

A Corpus Analysis of Harmony in Country Music

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A Corpus Analysis of Harmony in Country Music

I. Background

II. Methods

III. Results

IV. Discussion

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND

Music Theory/Analysis Research on Harmony in “Rock”

- “The So-Called ‘Flattened-Seventh’ in **Rock**” (Moore 1995)
- *Understanding **Rock*** (Covach and Boone 1997)
- ***Rock**: The Primary Text* (Moore 2001)
- *What to Listen for in **Rock*** (Stephenson 2002)
- “Making Sense of **Rock**’s Tonal Systems” (Everett 2004)
- “The Melodic-Harmonic Divorce in **Rock**” (Temperley 2007)
- “Analytical Methodologies for **Rock** Music” (Burns 2008)
- *The Foundations of **Rock*** (Everett 2009)
- “Transformation in **Rock** Harmony” (Doll 2009)
- “Sectional Tonality and Sectional Centricity in **Rock** Music” (Capuzzo 2009)
- “Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in **Rock** Music” (Biamonte 2010)
- “The Cadential IV in **Rock**” (Temperley 2012)
- “Modal Tonicization in **Rock**” (Clement 2013)
- “Counterpoint in **Rock** Music” (Nobile 2015)
- “Harmonic Functions in **Rock** Music” (Nobile 2016)
- *Hearing Harmony: Toward a Tonal Theory for the **Rock** Era* (Doll 2017)
- “**Rock** Harmony Reconsidered” (Osborn 2017)
- *The Musical Language of **Rock*** (Temperley 2018)

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- “**Rock** Harmony Reconsidered” (Osborn 2017)
- *The Musical Language of **Rock*** (Temperley 2018)
- “British **Pop-Rock** Music in the Post-Beatles Era” (Spicer 2001)
- “Neo-Riemannian Theory and the Analysis of **Pop-Rock** Music” (Capuzzo 2004)
- “Retrogressive Harmonic Motion... [in] **Pop-Rock** Music” (Carter 2005)
- *Expression in **Pop-Rock** Music* (Everett 2008)
- “Guitar Voicing in **Pop-Rock** Music” (Koozin 2011)
- “Anti-Circles as... Model for Harmonic Motion in **Pop-Rock** Music” (Traut 2015)
- “Fragile, Emergent, and Absent Tonics in **Pop and Rock** Songs” (Spicer 2017)

BACKGROUND

Genre Share of Listenership in the U.S., 2016 Year-End Report (Nielsen 2017)

Rock	29%
R&B/Hip-Hop	22%
Pop	13%
Country	10%
Dance/Electronic	4%
Christian/Gospel	3%
Latin	3%
Holiday/Seasonal	2%
Jazz	1%
Classical	1%
Children's	1%

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Harmony in Country Music

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Jocelyn Neal: “Musically, there is a pervading misconception that (country music) relies on three-chord harmonic progressions” (1998, 322).

Jocelyn Neal: “One of the enduring clichés about country music is its primitive harmonic language..., (yet) nothing could be further from the truth” (2008, 291-292).

Some of My Computational Work with Popular Music (based on the RS 200)

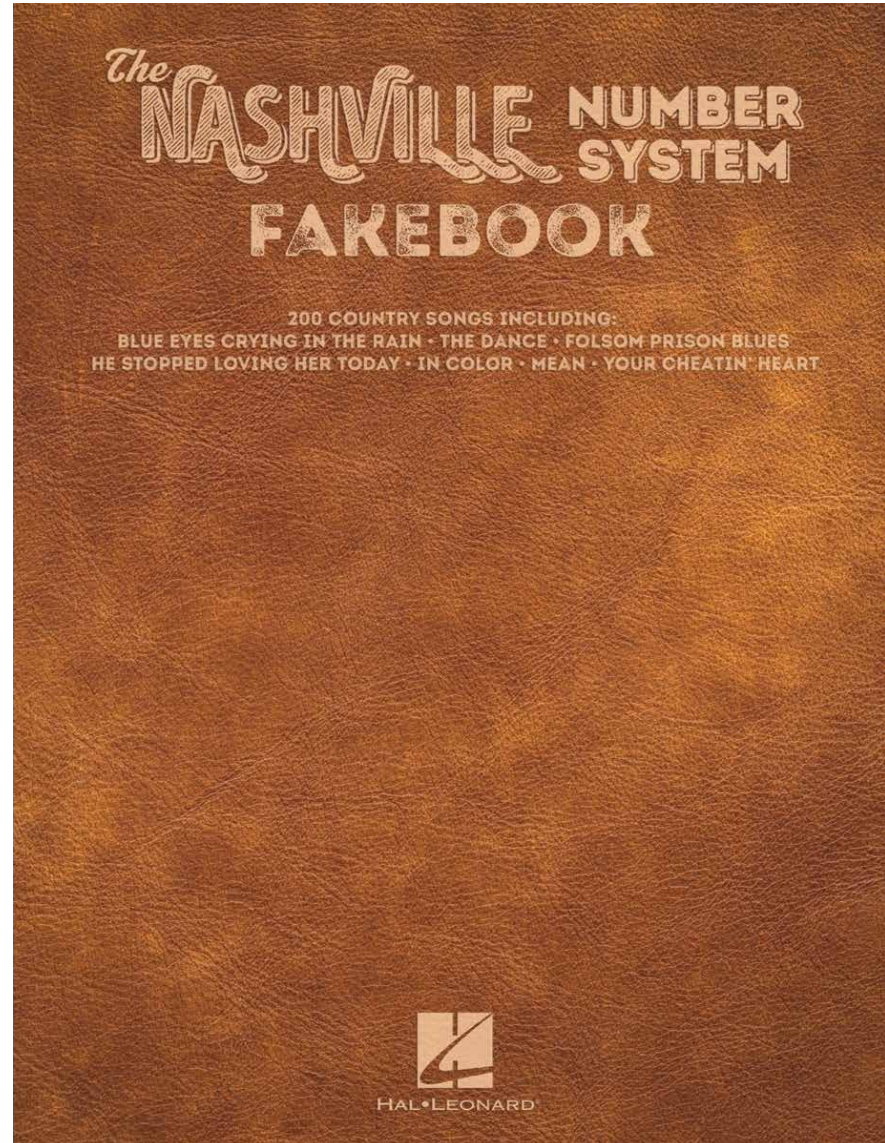
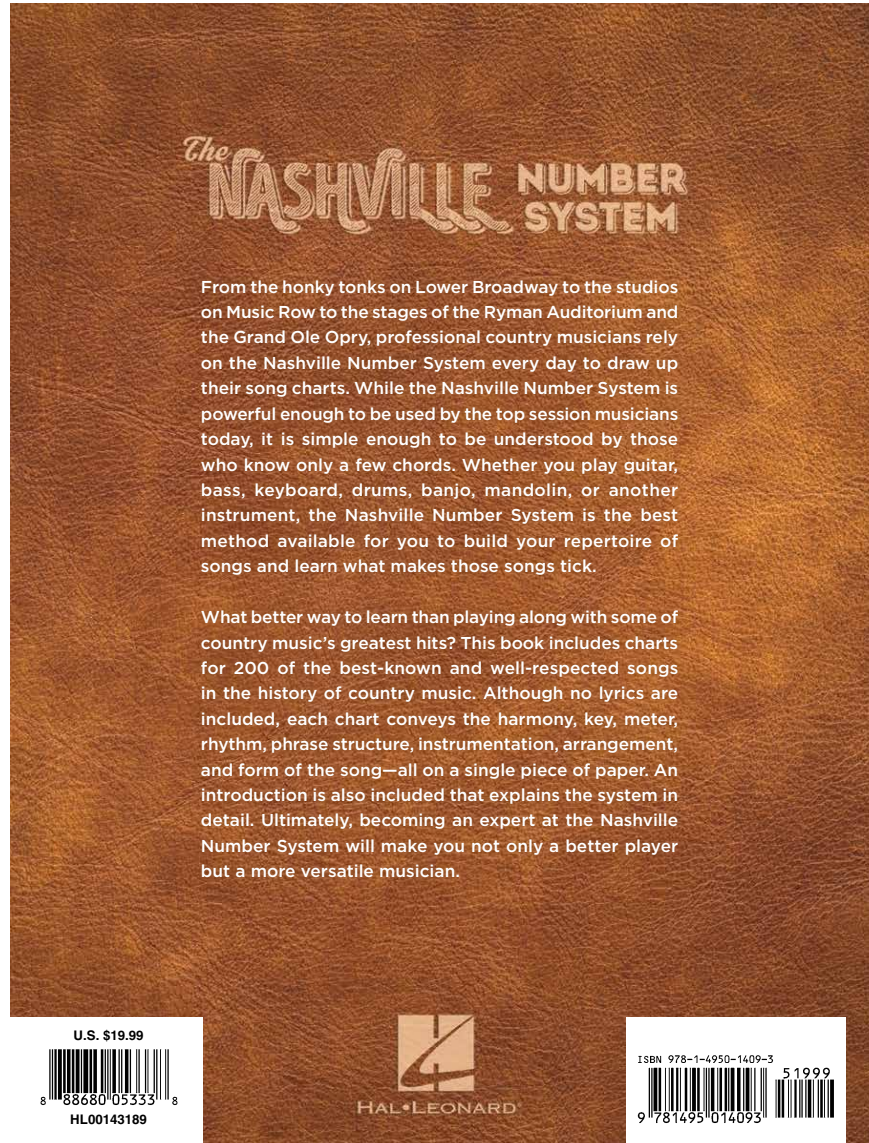
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- de Clercq, Trevor. (2017). "Interactions Between Harmony and Form in a Corpus of Rock Music." *Journal of Music Theory* 61/2: 143–170.

BACKGROUND

CHAPTER TWO

THE METHODS

The Nashville Number System Fakebook (de Clercq 2015)



Sources for the Songs (de Clercq 2015)

- *Academy of Country Music*. 1967-2014. "Single of the Year."
- *Academy of Country Music*. 1967-2014. "Song of the Year."
- *Allmusic*. 2015. "Country Song Highlights."
- *American Music Award*. 1974-1995. "Favorite Country Single."
- *Billboard*. 1946-2014. "Year-End #1 Country Singles."
- *Billboard*. 2014. "Top 70 Country Songs 1989-2014."
- *Billboard*. 2008. "Billboard 50th Anniversary Charts: All-Time Top Country Songs."
- *Country Music Television*. 2003. "CMT 100 Greatest Songs of Country Music."
- *Country Music Association*. 1967-2014. "Single of the Year."
- *Country Music Association*. 1967-2014. "Song of the Year."
- *Nashville Songwriters Association International*. 1967-2014. "NSAI Song of the Year."
- *The Recording Academy*. 1965-2014. "Grammy Award for Best Country Song."
- *Rolling Stone*. 2014. "100 Greatest Country Songs of All Time."
- *Taste of Country*. 2012. "Top 100 Country Songs."

METHODS

Sample of Songs in the “NN 200”

- “Wabash Cannonball” (Roy Acuff, 1933)
- “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” (Flatt & Scruggs, 1950)
- “Your Cheatin’ Heart” (Hank Williams, 1952)
- “Ring of Fire” (Johnny Cash, 1962)
- “King of the Road” (Roger Miller, 1964)
- “D-I-V-O-R-C-E” (Tammy Wynette, 1968)
- “Always On My Mind” (Willie Nelson, 1971)
- “Rhinestone Cowboy” (Glen Campbell, 1974)
- “He Stopped Loving Her Today” (George Jones, 1978)
- “Forever and Ever, Amen” (Randy Travis, 1987)
- “Friends in Low Places” (Garth Brooks, 1990)
- “Strawberry Wine” (Deana Carter, 1996)
- “Alcohol” (Brad Paisley, 2005)
- “Need You Now” (Lady Antebellum, 2009)
- “Mean” (Taylor Swift, 2010)
- “Cruise” (Florida Georgia Line, 2012)
- “Automatic” (Miranda Lambert, 2014)

Chart of "80's Ladies" (K. T. Oslin, 1987)

KEY OF C

$\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ = 100

80's LADIES


(K. T. OSLIN)

SPARSE TEXTURE				
IN)	1^2	$\frac{1^2}{3}$	4^2	$5^{\frac{9}{4}}$
	1^2	$\frac{1^2}{3}$	4^2	$5^{\frac{9}{4}}$
VR)	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	<u>$1^{\frac{6}{4}} < 1$</u>	1	5
	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	<u>$1^{\frac{6}{4}} < 1$</u>	5	5
	1	<u>5^7</u>		
FULL TEXTURE				
CH)	1	<u>$\overset{\dots}{1}$</u> 5	4	4
	1	$1^{\Delta 9}$	6-	6- 6-
	5	5	5	5
SPARSE				
LN)	1^2	$\frac{1^2}{3}$	4^2	$5^{\frac{9}{4}}$

VR)	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
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	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	<u>$1^{\frac{6}{4}} < 1$</u>	5	1
FULL TEXTURE				
BR)	6-	5	4	<u>$\overset{\dots}{4}$</u> 5
	6-	5	4	$5^{\frac{9}{4}}$ 5
CH)	1	<u>$\overset{\dots}{1}$</u> 5	4	4
	1	$1^{\Delta 9}$	6-	6- 6-
	5	5	5	5
SPARSE				
OUT)	1^2	$\frac{1^2}{3}$	4^2	$5^{\frac{9}{4}}$
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(REPEAT OUTRO & FADE)

Chart of "80's Ladies" (K. T. Oslin, 1987)

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	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	<u>$1\frac{6}{4} < 1$</u>	5	5
	1	<u>5^7</u>		

FULL TEXTURE

$CH)$	1	<u>1</u> 5	4	4
	1	$1^{\Delta 9}$	6-	6- 6-
	5	5	5	5

Encoded Excerpt of "80's Ladies"

% Title: 80's Ladies
% Artist: K. T. Oslin
% Copyright: 1987
[Key: C]
[Meter: 4/4]
[Tempo: QN = 100]
[Feel: Normal]

In:	12	12/3	42	594
	12	12/3	42	594

Vr:	1	2-7	1/3	42
	1	(164 <1)	1	5
	1	2-7	1/3	42
	1	(164 <1)	5	5
	1	57		

Ch:	1	(1.. 5)	4	4	
	1	1M9	6-	6-	6-
	5	5	5	5	

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESULTS

Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

	NN 200	
1 chord	0	0.0%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%

RESULTS

Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

	NN 200	
1 chord	0	0.0%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%

RESULTS

Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

	NN 200	RS 200
1 chord	0	0.0%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%

RESULTS

Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

	NN 200		RS 200
1 chord	0	0.0%	2.5%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%	5.0%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%	

RESULTS

Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

	NN 200		RS 200
1 chord	0	0.0%	2.5%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%	5.0%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%	28.5%

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Number of Songs with X or Fewer Chords

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1 chord	0	0.0%	2.5%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%	5.0%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%	28.5%
≤ 4 chords	100	50.0%	48.0%

RESULTS

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	NN 200		RS 200
1 chord	0	0.0%	2.5%
≤ 2 chords	3	1.5%	5.0%
≤ 3 chords	53	26.5%	28.5%
≤ 4 chords	100	50.0%	48.0%
≤ 5 chords	146	73.0%	65.5%
≤ 7 chords	188	94.0%	86.0%
≤ 9 chords	196	98.0%	95.0%
≤ 10 chords	199	99.5%	96.5%
≤ 14 chords	200	100.0%	99.0%

RESULTS

Triad Types in the NN 200, Ranked by Frequency

Triad	Instances	
I	4,602	32.7%
V	3,586	25.5%
IV	3,360	23.8%

Triad Types in the NN 200, Ranked by Frequency

Triad	Instances		Bars	
I	4,602	32.7%	7,800	43.6%
V	3,586	25.5%	3,945	22.0%
IV	3,360	23.8%	3,621	20.2%

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Instances of I, IV, V in NN 200: 82%

Bars of I, IV, V in NN 200: 86%

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IV	3,360	23.8%	3,621	20.2%
vi	851	6.0%	813	4.5%

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Instances of I, IV, V in RS 200: 79%

Bars of I, IV, V in RS 200: 85%

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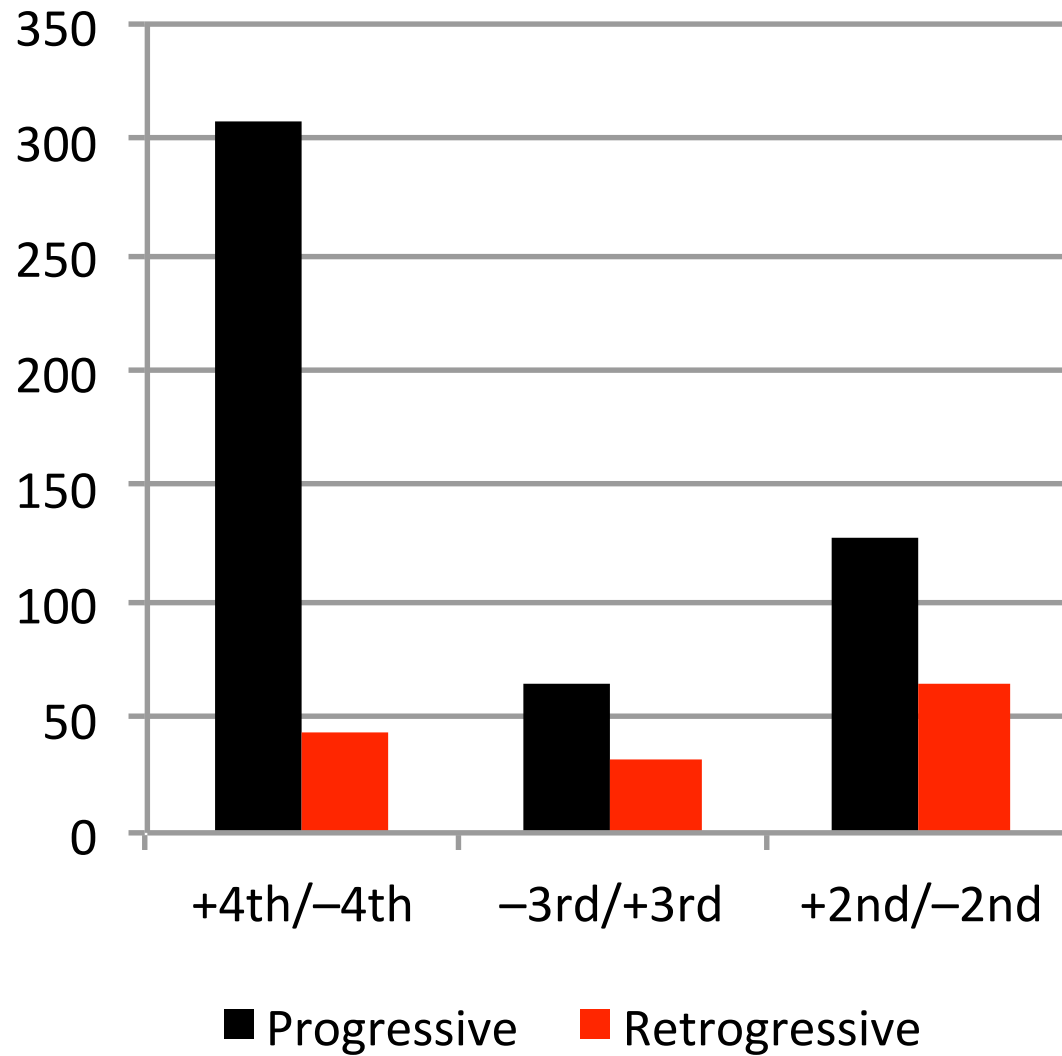
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vi	851	6.0%	813	4.5%
ii	704	5.0%	677	3.8%
bVII	225	1.6%	208	1.2%
II	182	1.3%	193	1.1%
iii	120	0.9%	133	0.7%
i	97	0.7%	194	1.1%
bVI	76	0.5%	71	0.4%
III	73	0.5%	69	0.4%
v	51	0.4%	44	0.2%
VI	34	0.2%	40	0.2%
iv	23	0.2%	26	0.1%

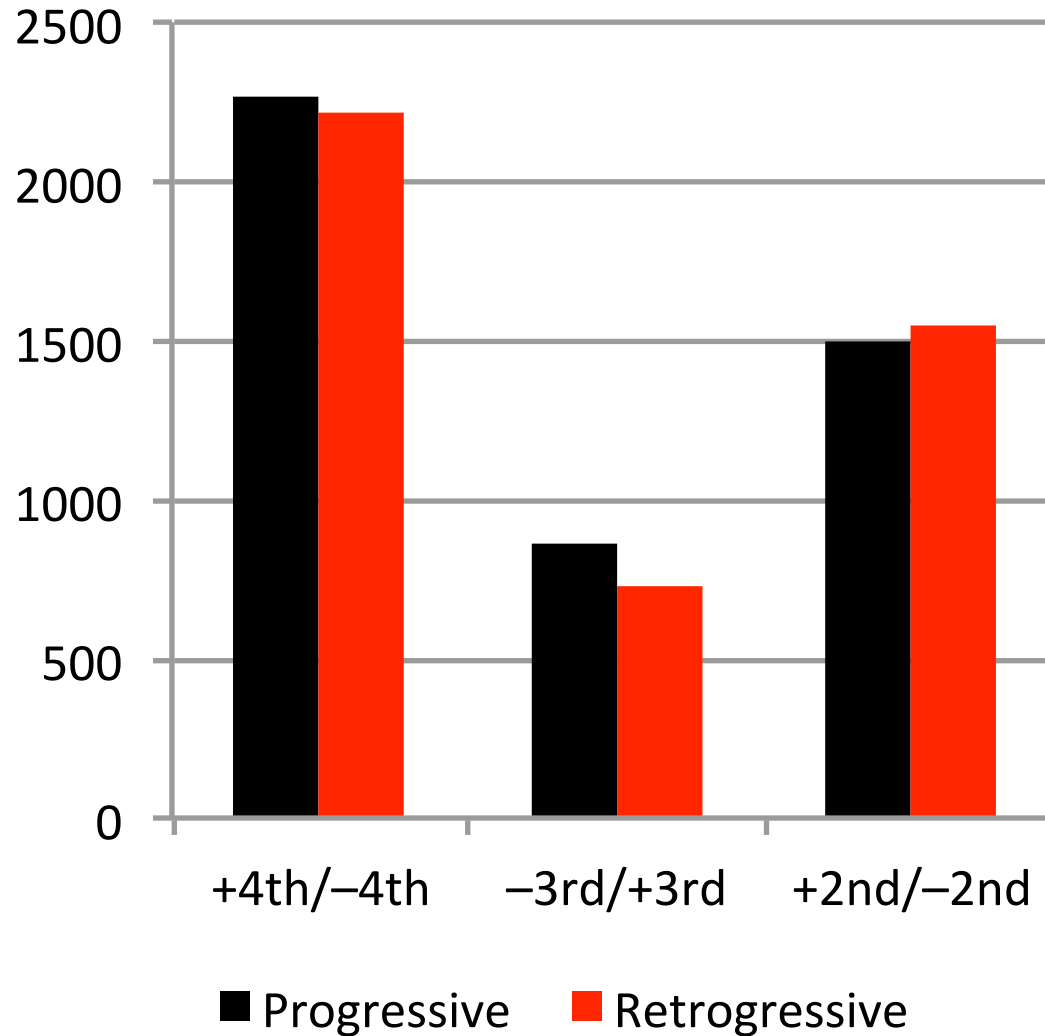
RESULTS

Root Motion in Common-Practice Music (Temperley 2009)

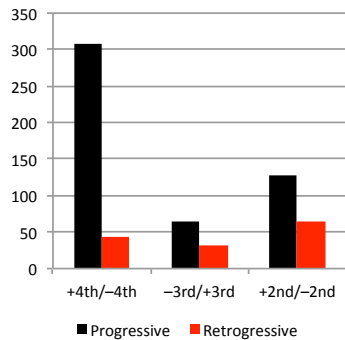


RESULTS

Root Motion in Rock Music (de Clercq & Temperley 2011)



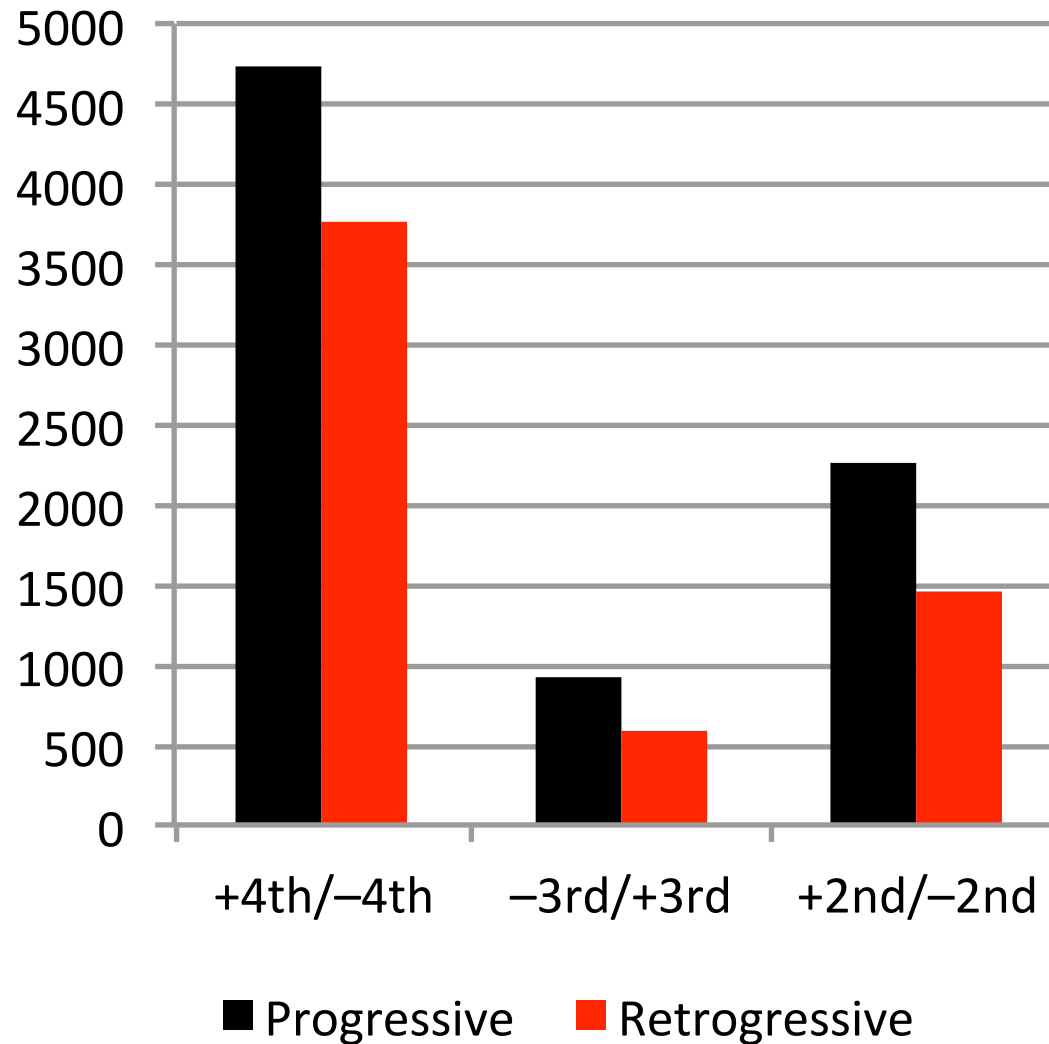
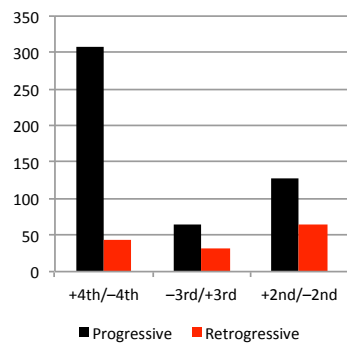
C-P Music



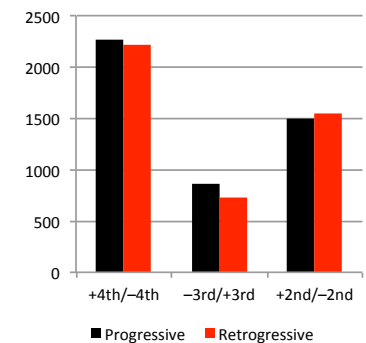
RESULTS

Root Motion in Country Music (the NN 200)

C-P Music



Rock



RESULTS

Two-chord Patterns in the NN 200, Ranked by Asymmetry


Pattern XY	Interval	Motion Type	Factor	Pattern YX	Pairs
bVII – IV	–P4	Retrogressive	5.52	IV – bVII	137
I – bVII	–M2	Retrogressive	3.60	bVII – I	161

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iii – IV	+m2	Progressive	3.55	IV – iii	100
vi – IV	–M3	Progressive	3.18	IV – vi	506
I – vi	–m3	Progressive	2.36	vi – I	423
ii – V	+P4	Progressive	1.99	V – ii	542
I – ii	+M2	Progressive	1.76	ii – I	502
IV – V	+M2	Progressive	1.67	V – IV	1,907
V – vi	+M2	Progressive	1.65	vi – V	593
V – I	+P4	Progressive	1.40	I – V	3,751
ii – IV	+m3	Retrogressive	1.09	IV – ii	232
I – IV	+P4	Progressive	1.03	IV – I	3,587



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**Root-position chords in C-P music:
~60%**

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Root-position chords in RS 200:

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Root-position chords in NN 200:

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Non-root-position Chords in the NN 200

Triad and Bass	Instances		Common Chords Before		Common Chords After	
I over 3	373	(41.2%)	IV	(43%)	IV	(61%)
			I	(30%)	ii	(27%)
			ii	(23%)		
V over 7	213	(23.5%)	I	(68%)	vi	(55%)
			vi	(14%)	I	(27%)
I over 5	78	(8.6%)	vi	(83%)	IV	(77%)
IV over 6	67	(7.4%)	I	(30%)	I	(37%)
			bVII	(28%)	V	(21%)
					V over 7	(21%)
V over 4	40	(4.4%)	IV	(68%)	IV	(44%)
			I	(33%)	I	(36%)
IV over 1	28	(3.1%)	I	(61%)	I	(50%)
I over 7	22	(2.4%)	I	(91%)	vi	(82%)

RESULTS

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Chart of "80's Ladies" (K. T. Oslin, 1987)

$\nu R)$	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	$\frac{1^6}{4} < 1$	1	5
	1	2^{-7}	$\frac{1}{3}$	4^2
	1	$\frac{1^6}{4} < 1$	5	5
	1	5^7		

FULL TEXTURE

$CH)$	1	$\frac{1}{5}$	4	4
	1	$1^{\Delta 9}$	6-	6- 6-
	5	5	5	5

RESULTS


A "Rule of the Octave" for Classical Music

A musical exercise in bass clef, consisting of an eight-note ascending scale. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The notes are grouped into two pairs of four notes each, with a slur over each pair. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 5. The notes are articulated with slurs and accents. Below the notes are the letters T, D, T, S, D, S, D, T, which correspond to the notes above them.

	6	6	6		6	6	
			5				
T	D	T	S	D	S	D	T

RESULTS

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6 6 6 6 6

T D T S D S D T

Detailed description: A musical staff in bass clef showing an ascending eighth-note scale. The notes are G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 6 for G2, A2, B2, C3, and D3; 5 for E3; 6 for F3 and G3. Techniques are indicated below the notes: T for G2, D for A2, T for B2, S for C3, D for D3, S for E3, D for F3, and T for G3. A slur covers the notes from A2 to G3.

A "Rule of the Octave" for Country Music



7 6 6

T S T S D T D T

Detailed description: A musical staff in bass clef showing an ascending eighth-note scale. The notes are G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 7 for G2, 6 for A2, B2, C3, and D3; 6 for E3. Techniques are indicated below the notes: T for G2, S for A2, T for B2, S for C3, D for D3, T for E3, D for F3, and T for G3. A slur covers the notes from A2 to G3.

RESULTS

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DISCUSSION

Like Rock (& unlike Classical), Country:

- Employs bVII much more frequently than vii^o
- Shows a much greater use of root-position chords than inversions
- Shows a good deal of retrogressive harmonic motion (e.g., V-IV, V-ii, ii-I)
- Has subdominant often acting in cadential role

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Like Classical (& unlike Rock), Country:

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Other Notable Features of Country:

- Is almost always set in a major key
- Does not have significantly more three-chord songs than rock
- Relies only slightly more heavily on I, IV, and V than other styles
- Rarely has a harmonic palette of more than 7 different chords

DISCUSSION

THANK YOU!

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