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Group Analysis Special – Guest Editors Ralf von Appen, Samantha Bennett, André Doehring and Dietrich Helms

## UNCERTAINTY, NARRATIVE, AND PERSONA IN »GIMME ALL YOUR LOVE« BY ALABAMA SHAKES

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In music theory and analysis, we typically analyse music alone. This exacerbates a tendency for us to assume that our own analytical observations are objective and universal, when in fact they are subjective—depending on our own experiences. This article addresses this problem by highlighting the extent to which analytical interpretations vary from person to person. It does so through a group analysis of the uncertain elements of »Gimme All Your Love« (2015) by Alabama Shakes. How does the song subvert our expectations? Why do we hear passages in different ways? How can we interpret the song's narrative? To answer these questions, we draw on a range of analytical methods with a focus on narrative and persona, as formulated by Allan F. Moore (2012).<sup>1</sup>

This study contributes a simple but effective three-part taxonomy of uncertainty in popular music: unpredictability, ambiguity, and doubt. Unpredictability refers to elements of a song that are unexpected, such as interruptions of established musical patterns or deviations from stylistic norms. Ambiguity refers to aspects of a song that could be interpreted in various ways. Doubt refers to uncertainty expressed in a song's lyrics.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the introduction to this special section, this research originates in group analysis that took place at the summer school »Methods of Popular Music Analysis« at the University of Osnabrück in 2015. This article was written between 2015 and 2017 and therefore does not draw on more recent scholarship.

The article is structured in two larger sections: Hearings and Readings. This mirrors the structure of our group work. The Hearings section focuses on our perception of the song's personic environment (i.e., musical accompaniment) as unpredictable and ambiguous. The Readings section focuses on our interpretation of the song's persona and lyrics as doubtful. The Readings section also presents a collective interpretation of the song's narrative, which is compared with the narrative of a music video of the song that was selected by the band as the winner of an online competition.

## HEARINGS

### UNPREDICTABILITY

No members of our group had heard »Gimme All Your Love« before we started to analyse it. We are therefore in the privileged position of being able to draw on our first impressions of the song. This is significant because music analysts often analyse music that they already know. Our first impressions emphasised the unpredictability of the song, seen in notes that we made at the time such as »playing with expectations«. These responses led us to discuss the song's unpredictable features, including its surprising dynamic, textural, and timbral interruptions and an unexpected form—featuring a false ending, tempo and metre changes, and a mixture of song forms (see Figure 1 for an overview of the song's form).

TIMESTAMP	0:00	0:23	0:50	1:20	1:41	2:10	2:13	2:26	2:47	3:07	3:28	3:46
	<b>FIRST SECTION</b> (Verse-Chorus Template)					<b>MIDDLE SECTION</b> (Cumulative Template)					<b>CLOSING</b>	
<b>SECTION</b>	<b>Intro</b>	<b>Verse 1</b>	<b>Chorus</b>	<b>Verse 2</b>	<b>Chorus</b>	<b>Instrumental Interlude</b>				<b>Chorus (Climax)</b>	<b>Outro</b>	
<b>SUBSECTION</b>						Unaccompanied Guitar Chords	Full-band Groove	Dynamic Build-up	Guitar Solo	Modified Chorus		
<b>LYRIC</b>		So much...	GIMME all your love	So tell me...	GIMME all your love					GIMME all your love		
<b>TEMPO</b>	<i>Slow 6/8</i>					<i>Uptempo 4/4</i>					<i>Slow 6/8</i>	

Figure 1. Abbreviated Formal Diagram of »Gimme All Your Love«. Note some formal boundaries are ambiguous (as discussed in below).

The song begins with an arresting triplet-semiquaver motif that is played loudly by a distorted lead guitar (see Example 1), which is accompanied by the rest of the band—rhythmic guitar, bass, and drums as well as Rhodes electric piano and Hammond electric organ. This rhythmically, dynamically, timbrally, and texturally interrupts the slow, soft, and sparse 6/8 soul feel of the introduction (0:00–0:28). The motif recurs every two bars in the introduction which leads the listener to anticipate the intervention. However, on its

fourth iteration, the motif is rhythmically augmented into triplet quavers—subverting our expectations once more (0:20; see again Example 1).

♩. = ca. 35  
With distortion  
ff

Lead Guitar

Example 1. Opening triplet-semiquaver motif and augmented triplet-quaver variation (from 0:00).

The triplet motif does not interrupt the song's two verses (ca. 0:28–0:54 and 1:20–1:47). Like the quieter passages of the introduction, the verses feature soft dynamics and timbres (e.g., clean rhythm guitar and Rhodes), a sparse texture, and a laidback rhythmic feel that is both extremely slow in tempo and behind the beat microrhythmically. This relaxed atmosphere is suddenly obliterated by a thunderous distorted F#m guitar chord in what one expects to be the eighth bar of the verse (0:50). This dynamic, textural, and timbral accent is particularly surprising given its hypermetrical placement—a bar *too early* within the four-bar hypermeasure.

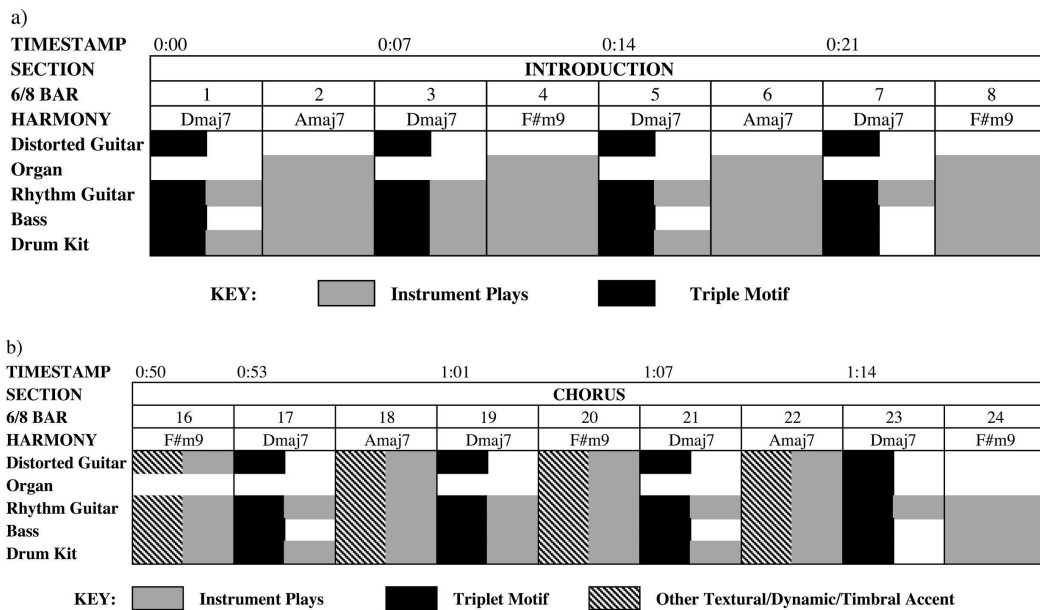


Figure 2. Formal layout of the introduction, bars 1–8 (0:00–0:28), and one hearing of the chorus, bars 16–24 (ca. 0:50–1:20). Note that the chorus boundaries are ambiguous (see the Ambiguity section).

In the first two choruses (ca. 0:54–1:20 and 1:47–2:14), material from the introduction is reworked to include a similar accent but at the beginning of each

bar, rather than every other bar (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> Unpredictable dynamic, textural, and timbral accents therefore interrupt the song's introduction, verses, and first two choruses.

Given that verse-chorus form is a norm in popular music, the listener may expect a bridge after the second verse and chorus. Instead, a silence follows (2:13). On first listening, the pause led some group members to assume that the song was over. During live performances, the band seems to play on this expectation by waiting until the audience starts to applaud before resuming the song.<sup>3</sup> The silence is, however, broken by unaccompanied guitar chords. When the rest of the band enters, we find ourselves in a mid-tempo 4/4 soul groove (2:26): a surprising contrast with the slow 6/8 of the first half of the song.<sup>4</sup> The false ending and change in tempo and metre disrupt our expectations.

The song's instrumental middle section (2:13-3:47) surprises the listener by initiating a new approach to song form (accumulative form) within the established structure (verse-chorus form).<sup>5</sup> Mark Spicer (2004) uses accumulative form to describe a section of a song that builds layer by layer. The accumulative middle section of »Gimme All Your Love« culminates in the surprising return of chorus material (3:28), modified to fit the mid-tempo 4/4 feel of the middle section. The marriage of chorus material with the tempo and metre of the middle section serves both as the climax of the accumulative section and the song as a whole. This functions similarly to Brad Osborn's (2010) two-part terminally climactic form, in which the first part of a song comprises a traditional song structure followed by an accumulative section culminating in a climactic section—for example, as in »Hey Jude« (1968) by the Beatles. However, unlike terminally climactic form (which ends with a novel section), »Gimme All Your Love« culminates in a section that is both old (featuring chorus material) and new (modified to the mid-tempo 4/4 of the middle section). The song's form is therefore unpredictable and innovative.

The mix of 6/8 and 4/4 material is facilitated by an approximate metric modulation between the slow 6/8 (dotted crotchet = ca. 35-37 bpm) and the mid-tempo 4/4 (crotchet = ca. 88-93 bpm). This is best seen in motifs that appear in both the 6/8 and 4/4 choruses. Brittany Howard, the band's

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2 The vocal delivery and production are also unpredictable in the first two choruses—for example, the oscillated laughter at 1:04.

3 For example, see their Artists Den performance from February 2015 (see Videography).

4 In our second hearing, we noticed that the unaccompanied guitar plays in 4/4 from the start of this middle section.

5 The accumulative form is intensified by the fact the band speed up throughout the section—starting at around 88 bpm (2:26) and accelerating to a peak of around 95 bpm (3:28).

lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist, sings an »oo« motif in the second and third choruses. This motif appears as triplet quavers at the end of the second 6/8 chorus (2:07) before being reconceived as duplet quavers at the end of the final 4/4 chorus (3:44; see Example 2a). Similarly, the »Gimme all your love« vocal hook is modified from swung semiquavers in the slow 6/8 choruses to an alternation between quavers and semiquavers in the mid-tempo 4/4 chorus—maintaining its characteristic long-short rhythm despite the difference in tempo and metre (see Example 2b). That said, the rhythmic relationship between the two tempos and metres was not perceptible to our group until the entrance of the final 4/4 chorus. Consequently, the change in tempo and metre remains highly unpredictable throughout the song's middle section.

a) 2:07 ♩ = ca. 37

Oo oo oo oo.

3:44 ♩ = ca. 93

Oo oo oo oo.---

b) 0:53 ♩ = ca. 37

Gim - me all your love,---

3:28 ♩ = ca. 93

Gim - me all your love,---

Example 2. Approximate metric modulation from the slow 6/8 to the mid-tempo 4/4 metre (triplet quaver  $\approx$  quaver; quaver  $\approx$  dotted quaver) illustrated by: a) comparison of the »oo« motif in the second 6/8 chorus and in the 4/4 chorus (see Example 3 for an alternative hearing of the metre in this bar); and b) comparison of the »Gimme all your love« vocal hook in the 6/8 choruses and in the 4/4 chorus.

At the end of the 4/4 chorus, the tempo and metre unexpectedly revert to the slow 6/8 feel of the first half of the song (3:47). This occurs on what we expect to be the last quaver of the last 4/4 bar. We expect a chord change on this beat because, throughout the 4/4 chorus, the second and fourth chords anticipate the barline by a quaver (see Example 3). However, we do not expect the last quaver of a mid-tempo 4/4 bar to become the first quaver of a slow 6/8 bar. The bar before the tempo and metre change can be heard in two ways: as an *elision*, where the last quaver of a 4/4 bar is elided

into the following 6/8 bar which leads us to reinterpret the previous bar as a 7/8 bar (see Example 3a); or as an *overlap*, where the final quaver of a 4/4 bar also serves as the first quaver of the subsequent 6/8 bar (see Example 3b).<sup>6</sup> Either way, the placement of the tempo and metre change is startling. The song ends with a short outro (3:47–4:03) that recaps material from the introduction. This is abruptly cut short, after only two bars of the introduction material, by the triplet-semiquaver motif, with which the song began. The song therefore exhibits unpredictable interruptions and unexpected formal features.

Example 3 consists of two musical staves, labeled a) and b). Both staves are in the key of D major (two sharps) and start with a tempo of 93. Staff a) shows a 4/4 bar with a tempo of 93, followed by a 7/8 bar with a tempo of 35. Staff b) shows a 4/4 bar with a tempo of 93, followed by a 6/8 bar with a tempo of 35. The lyrics 'Gim-me all\_your love,' are written under the first bar of each staff, and 'oo oo oo oo...' are written under the subsequent bars. Chord symbols are indicated above the staff: Dmaj7, Amaj7 Organ, Dmaj7, and F#m9 Organ. A fermata is placed over the final note of the 7/8 bar in staff a) and the final note of the 6/8 bar in staff b).

Example 3. Last phrase of the final chorus (from 3:38): a) the elision hearing, transcribed with a 7/8 bar before the change in tempo and metre; b) the overlap hearing, transcribed with a shared quaver between the 4/4 and 6/8 bars.

## AMBIGUITY

When we were discussing our first impressions of the song, we realised that we heard passages in different ways. This led us to discuss ambiguity in the song's form, tonality, and lyrics. We quickly noticed a significant difference in how we were interpreting the song's form. Specifically, does the first chorus start at 0:50 or 0:53 (see Figure 3)? In general, the earlier hearing of the chorus (0:50) is suggested by the so-called ›secondary‹ musical parameters: e.g., the sudden changes in dynamics, texture, and timbre. Conversely, the later hearing of the chorus (0:53) is suggested by the so-called ›primary‹ musical parameters: e.g., the four-bar harmonic loop and the accented placement of the chorus vocal hook (»Gimme all your love« on a hypermetrical down beat), and the drum fill leading into this bar.<sup>7</sup> These two differing

<sup>6</sup> We use elision and overlap here as defined by Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983: 55–62).

<sup>7</sup> We do not subscribe to the hierarchy implied by the terms »primary« and »secondary« parameters, as defined by Leonard Meyer (1989). Nonetheless, the terms usefully differentiate the two hearings of the chorus.

hearings of the chorus form are facilitated by the dynamic, textural, and timbral emphases on each bar, which lessen the listener's evidence for establishing a metrical accent, the hypermeasure, and the form. In a presentation of our analysis at the summer school, we asked the audience (made up of other participants and lecturers) to raise their hands when they perceived the beginning of the chorus. The results showed a more-or-less equal split between the two interpretations noted above. Although this evidence is anecdotal, it indicates that these two divergent interpretations might be common among a wider sample of listeners.

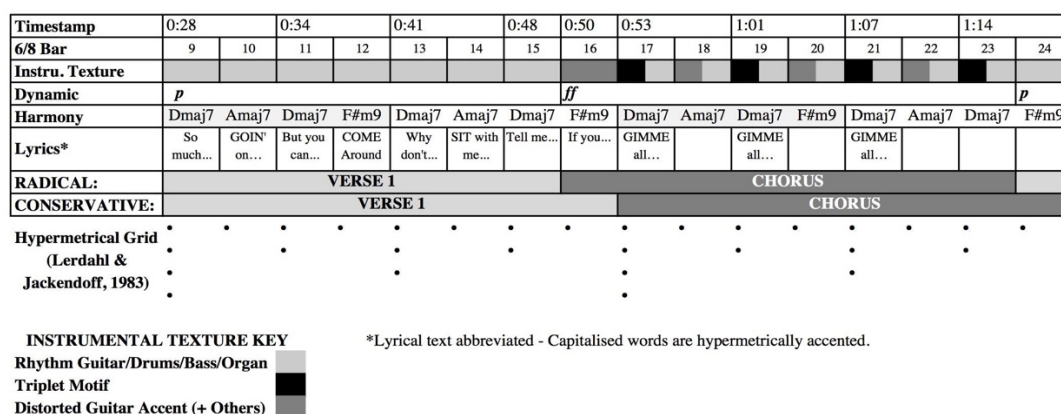


Figure 3. Form diagram showing »radical« (0:50) and »conservative« (0:53) interpretations of where the first chorus begins.

Andrew Imbrie's speculative distinction (1973) between what he terms »conservative« and »radical« listening provides another way of labelling the two different interpretations.<sup>8</sup> Imbrie states that the »conservative« listener will »persist in interpreting [their] experience for as long as possible within an established framework [such as the hypermetre], even in the face of disturbing events«. The »radical« listener, on the other hand, will often group their perception based on changes, such as dynamic or phenomenal accents (ibid.: 65–66). Thus, a »conservative« listener, focusing on hypermetre, would most likely hear the chorus as starting at 0:53, while the »radical« listener, focusing on sudden textural changes, would most likely hear the chorus beginning at 0:50. Our group included »conservative« and »radical« listeners as well as one group member who switched from a »radical« to a »conservative« hearing over time and another who could hear it both ways. There were even changes in how group members heard the beginning of the chorus throughout the duration of the song. In theory, a »radical« listener would hear the final 4/4 chorus as starting at 3:25—the earlier hearing mentioned

8 We do not attach any political associations to the terms »conservative« and »radical« listener.

above. However, this bar features a semiquaver snare crescendo leading into a strong downbeat. This would be an unusual start for a chorus given that drum fills usually lead into sections. Relatedly, the »If you just« vocal anacrusis is removed in the 4/4 chorus, so there is no vocal line in the bar that would commence the earlier hearing of the chorus. Consequently, in practice, most of the »radical« listeners in the group heard the 4/4 chorus as starting at 3:28 with the entrance of the vocal hook »Gimme all your love«—the »conservative« or later hearing. This evidence might be used to argue in favour of the »conservative« hearing. But more pertinently, it reveals another layer of ambiguity for »radical« listeners, who hear the initial choruses and the final 4/4 chorus as starting in different places, lyrically and hypermetrically. These changes in interpretation suggest that the song's form is not just ambiguous between listeners but can also be ambiguous for individual listeners.

The tonal centre of the song is also ambiguous.<sup>9</sup> The four-bar chord sequence that repeats throughout most of the recording (D<sup>maj7</sup>–A<sup>maj7</sup>–D<sup>maj7</sup>–F#m<sup>9</sup>) does not feature an authentic cadence. The harmonic loop suggests three possible tonal centres: D lydian, A major, or F# aeolian. Other musical parameters (hypermetre, dynamics, texture, and timbre) could be seen to support both D lydian and F#m aeolian. The four-bar harmonic loop features D<sup>maj7</sup> on the first and third bars, which are hypermetrically accented, suggesting D lydian. However, the fourth chord of the loop is F#m<sup>9</sup>, suggesting a resolution to F# aeolian.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the triplet motif dynamically, texturally, and timbrally accents D<sup>maj7</sup>, suggesting D lydian. However, the dynamic, textural, and timbral accent on F#m<sup>9</sup> between the verses and the choruses (e.g., 0:50) suggests F# aeolian.

The opening D<sup>maj7</sup>–A<sup>maj7</sup> progression could be interpreted as a IV–I motion in A major. However, a bass-register hum that is pitched around F# (including a quiet fundamental, ca. 46 Hz, and a louder overtone an octave higher, ca. 92 Hz—perhaps produced by an amplifier) is audible in quieter moments of the song's intro and outro sections (for example, panned left at 0:22). For several of us, this low *hum* on F# undermined the root note of the A<sup>maj7</sup> chords (55 Hz) played by the bass guitar with a muted tone and short decay, causing us to reinterpret the A<sup>maj7</sup> chords as F#m<sup>9</sup> chords (for example, in the second bar at 0:03). This contributed towards some group members hearing F# aeolian as the song's overall tonal centre. However, other group members

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9 We use the expression *tonal centre* in general terms, but do not imply or assume that the song is tonal rather than modal.

10 The seventh and ninth of the F#m<sup>9</sup> chords add to the ambiguity here.



interpreted this hum as background noise that did not affect their hearing of the A<sup>maj7</sup> chords nor the song's tonal centre.

Four other features support F# aeolian or F# minor as the tonal centre of the song. First, throughout the song, F#m<sup>9</sup> chords are approached with passing movement in the bass from E through a leading note E# to F# (e.g., 0:08). Second, the initial half of the middle section features a D-E-F# chord sequence (from 2:14) which can be heard as a  $\flat VI-\flat VII-I$  aeolian progression in F# (Everett 2009: 260; Biamonte 2010; Moore 2012: 73). Third, the middle section also features tonic and dominant pedal notes in F# (F# and C#) in the bass and the organ respectively (e.g., 2:26). Finally, the change from 4/4 back to 6/8 occurs on an F#m<sup>9</sup> chord (3:46). Although there are F# major chords in the first half of the middle section, these could be interpreted as modal mixture within F# aeolian. Holistically, it could be argued that there is most evidence to support F# aeolian as the song's tonal centre. However, again, the more pertinent point is that the group did not reach a consensus on the tonal centre of the song between D lydian, A major, and F# aeolian. For one group member, the song's harmony was so ambiguous that they had no sense of a single overall tonal centre.

The melody is also tonally ambiguous (see Example 4). The rhythm guitar and organ motifs in the chorus (0:54) could be seen to suggest a tonal centre of A major or F# aeolian. In A major, the guitar motif (C#-B-A) would be a  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  descent that extends down to a neighbouring leading note (G#) while the organ motif (E-F#-C#) features an F# that could be understood as a neighbouring substitute of the D that would complete an E-D-C# ( $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ ) descent back to the Schenkerian primary tone, or »Kopfnote«, C# (see Example 4a). In F# aeolian, the guitar motif (C#-B-A) would be a  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}$  descent that is interrupted before reaching the tonic (see Example 4b). The F# aeolian hearing is supported in the chorus by the »If you just« vocal ascent (F#-G#-A), which is  $\hat{1}-\hat{2}-\hat{3}$  leading to the vocal hook »Gimme all your love« on the dominant scale degree (C#; see again Example 4b). However, a Schenkerian reading of the song in F# aeolian is problematised by the organ motif (E-F#-C#) because this features a flattened seventh (E), not a leading note (E#), and is therefore modal, not tonal. Further limitations to a Schenkerian reading are the lack of harmonic support to the melodic ascents and descents as well as the absence of authentic cadences. For clarity, we are not claiming that the song is a prolongation of a Schenkerian descent in either A major or F# aeolian. Instead, we are highlighting that the melody is tonally ambiguous and could suggest either A major or F#m aeolian as a tonal centre.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Upon revising this article in 2023, several group members found the Schenkerian analysis of a song written by a person of colour to be problematic because of Schenker's

Finally, the song's lyrics are also sometimes ambiguous. In the second verse, two lines are difficult to comprehend on the recording because of the unusual vocal performance, the use of colloquialisms, and the production effects applied to the vocal. At 1:28, is it the »word«, the »world«, or the »we-ather« that »don't fit with« the addressee? Similarly, at 1:41 is Howard singing about a »child« or about trying to do something? The lyrics are clearer in live performances, in which Howard sings variations on »You say the world, it ain't no good to you« and »I can try and make it right«. However, the ambiguity of the lyrics in the recorded version could lead to different interpretations of the song's narrative.

Example 4 consists of two musical staves, a) and b), showing a vocal melody and a bass line. Staff a) is labeled with a time stamp [0:54] and has a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5. The bass line has chords Dmaj7 and Amaj7. Staff b) is labeled with a time stamp [0:51] and has the same melodic line. The bass line has chords F#m, Dmaj7, and Amaj7. Roman numerals IV, I, I, VI, III are placed below the bass line for both readings.

Example 4. Two different Schenkerian readings of the tonal centre of the song as suggested by the guitar, organ, and vocal melodies: a) suggests an A major tonality, b) suggests an F# aeolian modality.

## DOUBT

Having discussed the unpredictability and ambiguity we heard in the song's musical aspects, we started to discuss their relationship to the doubt expressed in the song's lyrics. The lyrics appear to refer to relationship troubles, as seen in the song's title and hook »Gimme all your love«. There seems to be uncertainty about the future of this relationship. The lyrics imply that the vocalist cannot predict how the addressee will respond—e.g., »Tell me, what's wrong?« and »So tell me what you wanna do«. It is perhaps ambiguous as to how she should interpret what the addressee has said to her—e.g., »You say the world doesn't fit with you«. This suggests a state of doubt about the future of the relationship.

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racist views—as highlighted in Phillip Ewell's 2020 article »Music Theory and the White Racial Frame«. This passage was mainly written by a group member who was not involved in the final revision. We did not feel that it was appropriate to remove this contribution without their consent.

## READINGS

### OUR INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG'S NARRATIVE

In this section, we propose a collective interpretation of the narrative of »Gimme All Your Love«. This interpretation brings together the unpredictable and ambiguous elements of the music (expressed in the song's personic environment) with the state of doubt heard in the lyrics (expressed by the persona). This section then compares our interpretation of the song with the interpretation seen in a short film soundtracked by the song that was chosen by the band following an online competition. Although the song's lyrics are minimal and at times generic (e.g., the title hook »Gimme all your love«), the song's unpredictable interruptions and form demand a narrative reading.

We draw on Allan Moore's (2012) work on the »persona« and »personic environment« due to the affordances of the prominent production techniques applied to the vocal. Moore distinguishes between a song's performer, persona, and protagonist (ibid.: 180–181). He defines a persona as »an artificial construction that may, or may not, be identical with the person(ality) of the singer« (ibid.: 179). Because the focus of this article is analytical rather than biographical, we refer to Brittany Howard as the protagonist throughout and do not attempt to connect her lyrics with her life. Howard does not seem to be enacting a particular protagonist in »Gimme All Your Love« since she sings in a similarly unusual style elsewhere on the album *Sound & Color*—e.g., her wheezing vocal effect in »Don't Wanna Fight« (0:38). Nevertheless, the term protagonist is employed here to refer to both Howard within the song's narrative and the two characters within in the short film.

The song broadly fits Moore's five criteria for the »bedrock« position of the persona. Specifically, it features a »realistic persona«, in an »everyday situation«, who is »involved« in the narrative of the song, which is occurring during the »present time«, and the song is an »exploration of [a] moment« (ibid.: 183). However, »Gimme All Your Love« presents an interesting challenge to Moore's adaptation of proxemics (interpersonal distance) to the analysis of the persona and the personic environment in music (ibid.: 187). Generally, the perceived distance between the vocalist and the listener in the verses would be categorised by Moore as »intimate« or »personal« (e.g., a small amount of reverb on the vocal and a sparse texture) while the choruses would be categorised as »social« or »public« (e.g., a large amount of reverb on the vocal and a dense texture). However, in the verses, a band-

pass filter is applied to the vocals, which narrows the frequency range in a similar way as telephones do. A study by Serge Lacasse (2000: 161) suggests that participants hear this telephone effect as sounding slightly temporally distant and very geographically distant. Our everyday association with the sound of this band-pass filter and the sound of speaking on a telephone suggests that the protagonist might be communicating by phone. The temporal distance associated with this effect, as well as the fact that we do not hear the addressee respond, leads us to question whether we might read the protagonist as leaving a voice message to the addressee.

Alternatively, the band-pass filter could be interpreted as the sound of singing into a lo-fi microphone. The lo-fi mic sound, the amplifier hum, and the room reverb applied to some of the instruments (e.g., the airy snare drum) might suggest that events are taking place within a rehearsal room. Both the voice message and rehearsal room interpretations seem plausible to us. However, neither reading explains all of the production elements in the verses, such as the delay effect applied to the line »Why don't you talk to me for just a little while« (1:35). Nevertheless, the protagonist seems to be addressing someone in the lyrics, an addressee who does not respond. Thus, we interpret the verses as monologues. The everyday sound of communicating via voice message (or in a rehearsal room) setting led us to interpret the verses as external monologues, where the protagonist is communicating to the addressee ›out loud‹.

In the first two choruses, the band-pass filter is removed and is replaced by cavernous reverb.<sup>12</sup> As Peter Doyle argues in his book *Echo and Reverb*, a recorded voice featuring a large amount of reverb has often signified an ›inner voice‹ in popular culture since the 1950s. This effect continues to be influential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—for example, the reverb on JD's internal monologue in the sitcom *Scrubs* (2005: 145). The cavernous reverb applied to the vocal in the first two choruses of »Gimme All Your Love« led us to interpret the first two choruses as internal monologues, where the protagonist is communing with herself ›in her head‹.

The song's lyrics and melody support the interpretation of the verses as external monologues and the first two choruses as internal monologues. The verse lyrics and melody are tentative because the protagonist is singing ›out loud‹ to her partner about their uncertain relationship. For example, the first verse features an uncertain lyric, »Why don't you sit with me for just a little while«, set to an uncertain melody, which includes every note in the scale

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12 In the first chorus, a distorted effect is applied to one line of the vocal (1:07) and an oscillator effect is applied to Howard's laughter. We interpreted these elements as representing the protagonist's frustration.

except the three possible tonics: D, A, and F#. Conversely, the chorus lyrics and melody are more direct because the protagonist is singing ›in her head‹ and therefore does not have to hold back. For instance, the choruses feature more certain lyrics (e.g., »Gimme all your love«), which are performed loudly, in the upper register of her full voice. The melody in the choruses is also more certain (although still ambiguous), suggesting two possible tonics (as illustrated in Example 4). The interpretation of the verses as (hesitant) external monologues and the first two choruses as (direct) internal monologues is therefore supported by other musical parameters.

The middle section (2:13–3:38) can be split into four subsections, which we refer to as: unaccompanied guitar chords (2:13), full-band groove (2:26), dynamic build up (2:47), and lead guitar solo (3:07). The unaccompanied guitar chords and full-band groove feature a new chord progression (D–E–F#), before the dynamic build up and lead guitar solo return to the original four-chord harmonic sequence (D<sup>major7</sup>–A<sup>major7</sup>–D<sup>major7</sup>–F#m<sup>9</sup>). The hesitant and contemplative unaccompanied guitar chords that begin the middle section exhibit the only new harmonies in the song. This, in addition to the new tempo and metre (mid-tempo 4/4), represents a change in the protagonist's mental state sparked by a new idea. The protagonist then seems to start to act on this idea when the full-band groove enters (2:26).

The image contains two musical staves. The top staff is in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 6/8 time. It starts at 0:00 with a D<sup>major7</sup> chord. The melody consists of a triplet of eighth notes (D, E, F#) followed by a quarter rest. The dynamic is *ff* and the tempo is ca. 35. The bottom staff is also in treble clef, key of D major, and 4/4 time. It starts at 2:47-3:03 with a D<sup>major7</sup> chord. It features two guitar parts: 'Guitar 1' and 'Guitar 2'. Both play a pattern of semiquavers (D, E, F#, G, A, B) in a staggered fashion. The dynamic is *mf* and the tempo is ca. 93.

Example 5. Comparison of the triplet-semiquaver opening motif and the guitar parts in the dynamic build up subsection.

During the dynamic build up (2:47), two electric guitars (panned left and right) exchange what we might interpret as the opening triplet motif reconfigured as semiquavers in 4/4 (see Example 5). These are the shortest note values in the song, which increases the feeling of momentum. We consider the dynamic build up to represent the protagonist acting on the new idea

with increasing urgency.<sup>13</sup> The build-up leads to the guitar solo (3:07). Given its similarity in various live performances (see Videography) and its clear periodic structure, the solo is written rather than improvised. It does not clearly refer to other material from the song and it is not mentioned in the lyrics. The solo is therefore interpreted as a stylistic trait of rock and soul songs, rather than as a clear step in the song's narrative.

During the subsequent 4/4 chorus (3:28–3:46), there is substantially less reverb applied to the vocal than in the previous choruses. This suggests that the protagonist is finally expressing the chorus lyrics out loud, perhaps to the addressee. This interpretation is supported by other musical parameters. The chorus lyric is more direct here because the »If you just« anacrusis of previous choruses is removed. Moreover, the dynamics, texture, and timbre are more consistent throughout the 4/4 chorus than they are in the initial 6/8 choruses. As noted above, the 4/4 choruses represent a terminal climax that marries the song's two areas of musical material—the modification of the 6/8 chorus material to fit the mid-tempo 4/4 of the middle section.<sup>14</sup> This marriage suggests some resolution between the protagonist's contrasting emotional states in these sections: the frustrated internal monologue, suggested by the 6/8 chorus material, and the decision to do something about her situation, suggested by the middle section. The terminally climactic form culminating in this modified chorus intimates that the protagonist has decided finally to express the frustrated chorus lyric *out loud* to the addressee: »Gimme all your love!«. The sudden interjection of introduction material in the outro, however, appears to overthrow any resolution to the protagonist's relationship troubles.

The song ends as it began on the triplet-semiquaver motif (on D<sup>major</sup>) which lends a feeling of circularity. This might suggest either that nothing is going to change or that the same scenario is going to recur in the future. If one hears the tonal centre as D lydian, then the song's harmony and narrative are resolved. However, if one hears the tonal centre as A major or F# aeolian, then the harmony and narrative are left up in the air—provoking uncertainty as to what effect the protagonist's outburst might have had on her

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13 Moore (2012: 191) outlines five categories describing how the personic environment relates to the persona: inert, quiescent, active, interventionist, or oppositional. The personic environment in »Gimme All Your Love« is »interventionist« in that it »[goes] further than what is specified in the lyric by amplifying what it signifies, or even by enacting the lyric« (ibid.).

14 Similarly, the verse and chorus vocal, lyrical, and production approaches are merged in the final 4/4 chorus. Specifically, the external (but tentative) nature of the verse vocals is mixed with the direct (but internal) nature of the 6/8 chorus vocals in the 4/4 chorus vocals, which seem to be both external and direct.

relationship. Simply put, a *happy* ending might have been suggested in the song had ended with an A<sup>maj7</sup> chord while a *sad* ending might have been suggested in the song had ended with an F#m<sup>9</sup> chord.<sup>15</sup> However, we do not get either. Instead, the song ends as with as much uncertainty as it began.

To summarise, we interpret the song's narrative as follows (see Figure 4). A female protagonist is in a romantic relationship which is uncertain. In the verses, she communicates to her partner tentatively but aloud and seemingly via telephone (they do not respond). In the choruses, she seems to communicate to her partner directly, but it is a fantasy (they do not respond). In the middle section, the protagonist has a new idea about her relationship and makes steps to act on it with increasing urgency. In the final 4/4 chorus, she communicates perhaps to her partner directly and aloud for the first time (they, still, do not respond). It is unclear what the result of her outburst is.

	Section	Time	Narrative Interpretation	Lyrical Tone	Proxemic Zone
First section	Intro	0:00			
	Verse 1 & 2	0:23-0:50; 1:20-1:41	External monologue	Tentative	Intimate/Personal but telecommunicated
	Chorus 1 & 2	0:50-1:20; 1:41-2:11	Internal monologue	Direct	Imaginary
Middle section	Unaccompanied guitar chords	2:13-2:26	New idea about relationship		
	Full-band groove	2:26-2:47	Steps towards putting idea into action, with increasing urgency		
	Dynamic build up	2:47-3:07			
	Lead guitar solo	3:07-3:28			
	Chorus 3 (in 4/4)	3:28-3:46	External monologue	More direct	Social/Public (not telecommunicated)
Closing	Outro	3:46-End			

Figure 4. Narrative Interpretation of »Gimme All Your Love«.

<sup>15</sup> »As a working premise, in the abstract, it would appear that a major triad carries connotations of positive emotional states (to put it no more strongly than that), and the minor triad connotations of negative states« (Moore 2012: 225).

## THE SHORT FILM'S INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG'S NARRATIVE

In 2016, Alabama Shakes invited filmmakers to submit short films sound-tracked by »Gimme All Your Love«, most of which are effectively music videos (Ismail/Blanco 2016). The band published the short film that they selected on their Vevo channel after we had developed our interpretation. The comparison illustrates some interesting commonalities.

The video features a romantic relationship between two protagonists: an elderly heterosexual couple. During the first chorus, the female protagonist sustains a hip injury and is bedridden for the second verse and chorus. In the second verse, her daughter, still mourning the death of her father, does not want her mother to date and keeps the elderly couple apart. In the verses, the male protagonist and the daughter are each seen talking to the female protagonist, but she never responds to either of them. The video's interpretation of the verses differs from our own in two ways: first, it features a third character (the daughter); second, it is a male protagonist that speaks out loud to someone who does not respond, rather than a female protagonist. However, the video indicates that other listeners have interpreted the verses of »Gimme All Your Love« as external monologues, or a one-sided dialogue.<sup>16</sup>

The video also alludes to interactions via telephone throughout. The female protagonist is seen talking on the phone in the introduction and both protagonists make steps towards calling each other during the second verse. Although the couple fail in communicating by phone, the prominence of telephones in the video suggests that other listeners might have interpreted the band-pass filter applied to the verse vocal as representing telecommunication.<sup>17</sup>

In the chorus sections, no one is seen speaking (unlike during the verses).<sup>18</sup> The second chorus also prominently features shots of the couple dancing in a darkened room, featuring blue light reflected by a disco ball, even though they have been separated by this point in the narrative (2:00–2:10).

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16 In the first verse, the male protagonist seems to say the line »[But you can] always come around« and, in the second verse, the female protagonist's daughter is seen talking to her.

17 We are not saying that the artist intended this interpretation as the song's *official* meaning. However, the fact that the band selected this short film from over 100 entrants indicates that this interpretation was not objectionable to them.

18 The protagonists are not seen speaking anywhere else in the short film, excluding the shot of the female protagonist on the phone in introduction.



This suggests that these scenes are reminiscences. Although a similar shot occurs in the previous verse (1:41-1:44), it lasts for twice as long the one during the chorus. Thus, in the video, the second chorus takes place in what appears to be a more *imagined* space than the one during the verse narrative. The film indicates that others have interpreted the verses and the initial choruses as taking place in different spaces: a telecommunicated space and an imaginary space, respectively. Moreover, given that the female protagonist does not respond in the short film, the video mirrors our interpretation of the verses as external monologues and the first two choruses as internal monologues.

The video's interpretation of the middle section bears similarities to our own. In the second verse and chorus sections, the couple are physically separated. The unaccompanied guitar chords (2:13-2:26) then underscore a shot in which the male protagonist appears to look at his telephone. The telephone seems to represent both protagonists' desire to do something about their situation. At the beginning of the full-band groove section (2:26), they take action, moving from the locations in which they seem stuck during the second verse and chorus (her bed and his flat respectively). At the start of dynamic build up section (3:07), the male protagonist acts with increasing urgency, running from the bus stop—which synchronises with the panned semiquaver electric guitar motif (see Example 5). The video's interpretation of the dynamic build up slightly differs from our own in that two protagonists decide to act in the video while a single protagonist decided to act in our interpretation.<sup>19</sup> However, the similarities between the video's interpretation and our own suggests that others may interpret the middle section as the persona or protagonist(s) acting on a new idea.

With the beginning of the 4/4 chorus, the couple finally reunite and kiss—mirroring our interpretation of the final 4/4 as the terminal climax. As the song ends on the triplet motif, the video cuts to black. Since the previous shot is of the couple kissing, there is little doubt as to the outcome of their relationship in the video—akin to interpretation that the song ends resolved in D lydian. However, one of the two runner-up videos interprets the song's ending as uncertain—akin to interpretation that the song is circular and ends as uncertainly as it began. Specifically, the runner-up video follows a man with a gambling addiction who finally wins big, having lost money through-

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<sup>19</sup> During the guitar solo in the short film, the female protagonist appears to try to telephone the male protagonist but does not get through; here, the distorted and processed guitar tone could be associated with the heavily compressed sound of a telephone, which the production of the earlier verse vocals also evoke.

out the video. However, in the closing shot, the protagonist is seen gambling again, implying he will lose all of his previous winnings.<sup>20</sup>

The selected short film, soundtracked by the song, mirrors our interpretation of the verses as external monologues (in a telecommunicated space), the first two choruses as internal monologues (in an imagined space), the middle section as the protagonist(s) deciding to do something about their situation, and the final 4/4 chorus as the protagonist(s) showing how they feel to their partner. The two short films that we analysed reflect two possible interpretations of the song ending: as resolved or as unresolved.

## CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated the degree of subjectivity and person-to-person variation in analytical objection and therefore the need for more group analysis. It has outlined a three-part taxonomy of uncertainty (unpredictability, ambiguity, and doubt) that could be useful for the analysis of other popular songs. It has also presented a collective interpretation of the narrative of »Gimme All Your Love«. Specifically, we interpreted the verses, in which the song's protagonist seems doubtful as to the future of her relationship, as hesitant external monologues—because of our everyday associations with the telephone effect or small-room reverb applied to vocal. We interpreted the first two choruses, in which the protagonist shouts »Gimme all your love« in frustration, as direct internal monologues—because of the cavernous reverb applied to the voice. The new harmonies, metre, tempo, and rhythmic feel of the middle section suggested a change in the protagonist's mental state while the ensuing dynamic build up implied that the protagonist is taking urgent steps to do something about her situation. In the final modified chorus, there is substantially less reverb applied to the vocal than in previous choruses as well as more direct lyrics and more consistent dynamics, texture, and timbre. These changes suggested that the protagonist was finally expressing the chorus lyrics ›out loud‹, perhaps to the addressee, in a direct external monologue. The song concludes in an uncertain manner leaving us unsure as to what outcome this ›outburst‹ might have had on their relationship. Commonalities between our interpretation and that exhibited in a short film soundtracked by the song that was selected by the band demonstrate that our interpretations of the song might be held among a wider listenership.

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20 See McCracken (2015) (Videography).

## REFLECTIONS ON GROUP ANALYSIS

Group analysis enriched this research and was a formative experience for us as early researchers. Working as a group of five postgraduates, each steadfast in their views, was challenging. The non-hierarchical structure of the group was difficult to maintain in practice. How do five academics co-author an article without a hierarchy? We opted against writing a section on a different musical parameter each. Instead, we each took different roles in the writing process—including writer, editor, sub-editor, and producer of musical examples and figures. In the end, we all did a bit of each role. Although discussing every possible interpretation and picking over every sentence of this text was time-consuming and somewhat taxing, this was informative and resulted in more rigorous research. In this way, group analysis took peer-review a step further to a *peer-review-as-you-go* model, drastically changing the outcomes of the research—we think for the better.

Our group featured members from Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States with backgrounds in music psychology, production, pedagogy, and literature as well as musicology, analysis, performance, and composition. The writing process was therefore difficult because of differences in native languages, national dialects, analytical terminology, and (practically speaking) time zones. We also had disagreements about prose style (conversational or formal). While some of us had experience of group analysis and co-authoring research, this had usually been with peers within the same country or subdiscipline. The group analysis conducted at the summer school was unique because the groups were constructed with a somewhat »random sample« of analysts from different geographical and subdisciplinary backgrounds. Ultimately, our different perspectives and approaches led to a more comprehensive analysis.

The most challenging aspect of group analysis was also the most rewarding. Initially, some members found it difficult to accept that other analysts could hear the same song in an entirely different way. We also struggled to make a persuasive argument without rejecting alternative interpretations. However, the benefits of collaborative analysis greatly outweighed the challenges. Group analysis is compelled to recognise the subjectivity of our own interpretations and to embrace the fact that there is not a »right« way to hear music. This was a particularly useful approach for interrogating »Gimme All Your Love« because of its ambiguity. Our group agreed that if we had analysed the song individually, we would probably not have identified the multiple hearings that the song affords (at least, unless empirical

perceptual experiments were employed). We thoroughly recommend group analysis as a means of highlighting the subjectivity and person-to-person variation in analytical observations.

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