AN EXPLORATION OF MELODY, HARMONY, AND IMPROVISATION IN THE MUSIC OF STEVIE WONDER

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I examine Stevie Wonder's compositional style from his celebrated "classic period," (1972-1976) focusing specifically on the concentrated two-year time span from 1972-1974 marked by his unparalleled creative output that launched him into superstardom. My study operates on the premise that most melodic relationships are governed by a fundamentally pentatonic process and that harmonic relationships are largely governed by jazz-influenced tonal processes. I have transcribed dozens of examples from the time period under review in order to survey the expressive interaction between these two related but distinct systems and the resulting effect their usage has on melody and harmony. Using Schenkerian reductive analysis as my primary tool, I uncover recurring patterns that shape and shed light on his style. The final chapter of this study focuses on the ways in which Wonder's improvised melodic lines relate to the voice-leading framework of the basic melodic ideas in his performance of "I Love Every Little Thing About You" and also the ways in which his improvisation impacts forward motion in the course of this song.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stevie Wonder come of age
In now time
Into his own.

A genius youth grew up with
Sings a new song
Now he's free.[1]

-*Music of My Mind*

In early 1972, on the cusp of Stevie Wonder's transformation from youthful "soul singer" to grown-up "pop superstar," British music critic David Nathan mused, "it will be interesting to see how the audience react next year, though, when Stevie will in all likelihood, have 'progressed' further."[2] One indirect response put these questioning words to rest. In 1974, in the midst of Wonder's "further progression" as an artist, *Downbeat* contributor Lee Underwood gave this succinct and glowing appraisal: "At age 24, Stevie Wonder has reached a height of popular and critical success that few recording artists attain in an entire lifetime."[3]

Since then, Stevie Wonder (born Steveland Hardaway Judkins Morris on May 13, 1950) has remained an iconic fixture of mainstream culture, and belongs to a select group of innovative artists instrumental in shaping the landscape of popular music. Stemming from his seminal recordings of the 1970s, he has made singular contributions to and had

[1] Liner notes to *Music of My Mind* (Tamla, 1972).

[2] David Nathan, "Stevie Wonder: A Little Too Far Out?," *Blues and Soul* (February 4, 1972).

[3] Lee Underwood, "Boy Wonder Grows Up," *Downbeat* (September 12, 1974), 14.

top hits in several major styles including funk, soul, and rock. The number of diverse artists who have covered his songs, including crooner Frank Sinatra, folk songstress Joan Baez, the rock group The Red Hot Chili Peppers, and classical soprano diva Renée Fleming, testifies to his widespread influence on the music world.[4] Jazz musicians have drawn inspiration from the harmonic sophistication of his songs, many of which have become canonized as jazz standards.[5] Hip-hop artists have sampled his songs, the most famous being the rapper Coolio, whose 1995 number-one hit "Gangsta's Paradise" was a re-interpretation of Wonder's song "Pastime Paradise."[6] As further testament to his far-reaching appeal, Wonder has collected more Grammys than any other male solo artist, amassing an astounding 22 awards in a career spanning nearly five decades.

Despite Stevie Wonder's undeniable reputation in pop culture, analyses of his music are conspicuously lacking. The sole in-depth study, a dissertation by Timothy Hughes, represents the first and only musicological exploration to date devoted exclusively to Wonder's music.[7] Hughes focuses on the repetition of certain musical

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[4] For example, see Frank Sinatra, "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," from *Some Nice Things I've Missed* (Reprise, 1974); Joan Baez, "Never Dreamed You'd Leave in Summer," from *Diamonds & Rust* (A & M, 1975); Red Hot Chili Peppers, "Higher Ground," from the pivotal album, *Mother's Milk* (EMI, 1989); and Renée Fleming, "My Cherie Amour," from *Haunted Heart* (Decca, 2005).

[5] Several commercial/smooth jazz albums feature Wonder's songs. Some early examples include George Benson, "My Cherie Amour," from *Tell It Like It Is* (A & M, 1969); Freddie Hubbard, "Too High" and "Black Maybe" from *High Energy* (Columbia, 1974); Joe Farrell, "Too High," from *Penny Arcade* (CTI, 1974); Joe Henderson, "My Cherie Amour," from *Black Miracle* (Milestone, 1976); Quincy Jones, "You've Got it Bad Girl," and "Superstition," from *You've Got it Bad Girl* (A & M, 1973), and "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)," from *Sounds…and Stuff Like That* (A & M, 1978). More recent jazz covers include Herbie Hancock, "You've Got it Bad Girl," *New Standards* (Verve, 1996); Various Artists, *Blue Note Plays Stevie Wonder* (Blue Note, 2004); and Joe Gilman, *View So Tender: Wonder Revisited Volumes 1 & 2* (Capri Records, 2006, 2007).

[6] *Gangsta's Paradise* (Tommy Boy Records, 1995). "Pastime Paradise" was originally featured on *Songs in the Key of Life* (Tamla, 1976).

[7] Timothy Hughes, "Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2003). There is one other analytical study/monograph of Wonder's

elements (or *grooves*) that generate forward motion (or *flow*), and links their usage to ideals central to the African-American music-making tradition.

My dissertation deviates from Hughes' important introductory work by shifting the primary emphasis to pitch organization. While Hughes' study focuses on a number of important elements that contribute to *groove* and *flow*, it leaves melody under-explored.[8] In this study, my chief interest is examining the salient pitch relationships that govern both *melody* and *harmony* as they relate to Wonder's skillful approach to songwriting. I reserve some discussion for issues central to Hughes' thesis regarding forward motion, but only with respect to Wonder's improvised vocal ornamentation—an essential agent in the creation of momentum and climax in his songs.

Central to my examination of melody and harmony, and the focal point from which these elements are studied, is the prevailing influence of the pentatonic scale. It is the fundamental collection from which Wonder derives much of his music vocabulary. In fact, my dissertation hinges in large part on this basic premise: *that the pentatonic scale is the primary generator of Stevie Wonder's melodic construction.*

That this collection is ubiquitous in Wonder's music should come as no surprise. It is common knowledge that the pentatonic scale forms the basis for many vernacular music styles. From it are formed the pitch patterns idiomatic to the gospel style with which Wonder grew up, consequently making their way into his later music. I hope to show how he exploits the pentatonic scale in an imaginative way, and casts it in harmonic environments that give his music its singularity and charm. And I will argue that it is the

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music by James Perone. However, it is meant more as an introduction and survey for the layman without getting overly technical by engaging in-depth theoretical issues. See James Perone, *The Sound of Stevie Wonder: His Words and Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006).

[8] Hughes admits as much in the concluding remarks of his dissertation. See specifically pages 261-62.

interaction of these pitch-related musical elements that makes Wonder's style so compelling.

Scope of Study

I focus my study primarily on the music that led to Wonder's breakthrough success as a popular-music artist, roughly spanning from 1972-1976, generally regarded as Wonder's "classic" period.[9] It represents Wonder's first musical efforts as an autonomous artist, not restricted by the production practices that Motown Records generally imposed on its performers.[10] After turning 21 in 1971, Stevie rejected standard offers from Motown and aggressively began negotiations for a new contract that gave him full artistic control over the production of his music. Working as a free agent while negotiating his new contract with Berry Gordy, Wonder distanced himself from the familiar Motown sound of his youth.[11] He set out on a new musical path of self-expression, leading to a five-year recording frenzy that produced a string of

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[9] See Steve Lodder, *Stevie Wonder: A Musical Guide to the Classic Albums* (San Francisco: Backbeat Publishing, 2005). In a 2005 interview article for *Uncut*, Barney Hoskyns summarized this productive period for Wonder as follows, "Wonder's discovery of electronics was just part of the extraordinary burst of creativity that flowered when he came of age in 1971, ten years after signing as a pint-sized prodigy to Berry Gordy's emerging Motown label. In a frenetic four-year run he left "Little Stevie" and the '60s behind and became one of the towering artists of the new decade." Barney Hoskyns, "Stevie Wonder Takes His Time," *Uncut*, (June 2005), 52-70.

[10] Artists were controlled by production teams who were responsible for creating and pitching the recorded product consistent with the crossover vision of Motown president, Berry Gordy. The artist's role in the creative process was often minimized solely to the performance. The system was not ideal for artists who exhibited songwriting ability, as was the case with Stevie Wonder. This process is described in Gerald Posner, *Motown: Music, Money, Sex and Power* (New York: Random House, 2002). See particularly pages 50-53.

[11] It wasn't until the first part of 1973, close to the release of *Innervisions,* that both sides agreed to a contract. As a result of rigorous negotiations, Wonder was given full control over his product, with no input necessary from Motown. See Mark Ribowsky, *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered: The Soulful Journey of Stevie Wonder* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 208-10.

groundbreaking albums: *Music of My Mind*, *Talking Book, Innervisions,* and *Fulfillingness' First Finale,* and culminating in the massive work*, Songs in the Key of Life.*[12]

Chapter Overview

Chapter II begins by surveying the pentatonic scale: its importance to varied systems of music, its constitution and unique properties, and the natural pitch relationships that emerge from it. Within this general discussion, I draw on a few of Wonder's songs in order to address some of the ambiguities the structure poses for the analyst. Following this survey, I introduce *pentatonic-defining gestures* (PDGs)*,* the important pentatonic patterns (and their most common elaborations) utilized by Wonder in melodic construction and present on multiple levels of structure. I draw upon several examples from Wonder's repertoire to substantiate my claim that PDGs are an integral part of his melodic vocabulary and are useful in identifying a fundamentally pentatonic framework in his music even when surface events suggest other collections.

In addition to examining these "bits" of vocabulary, I examine larger pentatonic processes at work in his music and attempt to categorize them into two simple groups:

Type 1 Pentatonic Melodies: Melodies that exhibit clear pentatonicism on the surface with little to no elaboration of the basic pentatonic collection.

[12] *Music of My Mind* (Tamla 1972), *Talking* Book (Tamla, 1972), *Innervisions* (Tamla, 1973), *Fulfilingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974). *Songs in the Key of Life* (Tamla, 1976), an essential album in the Wonder canon, typically is included when referencing Wonder's "classic" period. However, it also takes a noticeable stylistic departure from the other albums referenced, enough to omit it from discussion in my dissertation, except in peripheral comments.

Type 2 Pentatonic Melodies: Melodies that seem to exhibit little to no traces of pentatonic usage, but that through reductive analysis actually reveal a fundamental pentatonic framework.

The chapter concludes with an in-depth examination of melodic relationships in the two-part song-suite, "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)."

While the ideas posited in this chapter are of a technical nature, it is important to recognize that PDGs connect Stevie Wonder's vocal practices to the gospel and blues tradition. The structures and relationships laid out here represent rhetorical gestures and other expressive ideals that Wonder first learned from his own experiences as a choirboy singing in the White Stone Baptist Church in Detroit.[13]

The expressive use of these gospel music formulas were also appropriated in the music of Motown, and were integral to the development of the Motown sound in general. The manipulation of gospel gestures in pop music played a central role in Wonder's most profound period of music making during the 1970s, but evidence shows that Wonder learned how to implement these gestures in the studio early in his career.[14] Wonder's first producer, Clarence Paul, was well known for encouraging Motown singers to adapt blues and gospel gestures within a pop format. According to Motown executive Mickey Stevenson, Wonder, like others, learned what Paul called:

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[13] Ribowsky, 39.

[14] In fact, the wholesale importation of the gospel style into pop music in general occurred as a result of former church singers moving into the mainstream of music. See Horace Boyer, "Gospel Music," *Music Educators Journal*, (Vol. 64, no. 9, May 1978), 43; and Jon Fitzgerald, "Motown Crossover Hits 1963-1966 and the Creative Process," *Popular Music,* (Vol. 14, no.1, Jan. 1995), 3-5.

> the "colors" of the blues. You'd start with gospel and take it to different places while keeping the main 'color' the same. That was the root of all Motown songs…making it fit into pop, that was the trick, that was the *real* Motown formula, and nobody else could get it. The fact that Stevie was schooled in the blues by Clarence went a long way to shaping what he would become.[15]

Using reductive analytic methods (explained below), I will attempt to illuminate Wonder's version of these rhetorical melodic features and how they are manifest in his music.

Chapter III is a comprehensive exploration of Wonder's cosmopolitan approach to harmony. I identify two important strands of harmonic systems at work in his music, and examine how they interact with each other and with the melody. Namely, I discuss how in some of Wonder's songs it is the pentatonic scale that regulates bass-line motion, whereas in others it is functional tonality with clear hierarchical relationships that dictates the bass-line motion. Common to both of these processes is Wonder's extensive chord vocabulary, clearly influenced by jazz. With added ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths, basic tertian structures are elaborated and thus contribute to the novel sound of Wonder's style. His harmonic language was inspired by his work with the Funk Brothers, jazz musicians that comprised Motown's house band, and by his enthusiasm towards jazz music in general.

I will also examine melodic-harmonic relationships that sometimes create moments of tension with each other. This is not to say that there is a tenuous relationship between melody and harmony, but that the expressive power of Wonder's music comes from the interaction of rhetorical strategies borrowed from gospel, and harmonic structures borrowed from jazz. The mixture of pentatonic-based melodies with jazz-

[15] As quoted in Ribowsky, 68-69.

influenced harmonies gives his music its characteristic sound. This chapter concludes with an in-depth study of "You and I (We Can Conquer the World)" that illustrates the relationship between pentatonic and tonal processes, and the interesting ways that they interact.

Up to this point, my analyses will focus particularly on Steve Wonder's genius as a *songwriter*. I reserve Chapter IV for an in-depth examination of the role that improvised ornamentation plays in the projection of form in his song, "I Love Every Little Thing About You." The song is a quintessential example of Wonder's use of ornamentation for the purposes of creating climax. Using the studio performance, I will focus on the teleological aspect of this song, and address the relationship ornamentation has to the melodic and harmonic structures. Wonder propels the song toward an exciting climax by repeatedly singing variations of the *pentatonic-defining gestures* I discuss in Chapter II, which progressively ornament each verse. His ornamentation increases to the point that the melody of his final verse seems to bear only marginal resemblance to his earlier verses. This feature of his music also links him to his gospel roots.

One challenge that arises in this chapter, and is certainly implied in Chapter II, is the difficulty in trying to keep track of the basic melody and Wonder's ornamentation of the melody.[16] Musicologist Richard Rischar discusses this problem in locating an "original" melody, especially when considering that African-American music generates its meaning through improvised ornamentation.[17] Even though melodic statements are

[16] This may seem at odds with my discussion of melodic construction in Chapter II, given the fact that I have already implied that there is a basic melody that exists apart from the improvised aspects of performance.

[17] See Richard Rischar, "A Vision of Love: An Etiquette of Vocal Ornamentation in African-American Popular Ballads of the Early 1990s," *American Music*, (Vol. 22, No. 3, Autumn 2004), 407-443.

less ornate early in the song, there is a certain fluctuation that makes them difficult to pin down. "Clearly," he states, "the notion of the 'original melody' introduced in the first verse is a difficult one, since hearing a melody without such vocal features would be heard as lacking in emotion. Popular music of this variety is interesting since…the song is a set of variations on a theme that is never stated explicitly."[18]

The difficulty of locating the "original" melody—what I will refer to as the "basic" melody, or "basic" melodic idea—can be overcome through analysis. The basic melodic structures, or "themes," upon which embellishments are applied can be hypothesized, despite the fact that these structures may never be explicitly stated in the course of the song. Instead, I want to suggest that they act as an *a priori* framework. By examining these basic melodic structures (an important task of Chapter II), I hope to show how Wonder retains the basic structure of the melody throughout his songs even though embellishments alter the initial and subsequent melodic iterations.

Chapter V will summarize the findings of this study and also suggest areas for further research into the music of Stevie Wonder and others who employ similar expressive means.

Methodology

As my primary analytic tool, I draw on reductive methods based on the ideas of Heinrich Schenker.[19] This tool will allow me to seek out relationships beneath the surface level of Wonder's melodic textures and locate the basic melodic structures referred to

[18] Ibid, 424.

[19] Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition* (Pendragon Press, [1935] 2001), is the first complete main exposition of this system of analysis.

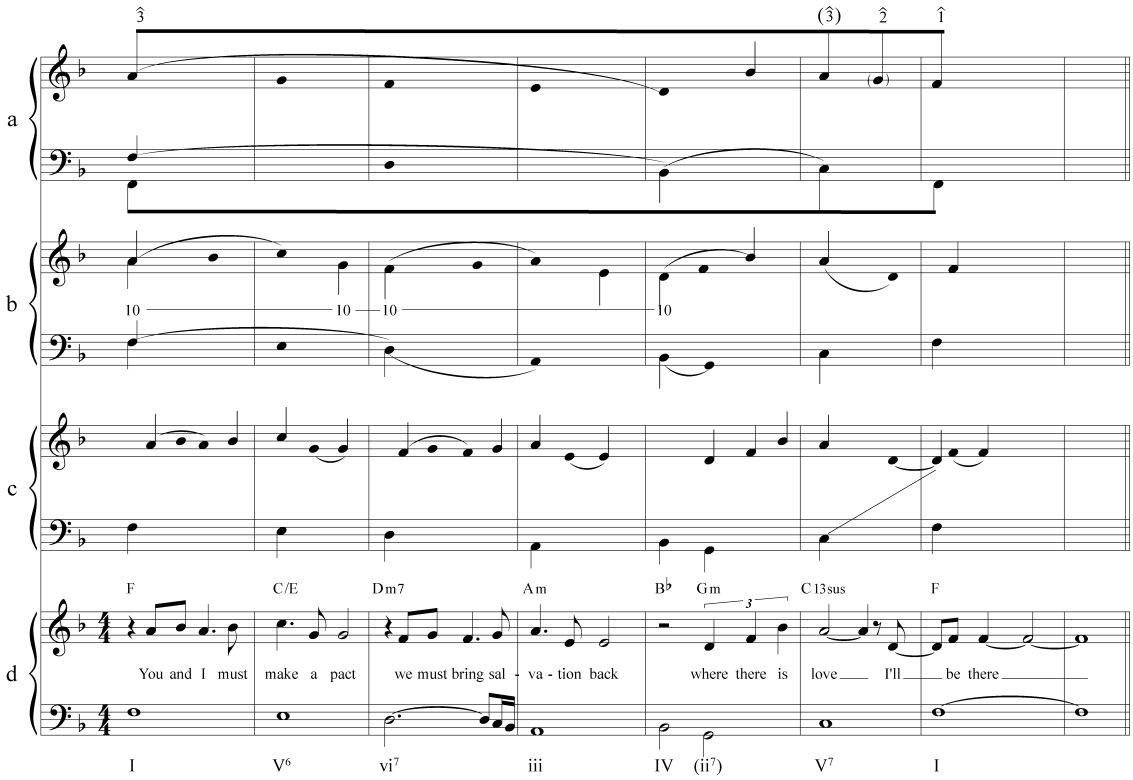
above. I will also use this tool to show how beneath ornamented surfaces a more basic pentatonic collection is present in the music.

Strict use of analytic notation

The form of Schenkerian Analysis I will use was developed by Steve Larson and is called "strict use of analytic notation."[20] In Larson's restricted version of the Schenkerian system, stems are attached to structural pitches and slurs are set over embellishing pitches to denote a hierarchical relationship. What sets Larson's system apart is the implementation of these stems and slurs. Stemmed notes, since they represent structural pitches that direct voice-leading, are not set within slurs, but rather act as structural points to and from slurs. Slurs contain unstemmed, *connective* notes that elaborate stemmed notes, and whose motion is by either step *or* skip. In strict use, slurs cannot mix motion by step *and* leap. As the analysis moves from the foreground level (i.e. the actual surface events of the music that appear in the bottom-most staff) through various middleground levels (i.e. the more abstract structural underpinnings of the music that appear in the middle staves of the graph), each reductive level successively peels away embellishing notes, promoting only those pitches with stems to reveal the essential voice-leading. A brief example, taken from the 1969 Jackson 5 hit, "I'll Be There," illustrates the full extent to which I will utilize this system (Example 1.1).[21]

[20] For a detailed explanation of this system, see Steve Larson, "Strict Use of Analytic Notation," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 10 (1996), 31–71.

[21] Co-written by Berry Gordy, Bob West, Hal Davis, and Willie Hutch for Motown Records (Motown, 1970).



Example 1.1. Strict use of analytic notation and "I'll Be There"

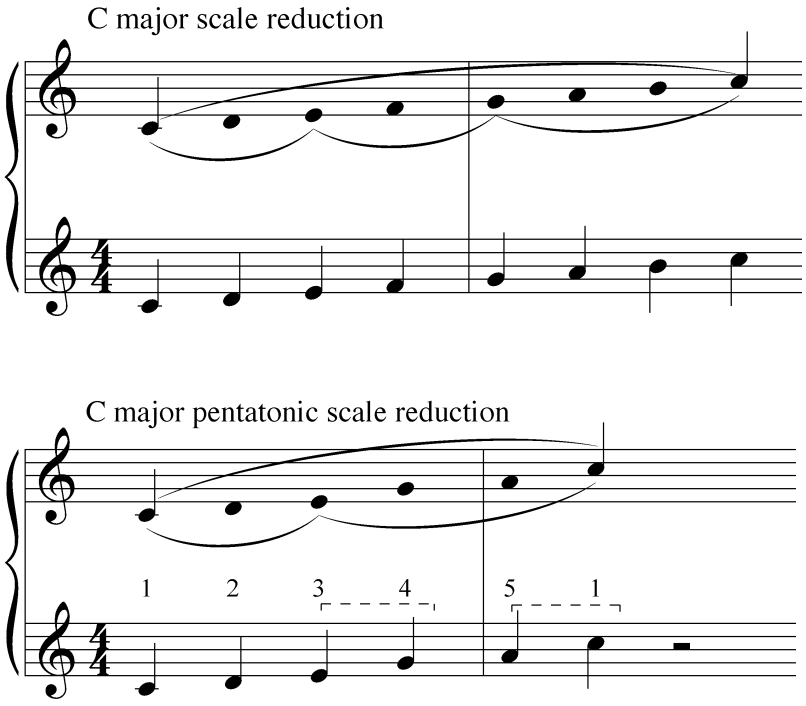
Each level of analysis (reading from level d, the surface of the music, up to level a, the deepest level of structure) reveals the essential path of the basic melodic structure, and its relationship to the embellishments. Stems indicate notes that have structural significance at a particular level, while notes contained within slurs function as embellishments to those structural notes. The diagonal line in m. 6 at level c represents notes that are separated spatially from the harmony from which they derive their meaning, either as a delayed note (shown here), or as an anticipated note. The horizontal lines at level b indicate the linear intervallic pattern of consecutive tenths that drive the voice-leading of the "Pachebel" chord sequence, I – V – vi – iii – IV, in mm. 1-5. Level a reveals that the descending melodic voice-leading structure $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{1}$ is anchored to the

tonic – dominant – tonic bass arpeggiation. Each level shows how elaborations prolong this basic structure.

The pentatonic scale and reductive analysis

Given the unique properties of the pentatonic scale, distinct from the seven-note major scale, it is necessary to take some liberties with Larson's system—modifications that I believe he would support.[22] The major pentatonic scale contains "gaps" of a minor third between the 3rd and 4th elements and then the 5th and 1st elements. Therefore, a strict analysis rendering of a scalar passage that simply traverses the pentatonic scale from bottom to top in a single motion, as opposed to the major scale, would have to be broken up due to the interpolated skips. Recall that under this system, a slur cannot contain both a step and skip. Since the scale only contains five distinct pitches (not always the case in practice as I will show), the "gaps" do not represent skips since they are adjacent notes in the collection. So although we still perceive a larger distance at these points—because there is one—I analyze these natural "gaps" as stepwise motion, and therefore contain them within a single slur, as in Example 1.2. Note that the dotted brackets identify the pentatonic "gaps" and the upside-down slurs account for the filled in arpeggiation of the basic triad.

[22] Larson championed the application of this mode of analysis to disparate musical genres, believing that all music was governed by universal principles for which this system attempts to account. His recent book, *Analyzing Jazz: A Schenkerian Approach* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2009), in addition to his unpublished Schenker textbook and earlier articles, demonstrates that Larson would be in support of this application.



Example 1.2. Strict-use analysis applied to the pentatonic scale

Some scholars have challenged the idea of borrowing modes of analysis developed to address Western classical music and imposing them on non-Western or vernacular genres. Richard Middleton concludes that "the wholesale importation of analytical methods borrowed from music analysis and applied to popular music could not be sustained."[23] While I appreciate such concerns, my intention is not to force Wonder's

[23] Quoted in Allan Moore, *Analyzing Popular Music* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9. Cristóbal L. García Gallardo, "Schenkerian Analysis and Popular Music," *TRANS-Transcultural Music Review 5*, Article 3 (2000). Accessed January 14, 2012. Gallardo argues that application of Shenkerian Analysis to rock and pop has mixed results, depending on what the analyst is trying to show. Looking for large-scale directed tonal motion is less relevant to pop and rock styles than the forms found in Western art music. He states that, "[s]urface events also seem to be more important than deep structures in most popular music. In rock music, for example, the continuous repetition of a short musical structure; usually composed of verses and refrain; and the use of very short harmonic and melodic patterns, guarantees a strong, obvious unity that does not need to be emphasized by means of any hidden relationships. As we have already seen, the absence of directed tonal motion in much of this music makes problematic the application of Schenker´s theory." Allan Moore, while refuting the system's relevance in rock styles, does, however, admit to using a very limited form of reductive analysis first in his article "The So-Called 'Flattened Seventh' in Rock Music," *Popular Music* (Vol. 14, no. 2, May 1995), 185-201; and

music into an awkward paradigm or to judge it by irrelevant aesthetic criteria. Rather, I wish only to use reductive analysis to illustrate the structural versus ornamental voice-leading relationships that appear are relevant to understanding the interaction of melody and harmony in Wonder's music. I believe that doing so will allow me to observe and comment on the meaningful and relevant relationships that are responsible for his music's expressive power. Furthermore, it stands to reason that since Wonder's music is in many cases tonal, this system of analysis—created for the analysis of tonal music in all its stylistic variations—is appropriate and completely relevant. Any deviations from the tonal paradigms of Schenkerian Analysis should in fact reveal important stylistic features of Wonder's music.

Current State of Research/Literature Review

Even in the expanding field of popular music analysis, Wonder's music has received only scant attention. In fact, comparatively few theoretical analyses have been aimed at African-American popular styles in general, with jazz being the one exception. Over the past twenty years, pop music analysis has steadily infiltrated and, in certain settings, supplanted the dominant focus on music solely from the Western art tradition. However, of the existing references to Wonder's music, very few do more than simply include it in lists of examples to support a position taken for another subject.

There are, however, a handful of exceptions to this lack of analytical studies. Walter Everett, one of the leading scholars in pop music analysis today, has devoted

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later in his discussion of voice-leading in Chapter 4 of his study on the music of The Beatles. *The Beatles: SGT. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xi. His purpose is not to locate an archetypal tonal background structure of the music, but rather to examine middleground pitch relationships closer to the surface of the music.

much effort to applying analytical techniques to the music of The Beatles, but also has done extensive research into pop styles. His article, "Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can Be a Sticky Substance,"[24] uses an example from Wonder's music to suggest that pop and rock music often operate under similar principles as Western tonal music, and therefore can be analyzed using similar techniques (when appropriate).

Everett's article provides one of the few instances where Wonder's music is the main repertoire used to support a specific claim—namely, that harmonic tensions or unstable pitches (dissonances) in any style where the music is tonal behave in much the same way as in Western art music. Everett produces a Schenkerian reductive graph of the main sections of Wonder's "My Cherie Amour" to illustrate how chordal tensions in popular styles tend to resolve the way we expect them to, following basic contrapuntal norms found in typical Western classical styles. Similar to conclusions I arrive at in this study, he concludes that "despite the high prevalence of accented dissonant sevenths, fourths, ninths, and added sixths, these are all treated as conventional appoggiaturas, suspensions, neighbors, anticipations, and chromatic and diatonic passing tones at the large scale level if not on the literal surface."[25]

The first in-depth analytical study of Wonder's music did not appear until 2003. Tim Hughes' dissertation, *Groove and Flow*: *Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder,* provided the first extensive analytical examination of Wonder's music.[26]

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[24] Walter Everett, ed., *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays.* Studies in contemporary music and culture, vol. 2. (New York: Garland, 2000).

[25] Everett, 313.

[26] Timothy Hughes, "Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2003).

Hughes focuses primarily on the musical parameters he refers to as *groove* and *flow,* aspects of Wonder's style that are certainly integral, yet difficult to quantify and isolate without ambiguity. Specifically, Hughes seeks to offer insight into the various ways (harmonically, rhythmically, formally) that Wonder is able to generate forward motion, what he calls *flow,* through *grooves* (i.e. various figures on the local or background level, "designed to be repeated"), and how those grooves are manipulated and interrupted, thus disrupting the *flow*, or the repetitions of the groove.[27] An important aspect of his dual thesis of groove and flow is the notion that these principles are not just surface-level occurrences in the music, but also are present on a larger scale.

By making *groove* and *flow* central to his inquiry, Hughes effectively engages the larger discussion regarding their role in African and African-American musical traditions. Part of his purpose is to show how Wonder's music belongs to this larger community, framing it within both the African tradition of *collective individuality*, and the contrasting individualistic African-American popular music tradition. In Hughes' mind, the working out of this paradox between individual and group represented by the term *collective individuality* is "the source of the key, twin mechanisms of groove and flow."[28] Viewing Wonder's music from this perspective, Hughes suggests, will contribute to popular music analysis by providing "a clear window into the often murky world of the groove and allow the analyst to map the swirling paths of musical flow."[29]

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[27] Hughes details what constitutes *groove* and *flow* extensively in the introduction to his dissertation, comprising pages 14-19.

[28] Ibid, 3.

[29] Ibid, 4.

While Hughes embarks on a journey to address this central feature of Wonder's music, and in African American music in general, the subjects of *groove* and the more elusive *flow* threaten to defy analysis altogether. These two concepts are not easily defined analytically, and Hughes is left to navigate carefully through these difficulties using charts and graphs to document how the concepts interact. We understand implicitly what they are and their impact in the musical process, but to construct models by which to analyze their effect in music presents a set of challenges for the analyst.

Hughes selects as his case study five songs from Wonder's canon of his "classic" period (ca. 1972-1976), and analyzes the variety of ways that groove and flow operate in a given piece. After thorough analyses of each song treated individually in its own chapter, Hughes concludes by suggesting further avenues of exploration in Wonder's music. From his analyses comes the realization that among all the features that govern Wonder's music, repetition is key, "a force [in the music] that has largely been unexplored by music theorists."[30] Of course, this subject not only has implications for better understanding the music of Stevie Wonder, but also could potentially better inform our understanding of African-American music making in general. The realization implies that new methods of inquiry are required to engage repetition as it occurs in this music, although Hughes has offered possible templates by which to analyze the interaction of *groove* and *flow*.

In the context of my study of ornamentation (the focus of Chapter IV), Hughes' work deals only marginally with the integral role of melodic ornamentation and its

[30] Ibid, 261.

interaction with the projection of form in Wonder's music. In his analysis of "Superstition," he posits that

> [the melody] is a template or model that is conceptually present during every verse, even though Wonder's actual vocal often includes slight melodic or rhythmic variation. (This is a standard convention in most American popular music styles of the time.) *During this phase of Wonder's career, his variations tended to be less florid than they have since become.* Most of his variations during the verses in "Superstition" occur during the sustained phrase-endings [emphasis added].[31]

While his statement regarding the melody as a conceptual "template or model" is clearly related to my idea (influenced by Rischar) of the "basic" melody, Hughes does not acknowledge the teleological impact that melodic ornamentation plays in the course of the song. That Wonder ornaments his melodies less may be true in some cases, but melodic variations are quite florid in Wonder's "classic" period, enough to warrant a discussion of their overall impact on the progression and development of many songs. I would argue, even more strongly, that the melodic structures found in Wonder's soul and R & B songs contain a considerable amount of variation for teleological purposes.[32] Wonder's live recordings also reveal that ornamentation was profuse in even his overtly pop tunes that contain only slight melodic variations—the kind to which Hughes refers—on the original studio recordings.[33]

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[31] Ibid, 181.

[32] I can think of a number of songs whose melodic content is significantly altered. Many of the songs on *Music of My Mind*; "Maybe Your Baby," "You and I" and "I Believe" from *Talking Book;* "Living for the City," "Jesus Children of America," "He's Misstra Know-it-All," and "All is Fair in Love" from *Innervisions*; "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light-Years Away," "They Won't Go," and "Please Don't Go" from *Fulfillingness' First Finale.*

[33] For instance, the bootleg album, *Funkyfied Rainbow: Stevie Wonder, Live at the Rainbow Theatre,* includes a 10-minute version of "Visions", and 12-minute rendition of "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" both of which undergo significant melodic transformations.

Other forms of inquiry relating to African-American music studies

Important studies that do not deal directly with Wonder but engage other African-American music-making traditions have only marginal relevance to my study. Since the direction I take in this dissertation deviates from some of the more common issues under discussion involving African-American music, it is necessary to briefly mention where current musicological interest stands in this subject.

Popular music scholar David Brackett examines black rhetorical devices in the music of James Brown in Chapter 4 of his book *Interpreting Popular Music* (1995).[34] Entitled "James Brown's 'Superbad' and the Double-Voiced Utterance," Brackett's article first addresses both the historical and current primary discourses on African-American music-making, focusing primarily on the theories espoused by Samuel Floyd, Jr., who takes his ideas primarily from black literary theorist Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Gates designates the all-inclusive term "Signifyin(g)" as a means to describe a distinct black vernacular tradition, the "trope of tropes;" Floyd re-names it "Call-Response," and uses it to locate musical troping equivalents. "Its primary value as an analytical concept," Brackett states, "is that it functions as a source pool of black vernacular musical practices and seeks to relate those practices to a wide range of music associated with African-Americans."[35]

Using the concept of Signifyin(g) as his analytic tool, Brackett proceeds to identify distinct black features and ideals noticeable in "Superbad," noting that Brown was "one of the performers most tightly linked to the idea of black music in the sixties

[34] David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 108-156.

[35] Brackett, 117.

and seventies."[36] He rigorously scrutinizes every aspect of the performance through this lens, commenting on the key performative aspects of Brown's music, like troping from other black genres through repetition of small melodic figures, implied poly-rhythm and poly-meter, and proportional relationships.

Brackett makes one critical observation about Signifyin(g) in the funk genre that distinguishes it to some extent from how Wonder signifies in his music. After analyzing melodic features of Brown's performance, he concludes that,

> [t]he important characteristics in the melodic parameter reside neither in the creation of new melodic lines as the song proceeds nor *in the totality of its dramatic form*; rather, interest lies in the complex reshuffling—with subtle variation in pitch and rhythm—of small fragments that are used first to create, then to disrupt listener expectations [emphasis added].[37]

Moments later, he also recognizes that the complex interactions of all the moving parts in funk, or the "high density of musical events," directly "correspond to the largely non-teleological aesthetic at work…"[38] Wonder's music, specifically his brand of funk, exhibits a similar "high density of musical events" that doesn't necessarily seem goal-driven, but contribute to the texture of the song. But at the same time, existing alongside the static events, are additive events achieved by melodic ornamentation and harmony, designed to move the listener through the experience toward an end goal and unequivocally affect the "totality of the dramatic form." In short, while Wonder employs several similar rhetorical devices—troped from gospel and other black styles—there always seems to be a linear trajectory, or a teleological drive, fueled in part not by static

[36] Ibid, 119.

[37] Ibid, 135.

[38] Ibid, 136.

harmony, but functional harmony, and motivated specifically through the gradual layering of melodic and rhythmic events.

Olly Wilson seeks to link African-American music practices with that of its historical antecedents from West Africa. In his article, "The Significance of the Relationship Between Afro-American Music and West African Music," he cites ethnological research done in West African areas to support evidence that distinctive African traits are held over in African-American music.[39] The shared link is a rhythmic one, specifically the use of polyrhythm in both related cultures, what he classifies in another article, as "the heterogenous sound ideal."[40] Wilson gives transcribed examples of overlapping rhythmic patterns and larger emergent polymetric groupings as found in Western African cultures, and compares them to the temporal layering of rhythmic events in James Brown's "Superbad." Each instrument plays a distinct rhythmic pattern that creates a composite grouping similar to those found in African drumming ensembles.[41]

The rhythmic interplay and overlap to which Wilson makes reference has significant implications to Wonder's music aesthetic. The heterogeneous ideal plays out in many of his tunes, and is especially noticeable in his funk style. Closely related to this ideal, and a trait noticeable in Wonder's music, is the density created from the convergence of multiple events happening within a short time span. "There tends to be a profusion of musical activities going on simultaneously, as if in an attempt to fill up

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[39] Olly Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship Between Afro-American Music and West African Music," *The Black Perspective in Music*, (Vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1974), 3-22.

[40] Olly Wilson, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music," *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. Josephine Wright and Samuel Floyd, Jr. (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 327-340.

[41] Wilson, 9-15.

every available area of musical space."[42] While I do not take up this characteristic from an analytic perspective, it certainly appears as a tacit subject that is noticeable in my dissertation.

Wilson also desires to distance African American music from Euro-centric connections by showing that the presence of "functional tonality" is not exclusively a contribution from the Western art music tradition, but can be found in some form in African music.[43]

Anne Danielsen's fascinating book on rhythmic perception in the funk music of James Brown and Parliament propels the hypotheses articulated by Wilson into a full-fledged theory and philosophy on groove.[44] After examining the complex relationships that exist between white and black culture, Danielsen details the essential components of funk rhythm and meter. She is particularly interested in how funk moves and engages the listener and uses her analyses to show this experiential element to the music. Ultimately, for this style, it is the state of "being in funk" via the groove and the instant gratification it produces, Danielsen suggests, that is of the essence and the ideal:

> When the groove is a success, when the music hits the body in exactly the right way, the state of being in funk is a totally focused experience. To refer to the cliché that most commonly accounts for it, it is a forgetting of time and place—that is, of a certain understanding of time and place.[45]

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[42] Ibid, 15. Recall that the object of interest in Timothy Hughes' dissertation is the groove, which is precisely the result of the intricate rhythmic layering that occurs in many of Wonder's funk tunes.

[43] Ibid, 16-17.

[44] Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

[45] Danielsen, 216.

The payoff is in the transparent process, not the end result for both the performer and the listener. This she claims is one of the distinct aspects that separate music from the African-American tradition and European art music.[46]

Robert Fink's recent article argues against the type of reading common in African-American musical discourse represented by Danilesen's thesis regarding the roles of rhythm and groove. He details the teleological strivings present in Motown music—especially music produced by Norman Whitfield—as a musical metaphor of the rising black middle-class in the 1960s that worked hard for their status in a white capitalist society, and was epitomized by Motown owner Berry Gordy. He argues that Motown music specifically (and other African-American styles, like funk) organizes rhythms and grooves in an additive process that has structural significance and is goal-directed. Fink's concern here is that the major works on groove (particularly Danielsen) examine groove as a purely local phenomenon, deliberately devoid of teleology, for the purpose of immediate gratification—of being in the moment.[47] Motown, in addition to troping the figures, troped the gospel message through the use of delayed musical gratification. Fink is primarily concerned with rhythmic teleology, and how it is implemented in the studio systematically "to create, sustain, and ultimately release musical tension."[48] Although Fink's claim about teleology and climax are relevant to my own research, he downplays pitch as having a functional teleological role in African-American music styles, primarily in reaction to primitivist arguments made by

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[46] Ibid, 30.

[47] Robert Fink, "Runaway Child: Goals, Grooves, and Greatness in African-American Pop Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (forthcoming). See specifically pages 6-9 for this discussion.

[48] Ibid, 10.

musicologists who attempt to view Afro-centric styles through the lens of the European art music style.

With the exception of Everett, each of the studies I reference above places prime importance on rhythm as a point of departure for analysts and are used to make claims about black music's essential nature. Pitch relationships is an undervalued component from which analysts of black music have shied away so as to distance black music styles from classical styles and the high formalist analytical approach normally employed. I hope to show that pitch and harmonic relationships still occupy a central role and are relevant to teleology in Wonder's lyrical style. Patterns of tension and release that drive the song structurally are manifest not only in the rhythmic quality of his music—an important argument for Fink—but also in the melodic and harmonic content of his songs. It is important to understand that by promoting pitch relationships and harmony as viable topics for analysis, I am not suggesting that these elements are superior, thus diminishing the role that rhythm and groove plays. Rather, I hope to show that Wonder's use of melody and harmony should be given equal attention from the analyst in order to form a more complete picture of his music's expressive qualities.

Nomenclature

I use conventional lead-sheet symbols borrowed from jazz analysis to represent Wonder's harmony. Wonder uses the full compliment of common jazz harmonies. Table 1.1 below aligns the most common symbols with the corresponding most-common chord structures. This is by no means an exhaustive list of all the possible chord combinations. The "x" before each chord quality represents the variable chord letter name.

Table 1.1 Lead-sheet nomenclature

Symbol	Chord structure	Chord with C root	Common scale step	Extensions
(x) maj7	major-major 7th	C, E, G, B	I, IV, ♭VII, ♭VI, ♭III	maj9, maj13
(x) 7	major-minor 7th	C, E, G, B♭	various	9, 13
(x) m7	minor-minor 7th	C, E♭, G, B♭	various	m9, m11
(x) ø7	diminished-minor 7th	C, E♭, G♭, B♭	II	N/A
(x) °7	diminished-diminished 7th	C, E♭, G♭, B𝄫	VII	N/A
(x) 7sus4	major-minor 7th	C, F, G, B♭	V	9sus4

Lead sheet symbols identify, from left to right, the chord root by letter name, the basic chord quality, and the type of extension (if present) beyond the chordal seventh. It is assumed that the seventh is still present in the chord if, in its customary position in the symbol, it is replaced by an extension. Altered chord tones and extensions will be shown in parenthesis as suffixes to the chordal seventh symbol (i.e. a major-minor seventh chord with a lowered ninth = 7(♭9), showing the altered extension in parenthesis). Notice that the seventh chord and its various permutations represent the basic vertical unit described in the table.

The chart does not include triads, which are simply identified by their letter name followed by a chord-quality suffix (i.e. C = C major triad, Cm = C minor triad, C°= C diminished, C+ = C augmented). Slashes that appear at the end of a symbol followed by a pitch letter name (i.e. C7/E) indicate that an alternate bass note stands in place of the root of the chord, typically representing an inversion of the basic structure. Since these structures regularly incorporate non-diatonic pitches, it is important to consider the chord spelling in accordance with the intervallic relationships *of the chord* and not the pitches in the key of the song.

A Word on Transcriptions

All of the music that I examine in this dissertation comes from my own transcriptions. In every case, the transcriptions have been taken from the original studio recordings. I realize that transcribing can be an extremely politicized undertaking with deep implications for how a song may or many not be interpreted.[49] Several anthologies of Wonder's music exist, but most all of them are prepared with the novice enthusiast in mind. Issues relating to key selection, oversimplification of melody, and faulty lead sheet symbols make these folios less appropriate for critical study.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen in my transcriptions not to account for every detail of pitch nuance/inflection or rhythmic minutia. The rigidity of our system of western notation simply would make the literal translation of the performance unnecessarily complicated. To me, this would distract from the main points that I am making regarding pitch pattern relationships. Instead, I have transcribed what I considered to be the essence of each gesture, or the representation of the basic idea. This is especially true of the rhythmic gestures of Wonder's performance of the melody. Pinpoint accuracy is not the point I wish to pin on my transcriptions. It seems that it is still possible to gain an understanding of the performative aspects of his music despite the fact that every subtlety is not present in the transcription.

[49] Peter Winkler's fascinating reflexive article on the challenges of transcribing succinctly captures the essence of this problem. See Peter Winkler, "Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription," in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, Lawrence Siegel, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 169-203.

Where appropriate, I use vertical or horizontal arrows as symbols to show when certain features of Wonder's performance are not easily shown with Western notation:[50]

Vertical arrows: ↑↓ represent notes that are either slightly above or below the target pitch—at least my interpretation of it.

Horizontal arrows: ← → represent rhythmic gestures that either pull behind or ahead of the established beat.

[50] Winkler, 190. Winkler chooses a wide assortment of symbols to represent some aspects of pitch manipulation in Aretha Franklin's vocal style. Symbols express the basic inflections on a given pitch, the attack, slides that connect two pitches together, and other vocal sounds.

CHAPTER II

THE PENTATONIC IDEAL: EXPLORING PENTATONICISM IN THE MELODIES OF STEVIE WONDER

> Stevie always stayed true to keeping the structure of a song simple, and clever and *melodic*. If it didn't have that, to Stevie it sucked [emphasis added].[1]
>
> -John Glover, longtime Wonder friend

> I believe a song has to have a strong melody. When you want to get into the beat, you gotta get that thing going. In writing I'll put the melody on tape, do the background voices or whatever I want. Then I get it together—like, go into the studio and do this and do that, and it's like I want it.[2]
>
> -Stevie Wonder

Stevie Wonder excels at the craft of melodic invention. His fine-tuned artistic sensibilities and intuitions lead him to compose melodies that are at once logical, deeply lyrical, profoundly communicative, and most of all, memorable. He thoughtfully finds the ideal musical environments (i.e. harmony, groove, tempo) wherein melody can fulfill its singular role regarding affective expression of his song lyrics. His abundant melodic ideas are appropriately varied from style to style, yet he is surprisingly consistent with the basic vocabulary from which he draws.

During this period of his career, Wonder experimented with different musical collections for wide-ranging melodic expression, such as whole-tone, modal (mainly Dorian and Mixolydian), chromatic, and major and minor scales. Despite his application of these varied collections, the fundamental collection that underlies all the rest is the

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[1] As quoted in Mark Ribowsky, *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered: The Soulful Journey of Stevie Wonder* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 145.

[2] As quoted in Craig Werner, *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield and the Rise and Fall of American Soul* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 201-202.

ever-present pentatonic scale. Many of Wonder's melodic decisions can be traced to some embellished form of the pentatonic; it represents both a universal component and a unique stylistic feature of his music. Sometimes the pentatonic is clearly presented on the surface of the music. At other times, it serves as a guiding principle, silently governing the pitch content of melody, no matter whether all twelve tones of the chromatic scale are included.

Pentatonicism never seems far from Stevie Wonder's mind, and the means by which he is able to create so much variety from it is part of his musical ingenuity. This variety comes primarily from the way in which he embellishes this framework, either in the form of composed or improvised elaborations. This chapter is devoted specifically to the identification of the pentatonic framework in Wonder's melodies, and the various ways that it operates on both the surface of the music and at deeper levels of structure. An examination of his melodic construction through the lens of pentatonicism will show how larger supersets interact with and are informed by it.

In this chapter on melody I have purposely excluded a discussion of local harmonic motion and its role in the melodic process. I realize that the horizontal and vertical aspects of music go hand in hand, and often it is difficult to separate out which element exerts more influence over the other. Indeed, it is often a chicken-versus-egg impasse. However, I am interested in comparing how the pentatonic collection interacts with the basic key area as established at the beginning of a song. Therefore, the localized melodic shifts are explained from a more global perspective.

Finally, the flexibility and command Wonder has over his vocal style allows him to manipulate and further elaborate this pentatonic framework, creating a wide range of

expressivity through ornamentation, both pitch-wise and rhythmically. While many of the ideas put forth in this chapter will have direct applications to his vocal stylings, a more thorough investigation of his improvised ornamentation and its relationship to the basic melodic structure will comprise Chapter IV.

Part 1: Properties of the Pentatonic Scale

Wonder's application of the pentatonic scale, as the basis for melodic construction, stems from a rich and varied tradition of African-American music making. But its presence in other musical systems has been widely recognized too. Ethnomusicologists have identified variations of this five-note collection in virtually all known world music cultures, and musicologists such as Peter Van der Merwe and Jeremy Day-O'Connell have more recently traced its history in and impact on classical music, and its presence is well documented in popular music styles.[3] Tenor-saxophone giant John Coltrane intimated that the pentatonic scale was the universal scale, found in some form as the basis for all musical syntaxes.[4] As part of a panel called "Notes & Neurons:

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[3] Peter Van der Merwe, similar to my study, explores Western music from a pentatonic viewpoint in *Roots of the Classical: The Popular Origins of Western Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). He suggests that tonality emerged from pentatonicism, that in one sense, the major scale is a superset of a more fundamental pentatonic collection. Jeremy Day-O'Connell takes a slightly different perspective in *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007). He desires to show that the presence of the pentatonic existed in Western art music long before the Romantic composers consciously imported it from other "exotic" musical systems. In the introduction, he chooses to define it as a subset of the major scale, thus differing from Van der Merwe's conception (3-5). Bruno Nettl in his discussion on the various ways ethnomusicologists study universals in music practice among cultures, references the pentatonic as one of these universals. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts,* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 48-49.

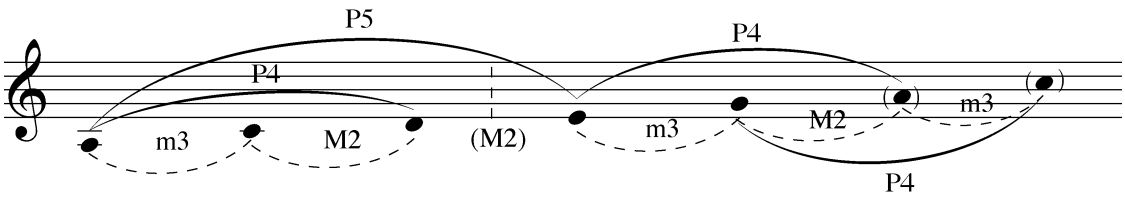
[4] As quoted in Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1998), 211. Coltrane was interested in a wide range of ethnic pitch collections, but was more interested in finding the common ground between them all. He is quoted in Porter's book as saying, "[i]f you want to look beyond the differences in style, you will confirm that there is a common base…and you'll discover the presence of the same pentatonic sonority, of comparable modal structures."

In Search of the Common Chorus," at the 2009 World Science Festival, Bobby McFerrin illustrated the inherent experience and expectation of the pentatonic scale by interacting with an audience presumably made up of mostly non-musicians to show that it is an innate pitch collection.[5]

Pentatonic structure

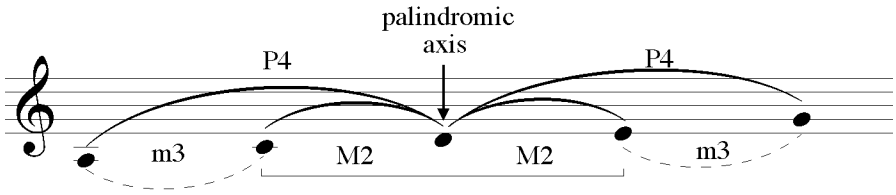
The most significant characteristic of the pentatonic scale is the absence of minor seconds, which result in "gaps" or skips between some of the pitches in the collection when compared to the seven-note scale. The fundamental relationship that generates the entire scale is the combination of a minor third plus a major second, forming a trichord subset. Example 2.1 shows that the transposition of this trichord up a fifth creates a self-contained gamut that spans one octave. A third iteration of the trichord appears between consecutive pitches in the pentatonic, although it generates no new pitches. With the minor third first, the initial generating move results in the creation of the minor form of the pentatonic.

[5] "The Power of the Pentatonic," *World Science Festival*, online video, 26 Jan 2011, <http://wsf.tv/videos/the_power_of_the_pentatonic_scale>. Accessed 5 Apr 2011. McFerrin engages the audience in a call-and-response activity by repeating each of the first three stepwise pitches and one lower minor third of the major pentatonic scale. He connects each pitch with his own dance-like movement: as he takes a dance step (a bounce really) up, that would cue the audience to proceed to the next ascending pitch and vice versa. Once he had established this pitch domain, then he would simply jump either direction to cue the audience as to which adjacent pitch they would sing. He then indicated through his movement to move beyond the upper step and the audience complied by singing a minor third, a defining motion of the pentatonic. He also moved beyond the lower boundary and the audience similarly complied by singing down the pentatonic scale.



Example 2.1. Generation of the pentatonic scale

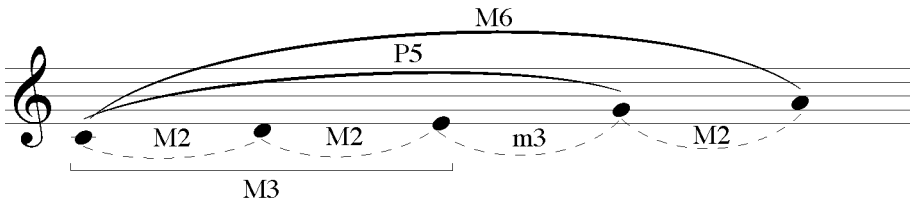
An alternative explanation regarding its generation focuses not on the transposition of two minor third-major second subsets a whole step apart, but on the collection's symmetrical properties. Using the last note of the first trichord as the point of axis, the collection expands on either side first by the interval of a major second, then by a minor third. This arrangement emphasizes the mirroring of intervals: 3 – 2 | 2 – 3, and expresses an inversional relationship between the first and second trichord. The inversional point of axis appears to hold a prominent position in the derivation of the collection, and as will be seen in the melodic analyses that follow, also holds significance as an important boundary tone in practice.



Example 2.2. Alternate generation of the pentatonic scale

The symmetrical intervallic arrangement of the pentatonic collection in Example 2.1, has led some to conclude that the minor pentatonic is the generative scale and that

the relative major pentatonic is the derivative scale.[6] However, the palindromic generation of the scale as shown in Example 2.2 also suggests that the major side of the pentatonic exerts its influence, not in the generation of the scale, but in the projection of the idea of a "scale." Given that stepwise motion of consecutive seconds fills in the major third, and because of its ability to move to a tonic pitch by step, the major mode plausibly has prominence over the relative minor regarding its identification as a "scale." Example 2.3 arranges the members of the collection to emphasize the stepwise motion that results in the collection's major form.



Example 2.3. Major pentatonic scale formation

The major form does not project the intervallic symmetry of the collection. However, whether by cultural conditioning or something else, our inclination is to hear the distinctive stepwise motion move in the collection as the major mode "mi – re – do" and not as part of the minor mode "sol – fa – me," unless of course the harmonic context

[6] Van der Merwe, 39-42. The evolutionary generation of the pentatonic comes from what Van der Merwe calls the "children's tetrachord," which is a three-note abstract collection that forms the most fundamental basis for melodic construction that finds its first iterations in children's nursery songs. The tetrachord is constructed by pivoting from a central pitch up a major second and down a leap of a minor third. He offers two possible ways to generate the pentatonic collection from this structure. 1) Extend the tetrachord on either end, or 2) by reproducing the tetrachord at the interval of a fourth or fifth. Nicole Biamonte argues for the minor as fundamental, citing the symmetrical arrangement of intervals, and consequently places it as the primary mode. See Nicole Biamonte, "Triadic, Modal, and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum,* (Vol. 32, no. 2, Fall 2010), 104.

dictates otherwise. Given this consideration, along with conventional practice, further analysis below will use the major pentatonic as the point of comparison.

The pentatonic modes

The mode producing the melodic major triad then becomes the mode by which all other rotations of the pitch collection are compared.[7] The following diagram in Figure 2.1 represents all five rotations of this mode, labeled modes 1 through 5, and their transpositions around the tonic note C.

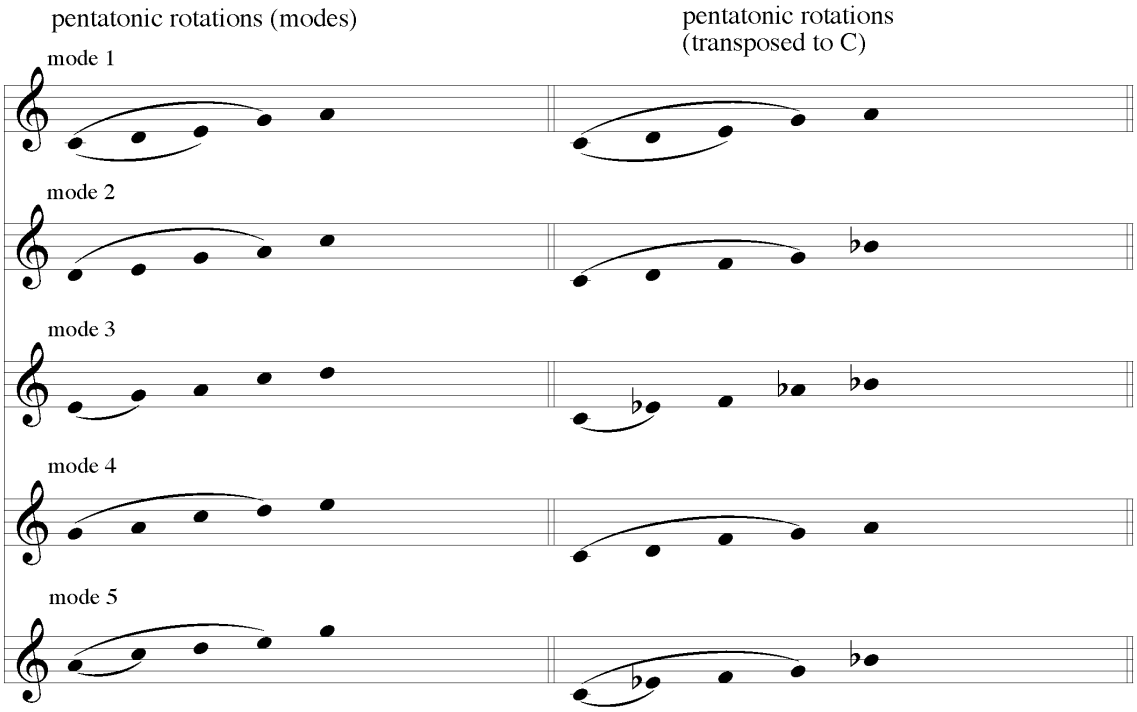


Figure 2.1. Pentatonic modes

[7] Biamonte (104) places mode 5 as mode 1 in her explication of the pentatonic rotations, citing that it is the most common of all modes in guitar rock music and that it represents the most symmetrical ordering of intervals.

Out of the five possible pentatonic modes, the two used almost exclusively in pop and rock styles are modes 1 (major) and 5 (minor). This is because of the clear third and fifth above the tonic pitch, which allows for the possibility of tonal harmony to map more smoothly onto the collection.[8] As evidenced by the slur groupings in Figure 2.1, the other modes are less stable in their projection of a tonic note since they are either lacking a perfect fifth or third above the tonic, essential to the creation of the tonic triad. Mode 2, while it contains a perfect fifth above the tonic, prominently emphasizes fourth spans given the two stacked trichords, but blurs any sense of a tonic note. Consecutive stepwise motion is not a feature of this mode. Mode 4 also has a clear fifth above tonic, but the consecutive stepwise motion emphasizes the third note of the collection as the potential tonic note, and not the first.

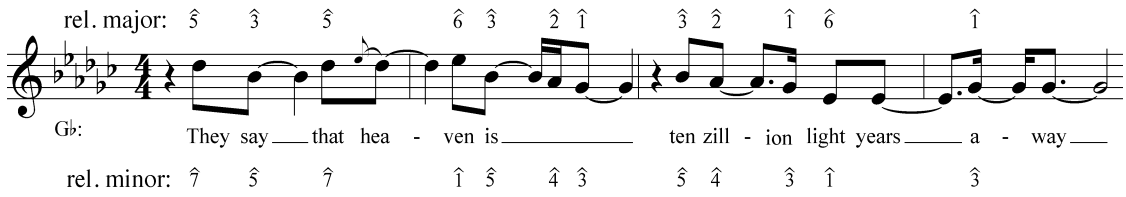
On relative relationships in pentatonicism

The two shades of the pentatonic scale, modes 1 and 5, have an intertwined relationship. Considering only the horizontal organization of the pentatonic collection, and withholding a discussion of harmonic implications until Chapter III, it is apparent that shifts of emphasis can appear quite naturally, and that distinguishing between the two diatonic modes is somewhat ambiguous, given the distinctive intervallic construction of this collection. Van der Merwe suggests that because of the move from $\hat{1}$ down to $\hat{6}$, and I would add the absence of leading tones, modal identity is somewhat nebulous.[9] Taking only the melodic line into consideration, we can reorient our listening to hear moves

[8] The subject of pentatonicism and its relationship to harmony will be addressed thoroughly in Chapter III.

[9] Van der Merwe, 41-42. In discussing the pentatonic ambit (range), major melodies often encompass a range that spans or reaches down beneath the tonic to scale degree $\hat{6}$.

within the diatonic pentatonic collection as emphasizing either the major or minor side. Take for example the opening phrase of Wonder's gospel-themed song, "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light Years Away" in Example 2.4.[10]



Example 2.4. "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light Years Away," verse, mm. 1-4

At first glance, the melodic unit of the first two measures outlines a descending tonic G♭ major triad, with scale degree $\hat{6}$ acting as an upper neighbor to $\hat{5}$. The line arrives on scale degree $\hat{3}$ on the "and" of two in m. 2, but a short $\hat{3} – \hat{2} – \hat{1}$ melisma embellishment extends it to the tonic note (G♭) on the "and" of three. Beginning in m. 3, the next melodic unit repeats the $\hat{3} – \hat{2} – \hat{1}$ stepwise descent to G♭, but continues to descend by leaping over the pentatonic minor third break to scale degree $\hat{6}$ (E♭) which melodically outlines the relative minor triad. One therefore could conclude that the first two-measure unit centers around G♭ major, embellishing the notes of the triad, while the second two-measure unit emphasizes the relative E♭ minor.

The entire four-measure excerpt could also be interpreted as a single move across either the major or relative minor, spanning the entire range of the collection. In G♭ major, the melody descends from $\hat{5}$ (m. 1) to $\hat{1}$ (m. 4), passing through $\hat{6}$ as a lower neighbor tone. In E♭ minor, the first pitch in m. 1, represents $\hat{7}$, descending to the tonic

[10] From Stevie Wonder, *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).

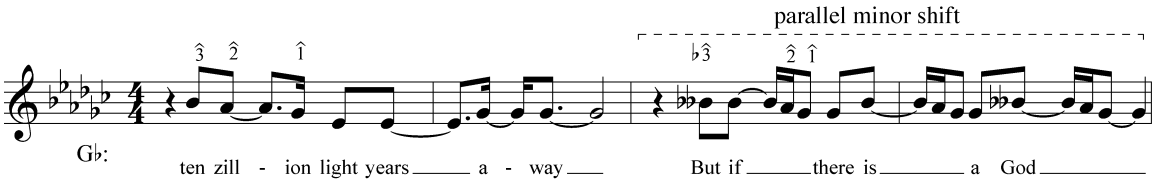
(E♭) on beat four of m. 3. Indeed, the range of this melodic section spans from E♭3 to E♭4, outlining the minor side. As is apparent, pentatonic-based melodies are able to slip between major and minor modes with relative ease, and songwriters often take advantage of this ambiguity harmonically. In this case, the key of the song happens to be in G♭ major, but it appears as though it could function just as comfortably in E♭ minor.

Given this ambiguity, is it useful to differentiate between relative diatonic collections since each path could potentially emphasize either the major or minor side of the collection *sans* harmonic context? Does either the major or relative minor mode have the capability to adequately define itself? While it ultimately becomes the role of the harmony to delineate modal context, Wonder does emphasize certain coded melodic cues that he associates with a particular mode, and the specific gestures he uses are found more often in one mode over the other. More importantly, these cues—in the form of patterns—help to identify the pentatonic framework in which the melody is built when pitches outside the pentatonic gamut are present.

The parallel minor (mode 5 transposed) as the important "other"

As seen above, Wonder exploits this diatonic ambiguity in his melodic construction, at times emphasizing third spans to suggest both the relative minor and major poles. However, it is the juxtaposition of the *parallel* pentatonic major and minor relationships that has a far greater impact on his approach to melodic construction. Utilizing both parallel collections within the span of a single song, phrase, or even melodic unit, Wonder frequently introduces chromatic shifts to his otherwise diatonic melodic surfaces, enabling his vocal lines to move easily without the established modal

area, while still maintaining the primary tonic pitch. This parallel transference is noticeable in the second phrase of the verse of "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light Years Away." After the repeat of the refrain at the beginning of the second phrase in Example 2.5, Wonder briefly introduces B♭♭ for two measures (mm. 5-6 of the form), the ♭$\hat{3}$ in the key of G♭ major, which temporarily replaces the ♮$\hat{3}$ in the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ pattern already established.



Example 2.5. "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light Years Away," verse, mm. 11-14

Following the temporary aside into the parallel minor, Wonder restores the diatonic melody for the remainder of the verse. Shifts such as these are not typically unjustified and often seems directly linked with some textual reference. In this instance, the parallel shift coincides with the doubt expressed by the words, "but if there is a God, we need Him now," suggesting that there is a narrative purpose behind the alternation between modes. As will be shown below, both the major and minor pentatonic collections have idiomatic patterns that Wonder favors melodically as expressive gestures, many of which are devices that draw their original meaning from gospel music and the blues.

Part 2: Melodic Construction and "Pentatonic-Defining Gestures"

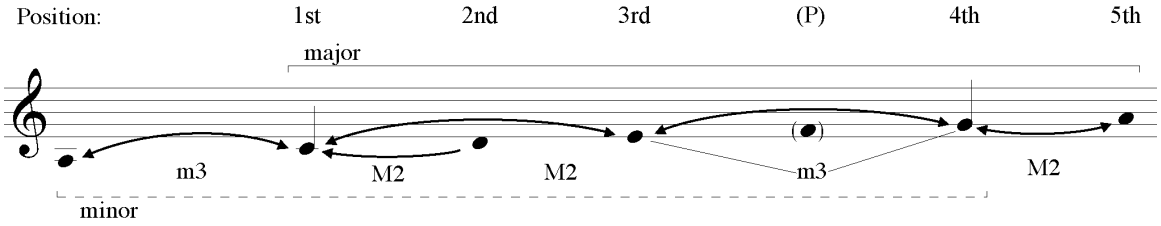
Of the number of recurring expressive patterns present in Wonder's music, many of them appear to be generated from within a pentatonic framework. Specifically, they emphasize the important skips or leaps that define the pentatonic collection. For this reason, I call these melodic "bits" based on the trichord subsets described above *pentatonic-defining gestures* (PDGs), or gestures that outline an important move within the collection, and clearly signal its identification. These gestures are useful to identify because a) they are significant to Wonder's approach to melodic construction, and b) they reinforce the hypothesis that although larger collections (heptatonic, chromatic, etc.) might be evident in Wonder's music, the melodic framework is still governed by a more fundamental pentatonic collection. Wonder often articulates this pentatonic framework clearly in the beginning of a song—via the *PDGs*— before embellishing it with pitches outside of the collection.

Pentatonic pathways

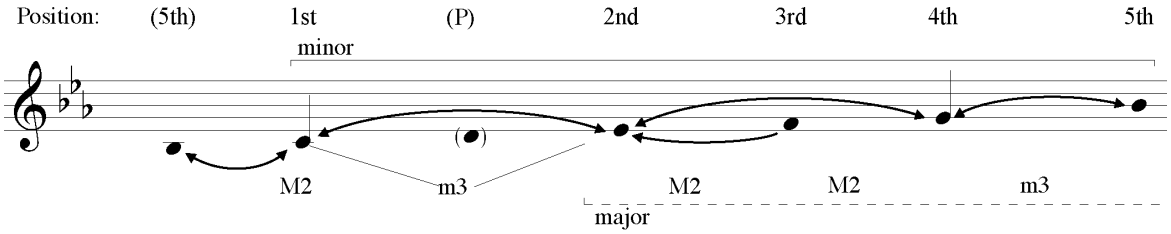
Before discussing *pentatonic-defining gestures* (hereafter PDGs), it is useful to first address the larger pathways from which they emerge. The general pathways through the pentatonic that Wonder draws on for melodic construction are represented in Example 2.6a & b, which shows both the major and parallel minor. Notes in parenthesis represent common notes added to the collection, and dotted lines below the staff indicate the relative relationships. [11]

[11] Similar pathways have been explored in Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis,* (Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press, 1977); and Winthrop Sargeant *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid,* (London: The Jazz Book Club, 1959). In an article on The Beatles melodic tendencies, Naphtali Wagner argues from a similar pentatonic perspective, that the pentatonic framework is

a. Major pentatonic pathways



b. Minor pentatonic pathways (parallel mode)



Example 2.6. Pentatonic pathways: a, major; b, minor (parallel mode)

Stable points in the collection, or pitches that are mostly invariable in practice, are indicated with stemmed notes. Notice that in both instances pathways through the tonic triad regularly occur in Wonder's melodies. As displayed in Example 2.6a, in the major mode, he favors motions between the 1st and 3rd, and 3rd and 4th positions of the pentatonic, either through alternation (the idiomatic "pendular thirds" found in African and African-American music), or by filling in the space between these positions with stepwise passing notes. As already explained above, in the major pentatonic the 2nd position naturally forms a whole step between the 1st and 3rd positions, providing stepwise motion, but between the 3rd and 4th positions is where the gap of a minor third sits — again, a defining feature of the pentatonic. By "filling in" this minor-third space, a half step results, which is an interval that disrupts the impression of the fundamental

"filled in" with diatonic notes. His purpose is to show that when added notes occur, their presence fulfills a narrative or developmental function in a song. See Naphtali Wagner, " Fixing a Hole in the Scale: Suppressing Notes in the Beatles' Songs," *Popular Music,* Vol. 23, No. 3 (2004), 257-69.

pentatonic. Because of this addition, the presence of scale degree $\hat{4}$ might lead some to conclude that a pure pentatonic collection is not the sole basis for Wonder's melodic material, and that a larger collection is required to explain deviations. While this may be true on the surface of the melody, accounting for large-scale melodic events shows that the influence of scale degree $\hat{4}$ in the major mode is quite minimal in Wonder's music. [12] And the major pentatonic identity is preserved by motion to scale degree $\hat{6}$, in place of scale degree $\hat{7}$.[13]

That this five-note scale, void of half steps, is not always presented in its true diatonic form should not be surprising. In practice, this collection is regularly adorned with additional pitches that "fill in" the naturally occurring skips of the scale between degrees $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{5}$ (or $\hat{5}$ and $\flat\hat{7}$ in minor) and $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{8}$ (or $\hat{1}$ and $\flat\hat{3}$ in minor). Van der Merwe makes similar claims about the usage of pentatonic collections found in diverse musical systems. He hypothesizes that these skips within the collection could be filled in with either a major or minor second (smaller intervals outside of the western system too), leading to larger collections.[14] However, these additions most often occur as passing tones that link the primary pentatonic notes together. As Van der Merwe states, "it is a rule rather than an exception that heptatonic melody should have a pentatonic framework."[15]

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[12] The inclusion of scale degree $\hat{4}$ often can be explained harmonically, since this note represents the IV chord, a vital structure in Wonder's music. Although this scale degree is not truly pentatonic, the upper third of the chord ($\hat{6}$ and $\hat{4}$) consist of pitches that are scale members.

[13] Day-O'Connell (2007), 237.

[14] Van der Merwe, 45.

[15] Ibid, 46.

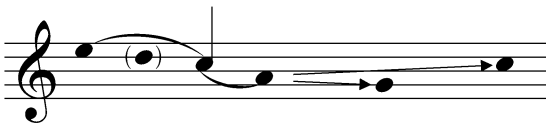
This half-step addition is also often present in the parallel minor pentatonic between the 1st and 2nd positions of the collection, where a minor third typically occupies this space (see Example 2.6b). It is clear, however, that this added interval between the 3rd and 4th positions (or 1st and 2nd positions in minor) has an incidental role within the pentatonic framework, which is to embellish the primary tones of the collection. This might also explain the practice of "filling in" the gap in the parallel minor between the first and second position with a step, resulting in "me-re-do," as shown in Example 2.6b—to imitate the stepwise descent to $\hat{1}$ of the major mode. Put in another way, it is the inclusion of scale degree $\hat{4}$ in major, and the filling in of scale degree $\hat{2}$ in minor as described above, that gives the pentatonic the appearance of a larger collection.

The most common pentatonic-defining gestures: major mode

Obviously many possible melodic networks through the pentatonic exist, evident from Example 2.6a & b. Although any one of these routes could comfortably produce a meaningful melodic structure, there are a few essential PDG's that appear regularly in Wonder's music, especially in his vocal embellishments, and that are generally idiomatic to one mode or the other. Note that in the examples given below the pitch relationship of these gestures is shown by stems (representing melodic arrival points) and slurs (representing motions to or from melodic arrival points). Notes in parenthesis are not essential to the basic gesture and are sometimes omitted.

The first melodic gesture, shown in Example. 2.7, orbits around the tonic pitch, and at once seems to suggest both modes by emphasizing both the lower third of the major: C – E, and the upper third of the relative minor: A – [C – E]. Though this same

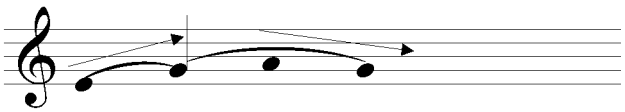
intervallic relationship occurs in the parallel mode around scale degrees $\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \flat\hat{3} - \hat{1}$ noticeable in the minor pathways shown in Example 2.6b, it is a pattern that occurs typically in major keys and helps to firmly establish the tonic (this was the case with the melodic excerpt in Example 2.4). Furthermore, there are two pathways that this PDG tends to follow, both of which usually emphasize the lower boundary of the major pentatonic and consequently the major tonic triad.



Example 2.7. Lower boundary major PDG (around $\hat{1}$)

Following the pentatonic leap from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{6}$, the figure either circles back to $\hat{1}$, forming a neighbor motion, or the downward momentum continues to propel it through $\hat{6}$, to scale degree $\hat{5}$. Whichever direction the gesture proceeds, its essential function is to elaborate $\hat{1}$. Most importantly, this gesture melodically articulates both the pentatonic scale, by moving from "do" to "la," and the pentatonic mode by moving from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$. This PDG is often found at the ends of melodic units as a way to bring closure to a melodic idea.

The other "most" common major-mode PDG articulates the upper boundary of the pentatonic collection by ascending up to scale degree $\hat{6}$ by step or leap, followed by a step down to scale degree $\hat{5}$,which essentially creates a neighbor motion around $\hat{6}$ (Example 2.8). In many cases, Wonder melodically pivots around the upper third of the major triad ($\hat{3}$ and $\hat{5}$) before ascending up to $\hat{6}$.



Example 2.8. Upper boundary major PDG

Both the upper and lower boundary PDGs appear in the melodic segments taken from "Heaven is Ten-Zillion Light Years Away" in Example 2.4. Within the span of the first four measures of the melody, Wonder effectively presents the upper boundary with the $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ pattern in mm. 1-2, followed by the articulation of the lower pattern that circles around $\hat{1}$ in mm. 3-4.

The most common pentatonic-defining gestures: minor mode

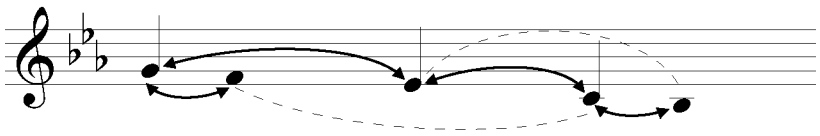
The most common PDG that is idiomatic to the minor pentatonic also circles around $\hat{1}$ and outlines the plagal division—based on the trichord subsets—of the minor pentatonic. In many instances, this gesture's fundamental move is up, contrasting it with the descending major PDG, although its inverse occurs frequently. As the arrows show, the ordering of the upper pitches is also variable (Example 2.9). [16]

[16] Walter Everett identifies these PDGs (i.e. subsets of the pentatonic), based on their interval content of whole step + minor third, using the set-class label [025]. He asserts that this consistent interval pattern is what makes the pentatonic scale ambigious in terms of its ability to establish tonic. See Walter Everett, "Making Sense of Rock's Tonal Systems," *Music Theory Online*, Vol. 10, no. 4 (Dec 2004), n. pag. http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.w_everett.html. Accessed 23 May 2012.

Example 2.9. Lower boundary minor PDG

This gesture firmly establishes the tonic third of the minor triad (C – E♭), while scale degree $\hat{7}$ and $\hat{4}$ embellish this structure on either side. Interestingly, these two boundary tones create overlapping fourth spans, articulating inversions of the trichord subset from which the pentatonic is derived. $\hat{7}$ often appears as an incomplete lower neighbor to $\hat{1}$, and $\hat{4}$ as an incomplete upper neighbor to $\hat{3}$. Both forms of this particular pattern are quite noticeable in a number of Wonder's funk melodies, most notably in "Superstition."

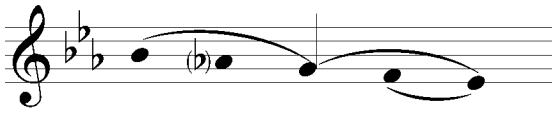
The presence of the entire minor triad further elaborates the minor gesture and appears as a secondary structure within this gesture, illustrated by Example 2.10. However, the fourth span is the more basic structure than is the fifth in the minor mode precisely because it articulates the symmetrical division of the minor pentatonic, or the plagal division of the collection. In other words, $\hat{5}$ forms the upper boundary of the gesture, as an upper neighbor to the neighbor note $\hat{4}$.



Example 2.10. Upper boundary minor-mode PDG

Other variations of these common PDGs surface in several of Wonder's minor-mode songs. These expressive patterns articulate the mode by which Wonder is operating by efficiently emphasizing scale degree $\hat{1}$, and their repetition confirms the pentatonic collection.

The above minor examples all reinforce the tonic region of the collection, and seem to regularly divide the lower fourth of the mode from the upper fourth in melodic construction. It is worth repeating again that this represents the plagal division of the pentatonic, routinely the case in minor-mode melodies. An second important minor-mode PDG that Wonder often uses in melodic construction emphasizes the upper fourth region, descending from scale degree $\flat\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ (passing through either $\hat{6}$ or $\flat\hat{6}$), and will sometimes continue to progress to $\flat\hat{3}$ (Example 2.11). Wonder will often approach the motion from $\hat{7}$ by first introducing $\hat{8}$.



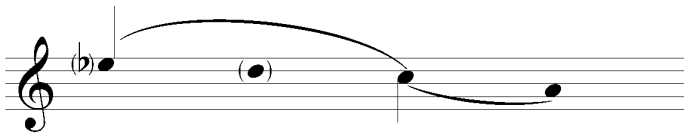
Example 2.11. Embellished minor-mode PDG

PDG variants

The PDGs as explicated represent basic diatonic frameworks on which more elaborated versions are based that Wonder makes use of in his style. Often chromatic inflections will either "stand in" for a member of the basic gesture or embellish it, adding a deeper level of expressivity and emotion to the music. The most common chromatic inflections borrow from the parallel modes. A song in a major key will often have PDGs

inflected or borrowed completely from the parallel minor mode (mode 5). The same is true for a song in a predominantly minor key—key pitches associated with the major mode are transferred to the minor. This *fluid interaction* between modes is practically seamless. These types of inflections have been conventionally described in the literature as "blue notes," and are expressive pitch manipulations that Wonder draws on, either improvised in the moment or compositionally planned, from established rhetorical gestures found in the gospel music and blues traditions. The following examples detail common pathways and chromatic inflections that transfer typical characteristics from one mode to the other. Again, the description and usage of these gestures are described here as compositionally planned and not ornamental improvisations.

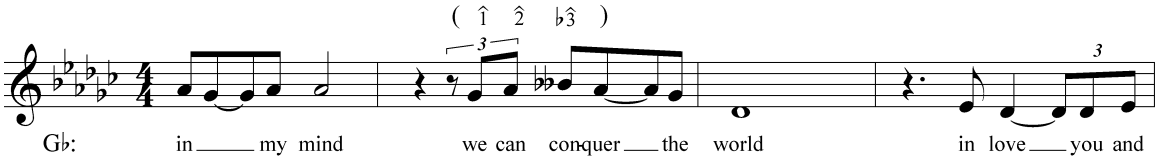
The pitch that is most often inflected in the primary recurring major pattern (and the major pentatonic in general to some extent) is scale degree $\hat{3}$, which is replaced by $\flat\hat{3}$, or at least an *approximation* of it, as the spectrum of this pitch is quite flexible in terms of its location to either scale degree $\sharp\hat{3}$ or $\hat{2}$ (Example 2.12).[17]



Example 2.12. Minor-inflected lower boundary PDG

[17] Some scholars have investigated this pitch proximity and variability by comparing frequencies (See for example, Titon, 1977). While this is a fascinating endeavor, and may offer some useful scientific data, in this study, I will discuss these relationships generally, and rely on data taken from my phenomenological experience—however flawed or deficient—of the music.

Wonder routinely "bends" the pitch down in performance so that it appears to function less as a scale degree proper, but it rather hugs scale degree $\hat{2}$ as an incomplete upper-neighbor embellishment. It also appears as a composed feature of his songs. The excerpt below from the first four measures of the chorus to "You and I (We Can Conquer the World)" demonstrates how Wonder takes this major pattern—here in the key of G♭ major—and inflects scale degree $\hat{3}$ so that it functions as an embellishment to $\hat{2}$, in this case as an upper neighbor (Example 2.13).



Example 2.13. "You and I (We Can Conquer the World)," chorus, mm. 1-4[18]

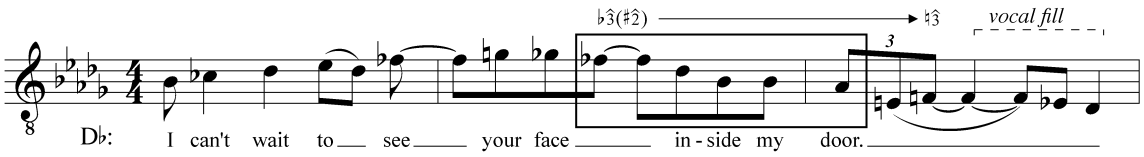
Since the basic framework of the PDG is derived from the major, this lowered $\hat{3}$ essentially stands in for the conceptual ♮$\hat{3}$ that it replaces. As with the diatonic version, the pitch ordering is variable, it appears in both ascending and descending forms, and scale degree $\hat{2}$ may not necessarily be present. In addition to the descent from or ascent to $\hat{3}$, it is the characteristic motion from "do" to "la" that is the move that identifies this gesture as a derivative of the major PDG.

Within the region of the variable $\hat{3}$, Wonder's placement of the lowered $\hat{3}$ is sometimes closer to ♮$\hat{3}$ than the inflection described above. Because of the proximity to ♮$\hat{3}$, Wonder favors sliding up and toggling between the slightly lowered version, and the

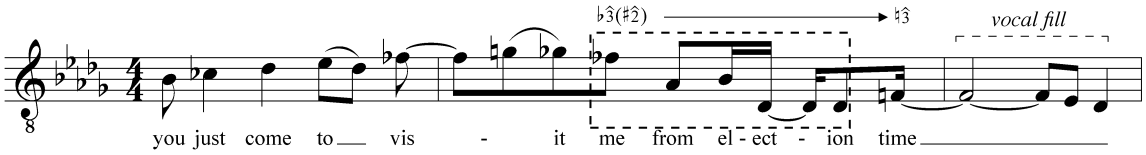
[18] From Stevie Wonder, *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

issue becomes whether or not to fundamentally call this a motion from ♯$\hat{2}$ to ♮$\hat{3}$. Both ascending and descending embellished versions of this pattern make up the last melodic gesture of the folksy-blues political rant, "Big Brother" in Example 2.14a & b.

a. Verse 1



b. Verse 2



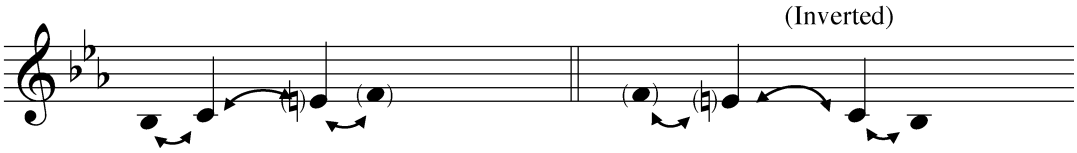
Example 2.14. "Big Brother," minor-mode inflection, mm. 18-20: a, verse 1; b, verse 2[19]

As part of this temporary parallel minor shift, Wonder modifies the lower PDG of D♭ major, replacing $\hat{3}$ with the with the ♭$\hat{3}$. Beginning on scale degree $\hat{6}$, the melody bridges the gap up to $\hat{1}$ with ♭$\hat{7}$, and then ascends to ♭$\hat{3}$ by passing through $\hat{2}$. An embellished upper neighbor motion around ♭$\hat{3}$ forms the top of the contour. In the first cycle of the verse (Example 2.14a), the descending major PDG, with the lowered ♭$\hat{3}$, is noticeable in a reduced form in the second half of the second measure. Instead of circling back to $\hat{1}$ from $\hat{6}$ on the downbeat of the following measure, this gesture continues to descend to the lower octave where it settles on the ♮$\hat{3}$. Although in a different register, it is clear that the larger voice-leading motion connects the ♭$\hat{3}$ (or the ♯$\hat{2}$) to the ♮$\hat{3}$, which is how this particular version of the gesture functions when the ♭$\hat{3}$ assumes the role of a

[19] From Stevie Wonder, *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

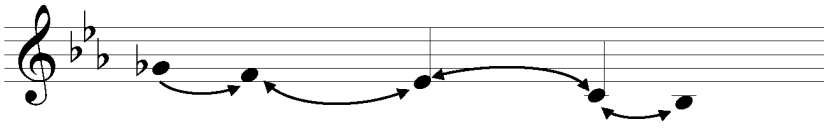
lower embellishment to ♮$\hat{3}$. For comparison, the same section of verse two confirms this relationship, albeit with a broken-up form of the PDG (Example 2.14b).

The minor-mode version, with the defining motion of a minor third above and flat seventh below $\hat{1}$, has a number of possible inflections. Similar to the major-mode pattern described in Example 2.12, one minor-mode variant PDG simply inflects the parallel mode by raising ♭$\hat{3}$ up to ♮$\hat{3}$, or just slightly below it in pitch. When the ♮$\hat{3}$ replaces the ♭$\hat{3}$ in this pattern, scale degree $\hat{4}$ is less likely to appear as the upper boundary note (Example 2.15).



Example 2.15. Major-inflected lower-boundary minor PDG

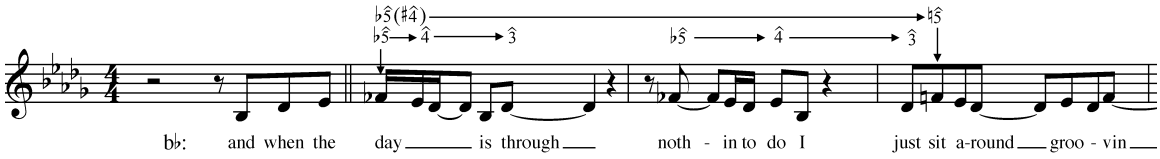
The upper boundary tone of the minor PDG, or scale degree $\hat{4}$, is also the beneficiary of embellishment with a lowered $\hat{5}$. This idiomatic expression of the minor PDG appears only in combination with ♭$\hat{3}$, and does not have an equivalent version that inflects the ♮$\hat{3}$ borrowed from the major mode (Example 2.16). However, this pattern can be triggered in a major key when Wonder introduces the minor third inflection. This version can be seen in Example 2.14a & b, the excerpt from "Big Brother."



Example 2.16. Minor PDG variant

The top of the contour in m. 19 pivots around $\flat\hat{3}$, creating the elaborated upper neighbor pattern, $\flat\hat{3} - \flat\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \flat\hat{3}$.

A clear example of this gesture appears in the gritty soul-song, "Love Having You Around," the opening number from the self-proclaimed "coming of age" album, *Music of My Mind.* The verse is brimming with sexual metaphors leading Wonder to exclaim exuberantly the title words in the chorus-refrain. In the verse, he first frames the B♭ minor pentatonic by loosely referencing the lower-boundary minor PDG, but later in the chorus, shown in Example 2.17, he sings a complete presentation of this gesture with elaborations.



Example 2.17. "Love Having You Around," chorus, mm. 1-3[20]

The melodic line ascends through the minor pentatonic to $\flat\hat{5}$ in the first of two PDG repetitions in m. 1 of the chorus. In both repetitions, the $\flat\hat{5}$ is an upper neighbor and resolves quickly to $\hat{4}$, the actual upper boundary of this PDG. The $\flat\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \flat\hat{3}$ pattern that appears in m.1 is a brief melisma that lengthens the word "day," and is most likely an improvised ornament. In mm. 2-3, Wonder expands this pattern, rhythmically emphasizing the essential tones $\hat{4} - \flat\hat{3}$ by placing them squarely on downbeats. $\natural\hat{5}$ replaces $\flat\hat{5}$ in m. 3 on the "and" of one, but still retains its function as an elaboration to $\hat{4}$.

[20] From Stevie Wonder, *Music of My Mind* (Tamla, 1972).

At the same time, the prolongation of ♭$\hat{5}$ over the first two measures creates another level of voice-leading that acts as an elaboration of ♮$\hat{5}$ on a larger scale. Curiously, this motion at once has an immediate and typical descending resolution from ♭$\hat{5}$ of $\hat{4}$ (as part of the PDG), and a more broad ascending resolution to ♮$\hat{5}$ in the third measure of the chorus, suggesting that this pitch, on another level of voice-leading, also operates as a ♯$\hat{4}$ in much the same way as the ♭$\hat{3}$/♯$\hat{2}$ can be heard resolving up to ♮$\hat{3}$, expressed in Example 2.14a & b.

Part 3: Larger Pentatonic Processes

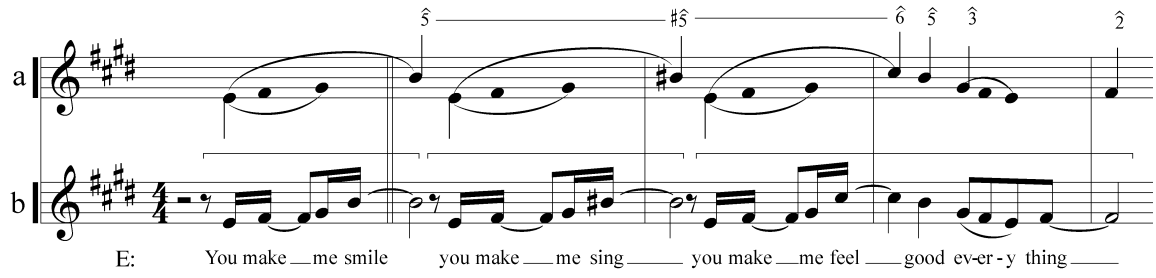
Type 1 melodies: surface-level pentatonicism

As I have illustrated in Part 1, PDGs are important subsets that Wonder uses in melodic construction. They reveal a fundamental pentatonic process at play, especially when pitches outside the collection are present. However, their identification is not always needed to determine the pentatonic framework by which Wonder organizes his melodic material. When this is the case, it usually means that the melodic construction on the surface of the song is unequivocally either major or minor pentatonic, notwithstanding occasional interpolated chromatic pitches. These melodies belong to a large category I have labeled as "Type 1 Pentatonic Melodies."

Major pentatonic melodies

In Wonder's ballad, "Too Shy to Say," the E major pentatonic scale is presented essentially unaltered in ascending form in the verse. The melody in Example 2.18, consisting of three units organized in a sentence structure of 1+1+2, traverses the entire

pentatonic collection beginning with scale degree $\hat{1}$, and ascends by step with each repetition to scale degree $\hat{6}$, passing through $\sharp\hat{5}$ along the way.



Example 2.18. "Too Shy To Say," Type 1 pentatonic, verse, mm. 1-4[21]

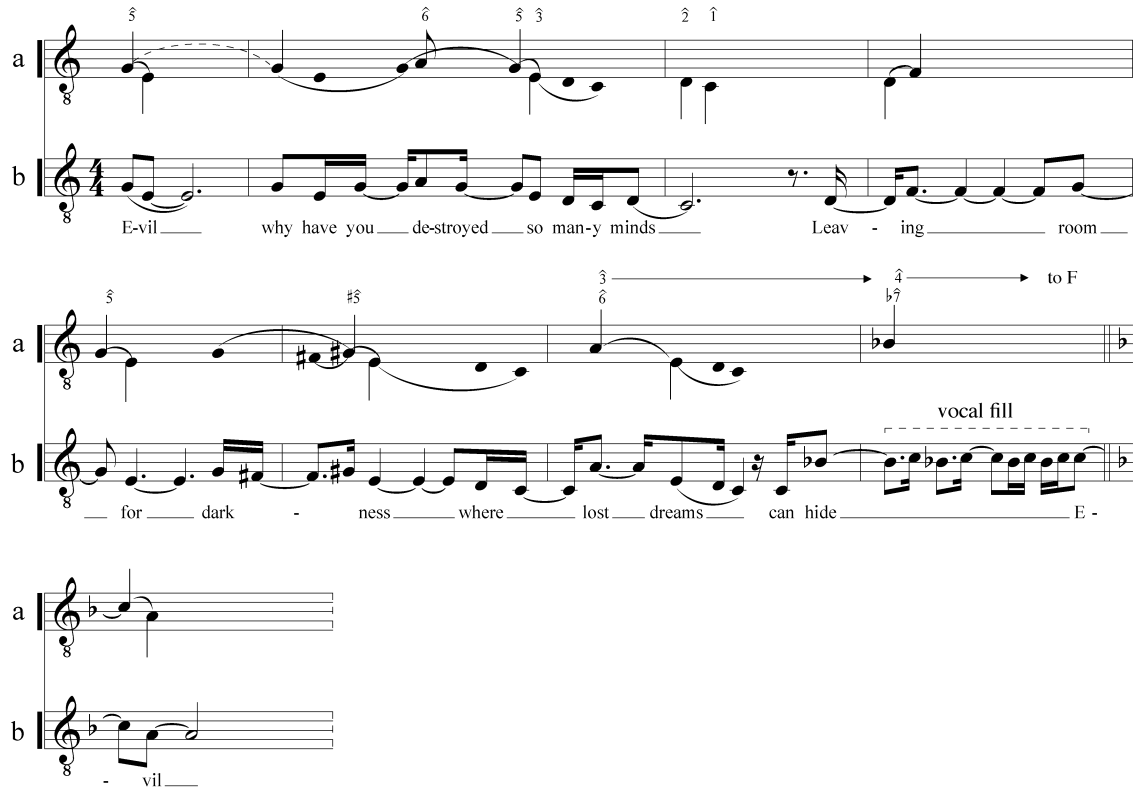
Level a of Example 2.18 shows a reduction of the main voice-leading events of this segment. The stemmed notes in the voice-leading staff indicate melodic arrival points, which consequently outline the tones of the E-major pentatonic scale. With each subsequent repetition of the one-measure melodic unit, the top of the contour reaches above the previous repetition, gaining momentum until it finally climaxes on $\hat{6}$ before shifting directions at this upper boundary tone. The voice-leading of the entire line creates an elaborated $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$ complete neighbor pattern, which connects to a descending, incomplete $\hat{3} - \hat{2}$ lower boundary major pattern that will eventually move to $\hat{1}$ in order to repeat the melodic phrase.

A virtually uninterrupted scalar presentation of the major pentatonic as displayed in Example 2.18 is a rarity in Wonder's repertoire.[22] Normally the presentation of the

[21] From Stevie Wonder, *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).

[22] One other exception is "I Love Every Little Thing About You," from *Music of My Mind*. In this song, the primary melodic figure outlines in ascending scalar form the major pentatonic starting on scale degree $\hat{5}$

pentatonic collection involves melodic groupings or repeated alternations around the primary pentatonic pitches, namely, the members of the tonic triad. In Example 2.19, a segment of the twelve-measure stanza of "Evil" illustrates how the pentatonic collection often unfolds in Wonder's melodies, as part of repeated units that alternate two or three notes in short spans.



Example 2.19. "Evil," Type 1 pentatonic, mm. 1-9[23]

As in the previous example, provided on the top staff (level a) is a reduction of the voice-leading which gives clarity to the basic movement of the melody. The melody—in C major—revolves mainly around the tonic third and fifth regions, producing

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and arrives on scale degree $\hat{3}$ in the octave above. Chapter IV will be devoted to an extensive discussion of this song.

[23] From Stevie Wonder, *Music of My Mind* (Tamla, 1972).

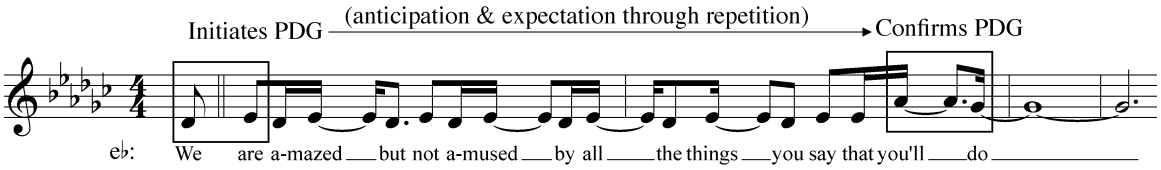
two voice-leading strands (indicated by the stem directions in the top staff of the example). The upper strand articulates the pentatonic upper boundary PDG in mm. 5-6 with the neighbor motion $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$, while the lower strand descends, spanning the lower major third, $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ in mm. 6-7. Both patterns together complete the pentatonic collection by outlining the two common major PDGs that Wonder favors. The first PDG is linked together with the second via a passing motion through scale degree $\hat{4}$.

The next segment in mm. 9-12 begins with the same descending embellishing leap between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{3}$ as before, but the upper line continues to ascend from scale degree $\hat{5}$, passing through an embellished $\sharp\hat{5}$ towards $\hat{6}$ while the lower line remains fixed on the descending $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ pattern, much like the contour in "Too Shy to Say" of Example 2.18 above. However, this line continues to ascend, pressing past the boundary note $\hat{6}$ and introduces $\flat\hat{7}$ into the collection. The $\flat\hat{7}$ appears to function as a passing tone to $\hat{1}$ in m. 13, and functions similar to the way in which $\sharp\hat{5}$ connected $\hat{5} - \hat{6}$. The overall voice-leading shown in level a reveals that from mm. 9-12 the trajectory of the melody ascends stepwise from $\hat{5}$ up to $\hat{1}$. At the same time, this motion is transitional as it sets up the modulation to F major in m. 13 when the melodic ascent—beginning with $\hat{6}$ in m. 11—is reinterpreted as a $\hat{3} - \hat{4} - \hat{5}$ relationship in the new key.

Minor pentatonic melodies

Clear-cut presentations of the minor mode as the primary mode are relatively few compared to major-mode pentatonicism in Wonder's music. When a song begins in a minor key, Wonder often exploits the modal ambiguity between the relative diatonic modes and often drifts back into major. Minor pentatonicism is most evident in Wonder's

funk and soul songs. In the hip E♭-minor rant on Nixon, "You Haven't Done Nothin'," the minor PDG and its repetition with variations comprises the basic melodic building block of the verse (Example 2.20).



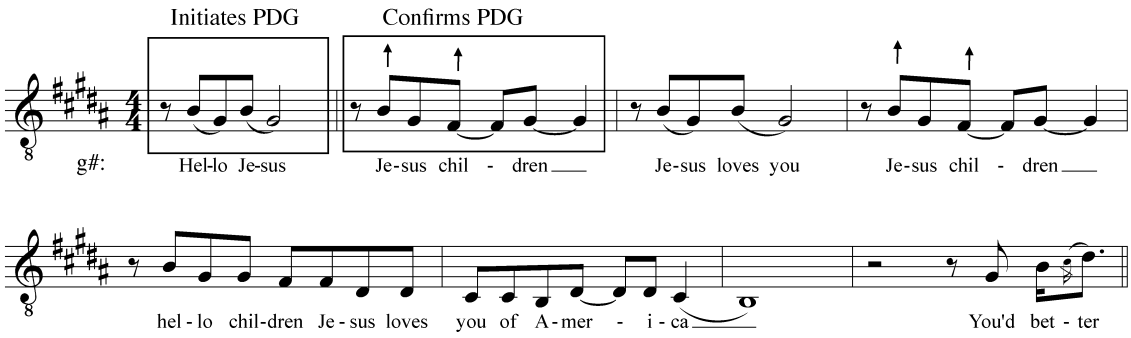
Example 2.20. "You Haven't Done Nothin'," Type 1 minor pentatonic, verse, mm. 1-4[24]

Also true of his funk melodies, the range is much more confined, and the focus is on repeated, rhythmically energized patterns. Here the lower minor-mode PDG, detailed in Example 2.9, spans the four-bar unit of the verse. The repetitive oscillations between ♭$\hat{7}$ and $\hat{1}$ (seven repetitions encompassing two measures to be exact) initiate the pattern in m. 1 and generate momentum toward the end of the melodic unit in m. 3. Propelled by the repetitive motion of the first two measures, the tension is neutralized with the leap to $\hat{4}$—the upper part of the PDG—followed by the characteristic step down to ♭$\hat{3}$. The leap from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{4}$ also articulates the boundary of this gesture and confirms the minor pentatonic. Oscillations between ♭$\hat{7}$ and $\hat{1}$, juxtaposed with oscillations between ♭$\hat{3}$ and $\hat{4}$ are unmistakable features fundamental to Wonder's funk style.

In "Jesus, Children of America," Wonder begins the verse melody by alternating incomplete and complete forms of the minor PDG in each of the first four measures of Example 2.21. The odd measures (mm. 1, 3) present the minor third framework of the

[24] From Stevie Wonder, *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).

gesture, and approach scale degree $\hat{1}$ from above. The confirmation of this gesture occurs in the even measures when the lower part of the PDG is articulated with the lower neighbor figure $\hat{1} - \flat\hat{7} - \hat{1}$.



Example 2.21. "Jesus Children of America, " Type 1 minor pentatonic, verse, mm. 1-8[25]

After two alternations of this incomplete –to – complete PDG (mm. 1-4), Wonder expands this descending motive and traverses the whole G♯-minor pentatonic collection. The inherent magnetism of this PDG toward the tonic note G♯ is trumped by the inertia or direction of the line.[26] In m. 5, the melody breaks free of the magnetic pull of the $\hat{1} - \flat\hat{7} - \hat{1}$ neighbor pattern in mm. 1-4 and continues pressing through the pentatonic pathway to the lower octave $\flat\hat{3}$ on the downbeat of m. 7.

[25] From Stevie Wonder, *Innvervisions* (Tamla, 1973).

[26] In course of this study, I sometimes refer to terminology described in Steve Larson, "Musical Forces, Melodic Expectation, and Jazz Melody," *Music Perception,* (Vol. 19, no. 3, Spring 2002), 351-385. In this article, Larson uses "gravity," "intertia," and "magnetism"—terms linked with physical motion—as metaphorical concepts that embody our understanding musical motion. These terms are the foundation of Larson's theory of musical forces (352). "Magnetism" describes the attraction of an unstable pitch to move to the nearest stable pitch in proximity. "Intertia" describes the tendency by which a pattern continues on in the same way. His work on musical forces has culminated in the extensive posthumous recent publication, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

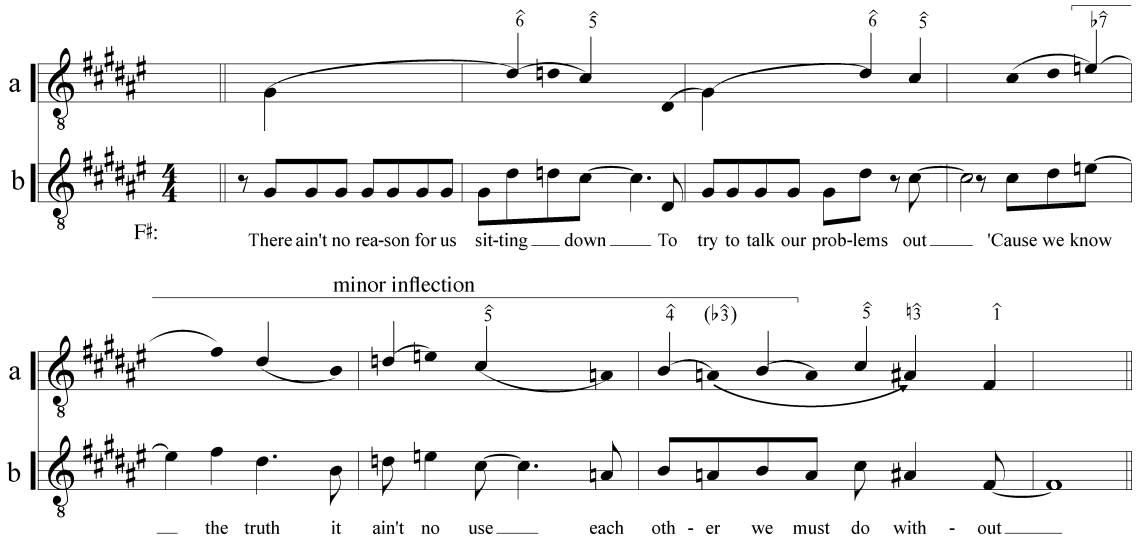
As explicated in Chapter I, the arrows above certain notes indicate that the pitches of which the PDG is dependent on for its meaning have been performed slightly high. It is no coincidence that Wonder would alter the gesture by nudging ♭$\hat{3}$ closer to ♮$\hat{3}$, hinting at the major mode while singing the name "Jesus."

Fluid interaction between major and minor

The melodic segments examined thus far have generally remained diatonic to the mode in which they originate—interspersed with occasional surface-level chromatic pitches. However, many of Wonder's melodies exhibit properties of both pentatonic *parallel* modes, and weave in and out of major and minor seamlessly, as was shown above with the common pitch variants of the PDGs. This mixing usually takes place as either a brief modal shift with one or more key notes borrowed from the parallel mode (♭$\hat{3}$ and ♭$\hat{7}$ in major, or ♮$\hat{3}$ in minor), or the melodic idea(s) will contain properties of both modes. The question becomes one of labeling. How do we account for this *fluid interaction* between modes*?*

In the first case, notes are borrowed from and temporarily inflect the parallel mode within a short span. The first four measures of the verse to "It Ain't No Use" in Example 2.22 begin in F♯ major on scale degree $\hat{2}$, and clearly outline the upper boundary of the major collection by leaping up to $\hat{6}$, followed by a step down to $\hat{5}$ that is filled in with the chromatic passing note ♭$\hat{6}$.[27]

[27] The first four measures also appear to outline pentatonic mode 2 [G♯, A♯, C♯, D♯, F♯], oscillating between the first and fifth tones of the collection.

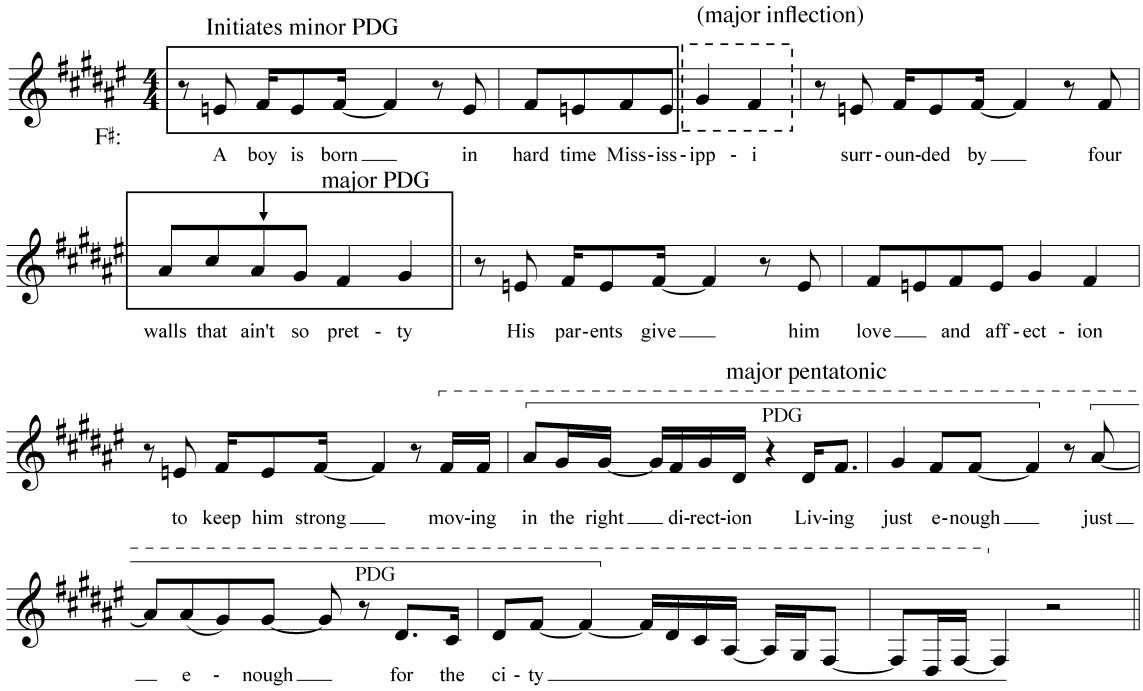


Example 2.22. "It Ain't No Use," modal shift at the phrase level, verse, mm. 1-8[28]

Again, level a is given to show the clear projection of the main voice-leading events. The four measures leading up to the end of the verse mix in the parallel minor mode of F♯ beginning with a descending sequence that moves chromatically. This motion fills in the minor pentatonic "gap" from ♭$\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ in mm. 5-6. Wonder further emphasizes the minor mode in m. 7, as the melody embellishes $\hat{4}$ with ♭$\hat{3}$ as a lower neighbor oscillation. But he immediately reasserts the major $\hat{3}$ in the same measure with a descending F♯ major triad to conclude the phrase.

In some instances, individual melodic units are infused with traces of both parallel modes so closely that it becomes a challenge to determine which mode is more fundamental. In Wonder's social commentary piece, "Living For the City," the main melodic material in the verse consists of pitches drawn from both collections (Example 2.23).

[28] From Stevie Wonder, *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).



Example 2.23. "Living For The City," verse, mm. 1-12[29]

The first idea presented appears to initiate the minor-mode PDG by oscillating between ♭$\hat{7}$ and $\hat{1}$ in m. 1 much like the minor melody of "You Haven't Done Nothin'" (Example 2.20). In m. 2, however, the repeat of the gesture approaches $\hat{1}$ from above with scale degree $\hat{2}$, a pitch outside of the mode, briefly suggesting F♯-major pentatonic. The arrival of an embellished version of the major PDG in m. 4 confirms the occurrence of interplay between modes. This interplay also occupies the middle four measures of the verse, but by the concluding four measures, F♯-major pentatonic comes clearly into focus.

It is plausible that this entire passage could also be described as a subset of the Mixolydian mode, since scale degree ♭$\hat{3}$ is not present at all (with the exception of the slight improvised inflection indicated in m. 4 with the downward arrow) in the partial

[29] From Stevie Wonder, *Innversions* (Tamla, 1973).

minor PDG (1̂–♭7̂ –1̂), and the total melodic aggregate consists of pitches of the larger mode. However, the F♯ major pentatonic appears to be the arrival point of the refrain, "Living for the City," with the occurrence of idiomatic leaps from 6̂ – 1̂ which replace the ♭7̂ –1̂ minor patterns. The 6̂ – 1̂ firmly establish the major mode since they belong to larger PDGs spans that make up the segment from mm. 8-12. Wonder's extended melisma at the end of the refrain on "city" encompasses the full pentatonic gamut, descending stepwise from F♯4 to F♯3 (mm. 11-12).

Perhaps the dichotomous relationship portrayed so far between these two collections is more apparent than real in practice. The dualistic qualities present in the above melodic structure do not appear to stand out or affect our aural experience as something Frankenstein-*ishly* striking. In fact, if anything, it *sounds* idiomatic to the funk and soul styles to which this song belongs. An attempt to identify the theoretical construct behind these hybrid gestures gets murky, however. The basic pentatonic collection is not affected in the larger context of the key—in this case, every pitch with the exception of the E♮ resides within F♯ major pentatonic. The occurrence of E♮ could be explained as a pitch—borrowed from the idiomatic minor PDG—that "fills in" for the diatonic-pentatonic pitch, which would be D♯ (scale degree 6̂), conforming to the larger key context.

The *fluid interaction* between these two pentatonic modes – in some cases the constant alternation with the variable "blue" pitches— calls into question the usefulness of having a major-minor dichotomy in the first place.[30] If in a predominantly major key,

[30] Scholars have questioned the usefulness of the idea of "blue notes" altogether, considering them the product of "wrong thinking" on the part of the analyst who, in trying to understand the largely improvised practice of performing notes that don't fit easily into the major-minor tonal paradigm, explain them as anomalies. See especially Hans Weisethaunet, "Is There Such a Thing as the 'Blue Note'?," *Popular Music*

it is almost expected that the minor mode will receive some attention and vice versa. Perhaps it is more favorable, and reflective of actual practice, to conceive of this modal duality as a composite collection of interchangeable parts; the collection is still a pentatonic-based gamut that allows for the type of flexibility necessary to explain the significant pitch relationships in Wonder's music and in African-American music in general. As before, we can speak of PDGs as originating from a fundamental major or minor collection, but the variable elements create temporary modal shifts (Figure 2.2).

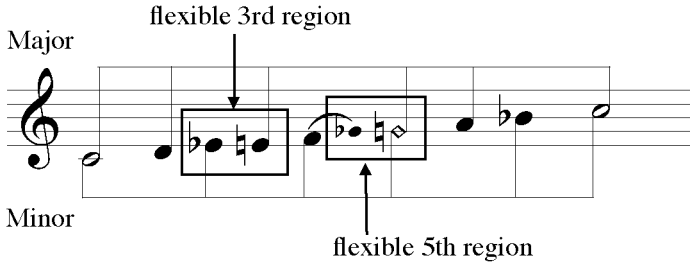


Figure 2.2. Composite pentatonic collection

The critique of course is that we are no longer dealing with an exclusively five-note collection, but rather a heptatonic collection with flexible elements as an *a priori* form from which pitch relations are drawn. I would argue that, while the abstract collection is not necessarily pentatonic, the networks through it are most certainly pentatonic.

(Vol. 20, no. 1, Jan. 2001), 99-116. Weisethaunet argues that "blue notes" are not fixed objects—flat third and seventh elements specifically—but are manifestations of "blues expression," an attitude that can possibly affect any of the chromatic notes (101). I agree to some extent that "blue notes" are constructs of analysts, but not in a pejorative way. When an artist like Wonder consistently alternates between the regions I have identified above, both in his compositional and improvisational style, then they seem to be concrete entities with which the analyst must grapple.

Other authors have identified similar types of collections present in African-American styles of music, but do not acknowledge that a more fundamental pentatonic process governs the motion through the collection. Rather, they have discussed them as separate and distinct collections or all-inclusive collections.[31] I think it is useful to think of them as separate collections each with their own idiomatic patterns, despite the regular overlap that occurs in practice. The reason for this is primarily context driven, meaning that the fluid interaction between parallel modes is an essential feature that provides contrast. Shading the major with minor and vice versa often represents expressive moments in the compositional process, and, as Chapter IV will show, in Wonder's improvisation over the compositional framework.

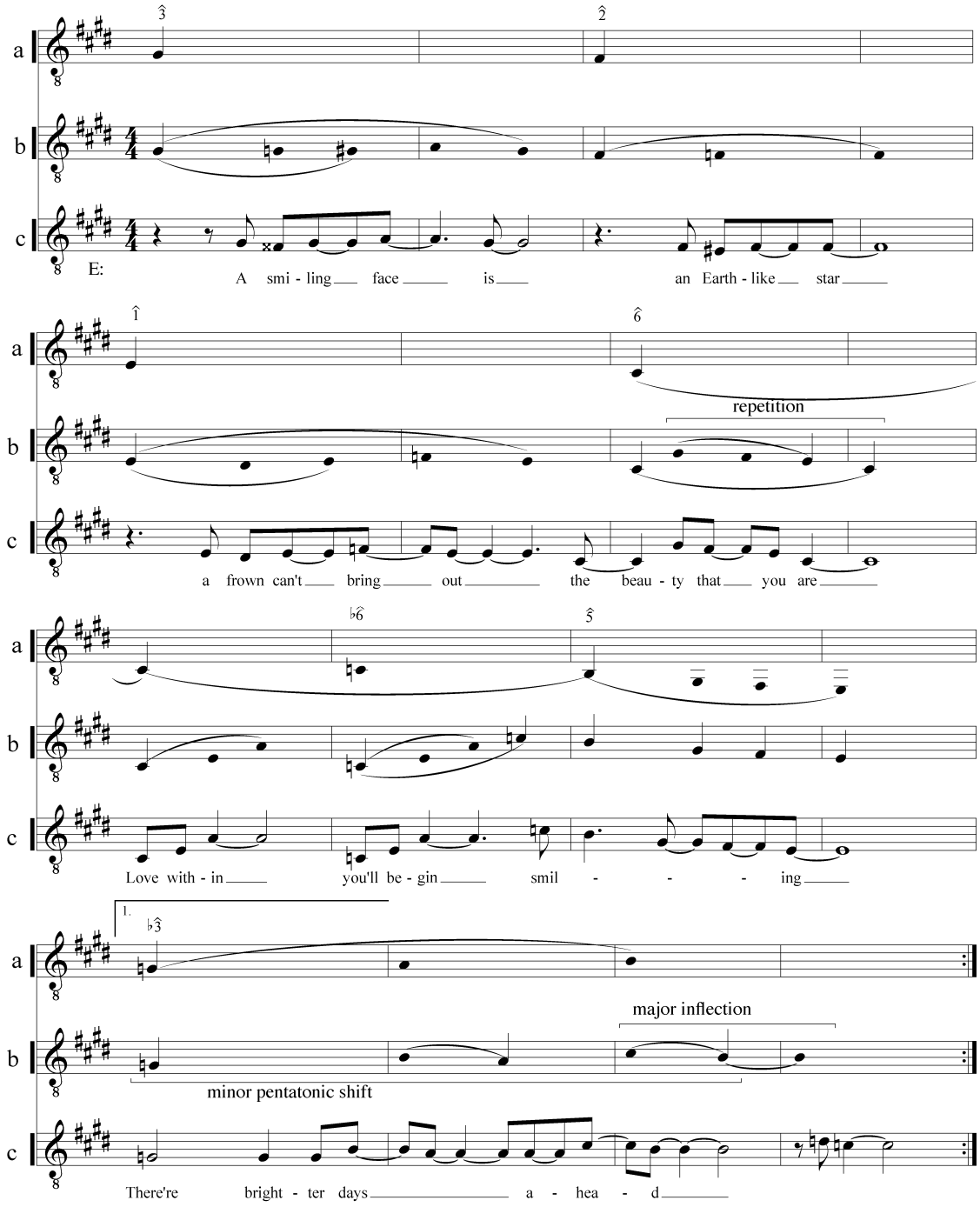
Type 2 melodies: embedded pentatonicism

The several examples in the previous section, categorized as Type 1 Pentatonic Melodies, have illustrated the self-evident surface-level pentatonic processes in Wonder's approach to melody, with limited inclusion of foreign pitches. The next category, Type 2 Pentatonic Melodies, identifies more elaborate melodic events that appear over an underlying pentatonic framework. Even when surface-level events do not necessarily

[31] Again, see Winthrop Sargent (1959), Jeff Titon (1977), and David Temperley, "Scalar Shift in Popular Music." *Music Theory Online,* (Vol.17, no. 4, Dec. 2011), n. pag. Web. Accessed 13 June 2012. The first two of these authors assembles a chromatic gamut to express pitch relations as found in jazz and blues—two distantly related styles to emerge from a common African-American aesthetic. Titon's explanation of deviations in pitch collection is far more exhaustive than is Sargent's. Titon details almost every possible network through an established gamut in the blues, while Sargent's earlier examination of jazz styles identifies only more common patterns—similar in respect to this current study; In order to explain deviances from the primary collection in use in pop/rock music, Temperley invokes an even larger structure called the "Supermode" [online Section 2.1-2.2], an abstract arrangement of scale degrees in perfect fifths moving along a continuum from the flat side to the sharp side. He uses the term "scalar shift" to designate when one end or the other of this spectrum is emphasized at different points and in varying degree within a piece [see online section 3]. But when both forms of a scale degree appear in close proximity to one another, he refers to this as representing a "mixed collection," [online Section 5.1] where I refer to this mixing as *fluid interaction*.

project pentatonicism, this collection fulfills a structural role at the deeper middleground level of a song. When clear pentatonic relationships are absent from the surface of the melody, in many cases it is still possible to locate embedded pentatonic relationships. In several instances, when it is not readily apparent on the surface of the music, pentatonic structures still continue to guide and inform the underlying structure of Wonder's melodies.

"Smile, Please," the first track on Wonder's Grammy-award winning album *Fulfillingness' First Finale,* presents a clear example of embedded pentatonicism (Example 2.24). Using reductive analysis to reveal the main voice-leading structures, the same type of pentatonic patterning is evident, just at a deeper level of structure. Level b shows that the smooth, pop melody of the verse begins by embellishing scale degree $\hat{3}$ with double chromatic neighbor motions in mm. 1-2. This basic idea alternates in the next two measures with a lower chromatic-neighbor pattern that embellishes scale degree $\hat{2}$ and then is sequenced twice down by step every two bars, moving through scale degree $\hat{2}$ to $\hat{1}$ from mm. 3-6. Following this sequential passage, the melody descends to scale degree $\hat{6}$ in m. 7, and compresses into this measure the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ path the melody has just traversed. It effectively reaffirms (sans embellishment) through the PDG, the major pentatonic collection that has been prolonged through the first eight measures. The next four measures complete the pentatonic cycle.



Example 2.24 “Smile Please,” verse, mm. 1-16

After arriving on scale degree $\hat{6}$ in m. 8, the melody continues its stepwise descent through the pentatonic, passing through the lowered $\flat\hat{6}$ in m. 10, to scale degree $\hat{5}$ in m.

11. This is a chromatic move that has been shown in ascending form in earlier examples in the major mode.[32] The fundamental path of the melody is made clear in reductive level a, where the octave leap is removed, along with other embellishments.

The final four measures of the first sixteen-bar phrase feature a brief modal shift to the parallel minor pentatonic collection. As the melody moves towards the half cadence in m.16, the lowered third, G♮, is introduced as an important shift melodically in m. 13. The melody continues by ascending stepwise to scale degree $\hat{5}$, although scale degrees $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{5}$ are embellished with appoggiaturas. The last appoggiatura embellishes scale degree $\hat{5}$ with $\hat{6}$ which effectively re-establishes the major collection at the cadence, and sets up the next parallel phrase of the verse. Level "a" also shows that the overall gesture of the verse traverses the entire E-major pentatonic collection, initiated by the embedded major PDG—the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1} - \hat{6}$ pattern—that spans the first eight measures. This extended pattern is followed by a brief minor-mode shading with the insertion of scale degree $\flat\hat{3}$. Scale degree $\hat{3}$ replaces $\flat\hat{3}$ when the verse repeats.

Case study: pentatonicism and narrative in "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)"

Many of the ideas posited in this chapter regarding the projection of pentatonicism in Wonder's melodies are manifest in the autobiographical two-part pop-song suite, "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)," the second track on his first self-produced album, *Music of My Mind.* An in-depth study of the song's melody will solidify the assertions about Wonder's usage of the pentatonic collection—in all of

[32] See Examples 2.18 – 2.19 for instances of chromatic ascending passages, and Example 2.22 for chromatic descending passages.

its iterations—as the backbone of his melodic language. Furthermore, I will explore the interplay between the major and minor modes and the significance this interplay has in the narrative implications of the song.

The overarching narrative, in conjunction with the bipartite structure of the song, is also in two parts. Part One (Superwoman) focuses on a misguided "Mary," who, according to the lover-protagonist telling the story, is mistakenly putting their relationship at risk by pursuing a potential, but unlikely, career as a movie star. The protagonist challenges this naïve idea, conveying his doubts that this is a passing phase with no real substance. At the same time, however, he is resolute in his hope that they will work it out, confidently stating that "[he] thinks [he] can deal with everything going through her head." By the end of Part One, "Mary" apparently holds firm to her dream, effectively obliterating his resolve; with his hope for reconciliation dashed, the protagonist waves the white flag in defeat, exclaiming, "I just had to say goodbye."

While Part One seems to project a progressive narrative that occurs over time, Part Two represents a place even further down the road after the dissolution of their relationship, as the protagonist sorrowfully reflects back on his lover's absence that ultimately led to the current situation. Ironically, it is "Mary" who now wants back in, proclaiming that she has changed and that "tomorrow will reflect loves past." The protagonist laments that, while he may still need her, and despite the fact that she may finally be coming around, he cannot commit his feelings again as he wonders if it will be "summer's love that will let [him] down."

The drama that unfolds in this suite depicts Wonder's account of the failed marriage between him and Syreeta Wright, a former Motown secretary-turned back-up

singer-turned soloist, who had first collaborated with Wonder on the album *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* and subsequently had become a valuable writing partner for him.[33] In the summer of 1971, when Motown was in the process of moving all operations in Detroit to Los Angeles, 21-year-old Wonder headed east to New York City. He had hoped Syreeta would later join him there to work out their marital issues, which were escalating. Instead, she decided to pursue an acting career through the auspices of Motown's recent forays in Hollywood. With their marriage already on unstable ground, Wonder felt betrayed and abandoned, and wrote the "Superwoman" suite as a coded ultimatum to Syreeta. Much to Wonder's dismay, the marriage dissolved sometime in 1972 or 1973.

The phrase organization of both the repeated eight-measure verse and chorus in Part One (hereafter called "Superwoman") reveals a consistent hierarchical melodic structure that Wonder favors: a single phrase divided into two parts, typically four measures in length, with the first comprising two melodic units of two measures each. These smaller melodic units, often similar in content, present the basic idea of the section and each corresponds to one line of text. The adjoining second part contains a single contrasting melodic unit, usually twice the length of the preceding units of the first section. This relationship results in a sentential structure as the basis for melodic organization. The phrase structure of the chorus, also eight measures in length, follows the same schema. For labeling purposes, I have adopted the terms *presentation phrase* and *continuation phrase* put forth by William Caplin to describe the function and content of these two complementary parts of the sentence structure which combine to create a

[33] *Signed, Sealed, Delivered and Delivered* (Tamla, 1970).

complete phrase.[34] The *presentation phrase,* with its two melodic units, can be further broken down into the presentation of the *basic idea* followed by its *repetition*. In most cases, this format (or some variation of it) is the template by which Wonder organizes his melodic material.

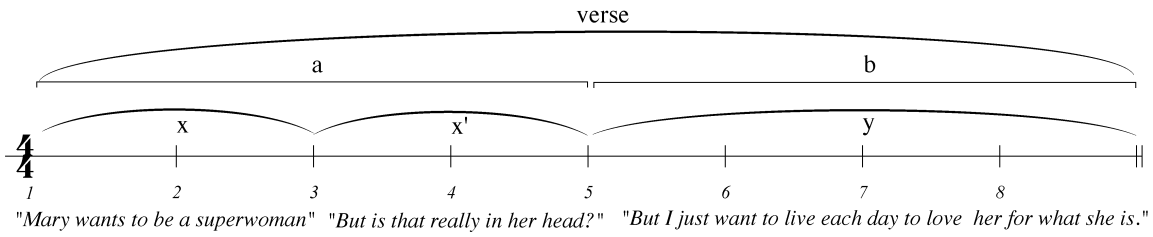
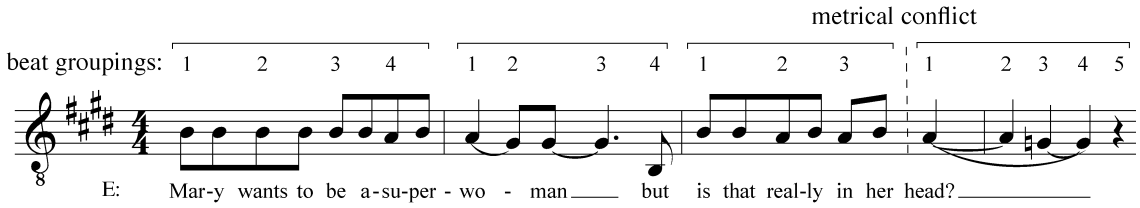


Figure 2.3 Phrase structure, verse, mm. 1-8, "Superwoman"

In both the verse and chorus, Wonder uses memorable, short, and simple melodic ideas in the presentation phrase to contrast with the longer span of the continuation phrase, which deliberately generates momentum toward the end of the section by intensifying the rhythmic and melodic content. This configuration effectively corresponds to the emotional sentiment expressed in the lyrics. The two units that comprise the presentation (mm. 1-4) hover around the pitch B, scale degree $\hat{5}$ in the key of E major, and descend stepwise to $\hat{3}$, filling out the upper tonic third. The lyrics that accompany the first statement of this conservative motive that outlines the upper third of the tonic triad are fairly neutral, and simply state the supposed intentions of "Mary." She *wants* to be a superwoman. Shown in Example 2.25, the repetition of this motive however, makes a

[34] William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (London: University of Oxford Press, 2000), 9-11. Note that Caplin bases his ideas on the earlier ideas posited by Erwin Ratz and Arnold Schoenberg.

calculated shift to the parallel minor (mm. 3-4), reflecting the negative tone of the question raised by the protagonist.



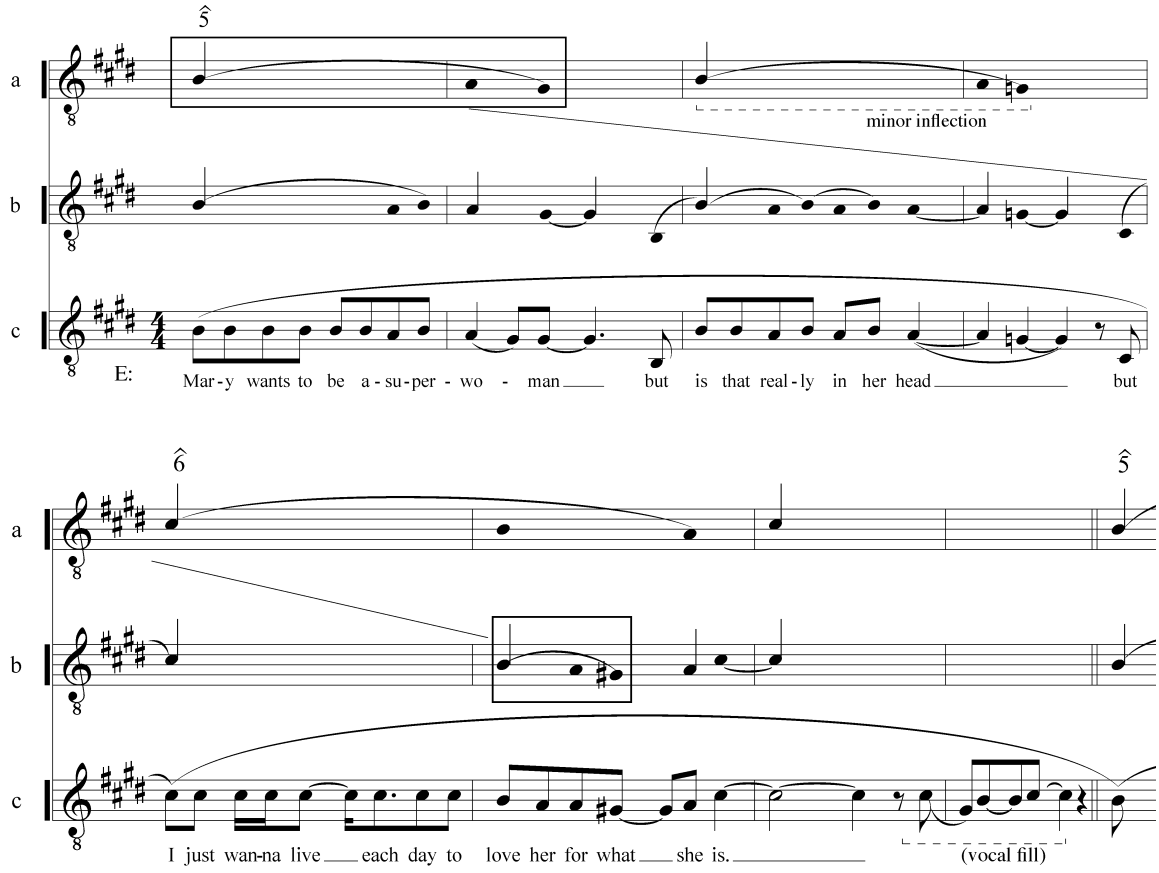
Example 2.25 "Superwoman," presentation phrase, verse, mm. 1-4

In addition to the minor-mode inflection, the above example also shows that Wonder places metrical emphasis on this second statement of the motivic unit. In the first statement of the motive, he sets up an expectation by introducing the passing $\hat{4}$ on the downbeat of the second measure of the pattern, but in the repetition, he brings it in early on beat four of the first measure of the unit. In fact, the whole motive is truncated by one beat in order to accomplish this shift, resulting in a rhythmic displacement that cuts across the grain of the meter and creates beat groupings of 3 + 5. The convergence of the minor inflection with increased rhythmic emphasis adds significant weight to the protagonist's reaction to the initial neutral statement, "Mary wants to be a superwoman." With each verse, Wonder is consistent with his placement of negative reactions in this repeated motivic unit relative to the opening text (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. “Superwoman,” text analysis, verse, mm. 1-4

	Basic Melodic Unit (mm. 1-2)	Repetition of Melodic Unit (mm. 3-4)
Verse 1	“Mary wants to be a superwoman”	“But is that really in her head?”
Verse 2	“Mary wants to be another movie star”	“But is that really in her mind?”
Verse 3	“Mary wants to be a superwoman”	“And try to boss the bull around”
Verse 4	“My woman wants to be a superwoman”	“And I just had to say goodbye”

The continuation phrase in mm. 5-8 continues to build on the emotional intensity of the second motivic unit of the presentation phrase. Beginning on scale degree $\hat{6}$ much like the preceding motives, this motive spans a descending third from C♯ to A. In Example 2.26, each layer of reduction shows the way in which these pitches are related.



Example 2.26 “Superwoman,” verse, mm. 1-8

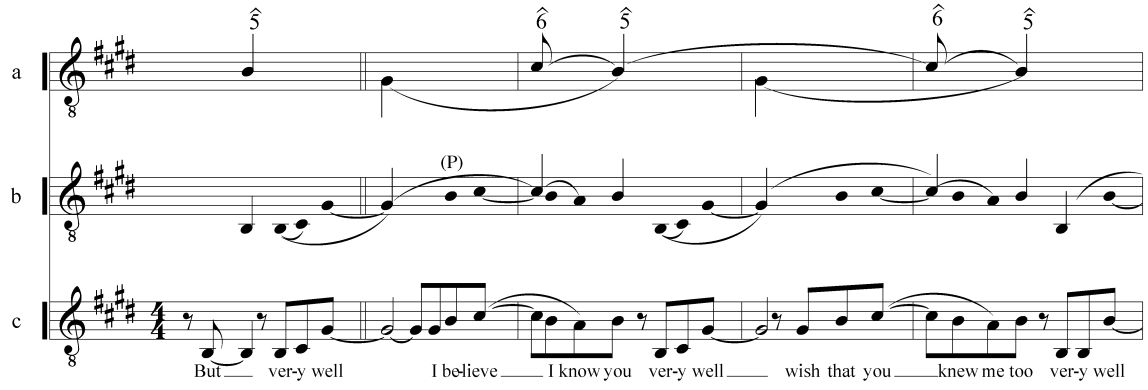
This motion receives some elaboration—since the motive spans four measures instead of two, like the previous two motives—by embellishing the passing note, which in this case is scale degree $\hat{5}$, with its own third descent that happens to mimic the opening motive (reductive level b), before finally arriving on the lower pitch (A) of the larger third span. The most basic shape of this motive appears at level a of the analysis. The rhythmically active C♯ moves through the embellished B to A in m.6 before leaping back up to the starting pitch. Within this descending third span from scale degree $\hat{6}$ is embedded the original third span of the opening motive from B to G♯, shown in the graph at level b.

Level c of the above example, or the foreground melody, also provides a clear comparison of the progressive rhythmic activity between the presentation and continuation phrases. The continuation phrase begins more aggressively, adding sixteenth-note syncopations, further enhancing the basic move from $\hat{5}$ (mm. 1-4) to $\hat{6}$ (mm. 5-8), noticeable in level a of the graph. With this gradual intensification between the two phrases, the entire verse can be viewed as a single overarching and progressive motion, supporting the textual angst that seems to be growing as the protagonist attempts to justify his supportive position, despite the distant "Mary."

The resolution of the tension created by this large-scale motion from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{6}$ is suspended until the arrival of verse two, when scale degree $\hat{5}$ reappears with the basic idea of the presentation (shown in Example 2.26). This moment is also a confirmation of the basic $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$ neighboring motion of the major PDG, indicating the upper boundary of the pentatonic framework not readily apparent on the surface of the music. All of the

melodic attention of the verse is focused on the upper half of the pentatonic collection, and is tightly woven around scale degree $\hat{5}$. In fact, the tonic pitch plays a minimal role in both the verse and chorus.

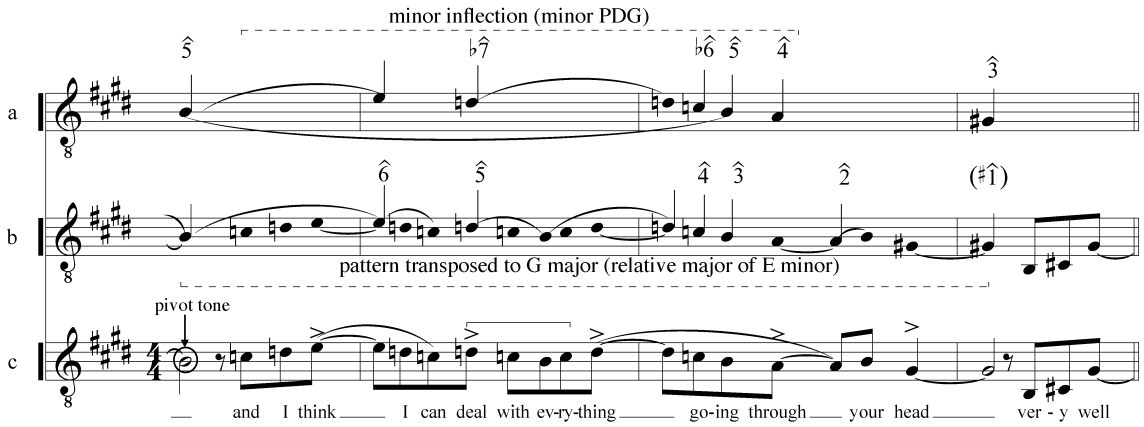
The chorus follows the same sentence-structure format as does the verse, and utilizes the continuation phrase similarly to create momentum and climax in the section. However, this section is much more active melodically, yet in a collected and lyrical way, and accelerates the large-scale motion initiated in the verse. Wonder also reverses the melodic contour of the chorus by ascending to scale degree $\hat{5}$ instead of descending from it. The presentation phrase clearly projects the major pentatonic notwithstanding the presence of scale degree $\hat{4}$, which functions as a motion to an inner voice that embellishes $\hat{6}$ (Example 2.27, level b). The melodic unit pivots around $\hat{3}$, approaching this pitch by leap from below. The melodic path only momentarily remains on $\hat{3}$ before ascending through $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{6}$, which still functions as the upper boundary of the melodic range in mm. 1-2. Notice that $\hat{5}$ acts more as a passing note from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{6}$ than an incomplete neighbor note pattern with $\hat{6}$, and that the primary motion connects the lower pentatonic strand with the upper strand.



Example 2.27. “Superwoman,” presentation phrase, chorus, mm. 1-4

The descending third around $\hat{6}$, first appearing in the verse, again embellishes this scale degree briefly before the melodic unit rests back on $\hat{5}$ in m. 2 on the "and" of two. This overarching motion of the chorus-motive forms the upper major PDG, which not only informs the pentatonic framework as previously described, but appears here on the surface in more concentrated repetitions. Whereas in the verse, the entire eight-measure span plus the downbeat of the next verse references the basic overarching motion of this $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ PDG, the chorus presents this gesture clearly and in rapid succession every two measures.

Example 2.28 shows that the continuation phrase transposes the basic melodic idea initiated in the presentation phrase to scale degree $\hat{5}$—the structural pitch of the verse—and consequently transcends the artificial boundary imposed by $\hat{6}$, culminating in an important expressive and climatic moment in the music. As was seen with "It Ain't No Use" above, an important feature found in some of Wonder's major-key songs is his use of the $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ major PDG to establish a temporary upper boundary that the melody eventually breaks free by ascending past the boundary to peak on either $\flat\hat{7}$ or $\hat{1}$. It also represents one way that Wonder introduces the parallel minor, since the descending minor PDG from $\flat\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$, shown filled in at level a, is the basic structure that Wonder often uses to complete this sweeping motion initiated by the repetitive use of the $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$ pattern.



Example 2.28. "Superwoman," continuation phrase, chorus, mm. 5-8

The line ascends to what is the first melodic appearance of E, the original tonic of the key (mm. 5-6), but it does not function as a stable tonic arrival point because of a shift in tonal context. The ascending stepwise motion from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$ introduces intervals foreign to E major pentatonic. Instead of a "sol-la-ti-do" ascent, in mm. 5-6, scale degrees $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ are both lowered a half step to C♮ and D♮ respectively, creating a "mi-fa-sol-la" relationship (B-C-D- E) in the key of G major. Thus scale degree $\hat{5}$ functions as a pivot, and links E major to G major, two keys a chromatic third apart. On the surface, this transposed gesture articulates a boundary around a "new" $\hat{6}$ (on E) before shifting directions and descending stepwise through a quick succession of filled in thirds around each scale degree in mm. 6-7, shown at level b.

While G-major pentatonic is the surface level collection at play from mm. 5-7, on a deeper level, this melodic unit also resembles the descending minor PDG that often accompanies parallel shifts to the minor mode, which in this case would be E minor. This also happens to be the relative minor of the fleeting surface key of G major, thus strengthening the linkage between keys. It is appropriate to compare this passage to the

analogous passage in E major of the presentation phrase on the surface at level b, hearing the motion up to E as a motion to the transposed "la"—the expression of the upper major PDG in G major, but it also is important to compare it to the type of modal shifts Wonder prefers. As stated above, this pattern represents an embellished form of the descending minor PDG from ♭$\hat{7}$, that moves stepwise back down to $\hat{5}$, or $\hat{3}$ in some cases.

The pitch that represents both scale degree $\hat{5}$ (D) in the implied key of G, and the ♭$\hat{7}$ of the original key area also receives additional emphasis through prolongation in m. 6 until the downbeat of m. 7. As already indicated, Wonder treats the E at the top of the contour as an embellishment to D—an incomplete neighbor pattern from $\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ in the key of G major. This pitch is elaborated by a descending third span that drops down to B, and then reversing direction, retraces its pathway back up to itself. The pattern also receives rhythmic stress at the beginning of each third span on scale degrees $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{5}$ (of the G major pattern of level b).

The deeper analysis at level a interprets this gesture as a large-scale stepwise embellishment of B, or scale degree $\hat{5}$ of E major from mm. 5-7, with the ascending $\hat{5}$ – ♭$\hat{6}$ – ♭$\hat{7}$ – $\hat{8}$ motion counterbalanced by the $\hat{8}$ – ♭$\hat{7}$ – ♭$\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ descending motion. In m. 7, this descending-stepwise motion moves back through $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{4}$, and given the minor PDG it appears to be imitating, would normally land on G♮, the ♭$\hat{3}$ of E. However, the motive subtly restores the primary key of E major in mm. 7-8 by stepping down a semitone to G♯ (♮$\hat{3}$).

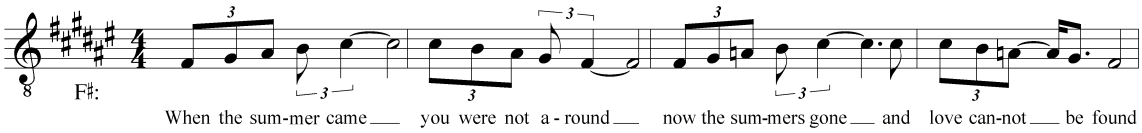
Concentrated syncopations, combined with the climactic melodic ascent through this transposed figure, heighten the emotional intensity of this gesture making it an important affective feature of the chorus corresponding to the lyrics. The arrival pitch at

the top of the contour (E) and the gradual melodic descent coincide with moments in which the protagonist, with each repetition of the chorus, expresses his progressive doubt that he can handle what's going on in the head of "Mary." Alternating phrases with "I think" or "I believe" amplify this questioning attitude. After the last verse, the chorus continues to vamp on its own another four times. In the final two cycles, the words of the presentation phrase are gradually replaced with the syllables "da" and "dum," suggesting that the protagonist has a) lost all confidence in the idea that he knows her "very well," and b) that he no longer clings to the hope that she knows him "very well." By the final repetition of the continuation phrase, the once semi-confident refrain, "and I think I can deal with everything going through your head," in this late stage of the narrative now seems like a string of hollow words.

Part Two of the "Superwoman" suite, "Where Were You When I Needed You," functions as a freestanding separate song that continues the narrative established in "Superwoman." The tempo slows down appropriately for this "movement," reflecting the somber condition of the protagonist. A rubato interlude, featuring the first pop-music outing of the cutting edge T.O.N.T.O synthesizer, connects the two songs together by drifting from the key area of E major to the new key of F♯ major.[35] Explication of the pentatonic processes found in the melodic structure of this song will occur concurrently with an examination of the melodic analogies existing between both songs.

[35] Wonder's integral but far underappreciated sound engineers Malcolm Cecil and Robert Margouleff operated "The Original New Timbral Orchestra" (referred to by its common acronym, T.O.N.T.O). The super-sized Moog III modular synthesizer, designed by Cecil in the early 70s, took two people to run and was the first multitimbral polyphonic analog synthesizer. What initially attracted Wonder to Cecil and Margouleff was the duos recording of *Zero Time* under the auspices of "Tonto's Expanding Head Band," which featured the novel and spacey sounds produced by T.O.N.T.O. The synthesizer consisted of several modules that had to be manipulated in real time by adjusting knobs and re-routing patch chords in order to produce the complex and subtle alterations to its unique sounds. Ribowsky details the integral role of T.O.N.T.O and its engineers in the production of Wonder's music (Ribowsky, 199-204).

Part Two's phrase structure of the verse follows the same format as the verse and chorus of "Superwoman" (the 2+2+4 sentence structure). The presentation and continuation phrases divide into four measures each, the first of which consists of two similarly constructed two-measure melodic units. These units consist of a simple idea: an ascending stepwise five-note pattern from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{5}$ that retraces its steps back down to $\hat{1}$ from mm. 1-2. The scalar passage of the repetition's basic melodic unit in the presentation phrase, analogous to the verse in "Superwoman," inflects the minor mode (Example 2.29). However, the minor inflection, while a fundamental shift in Wonder's melodic organization, functions more as an inner part of a stepwise path that seems secondary here to the alternating dialogue between the bookends of the melody.



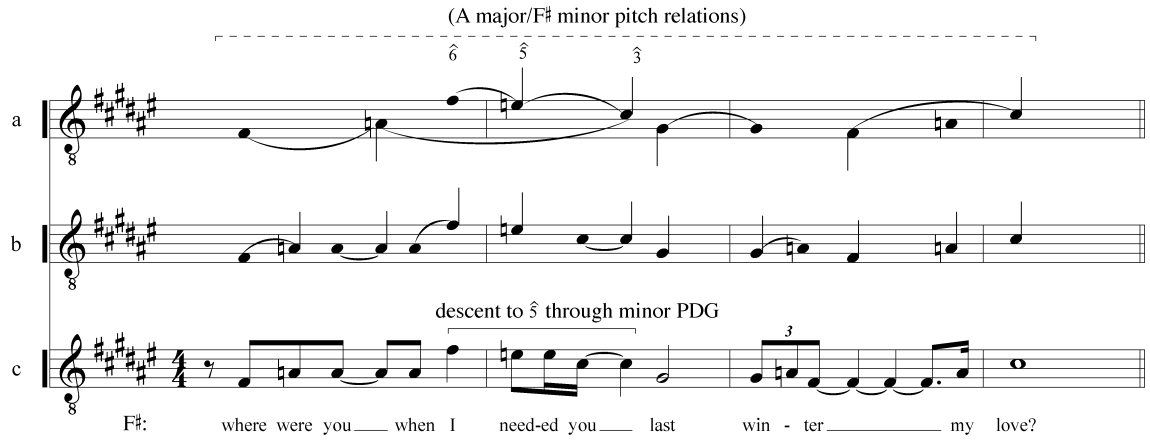
Example 2.29. "Where Were You When I Needed You?" presentation, verse, mm. 1-4

Both $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$ vie for aural attention: the stepwise ascent emphasizes scale degree $\hat{5}$, which is the top of the gesture's contour, but the stepwise motion down to $\hat{1}$ reasserts tonic as the primary pitch. In fact, as will be apparent in later examples, both pitches follow their own voice-leading strands down distinct pathways that explore respectively the lower and upper boundaries of the pentatonic framework of the melody.

The continuation phrase from mm. 5-8 continues to emphasize the parallel minor mode referenced in the second motivic unit of the presentation phrase, and the melodic

shape is very similar to the continuation phrase of the "Superwoman" chorus shown in Example 2.30.[36]

The ascending leap between $\hat{1}$ and $\flat\hat{3}$ (F♯ to A) in m. 5 is followed by an expressive leap from $\flat\hat{3}$ up to $\hat{1}$, which is the emotional peak of this section, coinciding with the longing expressed in the refrain of the song, "where were you when I needed you…?" However, following this important leap, the line steps down from $\hat{8}$ to $\flat\hat{7}$, which sounds more like the "la-sol" motion in the key of the parallel minor's relative major (A major), much like the previously described key shift in the chorus of "Superwoman." In this instance, the melody does not move stepwise from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{3}$ of A major ($\flat\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ in F♯ major), and consequently does not fill in the pentatonic gap as Wonder does earlier.



Example 2.30. "Where Were You When I Needed You?" continuation, verse, mm. 5-8

The temporary key shift to A major still represents the melodic shift to the parallel minor since the gesture, for all intents and purposes, fulfills the function of the

[36] I provide a comparison of the melodies in Part One and Two at the end of this case study.

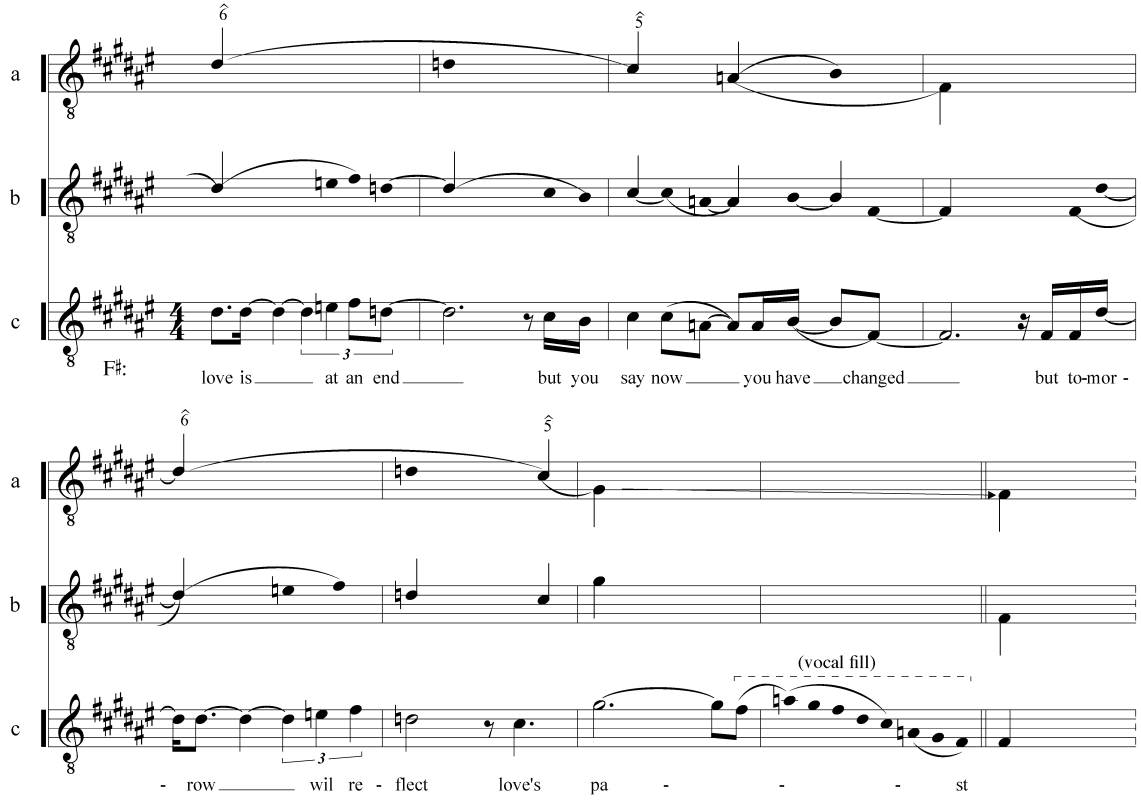
descending minor PDG. The gesture pushes past the upper boundary note of the major pentatonic ($\hat{6}$), notably absent throughout the verse, and moves back down within the original range of the melody. Wonder also prepares this shift to A major, unlike in "Superwoman," by first inflecting the minor mode (F♯ minor) in the second motivic unit of the presentation phrase before changing collection. So the melodic pathway proceeds from F♯ major in mm. 1-2, to F♯ minor in mm. 3-4, to A major in mm. 5-6. On a more remote level this shift in collection, between F♯ major and F♯ minor, represents the fluid interaction between parallel modes.

The two consecutive leaps that begin the continuation phrase leave traces that are subsequently picked up by the two distinct voice-leading strands projected between $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$ from the presentation phrase. Both strands are visible in level a of the graph. The lower voice, shown with stems down establishes the span from $\flat\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$, passing through $\hat{2}$ from mm. 5-7, and the upper voice shown with upward stems moves along and above the boundary established by scale degree $\hat{5}$.

The eight-measure chorus departs from the sentence-structure phrase organization of the verse and consists of two repeated four-bar units. In Example 2.31, scale degree $\hat{6}$ makes its first appearance, which has been absent because of the emphasis on the minor mode for most of the verse. The basic melodic movement of the chorus is the chromatic descent from $\hat{6}$ through $\flat\hat{6}$ to $\hat{5}$ (level a of the graph). This motion around $\hat{6}$ is embellished in m. 1 with an ascending filled in third that connects $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{1}$. Also receiving embellishment is $\flat\hat{6}$, with a descending filled in third before moving to $\hat{5}$ in m. 3. The motive comes to rest on $\hat{1}$ in m. 4 after descending from $\hat{5}$ to $\flat\hat{3}$. Scale degree $\hat{4}$

embellishes ♭$\hat{3}$ as an incomplete upper neighbor along the descending path shown at level a.

The ending of the continuation phrase in the chorus differs from the ending of the presentation phrase by leaping up from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{2}$ (m. 7), the highest melodic point in the melody, which also happens to be the most intense moment in the overall narrative. Here the protagonist, still grieving over the end of his relationship to "Mary," is attempting to move on, maybe even close this tumultuous life chapter. But now she supposedly wants back in, claiming a change of heart to the utter agony of the protagonist, who displays this torment when repeating "Mary's" pleading words at this climactic moment, "but tomorrow will reflect love's past[!]"



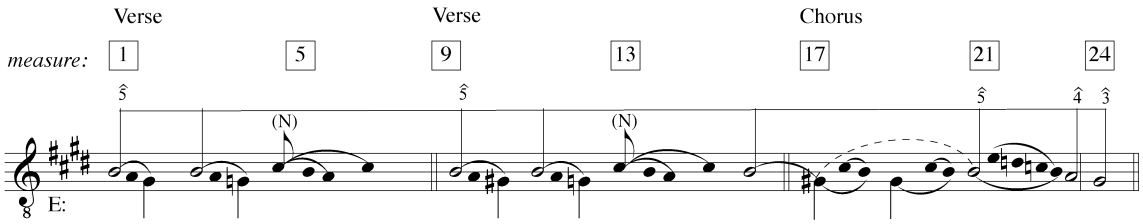
Example 2.31. "Where Were You When I Needed You?" chorus, mm. 1-8

Scale degree $\hat{2}$ (G♯) also represents the inconclusiveness of this phrase that is not resolved within the section, but depends on the next rotation of the verse for its resolution where it connects to $\hat{1}$ as part of the lower voice-leading strand. This explains why it is shown as representing an octave shift in the top most level of the graph. In fact, Wonder's own vocal embellishment of this pitch returns it to this conceptual register (see level c).

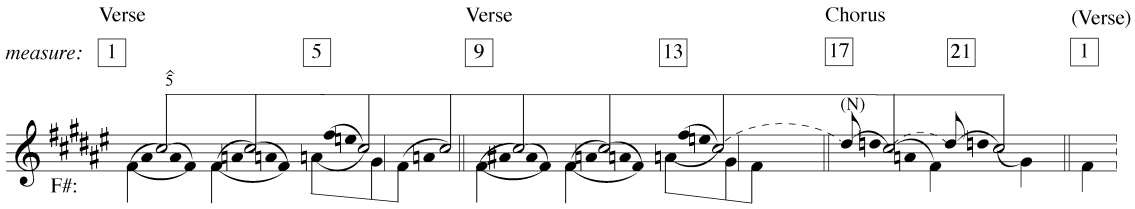
It seems fitting that, although F♯ major is the fundamental key of Part Two of the suite, pentatonic motions associated with F♯ minor adorn the surface of this piece along the way. The drama unfolds further as the tension between the two middleground voice-leading strands simultaneously project the upper boundary of F♯ major and the lower boundary, F♯ minor, which coincides with the conflict described in the narrative.

A comparison of the large-scale motion between Part One and Part Two of the "Superwoman" suite reveals the deeper relationship that these two songs share (Example 2.32a & b). While "Where Were You When I Needed You" is certainly injected more with the parallel minor mode, both songs' melodic structures focus on the upper boundary of the major pentatonic, projecting large-scale $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$ patterns as the basic motion. The remote melodic idea of "Superwoman" focuses first on the interaction between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{6}$, but ultimately descends stepwise to $\hat{3}$ in a broad sweep that imitates the surface-level pattern set in motion at the beginning of the verse. The overall voice-leading combines $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \hat{5}$ pattern with $\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \hat{3}$.

a. “Superwoman”



b. “Where Were You When I Needed You”



Example 2.32. Comparison of large-scale melodic relationships: a, “Superwoman,”; b, “Where Were You When I Needed You?”

In Part Two, scale degree $\hat{5}$ is left without its upper-neighbor partner until the chorus, and seems to behave more like a cover tone that hovers above the other primary voice-leading event below: the $\flat\hat{3} – \hat{2} – \hat{1}$ pattern. However, attempting to show this lower pattern as encompassing the larger time span of the entire form is problematic, since it does not make an appearance until the continuation phrase of the verse, with no clear motion to set it up. Furthermore, much of the melodic motion drives toward $\hat{5}$, either from below (verse, presentation phrase), or above (verse, continuation phrase, chorus), notwithstanding the initial alternation with scale degree $\hat{1}$ in the first four measures of the verse.

Notwithstanding the varied expressive movement in "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)," the pentatonic collection represented by the repetition of a few simple gestures (PDGs) present on multiple levels still accounts for the most basic structure from which embellishments are generated. Wonder's straightforward phrase organization enables these patterns to speak lucidly and contribute to the narrative of the suite behind the scenes. He sets up boundaries with these repetitive pentatonic motions in order to break free of them at key dramatic moments.

Conclusion: Deviations from the Pentatonic Ideal

I acknowledge that not all songs of Wonder's vast repertoire can easily be explained through this pentatonic perspective. Nor am I suggesting that his compositional prowess is somehow diminished or at all limited because of the prevalence of pentatonic relationships that seem to form an integral part of his melodic vocabulary. Some melodies clearly utilize seven-note collections, such as the major scale, and others are quite chromatic. Still, many of these melodic (pentatonic) anomalies, however, are the result of harmonic choices, which subsequently effect the linear pitch organization. But in many cases, pentatonic subsets still emerge as essential organizational collections. This leads to a discussion of the role harmony plays in the melodic content defining or deviating from strictly pentatonic collections—the subject of Chapter III.[37] The pentatonic collection also becomes the prime tool that Wonder superimposes over the larger collections when using improvised ornamentation as an expressive device—the focus of Chapter IV.

[37] Day-O'Connell (2009) recognizes the dynamic relationship between pentatonic and diatonic systems in the music of Debussy. He explores the interplay between pentatonic melodies and diatonic harmony, an important topic in my Chapter 3. See Jeremy Day-O'Connell, "Debussy, Pentatonicism, and the Tonal Tradition," *Music Theory Spectrum,* Vol. 31, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 225-261. See specifically pp. 234-5.

CHAPTER III

EXPLORING THE VERTICAL: STEVIE WONDER'S HARMONY

> Stevie, first of all, has a unique voice. His melodic structures are unique, and that comes form his chord playing on the piano. When he makes chords…very few people can figure out [his] chords. They just say, "that's a Stevie Wonder chord."
>
> —Berry Gordy, founder and CEO of Motown Records.[1]

Introduction: Understanding the Melodic Through the Harmonic

Waxing theoretical in the impromptu remark above, Berry Gordy describes in essence one the most salient features of Wonder's music, one that arguably sets him apart from other songwriters: his sophisticated harmonic vocabulary and its relationship to and impact on melody. As Gordy suggests, Wonder's creative use of harmony exerts a strong influence on his melody making. His memorable pentatonic-based melodies become more expressive and their affect more potent when cast within rich harmonic contexts. It is Wonder's strong conceptual command of harmony and voice-leading that enable melody to expand beyond its predominantly pentatonic framework; melodic tones extend through local harmonic space, spilling over the boundaries of the fundamental pentatonic collection in unique ways.[2]

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[1] Taken from "Biography Presents Stevie Wonder," *Biography,* online video, Part 4 of 6, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1i-Q71bfJs&feature=fvwrel. Accessed 12 June 2002.

[2] An important observation that arises from the discussion in this chapter is that the use of sophisticated harmony does in fact affect the presentation of a pentatonic process in Wonder's music. Over the course of the chapter, it will become apparent that deviations from a purely pentatonic melodic framework can often be explained as the result of Wonder's harmonic decisions. The intertwined relationship between vertical and horizontal events makes it difficult to determine which one comes first, the melodic or the harmonic. In some cases, like Wonder's funk tunes, the clear pentatonic patterning of the melody suggests that it was the first to be composed, while in his lyrical ballads, it seems evident that the two perspectives are melded

The purpose of this chapter is to give a comprehensive view of Wonder's broad harmonic vocabulary and the resulting types of meaningful melodic-harmonic associations that emerge. Specifically, Chapter III explores harmony through three syntactical viewpoints integral to Wonder's harmonic style: pentatonicism, jazz harmony, and functional tonality. I examine how these components work both individually and together to define Wonder's harmonic language. I treat each in turn, beginning with a study of the pentatonic collection's influence on chord succession, recognizing that it represents a system distinct from (yet dependent upon) the major-minor tonal system. This is followed by a survey of the parts of jazz syntax that find voice in Wonder's style. Finally, I explore the larger, functional tonal schemes related to his use of jazz harmony, with particular emphasis on tonal paradigms and their expected (and unexpected) voice-leading outcomes.[3] The chapter concludes with a case study that focuses more in depth on the various ways that these aspects of his harmonic style operate in tandem.

Part 1: Pentatonicism and Harmony

The previous chapter thoroughly detailed the pentatonic collection's organizing role in Wonder's melodies. Because of its ubiquitous role in the formation of melody, it seems useful to consider what role (if any) the pentatonic collection plays in the formation of harmony. This section explores the potential and limitations of the pentatonic, both in terms of chord *structure* and chord *succession*. Note that with chord

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together into a single process that unfolds simultaneously. In any case, both processes can be explained in terms of the other, which in this study is often the case.

[3] To clarify, when I refer to functional tonality, I specifically mean the special scale degree hierarchies and the resulting chord hierarchies built on those scale degrees that articulate key (the tonic note) within the major-minor scale system, the most important of these being the dominant (V) and tonic (I) notes (and chords).

succession, the emphasis remains on the linear projection of the collection, as was the case with melody. The difference here, of course, is that the attention shifts from Wonder's vocal line to the lowest accompanying voice—the bass line, the voice most responsible for the production and distribution of harmony.[4] Many of the observations presented here stem from the recent work on harmonic patterns in pop and rock music by Walter Everett and Nicole Biamonte.[5]

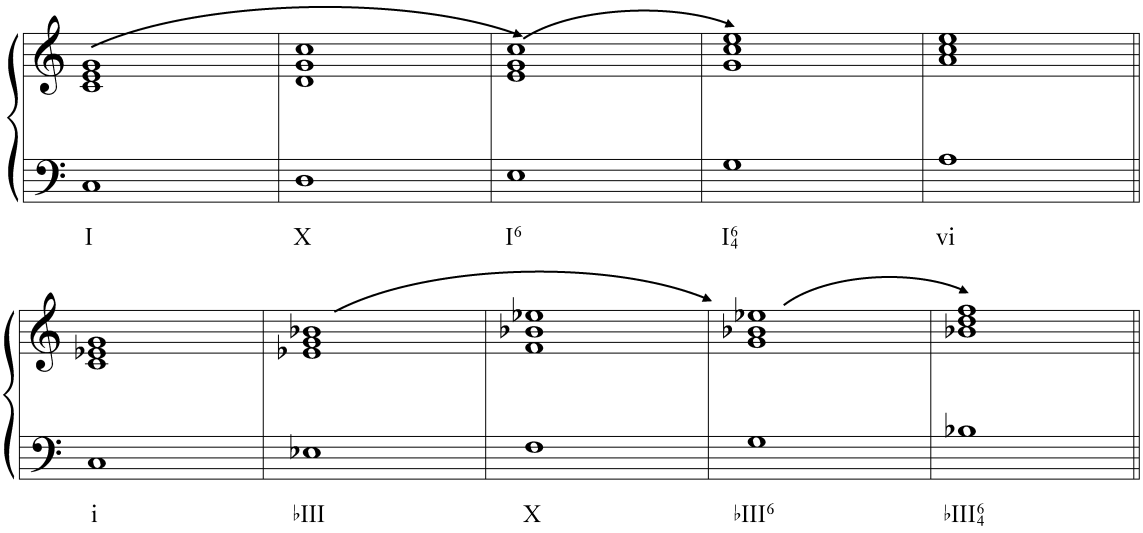
Pentatonic bass lines and harmony

Without the aid of additional pitches, the pentatonic scale in fact is a poor harmonic generator. Unlike the seven-note major and minor scales, which produce diatonic triads on every scale degree, the pentatonic collection produces only two triads. Triads form the basis of harmony, and result from the stacking of every other note in the scale, which in the major-minor system creates stacks of thirds. Applying the aforementioned criteria to all the scale degrees, and using only pitches diatonic to the collection, the major pentatonic supports a major triad on the tonic scale degree, and a minor triad on scale degree $\hat{6}$. Other harmonic structures that appear either duplicate the tonic triad through inversion ($\hat{3}$ and $\hat{5}$ in major), or are not triad based at all ($\hat{2}$ in major). I assign traditional Roman numeral symbols in Example 3.1 to each scale degree in order

[4] Melody is not cast aside entirely, but it is less essential to the present discussion. The relationship between melody and bass line, and the voice-leading created between the two, are linear aspects reserved for the next two sections. The reason for this organization will be made clear shortly.

[5] Two articles have influenced my approach toward understanding Wonder's harmonic language. See Walter Everett, "Making Sense of Rock's Tonal Systems," *Music Theory Online*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Dec 2004), http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.w_everett.html (accessed 22 May 2012); and Nicole Biamonte, "Triadic, Modal, and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum,* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2010): 95-110.

to indicate the relationships between chords in context of the given pitch center. Both major and minor mode examples are shown.

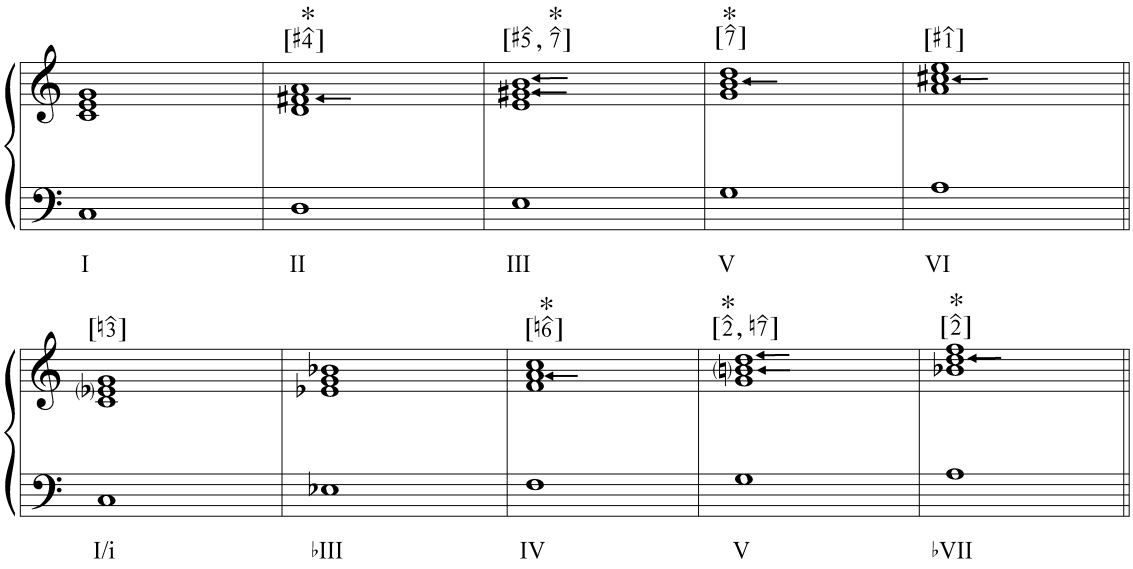


Example 3.1. The pentatonic scale harmonized

Because of the limited triadic options of the pentatonic notes, pop and rock musicians regularly draw upon pitches outside of the basic collection so that each pentatonic scale degree supports a root-position triad. According to Biamonte (who references Everett), a more recent practice in rock is to harmonize each scale degree with a major triad. This practice creates networks of cross relations between chordal structures and members of the pentatonic scale due to the infusion of chromatic tones. Added tones to the basic major and minor pentatonic collections are shown with arrows in Example 3.2.[6] The numbers with carats in brackets above the staves show the pentatonic scale degrees that are altered, and which pitches have been added (shown with an asterisk) to

[6] Biamonte, 104.

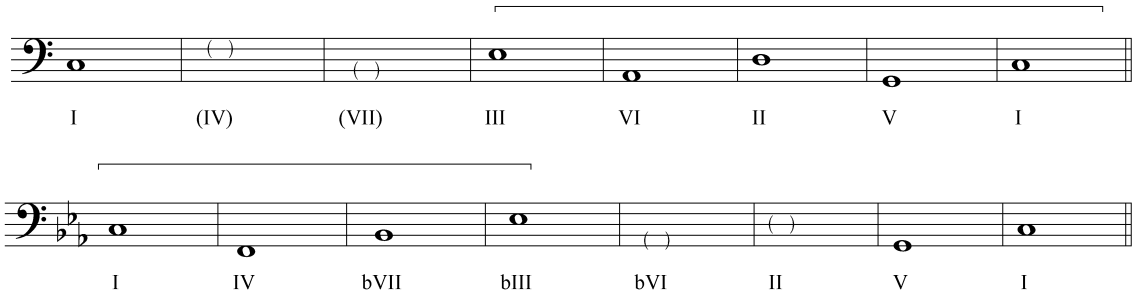
the collection in order to form major triads. The minor pentatonic is by far the more common mode to receive this type of harmonic treatment.



Example 3.2. Common pentatonic root harmonizations

Although the pentatonic scale has only marginal relevance to harmonic generation, and is essentially dependent upon the major-minor tonal system to form chords, its principal function is to create *root movement* from chord to chord. Biamonte examines several routes taken in rock and pop music through pentatonic and other modal networks. One path less frequented in modern rock and pop, yet significant in earlier classical and popular styles, including jazz, is the goal-directed motion by falling fifths (discussed in more depth later). The pentatonic is able to simulate only a partial cycle with root motions by fifth. Arranged in falling fifths, the major pentatonic projects a partial cycle through the octave, lacking scale degrees 4̂ and 7̂ found in the major scale.

Similarly, the minor pentatonic projects an incomplete fifths cycle that lacks scale degrees $\hat{2}$ and $\hat{6}$, as shown in Example 3.3.



Example 3.3. Major and minor pentatonic fifth cycles

Everett implies that a goal-oriented cycle such as the one above is a less important chord succession in pentatonic-based rock and pop music, arguing that pentatonic progressions do not function in the same way as progressions in tonal music. Instead, because they lack half steps between adjacent pitches—a requirement for creating tonal relationships—key and pitch center is the result of centricity and emphasis to a given tonic, and not through a distinctive chordal hierarchy.[7] Everett's observation here is applicable to Wonder's funk-based music, but not necessarily to his pop-based music. Fifth-related cycles occur frequently, making it necessary to invoke the major-minor tonal system in order to explain harmonic relationships.

Biamonte looks closely at the chord progressions that emerge from each rotation of the pentatonic (she assigns the minor pentatonic as mode 1), and their usage in

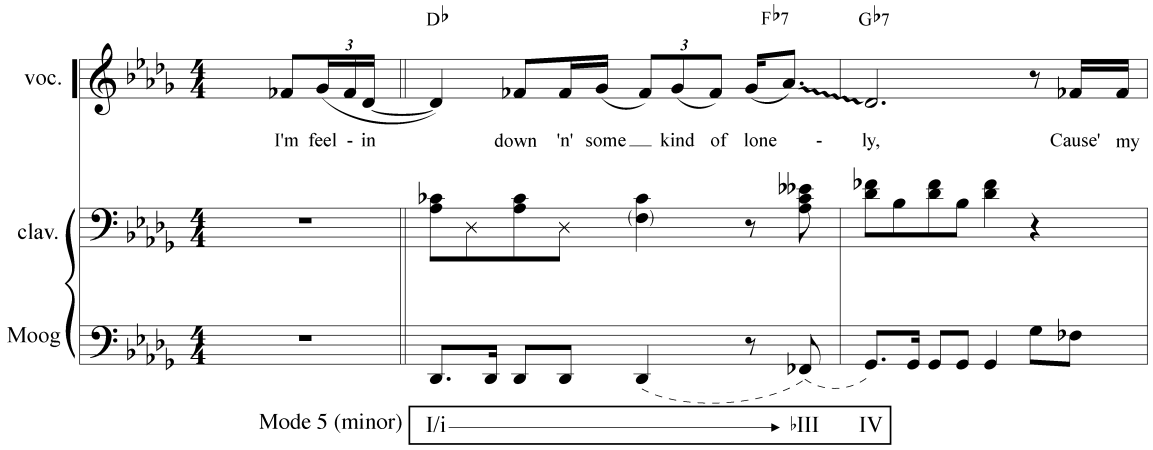
[7] Everett, *n. pag.,* para. 19. Other harmonic cycles through the pentatonic occur, however. For instance, Biamonte indicates that many chord successions in rock music, in contrast to the falling-fifth sequence, move through partial descending fourth cycles. The chord sequence in minor ♭VII – IV – I is among the most common of these successions.This falling fourth progression is referred to by both Everett and Biamonte as the "double-plagal progression." See Biamonte, 98, 107.

practice.[8] She concludes that of all the rotations that yield possible root movements utilized in rock styles, modes 3 and 5—both minor-side modes (Biamonte assigns these as Pentatonic 4 and 1)—are the ones most commonly used. By showing how these minor pentatonic collections are harmonized with major triads, Biamonte provides one possible way of relating some of the modal inflections prevalent in the melodies of blues and gospel styles (discussed in the previous chapter) to the resulting cross relationships formed when melody and harmony collide.

Wonder's pentatonic bass lines

Similar observations involving root movement can be made about Wonder's music. Chord progressions are best understood as repeated rotations through the modes of the pentatonic scale, and the structures harmonizing the root movement are fundamentally major triads. This is especially true with his funk repertoire, where the minor-mode pentatonic scale organizes both the melody *and* the movement of chord roots. Example 3.4 shows one repetition of the two-measure Moog bass line in the verse to the gritty funk song "Maybe Your Baby." It alternates between scale degrees $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{4}$ of the D♭ minor pentatonic in mm. 1-2, linked together by a brief, harmonized passing motion through $\hat{3}$. The $\hat{1} - \hat{3} - \hat{4}$ bass line, the quintessential plagal-divided minor PDG, follows the same basic path as Wonder's vocal line, only in longer spans. As is the case with much of his funk music, repeated patterns based on the PDGs expressed in Chapter II are not only noticeable in Wonder's melody, but also form important pathways of the bass voice.

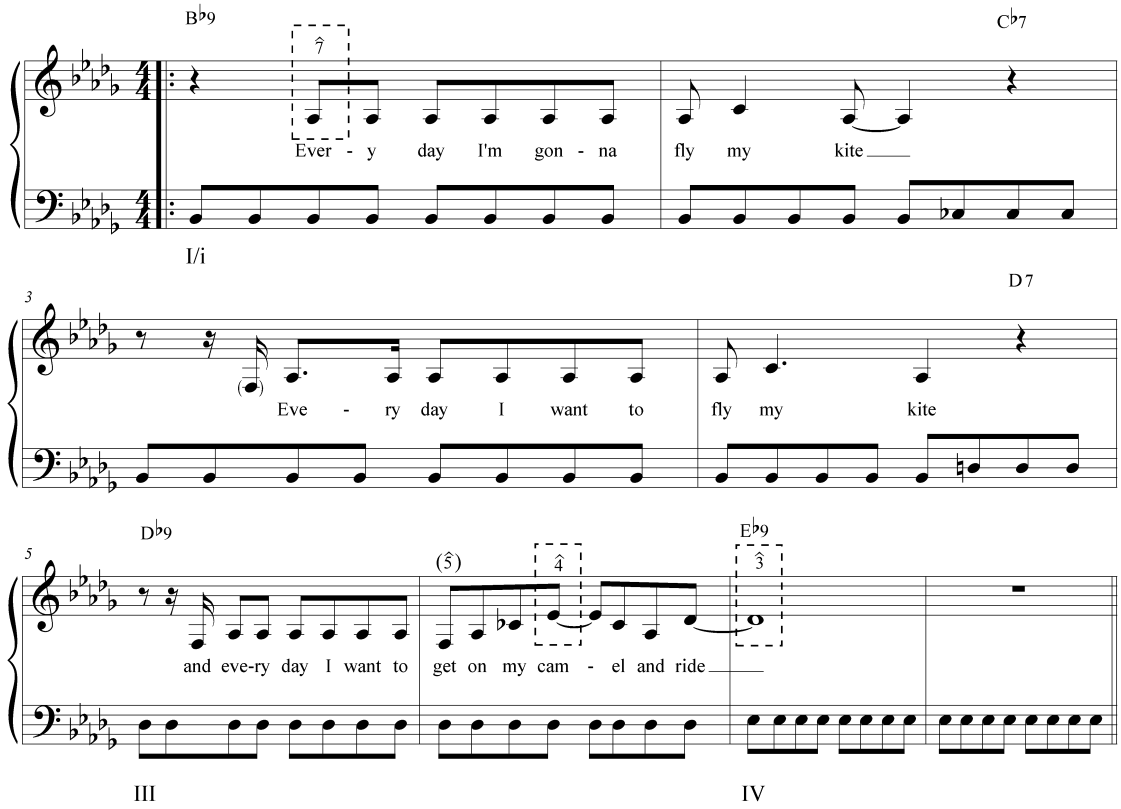
[8] See Chapter II, Figure 2.1 for a listing of the pentatonic modes.



Example 3.4. "Maybe Your Baby," pentatonic root succession, mm. 1-2[9]

A clear pentatonic process governs the root succession in the verse and chorus to the irreverently funky tune, "Love Having You Around." The bass line of the verse, given with the melody in Example 3.5, articulates a minor pentatonic process by progressing through the B♭ minor PDG from I to IV, linked together by a passing motion through III, similar to "Maybe Your Baby" but in much larger spans. In addition to this fundamental progression, the motion from I to III is elaborated with upper chromatic neighbor chords that lead to these pentatonic bass notes—B7 precedes the B♭9 chord (I), and D7 precedes the D♭9 chord (III).

[9] From *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

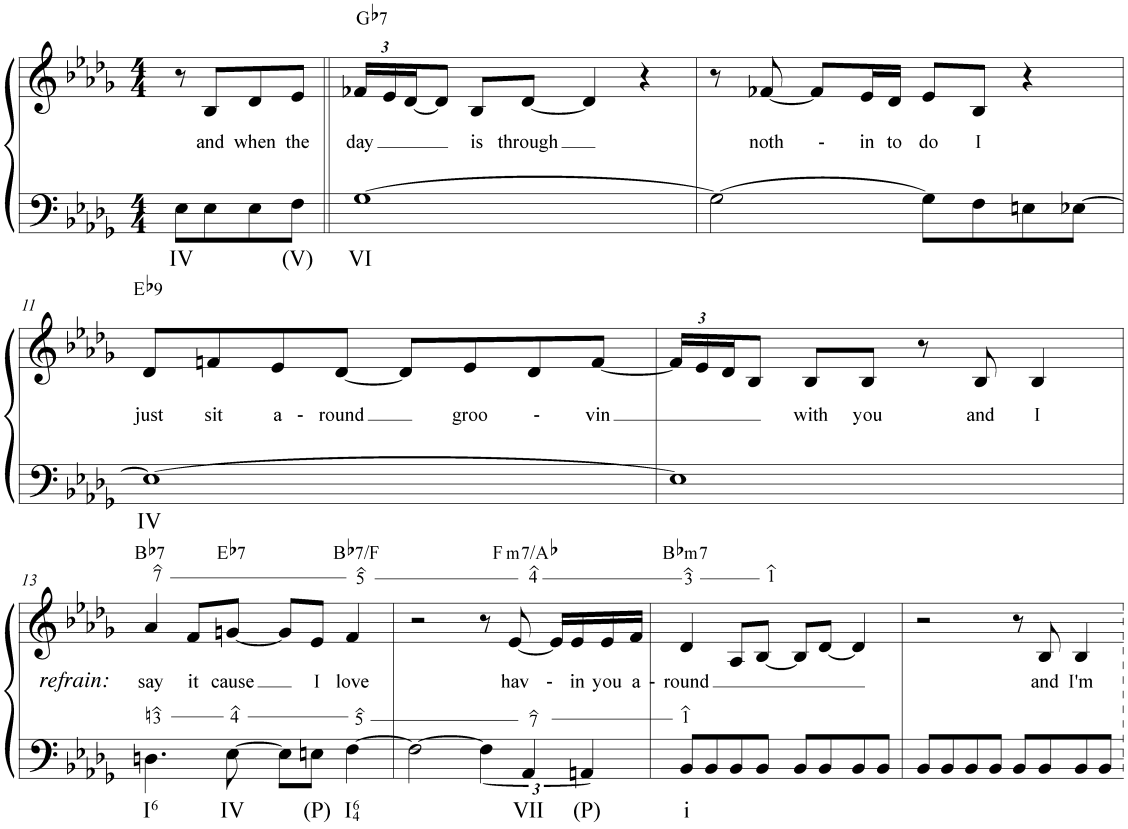


Example 3.5. "Love Having You Around," verse, mm. 1-8[10]

A few significant melodic relationships worth mentioning correspond to the bass line at key moments in this excerpt. For the first four measures, the melody hovers around ♭$\hat{7}$ over the pulsating B♭ tonic pedal. ♭$\hat{7}$ persists through the change in bass in m. 5 to the III chord until m. 6, when it is displaced by an ascent to $\hat{4}$. The melodic motion concludes with the arrival on $\hat{3}$ in m. 7. These essential melodic points confirm the minor-mode PDG, despite the appearance of non-pentatonic notes along the way that embellish the tightly woven pentatonic framework of both melody and bass line. The example shows that the melody's descending ♭$\hat{7}$ – $\hat{4}$ – ♭$\hat{3}$ large-scale voice-leading path mirrors the bass line's ascending $\hat{1}$ – ♭$\hat{3}$ – $\hat{4}$ path.

[10] From *Music of My Mind* (Tamla, 1972).

Based solely on the verse, it would appear that mode 5, the most common minor pentatonic, is the governing mode. The bass motion in the first half of the chorus, however, projects mode 3 [1 ♭3 4 ♭6 ♭7], juxtaposed with mode 5 [1♭3 4 5 ♭7] that continues in the melody. Example 3.6 shows the bass continuing its ascent from IV (at the end of the verse) to VI at the beginning of the chorus—passing through V but not harmonizing it. With the exception of the missing VII, the bass motion spans the complete range of the mode-3 pentatonic.



Example 3.6. “Love Having You Around,” chorus, mm. 9-16

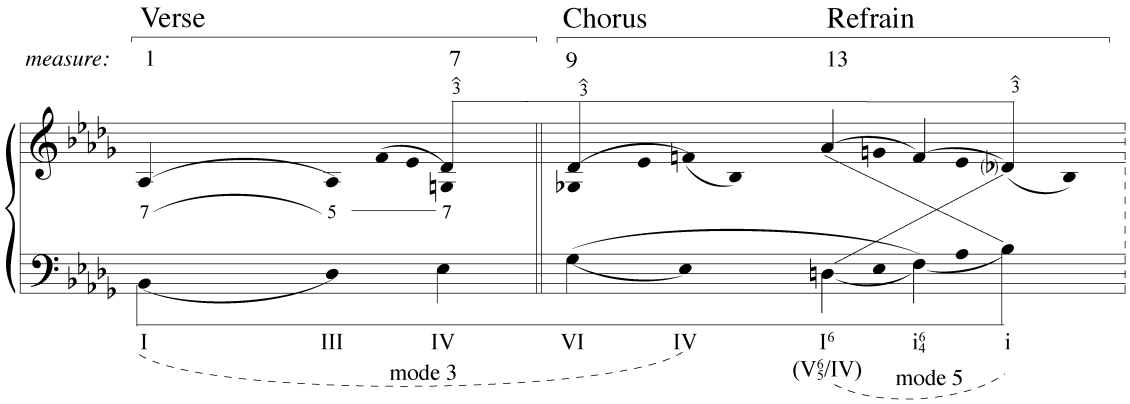
Both melody and bass return to mode 5 in the repeated refrain, "and I say it 'cause I love having you around," that ends the chorus in mm. 13-16, and 17-20 (not shown).[11] The bass ascent from ♮$\hat{3}$ in m. 13 prolongs the tonic chord until an emphatic cadential arrival in m.15, passing through chords built on IV, V and VII, indicative of mode 5's return. Notice also that the descending melodic strand $\hat{7} - \hat{5} - \hat{4} - \hat{3} - \hat{1}$ that corresponds with the ascending bass ♮$\hat{3} - \hat{4} - \hat{5} - \hat{7} - \hat{1}$ spanning mm. 13-15, is an extended version of the large-scale melodic features of the verse. As a noteworthy aside, the harmony that accompanies the intermediate arrival point of this line on $\hat{5}$ is curiously not a V chord, but the tonic chord with the fifth in the bass. In fact, the dominant chord is not present at all. $\hat{5}$ never supports a dominant chord in this song, but is expressed only as a melodic passing tone throughout. Instead, it is the plagal division from I/i to IV that is the fundamental harmonic relationship.

Wonder's use of the modally borrowed major IV chord, the E♭9, explains the addition of ♮$\hat{6}$ in the melody (m.13) as the chordal third. Alternation between i and major IV is an idiomatic characteristic of R & B related styles. But the melodic implications are worth discussing here. The major IV chord adds to the minor collection the passing raised ♮$\hat{6}$ ("la"), nestled between the familiar descending ♭$\hat{7} - \hat{5}$ PDG in m. 13 as a passing tone. When the melodic pitch ♮$\hat{6}$ appears as a melodic tone in this context, it is almost always harmonized with the major IV, as shown in this example. This pattern occurs in the cadential ascent described above in m. 5 of the chorus. The addition of ♮$\hat{6}$ imposes a

[11] The major mode ♮$\hat{3}$ interplays with ♭$\hat{3}$ in the accompaniment throughout the song, and represents a stylistic feature of Wonder's music that makes it difficult to determine the quality of the tonic triad. This complexity will be discussed shortly.

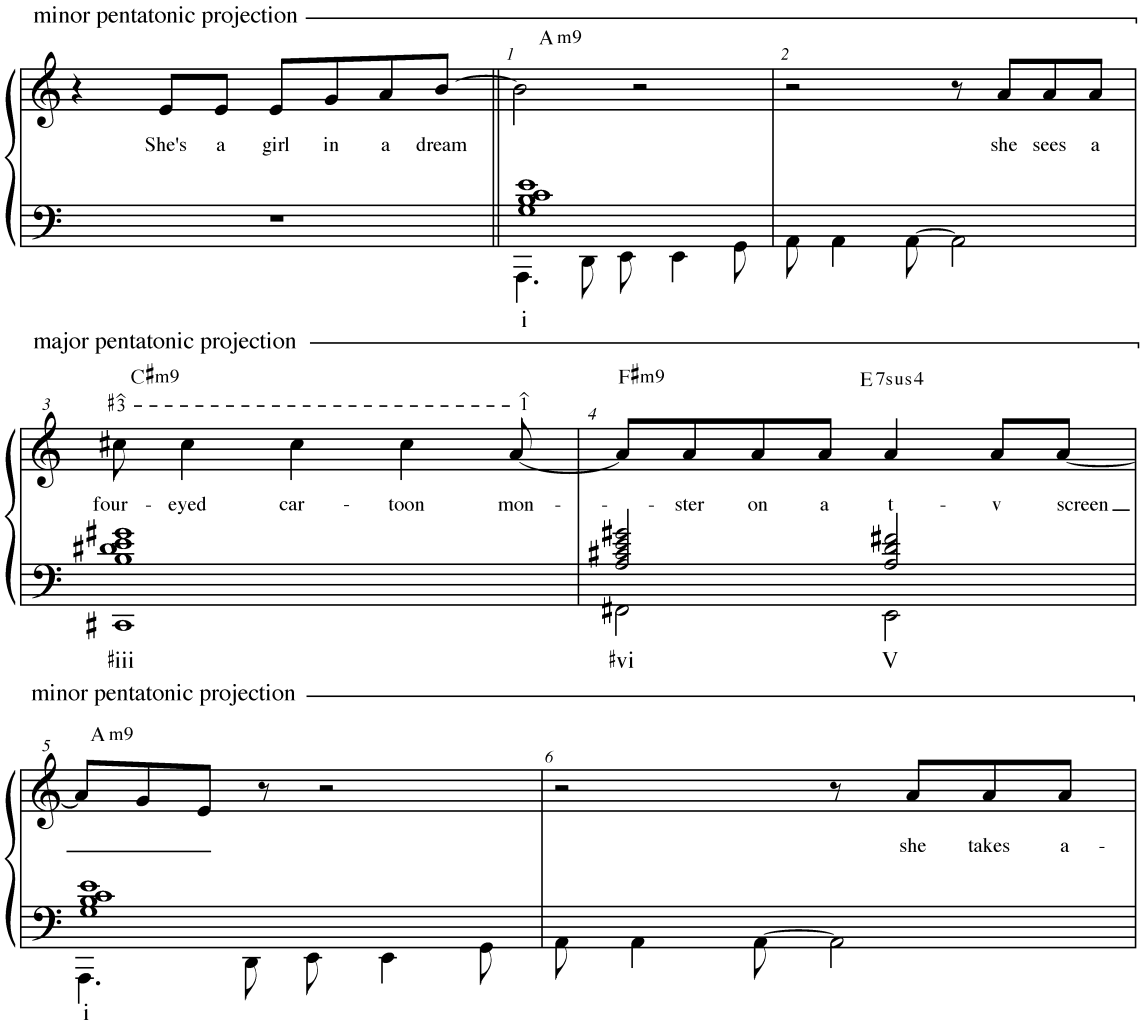
Dorian quality onto the pentatonic minor, and even a shade of the Mixolydian mode when Wonder inflects the raised $\hat{3}$ over the tonic chord.

The summary graph in Example 3.7 depicts the primary voice-leading events and illustrates that the entire song is a fluid juxtaposition of both pentatonic modes 3 and 5. It also reveals that the large-scale root movement of the bass line, after intermediate motions to IV and VI, ascends through the minor pentatonic triad.



Example 3.7. "Love Having You Around," summary graph, verse & chorus

A final, quite different example of the pentatonic's linear function in root movement appears in "Too High," a raw diatribe on 1970s drug culture. In the verse to this song, Wonder arranges the chord progression along the path of the A major pentatonic, but harmonizes it primarily with minor chords—contrary to the model presented by Biamonte and Everett. This dual aspect of the differing vertical and linear modal projections challenges the notion of key area in some places, since either the major or minor mode could be posited depending on which perspective is taken.



Example 3.8. "Too High," verse, mm. 1-6

The minor pentatonic influence permeates the song. The hip, ascending, two-measure repeated bass line of the opening vamp outlines the A minor pentatonic collection, but lacks the mode defining ♭$\hat{3}$. This essential pitch occurs harmonically with the Am tonic chord that accompanies the repeated bass-line ostinato. These two features alone are enough to christen the song in A minor.[12] But in the verse, shown in Example 3.8, the major pentatonic mixes fluidly with the minor. The melody and bass both project

[12] Not discussed here is the whole tone collection, which makes a dramatic appearance in the chorus, and further obfuscates the key area.

A-major pentatonic through the first eight measures, which consists of a repeated four-measure unit. The bass line outlines the essential major pentatonic pitches in that span, progressing from A (mm. 1-2), to C♯ (m. 3), an upper boundary leap to F♯ that drops down a step to E.

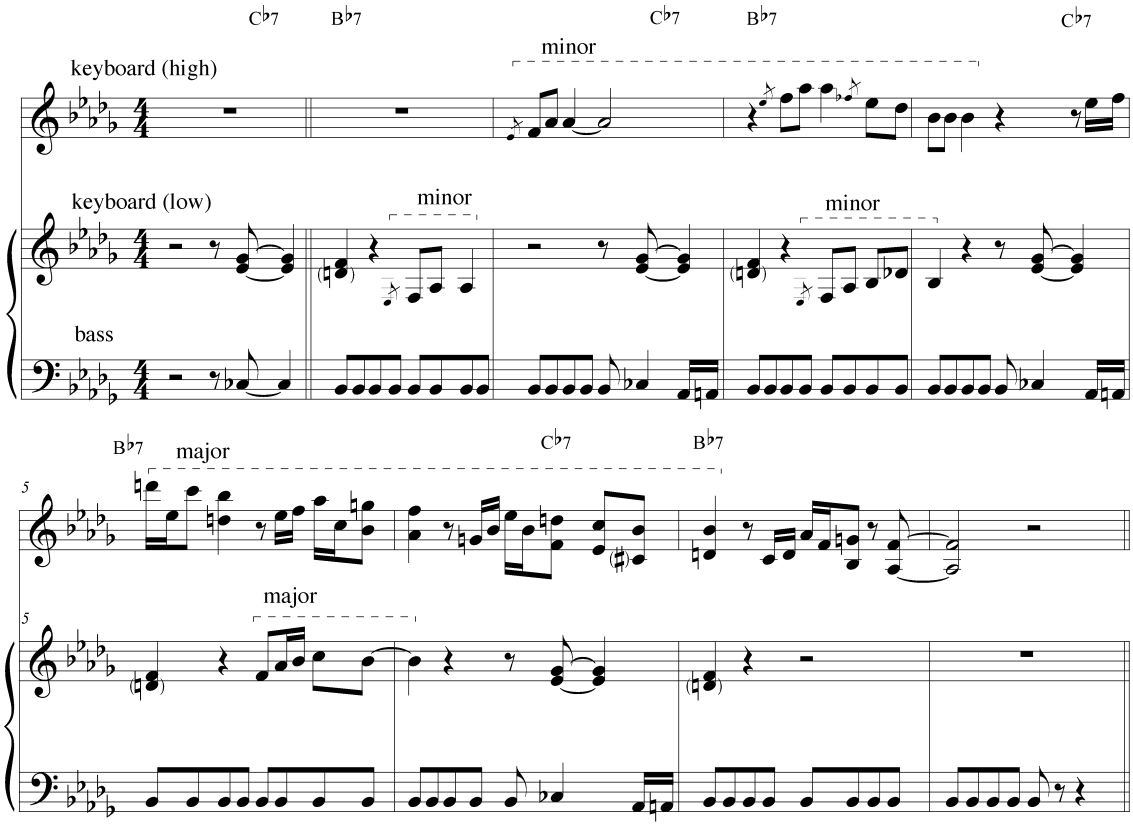
The conservative melodic structure, aside from a lead-in ascent through the minor pentatonic—again, it curiously lacks the ♭$\hat{3}$ like the bass line—begins on scale degree $\hat{2}$ (B), and then alternates between A and C♯ in mm. 3-4. With the exception of the bass ostinato that accompanies the tonic chord (mm. 1-2, 5-6), all linear root motion unequivocally expresses the A major pentatonic. The major-mode melodic inflection, accompanied by the root motion, A - C♯ - F♯ - E, almost exert as strong of a pull on the definition of key as does the repeated minor-mode ostinato and the quality of the tonic chord. A constant cross relation tug-of-war unfolds between $\hat{3}$ and ♯$\hat{3}$ in these back-to-back measures: $\hat{3}$ consistently defines the quality of the tonic chord, but never appears melodically, and ♯$\hat{3}$ is expressed linearly, appearing only in the melody and bass, but never harmonizes the tonic chord.

The tonic-chord complex

Tonic chords in many of Wonder's minor-pentatonic funk songs de-emphasize the chordal thirds, or the mode-defining pitch, in the vertical sonorities and often leave $\hat{3}$ purposely ambiguous. Instead, layers of contrapuntal melodic strands provide emphasis to the major or minor pentatonic, sometimes in close proximity.[13] This ambiguity explains why I indicate minor key tonic chords with both the upper case Roman numeral

[13] Everett also recognizes the melodic derivation of the resulting harmony produced in pentatonic-based chord successions. The prevalence of doubled, parallel melodic lines give the impression of harmonic units that correspond with root position chords on the scale steps of the pentatonic collection.

I and lower case i. Vocal and instrumental gestures keep this relationship dynamic by shifting back and forth between the major and minor third of the tonic chord, suggesting *that the projection of the minor mode is primarily a melodic event.*



Example 3.9. "Love Having You Around," introduction, mm. 1-8

The vertical-linear duality of the tonic chord is highlighted in the opening measures of "Love Having You Around." In Example 3.9, Wonder injects brief references of the parallel major mode with non-harmonic events, as referenced by the two distorted clavinets that are in dialogue with one another in separate octaves. Each takes turns playing short riffs that alternate throughout the song between the variable ♭$\hat{3}$ and $\hat{3}$, projecting simultaneously the fluid interaction of the major and minor modes.

The tonic chord in these cases should be thought of more as a complex made up of melodic strands with shared qualities of both modes. Its quality is usually determined by the linear melodic events unfolding and less by the vertical structures. This is not the case with the other chords in the key: in Example 3.9, Wonder clearly voices the D♭9 and E♭9 chords as parallel seventh-chord harmonies. Even the melody departs briefly from the linear projection of the pentatonic to arpeggiate the D♭9 chord in m. 6 of the verse. The sonority built over the minor tonic note does not always project mode—instead, that role is assigned to the contrapuntal voices that weave in and out of the texture.

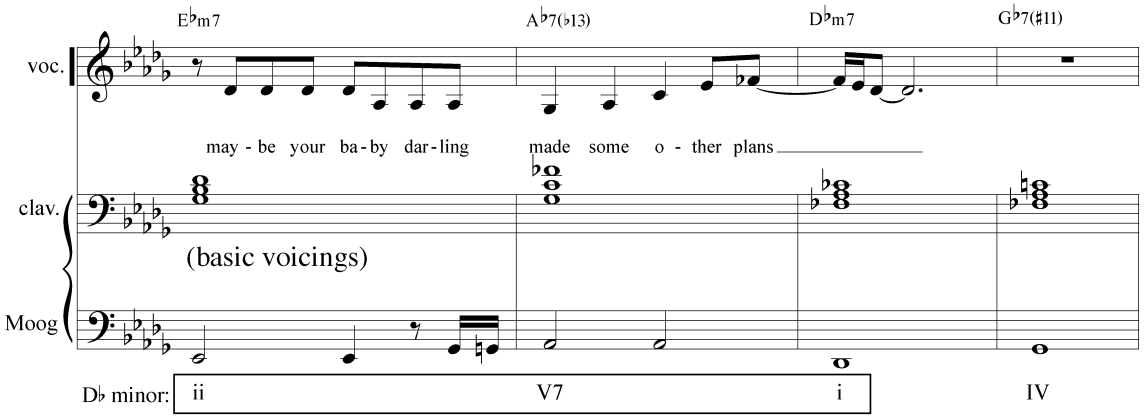
Conclusion

The excerpts from this section illustrate that Wonder's music at times exhibits a clear pentatonic process that governs both the melody and bass line. It was also shown that, in general, the pentatonic is able to account only for the linear aspect of harmony and not the vertical. The next section focuses on some of the basic tenets of jazz harmony, the characteristic vocabulary Wonder uses to harmonize pentatonic and tonal bass lines.

Part 2: Jazz Harmony

While Wonder's harmonization of pentatonic bass lines follows to some extent the norms described by Everett and Biamonte, important stylistic deviations set him apart from the common pop and rock practice. Notice that in "Maybe Your Baby," from Example 3.4 above, parallel major triads occur on scale degrees $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{4}$ of the minor pentatonic, visible in the harmony-providing clavinet part. But the notes played by the

clavinet also reveal that Wonder elaborates these triads with added sevenths to form parallel major-minor seventh chords. This was also the case with the other examples. The linear root succession through the pentatonic is accompanied by a harmonic practice that bears only a superficial resemblance to the pop and rock formations, and more accurately illustrates the jazz influence on Wonder's style.[14]



Example 3.10. "Maybe Your Baby," chorus, mm. 1-4

Shown in Example 3.10, the jazz influence is also quite recognizable in the chorus. Not only are the chords (and chord voicings) with which he uses to harmonize the bass line all jazz-derived seventh chords with added extensions, but the bass line noticeably breaks away from the strictly pentatonic pitch successions.

The chorus reveals a new harmonic succession, created by the three-chord ii – V – I cycle arranged in root movement by fifths, representative of a tonal process rather than a pentatonic one. The progression also features chords that are functionally related to

[14] Moore hypothesizes that there are certain types of harmonic patterns common to pop, rock, and soul that separate these styles from "jazz-derived popular musics." See Allan Moore, "Patterns of Harmony," *Popular Music,* (Vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 1992), 81.

one another, contrasted with the oscillating parallel major-minor seventh chords that harmonize the pentatonic bass line of the verse. The melody also departs from a purely pentatonic construction, and engages the local harmonic structures, as in m. 2 where the melody is a clear arpeggiation of the A♭7(♭13) harmony. This section of the chapter will address some of the features of Wonder's harmonic style that stem from his jazz background.

Jazz harmony: some basics, and the main source of Wonder's harmonic vocabulary

Stevie Wonder's harmony stems less from the harmonic practices of other pop and rock musicians of the day, and more from his proximity to and love of jazz. The members of Motown's house band, collectively known as the Funk Brothers, were all accomplished Detroit jazz musicians in their own right, and mentored Wonder in his formative years. Wonder was informally tutored by the Funk Brothers, who gave him tips on how to play bass, piano, and drums. It can be presumed that harmony was one of several elements covered.[15]

Anecdotes from Motown musicians suggest that Wonder gradually accumulated and synthesized information on the fly in between sessions over the years.[16] Wonder also absorbed recorded jazz and was influenced by artists like pianist Bill Evans and saxophonist John Coltrane. Longtime friend and flautist Bobbi Humphrey reportedly

[15] Craig Werner, *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield and the Rise and Fall of American Soul*, New York: Crown Publishers (2004), 142.

[16] Werner, 151-158.

remarked that Wonder listened to and played along with recordings of the jazz greats.[17] Later it was Wonder's sound engineer Malcolm Cecil, a successful British jazz bassist, who became a sounding board for inventive harmonies. Wonder often finds intricate routes—roads less traveled—between chords, linking them together in complex voice-leading networks. He locates common tones in the upper extensions of harmonies, painting his pentatonic melodic lines with colors borrowed from the jazz world.

Chordal extensions

I explain the concept of chordal extensions here for a couple of reasons. First, I want to establish the idea that extensions are additions to harmony that are treated a special way in tonal-based music, of which jazz is a part. Second, since Wonder's harmonic vocabulary is derived from this specific language then it stands to reason that we can compare (and contrast) his particular stylizations of it with expected norms of this language. In any case, an exciting trait of Wonder's music is the creative voice-leading networks he locates between chords through the use of chordal extensions. The observations of this section rely heavily on ideas about extensions and voice-leading in jazz as explicated by Steve Larson. [18]

Musicians today regard extensions as unstable chord tones that linger and resonate alongside basic chord tones. But their origin is clearly melodic. Ninths,

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[17] John Lewis, "Stevie Wonder: jamming with the jazz set," *The Guardian* (Thursday, June 17, 2010), http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/jun/17/stevie-wonder-jammin-jazz-set (accessed May 9, 2011).

[18] See Steve Larson, *Schenkerian Analysis of Modern Jazz* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987), and the resulting book, *Analyzing Jazz: A Schenkerian Approach* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2009). See in particular pages 20-21, Volume I of his dissertation on the melodic origins of chordal extensions. In general, his ideas act as spiritual guideposts to the observations presented in the remainder of this chapter.

elevenths, and thirteenths were originally understood as suspensions that displaced octaves, tenths, and fifths respectively. Outside of strict contrapuntal styles, however, these tensions are not always prepared according to normative voice-leading rules (as consonances of the previous chord) nor immediately resolved to more stable pitches that they temporarily supplant.

Extensions add color and presence to the basic chord tones but they are fundamentally extra dissonances that in common-practice tonality receive special treatment. In jazz, they are often voiced in the same octave as the primary chord tones (thirds, fifths, sevenths), forming dissonant major and minor second tensions as favorable and expressive clashes against the chord tones. For instance, ninths frequently cling to thirds, elevenths stick to fifths, and thirteenths bond to sevenths. As mentioned above, since extensions are considered as part of the chord, the resolutions of these tensions occur with a change in harmony. When extensions follow their expected voice-leading pathways, they tend either to resolve only with the arrival of the next harmony or to be further delayed. In context of longer chord spans, the voice-leading of extensions creates an unstable chain of dissonances, heightening or intensifying the anticipation of an eventual return to a more stable harmonic arrival point.

Chordal extensions in Wonder's music

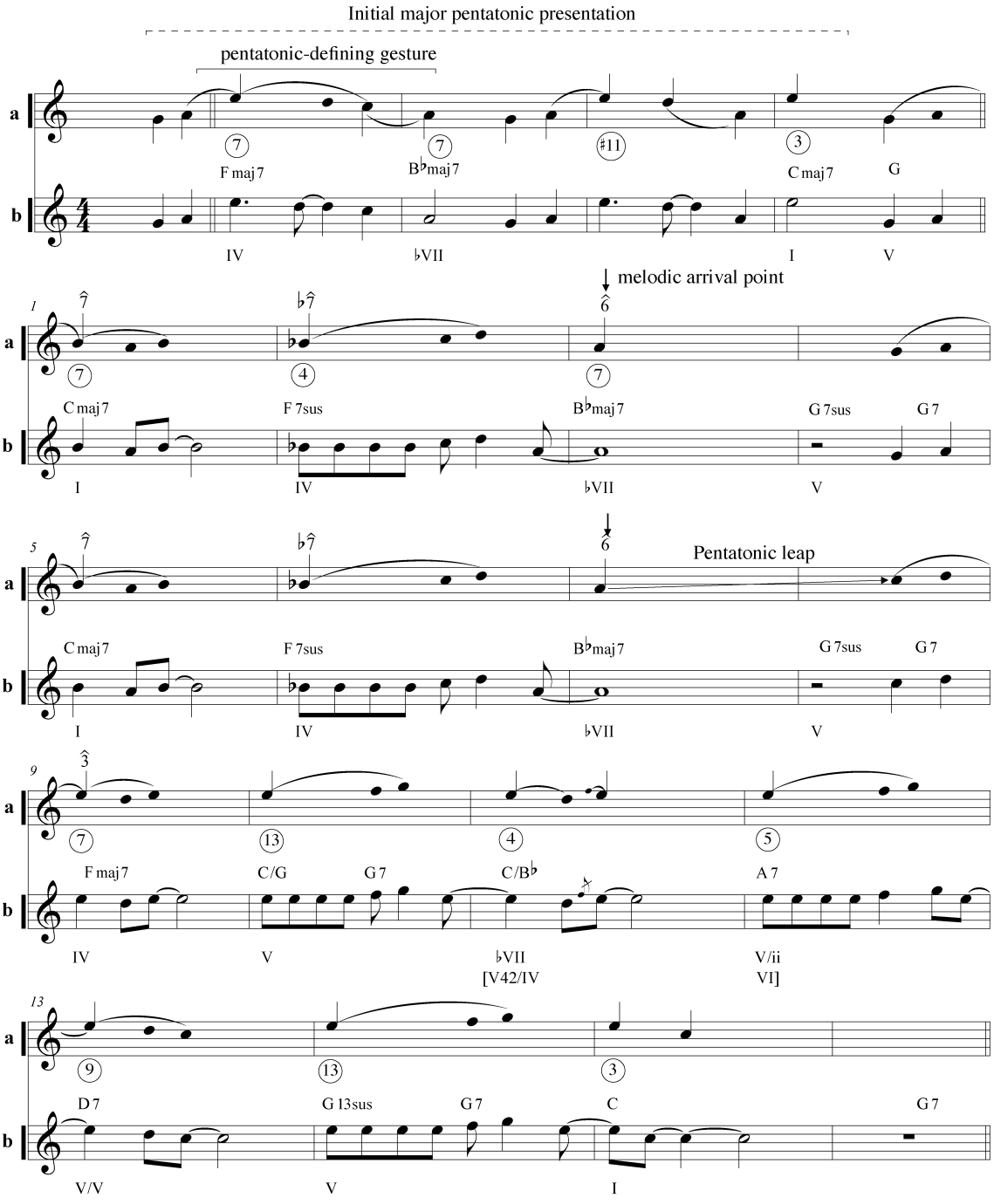
Extensions have a profound effect on the pentatonic-based melodies that Wonder favors in two characteristic ways. First, pentatonic notes of the melody are often voiced as chordal extensions, and not simply members of the basic triad. For example, the pentatonic scale degree $\hat{3}$ may represent harmonically a chordal seventh, ninth, eleventh,

or thirteenth. Second, melodic pitches that appear outside of the basic pentatonic framework of the song can often be explained as chordal extensions—instances where the harmony trumps the basic pitch collection of the melody. The melodic inclusion of $\hat{7}$ as a chordal major seventh over the tonic chord is one common occurrence where the harmony contributes a melodic pitch foreign to the pentatonic collection.

A clear example of both types of extension treatment appears in Example 3.11. The classic opening line of Wonder's 1969 hit single "My Cherie Amour" instantly confirms the C major pentatonic as the framework of the melody.[19] The familiar six-note refrain consists of a two-note ascending stepwise anacrusis from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{6}$, followed by a leap up to $\hat{3}$ on the downbeat, and concludes with a descent through the oft-discussed major PDG ($\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1} - \hat{6}$). From the very beginning, Wonder harmonizes melodic tones of the C-major pentatonic as chordal sevenths and other extensions. Circled numbers indicate the harmonic function of melodic pitches.

In the four-measure refrain, $\hat{3}$ is first heard as the chordal seventh of the IV chord (Fmaj7), then the sharp eleventh of the ♭VII (B♭maj7), as tensions to the basic chord, before it appears at the end of the phrase as a consonant third of the tonic chord (Cmaj7). The harmonic recasting of $\hat{3}$ is evident by the stemmed notes of the voice-leading reduction of the top staff, level a. In the lower half of the major PDG, $\hat{6}$ as appears the chordal seventh of B♭maj7. In each case, the pentatonic notes cast as extensions resolve down immediately to more stable intervals. In the first two measures, the chordal sevenths of Fmaj7 and B♭maj7 move down by step.

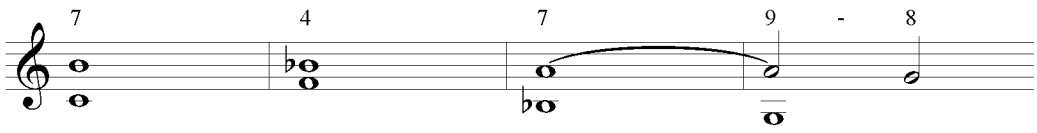
[19] From the album, *My Cherie Amour* (Tamla, 1969). Transcribed here in C major. The original key on the recording is in D♭ major.



Example 3.11. “My Cherie Amour,” introduction & mm. 1-16

Wonder continues to harmonize melodic tones as chordal sevenths in the verse. The first non-pentatonic melodic pitch, B, is introduced over the tonic chord as the

chordal seventh of Cmaj7 in m. 1. The linear path of this pitch however, is a chromatic descent to the pentatonic pitch A from mm. 1-3, passing through the B♭, setting in motion a chain of active, unstable pitches. The change in bass occurs here, and the A again represents a chordal seventh of B♭maj7, the chord built on ♭VII that is approached by its own dominant chord (F7sus).[20] Thus, the resolution of the B as a chordal seventh of the Cmaj7 occurs precisely at the arrival of the B♭maj7 chord. However, this resolution tone (A) also forms a tension (the seventh) that finally resolves at the end of the fourth measure with the arrival of G, scale degree $\hat{5}$ of the key and the root of the V chord. So the overarching motion of this passage actually leads to scale degree $\hat{5}$ in m. 4, with an intermediate resting point on the B♭maj7 chord in m. 3. The following voice-leading reduction of the melody and bass given in Example 3.12 summarizes the tension-resolution pattern that energizes this first phrase.



Example 3.12. "My Cherie Amour," tension-resolution pattern, verse, mm. 1-4

Wonder transposes this basic idea up a fourth in the preceding extended eight-bar phrase (see Example 3.11, mm. 9-16). By doing so, the transposition firmly re-anchors the melody within the pentatonic collection, as the repeated melodic gestures center around scale-degree $\hat{3}$. Subsequently, this scale degree receives extensive

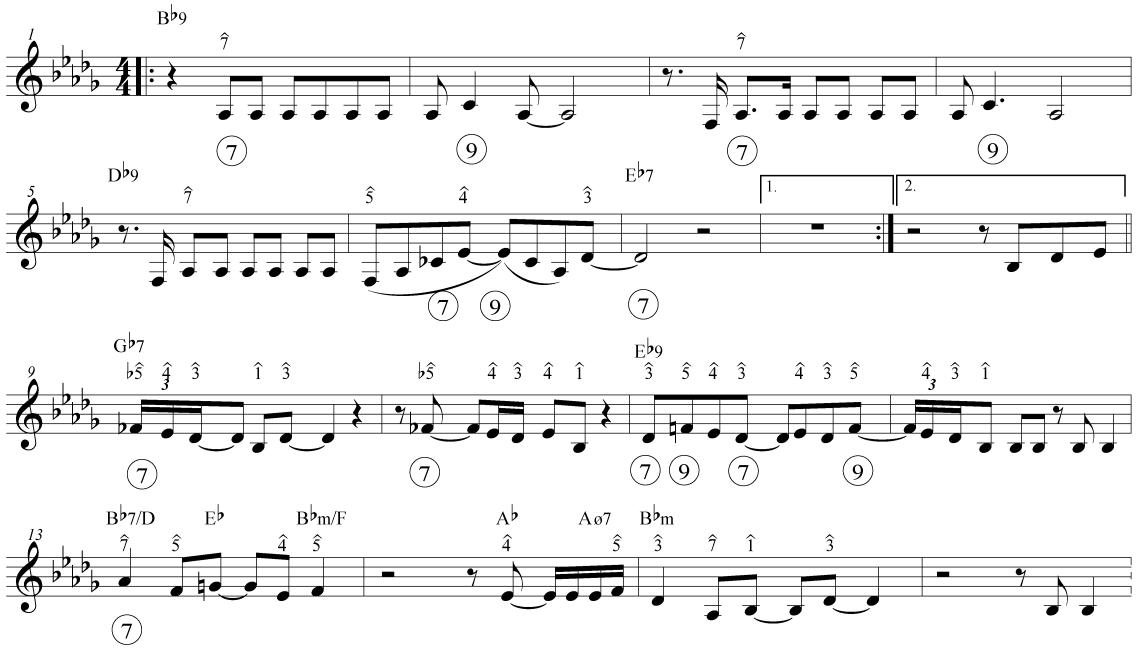
[20] The ♭VII with an added major seventh seems to fulfill an important functional role as an embellishing chord of the IV chord. The next section discusses this role in more detail.

reharmonizations over the final eight measures of the section, recast as the chordal seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth.

Pentatonic pitches as chord extensions add to the distinctiveness of Wonder's funk style too. "Love Having You Around," already recognized for the pentatonic process that governs root succession in Examples 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7, also features pentatonic notes interpreted as chordal extensions, and chordal extensions that introduce non-pentatonic notes. For instance, in Example 3.13 the first melodic gesture of the verse oscillates between the minor pentatonic ♭$\hat{7}$ (A♭), and the non-pentatonic C. These two pitches represent respectively the chordal seventh and ninth of the B♭ tonic chord. C♭ appears in the melody in m. 6 as part of an arpeggiation through the D♭9 chord (III). The inclusion of these foreign tones, however, does not disrupt the essence of the minor pentatonic. Each is understood as a color tone of their respective harmonies. Other pitches belonging to the B♭ minor pentatonic are also consistently voiced as chordal sevenths and ninths. Example 3.13 tracks the distribution of these pentatonic members in context of the prevailing mode and their role as active chordal tones. Numbers with carats represent pentatonic scale degrees, and circled numbers represent chord tones.

Several reharmonizations of the minor $\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \hat{3}$ pattern, an important repeated gesture of the melody, emerge throughout the song. An embedded form of the pattern first appears in the verse, stretched out over the D♭ and E♭ chords in mm. 6-7. $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{4}$ represent the tenth and ninth of D♭ in m. 6, and $\hat{3}$ the chordal seventh of E♭ in m.7. The pattern proliferates in the chorus as the melody becomes more animated. Against the G♭7 in mm. 9-10, the notes of the pattern are heard in succession as the chordal seventh ($\hat{5}$ is

flattened to create the minor seventh), sixth (thirteenth), and fifth. Then again in mm. 11-12, the $\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \hat{3}$ pattern is heard as the ninth, root, and seventh of E♭.

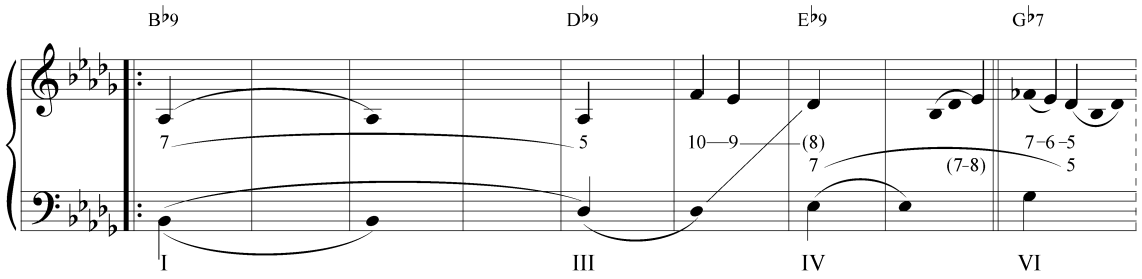


Example 3.13. "Love Having You Around," verse (mm. 1-8) & chorus (mm. 9-16)

It is not until mm. 13-15, with the arrival of the tonic B♭, that the pattern resolves most conclusively. Wonder withholds harmonizing scale-degree $\hat{3}$, the important mode-defining pitch of the pattern, with the tonic chord until the refrain. As shown, each instance that it appears prior to this point, $\hat{3}$ is cast as either the seventh of the IV chord on E♭ (mm. 7-8) or the fifth of the VI chord on G♭ (mm. 9-10).

It may seem that some of the extensions in this excerpt do not resolve as expected. The parallel motion of the chords B♭9 – D♭9 – E♭7, following the pathway designated by the minor pentatonic, appears to prohibit their active tones to move to more stable pitches. But if we suppose that these active pitches resolve *into* consonant pitches of the

following chord, then we can see that they do in fact *become* stable pitches above the bass. Example 3.14 illustrates the resolution of these active tones.



Example 3.14. "Love Having You Around," mm. 1-9

The above example shows that the active chordal seventh of the B♭9 chord *becomes* the consonant fifth of the D♭9 chord from mm. 1-5. In mm. 6-7, the ninth of the D♭9 chord resolves down to the root of the chord, but only after the bass has moved up by step to E♭, resulting in another dissonant seventh. This seventh *becomes a* fifth in m. 9 once the bass changes from E♭ to G♭, similar to the relationship between the B♭9 to D♭9 chords. The surface-level 7 – 6 – 5 resolution pattern elaborates the larger embedded resolution over the G♭ chord.

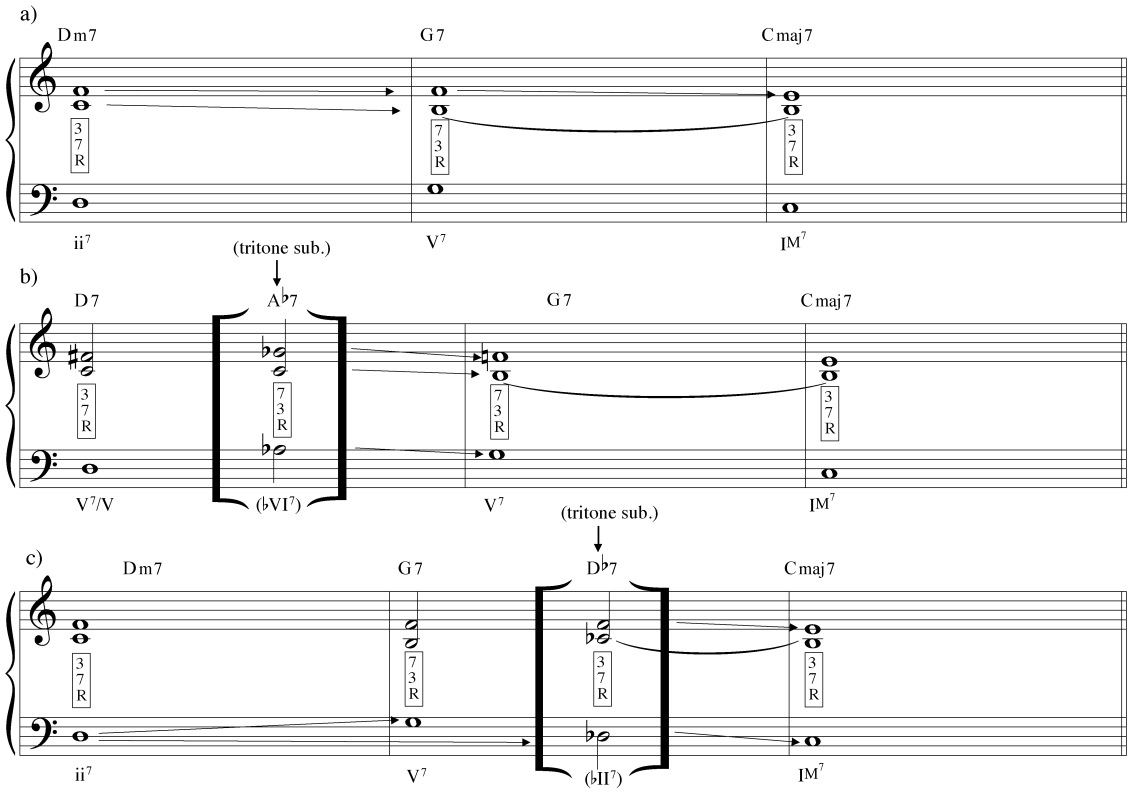
The purpose of presenting these examples in this section has been to make clear the idea that chordal extensions are an essential feature of Wonder's craft, and that his consistent use of them color his pentatonic melodies in a distinctive way. In addition to this objective, I have also made clear that in many cases chordal extensions in his style tend to behave as tensions do in other styles, resolving either immediately or eventually as part of longer voice-leading strands.

Tritone substitutions

As mentioned in Part I, the most common chord progression in jazz, and in tonal music in general, involves root motion by fifth or some variation of this pattern through chord substitutions. This motion appears not only in long sequences of chords related by fifth, but perhaps more significantly in the shorter progressions of embedded ii – V or ii – V –I cycles, which occur both diatonically and non-diatonically.[21] In many cases, chromatic bass lines can be explained as alterations of fifth cycle progressions. The most common elaboration of the ii – V unit results from the substitution of one of the chords with an alternate chord a tritone apart. Known as the "tritone substitution," this alternate chord shares similar voice-leading properties to the chord that it replaces. What makes this chord an attractive option is that it adds variety to the fundamental cycle by creating chromatic, stepwise motion in place of the conventional fifth motion in the bass. Example 3.15 illustrates the tonal model (a) and the common tritone substitutions of the ii chord (b) and the V chord (c). As shown in the boxes and by the arrows, chordal thirds map onto chordal sevenths and vice versa, creating a smooth voice-leading chain.[22]

[21] For more information on the importance of the ii-V unit in jazz, see Steven Strunk's, "Jazz Harmony," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2 vols., ed. Barry Kernfield, (New York: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2002), 159-172. In particular, pages 166-168 focuses on this integral unit, and the types of linear patterns that occur with them.

[22] See Nicole Biamonte, "Augmented-Sixth Chords vs. Tritone Substitutes," *Music Theory Online*, (Vol. 14, no. 2, 2008), n. pag. Biamonte does an extensive investigation of tritone substitutions in the ii-V unit, comparing them to augmented-sixth chords common to the Western art music tradition. Significant to this study, is her claim that both predominant and dominant function chords can be substituted with their tritone equivalents. Further, she alludes to the idea that the substituted chord does not necessarily have to be of the same quality as the original, so long as it fulfills the same essential voice leading (see paragraphs 4-5 in particular).

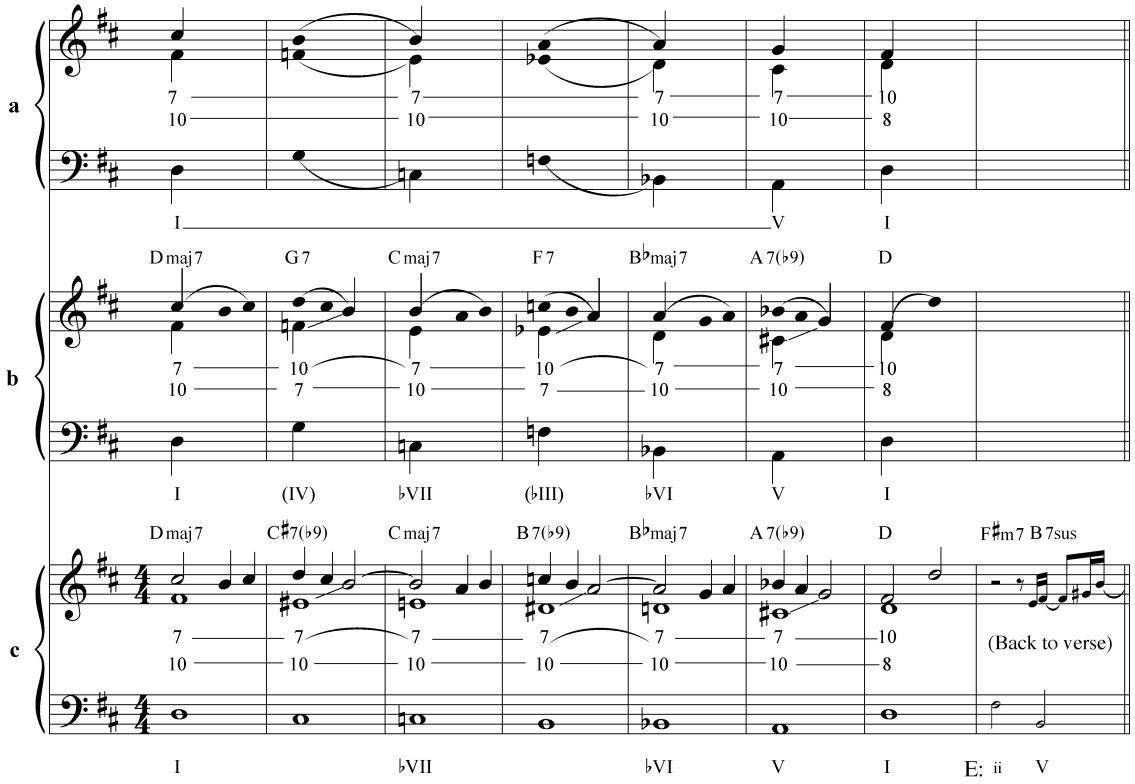


Example 3.15. Common tritone substitutions

While other possibilities exist, frequent substitution of either of the chords in this unit happens through tritone substitution—a chord whose root is an augmented fourth away from the fundamental chordal root and that shares the same active tritone. The standard ii-V progression (3.15a) transforms into either a ♭VI – V – I unit (3.15b), or a ii – ♭II – I (3.15c) unit. Chains of ii – V units, in which the tritone substitution has been applied, result in sequences of chromatic half-step resolutions in the bass voice.

An extended instance of consecutive ii – V chains that form a falling fifth sequence happens in the chorus of Wonder's "Too Shy To Say." Example 3.16 shows the sequential pathway of the chorus (level c) and reduction levels of the essential voice

leading (levels a and b). The actual surface rhythms at level c have been simplified in order to present the pattern clearly.



Example 3.16. "Too Shy To Say," chorus, mm. 1-8[23]

At level c, tritone substitutions intensify the voice leading of the sequence linking the span from I to V (mm. 1-6) by creating a chromatic stepwise descent in the bass.[24] A comparison of structural levels a and b with the surface-level events (level c) reveals that

[23] From *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).

[24] As a side note, observe that the tritone substituted major-minor seventh chords in every other measure feature an expressive flat ninth extension on the downbeat. The resolution of these unstable extensions are immediate, resolving directly to the root of the chord before the voice leading proceeds through to the chordal seventh.

the essential voice-leading strands between the upper voices retain the perfect fifth or tritone, and are unaffected by the change in bass. But the alternating interval pattern of sevenths and tenths does change, represented by the figures in the middle of the staff. The horizontal lines and slurs emphasize the distinctive interval pattern that is produced by this particular progression. Level b replaces the tritone substitutions to reveal that the fundamental sequential pattern is a series of fifth-related major-minor and major-major seventh chords. This pattern features chains of sevenths that move down by step to become tenths, and chains of tenths that holdover to become sevenths of the following chord.

The most conclusive resolution of the active voice-leading strands occurs with the arrival of the tonic chord (D) in m. 7. Level a presents a reduction of this basic voice-leading. In the melodic reduction each of the intermediate arrival points (shown with stemmed notes) contain active major sevenths between the outer voices. Each pitch of the stepwise descent, C# – B – A – G, signifies chordal sevenths linked together melodically, propelling the motion of the phrase to its resting point with a more consonant tenth on the tonic chord in m.7.

Level b also reveals another important aspect of Wonder's approach to harmonic sequences. He often uses falling-fifth sequences to temporarily drift out of the key by keeping the interval between each root a perfect fifth. The drift begins in m. 3 with the move to the Cmaj7 chord—the ♭VII of the key of D major—in place of C♯, the diatonic VII of the key. At this point, Wonder could have continued to cycle through fifths until circling back to the starting point, and indeed he does in some cases or at least comes

close. Here he understandably breaks away from the pattern at the V chord in m. 6 in order to reach the cadence on a strong metrical point in the phrase.

The ii – V unit and longer fifth sequences (discussed more in-depth below) are fundamental to Wonder's harmonic language. Its frequency in many of his classic songs indicates that he was working out harmony from within a tonal framework, specifically a jazz-centric tonal framework. The final section explores Wonder's use of harmony from the perspective of this larger framework.

Part 3: Tonal Patterns and Harmonic Archetypes

Part 1 of this chapter explored the general role of pentatonicism as it relates to chord succession, and Part 2 showed that the vertical structures used to harmonize the pentatonic successions have a clear origin in jazz harmony. Part 2 also recognized that jazz, aside from the linear pentatonic root movement, also had an apparent tonal framework that organized chords by fifth, with clear hierarchical relationships. Part 3 details more specifically the way in which tonal frameworks function in Wonder's music, and investigates the various ways that he establishes a given key, explores or deviates from that key, and confirms the key with regular cadence points.

The tonal relationships that appear in Wonder's music come from his specific use of the jazz harmonic language. Other more general tonal patterns emerge that are common to varying styles of tonal music. One important relationship, chord movement by fifth, was explained in Example 3.9 above. The following template provided in Figure 3.1 describes the harmonic overview found in a number of Wonder's songs. With only the exception of his funk tunes, at least one of the main sections (verse, chorus or both) is

normally self-contained and has a clear harmonic path, resulting in a fairly consistent projection of periodicity through functional harmonic progressions. Even his funk tunes tend to be goal-oriented in at least one section, pursuing the end path of the harmonic motion, as was noticeable when comparing the differing harmonic pathways of the verse and chorus of "Maybe Your Baby" in Examples 3.4 and 3.5.

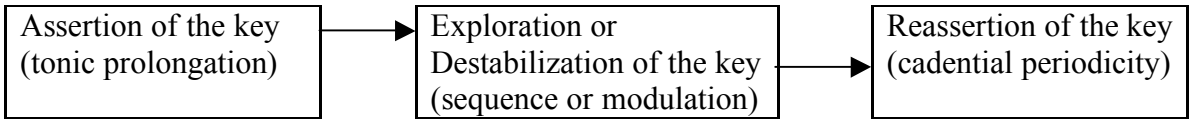


Figure 3.1. Harmonic template of verse and/or chorus structures

Either verse or chorus will typically have a subordinate role in terms of harmonic conclusiveness and will rely on the other for completion. The examples that follow illustrate how each part forms the whole harmonic path of a given section. The motion away from tonic almost always drives toward a cadential goal.

While this template may appear to suggest three separate harmonic events within the span of a section, in reality one or more of these events often seamlessly transition from one to the next without perceptible divisions. In some cases, Wonder may even omit one or more elements above. In funk tunes, for instance, a vamp on a single tonic chord for an entire section is not unusual. If this is the case, the other section will almost always contrast with the first by presenting functional harmonic relationships that proceed to a cadence. The template is useful in depicting the basic processes Wonder uses to create directed harmonic motion, and traces of the template are even noticeable in songs that

appear to have static harmonic progressions. The discussion below will address in turn each harmonic category of the template.

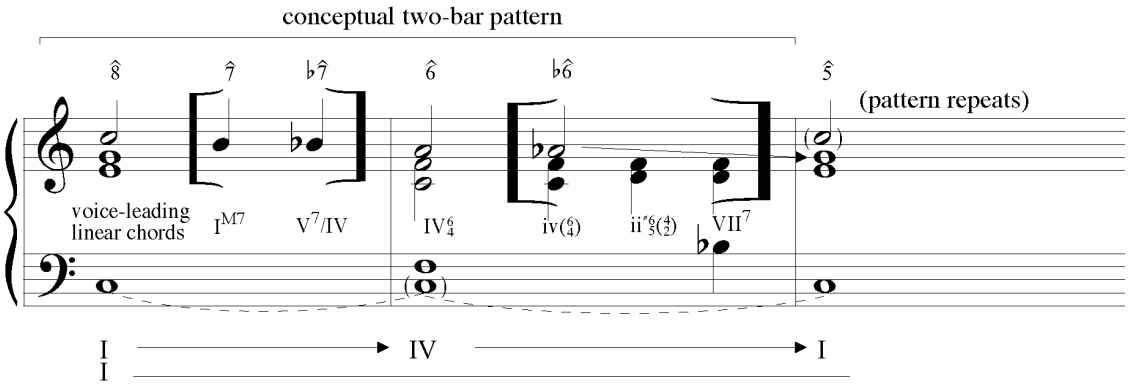
Asserting the key: tonic prolongation patterns

Wonder routinely sets up the basic key area by initiating some type of static pattern that clearly elaborates the tonic chord. In many cases, he includes a vamp prior to the start of the first main section of the song in order to establish the tonic of the key.[25] The pattern typically takes the form of a two-bar (notated or otherwise aurally understood) repeated unit that either remains on the tonic chord or embellishes it by alternation with another chord, usually the IV chord. Note that the IV chord is present as the "other" chord in relation to the tonic as part of an expansion pattern; it represents in this case a linear event instead of a functional predominant chord.

Example 3.17 shows an abstraction of the basic harmonic framework that Wonder uses to prolong a given primary key area, the common voice-leading strands that result, and the elaborations that further expand the tonic. Not all of the elaborations shown here occur simultaneously in a given song; rather, they are normative pathways that Wonder uses for elaborative purposes. At the most basic level of harmonic analysis, the tonic is shown as the governing sonority. The tonic chord itself may undergo a voice-leading transformation as the tonic pitch (sounding in an upper voice) moves down either a half step or whole step, forming a major-major seventh chord or major-minor seventh chord, respectively. The move of a whole step to the $\flat\hat{7}$ scale degree, however, represents a secondary dominant chord of the IV chord and, by virtue of the inserted half-step,

[25] Note that while I do reference the term "vamp" to describe the repetitive aspect of this pattern, I am primarily concerned here with the harmonic pattern, and not necessarily the specific figuration or ostinato representative of the harmony.

creates a more intensified pull toward scale degree $\hat{6}$, which signals a shift in harmony to the IV chord.



Example 3.17. Tonic prolongation pattern template

Again, should this pattern move to the IV chord, as the inclusion of a descending line to $\hat{6}$ proceeding from the tonic chord ($\hat{8} - \hat{7} - \flat\hat{7} - \hat{6}$) would certainly imply, its function is not that of a predominant. The chords that represent this harmony are essentially neighboring chords, the purpose of which is to elaborate the chord being prolonged—in this case the tonic chord.[26] Wonder further emphasizes this stable – unstable chordal relationship through modal mixture, or borrowing a chord from the parallel key to introduce chromatic elements to the basic collection. It also allows the essential voice-leading line to continue the stepwise chromatic descent initiated over the

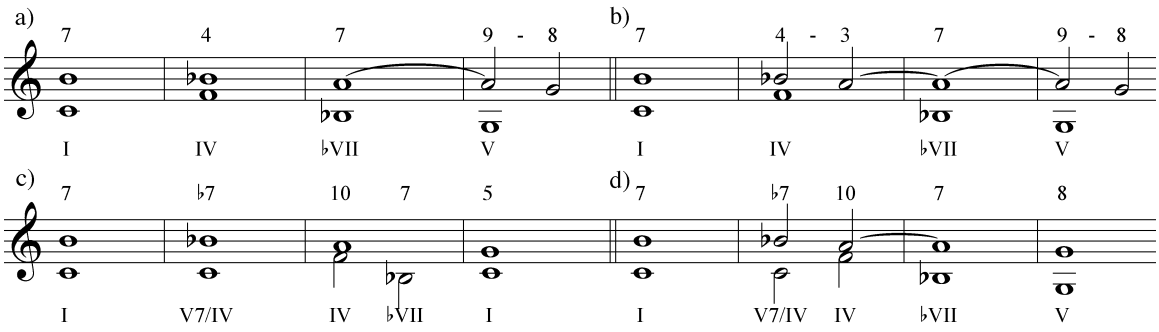
[26] Jon Fitzgerald, "Motown Crossover Hits 1963-1966 and the Creative Process." *Popular Music*, (Vol. 14, no. 1, Jan. 1995), 97-140. Fitzgerald recognizes the embellishing role of the IV chord in this context in other notable black songwriter's music of the slightly older generation to Wonder (such as Cooke, Mayfield, and Robinson). A comparative chart tracks the most common chord progressions, and the most common one of all is the I – IV progression. He notes that "[i]n many cases, this progression forms part of a repetitive rhythmic-chordal riff, rather than being used to harmonize melodic movement. When used as part of the I-IV riff, the IV chord acts as an embellishment of the I chord…" (117-119).

tonic harmony, linking ♭$\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ through $\hat{6}$ and/or ♭$\hat{6}$. Wonder typically harmonizes the lowered ♭$\hat{6}$ with one of three possible modally-borrowed chords that share common tones: iv (as the chordal flat third), ii$^{\varnothing}$7 (as the chordal flat fifth) or ♭VII (as the chordal flat seventh). He often inverts the iv (iv$^{6}_{4}$) and ii (ii$^{\varnothing\,4}_{\;2}$) chords in order to permit the bass voice to remain constant on the tonic note, but the ♭VII chord always appears in root position and is first preceded by a motion from the IV chord.[27] The completion of this pathway on scale degree $\hat{5}$ results when the tonic chord returns to begin the next pattern repetition.

A variation of the tonic prolongation pattern was seen in the opening phrase of "My Cherie Amour" in Example 3.11. Shown again in Example 3.18a, the voice leading linking $\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ remains the same, with a passing motion through ♭$\hat{7}$ and $\hat{6}$, but the harmonic rhythm cycles through the IV chord to the ♭VII more quickly and the pattern completes within itself. The motion to scale degree ♭$\hat{7}$ is usually part of the tonic chord that functions as a V^{7}/IV. Here Wonder accelerates the harmony, and ♭$\hat{7}$ becomes the suspended fourth of the IV chord, and $\hat{6}$ becomes the major seventh of ♭VII. This move essentially shifts the relationships between melody tones and harmony over one position, and the ♭VII performs the same voice-leading role of the IV chord. Notice also that Wonder extends the harmonic pattern by progressing to V before repeating the cycle.

[27] Steven Strunk, "The Harmony of Early Bebop: A Layered Approach," *Journal of Jazz Studies,* (Vol. 6, 1979), pp??. Strunk suggests in this article that the ♭VII chord fulfills the same voice-leading function as the IV chord and subsequently is included in the same substitution set.

Compared to the model (c), this tonal pattern still fulfills its voice-leading pathway, and asserts the tonic chord.[28] Two similar interpretations are given in Example 3.18 (b & d).



Example 3.18. "My Cherie Amour," comparison of prolongation patterns

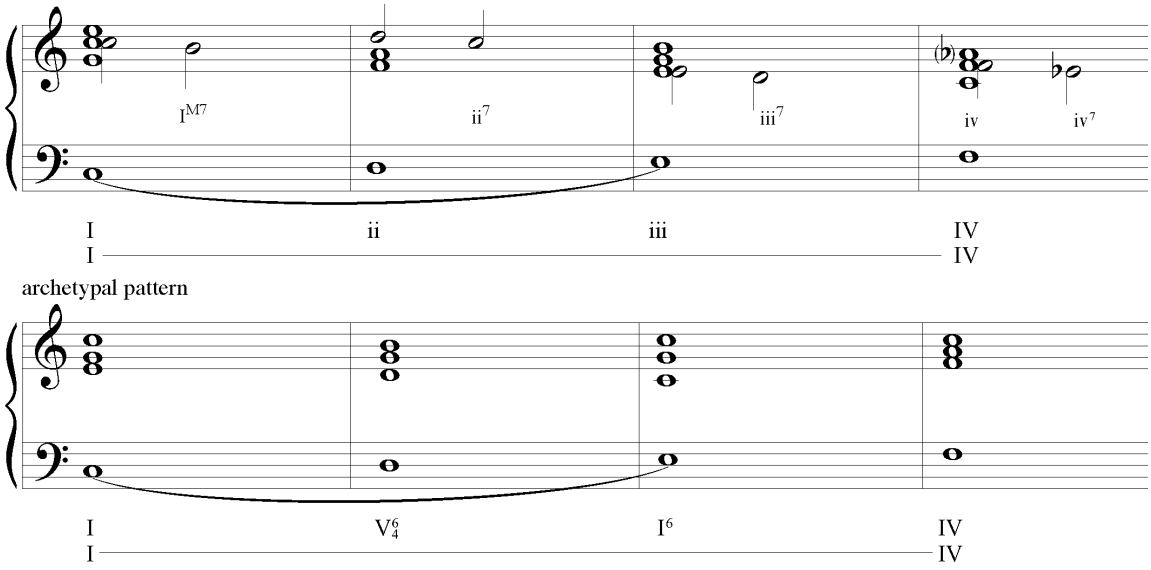
This mapping at once reveals some important considerations about Wonder's harmonic practice. The added local chords are best explained as the product of linear voice-leading events that embellish a more basic structure in order to infuse moments of harmonic tension that then actively pull towards more stable points. The most stable point and resolution of the linear line ($\hat{5}$) occurs only with the repetition of the pattern.[29] Even though Wonder prolongs a single harmony with this pattern, essentially static in terms of harmonic progression, he is able to create moments of great tension by passing through other linear, ornamental harmonies over the tonic pattern.[30]

[28] One could also argue that this four-measure unit is a phrase that departs from to tonic and ends with a half cadence. The progression also starts to initiate a falling-fifths cycle, but breaks the chain of fifths by moving from ♭VII to V, instead of ♭VII to ♭III.

[29] Timothy Hughes has called these types of recurring two-bar units *autotelic* patterns, where pattern completion occurs at the start of the next cycle of the pattern (Hughes, 15).

[30] Other prolongational patterns that feature repeated two-bar units before moving to another harmonic area occur less frequently in Wonder's music (For instance, the repetition between I – vi as found in many pop

One tonic prolongation pattern that occurs in Wonder's songs during the period under consideration is the $\hat{1}$ – $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{3}$ ascending bass line. This stepwise ascent typically links the prolonged tonic chord to the predominant chord, and each scale degree in the chord succession is harmonized with parallel root position chords.



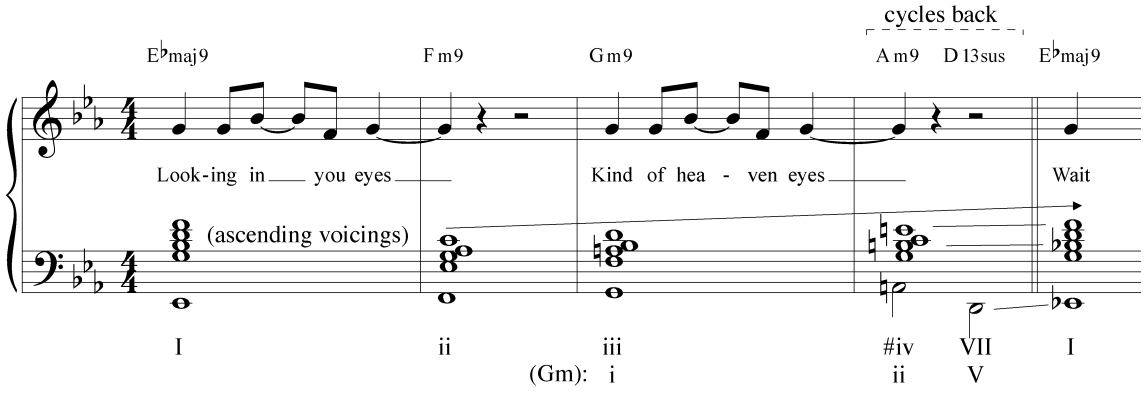
Example 3.19. Ascending bass tonic prolongation pattern

The most basic voice leading of this pattern connects the tonic thirds $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{3}$ with a passing motion through $\hat{2}$. In Example 3.19, the archetypal pattern this imitates avoids the linear parallel motion caused by successive root position chords by inverting the chord built on scale degree $\hat{2}$.

The cyclical verse section of "Golden Lady" provides a clever instance of this pattern. In Example 3.20, the repeated four-measure unit consists of two rotations through the tonic prolongation pattern. The melodic pitch G is the focal point of the

songs). The main idea here is that the tonic is expanded harmonically in some way before the harmony progresses toward the end of formal sections.

melody, threaded as a common tone through the three chords that comprise the pattern. The successive parallel chords, E♭maj9, Fm9, and Gm9, harmonize the linear movement through the tonic third span in the bass, and recast the melodic note G (scale degree $\hat{3}$) respectively as a chordal third, ninth, and root.



Example 3.20. "Golden Lady," verse, mm. 1-4[31]

The bass pattern—which, as previously noted, links to the IV chord by the half step between $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{4}$—surprisingly simulates this move up a whole step on the raised $\hat{4}$. Wonder initiates a turnaround that leads back to the beginning of the tonic prolongation pattern by making the chord built on the raised $\hat{4}$ a minor chord that functions with the chord on VII in an apparent ii-V relationship. But this harmonic unit from Am9 to D13sus seems at first glance to function in the key of G minor and not E♭ major. The progression briefly sidesteps the key of E♭ major temporarily and tonicizes the back-related G-minor chord that was part of the tonic prolongation (built on iii) of the original

[31] From *Innervisions* (Tamla, 1973).

key.[32] This same progression returns at the end of the pre-chorus, which does in fact modulate to G minor, but Wonder's own voice leading in this passage lifts the D13sus more convincingly up to E♭ major rather than as a true dominant-functioning chord in G minor. In fact, with the leading tone of the key in the bass (♯7) it fulfills an dominant function in the key of E♭.

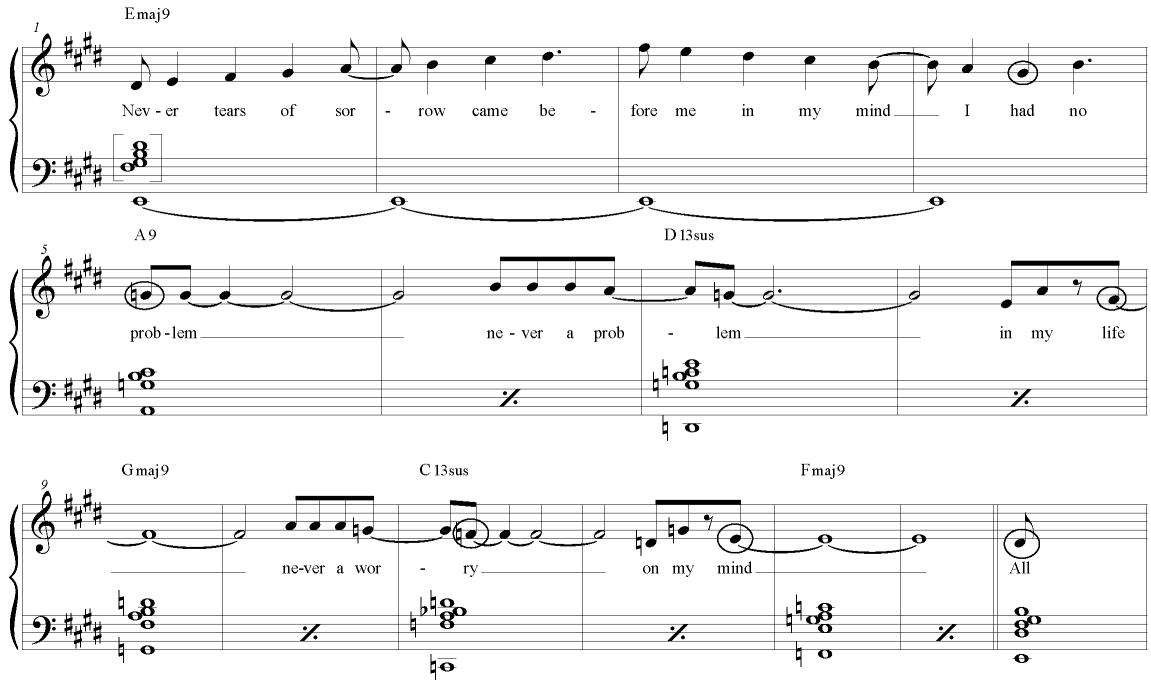
Sequences[33]

As I mentioned previously, one of Wonder's most identifiable harmonic tendencies is his affinity for the falling-fifth sequence, used to connect tonic prolongations patterns that anchor the key area with cadential arrival points. Sequences give the music a sense of motion and direction. Falling-fifths sequences are initiated in many cases by a move to IV (or iv). Sequences also are responsible for much of the chromaticism that occurs in Wonder's music. As already explained above, Wonder favors tritone substitutions as part of a sequential passage in order to create a descending chromatic bass line. Depending on how far the rotation through the fifths cycle, Wonder sometimes allows the sequence to rotate out of the key altogether, albeit temporarily, before shifting to a cadence. The extended sequence in "Lookin' For Another Pure Love" is a fine example of this type of non-diatonic cycle, shown in Example 3.21. After setting up the key of E major with a pedal on the tonic chord in mm. 1-4, the remainder of the

[32] Timothy Hughes has an alternate reading of this passage (see pages 74-76). He supports the idea that the final two chords deliberately reference/foreshadow the key of G minor and that the resolution to E♭ functions as a deceptive resolution, a motion from V-VI assuming G minor is the temporary new key. I personally hear this resolution confirming E♭ major as the primary key considering the voicings of the chords linking the end of the progression with the beginning.

[33] Sequences briefly make their appearance in Part II on jazz harmony, as part of the discussion on tritone substitutions. I discuss them here as a separate subject to show how they fit into Wonder's overall harmonic schemes. They are such an important part of his vocabulary that they are worth further exploration.

verse is comprised of a falling-fifths sequence starting on IV in m. 5. The IV chord also introduces the ♭3̂ of the inflected minor key into the melody as the chordal seventh of A9, which subsequently becomes the primary voice-leading event of the sequence.



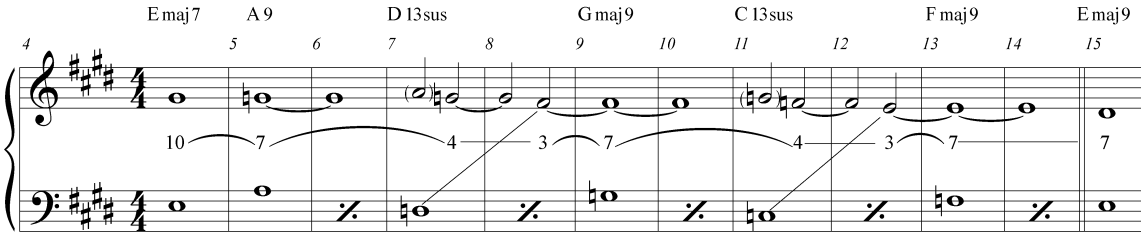
Example 3.21. "Lookin' For Another Pure Love," verse, mm. 1-14[34]

Instead of shifting to a diatonic fifth from the IV chord to VII (D♯ of the key), Wonder's bass line moves a perfect fifth to the ♭VII chord, immediately sending the harmonic cycle out of the key of E. It is also this second chord of the sequence, the D13sus chord in m.7 that begins the dominant-tonic pattern of the sequence, creating a chain of chordal pairs that continues through two rotations. The "jumping off" point lands

[34] *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

the sequence on Fmaj9, the ♭$\hat{2}$ scale degree in relation to the home key.[35] This may seem like a miscalculation, but Wonder exploits the half step relationship between the F and E major chords to create a convincing magnetic resolution.

The primary voice leading of the melody, shown with circled pitches, progresses chromatically from ♭$\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ – ♭$\hat{2}$ – $\hat{1}$. In the sequence, each primary melodic tone represents either an unstable chordal seventh or eleventh. Since Wonder treats the "sus" chord as a distinct structure, the suspension pattern in the voice-leading displaces the 4-3 resolution pattern that occur with archetypal fifth cycles.[36] In this case, Wonder directly resolves the expressive dissonant fourth above the bass to the chordal seventh of the following chord. Example 3.22 shows the basic template that Wonder embellishes.



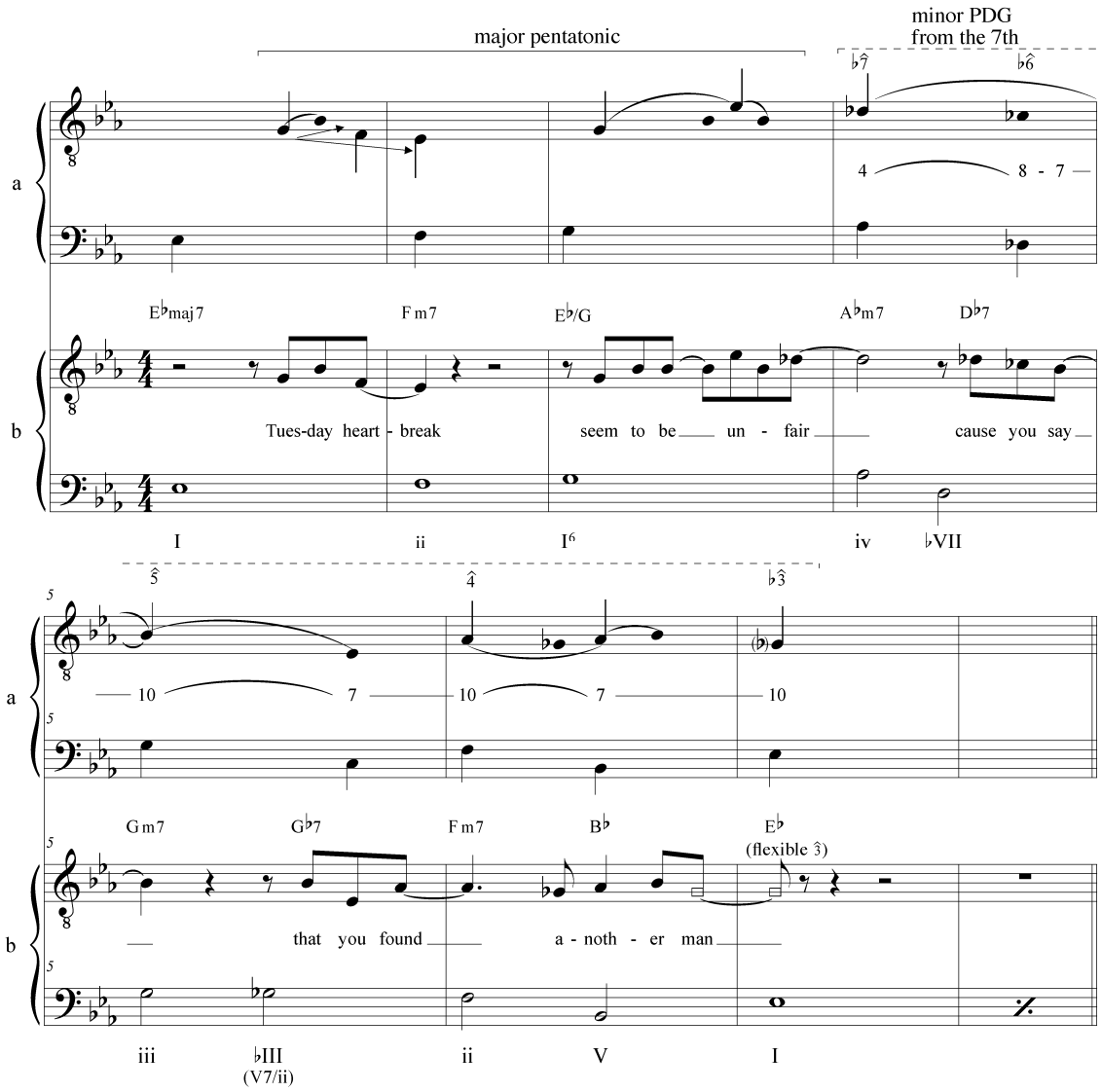
Example 3.22. "Lookin' For Another Pure Love," sequence voice-leading, mm. 4-15

Melodic events, such as the descending minor span from ♭$\hat{7}$ – $\hat{5}$, are often the result of the voice-leading initiated by a sequential passage. When Wonder incorporates

[35] Interestingly, the span from the tonic to ♭II covered by this sequential motion is foreshadowed by the same two chords in alternation during the opening vamp.

[36] This same resolution pattern is implied in most chord sequences related by fifth, where the dominant-functioning chord has a suspended third. See for instance "My Cherie Amour" above in the preceding section, that features this same motion, creating a 4-7 voice-leading pattern, a representation of the more fundamental 4-3-7 linear pattern.

this pattern in the major mode, he embellishes the melodic motion from ♭$\hat{7}$ to $\hat{5}$ with chromatic passing tones that represent harmonic tones of the falling fifths sequence. The verse to "Tuesday Heartbreak" begins with the ascending "do-re-mi" tonic prolongation pattern that establishes the key of E♭ major in Example 3.23.

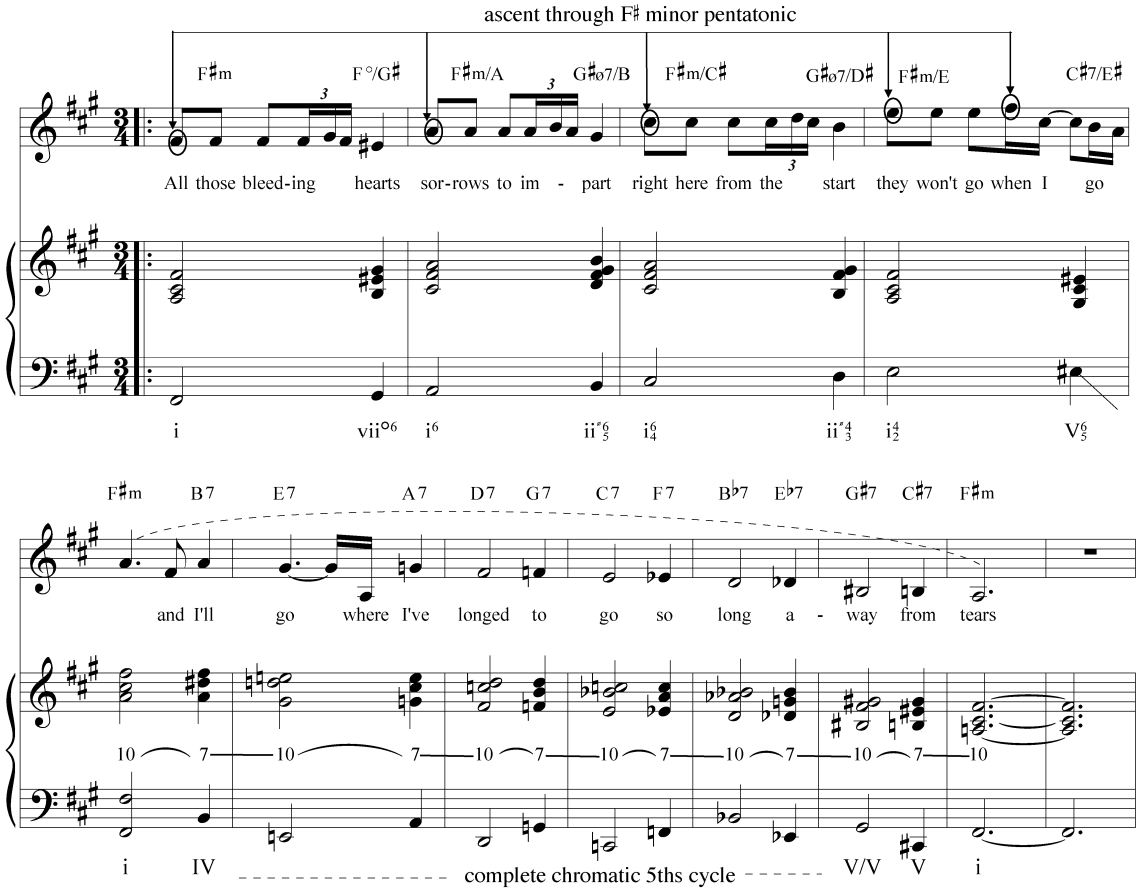


Example 3.23. "Tuesday Heartbreak," verse, mm. 1-8[37]

[37] *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

The prolongation pattern connects with the iv chord in m. 4, initiating a falling-fifth sequence, altered with a tritone substitution in m. 5 to create a chromatic bass descent, before arriving at the cadence in m. 7. Minor-mode scale degree ♭$\hat{7}$ is introduced into the major pentatonic melodic structure initially as the eleventh of the minor iv chord in m. 4, but with the change of bass to D♭ in the second half of the measure it becomes the root of the ♭VII chord. The fifths cycle, which as before, moves chromatically outside of the key, embellishes the basic descent of the minor PDG here with the addition of chromatic tones filling in the motion that links ♭$\hat{7}$ – ♭$\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$. The line continues to descend stepwise to $\hat{3}$ in conjunction with the cycle. Wonder performs this arrival pitch ambiguously by toggling back and forth between ♭$\hat{3}$ and $\hat{3}$.

Wonder also uses extended sequences for textual purposes in order to convey the idea of a journey, or as a way to express distance from someone or something. The most compelling and extended use of the falling-fifths sequence occurs in the verse to "They Won't Go When I Go," Wonder's sobering take on Judgment Day in Example 3.24. Depicting his longing to journey "away from tears," the falling-fifths progression is constructed of consecutive major-minor seventh chords. This extended sequence dramatically traverses the entire chromatic collection, connecting the tonic chord at one end of the progression to the tonic chord on the other end. The interval pattern of connected tenths to sevenths, indicated in the accompaniment, applies to the essential voice-leading relationship of the sequence between the bass line and the vocal line.



Example 3.24. "They Won't Go When I Go," verse, mm. 1-12[38]

During the cycle from mm. 5-11, the melody continually spirals downward by half step as a result of the nature of the progression, offering an additional, even contrasting layer of meaning expressed above. It suggests that Wonder in his quest to ascend (as implied by the rising line in the first phrase in mm. 1-4) and thus depart from the sorrow and pain, is actually being gradually pulled down by the rest of the world.

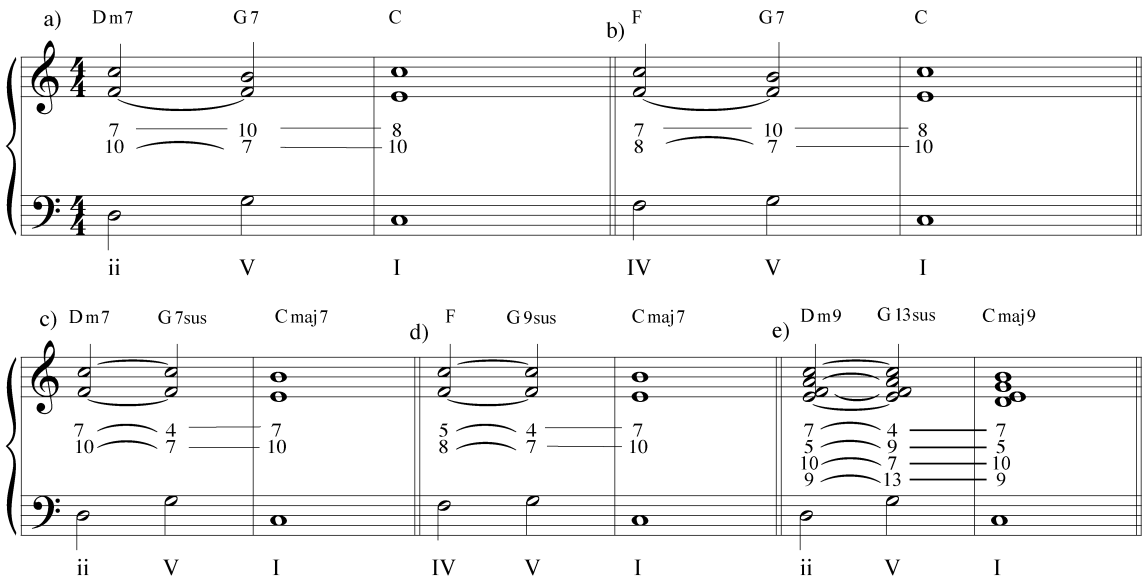
[38] *Fulfilingness' First Finale* (Tamla, 1974).

Cadences and the dominant "sus" chord

Periodicity in Wonder's music, like all tonal styles, is created by regular cadential moments that mark phrase endings. However, the melodic and harmonic structures of half and authentic cadences differ from the strict tonal patterns on which they are based. This has to do with the reduced role of scale degree $\hat{7}$, a tone that is at odds with the fundamental pentatonic collection but, as already shown above, appears as a melodic tone in Wonder's music primarily as the result of his fondness for using chordal sevenths over the tonic. Melodically, its voice-leading function is to step down to $\hat{6}$, as part of the harmonic motion to IV as explained in the discussion on tonic prolongation patterns.

Example 3.25 below compares two possible cadential tonal archetypes (a and b) with models based on Wonder's stylistic formulas (c, d, and e). I have used simple chord voicings in order to illustrate clearly the voice leading of each chord tone. Scale degree $\hat{7}$ rarely functions as a leading tone of the dominant chord built over scale degree $\hat{5}$ of the key. Wonder often withholds this pitch, and substitutes it with $\hat{1}$ as the chordal fourth of V. The resulting "sus" chord represents the functional dominant for Wonder, and can be explained as a product of the smooth voice leading of the harmonic succession.

In each case, a motion to scale degree $\hat{5}$ in the bass is almost always preceded by either scale degrees $\hat{2}$ or $\hat{4}$, both of which fulfill predominant roles at cadences. Central to Wonder's cadences (c, d, and e), the essential voice leading from either predominant chord (ii or IV) retains $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{1}$ in the upper voices over the dominant as common tones. These tones become respectively the chordal seventh and suspended fourth of the dominant harmony, and create different surface-level resolution patterns than those of the archetypes.



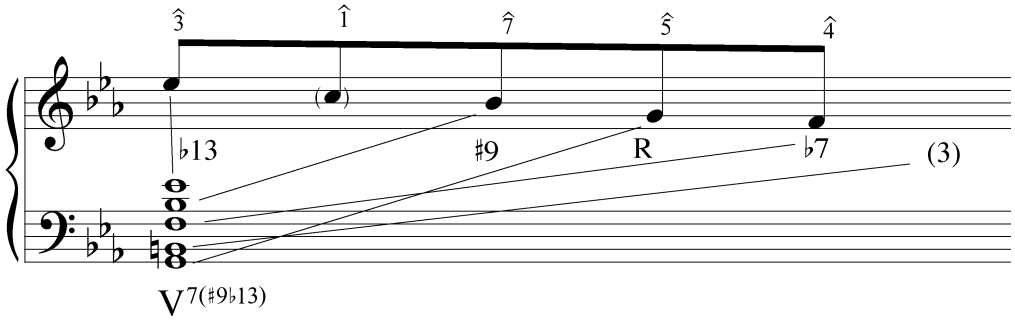
Example 3.25. Wonder cadential formulas

The harmonic intervallic patterns indicated by the numbers in the middle of the staff represent this stylistic difference. Wonder sometimes keeps the entire chord voicing built on ii or IV unchanged, only moving the bass note up to V in order to simulate the V-I authentic cadence. This technique calls into question the idea that the authentic cadence is the more basic structure (c and d). Since the harmonic structure essentially reprises the predominant role of IV with a change of bass to $\hat{5}$, the "plagal-ness" of the structure is still present in the cadence to I.[39] Wonder seldom allows the suspended chordal fourth to resolve to the chordal third ($\hat{1}$ to $\hat{7}$) over the V chord prior to the motion to I—the

[39] The idea that the "sus" chord is a hybrid structure combining the IV and V is briefly addressed in David Temperely, "The Cadential IV in Rock," *Music Theory Online,* (Vol. 17, No. 1, April 2011), para. 8.4.

suspended dominant seems to be in most cases the fundamental sonority he chooses to utilize at cadences.[40]

It is also important to recognize that this suspended cadential structure appears almost exclusively in major keys. In minor keys, Wonder regularly moves to an altered major-minor seventh chord on scale degree $\hat{5}$ as shown in Example 3.26. This structure's altered extensions are diatonic to the collection, like the raised ninth and lowered ninth, tones which represent respectively the $\flat\hat{7}$ and $\flat\hat{3}$ of the minor pentatonic. In the example below, the numbers above the staff with carats represents the C-minor pentatonic scale degrees and the numbers below the staff represent their harmonic context.



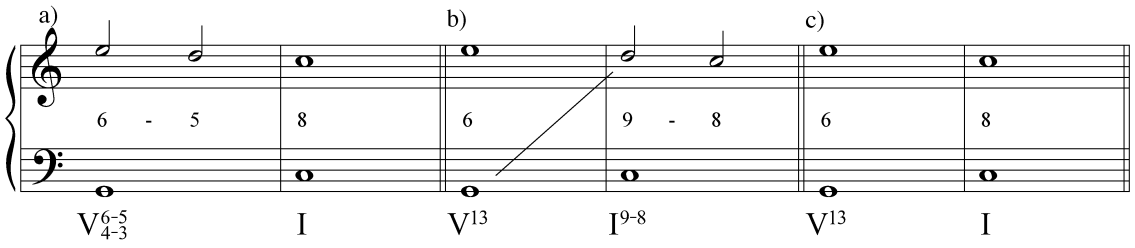
Example 3.26. The minor pentatonic cadence

Significantly, it is the defining chordal third (the leading tone $\hat{7}$), not part of the pentatonic collection that creates the most tension with the chordal extensions. The tritone rub between the chordal third and seventh is an important interval of any dominant chord. The more jarring interval of the diminished octave (or major seventh, depending

[40] A few clear examples of the V chord with "ti" appear in this period I am surveying. Wonder resolves the Vsus chord at cadences in "Happier Than the Morning Sun," "Seems So Long," "You and I (We Can Conquer the World)," "Blame it on the Sun," and "He's Misstra Know-it-All."

on how you spell it,) is formed between the chordal third and sharp ninth (customarily spelled as a minor third). This chord is a characteristic sonority in several of Wonder's funk tunes.

Melodic closure at cadences occurs less often in Wonder's music than in other tonal styles of music. Common practice requires scale degree $\hat{2}$ to link the tonic $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$, and represents the dominant harmonic function.[41] But in Wonder's style, and popular styles in general, the absence of $\hat{2}$ is more idiomatic. When clear tonal cadences are present, meaning that there is a clear harmonic motion from V to I, scale degree $\hat{2}$ appears as a 9-8 suspension figure over the tonic chord, and seems to act more as an embellishment rather than a structural melodic tone (Example 3.27). When this is the case, the melodic cadence features a move from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$ as the fundamental motion, where the structural $\hat{3}$ forms a thirteenth over the dominant chord. But I submit that this is a surface-level, stylistic representation of the archetypal pattern upon which this pattern is built.



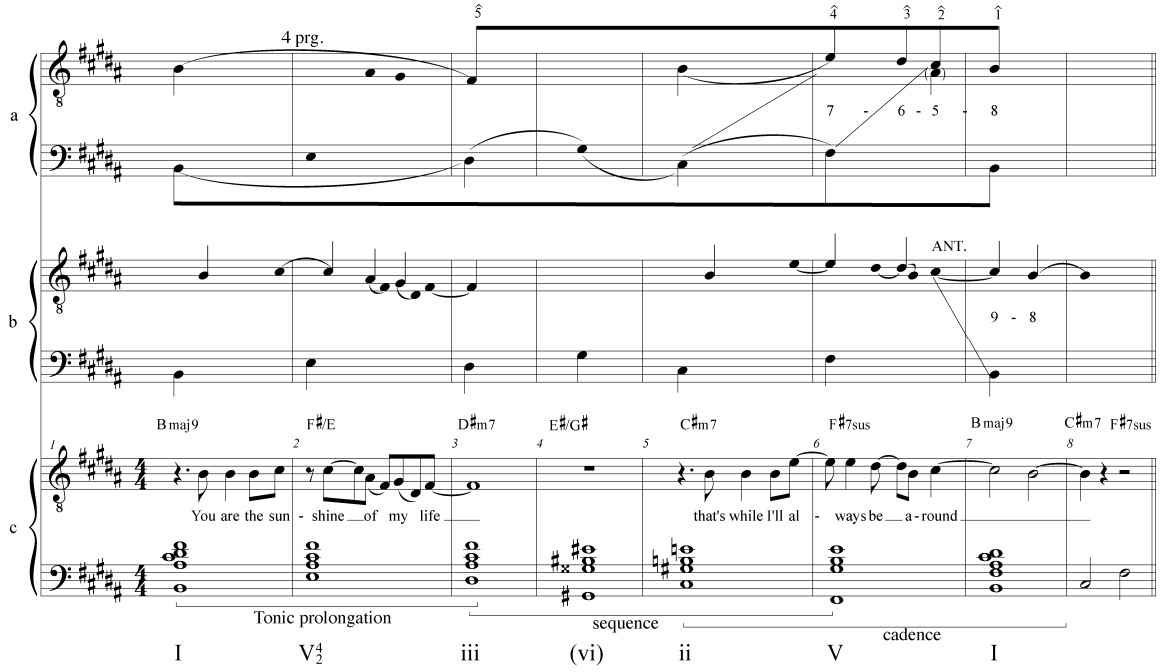
Example 3.27. Comparison of cadential melodic patterns

[41] Henry Martin identifies this particular cadential variation of the tonal archetype as an important melodic close in the standard jazz repertoire, particularly bebop. Where we differ in our understanding of these melodic formulas has to do with how we interpret their fundamental meaning. Martin implies that these variations (he does in fact call them variants or alterations) are not really variations of a more basic tonal pattern (my position), but are distinct melodic background structures. Specifically, the main issue between the two positions is the treatment of scale degree $\hat{2}$. See *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation,* (Lanham, Md., The Scarecrow Press, 2001), *28-29.*

Example 3.27a shows the archetype that this pattern is based upon, with the thirteenth resolving down to the fifth ($\hat{2}$) over the dominant harmony before moving to the tonic chord. Examples 3.27b and c show the two most common elaborated forms of the archetype that Wonder uses for melodic closure. 3.27b shows the delayed arrival of $\hat{2}$ over the tonic harmony, and 3.27c illustrates that $\hat{2}$ is sometimes completely removed from the melodic descent to $\hat{1}$.[42]

"You Are the Sunshine of My Life," the cool, Latin-tinged pop tune that opens *Talking Book*, illustrates Wonder's usage of the type of melodic-harmonic framework identified in Example 3.27b. In fact, each part of the tonal template described in this section of the chapter is visible in Example 3.28: a tonic prolongation pattern (mm. 1-3) moves from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{3}$ with an upper neighbor chord to $\hat{3}$. A D♯m7; the iii chord of the key, harmonizes $\hat{3}$ and sets in motion the falling-fifths sequence from mm. 3-6 that leads to the cadence in mm. 6-8. At the surface of the music, shown in level c of the graph, the eight-measure phrase concludes with an authentic cadence in m. 7. Leading to the cadence, at first glance it appears as though $\hat{2}$ does in fact sound over the dominant chord on beat four of m. 6, but as level b shows, it functions as an anticipation to the downbeat of the next measure.

[42] Example 3.27c appeared in the cadential arrival of "My Cherie Amour," shown above in Example 3.6.



Example. 3.28. "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," mm. 1-8[43]

The displacement of $\hat{2}$, detached from its harmonic function, creates a 9-8 suspension over the tonic chord. This brief delay builds tension caused by the dissonant ninth above the root of the tonic chord before finally moving to the octave. Level a shows how the stylistic alterations align with the basic structure that governs this melodic motion. $\hat{2}$ belongs to the dominant harmony and by placing it back with the dominant harmony at this level, it also helps to explain how $\hat{3}$ functions here: as the thirteenth (labeled as a sixth) of the chord that resolves to the fifth prior to the change in harmony to the tonic. Elaborations such as this add elasticity to Wonder's music, by expressively manipulating expected tonal resolutions.

The purpose of Part 3 has been to show Wonder's singular approach to more general tonal operations, and the voice leading that is the result of those operations. In

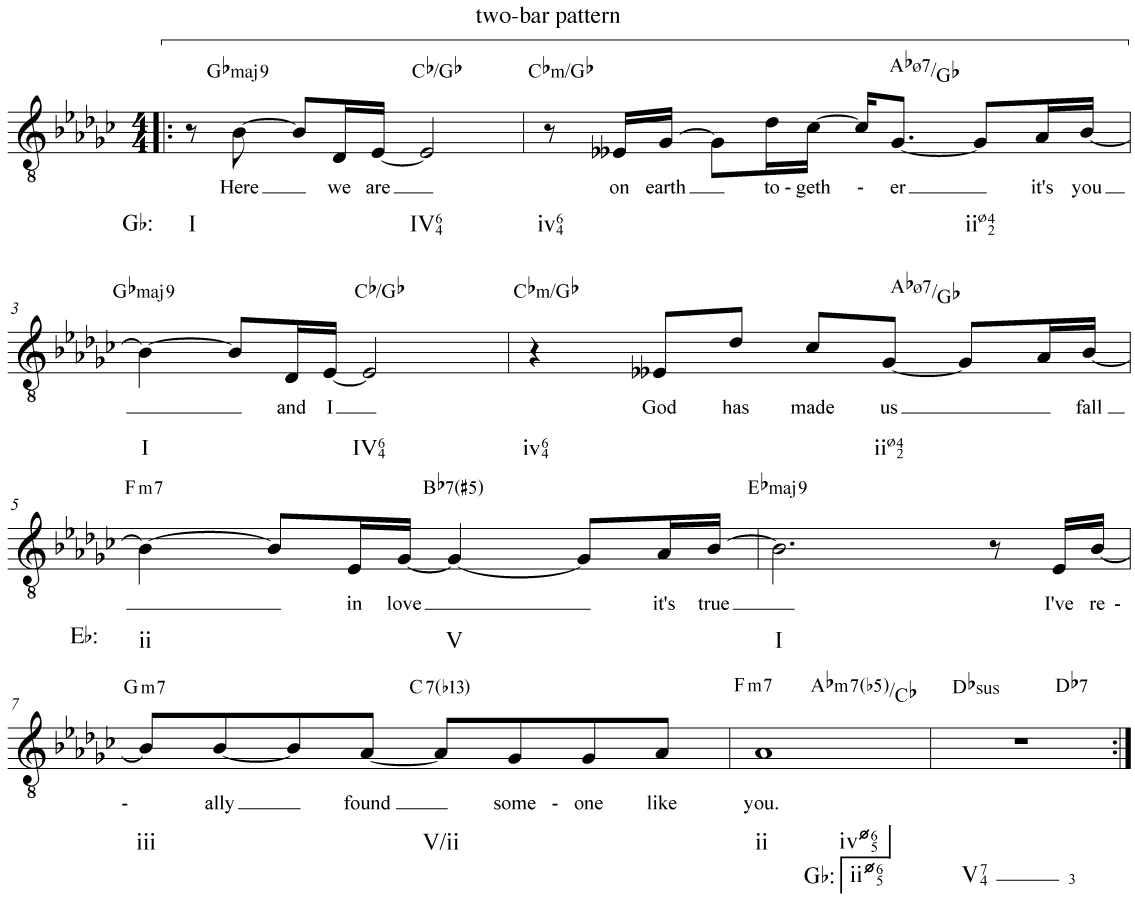
[43] *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

fact, much emphasis has been placed on the voice leading that links the chords together successively. How chords relate to one another to create meaningful linear networks is a vital and indispensable component of harmonic relationships. It is these networks between chord tones and extensions that Wonder masterfully locates and utilizes in his extensive harmonic vocabulary.

Case study: "You and I (We Can Conquer the World)"

This concluding case study explores how Wonder uses voice-leading to link distinct key areas together by means of modulation, and specifically how the interplay between the two key areas result in some very thoughtful re-harmonizations of the pentatonic melody. The analyses presented here are intended to bring together the most salient features of Wonder's harmonic style as articulated in Parts 2 and 3. In the tender piano ballad "You and I," Wonder introduces the contrasting key areas of G♭ major and E♭ major to express the conflicting emotions of a protagonist whose feelings of hope for an enduring relationship with his lover are tempered by nagging feelings of doubt. This conflict is further emphasized through his use of expressive chords and modal borrowings.

The nine-measure melody of the verse to "You and I," with few exceptions, is constructed of pitches belonging to the G♭-major pentatonic collection (Example 3.29). Surprisingly, these pitches continue to be emphasized even after the modulation to the key of E♭ major in mm. 5-6.



Example 3.29. "You and I," verse, mm. 1-9[44]

As discussed in Chapter II, the major pentatonic collection comfortably maps onto its diatonic equivalent, the relative minor pentatonic, by a simple shift that emphasizes the minor-side PDGs. In this song however, Wonder preserves the G♭-major/ E♭ minor pentatonic collection in the melody, but unexpectedly harmonizes this collection with the parallel key of E♭ major—modulating not to the relative key (a closely-related key) but to the chromatic submediant key (VI).

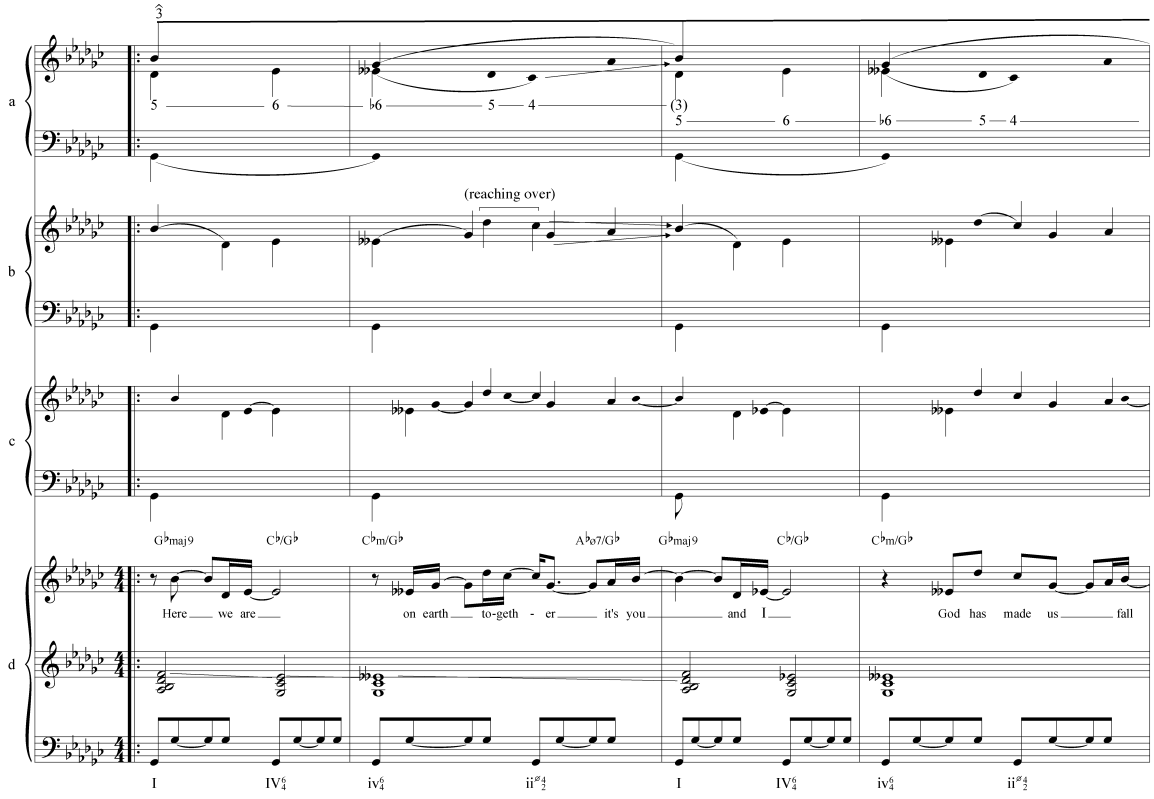
With the shift to a distant key, one would expect to find the E♭ major pentatonic pitches of E♭, F, G, B♭, and C. But Wonder cleverly harmonizes the pentatonic pitches of

[44] *Talking Book* (Tamla, 1972).

the G♭ major melody as chord extensions and alterations in the key of E♭ major. By mapping these pitches onto a foreign key, they take on new meaning in their local harmonic contexts. A closer look at the voice leading of the melody and harmony will elucidate the method by which Wonder fuses together these two keys.

The subtle shift between keys in m. 5 hinges on scale degree $\hat{3}$ (B♭), which is the structural tone of the melody and the axis around which all melodic events intersect. The melody consists of two basic motives that are variants of either the upper ($\hat{3} - \hat{5} - \hat{6}$) or lower boundary major PDGs ($\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1} - \hat{6}$). The first motivic idea in m. 1 begins on $\hat{3}$ followed by a leap down to $\hat{5}$ and a step up to $\hat{6}$—essentially an incomplete inversion of the upper-boundary major PDG. Level a in Example 3.30 shows this important melodic voice-leading. The expressive leap down to $\hat{5}$ results in another distinct voice-leading strand below the primary line around $\hat{3}$ that moves to $\hat{6}$ and then $\flat\hat{6}$ in the following measure (m.2). This incomplete neighbor motion corresponds to the harmonic motion within the tonic prolongation pattern, since $\hat{6}$ and $\flat\hat{6}$ represent the modal shift from IV to iv, respectively.

The second idea passes between $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{1}$ in m. 2. The completion of both melodic patterns happens as a result of the repeated tonic prolongation pattern in m. 3. The lower voice-leading strand completes the $\hat{5} - \hat{6} - \flat\hat{6} - [\hat{5} - \hat{4}] - \hat{3}$ large-scale pattern at the same time that the upper strand completes the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1} - \hat{3}$ pattern on the downbeat of m. 3. This convergence is shown in mm. 1-3 at level a of the example below.

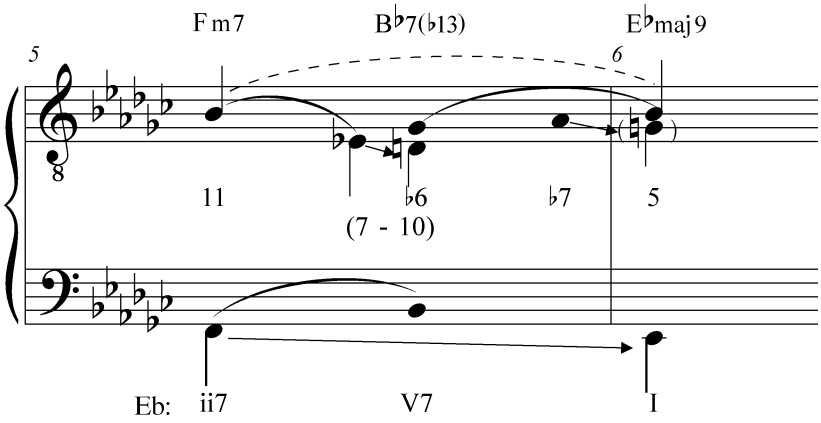


Example 3.30. "You and I," voice –leading graph, verse, mm. 1-4

The accompanying two-measure tonic prolongation pattern, with its built in tensions, reinforces the voice leading of the melodic gestures. Tension is created in the repeated harmonic pattern primarily through modal borrowing of the predominants IV and ii with their minor equivalents, iv and ii°. This modal shift, already identified as a favorite device of Wonder's, is realized through the voice-leading of scale degree $\hat{6}$ to $\flat\hat{6}$. Moving along a progressive stable-to-unstable continuum beginning on the consonant tonic chord G♭ major, the chords become increasingly darker over the tonic pedal. The arrival of $\flat\hat{6}$ at the end of the two-measure pattern, represented harmonically as the chordal ♭5 of the unstable $ii^{\varnothing 4}_{2}$, marks the emotional and dissonant apex of the pattern before the welcome release into the next cycle. As I have already pointed out, the

compound melodic line $\hat{5}$ –$\hat{6}$ – $\flat\hat{6}$ – [$\hat{5}$ – $\hat{4}$] – $\hat{3}$ emphasizes the integral voice leading of this pattern.

In the third repetition of this motive in m. 5, Wonder slightly alters the initial leap of the melody, moving from $\hat{3}$ down to $\hat{6}$. But rather than releasing tension by repeating the tonic prolongation pattern as before, the bass breaks free of the tonic pedal on G♭, resolving the unstable ii$^{\varnothing 4}_{2}$ down a half step to F. This bass movement at once diffuses the inherent tension built into the repeated harmonic pattern and initiates a ii – V progression to E♭ major (Example 3.31).



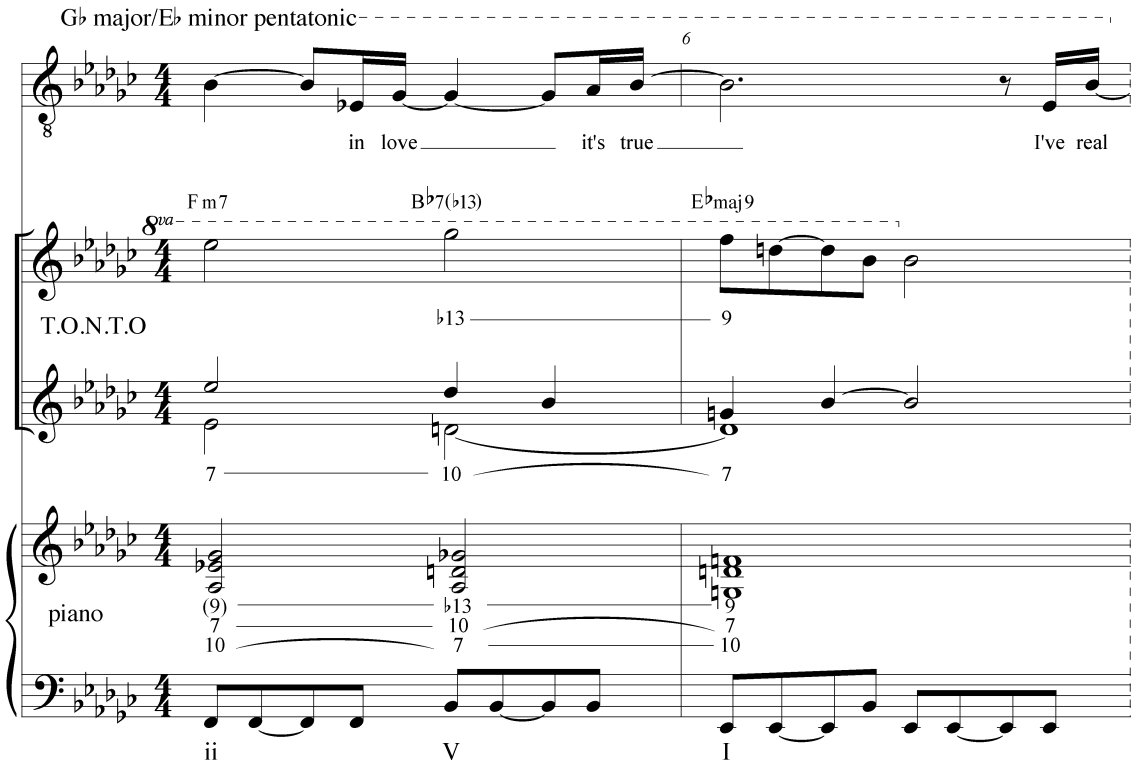
Example 3.31. "You and I," modulation to E♭ major, verse, mm. 5-6

At this key-area crossroads, each pitch of the pentatonic motive in m. 5 represents a tension against the chords leading to E♭. Scale degree $\hat{3}$ (still in relation to G♭), for the first time in the song is now a dissonance, forming an eleventh against the Fmin7 chord. After the expressive descending leap to E♭, which again implies a second voice-leading strand that does not continue to its expected resolution (the D in parenthesis notes the theoretical continuation of its path), the melodic line ascends from $\hat{1}$ back to $\hat{3}$ in the

second half of the measure. Over the B♭7, the melodic note G♭ forms a dissonant flat thirteenth that uncharacteristically steps up to A♭, the chordal seventh, instead of pulling down to F.[45] A♭ also defies expectation, as it too ascends instead of descends as sevenths tend to do. However, the usual downward resolution of the seventh to its chordal third partner is circumvented by the strength of the melodic line. It is propelled upwards to B♭ ($\hat{3}$), imitating the melodic gesture of mm. 1-4, and becomes the consonant fifth of E♭maj9, the new tonic. What were once consonant pitches in G♭ major now, in m. $\hat{5}$, form dissonances with the modulating bass. Initially, they form unstable chord tones that are drawn to and resolve to a more stable harmonic environment with the arrival of E♭ major.

In this case, the melody does not appear to resolve the tensions it creates against the chord structures, since Wonder retains the ascending idea set forth in the opening four measures: here it seem that the trajectory of the line circumvents the expected voice leading. However, Wonder does pay attention to the tendency of these pitches and their typical resolutions. This much is evident in his piano voicings and the otherworldly multiple descant lines provided by the synthesizer T.O.N.T.O, which enters precisely at this transitional moment, and treats the active tones expectedly (Example 3.32).

[45] With its uncharacteristic upwards resolution (the flat thirteenth typically resolves down to a chordal fifth), the G♭ appears to behave more like a raised fifth (F♯). I prefer to spell it as a G♭ in order to keep the spelling consistent with the governing pentatonic collection. The voice leading in the accompaniment, explained in Example 3.2xx also supports this reasoning.



Example 3.32. "You and I," verse, mm. 5-6

In the descant provided by T.O.N.T.O and the piano part, E♭, the chordal seventh of Fm7, does move to the stable tenth of B♭7(♭13) on beat 3 of m. 5; the chordal seventh of B♭7(♭13) in turn resolves down to the (major) tenth of E♭maj9 in m. 6. The flat thirteenth introduced with the B♭7 chord also clearly resolves downward in m. 6 over the E♭ chord.

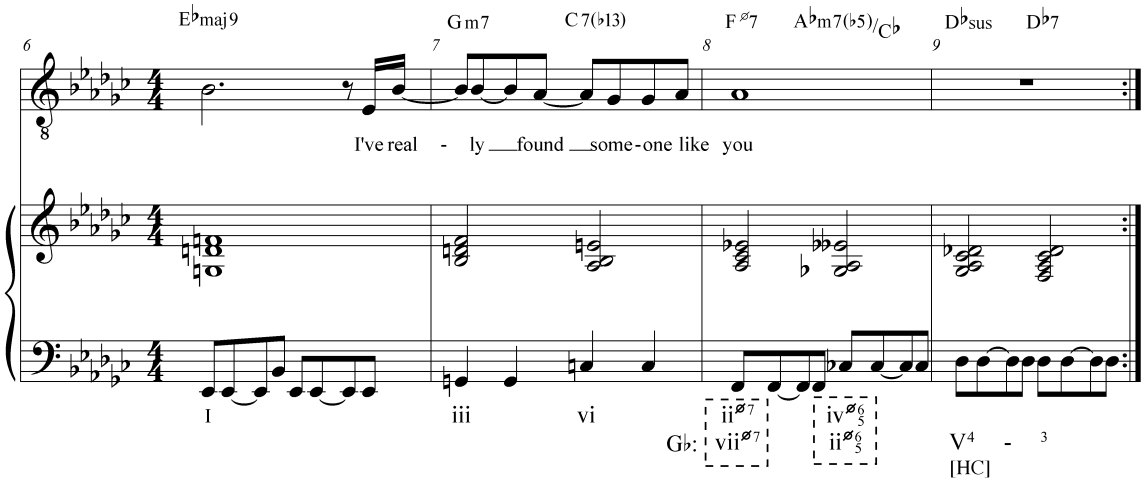
With the arrival of the new center of E♭ in m. 6, Wonder is careful to avoid G♭ as a melodic pitch, although his voice leading in the preceding measure certainly implies its arrival. At the moment that the bass moves to Fmin7, the pattern no longer sounds like the key of G♭ major, but anticipates E♭ minor since the melodic motion through this pattern outlines the E♭ minor triad. The major third (G♮) of the E♭ major chord is never

sounded in the melody, but is voiced as part of the harmony in the piano part. Wonder retains the same melodic relationships of G♭ pentatonic throughout the brief excursion to E♭ major while never truly emphasizing the temporary key in the melody.

Other events amass in m. 5, culminating in a powerful moment both musically and textually. There is a surge of dramatic energy as dynamics intensify, left-hand octaves are heard in the piano accompaniment, and quarter-note pulsations are more resolute. With each repetition of the verse, key words coincide at this harmonic shift. Notwithstanding the impact of these other events, the harmony is the primary catalyst here. By tonicizing E♭ major instead of E♭ minor, Wonder draws interest to this part of the verse's tonal plan, which consequently strengthens the sentiment of the text and represents an important intermediate arrival point of the verse. The emphatic arrival of E♭ major is striking enough of a contrast to the first four-measures in G♭ major. The first key area of G♭ major begins with a tonic prolongation pattern that engages the modally borrowed minor iv and ii chords (mm. 1-4), sounding deeply sorrowful, possibly representing the protagonist's lurking doubt. E♭ major, conversely, infuses the verse briefly with harmonic stability and newfound confidence, represented by the protagonist's declaration, "God has made us fall in love, it's true."

The confident arrival of E♭ major in m. 6 turns out to be only a temporary harmonic destination. Wonder begins to establish the key of E♭ major in mm. 7-8 with a partial cycle through a falling-fifth sequence, moving from Gm7 – C7(♭13) – F$^{\varnothing}$7. Despite the chordal alterations, the relationship among these three chords is clear: they represent the progression III – VI – II in E♭ major. But Wonder stops just short of confirming the key by withholding the key-defining move from V – I to complete the

cycle. In Example 3.33, he breaks from the cycle at the F$^{\varnothing}$7 chord in order to form a welding link between the two key areas.

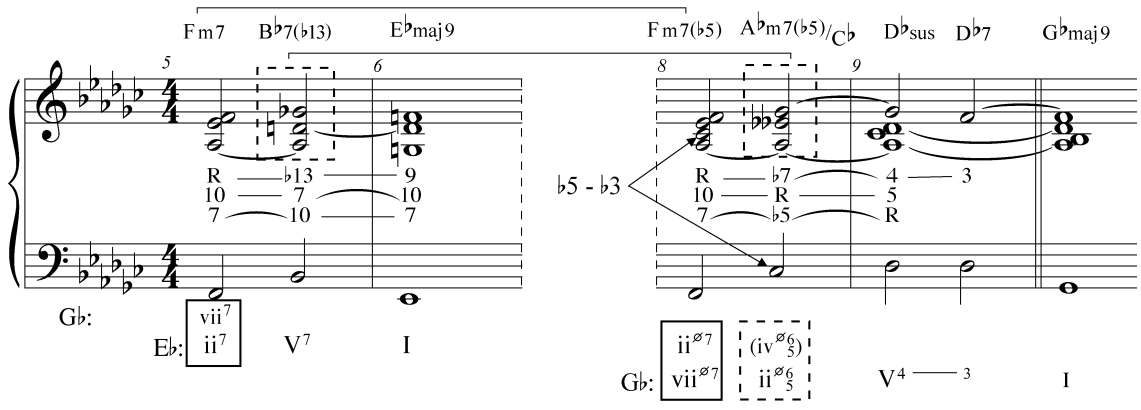


Example 3.33. “You and I,” transition, mm. 6-9

In Example 3.33, the F$^{\varnothing}$7 chord, a modally borrowed II chord again from E♭ minor, also represents the vii$^{\varnothing 7}$ of G♭ major. The A♭$^{\varnothing}$7/C♭ on beat three of m. 8 also makes a potential pivot point connecting the keys together. This is perhaps a more convincing set up for the return of G♭ major since the A♭$^{\varnothing}$7/C♭ functions as a modally borrowed predominant II chord that immediately proceeds to the suspended dominant V chord in m. 9 to form the key-defining half cadence. Ultimately, it is the seamless voice-leading between the F$^{\varnothing}$7 and the A♭$^{\varnothing}$7/C♭ that makes the transition back to G♭ so interesting. The accompaniment (especially T.O.N.T.O) highlights the E♭-E♭♭-D♭ path in mm. 8-9, as it appears in the top-note line of the piano voicing above. The unstable E♭, functioning as the chordal seventh of F$^{\varnothing}$7, is drawn downward to E♭♭, an even more

dissonant diminished fifth of A♭ø7/C♭, before completing the satisfying half-step resolution down to D♭.

The transitions from G♭ to E♭ (mm. 5-6), and then from E♭ back to G♭ (mm. 8-9) have some intriguing similarities worth mentioning. Specifically, the dominant B♭7(♭13) chord that leads to E♭ major in m. 5 shares the same basic voice-leading as the predominant A♭ø7/C♭ that leads back to the key of G♭ major in m. 8. In fact, they are nearly the same chord (enharmonics aside). A side-by-side comparison in Example 3.34 shows that the G♭, present as a tension in both chords, resolves down. Other voice-leading strands are also given. Wonder uses the same basic voicing for each chord. What I am suggesting is that Wonder cleverly uses the same voice-leading structure that took him to the distant key to get back to the home key by simply "switching" out the bass notes. Furthermore, he approaches these chords with an altered version of the same chord. On the way to E♭ major, the chord is the diatonic minor II seventh chord, not a strong pivot from G♭ since it's not diatonic. But in the transition back, the F chord is diatonic to G♭, but is a modally borrowed II in E♭.

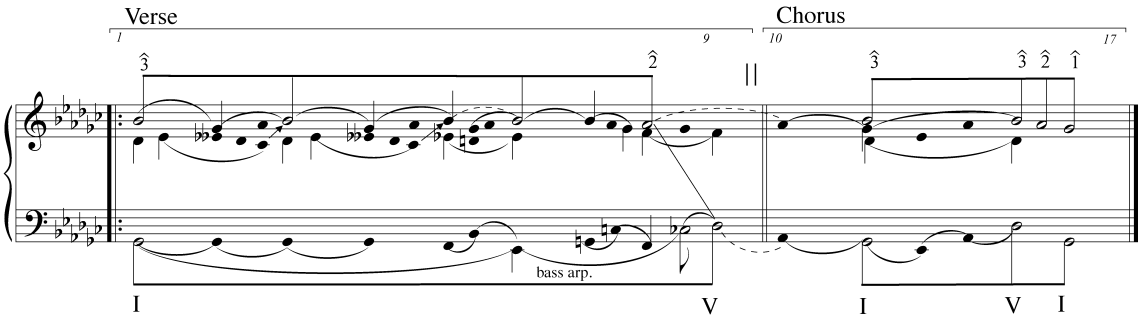


Example 3.34. "You and I," transition comparison, mm. 5-6, 8-9

The melodic gesture that glides over this transition continues to assert the same G♭ pentatonic relationships as before, creating a few tensions with the local harmony along the way. Notice back in m. 7 of Example 3.33 above that the neighbor motion from A♭ to G♭ over the C7 chord creates a flat thirteenth moving to a flat fifth. The tension resolves when A♭ becomes the consonant tenth of F on the downbeat of m.8.

The purpose of the analysis of "You and I" has been to illustrate Wonder's knack for locating seamless voice-leading routes, not only between local chord relationships but also between distant key areas, and to explore the extent to which modulation affects the pentatonic melody. Wonder transforms the pentatonic by engaging it in a full complement of complex harmonies—finding novel and quite pleasing networks from chord to chord—that compel us to hear that they belong together. It was shown that Wonder allowed the pentatonic melody to move freely above the harmonic backdrop, sometimes without regard for expected local resolutions. The analyses showed that the few unresolved tensions that the melody formed with the local harmony were incidental rubs justified by the omnipresent pentatonic collection. It was therefore left to the accompanying instruments to not leave the tensions dangling.

The following summary graph in Example 3.35 of the entire song (both verse and chorus) shows that these two distinctive processes—one pentatonic, the other tonal—map onto one another, not always perfectly, but always to expressive ends.



Example 3.35. "You and I," summary graph, verse/chorus

The graph highlights the global relationships that exist between the two systems, and the overall tonal scheme proceeds logically, following an established paradigm common to tonal forms. As indicated at the beginning of this case study, the melody is framed around $\hat{3}$ and in the larger voice-leading span of the verse, is not displaced until the arrival of $\hat{2}$ introduced in m. 8 just prior to the half cadence. The essential melodic motion in the chorus completes the pathway initiated in the verse to a full close on the tonic $\hat{1}$ conclusively ending the form. This interrupted form between the two sections (the $\hat{3} - \hat{2}$, $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ pattern) represents a normative paradigm that transcends any one style in particular, but is a fundamental pattern found in all types of tonal music. The local chord-to-chord relationships that Wonder uses, however (already closely examined above), and that contribute to this larger structure, may deviate to some extent from the way in which this paradigm unfolds compared to other tonal styles. It is at this intersection where the distinctiveness of Wonder's harmonic style emerges.

There is one modification to the tonal paradigm that appears in this song, noticeable in the graph. After the repeat of the verse, the chorus begins with the prolongation of $\hat{2}$, which does not yield to $\hat{3}$ right away. Harmonically, $\hat{2}$ represents the

continuation of the predominant A♭ø7, the chord that was instrumental in setting up the transition back to the key of G♭ with the repeat of the verse. After the repeat however, this motion back to A♭ø7 delays the arrival of G♭ in the chorus, and creates a backwards progression coming out of the verse: A♭ø7 – D♭ – A♭ø7, or ii – V – ii – I. The prolongation of ii, while not conventional by following V, creates an expressive plagal resolution to tonic before the emphatic tonal conclusion of the final few measures.

The occasional tension between the pentatonic and tonal processes at work in this song, and other tonally based songs in Wonder's canon, is to be expected, and does not represent some type of deficiency or distortion. What I have tried to show with this voice-leading graph is that tensions occur on a local level and very rarely do they negate the larger tonal plan of a song.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified the two predominant systems that find expression in Wonder's harmonic vocabulary, both of which are modified with a jazz tinge. From the various analyses presented in Part 1, some of Wonder's songs follow harmonic norms of other pop and rock styles regarding chord successions based upon a pentatonic framework. However, the chords he constructs above pentatonic bass lines, and the voicings with which he builds them, divulge the influence that jazz harmony has on his overall conception. As explained in Parts 2 and 3, it is precisely his functional use of jazz harmony that situates much of his music under discussion firmly within the larger realm of tonality, creating relationships that form the backbone of Wonder's harmonic practice.

Equally important is the effect his harmonic language has on his pentatonic-derived melodic language. From the discussion in this chapter, I have attempted to show the dynamic relationship that exists between the linear and the vertical, and how the two components of his compositional style intersect with one another. Wonder's expansive harmonic vocabulary results in intricate and novel voice-leading networks, through which his pentatonic melodies display a distinguishing attractiveness. It is, in part, Wonder's attentiveness to voice leading as a means to instigate forward motion that distinguishes him from his rock counterparts—and aligns him with jazz harmonic practices.[46] At times, it has been necessary to employ a microscopic approach to harmony, examining every voice-leading strand, probing thoroughly melody and chord relations, comparing gestures to other tonal and pentatonic schema, and attending to the other minutiae that contribute to the sum total of Wonder's extensive craft.

Chapters II and III have addressed what I consider to be the important building blocks of Wonder's compositional style. Chapter IV's task will be to offer insights as to how Wonder elaborates his compositions through improvisation.

[46] See Moore 1995, 190-191. Moore states that "the harmonic practices of rock encourage the identification of harmonies as discrete entities *not subject to voice-leading processes* [italics added]," and "voice leading does not determine harmonic succession." Both of these arguments I have implicitly refuted in my analyses of Wonder's harmonic practice.

CHAPTER IV

EXPLORING MELODIC ORNMANENTATION AND PERFORMANCE IN "I LOVE EVERY LITTLE THING ABOUT YOU"

Chapters II and III focused on the key types of melodic and harmonic structures that appear in Wonder's songs, and also the way those structures interact. I argued in these chapters that a main ingredient—indeed an essential component—that influences both melody and to some extent harmony is the pentatonic collection and its various permutations. In Chapter II, I identified PDGs as important building blocks of Wonder's melodies, signaling a pentatonic construct, and Chapter III explored both pentatonic and tonal processes at work in his approach to harmony. However, the composition ultimately is the medium for and the servant of performance; it is a desirable, yet fixed platform upon which Wonder's vocal artistry can be aptly conveyed. In Chapter IV, I explore this performative aspect of his music by considering the way that improvised melodic ornamentation relates to the compositional framework using as a case study the studio recording of the pop song, "I Love Every Little Thing About You."[1] I will show that a major force propelling the music forward is the gradual transformation, both in pitch and rhythm, of melodic material through Wonder's *performance* of this composition.

On display once again is the pentatonic collection, with particular emphasis on the PDGs, which is the basis for Wonder's improvised ornamentation and newly improvised lines. Along the way, I will identify some of the expressive details of Wonder's virtuosic vocal style that help to define his personal sound, like the relationship the unique melodic

[1] *Music of My Mind* (Tamla, 1972).

phrasing has to the rhythmic groove provided by the accompanying instrumentation. Simply put, Wonder's vocal style is the object of inquiry in Chapter IV. Note that some of the stylistic aspects discussed in this chapter reflect larger African-American ideals in music making, but are distinctive due to Wonder's intertwining of gospel and blues formulas into his vocal style. Before proceeding to the primary analyses, I would like to clarify my ideas about melody and form.

Will the Real Melody Please Stand Up? Ornamentation vs. Structural Melody

In Chapter II, I identified and analyzed PDGs, common patterns found in Wonder's melodies. An implicit challenge in that chapter, and one that resurfaces again in this chapter, is the decision as to what to call melody and what to call ornamentation. Are they inseparable due to his improvisational style? At what point does melody become ornamentation and vice versa? As I stated in the introductory chapter, I will say that I am reluctant to use terms like "original," "fundamental," or "primary" when referring to melody. This has to do with the fact that in the African-American music tradition, identifying a set, fixed recurring melody is problematic, since emphasis is on short, improvised, repetitive formulaic patterns. This is not to say that a basic melody does not exist, however. Maybe it is more accurate to refer to it as the basic *idea* of the melody, or the basic *gesture* of the melody, as opposed to the basic melody—i.e. the structure that is revealed through reductive analysis. The written-down, transcribed melody can be misleading, and only represents a snapshot of a fluctuating entity, as it does not accurately reflect how it becomes transformed in practice, either rhythmically or melodically. It is not always a fixed object, but it still seems to function as a referential

idea upon which Wonder bases his ornamentation. While some may consider it a fruitless endeavor to attempt to locate *the* melody, since thinking of an absolute melody may be problematic, the fact remains that the melody Wonder conceptualizes does have a basic shape, a basic pitch collection, and a basic metrical positioning. This "loose" attitude towards actual vs. apparent melody might help explain why Wonder allows the lyrics to dictate, sometimes dramatically, the melodic shape from verse to verse. By examining the voice-leading of melody, we are able to get a better picture as to how the basic idea of the melody aligns itself with fragments that appear to be embellishments of itself, and new melodic material that contain traces of the initial ideas.

General Thoughts on Ornamentation and its Relationship to Form

Ornamentation and embellishment of the basic melody play a central role in the projection of form, a topic left largely uncovered in this study. An essential feature of Stevie Wonder's compositional style is his consistent use of simple verse-chorus song forms. The complexity of his craft lies not only in the intricate ways in which he creates meaningful relationships between melody and harmony, but his ability to use formal structures that seem to lack in complexity, and infuse them in performance with direction and focus toward climactic moments. Wonder's talent manifests itself particularly in the way he adorns these simple musical forms with progressively ornate melodies, giving his songs a decidedly teleological drive.

Musicologist Richard Rischar makes related claims about the formal function of ornamentation in early 1990s black pop music, and uses a performance by vocal diva Mariah Carey of "I'll Be There" as a case study. He notes that "in African-American pop

ballads, expressiveness works in close conjunction with form. Position in the form seems to determine the appropriateness of the gesture."[2] Rischar breaks down the sections of the form and their subsequent repetitions in the cycle, showing how Carey gradually builds intensity by ornamenting the melody of "I'll Be There." Ornamentation is especially prevalent and texture particularly dense in the repetition of the final chorus, as Carey draws on vocal figurations to build emotional intensity toward the end goal, suggesting a clear relationship to the gospel style that she emulates. "Here [in the final chorus]," Rischar states, "musical process, expressivity, and collectivity are indelibly infused."[3]

Rischar's observations apply to Wonder's vocal stylings as well. Melodic ornamentation increases as his songs progress, giving them a clear sense of shape and climax. This surface-level ornamentation—much of it improvised in the course of performance—exemplifies Stevie's vocal style, and, as discussed above, has a functional role in the projection of form. With much African-American music, the act of performance supersedes the actual composition; the journey is more important than the destination. But it is the performative nature of Wonder's music that contributes to its teleology. In Wonder's case, both journey *and* destination are of consequence, and ornamentation fulfills a structural function toward this end.

To reiterate, Wonder's melodic ornamentation takes on a formal function. He adds vitality to simple two-part cyclical forms for the duration of a song because he uses lyrical melodies that are gradually transformed through improvised ornamentation, both melodically and rhythmically. These elements create a sense of development, allowing

[2] Rischar, "A Vision of Love: An Etiquette of Vocal Ornamentation in African-American Popular Ballads of the Early 1990s," *American Music*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), 418.

[3] Ibid, 432-33.

his songs to build towards climactic moments. The choice of simple song forms is the primary reason that melodic process is able to move to the foreground of the listening experience. Rather than detracting from the expressive quality of his melodic process, the formal structures are subjected to it. The recording studio also functions as a compositional tool to this end, enabling Wonder to layer background vocals, synthesized voices, or a combination of both together in counterpoint with his primary vocals and accompaniment. The manipulation of these parameters allows for the gradual densification to the formal structure, resulting in a narrative process that becomes more complex over the course of the song.

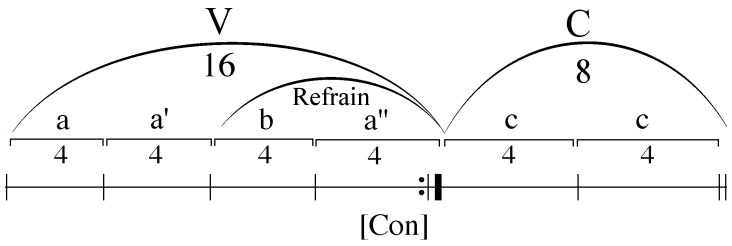
Thus, the listener may envision the cyclical form as a kind of aural landmark. Yet by virtue of the additive process Wonder uses in his music, the listener also experiences a progressive journey that spirals forward from a starting point toward an ending point. Listening to cycles of the form in a Wonder song is something like the experience we have when moving from the living room into the adjoining kitchen and then back again only to find that the living room furniture has been rearranged or that the room itself has been painted. We comprehend the newness while at the same time registering that the space is still the place called the "living room."

Wonder's performance of "I Love Every Little Thing About You" features melodic devices used to create development and thus transcend the constraints of the two-part song form. Wonder draws on the conventional African-American melodic patterns or gospel clichés that throughout this study have been labeled for analytic purposes as PDGs, and frames them in a sophisticated rhythmic tapestry. Wonder's performance here showcases him at his creative best, taking a simple melody that

becomes enlivened and transformed through the emotional course of the song. In order to understand the relationship of the composition to this particular performance, I will first explain the song's form.

Form in "I Love Every Little Thing About You"

The following schematic in Example 4.1 illustrates the organization of each of the two sections, showing the main parts of the song. The verse consists of two main parts, each eight measures in length that can also be parsed into smaller four-measure groupings. Although not shown, these groupings can be broken down into two-bar motives, representing the smallest units in the song. An authentic cadence closes the section in mm. 15-16, making the verse a complete harmonic structure in and of itself. The chorus is half the length of the verse, comprising eight measures of two repeated four-measure ideas. It also forms a complete, independent harmonic unit but features no cadential relationships—it simply prolongs the tonic.



Example 4.1. Verse and chorus structure

The four, four-measure phrases organize the verse into a quatrain a – a' – b – a'' format, consisting of two semi-related phrases, a contrasting phrase and a return to a

varied form of the first phrase.[4] The final phrase is altered to form a conclusive ending to the section with a cadence (shown in Example 4.1 as [Con]). The eight-measure chorus consists of two parallel four-measure phrases, the content of which receives little variation primarily due to the descending repeated background vocals figure that comprises the main melodic event featured in this section. Its single purpose is to present the joyous refrain, "I love, I love, I love, I love every little thing about you, baby."

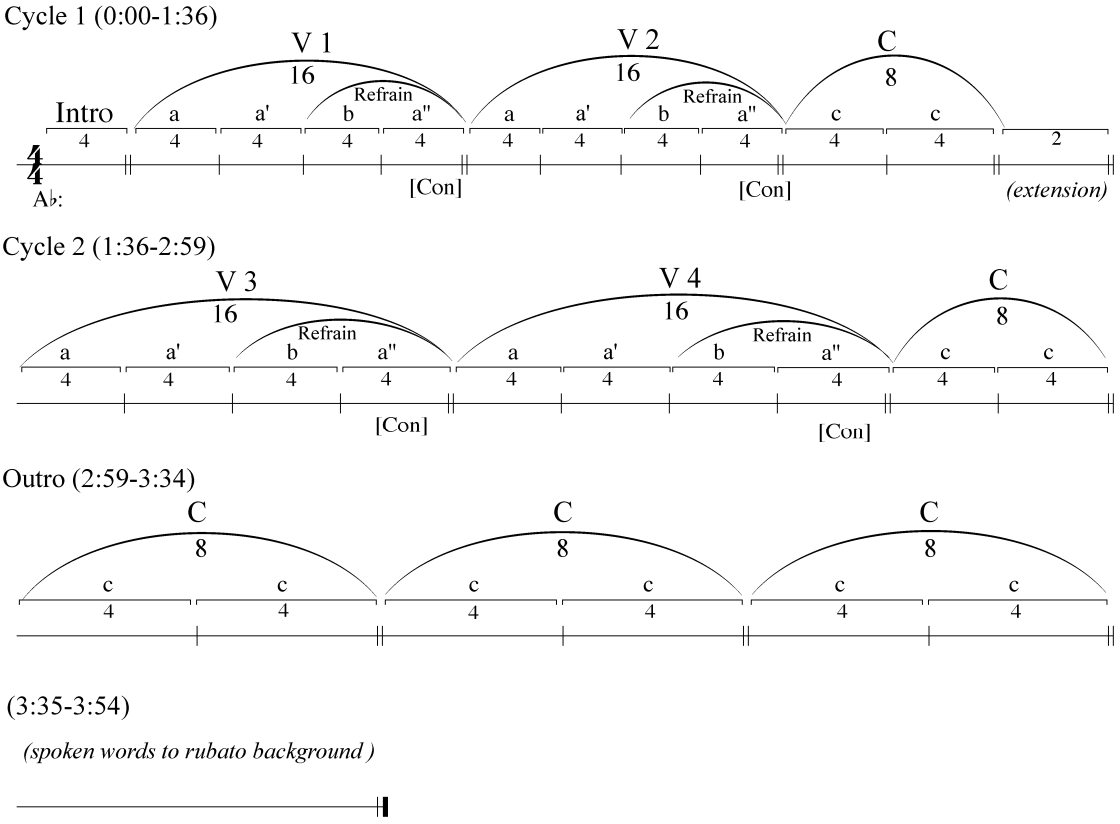
These two formal sections follow the usual verse-verse-chorus format (16+16+8) for two cycles in course of the performance before vamping three times on the chorus to end the song.[5] In Example 4.2 below, each cycle is given, thereby mapping the entire performance of the song, which ends just shy of 4 minutes on the original studio recording. Time lengths are given to gauge the proportions of each cycle of the form in relation to the overall length of the song performance.

Although the standard verse-chorus template is used, Wonder still finds little ways to elaborate it. For instance, at the conclusion of the chorus of the first main cycle, Wonder lets the song breathe momentarily for two measures before beginning the next cycle. As an aside, it is worth pointing out that he seldom makes use of the pop bridge, a separate internal section in song forms comprised of new material that breaks up the bipartite structure. Even the more lengthy pieces with more expansive forms in his oeuvre, like "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)" and "Sunshine in

[4] I am using the term "phrase" loosely here to describe the complete melodic units, and not the harmonic units. In traditional terms, "phrase" refers to a complete harmonic unit that ends with a cadence. This is not the case with my designation: the only four-measure unit to end with a cadence is the last one. The verse in this sense equals one complete phrase, and with the repeat of the verse, two complete phrase together which resemble a sectional parallel period.

[5] Hughes examines these larger formal structures resulting from the verse + chorus pair. He designates one verse-chorus pairing as a "stanza" (8), synonymous with my use of the term "cycle."

Their Eyes," follow the verse-chorus format. His preference for this simple song structure also may have resulted from his conditioning early on as an understudy at Motown.[6]



Example 4.2. "I Love Every Little Thing About You," form cycles

The verse-chorus sections follow closely the typical format found in much of Wonder's music, in that there is at least one alternation between the two sections. After the cyclical alternation, one section (usually the chorus) functions as a repeated vamp, the function of which is to build intensity and forge an emotional climax prior to the song's conclusion. But as I suggested above, Wonder starts the emotional build up to the final

[6] Jon Fitzgerald has documented the favored formal structures found in Motown hits between 1963-1966, noting the tendency for Motown writers to rely primarily on this song form (Fitzgerald 2007, 121-22).

chorus repetition in verse three. All in all, "I Love Every Little Thing About You" makes two complete cycles through the form.

Following the first full cycle of the form, verses three and four depart significantly from the earlier two verses, with verse four's melodic content bearing little similarity to the previous ones. Wonder varies the melodic content of each four-measure grouping in some way. It is at the motive level that details on the surface of the music vary either minimally, making the relationship from one strain to the next audibly perceptible, or maximally, where it appears that new melodic material replaces the expected material for that portion of the form.

Melodic relationships, corresponding lyrics, and measure numbers within the verse, are illustrated in Table 4.1. The motive label column reveals that some transformations of the melodic content occur between verses one and two, and that more significant changes happen in verses three and four. Letters attached with superscripts denote a perceptible motivic relationship, and new lowercase letters indicate new material altogether. From the table, we notice that most of the alterations take place within the first eight measures of the form, while the refrain's motives receive less elaboration. Wonder frames his embellished vocal lines in context of the initial "x" motive of verse one until the fourth verse, where the "x" label loses its meaning and new labels are necessary to account for the different surface-level motives.

Table 4.1 also provides a brief survey of the relationship between the lyrics and the motives. In particular, the syllabic distribution of the first eight measures of each verse stanza reveals changes to the lyrical content correspond to the motivic changes in later verses. Each line of text represents one two-measure motive, with the exception of

the refrain, where the motives occupy four measures. Note that the brackets indicate lyrics that lead into the next two-bar segment and are not included in the syllable count.

Table 4.1. Lyric – melody analysis

Lyrics	Syllable count	Motive label	Form measure
Verse 1			
1Though they say you're not my friend	7	x^{1}	1-2
2 You've been here through thick and thin	7	x^{1a}	3-4
3 [And] for that little girl I love ya	8	x^{2}	5-6
4 [And] all I want to do is talk about ya.	10	x^{2a}	7-8
Refrain			
I'm here to say, I love you more each day	10	y	9-12
And I just wanna tell the world, that I love you so.	12	x^{3}	13-16
Verse 2			
1 Though they put me down because	7	x^{1}	1-2
2 [I] love you as much as I do	7	x^{1b}	3-4
3 [But] they don't know what you've done for me	8	x^{2b}	5-6
4 [You've] made such a happy man out of me.	9	x^{2b}	7-8
(Refrain)	10 + 12	y, x^{3a}	9-12, 13-16
Verse 3			
1 Though they say that I am wrong	7	x^{1c}	1-2
2 'Cause my love is strong	5	z	3-4
3 [But] There's only one that I place above ya.	10	aa^{1}	5-6
4 [It's] God that I place above ya.	7	aa^{1a}	7-8
(Refrain)	10 + 12	y^{1}, x^{4}	9-12, 13-16
Verse 4			
1 Some folks say that it's strange	6	bb^{1}	1-2
2 [But] my whole life you have changed	6	bb^{1a}	3-4
3 [You've saved] all the pain the world's put on me	8	cc	5-6
4 All I want to do is talk about ya.	10	bb^{2}	7-8
(Refrain)	10 + 12	y^{2} + bb^{1b}, bb^{3}	9-12, 13-16

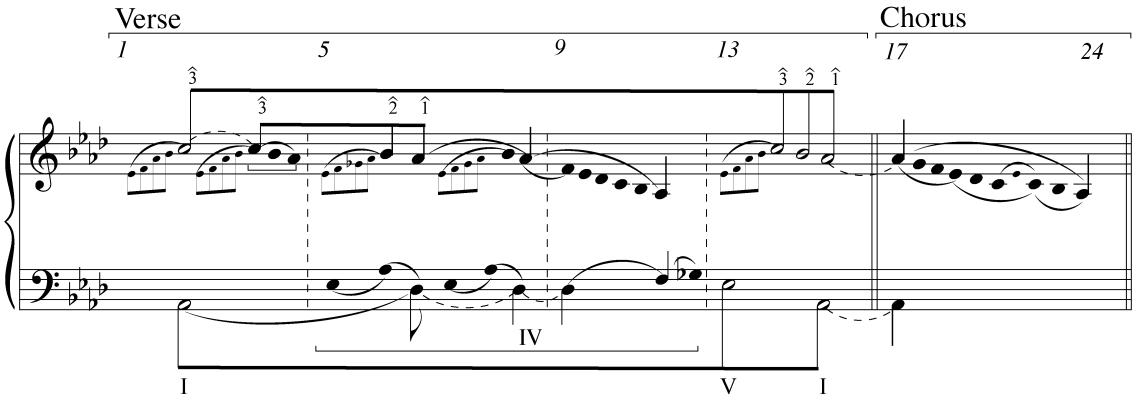
The syllabic distribution from line to line, in comparison with each verse, is fairly consistent. Corresponding with the motivic variations, noticeable variations to the lyrics occur in verses three and four, both of which show that lines 1-2 have a slightly reduced number of syllables from 7 down to 6 or 5. A change in the syllables predicts that corresponding melodic units from verse to verse will have some necessary alterations, especially regarding metrical points of emphasis. It is obvious that with fewer syllables

distributed in these time spans, potential opportunities arise for Wonder to ornament and expand upon the basic melodic idea in order to fill the same space. Of course, the syllabic count only allows us to predict incompletely the potential spaces where Wonder might take liberties to ornament the melodic line, or as Table 4.1 reveals, change it altogether. It also does not account for the way in which Wonder combines lyrics with melody.

In the analyses that follow, it will become evident how Wonder rhythmically compresses and elongates lines within two-measure time spans. However, the purpose for showing these lyric relationships is to suggest that the initial melodic ideas presented in the opening verse could in fact support the syllabic alterations in the lyrics, albeit with some manipulations. What we find is that Wonder alters the melody in the later verses to such a degree that, as the motivic labels indicate, it bears only slight resemblance to the initial gestures, or it appears to bear no resemblance at all.

Melodic Analysis of Verses 1 and 2

In order to see the clear relationship between the basic melodic ideas and improvised ornamentation over recurring sections, I present first a Schenkerian graph in Example 4.3 which depicts the primary voice leading of verse and chorus. While the surface-level events vary from verse to verse as will be shown, it is this basic structure to which I compare and contrast the variations. Binding the entire verse and chorus together is the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ voice-leading pattern represented by the unfilled note heads. This pattern is manifest on multiple levels throughout both the composition and performance of the song.

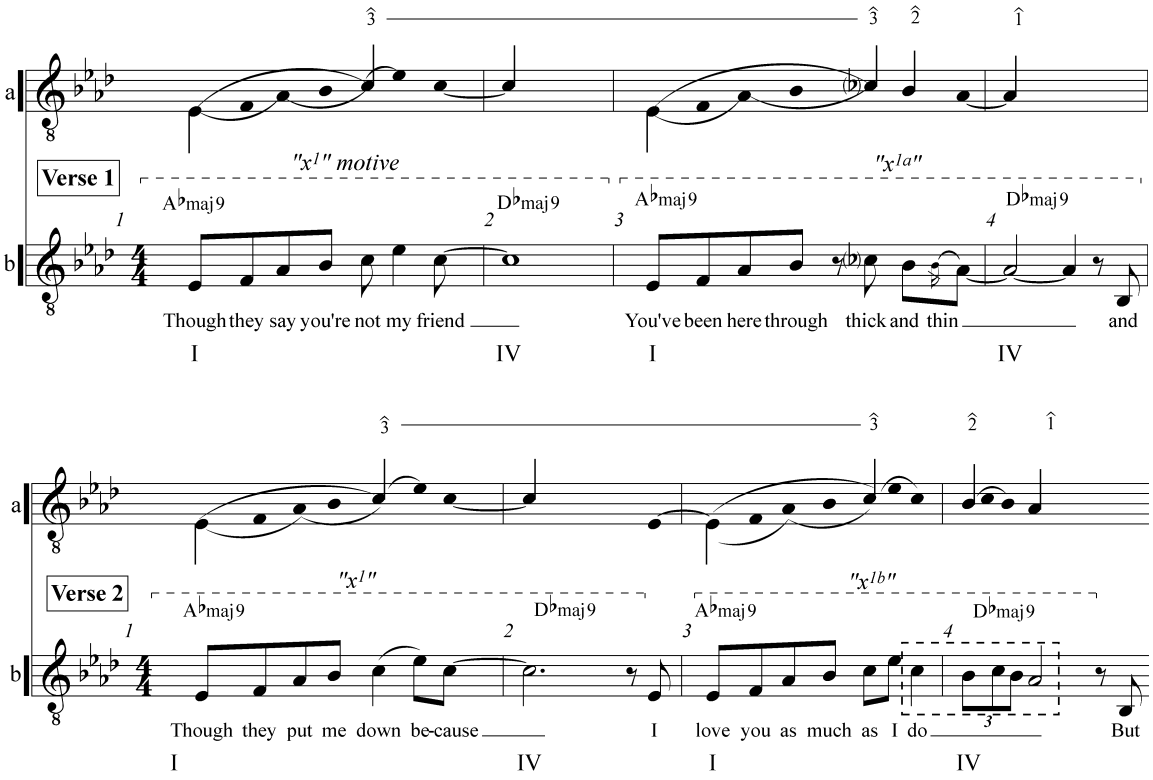


Example 4.3. Verse & chorus, summary graph

Wonder begins the melody in a comfortable part of his range, singing the vocal line in a subdued and relaxed manner. By the third and fourth verses, however, Wonder's vocals dramatically change, infused with increased emotional intensity, rhythmic vitality, and registral extremity. This energetic outburst is further enhanced with repeated two-note oscillations within a constrained range.

In Example 4.4, the basic *gesture* of the first melodic unit, labeled as the "x" motive, consists of a simple, unadorned ascending A♭ major pentatonic scale, spanning an octave from E♭3 to E♭4, which is set to a common tonic prolongation pattern that alternates between I and IV. This melody conforms to the Type 1 pentatonic melody classification delineated in Chapter II, meaning that the pentatonic structure is clearly recognizable on the surface of the song. The figure drops back down to C4 in anticipation of the downbeat of m. 2. In fact, many of the elaborations to the basic melody (shown in level a) originate as rhythmic anticipations of the metrically stable downbeats. Verses 1 and 2 are shown together in this section, since the melodic shape of both motives in mm.

1-4 are near identical, with only slight rhythmic variance, some of which are discussed below. Reductive analyses accompany each example in order to highlight the voice-leading similarities of each motive.



Example 4.4. Verses 1 and 2, mm. 1-4

In m. 3 of verse 1, the repeat of the initial melodic unit ("x[1a]") of this phrase gently disrupts the calm diatonic surface of the opening gesture; Wonder repeats the ascent of the melody to C (scale degree $\hat{3}$), but inflects scale degree $\hat{3}$, bending the pitch downward to C-flat (indicated by the flat sign in parenthesis). At a deeper level, shown at level a, this C♭ "stands in" for C, and represents a common surface-level ornamentation of this note in Wonder's performance of it. The arrival on C at the top of the contour here connects to the descending stepwise major PDG, moving stepwise from $\hat{3}$ down to $\hat{1}$.

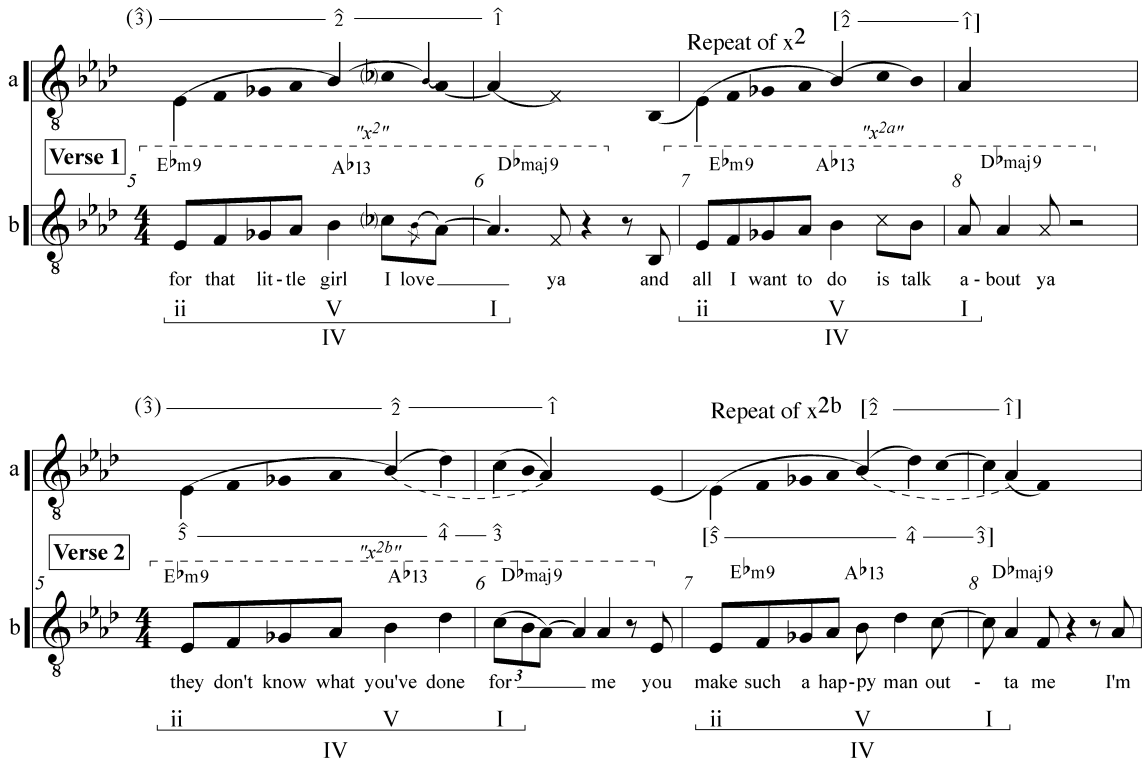
Wonder makes a subtle rhythmic alteration to the end of the "x" motive in verse 2 by shifting the metrical emphasis of the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ PDG to beat four of m. 3 ("x^{1b}"), effectively making it seem as though the pattern starts on the downbeat of m. 4.

Wonder's melodic embellishments in mm. 1-4 (and as will be seen throughout the course of the song) revolve around the adornment and repetition of the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ PDG, both on multiple structural levels and in various permutations on the surface. In both verses above, he uses this pattern to "tie off" the four-measure melodic spans with a conclusive stepwise descent to $\hat{1}$.[7] Level a of verse 1 represents the essential voice-leading, and what I designate as the basic idea of the melody. It combines as a unit the two "x" motives showing that the large scale voice-leading of the first "x" motive initiates a move away from the tonic by settling on C in mm. 1-2, followed by the elaborated "x" motive which moves the line back down to A♭. Although the identity of the surface gestures hinges on the pentatonic ascent, it is the overarching descent of the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ voice-leading pattern that allows for comparisons to be made between complementary phrases of subsequent verses.

The next four-measure grouping in Example 4.5 continues with two new variations of the "x" motive ("x^{2}" and "x^{2a}") over an extended prolongation of the IV chord in mm. 5-8. Instead of the rising pentatonic leap from $\hat{6}$ up to $\hat{1}$ as before, the melody fills in the gap with $\flat\hat{7}$. Again, $\flat\hat{3}$ appears, but in this case it elaborates $\hat{2}$ as an upper neighbor, noticeable at level a. The top of the contour in motives "x^{2}" and "x^{2a}"

[7] Wonder also tends to use this conclusive PDG over dominant functioning chords, despite the possible tension the presence of the melodic scale degree $\hat{1}$ forms with the pitches of the dominant harmony. However, as mentioned in Chapter III, this scale degree works because Wonder replaces "ti" with "do" in the dominant chord, which results in the dominant sus chord in which $\hat{1}$ is present.

peaks at $\hat{2}$, and not $\hat{3}$. Wonder embellishes this framework in verse 2 by leaping from $\hat{2}$ up to $\hat{4}$ at the top of the contour before descending back to $\hat{1}$.



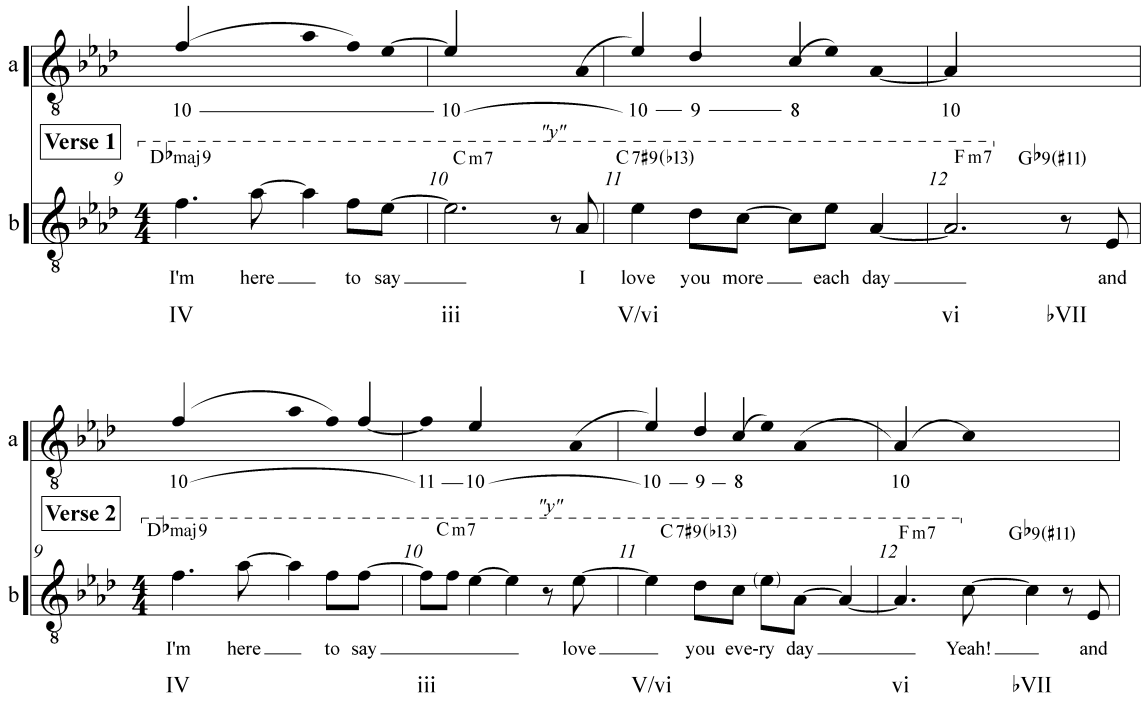
Example 4.5. Verses 1 and 2, mm. 5-8

Wonder continually presses forward on each gesture in his performance by anticipating the resolution of tensions in the melodic lines. The B♭ representing the $\hat{2}$ in m. 5 and m. 7, forms a ninth against the A♭ chord that jumps early to the resolution of what will be a fifth once the change in harmony arrives on D♭ in m. 6 and m. 8 respectively.

In verse 2, the shape of the basic melodic idea is embellished when the line reaches past $\hat{2}$ and leaps up to $\hat{4}$. This extra leap results in a new voice-leading pattern compared to the complementary grouping in verse one, as $\hat{4}$ resolves down by step to $\hat{3}$

from mm. 5-6, and mm. 7-8. The accompanying graph of verse 2, however, shows that this expressive ornamentation of the basic $\hat{2} - \hat{1}$ line of the group does not affect the main idea of the line, but is best understood as a motion through an inner voice, creating a $\hat{5} - \hat{4} - \hat{3}$ pattern from the initial starting pitch of the melody (E♭). It is clear that Wonder's elaborations of the melodic line are becoming progressively more active. Not only do the surface rhythms animate the feel of the line compared to verse 1, but interpolations to the basic voice-leading structure begin to increase. Wonder is unmistakably starting to make his move by this point.

The beginning of the refrain features a new motive distinct from the first and symbolizes the emotional high point of the verse as the confident Wonder blissfully exclaims, "I'm here to say, I love you more each day."

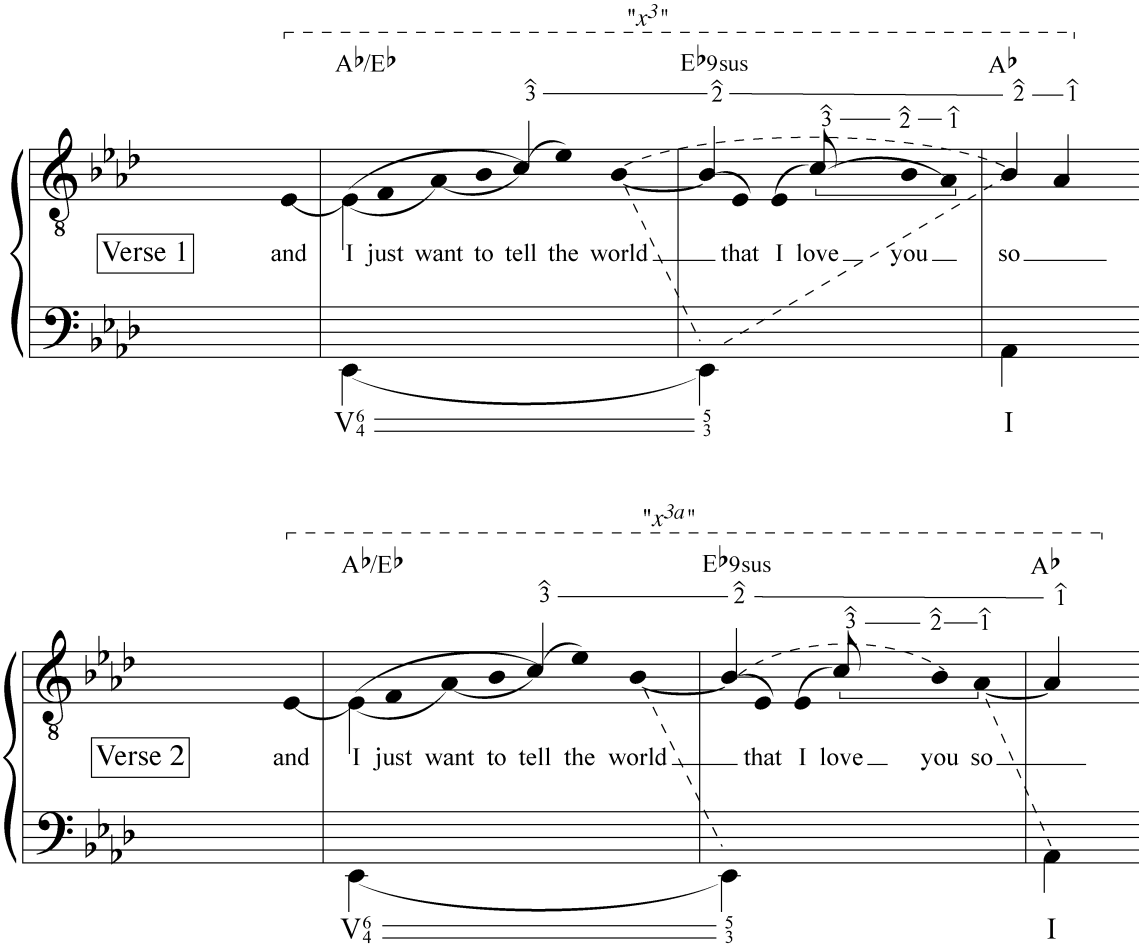


Example 4.6. Verses 1 and 2, refrain, mm. 9-12

The descending motion of the "y" motive is a welcome contrast to the ascending motion that defines the "x" motive and all its variations. Shown in level a, after an expressive leap from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{6}$ from m. 8 to m. 9 that places the melodic line into the upper, more intense part of Wonder's range, the "y" motive reverses direction and descends stepwise through the A♭ pentatonic collection, concluding on $\hat{1}$ over the Fm7 chord in m. 12. Like so many other melodic arrival points in Wonder's performance of this song, this arrival point also anticipates the downbeat of the measure of resolution by landing squarely on beat four of the previous measure—again, forcing the melody to wait while the harmony "catches up". In verse 2, this arrival on $\hat{1}$ is anticipated even further by an eighth note.

Wonder makes very few significant changes to the "y" motive in the first three verses, although he does make one expressive rhythmic variation to the beginning of the motive in mm. 9-10 during verse 2. Comparing level a of verses 1 and 2 in Example 4.6, Wonder elaborates the basic linear pattern of parallel tenths, formed between the melody and root of each successive chord on the downbeats, by delaying the expected resolution of the melodic tone F to E♭ in m. 10. This displacement of the tenth that belongs with the Cm7 chord results in an 11 – 10 (4 – 3) suspension figure—an elaboration not yet encountered in Wonder's ornamentation of the basic melody. In fact, it is a reverse figure to the anticipation, which up until now has been his preferred type of ornamentation. Anticipated melodic tones reach ahead for the next harmony as opposed to suspended melodic tones, which hold onto the previous harmony, and displace temporarily the tone of resolution. Wonder repeats this suspension figure again in verse 3.

The final four measures of the refrain connect the "x" motive with a conclusive cadence in m. 15 (Example 4.7). Here the $\hat{3}$ –$\hat{2}$ – $\hat{1}$ figure, an important "x" motive feature, is grounded firmly by the cadence, receiving the harmonic stability of the tonic chord. Earlier in mm. 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8, the figure concluded over the IV chord (D♭maj9). At the cadence, an elaborated form of the pattern extends over three measures—almost the entire phrase length—forming a hidden repetition on one level (mm. 13-15) in addition to the surface-level presentation that occurs at the tail end of m.15, on beats three and four.



Example 4.7. Verses 1 and 2, mm. 13 – 15

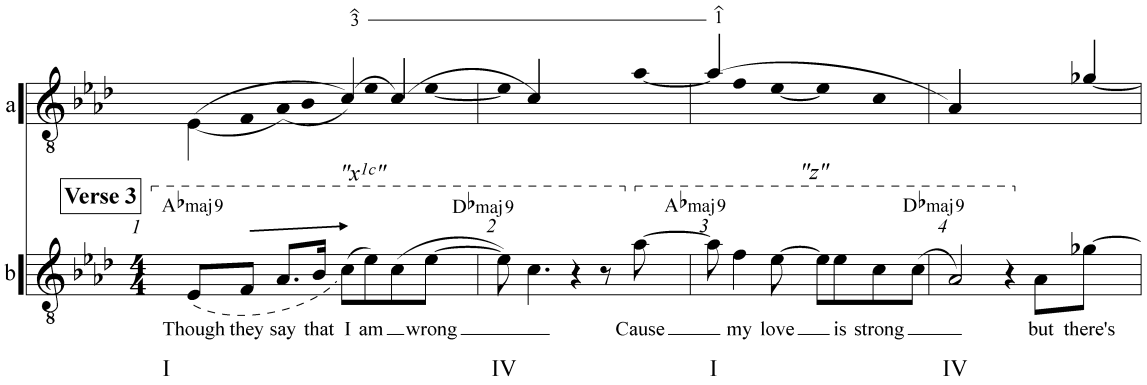
Unlike the earlier phrases, this final phrase in the verse is not easily parsed into a pair of two-bar melodic units; rather, it forms one continuous cadential idea based on the first motive (mm. 1-2). While the rhythmic component of these patterns will be discussed in detail later, it is worth noting the treatment of $\hat{2}$. Coinciding with the arrival of the V chord in m. 14, $\hat{2}$ is elaborated as an extended neighbor pattern over the E♭7 dominant chord (a $\hat{2} - \hat{3} - \hat{2}$ pattern in the key), first appearing as an anticipation on the "and" of four of m. 13, and then prolonged as a 9 – 8 suspension over the tonic chord on beat one of m. 15.

Wonder makes a subtle adjustment to the neighbor-note ornament that elaborates $\hat{2}$ when the "x" motive returns at the conclusion of verse 2. He retains the basic melodic shape, but introduces $\hat{1}$ a half beat early over the dominant harmony as an anticipation of tonic chord resolution in m. 15.

Verse 3

The purpose for presenting the motives and their various ornamentations of verses 1 and 2 together has been to show that, notwithstanding a few surface-level changes, the motives still resemble one another pretty closely. Despite slight elaborations, the character of the defining pentatonic "x" motive, and therefore its essential voice-leading, have been preserved. However, on the heels of the chorus comes verse 3, and Wonder begins in earnest to improvise over the basic motives, affecting both contour and rhythm, and changing them altogether.

Example 4.8 shows that the "x" motive retains its basic shape in mm. 1-2, with the exception of a single dotted-eighth sixteenth rhythm on beat two that effectively transfers the energy from the chorus into the verse. The momentum generated by the gesture carries through to beats three and four, where consecutive eighth notes alternate between the pentatonic notes C and E♭, and gradually allow the figure to end less abruptly than if, at the top of the ascending contour, a quarter had remained (in the corresponding groupings of verses one and two).

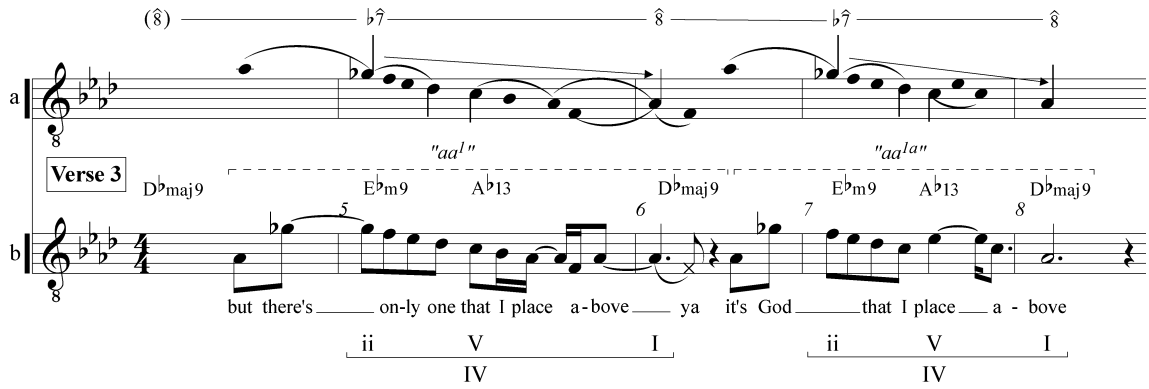


Example 4.8. Verse 3, mm. 1-4

The "x" motive disappears altogether in mm. 3-4; in its place is a descending arpeggiation through the pentatonic from A♭4 to A♭3. This new substituted idea, what I have labeled as the "z" motive, is less relaxed than the earlier gesture—it reverses the contour and syncopates the rhythms compared to the original idea that appears earlier in this part of the form, but it importantly retains the concluding descent to $\hat{1}$, easily noticeable at level a of Example 4.8. Recall that in verses 1 and 2, these basic "x" motives formed a related pair connected by the larger $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ voice-leading span from

mm. 1-4. The main difference between the earlier iteration of this voice-leading strand and this one is the absence of $\hat{2}$ linking the consonant skip from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$.

In mm. 5-8, Wonder further alters, or completely abandons, the expected "x" motive variant of this part of the form. Example 4.9 shows that after a dramatic leap of a seventh from A♭3 to G♭4, the line descends stepwise from G♭4 back down to the A♭3, passing through the chordal space of the applied ii-V chords of the subdominant D♭maj9.

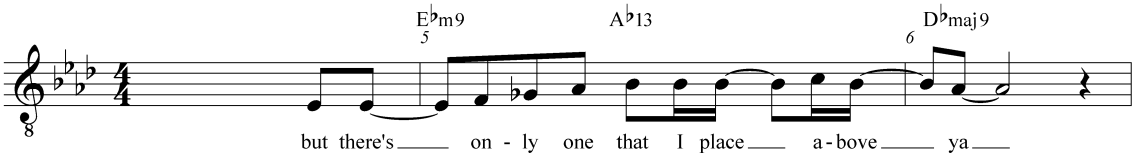


Example 4.9. Verse 3, mm. 5-8

This significant change to the contour intensifies the pathway of the earlier "x^2" motive's voice-leading in verses 1 and 2. With the A♭3 pick up on beat four of m. 4, the complete descent linking the A♭ octaves together in this new motive (labeled "aa^1") augments the earlier approach to $\hat{1}$, which was elaborated with a single descending stepwise motion from $\hat{2}$. In this sense, the two motives still fulfill the same voice-leading role by both concluding their pathway on A♭, only the "aa" motive is expectedly much more dramatic in this role. Level a shows that the motive's octave descent is actually part of an overarching voice-leading span that contributes to an extended neighbor note

pattern $\hat{8}$ ($\hat{1}$) – $\flat\hat{7}$ – $\hat{8}$ ($\hat{1}$), with the prominent G♭4 prolonged through m. 5 and m. 7. At this voice-leading level, the approach to $\hat{1}$ is not from above, but from below.[8]

An increased syllable count of the lyrics explains the inclusion of smaller durations of the "aa" motive in m. 5. As Table 4.1 already illustrated, the syllable count of this section noticeably increases from 8 in verses one and two, to 10, in verse 3. It would take some modifications to the basic "x" motive, and still require the use of sixteenth note subdivisions, in order to accommodate the additional lyrics that Wonder crams into the same space. Example 4.10 shows that the original "x" motive could be manipulated to support the lyrics here, using the same rhythms of the "aa" motive.



Example 4.10. Verse 3, mm. 5-6 rewrite

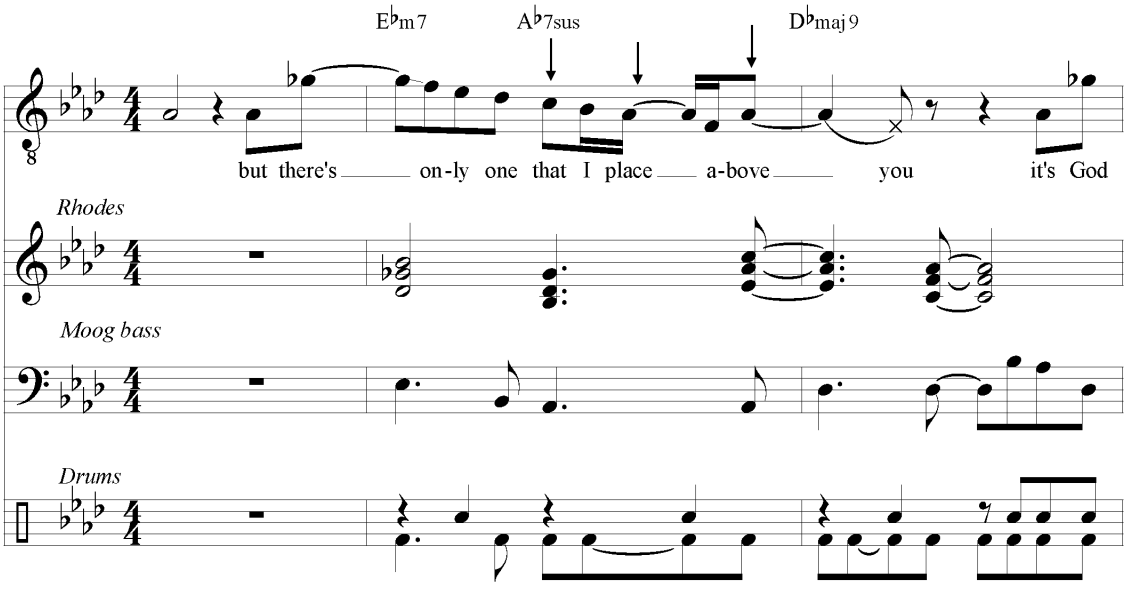
Wonder's solution to change the line altogether seems the best choice, since by doing so it adds contrast to the contour without having to use an excessive number of repeated notes—a necessary addition if he had chosen to use the "x" motive.

Lyrics aside, the accelerated rhythms are an important feature that energizes the line's overall affect. A string of eighth notes drive the beginning of the line (as in earlier verses), but on beat three of m. 5, the rhythm pushes forward, evolving into an eighth and

[8] From a harmonic perspective, the G♭, a chordal seventh over the A♭ chord, does not fulfill its voice-leading role by resolving down to F over the D♭ chord. Conceptually, at a deeper level of structure, the seventh would be shown resolving down. As seen in "You and I" from Chapter 3, the accompanying instruments fulfill this expected resolution.

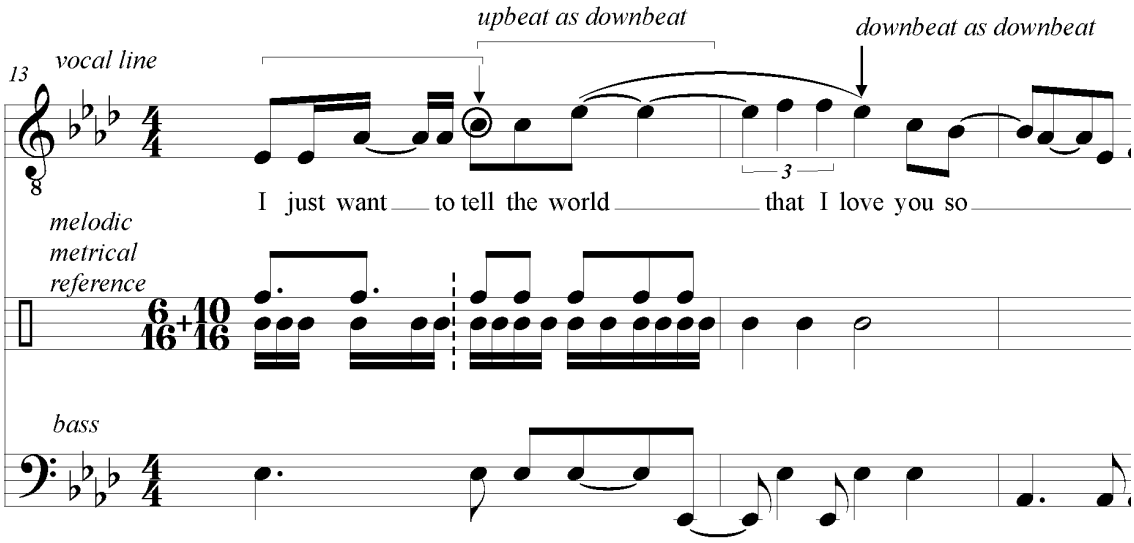
two-sixteenths pattern over the $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ figure. The last sixteenth note is tied to beat four, anticipating the beat as a syncopation at the sixteenth-note duration level for the first time. Also, the downbeat to the following measure is tugged on by an eighth-note anticipation on the "and" of beat four. This doubly-syncopated rhythm on beats three and four produces a "micro" hemiola effect at the sixteenth-note level, against the predominantly quarter and eighth-note pulse, and pulls at the impending downbeat energetically. This brief perceptual acceleration of the beat forms a temporary cross-rhythm with the primary pulse established in the accompaniment, as depicted in Example 4.11.

Beats one and three in m. 5 are emphasized by the Moog bass-line and bass drum hits (notated in the bottom drum part). Both parts enhance the drive to the downbeats with eighth-note pick-ups. The Rhodes also articulates downbeats at first, but at the end of the figure, aligns itself with the vocal part on the "and" of four.



Example 4.11. Verse 3, mm. 5-6

A new variant of motive "x" appears at the cadence of verse 3 and continues to build rhythmically. Wonder's vocal line nimbly dances around the metrical points of emphasis with sixteenth-note syncopations. At the start of the final phrase of verse 3, the "x^4" motive retains the overall ascending shape of the basic "x" motive of earlier verses, but instead of ascending the pentatonic scale as before, the figure leaps through the A♭ major chord. In Example 4.12, each step up the triad is syncopated by a sixteenth note, creating a similar type of perceived acceleration against the established beat as was experienced in mm. 5-8 of verse 3.



Example 4.12. Verse 3, mm. 13-15

The resulting hemiola pattern produced by Wonder's distinct phrasing connects to a larger, more complex cross-rhythm in m. 13. The last pitch, which forms three-note grouping at the sixteenth-note level, also elides with another pattern consisting of groups of five eighth- notes that are organized into sub-groupings of 2+3. This grouping cuts

across the grain of the established meter in a conceptually sophisticated manner. The implied compound 6/8 meter in the first half of the measure elides with an implied 5/8 meter that begins surprisingly on the "and" of beat two. The phrasing does not get reconciled with the primary meter convincingly until beat three of m. 14, after the melody crests on the upper neighbor note PDG around scale degree $\hat{5}$.

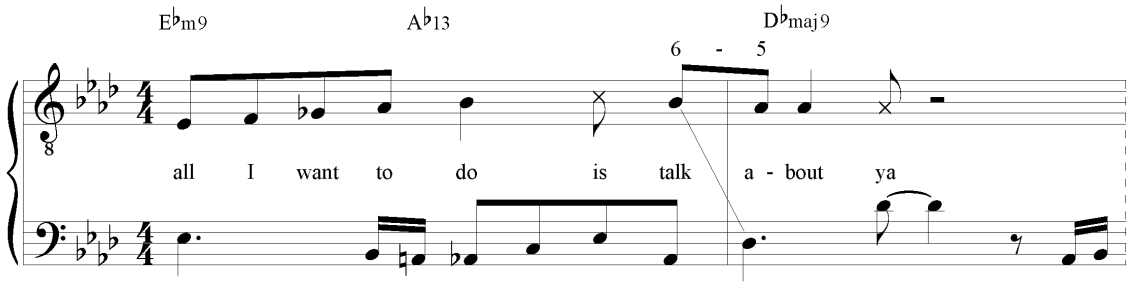
Although the conceptual sixteenth-note and eighth-note subdivision frameworks that create this flexible metrical moment may not be readily audible, it does explain the irregularity in the points of emphasis, where Wonder's phrasing suggests a metrical shift on the "and" of beat two, making it seem as though the measure has expanded. After the syncopations on beats one and two, the eighth-note arrival on the "and" of two feels more like a stable metrical point and less like an upbeat. The words here, "…tell the world," group together well, evenly assigned to an eighth-note duration. But our ears have tricked us, when we discover that we have been had by another new layering of syncopations.

From this discussion on rhythmic placement comes another important observation regarding Wonder's offbeat phrasing. Similar types of offbeat, reverse phrasing occur frequently throughout his performance of this song and elsewhere: phrasing of melodic lines is often the result of his unique delivery and placement of the lyrics. Reverse phrasing adds an elastic quality to his music, as syncopated lines generate motion through a disruption of the pulse—the offbeat groupings blur our perception of downbeats.[9]

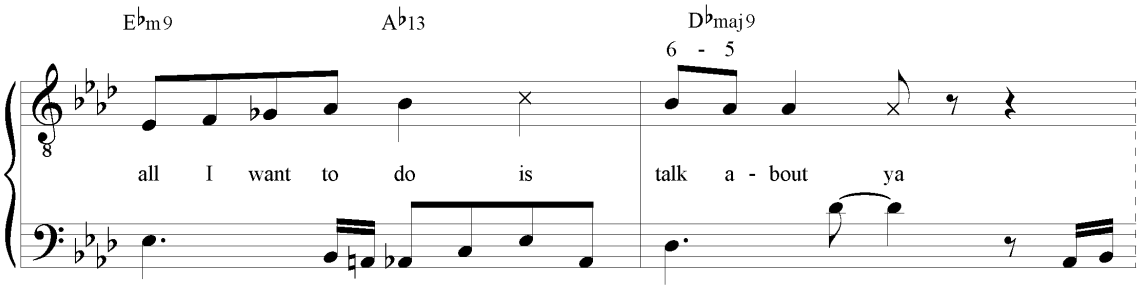
[9] Wonder's delivery of the lyrics could be a product of the recording techniques that were in place to address the practical complications arising from his blindness. The necessity of trying to teach him all the lyrics by rote perhaps was too daunting a task, and Braille reading presented another set of practical challenges. To address this issue, Clarence Paul was the first to devise an imperfect but useful system wherein Wonder could be fed the lyrics in real time through his headphones. He would have to hear lyrics of the next phrase while singing the current ones, always anticipating what came next (Ribowsky, 66). Wonder would have had to make split-second adjustments to fit the lyrics with the melody. From this process, it seems that the very nature of the system allowed for a certain level of flexibility regarding melodic interpretation.

For instance, a subtle type of reverse phrasing occurs in verse 1 (Example 4.13a). In the second motive of mm. 5-8, Wonder parses the lyrics into two segments, "all I wanna do is," and "talk about ya." The first line coincides with the rising gesture, and the second line with an anticipated 6-5 suspension-like gesture over the subdominant.

a. Original performance



b. Non-syncopated version



Example 4.13. Verse 1, mm. 7-8: a, original performance; b, non-syncopated version

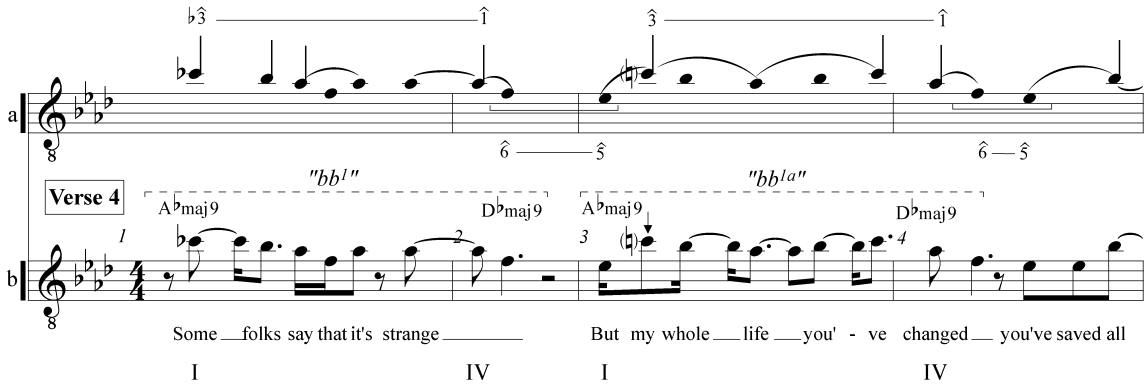
The suspended tone is anticipated on the "and" of four in m. 7, and the resolution tone actually occurs on the downbeat—although we still hear the grouping as belonging to the downbeat of m. 8 as shown in Example 4.13b. The 6-5 resolution occurs frequently in this song, but normally Wonder either anticipates both pitches just prior to the downbeat (verse one, mm. 3-4, mm. 5-6), or places them squarely on the downbeat.

Verse 4

Wonder's vocals reach an excited, declamatory level in verse 4. Here his melodic line is a concentrated mix of PDGs and melodic holdovers of earlier verses. Immediately following the cadential closure of verse three, Wonder, with vocals a-blazing, charges into the final verse with an improvised ascent through the pentatonic into his extreme upper range. Abandoning the restraint expressed in his voice from earlier verses, in verse 4 Wonder makes his most emphatic case of unflagging love yet, reserving his most expressive ideas for last. Syncopated bits and pieces of the melodic figures pull violently at the downbeats, and propel the music forward more agitatedly. Even the timbre of Wonder's voice becomes noticeably frenetic, his voice strained at moments. He remains in his upper tessitura, limited primarily between E♭4 and C5, throughout most of verse 4.

The narrow range of this verse has much to do with the expressive fragments of melody, activated on the surface of the music through intense syncopations at the sixteenth-note level. Throughout the verse, the smooth contours that characterized the earlier iterations of the "x" motive give way to compressed oscillations of the major $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1} - \hat{6}$ PDG itself, either embellished or reduced down to its basic framework (see Example 4.3 above). Wonder treats the tonic note (A♭) as the point of axis by which he focuses the melodic direction of his vocal line, pivoting between the upper pentatonic third, C and lower third, F. In general, the tonic note is the anchor of all the figures in verse four, and functions much like a recitation tone, lending to the music its gospel-style rhetorical quality. With the repeated short fragments, constricted range, and extreme upper tessitura adding to the intensity, verse four is a veritable sermon, in which the protagonist preaches his love with all the energy of his soul.

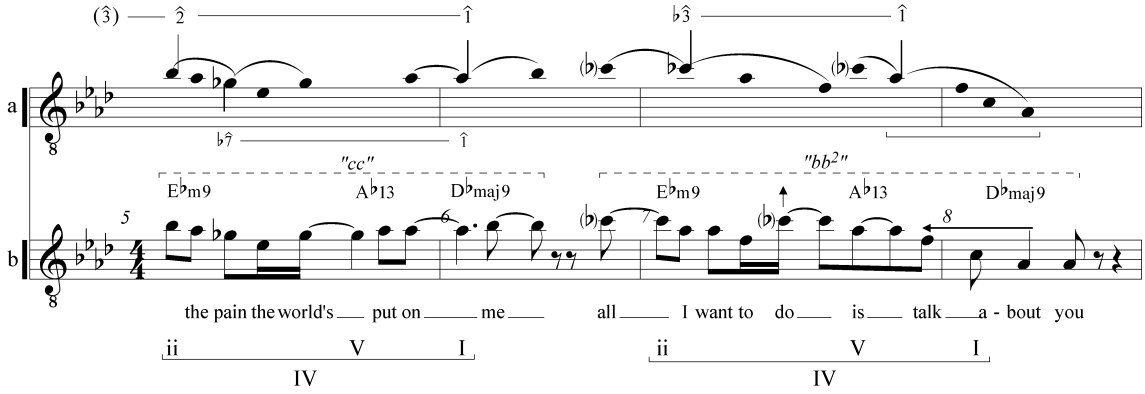
Wonder's regular inflections of $\hat{3}$ with $\flat\hat{3}$ enhance the upper third alternation. In place of the expected motives previously described in verses 1 through 3, each four-measure segment of this final verse features some variation of the common major PDG. In mm. 1-4, the improvised PDG first replaces the "x" motive. Level a in Example 4.14 illustrates the way in which Wonder embellishes the larger voice-leading span of the PDG-based "bb" motive from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$ with embedded $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ patterns.



Example 4.14. Verse 4, mm. 1-4

Unlike earlier verses, the two-measure "bb" motives appearing in mm.1-4 do not form a larger complementary pair, since each "bb" motive acts as a self-contained, closed unit with the conclusive arrival on $\hat{1}$. However, the following third span from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{6}$ is common to both. This extra move to $\hat{6}$ functions as a lower incomplete neighbor from $\hat{1}$, and essentially "ties off" the end of each variant of the PDG-based motive. It also initiates an additional voice-leading path within a conceptual inner voice. At the "tie off" points in both m. 2 and m. 4, $\hat{6}$ connects with $\hat{5}$, suggestive of the typical path of the upper boundary PDG.

Over the tonicization of the predominant in mm. 5-8, Wonder sings two different patterns, instead of repeating the first motive as before. Interestingly, in Example 4.15, the first motive in mm. 5-6 (labeled "cc") combines characteristics of the "x^2" and "aa" motivic variants found in the first three verses.



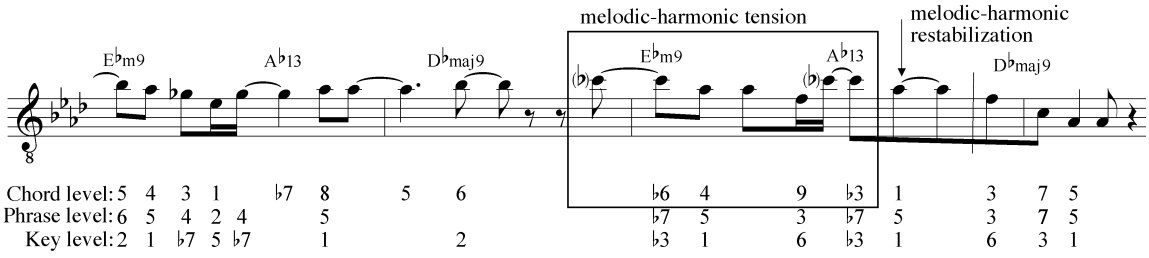
Example 4.15. Verse 4, mm. 5-8

The surface-level gesture has a similar descent to motive "aa" in m. 5, but moves through the E♭m9 harmony from $\hat{2}$ instead of $\flat\hat{7}$. By emphasizing $\hat{2}$ at the top of the contour here, shown in level a, the $\hat{2} - \hat{1}$ voice-leading from mm. 5-6 resembles the pathway of the "x^2" motive. At the same time, a lower voice-leading strand creates the $\flat\hat{7} - \hat{1}$ pathway of the "aa" motive. Wonder basically fuses together the core of these two motives.

In mm. 7-8, opting to not repeat a variation of "cc," Wonder improvises over the set of changes with a reduced version of the major PDG, labeled here as a "bb" motive variant. All stepwise motion has been removed in favor of alternating thirds that articulate the $\hat{3} - \hat{1} - \hat{6}$ framework of the PDG. In addition, Wonder ornaments the

motion from $\hat{6}$. Shown in level a, the motion to $\hat{6}$ in this case is not a move to an incomplete neighbor, but is part of a larger arpeggiation that links A♭4 with A♭ 3 below. Notice too that Wonder introduces this ending pattern on $\hat{6}$ a half beat early, beginning on the "and" of beat four in m. 7, anticipating the arrival of F. Level a shows that its conceptual metric placement is on the downbeat of m.8.

This gospel figure does not neatly agree with the chord progression here, and as in other instances, it creates momentary tensions between melody and harmony. Melodically, the pattern conforms less to the local chord progression, but it still does operate within the basic pentatonic key area of A♭ major. To get a better view of this, we can turn the reductive analysis upside-down, and compare the surface ornamentations to the structural levels of harmony (at the local level, phrase level, and general key level of the pentatonic collection) given in Example 4.16.



Example 4.16. Verse 4, mm. 5-8

The melodic patterning that occurs in m. 7 - 8 deviates temporarily from the local harmony, unlike the "cc" motive which adheres closely to the local ii-V progression in D-flat, as the structural pitches, B♭ and G♭, form the chordal fifth and minor third of the E♭m9 chord in m. 5. In the second half of the measure, the G♭ becomes the chordal

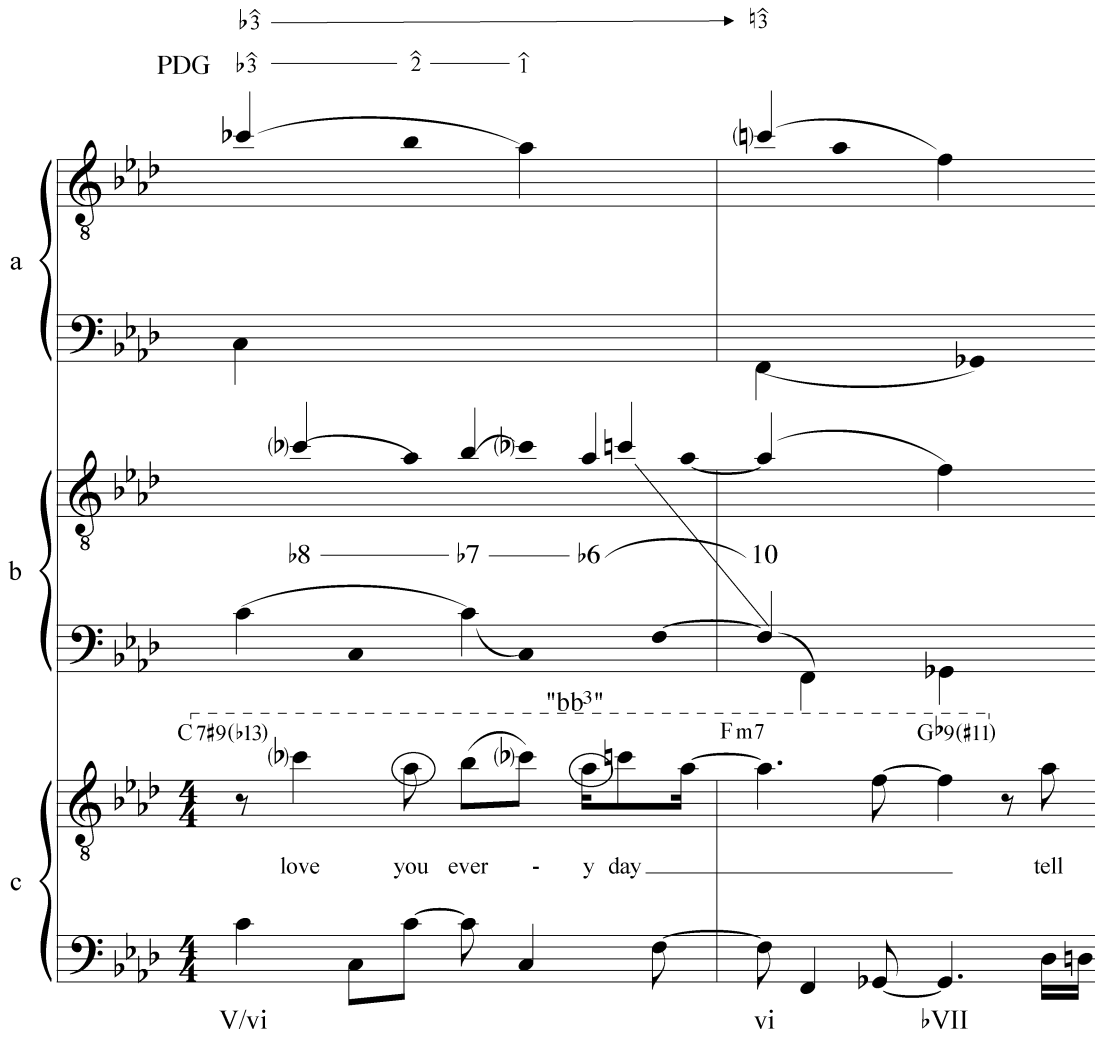
seventh of the A♭7. However, Wonder's improvised repeated PDG variant in m. 7-8 over the same chord progression forms two tensions, the flat sixth and fourth with the E♭m9, and a flat third with the A♭ chord.

Although these active pitches in mm. 7 – 8 do not necessarily agree with the local harmonic progression, and do not seem to behave as chordal extensions, the example above clearly shows that they operate in concert with the global major-pentatonic key of A♭. Important pentatonic melodic relationships are present at this level, supplanting the voice-leading implied by the local chordal relationships. Unlike the earlier verses (especially one and two), the PDG is not part of a stepwise scalar passage, but its pitches coincide with melodic arrival points. Immediately following the tension created in the first part of m. 7, the gesture realigns itself on all levels of harmonic structure on the "and" of three by firmly landing on scale degree $\hat{1}$ which forms the chordal fifth of the D♭ chord.

This same strained relationship between melodic idea and harmony occurs in mm. 11-12 of the next phrase (Example 4.17). The minor-inflected PDG (labeled "bb^{3}") is once again at odds with the local C7 chord, creating brief tensions vertically, until the release over the Fm7 in m. 12.

Shown clearly at level b in the reductive graph above, the pitches of the PDG form dissonances with the local harmonies. The C♭ on the downbeat of m.11 forms a dissonant diminished octave against the bass, although it does resolve immediately down to the B♭ – the chordal seventh –on beat three of m. 11. But the continuation of the PDG makes the arrival note A♭ a dissonant flat thirteenth against the C chord that does not truly resolve until the change in harmony to the F chord in m. 12. Again, it seems that

these local tensions that arise by the PDG pathway do not act as chordal extensions, but rather illustrate the inexact mapping of a pentatonic process overlaid on a tonal process, a topic addressed in Chapter III.



Example 4.17. Verse 4, mm. 11-12

Level a reveals the important ascending melodic relationship that C♭ has to C on beat one of the next measure, as a prolongation of 3̂. On the local level, ♭3̂ functions in

context of the downward gesture drawn within the magnetic field of $\hat{2}$. At the remote level it also appears to function as a $\sharp\hat{2}$, since the voice-leading strand moves up to $\flat\hat{3}$.[10]

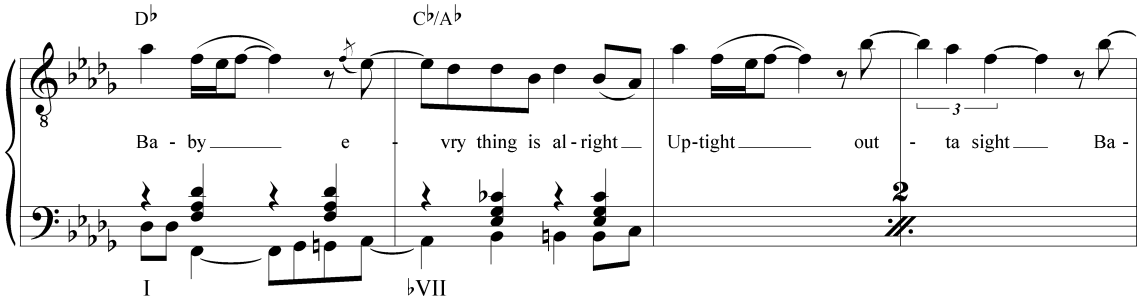
The diffusion of PDGs (the "bb" motive variants) as improvised motivic material in this verse represents Wonder's application of a rhetorical gospel formula overlaying the local harmony. These repeated patterns cling to the central tonic and operate within the more global space of A♭ major pentatonic, with expected shades of the parallel minor, and only casually reference the underlying local harmonic space. This formulaic approach is reflective of the practice that Motown's Clarence Paul passed on to Wonder on how to sing the blues using standard melodic patterns (PDGs).

On one structural level, the local harmonic environment in which these gospel devices occur does not readily agree with the pitch content of the circling PDG. The harmonic rhythm of this passage in Example 4.16 moves relatively quickly. Additionally, it includes extended jazz chords that contain pitches outside of the key. To reiterate, the gestures described above are borrowed from one context (gospel style), where the harmonic rhythm is not as active or chromatic, and appropriated into another related but considerably different context (jazz tonal harmony). In a less chromatic environment, or songs with slow harmonic rhythm, these gestures agree more closely with the chordal underpinnings.

Consider Wonder's hit single from 1966, "Uptight, (Everything's Alright)," which illustrates the type of melodic-harmonic tensions to which I refer. The first eight

[10] A similar relationship was seen in Chapter II, with the example of "Big Brother." Also in that chapter it was shown that $\flat\hat{5}$ not only pulled down to $\hat{4}$, but could also be heard on a larger voice-leading level as a $\sharp\hat{4}$ resolving up to $\hat{5}$.

measures appear in Example 4.18 below.[11] The two-chord vamp of the verse and chorus oscillates between a D♭ major triad (I) and C♭ major triad (♭VII). The bass ostinato moves to an A♭ beneath the C♭ chord, giving the chord a minor V7 sound. The harmony in general operates completely within the diatonic framework of D♭ Mixolydian. The basic pattern, and the improvised embellishments, are clearly built around D♭ pentatonic, but they do not appear to emphasize the pitches that define the local shift to the minor V7, specifically the third and seventh (C♭ and G♭). The pattern does come to rest, however, on the root (A♭) of the minor V7 chord, as it moves predictably from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{5}$, alluding to the upper boundary major PDG.

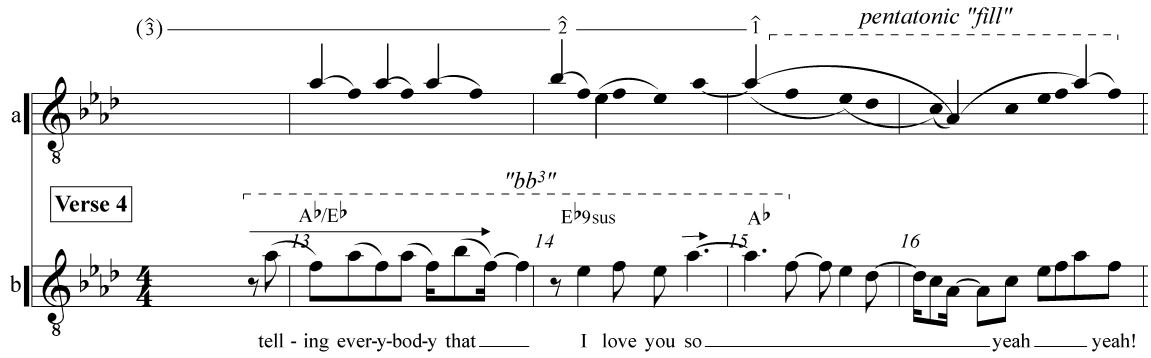


Example 4.18. "Uptight (Everything's Alright)," chorus, mm. 1-4

These comparisons suggest that in his "classic" period style, Wonder not only retained the basic gospel patterns and formulas that he learned in his earlier style but utilized them within a more harmonically complex environment. This application of gospel gestures forms interesting melodic-harmonic relationships of varying levels of compatibility that ultimately enhance the expressive power of his music and contributes to the distinctiveness of his sound.

[11] *Uptight (Everything's Alright)* (Motown, 1966).

The final motive leading up to the cadence in "I Love Every Little Thing About You" is an abbreviated variant of the "bb" motive and features a rapid flurry of repeated third alternations between A♭ and F which replaces the defining $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ descent (Example 4.19).



Example 4.19. Verse 4, mm. 13-16

Perhaps the most aggressive anticipations occur in this stretch of verse four. Wonder introduces the "bb" variant on the offbeat (the "and" of beat four) in m. 12, and the melody continues to pull ahead of the established harmonic rhythm through m. 15. This anticipation is clearly noticeable when the vocal line steps up to $\hat{2}$ early as a syncopation to beat four of m. 13 while still over the tonic harmony. At level a, $\hat{2}$ is placed back with the E♭9 harmony to which it belongs. $\hat{1}$ is also significantly anticipated by one and a half beats leading from mm. 14-15. With the proliferation of anticipated notes, it is as if in his exuberance, Wonder can hardly wait to proclaim his ardent love.

Wonder further ornaments the ending move to $\hat{6}$ of the "bb" motive, completely filling in the post-cadential space in mm. 15-16. Similar to the extension ending the "bb" gesture in mm. 5-8 above, the move to $\hat{6}$ becomes part of a drawn out elaboration of $\hat{1}$.

Wonder's improvised line descends through the pentatonic collection to A♭3 and then doubles back on the pathway, returning through the pentatonic up to A♭4.

Despite the contour change, the voice-leading of this improvised motive is still much like that of the other "bb" variations. While $\hat{3}$ does not appear in this four-measure span, its prolongation does take place in mm. 11-12, immediately preceding this span (see level a of Example 4.16). This pitch corresponds with the A♭/E♭ chord in m.13 and connects with $\hat{2}$ as part of a larger $\hat{3} - \hat{2} - \hat{1}$ voice-leading span—not present on the surface of the gesture.

In addition to the voice-leading relationships discussed here, what gives the PDG-based motives much of their expressive power and teleological drive is their rhythmic character. By animating the surface with a slew of syncopations and anticipations, the song, initially a relaxed groove ballad, transforms into a declamation of Wonder's ardent love. He utilizes these rhythmically charged figures, repeated in shorter, fragmented PDGs by the end—at this point they are reduced to their raw essentials—as persuasive outbursts of his enthusiastic love. As if to prove though sermon, once and for all to those who doubted ("Though they say…"/ "Some folks say…") that his love is indeed genuine and lasting.

Chorus

I purposely neglected to mention the role of the chorus in the song's emotional journey, because most of the significant melodic development occurs in the verses. What I will say is that Wonder sustains the energy level from verse 4 into the three cycles of the chorus that follow. He weaves improvised vocal lines in counterpoint to the chorus'

repeated melodic idea, creating multiple layers of commentary that hearken back to Wonder's gospel roots; he recreates a virtual gospel choir in the chorus, complete with exclamations and shouts of confirmation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that voice-leading is key to understanding the deeper relationships between the basic *idea* of each motive and the way in which Wonder transforms or changes them in his performance of "I Love Every Little Thing About You." Within the melodic variations and newly improvised lines there exists a consistent patterning around which Wonder elaborates. He begins by playfully teasing out the PDGs and their modal inflections, and he gradually improvises on these rhetorical gestures more earnestly as the song unfolds. What also gives the music its dynamicism is the melodic interplay against the sustained rhythmic groove. His increasing use of syncopated figures that tug and pull at downbeats excites the pulse and contributes to the overall vitality of the song. Compelled by the lyrical content of the song, Wonder's vocal line progressively cuts across the relaxed groove laid down by the rhythm section with great fervor.[12]

[12] The accompaniment interacts with Wonder's vocal line sparingly, and largely provides a stable metrical backdrop whereupon the melody can dance. The lack of serious interaction seems to be a result of the recording process Wonder uses on the "classic" albums. He performs each part himself, layering one at a time on separate tracks. Obbligato parts that weave around the lead vocals in counterpoint are added after the primary vocal and rhythm tracks have been recorded. This process might explain, at least in part, the limited interaction between vocals and accompaniment.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

I would like to feel that as my albums change,
my people—meaning all people—
will come with me, that we will grow together.
Everything that I experience is in the songs that I write.
You see, my music is my way of giving back love.[1]

This dissertation is the first in-depth analytical study devoted exclusively to examining the intricate relationships of melody and harmony in the music of Stevie Wonder. In it, I have attempted to locate those salient features that help to define the style of his "classic" period from 1972 - 1976. This is why the core pursuit of this dissertation can ultimately be reduced to a study of patterns—patterns that, paradoxically, make Wonder's musical style his own, and yet not his own. Throughout, I was confronted with this paradox, trying to grasp how these patterns, melodic and harmonic, at once make Wonder's voice unique and universal within the realm of African-American music styles. What I discovered from this process is that it was not always easy to keep the two in balance; in some ways it is his use of the universal aspects of his music that *make* Wonder's style what it is: unique. The uniqueness, I decided, lies in the inventive ways in which recurring patterns appear, and the universal is manifest in the emergent pentatonic and tonal patterns themselves. In this sense Wonder's music is uniquely universal. Hopefully it was clear from my analyses that my intention was to explore the "unique" through the perspective of the universal; in other words, in order to understand the unique (i.e. Wonder's use of the patterns), I first had to understand the universal (i.e. the patterns themselves).

[1] Underwood, 42.

Because my focus was primarily on the study of pitch relations in melodic and harmonic patterns, my dissertation takes a different path from that of many of the current studies on African-American music. Chapter I surveyed a cross section of the types of recent scholarship on African-American music that focuses on temporal aspects like rhythmic perception and repetition.[2] In contrast, as I moved forward with this study, I came to the conclusion that there was much to say regarding pitch relationships, specifically in the realm of voice-leading. Wonder's melodies are lyrical and intensely expressive, and his harmony imaginative and clever. These attributes seem to have more to do with how pitches relate to one another, vertically, horizontally, and together; the pitch relations create meaningful patterns that help to define this aspect of his style.

Of course, these musical parameters are animated and dependent upon the parameters of rhythm and meter, and the tradition to which Wonder belongs places prime importance on them. Chapter IV included relevant asides on the relationship of these patterns to rhythm, meter, and temporality. Specifically with regards to his performance of the lyrics and melody, rhythm interacts and plays against the pulse in exciting ways, enhancing the forward momentum and climax of the song.

Reductive analysis was the workable tool that enabled me to uncover the pitch relationships central to Wonder's music, since it proved particularly useful in exploring the intersection of the universal and the unique in Wonder's music. As I described in Chapter I, since much of his music can be described as tonal, this form of analysis is relevant to his style. I feel that by using this form of analysis, I was able to locate

[2] Recall that in Hughes' dissertation, the first devoted entirely to the music of Stevie Wonder, the primary focus is on *groove* and *flow*, topics that are largely rhythmic in nature. Another reason for my choice of topic was to move scholarship on Wonder's style into a realm not already covered.

meaningful connections between the pentatonic melodies and the tonal structures that harmonized them.

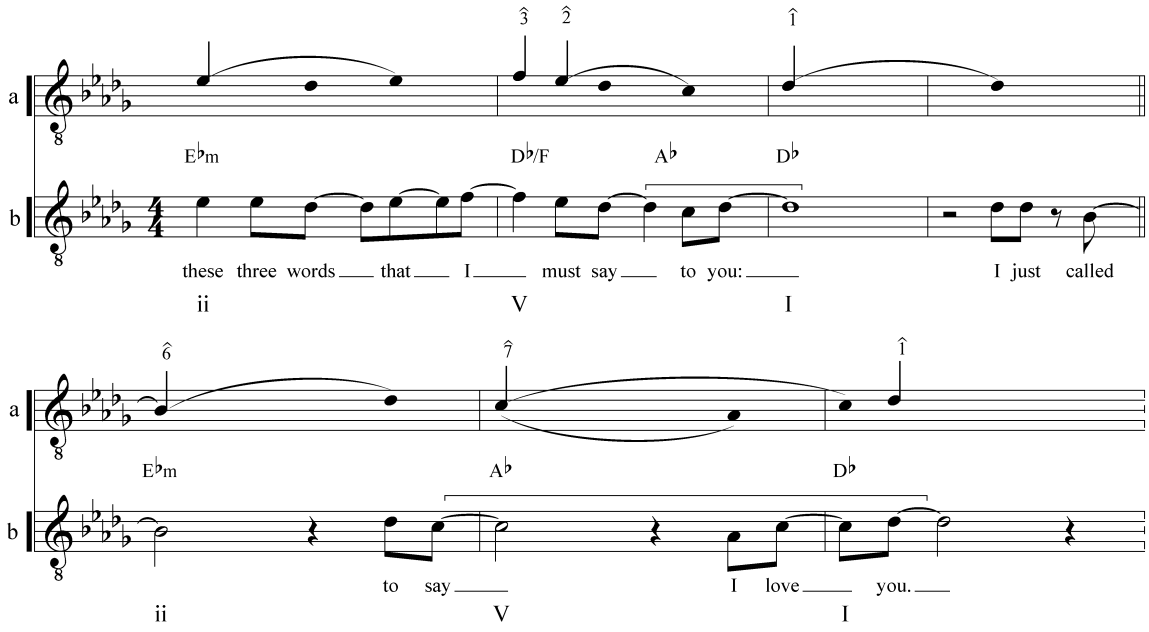
As Hughes did before me, I chose to focus on Wonder's output of the early to mid 1970s. I wanted a representative sampling from the albums generally regarded as his most critical and influential works. This is not to say that his music from *Hotter Than July* to *A Time to Love* in any way is of inferior quality, nor that his commercial appeal waned.[3] From my point of view, it seems that Wonder's later music is less about being on the cutting edge and more about settling into a niche with strong commercial undertones. It is the earlier works that first define and establish what would come to represent Stevie Wonder's musical signature: harmony influenced from the jazz domain, innovative/ imaginative usage of synthesizers, and poignant social messages. The "newness" of his style already achieved, the later albums in many ways represented a solidification of this innovative template. Beginning in the 1980s, while Wonder moved front and center with his celebrity status to confront civil rights issues, his music began charting in the "adult contemporary" category—indicative perhaps of a generational shift away from younger audiences.[4]

The above criteria alone are not enough to merit exclusion of part of Wonder's oeuvre from critical examination in this study. From a musicological perspective, the later works, primarily of the 1980s, also feature musical departures from his earlier aesthetic. In other words, a stylistic shift occurs along the way—not just timbral changes due to new technological advancements with the popularity of drum machines, poly-

[3] *Hotter Than July* (Tamla, 1980); *A Time to Love* (Motown, 2005). A simple comparison of the Billboard charts from the 1970s on will easily confirm this assessment. Of Wonder's 22 Grammys, most were awarded in the span already identified in the beginning of this study as his "classic" period (ca. 1972-1976).

[4] For an in depth discussion assessing Wonder's output of the 1980s, see Werner, Chapter 5.

synthesizers, and recording equipment, but also changes in pitch collection. Even his harmonic choices are sometimes more standardized and less inventive than his earlier works. As referenced in Chapters II and III, one of the most noticeable changes is his increasing use of the major scale as the fundamental collection on which his melodies are based. His smashing pop hit from the movie, *The Woman in Red*, "I Just Called to Say I Love You," consists of a very straightforward melody, both rhythmically and melodically.[5] Displayed in Example 5.1, the melodic content is exclusively based on the seven-note major scale. Scale degree $\hat{7}$, as leading tone, receives much more melodic emphasis than in his earlier works.



Example 5.1. "I Just Called to Say I Love You," verse & chorus, mm. 13-19

[5] *The Woman in Red Soundtrack* (Motown, 1984). This immensely successful song peaked at no. 1 across the charts, and gave Wonder his first no. 1 single in the UK.

This use of $\hat{7}$ is not entirely out of the ordinary for Wonder, since harmonically it often represents the chordal seventh of the tonic, a sonority that appears in his earlier works. But here it becomes an integral melodic and harmonic tone. It takes on a functional role when Wonder harmonizes $\hat{7}$ as the chordal third of the dominant—a rare occurrence in his earlier music. Wonder typically avoided using the chordal third of the dominant (scale degree $\hat{7}$ of the key) and instead preferred the dominant with a suspended fourth as I explain in Chapter III. In Wonder's earlier music, scale degree $\hat{7}$ rarely appears as part of this harmony. This and other stylistic changes apparent in his later works merit a separate comparative study.

In Chapter I, I examined in close detail Wonder's use of the pentatonic collection as an integral organizational force in his melodic construction, and the important subsets of that collection, or what I have labeled as *pentatonic-defining gestures.* As I indicated, these surface-level patterns are not exclusive to Wonder's music, but also represent important rhetorical gestures found in African-American music and other related styles in general. Later, in Chapter IV, I showed how these PDG's also comprised the essential "bits" of improvisatory matter upon which Wonder elaborated the basic melodic structure of the composition to enhance the drama of the text and set in motion the teleological aspect of the song. The survey of these improvised gestures, and how Wonder manipulates them in performance in relationship to the harmonic underpinnings, revealed that PDG's operated on a larger key level rather than the local chord-to-chord level. This evidence effectively confirmed that Wonder's improvisations over the compositional framework represented an "in-the-key" versus an "on-the-chord" conception.

Further research is needed in order to understand more clearly the role that pentatonicism and more specifically *pentatonic-defining gestures* play in other African-American related styles. These integral networks through the pentatonic seem to form the fundamental building blocks of African-American music, and are quite audible in most R&B, funk, gospel, or blues styles. Understanding their relationship to the "composition" (i.e., the abstract template upon which these patterns are overlaid), how they jibe with the local harmony, and how they contribute to the overall teleology of the song will help form a more complete picture about pitch organization in African-American music.

Chapter IV explored how these patterns arise through improvisation in Wonder's performance through a close reading of "I Love Every Little Thing About You." A comparative analysis surveying various covers of this tune could illuminate how different artists have interpreted the melody—especially of verse four—and to what extent PDGs influence improvised melody. Several artists, both headliners and pedestrian, have covered this song: from well-known artists like The Four Tops, Aretha Franklin, and more recently John Legend, to lesser-known performers like Syreeta, Rhianna (not the sultry Barbadian Rihanna), Jerry Peters, Charlene, and White Heat. How do they interpret the melodic content of verse four, since the improvised melody is very different from the rest?

My survey of Wonder's rich harmonic vocabulary also yielded implications for further study. In Chapter III, I first explored how both the major and minor pentatonic collections were responsible for chord succession in some of Wonder's songs, particularly his funk-based tunes. Juxtaposed with this approach to chord succession was Wonder's use of conventional tonal patterns, stylized in his unique way, to establish key

and periodicity. The way in which Wonder employed extended tertian harmonies borrowed from jazz within tonal contexts is what added to the distinctiveness of his style. Schenkerian analysis was instrumental in comparing Wonder's harmonic style with larger tonal norms.

Wonder's compositional process, facilitated by the role of the recording studio in that process, is a potentially fascinating subject outside the scope of this dissertation. The songs of Wonder, beginning as not much more than an imprint of the mind, a kernel of an idea as the catalyst for spontaneous expressiveness, are born out in the studio, a product of the recording environment. Wonder demonstrates this process on the British television program, *Classic Albums*, which featured a documentary on the making of *Songs in the Key of Life*. Using the song "I Wish," he works through each track, laying down keyboard chords, bass grooves, and drum beats, not necessarily always in that order, before finally laying down the vocal track.[6] Obbligato parts that weave around the lead vocals in counterpoint are added after the primary vocal track. This layered approach, made possible by the recording studio, seems integral to Stevie's compositional process, and the possible effect this approach has on his conception would be a fruitful direction for research. This process might help explain, for instance, the limited interaction between vocals and accompaniment, briefly noted in Chapter IV.

All told, Stevie Wonder possesses a seemingly endless supply of musical ideas—he reportedly has a massive treasure trove of song ideas captured on recording devices waiting to see the light of day.[7] His inexhaustible creativity coupled with his inherent

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[6] "Songs in the Key of Life," *Classic Albums*, (Rhino/Wea, 1999). DVD. "I Wish" appears on *Songs in the Key of Life,* (Tamla, 1976).

[7] Ribowsky, 310.

understanding of musical structure is what makes his genius so compelling—it's no *wonder* that his is the Midas touch.

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