



A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR MUSIC THEORY

MTO 28.4 Examples: Nobile, Alanis Morissette's Voices

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

<https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.22.28.4/mto.22.28.4.nobile.php>

Example 1. Alanis Morissette on the cover of *Rolling Stone Magazine*, issue 720 (November 2, 1995), with the caption “angry white female”



Example 2. List of *Jagged Little Pill*'s songs with lyrical summaries and thematic categories

Track	Title	Text summary	Category
1	All I Really Want	Introduces persona as someone looking for connection but frustrated by social pressures.	Self-description
2	You Oughta Know	Excoriates a former lover for his selfish actions and explains the persona's psychological aftermath from the breakup.	Gendered anger
3	Perfect	Reflects upon parental pressure on children to be "perfect" and the psychological ramifications thereof.	Personal psychology
4	Hand in My Pocket	Describes the persona's peace with her internal contradictions.	Self-description
5	Right Through You	Recounts experiences of sexism in the music industry and presents the persona's eventual career success as retribution.	Gendered anger
6	Forgiven	Reflects on the psychological effects of the persona's Catholic upbringing.	Personal psychology
7	You Learn	Describes how the persona's hard times have taught her valuable life lessons.	Self-description
8	Head Over Feet	Lists positive qualities of the persona's new love interest and expresses surprise at her feelings of devotion	Love
9	Mary Jane	Consoles a friend who is experiencing domestic abuse.	Personal psychology
10	Ironic	Recounts situations in which a single flaw sours an otherwise positive experience.	Self-description
11	Not the Doctor	Resists the role of psychological healer within a toxic relationship.	Gendered anger
12	Wake Up	Chastises an addressee for general passivity and unwillingness to engage with the persona.	Gendered anger
13a	You Oughta Know (Jimmy the Saint Blend)	<i>Demo version of track 2 (same vocals)</i>	
13b	Your House (a cappella hidden track; starts at 5:12 of track 13)	Tells the story of a female protagonist going into her lover's house uninvited and discovering evidence of an affair.	Fictionalized anecdote

Example 3. Alanis Morissette’s six vocal styles on *Jagged Little Pill* and their associated vocal properties, presented as binaries with unmarked and marked values (the marked value indicated by gray shading)

Vocal style	Chest or head voice	Neutral or breathy phonation	Twang (constricted) or open vocal tract	Pitch range
Speech-song	Chest	Neutral	Twang	Mid
Modal	Chest	Neutral	Open	Mid
Belt	Chest	Neutral	Twang	High
Soft voice	Chest	Breathy	Open	Mid
Sweet voice	Head	Breathy	Open	High
Squeal	Head/mix	Neutral	Twang	High

Example 4. Speech-song in first verse–prechorus–chorus cycle of “All I Really Want” (track 1)

VERSE

Do I stress you out?^h
 My sweater is on backwards and inside out
 And you say, “how appropriate”
 I don’t like to dissect everything today
 I^h don’t mean to pick you apart you see
 But I can’t help it^h

PRECHORUS

And there I go jumping before the gunshot has gone off^h
 Slap me with a splintered^h ruler^h
 And it would knock me to the floor if I wasn’t there already^h
 If only I could hunt the hunter^h

CHORUS

And all I really want is some patience
 A way to calm the angry voice
 And all I really want is deliverance, ah

Key
Speech-song
Modal
Belt
Soft voice
Sweet voice
Squeal
^h = yodel break
Vocal fry
Flange
Double tracking

Example 5. Medley of other speech-song examples from across *Jagged Little Pill*

“Not the Doctor,” from first verse

I don't wanna be the filler if the void is solely yours

“Hand in My Pocket,” from first verse

I'm broke, but I'm happy^h

I'm poor, but I'm kind^h

I'm short, but I'm healthy, yeah

“You Learn,” from first verse

I recommend getting your heart trampled on to anyone

“Irony,” from second verse

He waited his whole damn life to take that flight

And as the plane crashed down

He thought, “Well, isn't this nice?”

“Right Through You,” from second verse

Your shake is like a fish

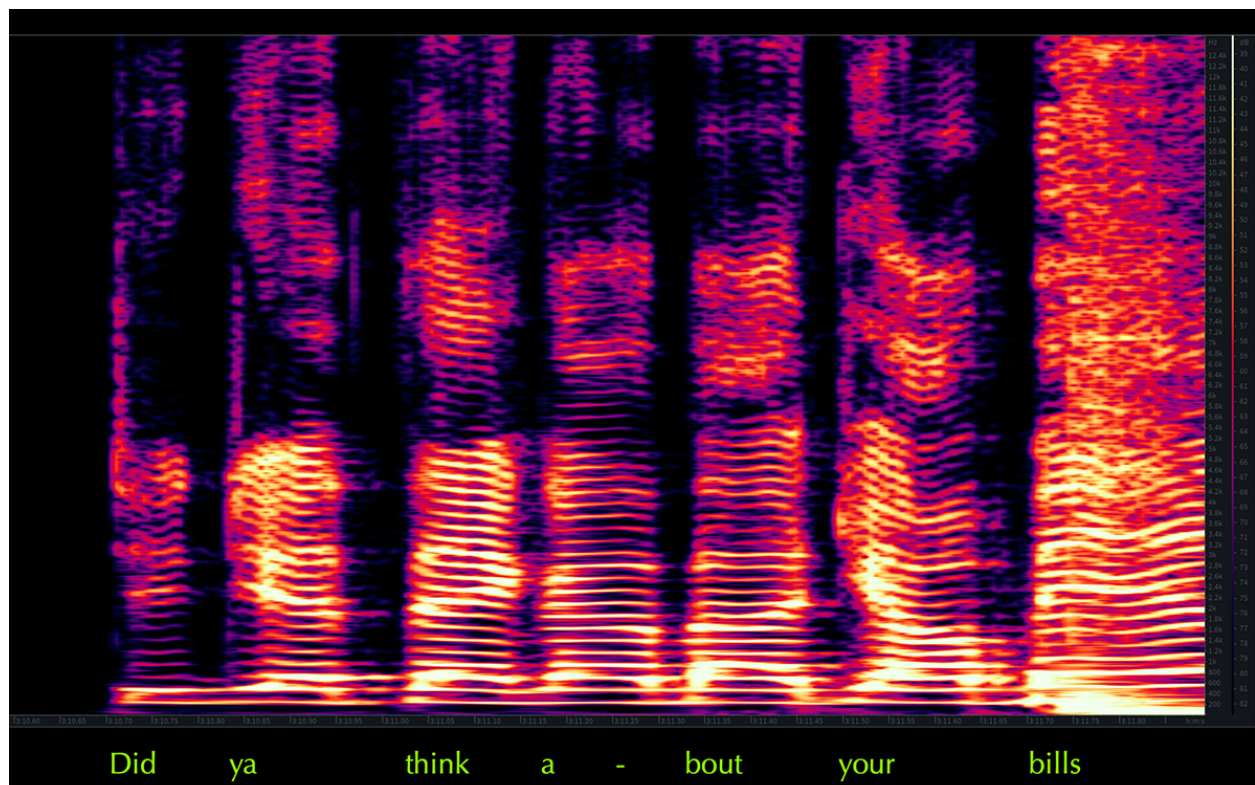
You pat me on the head

You took me out to wine, dine, sixty-nine me

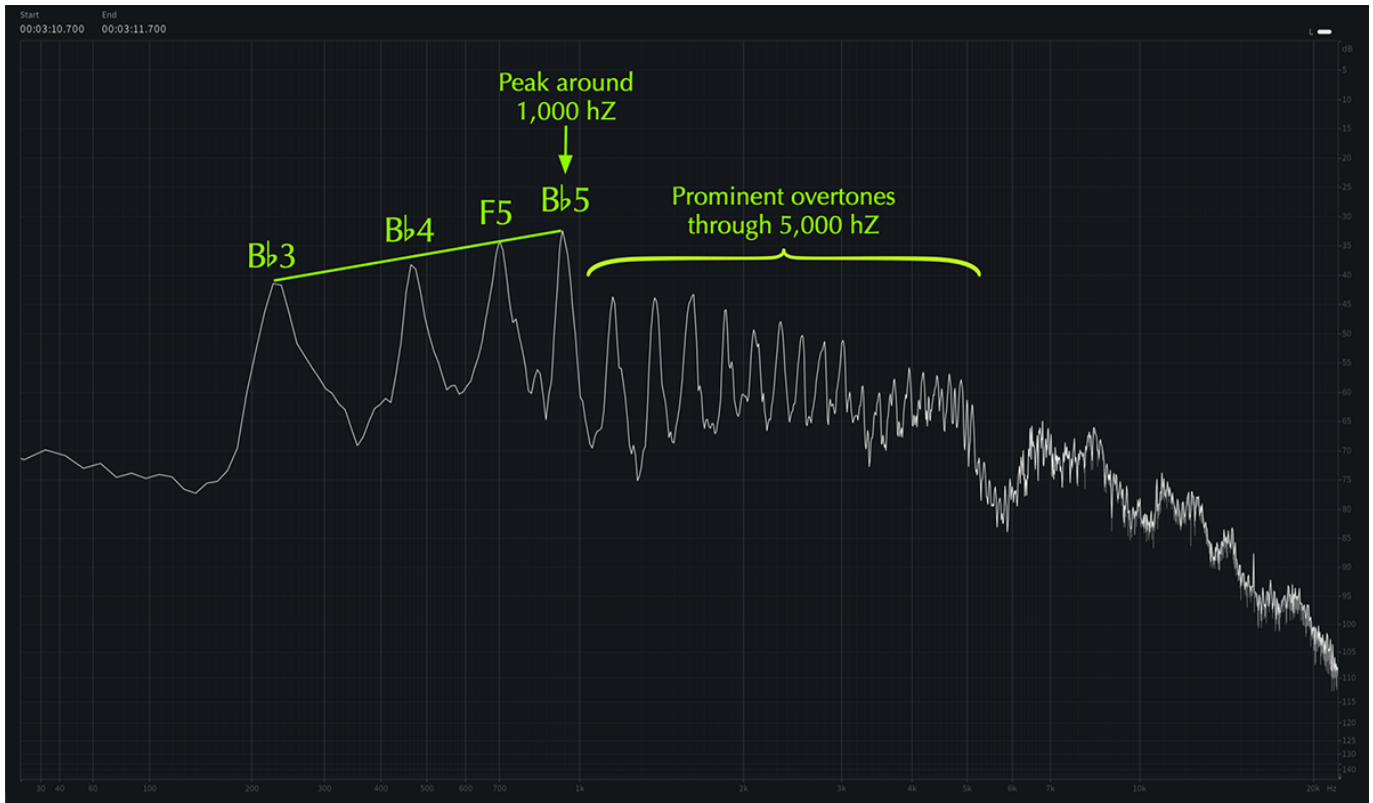
But didn't hear a damn word I said

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 6. Standard spectrogram of Morissette's speech-song on the line “did you think about your bills” from the third verse of “All I Really Want” (track 1, at 3:09)



Example 7. Spectrum graph showing frequency amplitudes (averaged across “did ya think about your” from Example 5, all sung on B $\flat$ 3)



Example 8. Modal voice in “Head Over Feet” (track 4, second verse and chorus, 1:00–1:42)

VERSE 2

Your love is thick and it swallowed me whole
 You're so much braver than I gave you credit for
 That's not lip service

CHORUS

You've already won me over in spite of me
 And don't be alarmed if I fall head over feet
 And don't be surprised if I love you for all that you are
 I couldn't help it
 It's all your fault

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 9. Belt voice in the choruses of “Forgiven” (track 6) and “You Oughta Know” (track 2)

“Forgiven,” chorus

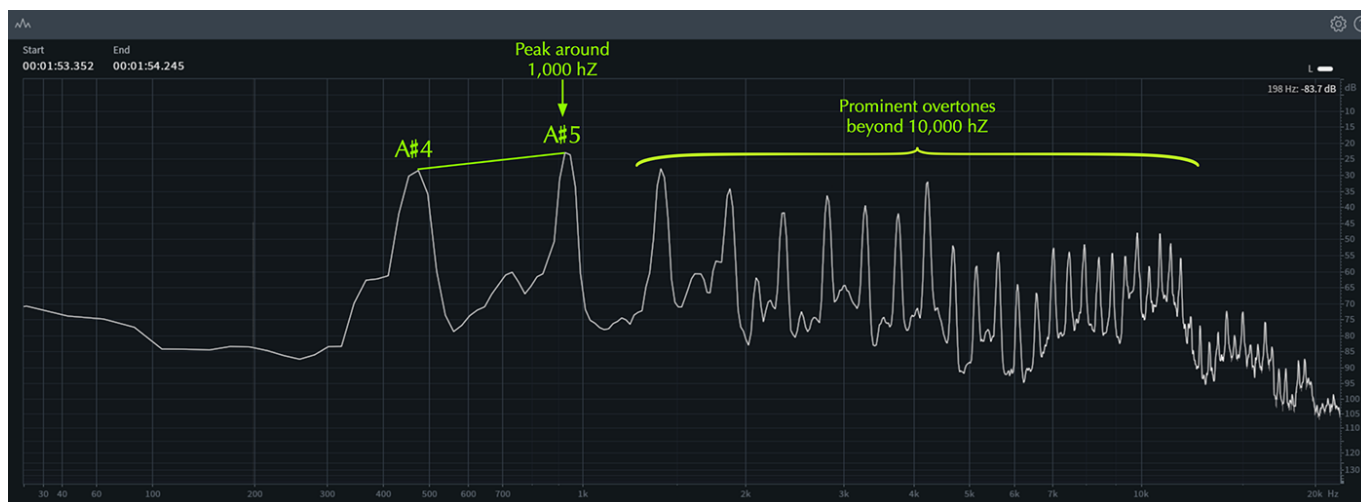
We all had our reasons to be there
We all had a thing or two to learn
We all needed something to cling to
So we did

“You Oughta Know,” chorus

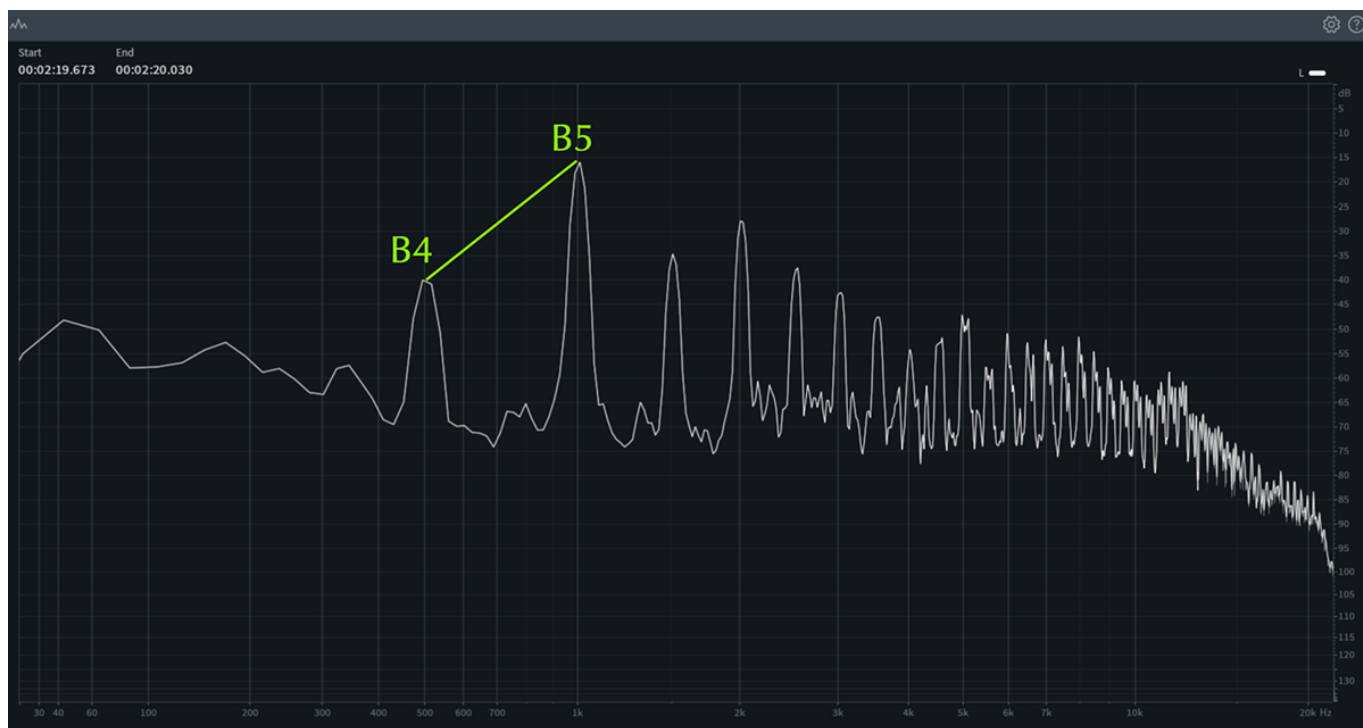
And I’m here, to remind you
Of the mess you left when you went away
It’s not fair to deny me
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me
You^h, you^h, you^h oughta know^h

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 10. Spectrum graph of belted A#4 on “-noon” from “if I stay all afternoon” in “Your House” (track 13b, at 6:03). We see a peak around 1,000 Hz, as in speech-song, but because of the higher fundamental pitch, that peak occurs at the second partial, rather than the fourth.



Example 11. Spectrum graph of belted B4 on “cryin’” from “why are you cryin’?” in “Perfect” (track 3, at 2:18)



Example 12. Soft voice and sweet voice in the intro and first verse of “Ironic” (track 10, at 0:00)

INTRO

Hey, yeah, yai
Ya, ah-ah hi, yeah hi

VERSE

An old man turned ninety-eight.
He won the lottery, and died the next day.
It's a black fly in your Chardonnay;
it's a death row pardon two minutes too late.
Refrain
And isn't it ironic?
Don't you think?

Key

Speech-song

Modal

Belt

Soft voice

Sweet voice

Squeal

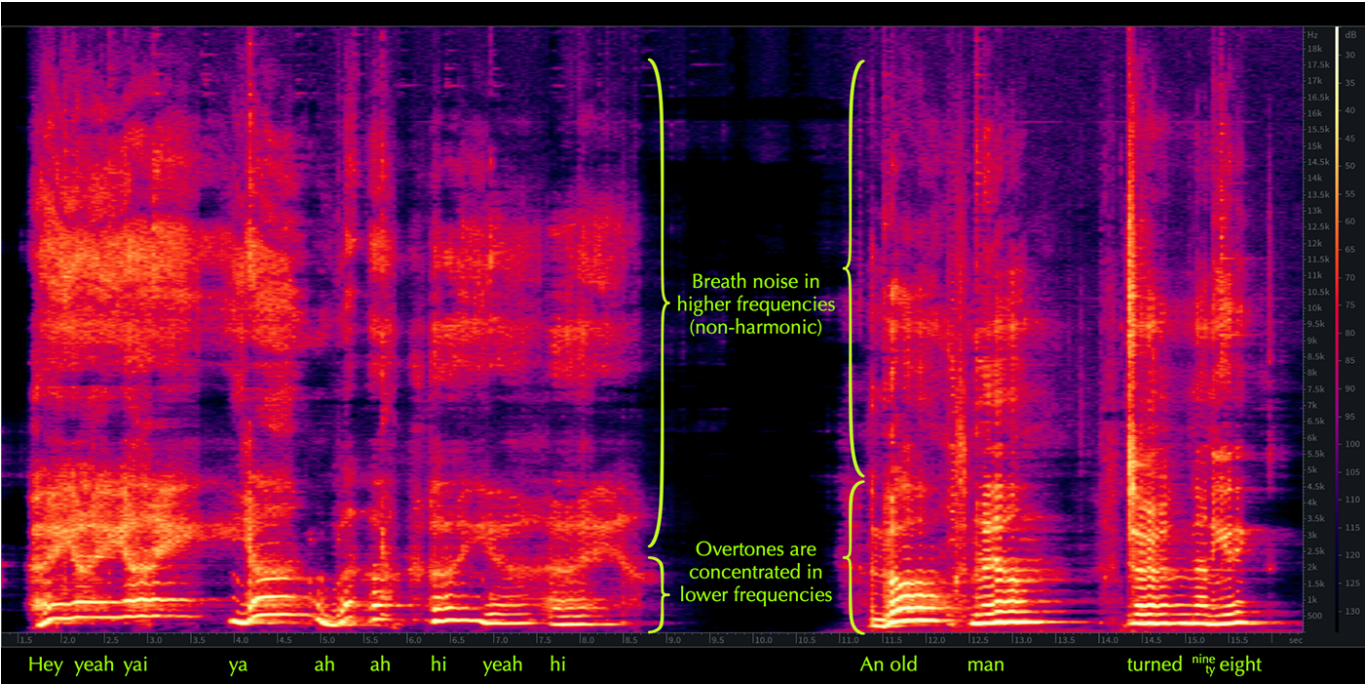
h = yodel break

Vocal fry

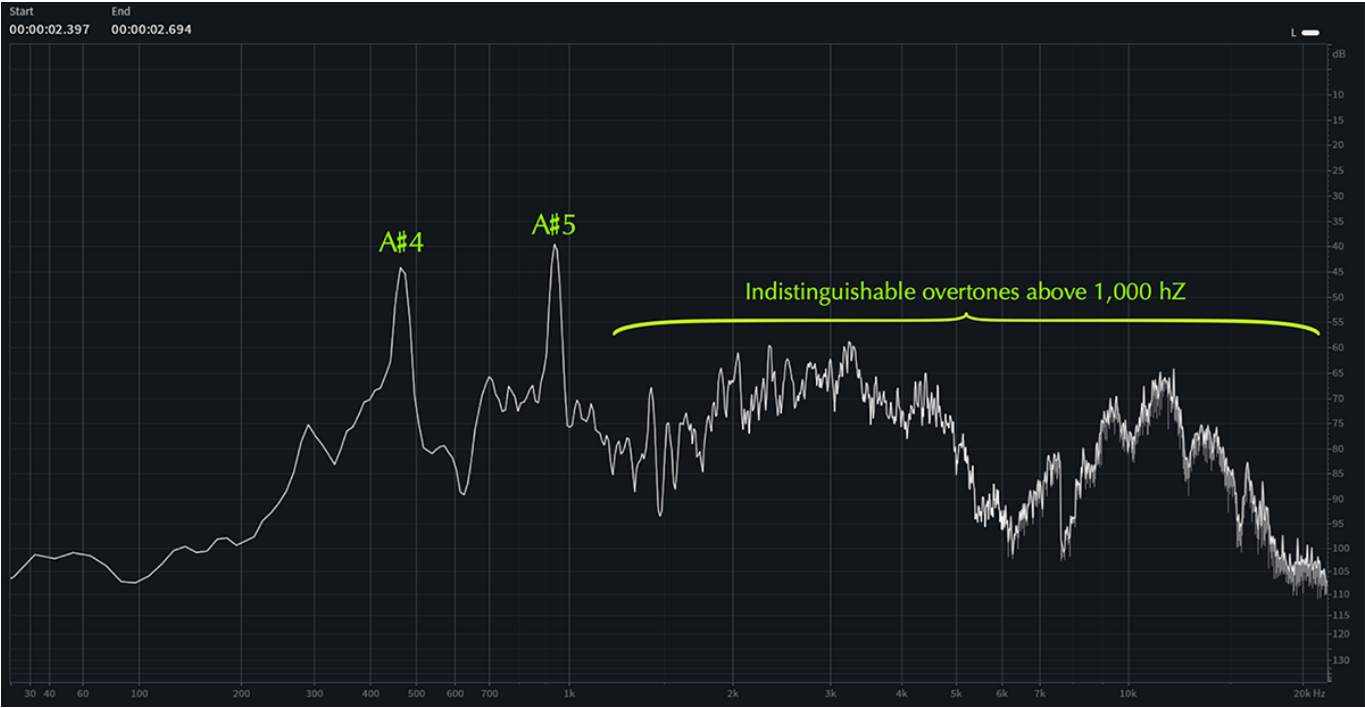
Flange

Double tracking

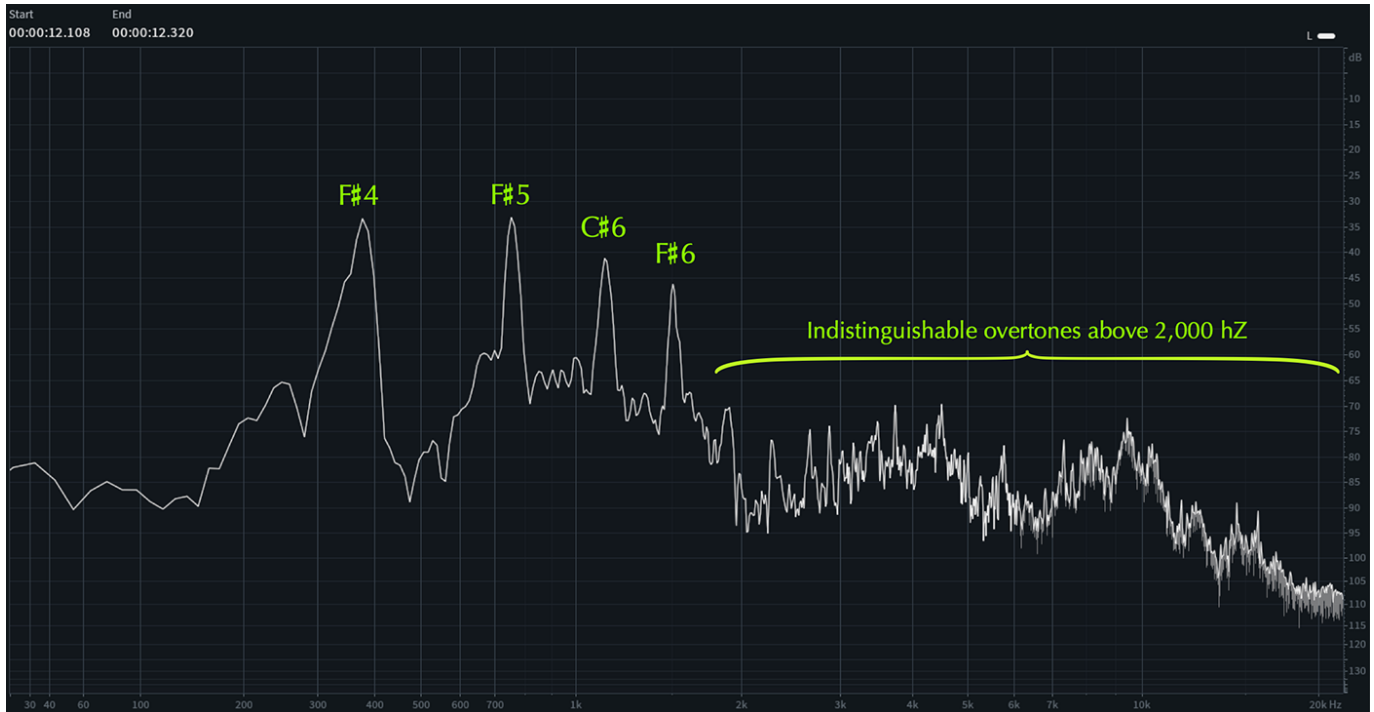
Example 13. Spectrogram of the isolated vocal line from the opening of “Ironic”



Example 14. Spectrum graph of sweet voice on A#4 (the first “yeah” in the intro to “Ironic”)



Example 15. Spectrum graph of soft voice on F#4 (“old” in the first verse of “Ironic”)



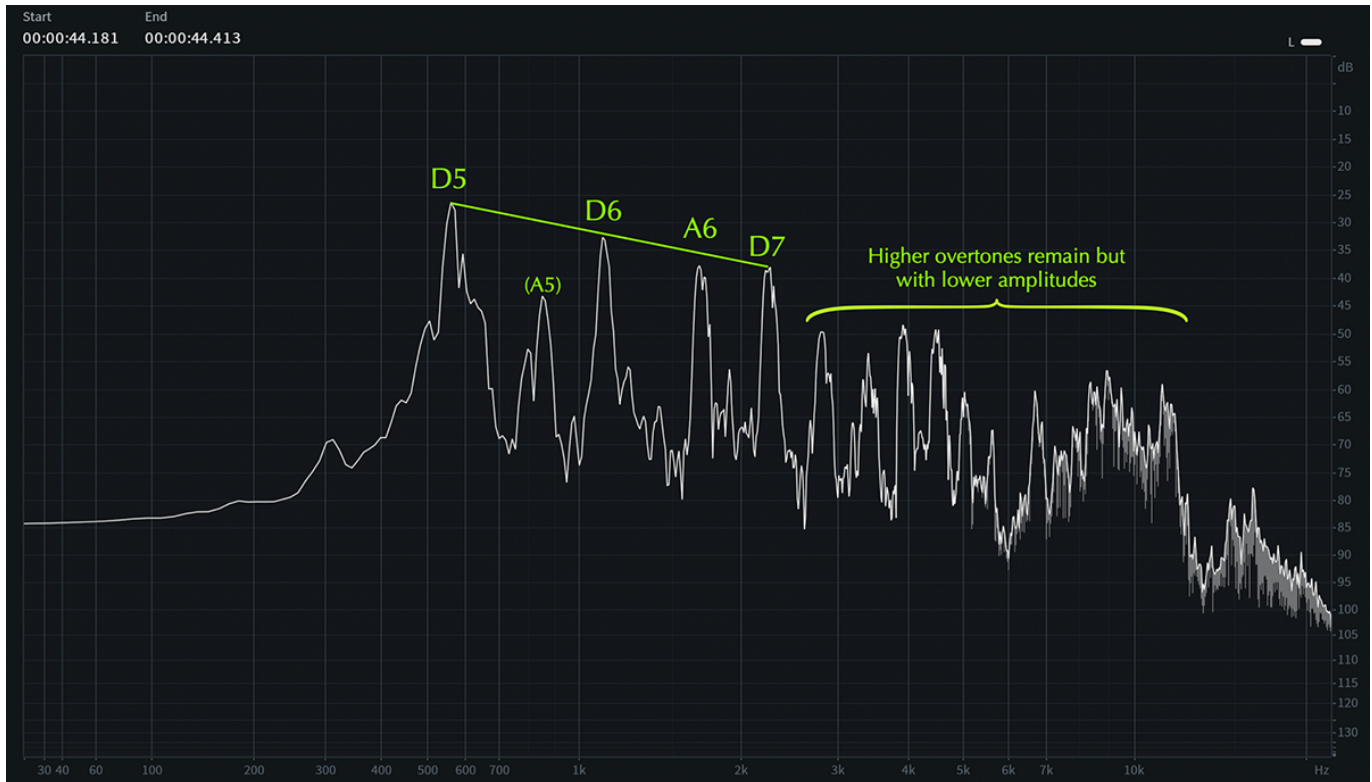
Example 16. Squeal in the prechorus of “All I Really Want” (track 1, at 0:42)

PRECHORUS

And there I go jumping before the gunshot has gone off^h
 Slap me with a splintered^h ruler^h
 And it would knock me to the floor if I wasn't there already^h
 If only I could hunt the hunter^h

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h	= yodel break
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 17. Spectrum graph of squeal on the syllable “-fore” from “before the gunshot has gone off” (“All I Really Want,” track 1, at 0:44)



Example 18. Some examples of prominent yodel breaks from across *Jagged Little Pill*

“Your House,” from second verse (track 13b, 6:35)

And I^h shouldn't stay long^h

“All I Really Want,” from final chorus/outro (track 1, 4:18)

Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah^h ah^h ah^h

“Mary Jane,” from second chorus (track 9, 1:36)

speed baby^h

“Hand in my Pocket,” from second chorus (track 4, 1:11)

And what it all comes down^h to^h

“You Oughta Know,” end of last chorus (track 2, 4:02)

You, you, you oughta know^h

Example 19. “You Oughta Know,” prechorus (track 2, 0:36): manual double tracking, with each of the two recorded tracks panned hard to one side

PRECHORUS

'Cause the love that you gave that we made
Wasn't able to make it enough for you
To be open wide, no
And every time you speak her name
Does she know how you told me
You'd hold me until you died
Till you died, but you're still alive

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 20. “Ironic,” bridge (track 10, 1:52): flanging effect

BRIDGE

Well, life has a funny way of sneaking up on you
when you think everything's okay and everything's going right
And life has a funny way of helping you out
when you think everything's gone wrong
And everything blows up in your face

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 21. "Perfect" (track 3), annotated lyrics

VERSE

Sometimes is never quite enough
If you're flawless, then you'll win my love
Don't forget to win first place
Don't forget to keep that smile on your face

CHORUS

Be a good boy
Try a little harder
You've got to measure up
Make me prouder

VERSE

How long before you screw it up^h
How many times do I have to tell you to hurry up^h
With everything I do for you
The least you can do is keep quiet

CHORUS

Be a good girl
You gotta try a little harder
That simply wasn't good enough
To make us proud

BRIDGE

I'll live through you, I'll make you what I never was
If you're the best, then maybe so am I
Compared to him, compared to her
I'm doing this for your own damn good
You'll make up for what I blew
What's the problem, why are you crying^{h?}

CHORUS

Be a good boy
Push a little farther now
That wasn't fast enough
To make us happy

We'll love you just the way you are
If you're perfect

Key

Speech-song

Modal

Belt

Soft voice

Sweet voice

Squeal

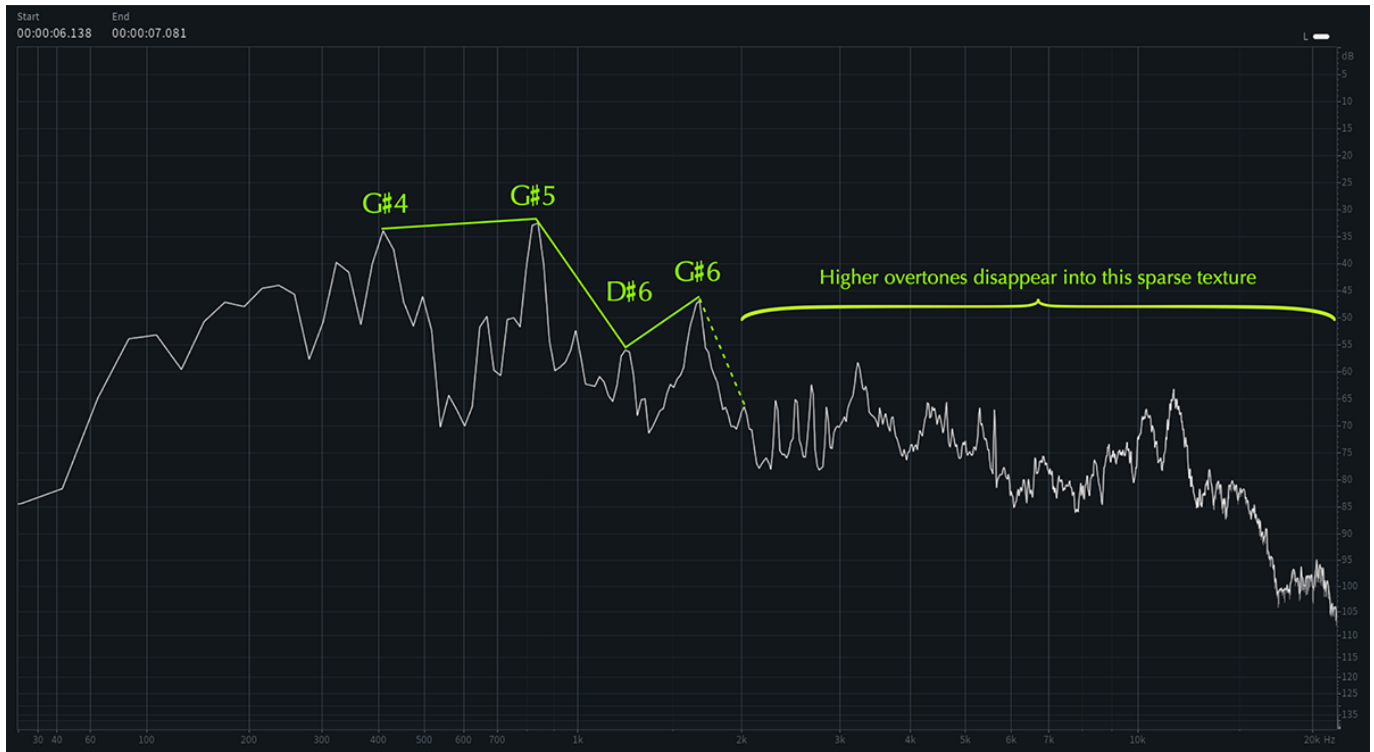
^h = yodel break

Vocal fry

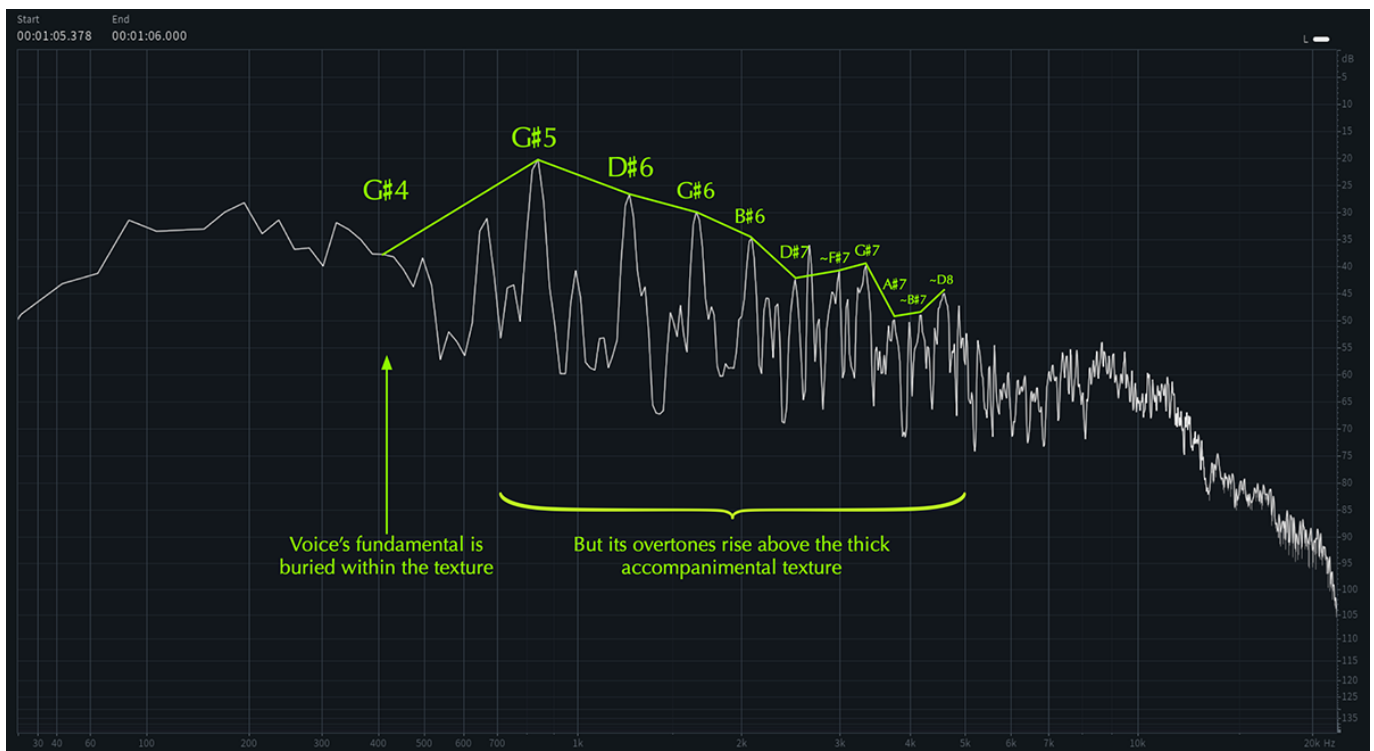
Flange

Double tracking

Example 22. Spectrum graph of sweet voice on G $\sharp$ 4 on the syllable “-nough” from “is never quite enough” (“Perfect,” verse 1, 0:06)



Example 23. Spectrum graph of belted G $\sharp$ 4 on “up” from “before you screw it up” (“Perfect,” verse 2, 1:05). Compare with the parallel moment from verse 1 shown in Example 22.



Example 24. Squeal and belt in the bridge of “Perfect” (track 3, at 1:59)

BRIDGE

I'll live through you, I'll make you what I never was
If you're the best, then maybe so am I
Compared to him, compared to her
I'm doing this for your own damn good
You'll make up for what I blew
What's the problem, why are you crying^h?

Key

Speech-song

Modal

Belt

Soft voice

Sweet voice

Squeal

^h = yodel break

Vocal fry

Flange

Double tracking

Example 25. Close synchronization of vocal style and formal structure in “You Oughta Know” (track 2): four vocal styles across four sections/subsections

VERSE

Part 1 (8m)

I want you to know, that I'm happy for you
I wish nothing but the best for you both

Part 2 (8m)

An older version of me
Is she perverted like me?
Would she go down on you in a theater?
Does she speak eloquently
And would she have your baby?
I'm sure she'd make a really excellent mother

Key

Speech-song

Modal

Belt

Soft voice

Sweet voice

Squeal

^h = yodel break

Vocal fry

Flange

Double tracking

PRECHORUS (8m)

'Cause the love that you gave that we made
Wasn't able to make it enough for you
To be open wide, no
And every time you speak her name
Does she know how you told me
You'd hold me until you died
Till you died, but you're still alive

CHORUS (9m)

And I'm here, to remind you
Of the mess you left when you went away
It's not fair to deny me
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me
You^h, you^h, you^h oughta know

Example 26. “Right Through You” (track 5): similar to “You Oughta Know,” a progression from soft voice to belt across a verse-chorus cycle

VERSE

Wait a minute man^h
 You mispronounced my name
 You **didn't** wait for all the information
 Before you **turned me away**^h

Wait a minute sir^h
 You kind of hurt my feelings
 You see me as a sweet back-loaded puppet
 And you've **got meal ticket**^h taste

CHORUS

I see right through you
 I know right through you
 I feel right through you
 I walk right through you

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 27. “Not the Doctor” (track 11): another belted chorus, this time after speech-song in the verse

VERSE

I don't want to be the filler if the void is solely yours
 I don't want to be your glass of single malt whiskey
 Hidden in the bottom drawer
 I don't want to be a bandage if the wound is not mine
 Lend me some fresh air

I don't want to be adored for what I merely represent to you
 I don't want to be your babysitter
 You're a very big **boy** now
 I don't want to be your mother
 I didn't carry you in my womb for nine months
 Show me the back door

CHORUS

Visiting hours are nine to five and if I show up at ten past six, well I
 already know that you'd find some way to sneak me in and oh
 Mind the empty bottle with the holes along the bottom, you see it's
 too much to ask for, and I am not the doctor

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 28. “All I Really Want” (track 1): speech-song governs verse, prechorus, and chorus

VERSE

Do I stress you out?^h
My sweater is on backwards and inside out
And you say, “how appropriate”
I don’t like to dissect everything today
I don’t mean to pick you apart you see
But I can’t help it^h

PRECHORUS

And there I go jumping before the gunshot has gone off^h
Slap me with a splintered^h ruler^h
And it would knock me to the floor if I wasn’t there already^h
If only I could hunt the hunter^h

CHORUS

And all I really want is some patience
A way to calm the angry voice
And all I really want is deliverance, ah

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 29. “Hand in my Pocket” (track 4): similar

VERSE

I’m broke, but I’m happy^h
I’m poor, but I’m kind^h
I’m short, but I’m healthy, yeah cough
I’m high, but I’m grounded^h
I’m sane, but I’m overwhelmed
I’m lost, but I’m hopeful, baby

CHORUS

And what it all comes down to^h
Is that everything’s gonna be fine, fine, fine
’Cause I’ve got one hand in my pocket
And the other one is giving a high five^h

Key	
Speech-song	
Modal	
Belt	
Soft voice	
Sweet voice	
Squeal	
^h = yodel break	
Vocal fry	
Flange	
Double tracking	

Example 30. “You Learn” (track 7): similar, with modal voice in prechorus

VERSE

I recommend getting your heart trampled on to anyone, yeah.
I recommend walking around naked in your living room.

PRECHORUS

Swallow it down (what a jagged little pill)
It feels so good (swimming in your stomach)
Wait until the dust settles

CHORUS

You live, you learn
You love, you learn
You cry, you learn
You lose, you learn
You bleed, you learn
You scream, you learn

Key

Speech-song

Modal

Belt

Soft voice

Sweet voice

Squeal

^h = yodel break

Vocal fry

Flange

Double tracking