Keyboard playing in the Beatles' *Abbey Road:* Topic, Persona, and Social Discourse

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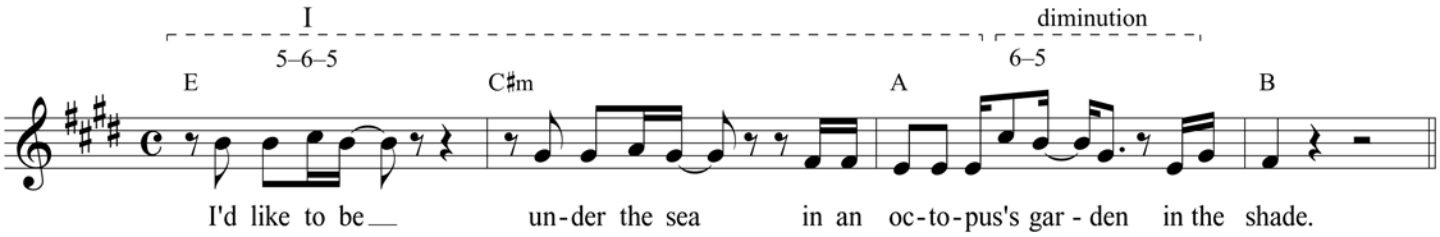
Example 1. "Octopus's Garden"

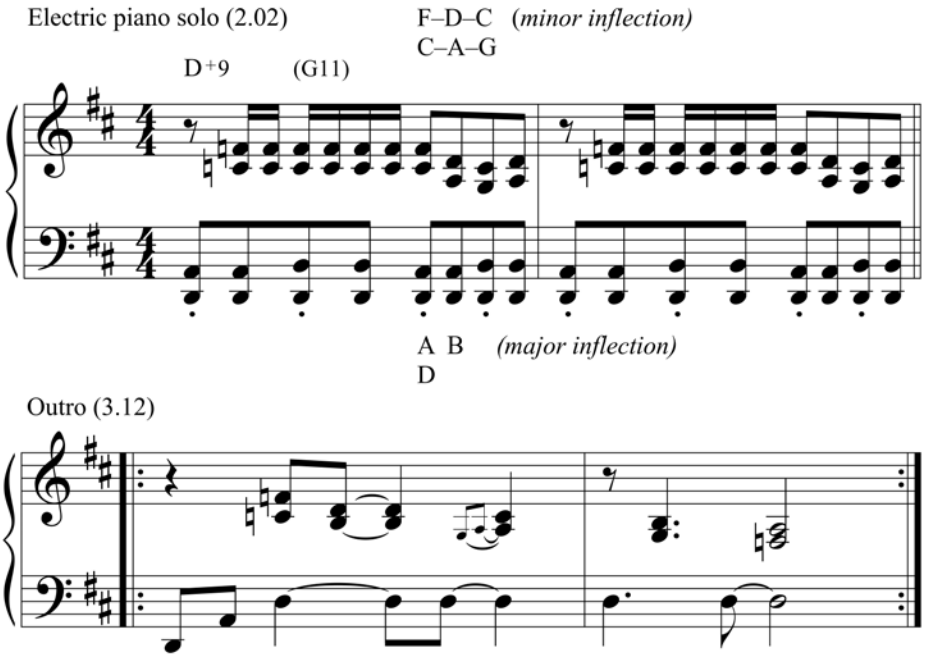


"Ice Cream Changes"

	I	vi	IV	V	
I:	E	C♯m	A	B	*Verse*
			IV		

	I	vi	IV	V	
IV:	A	F♯m	D	E	*Guitar solo with "underwater" vocalise*

Example 2. Come Together



Guitar-like keyboard voicing

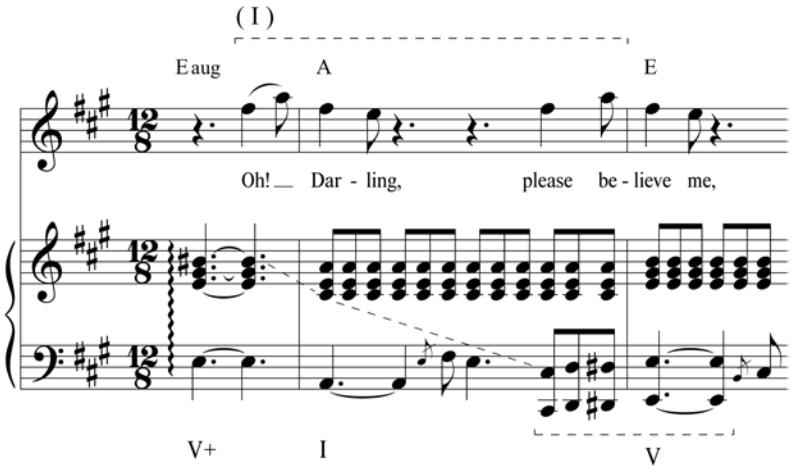
Chuck Berry-style accompaniment

"Swampy" exoticism

Blues-pentatonic modal inflection

Voodoo references in lyrics

Example 3a. “Oh! Darling,” beginning



Some topical exemplars

Jazz swing ballad
“Blueberry Hill” (1940), Louis Armstrong (1949)
Nat King Cole with Billy Preston (1957)

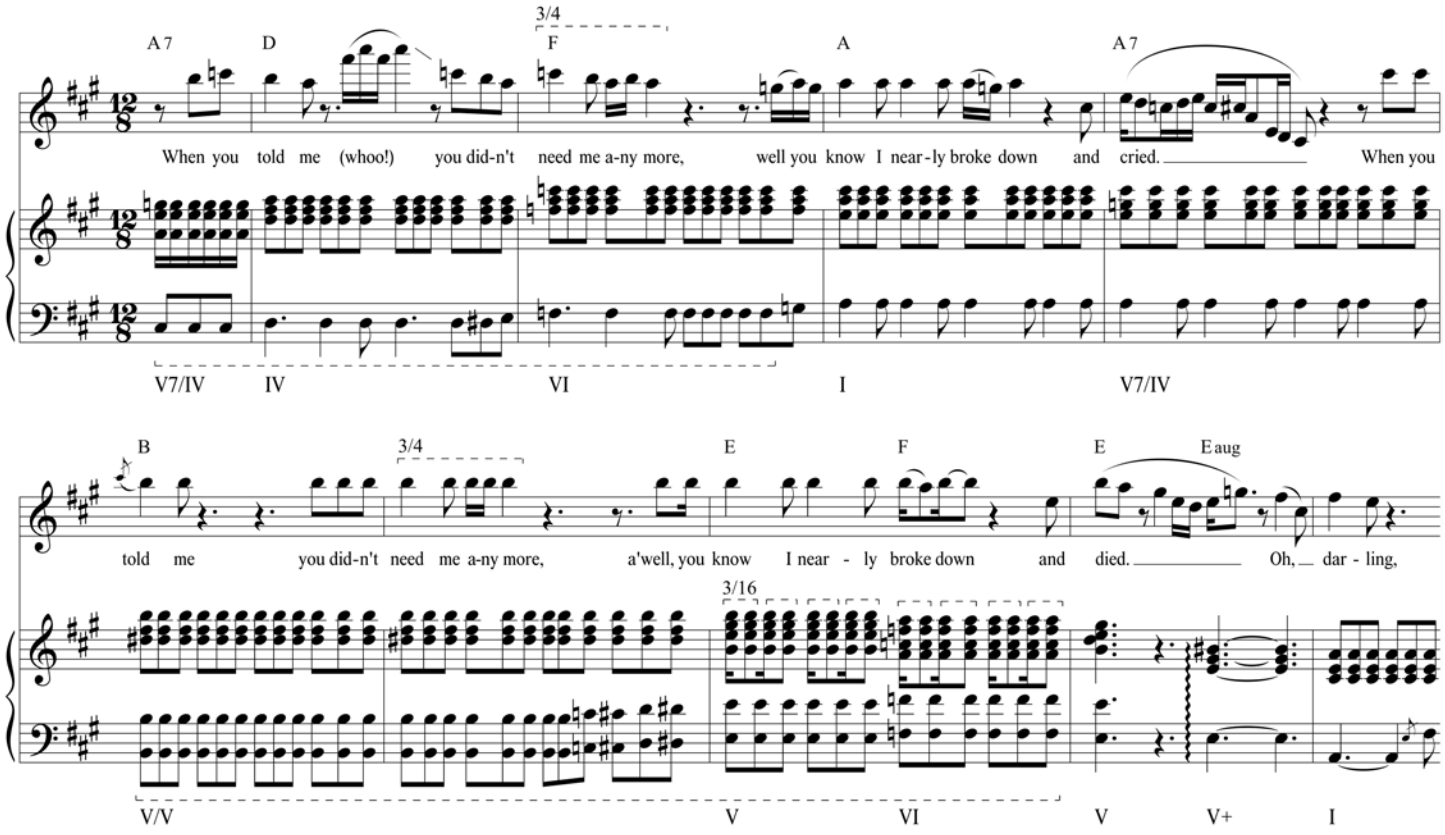
Swamp Pop
“Mathilda,” Cookie and the Cupcakes (1957)
“Leaving It Up to You,” Dale and Grace (1963)

1950’s rock and roll ballad
“Blueberry Hill,” Fats Domino (1956)
“I Can't Believe You Wanna Leave”
Little Richard (1957); Fleetwood Mac (1967)
“Send Me Some Lovin’,” Little Richard (1957);
Buddy Holly (1957); John Lennon (1975)

1950s Do-Wop
“Little Darlin’” (1957)
The Gladiolas (Swamp Blues); The Diamonds

1960s R &B ballad
“You Really Got a Hold On Me,” Smokey Robinson
and the Miracles (1962); Beatles (1963)
“This Boy,” Beatles (1963)

Example 3b. “Oh! Darling,” chorus

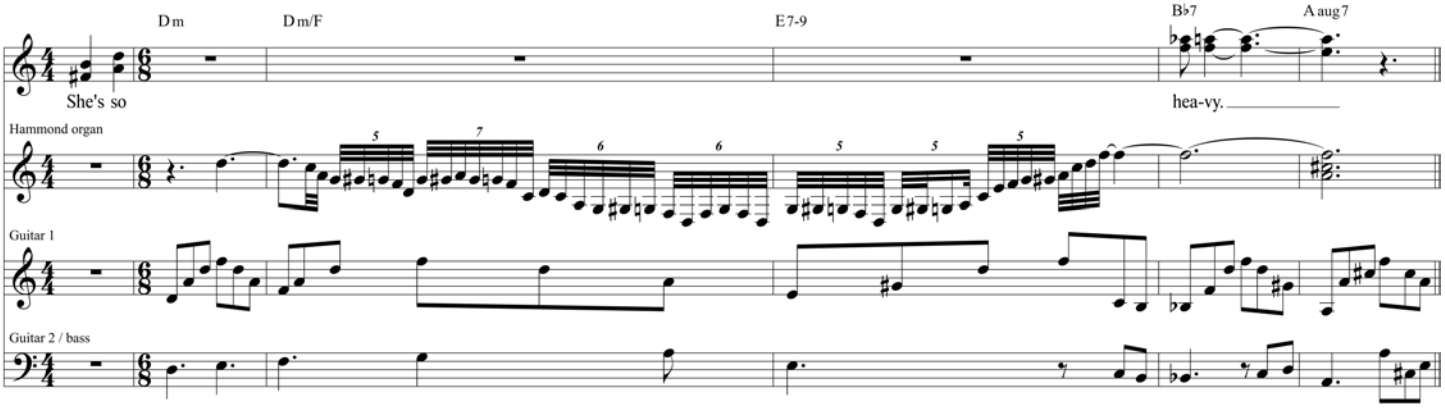


Little Richard-style vocal inflection

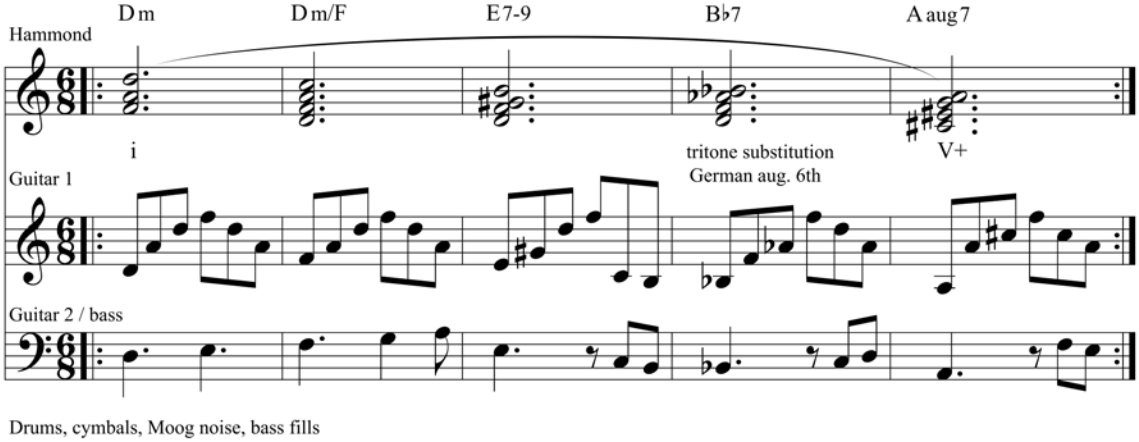
1950s Rock and Roll piano

12/8 meter with hemiola patterning

Example 4a. “I Want You (She’s So Heavy).” Hammond organ solo



Example 4b. “I Want You (She’s So Heavy).” Outro (reduction)

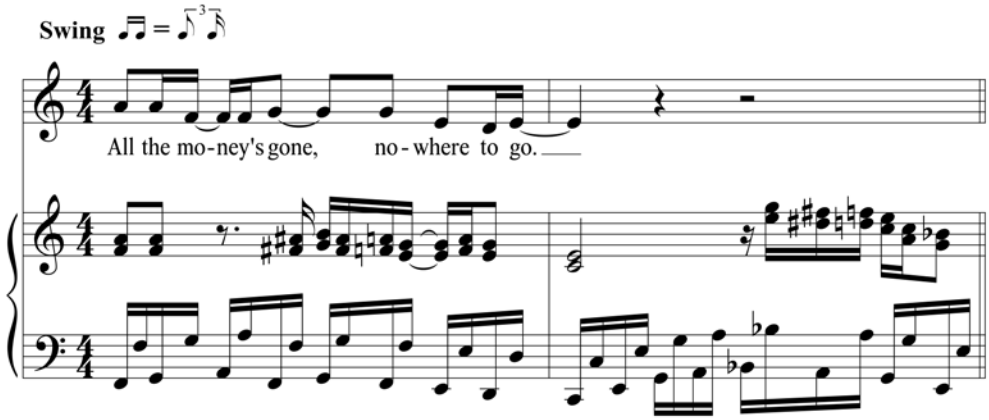


Gospel chorale

Blues guitar

“Psychedelic ombra”

Example 5. “You Never Give Me Your Money,” middle section

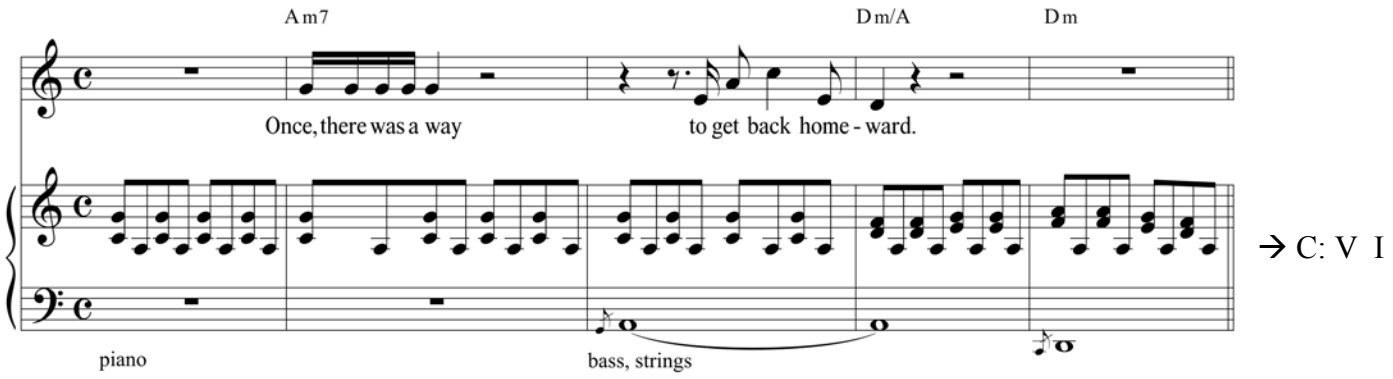


Working-class narrative

Honky-tonk piano

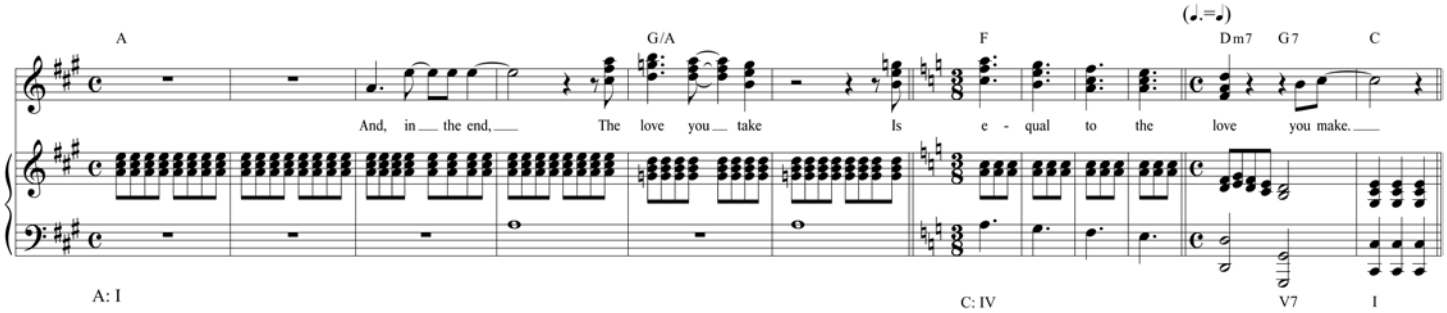
Broken-octave boogie bass

Example 6a. “Golden Slumbers”



rocking gesture *pastoral thirds*

6b. “The End”



elemental “chord of nature” *pastoral thirds*

Figure 1.

Gesture: The intersection of human movement and expression

Topic: A field of meaning, a subject for musical discourse

Personic environment: The created world inhabited by the *persona* in song

Beatles topicality

Distant	Belle époque	Close	Proto-topic
Pastoral	Military bands	Early Beatles	hard rock
Classical	The “quaint”	1950’s rock & roll	the “power ballad”
Baroque	Music hall	Blues	progressive rock
Orientalism	Old-time song	Boogie-woogie	post- or late-stage psychedelic
	Nursery rhyme	Latin dance music	
		Working-class “low style”	

Interpreting cultural codes, multilayered narratives

Base styles ⟷ Anachronistic and disjunctive