

»Lovely Ritmos, Meter Mad« — Irregular Hypermeter, Aesthetic Realism, and the Joyous Artistry of the Beatles

A large reason, as I see it, the music of the Beatles gives so much pleasure is that the underlying rhythms in their best songs *rock* just as much as the rhythms we hear right away on the surface. These deeper structural rhythms have to do with phrase length – hypermeter – and in their songs hypermeter is often surprisingly irregular.

In this essay I'll be looking at ten songs, seven by the Beatles and three by other rock artists. I'll be very technical, since we can't grasp hypermeter without listening closely. Most importantly, I'd like to make clear from the onset that the artistic use of hypermeter concerns far more than abstract sonic mathematics. It has life significance; expressive significance. It satisfies – truly successful hypermeter does, with its oneness of what we expect and what surprises us – a permanent need of the human mind.

What I have just written is based on the philosophy of Aesthetic Realism, founded by the great American scholar, critic, and poet Eli Siegel, with

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Abstract - Résumé

A large reason the music of the Beatles gives so much pleasure is that the underlying rhythms of their best music *rock* just as much as the rhythms heard right on the surface. These deeper, structural rhythms concern phrase length. And hypermeter in the Beatles is often surprisingly irregular. With its oneness of what we expect and what surprises us, this beautiful use of hypermeter satisfies a permanent need of the human mind. As the great American scholar Eli Siegel, who founded Aesthetic Realism, explained: »All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.« Ten songs are considered, seven by the Beatles, three by other artists. Among these are »Eleanor Rigby,« »Yesterday,« »Martha My Dear,« and Burt Bacharach's »Do You Know The Way To San José?«

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whom I had the honor to study.¹ He explained: »All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.« I love this principle. I see in it the future of music education. Having tested it for decades, across a wide variety of musical genres, past and present, I know it is true. We are hoping every moment of our lives, Aesthetic Realism says, to like the world on an honest basis; the one way to do this successfully, Eli Siegel explained, is to see the world, and ourselves, as the aesthetic oneness of opposites.²

As this essay proceeds, I'll say more about this magnificent idea – and how the best music of the Beatles provides clear, joyous evidence for its truth. In my opinion, it is the single greatest idea about the relation of Art and Life ever stated.

Alternatives to Four-Bar Phrasing

I have just indicated that this essay will be philosophic. First, however, to set the stage, a word about something at once technical and historical: the most typical way in Western music in which phrase lengths have been organized – both pop and concert music – is in 4-bar groupings. Now, surprising shifts of phrase structure can be found in rock-and-roll before the Beatles. But they are rare, and largely unadventurous. Meanwhile – thank God – there were some early rockers who liked to break free from numbingly predictable 4-bar units.

Take, for example, this 12½ bar phrase by Little Richard from his 1958 hit *Good Golly, Miss Molly*. To feel the impact of that surprising and irregular phrase, we'll start one phrase earlier with a pure 12-bar blues, and then hear – in the next phrase (which also features stop-time technique) – how Little Richard adds two extra beats to the fourth measure:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 1: *Good Golly, Miss Molly*]

Now, compare this with *Love Me Do* – a 1962 song by John Lennon. Its opening vocal phrase is, surprisingly enough, 13 bars long, with an internal structure of

¹ A biographical sketch of Eli Siegel (1902-1978), which I authored, can be found at <https://aestheticrealism.org/knol-on-eli-siegel/>

² There are two other ways people try to get into a relation with the world outside of them in order to see it as likable, but neither is solid, or logically justifiable. The first, Aesthetic Realism explains, is the »luck way« – a person thinks reality is one's friend because he had good fortune. Of course, this is a very contingent situation, since one's luck might change at any moment. The other way is far more dangerous. It is ugly and utterly spurious: the way of contempt. Contempt is the desire to feel one has gotten into a likable relation to outside reality either through conquering instances of it, or dismissing many aspects of reality as meaningless, unworthy of one's respectful attention. A definition Eli Siegel has given of contempt is: »The disposition in every person to think we will be for ourselves by making less of the outside world.«

6+3+4 bars. That stretched-out three-bar unit in the middle (we expect only two) is wonderful.

It happens on the word »please.« The painful, straining effect of the »e« vowel – «please« – draws our attention to Lennon’s ardent beseeching. Moreover, during this three-bar phrase the harmonic pendulum, which earlier had been swinging back and forth measure-by-measure, suddenly halts.³ This adds to our sense of suspense. Lennon literally is waiting to know the answer: Will she—or won’t she—»love me do?«

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 2: *Love Me Do*]

A way of testing the expressive power and artistic rightness of Lennon’s irregular use of phrase structure is to sing the song through, transforming that surprising three-bar unit, as an experiment, into a unit just two measures long. I have done this experiment with hundreds of people in classrooms, as well as with a similar number or people in lecture halls both in the US and several other countries. Readers of this essay, if they like, can try the experiment for themselves. I can only report that I have yet to meet a single person who has felt the song was stronger structurally, or presented human emotion more honestly, in a truncated, 12-bar transformation.⁴ The irregularity of the song is part of its satisfaction – an integral part.

Lovely Rita, Meter Maid

Let’s now consider a 1967 McCartney song from the classic album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and see whether, in its own way, it honors the aesthetics of symmetry and surprise. As I implied in my title, *Lovely Rita, Meter Maid* has a »lovely ritmos,« and is »meter-mad.« Does this song, in keeping with the principle of Aesthetic Realism I cited earlier, bring opposites together? If so, does this technical fact encourage us to like the world? Let’s see.

It begins with a standard 8-bar intro. Then the main tune enters as Paul sings solo – and we soon hear surprisingly irregular hypermeter. The first phrase of his tune, as expected, is 4 bars long; the second, only 3:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 3a: *Lovely Rita* – opening]

³ The alternating chords were tonic and subdominant: G and C. Thus we get 4 bars of the subdominant rather than just one: the measure before »please,« plus those three measures.

⁴ The long vowel »e« is edgy, is outward in emotional orientation, and, when compared to nearly all other spoken vowels, high in pitch. What follows that vowel? A word whose vowel is in dramatic and nearly utter contrast to it: »uh« – in the word »Love.« (And with that word we reach the song’s title phrase.) The »uh« sound is large, rounded, low in pitch, and seems to express person’s inward depths. These vowels create a drama of opposites all on their own.

Phrase three of the vocal solo seems, at first, to neatly balance phrase two: that is, it repeats both its melody and its 3-bar length. Symmetry is honored. But then, in a daring act of structural mischief, Paul adds an extra bar, a purely instrumental bar, making this phrase four, rather than three, measures long.

Here's the charm of it: what surprises us? A phrase of *normal* length: four bars. Opposites – the expected and the unexpected – are experienced together.

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 3b: *Lovely Rita* – first three vocal phrases]

We can ask, at this early point in my essay: Do we need both symmetry and surprise, the expected and the unexpected, in order to like the world? In order to our lives? I think the answer plainly is, Yes.

Music is something cared for universally. What culture is without it? What century? As Eli Siegel explained in a class he gave in February, 1966, music cannot be successful unless, in some convincing fashion, these opposites come together. »As you hear sound,« he said, »you either get what you expect or you don't; but since happiness is getting both what you expect *and* what you don't, the best rhythms have both.«⁵ This is true for the rhythms of Rameau and Raga; Gershwin and Gamelan; Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* as well as the Chinese Pipa classic *Snow on a Sunny Spring Morning*. And it is true for the best hypermeters. Hypermeter, after all, is simply rhythm functioning at a deeper level.

I'm focusing on hypermeter in rock music; specifically, in the work of the Beatles. But one could easily give hundreds of examples from such classical masters as Mozart and Brahms of phrase structures that have both what we expect and what we do not, joined in a satisfying manner. Even Tchaikovsky often does – a composer one might not suspect would enjoy working with asymmetrical hypermeter. Consider, for example, his famous *Waltz of the Flowers* from *The Nutcracker*. Its main theme, on first glance, seems very »standard« – it is 16 bars long, divided into a four-phrase structure. Yet, in fact, the phrases are highly irregular: 4 + 3 + 4 + 5 measures long! [See Musical illustration #1]

Returning to Paul McCartney's song: with the arrival of its fourth phrase, the opening portion of the tune returns – note for note – only now to fresh lyrics. That again is a situation of opposites: repetition and change; the old and the new.⁶ Here are the new lyrics:

Lovely Rita, meter maid
May I inquire discreetly
When are you free to take some tea
with me?

⁵ From my class notes, confirmed by comparison with notes taken by several other persons present.

⁶ Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, it's worth noting that this matter – repetition of music joined to freshness of lyrics – is fundamental to the aesthetics of strophic song, a structure found universally across all musical cultures, and across all the centuries.

Ex. 1

The musical notation consists of four staves. The first staff shows a melodic phrase of four measures, with a bracket above it labeled '4'. The second staff shows a phrase of three measures, with a bracket above it labeled '3'. The third staff shows a phrase of four measures, with a bracket above it labeled '4'. The fourth staff shows a phrase of five measures, with a bracket above it labeled '5'. The music is in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

[Musical Illustration #1]

Like its model – phrase one – this fourth phrase of *Lovely Rita* is four measures long. So, as we consider the four phrases melodically, its symmetry of design seems clear enough – a mirror-like symmetry, AB / BA, even as the second B section has that extra 4th measure.

But it gets more subtle. The final measure of the fourth vocal phrase overlaps with the first measure of an instrumental tag. They dovetail; share a bar. So is it 4 bars long, or 3? We were all taught early in our mathematical education that 4+4 equals 8. But here, 4+4 equals 7.

It's Beatles' joy-giving, topsy-turvy math!⁷

We are meeting, courtesy of Paul's musical imagination, an arrangement of sounds that embodies the world's opposites. This is sound as symmetrical and asymmetrical, balanced and yet subtly off-kilter.

And there's yet more to it! – in the 4-bar tag I just talked about, Paul adds an entirely unexpected vocal *kick* on the otherwise very weak final two sixteenths of bar 4. It happens as he shouts »Rita!« And that accented shout momentarily throws our sense of meter off kilter. It takes the ensuing honky-tonk piano solo to restore rhythmic equilibrium.

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Ex. 3c – *Lovely Rita* (entire opening unit)]

⁷ This is a technique found very frequently in Mozart.

Rita, Paul tells us, is dressed surprisingly:

In a cap she looked much older
And the bag across her shoulder
Made her look a little like a military man

Musically, she's surprising, too – what with all that irregular hypermeter! Between the words and the music, no wonder Paul is so smitten by the girl: Rita is a representative of the beauty of the world: its aesthetic structure of opposites.

Eleanor Rigby

I wrote earlier that the music of the Beatles is fundamentally pleasure-giving; in my title I speak of their »joyful artistry.« But theirs is not a superficial joy – a »Bubble-gum« joy dependent on words that are bright, pleasant, swiftly optimistic. Many of their best songs, in fact, have lyrics which emphasize dissatisfaction, pain, loneliness, confusion; even ugliness. Nevertheless, taken as a whole – words *and* music – these songs *are* joy-giving. After all, that's how we experience songs: words and music at once, not separately.⁸

Consider *Eleanor Rigby*. As it begins, we are told: »Ah, look at all the lonely people.« There's no preparation for these words: the music that goes with them hits us hard, direct, straight off. It's an ethical command: »Look,« says Paul, »Don't turn away. Don't turn these people into nothing. They are real, and deserve your thought, your compassion, your respect.«

In keeping with the imperative ethics embodied in the words, the music likewise is firm and solid: two 4-measure phrases, each with identical music.

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 4a: *Eleanor Rigby*]

This, surely, is symmetry. On top of it, there's yet another level of symmetry: each 4-bar phrase, from the harmonic point-of-view, is neatly bisected: two bars of C major, two of E minor.

But immediately following this pair of highly symmetrical 4-bar phrases, surprisingly we hear a pair of lively and flexible 5-bar phrases. We hear them as Paul sings out her name, Eleanor Rigby. She's not just any lonely person; she's not anonymous; she's specific; she has her own unique life story – as is true later for Father McKenzie:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>
[Example 4b – *Eleanor Rigby* opening]

⁸ In my opinion, it is faulty methodology ever to discuss the words of a song and the music of a song in an isolated way; a true analysis will always aim to understand how these two primal elements of song affect each other – for good, or ill.

This pattern – a pair of 4-bar phrases contrasting with a pair of 5-bar phrases – remains unbroken throughout the song.

Now let's go deeper. The 5-bar phrases actually subdivide in a very complex manner. Melodically the division is 1+3+1. Yet harmonically, they divide in an edgy, shard-like manner: 3 bars of E minor, 1½ bars of C major, and then a ½ bar of E-minor.

Ex. 2



[Musical Illustration #2]

And so, between the harmony and the melody there is an exciting and marvelously syncopated, hypermetric cross-rhythm. Nor is this all; bar 5 of the first phrase (»lives in a dream«) pairs up, melodically, with bar 1 of the second phrase (»waits at the window«). Together they form an easy-to-hear, 2-bar unit that reaches across the phrase-divide.

Ex. 3



[Musical Illustration #3]

So as we reach the end of second stanza and hear »Who is it for?« – we expect a balancing measure. But no; abruptly, even rudely, the opening melody barges back in, adding fresh urgency to its ethical question: »All the lonely people, where do they all belong?«

Though Paul never gives the answer, it is implied throughout. Where do they belong? With us! – they deserve to be in our minds with fellow-feeling, and full reality. And let us remember: this song is hardly a »softy-soft« thing! Fellow-feeling, I learned from Aesthetic Realism, includes not only compassion, but accurate criticism.

There's edginess in this song, especially in the sharply cutting staccato chords on the strings. The implication of this edgy sound is a critical one – that the loneliness of Eleanor and Father McKenzie is hardly the world's fault alone. There was a preference in them – a contemptuous preference – to be solitary rather than be in the company of other people. Contempt, Aesthetic Realism explains, is »the feeling we'll be for ourselves by making less of the outside world.«⁹ It is a possibility in every human mind – the most hurtful possibility.

⁹ See <https://aestheticrealism.net/tro/art-and-the-purpose-of-our-lives.html> (p.1)

Lesson of a Rock Musician

In an Aesthetic Realism lesson Eli Siegel gave in 1969 to a rock musician, he asked:¹⁰

Do you believe there's a desire for a person to unburden himself as if he were an earthquake?

And he continued:

I say the purpose of rock and roll is to make secrets a public delight. Rock and roll consists of opposites, and there is an assertion of agony. »If you don't care for me, O-O-O, I still care for you.« There is a desire to take one's private life and to have a train caller give it.

The musician – whom we'll call »Bob Walker« – said, »I never thought of that, but I think so.« And Eli Siegel continued:

There's a feeling had by everyone that the rest of the world doesn't know him or her well enough...the feeling that we are more unknown than known. Do you think you have that?

BW: Yes. I do.

ES: And do you think the purpose of rock is to shatter it? The words are mostly about »how defiantly alone I am.« It's the tremendous assertion of loneliness. And that's why it affects people more than other things, because there's something unabashed about it – also, in control.

In *Eleanor Rigby* we experience that shattering. In the sharp, cutting strings, there's sound which is remorseless. We feel pain and separation, pain and loneliness. But Paul's melody contradicts that feeling – through the warmth of his voice, certainly, but also by how the melody ardently pushes across phrase barriers, refusing to be trapped by them. Refusing to be caged in. Here's the entire song:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 4c: *Eleanor Rigby*, entire]

Is this song harsh, or compassionate? Tragic, inexorable, or filled with freedom and flexibility? Filled with sadness, or the rhythmic joy of life? It is both, and because it is both, it is beautiful.

What does this mean? That with all the facts present – even the most dispiriting and painful of facts – beauty cannot be defeated. It is there to be found by a person honestly looking for it. Does that speak well for reality? Yes, it does.

¹⁰ This is excerpted from a transcript made of a tape recording of the lesson. Both the original recording and the transcript are in the collection of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation.

Hypermeter and the Art of Joining Words and Music

As I indicated earlier, John Lennon took pains, however subconsciously, to relate his musical design to the meaning of his words. So does Paul McCartney. The coordination can be obvious, or subtle. But in all good songwriting it is there.¹¹

Most often we think about this in terms of melody and lyrics: how they add to each other, support each other. Even at times usefully contradict each other in behalf of the meaning of the song as a whole.

The interplay of words and melody is certainly the central thing in the art of songwriting. But we can also think about whether the harmony which accompanies the words is chosen rightly. Or how well the instrumental color of a song relates to its lyrics. Or its rhythmic groove. Or its dynamics. Or its tempo. Do they do right by the words?

In this essay, I'm focusing on an aspect of word-music relations that has largely gone unexplored: the relation of words and musical hypermeter. The question is: what would make this relation valuable; honest; beautiful?

In *Eleanor Rigby*, we hear it. The hard-edged sequestration of the 4 and 5 bar units reflects the loneliness of Rigby and Father McKenzie. Yet the way phrases reach out towards each other, dovetail and join, symbolically reflects the fact that – as Paul passionately implies – we all need to break out beyond the boundaries of our narrow, sequestered, lonely notions of self.

In both its words and its music, *Eleanor Rigby* had a big impact on other songwriters. As an example, let me go now to a song in surprisingly different emotional territory, yet one which likewise deals with the contrast of 5 and 4 bar phrases: Burt Bacharach's 1968 hit *Do You Know The Way To San José?*

The main portion of this song is in consistent 5-bar phrases. And notice Bacharach's structural wit: not only are all the phrases of this tune 5-bars long, there are five such phrases in it. What is this? Symmetry or asymmetry? Or both?

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 5a: *Do You Know the Way....?*]

And here's the coda, up a half-step to Db major. Now we hear tightly symmetrical, sharply defined 4-bar phrases. Since 4-bar units are standard for pop music, as we hear them after those looser, somewhat wandering, 5-bar units, we feel: we've finally arrived; we've actually *found* the way to San José!

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 5b: *Do You Know the Way....?*]

¹¹ For a more extended discussion of this perspective on the meaning of song, see my essay »Marcabru and the Foundations of Modern Song,« which appeared in Vol. 15 of *Ars Lyrica*. (2005-6).

Simplicity and Complexity

In December, 1955, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* published Eli Siegel's classic essay in the form of 15 questions, »Is Beauty the Making One of Opposites?« I'd like to quote one of these now since it sheds profound light on the technical issues I'm writing about here.

Question 7 concerns »Simplicity and Complexity:«

Is there a simplicity in all art, a deep naiveté, an immediate self-containedness, accompanied perhaps by fresh directness or startling economy?—and is there that, so rich, it cannot be summed up; something subterranean and intricate counteracting and completing simplicity; the teasing complexity of reality meditated on?

The music we've listened to so far says »Yes« to that question.

Now, let's consider one of the songs John wrote for the *White Album*: *Sexy Sady* – whose original title was *Maharishi*. Might the seductiveness of *Sexy Sady* have to do with the relation of simplicity and complexity in it? Be reflected in its ever-shifting 7 and 5 bar-phrases – let alone its 3-bar introduction? Is this pattern of unpredictable hypermeter a way John had of underscoring the satiric intent of his lyrics?

I think so. The words to the song are oily. There's oiliness, too, in the texture of its instrumental sound. And there's oiliness in its hypermetric design; one is never quite able to pin its phrase structure down: to make the song say anything »four-square« and definite – just as, presumably, that was John's opinion of the Maharishi. The song keeps tricking you into thinking it will fall into simple 4, 6, or 8-bar units – but then it pulls the musical rug out from underneath your feet.

»You made a fool of everyone,« John sings. And the music wonderfully reflects those words, expressing – in its own way – his disillusionment with a man he considered an oleaginous guru.

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 6: *Sexy Sady*]

Yesterday – A Masterpiece of Songwriting

When it comes to coordinating irregular hypermeter with the meaning of a text, perhaps nothing in the music of the Beatles is clearer than the 7-bar vocal phrase which opens McCartney's *Yesterday*. By making this phrase one measure short of what we expect from a ballad – an 8-bar phrase – Paul achieves a brilliantly artistic effect, a magnificent oneness of verbal and musical meaning. His next phrase now comes in early – and on what word? Appropriately enough, »Suddenly.«

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 7a: *Yesterday*]

To get an idea of how laughable it would have been had Paul complacently followed »pop-music rules,« add – in your imagination – the missing eighth bar, perhaps with a fill based on a $G\emptyset7 / C7$ progression.

I can't imagine anyone – even a »lounge pianist« – thinking this an improvement! In a moment, I'll clear the air by providing a link to the full song as Paul beautifully composed it. But first I want to say that while I am focusing on hypermeter in this essay, I don't want to give the impression that it's the only way – or even the most important way – words and music are made one in this great song.

For example, Paul sings: »All my troubles seemed so far away.« In keeping with this, the melody moves far away from the register in which it began; as do the harmonies, which modulate to a new key.

Ex. 4

Yes-ter-day, _____ all my trou-bles seemed so far _____ a - way _____

[Musical Illustration #4]

Then he sings »Now it looks as though they're here to stay,« and the melody, gracefully and ever-so rightly, returns to its initial register, as the harmony does to the opening key.

Ex. 5

Now it looks_ as though_ they're here to stay____ (etc.)

[Musical Illustration #5]

This opening 7-bar phrase ends with the words, »Oh, I believe in yesterday.« That crucial word »believe« is supported by church-like harmonies. And the bittersweet meaning of »yesterday« comes across all the more powerfully because the music, too, is bittersweet. The melody rises, sadly, if bravely, through a minor triad. Yet the chords are strongly in the bright major mode: a classic »Amen« cadence.

Ex. 6

Oh I be - lieve_ in yes - ter - day____

[Musical Illustration #6]

An extraordinary fact about *Yesterday* is that the music was created by Paul McCartney a good deal before he found the lyrics that would beautifully join his music. So perfect is the ultimate conjunction, even the *marriage* of the two fundamental elements of this – (or any) – song, one can only marvel at that chronological fact.

There are many subtle acts of word-painting. The very first word, »Yesterday,« begins with an unprepared dissonance, which swiftly resolves itself. Isn't this an exact parallel to what people feel as an unexpected image arises in our minds of something from the past we regret; that pains us? A sudden *wince* of memory – in this case portrayed even more effectively because it disturbs what, up to that point, was the very calm strumming of a pure tonic triad?

That sudden, disturbing moment sets into motion the rest of the song. It is a disturbance within a diatonic setting; a disturbance, in fact, that happens as we hear only the tonic chord. Consider what happens next: the setting of »All my troubles.« We hear two notes – B and C# – which, being the first accidentals we encounter, *trouble* the tonal picture. How beautifully appropriate, how organic an intensification of the purely diatonic disturbance heard just a moment before during the word »Yesterday.«

One of the greatest achievements of McCartney, in terms of the marriage of words and music, is how, when the melody of the 7-bar »A« section repeats note-for-note, he finds words which once again fit the melody meaningfully. For example, B and C#, being higher, sharper than the basic scale of F major, have »edge« to them; are cutting. What words do we now hear with those pitches? »I'm *not half* the man I used to be.« Those words implicitly carry the imagery of something cutting, dividing the self.

Then there is phrase »There's a shadow hanging over me,« – and the descent of the tune at this point, so appropriate for »Now it looks as though they're here to stay,« is equally right for these new lyrics. Moreover, the slight rise to »over me,« followed by that painful, descending minor second resolution of the higher note (Bb) to its partner (A), perfectly captures darkness »standing *over* me.«

I also want to point out something surprising about the musical form of this great song. Normally the middle unit of a song – its bridge, or release – is meant to contrast strongly with the main section. On the surface, that is what happens in *Yesterday*. But as we listen more deeply, we hear how this release is not really new territory at all, but a wonderful variation of the opening melody.¹²

¹² It is well-known that Paul McCartney had a wide range of musical sympathies, including a strong knowledge of, and care for, the »Great American Songbook.« It is therefore worth noting that making the »B« section of a pop tune a variation of the »A« section is a procedure which can be heard in such songs as Gershwin's *Someone To Watch Over Me*, Rodger's *Mountain Greenery*, and Berlin's *Blue Skies*. On occasion, the introductory verse to a song proves to be the model for the »variation« which is the B section of the chorus. For example, Berlin's *Top Hat, White Tie and Tails*.

Ex. 7



[Musical Illustration #7]

This – in its sheer oneness of difference and sameness – is compositional virtuosity. But it is sincere virtuosity because the musical technique goes along with the meaning of the words. There can be no »release« in the customary sense in this song – no shift to a different emotional state or viewpoint; the words will not permit it. Wherever he turns, the regret the singer has, stays with him. It's enduring: it's not something he can shuck off; he can't just »move on.« There's something in his past he is impelled to keep thinking about; he has to see just where and why he went wrong. And so there can only be a *single melody*. And now, *Yesterday*, as a whole:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 7b: *Yesterday*]

Earlier, I mentioned Burt Bacharach. Let me comment now about a song by Carole King. She was clearly affected by *Yesterday* as she wrote *So Far Away* for the 1971 album *Tapestry*.

The title, after all, comes directly from Paul's lyrics: »All my troubles seemed *so far away*.« But there are deeper kinships between the songs, including in their phrase structure. Each opens with a 7-bar phrase, organized as one single measure, followed by three pairs of measures: 1+2+2+2. (For the joy of it, let's add Mozart into the mix; take a look at the opening 7-bar phrase of the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. It has exactly the same design.)

In each of these rock songs, the opening 7-bar phrases have lyrics which circle around: the end echoing the beginning. For McCartney, it's »Yesterday,« and then »I believe in yesterday.« For King, it's »So far away,« and then »That you're just time away.« Here is the opening of Carol King's song:

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html> [Example 8: *So Far Away*]

What Are We Hoping For as We Listen?

Whether it's Lennon or McCartney, Bacharach or King – or, for that matter, Haydn, Mozart, or Brahms – when hypermeter is used truly and artfully, the

opposites of the Expected and the Unexpected are brought together. And they have to be brought together, I learned from Aesthetic Realism, to satisfy what our minds are looking for.

Simply by itself, the expected is boredom, deadening routine, and the very unhandsome personality trait of complacency. But the unexpected, without any sense of perceptible pattern, is also unlikeable. To be constantly on edge, to feel that this is a world in which you never know what might happen next, is terrifying. And in terms of people, no society has ever considered the erratic, mercurial person as having an optimally beautiful state of mind.

I am grateful to have learned from Eli Siegel that there is a fundamental connection between aesthetics and ethics. Separate the opposites, and we have trouble – in life and in art; join them, and we have beauty, sanity and health.

Because of this, he explained, song is a far deeper thing than people generally have realized. When we like a song, we are liking nothing smaller than the permanent aesthetics of the world – the oneness of opposites. Song is powerful evidence that the world can be liked on an honest basis¹³ – even in the midst of pain and confusion; even when we have intense criticism of the ugliness, injustice, or insincerity of specific aspects of reality, including in the people we know.

Insincerity, Satirized Musically

I go now to a song that does exactly that: find a beautiful way to deal with ugliness, a sincere way of exposing insincerity. It's *Baby You're a Rich Man* from 1967 – a sharply satirical song by John Lennon about human fakery: a song with important input from Paul, who wrote the part of the song that includes its title phrase.

After an 8-bar instrumental introduction, with a bit of a super-trendy, quasi-Indian atmosphere in it, we get an 11-measure vocal melody, written by John. »How does it feel,« he asks, »to be one of the beautiful people?«

These 11 measures are divided very irregularly. We begin with a 7-bar phrase: five in falsetto, followed by two in normal vocal range and normal timbre. The second half has exactly the same contrast of timbre and register, but it only needs four bars to accomplish the task: two of falsetto and two of ordinary singing.

¹³ On December 31, 1969, Eli Siegel gave a lecture titled »What Is Worth a Song?«--in which he said: »There is that very mysterious thing: the relation of song as it is in music to song as it is in poetry. There is no greater subject. It is much deeper than either people interested in poetry have realized, or musicians. The song, in every sense of the word, is a very living thing, because everywhere in the world a person is trying to have an emotion which the sound structure of the world, the reality-as-sound aspect of the world, would justify.« I wrote a detailed report of the main aspects of this great lecture: a report published in issue 751 of *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known*. (August 26, 1987).

Eleven bars in all, symmetrical in its design, yet entirely imbalanced as to the dimensions of the two halves: 7 and 4 measures.

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 9: *Baby, You're a Rich Man*]

There's irony and criticism both in John's lyrics and in his none-too-subtle contrast of earthy and falsetto vocalism. By means of that thin falsetto tone, he alerts us to the fact that there's something self-intoxicated, falsely elevated, thin and empty in the superior vision these people have of themselves.

The rhythmic imbalance of the hypermeter also makes us sense that something not too solid is going on. Ego is like that: pretending to solidity, but not authentically having it.

We can ask: which is more in behalf of liking the world? Burying the criticism we have? Pretending we *don't* have it? Or trying to give it outward and honest form?

The whole history of art, I learned from Aesthetic Realism, says the answer is the second. We need to put together accurately what we are against and what we are for; what we see as ugly and what we see as beautiful. And if we do that, the result is not something gray, dull, and neutral: it is a beautiful and exciting thing when ugliness is looked at honestly, when a person is sincere about the insincere.

Martha My Dear

Since I've already written about one song from the *White Album* – *Sexy Sady* – it seems good to conclude this essay by saying something about another: *Martha My Dear* by Paul McCartney.

Its hypermeter is astonishing! Phrases are of irregular length, and within phrases some bars are in 3/4, others in 2/4, and yet others in 4/4. But if we follow the underlying quarter note pulse, we arrive at this: a 29 beat piano intro, followed by the same 29 beat melody, now with Paul singing.

Outwardly, there's perfect symmetry here – but what irregularity within! It's so complicated, so *cubistic*, I won't dare analyze it now; when you listen to it, the rhythmic impact is clear.

Meanwhile, a quick note about the song in terms of word-music relations: the way some of the phrases within the larger 29-beat pattern are cut short, while others are full and expansive, is in keeping with the worry Paul expresses in the lyrics: Will Martha forget him – cut him short? Or have him in her mind with loving fullness?

Just because it's such a wonderful song, and is my final example, the sound sample to follow includes not only those 29-beat opening sections, but also what follows. The opposites of curtailment and expansion are present there, as well.

We hear, as the next phrase, a very nicely balanced 8 measure unit – beginning »Hold your head up you silly girl« – followed by a phrase cut tantalizingly just a bit short, 7½ bars, beginning »Take a good look around you.« Counting by beats, it's 29 + 29 + 32 + 30. How subtle can you get!

<http://www.edgreenmusic.org/beatles.html>

[Example 10: *Martha My Dear*]

In various ways in this essay, I've been speaking about song as a oneness of opposites. I'd like to conclude by quoting another question from Eli Siegel's classic essay »Is Beauty the Making One of Opposites.«

Continuity and Discontinuity

It is Question 8, and concerns something crucial to all music; in fact, to all the arts: the relation of »Continuity and Discontinuity.« He asks:

Is there to be found in every work of art a certain progression, a certain indissoluble presence of relation, a design which makes for continuity?—and is there to be found, also, the discreteness, the individuality, the brokenness of things: the principle of discontinuity?

That's what I hear in *Martha, My Dear*, in *Baby, You're a Rich Man*, in *Yesterday*, *Eleanor Rigby*, and in all the best music of the Beatles: Continuity and Discontinuity; what we expect and what surprises us; the »brokenness of things« and the »indissoluble presence of relation.«

It's what I hear in Beethoven, in Duke Ellington, in Webern, in Scott Joplin – let alone the best of Tango. It's in Stravinsky and Johann Strauss; Josquin and (when he's good) Karlheinz Stockhausen. Test it for yourself, and I think you'll find that in all the music you spontaneously care for and think is beautiful, opposites are convincingly together.

I want to thank Stanislav Tuksar for organizing this celebratory, anniversary issue of *IRASM* and for asking me to contribute to it: to write, from the Aesthetic Realism point-of-view, about the work of two artists I love deeply, John Lennon and Paul McCartney; about the meaning of song; and also about the great, and much-more-to-be-explored subject of musical hypermeter.

Sažetak

**»Dražesni ritmovi, ludi metar« – Nepravilni hipermetar,
estetički realizam i radosna umjetnost Beatlesa**

Ovaj članak pruža dokaze da je znatan razlog što glazba Beatlesa pruža toliko užitka u tome što se pozadinski ritmovi njihove najbolje glazbe »njišu« upravo tako kao i ritmovi na površini. Ti dublji strukturni ritmovi imaju veze s duljinama fraza – hipermetrom – i u njihovim pjesmama hipermetar je često iznenađujuće nepravilan.

Umjetnička uporaba hipermetra tiče se nečega što je više od puke kreacije nekog dražesnog nacrtu apstraktne zvučne matematike. Ona ima životno, ekspresivno značenje. Svojim zajedništvom onoga što očekujemo i što nas iznenađuje, lijepa uporaba hipermetra zadovoljava trajnu potrebu ljudskoga uma.

To je u skladu s filozofijom estetičkog realizma što ga je utemeljio veliki američki znanstvenik i kritičar Eli Siegel, koji je objašnjavao: »Sva ljepota leži u činjenju jednog iz suprotnosti, a činjenje jednog iz suprotnosti je ono što slijedimo i u nama samima«. Najbolja glazba Beatlesa pruža jasan i radostan dokaz za istinosnost ove ideje.

Za svaku pjesmu koju istražuje u ovome članku autor komentira ono što mu se čini kao najvažnije tehničko pitanje u umjetnosti pisanja pjesama: odnos riječi i glazbe. Jačaju li se međusobno riječi i glazba? Daju li jedno drugom značenje i snagu? Odgovor se, naravno, tiče melodije i harmonije. No to da se to odnosi i na hipermetar puno je manje poznato.

U ovom se članku raspravlja o deset pjesama – sedam Beatlesa i tri drugih rock glazbenika. To su redom: *Good Golly, Miss Molly* (Little Richard); *Love Me Do*; *Lovely Rita, Meter Maid*; *Eleanor Rigby*; *Do You Know The Way To San José?* (Burt Bacharach); *Sexy Sady*; *Yesterday*; *So Far Away* (Carole King); *Baby You're a Rich Man*; i *Martha My Dear*.

