



MTO 23.4 Examples: Ferrandino, Voice Leading and Text-Music Relations in David Bowie's Early Songs

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.4/mto.17.23.4.ferrandino.php>

Example 1. "Life on Mars," Verse 1, Prechorus, and Chorus (0:00–1:42)

LIFE ON MARS

David Bowie (1947–2016)

Verse 0:00

F F/E $\flat$ F/E $\flat$ D Gm Gm/F C 7

Its a God aw-ful small a- ffair_ to the girl with the mou-sy hair_ and her mo-mmy is yell - ing "no!"_ but her
Its on A-mer - i - ca's tor-tured brow_ that Mic-keyMouse has grown up_ a cow_ now the wor-kers have struck for fame_ 'cause

8 F F/E $\flat$ Cm D Gm

da - ddy has told her to go_ but her friend is no where to be seen_ now she walks through her sun - ken dream_ to the
Len-nins on sale a- gain_ see the mice in their mi- llion_ hordes_ from I - bi - za to the Nor-folk broads_ rule Bri

Prechorus 0:33

14 Gm/F C 7 Cm/E $\flat$ Ab+/E $\flat$ Fm

seats with the clear-est view_ and she's hooked to the sil - ver screen but the film is a sadd ening bore_ for she's
tan - nia is out_ of bounds_ to my mo - ther my dog_ and clowns 'cause I

Chorus 0:49

20 Ab/G $\flat$ D $\flat$ D $\flat$ /A B $\flat$ m D $\flat$ /C $\flat$ B $\flat$ E $\flat$

lived it ten times or more_ she can spit in the eyes of fools_ as they ask her to fo - cus on sai - lors fight-ing in the dance hall,
wrote it ten times or more_ its a - bout to be writ a- gain_ as I ask her to fo - cus on

27 Gm 7 B $\flat$ +/G $\flat$ F Fm Cm 7 Ebm 7 B $\flat$ E $\flat$

oh man, look at those cave men go its the frea-ki-est show_ take a look at the law man beat-ing up the wrong guy

35 Gm 7 B $\flat$ +/G $\flat$ F Fm Cm 7 Ebm 7

oh man won-der if he'll ev - er know_ he's in the best sell-ing show_ is there li - fe on

Retransition 1:19

41 Gm 7 B $\flat$ +/G $\flat$ B $\flat$ /F C 7 /E $\flat$ F B $\flat$ +/F $\sharp$ Gm G $\sharp$ 7 /D Am B $\flat$ B $\flat$ m

Mars?_____

Example 2. Chromatic Voice-Leading Patterns in “Life on Mars”

Verse 0:00 Prechorus 0:33 Chorus 0:49 Retransition 1:19

m. 17 m. 25 m. 41

F F/E♭ F/E♭ D Gm Gm/F C7 Cm/E♭ A♭*/E♭ Fm A♭/G♭ D♭*/A♭ B♭m D♭7/C♭ B♭ E♭ Gm F Fm Cm7 Ebm7 Gm7 B♭*/G♭ B♭/F C7/E♭ F B♭*/F# Gm G♯7/D B♭ B♭m

Example 3. “Life on Mars,” Normative Voice-Leading Reduction

LIFE ON MARS

Verse 0:00

Prechorus 0:33

Chorus 0:49

Retransition 1:19

Lyrics:

"It's a God awful small affair..."

"but the film..."

"ask her to focus on"

"Sailors fighting..."

"Lawmen beating..."

"...life on Mars?"

Chords:

F: I V/ii V⁷ I V/ii V⁷

(A^b₂)

B^b: bIII (D^b₄) I ii⁷ iv I

Example 4. Expressive Constructs in “Life on Mars”

Musical Gesture	Expressive Element
Modified Plagal Cadences (IV–iv–I)	Unexpected, Becomes Familiar
Auxiliary V–I Cadence in Bb Major	Transformation, Lack of Stability, Unsure
Symmetrical Key Relationships (F–Ab, Db–Bb)	Change, Shift of Setting
Ascending Tetrachord Verse Motive	Rising Tension
Reaching Over Thirds in Verse	Building Tension, Working Against Musical Gravity
Transfer of Head Tone C to F	Dramatic moment, Tense Leap
Repeated 5–1 Descent in Chorus	Release of Tension, Deceptive Conclusion
Obfuscation of Scale Degree 1 in Bb Major	Expectation, Hopeful
Chromatic Voice Leading	Goal-Oriented, Direction to Bb

Example 5. “Five Years,” sections A, A, B, and C (0:00”1:36)

FIVE YEARS

David Bowie (1947-2016)

A 0:16
G Em A
Push-ing through the mar-ket square so man-y moth-ers sigh-ing— News had just come ov-er,— we had

A 0:35
7 C G Em A
five years left to cry in. News guy wept and told us Earth was real-ly dy-ing cried so much his face was wet then I

B 0:54
15 C G Em
knew he was not ly-ing I heard tel-e-phones oper-a house favor-ite mel-o-dies_ I saw boys, toys, el ec-tric ir-ons and T. V.'s my

21 A C
brain hurt like a ware-house it had no room to spare I had to cram so man-y things to store ever-y-thing in there and all the fat

C 1:13
25 Am C Am C G
skin-ny peo - ple— and all the tall short peo - ple— and all the no - bod - y peo - ple

30 C D7 Am C
and all the some-bod - y peo - ple I ne-ver thought I'd need so man - y peo - ple.——

Example 6. “Five Years,” Divorced Voice-Leading Reduction

FIVE YEARS

A 0:16 m. 1, 8 ³
B 0:54 m. 17 ⁵
C 1:13 m. 25 ⁸

"I heard telephones..."
"all the fat skinny people..."

G: I vi II IV I vi II IV IV IV I ii IV

Example 7. Expressive Constructs in “Five Years”

Musical Gesture	Expressive Element
Cyclic Progression	Repetition, Familiarity
Breaking of Cycle in Section C	Interruption, Anticipation for Resolution
Cumulative Bass Descent	Lament, Sighing
Pentatonic Ascent to Head Tone	Hopeful, Anticipation
V7 Without Resolution (Section C)	Shock, Unfamiliar, Alienation
Repeated Scale Degree 5 and 6 in Refrain	Disorientation, Lack of Closure
Upper String Resolution in Refrain	Detached, Inevitable Closure

Example 8. “We are the Dead,” Verse and Chorus (0:00-2:15)

WE ARE THE DEAD

David Bowie (1947-2016)

Verse 0:16

Some-thing kind of hit me to - day_____ I looked at you_____ won - dered if you saw things my way_____ ?

8 peo - ple will hold_____ us to bla - me_____ it hit me to - day_____, it hit me to day_____ .

16 we're ta - king it hard_____ all the time_____ why don't we pass_____ it by just re - ply you've change your mind.

24 we're figh-ting with the eyes of the blind_____ ta - king it hard_____, ta - king it hard But now_____ we

Chorus 1:15

35 feel that we are pa per, cho-king on you night-ly They tell me "Son we want you be el - u-sive but don't walk far" For we're break-ing in the new boys de - ceive your next of

46 kin For you're dan-cing where the dogs de-cay de-fe ca-ting ees-ta-sy you're just an al-ly for the lee-cher lo - ca tor for the vir-gin king, but I love you in your fuck me pumps, and your

57 nim - ble dress that trails, oh dress your - self my ur - chin ones for I hear them on the rails be - cause of

63 all we've seen be-cause of all we've said we are the dead

Example 9. “We Are the Dead,” Modal Voice-Leading Reduction

WE ARE THE DEAD

Verse 0:16 m. 1, 16
"Something kind of hit me today" "it hit me today"

Chorus 1:16 m. 35
"we feel that we are paper..." "we are the dead..."

g: i VII VI VII i VI VII VII IV VII V IV

Example 10. Expressive Constructs in “We Are the Dead”

Musical Gesture	Expressive Element
Minor Modality	Gloominess, Foreign
Axial Structural Melody in Verse	Fixation, Redundancy
Global Melodic Oscillation	Lack of Clear Goal, Stuck in “Rut”
Double Plagal Cadence	Alternative Closure
Hypermetric Dissonance in Chorus	Disorientation, Chaotic
Quasi- <i>Sprechstimme</i> in Chorus	Recitative, Music Subordinate to Lyrics