

# Jesper Juellund Jensen: *Musical norms in popular music*

## Summary

This thesis deals with aspects of musical analysis of popular music with a main emphasis on the period between the mid-nineteenfifties and the mid-sixties. The purpose is to describe musical *norms*, which is to say the underlying structures that are characteristic of this music, and ‘in the light of’ which concrete instances of music are heard. Consequently, a musical norm cannot merely be defined as an ‘average’ of what statistically occurs most frequently within a certain repertoire, but is more like a set of patterns and expectations that characterise the experience of the music as a sounding structure.

Traditional musicology offers a large number of methods for notating and analysing music, but since these methods have not been developed as tools for understanding popular music, they do not apply unproblematically to this repertoire. In this thesis a wide range of analytical methods, taken from various musicological traditions, are discussed and adjusted with a view to the music under consideration. And applying traditional music theory to popular music in this way in its turn leads to discussions of the terminologies used within such theories and how these terminologies explicitly and, not least, implicitly shape and delimit the type of musical understanding they produce. Furthermore other analytical methods and terms which aim directly at explaining aspects of popular music are developed in the thesis.

All musical phenomena are considered from two different viewpoints, as *idea* and as *realisation*, respectively. For example the experience of pitch – of a g-sharp, for instance – is on the one hand considered a perception of a pitch idea and on the other hand of a realisation of this pitch idea in performance. Similarly, a ‘tune’ designates, in the thesis, that (idea) which is common to various differing recordings or realisations of it – for instance the tune, *What’d I Say*. The thesis focuses on *tunes*, not realisations. Even so, the point of departure is, in every instance, recordings of the music discussed, and transcriptions therefore play a considerable role in – and make up a large part of – the thesis.

The thesis consists, roughly, of two parts. The first part includes general discussions of analytical terms within the context of popular music analysis. Chapter two deals with *underlying structures*, with the main emphasis on melodic and harmonic structures, and here *Schenkerian analysis* serves as the point of departure. I continue in chapter three by considering the question of *pitch*, partly as concerns the individual note and partly as concerns larger contexts – that is to say, questions of *mode*. Finally, chapter four deals with *temporal aspects*, including rhythm, meter and the construction and combination of phrases. Chapter five concludes the first part of the thesis, and shows an example of how *formal models* can function as a method for a theoretical description of music. The development of models for describing melodic rhythm forms the point of departure here.

The second part of the thesis is a more concrete survey of a selection of important musical norms in British and American popular music from around the second half of the fifties until the mid-sixties: Blues-based rock’n’roll (chapter six), American pop around 1960 (chapter seven), and the R&B of the sixties (chapter eight).

More information on the project and the thesis is available on [www.cyrk.dk/phd](http://www.cyrk.dk/phd) .