

STEPWISE MODULATION AS A DRAMATIC DEVICE FOR TONIC RETURN IN MUSICAL THEATER SONGS

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Nathan Beary Blustein, Indiana University

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FIGURE 1: *Ragtime*, “What a Game”

	Introduction	A	A'	B (Trio)	A''
Key	C Major	C Major	D-Flat Major	B-Flat Major	C Major
Lyrics	FATHER: “In a world gone mad, there is comfort to be had...”	GROUPS: “Ain’t this the kind o’ weather—” “for smackin’ leather—” “for playin’ baseball!”	(FAN: “Hey, Schnabel...”) FATHER: “At Harvard we were gentlemen, men were gentlemen!” ENSEMBLE: “So’s your sister!”	ENSEMBLE: “It’s Braves and Giants, two to two...”	ENSEMBLE: “Ain’t this the kind o’ weather to get together and—” FAN: “bash his teeth in!”
# Measures	10	8 (intro) + 32	8 (intro) + 32	16 + 6 (dream music)	32 + 8 (internal repetition)

FIGURE 2: “What a Game”: Transitions

(a) From A to A'

A'

CROWD: FAN: Hey, Schnabel!...

What a game! (hock, spit)

Tutti

ff

8^{vb}

CM: V⁷/ → V⁷ I DbM: V⁷ I

(Cl + Fl)

(Tbn) p

(b) From A' to B

B

CROWD:

What a game! (hock, spit)

It's Braves and Gi-ants

Tutti

fp

DbM: V⁷/ → V⁷ I BbM: V⁷ I

FIGURE 2: “What a Game”: Transitions (continued)

(c) From B to A''

Music score excerpt showing a transition from section B to A''. The vocal line includes lyrics: "Jack Mur - ray's now up at bat...". The piano accompaniment shows a progression from B♭M: I to V⁶, then IV, and finally Ger⁺⁶. The key changes to C Lydian. The vocal line continues with "dream-music... (Murray hits the ball and the crowd watches in awe)". The piano accompaniment consists of eighth-note chords.

Music score excerpt continuing the transition. The vocal line includes lyrics: "(Edgar catches the ball in his glove)" followed by "f My God, would some-bo - dy look at that!". The piano accompaniment shows a progression from B♭M: V⁶ to V⁷, then E♭M: V, and finally V⁶ CM: V. An oval labeled "Ascending bass pattern" highlights a series of eighth-note chords in the bass line. The vocal line continues with "Ain't this the". The piano accompaniment consists of eighth-note chords. The section concludes with a return to the tonic, indicated by an oval labeled "Tonic return".

FIGURE 3: Wicked, “The Wizard and I”

	Intro	Intro'	A	A'	Bridge 1	A'' (ending of A)	Bridge 2	A'''
Key	G♭M ~ A♭M	A♭M ~ CM	<u>CM</u>	CM	AM ~ CM	CM	G♭M ~ V/FM	BM → <u>CM</u>
Lyrics	MORRIBLE: “Many years I have waited...”	ELPHABA: “Did that really just happen?”	“When I meet the Wizard...”	“Once I’m with the Wizard...”	“One day he’ll say to me, ‘Elphaba...’”	“And of course that’s not important to me...”	“Unlimited, my future is unlimited...”	“And I’ll stand there with the wizard...”
# Measures	16 + 2	4 + 12	4 + 20 + 2	4 + 20 + 2	2 + 16	8 + 2	2 + 8 + 2 + 8	12 + 2 → 4 + 5

FIGURE 4: “The Wizard and I”: Transition to Bridge 2

Bridge 2

Dreamily

What a pair we'll be: _____ The Wizard and...

CM: I IV⁴⁻³

Un - li - mi - ted _____ My fu -ture is...

G♭M: IV

3 8

3

FIGURE 5: "The Wizard and I": Transition to A"

E♭M: HC

ce-le-bra-tion through-out Oz...that's all to do with me!

rall. **f** cresc.

FM: HC **A''**

— And I'll stand there with the Wiz - ard...

rall. **ff**

BM: I!

No resolution!
 (Stepwise descent to G...)

FIGURE 6: "The Wizard and I": Final tonic return

Beginning of cadential gesture...

Transposed up by half step

Held in such high es teem_

when peo ple see me they will scream_ for half of

cresc.

FIGURE 7: Legally Blonde, “So Much Better”

	Verse 1 (Intro)	Chorus 1	Verse 2	Chorus 2	Bridge	Chorus 3/4
Key	GM ~ em ~ GM	<u>EM</u> → FM ~ dm(DM)	GM ~ em ~ GM	EM → FM ~ dm(DM)	DM → E♭M	E♭ → <u>EM</u> → FM → F♯M
Lyrics	ELLE: “All of this time I planned...”	“Is that my name up on that list?”	“Sorry I’ve been a pest...”	“Seein’ my name up on that list...”	“Maybe she’s what you prefer...”	“(I’m too busy lovin’ my name) up on that list...”
# Measures	1 + 8 ~ 8	8 → 8	8 ~ 8	8 → 8 ~ 2	4 → 4	8 → 6 → 8 → 23

FIGURE 8: “So Much Better”: Transitions

(a) From Verse 1 to Chorus 1

(a) From Verse 1 to Chorus 1

Chorus 1

A Am⁷ G(add²)/B C C[#]m^{7b5} F - N.C. N.C./B AM⁹ Bsus

Watch-ing you walk a-way_ is like a fa-tal blow... Woah! Is that my name up on that list?

(G:^bVII) (E: V I) IV V

(b) Modulation within Chorus 1

(S) Desolation Within Chorus 1

G[#]7sus C^m G^{#7/D[#]} C^{#/E} F B^bmaj7 Csus

Pinch me now to make sure.____

Ow! Yes! That is my name____ in black and white!

(EM: vi⁶) (F: I) IV V

FIGURE 8: “So Much Better”: Transitions (continued)

(c) From Chorus 1 to Verse 2

Verse 2

F/B_b B_b/A Gm⁷ B_b/F C7sus B_b C D C/G G

I feel so much bet - ter than be fore! Oh War- ner? Sorry I've been a pest

(dm: 3 2 1)

(F: V) (D:_bVI bVII I) (G: I)

FIGURE 9: “So Much Better”: Bridge and final choruses

(a) From Bridge to Chorus 3

Chorus 3

A_b(add2)/C BMaj7 E_b(add2)/B_b Dm7b5 G7[#] AbMaj9 Bbsus

I've gone on to bet-ter things, bet-ter jobs and big ger rings. I don't have the time to cry. I'm too bu-sy lov-in' my name up on that list!

fp cresc. f

(E_bM: V[#]9/vi IV9)

(b) Modulation within Chorus 3

G Cm G7/B Cm/E_b E AMaj9 Bsus

Mom will fall on the floor. Hey, Mom! Look at my name in black and white!

(E: I)

9(c) Beyond Chorus 3 (Chorus 4)

Beginning of cadential gesture...

I feel so much bet - ter. I'll be there on Mon - day, nine - o' clock.

Figure 10: *Wicked*, “Defying Gravity” (Return to verse)

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, featuring a treble clef, a key signature of four sharps, and a common time signature. It includes harmonic markings such as 'BM', 'Esus2', 'D♭M', 'G♭sus2', and a final section starting with 'So if...'. The bottom staff is for the voice, also in common time, with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The vocal line follows the piano's harmonic changes.

Figure 11: Legally Blonde, “Omigod You Guys”

Section	Verse A1&A2	Chorus A1&A2	Verse B1	Chorus B1&B2	Bridge 1	Chorus E1&C2	
Key	EM&EM	CM&CM~E♭M(PAC)~CM	EM	CM&CM~E♭M(?)	Fm&Fm(HC)	D♭M&D♭M~GM	
# Measures	8 (intro) + 11 & 11	8 & 8 + 3	11	8 & 8	6 & 8	4 & 10 + 5	
Section	Verse D1	Chorus D1&D2	Bridge 2	Chorus E1	Verse F1	Chorus F1 & F2	
Key	E♭M	BM & CM	E♭M~GM	GM	E♭M~EM	CM & E♭M	
# Measures	12	8 & 8	22 (interlude)	11 (+underscore)	4 + 8	8 & 17	

Figure 12: The Drowsy Chaperone, “Show Off”

(a) Dance break—return to section B

(a) Dance break—return to section B

ENSEMBLE:

more!

JANET: // B' 3

! Please! no more at - ten - tion...

G♭M: I (PAC)

AM: V⁶₄

B♭M: V7/ IV

Figure 12: *The Drowsy Chaperone*, “Show Off” (continued)

(b) Dance break—overview

Section	“Ragtime”		“Crystal glasses”	“Snake charmer”	“Circus”	Return to B section
Key	B♭ ~ GM (HC)	GM (PAC)	(IV/)GM ~ A♭M (HC)	A♭m (PAC)	A♭m ~ G♭M (PAC)	G♭M~V/AM~ V/E♭M
# Measures	8 (double time)	8	8	8	14 (waltz)	4 + 5

Table 1: Further examples

Musical theater/film	Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, <i>Ragtime</i> : “The Night that Goldman Spoke at Union Square”	Younger Brother’s refrains in D Major; Emma Goldman’s first chorus in B Minor, second chorus B Minor→C♯ minor; Younger Brother’s transition C♯ minor→D Major; final refrain in D Major.
	Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, <i>Hairspray</i> : “Welcome to the ‘60s”	Original key in C Major; from Dynamites solos: F♯M (Judine), GM (Kamilah), AM (Shayna), B♭M (Edna); last two choruses each ascend by half step, ending in CM (On OST, Edna sings in E♭M).
Pop/rock	Paul Williams, <i>The Secret of N.I.M.H.</i> soundtrack: “Flying Dreams”†	TV Tropes: “The song has a very loose, undefined lyrical structure, so it’s roughly: Verse in C, bridge up to A#, chorus back down to C, instrumental break in [E♭] — and then the second iteration of the bridge modulates a full step <i>down</i> to B major before finishing in C.”
	The Beatles: “Penny Lane”**	Verses in B Major, choruses in A Major; final repeat of chorus in B Major.
Swing	Billy Joel: “Captain Jack” (?)	Brief introduction in G Major, verses in F Major, choruses in G Major.
	Supertramp: “Dreamer”‡	Griffiths 2015: “[A] fascinating example of the drop down a tone, T10, followed by the return to tonic, T2.”
Metal	Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters: “(There’ll be a) Hot Time in the Town of Berlin”‡	Griffiths 2015: “[D]rops T10... for the entry of the Andrews Sisters, from F to E♭ (at 0' 57: 33 per cent)...a final elevation (T2) enables the original key to conclude (2' 27 to 2' 51: 86 per cent).”
	Lacuna Coil: “Fragments of Faith”‡	TV Tropes: “[Z]ig-zags the hell out of this trope - the home key is G♯ minor, but pre-choruses are in A minor and both the first chorus and the first half of the second chorus is in F♯ minor. The ‘offending’ gear change during the second chorus is actually a return to the original key.”

**=Drew Nobile, “Modulation by Whole Tone in Late Beatles Songs,” paper presented at *It was 50 years ago today! An International Beatles Celebration*, Altoona, PA, February 9, 2014.

†=TV Tropes: Music Tropes, “Truck Driver’s Gear Change,” <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TruckDriversGearChange> (accessed October 23, 2015).

‡=Dai Griffiths, “Elevating form and Elevating Modulation,” *Popular Music* 34, no. 1 (January 2015): 22-44.