The Best Is Yet To Come: Approaches to Rhythmic Development

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THE BEST IS YET TO COME: APPROACHES TO RHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT

by

Robert W. Lindsay II

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Music
Western Michigan University
May 2021

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THE BEST IS YET TO COME: APPROACHES TO RHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT

Robert W. Lindsay II, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2021

For my Masters of Arts thesis, I recorded a number of songs that I had written between 2015 and 2020 for an album titled “The Best is Yet to Come.” In this adjunct essay, I will analyze four of those pieces to demonstrate my use of rhythmic development; I use rhythmic development extensively in my work in order to generate cohesion between songs. The opening song, “Fresh Vegetables,” demonstrates the rhythmic motive that all other songs develop from. If anyone chooses to learn or analyze my music in the future, this document can be a reference.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I’d like to begin by thanking all the music educators that have graciously given up their time to help me learn and grow; without your help, I wouldn’t and couldn’t be where I’m at today. Perhaps the biggest thanks to Paul Scheiderer for spending the summer before 7th grade teaching me music theory and keyboard performance while eating pizza and playing video games. His passion for music still inspires me to analyze songs to this day. Thanks to Pasquale Pascaretti and James Rodgers for keeping me in line all throughout high school. There were many times I could’ve gotten in a lot of trouble, but these guys knew that music was the one thing I knew how to take seriously and took advantage of that. Thank you both for believing in me when no one else did and giving me the physical and mental space to hone my skills.

I’d also like to thank the current music educators I’m working with at Western Michigan University; you’ve all helped me take my passion to different dimensions. John Campos, thank you for showing me that a professor can be a friend; you’ve taught me that not every professor has to hold a superiority complex simply because they decide your grade. Thank you for always treating me like an equal and showing an interest in my quirky music. I look forward to a lifetime of jams and recreation. Matt Fries, every time we talk I feel as if I’m thanking you for putting up with my silly antics. “Fresh Vegetables” at jazz combo night… All trauma aside, from giving me lessons, letting me in a jazz combo, letting me form my own “combo” and play at the Union, to jazz sessions, live sound, and this paper, you’ve been so supportive of me at every step of the way whether I deserved it or not. If you ever need live sound help at a gig, know that I’m forever musically indebted to you. Chris Biggs, a little over a year ago I hardly knew you; I
would’ve never guessed you’d become such a close friend who encourages me more than some people who’ve known me for a lifetime. Thank you for not only encouraging me to apply for this program, but for supporting me in every walk of life- especially Zappa. Here’s hoping we can work on some projects together in the future. Carter Rice, I also only truly met you within the past year, but never have I had a professor where I can see myself in their shoes. Thank you not only for you true concern for students, but also your down-to-earth way of helping others and making everything work around Dalton. You’ve made every collegiate process seem so doable, it encourages me to get my PhD. Thanks to Dr. Code and Dr. Kothman for their immense banks of knowledge and their way of making students feel at home; thanks for making sure I graduate. Thanks to Barb, Britt, Ariel, Kevin, David, and everyone that works in the Music Office. Over the past 5 years, you’ve all made Dalton such a warm and welcoming environment for so many students; without everyone mentioned, Dalton would lose its heart and soul.

Thanks to all my friends who’ve supported me throughout this whole process; the list is far too long to name. I’d also like to shout out our family of squirrels back home: Bob, Nick, Jake, Fluffy, Skunky, Mangy, and Bob’s newborn babies, as well as my two Dalton squirrels, Buddy and Ginger. Without these squirrels in my life, I would’ve probably had a breakdown and dropped out of college by now. May your tails grow long and your peanut bowl never be empty. Finally, I’d like to thank my parents: Bob and Jeep. Obviously, I wouldn’t be alive without you both working so hard to support me alongside yourselves. I could write a whole paper on everything you’ve done for me, so I’ll just leave it at: “thank you, I love you.”

Rob Lindsay
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INTRODUCTION

For my Masters of Arts thesis, I recorded a number of songs that I had written between 2015 and 2020 for an album titled “The Best is Yet to Come.” In this adjunct essay, I will analyze four of those pieces to delineate my use of rhythmic development. I have chosen these songs as they best demonstrate the implementation of rhythmic development across my works, as I use rhythmic development extensively to generate cohesion between songs. I will provide a brief summary of each song’s most pertinent features, analyze the recurring musical materials in each song, and conclude by comparing the implementation of these materials between songs. Through this comparison, I have found that the song “Fresh Vegetables” contains rhythmic material that all other songs derive from.

I have created tables that demonstrate the formal organization of each song. The tables delineate the duration of sections, the starting time of each section, the length of each section in bars, the meters, keys, and tempi of each section. Each table is named after its associated song, ie “Fresh Vegetables.” Improvised formal sections are denoted by parentheses, as the focus will be on precomposed sections that utilize recurring rhythmic motives.
ANALYSIS

Fresh Vegetables

“Fresh Vegetables” acts as the overture for the album; it is an instrumental piece that is through-composed and highlights several approaches to pitch, rhythm, and meter that will recur throughout the album. For this piece only, each formal section will be referred to as “episode,” as the tempo, time, and key signature change quickly and share few parameters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Episode I</th>
<th>Episode II</th>
<th>Episode III</th>
<th>Episode IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>0:31</td>
<td>0:53</td>
<td>0:32</td>
<td>1:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bars</strong></td>
<td>1-11</td>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>30-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Db Gb</td>
<td>Gb G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tempo</strong></td>
<td>192</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. “Fresh Vegetables”
Episode I

The most predominant rhythmic figure (see Figure 1) occurs starting in bar 4; this is the first of several rhythmic motives that will recur throughout the album. In bar 12, the next rhythmic motive (see Figure 2) occurs as a fragmentation of Rhythmic Motive 1 in retrograde. I use these figures commonly as they have a pleasing yet deceiving syncopation that throws off the listener’s perception of the beat. The first episodic cadence occurs in bars 15-17 with a reharmonization of “the lick”¹ (see Figure 3) to imply the rest of the album will be a joke.

![Figure 1. Rhythmic Motive 1](image1)

![Figure 2. Rhythmic Motive 1 as 7/4](image2)

![Figure 3. “The Lick”](image3)

¹ Alex Heitlinger. “The Lick.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krDxhnaKD7Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krDxhnaKD7Q)
**Episode II**

This episode’s most significant musical motive is the 2-over-3 polyrhythm (see Figure 4). It can be played over 3/4 as shown, or over 2/4 and 4/4 with triplets. This is not only used in a sizable variety of musical genres, but it is also one of my favorite grooves to compose and improvise rhythms and melodies over.

![Figure 4. 2-over-3 polyrhythm as 3/4](image)

**Episodes III & IV**

Bar 50 introduces a new rhythmic motive (see Figure 5) that is a fragmentation and diminution of Rhythmic Motive 1. That figure will commonly be fragmented by removing beat 3, as the offbeat before the second bar gives the music a feeling of being propelled forward. In the final repeat of bars 99-106, the guitar plays the first instance of Melodic Motive 1 (see Figure 6), one of my most commonly implemented themes in improvisation sections.

![Figure 5. Rhythmic Motive 1 delayed](image)
Figure 6. Melodic Motive 1 in “Fresh Vegetables”

Groovy You

“Groovy You” has a progressive form that repeats from the beginning after the D section. I revisit many of the previously introduced rhythmic concepts while keeping other parameters the same, such as style, key, and tempo.

Table 2. “Groovy You”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0:45</td>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>0:21</td>
<td>0:21</td>
<td>0:46</td>
<td>0:35</td>
<td>0:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>21-46</td>
<td>47-50</td>
<td>51-66</td>
<td>67-74, 1-20</td>
<td>31-46</td>
<td>47-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meter</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>7/4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempo</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A

The A section introduces a new motive (see Figure 7) that is yet another transformation of Rhythmic Motive 1, this time displacing it by a beat and adding another statement with embellishments. This creates a satisfying loop of syncopation against the half-time groove.

![Figure 7. Rhythmic Motive 1 displaced](image)

B

The most predominant rhythmic figure in this section (see Figure 8) includes the reduction of Figure 5 combined with the original statement of Rhythmic Motive 1. Beat 4 of the original motive is especially effective when preceded by Figure 5, which accents beat 4(+).

![Figure 8. Rhythmic Motive 1 extended](image)

C & D

These sections do not introduce any new pertinent features, as they only incorporate previously introduced approaches to rhythm, meter, and pitch; however, the D section references the style of my favorite math-rock group, CHON.²

² CHON. “Knot.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F840uydN-Ps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F840uydN-Ps), 1:10.
Feel Good Vibes

“Feel Good Vibes” uses several of the rhythmic concepts previously discussed, as well as a new approach to motivic development: augmentation/diminution of harmonic rhythm.

Table 3. “Feel Good Vibes”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0:22</td>
<td>0:52</td>
<td>1:22</td>
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<td>3:31</td>
<td>4:27</td>
<td>5:21</td>
<td>5:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meter</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>2/2</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>136</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A, B, & C

The initial groove is established in section A with a harmonic phrase that lasts 4 bars; it uses the reduced version of Figure 5 to propel the beat forward without actually rushing. In section B, the harmonic phrase lasts 8 bars; this is an example of augmenting the harmonic rhythm. While section C is only transitional material, it reinstates the original statement of Rhythmic Motive 1, providing a sense of familiarity.
Rendezvous

“Rendezvous” is the closing track on the album and doesn’t introduce any new motives; however, several of the previous approaches to rhythm are slightly altered.

Table 4. “Rendezvous”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>(E)</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>A’</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0:15</td>
<td>0:31</td>
<td>0:46</td>
<td>1:23</td>
<td>1:39</td>
<td>2:10</td>
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<td>3:17</td>
<td>4:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempo</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>178</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A & B

The first theme occurs in 11/8 time signature: one irregular meter that I have not used up to this point. The grouping of 7/8 + 2/4 gives the sense of adding or subtracting a beat in the middle of the phrase, displacing the perception of the beat. The B section revisits the 2-over-3 polyrhythm, which will be used throughout this song over more time signatures than just 3/4.

C & D

In the C section, the meter alternates between 5/4 and 6/4, again giving the sense of removing a beat; the D section is a 4 bar phrase of 6/4 with every 3rd bar switching to 5/4. Both of these sections disregard the sense of pulse in the middle of the phrase and are supported by the 2-over-3 polyrhythm when possible.
CONCLUSION

Utilizing motivic development to transform the same motive is a commonly used compositional tool as it is an extremely effective way of generating cohesion throughout a large body of work. When transformed in complex ways, a simple motive can soon become unrecognizable to the untrained ear, yet a sense of familiarity can still be achieved; such is the case with the same rhythmic motive played over various meters. Melody seems to be subservient to rhythm in this regard; it can often be easier to recognize a repeating rhythmic figure than a repeating melodic figure. This is not to disparage melodic development, but rather to highlight the importance of rhythmic development. Analyzing my own works has given me a great insight into my own creative process. Organizing my use of rhythm has streamlined my compositional process and will allow me to take better advantage of my own pre-existing materials.
APPENDIX
segue into Canned Fruits
Fresh Vegetables

trombone

\( \text{RL} \)

\( \text{mf} \)

\( \text{f} \)

\( \text{mp} \)

\( \text{rit.} \)

\( \text{A maj 7, C maj 7} \)

©

21
Fresh Vegetables

\( \text{RL.} \)
A'BABCA(B)(B)(B)AC'

Lead Sheet

Feel Good Vibes

$\frac{3}{4}$

\[\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{B maj7} & \text{A}\#m7 & \text{D}\#m7 & \text{A}\#m7/C\# \\
\text{A} & \text{B maj7} & \text{A}\#m7 & \text{D}\#m7 & \text{A}\#m7/C\# \\
\text{B} & \text{B maj7} & \text{A}\#m7 & \text{G}\#m7 & \text{C}\#7sus \\
\text{C} & \text{B maj7} & \text{A}\#m7 & \text{G}\#m7 & \text{C}\#7sus \\
\end{array}\]

©
Rendezvous

\[ \text{\textcopyright} \]

\section*{trombone}

\begin{equation}
\begin{align*}
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&\text{\textcopyright}
\end{align*}
\end{equation}
Rendezvous

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krDxhnaKD7Q


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F840uydN-Ps