# *Melody and Accompaniment*

articles for EPMOW

(Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World)

by Philip Tagg

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# *melody*

From the two Ancient Greek words *mélos* (μέλος = a song, or the music to which a song is set) and ōdē (ᾠδή = ode, song, poem), the English word *melody* seems to have three main meanings: [1] a monodic tonal sequence, accompanied or unaccompanied, perceived as a musical statement with distinct rhythmic profile and pitch contour; [2] the monodic musical foreground to which ACCOMPANIMENT (see p.17 ff.) and HARMONY (see *Tagg's Harmony Handout*) are, at least within most popular music traditions of Europe and the Americas, understood as providing the background; [3] all such monodic tonal sequences and/or aspects of musical foreground within one complete song (e.g. '*Auld Lang Syne* is a popular Scottish melody').

It should be noted in the latter case that *mélodie, Melodie, melodia, melodi* (French, German, Latin and Scandinavian languages respectively) can in popular parlance sometimes denote the entirety of any TUNE or SONG (including lyrics and accompaniment) in which melody, defined according to [1] and [2] above, is a prominent feature.

## *Defining parameters*

### *General characteristics of popular melody*

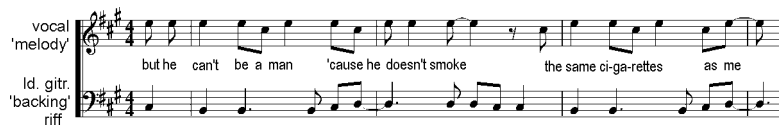
It is difficult to be precise or consistent about which characteristics constitute melody since its definition according to [1] and [2] above are contingent on cultural consensus. Nevertheless, the following parameters, most of them documented by Stefani and Marconi (1992: 13-24), seem to determine what is more likely to be popularly understood, at least within a mainstream European or American context, as typically melodic about a monodic tonal sequence:

- easy to recognise, appropriate and to reproduce vocally;
- perceptible as occupying durations resembling those of normal or extended exhalation (the 'extended present', i.e. consisting of melodic phrases lasting between about two and ten seconds);
- delivered at a rate ranging from that of medium to very slow speech;
- generally articulated with rhythmic fluidity and unbroken delivery of tonal material within one sequence: legato rather than staccato;
- distinctly profiled in terms of pitch (melodic contour) and rhythm (accentuation, metre, relative duration of constituent events);
- delivered with relative regularity and metric articulation of breathing;
- relative simple in terms of tonal vocabulary;
- exhibiting tendency to change pitch by intervallic step rather than leap;
- spanning rarely more than one octave.

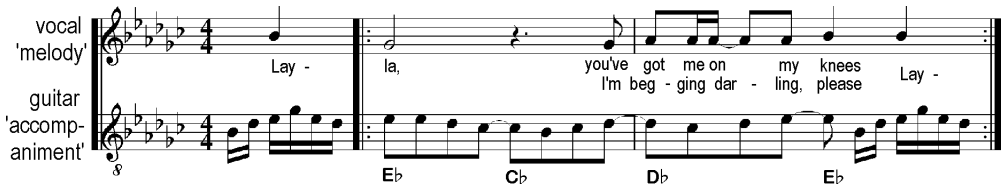
In other words, a monodic tonal sequence is less likely to be considered melodic if it is not clearly tonal, if it is difficult to appropriate and reproduce, if it is too long or too short, if its constituent notes are delivered too fast, if it consists of no more than one or two very long notes, if it is broken up into very short units consisting of just one or two notes, if there is little or no metrical regularity between phrases, if it exhibits no clear tonal or rhythmic profile, if it is too chromatic, contains too many large intervallic leaps or covers too large a pitch range. Indeed, it is for the following

reasons that monodic sequences of the following types, even though they may exhibit some important melodic traits, are less likely than nursery rhymes, folk tunes or jazz standards to be considered melodic: RAP or HIP-HOP declamation and SPRECHGESANG because of unclear tonal articulation, recitative because of irregular metricity, RIFFS because they are too short. Even so, some riffs are more singable than the melodic lines they accompany (e.g. the 'verse' parts of *Satisfaction* (ex. 1), *Layla* (ex. 2) and *Hoochie Coochie Man* (Waters)), while some literally monotonous monodic sequences of tones still qualify as melody (e.g. the verse parts of *Samba de una nota só* (ex. 3), *Un homme et une femme* (Lai) and *Subterranean Homesick Blues* (Dylan)). Moreover, important sections of some well known melodies are based on little more than repetitions or sequential variations of motifs almost too short to qualify as melodic phrases, for example *Volare* (ex. 4) and *La feuille morte* (ex. 5).

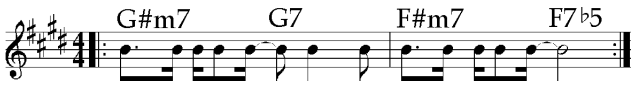
Ex. 1 Rolling Stones: *Satisfaction*



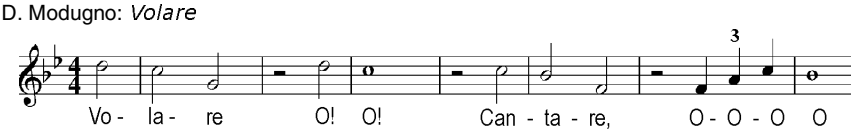

Ex. 2 Derek and the Dominoes: *Layla*



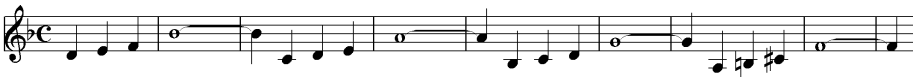

Ex. 3 A. C. Jobim: *Samba de una nota só*




Ex. 4 D. Modugno: *Volare*




Ex. 5 J. Kosma: *La feuille morte*



## *Metaphorical nomenclature*

The nature of melody can also be understood by examining words and expressions either commonly associated or partly synonymous with 'melody'. For example, 'melodic line' emphasises the monodic and sequential (horizontal) aspects of melody while 'melodic phrase' and 'melodic statement' draw attention to the relationship between melody and human speech or declamation. 'Motive' and 'motif' denote movement by definition and melodies are thought of as movement in two-dimensional space — forwards, upwards, downwards, etc. —, often with culturally specific patterns of implication (expected or unexpected continuation, see Meyer 1987),

while melodic 'profile', 'contour' and 'figure' refer to qualities of distinct linearity, shape and gesture. 'Strain', meaning tune, also links melody with notions of distinct characteristics (cf. 'a genetic strain') while 'lay', another archaic synonym, is defined as 'a song' or 'short poem meant to be sung' (*Oxford Concise Dictionary*, 1995).

'Tune' (Middle English variant of 'tone') highlights melody's tonal nature, while 'air', in the sense of TUNE, suggests speech, gesture and movement that have metaphorically taken off ('melody hath wings', '*volare - cantare*', see ex. 4), thereby emphasising the notion of melody as heightened discourse transcending speech.

These transcendent notions of melody can in turn be related to the connotations of monodic pitched declamation necessitated, in the interests of comprehension and before the invention of microphones and PA systems, by acoustic settings characterised by long reverberation times, for example the chanting of prayers and biblical texts in cathedrals and large churches, or the muezzin's call to prayer from the minaret across the town in the relative stillness of dawn or dusk. They are also related to the everyday observation that emotionally heightened speech exhibits greater variation in pitch and resembles melody more than does talking in a normal voice.

In short, melody is tonal monodic movement, temporal and spatial, which is inextricably connected with human utterance, both gestural and vocal.

## *Typologies of melody*

Structurally, melodies resemble or differ from one another according to several factors: [1] pitch contour, [2] tonal vocabulary, [3] dynamics and mode of articulation (incl. phrasing), [4] rhythmic profile, [5] metric and periodic organisation. They can also be categorised in 'experiential' (perceptual, semiotic) categories (Stefani and Marconi, 1992: 111-229). Structural and experiential typologies are interrelated.

## *Structural typologies*

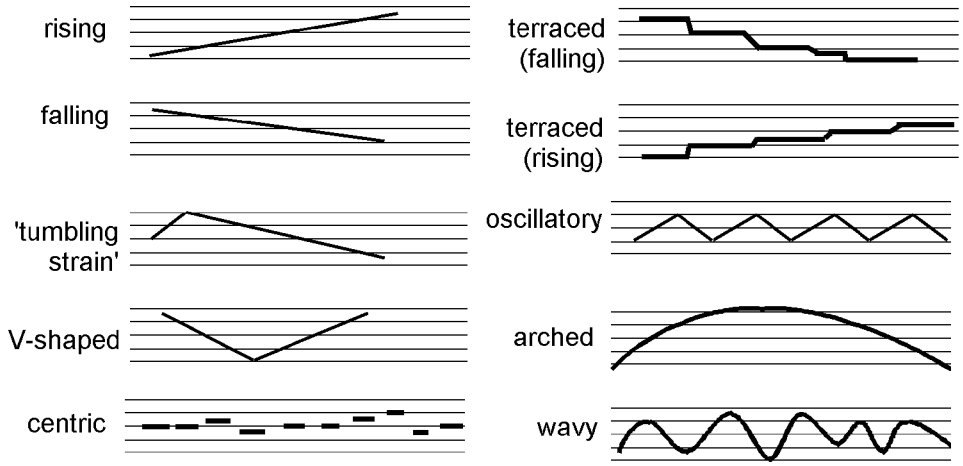
### *Pitch contour*

Figure 1 shows the basic pitch contour types used by ethnomusicologists in the classification of melody (Skog 1977). Each contour type is illustrated by the following examples: [1] *rising* – ex. 6, 21 (phrase 1); [2] *falling* – 7, 21 (phrase 2) and [3] *tumbling* – ex. 8, 9, 10, 20 (bars 1-2); [4] *V-shaped* – ex. 11, 12 (bars 3-4), 15 (bar 1); [5] *centric* – ex. 13, 14; [6] *terraced* (*falling*) – ex. 12 (bars 1-2), 15 (bars 3-4) and [7] (*rising*) – ex. 15 (bars 2-3), 20 (bars 4-9); [8] *oscillatory* – ex. 16 and the double V-shape of ex. 11; [9] *arched* – ex. 17, 19 (phrase 2); [10] *wavy* – ex. 18, 19 (phrases 4-6).

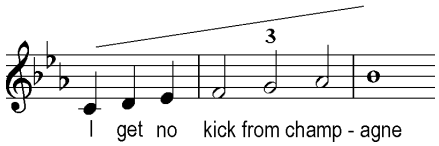
Boundaries between melodic contour types are fluid. For example, the double V-shape of ex. 11 has an oscillating character while parts of ex. 16's oscillatory profile have the shape of a flat V. Similarly, many centric contours (ex. 13-14) can also be heard as oscillating, while some 'wavy' phrases can be heard as short arcs (ex. 18, bars 2-4, 4-5). Moreover, a 'tumbling strain' is little more than an overriding melodic descent with initial rising anacrusis or with intermediate, subsidiary rises in pitch (hence 'tumbling'). It should also be noted that certain styles show a predilec-

tion for particular contours, for example blues-related styles for the 'tumbling strain' (ex. 8-10). However, pitch contour alone is not enough to distinguish the style or character of one melody from another: example 21 illustrates how tonal vocabulary, rhythmic profile and metricity, not pitch contour, can be the operative distinguishing factors.

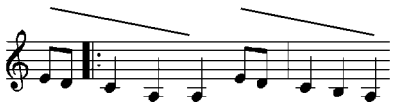
Fig.1 Melodic contour categories



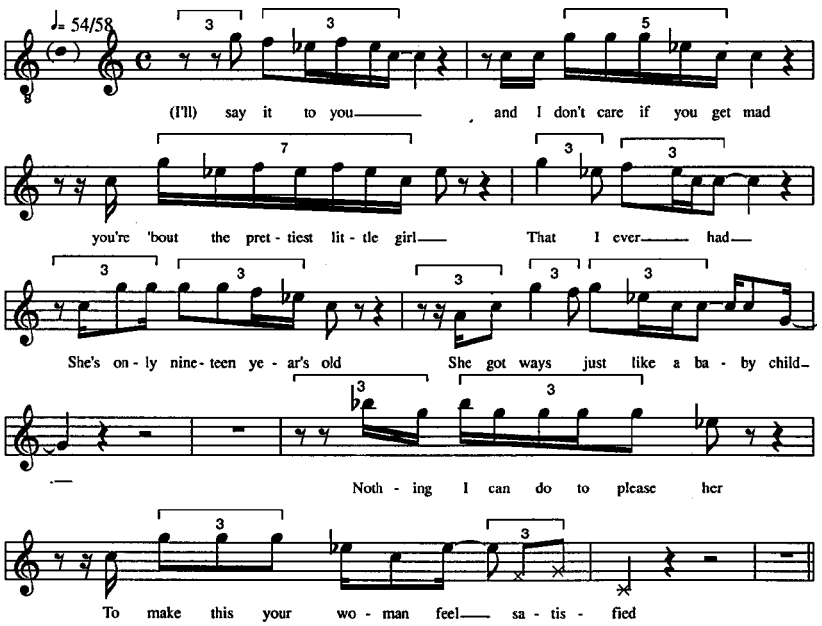

Ex. 6 Cole Porter: *I Get A Kick Out Of You* (1934)



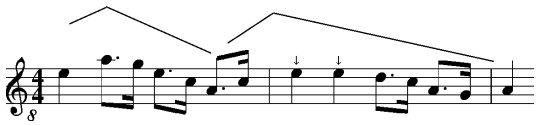

Ex. 7 *The Raggle Taggle Gypsies* (English trad.)



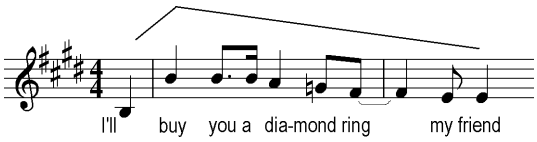
Ex. 8 Muddy Waters (cited by Miani, 1992)



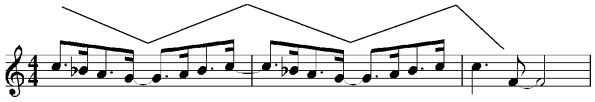
Ex. 9 Nashville Teens: Guitar intro. to *Tobacco Road* (Loudermilk, 1964)



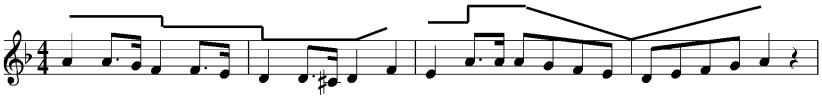
Ex. 10 Beatles: *Can't Buy Me Love* (1964)



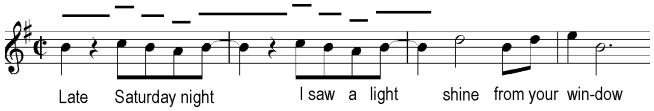

Ex. 11 Ellington: *Satin Doll* (1953, start of middle 8)



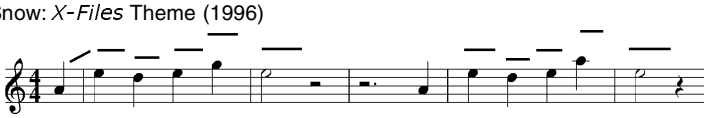
Ex. 12 *Warzawjanka* (Polish trad.)



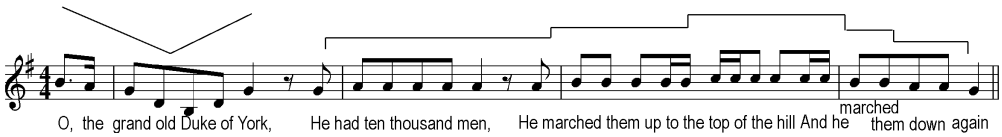
Ex. 13 Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas: *From A Window* (1964)



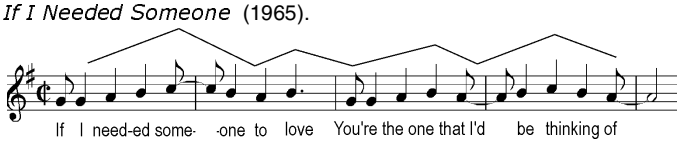

Ex. 14 Mark Snow: *X-Files* Theme (1996)



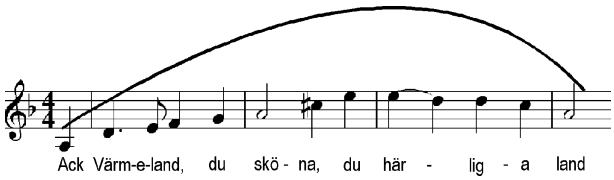
Ex. 15 *The Grand Old Duke of York* (English trad.)



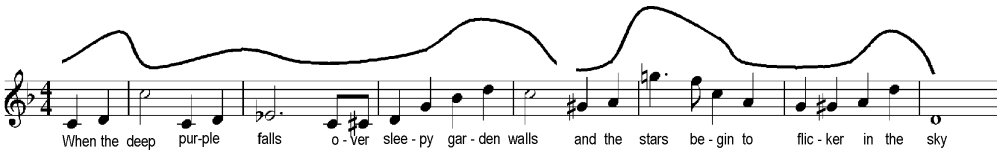

Ex. 16 Beatles: *If I Needed Someone* (1965).



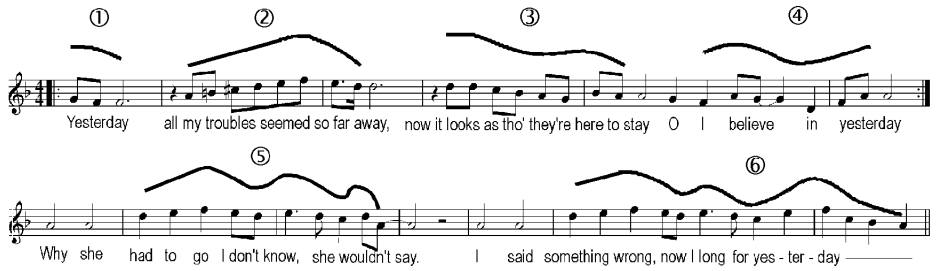

Ex. 17 *Ack Värmeland du sköna* (Swedish trad.)



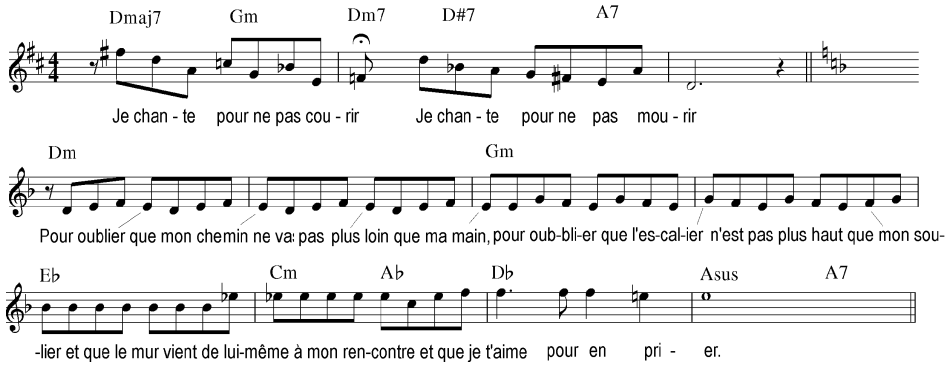

Ex. 18 P. De Rose: *Deep Purple*



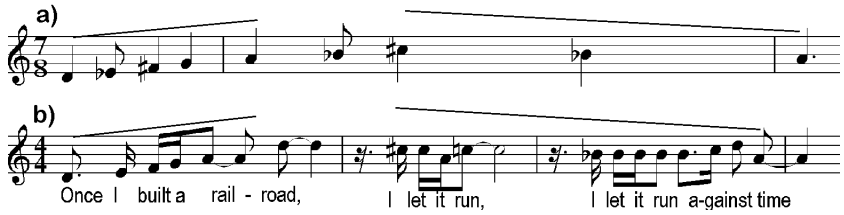
Ex. 19 Beatles: *Yesterday* (1965).




Ex. 20 Vigneault/Rochon: *Je chante pour* (1978)



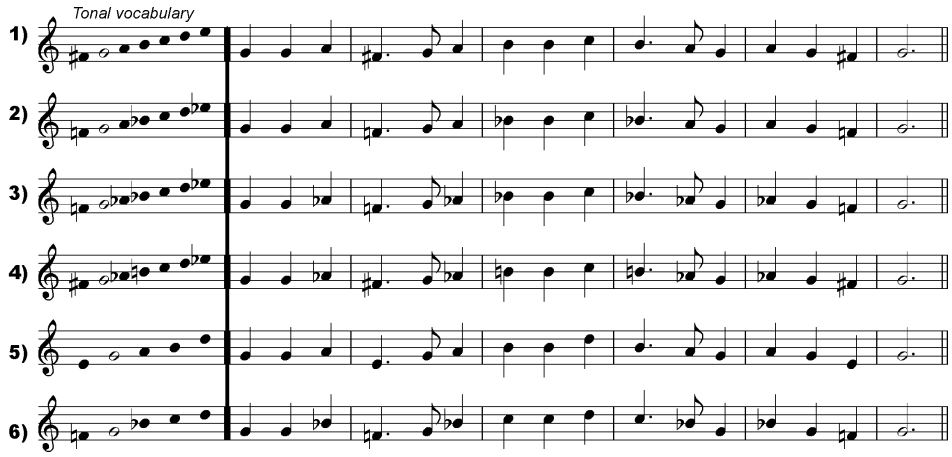

Ex. 21 (a) Misirlou; (b) E. Y. Harburg: *Brother, Can You Spare A Dime*




## *Tonal vocabulary*

The popular device of putting major-key tunes into the minor and vice versa testifies to the fact that changing tonal vocabulary can radically alter the character of a melody. Example 22 shows the first six bars of the UK national anthem's melody: (1) as is, in the major key (ionian mode) and with the same melodic contour, rhythm, metre, etc., but in the following modes — (2) aeolian (or dorian); (3) phrygian; (4) Hijjaz; (5) major pentatonic; (6) minor pentatonic (see MODES). All these variants would most probably be heard by members of the UK cultural mainstream as 'ethnic' or 'folksy': (2), (5) and (6) as possibly 'Celtic', (5) and (6) conceivably also as 'Chinese', (3) as vaguely 'Spanish', and (4) most likely as 'Arabic'. The same six bars could also be changed, without altering other factors, to create a dodecaphonic tone row producing an unsettling effect on most ears.

Ex. 22 *God Save the Queen*: commutations of tonal vocabulary.

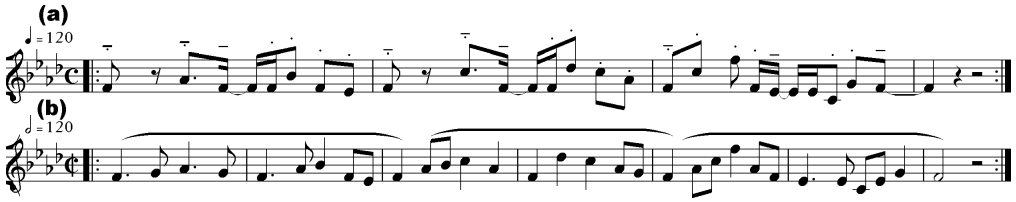



## *Dynamics and mode of articulation*

The structure and character of a melody are determined also by [1] how loud or soft it is presented in part or as a whole (yelling and crooning the same tune produces radically different effects); [2] what timbre or instrument is used to articulate it — imagine Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* delivered bel canto, or your national anthem played on kazoo; [3] in what tessitura it is executed (influences whether it will sound growled or screeched, squeaky and strained); [4] if lyrics are included, what kind of accent and diction are used — imagine Queen Elizabeth II delivering a Grandmaster Flash 'message', or a stirring union song crooned by Crosby or mumbled in the manner of Radiohead's Thom Yorke in *Creep* (1993).

The characteristics of a melodic line are also determined by [4] its phrasing and accentuation. Examples 23(a) and (b) are of identical length, melodic contour and tonal vocabulary, but differ so radically in phrasing that ex. 23b needs notating *alla breve*. Whereas the original version (ex. 23a), with its staccato punch and syncopation, is well suited to the funky trickster character played by Eddy Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop*, ex. 23b resembles more some lyrical or pastoral theme with an archaic flavour and would be more appropriate played by strings than by a synthesiser of mid nineteen-eighties vintage.

Ex. 23 Faltermeyer: *Axel F* (1984) – (a) original; (b) as legato tune



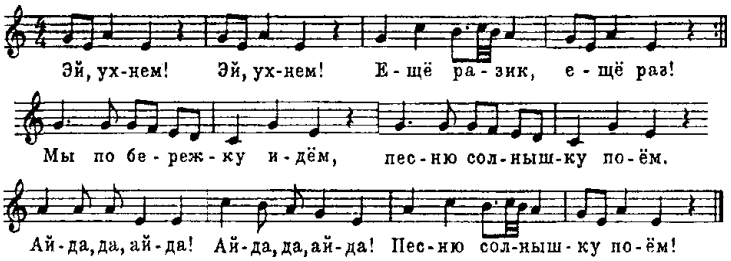

## *Rhythmic profile*

As much as showing difference in phrasing, example 23 also illustrates how difference of rhythmic profile influences the affective character of melody. But rhythmic profile is also related to bodily movement and posture, as well as to patterns of language.

### *Body and melodic rhythm*

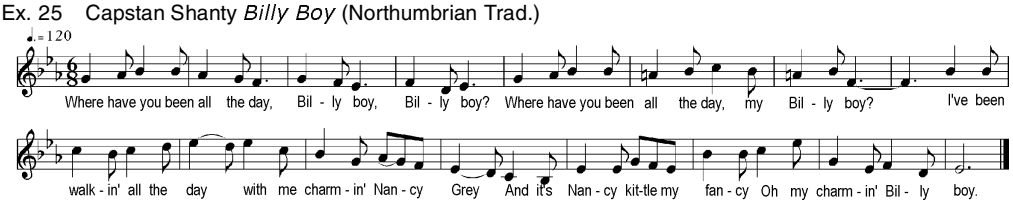
Example 23a's rhythmic profile — its staccato quality with short pauses, its lack of anacruses, its sudden disjunct leaps for agogic effect, its anticipated downbeats (especially bar 4) — corresponds much more closely with skipping or jumping movement than with the flowing, legato, constant type of movement immanent in the regularly measured downbeat dotted crotchets, crotchets and upbeat quavers of example 23b.

Ex. 24 Song of the Volga boat men (Russian trad.)




Similar links between melodic rhythm and body movement can be found in work song. For example, the slow, heavy task of hauling barges, with its repetitive to-and-fro of body and arms, is better helped by the kind of steady, measured rhythm and short phrases (as well as restricted oscillatory pitch contour) evident in ex. 24 than by the brisk 2/4 or 6/8 call-and-response patterns of continuous melody spanning an octave which can be found in numerous British shanties sung to help with nautical work involving quicker, more circular types of movement ('capstan' and 'windlass' songs, the latter sung when hoisting sails with a winch). *A-Roving, Billy Boy* (ex. 25)*, Bound For The Rio Grande, What Shall We Do With The Drunken Sailor, Fire Down Below and Johnny Come Down To Hilo* all belong to this category.

Ex. 25 Capstan Shanty *Billy Boy* (Northumbrian Trad.)



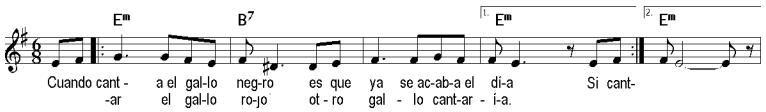

Clear links also exist between body and melodic rhythm in dance music. The mazurka, polka, schottische, jig, reel, slow waltz, Viennese waltz, samba, cueca, cha-cha-cha, rumba, tango, etc. exhibit unique and easily identifiable traits of melodic rhythm. Similar observations can be made about differences between the melodic rhythm of lullabies, marches, dirges, cattle calls, field hollers etc. whose melodic rhythm tallies with the relevant type of bodily activity and/or acoustic conditions of that activity.

### *Language and melodic rhythm*

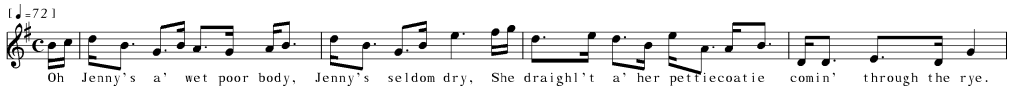
Since melody is so often a matter of singing words, melodic rhythm is also determined by the rhythm of the language in which those words are sung. For example, a melodic phrase ending ♪ | ♪♩., especially with descending pitch contour (see ex. 26 at 'negro', 'roja', 'el día', 'cantaría'), is less likely to occur in English than in Latin language song, as evidenced by the following trisyllabic words and phrases: 'volare',

'cantare', 'amore', 'nel cuore' (Italian), 'querida', 'contigo', 'belleza', 'te quiero', 'llorando', 'tristeza', 'partido', 'destino', 'mi alma', 'la noche', 'y siento', 'tan solo', 'en pena', 'mi vida', 'tus ojos', 'tu pelo', 'me mata' (Spanish, from tango lyrics, see Vilariño, 1981). On the other hand, phrases starting with the onbeat 'Scotch snap' | ♪ ♩. or | ♪♪. (inverted dotting), especially with rising pitch contour, are unlikely to appear in Germanic or Latin-language song simply because, with the exception of Gaelic and Hungarian, English is the only European language to feature this trait (e.g. 'mother', 'brother', 'do it', 'hit it', or, in ex. 27, at 'Jenny', 'body', 'pettie', 'coatie', 'coming').

Ex. 26 Ferlosio: *El gallo negro*.



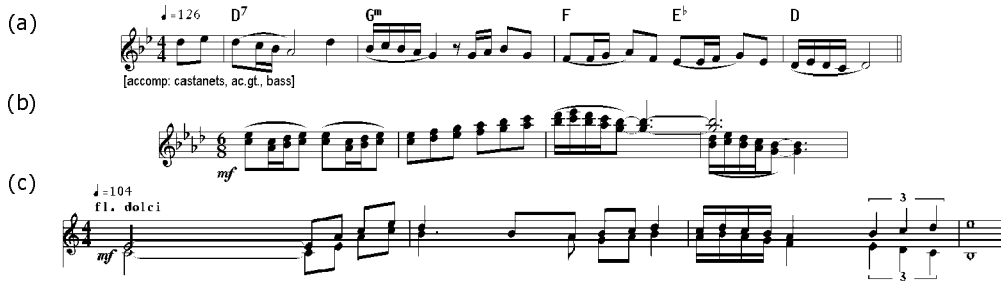

Ex. 27 *Comin' Through The Rye* (Scottish trad.)



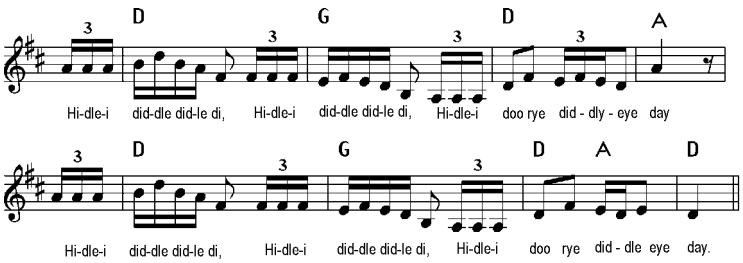

## *Culturally specific melodic formulae*

Melodies can also be recognised as belonging to particular cultures not only due to idiosyncrasies of language rhythm (see , above) but also because particular turns of melodic phrase have become by convention associated with those cultures. This observation applies not only to patterns of melodic ornamentation, for example the onbeat figure often found in popular notions of Hispanic melody (ex. 28) or in the semiquaver triplets of Irish traditional music (ex. 29), but also to more substantial patterns of pitch contour and rhythmic profile (see exx. 30-39).

Ex. 28 Hispanicisms in library music: (a) *Cordigliera*; (b) Duncan: *Wine Festival*; (c) Haider: *Spanish Autumn*



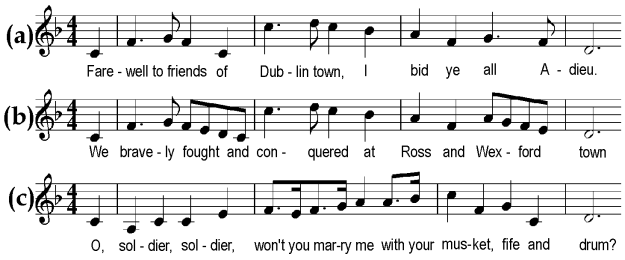

Ex. 29 *Poitín* (Irish trad,) – semiquaver triplets



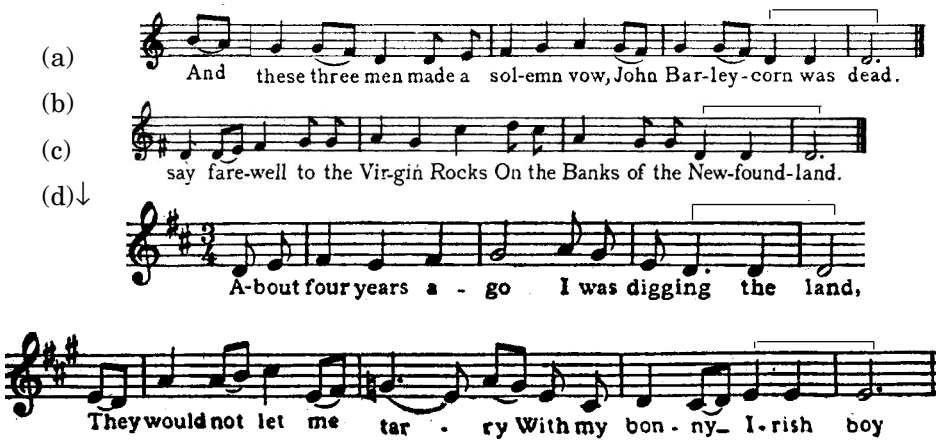

Major key phrases descending to degree 6 (the final notes of ex. 30) are typical of

many traditional melodies from the British Isles, as are pentatonic melodic cadences of the type 8[1]-6-5 (ex. 32 bar 3, first time), 6-1 (ex. 32 bar 3, second time), and those containing repeated final tonics (ex. 31a-c) or final fifths (ex. 31d). Strings of appoggiature, on the other hand, highly unusual in popular melody from the English-speaking and Celtic sphere, are all the more common in popular melody of the European classical tradition (ex. 33) and its pastiches (ex. 34) or of Arabic origin (ex. 35-36). Finally, the (5)-4-1 cadence is typical of traditional Russian melody (ex. 37) while 8[1]-#7-5 patterns are an idiosyncratic trait of certain types of traditional Scandinavian melody (ex. 38-39).

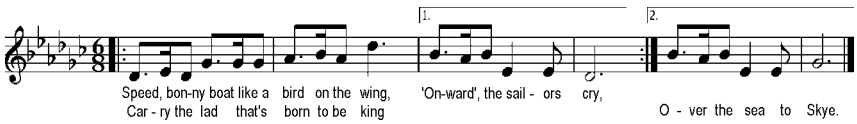
Ex. 30 (a) *Rossa's Farewell to Erin* (Irish trad.); (b) *The Boys of Wexford* (Irish trad.); (c) *Soldier, Soldier* (English. trad.)



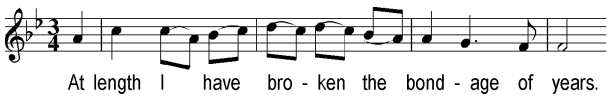

Ex. 31 Repeated final note cadence formulae. (a) *John Barleycorn* (English trad.); (b) *The Banks of Newfoundland* (English trad.); (c) *The Kerry Recruit* (Irish trad.); (d) *The Bonny Labouring Boy* (Irish trad.)



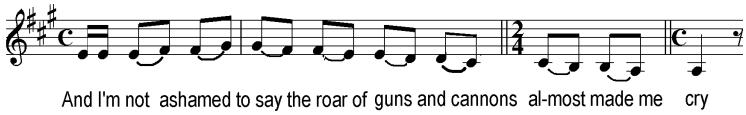

Ex. 32 Skye Boat Song (Scottish trad., quoted from memory)



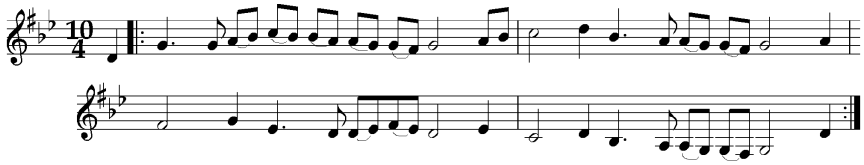

Ex. 33 Carissimi: Aria 'I Triumph!' (Vittoria!)



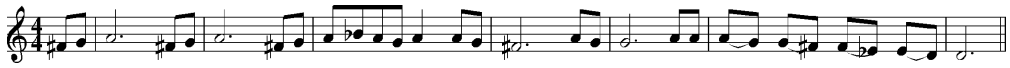

Ex. 34 Abba: *Fernando* (1975).



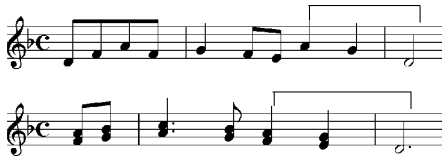
Ex. 35 Egyptian trad. (quoted from memory)



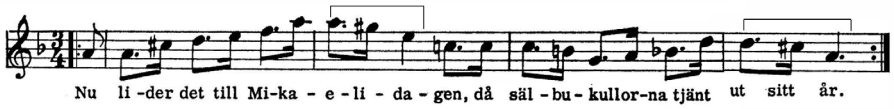
Ex. 36 Mameluk, a.k.a. Aya-Zehn (Egyptian trad.)



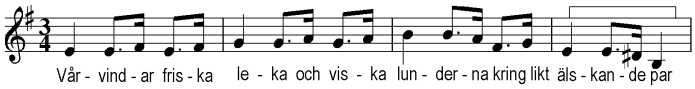
Ex. 37 Russian 5-4-1 melodic cadences: (a) *Podmoskovskoye Vechera*; (b) Aturov: Partisan Song



Ex. 38 *Mikaelidagen* (Swedish trad.)




Ex. 39 *Vårvindar friska* (Swedish trad.)




## *Patterns of recurrence*

Melody can also be categorised according to the manner in which constituent phrases or motifs are organised into a larger whole in patterns of variation and recurrence. Middleton (1983) suggests a sliding scale of musical syntaxes stretching from the *monadic* (circular, mythic, unchanging, etc.) to the *infinite set* (linear, narrative, teleological, 'nothing to be heard twice'), a scale along which any type of musical statement, including melody, can be placed.

Monadic melody is typical for song whose narrative interest resides in other factors than those mentioned so far, such as in changing lyrics or varying metre (e.g. chanted psalms, prayers) or in harmonic progression (e.g. *One Note Samba*, ex. 3, *Hucklebuck*, ex. 40). At the other end of the scale are phenomena such as the dodecaphonic tone row, constrained by avant-garde imperatives of non-repetition and absent from popular song. Instead, patterns of recurrence and difference vary from the relatively simple, single-layered (or 'immediate') to the multi-layered (or 'delayed'). Common processual devices in European and North American popular melody are *reiteration, recapitulation, sequence, inversion, anaphora, epistrophe* and '*ready-steady-go*'. The ordering of melodic segments on a larger scale, for example into the eight-bar sections of a thirty-two-bar (AABA) JAZZ STANDARD, is a question of song form rather than of melodic typology.

**Reiteration** — consecutive recurrence(s) of identical motif or phrase — is found in examples 1 and 2 (p.3, both melodic line and riff), as well as in examples 24 (p.9, bars 1 and 2, bars 5-6 and 7-8), 28b (bar 1, p. 10), 36 (bars 1-2, p.12) and 40 (p.14, throughout).

**Recapitulation** — recurrence of motif or phrase after different intervening material — is illustrated at the musematic level by example 24 (p.9) in which the motif of bars 1 and 2 recurs in bar 4 after different material in bar 3 and again in the final bar of the song. Melodic recapitulation is more commonly thought of on a larger scale, for example in terms of recapitulating the A section of a song in AABA form, such as the first line of example 19 (*Yesterday*, p.7) recurring after the intervention of a 'middle eight' or 'bridge' passage. However, recapitulation on this time scale is more an issue of overall song form than of melodic profile.

**Sequence** — reiteration of rhythm and relative pitch profile at a different absolute pitch — can be found in *Autumn Leaves* (ex. 5, p. 3), *El gallo negro* (ex. 26, p. 10), *Poitín* (ex. 29, p. 10, bars 1-2, 5-6), *Vårvindar friska* (ex. 39, bars 1-2), and in Gershwin's *A Foggy Day in London Town* (ex. 43, p. 15) where 'B' (bars 1-4) is repeated a fourth higher (bars 5-8) and 'A1' (*d-a*♭, bar 3) can be regarded as a sequential variation of 'A' (*c-e*♭, bar 1).

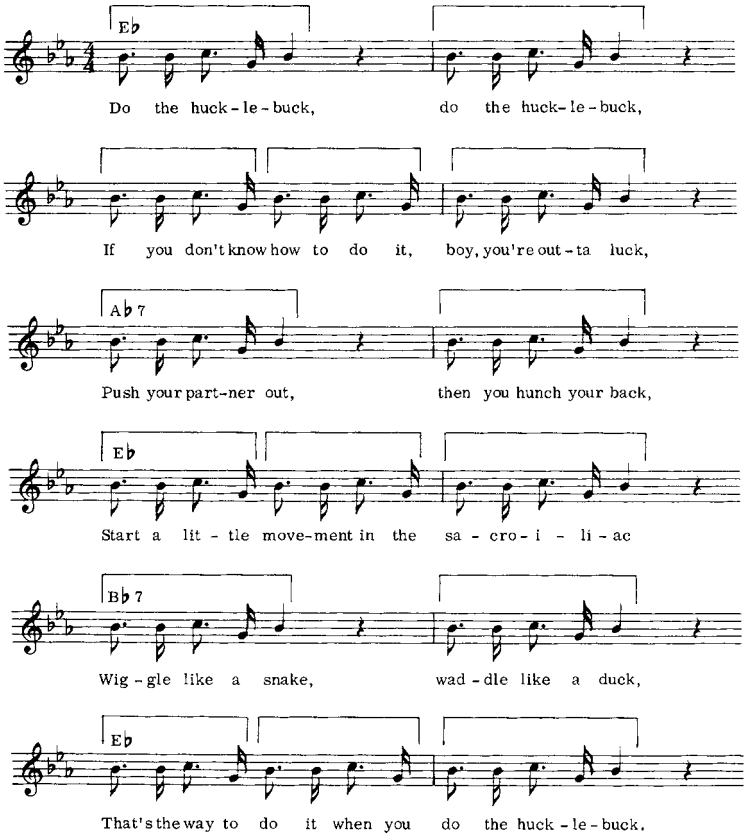
**Inversion** (repeating rhythm profile but substituting up for down and vice versa in pitch profile) also occurs in example 43 (p.15) whose bars 9-12 are an upside-down variant of bars 1-4.

**Anaphora** — repeating the same element at the start of successive phrases — is inherent in terms of rhythmic and relative pitch profile in any sequential repetition (see above). It can also recur at the same absolute pitch, as in the *d-c*♯*-d* ♩♩♩ figure of ex. 41 (p.14)a or the ♪♩ (♪) *c-d* figure of ex. 41b. Even the single note *f* recurring at the start of each short motif in *Axel F* (ex. 23) and rising in turn to different pitches (*a*♭*, b*♭*, c, d*♭*, f*) functions anaphorically.

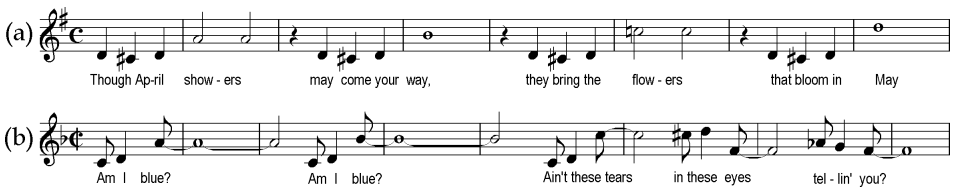
**Epistrophe** — repeating the same or similar element at the end of successive phrases — is found at the words 'far away', 'here to stay' and 'yesterday' of bars 3, 5 and 7 in *Yesterday* (ex. 19, p. 7).

**'Ready-steady-go'** is a popular melodic device consisting of a motif, either simply reiterated or repeated by sequential transformation (usually once or twice) and followed by new rhythmic material or pitch pattern. For example, bars 1-2 and 3-4 of Akst's *Am I Blue?* (ex. 41b, p.14) are rhythmically identical ('ready' and 'steady') but instead of leading to yet another long held note, the same anaphoric figure in bar 5 introduces the tonally and rhythmically different material of bars 6 and 7 ('go!'). The device can work at several levels, as shown in ex. 42 (p.14). The function of such repetition is propulsive and similar to that of gaining momentum by circling on the spot before hurling a discus.

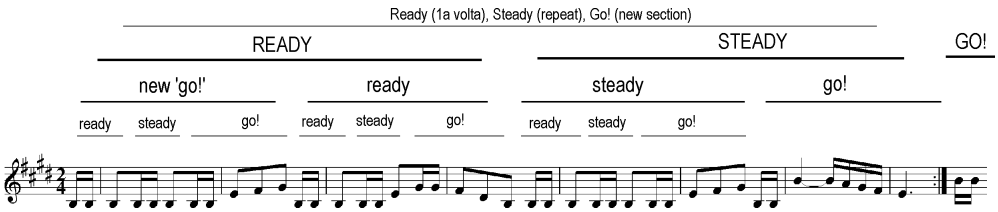
Ex. 40 Roy Milton: *Hucklebuck* (1949).



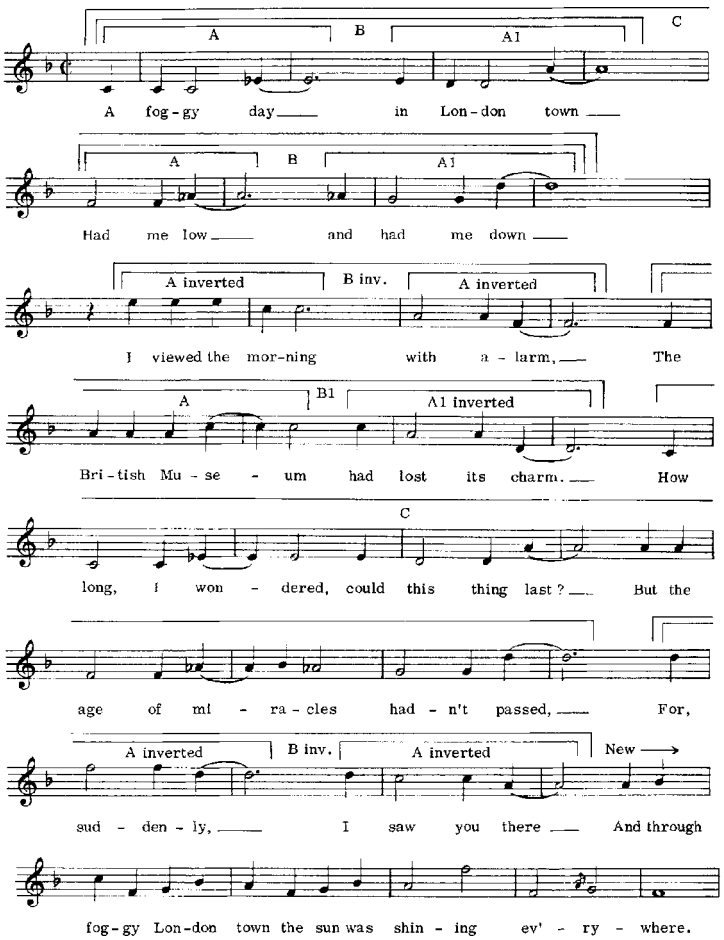

Ex. 41 Melodic anaphora — (a) Silvers: *April Showers*; (b) Akst: *Am I Blue?* as quoted by Middleton (1983: 250).




Ex. 42 Rossini: *William Tell* Overture (1829), a.k.a. theme from *The Lone Ranger* (1949)



Ex. 43 Gershwin: *A Foggy Day in London Town* (1937) quoted by Middleton (1983:251).



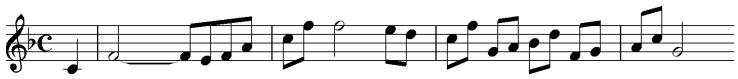

## *Connotative typologies*

Families of melody definable according to the kind of structural parameters mentioned above are often grouped together in more connotative, perceptual or semiotic categories. Concepts such as the Arabic *maqam*, Iranian *dashtgah* and Indian RAGA all exemplify the formalisation of links observed in particular cultures between, on the one hand, certain categories of tonal, rhythmic and motivic structure and, on the other, certain regional locations or ethnic groups, or specific moods, attitudes, activities, types of behaviour, times of the day, etc.

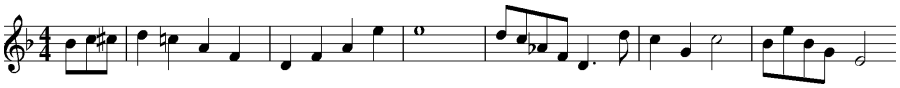
Stefani and Marconi (1992: 111-229) expound several connotative categories of popular melody in Western culture. These include 'dream', 'desire and tenderness', 'meditation', 'supermusic', 'recitation' etc. For example, the authors characterise 'dream' structurally in such terms as slow movement, smooth articulation, arched or waved pitch profile spanning a large range, phrase length well in excess of normal breathing, continuous transformation of main motif(s), unexpected intervals, lack of hard scansion and accentuation, etc. More connotatively they note similarities with slow motion camera work, soft focus, suspended animation, large spaces, fluid gestures like unpredictable flight, beauty, the unreal, etc. This melodic cate-

gory, including its connotations, is exemplified by Schumann's *Träumerei* (ex. 44), *Deep Purple* ('When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls', ex. 18, p. 6), *Stardust* (ex. 45), *The Dream of Olwen* (ex. 46) and *In A Monastery Garden* (ex. 47).

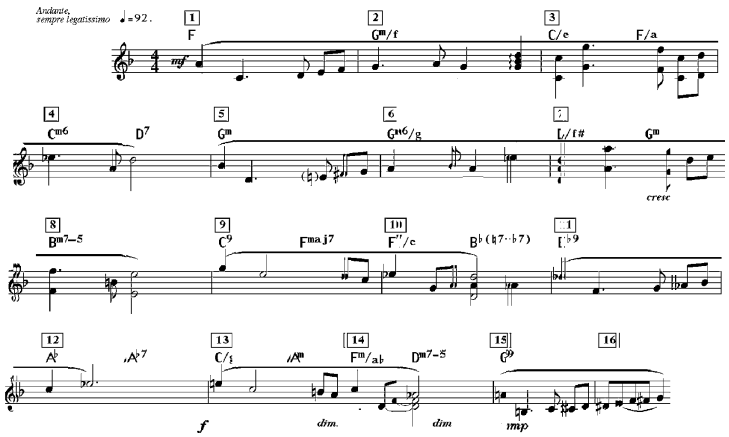
Ex. 44 R. Schumann: *Träumerei* (1838).



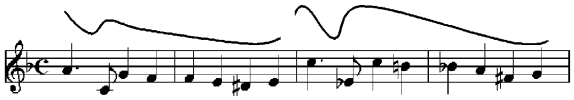
Ex. 45 Carmichael. *Stardust* (1929).



Ex. 46 C. Williams: *The Dream of Olwen* (1947)



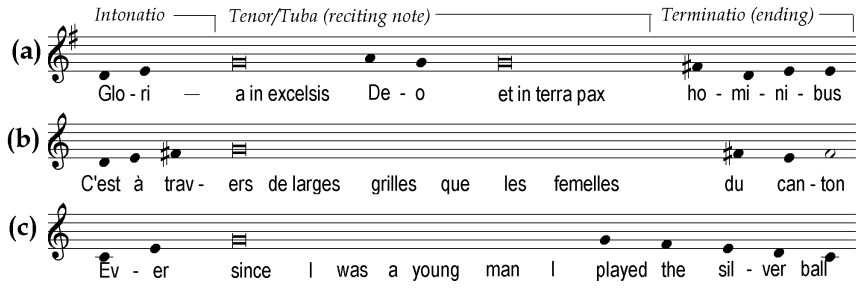
Ex. 47 Ketelby: *In A Monastery Garden*(1915)



'Supermusic', on the other hand, exemplified by the main themes from *Superman, Star Wars, Dallas, Dynasty, Kojak, The FBI, Counterspy, The Gun Fight at O.K. Corral, How The West Was Won, The Champions*, etc., uses staccato articulation at brisk pace, favours rising leaps of the fourth, fifth and octave, etc. (see also Tagg, 1979: 124-132).

'Recitation' as an experiential rather than formal category of melody in popular song is usually articulated metrically rather than parlando rubato (recitative). It is characterised structurally by a reciting tone to which most of the phrase's syllables are set, as well as by a cadence formula and, sometimes, an initial lead-in motif. Recitation tunes are generally of a declamatory character. For example, the underlined syllables in '<u>How many</u> roads must a <u>man</u> walk down be<u>fore they can</u> call <u>him</u> a <u>man</u>?' from Dylan's *Blowing in the Wind* (1963) are all declaimed at the fifth (*a* in D major). The principle of lead-in motif (*intonatio*/*initium*), reciting tone (*tuba* or *tenor*) and cadence formula (*terminatio*) is illustrated in example 48. 'Once the voice is activated' (*intonatio*)… 'it stays still in a manner of speaking, giving no further information about itself and drawing the listener's attention to the "message", i.e. to the words' (Stefani & Marconi, 1992: 132).

Ex. 48 'Recitation' melody — (a) Latin psalmody, tone 2 (plagal); (b) Brassens: *Le gorille* (1952); (c) The Who: *Pinball Wizard* (1969).




# *accompaniment*

[1] (general meaning and common parlance) music that is heard as subordinate to a simultaneous aspect of performance, musical or otherwise: for example, film underscore as *accompaniment* to on-screen action and dialogue, or a polyphonic choral piece sung with instrumental accompaniment as opposed to *a cappella*; [2] (musicological definition) that part of a musical continuum generally regarded as providing support for, or the background to, a more prominent strand in the same music. This text deals with accompaniment according to the second definition.

Accompaniment can only occur within a musical structure consisting of separate strands exhibiting different degrees of perceived importance. If a musical texture consists of several different strands of perceived equal importance, as in a round like *Frère Jacques* or as in some forms of West African polyrhythm, there is neither accompaniment nor any particularly 'prominent strand'. Similarly, if the music consists of one strand only, as with Gregorian plainchant or a simple lullaby, there is no accompaniment. However, as soon as those performing monody tap their feet in time with the music, or the audience clap their hands in time with the tune, there is accompaniment.

Accompaniment can be provided by any number or type of instruments and/or voices, ranging from the simple foot stamp in Janis Joplin's *Mercedes Benz* to the dramatic orchestral backing behind the Three Tenors' rendering of Puccini's *Nessun' dorma*. The notion of accompaniment's supporting role is echoed in the word *backing* used to qualify the voice(s) and/or instrument(s) heard as musical background to the *lead* vocal(s) or instrument(s) in the foreground.

Although, for example, rap backing tracks constitute accompaniment to the spoken word, accompaniment is most often used to support a MELODY. The dualism between melody and accompaniment is one of the most common basic devices of musical structuration. Its increasing popularity during and after the Renaissance in Europe is concurrent with the rise of central perspective in painting and of a visual dualism between figure and ground. Both dualisms — visual figure/ground and musical melody/accompaniment — also concur historically with the gradual development of notions of the individual and of his/her relationship to his/her natural and

social surroundings. Accompaniment (including its aspects of texture, reverberation, etc.) can in other words be visualised in general terms as the acoustic background or environment against which melody stands out in relief as an individual foreground figure (Maróthy 1974; Tagg 1994). Such stylistically diverse types of music as Elizabethan dances, opera arias, parlour ballads, jazz standards, Eurovision Song Contest entries and rock numbers all use the melody/accompaniment dualism as a basic structuring device. However, the accompaniment's degree of subordination to melody can vary considerably, for example: [1] from a solo singer-songwriter's guitar strum to the relative contrapuntality of multi-layered patterns of drumkit, bass and guitar riffs in many rock recordings; [2] from the homophonically set alto, tenor and bass parts in the four-part harmony of traditional HYMNS to the cross rhythms of many types of Latin American dance music (e.g. cumbia, mambo, murga, salsa); [3] from the continuous drone note(s) accompanying the chanter melody on bagpipes to the hocket techniques of funk music.

The relative importance of melody and accompaniment can also be highlighted by assigning varying degrees of prominence to one or the other at the mixing desk. For example, lead vocals on late twentieth-century recordings of pop songs from Italy, France and Spain tend to be mixed slightly louder, more 'up front', than those on recordings from the English speaking world. In addition to these general foregrounding practices, the melodic line is usually panned in the middle of the stereo array, while accompanying parts are more likely to be mixed within the acoustic semicircle behind and on either side of the melodic focal point (Lacasse 2000). Such acoustic positioning reflects the most common stage locations of lead vocalists and of the accompanying band members in concert.

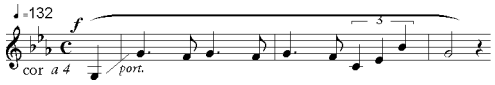
The general pattern of acoustic positioning just described is often subject to changes in focus during the course of the same piece. For example, a rock guitar can emerge from its accompanying role of providing support in the form of chords or riffs into a full-blown solo. As it does so, the main focus of listener attention turns from the vocal line to what now clearly becomes the *lead* guitar. This change of focus works because the guitar is played more melodically than before and because its volume is usually turned up (on the guitar itself and/or on the guitar amp and/or at the mixing desk) for the duration of the solo. Moreover, the guitarist in concert will often go to the front of the stage at the start of the solo, be more visibly active during the solo, and retire to his/her previous position as accompanist after its completion. Similar changes of focus in the melody/accompaniment dualism occur in jazz, not only during the improvised solos which characterise gigs played by smaller combos and which usually span several choruses within the same number, but also in big band performances when instrumentalists stand up to draw both visual and musical attention to much shorter passages considered to be of particular interest or importance, sitting down afterwards to resume their accompanying role. When televised, these types of solo passage are usually marked by editing devices, for example by switching point of view from a general shot or close-up of the lead vocalist to a camera trained on the relevant soloist, or by zooming in on the individual or instrument in question.

There are occasions when (parts of) the instrumental accompaniment to a popular song can be more memorable, sometimes more easily reproduced and perhaps even

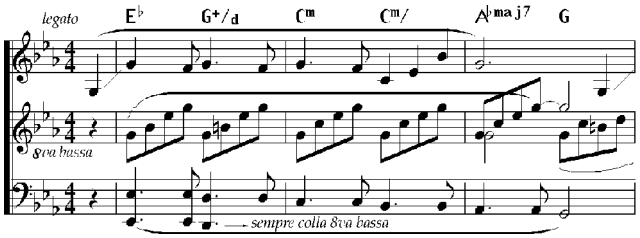
more important than its lead vocal line. This is certainly true of the verse part of such popular recordings (cited under MELODY) as *Satisfaction* (Rolling Stones 1965) and of the chorus in both *Layla* (Derek and the Dominoes 1970) and *Samba de una nota só* (Jobim 1960). In *Satisfaction* and *Layla* the accompanying guitar riffs are infinitely more singable than the lead vocals while in *One Note Samba* it is the accompanying guitar's chord progression which provides the greater sense of profile and direction. Indeed, some of accompaniment's most common functions are to provide melody with: [1] an ongoing kinetic and periodic framework (metre, patterns of accentuation, rhythmic figurations, episodic markers, etc.); [2] tonal reference point(s); [3] a sense of harmonic direction and expectation; [4] suitable background textures and timbres. Given these basic parameters, it is clear that accompaniment, despite notions of its supporting role, can be just as important as melody, sometimes more important, in the communication of the music's overall message.

For example, imagine the first phrase of the title tune for the TV detective series Kojak (ex.49, p.19), with its heroic unison horn calls and fanfare figures (Tagg 2000) accompanied, not by the actual driving rhythms and woodwind stabs used when it was broadcast, but by a single hurdy-gurdy drone, or by a kazoo band, or by techno loops, or by a wordless cathedral choir, or by massed mandolins. Such replacement of one type of accompaniment by another is similar to superimposing an identical visual foreground figure on different backgrounds, perhaps your favourite artist first amidst industrial decay and then in a village school playground on a sunny spring day. The figures or melodies may be objectively identical but such radical differences of background or accompaniment will alter not only the overall picture but also your perception of the foreground figure's or melody's character. To illustrate this important function of accompaniment, example 50 would probably put Kojak in the pastoral setting of a romantic soap opera, example 51 might place him amongst his African-American brothers, and example 52 would probably see him under a Martini parasol in Copacabana.

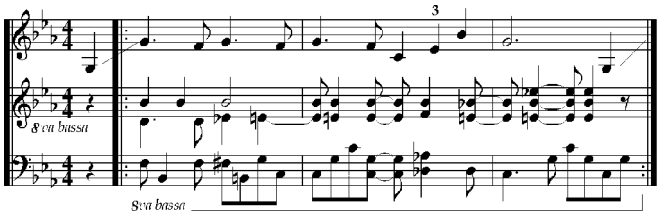
Ex. 49 Goldenberg: Kojak Theme, first main melodic phrase



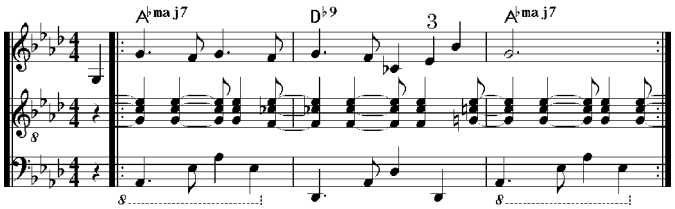

Ex. 50 Kojak as romantic pop ballad in French or Italian vein



Ex. 51 Kojak as funk




Ex. 52 Kojak as bossa nova

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