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Changed for Good: Pathways of Motivic and Tonal Development in *Wicked*

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ABSTRACT: This article proposes three analytic pathways through *Wicked*. As Schwartz describes, *Wicked*'s primary motif derives from the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," which I divide into two parts: "Unlimited," which uses a major-mode $\hat{1}$-$\hat{1}$-$\hat{7}$-$\hat{5}$, and the continuation which includes $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{2}$ as subordinate motivic pitches. But intertextual aspects of "Unlimited" are only one dimension of the musical fabric: the motif also undergoes transformation across the show in a manner reminiscent of Schoenberg's theory of developing variation. During "Defying Gravity," the verse rearranges these scale degrees; in Act II, the Wizard corrupts the motif through inversion in "Wonderful." Elphaba then adapts the original motif into a minor-mode context as she spirals into despair in "No Good Deed," while the motif returns to its original form in "For Good."

Similarly, the show's large-scale tonal design (following Motazedian 2023 and Gilliam 1991) develops three tonal pathways that Elphaba traverses: C major reflecting her initial goals, and later the semitonally juxtaposed keys of B (the Wizard) and D-flat (defying the Wizard). In Act II, as Elphaba accepts the moniker of "wicked," she descends into the Wizard's associated tonality (B minor), before being redeemed by Glinda, who brings Elphaba back to D-flat major before her disappearance. A final pathway suggests that there are other relationships of note in *Wicked*: like "Unlimited," namely other melodies from the show also originate in *The Wizard of Oz*. These analyses suggest a deeper-level musical unity and development that repudiates common criticisms of megamusicals, and, I argue, provide a compelling path for larger-scale musical analysis of Broadway shows.

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[0.1] Stephen Schwartz's Broadway musical *Wicked* (2003)—an adaptation of Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel of the same name—tells the story of Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West from L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), who is perhaps most recognizable as the green-skinned antagonist in the 1939 film adaptation of Baum's novel.(1) *Wicked* traces Elphaba's early days attending Shiz University in Oz, where she meets and (eventually) befriends Glinda (the

Good Witch of the North in *The Wizard of Oz*), and studies sorcery with the intent to help improve life for the people of Oz. Upon meeting the Wizard of Oz, Elphaba discovers he aspires to install an authoritarian regime but needs her magic powers since he has none of his own. Elphaba rebels against the Wizard but eventually spirals into despair after he orders the deaths of both her sister and her lover, and uses propaganda to label her as "wicked," leading to her actions in the original story.

[0.2] "Schwartz's eclectic pop-tinged score," as Paul R. Laird writes, "has played a major role in the show's popularity" (2011, 89). And while the same could be said for almost any megamusical—*Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Aida*, and so on—it is notable that unlike many of its megamusical brethren, *Wicked*'s score has received some level of scholarly analytic attention.(2) Laird, for instance, describes how "[Schwartz] speaks proudly of the score's musico-dramatic unity through the repetition of 'small motifs', like opera composers" (2017, 12), while Nathan Beary Blustein has engaged with some of the modulatory techniques in the show (2023). The fact that *Wicked* has received analytic commentary in scholarly venues is a refreshing development, especially when juxtaposed against Jessica Sternfeld's assessment that "Next to no musicological scholarship exists on the megamusical. . . because many scholars dismiss, disdain, and purposely ignore the genre. Like critics who dislike megamusicals by virtue of their popularity, most musicologists and theater scholars develop an arrogant, even disgusted tone when mentioning the megamusical, if they mention it at all" (2006, 5).

[0.3] Megamusicals, as Sternfeld describes them, are "large in several respects" including their plot, staging, and marketing (2006, 2–4). Likewise, their scores are also grandiose: "typically sung throughout" (2), and "featur[ing] ballads, tinged with pop, country, blues, or cabaret influences; they also offer hard-driving up-tempo numbers, songs in early rock 'n' roll style, and love duets that could work just as well in the movies or on television as they do onstage. All these appear alongside quasi-operatic ensembles and purely theatrical styles" (94).(3) This stylistic eclecticism, however, is also something of a double-edged sword, as the scores are often charged with evincing a "lack of organic development. . . because of the sectional approach to the form" (Snelson 2004, 185).(4) The issue, it seems, is that megamusicals often give the impression that their musical construction is merely a haphazard stitching together of catchy but unrelated songs in various styles. This view is expressed in no uncertain terms by Ben Brantley, who derides the genre in his review of Elton John's *Aida*: "Like many Broadway megamusicals today, [*Aida*] has the disconnected, sterile feeling that suggests it has been assembled, piecemeal, by committee" (2000).(5) Brantley's criticism suggests that the music in such shows is only a sensory accessory to the drama onstage, and not constructed and developed intentionally alongside the dramatic structure: the concepts of development and unity "sit uneasily with the take-out hit and stylistic pageant" (Snelson 2004, 185). Joseph Swain makes a similar argument regarding a dearth of long-range musical structure and development in musicals:

> Mozart can prepare a climactic finale for twenty minutes, Wagner for an entire act, but a theater song must make its point and quit within a very few minutes. Only by constructing musical relationships across the entire drama could Broadway composers create similar effects, and that level of composition was beyond all but a handful of the best musical plays of the tradition. (2002, 10)(6)

[0.4] While Laird's critical commentary on the score suggests that issues of development and unity are overcome, at least to some extent, in *Wicked* through the repetition of short musical motifs, these observations only begin to scratch the surface of *Wicked*'s musical construction. Indeed, unlike Andrew Lloyd Webber—who Sternfeld (2006, 89) describes as being somewhat tight-lipped about his compositional process—Schwartz has often spoken openly about aspects of his compositional approach to *Wicked*'s score beyond observations of *Leitmotivic* recurrence. In particular, Schwartz (2024) has described how the show's primary motif, "Unlimited" (Example 2a, discussed below), is a rhythmic variation of the first seven notes of the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (Example 2b, below), concluding on an eighth pitch that is not in the original melody ($\hat{2}$) prior to a repetition of the motif up a major third. Given that "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is arguably the most recognizable musical association with the world of Oz—owing to its use in the

1939 movie where it is sung by Judy Garland's character, Dorothy—"Unlimited" acquires a marked semiotic importance from its intertextual derivation. Indeed, musicological research has focused on this motif, and its recurrence in an almost *Leitmotivic* fashion throughout the show; Laird, for instance, notes that the "Unlimited" theme occurs "early in the show and then [becomes] 'I'm limited' towards the end" (2017, 12).

[0.5] But the intertextual and *Leitmotivic* aspects of "Unlimited" are only one dimension of the musical fabric. In this article, I demonstrate the pathways—or yellow-brick roads, if one prefers—of motivic and tonal development in *Wicked* that refute many of the aforementioned criticisms of megamusicals, while also providing a deeper analytic engagement with *Wicked*'s musical structure. Ultimately, "Unlimited" is more than simply a recurring *Leitmotif* to be used as an aural calling card: what I will demonstrate through analysis of the songs most integral to Elphaba's dramatic progression across the show ("The Wizard and I," "Defying Gravity," "Wonderful," "No Good Deed," and "For Good") is that transformations of the "Unlimited" theme permeate the show. These transformations occur at structurally important dramatic moments, and in ways that musically reinforce the associated plot development, while simultaneously developing the motif in a manner reminiscent of the Schoenbergian concept of developing variation (Schoenberg 1975; see also Frisch 1984).(7) But while motivic development provides a compelling pathway through *Wicked*'s score, I also contend, following my appeals to analytic cosmopolitanism found elsewhere (Hutchinson 2025a), that it is not the only analytic path through *Wicked*.(8) In addition to the motivic variations on "Unlimited," *Wicked*'s tonal design (after Motazedian 2023) likewise suggests a deeper-level integration between musical structure and dramatic development. In this second section, I describe how Elphaba's dramatic trajectory is reflected in the show's key structure, similar to how Verdi (Rothstein 2023) and Strauss (Gilliam 1991, 2014) often used tonal centers, and relationships between them, as associative musico-dramatic symbols reflecting in music the dramatic or psychological underpinnings of the plot. As a final pathway through *Wicked*, I suggest that one might explore intertextual aspects of the score. In particular, I focus on Schwartz's penchant for deriving themes in *Wicked* from the music of *The Wizard of Oz*, either directly at the musical surface or concealed at the musical middleground—a process that I describe as "musical worldbuilding" between the two mediums.

[0.6] Thus, I suggest that Schwartz's score for *Wicked* is not only developed intentionally through integration with the plot, but also undertakes motivic and tonal development that more closely links it with nineteenth-century operatic and instrumental antecedents. In situating my conclusion in questions of perception, I contend that *Wicked* is not alone in its association with its operatic and symphonic antecedents: recent analytic work by both Nicole Biamonte and myself, as well as comments from musical theater composers themselves (see, e.g., Lloyd Webber and Rice 1978, Schwartz 2010a and 2010b, or comments by Sondheim in Horowitz 2010) suggest that, *pace* Swain's claim to the contrary, developmental processes and structures in musical theater are part-and-parcel of the musical construction, albeit often embedded in ways that are not immediately aurally apparent to the listener. I thus contend that the analytic approaches I apply to *Wicked* in this article are more broadly applicable and form a compelling case for continued analytic and theoretic engagement with musical theater.

1. The "Unlimited" Motif and its Transformations

[1.1] Much of the thematic content of *Wicked* that concerns Elphaba can be interpreted through a modified process of developing variation. Schoenberg describes the concept of developing variation as involving "variation of the features of a basic unit [that] produces all the thematic formulations which provide for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic and unity on the one hand, and character, mood, expression, and every needed differentiation, on the other hand—thus elaborating the idea of the piece" (1975, 397). Walter Frisch notes that "Schoenberg stresses that this is primarily a thematic or melodic procedure" (1984, 2) and describes how Schoenberg undertakes this type of analysis locally by dissecting the theme of Brahms' String Quartet op. 51 no. 2 (**Example 1**). In cordoning off several short three- or four-note units, "Schoenberg explains that *b* is the inversion upward of *a*, *c* is *a*+*b*, *d* is a part of *c*, *e* is *b*+*b*, [and] *f* is the interval of a fourth,

abstracted from *e*, in inversion" (4). In other words, each of the thematic utterances are derived via some transformation of *a*, often combined in various ways. Other types of developmental procedures Schoenberg identifies include the addition of ancillary notes, reduction, omission or condensation, and additions of upbeats or repetitions (10). Frisch concludes that "by developing variation, Schoenberg means the construction of a theme by the continuous modification of the intervallic and/or rhythmic components of an initial idea" (9).[9]

[1.2] The first step in adapting this analytic process to *Wicked* is to define the basic unit: the "Unlimited" motif (**Example 2a**), which serves as a central nexus owing to its consistent dramatic and intertextual role within the show. Owing to the salience of the "Unlimited" portion of the motif, I will for the purposes of this analysis refer to the first four pitches—an octave leap on $\hat{1}$, followed by a stepwise descent to $\hat{7}$ and a skip down to $\hat{5}$, all in the major mode—as the primary scale-degree content.[10] I refer to the next four notes ("my future is. . . "), which lead into the repetition of the motif, as the "Tail" portion of the motif. This "Tail" segment includes a passing $\hat{6}$ as well as the metrically marked $\hat{2}$ that concludes the motif and that is not present in the original melody from "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (Example 2b). Owing to their auxiliary relationship to the main "Unlimited" portion of the motif, I consider these "Tail" pitches subordinate motivic constituents: their appearance is not requisite for the motif and its subsequent transformations. In summary, $\hat{1}$, $\hat{7}$, and $\hat{5}$, ideally with an octave ambitus, are requisite elements in this motivic idea, while $\hat{2}$ and $\hat{6}$ are optional subordinate elements that I include in parentheses when they appear. In what follows, I trace the recurrence of this motif in other melodic situations across *Wicked*'s score, focusing on moments that are perceptually salient and marked (typically primary thematic material in a song, or themes that are repeatedly emphasized, or themes arising from formal-structural interpolation).

[1.3] Outside of the Overture, the first appearance of the "Unlimited" motif is concealed in the harmonic material heard during Elphaba's birth during the opening "No One Mourns the Wicked" sequence. This motif, which Schwartz describes as Elphaba's "Wicked" motif, begins with a C♯ in the bass in m. 120, above which a dissonant chord comprising pitches E, B, and D♯ is sounded.[11] While these pitches might, in their immediate context, appear as $\hat{3}$, $\flat\hat{7}$, and $\sharp\hat{2}$ of the bass tone and implied tonic (C-sharp minor), they might equally be considered as $\hat{5}$, $\hat{7}$ and $\hat{1}$—the scale degree content of "Unlimited" but orderless and harmonic, rather than ordered and melodic—in C♯'s relative major, E (**Example 3**).[12] This juxtaposition of the major-mode scale-degree content of Elphaba's aspirational "Unlimited" against a more salient minor-mode underpinning could hardly be more dramatically effective, given Elphaba's altruistic goals that are juxtaposed throughout the show against negative assumptions about her given her green skin and the Wizard's propaganda campaign against her.

[1.4] In its most recognizable melodic form, "Unlimited" first appears in "The Wizard and I," a song in an expansive AABA(C)A form that occurs early in Act I of the show. "The Wizard and I" is Elphaba's "I Want" song, detailing her desire to excel at her study of sorcery in order to work altruistically with the Wizard of Oz, a desire that fuels much of Elphaba's dramatic arc in Act I of the show. As the third refrain approaches its cadence, the music suddenly and dramatically shifts from C major to G-flat major.[13] At this moment the "Unlimited" motif (shown previously in Example 2a) interrupts the song's AABA structure as Elphaba has "a vision almost like a prophecy" that "someday there'll be a celebration throughout Oz that's all to do with [her]."[14] The motif, thus accrues a sort of otherworldly connotation and becomes linked with the themes of magic, fate, and Elphaba's intractable effort to achieve the vision she saw. A truncated version of the motif appears again, slightly modified, in the post-cadential orchestral codetta at the end of the song (**Example 4**). Here, the trumpet melody proceeds $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{5}$; the octave leap is eschewed, and the final $\hat{5}$ in the melody occurs over two tonally disjunct harmonies—D-flat major and B major—but the scale degree content is undeniably derived, via a slight modification of the first pitch from "Unlimited" (where the original motif began on $\hat{1}$, this one begins on $\hat{5}$).

[1.5] "Unlimited" then recurs sporadically in unaltered form throughout Act I, most prominently during the Ozdust Ballroom dance scene as Elphaba and Glinda take their first steps toward

friendship. The motif's first major transformation, however, comes in the climactic finale to Act I, "Defying Gravity." Having realized that the Wizard is both a fraud and an aspiring dictator, Elphaba begins "Defying Gravity" with a slow rendition of the verse, stating: "Something has changed within me, something is not the same." As shown in **Example 5**, the verse's melody is set using the scale-degree content of "Unlimited," but reorganized from its original iteration. In this case, the melody still begins on $\hat{1}$, but instead of an octave leap, the melody progresses $\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{5}$, while the next four pitches outline $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{5}$. Here, the octave ambitus from the original motif is still present, but occurs with $\hat{5}$, rather than $\hat{1}$, at its highest and lowest points, and is filled in by ancillary repetitions of $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{7}$. This reorganization of the scale-degree content of "Unlimited" continues: "I'm through with playing by the rules of someone else's game" is likewise built of $\hat{1}$, $\hat{7}$, and $\hat{5}$ in a different ordering, with $\hat{2}$ neighboring $\hat{1}$ at the conclusion. In this case, as Elphaba's words speak of a realignment of her goals and motivations, the musical material that underscored her initial vision undergoes a similar musical transformation.

[1.6] This transformation then continues into the chorus of the song that includes the "defying gravity" hook, shown in **Example 6**. First, the accompaniment ostinato in the high strings and woodwinds is built from a repeating $\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ pattern, another rearrangement of the scale-degree content of "Unlimited." The melody in the chorus similarly emphasizes $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$ (and to a lesser extent $\hat{2}$), but stabilizes the motif by trading $\hat{7}$ for $\hat{3}$, albeit in an embellishing rather than structural role. The result of this trade is a more traditionally tertian melodic outline of the tonic triad: $\hat{5}$–$\hat{3}$–$\hat{1}$, rather than the dissonant $\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{5}$ of "Unlimited," as though Elphaba's realization about the Wizard's treachery has brought a musical clarity to the non-tertian content of the original motif.

[1.7] The next transformation of the motif comes in the Wizard's song "Wonderful," about halfway through Act II. At this juncture, the Wizard is making a second attempt to convert Elphaba to his side, promising her that with his help she can change the popular narrative from her being "wicked" to her being "wonderful." The way that the Wizard tempts Elphaba here is musically insidious. Shown in **Example 7**, the primary motif of the song, to which the word "wonderful" is sung, consists of a descending minor sixth from A to C♯, with the C♯ then stepping up by semitone to D. Taken in isolation, these pitches give a strong sense of centricity around D as $\hat{5}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$ (and the subsequent F-natural in the lead-in to the repetition of the motif clarifies specifically D minor), a retrograde inversion of the original progression of pitches in "Unlimited," save that there is no octave ambitus. But the harmonic context of the music masks these scale degrees: the preceding C7 (not shown) that leads into m. 27 strongly suggests F major, rather than D minor, as the tonic—as does the subsequent appearance of A♭ in the melody in m. 32, which would be a tonally disorienting $\flat\hat{5}$ in D minor—though the presumed tonic takes the form of a $\text{I}^{(\text{add6})}$ chord, or F major and D minor directly juxtaposed. This fluctuation between scale collections gives rise to what I see as a moment of melodic-harmonic divorce, which has been discussed extensively in popular music (see, for instance, Temperley 2007 and Nobile 2015) but derives from notions of tonal pairing or double-tonic complexes in classical music in which two distinct keys, often relative major and minor keys, vie for tonic status (see, for instance, Krebs 1996). Indeed, this passage exhibits all the hallmarks of tonal pairing as expounded by Christopher Lewis: "(1) juxtaposition of musical fragments implying two tonics in succession or alteration; (2) mixture of the two tonalities, exploiting ambiguous and common harmonic functions; (3) uses of a tonic sonority created by the conflation of two tonic triads; and (4) superposition of lines or textures in one key on those in another" (1984, 6).(15)

[1.8] The Wizard's multitude of masks are thus on full display as he attempts to entice Elphaba by singing a version of her own motif to her. The insidiousness of the minor-mode allusions and the retrograded and inverted scale-degree progression, however, are masked by the harmonic content over which this motif occurs, which is unambiguously F major. This type of melodic-harmonic divorce suggests an intentional deployment of the major mode in the harmonic layer as a mask for the Wizard's underhandedness in the melodic domain. Smoke and mirrors, deceit, and fraudulence are all well-established elements of the Wizard's personality, not only in *Wicked*, but in the source material and 1939 movie adaptation as well; it stands to reason that the Wizard would not be above using musical deception as well.(16)

[1.9] Elphaba almost falls for the Wizard's ploy: she is willing to join him, on the condition that he set free the winged monkeys that he uses as servants and spies. It is only upon the discovery of Dr. Dillamond—a Goat and Elphaba's former teacher—caged and voiceless, that the Wizard's illusion is shattered, prompting Elphaba to once again denounce him. At this moment, the music transitions into a *forte* outburst of the "Wicked" motif first heard during "No One Mourns the Wicked." The juxtaposition of the aspirational major-mode "Unlimited" motif in the upper voices against its tonic's relative minor in the harmonic layer (as discussed previously with respect to Example 3) further characterizes Elphaba and the Wizard as musical inversions of each other: the Wizard masks the minor-mode qualities of his melodic line with a major-mode harmonic underpinning in "Wonderful," whereas Elphaba's "Wicked" motif sees the major-mode connotations of "Unlimited" in the upper voices masked by the overwhelming minor-mode implications of the bass layer.

[1.10] Eventually, Elphaba spirals into despair after a flying house crushes her sister and the Wizard's guards capture and kill her lover, Fiyero. During "No Good Deed"—perhaps the most dramatically important moment of her narrative arc—she laments that all her attempts to do good have hurt the people she loves and earned her hatred and scorn, leading her to embrace the moniker of The Wicked Witch of the West. Indeed, her renunciation of doing good is at odds with her previous motivations, and as such it makes sense that the thematic material in this song, with its emphasis on $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{3}$, is not derived from "Unlimited"—save in one conspicuous place. The refrain of "No Good Deed," which is cast in a periodic structure and uses the gamut of pitches in the B-minor scale, contains a parenthetical insertion (see Rothstein 1989, 87) in which Elphaba intones that her "road of good intentions led where such roads always lead" (**Example 8**).[(17)] Unlike the rest of the refrain, the melodic content of this parenthetical insertion is constructed from the scale degree content of "Unlimited," as is the harmonic content supporting the words "led where," which uses scale degrees $\hat{5}$, $\hat{7}$, $\hat{2}$, and $\hat{1}$ of the song's B-minor tonality—another recollection of the harmonic "Wicked" motif. Melodically, this transformation retains the ordering of the original motif, save that an ancillary major-mode $\hat{6}$ is used as a passing tone between $\hat{7}$ and $\hat{5}$, imparting a slight major-mode flavor into the otherwise minor-mode context of this song, and juxtaposing the major-mode recollections of her good intentions against the song's minor modality. Similarly, the ascending octave leap of the original motif is inverted: the parenthetical insertion begins on B4 and makes its way down by step to F♯4 before leaping down to B3, reflecting a descending—or negative—transformation of what was initially an aspirational ascending motif.

[1.11] In addition to this thematic use of "Unlimited" in "No Good Deed," a particularly daring analysis of this song might also suggest that a variant of "Unlimited" is embedded in the deeper-level key structure of this song's frequent and ambitious modulations. Following the introductory material, the song proper begins in B minor with the "no good deed" refrain. The B section then modulates to B-flat minor (enharmonically A-sharp minor), then C-sharp minor, and finally stands on a dominant F♯ prior to the return to B minor for the final refrain and coda.[(18)] As shown in **Example 9**, the key structure of the song represents yet another variation of "Unlimited," this time undergoing a process of enlargement[(19)] and migrating from the melodic domain to the deeper-level tonal structure of the song. This larger structure seems to hint at a disjunction between Elphaba's words rejecting her previous goals, and her desires, which—in the end—are still driving her actions.

[1.12] The final variants of "Unlimited" occur in the song "For Good," the emotional climax of the show. During this scene, Elphaba—having assumed the moniker of The Wicked Witch of the West—is making good on her promise to be wicked by threatening to harm Dorothy, whom she has imprisoned in order to retrieve her sister's magical slippers.[(20)] Glinda appears at Elphaba's castle and is able to convince Elphaba not to harm Dorothy by promising to continue Elphaba's work in deterring the Wizard's dictatorial ambitions. At this point, they realize how important they have been in each other's lives, and the prelude to "For Good" begins with the "Unlimited" motif in its original form as Elphaba intones "I'm limited" and tells Glinda she can achieve all the good that Elphaba could not, so long as Glinda publicly denounces Elphaba after she's dead.

[1.13] The chorus of the song is sung three times: once by Glinda, once by Elphaba, and finally together. Each iteration of the chorus concludes with the line "because I knew you, I have been changed for good." As shown in **Example 10**, this acknowledgment of their importance to each other, specifically the "because I knew you" line, uses a compressed version of the scale-degree content of "Unlimited." The importance of this particular segment of the melody is reinforced in the final verse, where the words "because I knew you" are repeated three times. As shown in **Example 11**, this short melodic motif transforms from the compressed $\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ version, through a version with the octave leap on $\hat{7}$,[(21)] concluding finally on a version of the original motif with the octave leap on $\hat{1}$ followed by a stepwise descent to $\hat{7}$ and a skip to $\hat{5}$. An additional concluding $\hat{1}$ imbues this final iteration with a more conclusive feel when compared to the open-ended instability of the original motif. Ultimately, it takes both Elphaba and Glinda, together, to return the motif to its original, aspirational, form, and stabilize it with the final $\hat{1}$.

[1.14] The song then concludes by subtly revisiting the transformation of the motif that occurred in "Defying Gravity." The final moments of the song use the pitches of "Unlimited," but again rescind $\hat{7}$—which had long served as a dissonant tone between $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$—and replace it with the same $\hat{3}$ that brought the "defying gravity" hook triadic stability. Not inconspicuously, this $\hat{3}$ (F) is sung by Glinda, whose tonal center in songs such as "What is This Feeling" and "Popular" is also F, and first enters the vocal part on the word "changed," suggesting it is Glinda's influence in Elphaba's life that was ultimately the most stabilizing and meaningful. This erasure of $\hat{7}$ remains in effect through to the final chord of the song, a $I^{(add9)}$ which contains $\hat{1}$, $\hat{3}$, $\hat{5}$, and ($\hat{2}$): "Unlimited," but with $\hat{3}$ in place of $\hat{7}$.[(22)] The addition of $\hat{2}$ undermines complete triadic stability for the final chord, but its presence reinforces the idea that in trading $\hat{7}$ for $\hat{3}$, the unstable $\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{5}$ of "Unlimited" has, via the insertion of Glinda's F ($\hat{3}$), transformed into something more tonally stable at the end of Elphaba's life. Indeed, these stabilizing reconfigurations of "Unlimited" draw convincing parallels to the drama of this scene: Glinda accepts the mantle of Elphaba's final request to take up her battle against the Wizard and set things right in Oz—which Glinda succeeds in doing by using her political position to force the Wizard into exile and arrest his accomplices—thereby allowing Elphaba to find peace in acknowledging her limitations.[(23)] Through their friendship, fraught as it was at times, both the witches, and the music, have been changed for good.

[1.15] While many of Schoenberg's analyses of developing variations are restricted to local events, employing the concept on a larger scale—across *Wicked*'s score—generates important analytic observations, which are summarized in **Example 12**.[(24)] As noted at the outset of this paper, while there is indeed an element of intertextual interest in the way that "Unlimited" derives from "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," to understand this motif only as an intertextual curiosity, or as a *Leitmotif* that reoccurs unaltered a few times throughout the show, overlooks the ways in which the motif is integral to *Wicked*'s musical-dramatic development processes.[(25)] This analysis enriches much of the *Leitmotivic* work on *Wicked* (primarily in work by Laird) by demonstrating that not only are reprises of "Unlimited" scattered throughout the score, but that the motif also serves as a thematic progenitor for the score, unifying the music through its various transformations and developing these transformations at critical moments in the plot. In what follows, I turn to ways in which key analysis and notions of tonal trajectory can be deployed to make similar analytic observations.

2. On Key Relationships and Tonal Trajectory

[2.1] In a recent study on film music, Táhirih Motazedian has proposed to differentiate between tonal *structure*, which is concerned with "the hierarchical relationship of pitches within a single key (in a Schenkerian sense)," and tonal *design*, which "refers to a development of keys not necessarily governed by a global tonic and possibly influenced by extramusical factors" (2023, 3). Motazedian further distinguishes between structure as prescriptive, and design as descriptive: "the versatility of this approach makes tonal design a better tool for analyzing expansive, multifarious works like opera and film, which. . . do not necessarily conform to monotonality" (3). Appropriating an approach similar to Motazedian's description of tonal design, Nicole Biamonte's recent analysis of

The Rocky Horror Picture Show links this type of analysis to operatic precedent: "correlating the tonal plan of a dramatic work with its characters and plot has been well established in opera analysis, mostly in the music of Giuseppe Verdi" (2023, 169).[(26)] I have likewise described an associative network of key relationships as a tonal design characterizing religious and humanistic views of Jesus in Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Hutchinson 2025a).

[2.2] Building on Motazedian's conception of tonal design, as well as the associative and network-style analyses of both myself (2025a) and Biamonte (2023), this sort of tonal trajectory, untethered to traditional tonal-structural relationships, is an effective tool for describing Elphaba's musical-dramatic journey in *Wicked*.[(27)] Fundamentally, Elphaba has five major solo songs throughout the show, many of which were discussed in the previous section: "The Wizard and I," "I'm Not that Girl," "Defying Gravity," "No Good Deed," and "For Good." She also participates in an Act II duet, "As Long as You're Mine," with Fiyero, while the "Wonderful" sequence (including "Set Free the Monkeys" and "Dillamond Discovered") is also a pivotal moment in Elphaba's dramatic trajectory, even though part of this sequence is sung by The Wizard.[(28)] In the tonal network shown in **Example 13**, I have arranged these songs (with abbreviated titles) in sequential order, with their primary key center listed below along one of three tonal trajectories, or paths.[(29)]

[2.3] The first path, which I have labeled "Initial Path," constitutes a tonality centered on C and represents Elphaba's initial altruistic path toward working with the Wizard. As noted earlier, "The Wizard and I," Elphaba's "I Want" song, is in the key of C major, thus serving as both her initial key as well as the key that is emblematic of her goals: it is optimistic and "pure" reflecting her genuine desire to use her magic powers help people and do good. In her second major song in Act I, "I'm Not that Girl," Elphaba laments that her burgeoning attraction to Fiyero could not possibly be requited. Because the song is in the key of A major, I have placed it outside of the "initial" C-major path: the chromatically disjunct relationship of A major to Elphaba's initial C major—a chromatic submediant, specifically one that distorts the tonic pitch[(30)]—supports the idea that her burgeoning romantic feelings for Fiyero exist in stark contrast to her off-putting and distant personality, and are, at least at this moment in her life, antithetic to her larger humanitarian goals. Instead, I have placed this key in brackets on the D♭ "resistance" path: dramatically, Fiyero and Elphaba's relationship blooms during her rebellion against the Wizard, and so her feelings for him seem more attuned to that path; musically, A major is enharmonically ♭VI in D-flat major and thus exists in a modal relationship with that key, but one that does not distort the function-defining scale degrees—namely $\hat{1}$, $\hat{5}$, $\hat{4}$, or $\hat{7}$—of D-flat major.[(31)]

[2.4] When Elphaba first meets the Wizard, their musical incompatibility is on display even before she realizes his authoritarian ambitions. His song "A Sentimental Man" (**Example 14**), which he sings upon meeting Elphaba for the first time in an attempt to appear sympathetic, is in the key of B major which, like A major, is chromatically removed from Elphaba's C major.[(32)] Owing to the role that the key of B plays throughout in the show, I have defined B as a tonal track reflecting the Wizard and Wickedness.[(33)]

[2.5] Rather than undergoing a musical transfiguration that would transform her C major into something more closely aligned with the Wizard's tonal track—a change that would place her in a tonal position antithetic to her initial goals—Elphaba rejects him. As she vows to oppose the Wizard, her tonal grounding changes: the "Monkey Reveal" scene shifts from C major-minor, through several brief intermediary keys, to the D-flat major of her Act I finale, "Defying Gravity" (Examples 5 and 6). D-flat major thus constitutes a third tonal path and can be thought of as Elphaba's "Resistance" or "Realization" key. The fact that it stands a semitone higher than her initial C major is intriguing: rather than pulling her key a semitone down to the Wizard's B major, she shifts it a semitone up, reflecting a musically analogous movement away from his key of B major.

[2.6] Act I thus sets up three semitonally related tonal pathways for Elphaba: C, B, and D♭, with the overarching trajectory beginning on C and ending on D♭.[(34)] Indeed, the importance of these keys is foreshadowed early on. As noted in the previous section, the post-cadential orchestral codetta of "The Wizard and I" (Example 4) concludes with what Laird describes as "a fascinating cadence"

(2011, 133): D-flat major proceeding to B major and concluding on C major. Though Laird does not posit a reason for this disjunct chord progression, the way in which he specifically marks its uniqueness suggests there is something atypical at play here, and given the importance of D♭, B, and C to Elphaba's tonal journey, this progression can hardly be coincidental. Instead, it reads as harbinger of the tonal trajectory that is to come: the localized chromatic effect of D♭ and B undergo a process of enlargement, as they expand from serving as chromatically disjunct effects at the musical surface to projecting a more structurally salient chromaticism in the larger-scale tonal trajectory of Elphaba's journey. It is also worth noting that the tritone shift from C major to G-flat major that spawns the "Unlimited" motif and Elphaba's vision of the future in "The Wizard and I" might be seen as another moment of musical foreshadowing. While G♭ is functionally incoherent in C major (♭V),(35) it exists diatonically both in D♭ (IV) and (enharmonically) in B (V).(36) One might thus read the emergence of G-flat major in that song as anticipating these keys that will play an important tonal role in Elphaba's future. Act II then builds on these established tracks, using them as tonal areas to reflect Elphaba's emotional journey through to the end of the show.

[2.7] The next time Elphaba meets the Wizard, during the "Wonderful" sequence, he nearly convinces her to join him by shifting his key to the dual D-minor/F-major complex discussed earlier (see Example 7), which is diatonic to Elphaba's original C-major trajectory, but a tritone away from the Wizard's initial B major. After "Wonderful," the music shifts back to C major, returning to the centric pitch of the "Initial" path as Elphaba agrees to join him on the condition that he free the winged monkeys. This return to C major reflects what appears to be a realization of Elphaba's initial goals: working with the Wizard to help the people of Oz. Upon the discovery of Dr. Dillamond, however, Elphaba rejects the Wizard once more and vows to keep fighting him as the music reverts to the D-flat major of the upper "Resistance" path (**Example 15**).

[2.8] After her brief C-minor tryst with Fiyero in "As Long as You're Mine" and subsequent despair at Fiyero's murder by order of the Wizard (in G-sharp minor, B's relative minor), Elphaba adopts the "Wicked Witch of the West" moniker in the key of B minor during the "No Good Deed" scene (see Examples 8 and 9 above). As the parallel minor of the Wizard's initial B major, B minor falls within the "Wizard and Wickedness" trajectory. In the musical's plot, this is Elphaba's lowest point, both dramatically and musically. She has fallen, in some sense, to the level of the Wizard and, in abandoning her goals to do good, fallen victim to the gravity of his B-oriented key-path.(37)

[2.9] As seen earlier in my analysis of "For Good", Elphaba is only pulled out of her despair—and the associated B-minor key—when Glinda reminds Elphaba of the importance of their friendship and promises to take up her cause against the Wizard, returning the music to D-flat major. After "For Good," the key shifts briefly to B minor in the lead-up to Elphaba's demise at the hands of Dorothy and a pail of water, before returning to D-flat major when Glinda learns of Elphaba's death and undertakes her subsequent confrontation of the Wizard.(38) Reinforcing my earlier motivic analysis, the prominence of D-flat major in both "For Good" and its aftermath suggests that Elphaba finds a quantum of solace by ending her role in the show through a passing of the proverbial D-flat torch to Glinda. This also has the effect of creating a tonal parallelism: the C→D♭ trajectory that defined the boundaries of Elphaba's journey in Act I likewise defines the boundaries of Elphaba's journey across the entire show.

[2.10] In my analysis of the tonal trajectory of *Wicked*, I have focused on Elphaba's story, and therefore the songs prominently featuring that character. Other numbers (such as "Dear Old Shiz," "What is this Feeling," or "Popular") have been excluded. This is not to say that these keys do not fit into the trajectory: Glinda's associated key of F major (in both "What is this Feeling" and "Popular"), for instance, could be seen as contributing to Elphaba's initial C-major path as its subdominant, and also reflects Glinda's stabilizing role as the mediant in Elphaba's subsequent D-flat-major trajectory. Conversely, Glinda's E-flat major of "I Couldn't Be Happier" reflects her decision to side with the Wizard after the events of Act I (E♭ being both a step down from F and enharmonically the mediant of the Wizard's key of B). Nor should their exclusion from this particular analysis suggest that they are unimportant to the show. One could surely imagine analyses that foreground Glinda and track how her keys and tonal pathways through the show

oscillate back and forth on the various tonal paths as her allegiances switch between Elphaba and the Wizard.

3. Thematic Derivation and Worldbuilding in Wicked and The Wizard of Oz

[3.1] While emphasizing motivic transformation or tonal design are more traditional approaches to musical structure, the idea of intertextual derivation is, perhaps, a strategy more unique to *Wicked* than to other megamusicals given its connection to the well-known movie *The Wizard of Oz*.(39) The clearest example of this type of musical derivation is Schwartz's well-documented borrowing of the melodic material from "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" in "Unlimited," as discussed earlier. But if Schwartz derived one motif from *The Wizard of Oz*, why not others? Indeed, as it turns out, looking for these types of intertextual motivic connections is a remarkably fruitful endeavor, and their widespread integration into *Wicked*'s score creates what I consider to be a type of musical worldbuilding. "Worldbuilding" is a concept derived from science-fiction and fantasy genres—the latter of which encapsulates both *Wicked* and *The Wizard of Oz*—and describes how authors create complete fictional worlds, including histories, geographies, and cultures. The idea of musical worldbuilding, then, conceives of the musical relationships between *Wicked* and *The Wizard of Oz* as creating a shared musical universe, one in which musical themes from one medium can forge connections with the other through resemblance, development, or elaboration. I provide here but a few instances of this type of musical worldbuilding between *Wicked* and *The Wizard of Oz*, some overt, others less directly perceptible.

[3.2] For instance, the melodic line in the passage from "What is this Feeling" shown in **Example 16** is identical to the opening melody of "If I Only Had a Brain" (**Example 17**) sung by the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, with the same music used by the Tin Woodsman in "If I Only Had a Heart" and by the Cowardly Lion in "If I Only Had the Nerve." In narrative terms, each of these three characters crosses paths with Elphaba at Shiz University (where "What is this Feeling" takes place): Elphaba rescues the Lion, her classmate Boq is transformed into the Tin Woodsman in Act II, and another classmate, Fiyero, is likewise transformed into the Scarecrow. One might thus see the characters' use of this melody in *The Wizard of Oz* as arising out of their shared familiarity with it during their youth.(40)

[3.3] Another overt example can be found in Glinda's song "I Couldn't Be Happier," part of the "Thank Goodness" sequence that begins Act II. The song's primary theme, shown in **Example 18**, is unabashedly derived from "Follow the Yellow Brick Road" (**Example 19**) in *The Wizard of Oz*, save that the former ends on $\hat{2}$, while the latter ends on $\hat{1}$. Indeed, in *The Wizard of Oz* it is Glinda who first tells Dorothy to "follow the yellow brick road"; it is thus easy enough to imagine "Thank Goodness," with its slightly truncated melody, exists (in the imaginary musical world of Oz) as a sort of early or incomplete version of "Follow the Yellow Brick Road." While Schwartz has not commented directly on this connection, he has noted that in constructing this song his aim was to "conceive a song for folk and village people" (Laird 2017, 14). While not expressing a distinct correlation with the Munchkins who take up Glinda's suggestion and sing "Follow the Yellow Brick Road" in *The Wizard of Oz*, Schwartz's statement certainly alludes to the folksy and village setting of the Munchkins.

[3.4] There are also melodic allusions to *The Wizard of Oz* that occur only in the orchestra. During "The Cyclone" (which depicts Dorothy's house falling on Elphaba's sister, The Wicked Witch of the East), a winding three-note chromatic motif (**Example 20**) appears to be a rhythmic variation of Miss Gulch's theme in *The Wizard of Oz* (**Example 21**). This theme is first heard in the film when Miss Gulch is riding her bicycle in Kansas, but also when she appears within the cyclone and transforms (in Dorothy's fever dream) into the Wicked Witch of the West. This case appears to simply exist as an allusion to the well-known and sinister tune from the tornado scene in the movie, but reinforces the notion that much of this music has a connection to Arlen's score for *The Wizard of Oz*.

[3.5] In addition to these very direct melodic correlations there are also relationships that exist at a more structural level, concealed by melodic development or embellishment on the musical surface.

For instance, the Wizard's song "A Sentimental Man"—essentially a self-serving ode to himself—in *Wicked* has as its main theme a melodic line that descends directly and succinctly from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$ (see Example 14). The chorus of Arlen's "You're Off to See the Wizard" (**Example 22**) from *The Wizard of Oz* is likewise an ode to the Wizard and also features a structural descent from $\hat{5}$ down to $\hat{1}$; this descent, however, is embellished by other tones compared the more straightforward descent in "A Sentimental Man." Since both songs exalt the Wizard—one in private, one in public—the embellishment of the line in "You're Off to See the Wizard" might be read as a type of propagandization of the Wizard: the music of "You're Off to See the Wizard" takes the humbler descending-fifth progression of "A Sentimental Man" and elaborates it, deifying the Wizard even further among the citizens of Oz.

[3.6] The songs "Popular" (*Wicked*) and "Come Out, Come Out" (*The Wizard of Oz*), both sung by Glinda, share a similar hidden motivic connection. The basic idea of "Popular," shown in **Example 23**, is constructed of an oscillation between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{3}$ in F major, while the fragmentation in the theme's continuation section is constructed of an arpeggiated F-major triad. As shown in **Examples 24** and **25**, both of these motifs are also present in "Come Out, Come Out." The triadic arpeggiation from "Popular" forms the basic idea of "Come Out, Come Out" but is further developed into a full melody, while an embellished version of the oscillation between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{3}$ forms the basic idea of the contrasting B section. Here, too, these motivic links suggest an element of musical world building: when she sings "Popular," many years before Dorothy arrives in Oz, Glinda is a somewhat vapid university student, barely able to form coherent musical phrases. Comparatively, Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz* has grown and become a well-respected Good Witch; she still builds her musical material out of the same motivic building blocks, but these motifs are more developed and structured, creating an entirely different musical portraiture of Glinda that obscures the musical connection between the two songs.[(41)]

[3.7] A complete catalogue of references to *The Wizard of Oz* that occur in *Wicked* is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper; instead, these examples show that *Wicked* musically references *The Wizard of Oz* in such a consistent way as to build a rich, coherent, and intertextual musical world that includes both the musical and the earlier movie. As de Giere writes, "There are numerous other winks, nods and self-references that weave themselves in and under the score. Part of the fun is finding them and appreciating just how much thought and talent went into their deliberate use" (2007).

4. Conclusion

[4.1] One question that often underscores transformational and large-scale key analysis is whether these relationships are audible. Without the benefit of a close study of the score, can one, and especially one without absolute pitch, hear the scale-degree transformations of the "Unlimited" motif, or the tonal trajectory of Elphaba's journey? Indeed, Schwartz himself ponders these types of questions, as Laird (2017) summarizes:

> 'Does the audience hear this stuff at all? Maybe some do, but it's a fun way to write. . . It's all the stuff I learned as a music student.' Concerning the entire process of writing a musical, but especially repeating themes in appropriate places, Schwartz notes: 'That is part of the fun. It is so satisfying to take this great, big amorphous blob and watch it slowly come to clarity and focus, the fat get trimmed away, and [find] the things that really work about it structurally and the repetitions.' (12)

Contending with similar issues, Motazedian deploys Carolyn Abbate's (2004) terms "gnostic and drastic forms of perception": "On the *drastic* end. . . some believe that key relations only matter if the keys are directly contiguous and perceived immediately and naturally. . . On the *gnostic* end. . . Nicholas Cook (1987) assigns the task of tonal perception to the mind rather than the ear. . . the conceptual nature of long-range tonality described by Cook can be discerned gnostically, even if it cannot be perceived drastically" (2023, 5). In Cook's estimation, then, whether one can hear these relationships or not is in some sense a moot point, so long as one can conceive of them—that is, one

can know they exist and understand and agree with the relationships being proposed—then they exist, whether they are heard drastically or not.

[4.2] In this sense, the three pathways through *Wicked* that I have discussed—motivic transformation, tonal design, and intertextual derivation—all exist along a spectrum of drastic-gnostic perception. I suspect that previous *Leitmotivic* analyses by Laird, as well as many of the motivic derivations discussed in this article, may align more closely to the drastic side of perception and thus be more readily audible to listeners. Conversely, the long-range tonal trajectories I've outlined may be less perceptually salient and therefore align more closely to the gnostic side of perception. The motivic transformations of "Unlimited" discussed in Section 1 likely lie somewhere in the middle.

[4.3] We can only speculate whether these issues affect critical assessments of this musical specifically and musical theater as a whole, though Brantley's condemnation of *Wicked*'s score as "pop-eretta" devoid of "any glimmer of originality" (2003) certainly seems diluted against the musical relationships I have explored over the course of this article.(42) Indeed, the analyses undertaken in this paper reflect a growing collection of recent analytic scholarship that challenges the idea that musical theater lacks intentional musical development and construction and the notion that "constructing musical relationships across the entire drama. . . was beyond all but a handful of the best musical plays of the tradition" (Swain 2002, 10). Indeed, this article is hardly the only challenge to this claim: again, consider Nicole Biamonte's (2023) discussion of tonal design in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Sondheim's discussions of his own processes of melodic development (which are also proximate to the Schoenbergian developing variation; see Secrest 1998, Horowitz 2010, and Swayne 2005), or my own discussions of tonal design and enlargement in *Evita*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *The Phantom of the Opera* (Hutchinson 2025a). As more analytic work emerges on musical theater, it becomes increasingly apparent that processes of musical development and structure are not only present in these scores, but have been perennially overlooked in prior critical and analytic estimations. Acknowledging these aspects of musical construction gives listeners the opportunity to engage with more detailed, long-range connections within the score, while also showing how the genre draws on the same techniques of motivic and tonal development found in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century opera.

[4.4] And these relationships and developmental processes exist whether they are audible or not—whether they fall on the drastic or gnostic pole of musical experience. And the fact that they do exist substantiates Buchler and Decker's entreaty for more analytic and theoretic engagement with musical theater repertoire (2023). If one subscribes to the notion that analytic approaches to this music can adopt a level of flexibility that reflects the cosmopolitanism of style and compositional diversity of theater composers, then this in turn suggests that the path forward is not a homogenous one. One analytic approach to musical theater, in other words, is insufficient, and analytic methodologies must be suitably flexible to adapt to the dramatic ideas of a given show. What works for analyzing musical relationships in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (conflicts between plagal and authentic constructs that permeate the surface-level musical construction of songs, but also a deeper-level tonal design) might not—or might need to be adapted—for something like *The Phantom of the Opera*, where conflict between the subtonic as IV/IV and ♭VII defines the Phantom and Raoul respectively at various levels of structure. Both approaches might likewise be less integral for analyzing *Sweeney Todd*, in which *Leitmotifs* and their development define integral musical relationships (see, e.g., Swain 2002, 366–82). In this sense, a cosmopolitan analytic mindset strongly resonates with Richard Strauss' historic contention that "new ideas must search for new forms."(43) Such a mindset, at least in my view, reflects the various approaches to the music in *Wicked* described in this article: productive and engaging musical relationships abound across different parameters including melody, harmony, and interconnected intertextuality. Rather than devising a singular systematic approach to musical theater, engaging with shows on a more individual level in order to discover what approaches and methodologies bring out the musical processes of that particular show—as I have suggested with the three different analytic pathways through *Wicked* developed in this article—will, ideally, create an evolving, and much needed, repository of analytic and theoretic engagement with musical theater repertoire.

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Footnotes

1. The Wicked Witch of the West in Baum's novel is not described as having green skin.
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2. Stacy Wolf describes *Wicked* as espousing elements of both traditional "Golden Age" musicals and the more contemporary megamusical: "First, it epitomizes the twenty-first-century megamusical in its production values, which are spectacular, and in its marketing strategy, which is global capitalism. It can be replicated with unprecedented meticulousness across a greater number of international venues. For audiences familiar with *Phantom* or *Les Miz*, these aspects of *Wicked* seem familiar. Second, it is structured by the conventions of the traditional, classic, 'golden age' musical theater and so calls up ideas and feelings about musical theater thoroughly embedded in the U.S. cultural imagery" (2011, 217). To Wolf's contentions, we might add that *Wicked* espouses a stylistic eclecticism that was less typical in earlier musicals but highly typical of the megamusical (see Snelson 2004, Sternfeld 2006).
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3. Intriguingly, apart from citations of stylistic eclecticism and grandiosity, there is very little scholarship regarding what musical processes, if any, set the megamusical apart from non-mega musicals. Indeed, despite surface-level differences in musical style I am not certain that the processes of musical development differ significantly from one subgenre to the other: *Gypsy* (1959),

for instance, undertakes a process of melodic development similar to what I will describe in *Wicked* (Hutchinson 2025a); similarly, *Oklahoma!* (1943), like *Wicked*, has a dramatically driven tonal structure (descending fifths toward the final tonic, emblematic of Curly and Laurey's progression toward admitting their love for each other) that makes compelling use of associative keys. The question of what differentiates "musical theater" from "megamusicals"—again, if anything—from musico-structural perspectives, is thus an intriguing one, but alas one that lies beyond the scope of this article.
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4. Snelson is writing particularly of Andrew Lloyd Webber, who is arguably the originator—or at the very least the most successful composer of—the megamusical (Sternfeld 2006, 2–4), though this description aptly applies to other composers, including Boublil and Schonberg (*Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon*), Stephen Schwartz (*Wicked*, *Godspell*), Frank Wildhorn (*Dracula*, *Jekyll & Hyde*), and Lin-Manuel Miranda (*Hamilton*).
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5. Brantley makes a related claim in his review of *Wicked*, noting that "whenever Ms. Chenoweth leaves the stage, "Wicked" loses its wit, while its swirling pop-eretta score sheds any glimmer of originality" (2003).
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6. Sternfeld also suggests that the disdain for megamusicals results from a confluence of factors, including "loyalty to the Golden Era, or to Sondheim. . . or resistance to anything so popular that it feels unscholarly to discuss it" (2006, 6).
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7. I have likewise (2025a) suggested that Jules Styne's *Gypsy* (1959) develops Rose's "I have a dream" motif by subjecting it to various transformations throughout the show, an intriguing parallelism when considered alongside Schwartz's statement "I always knew that 'Unlimited' was going to be our 'I ha[ve] a dream.' And what I wanted to do was have her say, at the very beginning, 'Unlimited. My future is Unlimited.' And at the end of the show say, 'I'm limited'. . . It was always going to be in 'Defying Gravity' as well" (de Giere 2007).
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8. By analytic cosmopolitanism, I simply mean that musical theater responds well to a variety of analytic methodologies (e.g. tonal structure, tonal design, motivic development, intertextual analysis, topic theory, etc.) and that one should adopt or adapt any methodological approach that produces analytically fruitful observations.
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9. Roger Parker describes a similar process in Verdi's *Aïda*, in which the themes for Aïda and the Priests are "contrasting in register, rhythm, and degree of chromaticism. . . [but] are also complementary, and derive from one another" (Parker 1989, 223). Intriguingly, Sondheim acknowledges a similar process in his approach to melodic composition, though typically at the level of the song or the scene, rather than across the entire show: Sondheim "praised Jerome Kern's ability to develop a single motif through tiny variations into a long and never boring line, and his maximum development of the minimum of material" (Secrest 1998, 87). This concept of motivic development through small variations—which sounds identical to Schoenberg's concept of the developing variation—was "one of the most valuable lessons [Sondheim] learned from [Milton] Babbitt[:] how to structure a piece of music so that it will make a coherent whole, whether it goes on for three minutes or forty, what he called 'long-line' compositions" (Secrest 1998, 86).
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10. Laird contends that the "Unlimited" motif only occurs in the major mode once in the show (2017, 14; de Giere 2007 makes a similar claim). This is a perplexing statement since the scale-degree content of the motif uses the major-mode $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$ (the motif does not include $\hat{3}$, though the repetition of the motif occurs a major third higher, also suggesting major-mode connotation). Thus, while the motif might occur in surrounding minor-mode contexts, the motif itself seems to be

unequivocally in the major mode; this makes sense, given its derivation from the major-mode theme of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Conversely, the unaltered theme's only minor-mode occurrence in the show is its distorted reprise during the scene where Dorothy melts Elphaba with water. As such, I treat the theme as a major-mode theme beginning on $\hat{1}$, rather than a minor-mode theme beginning on $\hat{3}$.
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11. "The theme's identification with Elphaba becomes obvious during her birth" (Laird 2014, 232).
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12. Theories of melodic transformation naturally err more typically toward strings of ordered pitch classes (e.g. Alegant and McLean 2001), though unordered pitch motifs have also been the subject of discussion (see McCreless 1990).
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13. My analyses and transcriptions are derived from the touring version of the show's orchestral score, which reduces the orchestra from twenty-three musicians to eighteen. As Michael Buchler describes, using full scores or piano-vocal scores are generally more accurate, as "sheet music versions are often abridged and/or simplified, regularly removing modulations and extra verses, while imposing recomposed introductions and endings" (2008, 36). As Laird notes, Schwartz worked with two orchestrators on the Broadway score—Stephen Oremus and Alex Lacamoire—but "Schwartz approved every note in the score" (2014, 233). It is also worth noting that my analysis herein is of the stage version of the show, rather than the recent film adaptations (2024 and 2025) which include subtle changes to the score as adapted for the film medium.
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14. Brian Jarvis and John Peterson refer to this section as a "detour," or "diversion" in which "an event causes the music to temporarily veer from the piece's expected trajectory on to an unexpected alternative path, before eventually returning to the original path" (2020, [02:12]).
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15. The preceding C^7 does, of course, set the listener up to hear A as $\hat{3}$ of F, though the subsequent accented C♯ should pull the listener away from F, given the destabilizing effect of $\sharp\hat{5}$ (see, e.g. Stein 1983, Cohn 2012, Hutchinson 2022, 2025b), with the subsequent arpeggiations of D minor further reinforcing a D-minor centricity in the melody.
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16. "And a wonderful road of yellow brick" in mm. 56–57 likewise contains an allusion to the "Unlimited" motif: the pitches C–C–D–F retain the intervallic structure of the motif in inversion (P8–m2–m3), but not the scale degree content.
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17. I interpret this as a periodic structure: BI+CI (HC) // BI + (parenthetical insertion) + CI (IAC). Jarvis and Peterson (2020) might likewise refer to this contrasting material as a "detour" elicited by Elphaba's brief reflection into the past here.
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18. There is also a brief foray into C minor in this final iteration of the refrain (which then returns to B): the music recaptures the same half cadence from the first iteration, which is followed by a direct modulation into C minor. This modulation appears to be more akin to what Buchler describes as a dramatic, rather than structural, modulation: "the ascending half-step modulation. . . does nothing to challenge our sense of tonal unity. The [two] tonics play the same role: neither is hierarchically central, and neither anticipates or is anticipated by the other. When we abruptly move to [C minor], it simply substitutes for [B minor]. . . Again, this does not behave like a large-scale auxiliary cadence both because the modulation. . . fulfills no implicit tonal goal and, more broadly, because coloristic/utilitarian modulations carry no tonal force" (2008, 39).
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19. Alegant and McLean describe enlargement as a process whereby "a surface (or near-surface) object [can be] subsequently 'enlarged,' or re-presented in temporally expanded form" (2001, 31).
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20. For those familiar primarily with the 1939 movie version these are the ruby slippers, but in Baum's original novel, as well as Maguire's *Wicked* and the Broadway show, they are silver.
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21. Intriguingly, the emphasized $\hat{7}$ here is C, Elphaba's initial key, and, as I will discuss in the next section, the primary tonal track of Elphaba's initial ambitions to do good.
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22. This harmony resembles the 'Wicked' motif as well, but with $\hat{3}$ in place of $\hat{7}$ and without $\hat{6}$ in the bass.
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23. If one wanted to draw out this analysis even further, it is notable that both of Glinda's solo numbers, "Popular," and "I Couldn't be Happier," use melodies that outline stable tonic triads, and place a significant emphasis on $\hat{3}$.
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24. I have arranged the scale degrees in Example 12 so that the highest scale degree is always the visually highest in the chart.
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25. I say this not to diminish or repudiate earlier work on this show that focuses on *Leitmotivic* aspects of the score, but rather to encourage analysts working in developing theoretic approaches to musical theater that excavating below the musical surface does indeed yield important, interesting, and useful analytic results. As Michael Buchler and Gregory J. Decker have succinctly described, "Musicologists and theater historians have much to tell us about the genre's history and social contexts, and their critical readings of musicals form an important body of scholarship," but analytic and theoretic approaches can "enrich critical and historical research foci with deep musical engagement" (2023, 1).
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26. William Rothstein suggests that in Verdi's *Macbeth*—which of course also contains witches [!]—"the motion from C minor to D-flat major is a recurring theme in the opera, as is the goal-status of D-flat more generally. It is as though the motive C–D♭–C that characterizes Macbeth. . . becomes a directed motion, C→D♭" (2023, 551). Likewise, Bryan Gilliam analyzes analyzes Strauss's operas through associative tonality, creating structures that might be more accurately termed "tonal design" (1991, 2014).
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27. Elsewhere, I have noted that "Musical theater, unlike opera, traditionally transposes songs to meet the vocal needs of the performers," but "mitigates this issue in part by treating the vocal score as a sort of standardized musical text" (2025a). More tellingly, when asked "if the [published] sheet music [for *Wicked*] will be written in the original Broadway key?" Schwartz responds that "in all cases except one, the piano vocal selections are in the show keys" (Schwartz 2010a, 27), which indicates that the songs in the show indeed have a set, or at least ideal, key. Schwartz has also described how he has "basic vocal ranges (soprano, tenor, etc.) in mind when [he] writes," but that he allows for the transposition of songs if necessary for individual actors (2010b, 12–13), but cautions that transposing can be complicated because of the relationships between keys (13), which suggests that there is some intent behind his original key choices.
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28. McCreless provides a more detailed study of the concept of associative tonality, noting in particular that it refers to "tonal structure arising not from the established tonal and harmonic constraints of the classical system. . . but from the deliberate choice that particular keys, whatever

their traditional relationships, may represent vital symbols of the drama" (1983, 90).
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29. Naturally my analysis of Elphaba's tonal trajectory does not encapsulate every key of every song present in the show. As Motazedian describes in her work on tonal design in film music, "Judicious selectivity and assessment are inherent features of this kind of work—as they are with analysis in general. We cannot weight every component equally but must be critical in deciding where to place emphasis in order to produce a compelling interpretation. It's important to resist the urge to include every musical element or concoct convoluted rationales for components that defy characterization. Not every key will be significant. . . and a successful analysis need not strive for complete tonal accountability" (2023, 18).
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30. For more on chromatic mediants and their functional incompatibility with a tonic, see Stein 1983, Cohn 2012, and Hutchinson 2022 and 2025b.
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31. See Harrison 1994 and Hutchinson 2022, for further discussion on the functional importance of these scale degrees, and McCreless 1983 on the functional interchangeability of parallel major and minor modes.
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32. The relationship of B and C recalls Richard Strauss' tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1896), whose "famous polytonal ending" (Youmans 1998) in which "the conflict between Man and Nature [is] basically unresolved and as irreconcilable as the two nearest, yet harmonically so distant keys of B and C" (Del Mar 1962–1972, 145) even positions B major and C major as tonally irreconcilable keys.
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33. The preceding song, "One Short Day," which is sung by the citizens of the Emerald City, with Elphaba and Glinda joining in partway through the song, is in F-sharp major; this too could be integrated into the tonal trajectory as an anticipation of the Wizard's B-major tonality in the form of B's dominant.
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34. See footnote 26 above for a similar tonal trajectory in Verdi's *Macbeth*.
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35. See Brown, Dempster, and Headlam 1997 for further discussion of the disjunct nature of ♭V/♯IV.
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36. Both IV and V are typical "pretonics" in popular music; Christopher Doll (2017) uses the term "pretonic" to describe chords—including both dominant and subdominant—that anticipate, or precede, the tonic in popular music.
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37. In Maguire's novel, Elphaba explicitly justifies her (attempted) murder of the Wizard's minister of propaganda, Madame Morrible, as "I have fought fire with fire. . . and I ought to have done it sooner!" ([2024] 1995, 422), confirming that she realizes that she has indeed fallen to their level.
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38. The musical version of *Wicked* slightly alters the ending of both *The Wizard of Oz* and Maguire's novel, suggesting that the "melting" was a ruse concocted by Elphaba and a (somehow alive) Fiyero (now a scarecrow). I have personally never enjoyed this aspect of the plot, as I feel it undermines much of Elphaba's development and character arc throughout the show (though Elphaba and Fiyero do leave Oz, with no one knowing that they are alive; so with respect to the larger plot of the show they are thus no longer catalysts driving the dramatic or musical action and

are effectively considered dead by the rest of the characters).
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39. One other situation where this type of approach might yield intriguing results that comes immediately to mind is Lloyd Webber's *Love Never Dies* (2010), which is a direct sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), though Lloyd Webber is the composer for both. There exists, for instance, a countermelody sung by the Phantom ("obey your heart and sing for me") in the song "Devil Take the Hindmost (Quartet)" that is derived from the melody of the song "The Phantom of the Opera," from the earlier show, but in a different rhythmic profile.
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40. This approach does not assign *a priori* normative status to the music in *The Wizard of Oz* despite being composed more than half a century before *Wicked* in real-world time, but rather considers when the music is first heard temporally in the timeline of the world of Oz. Thus, while Arlen certainly wrote "If I Only Had a Brain" before Schwartz wrote "What is this Feeling?," the latter takes place before the former in the Oz timeline, and thus "comes first" in that sense.
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41. Both songs also feature prominent octave leaps, though on different scale degrees. That both songs are in the key of F major is also intriguing, though I do not want to put undue weight on that observation having consulted only the sheet music published by MGM, rather than any sort of original score for *The Wizard of Oz*.
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42. Sternfeld litigates this point to some extent, noting that "There has always been debate over the qualifications of critics," who, she laments, "know theater but not music" (2006, 74).
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43. Strauss elucidates that this is the "basic principle of Liszt's symphonic works in which the poetic idea was really the formative element" requiring the music to "develop logically from within" (von Bülow and Strauss 1955, 139). Strauss further notes that: "If you want to create a work of art that is unified in its mood and consistent in its structure. . . [then] this is only possible through the inspiration by a poetical idea, whether or not it be introduced as a programme. I consider it a legitimate artistic method to create a correspondingly new form for every new subject" (von Bülow and Strauss 1955, 82–83).
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