartney favored it for slower pieces during their entire career with the Beatles and beyond, e.g., in »I Will« and »Hey Jude« (both 1968), »The Long And Winding Road« (1970), »Imagine« (Lennon 1971) or »My Love« (McCartney 1973). A few isolated cases can also be observed in the twilight of the Brill Building era in the songs of the Monkees, a creation of the Brill Building mogul Don Kirshner, but even among Monkees songs they are the exception (»Pleasant Valley Sunday,« Goffin/King 1967). In the ensuing years, songs in the AABA form would occasionally reach number one on the Billboard charts<sup>105</sup>, but the verse/chorus form (with or without a bridge) was now clearly the norm (cf. Summach 2011, 24).<sup>106</sup>

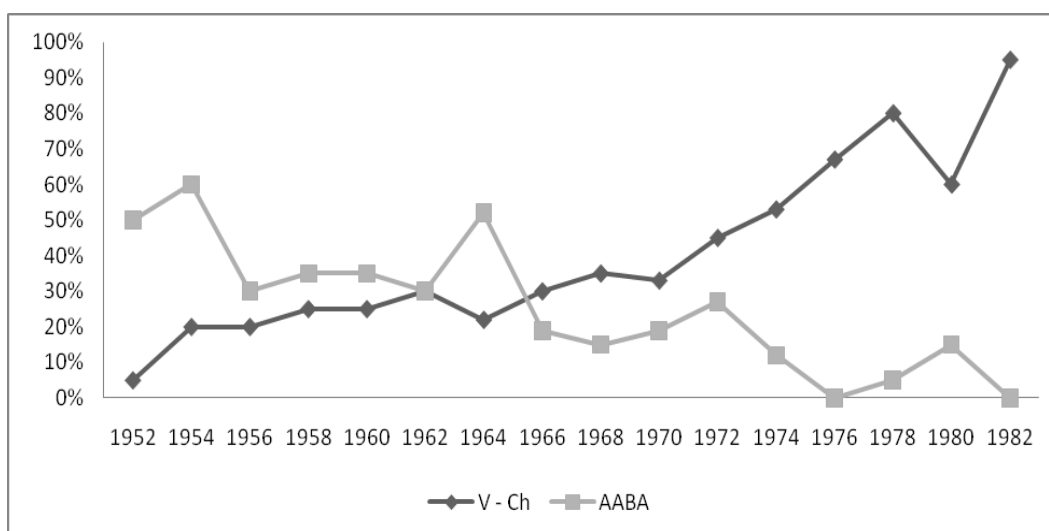


Figure 2: Proportion of AABA and verse/chorus forms among No. 1 Hits on the Billboard Top 100, 1952 - 1982 (n=342)

105 e.g., »Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head« (David/Bacharach 1969), Sammy Davis Jr.'s »The Candy Man« (Bricusse/Newley 1971), Michael Jackson's »Ben« (Black/Scharf 1972) or Billy Swans »I Can Help« (Swan 1974).

106 It is worth noting that »San Francisco (Be Sure To Wear Flowers In Your Hair),« written by John Phillips in 1967 to promote the Monterey festival, which seemed, at least to outsiders, to be an anthem of the hippie movement (and still does), was thoroughly atypical. By 1967, its AABA' form was an anachronistic element unusual for the music of the psychedelic scene in California, which sought to flout convention, had ideological roots in the folk movement, and was characterized by musical (and social) experimentation.

The fact that the AABA form was no longer the common currency of the pop music world in the late 1960s is also reflected in the fact that songwriters began to use it with conscious ironic, nostalgic, or parodistic intent. Thus, at least for insiders, it now carried connotations that it had not yet had at the time it was most widely used. As early as 1966, the New Vaudeville Band scored a hit with the music hall pastiche »Winchester Cathedral« (Stephens), which used the AABA form in a nostalgic copy of an older style. The 20s pastiche »Honey Pie« (Lennon/McCartney 1968) goes so far as to prepend an introductory verse to the AABA form, thus accurately copying the style. The AABA form, ironically disrupted as it is, is also an essential element of Frank Zappa's Doo Wop parody »Fountain of Love« (Zappa/Collins 1968), setting the scene along with the genre-typical lyrics and chord progressions. Bob Dylan could hardly have shocked his audience in the late 1960s more than by playing country songs with the form and genre markers the were so hated by the counterculture (»I'll Be Your Baby Tonight« 1968, and »Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You« 1969) or Tin Pan Alley-Standards (»Blue Moon,« Rodgers/Hart 1935, on *Self Portrait* 1970). The Rolling Stones' »100 Years Ago« (Jagger/Richards 1973) lives up to its title by using an AABA BA-Form in the first part, followed by other parts (including two jam-like sections) representing the presence, thus forming a kind of suite-form very unusual for the band. ABBA's Billy Vaughn-pastiche »I Do I Do I Do« (Andersson/Anderson/Ulvaeus 1975) is a further example for a retrospective use of the AABA form.

Punk and new wave musicians also used the AABA form (or hinted at it) to subvert norms, reaching for an older form to express their opposition to the musical trends of the times. In fact, this occurred precisely as AABA became unequivocally passé (1976 was the first year in which no No. 1 hit on the billboard charts followed an AABA form). While the AABA form and the bridges that emerged from them were not used in Hard Rock, Progressive Rock, or Disco, they were perfectly suited for the self-consciously simple songs of the Ramones (»Blitzkrieg Bop,« Dee Dee und Tommy Ramone 1976; »I Wanna Be Well,« Joey Ramone 1977), the Sex Pistols (»God Save The Queen,« Cook/Jones/Matlock/Rotten 1977) or those Blondie songs that evoke the Girl Group era (»(I'm Always Touched) By Your Presence Dear,« Valentine 1978; »Sunday Girl,« Stein 1979<sup>107</sup>). Verse/chorus forms with a bridge are also more common in punk. In the first British punk single, »New Rose« by the Damned (James 1976), the form, as well as the introductory

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107 Cf. also Blondie's cover versions of the AABA-songs »I'm Gonna Love You Too« (1978, orig. Mauldin/Petty/Sullivan 1958), »Denis« (1978, orig. »Denise,« Levenson 1963) and »Out In The Streets« (1999, orig. Greenwich/Barry 1965).

quote from »Leader Of The Pack« by the Shangri-Las (1964) and the cover of »Help!« on the B-side were clear references to the music of the 1960s. The Boys' »First Time« (Plain 1977) and The Ramones' »53<sup>rd</sup> And 3<sup>rd</sup>« (Dee Dee Ramone 1976) also use a verse/chorus form with a bridge.

The disco song »December 1963 (Oh, What A Night)« (Gaudio/Parker 1975) by the Four Seasons uses a variation of the AABA form which otherwise seldom appeared in disco. Expanded by a C-section, this form was not meant to subvert norms, but rather served an additional semantic vessel which, in combination with the more explicit reference to an earlier time in the lyrics, imparts a sense of nostalgia for the early 1960s.

There was apparently another AABA revival in 1980, when three songs in this form led the Billboard Hot 100. All three, Queen's »Crazy Little Thing Called Love« (Mercury), Billy Joel's »It's Still Rock And Roll To Me« and John Lennon's »(Just Like) Starting Over« make clear reference to the music of the 1950s with their echoes of Rockabilly and Doo Wop.

These and later exponents of the AABA form<sup>108</sup> can sometimes be interpreted as conscious appropriations of an outdated form. Their analyses should investigate the motives and messages contained in such appropriations (quotation, parody, nostalgia, homage, subversion of norms, etc...). In other songs however, especially in those by typical singer-songwriters, AABA is simply one template in their toolbox<sup>109</sup> (cf. Braheny 2006, 88).

## 7. And then? A diversity of forms

Since the reign of AABA came to a close, no other standard form has been as dominant as AABA was for four decades.

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108 e.g., Bruce Springsteen (»Fire« 1978, »If I Should Fall Behind,« 1992, »Streets Of Philadelphia,« 1994), Tom Waits (»Singapore« and »Clap Hands,« both 1985), Bob Dylan (»Make You Feel My Love,« 1997, »Floater (Too Much To Ask)« and »Bye And Bye,« both 2001), Adam Green (»Bluebirds,« 2003), Ron Sexsmith (»Tomorrow In Her Eyes« and »For The Driver,« both 2004, »Nowadays,« 2011), David Bowie (»Seven,« Bowie/Gabrels 1999) and more recently Magnetic Fields: »California Girls« (Merritt 2008; which makes formal and lyrical reference to the Beach Boys-era); Vampire Weekend: »Holiday« (Baio/Thomson/Koenig/Batmanglij 2010); The Black Keys: »Everlasting Light« (Auerbach/Carney 2010); Those Darlins' »Ain't Afraid,« 2014) and Nina Persson's »Burning Bridges For Fuel,« »Jungle,« »Forgot To Tell You,« and arguably, »The Grand Destruction Game« (all Johnson/Persson/Larson 2014).

109 It may also be used by bands rooting in jazz tradition, cf. Blood, Sweat & Tears' funky »Nuclear Blues« (Clayton-Thomas 1980).

Verses and choruses of varying length, number, and sequence now form the backbone of most songs. The vocal intros that appear sporadically beg the question of the extent to which the influence of the Tin Pan Alley verse may still be felt; gospel preludes or the lyrical vamps of Doo Wop are other potential models for such intros.<sup>110</sup> At this stage, songwriters can choose a combination of various other formal elements, such as prechoruses, bridges—which can now be instrumental as well<sup>111</sup>—and solos, without necessarily using them in their conventional position within the form.<sup>112</sup>

Accordingly, there was liberal experimentation with formal elements. The prechorus, for instance, sometimes appears after two consecutive verses ABBA's »Ring Ring« (Ulvaeus/Anderson/Andersson/Sedaka 1973); Oasis' »Wonderwall« (Gallagher 1995) and sometimes not until the second verse/chorus combination (»I Can See For Miles,« Townshend 1967). Other songs skip the prechorus in between the final verse and chorus (»Your Good Thing (Is About To End),« Hayes/Porter 1966; »School's Out,« Cooper/Bruce/Buxton/Dunaway/Smith 1972) or link two choruses, omitting a third verse (ABBA's »Voulez-Vous,« Andersson/Ulvaeus 1979). More often it immediately follows a solo or bridge (»I'm A Believer,« Diamond 1966; »Fool On The Hill,« Lennon/McCartney 1967). There are also songs with two different prechoruses (Lou Christie's »Lightnin' Strikes,« Christie/Herbert 1965) as well as songs that begin with the prechorus (following an »instru-

110 e.g., »I Do« (Pauling 1954), »Shop Around« (Gordy/Robinson 1960), »That Child Is Really Wild« (Gordy/Robinson 1960), »Itsy Bity, Pity Love« (Bradford/Wylie 1960), »Take Good Care Of My Baby« (Goffin/King 1961), »Twistin' Postman« (Bateman/Holland/Stevenson 1961), »It Might As Well Rain Until September« and »Keep Your Hands Off My Baby« (both Goffin/King 1962), »My Boyfriend's Back« (Feldman/Goldstein/Gottehrer 1963), »If I Fell« (Lennon/McCartney 1964).

111 Instrumental bridges were especially popular in 1960s' soul music, an interesting example being »Respect«: Otis Redding's original 1965 recording has a bridge with vocals, whereas Aretha Franklin's 1967 recording features a saxophone solo, using the chords from the prechorus of the recent Sam and Dave hit »When Something Is Wrong With My Baby« (Hayes/Porter 1967) as harmonic background; further examples are »In The Midnight Hour« (Cropper/Pickett 1965) and »Knock On Wood« (Cropper/Floyd 1966).

112 Zak (2008) examines the trend toward songs of »epic« length and »episodic« structure beginning after 1965 and becoming common in the 1970s. This can be observed in the music of hard rock bands (Led Zeppelin, Queen), singer/songwriters (Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel) and progressive rock groups (Genesis, Yes). Spicer (2004) cites examples of pieces in various styles that have a »cumulative« structure. Osborn (2010) deals with the trend, common since 2000 in »Post-Rock,« »Art-Rock,« »Math-Metal« and »Neo-Prog,« of ending songs with a part that does not contain any material from the verse or chorus as well as »through-composing« songs (without repetition of any material).

mental verse« as an intro) (Diana Ross' »Love Child,« Taylor/Wilson/Sawyer/Richards 1968).

Covach's claim that the music of the 1970s made more frequent use of verse/chorus-models with bridges (Covach 2005, 75) at least with regard to the top-ranking Billboard singles, does not hold up to closer scrutiny. Of a sample of 121 No. 1 hits from the years 1970-1978, 67 do follow the verse/chorus model, but only 12 of those include a bridge, and only 22 have a prechorus.

In the mid 1960s, songwriters pursued original and innovative new formal structures at Motown, where the AABA form was never very popular: Brian Holland/Lamont Dozier/Eddie Holland and William Stevenson did not compose a single song in this form that placed on the charts between 1963 and 1966 (when AABA enjoyed a renaissance in the music of the Beatles), while Smokey Robinson used it in about a quarter of his hits during the same period.<sup>113</sup> Instead of relying on AABA, these songwriters experimented with numerous different forms that cannot be categorized within a fixed schema: In The Supremes' hit »You Keep Me Hanging On« (Holland/Dozier/Holland 1966), the chorus appears in three variations: At the beginning of the song and in the first repetition, it is 12 measures long. In the second repetition it is eight measures long, and in the third it extends to 16 measures with new lyrics. The prechorus only follows the first and third verses; it is omitted from the second iteration. In »Come See About Me« (Holland/Dozier/Holland 1964), also performed by the Supremes, the prechorus is the longest formal section at 12 measures.

Martha & The Vandellas' »Dancing In The Street« (Stevenson/Gaye/Hunter 1964) begins with a brief introduction followed by a verse (A=8+6 measures). The shift from the I to the IV suggests a prechorus (B) or a blues derivative. Instead, after four measures the song returns to the verse vamp for another four measures (A'), which then ends with the title line. This is followed by an eight measure part with increased harmonic density that could be heard as the chorus (C), however the title line does not return until after this part, when the song has returned to the verse vamp (A''). The entire form is then repeated identically. Overall, this creates a sense of fluid, continuous motion that supports the lyrical theme of dance.

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113 Fitzgerald (2007, 122f.) compiled statistics that confirm that only twelve percent of the Holland/Dozier/Holland songs contain a bridge. However, Brian Holland and Mickey Stevenson were partly responsible for the curious form of the Marvelette's song »Playboy« (B. Holland/Bateman/Horton/Stevenson 1962): Chorus – AABA – Chorus – BA – Chorus, in which the A-section is unusually subdivided into sections of 4 and 6 measures.

»Stop! In The Name Of Love« (Holland/Dozier/Holland 1965) follows a similarly unconventional form: After an eight-measure verse (A), which ends on the V, a second verse (A') seems to follow. However, this ostensible second verse varies the harmony and then flows into another four-measure section (B), over which the refrain line »Think it over« is repeated. Subsequently, the title-line returns and is repeated over the eight-measure section (C), which is followed once again by the refrain, »Think it over« (B). After repeating this entire sequence once identically, the song ends with another verse (A), which flows directly into a chorus, omitting the A'- and B- sections.

»You Can't Hurry Love« (Holland/Dozier/Holland 1966) by the Supremes begins with a verse (A) and a chorus (B) which is harmonically identical to the verse. Instead of a second verse, the 16-bar section that follows already has a bridge-like character (C), beginning on the iii and ending, like many other bridges, on V<sup>7</sup>. This combination of chorus and bridge is then repeated once more before the verse section (A) reappears, this time not for eight measures as previously but for a tension-building 24 measures, during which the band—seemingly unable to endure the tension—begins to play the accompaniment to the chorus after just eight-bars, thus acting out the lyric, »I keep on waiting, anticipating« just as the bass player anticipates many chord changes by half a bar throughout the song. After 24 measures, the lead vocals finally join the band and reintroduce the by now long-anticipated chorus lyrics to end the song. This is a prime example of an instance in which song form becomes a vessel for semantic content.

In addition to these unique forms, other Motown songwriters developed formal models that would later become very influential: In songs like The Miracles' »Mickey's Monkey« (Holland/Dozier/Holland 1963) and »Going To A Go-Go« (Robinson/Moore/Tarplin/Rogers 1965),« Jr. Walker & The All Stars' »Shot Gun« (DeWalt 1965) as well as Stevie Wonder's »Uptight (Everything's Alright)« (Cosby/Moy/Wonder 1966), the form can no longer be discerned based on the harmony, because the vamps or riffs continue through the entire song without harmonic change. The formal sections of such songs are now a result of changes in the (background) vocals between verse-like sections and sections in which the title lyric is chanted repeatedly. Soli or short breaks can also serve to delineate formal sections:

| »Going To A Go-Go« (Robinson/Moore/Tarplin/Rogers 1965) |    |                |    |       |    |                |    |       |      |       |    |                |    |       |             |  |
|---|----|----------------|----|-------|----|----------------|----|-------|------|-------|----|----------------|----|-------|-------------|--|
| Intro   | Ch | V <sup>1</sup> | Ch | Break | Ch | V <sup>2</sup> | Ch | Break | Solo | Break | Ch | V <sup>3</sup> | Ch | Break | Ch          |  |
| 4+4   | 4  | 8              | 4  | 4     | 4  | 8              | 4  | 4     | 8    | 4     | 4  | 8              | 4  | 4     | 8<br>(fade) |  |

Verse and chorus-like sections appear in these songs in varying lengths and sequences, so that the form appears to be improvised, varied, fluid, and unpredictable. The songwriters manage to ensure that the effect is not disorienting, however, by consciously keeping the differences between the sections minimal. The song digs in and sits on the harmonic »zero-level,« a move that may have as its model John Lee Hooker's boogies (e.g., »Boogie Chillen«) or various forms of pre-war country blues.<sup>114</sup>

This formal model in which the individual sections are no longer marked by harmonic changes—genealogically fully distinct from AABA—served as a foundation for the further development of various dance-oriented styles, from funk and dub to disco and hip hop to Electronic Dance Music. Thus, it should also be viewed as a precursor to the track form, in which concepts like verse and chorus often have no meaningful application. In the track form, the only variations over time that mark the form occur in the vocals or through the addition or removal of individual »tracks« and other textural changes. This model, however, has left few traces in the mainstream charts.<sup>115</sup> Songwriters who seek commercial success still cannot afford to dispense with the chorus. Two choruses are even better: In recent years, we see a trend toward following the chorus with a discrete post-chorus that incorporates the title hook multiple times as harmonic tension decreases (e.g., Rihanna's »Umbrella,« Jay-Z/Harrell/Nash/Stewart 2007; Lady Gaga's »Pokerface,« Germanotta/Khayat 2008; Beyoncé's »Halo,« Bogart/Knowles/Tedder 2009; Rihanna's »Diamonds,« Furler/Levin/Eriksen/Hermansen 2012; Katy Perry's »Roar,« Perry/Gottwald/Martin/McKee/Walter 2013; Clean Bandit's »Rather Be,« Patterson/Marshall/Napier 2014).<sup>116</sup>

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114 e.g. Charley Patton's »Mississippi Boweavil Blues« (1929) or Robert Johnson's »Preaching Blues (Up Jumped The Devil)« (1936).

115 Among those songs in (proto-)»track form« that did reach number one on the Billboard charts were: »Tighten Up« (Bell/Buttier 1967), »Thank You (Fallettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)« (Stone 1969), »I'll Take You There« (Bell 1972), »Papa Was A Rolling Stone« (Whitfield/Strong 1972). »Disco Lady« (Scales/Vance/Davis 1976), »Le Freak« (Edwards/Rodgers 1978), »Miss You« (Jagger/Richards 1978; with a contrasting bridge) or, more recently »I Gotta Feeling,« Adams/Pineda/Gomez/Ferguson/Guetta/Rieserer 2009).

116 When this trend began is a matter for further investigation. Potential models with two-part choruses might be the Motown songs »I Heard It Through The Grapevine« (Whitfield/Strong 1967), »I Want You Back« (Gordy/Perren/Mizell/Richards 1969) and »ABC« the same, 1970) as well as »Friday On My Mind« (Young/Vanda 1966), »Summer In The City« (Sebastian/Boone 1966) and »Born To Be Wild« (Bonfire 1968). »Sheena Is A Punk Rocker« (Joey Ramone 1977) features a post-chorus as well.

## 8. Conclusion

Our investigation has shown how critical a historical analysis of various formal models is to the development of a terminology that can be applied to scholarly study of popular song. In order to deal with the current terminological confusion in this field, it is necessary to study its genesis. Scholars who wish to use these terms without exacerbating confusion must give careful consideration given to their historical context as well as their contemporary applications. Furthermore, it has become clear that an awareness of what is common and what is exceptional in a given era is a critical prerequisite to analyzing any specific song. Only with this background is it possible to interpret song-forms semantically and evaluate their cultural meaning and significance in the context of the time in which they originated. The examination and description of form is not a box to be perfunctorily ticked in the analysis of popular music, but a rewarding jumping off-point for musicological as well as cultural inquiry. For example, one might seek the origins of the apparently heightened need to communicate that led to the subdivision and expansion of the A-line into an A-section in order to accommodate more lyrics in the verse. A contrary line of inquiry would be to test the hypothesis that the continual increase in the prevalence of refrains and choruses is related to the expansion of media and shrinking attention spans.



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## Abstract

This paper deals with different dimensions of the formal construction of songs in 20<sup>th</sup> century popular music. First, it proposes that the form of songs is not only an obligatory starting point for analysis but is actually itself a worthwhile object of interpretation. It explains how the analysis of the formal song structure can produce meaningful insights on a semantic, symbolic, and functional level. Secondly, the authors provide a critical discussion on the use of prevalent terms such as chorus, refrain, verse, bridge, etc. They show that a study of the historical evolution both of constituent song parts, and of song forms in general, is necessary to overcome the internal contradictions and incompatibilities of the current terminology. This approach is the center of this paper. It refers to the authors' analysis of c. 3000 songs spanning the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century with a focus on the decisive years 1920 to 1970. Illustrating the results with a large number of examples, the authors trace the development of the AABA-form, various verse/chorus-forms, the evolution of the prechorus and various other song parts, and song form models. The findings are supported by statistical data based on the US Billboard Top 100, and show the prevalence of certain models as well as specific trends in historic change. Finally, the paper shows that the awareness of formal conventions and particularities can be an essential pre-condition for the analysis of popular music's cultural meanings.