

Student Learning: WA1 (draft) to WA3 (final)

#### WA1: 12 bar blues harmonization function

The 12 bar blues harmonic phrase is very influential in modern music. It provides a standard harmonic phrase, allowing artists to build in surprising and complex elements to make their songs unique.

The basic harmonic progression of the 12 bar blues is: I IV I V IV I/V7. Each chord in this progression is essential. For example, in the first 3 lines of the “Dead Shrimp Blues” we have the same line repeated: “I woke up this morning and all my shrimp were dead and gone”. One may say that this is repetitive, but because each line has a different chord underneath, each line is unique and has a specific function.

As for modern music, such as MJ’s “Black or White” or James Brown’s “I Feel Good”, we can see the harmonic influence that the 12 bar blues has had. At time mark 1:32 in “Black or White” and 0:15 in “I Feel Good” we can see the same chord progression of V IV I, just like the end of the 12 bar blues. The difference is the way the chords are used. We see a hints of the 12 bar blues chord progression in the modern songs, almost like artists are paying tribute to the chord progression, and then they switch to a new unexpected progression like at time mark 2:22 in “Black or White”.

All music builds off of each other and it is interesting to see the 12 bar blues’ effect on modern songs.

Final version of WA2:

#### WA2- Gravity by Sara Bareilles

Parallel period phrase structure is typical of most choruses in pop music, but Sara Bareilles makes her phrase unique and haunting by employing extensions, non-chord tones, and weak chord inversions in the chorus of Gravity.

The period begins in the chorus and the phrases are clearly marked by melodic repetition and text. In the antecedent, the bi lyrics “Set me free, leave me be” are melodically the same whereas the ci lyrics, “I don’t want to fall another moment into your gravity” are melodically different and end on tonic. The consequent phrase begins with the same melody as the first bi, but has different text. The ci of the consequent phrase is melodically different than the first ci, and also ends on tonic. The melody and text are markers of the phrases within the period. It’s at the end of the consequent where we find our first unique moment: a two measure extension.

The extension ends on a V7/IV chord in 3<sup>rd</sup> inversion. The function of the chord is questionable, as it could take predominant or dominant function, but the strong B flat in the bass sounds more like dominant function because it leans towards resolving to I. Yet the chord doesn’t resolve at all, rather, it leaves the listener hanging onto this dissonant chord, creating an eerie and suspenseful feeling.

Sara goes on to make the phrase unique by including interesting chords. The roman numerals for the first phrase are: ii V6 I V6 vi vi42. The second phrase is the same except for the last chord plus a two chord extension: V IV65 V7/IV. Sara includes ii, vi and first inversion chords. These weak chords do not demand specific chordal functions and end up blending together - similar to suspensions. To

strengthen this suspended sound; she includes non-chord tones and creates beautiful dissonance.

Sara has successfully created a powerful parallel period by using a clear melodic line, lyrics, and weak chords. The thing that makes this music powerful is the dissonance and the weakness, which is poetic in itself.