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Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs*: Influences and Musical Genre

by

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the implications of musical genre for American songwriter Tom Waits' 1985 studio album *Rain Dogs*. A discussion of recording artists and composers of the twentieth century that influenced Waits at this time serves to identify the multiple styles within which he writes and performs. Descriptive analyses of each of the album's nineteen tracks highlight salient musical elements to demonstrate how these pieces fit within specific styles. Finally, a music and text analysis demonstrates how Waits' performance of multiple musical genres, each with their own encoded historical and cultural associations, affects the thematic content and narrative structure of the album.

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# Introduction

Tom Waits is an American recording artist, songwriter and actor who has released twenty-two albums over a span of forty years, including sixteen studio records, three live records, two film soundtracks and a box set, in addition to numerous compilations and contributions to multi-artist collections. Since the release of his first studio album *Closing Time* in 1973 Waits' musical style has undergone several drastic transformations. I divide his musical output into three distinct stylistic periods, which I will outline below: the Asylum years (1973–1980), the Island years (1983–1993) and the post-Island years (1994–present).

This thesis is a study of one studio album in particular, Waits' critically acclaimed 1985 release *Rain Dogs*, the second of a trilogy of records that includes *Swordfishtrombones* (1983) and *Frank's Wild Years* (1987). This represents Waits' most prolific and stylistically groundbreaking period, in which he incorporates a wide variety of disparate musical genres into the fabric of his compositions. I intend to investigate the implications of musical genre within this work and hope to shed light on the variety of salient musical influences present. In Chapter One I engage in a description of key musical influences whose various elements Waits has absorbed and incorporated on *Rain Dogs*. Chapter Two is a detailed descriptive analysis of each of the nineteen pieces that make up the album, with a focus on musical genre. In Chapter Three I relate music to text, arguing that Waits' use of musical genre enhances the thematic and narrative content of the album. The question of musical genre as it pertains to Tom Waits in general and *Rain Dogs* in particular is worth investigating as this is an artist who has become widely

influential to a generation of songwriters and musicians, and I assert that he has helped shape many people's conceptualization of musical genre.

Musical genre can mean a number of things. Sometimes genre refers to a broad categorization applied to a musical product by record companies in the interest of attracting a consumer audience. However, broad categories such as jazz, rock and roll, or Latin music fail to identify the rich variety of musical styles that listeners know and seek out. My understanding of musical genre, therefore, is based on the tacit contract that develops between composer, performer and audience (or any combination of these) with regard to the expected style elements that make up a piece of music. As soon as a musical style is developed enough to be relatively easily identifiable and carries with it certain criteria that become expected, it has become a musical genre. Musical genre, as I understand it, emerges organically from musical culture rather than having been imposed artificially by a small number of music industry executives. It is this definition of musical genre with which I will proceed.

**The Asylum Years**

Waits' first six albums were recorded on David Geffen's Asylum record label between 1973 and 1980, and he quickly established himself as a black sheep on the music scene. As Jay Jacobs notes, "[i]n the early seventies most music-world denizens were still either on a post-Beatles psychedelic high or in a Southern California Jackson Browne folk-rock navel-gaze mode. Tom Waits seemed like such an anachronism—a grizzled, drunken hipster cat in roach-killers and a filthy beret who looked and acted like he'd just driven across town from skid row."[1] Descriptions such as this one, while focusing on the

[1] Jay S. Jacobs, *Wild Years: The Music and Myth of Tom Waits* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2006), 23.

artist's appearance and demeanor, are especially prevalent in contemporary articles and reviews, and speak to the importance of persona and theatricality in Waits' early oeuvre.

Waits' influences at this time are mainly poets and authors of the Beat generation, jazz musicians and composers of standards, as he himself said in a 1976 interview: "I listen to Charles Bukowski, Thurman Gould, Clarence Frogman Henry, Hubert Selby Jnr, Neal Cassidy, Oscar Brown Jnr, Harry 'The Hipster' Addison, Professor Longhair, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Milt Jackson, Mose Alison, Gil Evans, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny and Dennis Mercer, Jerome Kern—did I say Jerome Kern?—Jerome Kern…"[2] Waits was also deeply influenced by Jack Kerouac, and an early article describing Waits' performance on his 1975 live album *Nighthawks At The Diner* could just as easily have been describing the author of *On The Road*: "a be-bop raconteur, a scatting storyteller and spontaneous, rapid-fire imagist reciting to the fourth-gear highway rhythms of a smoky jazz trio."[3]

Reviewer Richard Cromelin keenly observes that "Waits' material falls into two primary styles: the deliberate, piano-and-strings ballad and the bebop, finger-pop, scat-talk jazz poetry that forms the thrust of his live show."[4] While piano and acoustic guitar-based ballads are present throughout this early period, the lush string arrangements Cromelin refers to are particular to the debut *Closing Time* (1973), produced by Jerry Yester. The five albums which follow—on which Waits continues to dole out piano

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[2] Mick Brown, "Tom Waits: Warm Beer, Cold Women," *Sounds* (June 12, 1976) http://www.rocksbackpages.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/Library/Article/tom-waits-warm-beer-cold-women (accessed September 11, 2011).

[3] Richard Cromelin, "Tom Waits: Personality Without Pretension," *Los Angeles Times* (March 14, 1976) http://www.rocksbackpages.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/Library/Article/tom-waits-personality-without-pretension (accessed September 11, 2011).

[4] Richard Cromelin, "Tom Waits: *Small Change*," *Phonograph Record* (October 1976) http://www.rocksbackpages.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/Library/Article/tom-waits-ismall-changei (accessed September 11, 2011).

ballads while further exploring his Beat-inspired monologue narrative style—are all produced by jazz producer Bones Howe and are sparser, featuring small jazz combos and ubiquitous solo saxophone.

Operating in a popular music culture that values authenticity above all, it is inevitable that a number of contemporary critics find Waits' mode of musical and literary pastiche suspect, while others, recognizing Waits' persona as part of his artistic expression, appreciate his dedication:

> It's a pretence, of course. Like the fake tenements of the *West Side Story* showtune that opens [*Blue Valentine*] at an offbeat pace, it's an act. Waits has been working on it for five albums and who known how many years— refining it from the sometimes maudlin angle of viewing the bottom of life through the bottom of an empty whisky bottle to altogether more poignant observations of his key characters, the loser and the used, both victims of either circumstance or the Big City or even an ugly coalition of the two. And he's good at it too. A tale-spinner worth his salt should suspend your belief for you and this Waits can do.[5]

Waits' lowlife persona was done so thoroughly and effectively that the artist began to chafe against the image he had created for himself. In a 1981 interview Waits describes the relationship between himself and his persona:

> I've grown a little. I think it's important now to be able to separate yourself as a performer and writer from whom you actually are. I started travelling, singing and writing at a time when I was developing as a person, and the two got very confusing. I got swept away with it, then felt I had to live up to something...I was very naive. More than once I was lucky I wasn't shot. But I realised that a guy who writes murder mysteries doesn't have to be a murderer. More than likely it's distance which has given them the vision, not closeness. I don't feel I have to live up to something anymore…[6]

Waits describes himself in this period as having freed himself from the shackles of the image that he created. This distancing from his lowlife persona was just part of a personal

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[5] Paul Rambali, "Tom Waits: *Blue Valentine*," *NME* (November 25, 1978) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-blue-valentine- (accessed September 11, 2011)

[6] Mick Brown, "He's a Coppola Swell: Tom Waits," *The Guardian* (March 1981) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/hes-a-coppola-swell-tom-waits (accessed September 11, 2011).

and artistic sea change. By his fifth album Waits began to get frustrated with his creative output, feeling that he was stagnating. Barney Hoskyns writes:

> Those who love Waits' seventies albums as much as I do will take issue with this statement, yet the fact remains that up to this point Waits had borrowed a bunch of styles and mannerisms—from music, movies, books—and jumbled together his voice and style. However great the songs were, to his ears they were derivative, unoriginal. He hadn't staked out a musical terrain he could sincerely call his own.[7]

Feeling creatively redundant in his music career, Waits pursued an offer to act in a feature length film, playing a small role in Sylvester Stallone's 1978 film *Paradise Alley*.[8] Although the film was a commercial and critical failure, it was the beginning of a fruitful acting career that has included a leading role in Jim Jarmusch's *Down By Law* (1986), a striking portrayal of Renfield in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) and the sinister Mr. Nick in Terry Gilliam's surreal *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009), among others. Already an eccentric and theatrical performer on stage, Waits' work in film acting through the eighties onward only served to enhance an already acute sense of character, narrative, and thematic continuity.

Another opportunity that shaped Waits' creative direction came in 1980 when Francis Ford Coppola hired him to compose the soundtrack to *One From The Heart* (1982). This was a project that involved a high degree of collaboration with Coppola, as Waits was composing songs to convey the point of view of each of the two romantically involved protagonists as the film was being shot. Waits reflects on the experience:

> I've never worked on anything as challenging as this, having to conceptualize and design the musical fabric of an entire story. But those are the real rewards when it comes down to it—working with someone like Francis who has so much insight and daring. Sitting down with someone like that over a glass of beer, talking about

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[7] Barney Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road: A Life of Tom Waits* (New York: Broadway Books, 2009): 276.

[8] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 202–203.

> film, exchanging ideas, knowing you're making a contribution—that makes you feel you're really going somewhere.[9]

Waits experience writing music to fit a large-scale narrative work surely affected his sense of structure and narrative in his musical output from 1982 onward, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. The soundtrack to *One From The Heart* was released in 1982 on the CBS record label, and musically it is more aligned with the Asylum years that preceded it than with the Island years that were to come. Though hoping to explore new musical possibilities, Waits was hired based on his prolific seventies output and was expected to produce similar material. Notwithstanding the release of the soundtrack *One From The Heart*, three years passed between Waits' studio records. In hindsight, these can be considered the fallow years wherein Waits musical style went through its greatest metamorphosis in his long career.

**The Island Years**

Between the releases of *Heartattack and Vine* (1980) and *Swordfishtrombones* (1983) much changed for Tom Waits. While working for Francis Ford Coppola at Zoetrope Studios Waits met Kathleen Brennan, who soon became his wife and artistic collaborator, receiving official writing credits on a number of songs and informal credit from Waits for being a constant source of influence and inspiration as well as a useful sounding board and editor. Brennan helped him to "integrate more far-ranging musical influences like Lead Belly, Captain Beefheart, Skip James and Schoenberg and finding ways to reconcile this diversity within his music."[10] Waits attests to Brennan's

[9] Brown, "He's a Coppola Swell: Tom Waits."

[10] Corinne Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 6.

contribution to *Swordfishtrombones* and his stylistic shift that lead him to switch record labels:

> [A] lot of credit has to go to Kathleen, because that record was really the first thing I decided to do without an outside producer…it was exciting, because I had never been in a studio without a producer: I came from that whole school where an artist needs a producer. You know, they know more than I do, I don't know anything about the board. I was really old-fashioned that way. And Kathleen listened to my records and she knew I was interested in a lot of diverse musical styles that I'd never explored myself on my own record. So she started talking to me about that—you know, 'You can do that.' She's a great DJ, and she started playing a lot of records for me. I'd never thought of myself being able to go in and have the full responsibility for the end result of each song. She really co-produced that record with me, though she didn't get credit. She was the spark and the feed. The seminal idea for that record really came from Kathleen. So it was scary and exciting, but it was like, well, okay, let's find an engineer. And I found Biff Dawes, and he was into it. And I knew a lot of musicians. So I went in and did four songs, and I went and played them to Joe Smith at Elektra-Asylum. And he didn't know what to make of it, and at that point I was kind of dropped from the label. And then [Chris] Blackwell heard the record and picked it up.[11]

The release of *Swordfishtrombones* was met with immediate critical acclaim and recognition among fans and critics that Waits had expanded his stylistic palette, and many contemporary critics agreed that Waits' new sound must be heavily influenced by two main sources: late-sixties psychedelic blues artist Captain Beefheart and depression-era American composer and musical innovator Harry Partch.[12] Hoskyns describes how one of the effects of these influences on *Swordfishtrombones* results in a music which

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[11] Barney Hoskyns, "What's He Building In There? An Interview with Tom Waits," *Mojo* (April 1999) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/whats-he-building-in-there-an-interview-with-tom-waits- (accessed September 11, 2011)

[12] Ian Penman, "Tom Waits: *Swordfishtrombones* (Island)," *NME* (September 10, 1983) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-iswordfishtrombonesi-island (accessed September 11, 2011); Edwin Pouncey, "Swordfish Out of Water: Tom Waits," *Sounds* (November 15, 1983) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/swordfish-out-of-water-tom-waits (accessed September 11, 2011); Barney Hoskyns, "Tom Waits: Marlowe Of The Ivories," *NME* (May 25, 1985) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-marlowe-of-the-ivories (accessed September 11, 2011); Don Watson, "Reigning Hats And Dogs: Tom Waits at the Dominion, London," *NME* (October 26, 1985) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/reigning-hats-and-dogs-tom-waits-at-the-dominion-london (accessed September 11, 2011).

evokes the environment depicted in the lyric—a relationship that will be more deeply explored in Chapter Three:

> *Swordfishtrombones*…was like the ghost of Captain Beefheart coming out to play on the homemade orchestra of Harry Partch, a 'small exotic orchestra' or 'demented little parade band' consisting of tuba, trombone, guitar, bass marimba, accordion and piano. The 15 songs explore Waitsian backwaters with a marvelously rich and eccentric array of noises, the sounds themselves conveying the environments he depicted.[13]

Toward the end of his Asylum years, Waits became uncomfortable with the image he had created, and at the time surrounding his move to Island Records, he abandoned a modernist concept of identity construction, adopting a "postmodernist model of identity construction that involved recycling, abandoning, discovering, manipulating, and superimposing many different personas throughout his personal life, performances, lyrics, and musical styles."[14] While the beginning of this process yielded a starkly new musical and narrative landscape with *Swordfishtrombones*, the follow-up album *Rain Dogs* (1985) was even more musically adventurous while Waits' voice expressed a wider range of characters. With *Swordfishtrombones* Waits had

> established himself as a grand composer in the American vein of not recognizing artificial barriers between the popular and the rarefied or the sacred and the profane. *Rain Dogs* continues his continental drift through the crannies and corners of America's varied cultures. This isn't to say, though, that it's a simple melting-pot exercise in pan-culturalism. On the contrary, its great achievement is how Waits draws the shapes of its 19 (!) pieces from the nuances and nonsense, the rhymes and rhythms locked in his language.[15]

This early review of *Rain Dogs* describes Waits sensitive treatment of American vernacular music as well as the composer's disregard for artificial divisions of high-

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[13] Hoskyns, "Tom Waits: Marlowe Of The Ivories."
[14] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 56.
[15] Biba Kopf, "Tom Waits: *Rain Dogs* (Island)," *NME* (October 12, 1985) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-rain-dogs-island (accessed September 11, 2011)

culture and low-culture. Also, though Kopf doesn't yet have a word to label the enterprise, he keenly recognizes Waits' participation in a uniquely American and postmodern mode of expression that would eventually become widely known as Americana. Humphries describes the album:

> *Rain Dogs* sounded ancient and withered. Here were blues that had lain mouldering, abandoned in a damp bargain basement. Here was jazz, the like of which had not seen daylight since Armistice Day. Here was a record redolent of New Orleans funeral bands mournfully trailing a hearse with no name.
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> This was music that felt like it had escaped from the cabarets of Weimar Germany – and been hiding ever since.[16]

Interestingly, Waits's brand of proto-Americana is not limited to music of the Americas but includes genres from the old-world. Influences such as Kurt Weill are often cited, as well as the expressionist composers of the Second Viennese School.[17]

*Rain Dogs* was followed with the release of a stage production (1986) and album (1987) *Frank's Wild Years*, a project Waits and Brennan had begun work on before the recording of *Rain Dogs*. The musical is based on the rise-and-fall story of Frank O'Brien, who Hoskyns calls Waits' "all-purpose dreamer-loser, an American archetype that he and Kathleen saw as the ideal cipher for their parable about 'the business of show.'"[18] *Frank's Wild Years* continues down the path of "theatrical eclecticism" and musical experimentation found on the previous two albums, amalgamating "carnival sounds, gospel melodies, cabaret schmaltz, and barrelhouse blues" and introducing instruments and effects like "the optigan (optical organ), mellotron (precursor to the modern digital

[16] Patrick Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits* (London: Omnibus Press, 2007), 163.
[17] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*; Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*.
[18] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 327.

sampler), prepared piano (a piano that has had its sound altered by placing objects between or on the strings, hammers, or dampers), megaphone, and rooster."[19]

These three albums recorded for Island between 1983 and 1987 are widely considered to fit together as a trilogy, as they deal with common themes of transience, itinerancy, crime, morality, dream and fantasy. They also represent the most prolific and experimental period in Waits' long career. Kessel describes the trilogy:

> *Swordfishtrombones*, *Rain Dogs*, and *Frank's Wild Years* can be considered a trilogy in terms of music, style, and production values. These three albums are a major departure from Waits's past musical styles and are a progressive exploration of new timbral and textural varieties seeped in exciting new instrumentation. These albums are linked by the character Frank, who is introduced in *Swordfishtrombones*, developed in *Rain Dogs*, and then followed on his ill-fated orphic quest for fame in the play *Frank's Wild Years*. Though all of the songs from *Swordfishtrombones* and *Rain Dogs* do not necessarily contain biographical material or direct references to the character Frank, they provide a foundation for the emotional and psychological development of his transient character and how it gets represented lyrically and musically.[20]

After *Frank's Wild Years* and a period of hiatus from musical releases (Waits' busied himself with a blossoming acting career and family life), came two more albums released on Island Records: an album of all new originals called *Bone Machine* (1992) and the studio recording of an expressionist operetta written in collaboration with avant-garde director Robert Wilson and Beat writer William S. Burroughs called *The Black Rider*. *Bone Machine* is perhaps the darkest of Waits albums, dealing with "the omnipresence of life, death, and destruction" and filled with "the sounds of clattering sticks and foreboding boot stomping."[21] The production value of the album leaves much of the background noise in (creaking chairs, background voices, passing cars). Improvements in digital music recording afforded the ability of Waits to choose his own

[19] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 30.
[20] Ibid., 100.
[21] Ibid., 8.

studio space, and he opted for a storage room. Waits said, "I'm more and more inclined toward texture, and you can't get texture with this whole bio-regenerator-flesh approach to recording. It gets a little to scientific for me...The room becomes a character. And, fortunately, we stumbled upon a storage room that sounded so good—plus it already had maps on the wall. So I said, 'That's it, we're sold.'"[22] Interestingly, Humphries notes a connection between the production techniques and aesthetics of Waits' 1992 Island release *Bone Machine* and the field recordings of Alan Lomax, of which Waits was enamored.[23]

Based on a nineteenth century German story called "Der Freischütz" ("The Marksman") that involves the accidental homicide of a woman by her lover, *The Black Rider* afforded Waits the chance to explore themes of "addiction, obsession, insanity, and pacts with the devil" and to delve further into "the German dance-hall style of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht."[24] *The Black Rider* was Waits' last Island release and was followed by a six-year hiatus.

**The Post-Island Years**

After a six-year break from releasing an album, Waits returned with what became his most commercially successful one to date, *Mule Variations* (1999). Musical styles from both the Asylum and Island periods are blended together here, while expanding the stylistic borders to include both more folk influences as well as hip-hop techniques of sampling. As Kessel writes, "[i]n addition to the percussive clank and corrosive rattle at which Waits became adept in *Bone Machine*, *Mule Variations* possesses many maudlin

[22] Jay S. Jacobs, *Wild Years: The Music And Myth of Tom Waits* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007), 164.
[23] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits,* 245.
[24] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 9.

ballads and a new bluesy soundscape he aptly describes as 'sururalism,' which combines surreal and rural elements."[25]

The success of *Mule Variations* was followed in 2002 with the simultaneous release of *Alice* and *Blood Money*, two studio albums based on previous theatrical collaborations. Waits had originally written *Alice* as another theatrical collaboration with Robert Wilson in 1992, based on stories from *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass* and biographical details of Charles Dodgson's life. *Alice,* like *The Black Ryder*, was performed by the Thalia Theatre Company in Hamburg. *Blood Money*, originally titled *Woyzeck*, was also a stage collaboration with Wilson, this time with the Betty Nansen Theatre in Copenhagen in 2000. The story is of an everyman whose obsession with his wife's infidelity leads to his madness and a tragic murder/suicide—originally a stage play by George Buchners (1837), it also was the basis for Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* and a Werner Herzog film (1979). Released on the same day, the two albums are drastically different: "[w]hile *Alice* is filled with soaring melancholic melodies and a sonic alchemy that harks back to his early years, *Blood Money* is more carnal, disjointed, and percussive, filled with gutteral yowls deploring the desolation of the human condition."[26]

*Real Gone* (2004) was Waits' first album of new material since *Mule Variations* (1999), and it represents Waits in fine form, incorporating many of the styles from previous periods in his own career while adding the influence of hip-hop. The album has violently aggressive moments that could well have fit on *Bone Machine*, but also more sensitive and heartfelt ballads. Also, for the first time in his long career, Waits includes

[25] Ibid., 35.
[26] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 2009.

political indictment (in this case of the Bush administration) as a subject. Humphries describes the album: "*Real Gone* is the sound of a shotgun wedding between Alan Lomax and 50 Cent...Spiders webs and Miss Havisham inhabit antebellum mansion, but in the distance there are plangent echoes of 57th Street walk-ups and previous occupants."[27]

*Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards* (2006) is a three-disc box set that gathers almost two decades worth of leftovers and castaways that didn't make their way onto Waits' previous studio albums. As one might expect, it lacks the continuity of his other studio albums, but covers a great breadth of musical styles, including covers of songs by artists as disparate as Leadbelly and The Ramones. This was followed by the release of a live album in 2009 called *Glitter and Doom Live* that offers a sampling of live performances from his recent world tour; the songs featured are mostly from *Real Gone* onward, but several songs from *Bone Machine* also appear, as does the opening track from *Rain Dogs*, "Singapore." The release of *Bad As Me* (2011) marked the first studio album of new material in seven years, and it was met with critical acclaim and a Grammy nomination for best alternative album. Waits hasn't seem to have drastically changed his musical style or approach since *Real Gone*, and many of the same personnel appear as on previous records (Marc Ribot, Charlie Musselwhite, Larry Taylor, Les Claypool) with the significant addition of his eldest son Casey on drums. Hoskyns wrote about *Real Gone* and *Orphans* that "Waits was stuck in a kind of self-parodying primitivism."[28] On *Bad As Me*, Waits seems comfortably settled into his own aesthetic, and if there is a hint of self-parody it reaches the listener as a more polished product than on previous albums.

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[27] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 2007.
[28] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 481.

## Chapter One: Musical Influences

In this chapter I will highlight a few of the most significant musical influences that helped to shape Waits' style during the Island Records period and on *Rain Dogs* in particular. These will include recording artists and composers, as well as whole genres of music that come to have a salient presence on the album. As *Rain Dogs* represents a significant moment for American popular music and an important instance of proto-*Americana*, the artists that Waits seems most moved by tend to be among the most creative and original within American genres of the twentieth century. Significantly, the artists and genres that Waits gravitates toward generally exist in the margins of the popular music landscape. The breadth of musical styles that crop up on *Rain Dogs* runs the gamut of jazz, country, and rock and roll among many others, yet the particular sub-genres that appear tend to be marked by a certain musical and/or social dissonance. Also, Waits' musical influences are mostly made up of the music of decades gone by, his general area of interest ranging from the twenties to the fifties. There is a heavy presence of jazz—bebop in particular—in the first decade of Waits' oeuvre, but on *Rain Dogs* the iterations of jazz are far more specific, and include the polyphonic collective improvisation characteristic of early New Orleans ensembles, such as Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers or the kind of ensemble one would expect to accompany a casket to it's grave site, known as the *second line*. Waits employs the stride piano style developed by Morton and later taken up by bebop pianist and composer Thelonious Monk. Both the bebop style of Monk and a more raucous Charles Mingus-esque post-bop make their influence heard on *Rain Dogs*, giving the album a particularly New York flavour. Indeed, many of the musical genres Waits draws upon carry with them heavy historical and

regional evocations. Beside the jazz of New Orleans and New York is the honky-tonk of 1940s Texas and Nashville and the lonely *frailing*[29] banjo sound coming out of the hills of Kentucky. Further along comes the amplified urban blues of Chicago (the quality of which is no doubt heightened by the appearance of Rolling Stone guitarist and Chess Records aficionado Keith Richards on the album). Then comes the earnest, blue collar rock befitting of New Jersey's favourite son and a contemporary of Waits, Bruce Springsteen. But Waits' influences weren't limited to popular music or, for that matter, American music. Waits was profoundly and conspicuously influenced by two early twentieth century composers whose unique styles heavily effect the overall atmosphere and timbral palette of the album: Californian Harry Partch and German–American Kurt Weill.

**New Orleans Early Jazz to New York Post-Bop**

Waits' piano style, as any artists, draws from a wide and diverse range of influences:

> The chords Waits found on the keyboard had a distinctive feel that combined folk, country, Tin Pan Alley, and New Orleans. Inspiration came as much from Nashville session king Floyd Cramer as from Waits; early hero Ray Charles. It also came from the jazz mavericks he was learning about in *Down Beat* magazine. Exerting a particular influence on Waits the budding pianist was the sublimely eccentric Thelonious Monk.[30]

Humphries also notes the profound influence of Monk on Waits, particularly Monk's 1964 album *Solo Monk*, and quotes Waits who says, "Monk said, 'There is no wrong note, it has to do with how you resolve it,' He almost sounded like a kid taking

[29] Frailing: a banjo playing technique that involves a combination of downward strokes with the index or middle finger on the full length strings and downward strokes of the thumb on the fifth string (Oxford Music Online: Banjo)

[30] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 40.

piano lessons. I could relate to that when I first started playing it. It was like demystifying the sound, because there is certain veneer to jazz..."[31] Waits admired Monk as a truly original artist who always strove to create something new:

> [Monk] demanded originality in others and he embodied it in everything he did—in his piano technique, in his dress, in his language, his humor, in the way he danced, in the way he loved his family and raised his children, and above all in his compositions. Original did not mean being different for the hell of it. For Monk, to be original meant reaching higher than one's limits, striving for something startling and memorable, and never being afraid to make mistakes.[32]

Waits seems to embody the same spirit of pushing himself and his fellow musicians to their limits of creativity, and his focus has never been on a perfectly polished result. Significantly, Monk was also able to "integrate and satisfy modernist and vernacular aesthetics in the creation of music in the context of a distinctly African American musical world."[33] Waits' also integrates avant-garde and folk aesthetics, as will come to light in the analyses of Chapter Two.

Another jazz musician and composer whose influence comes through on the *Rain Dogs* track "Midtown," which features the big-band style horn arrangement of Ralph Carney and his Uptown Horns is Charles Mingus. Though the bandleader's name isn't mentioned extensively in Tom Waits literature, he is cited as an influence, and Waits' raucous post-bop instrumental certainly echoes the celebrated album *Mingus Ah Um* (1959), especially the track "Boogie Stop Shuffle," with its film-noir evocations.[34]

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[31] Patrick Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits* (London: Omnibus Press, 2007), 23.

[32] Robin D.G. Kelley, Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original (Toronto: Free Press, 2009), 451.

[33] Gabriel Solis, *Monk's Music: Thelonious Monk and Jazz History in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30.

[34] Fred Dellar, "Tom Waits: Would you say this man was attempting to convey an impression of sordid Bohemianism?" *NME* (June 5, 1976) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-would-you-say-this-man-was-attempting-to-convey-an-impression-of-sordid-bohemianism (accessed September 11, 2011).

**Country Music, U.S.A.**

Waits cites Hank Williams as one of the singers he used to tune into on his car radio on the long commutes to the odd-jobs of his youth in Southern California,[35] and though almost four decades separate Waits unabashedly honky-tonk infused "Blind Love" from the peak of the most influential country singer of all time's career, the presence of the feted singer is clear.

The history of country music in America is a long and complex one, full of diverse styles and individuals navigating the treacherous and changing waters of a popular music industry that seeks out the unique and particular, while simultaneously manufacturing a homogenized product to distribute to the masses. At the time of the release of *Rain Dogs*, mainstream country music was at the height of homogenization. From the seventies to the mid-eighties, the country music industry began to sell a product with "clouded identity, possessing no regional traits," and recording artists such as Anne Murray, John Denver, Kenny Rogers and Olivia Newton-John earned a mass audience by offering watered-down, middle-of-the-road music that eschewed its rural and working-class roots.[36] To be accurate, the homogenization of country music had in fact begun at least two decades previously, shortly after the death of Hank Williams in 1953. By 1957, "fiddle and steel guitar seemed on the way to banishment from country recordings and could scarcely be heard on jukeboxes or country radio DJ shows," giving way to a new, highly polished style of production, laden with strings, known as the *Nashville Sound*.[37] However, in the margins of the industry, young rock acts of the sixties and early

[35] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 18.
[36] Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A., Third Revised Edition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 369–378.
[37] Ibid., 369.

seventies embraced the hardcore country (or honky-tonk) aesthetic, including Bob Dylan, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, The Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Linda Ronstadt and Gram Parsons, whose work with The Byrds yielded their unabashedly honky-tonk album *Sweethearts of the Rodeo* (1969). Parsons later formed a highly influential proto-alt-country band called The Flying Burrito Brothers:

> Choosing a self-mocking name, the Flying Burrito Brothers dressed in brightly arrayed and sequined Nudie suits which bore marijuana leaves instead of the traditional cactus plants and wagon wheels favored by country and western singers. Some of their songs, such as 'Christine's Tune' and 'Hot Burrito #1,' were strongly rock-flavored, but they also borrowed songs from the Louvin Brothers, George Jones, Merle Haggard, and other hard-core country singers. Burrito instrumentation was similarly mixed, but the steel-guitar stylings of Sneaky Pete gave the group a distinctive honky-tonk flavor.[38]

Though their style was distinctly rock and sometimes psychedelic-infused, the core of their sound was honky-tonk. Incidentally, Waits once played an opening set for The Flying Burrito Brothers back in 1975.[39] Another cast of songwriters who stood in contrast to the mainstream through the seventies were known as the "outlaw" country artists, many of who came out of Texas, such as Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Townes Van Zant, as well as Californian Merle Haggard, who Waits claims to have had in mind when he wrote "Blind Love."[40]

Interestingly, this assortment of proto-alt-country genres (sometimes referred to with the blanket term "hard-core" country) is most often associated with male singer-songwriters, and this idea stems from the roots of 1950s honky-tonk. Fox explains: "as minstrelsy began its decline as a performative mode during the mid-1940s and the honky-

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[38] Ibid., 388.

[39] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 128.

[40] Michael Tearson, Interview with Tom Waits, CBC Stereo, 1985, *Tom Waits on Tom Waits: Interviews and Encounters,* edited by Paul Maher Jr., 168–180 (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 178.

tonk style gained ground, gender supplanted race as a central masking device in the music: in other words, white rural masculinity became reconfigured as modern and 'strong.'"[41] She describes the long-enduring image of country authenticity that was established in small Texas clubs through the forties and coming to full commercial popularity in Nashville in the fifties as "the hard-driving, often brutally raw sound of male heartache in a 'dark,' alienating modern world."[42] It is no surprise that Waits is attracted to honky-tonk as a mode of expression, as he too tends to demonstrate a deeply ingrained masculine subjectivity in his songs, and indeed this is also the case in much of the music and literature that has influenced him.

**Itinerant Blues Singers, Prison Songs and Appalachian Folk**

The field recordings of ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax and their release as a number of commercial RCA and Decca records had a profound influence on many songwriters of Waits' generation. Recordings such as these helped to reveal rich vernacular musical traditions to the masses and can be considered a catalyzing force in the folk revival of the fifties and sixties. Lomax was responsible for many of the earliest recordings of the highly influential blues singers Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) and "Mississippi" Fred McDowell, as well as a number of field recordings of African American prison songs from penitentiaries across the southern states.[43] Szwed describes the nature of the songs Lomax encountered at the Imperial State Prison Farm at Sugar Land, outside Houston in 1932:

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[41] Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 65.

[42] Ibid., 63.

[43] John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (Toronto: Viking, 2010).

> What they heard in that prison and those that followed were songs about trains, dogs, foxes, and horses; praise songs of black and white cowboys and legendary supermen like Jody and Stavin' Chain; songs about women who ruled the men around them; deeply personalized ballads; stomp-down dance tunes; and songs of cotton, boll weevils, and the miseries of work—heat, hammers, guards, endless days, iron bars, and the sun. There were none of the sentimental meditations or ancient European ballads that John Lomax was accustomed to hearing from white singers.[44]

These songs rang with the truth of lived experience for these prisoners. This and the earnestness with which they are delivered had a profound effect on future generations of American songwriters who were exposed to them. Both the stories themselves and the sincerity of the performances Lomax recorded reflect the hard reality of these men. Szwed describes the conditions at a Mississippi prison:

> *Parchman Farm*. The name said it all: a sweatbox of a prison, and, like Angola, once the site of a plantation. Prisoners at Parchman were all too aware of its history of slavery. They were still being run into the fields by white men on horses to pick cotton shortly after 4 a.m., and the offspring of the same bloodhounds and German shepherds that once tracked down escaped slaves were ever present to menace and worry them. Yet being situated in the Yazoo Delta, Parchman was also firmly in blues country, perhaps the deepest and richest site of African American folk music in the United States. The Lomaxes reached the farm on August 8 and set up camp. That evening the warden assembled some of the prisoners to perform for them. As Alan later recalled, 'When the men finished with work, they were brought to sing for us, and I heard extraordinary exciting singers—men like Long Henry, Bat Eye and Tough Eye. They stood in the light of a kerosene lamp with shotguns poking them in the back and sang like mockingbirds.[45]

Probably the most famous of Lomax's "discoveries" which took place at Angola prison in Mississippi, was of singer and guitarist Leadbelly. Born in the 1880s in Louisiana, Huddie Ledbetter was in and out of prisons for various charges between the years 1915 and 1934, and over this period he developed a wide repertoire of songs. At Angola, Alan Lomax and his father John recorded eleven sides which included versions

[44] Ibid., 41.
[45] Ibid., 48.

of his most famous song—and, interestingly, one covered by Waits on his 2006 album *Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards*—"Goodnight Irene."[46] Szwed describes Leadbelly's style:

> He played with an aggressiveness that suggested Texas Mexican guitar bands and two-fisted juke-joint piano, and sang in a declamatory tenor that, like his guitar, could cut through the noise of street traffic and crowded bars. Singing with his eyes closed, rocking his body as he kept the rhythm with his feet, he seemed to draw inspiration from some distant, undisclosed source, or perhaps just from long memory.[47]

Waits' fondness of Leadbelly is well known, and he even felt a special affinity for the legendary blues artist who passed away the day following Waits' birth.[48] Waits once said:

> Leadbelly was a river...a tree. His 12-string guitar rang like a piano in a church basement. The Rosetta Stone for much of what was to follow...Excellent to listen to while driving across Texas, contains all that is necessary to sustain life, a true force of nature.
>
> [...] I marvel at Leadbelly, who just seems to be a fountain of music, When he started working with Moses Asch, he told Huddie he wanted to record anything—nursery rhymes you remember, whatever...They were like concept albums...kind of like photo albums, with pictures of you when you're a kid. I love the way the songs unfolded...The stuff he did with Alan Lomax is...like a history of the country at the time."[49]

Waits was aware of not only Leadbelly, but the work of the collectors who sought out the music of him and others. While it seems Waits interest in this music grew stronger in the post-Island years, Hoskyns suggests that Waits affinity for the music goes far back, when referring to the lead-up to Waits' 1999 *Mule Variations*: "Waits had been listening to a lot of early blues, particularly the Library of Congress field recordings

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[46] Ibid., 45–46.
[47] Ibid., 45.
[48] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 476.
[49] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 10–11.

made between 1936 and 1942 by archivist Alan Lomax. He'd always loved the music but was now immersing himself in the music of Leadbelly..."[50]

Lomax also captured on record several instances of the call-and-response chants that accompany the work of labouring prisoners and observed "the physical rhythms that connected each man to the collective effort" of chopping down trees or aligning steel train tracks with crowbars.[51] This results in a particular musical aesthetic that is invoked in many instances on *Rain Dogs*, especially on "Clap Hands" and "Gun Street Girl." What Bones Howe calls Waits' "junkyard music,"[52] likely referring to the frequent use of brake drum and other metallic clanks in the percussion section of Waits' ensemble, is evocative of the physical gestures one can imagine labouring prisoners would have made in these recordings.

Lomax also assembled a number of hillbilly collections of songs by influential folk singers, including banjo player Dock Boggs,[53] who was known for having a unique approach to the banjo that was a hybrid of the simple-strum and frailing techniques. The song "Gun Street Girl" suggests an Appalachian folk song influence, and features, in particular, a very Dock Boggs-like banjo style, hypermeter and lyrical content.

**Urban Blues, Howlin' Wolf and Captain Beefheart**

One of the historically important centres for urban blues in America from the forties to the sixties was Chicago, and in particular Chess Records, founded by brothers Leonard and Phil Chess. Some of the biggest and most innovative names in American blues of this period recorded there, including Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Etta James,

[50] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 417–418.
[51] Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 42.
[52] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 98.
[53] Ibid., 222–223.

Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley.[54] The influence of these artists goes far beyond the genre of the blues, as rock and roll was of course born of a marriage of urban blues (predominantly performed by African Americans) and country or hillbilly music (predominantly performed by white musicians). Rock and roll's blues roots are illustrated by a well-known anecdote featuring one of the greatest rock bands of all time:

> On an early US tour, the Rolling Stones came to Chicago so they could record in the same Chess studios their blues and R&B idols, whose songs they covered and 'crossed over' to a white audience of millions, had used.
>
> For in the minds of fans like the Stones, Chess was more than a record company; it was a matrix where key elements of postwar American popular culture were catalysed. The birth of gritty urban blues, rhythm and blues, then rock and roll are among the moments Chess Records helped create and chronicle.[55]

Interestingly, Rolling Stones guitarist and songwriter Keith Richards appears on three tracks on *Rain Dogs*, helping to provide the very specific gritty electric guitar timbre that he learned to master by emulating the tones of Muddy Waters and others. A combination of low to medium wattage Fender tube amplifiers (of 1950s vintage, to be sure), steel string electric guitar (most often Fender Telecaster in Richards' case), bottle-neck slide (a typical item in a blues guitarists toolkit—affording the ability to swoop into and out of notes and chords with portamento) and other techniques of articulation (bending and sliding across strings) are the elements of style inherent to blues guitar, and Richards does an exemplary job on *Rain Dogs* track "Union Square."

Tom Waits vocal style, while always flexible, has undergone a few major shifts through his career, and the style that he comes to favor through the Island Records years invokes two artists in particular: from the Chess Records roster Howlin' Wolf (Chester

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[54] Gene Santoro, *Highway 61 Revisited: The Tangled Roots of American Jazz, Blues, Rock, & Country Music* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), 100–101.

[55] Ibid., 100.

Arthur Burnett), and psychedelic-blues band leader from the late-sixties and seventies Captain Beefheart (Don Van Vliet). Santoro writes: "Waits has a smashed foghorn of a voice, somewhere between Beefheart's and Howlin' Wolf's, and he uses it to ruminate and yelp and scream and croon and plead and threaten. It can be a blunt, heavy instrument, but he wields it with incongruous dexterity—even, at times, lightness."[56] The salient influence of these two artists on Waits Island period and beyond are discussed by virtually every biographer and journalist who has written on Waits. The influence of Wolf was not limited to Waits taking up a raspy vocal timbre and arranging his songs with a heavy electric urban blues flavour. Wolf's enormous presence, confidence and use of evocative images of America seem to have informed Waits writing and performance style. Segrest and Hoffman write about Wolf's best known song, "Smokestack Lightin'":

> Saying "Smokestack Lightin'" was a song about a train is like saying *Citizen Kane* was a movie about a sled. It was Wolf's single greatest recording, distilling into one unforgettable performance everything that made him unique. A propulsive one-chord vamp...it was a pastiche of ancient blues lines and train references, timeless and evocative, as American as could be. It wasn't so much a song as a mood: insubstantial as a smoke ring melodically and lyrically, yet gigantic as a gathering storm in rhythm and power. Wolf's voice, harp, and conviction made it one of the great songs of the '50s—and it might just as well have been the 1850s.[57]

With *Rain Dogs*, Waits reaches the same level of evoking timeless Americana and creating a powerful mood with limited harmonic and melodic materials.

Captain Beefheart was also heavily influenced by Howlin' Wolf among other blues singers, including Richard Berry, Muddy Waters, Charley Patton and Blind Willie Johnson, and as Courrier writes: "Beefheart isn't so much an inheritor as he is inhabited.

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[56] Ibid., 238–239

[57] James Segrest and Mark Hoffman, *Moanin' At Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), 126.

He doesn't suggest influences; he demonstrates pure possession."[58] Also, Beefheart absorbs all the style elements of urban blues and somehow blends them with other disparate elements one would least expect, mixing folk and avant-garde without prejudice or pretense—an artistic impulse taken on by Waits. On Captain Beefheart's magnum opus, the Frank Zappa produced *Trout Mask Replica* (1969), Courrier writes:

> *Trout Mask Replica*...has a way of spurning simple, or easy categorization. Throughout its twenty-eight tracks, the album mixes and combines various genres of music, including Delta blues, free jazz and expressionist lyricism, and does it at the speed of a Cuisinart. The record is a scrapbook collection of songs and poems, impishly acted out with Dadaist abandon and jack-in-the-box hijinks, performed with jagged rhythms and sharp conflicting atonal melodies.[59]

One critic calls Waits "the true heir to Captain Beefheart" and Jay Jacobs goes so far as to call *Swordfishtrombones* "somewhat of a tribute to Captain Beefheart" that features "some obvious Captain Beefheart echoes."[60] Though Waits claims never to have heard Captain Beefheart before becoming acquainted with his wife Kathleen Brennan's vast record collection, the connection to Beefheart's music was quick and strong; Waits said, "Once you've heard Beefheart it's hard to wash him out of your clothes...It stains, like coffee or blood."[61] Kessel provides a good description of the musical elements that helped shape Waits' direction leading up to *Swordfishtrombones*:

> As well, at this time Waits also turned his attention toward the truculent and obstinately unconventional Captain Beefheart, who had released numerous brilliantly eclectic albums and whose strange and even dissonant fusion of blues, avant-garde, and classical forms and styles encouraged Waits to also push the musical envelope. Waits's passion for imperfection and grit began to flourish in his music...[62]

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[58] Kevin Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 33 1/3 (New York: Continuum, 2007), 71.
[59] Ibid., 15.
[60] Andy Gill, "Tom Waits: Bone Machine," *Q* (October 1992) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-bone-machine (accessed September 11, 2011); Jacobs, *Wild Years,*116.
[61] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 277.
[62] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 26.

**Blue Collar Rock**

Bruce Springsteen is the only real contemporary of Waits who has an influential presence on *Rain Dogs*. The two were lumped into a group of early-seventies singer-songwriters unofficially vying for the title of "the *new* Dylan,"[63] and they indeed share many similarities: a penchant for storytelling, a decidedly masculine subject-position in their writing and personas (though they have each focused on disparate aspects of masculinity) and above all an interest in the stories of working class Americans. Some common themes in the songwriters' oeuvres are the unattainable American dream, unrequited love, criminality and labour, and they share some key literary and musical lineage. Santoro writes:

> Like the strain of American populists he springs from, Springsteen has always seen this country as a dichotomy, the Promised Land that waits within the dream of This Hard Land. Originally inspired by what he has called "class-conscious pop records" like the Animals' 1960s hits "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" and "It's My Life" ("I'd listen…and I'd say to myself: 'That's My life, that's my life!' They said something to me about my own experience of exclusion."), during the 1970s he delved into Flannery O'Connor and John Steinbeck, William Carlos Williams and John Ford, country music ("a very class-conscious music") and Guthrie, Walker Percy, and Robert Frank.[64]

Waits and Springsteen have also expressed mutual respect for each other's songwriting. Springsteen did this by covering Waits' song "Jersey Girl" on the b-side of his hit single "Cover Me" from the monumental album *Born in the USA* (1984). Humphries describes Waits' reaction:

> He was duly grateful, and not just for the cash. Waits had long been a Springsteen fan, and genuinely appreciated the accolade from a songwriting peer..."God, I love his songs, I wish I had written 'Meeting Across The River.' His early songs are like little black-and-white films. Things like 'Wild Billy's Circus Story' were real well crafted. He's got a great visual sense, a great balance.'"[65]

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[63] Humphries, *The Many Lifes of Tom Waits*, 138.
[64] Santoro, *Highway 61 Revisited*, 230.
[65] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 138.

Of course, Waits also expressed his appreciation by writing and recording *Rain Dog's* track "Downtown Train," which has been called "the greatest song Bruce Springsteen never wrote."[66]

Springsteen is one among many other rock, blues and country artists who have influenced Waits and who, significantly, represent the hegemony of masculinity in popular music, a cultural ideology that has implications for musical genre, instrumentation, production, technique and other visual and aural signifiers. "Masculine" genres such as rock, "hardcore" country, and blues performed by men are often perceived as more authentic and meaningful that "feminine" genres such as teen-pop.[67] It is important to recognize that masculinity is as performative and constructed as femininity, despite a widespread tendency to perceive masculinity as natural and absolute. Jarman-Ivens notes,

> sonic gestures *become* codified, having gendered meanings ascribed to them over a period of time and generated through discursive networks, and those meanings are mutable according to the cultural, and musical context of those gestures, and the subsequent contexts into which they are constantly reinscribed. Clearly, there are multiple ways in which genders are constructed, formed, performed, problematized, and negotiated within and between music genres, taking into consideration visual and aural, verbal and nonverbal coding of genders.[68]

Electric guitar, dry or "lo-fi" production, and unadorned melodic phrases (absence of melisma) are just a few of the aural characteristics—shared by Waits and those who have influenced him—that have come to signify maleness (and by extension authenticity) in American popular music.

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[66] Kopf, "Tom Waits: *Rain Dogs* (Island)."

[67] Freya Jarman-Ivens, ed., *Oh Boy!: Masculinities and Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3.

[68] Ibid., 10–11.

**Harry Partch**

Waits was first exposed to the music and ideas of composer Harry Partch through his friend and member of the Harry Partch Ensemble, Francis Thumm, who collaborated as arranger and performer on many *Swordfishtrombones* tracks. Waits describes his impression of the composer: "Partch was an American hobo and the instruments he made were all built from things that he essentially found on the side of the road, not literally but figuratively. He dismantled and rebuilt his own versions of the whole concept of music and its purpose, but I just like the sounds he makes."[69]

One aspect of Partch's work that seems to have had a particular impact on Waits' Island recordings is his inventiveness with regards to musical instruments. Kessel notes, "Partch's music was unplayable by anyone else as he created his own 43-tones-to-the-octave system and used his own homemade instruments such as the Chromelodeon, the Kithara, and many others constructed from found items, bottles, and hubcaps."[70] Partch's musical compositions and the corporeal dimension that they embody are intimately linked to the instruments that Partch invented to serve his creative purposes. Bob Gilmore writes,

> Partch's work is…inseparable from his own handmade ensemble, the visual aspect of which, moreover, is important to the impact of his work in performance and was central to its evolution. The layout of blocks or strings or found objects on the instruments was determined projections of the relationships within Partch's microtonal tuning system—projections of interval and scale patterns that demanded new geometric forms of their own. The often large physical spaces occupied by the playing areas of the instruments calls for a bodily awareness and grace from the player that is almost choreographic, an antidote to the usual comportment of performers on the concert platform.[71]

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[69] Pouncey, "Swordfish Out of Water: Tom Waits."
[70] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 25.
[71] Bob Gilmore, *Harry Partch: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2–3.

Gilmore mentions microtonality and corporeality as the predominant preoccupations that drove Partch to invent new instruments, and the materials that he used varied from re-appropriated objects to exotic and beautiful natural materials:

> bamboo from the Philippines, Japan, San Diego; American redwood, Brazilian rosewood, African padouk, eucalyptus, sitka spruce; light bulbs, bottles, guitar strings, Pyrex bowls, brass cartridge shells, hubcaps. The collected ensemble looked like the artifacts of some imaginary ethnic group, a compost of allusions to flower stems, tendons, human sexual organs, claws, stamens, dismembered limbs, petals.[72]

The "found" aspect of many of these materials indicates an impulse to salvage and reuse the refuse of others, an activity one could surmise sprung from Partch's experiences traveling as a hobo during the Great Depression—a detail that, no doubt, must have appealed to Waits, who so often draws on images and themes related to itinerancy, and who himself has developed the same habits of appropriation (both of materials and musical style). Most importantly, these diverse materials produce unique and novel sounds to ears accustomed to traditional instruments of Western art and popular music. Also, throughout Waits' career, he has favored corporeality and striven for real texture and space on his records, rather than use digital instruments and effects. In the forward of a book about experimental musical instruments that features a chapter on Partch, Waits writes:

> Although I can't fix a toilet to save my life, the hardware store has developed more pull for me than the music store. I always bring a couple of mallets and a violin bow with me—I get to hear things I've never seen before. All hardware items must be admired for their sonic properties: pitchforks, egg beaters, crowbars, fireplace grates, shovels, anvils, rebars (the structural reinforcement rods used in poured concrete), trash cans—the list goes on and on and they're all waiting to be played.[73]

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[72] Ibid., 1.

[73] Tom Waits, Forward to *Gravikords, Whirlies & Pyrophones: Experimental Musical Instruments*, Bart Hopkin (Roslyn, NY: Ellipsis Arts, 1996), v.

Upon visiting a Partch Ensemble concert, Waits was quite taken by the Cloud Chamber Bowls, "a series of Pyrex bowls suspended in a frame" and by the "many kinds of marimba Partch devised and built for his music. The vibrophonic sounds of these percussive/melodic instruments—beloved also of Beefheart...suggested something at once exotic and strange, a world away from the jazz/R&B instrumentation [Waits had] relied on for so long"[74] Of course, the marimba is used to great effect on a number of *Rain Dogs* tracks, including "Singapore," "Clap Hands," "Diamonds & Gold," "Rain Dogs," and "9th & Hennepin."

**Kurt Weill**

It may seem odd that Waits, who has mainly been influenced by the rich array of popular music that America has produced through the twentieth century, would turn to a composer of operas from Weimar Berlin for an infusion of style, but interestingly, the works produced by Kurt Weill in collaboration with librettist Bertold Brecht embody a preoccupation with American culture, and the themes dealt with are remarkably similar to the same ones that have preoccupied Waits for decades. To understand this, a brief discussion of the cultural context that gave rise to the famous Weill/Brecht operas is in order.

In 1920, Berlin annexed its surrounding suburbs, creating a metropolis of almost four million citizens—the third largest after New York and London—and quickly became the political, intellectual and cultural capital of Germany:

> As Germany's largest city, as the capital of Prussia and the Empire, Berlin came to engross not merely government offices and party headquarters, but the leaders of culture, at the expense of the provinces. Other major cities like Munich, Frankfort, or Hamburg struggled to keep excellence in their universities, took

[74] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 281.

> pride in special institutes, cultivated continued high quality in their theatres and liveliness in their Bohemian quarters. But Berlin was a magnet...The old Berlin had been impressive, the new Berlin was irresistible. To go to Berlin was the aspiration of the composer, the journalist, the actor; with its superb orchestras, its hundred and twenty newspapers, its forty theatres, Berlin was the place for the ambitious, the energetic, the talented. Wherever they started, it was in Berlin that they became, and Berlin that made them, famous.[75]

As Ethan Mordden writes, "[o]ther Germans made a policy of loathing Berlin. It was ugly, they said. It was rude, immoral, criminal, its people always hurrying to some slimy assignation, its business life a black market. '*Alles Schwindel!*' (Everything's a cheat!) was the gleeful cry of popular songs of late Weimar, in 1931..."[76] Also, the army and law courts were complacent to right-wing aggression and terrorism, giving rise to a radicalized art world obsessed with "monster's and their victims, as if daily life were a horror film; and with the glory and despair of the Western Front, because the war about nothing *hadn't* ended."[77]

Modernism was in the air, but rather than heading in the expressionist direction of the Second Viennese School, though he had the adequate training and abilities as a composer, Weill chose to partner up with Bertold Brecht, a playwright and theatre director who was interested in "the smashing of the Wagner cult" by alienating his audiences through a number of tactics, including distracting set changes, plot spoilers, not allowing his actors to *act*, and utilizing music as "self-contained intrusions into the flow of the script."[78] The music itself—in particular that of *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera*—has elements of cabaret, American dance rhythms, jazz and tango, with melodies that are "jagged, wheedling, peremptory"; Weill is a composer who writes "classical in a

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[75] Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 128.
[76] Ethan Mordden, *Love Song: The Lives of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012), 39–40.
[77] Ibid., 47.
[78] Ibid., 88.

popular way, or who writes popular with a classical technique, depending on how one views it."[79] Weill was heavy influenced by the jazz that began to make its way over to Germany after the First World War, and his musical style and choice of instrumentation was affected by this:

> "jazz" quickly became an emblem of the openess and modernity of Weimar culture. And the hot new style from Germany's conquerors began to infiltrate all kinds of musical performances, from revue and cabaret to the concert hall and the opera house. As such jazz-based elements as syncopation, improvisation, a greater use of wind instruments, and a driving percussive beat mixed with native expressionist and atonal idioms, a fusion was born that was to prepare the way for Kurt Weill's music-theatre hybrids.[80]

It is not surprising that Waits would be attracted to a serious composer who manages to harness a number of popular styles and set them into an operatic score. Also, the characters in these works are similar to those found in a Tom Waits song: beggars, prostitutes and criminals (notably, *The Threepenny Opera* is based on John Gay's eighteenth century opera *The Beggar's Opera*). But interestingly, Waits wasn't aware of the German-American composer until people approached him after the release of *Swordfishtrombones*, suggesting that he must be listening to Weill, and he decided he should investigate, eventually discovering *Happy End*, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *Mahagonny*.[81] By the year *Rain Dogs* was release, Waits was asked to participate in a Kurt Weill tribute album called *Lost In The Stars* produced by Hal Wilner, contributing a version of Weill's "What Keeps Mankind Alive?" from *The Threepenny Opera*.[82]

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[79] Ibid., 89.

[80] Forster Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway* (New YorkL Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 18.

[81] Hoskyns, "What's He Building In There? An Interview with Tom Waits."

[82] Cath Carroll, *Tom Waits* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000), 38.

# Chapter Two: Musical Detail and Analyses

In this chapter, I deal with the elements of musical style of each piece on the album in turn. Describing the tempo, time signature, tonality, instrumentation and texture of each ensemble along with more detailed elements such as instrument timbre, playing techniques, rhythmic features and melodic contour, I will identify the variety of genres that appear. I will draw comparisons between elements of style present in this work and pieces performed by the highly influential artists discussed in the previous chapter to illustrate Waits ability as an artist to absorb a wide range of music and incorporate elements of it in his own oeuvre. Waits said about *Rain Dogs*: "While I'm writing and while I'm recording, everything you seem to pick up during the process somehow ends up in there. You know, it's like a big vat, you just start throwing things into it."[83]

## 1—"Singapore"

The opening seconds of the album's first piece "Singapore" gives the listener a powerful sense of the breadth and uniqueness of what is to come on the following eighteen tracks, and it signals a great departure from the artist's previous work, venturing even further into uncharted musical depths than Waits had explored on *Swordfishtrombones*. Though the overall atmosphere evoked is sinister and otherwordly, the harmonic and rhythmic structures are relatively simple. I identify this piece as a polka due to the 4/4 time signature at an insistent 100 beats per minute, consisting of bass drum on each beat alternated with muted snare on each eighth-note off beat, providing the

[83] Michael Tearson, Interview with Tom Waits, CBC Stereo, 1985, *Tom Waits on Tom Waits: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by Paul Maher Jr., 168–180 (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 173.

typical *oompah* rhythm of many polkas. Meanwhile, the harmony is firmly grounded in B minor and does not stray from primary diatonic chords (i, iv, V7 and the III that appears only once in each B section). The musical form is [intro]AABABA, wherein the A section is a truncated ten-bar blues progression and the B section, as is typical of many American popular standards begins on the subdominant (iv) and ends on the dominant (V7), however in this case the penultimate chord is $^{b}$III which stands in stark contrast to the overall minor sonority of the piece.

While the form, harmonic structure and rhythmic quality of "Singapore" appear relatively pedestrian, there are a number of features that contribute to the piece's uniqueness. Some of these include the instrumentation, polyphonic texture, angular melodic structures and *concrète* sounds. The ensemble on this track consists of voice, bass, drums and percussion, electric guitar, trombone and marimba. While within the context of Waits' oeuvre the trombone and marimba are relatively recent additions, the marimba having made its debut appearance on *Swordfishtrombones* (1983), this combination of timbres was unheard of on the soundscape of American popular music of the mid-eighties, which was dominated by synthesizers and gated drums. Also, Partch's model of inventiveness and use of found-objects as instruments seems to have influenced Waits' profoundly. Among the percussion used on "Singapore" is a chest of drawers that wound up as a pile of splinters on the studio floor.[84]

Semi-improvised polyphonic textures occur on many *Rain Dogs* tracks, and "Singapore" is a perfect flagship representation of what to expect on later tracks. Figure 1 provides an illustration of this polyphony. The marimba, trombone and double bass each play their own respective ostinato passages while the two electric guitars take more

[84] Ibid., 311.

freedom. Played by Marc Ribot and Chris Spedding, these guitar lines set the bar high in terms of highly chromatic and angular melodic phrases. In the first guitar's repeated rhythm in measures1–3 of this passage, note the emphasized downward leaps of sixths. More striking still is the combined angular riffs in the fourth measure, consisting of leaps of major and minor sevenths and a diminished fifth.

Finally, the closing seconds of the piece (2:23–2:46) include the atmospheric sample of what sounds like an ocean storm, complete with rain, wind and rolling thunder. A metallic scraping sound—what I surmise to be a plectrum slowly pulled down the length of a bronze-wound string—evokes a vaguely nautical mechanism such as a tightened rope or anchor chains.

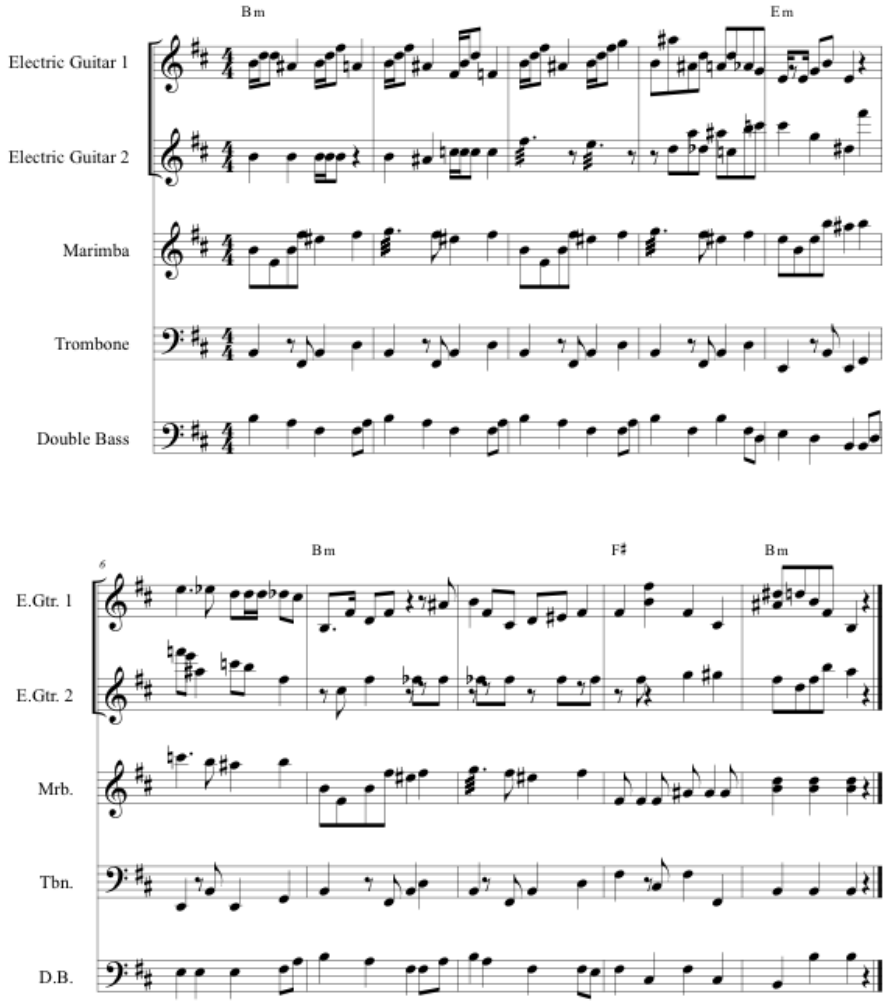



**Figure 1. "Singapore": ensemble polyphony (0:30–0:52)**

## 2—"Clap Hands"

"Clap Hands" is somewhat of a companion piece to the "deranged sea shanty"[85] that precedes it. Also in B minor and in 4/4 time, "Clap Hands" stumbles forward at a far slower 70 beats per minute. The piece follows a similar form as "Singapore": AAABAA'BA[coda] (A' signifying a guitar solo over the A section). In this case, each A section includes an eight bar verse/refrain, while the B sections are five bar bridges. The

[85] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 129.

coda is simply a vamp on the refrain portion of A. The piece is not only more laid back than "Singapore" rhythmically, but it is also sparser melodically and harmonically. Waits' sings in a quasi-monotone whisper, and his range only covers a perfect fourth. Meanwhile, the harmony is rather static, only alternating from the minor tonic (i) to $^{b}$VI during the refrain and bridge. The limited harmonic motion contributes to an overall claustrophobic effect, while the conspicuous omission of a dominant chord leaves the harmony devoid of cadential resolution, which creates a meandering effect—there is no feeling of departure or arrival, no beginning or end.

The instrumentation on this track includes voice, bass, archtop acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and percussion (muted marimba and temple blocks). The blend of percussion instruments is perhaps the piece's most unique feature. The marimba and temple blocks created a texture that seems like slowed-down syncopated Afro-Cuban beat, but the space that these sounds occupy in the track as well as the specific timbre and range of them give the sound a mimetic quality – that of nautical apparatus: buoys, anchors, bells and heavy chains striking the side of a vessel. Meanwhile, a glassy bell sound, with its sustain and pure timbre evocative of a Gamelan orchestra.

Identifying the generic signature of this piece is more challenging than others on the album. Though it contains elements of Afro-Cuban, Gamelan and a sense of nautical meandering, I think that the vocal cadence and the accented quarter-note off-beats throughout the ensemble is linked to the aesthetic of the prison labour songs recorded by Alan Lomax.

One last feature that stands out on this track is the electric guitar solo by Marc Ribot, which "sound[s] like it was beamed down from a passing space station."[86] Indeed, the sharp and lightly distorted timbre, angular and spacious melody and dry production quality of Ribot's solo do put it on another planet when compared to the bombastic contemporary mainstream rock guitar styles of Van Halen and his disciples or to the smoother lines strived for by most blues and jazz guitarists. Though Hoskyns suggests that "Marc Ribot…seem[s] to play with a flagrant disregard for the right notes,"[87] I believe the solo to be very well structured and purposeful. Figure 2 is an excerpt from the middle portion of Marc Ribot's solo. Ribot takes advantage of the moment before the first shift to G to unleash a characteristically angular and dissonant line. In addition to the many leaps of dissonant intervals, the scale tones as related to the local harmony of B minor proceed as scales degrees 5–13–7–b13–b5, and he arrives on an accented scale degree 4 over the G. Also, the riff in the third measure of this excerpt strikingly suggests a whole-tone harmony. Ribot's energetic and thoughtful melodic contributions are heard throughout *Rain Dogs* and are invaluable to the album's unique aesthetic quality.

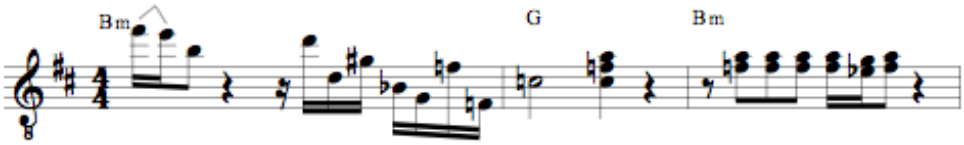



**Figure 2. "Clap Hands": guitar solo excerpt (2:16–2:26)**

Hoskyns describes "Clap Hands" as "even more jarringly percussive and tuneless [than "Singapore"], its clanky loping rhythm disrupted only by a wiry solo from Ribot. There was precious little melodic flesh on the bones of a song like this, which functioned

[86] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 163.
[87] Barney Hoskyns, "Variations on Tom Waits" *The Independent* (May 1999) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/variations-on-tom-waits- (accessed September 11, 2011).

as an extreme counterpoint to the lush passion of Waits' discarded ballad style."[88] I agree with Hoskyns observation that "Clap Hands" has very little in common with the ballad style Waits had mastered on his studio albums of the 1970s. However, Waits hasn't at this point abandoned the ballad entirely, as will come to light below.

**3—"Cemetery Polka"**

After the relative respite of "Clap Hands" comes one of the most challenging and original pieces on the album, another raucous polka with the foreboding title "Cemetery Polka." The rhythmic character of this piece is more march-like than "Singapore"—a cut time signature (2/2) at 83 beats per minute, however the parade drum that it features heavily falls on the first eighth-note off-beat and then squarely on beat two, providing an eccentric rhythmic feel for the chaotic polyphony that ensues. Kessel describes the pieces instrumentation and texture as "trombone, electric guitar, Farfisa organ, wood blocks, cymbals, accordion, double bass, and parade drums, all with their own seemingly random and independent musical lines until the unison crash on the very last note of the piece."[89] This description captures the overall effect of chaos and unease of the song, but I hope to highlight more the specific musical elements that cause this effect.

The "two-feel" bass line is doubled by the trombone, a feature that gives the piece an overwhelmingly Weillesque flavour (a good example of this is found on the "Kanonensong" from *The Threepenny Opera*). Here the bass motion is given a twist by moving from the tonic to the $^{b}$VI rather than the expected V. This gives the piece a similar lack of harmonic direction as "Clap Hands," by delaying the dominant chord's appearance until the fourth bar. This song also happens to feature the only harmonic

[88] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 311.
[89] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 23–24.

modulations on the entire album, further enhancing the harmonic ambiguity. The form of the piece is AA'BAA'A"BAA' (A' indicating a modulation to Fm and A" indicating a modulation to $B^b$ minor; B sections are instrumental breaks). First heard in C minor, the main theme (A) abruptly shifts to F minor. This shift between closely related keys happens twice, until the same theme is then heard in $B^b$ minor, creating a heightened sense of tension due to both the distance from the home key and the higher register of Waits' straining vocals. Interestingly, after a return to C minor, the theme is last heard in F minor. This clearly adds to the harmonic ambiguity of the piece and creates a vague sense in the listener that a change has occurred—the repeated modulation has a meandering effect, while beginning in C minor and ending in F minor gives one the feeling that a certain distance has been traveled, that we are no longer where we started.

Jacobs points to the "German music-hall feel" of this and other tracks on *Rain Dogs*, and how it "prompted a lot of people to conclude that Waits had been influenced Kurt Weill."[90] Though "Cemetery Polka" and "Singapore" have rather different surface rhythms, they share the same underlying feel that suggests a connection to cabaret-influenced music of Kurt Weill, particularly his early stage works *Mahagonny* and *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*). Several aspects of this piece are strikingly similar in style and effect to one of the most feted songs from *Mahagonny*, "Alabama-Song." For one, the main themes are both built around a repeated three-note minor scale passage. Hirsch describes the main theme of "Alabama-Song" (see Figure 3):

> monotonous, absurd; the notes, repeated over and over, seem to weave back and forth in their confined space, to stumble drunkenly over each other. The band accompanies this with an unvarying oompah. Yet, overall, these verses have an unforgettable sound because of Weill's harmony, which alternates between two

[90] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 129.

> great chordal blocks, C minor and C-sharp minor, that shift in lockstep with the two three-note melodies.[91]

The "Cemetery Polka" melody, as shown in Figure 4, is of a similar character as that of "Alabama-Song," and there is equal harmonic ambiguity in each piece—after the chromatic shifts the occur in the verses, "Alabama-Song" jumps to a bright sounding G major that in turn undergoes its own mysterious modulations.

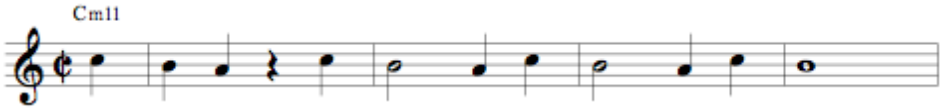



**Figure 3. "Alabama-Song": main theme**

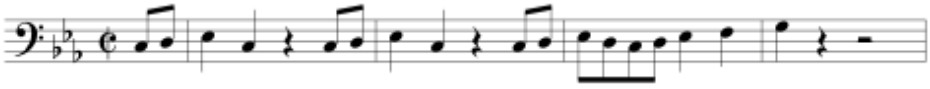
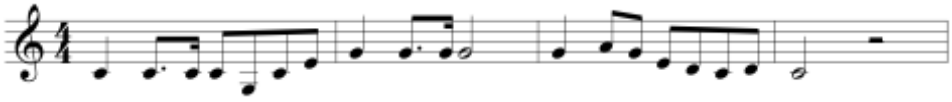


**Figure 4. "Cemetery Polka": main theme**

Chromaticism and polyphony in "Cemetery Polka" also contribute to sense of chaos, especially during instrumental breaks such as the one that occurs from 1:10–1:21. Hoskyns description of this piece as "a mutant stomp offset by the unholy blend of Waits' Farfisa organ and Bill Schimmel's accordion" seems appropriate.[92] I hear an allusion to circus music in Bill Schimmel's phrase (see Figure 5), which evokes the image of an acrobat tumbling through the air, suspended above a chaotic scene below. While the phrase is clearly in C major, not straying from major pentatonic, the rest of the ensemble is indulging in complete freedom from tonal centre, making the heavy-handed tonality of the C major phrase seem absurdly clownish in contrast.



[91] Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage*, 28.
[92] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 312.

**Figure 5. "Cemetery Polka": accordion figure (1:16–1:21)**

## 4—"Jockey Full Of Bourbon"

While the cultural and artistic genealogy of the previous three pieces analyzed is extremely varied and complex, there is general agreement that "Jockey Full Of Bourbon" is a Rhumba.[93] In a 4/4 time signature at 162 beats per minute, the rhythm is characterized by a steadily repetitive shaker, syncopated congas and, most of all, the characteristic tumbao bass pattern as performed by Larry Taylor (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. "Jockey Full Of Bourbon": tumbao bass pattern**

Considering these three aspects of the piece, the rhumba is clearly the foundation of the piece, though other stylistic elements transcend the Afro-Cuban genre. Marc Ribot's electric guitar, not a traditional Afro-Cuban instrument, has a Tex-Mex/rockabilly quality to its timbre, however the descending chromatic passages in quarter-note-triplets brings it back into Afro-Cuban territory (see Figure 7).

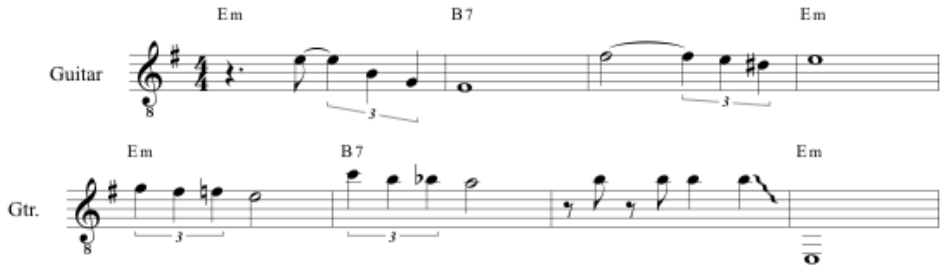



**Figure 7. "Jockey Full Of Bourbon": guitar solo (0:00–0:11)**

[93] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*; Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*; Jacobs, *Wild Years*.

Ribot weaves similar lines in counterpoint with Waits vocals throughout the track while Waits' guitar chugs syncopated chords subtly underneath; it is difficult even to distinguish the tone of Waits' crunchily distorted electric guitar from Ralph Carney's clipped baritone saxophone accents. One becomes acutely aware of Carney's presence only during the closing fade-out when he finally begins a solo break of his own. Interestingly, the saxophone—which had been a staple instrument on every one of Waits' first seven albums—were conspicuously absent from *Swordfishtrombones*. Hoskyns writes: "While saxophones had been banished from *Swordfishtrombones*, on *Rain Dogs* they returned as squalling, almost ugly-sounding beasts, closer to the post-bop free jazz of Albert Ayler or Rahsaan Roland Kirk than to the languid sounds of Al Cohn or Teddy Edwards."[94] Indeed, Carney's tone and style is steeped in New York City post-bop, adding an extra hint of cosmopolitan flavor at the song's conclusion.

**5—"Tango Till They're Sore"**

From a nightclub in Havana (or possible New York) the listener is transported to Storyville. Here, the ensemble is spare: voice, piano, double bass and trombone. While the title of this song has lead Kessel to falsely identify it as a tango,[95] there isn't a single musical element in it that gives a nod to the Argentine genre. Rather, Waits' piano performance and loose vocal style invokes a New Orleans' red-light district brothel of the early twentieth century, an effect largely enhanced by Bob Funk's trombone contribution, which fits right into a traditional small-combo jazz aesthetic characterized by collective improvisation and counterpoint. The style Waits draws from in particular is New Orleans stride piano, of which one of the earliest well-known practitioners was Jelly Roll Morton.

[94] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 312.
[95] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 24.

Morton's version of "Hesitation Blues" as recorded by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress is a fine exemplar of the style, which involves lightly syncopated melodic lines played by the right hand and an alternating bass note-chord pattern on each beat of a usually moderate 4/4 time signature. Of course, stride piano became a part of many later bebop and post-bop pianist's creative palettes as well. Art Tatum and Thelonious Monk are among the most influential jazz pianists who employed stride technique. Figure 8 shows the opening to his rendition of the standard "I'm Confessin' (That I Love You)" from his 1965 record *Solo Monk*. The characteristic alternating bass-chord pattern of the left hand is broken up by a walking chromatic descent at the change from $A^{b}6/9$ to $Fmin^{6}$—a common practice in stride—and the melody is syncopated, the goal-note of each phrase landing on off-beats. Waits' take on stride is more sparse, to be sure, but the stylistic elements listed above are all present (Figure 9).

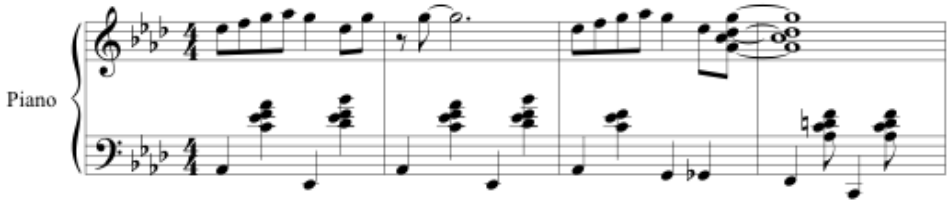



**Figure 8. "I'm Confessin' (That I Love You)": opening (0:00–0:09)**

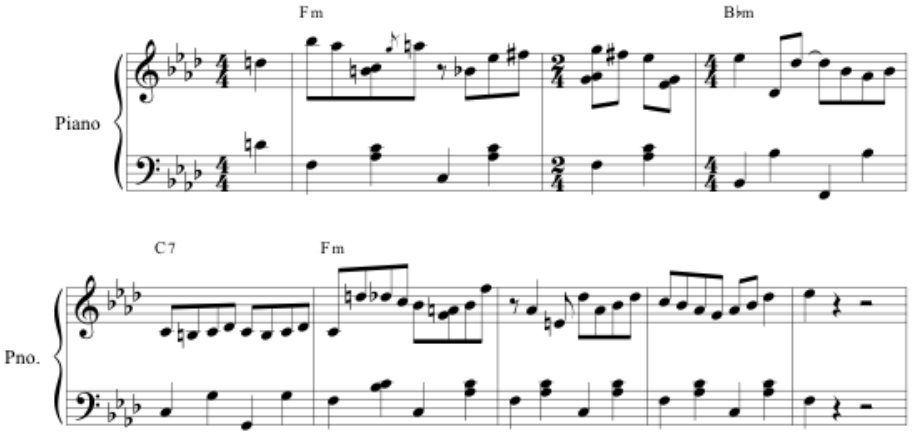



**Figure 9. "Tango Till They're Sore": piano intro (0:00–0:19)**

While Kessel may have missed the mark identifying the genre of the piece, she astutely observes that "the piano part [is] exemplary of Tom Waits' incipient affinity for the strained beauty of mistakes and distractions."[96] This can be observed by the several apparent slips that result in grace notes and double stops. These misplaced notes suggest much about the artist's willingness to deviate from perfection, yet another trait Waits shares with Monk, who strove for originality of expression more so than a clean execution, as is evident from the brief excerpt from his solo later in "I'm Confessin'" (Figure 10), which shows Monk making almost identical double-stop slips that Waits makes twenty years later.

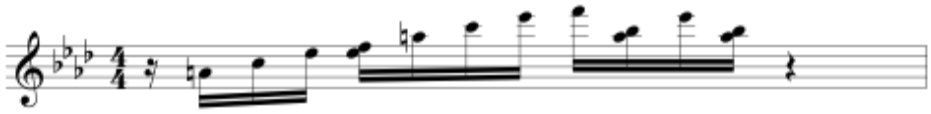


**Figure 10. "I'm Confessin' (That I Love You)": solo passage (1:38–1:40)**

## 6—"Big Black Mariah"

"Big Black Mariah" is a steadily-grooving urban blues shuffle, featuring voice, two electric guitars, bass and drum-kit. At a moderate tempo of 125 beats per minute in 4/4 time, the signature rhythmic feature is the heavily swung eighths. Equally aligned with the blues genre is the harmonic content, which contains the typical $I_7$, $IV_7$ and $V_7$ chords. The form of the tune isn't a typical twelve-bar form, but rather a vamp on $I_7$ over the verses (A) and refrain (A') and a bridge (B) that starts on $IV_7$ and ends on $V_7$ (incidentally, the same pattern followed on "Singapore"); the overall form then, is [intro]AA'BA'BA'[solo over A]BA'[A and fade]. Despite this deviation from the more

[96] Ibid., 29.

ubiquitous twelve-bar form, the minor pentatonic and mixolydian modalities employed place the tune firmly within the blues genre. Figure 11 shows Larry Taylor's bass line, which is quite typical of a blues shuffle—simple and sparse with one heavily accented syncopation to emphasize the shuffle rhythm.

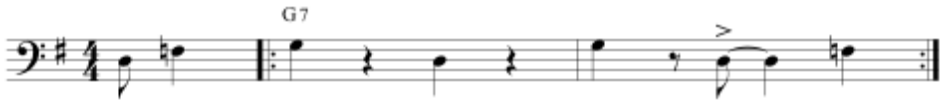



**Figure 11. "Big Black Mariah" bass line**

The timbre and articulation of the electric guitar performances are also undeniably steeped in the blues style. These guitars are clear and glassy sounding while still driven enough to push the tube amplifiers to light distortion. This is a sound particular to single-coil electric guitars (usually Fender Stratocasters or Telecasters—popular models that were introduced in the fifties) played through relatively low-watt Fender "tweed" amplifiers (referencing the lacquered tweed-encased pine enclosures). These amps were also developed in the fifties and were known for distorting at medium to high volumes. Amplifier companies later developed higher-watt amps to offer players more clean "headroom" (cleaner tone at higher volumes), but the early Fender tweeds have remained highly sought-after by players desiring their specific over-driven tone, primarily by blues and rock practitioners. This track is the first appearance of famous Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, who brings much bona fide blues playing to the tune. Richards use of string-bending and bottleneck slide are typical features of this tradition of playing. Richards is known for primarily playing Fender Telecasters and Fender Deluxe amplifiers.

One element that stands outside the typical blues style is Stephen Hodges drumming. Often a blues drummer will play shuffled eighth notes on the hi-hat and a

strong backbeat (quarter-note beats two and four) on the snare, but Hodges elects to dispense with cymbals and pounds out a two-bar phrase primarily on deep toms with a heavily accented second beat on the first bar. The absence of cymbals and overall dry production of the drums has the effect of leaving a lot of space in the tonal spectrum for Waits' voice and the two electric guitars to fill.

More than anywhere else on the album, Waits' truly seems to be channeling Howlin' Wolf's vocal style on this track. Wolf had a sandpaper inflected baritone which was full of character—truly lived-in—but it was also flexible enough to reach a high, much smoother falsetto. This is perhaps best demonstrated in his best-known song "Smokestack Lighting, " which features a plaintive falsetto moan at the tail end of each gruffly rendered verse. Waits opens "Big Black Mariah" with a similar falsetto howl, before descending into his own, slightly deeper baritone for the verses.

**7—"Diamonds & Gold"**

With "Diamonds & Gold" Waits returns to the signature *Rain Dogs* combination of Michael Blair's clanky, muted marimba and percussion (this time a blend of gingerly thudding toms, relentlessly tick-tocking temple-blocks and stumbling tambourine) and Marc Ribot's glassy electric guitar counterpoint to Waits' reedy voice. The bass and banjo offerings from Taylor and Musso are subtly mixed, the latter a barely audible steely breath. The first piece on the album in 3/4 time, at a moderate 118 beats per minute,

Hoskyns describes the song as "a Weill-esque waltz,"[97] and whether or not Waits was consciously paying musical homage to Kurt Weill in this piece, the harmonic progression and form are informed by Waits' knowledge of American musicals and

[97] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 314.

standards, a knowledge that Waits and Weill most certainly have in common. Although Waits again alternates between minor tonic (i) and $^{b}$VI (the same major third descending root motion observed in "Clap Hands" and "Cemetery Polka"), dominant chords and authentic cadences are applied here in absolutely conventional ways. The piece follows a standard thirty two-bar form almost exactly, except the B and C sections are twice the normal length. The entire form is played twice through, with a four-bar introduction and a studio fade: [intro]ABCABC. As with standard practice, the first eight-bar phrase ends on the dominant ($V_7$) and the second eight-bar phrase ends on the tonic (i), the first chord of the B section is a subdominant functioning $^{b}$VI and the section ends on V, and the C section follows a similar binary pattern as the A section.

**8—"Hang Down Your Head"**

Some have drawn a comparison between "Hang Down Your Head" and the folk song "Tom Dooley," made famous by the Kingston Trio in 1958,[98] but I believe this to be a rather superficial connection as the similarities to the Appalachian murder ballad don't extend far beyond the shared lyrics. However, the song is the finest example of an "unaffected folk-rock ballad"[99] to be found on *Rain* Dogs, and it wouldn't be out of place on any of Waits' releases from the 1970s, although the tune does have an Irish-folk quality to it, possibly as a result of Waits' exposure to Irish music and culture upon his honeymoon travels there.

Notably, this is the first track on the album that is in a major key ($D^{b}$) over a 4/4 straight-eighth rock beat at 114 beats per minute. The harmony is strictly major and diatonic, consisting of I, ii, iii, IV, $V_7$ and vi. The song follows a basic Brill-building style

[98] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*; Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*.
[99] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 130.

verse–chorus form—[intro]AAB[solo over A]ABB[coda]; the introduction and coda are both four-bar vamps on the tonic ($D^b$) chord. The ensemble of voice, two electric guitars, bass, drums and pump organ play in a laidback and conventional rock manner. Even Marc Ribot's usually eccentric and angular lines are smoothed into a singable solo break built from major pentatonic material and featuring conventional double-stops of intervals of major thirds, fourths and fifths. The more unique aspects of this arrangement are, again, Stephen Hodges spacious and dry drum part and Waits' own pump organ, which adds a folk element to the song.

**9—"Time"**

Hoskyns calls this recording "an acoustic throwback to *Closing Time* and *Heart of Saturday Night*,"[100] Waits' first two studio records, and I'm inclined to agree that "Time" fits the same acoustic singer-songwriter genre; however, the lyrical content places this song outside the confessional camp of songs into which many tracks off of *Closing Time* fit. A companion piece to "Hang Down Your Head," "Time" is also a verse/chorus structured folk song in a major key (D) that, again, sounds connected to the folk music of the British Isles. More so than any other track on the album, "Time" is produced in such a way that draws the listener into an imagined performance space. The style and instrumentation also contribute to this effect. The arrangement of Waits' most unaffected and natural sounding vocal style, acoustic guitar, bass and accordion played in a casual and relaxed style—the players are rather free and loose with the tempo (approximately 88 beats per minute)—give the effect that the musicians are having an informal jam session

[100] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 315.

in a pub or at a *céili*.[101] Also, the chorus features an easily singable melody that repeats the title—virtually anyone could join in the singing of this chorus after one listening. The simple harmony and form of this song are perfectly aligned with Anglo folk song norms. The song contains only the I, IV and $V_7$ chords, and the binary form (AABAABAABB) is made of two eight-bar phrases: the verse (A section) ends with a half cadence (on $V_7$) and the chorus (B section) ends with a perfect authentic cadence.

**10—"Rain Dogs"**

While "Time" concludes the first side of the original vinyl record format with a moment of respite and reflection, "Rain Dogs" launches the listener back into the similar derelict atmosphere as "Singapore," "Cemetery Polka," and "Diamonds and Gold." Hoskyns describes the song: "Beginning with the flourish of Bill Schimmel's mittel-European accordion, 'Rain Dogs' soon settle[s] into another helping of gruff Kurt Weill expressionism."[102]

As with its companion pieces mentioned above, the form and harmonic content are not overly adventurous. Once again binary form is used ([Cadenza]ABABB), and the chord progression follows typical jazz-informed motion and sticks primarily to basic diatonic chords i, $ii^o$, iv, and $V_7$, but with the addition of a striking $^bII$ that adds intrigue and tension to the tail end of each of Waits' vocal phrases. This chord functions almost like a musical raised eyebrow to the unfolding narrative of the song.

"Rain Dogs" features the golden combination of angular—and especially staccato in this case—electric guitar from Marc Ribot, a relatively reserved marimba from

[101] Céili (Irish Gael.; Scottish Gael. céilidh): a traditional household gathering in Scotland, Ireland or emigrant communities worldwide involving songs, music and dance (Oxford Music Online: Céilidh).
[102] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 315.

Michael Blair, and the usual dryly produced, tom-heavy drum part from Stephen Hodges. Blair sometimes plays independent lines but they often intersect with the guitar and Waits' vocal melody to form heterophonic moments in the piece's texture. Added to this arrangement is Bob Funk's plaintiff trombone, which supplies a sweet tenor cantabile counterpoint to Waits' bellowing baritone melody.

**11—"Midtown (Instrumental)"**

"Midtown" is the most extreme stylistic standout on *Rain Dogs.* It is the first instrumental piece on the album—part big band shout chorus, part free jazz. The intensity of Ralph Carney's Uptown Horns arrangement is at the centre of this track which has been described as "a [Charles] Mingus troupe romping through rush-hour Manhattan,"[103] a "detour into 'Dragnet' turf,"[104] and like "the theme for a fifties cop show."[105] I especially hear a connection to the post-bop big band sound of Charles Mingus' 1959 album *Mingus Ah Um*, especially the up-tempo track "Boogie Stop Shuffle," which features a similar shout chorus as well as moments of collective improvisation among the horns that can be characterized as non-tonal wailing. I also hear the influence of leading free jazz saxophonists of the late-1950s and 1960s such as Ornette Coleman informing the improvised polyphony of this piece, despite the driving rhythm that gives a sense of structure and climax to "Midtown."

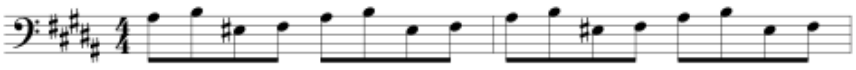


**Figure 12. "Midtown": bass ostinato**

[103] Ibid., 315.
[104] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 164.
[105] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 130.

**Figure 13. "Midtown": main theme (0:07–0:13)**

The piece is played at a briskly swinging 161 beats per minute in 4/4 time. The hard driving rhythm is lead by Larry Taylor's energetic bass ostinato, and its endless stream of accented chromatic lower-neighbouring tones to the root and fifth lay the ground for a high level of harmonic tension (see Figure 12). The entire harmonic structure of the piece is basically a vamp of $B_7^{\#9}$. After a five-bar intro, a portion of the horn section plays the main theme in a shout chorus (see Figure 13) while several saxophones squawk and wail independently. It all culminates in an eight measure crescendo of a sustained cluster of notes held by the shout chorus, and the relentless wailing of the saxophones.

### 12—"9th & Hennepin"

After the chaotic ruckus of "Midtown," Waits pulls the listener back down into a mood of quiet desolation with a "creepy soundscape...made up of Waits' dark piano notes, a percussive mix of metals and marimba, and a caterwauling mix of clarinet and bowed saw."[106] The song is rhythmically and harmonically sustained primarily by a two-measure marimba ostinato that outlines an A minor modality. It remains unaltered until a minor third motive is carried through a chromatically descending sequence which leads eventually to E minor (see Figure 15), later returning to A minor before the piece's conclusion. This ostinato figure is doubled by the bass, but in a rather slippery manner

[106] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 315.

wherein Greg Cohen steps in and out of sync with Michael Blair's marimba part, creating a heterophonic texture between the two instruments.

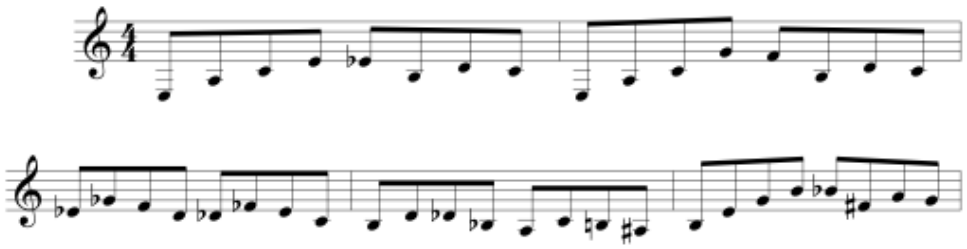


**Figure 14. "9th & Hennepin": marimba ostinato (0:56–1:13)**

Above this is an assortment of ghostly moans and rattles issuing from the bowed saw, clarinet, and metallic percussion, as well as a smattering of tinkling non-tonal piano phrases that, while not free atonality, sound like a page out of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. This all has a cinematic effect and contributes to a dark mood of isolation—a perfect setting for the images and characters that Waits introduces in a tired-voiced monologue.

**13—"Gun Street Girl"**

From dark tonal expressionism of the Second Viennese School, Waits shifts to the modal banjo-based folk ballad style of Appalachia. Waits banjo playing style is neither that of convention bluegrass picking in the Earl Scruggs tradition, nor is it frailing (or claw-hammer). Rather, Waits' playing is laid back (though at a relatively steady 131 beats per minute) and his tone dark and woody like that of Virginia coal miner and musician Dock Boggs, whose banjo style was influenced in part by the picking technique used in the blues. Figure 16 shows Waits' banjo part from the opening of the song (H indicates a hammer-on, a technique ubiquitous among banjo players and guitarists

wherein a rise in pitch is achieved by applying a fretting-hand finger to the fretboard abruptly, causing the string the vibrate).

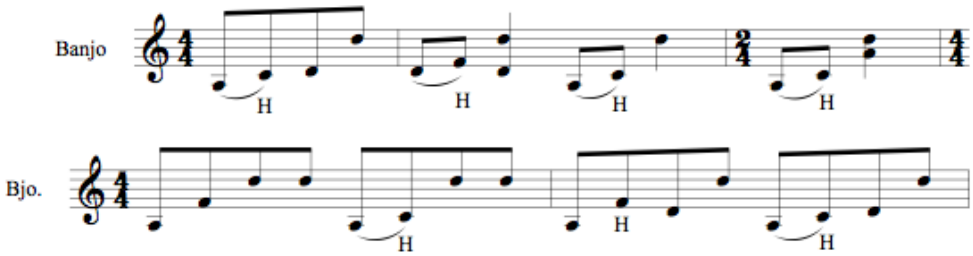



**Figure 15. "Gun Street Girl"—banjo (0:00–0:10)**

Comparing Waits' banjo part in "Gun Street Girl" to a Dock Bogg's performance of "Country Blues" (see Figure 17), there are a few striking similarities: the use of hammer-on as a technique of articulation, the flexible hypermeter, and the static and sparse nature of the harmonic content.

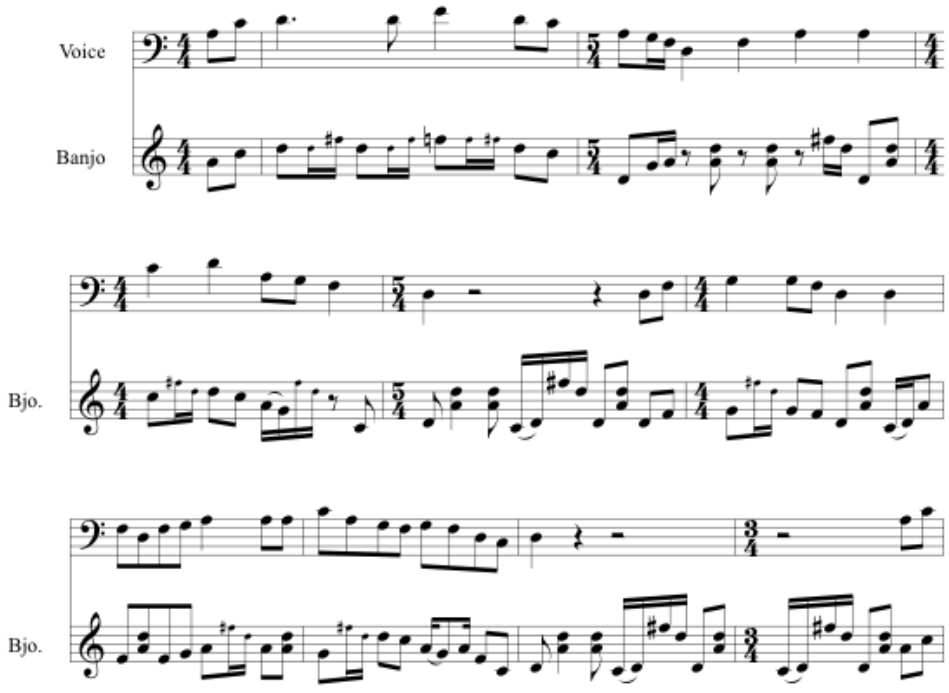



**Figure 16. "Country Blues" (Dock Boggs): vocal and banjo (0:00–0:24)**

Initially it seems that the form of this piece is strophic, as one might expect of a ballad of this nature, but after several verses Waits introduces a contrasting chorus that appears at two points (and is repeated a third time after a brief coda)—AAABAAAAAB[coda]B. As is common to folk song practice, the eight-bar phrase lengths of each section (in common time) are elastic insofar as beats are added or removed to accommodate the singer's whim or the natural breaks in vocal phrases. The harmonic content is extremely lean, consisting of a vamp on the tonic (Dm) that only occasionally (and at the apparent whim of the performer) shifts to the dominant ($A_7$). Incidentally, the banjo voicings enhance the open-sounding modal quality of this piece by excluding the third from both chords. Waits is supported on this recording by bassist Greg Cohen, who leaves much space while adding subtle fills, and Michael Blair's percussion, which consists of light toms and a hammered brake drum. Interestingly, this industrial clank shifts its position in the 4/4 bar throughout the tune—from beat four to beat two and back—with each bar of 2/4 that is appended. As a musical gesture, this repetitive metallic hammering evokes a particular moment in the history of American industrial development (the building of railroads), or possibly, once again, the collective efforts of labouring prison workers. As Humphries suggests, this piece "sound[s] like it was hewn from chain-gang rock."[107]

**14—"Union Square"**

With "Union Square," Waits brings us back to the intersection of urban blues and rock and roll, similar stylistic territory as occupied by "Big Black Mariah." Again, the harmony consists of mixolydian $I_7$, $IV_7$ and $V_7$ chords, and rather than a 12-bar blues

[107] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 164.

progression, the form is a binary verse/chorus—the seventeen-bar verses (A) ending on $V_7$ and the eight-bar choruses (B) ending on $I_7$: ABABAB[guitar solo over B]B. This time, the rhythmic base is straight-eighth rock (152 beats per minute) with a heavy backbeat, a feel that is linked to the early rock & roll of the mid to late-50s. The standard blues/rock & roll arrangement includes vocals, electric guitar, bass, drums and saxophone (though in this case, oddly, a baritone rather than the typical tenor). Once again, Keith Richards is featured on electric guitar, "channel[ing] Chuck Berry" while "Ralph Carney sax phrases [are] pure Bobby Keys"—best known as saxophonist on several of the highly-lauded Rolling Stones records of the late-60s and early-70s.[108]

**15—"Blind Love"**

"Blind Love" has been described as "arthritic country and western"[109] with "the same roadhouse feel that fueled certain Merle Haggard classics."[110] As Hoskyns writes, "The clipped rimshot beat, twangy intertwining guitars, keening fiddle and bleating Richards backing vocal make the track a proto-alternative-country classic."[111] I am especially interested in the moniker that Hoskyns ascribes to this song, as it helps to contextualize the tune within a rather precarious period for country music.

Stephen Hodges lays down his most straight forward mid-tempo (100 beats per minute) 4/4 with backbeats emphasized on hi-hats and rim-clicks, while Larry Taylor plays the requisite country two-feel bass line (from root to fifth) with the odd walking line thrown in. Electric guitarists Keith Richards and Robert Quine supply a blend of clean, glassy telecaster tone and a darker-toned guitar with chorus effect, both parts full

[108] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 316.
[109] Humphries, *The Many Lives of Tom Waits*, 164.
[110] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 130.
[111] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 316.

of major pentatonic riffs and double-stops. A common country guitar device is used wherein one note is static while another is bent up a whole step—from scale degree 5 to 6, or from scale degree 2 to 3 for instance—often returning to the note of origin. Ross Levinson's fiddle part, including a solo verse, similarly meanders through pentatonic material and double-stops, true to the genre. The harmony is in Bb major and sticks mainly to I, IV and $V_7$, though a $^{b}$VII precedes the dominant chords in the verses—a modal borrowing that adds a hint of edginess to the otherwise pedestrian harmonic makeup. Waits uses a straight forward verse/chorus form with a four-bar introduction: [intro]ABAB[fiddle solo on A]B. The sections are almost of equal length; however the resolution of the perfect authentic cadence at the end of each chorus (B) is delayed by an interpolated $IV_{sus}$.

**16—"Walking Spanish"**

"Walking Spanish" is an $F^{\#}$ minor blues shuffle at 119 beats per minute with a conventional and sparse arrangement. Stephen Hodges places heavy emphasis on the backbeat with a deep, dry snare while Larry Taylor's bass part is laid back and half-way between a two-feel and walking line, similar to that which he play's on "Big Black Mariah." Waits' guitar accentuates the shuffled off-beat eighth-notes on a mellow-toned hollow-body electric—probably the mildest sounding electric guitar on the album. Alto saxophonist John Lurie plays fills and doubles himself on a solo break. As opposed to the other urban blues tunes on the album—"Big Black Mariah" and "Union Square,"—"Walking Spanish" follows the conventional strophic form of the blues: AAA[solo over A] A[fade]. However, rather than the typical twelve-bar progression that features $I_7$, $IV_7$ and $V_7$ chords, this is a sixteen-bar form that curiously never goes to $IV_7$ but features a

slightly more adventures $^{b}VI_7$ ($^{b}II_7/V_7$—a tritone substitution for the secondary dominant $II_7$). The unadorned arrangement and production of this basic, groovy minor blues would befit any urban blues club in America.

**17—"Downtown Train"**

"Downtown Train" is a standout on *Rain Dogs* insofar as it is arguably the most conventional pop-rock song Waits has ever recorded (the song even became a major hit for Rod Stewart). Waits had earlier been grouped together with other "post-Dylan" American male singer-songwriters such as Bruce Springsteen, but clearly, by the mid-eighties Springsteen and Waits had taken drastically divergent creative paths, the former favoring stadium-rocking anthemic pop to the subtle and wry, jazz-informed beat-lounge act that Waits had specialized in, though both artists were feted for their respective prolific contributions to Americana. With "Downtown Train" Waits demonstrates that he is not afraid to explore a more conventional pop-rock style and production value by treading deep into Springsteen territory: "a stadium-pop Top 40 hit…the song brazenly crossed the tracks that divided Waitsville from Springstown."[112]

The track starts with a palm-muted electric guitar tapping out barre-chords in straight-eighths at 115 beats per minute in 4/4—this guitar also has a hint of chorus effect, a guitar effect used extensively in eighties pop. This Springsteenesque element features light accents on beat one and the off-beat of beat two. Added to the mix are Robert Kilgore's subtle Hammond organ pads, Waits' relatively unaffected yet still smokey vocals, and G.E. Smith's expressive electric guitar leads. By the first pre-chorus Tony Levin and Mickey Curry have entered with bass and drums, respectively. The

[112] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 317.

production of the drums is starkly different on this track—compressed with reverb effect added, typical of highly varnished contemporary production, such as those of Max Weinberg on Springsteen's 1984 mega-hit "Born In The U.S.A." Notably, Waits hired a different cast of supporting musicians for this tune than for the rest of the album, which further leads one to believe that the polished record's sharp contrast to the rawness of that which surrounds it is entirely by careful design.

The $E^b$ major harmony Waits employs is typical of a pop-rock anthem, consisting of I, IV and V chords with the addition of a ii–V turnaround at the conclusion of the chorus. Unique from the rest of the album is the relative complexity of the form, a sectional verse/chorus structure, this time with the addition of a six-bar pre-chorus and a discrete solo section (rather than a solo break over the harmony of another section). The resulting form is [intro]ABABCABCCDCC[fade], wherein A is verse, B is pre-chorus, C is chorus and D is G.E. Smith's guitar solo. The introduction is simply the first four bars of the verse and the track fades on a vamp of the same chords.

**18—"Bride of Rain Dog (Instrumental)"**

As its title suggests, this piece is a companion to and in a way a reprise of "Rain Dogs," and it fits the Weillesque aesthetic that permeates much of the album. As Hoskyn's writes, the track features a "gasping Ralph Carney sax and Waits himself on asthmatic harmonium,"[113] a description which captures the effect of Waits' dissonant tone-clusters and Carney's use of microtonal pitches and extended techniques. Also present is Michael Blair who knocks out an off-kilter carnivalesque march on bass drum and tambourine. The track has two distinct sections, both of which begin and end with a

[113] Hoskyns, *Lowside of the Road*, 318.

long fade. The A section includes the entire trio playing a loosely arranged vamp of i, iv, and $V_7$ chords in F minor. Due to the extreme brevity of the section (approximately 30 seconds) and the studio fade technique employed, one can assume that they are hearing a sample from a longer improvised vamp. The B section, which is fully audible for less than ten seconds, is a tonally ambiguous ostinato passage on solo harmonium, and seems only tangentially related to the A section, the tempo, 4/4 time signature and wheezy harmonium timbre connecting them.

The studio fade technique that Waits applies to both the ensemble A section and the solo B section along with the common musical elements of each section lead this listener to imagine a passing band—say in a parade setting—followed by a late-coming straggler whose limping gate doesn't ever allow him to reach his comrades.

**19—"Anywhere I Lay My Head"**

On this final track, Waits once again calls upon Arno Hecht (tenor saxophone), Crispin Cioe (baritone saxophone), Bob Funk (trombone) and Paul Litteral (trumpet) to supply smoothly voiced choral-style harmonies as well as polyphonic improvisation over his own pump organ and Michael Blair's percussion. The piece is divided into two discrete sections. Though stylistically they are contrasting and even separated by a pause, they share a common sixteen-bar harmonic progression. In 4/4 time at 72 beats per minute, the A section—which is played twice—is a solemn hymn in which the horns play long tones in chorale-style harmony underneath Waits' roughest baritone bellow. After a brief pause, the baritone sax plays a swinging pickup beat that sets off the B section (at 1:58): a collectively improvised polyphonic reprise A in a New Orlean's early jazz style. Specifically, the traditional cultural practice associated with New Orlean's funerals is

encoded into these sounds. As Jacobs writes, the piece "sounds like a New Orleans funeral march—the kind of piece that a Dixieland combo would offer up as it accompanied a casket to its burial site, winding its way through the narrow streets of the French Quarter."[114] Waits had already demonstrated that he was fascinated by the second-line New Orleans style as early as his 1978 album *Blue Valentine*, but his fascination comes to full fruition on "Anywhere I Lay My Head."

[114] Jacobs, *Wild Years*, 130.

# Chapter Three: Music and Text

There is an overarching narrative structure on the album *Rain Dogs*, the clarity and meaning of which is enhanced by the intimate relationship of text to music. I will first outline two parallel narratives as I perceive them and will then illustrate the ways in which the music works to enhance these narratives through Waits' performance of particular musical genres and a variety of stylistic elements inherent to them.

*Rain Dogs* is not simply a haphazard arrangement of nineteen Waits songs. Rather, I believe that much careful thought went into the album's composition, arranging, recording and sequencing to create a cohesive narrative and musical whole. When asked by an interviewer if the album was meant as a cohesive narrative, Waits replied,

> I don't known, because at first I thought there was some place where...all these people were held together with pain and discomfort and there was some imported and domestic place where they were all hooked up. I'm not sure, there does seem to be...for me there does seem to be some connection. I wouldn't say it's a linear story, it's more like an aquarium. So it's not really anything...that takes you from the beginning and drops you off at the end."[115]

While it is certainly the case that *Rain Dogs* does not progress like a conventional narrative with a protagonist or a sequence of related plot events, it is however connected through common themes, images and types of character that inhabit each song. Also, though Waits himself denies there is any sense of begin or end to the "story" of *Rain Dogs*, I assert that there are key moments in the course of the album that combine to form a sense of narrative structure.

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[115] Michael Tearson, Interview with Tom Waits, CBC Stereo, 1985, *Tom Waits on Tom Waits: Interviews and Encounters,* edited by Paul Maher Jr., 168–180 (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 169.

At its most basic level, *Rain Dogs* follows a *journey* narrative with three clear moments or periods: departure, journey, and arrival. Specifically, each stage of this narrative is overtly articulated by the text of the songs, as observed in first verse on the album, from the opening track "Singapore":

> We sail tonight for Singapore
> We're all as mad as hatters here
> I've fallen for a tawny moor
> Took off to the Land of Nod
> Drank with all the Chinamen
> Walked the sewers of Paris
> I danced along a colored wind
> Dangled from a rope of sand
> You must say goodbye to me

A moment of departure is overtly stated in the lyrics "We sail tonight for Singapore," and the idea is reiterated in the line "You must say goodbye to me," which is a refrain repeated twice more during the song. Interestingly, there is a shift in the narrative voice—first, announcing a collective departure in first person plural, the narrator finally switches to first person singular and bids farewell to an unspecified addressee: "You must say goodbye to me." This instability of narrative voice occurs on many tracks and contributes to a feeling of chaos and unrest. These examples introduce several important themes that permeate the album: displacement, itinerancy, separation and (implicitly) love.

This album is rife with these themes, but there is also a darker side to the narrative, wherein images and references to acts of crime, violence, madness, sin and damnation dominate. Indeed, this element of the narrative is also introduced in the verse above. My attention is instantly caught by the reference to the "Land of Nod," which alludes to the story of Cain and Abel from the Hebrew bible, wherein Cain murders his

brother and flees to the Land of Nod, which is said to be east of the Garden of Eden. This is a very powerful image that Waits invokes, and I believe it launches a second narrative structure that runs parallel with and is analogous to the *journey* narrative. I have named this parallel structure the *redemption* narrative.

The second line of the song, "We're all as mad as hatters here," introduces the theme of madness that crops up repeatedly throughout the album. References to the "tawny moor," the "Chinamen" and the "sewers of Paris" are tied both to the previously mentioned theme of itinerancy and is the first appearance of a non-Western "other" that appears in several songs. Interestingly, cultural "otherness" and spiritual damnation (or mentions of hell and/or the devil) appear to be thematically linked, especially through the first quarter of the album. "Singapore," "Cemetery Polka," "Jockey Full Of Bourbon," and "Tango Till They're Sore" all share references to hell or the devil and include iterations of the cultural "other." Figure 18 lays out a few examples of this.

| Track | References to Hell or the Devil | Cultural "Others" |
|---|---|---|
| 1–"Singapore" | "Through the Alley/Back from Hell" | "I've fallen for a tawny moor" |
| | | "Drank with all the Chinamen" |
| | | "Italian Dreams" |
| 3–"Cemetery Polka" | "All she ever says is go to Hell" | "He has a mistress/She's Puerto Rican" |
| 4–"Jockey Full Of Bourbon" | "I've been stepping on the devil's tail" | "Through the bars of a Cuban jail" |
| | | "Yellow sheets on a Hong Kong bed" |
| 5–"Tango Till They're Sore" | "the boys all go to hell" | "You play that Tarantella"<br>"the Cubans hit the floor" |

**Figure 17. References to hell or the devil and cultural "othering"**

While connections between the cultural "other" and damnation are not always direct, Waits uses each element in concert to suggest a sense of the sinister. Also, with

the exception of "Cemetery Polka," each of the above examples are taken from the same verse, and in the case of "Jockey Full Of Bourbon," the line "Through the bars of a Cuban jail" completes the rhyme scheme that begins "I've been stepping on the devil's tail," creating a deeper textual connection between the two images. Importantly, it is not Waits' authorial voice asserting cultural "otherness" to the sinister, but rather, one of a plurality of narrative voices that inhabit the work. Through what I believe to be a self-conscious wielding of exoticism, Waits links all things non-Western to the sinister—satirizing out-dated American bourgeois prejudices. Also, Waits reinforces this Euro-centric point-of-view with his politically incorrect and dated diction (ie. "Chinamen," "tawny moor"). This puts forth a subtle political commentary on American cultural hegemony, while having the added effect of suggesting an earlier time-period for the narrative.

The parallel narratives of *journey* and *redemption* are inexorably linked, namely through the recurring themes of displacement and itinerancy on the one hand, and crime, liquor and madness on the other. Figure 19 charts the appearance of these themes and images through the length of the album.

| Track | Displacement | Itinerancy | Crime | Liquor | Madness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Singapore | √ | √ | | √ | √ |
| 2. Clap Hands | | | √ | | √ |
| 3. Cemetery Polka | | | | | √ |
| 4. Jockey Full of Bourbon | | | √ | √ | |
| 5. Tango Till They're Sore | √ | | | | |
| 6. Big Black Mariah | √ | | √ | | |
| 7. Diamonds & Gold | √ | √ | | | √ |
| 8. Hang Down Your Head | √ | | | | |
| 9. Time | √ | | √ | √ | |
| 10. Rain Dogs | √ | | | √ | √ |
| 11. Midtown (*instrumental*) | | | | | |
| 12. Ninth & Hennepin | √ | √ | | √ | √ |
| 13. Gun Street Girl | √ | √ | √ | | |
| 14. Union Square | | | √ | √ | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. Blind Love | √ | √ | | √ | |
| 16. Walking Spanish | √ | | √ | | |
| 17. Downtown Train | | | | | |
| 18. Bride Of Rain Dog (*instrumental*) | | | | | |
| 19. Anywhere I Lay My Head | | √ | | | |

**Figure 18. Instances of displacement, itinerancy, crime, liquor and madness**

Displacement and itinerancy are related but distinct terms in this context, and both have already occurred at the moment of departure (displacement refers to a character's separation from home or homelessness while itinerancy refers to a perpetual state of travel). One or both of these themes appear in the majority of tracks, including most tracks from 5–16 (except the instrumental piece "Midtown" and the blues song "Union Square"). Interestingly, displacement and itinerancy are important themes among songs that make up the middle of the *journey* narrative and are relatively scarce toward the moments of departure and arrival.

Often, these themes manifest as characters such as hobos, sailors and fugitives. The song "Diamonds & Gold" paints a picture of derelict itinerant homelessness that includes references to the railroad and characters that "sleep by the side of the road" and "shave in the gutter." Both "Big Black Mariah" and "Walking Spanish" tell stories about men who are on the lamb from the law, one of whom is "never coming home" (about to be arrested) and another who is about to attempt a prison break from death row: "Tomorrow morning there'll be laundry/But he'll be somewhere else to hear the call/Don't say goodbye he's just leaving early." "Gun Street Girl" is a ballad about an itinerant fugitive and his various criminal exploits and brushes with the law. The story exhibits more geographical meandering (and Waits penchant for interesting sounding place names) than any other on the album, from Tahoe, to Birmingham, Waukegan, St. John's Wood, Baker and Indiana.

The most powerful instances of displacement and itinerancy are on the songs sung in a stable first person, including "Hang Down Your Head," "Time," "Rain Dogs," "9th & Hennepin" and "Blind Love." In "Hang Down Your Head" the protagonist is a heartbroken man who "must go away" on a train after his love has found another. "Time" includes an array of itinerant characters including sailors, musicians, criminals, a "calendar girl," and an unnamed woman who "said she'd stick around/Until the bandages came off" the unknown soldier who narrates. At the highest point of musical tension the narrator himself joins the group of itinerants: "pay the fiddler off till I come back again." Interestingly, this phrase suggests a momentary arrival point, and it is no accident that this song concludes side A of the LP record.

Of course, the arrival at the closing of side A is only a temporary respite, as the second departure is immediate. "Rain Dogs," the opening track of side B, is a strong confirmation of a renewed narrative preoccupation with displacement, especially in the repeated refrain: "Oh, how we danced and you whispered to me/You'll never be going back home." This is also the title track of the record, and the title itself is powerfully symbolic. Waits himself explained the title in a 1985 interview: "People who live outdoors. You know how after the rain you see all these dogs that seem lost, wandering around. The rain washes away all their scent, all their direction. So all the people on the album are knit together, by some corporeal way of sharing pain and discomfort."[116] After painting a vivid picture of aimless, hedonistic ne'er-do-wells, the narrator proclaims: "I am a rain dog too."

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[116] Peter Silverton, "Tom Waits: The Sultan of Sleaze," *You* (1985) http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/tom-waits-the-sultan-of-sleaze (accessed September 11, 2011).

"9th & Hennepin" is perhaps the piece filled with the darkest, most derelict images on the album, and it includes three distinct references to itinerant lifestyles. First, there is the description of a dirty, cheap motel: "And all the rooms they smell like diesel/And you take on the dreams of the ones who've slept there." Later, he introduces a character separated from her lover: "And the girl behind the counter has a tattoo tear/One for every year he's away she said." Finally, he reveals his own identity as some kind of perpetual traveler—a weary Willy Lowman type traveling salesman: "I've seen it all/I've seen it all through the yellow windows of the evening train."

Running parallel to references to itinerant lifestyles throughout the album are references to crime and violence, which connects the journey narrative to one of sin and finally redemption. Greed and envy are central character traits on "Singapore," "Clap Hands," "Cemetery Polka," and "Diamonds & Gold"; and deadly weapons appear on "Jockey Full Of Bourbon," "Gun Street Girl," and "Walking Spanish." Subtler are instances of prostitution, adultery and erotic practices still marginalized and condemned by Waits' contemporary socially conservative American contingent: homosexuality, transvestitism and promiscuity. Such references to marginalized sexuality occur on "Cemetery Polka" ("Uncle Violet...they say he never keeps it in his pants," "Uncle Bill...he has a mistress/She's Puerto Rican/And I heard she has a wooden leg"), "Jockey Full Of Bourbon" ("I'm on the lawn with someone else's wife"), "9th & Hennepin" ("All donuts have names that sound like prostitutes," "there's nothing wrong with her a hundred dollars won't fix"), and "Union Square," which features a Manhattan transvestite ("The guy in the dress is a beauty/Go all the way I swear you never can tell"). Reference to violence, crime and sin occur in virtually every track of the album with the exception

of the love songs “Hang Down Your Head” and “Blind Love,” and their conspicuous absence from the final three tracks of the album, in preparation for the final moment of redemption and arrival.

Redemption and arrival come with the nineteenth and final track on the album, “Anywhere I Lay My Head”:

> My head is spinning round
> My heart is in my shoes
> I went and set the Thames on fire
> Now I must come back down
> She’s laughing in her sleeve at me
> I can feel it in my bones
> Anywhere I’m gonna lay my head
> I wanna call my home
>
> Well I see that the world is upside down
> Seems that my pockets were filled up with gold
> Now the clouds have covered everything o’er
> And the wind is blowing cold
> I don’t need anybody
> Because I learned to be alone
> And I say anywhere I lay my head, boys
> I gotta call my home

There are several aspects of this text that suggest redemption. First, it is one of the few songs on the album that is sung from a stable first person perspective; the intimate confessional tone seems authentic and earnest. There is also a shift in the content. While he speaks of setting the Thames on fire it is in the past tense, and he admits that it is time he “come back down” (down to earth, reality, sanity or virtuousness). Though he is still a

fool ("She's laughing in her sleeve at me"), hard-luck ("Seems that my pockets were filled up with gold/Now the clouds have covered everything o'er") and a lonesome itinerant ("I learned to be alone/And anywhere I lay my head, boys/I gotta call my home"), there is an overwhelming tone of acceptance. Therefore, the moment of arrival isn't a literal one, but rather a symbolic one; a transformation has occurred, our now singular protagonist's personal journey is complete, and he can rest. The arrival and the redemption are made much more effective by the musical elements that work to enhance the themes, images and narrative structures outlined above.

**Musical Genre and Imagined Space**

One of the most overt ways that the music enhances the meaning of the text is through Tom Waits use of a variety of musical genres. Waits performs a variety of styles quite masterfully, and though all the songs on the album bear Waits' unique signature, they nevertheless manage to embody characteristics inherent to particular genres. By performing within a given genre Waits evokes a web of cultural meaning that relates to that genre. As Kessel writes, "[i]n addition to general portrayals of emotional states such as romance, bliss, fear, pathos, humor, and anxiety, music has been imbued over time with cultural and even geographical associations."[117] The effect is, of course, contingent upon the listener's perception and comprehension of the meanings encoded into a given genre, for it is the listener's mind that an imagined space is born. The musical genres that appear throughout the album take the listener on a journey through their own imagined geographical and cultural spaces. The final effect is that musical itinerancy parallels the itinerancy expressed in the text of these songs. Also, the themes and images that fill the

[117] Kessel, *The Words and Music of Tom Waits*, 15.

*Rain Dogs* narrative are often also inherent in the genres and artists that have come to bear a significant influential presence on the album.

Beginning with the moment of departure that sets off the journey narrative, the music of "Singapore" is itself a departure in its unique, other-wordly derelict polka style that is worlds away from the mainstream of American popular music of 1985. The genealogy of this sound includes Kurt Weill, Harry Partch and Captain Beefheart—all three mavericks within their own musical worlds. Though the foundational harmony is quite simple, it is stretched to its limits with the highly chromatic improvisation of the guitarists and the dissonant marimba ostinato. Notably, the presence of marimba on *Rain Dogs* most often corresponds with the theme of madness and share similar dissonant minor modalities. Indeed, "Singapore," "Clap Hands," "Diamonds & Gold," "Rain Dogs," and "9th & Hennepin" all feature the marimba heavily and touch upon the theme of madness. Cemetery Polka is the only outlier, and it makes up for the absence of marimba with the truly twisted circus-like atmosphere evoked by the dissonant counterpoint between the reedy farfisa organ and accordion.

| Track | Predominant Genre |
|---|---|
| 1. Singapore | Cabaret Polka |
| 2. Clap Hands | Prison Labour Song |
| 3. Cemetery Polka | Cabaret Polka |
| 4. Jockey Full of Bourbon | Rhumba (Afro-Cuban) |
| 5. Tango Till They're Sore | Stride Piano (Early Jazz) |
| 6. Big Black Mariah | Urban Blues |
| 7. Diamonds & Gold | Derelict Waltz |
| 8. Hang Down Your Head | Rock Ballad |
| 9. Time | Irish Folk Ballad |
| 10. Rain Dogs | Cabaret Polka |
| 11. Midtown | Post-Bop |
| 12. Ninth & Hennepin | Expressionism |
| 13. Gun Street Girl | Appalachian Folk Ballad |
| 14. Union Square | Urban Blues |
| 15. Blind Love | Country/Honky-Tonk |
| 16. Walking Spanish | Urban Blues |

| | |
|---|---|
| 17. Downtown Train | Rock Ballad |
| 18. Bride Of Rain Dog | Carnivalesque Polka |
| 19. Anywhere I Lay My Head | Secular Hymn/Second-Line |

**Figure 19. Musical genre by track**

Not only does the sheer variety of genres that appear on the album parallel the theme of itinerancy that is so key to the *Journey* narrative (see Figure 20), but musical elements that characterize each genre enhance the meaning of the songs individually. Along with the aesthetic borrowing from Kurt Weill, for instance, come the cultural associations listeners may have to Weill's music. The popular operas of Weill and Brecht such as *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera* explore many themes and character types that occupy *Rain Dogs* as well. In Weimar Germany *The Threepenny Opera* became "a key icon of 1920s Berlin as a jittery jazz-age bawdy house overrun with sharks, pimps, and tarts, a city perched on the edge of doom. The musical does not condemn its sinners as much as it subversively celebrates their unexpungeable life force, the primal energy that radiates from their misconduct."[118] Similarly, Waits casts a sympathetic light onto his criminals, prostitutes and itinerants. Both Weill/Brecht and Waits challenge hegemonic bourgeois values by representing, and sometimes romanticizing, an alternative morality.

The common ground that Waits shares with the music and ideas of Harry Partch comes across in a far subtler way. Aspects of Partch's aesthetic reflect his personal experiences having lived the itinerant lifestyle of a hobo during the Great Depression. His grand assortment of found objects-turned-instruments is indicative of an attitude of salvage and artistic appropriation. Of course, this impulse wasn't limited to physical

[118] Forster Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 52.

objects, but also sound objects. Partch made a practice while traveling to federal work camps in the late thirties of noting the speech of the men around him, complete with melodic inflection, into his journal. He writes:

> *Bitter Music* is a diary of eight months spent in transient shelters and camps, hobo jungles, basement rooms, and on the open road. I wrote each of the diary entries on the day indicated or the day following, and notated the music of the spoken words in a rough way without instruments, in most cases, very soon after the words were actually spoken...
>
> [...] I heard music in the voices all about me, and tried to notate it, and I tried to enhance the mood and drama of such little things as a quarrel in a potato patch. The nuance of inflection and thought of the lowest of our social order was a new experience in tone, and I found myself at its fountainhead—a fountainhead of pure musical Americana.[119]

On *Rain Dogs*, Waits use of "non-instruments" as musical material follows the same impulse of salvage and appropriation, and often the listener can imagine the physical nature of the sound source, for example the rooster's crow and destruction of the chest of drawers on "Singapore" and the brake drum (from a car) being hammered in "Gun Street Girl." The sounds themselves suggest "barnyard" and "junkyard" settings respectively. Of course, the characters and images Waits deals with throughout *Rain Dogs* are also shared with Partch, who lived these experiences and expressed them in "Bitter Music" and *U.S. Highball*:

> the constant hunger, filth, loneliness, and despair of the transient or hobo; the brutality of railroad police; the dangers of hopping and riding freight trains; the shame of begging and the hypocracy of accepting relief at Salvation Army missions; the suicides and homosexuality among transients and hobos; and throughout the failure to achieve any real human intimacy.[120]

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[119] Harry Partch, Preface to "Bitter Music," (November 22, 1940) Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos, edited by Thomas McGeary (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 6.

[120] Thomas McGeary, ed., Introduction to *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), xxv.

The songs that fit into the urban blues genre—"Big Black Mariah," "Union Square," and "Walking Spanish"—are characterized by gritty, distorted electric guitar, mixolydian or aeolian modes, and conventional chord progressions. Themes of violence, crime and sex are predominant in these three songs, and have indeed been common themes in American blues music since its emergence during post-civil war reconstruction and on recordings of the early twentieth century. Electric guitar distortion is an inherently aggressive tone and is generally contingent upon high volume levels. One of the most common themes dealt with in the blues from the early itinerant solo blues singers to the urban blues produced at Chess Records is masculine sexual prowess: "The bluesman was a solitary, swaggering individual who lived by his wits and enjoyed the fruits of his playing. He was a powerful man, a hoochie coochie man, as Muddy Waters put it, both gifted and dammed by the gods, and one who had special powers—especially over women."[121] This hypermasculinity is encoded into the sound of the aggressive tone of the electric guitar and in Waits' bellowing, Howlin' Wolf-like vocal style. Interestingly, though, Waits who regularly engages in this sort of heteronormative masculine posturing subverts the genre by suggesting an alternative sexuality in "Union Square." This keeps the highly sexual nature of electric urban blues intact, while giving it a more liberal, cosmopolitan twist. On the other hand, with the country ballad "Blind Love," Waits adheres strictly to the thematic expectations of the genre (heartache, solitude and liquor) as well as the musical characteristics that place the listener in a rural Texas roadhouse.

Another significant way that musical genre enhances the thematic and narrative content of album is through the variety of vocal styles that Waits employs. As Gabriel

[121] André Millard, "The Guitar Hero," in *The Electric Guitar: A History of an American Icon,* edited by André Millard, 143–162 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2004), 144.

Solis writes, one of the driving forces behind *Rain Dogs* is the multiple voices with which Waits performs, and this results in different iterations of masculine gender performance. Many of the masculine archetypes Waits brings forth are outgrowths of the hipster persona that dominates his seventies output, and race is often bound up in the images he projects. Solis writes about how Waits' vocal theatrics work in concert with the semiotics of genre, referring to an earlier recording, "$29.00" from *Blue Valentine* (but the process is consistent through *Rain Dogs* and Waits' later work):

> The connection of Waits's hipster character...with sexualized violence and misogyny, and musical signifiers of blackness is unmistakable—the setting as a blues song, the gritty sound of the guitar, the blues piano, and the admittedly subtle, but nonetheless significant changes to the voice—Waits changes the timbre (in other hipster songs this is perhaps more pronounced, as he goes for a more nasal, intense tone), throws in more noise, and affects an accent. Oddly, and found in varying degrees in most of his hipster theater pieces, Waits exaggerates his sibilants and fricatives— S's, F's, V's and P's. This is more than just slurring his words, it is a thoroughly distinctive verbal affectation.[122]

Both the musical genre and the features of Waits voice suggest ethnicity and gender, and Solis asserts that the performance of some type of masculinity is an aspect of virtually all of Waits' recordings. Ethnicity, just like gender, can be encoded into music:

> So masculinity may connect to blackness, and may be represented by electric guitars; but it may also be signified by whiteness and acoustic instruments, or by the trumpet or the saxophone; it may be represented through aggression and power, or through sophistication and finesse, or through obscurity and mystery. Muddy Waters may have made archetypally masculine music, but so may have Miles Davis, and so may have Woody Guthrie at one time or another and to one audience or another.[123]

Solis, following Roland Barthes seminal article "The Grain of The Voice," asserts that Waits is an exemplary model of "grain," "because there is so much larynx, epiglottis, adenoid, tongue, tooth, and lip in his articulation, sustain, and decay, such body to his

[122] Gabriel Solis, "'Workin' hard, hardly workin'/Hey man, you know me': Tom Waits, sound, and the theatrics of masculinity," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19, no. 1 (2007): 45.
[123] Ibid., 52–53.

voice."[124] Physical presence is projected in Waits voice, just as it is through the instruments he chooses and the stripped down production value of the recording. Barthes "grain" and Partch's "corporeality" are two ways of explaining the sense of presence and physical texture that *Rain Dogs* is rich in.

"9th & Hennepin" is the most unique piece on the album with regard to its musical genre. The piece is a spoken monologue—a mode of performance Waits has been engaging in since the 1974 release of his second studio album *The Heart of Saturday Night*—accompanied by a nightmarish, tonally ambiguous musical setting that has a clear connection to early twentieth century expressionist works, such as that of Arnold Schoenberg. The musical setting does not evoke any specific geographical space expressed through genre, but acts more like a cinematic backdrop, enhancing the ghostly, menacing atmosphere for the character to inhabit. The monologue, then, is given the space to invite the listener on the journey: a foreboding, nighttime train stop full of curious and miserable characters. It's Anywhere, U.S.A, but definitely the wrong side of the tracks.

The connection between a given musical genre and corresponding cultural references in the text sometimes occur on the local level of a song, but often transcend album tracks. The rhumba-infused "Jockey Full Of Bourbon" works as a sort of musical exoticism that mirrors the ethnic exoticism locally (within that song) as well as throughout the album. Textual references to Cuban and Puerto Rican cultures appear in "Jockey Full Of Bourbon," "Tango Till They're Sore," "Gun Street Girl", "Cemetery Polka," and "Union Square." While the rhumba genre is used only once, the imagined space it affords in the listener's mind is extended across the album through each textual

[124] Ibid., 50.

reference. This process functions inversely as well with regards to New Orleans culture. Waits' only explicitly mentions the city once, in "Tango Till They're Sore," however it exists as an imagined space afforded though musical means in both that track and in the final track, "Anywhere I Lay My Head." On both of these songs, the music has a direct, diegetic relationship with the local narrative. In the first case, the listener can imagine the small jazz ensemble playing its loose number, adjacent to the sordid activities in an early twentieth century Storyville brothel, while the latter evokes the scene of a New Orleans funeral procession.

This final song of the album carries with it a unique encoded cultural meaning, evoking the geographical and cultural space of New Orleans by using the genre of music associated with the *second line* of the funeral procession. This has a profound effect on the meaning of the song's text, and it also helps to bring the redemption narrative to fruition. Without the music, the song's text is not nearly as powerful. The line "anywhere I lay my head/I'm gonna call my home" takes on a far greater meaning—beyond an itinerant man's personal journey of self discovery, the funeral march adds a spiritual aspect, one of salvation. Further, the second line reprise contributes an aspect of jubilation. The overarching narrative of the album is far more powerful due to the cultural meaning encoded in the music than it possibly could be with the text alone.

The parallel *journey–redemption* narrative is absolutely contingent upon the relationship between music and text. The musical itinerancy that is at work on the album is not simply mimetic of the narrative journey, rather, it creates multiple imagined geographical spaces, connecting the listener intimately to the journey.

# Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to highlight the wide breadth of artists and genres that have influenced Tom Waits' musical output, specifically on *Rain Dogs*, through detailed musical analyses. I have also shown the effect of Waits' trans-generic mode of expression on the themes and narrative structure of the album. While it can be argued that artists in all fields build their work upon the traditions and practices that precede them, Waits engages in a sort of musical pastiche par excellence, drawing from multiple disparate sources and freely integrating them into his oeuvre. Perhaps music as an art is more naturally subject to this manner of practice than other media. Musicians must learn through the repetitive imitation of ethereal structures that exist only momentarily on a temporal dimension—to fully understand a musical genre, one must internalize it, as one would develop fluency in a new language.

Many musicians strive to carve out a niche for themselves in one particular genre, and this is certainly due, at least in part, to a popular music industry that demands an easily recognizable product with an equally easily recognizable consumer audience. Tom Waits himself was subject to this impulse to put forth a singular musical style and a persona to match, as evidenced by his releases in the seventies. Pigeonholed as a beat-inspired, lounge jazz-infused spinner of yarns, Waits managed to transcend the burden of expectation and strike new ground. Waits re-emerged as a new kind of artist with a new kind of hybrid genre. The freedom and pan-genericism of *Rain Dogs* helped catalyze a sea change within American popular music, and stands as an important early iteration of the emergent popular music genre: *Americana*. Mainstream artists of the nineties, such as Beck, began incorporating multiple genres of music on their albums and the practice of

reviving archaic genres became more popular through the nineties and into the new century (Gillian Welch, Old Crow Medicine Show, etc.). The Americana Music Association defines the genre as "contemporary music that incorporates elements of various American roots music styles, including country, roots-rock, folk, bluegrass, R&B and blues, resulting in a distinctive roots-oriented sound that lives in a world apart from the pure forms of the genres upon which it may draw,"[125] and I think Waits' treatment of musical style on *Rain Dogs* and throughout his career is a fine model of this mode of expression.

At the time of its release, the breadth of genres that Tom Waits engaged with on *Rain Dogs* was unsurpassed by any other artist. Of course, musical culture is always changing. Hip-hop culture and sampling practices have provided new means of intertextual musical expression and have lead to the emergence of several new genres of music marked by hybridity. Also, the new century has brought with it technologies that afford musicians and listeners unprecedented easy access to the entire history of recorded music at the click of a button. As Waits continues to create music within this new cultural landscape, time will tell what the implications of these new technologies and new modes of expression will be with regards to musical culture, musical literacy and people's conceptions of musical genre.

[125] The Americana Music Association Website. http://americanamusic.org/what-americana

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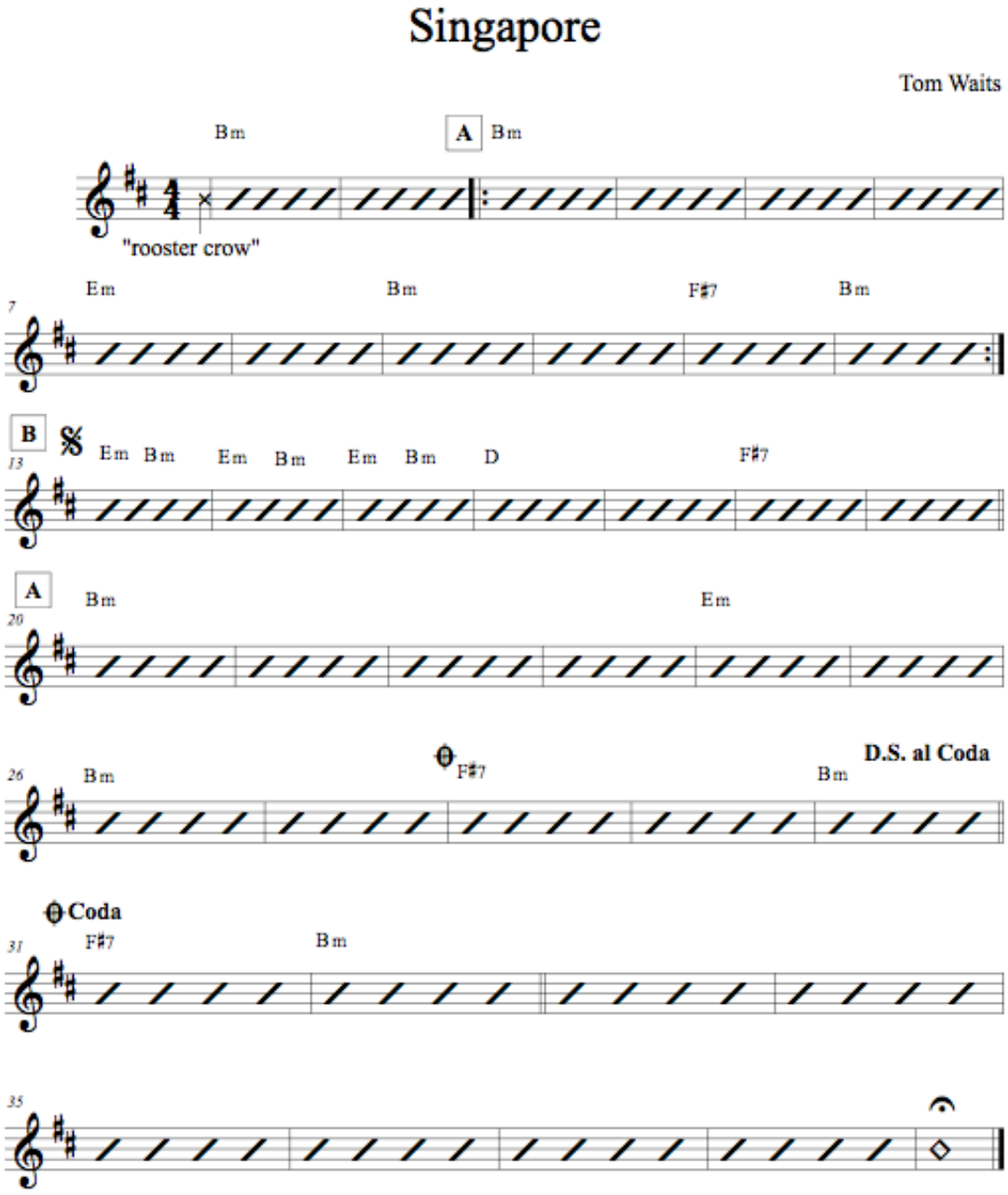
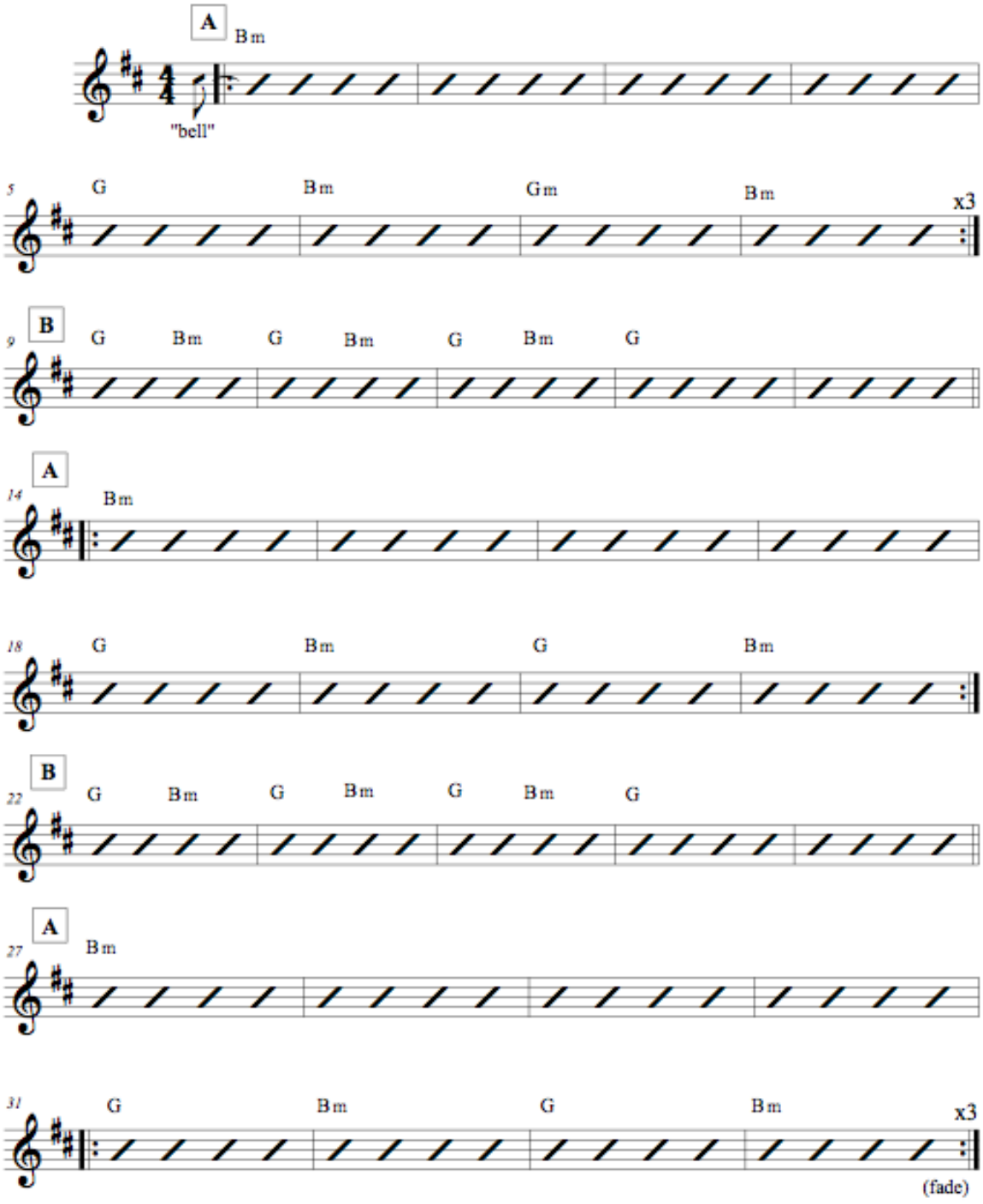
Tom Waits Official Website. http://www.tomwaits.com/

# Appendix I: Harmonic Lead Sheets



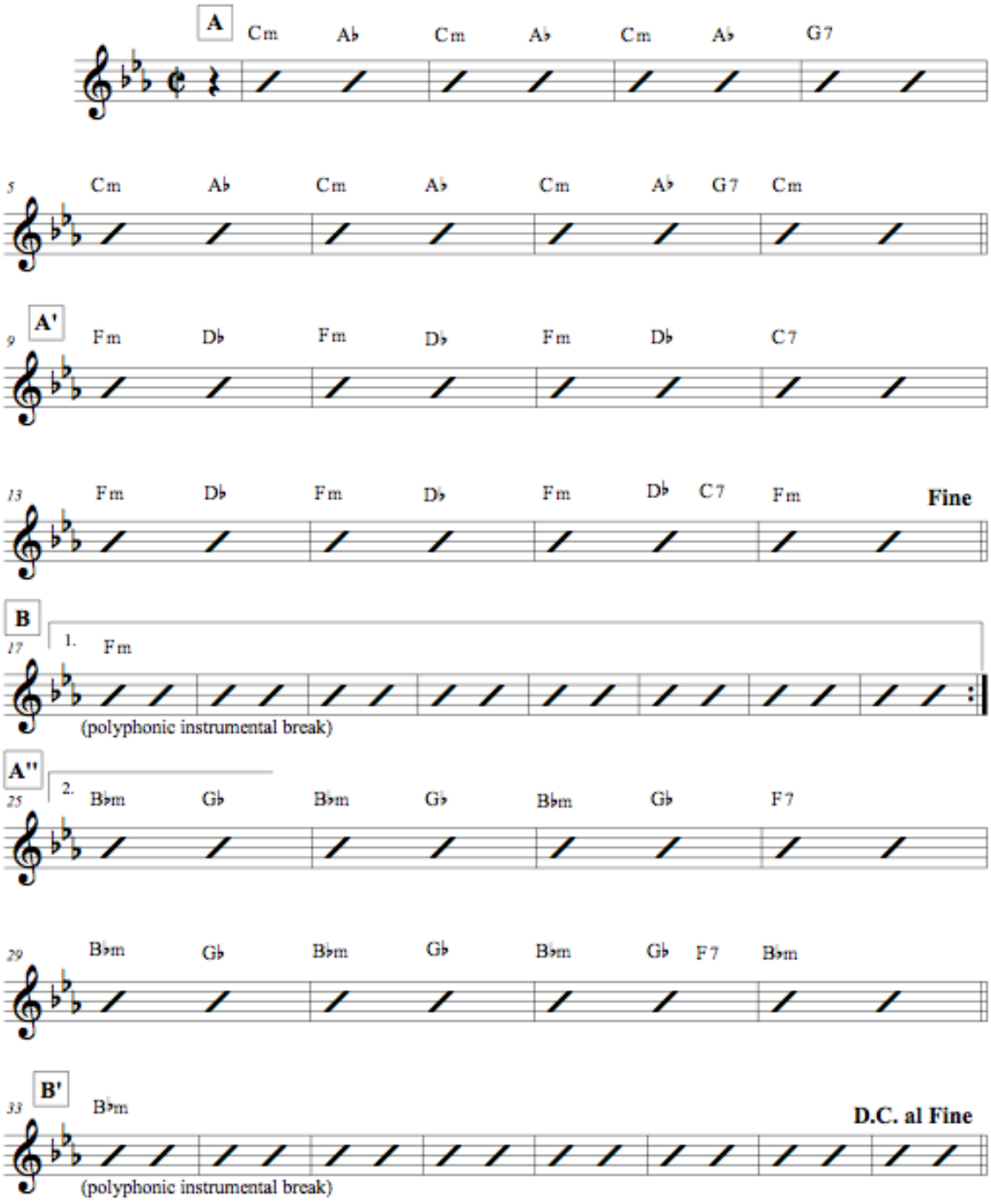
# Clap Hands

Tom Waits



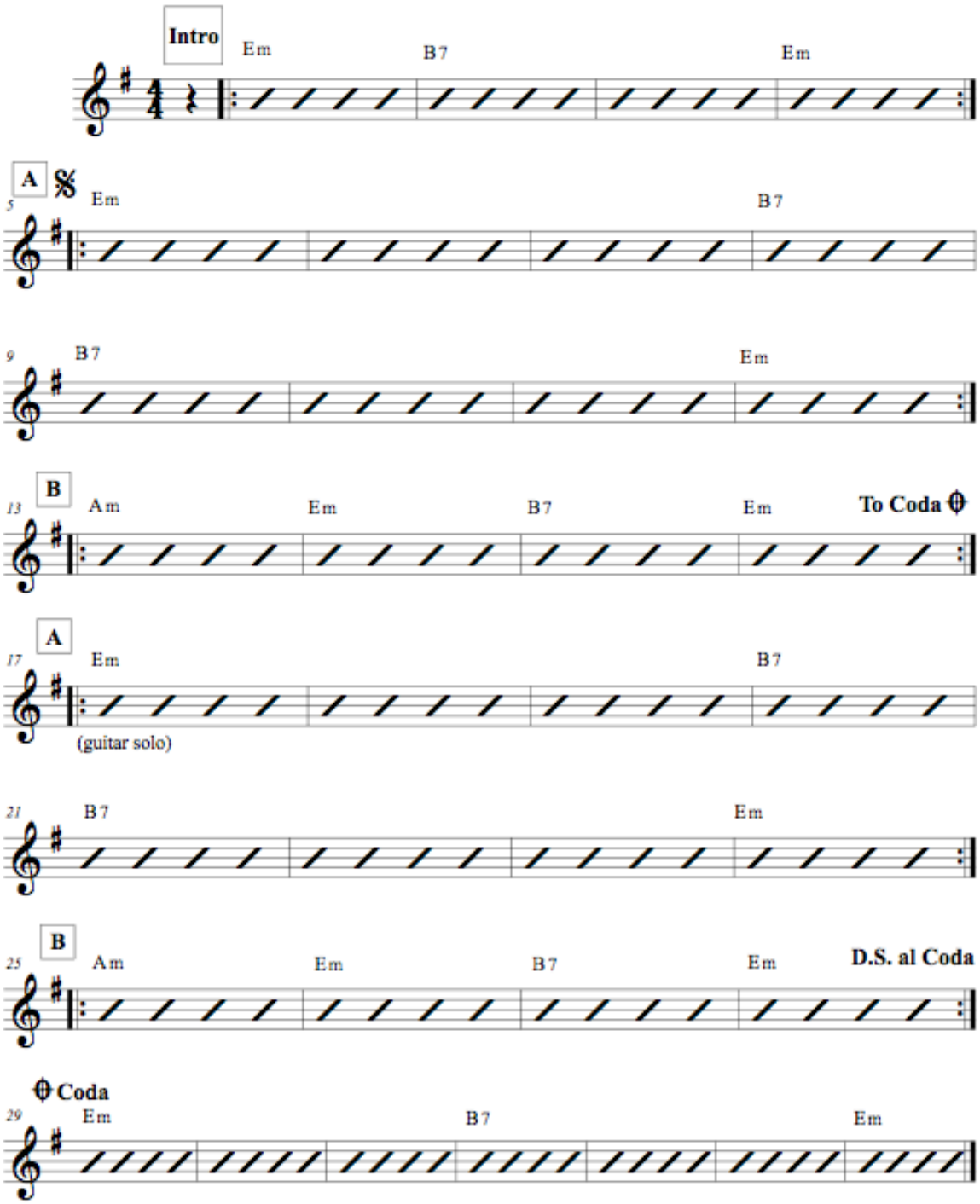
# Cemetery Polka

Tom Waits



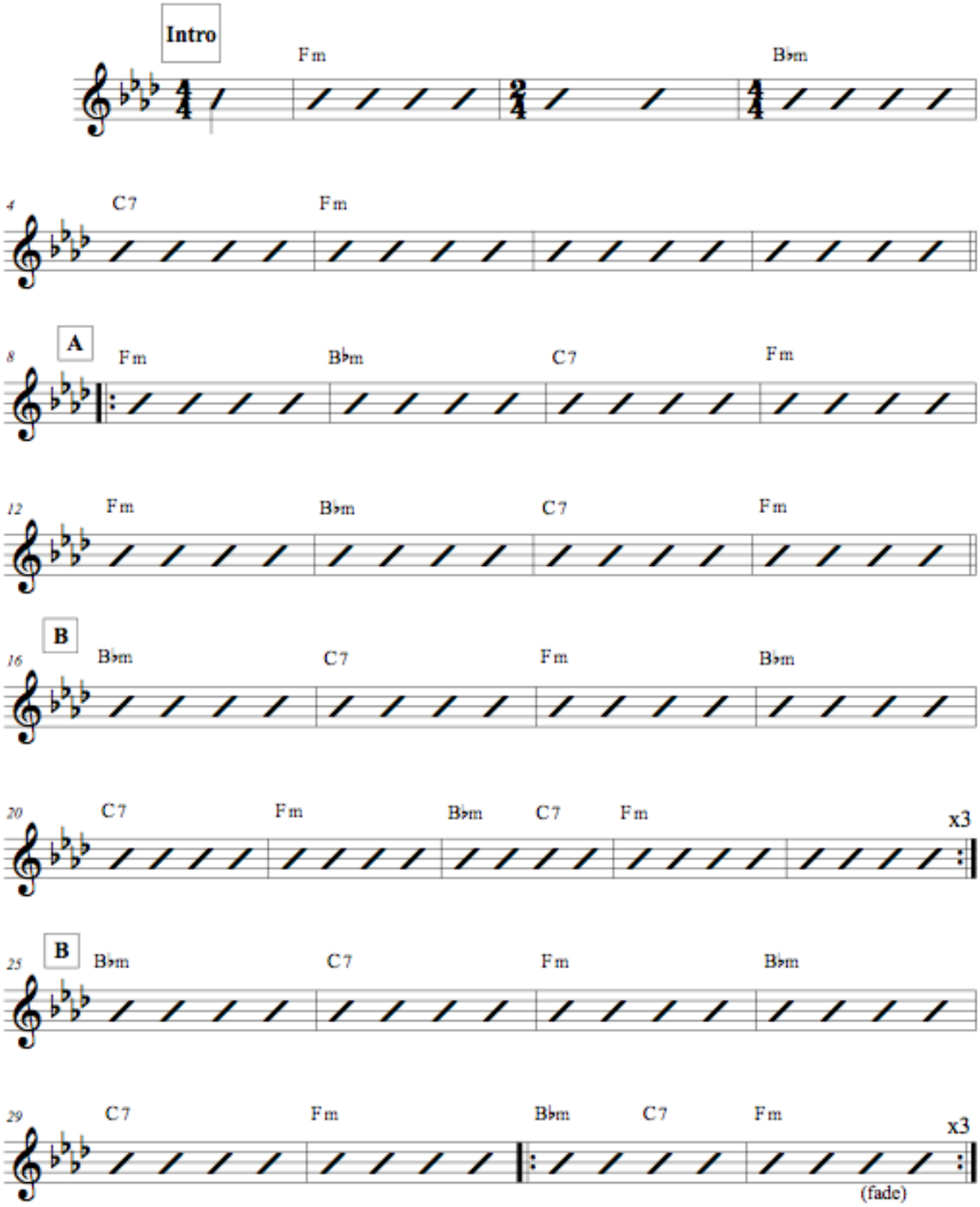
# Jockey Full Of Bourbon

Tom Waits



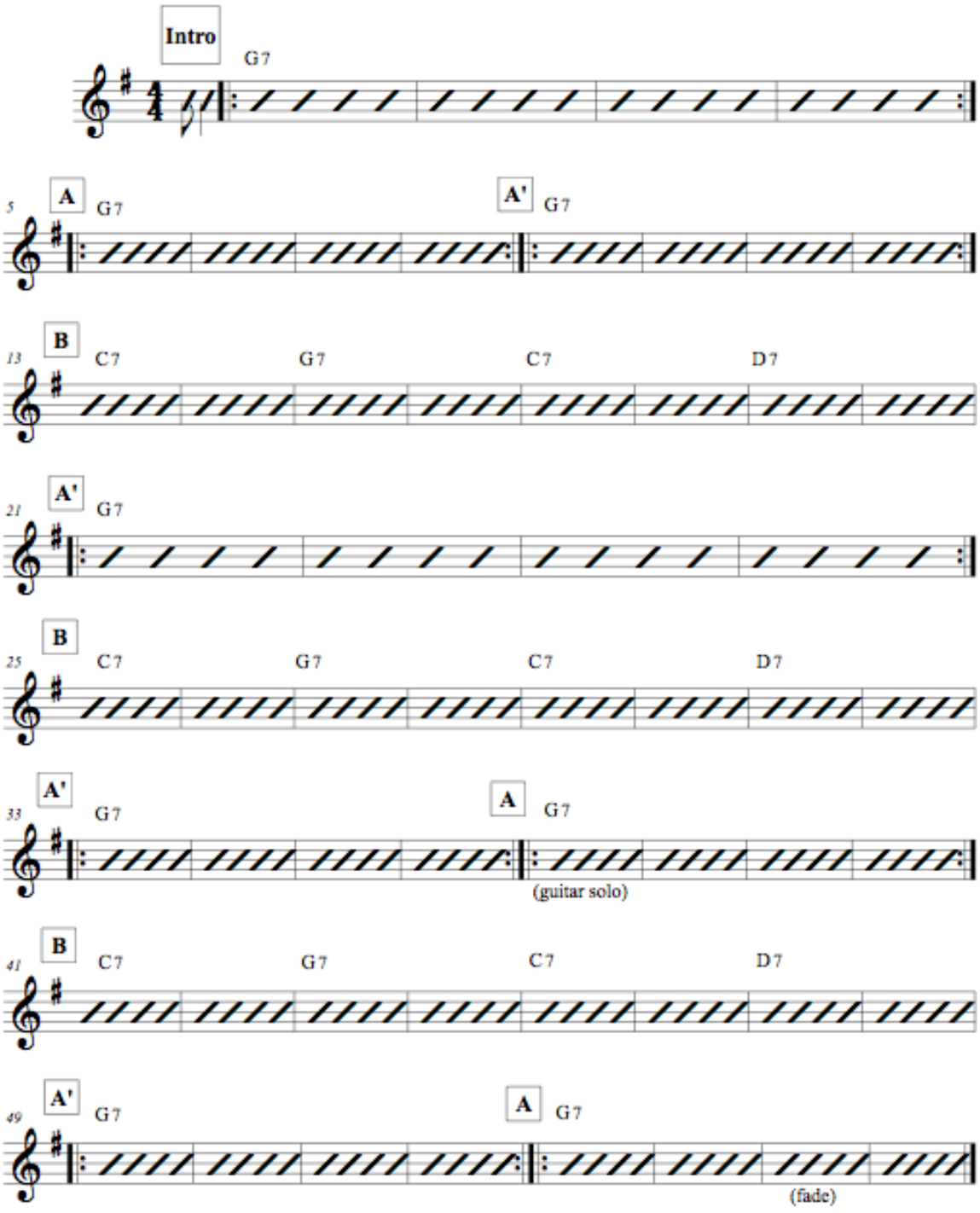
# Tango Till They're Sore

Tom Waits



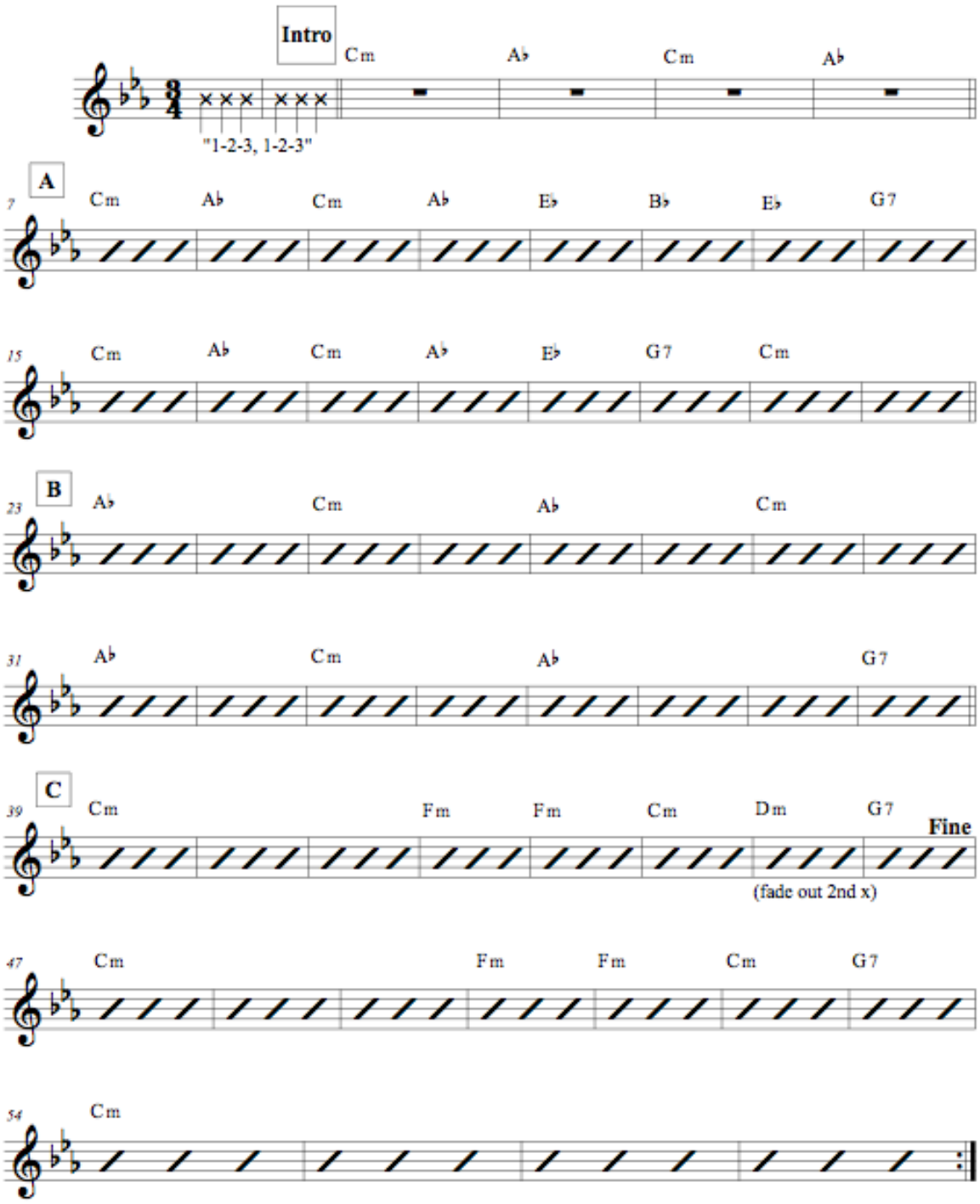
# Big Black Mariah

Tom Waits



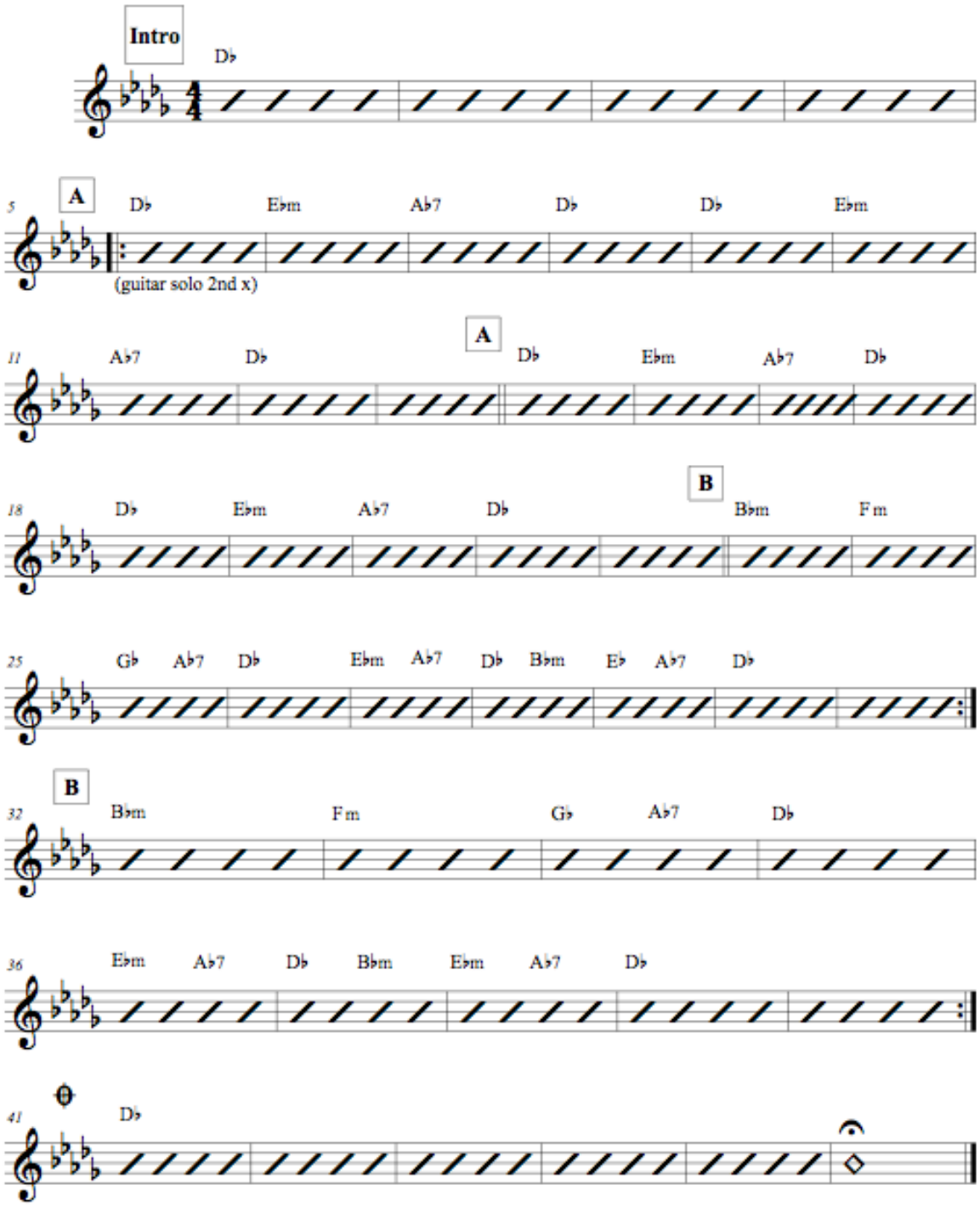
# Diamonds & Gold

Tom Waits



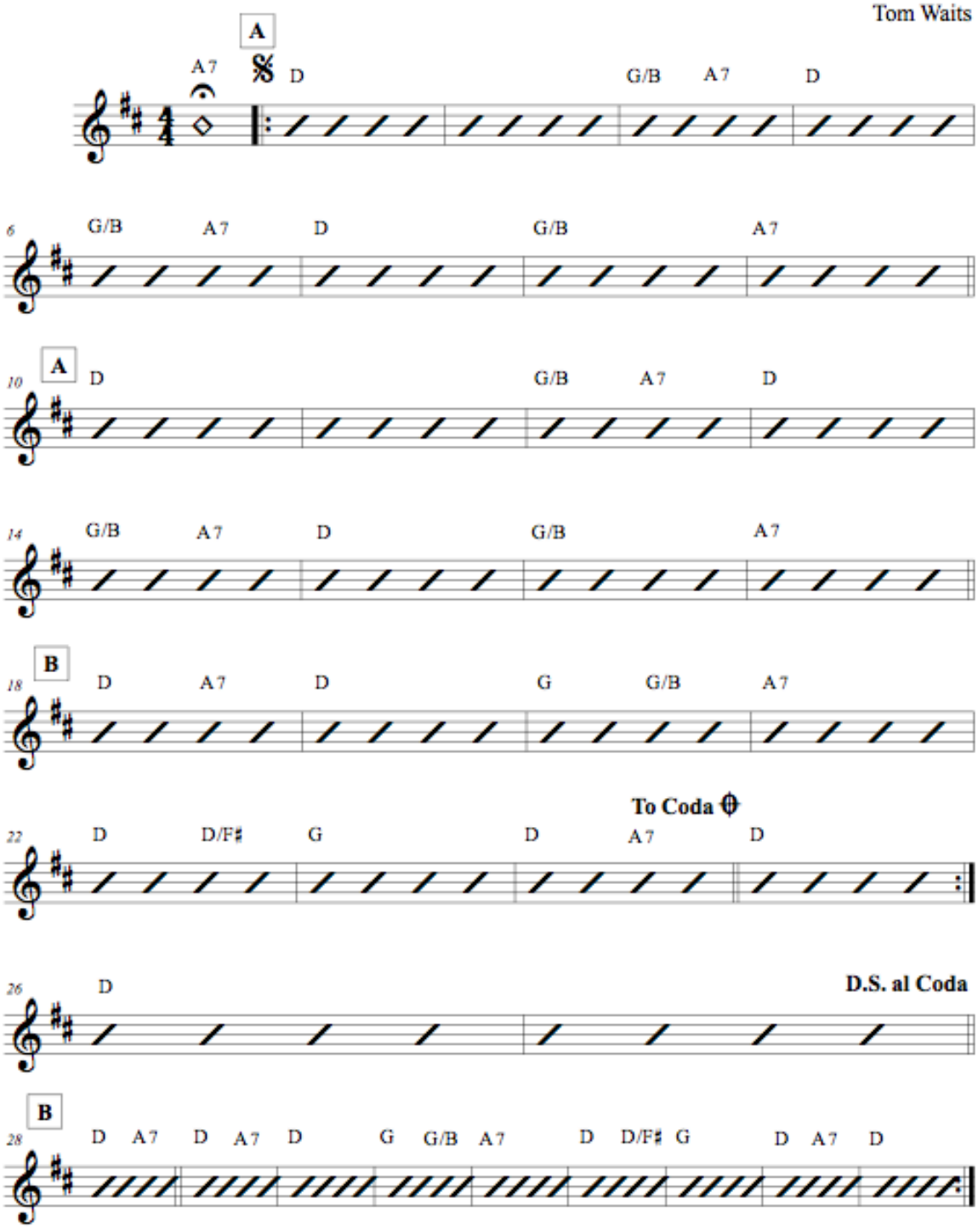
# Hang Down Your Head

Tom Waits



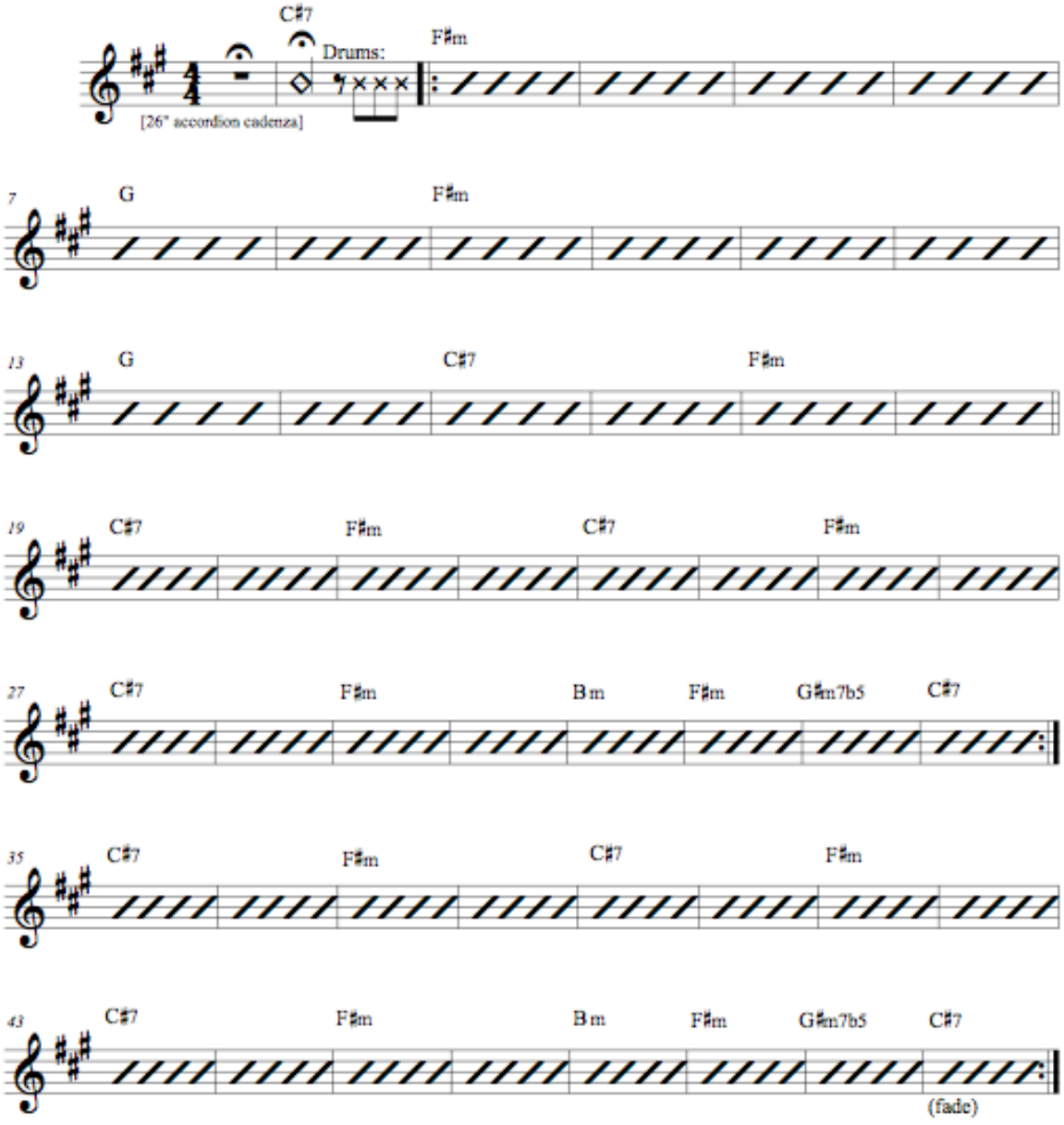
# Time

Tom Waits



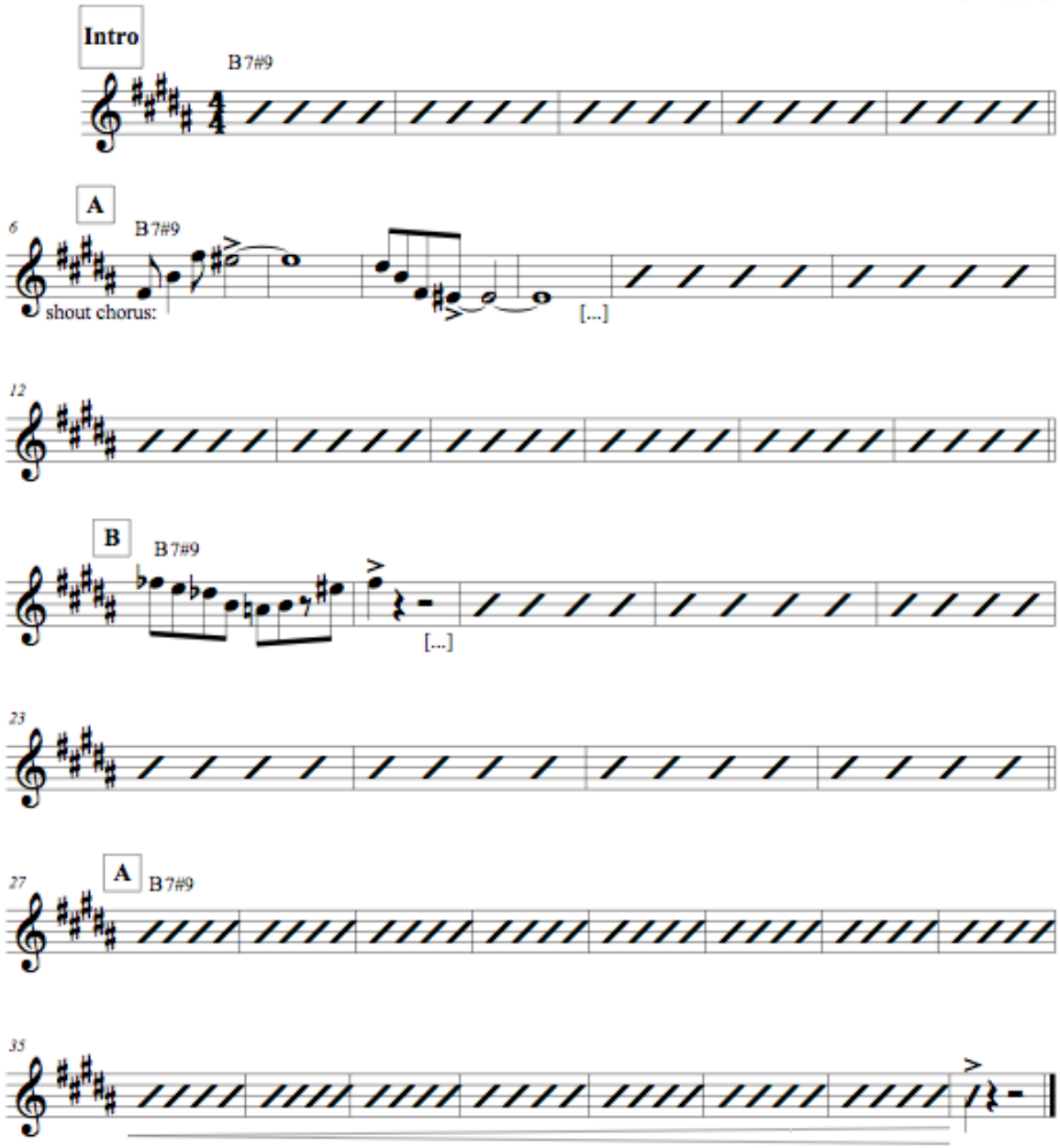
# Rain Dogs

Tom Waits



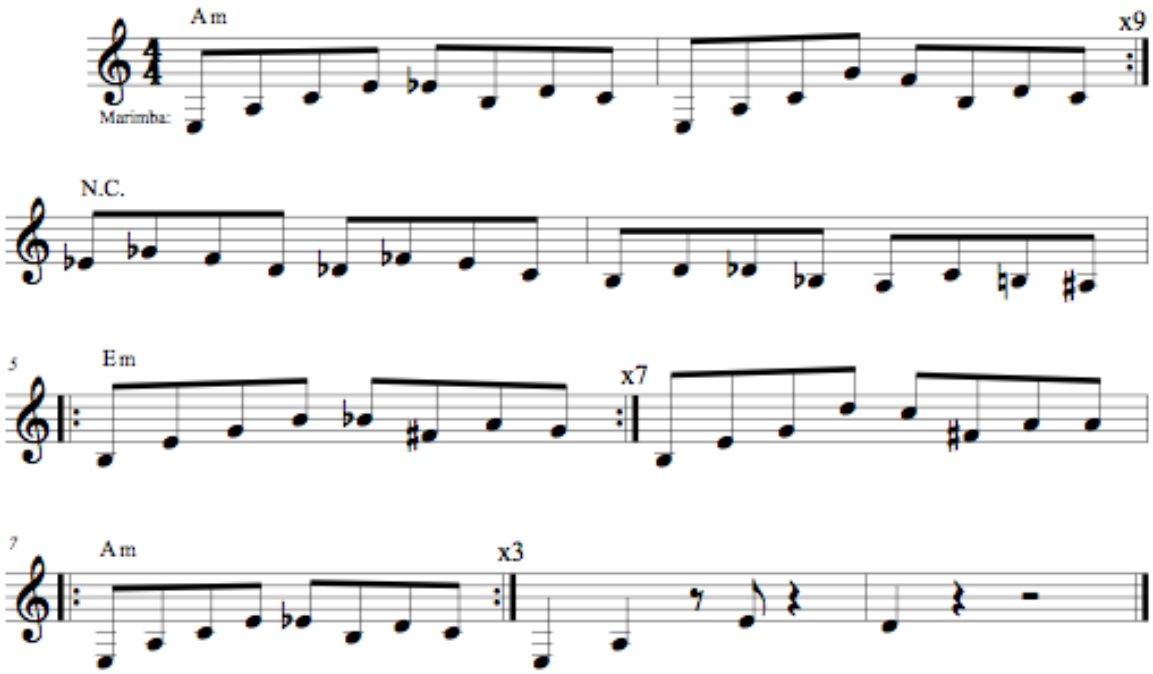
# Midtown (Instrumental)

Tom Waits



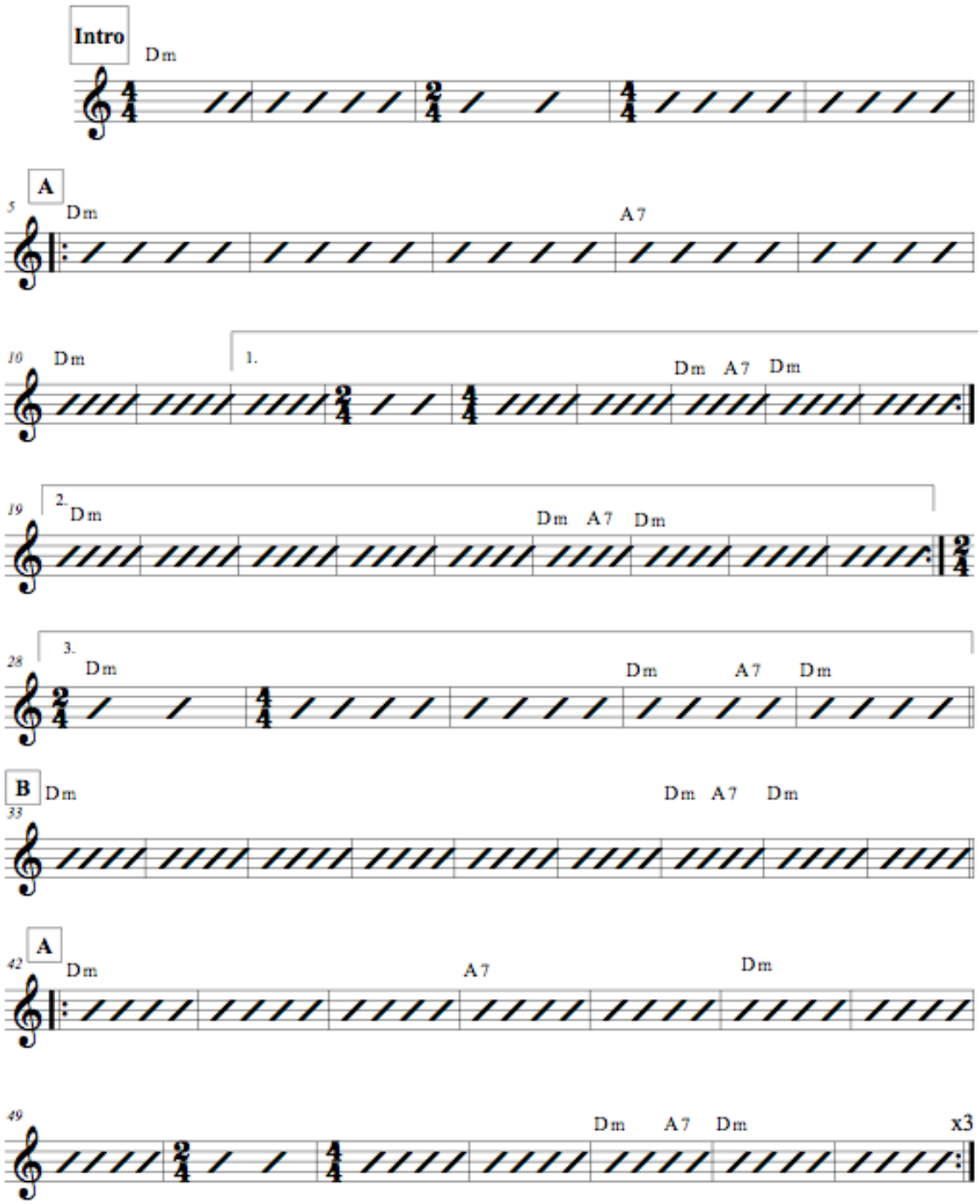
# 9th & Hennepin

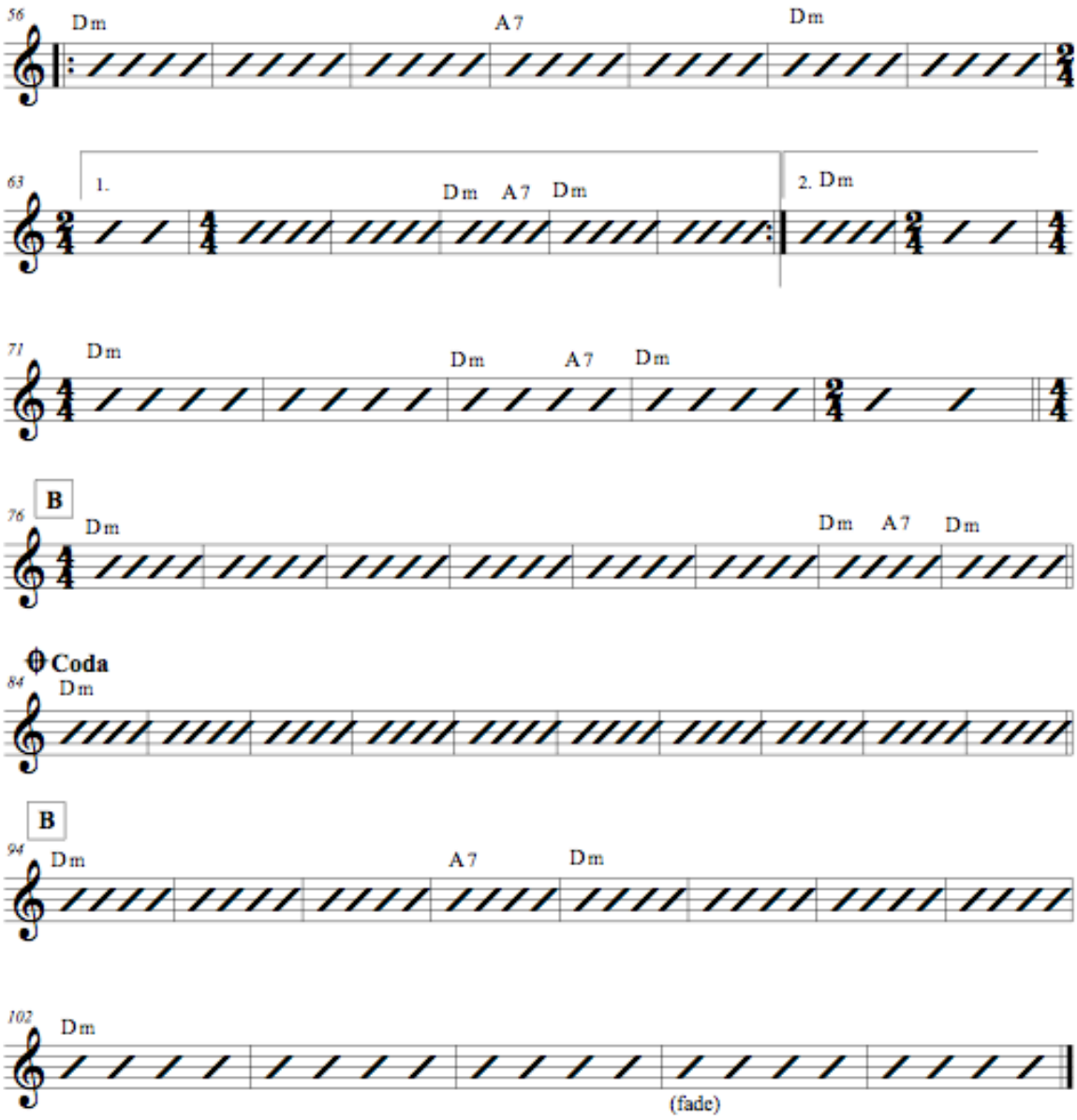
Tom Waits



# Gun Street Girl

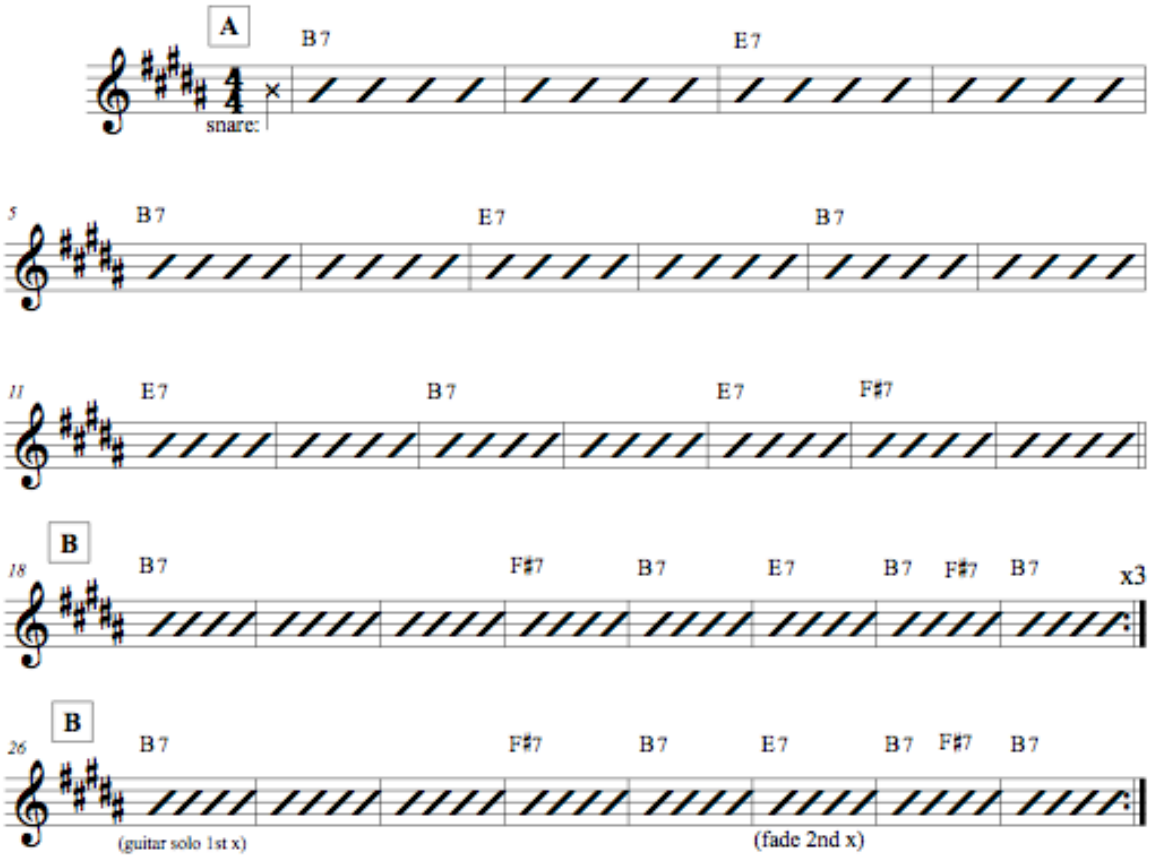
Tom Waits




56
Dm
A7
Dm
63
1.
Dm A7 Dm
2. Dm
71
Dm
Dm A7 Dm
B
76
Dm
Dm A7 Dm
Coda
84
Dm
B
94
Dm
A7
Dm
102
Dm
(fade)

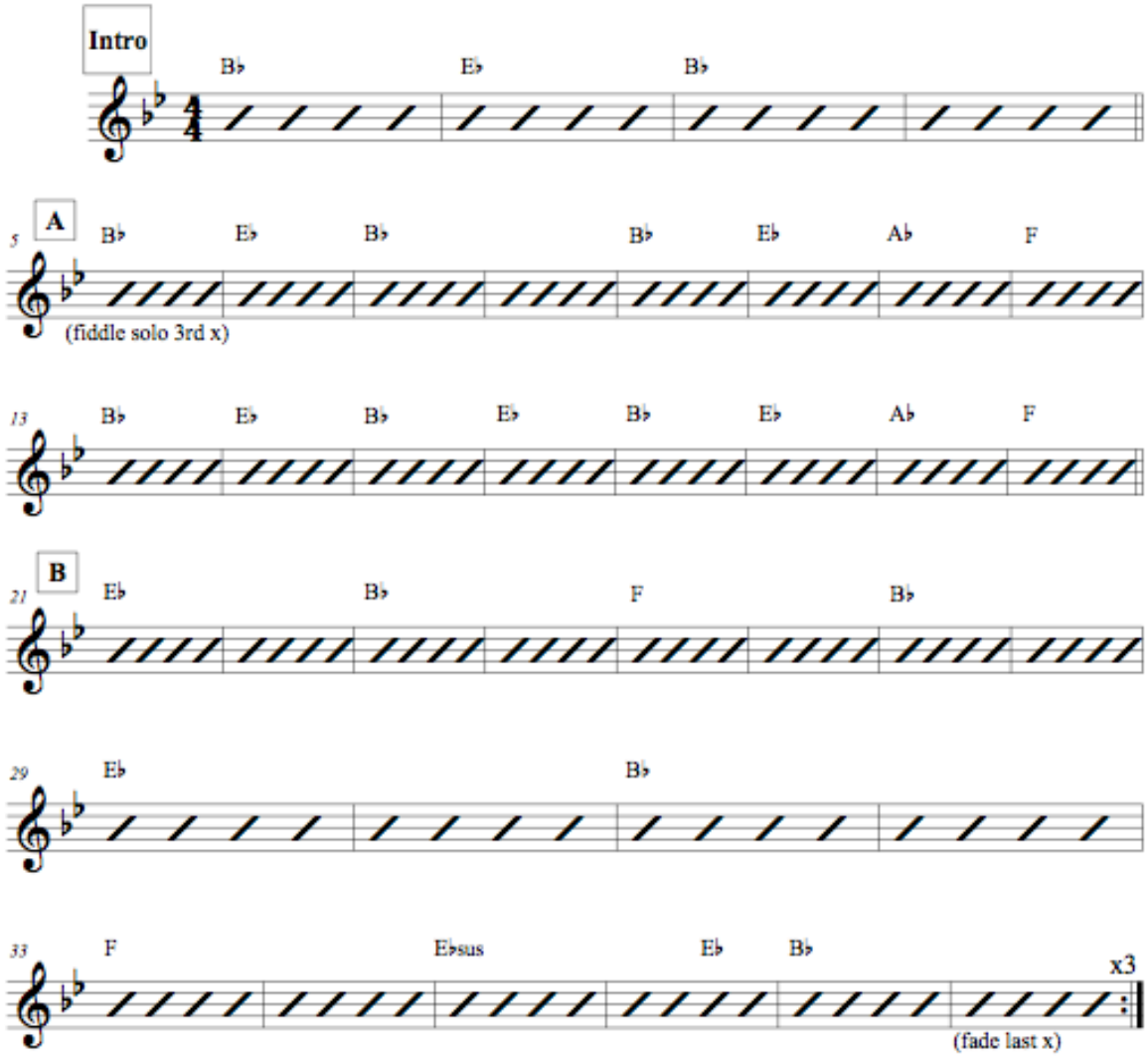
# Union Square

Tom Waits



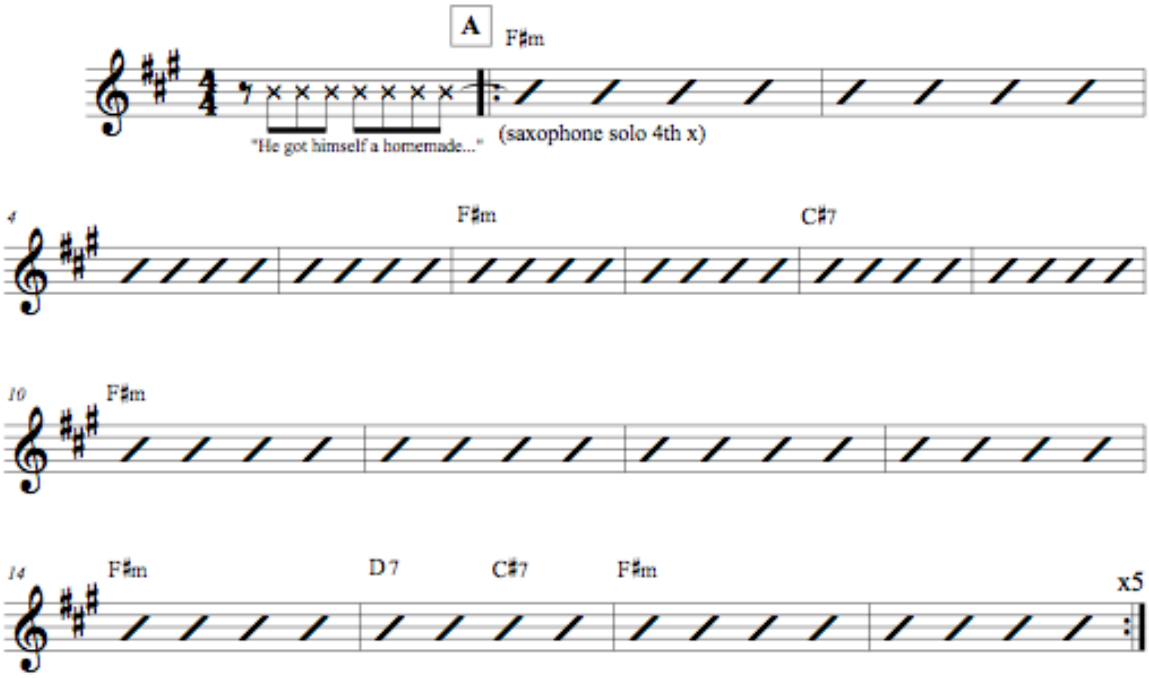
# Blind Love

Tom Waits



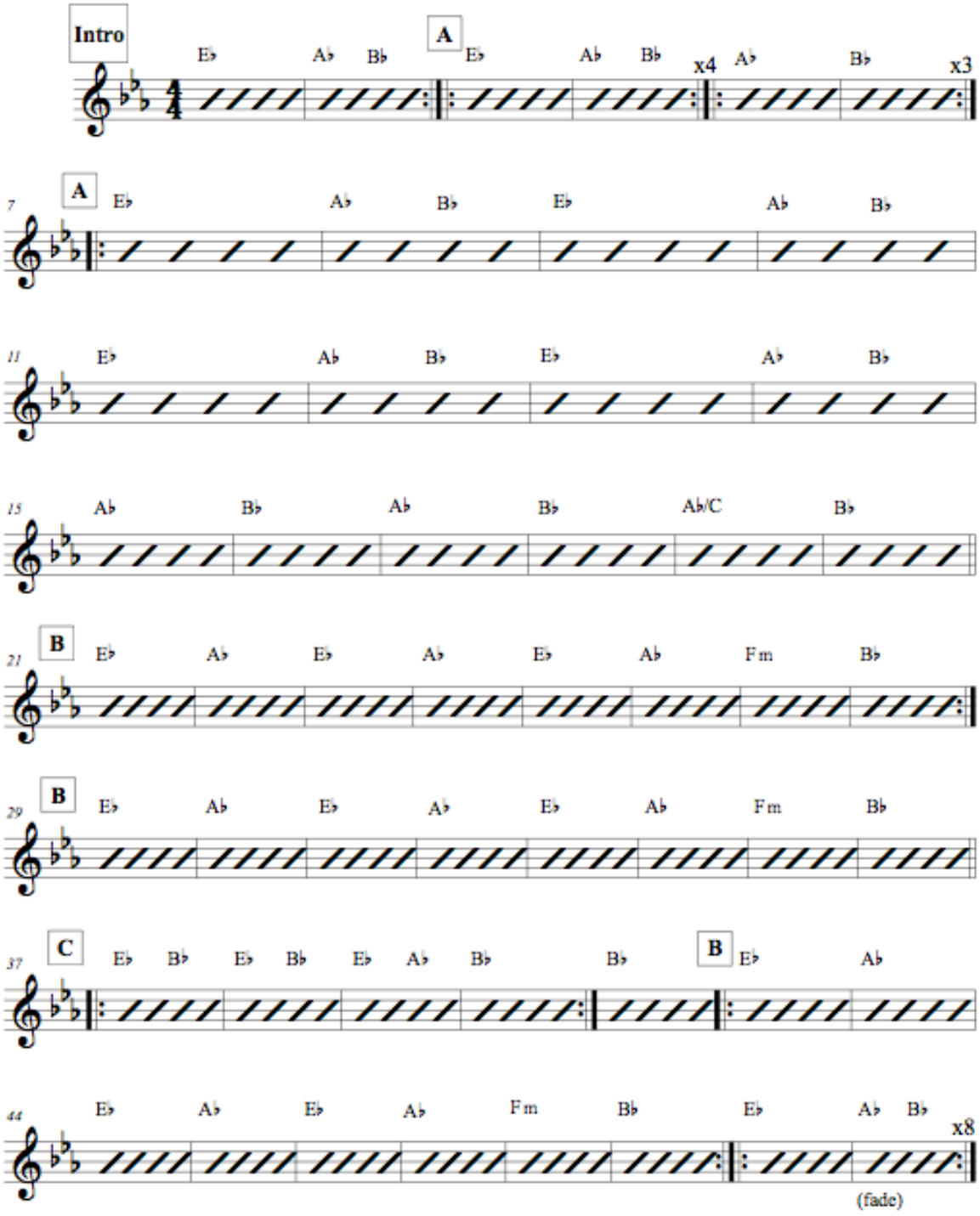
# Walking Spanish

Tom Waits



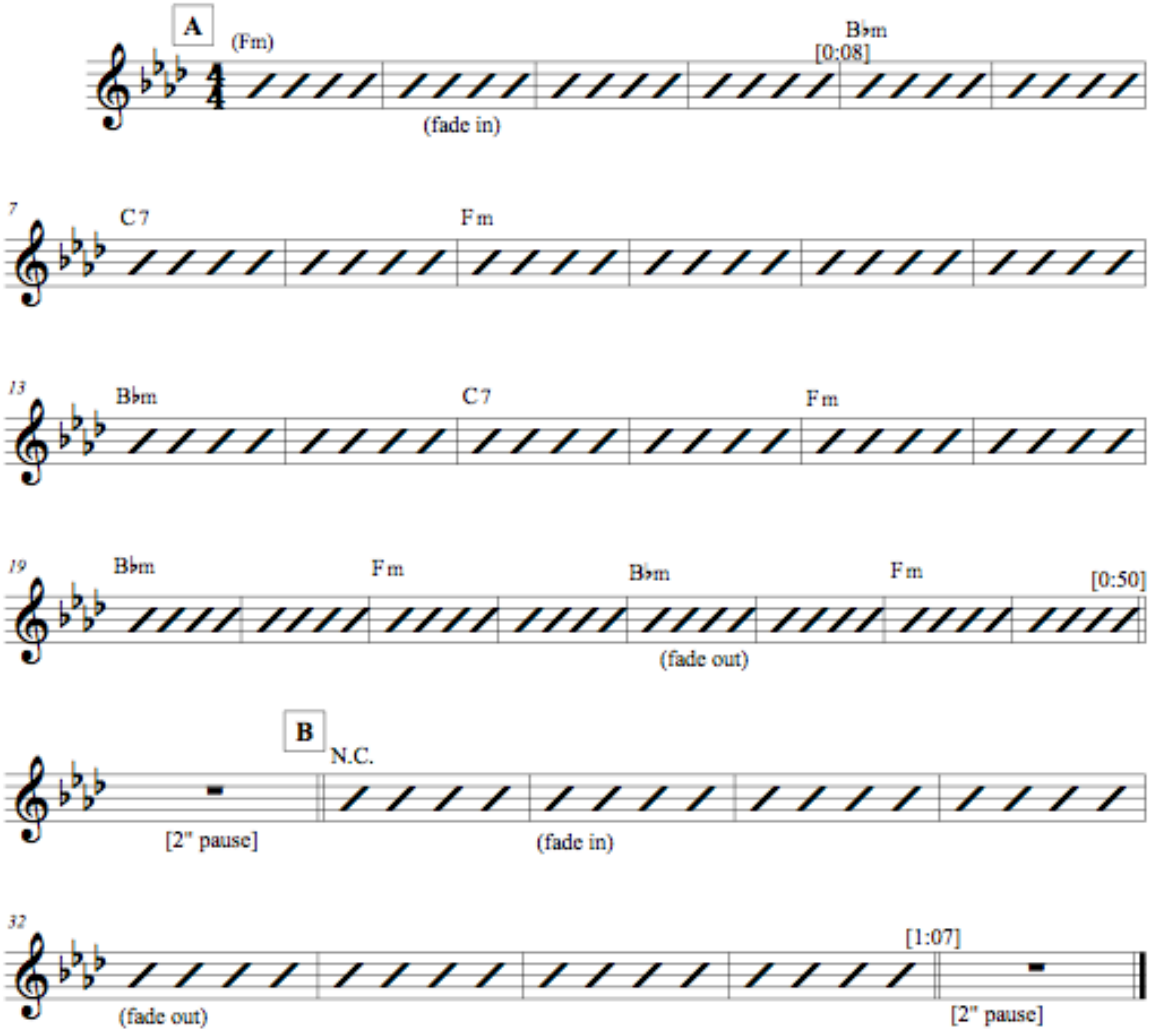
# Downtown Train

Tom Waits



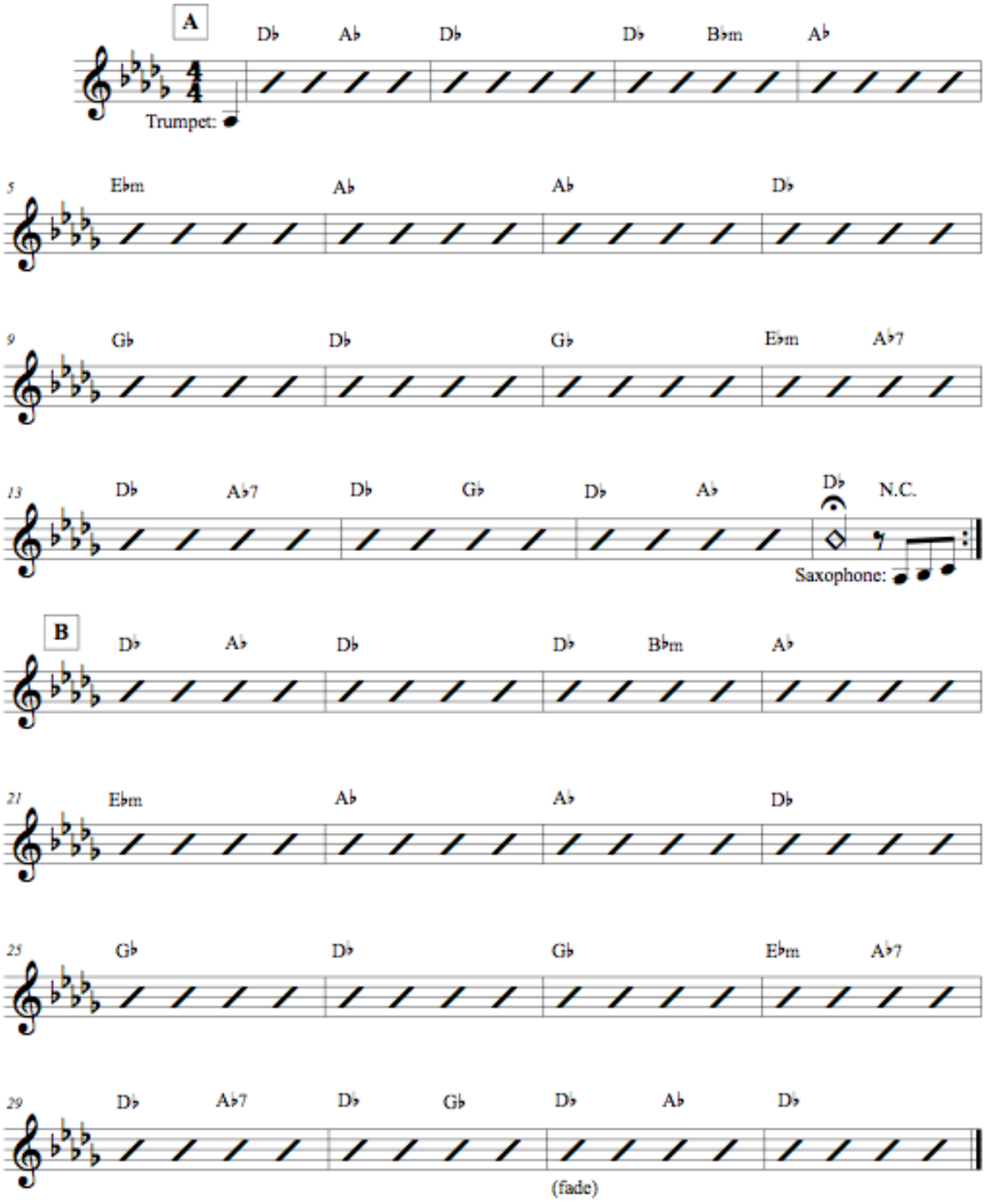
# Bride of Rain Dog (Instrumental)

Tom Waits



# Anywhere I Lay My Head

Tom Waits



# Appendix II: Lyrics

**Singapore**

We sail tonight for Singapore
We're all as mad as hatters here
I've fallen for a tawny moor
took off to the Land of Nod
Drank with all the Chinamen
Walked the sewers of Paris
I danced along a colored wind
Dangled from a rope of sand
You must say goodbye to me

We sail tonight for Singapore
Don't fall asleep while you're ashore
Cross your heart and hope to die
When you hear the children cry
Let marrow bone and cleaver choose
While making feet for children's shoes
Through the alley
Back from Hell
When you hear that steeple bell
You must say goodbye to me.

Wipe him down with gasoline
Till his arms are hard and mean
From now on boys this iron boat's your home
So heave away boys

We sail tonight for Singapore
Take your blankets from the floor
Wash your mouth out by the door
The whole town is made of iron ore
Every witness turns to steam
They all become Italian dreams
Fill your pockets up with earth
Get yourself a dollar's worth
Away boys, away boys, heave away

The captain is a one-armed dwarf
He's throwing dice along the wharf
In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is King
So take this ring

We sail tonight for Singapore
We're all as mad as hatters here
I've fallen for a tawny moor
took off to the Land of Nod
Drank with all the Chinamen
Walked the sewers of Paris
I danced along a colored wind
Dangled from a rope of sand
You must say goodbye to me



**Clap Hands**

Sane, sane, they're all insane
The fireman's blind, the conductor's lame
A Cincinnati jacket and a sad luck dame
Hanging out the window with a bottle full of rain
Clap hands. Clap hands
Clap hands. Clap hands

Said roar, roar the thunder and the roar
Son of a bitch is never comin' back here no more
A moon in the window, a bird on the pole
Can always find a millionaire to shovel all the coal

Clap hands. Clap hands
Clap hands. Clap hands

Steam, steam a hundred bad dreams
Goin' up to Harlem with a pistol in his jeans
A fifty dollar bill inside of Palladin's hat
And nobody's sure where Mr. Knickerbocker's at

Said roar, roar the thunder and the roar
Son of a bitch is never comin' back here no more
Moon in the window, a bird on the pole
Can always find a millionaire to shovel all the coal
Clap hands. Clap hands
Clap hands. Clap hands

Shine, shine a Roosevelt dime
All the way to Baltimore and runnin' out of time
Salvation Army seemed to wind up in the hole
They all went to Heaven in a little row boat

Clap hands. Clap hands
Clap hands. Clap hands



**Cemetery Polka**

Uncle Vernon
Uncle Vernon
Independent as a
Hog on ice
He's a big shot down there
At the slaughterhouse
He plays accordion

For Mr. Weiss

Uncle Biltmore and
Uncle William
Made a
Million during
World War II
But they're tightwads
And they're
Cheap skates
And they'll never
Give a dime to you

Auntie Mame
Has gone
Insane
She lives in
The doorway of an old hotel
And the
Radio is playing opera and
All she ever says
Is go to Hell

Uncle Violet
Flew as a pilot
He said there
Ain't no pretty
Girls in France
Now he runs a
Tidy little
Bookie joint they say
He never
Keeps it in his pants

Uncle Bill
Will never leave a will
And the tumour is as
Big as an egg
He has a mistress
She's Puerto Rican
And I heard she has
A wooden leg

Uncle Phil
Can't live without his pills
He has emphysema and
He's almost blind
And we must find out
Where the money is
Get it now
Before he loses his mind

Uncle Vernon
Uncle Vernon
Independent as a
Hog on ice
He's a big shot down there
At the slaughterhouse
He plays accordion
For Mr. Weiss



**Jockey Full of Bourbon**

Edna Million in a drop dead suit
Dutch Pink on a downtown train
Two dollar pistol but the gun won't shoot
I'm in the corner on the pouring rain
Sixteen men on a dead man's chest
And I've been drinking from a broken cup
Two pairs of pants and a mohair vest
I'm full of bourbon, I can't stand up

Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone
Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone

Schiffer broke a bottle on Morgan's head
And I've been stepping on the devil's tail
Across the stripes of a full moon's head
And through the bars of a Cuban jail
Bloody fingers on a purple knife
Flamingo drinking from a cocktail glass
I'm on the lawn with someone else's wife
Admire the view from up on top of the mast

Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone
Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone

I said, hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone
Hey little bird, fly away home
House is on fire, your children are alone

Yellow sheets on a Hong Kong bed
Stazybo horn and a Slingerland ride
To the carnival is what she said
A hundred dollars makes it dark inside

Edna Million in a drop dead suit
Dutch Pink on a downtown train
Two dollar pistol but the gun won't shoot
I'm in the corner on the pouring rain

Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone
Hey little bird, fly away home
Your house is on fire, your children are alone

**Tango Till They're Sore**

Well you play that Tarantella
All the hounds will start to roar
The boys all go to hell
And the Cubans hit the floor
They drive along the pipeline
They tango till they're sore
They take apart their nightmares
And they leave them by the door

Let me fall out of the window
With confetti in my hair
Deal out jacks or better
On a blanket by the stairs
I'll tell you all my secrets
But I lie about my past
And send me off to bed forever more

Make sure they play my theme song
I guess daisies will have to do
Just get me to New Orleans
And paint shadows on the pews
Turn the spit on that pig
And kick the drum and let me down
Put my clarinet beneath your bed
Till I get back in town

Let me fall out of the window
With confetti in my hair
Deal out jacks or better
On a blanket by the stairs
I'll tell you all my secrets
But I lie about my past
So send me off to bed forever more

Just make sure she's all in calico
And the color of a doll
Wave the flag on Cadillac day
And a skillet on the wall
Cut me a switch or hold your breath
Till the sun goes down
Write my name on the hood
Send me off to another town

And just let me fall out of the window
With confetti in my hair
Deal out jacks or better
On a blanket by the stairs
I'll tell you all my secrets
But I lie about my past
Will you send me off to bed forever more
Fall out of the window
With confetti in my hair
Deal out jacks or better
On a blanket by the stairs
I'll tell you all my secrets
But I lie about my past
Send me off to bed forever more
Send me off to bed forever more



**Big Black Mariah**

Cuttin' through the cane break
Rattling the sill
Thunder that the rain makes
When the shadow tops the hill
Big light on the back street
Hill to Evermore. Packin' down the ladder
With the hammer to the floor

Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Ford

Well he's all boxed up
On a red bell dame
Hunted Black Johnny with
A blind man's cane
A yellow bullet with a
Rag out in the wind
An old blind tiger
Get an old bell Jim
Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black Ford

Sent to the skies on a
Benny Jag Blue
Off to bed without his supper
Like the Linda brides do
Now he's got to do the story
With the old widow Jones...
He's got a wooden coat this boy
Is never coming home
Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Mariah
Here comes the Big Black Ford

Cut through the
Cane break...

Well he's all boxed up

On a red bell dame
Hunted Black Johnny with
A blind man's cane
A yellow bullet with a
Rag out in the wind
An old blind tiger
Get an old bell Jim
Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black
Mariah. Here comes the Big Black Ford



**Diamonds & Gold**

Broken glass
And rusty nails
Where the wild violets grow
Say goodbye to the railroad
And the mad dogs of summer
And everything that I know

What some men will do here for diamonds
What some men will do here for gold
They're wounded but they just keep on climbin'
And they sleep by the side of the road

There's a hole in the ladder
A fence we can climb
Mad as a hatter
You're thin as a dime
Go out to the meadow
The hills are agreen
Sing me a rainbow
Steal me a dream

Small time Napoleon's
Shattered his knees
But he stays in the saddle for Rose
And all his disciples
They shave in the gutter
And gather what's left of his clothes

What some men will do here for diamonds
What some men will do here for gold
They're wounded but they just keep on climbin
And they sleep by the side of the road

There's a hole in the ladder
A fence we can climb
Mad as a hatter
You're thin as a dime
Go out to the meadow
The hills are agreen
Sing me a rainbow
Steal me a dream



**Hang Down Your Head**

Hush a wild violet
Hush a band of gold
Hush you're in a story
I heard somebody told

Tear the promise from my heart
Tear my heart today
You have found another
Baby I must go away

Hang down your head for sorrow
Hang down your head for me
Hang down your head tomorrow
Hang down your head Marie

Hush my love the rain now
Hush my love was so true
Hush my love a train now
But it takes me away from you

Hang down your head for sorrow
Hang down your head for me
Hang down your head tomorrow
Hang down your head Marie



**Time**

Well the smart money's on Harlow
And the moon is in the street
And the shadow boys are breaking all the laws
And you're east of East St. Louis
And the wind is making speeches
And the rain sounds like a round of applause
And Napoleon is weeping in the Carnival saloon
His invisible fiance is in the mirror
The band is going home
It's raining hammers, it's raining nails
And it's true, there's nothin' left for him down here

And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time

And they all pretend they're Orphans

And their memory's like a train
You can see it getting smaller as it pulls away
And the things you can't remember
Tell the things you can't forget that
History puts a saint in every dream

Well she said she'd stick around
Until the bandages came off
But these mamas boys just don't know when to quit
And Matilda asks the sailors are those dreams
Or are those prayers?
So just close your eyes, son
And this won't hurt a bit

Oh it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time

Well, things are pretty lousy for a calendar girl
The boys just dive right off the cars
And splash into the street
And when they're on a roll she pulls a razor
From her boot and a thousand
Pigeons fall around her feet
So put a candle in the window
And a kiss upon his lips
Till the dish outside the window fills with rain
Just like a stranger with the weeds in your heart
And pay the fiddler off till I come back again

And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time

And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
And it's Time Time Time
That you love
And it's Time Time Time



**Rain Dogs**

Inside a broken clock
Splashing the wine
With all the rain dogs
Taxi, we'd rather walk
Huddle a doorway with the Rain Dogs
For I am a Rain Dog, too

Oh, how we danced and we swallowed the night
For it was all ripe for dreaming
Oh, how we danced away
All of the lights
We've always been out of our minds

The rum pours strong and thin
Beat out the dustman
With the rain dogs
Aboard a shipwreck train
Give my umbrella to the Rain Dogs
For I am a Rain Dog too

Oh, how we danced with the
Rose of Tralee
Her long hair black as a raven
Oh, how we danced and you
Whispered to me
You'll never be going back home

Oh, how we danced with the
Rose of Tralee
Her long hair black as a raven
Oh, how we danced and you
Whispered to me
You'll never be going back home



**Midtown (Instrumental)**

**Ninth & Hennepin**

Well it's 9th and Hennepin
All donuts have
Names that sound like prostitutes
When the moon's teeth marks are
On the sky like a tarp thrown over all this
And the broken umbrellas like
Dead birds and the steam
Comes out of the grill like
The whole goddamned town is ready to blow
And the bricks are all scarred with jailhouse tattoos
And everyone is behaving like dogs
And the horses are coming down Violin Road
And Dutch is dead on his feet
And all the rooms they smell like diesel
And you take on the
Dreams of the ones who've slept here
And I'm lost in the window
And I hide in the stairway
And I hang in the curtain
And I sleep in your hat
And no one brings anything
Small into a bar around here

They all started out with bad directions
And the girl behind the counter has a tattooed tear
One for every year he's away she said, such
A crumbling beauty, ahh there's
Nothing wrong with her that
$100 won't fix, she has that razor sadness
That only gets worse
With the clang and the thunder of the Southern Pacific going by
And the clock ticks out like a dripping faucet
Till you're full of rag water, bitters and blue ruin
And you spill out
Over the side to anyone who'll listen
I've seen it all
I've seen it all through the yellow windows
Of the evening train



**Gun Street Girl**

Falling James in the Tahoe mud
Stick around to tell us all the tale
Well, he fell in love with a Gun Street girl and
Now he's dancing in the Birmingham jail
Dancing in the Birmingham jail

He took a 100 dollars off a Slaughterhouse Joe
Bought a brand new Michigan 20 gauge
He got all liquored up on that roadhouse corn,
Blew a hole in the hood of a yellow Corvette
A hole in the hood of a yellow Corvette
Bought a second hand Nova from a Cuban Chinese
And dyed his hair in the bathroom of a Texaco
With a pawnshop radio, quarter past four
Well he left Waukegan at the slammin' of the door
Left Waukegan at the slammin' of the door

I said, John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
Ain't never coming home
I said John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
Ain't never coming home

He's sitting in a sycamore in St. John's Wood
Soakin' day old bread in kerosene
He was blue as a robin's egg brown as a hog
He's stayin' out of circulation till the dogs get tired
Out of circulation till the dogs get tired

Shadow fixed the toilet with an old trombone
He never get up in the morning on a Saturday
Sittin' by the Erie with a bull-whipped dog
Tellin' everyone he saw
They went that-a way
Tellin' everyone he saw
They went that-a way

Now the rain like gravel on an old tin roof
The Burlington Northern's pullin' out of the world
Now a head full of bourbon and a dream in the straw
And a Gun Street Girl was the cause of it all
A Gun Street Girl was the cause of it all

There's riding in the shadow by the St. Joe Ridge
And the click clack tappin' of a blind man's cane
He was pullin' into Baker on a New Year's Eve
With one eye on the pistol and the other on the door
One eye on the pistol and the other on the door

Well, Miss Charlotte took her satchel down to King Fish Row
Smuggled in a bran' new pair of alligator shoes
With a fireman's raincoat and her long yellow hair
Well they tied her to a tree with a skinny millionaire
Tied her to a tree with a skinny millionaire

I said, John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
Ain't never coming home
I said John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
Ain't never coming home

Bangin' on a table with an old tin cup
Sing I'll never kiss a Gun Street Girl again
I'll never kiss a Gun Street Girl again
I'll never kiss a Gun Street Girl again

I said, John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
Ain't never coming home
I said John, John he's long gone
Gone to Indiana
He ain't never coming home

**Union Square**

Well time is always money
For the boys on Union Square
You can bust your ass till doomsday
But don't forget to say your prayers
Someone's got a wad on the backstreet
Sacco got a bran' new slack
And your baby is handcuffed on the front seat
Sit right there, boy and you relax

Come on, honey, we're all goin'
down down down downtown
Down downtown
We're goin' down down down
We're goin' down downtown

Well they spill out of the Cinema 14
To that drag bar down the block
Best live show by far on the whole east coast
With a bank rolled up in your sock
She stand right there for your pleasure
Half Puerto Rican Chinese
You got to find your baby somebody to measure
I'm goin' to get me some of these baby

C'mon, honey, look-ee here
We're all goin' down down down down
Down down down downtown
Down downtown
I'm goin' down downtown

Four in the mornin' on a Sunday
Sacco drinkin' whiskey in church
Half pint of festival brandy
That boy 'bout to fall right off his perch
The guy in the sweater's off duty
Out in front on the welfare hotel
The guy in the dress is a beauty
Go all the way and I swear you never can tell

C'mon, honey, and pull up your socks
Down down down
I'm goin' down down down downtown
Down downtown
Down down down

Down down down
C'mon down downtown
Goin' down downtown
I'm goin' down down down



**Blind Love**

Now you're gone
It's hotels and whiskey and sad luck dames
And I don't care if they miss me
I never remember their names
They say if you get far enough away
You'll be on your way back home
Well I'm at the station
And I can't get on the train

Must be blind love
Only kind of love is stone blind love
Blind love
The only kind of love is stone blind love
With your blind love
Oh, it's blind love
Stone blind love
With your stone blind love

Now the streets turning blue
The dogs are barking
And the night has come
And there's tears that are falling
From your blue eyes now
And I wonder where you are
I whisper your name
The only way to find you
Is if I close my eyes
Find you with my blind love
The only kind of love is stone blind love

It's your blind love
The only kind of love is stone blind love
Stone blind love
Only kind of love is stone blind love

With your blind love
The only kind of love is stone blind love
Stone blind love
Stone blind love

Oh it's blind love
Blind love
The only kind of love is stone blind love
With your blind love
Oh it's blind love
Blind love
With your stone blind love



**Walking Spanish**

He's got himself a homemade special
You know his glass is full of sand

And it feels just like a jaybird
The way it fits into his hand
He rolled a blade up in his trick towel
They slap their hands against the wall
You never trip, you never stumble

He's walking Spanish down the hall

Slip him a picture of our Jesus
Or give him a spoon to dig a hole
What all he done ain't no one's business
But he'll need blankets for the cold
They dim the lights over on Broadway
Even the king has bowed his head
Every face looks right up at Mason

He's walking Spanish down the hall

Latella's screeching for a blind pig
Punk Sander's carved it out of wood
He never sang when he got hoodwinked
They tried it all but he never would
Tomorrow morning there'll be laundry
But he'll be somewhere else to hear the call
Don't say good bye he's just leavin' early

He's walking Spanish down the hall

All St. Bartholomew said was whispered
Into the ear of Blind Jack Dawes
All the Baker told the machine
Was that he never broke the law
Go on and tip your hat up to the Pilate
Take off your watch, your rings and all
Even Jesus wanted just a little more time

When he was walking Spanish down the hall



**Downtown Train**

Outside another yellow moon
Has punched a hole in the nighttime, yes
I climb through the window and down the street
I'm shining like a new dime
The downtown trains are full
Of all those Brooklyn girls
They try so hard to break out of their little worlds

You wave your hand and they scatter like crows
They have nothing that will ever capture your heart
They're just thorns without the rose
Be careful of them in the dark
Oh if I was the one
You chose to be your only one
Oh baby can't you hear me now

Will I see you tonight
On a downtown train
Every night its just the same
You leave me lonely, now

I know your window and I know it's late
I know your stairs and your doorway
I walk down your street and past your gate
I stand by the light at the four way
You watch them as they fall
They all have heart attacks
They stay at the carnival
But they'll never win you back

Will I see you tonight
On a downtown train
Where Every night its just the same
You leave me lonely
Will I see you tonight
On a downtown train
All of my dreams just fall like rain
All upon on a downtown train



**Bride of a Rain Dog (Instrumental)**

**Anywhere I Lay My Head**

My head is a-spinning round
My heart is in my shoes, yeah
I went and set the Thames on fire
Now I must come back down
She's laughing in her sleeve, boys
I can feel it in my bones
Oh, anywhere I'm gonna
Lay my head
Oh, I wanna call my home

Well I see that
The world is upside down
Seems that my pockets were filled up with gold
Now the clouds well they've covered everthing o'er
And the wind is blowing cold
Well I don't need anybody
Because I learned to be alone
I say anywhere
I lay my head, boys
Well I gotta call my home