

“Interactions between Music and Dance in Two Musical Theatre Tap Breaks”

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This file includes the abstract, keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “Interactions between Music and Dance in Two Musical Theatre Tap Breaks” by Rachel Short, *SMT-V* 9.3 (2023). This video-essay may be found at <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv093short>

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**Abstract for
“Interactions between Music and Dance in
Two Musical Theatre Tap Breaks”**

by Rachel Short, SMT-V 9.3

How do sounds made by dancers interact with rhythmic sounds in the music? When does the relationship between them change? Like music, dance has patterns, or “groupings,” that we can hear and see, particularly in tap dance, where the dancer’s feet intentionally create rhythmic sounds. Typically, choreography involves rhythmic groups that directly correspond to musical rhythms. But sometimes, movement patterns are at odds with musical patterns—non-alignments caused through metric displacement, groups with conflicting sizes, or asymmetrical patterns. The rhythmic complexity of these conflicts between music and dance can increase energy, and changing relationships between music and dance patterns can mark distinct sections. This video explores examples from two Broadway-style tap dance breaks (“I’ve Got Rhythm,” from *Crazy for You*, and the finale of *Billy Elliot Live*) to show how dancers’ on-stage movements and rhythmic tap sounds combine with musical rhythms and phrases to generate momentum and delineate formal structure.

Short Keyword List

rhythm, choreography, metric dissonance, Broadway, tap dance

Extensive Keyword List

Choreography, tap dance, Broadway, dance breaks, conflicts, clashes, dance patterns, musical groupings, rhythms, meter, metric dissonance, syncopation, dissonance, displacement, dance accents, pulse layers, choreographic phrases, accumulation, momentum, “I’ve Got Rhythm,” *Crazy for You*, George Gershwin, Susan Stroman, mining pans, AABA form, *Billy Elliot: The Musical Live*, Peter Darling, Elton John, formal delineation, asymmetric pattern, climax, choreomusical analysis.

About the Author

Dr. Rachel Short is Associate Professor of Music Theory at Shenandoah Conservatory, Shenandoah University (SU), in Winchester, VA, where she coordinates the Music Theory Tutor Program. Her research specialties are choreomusical analysis, rhythm and meter, American musical theatre, and music theory pedagogy. Dr. Short has presented papers and chaired sessions at various national and regional conferences including Music Theory Midwest, where her work received honorable mention for the Arthur J. Komar Award. She represented her academic field with a public-facing presentation that was highlighted in the article “Music Theory, Professional Conferences, and Community Engagement” (which she co-authored), and her chapter “The Changing Rhythms of Bridges and Ends” is included in the forthcoming edited collection *From Hammerstein to Hamilton: Analyzing Musicals* with University of Michigan Press. She has been recognized for her use of technology to further engaged teaching and learning: she was SU’s nominee for the Virginia Foundation of Independent Colleges’ Excellence in Instructional Technology Award and she was noted in Jennifer Snodgrass’s *Teaching Music Theory: New Voices and Approaches*. Viewing learning as a journey that requires both grace and rigor, her teaching goals center on developing students’ analytical abilities to appreciate and describe the music they perform and enjoy.

Discography and Filmography

Bates, Leon, pianist, 1990. “I’ve Got Rhythm.” Track 8 on *Gershwin • Corea*. Recorded at the Concert Hall of Slovak Philharmonic, Bratislava, December 1988. Naxos 8.550341, compact disc.

Charl du Plessis Trio. 2016. Charl du Plessis, pianist, Werner Spies, bassist, and Peter Auret, drummer. “I Got Rhythm.” Track 20 on *Baroqueswing Vol. II*. Claves Records CD1609, compact disc.

Daldry, Stephen, and Brett Sullivan, dirs. *Billy Elliot: The Musical Live*. 2014. Choreographed by Peter Darling, music by Elton John. Filmed on 28 September 2014 at the Victoria Palace Theatre, Westminster, London. Distributed by Universal Pictures, DVD.

tukutuku427. 2013. “‘I Got Rhythm’ from *Crazy for You*, Kennedy Center Honors 1992,”
Choreographed by Susan Stroman, music by Ira and George Gershwin. YouTube, 6:02.
Accessed Aug. 14, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTCywgHysY8>.

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