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ESSAYS

# "Spring from Night into the Sun": Metaphors of Dark and Light in the Music of the Grateful Dead

Melvin J. Backstrom

Perhaps the most common lyrical tropes found in the music of the Grateful Dead are invocations of darkness and light, or related concepts dealing with sight or the lack thereof. (The examples in table 1 are but a few of those that pervade the band's songs.) David Dodd (2007) has explored the metaphorical resonance of these tropes in their lyrics, but along with such relatively explicit references, the Dead made use of them in specifically musical ways as well. Particularly interesting are the ways in which the group reflects the lyrical use of these tropes in their instrumental work, and what this use suggests about the intended goals of its members' idiosyncratic musical practice. What do such lyrical contrasts suggest about the group's approach to structuring their music, and vice versa? This is significant because the widely attested phenomenological power of the Dead's music has a great deal to do with the way in which the group so effectively used the metaphorical difference between darkness and light *affectively*, reflecting an

uncommonly sophisticated awareness (at least among popular musicians) of the importance of exploring differences within their musical materials.

**Table 1**. Dark/Light and Sight References in Grateful Dead Lyrics

| Song | Lyrics / Reference |
|---|---|
| "Dark Star" | "Dark star crashes / pouring its light / into ashes ... Searchlight casting / for faults in the / clouds of delusion" |
| "Comes a Time" | "when the blind man / takes your hand / says: Don't you see? /... I can't see much difference / between the dark and the light" |
| "Saint Stephen" | "Ladyfinger dipped in moonlight / Writing 'what for?' across the morning sky / Sunlight splatters dawn with answers / Darkness shrugs and bids the day good-bye" |
| "Let It Grow" | "Morning comes, she follows the path to the river shore / Lightly sung, her song is the latch on the morning's door / See the sun sparkle in the reeds; silver beads pass into the sea" |
| "Ripple" | "If my words did glow / with the gold of sunshine … There is a road / no simple highway / between the dawn / and the dark of night" |
| "Days Between" | "Summer flies and August dies / the world grows dark and mean ... Comes the lightning of the sun / on bright unfocused eyes" |
| "Terrapin Station" | "Counting stars by candlelight / all are dim but one is bright / the spiral light of Venus / rising first and shining best / From the north-west corner / of a brand-new crescent moon / crickets and cicadas sing / a rare different tune / Terrapin Station / in the shadow of the moon" |
| "Wharf Rat" | Narrator August West is named for a month with diminishing daylight and for the direction in which the sun sets. |

"Let It Grow," lyrics by John Barlow, all other lyrics by Robert Hunter; © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp.

One such example of the manipulation of musical parameters is that of tempo, the range of which within the Dead's performances was exceptional. The oft-performed ballad "Stella Blue," for example, was often in the *grave* range, forty to forty-five beats per minute (e.g., Grateful Dead 1977a). Other songs, sometimes closely juxtaposed with "Stella Blue" or other songs with slow tempos, could be, in contrast, much faster. The band's disco-inflected arrangement of the Martha and the Vandellas' 1964 Soul hit, "Dancing in the Street," for example, was commonly played

around 130 bpm, and other songs reached similar *allegro* levels (e.g., Grateful Dead 1978).

The band's dynamic range was also unusually wide, from whispering, *pianissimo* soft—even to the point of complete silence—to *fortissimo*, airplane-engine loud. "The Other One," a song the Dead played consistently from late 1967 to 1995, exemplifies the description of their music as "rolling thunder," with its galloping 12/8 rhythms—particularly when drummer Mickey Hart was with the band.[1] But even within performances of the usual sonic intensities of "The Other One," the musicians could vary their dynamics to arrive at moments of extreme *pianissimo.*

A particularly good such example is from April 26, 1972, in Frankfurt, Germany, on their famed European tour of that year (Grateful Dead 1995; 2011). In this performance, the musicians shift and flow through a highly differentiated dynamic range, but with a continual sense of developmental continuity, rather than, say, the violently abrupt shifts of John Zorn's *Naked City* project (1990). From the double or triple *forte* of the first five minutes the musicians slowly diminish to a drummer-less (after 8:05) *pianissimo* around 8:20. (Jerry Garcia's string-bend down, F♯5 to E5, beginning at 8:30 is particularly powerful here.) They then build back up to the song's usual rolling thunder *forte* for the first verse that begins at 13:39 and ends at 14:19. Diminishing in volume again, they slowly work their way through a variety of atonal wanderings until only the three guitarists—Garcia, Lesh, and Weir—are left. After a burst of simultaneous feedback from all three at 23:52, Weir and Lesh drop out, leaving only Garcia to make the quietest *pianissimo* solo sounds. But by the 27:00 mark they are back up to *fortissimo*, as Garcia trills his guitar with anguished, atonal screams behind which the rest of the band supports him with their own atonal sounds, eventually leading back to the song's main theme for its second verse.

Yet another musical parameter that is an important part of the group's penchant for wide variations is texture—the number of different musical "voices." The sung portions of their songs primarily feature the homophony common to most popular music. But polyphony is not uncommon in the Dead's performances, especially in instrumental improvisations, though varying widely from the sometimes ambient-like

minimalism of a "Space" to the multi-instrument polyphony of a "Dark Star" jam.

The Dead also made use of an uncommonly wide range of styles or idioms, which they used in an arguably musically dynamic way. Rather than simply stand-alone examples of various idioms (e.g., country, rock, rhythm and blues, western ballad, blues, progressive rock), the group clearly understood the generic references of their songs in a highly relational fashion, consistently changing their idiomatic expression when moving from one song (or instrumental section) to another. The working out of such contrasts points to the highly experiential, bodily-centered nature of the group's practices. In opposition to the traditional view of art as object—a thing created by an artist to be subsequently interpreted by an audience—the group would seem to agree with John Dewey in instead positing an understanding of their music *as experiential process*, rather than as stable objects to be repeatedly recreated, as well as a temporally unfolding process of heightened awareness created in dialogue between the nominal musician creators and their audiences as the actual cocreators.[2]

Indeed, as members of the group have repeatedly recounted, it was precisely their dialogical engagements with the community that they were a part of in San Francisco in the 1960s that led them and their audience to the possibility of musical performance in such a non-work, experientially-centered way. As Phil Lesh explained:

> The audience and the community, that's us. That came out of that first flush of wonder and amazement, that realizing that there were so many people who were essentially us … When we would go out to play for free in the park, and for dancing in the middle of a beautiful summer day, it was so organic; it was just what we did. We weren't playing a concert; we weren't playing a 'gig.' We were going to church. (Parker 2009, 160)

The realization of such a wide range of musical qualities would have a particularly important resonance in such a context, given that it is precisely the changes—the differences within the experience of art—that are foregrounded as the primary aesthetic interest, rather than the assumption of a stable underlying work.

### The "Help on the Way" > "Slipknot!" > "Franklin's Tower" Triptych

There is perhaps no better example of the Dead's musical realization of such differences in the group's oeuvre, and of their oft-used invocation of darkness and light in particular, than the musical triptych "Help on the Way" > "Slipknot!" > "Franklin's Tower," commonly shortened to "Help > Slip > Frank." Debuted in concert in 1975 and then released later that year as the opening tracks of their album *Blues for Allah*, the sequence is one of the Dead's more musically complex and adventurous, remaining in fairly regular rotation until the band's demise in 1995.[3] Featuring numerous changes in key and meter intricately balanced between sections of strictly composed and highly improvised material—with even the strictly composed sections subject to changes in performance over time—this musical workhorse sent audiences into rapture when its distinctive opening chords rang out, with many seeing it as a sign of the seriousness of the group's creative ambitions.[4]

Key to the affective power of the "Help > Slip > Frank" sequence is the way in which the lyrics and music together narrate a transition from darkness to light, from doubt and uncertainty to revelatory affirmation. This musical narration mirrors, though in more structured and semantically descriptive fashion, the macro structure of the Dead's more exploratory improvisational journeys—for example, the form of their archetypal second set. As the product of a particularly experimental time in the group's career—the six or so months following their October 1974 "retirement" shows—the creation of "Help > Slip > Frank" suggests an attempt to capture, in more concise form, the lessons learned by band members about how to balance formal constraint with improvisational freedom, and to realize in music a sense of developmental progress through various affective states.

Yet this formalization also portended the increasing systematization of the group's performances. The more fluid combinations of structured songs and more freely improvised segments that characterized their performances up to the mid-1970s gave way to an increasingly rigid arrangement that, by the end of the decade, became formalized into a two-set

(plus the usual encore) structure, with the highly internally improvised "Drums" > "Space" always in the middle of the second set, which lasted until the group's demise in 1995. Although the specific songs that made up each performance continued to vary, the overall dramatic arc remained predictable, with certain songs and genres appearing in consistent patterns. The reasons for this change in the group's performances post-1975 are undoubtedly varied, but one might well wonder if the success they achieved with "Help > Slip > Frank" in realizing such a dramatic narrative did not in some way suggest the usefulness of a more structured performance form. The triptych in 1975, then, might well have looked to the past and the future—where the band had been, as well as where it was going.

## Analysis

Although the Dead continued to perform "Franklin's Tower" fairly often on its own after "Help on the Way" > "Slipknot!" fell out of their performing repertoire for six years, beginning in 1977, it is how the pieces function as a multi-movement musical work that interests me here, not only because that is how they were initially presented but also because that format best makes sense of the intricate interrelations of the pieces' overall construction.

Due to its three-part structure and turbulent, unstable middle section, the triptych evokes comparisons to sonata form in Western art music, with its ternary exposition-development-recapitulation structure. Although Garcia is credited with the composition of the triptych, Lesh, as the member of the group with the greatest degree of formal musical training, would have certainly been well aware of this parallel. But with little structural similarity between "Help on the Way" and traditional sonata form expositions, and absent the return of musical material (modulated or not) in the third section (although there is in the second), nor even a movement back to the initial key of F minor in "Franklin's Tower," there are also substantial differences. Yet the correspondences that exist between the triptych and sonata form do at least reveal a similarity of purpose.

As Scott Burnham has pointed out, the continuing appeal of sonata form centuries after its initial development and in radically different

sociocultural contexts can be attributed to how it "makes a central issue of resolution and of return ..." In his view:

> In dramatizing the return from dominant to tonic … sonata form performs not just a return but a return to nature ... This is a broadly resonant scenario, and hard to resist—sonata form brings us home, and who among us does not long for some sense of home. (2001, 111)

So, while the exact methods used are different in "Help > Slip > Frank" than in those of sonata form, the overall dramatic arc—of tension to resolution, realizing a metaphorical return to home—is indeed quite similar.

However, instead of sonata form's return of musical themes and the resolution of large-scale harmonic tension, in "Help > Slip > Frank" the return is manifested by a striking number of lyrical connections between the songs that bookend the triptych. These connections are supported by a harmonic scheme made up of a progressive (that is, non-cyclical) tonal movement from an unstable F minor in "Help on the Way"—with its lack of authentic cadences and, instead, dominant seventh harmony on the fourth degree—through dizzying diminished seventh-based arpeggios and metrical shifts to A minor for the largely improvised central section of "Slipknot!". (Transcriptions of "Help on the Way" in *Grateful Dead, Vol. 2* and "The Musical Imagination of Phil Lesh" have notated it in the key of E minor; however, it is quite clearly in F minor, confirmed by other published transcriptions—see *Garcia/Hunter Songs* and *Without A Net*.) The band then realizes the subsequent modulation to A major for "Franklin's Tower" through an almost identical series of diminished seventh arpeggios and metrical shifts.

"Help on the Way" (table 2) and "Franklin's Tower" both begin with invocations of temporality. "Franklin's Tower" opens with "In another time's forgotten space," a clear indication of temporality, and several lines offer light and dark references (italics mine): "It can ring, turn *night to day* / It can ring like *fire* when you lose your way"; "One watch by *night*, one watch by *day*"; and "Like four lean hounds the *lighthouse* keep." "Help on the Way" gestures to the future, to what's to come: "Paradise *waits*." "Franklin's Tower," in contrast, gestures to the past, to what's already occurred: "In another time's *forgotten* space." There is also in both the

**Table 2.** Light and Dark Images in "Help on the Way"

| | **Stanza 1** | **Stanza 2** | **Stanza 3** |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Paradise waits<br>on the crest of a wave<br>her angels in **flame**<br>She has no pain<br>Like a child, she is pure<br>She is not to blame | Tell me the cost<br>I can pay<br>Let me go<br>Tell me love is not lost<br>Sell everything<br>Without love, day to day,<br>insanity is king | Help on the way<br>I know only this<br>I've got you today<br>Don't fly away<br>'cause I love what I love<br>and I want it that way |
| B | Poised for flight<br>Wings spread **bright**<br>**Spring from night**<br>**into the sun** | I will pay<br>day by day<br>anyway<br>Lock, bolt and key | I will stay<br>one more day<br>Like I say<br>Honey it's you |
| C | Don't stop to run<br>She can fly like a lie<br>She can't be outdone | Crippled but free<br>**I was blind**<br>**all the time**<br>**I was learning to see** | Making it too<br>Without love in the dream<br>It'll never come true |

"Help on the Way," lyrics by Robert Hunter, © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Emphases mine.

presence of the feminine. The paradise in "Help on the Way" is female: "*her* angels in flame"; in "Franklin's Tower," "your eyes looked from your *mother's* face."

Furthermore, the start of both songs alludes to Biblical passages. The lines in "Help on the Way"—"like a child, she is pure, she is not to blame"—invoke Proverbs, "Even a child is known by his actions, whether his deeds are pure and right" (Prov. 20.11), and Philippians: "so that you may be blameless and innocent, God's children" (Phil. 2:15). And the lines, "Wildflower seed on the sand and stone / May the four winds blow you safely home" in "Franklin's Tower" (as well as its slight alteration in the penultimate stanza of the song) evokes the three parables told in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark: the Sower, the Growing Seed, and the Mustard Seeds (table 3).

Yet it is the many references to darkness and light that most strongly resonate with the triptych's transformation of musical materials. Along with the future-directed opening stanza of "Help On the Way," the title, in conjunction with the song's minor modality, suggest both the need and potential for some kind of saving grace, a light at the end of a tunnel—perhaps the very "Paradise" invoked in the song's first line. But this paradise is "on a crest of a wave / her angels in flame," suggesting both

**Table 3**. Biblical References in "Franklin's Tower"

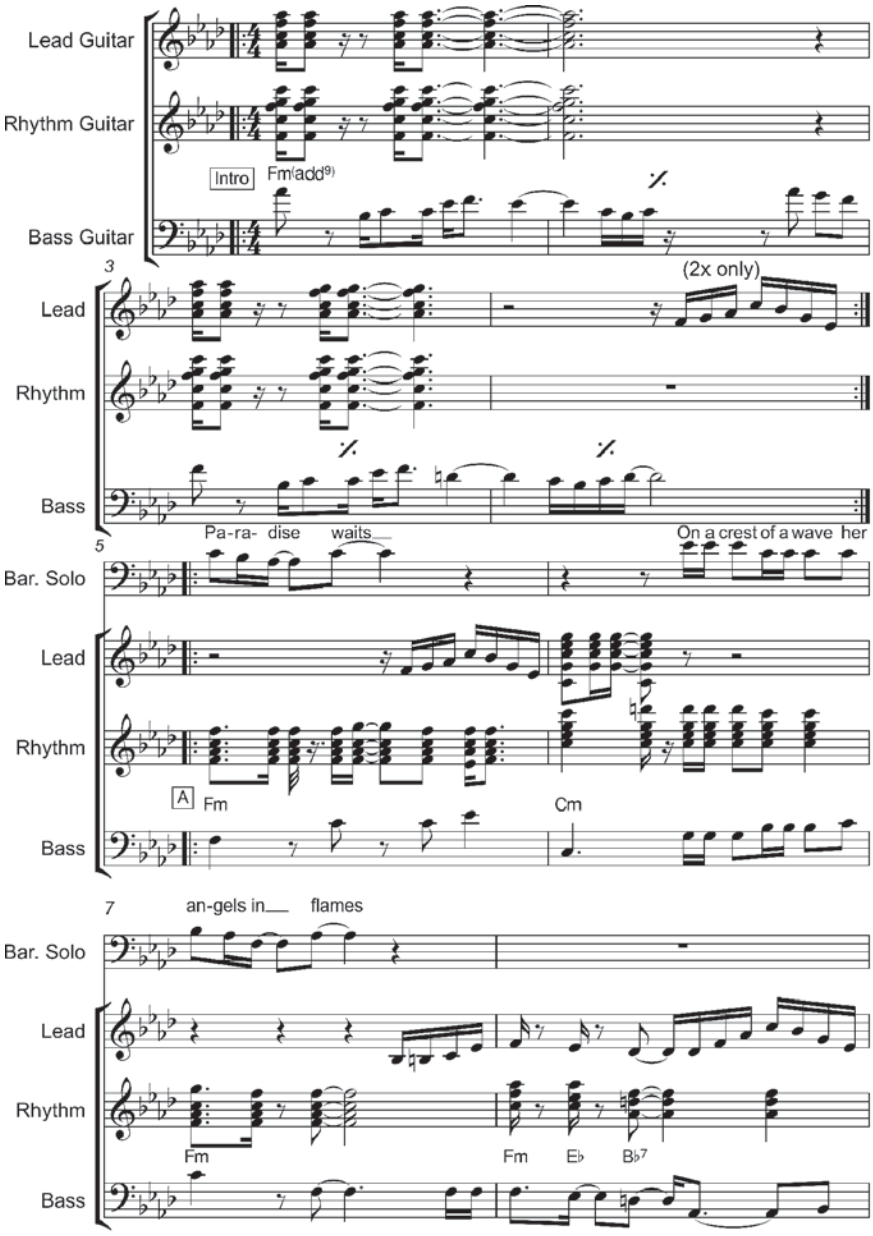
| | |
|---|---|
| "Franklin's Tower" | Wildflower seed on the sand and stone / May the four winds blow you safely home<br>Wildflower seed in the sand and wind / May the four winds blow you home again |
| Parable of the Sower | Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times. Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." (Mark 4.3–9) |
| Parable of the Growing Seed | He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4.26–29) |
| Parable of the Mustard Seed | Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." (Mark 4.30–32) |

"Franklin's Tower," lyrics by Robert Hunter, © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Biblical passages from the *International Standard Version.*

"her" highest possible point of attainment as well as the likelihood of an imminent fall, which surely must be *the* Fall, the one from Edenic paradise. The flaming angels, then, would be those placed by God to prevent a return to paradisiacal bliss.[5] Indeed, "She has no pain" also evokes this *ur*-myth since God's curse of Eve during the expulsion from the Garden was pain in bearing children.

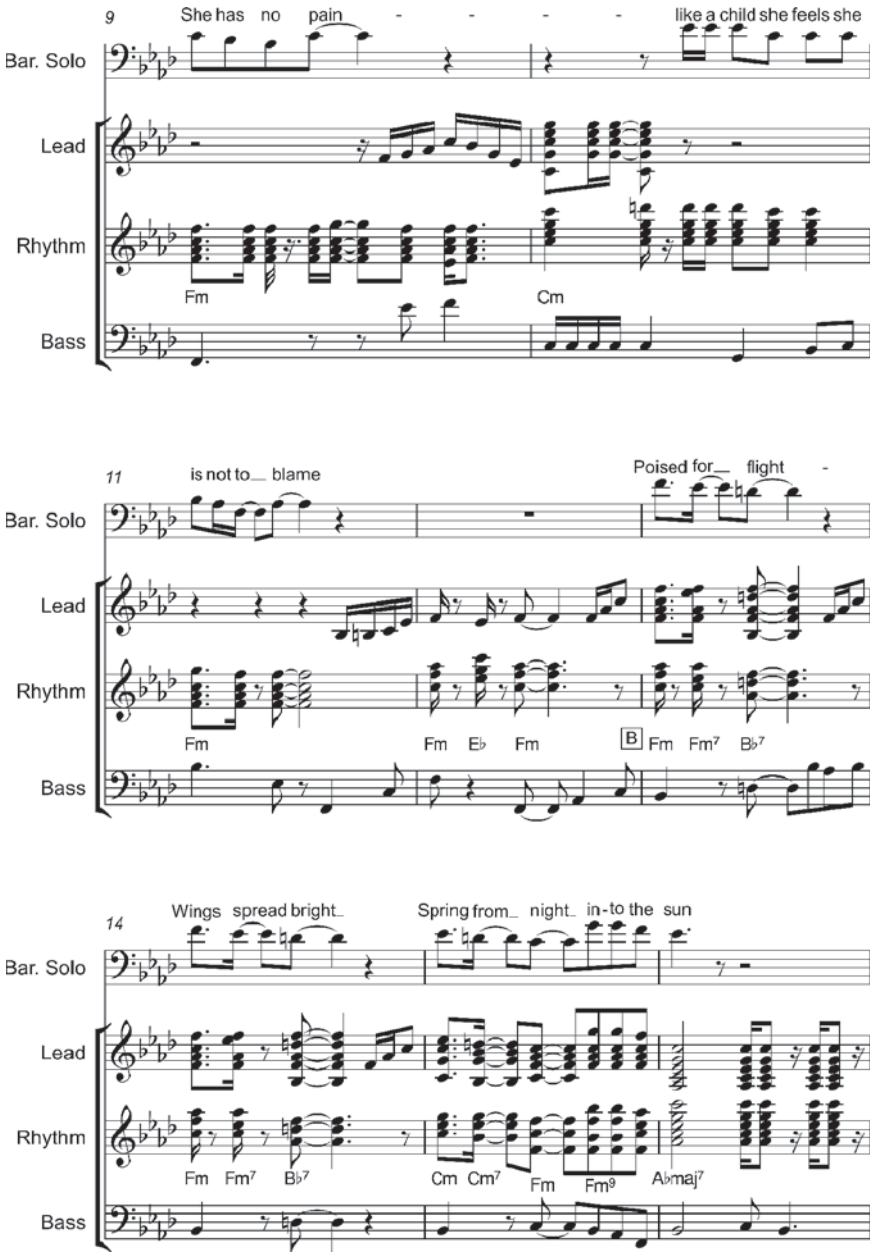
Yet instead of the feminine as the cause of the Fall, as many traditional Judeo-Christian accounts maintain, paradise here is, in fact, a woman. And rather than looking back to prelapsarian innocence, the second stanza insists on "her" futurity—"Poised for flight / Wings spread bright / Spring from night into the sun" (ex. 1.1). This invocation of change is musically depicted and dramatized through the first unambiguous appearance of chromaticism on "flight"—a B♭7 chord accompanying a D♮ in the melody—and then again on "bright" (m. 12). Then comes a clever text painting of "sun" set to an appropriate, and so far unheard, har-

**Example 1.1.** "Help on the Way" Part 1




"Help on the Way," by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter. © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Transcription by author.

**Example 1.2.** "Help on the Way" Part 2

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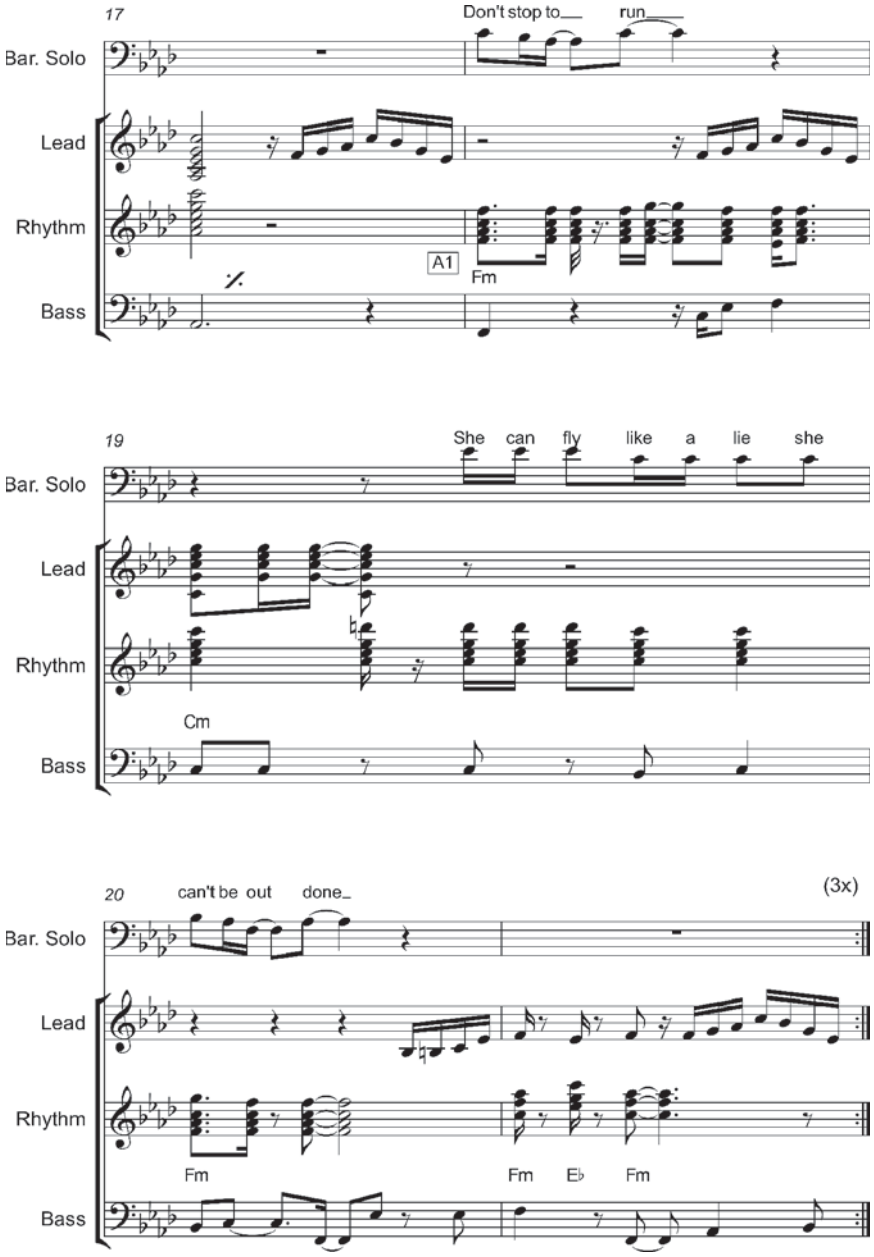
**Example 1.3.** "Help on the Way" Part 3




"Help on the Way," by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter. © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Transcription by author.

monic color, a major seventh chord, foreshadowing the eventual change to the major modality in "Franklin's Tower" (m. 16). Yet, while paradise's place seems to be in the future, the following lines—"Don't stop to run / She can fly like a lie / She can't be outdone"—also suggest the paradoxical nature of attempts to attain her in the present.

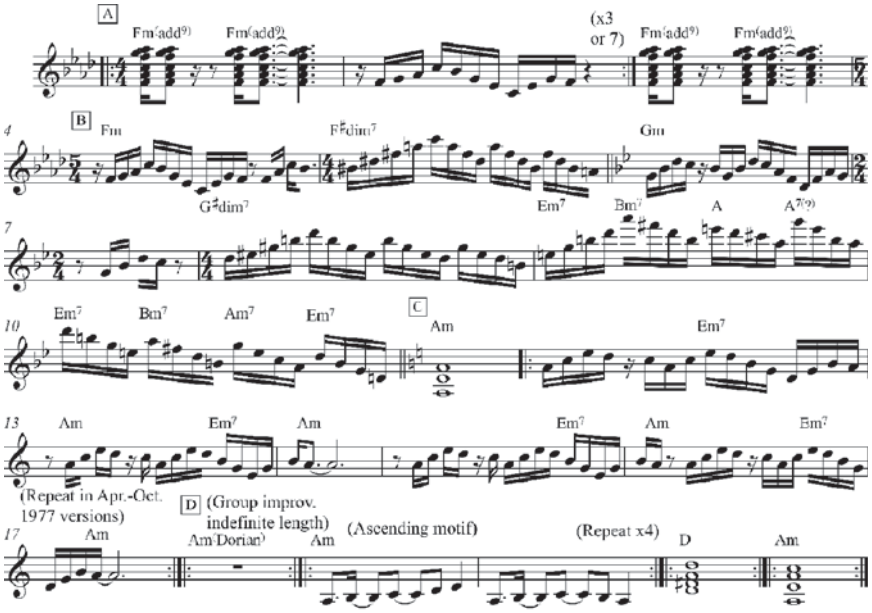
In the second strophe of "Help on the Way" there is another allusive reference to darkness and light. However, instead of appearing in its central B stanza, as before, here it appears in its second A: "Crippled but free / I was blind all the time I was learning to see." These paradoxes recall those from the same part of the first strophe. But, since the lead guitar-led instrumental passage directly follows, they also portentously suggest its music as this realization of freedom and sight, and, analogously, the upcoming "Slipknot!" as an even more adventurous lead guitar-led instrumental section.

The third strophe, by comparison, lacks any explicit reference to darkness and light. But it does revolve around a comparable dualism: I/You, an addressor and an addressee. Indeed, it suggests a synthesis of sorts between the wholly third person address of the first strophe and the wholly first person address of the second as the second person pronoun "you" here makes its first appearance. But is this "you" the speaker has ("I know only this / I've got you today"), then, the paradise that had been earlier waiting? We know that "She can fly like a lie" and "can't be outdone," which would explain why the addressor pleads with the addressee *not* to fly away. Having declared that he loves what he loves and wants it to remain as it is, however, he confirms this love as the addressee: "Honey, *it's* you." And, though we know, thanks to published editions of the song, that in the following line it is "too" in "Making it too," not "two," the homonymic resonance of the latter is also evoked, given that the entire song suggests the unfolding dynamics of a relationship between a self and an other—as does, in fact, the whole triptych, between the darkness of "Help on the Way" > "Slipknot!" and the light of "Franklin's Tower."

Yet rather than a simplistic triumph of the latter over the former, the final lines of "Help on the Way" suggest a synthesis of sorts. If love is the "it" in "Honey, it's you," then "making it" would seem to be a euphemism for union through love, whether physical or spiritual, without

which the dream (the aforementioned paradise, perhaps?) could not be realized. As many traditions insist, however, before any such ultimate goal can be attained, a trial—what mystics might call a dark night of the soul—is not only necessary but also unavoidable.[6] And that is exactly what "Slipknot!" seems to be. Used for, among other things, hangings, the subject of the title has an ominous connotation that matches well the minor mode intricacies and harmonically adventurous collective improvisation that characterize the piece (exs. 2.1, 2.2). As to where "Help on the Way" ends and "Slipknot!" begins, however, there is no clear delineation. A plausible case could be made for the first metrical shift (at section B, written as a bar of 5/4) and immediately following diminished seventh arpeggios, given how they clearly break from what has come before and are also repeated later at the piece's end before the segue into "Franklin's Tower." The arpeggios effect a modulation up a whole step to G minor

**Example 2.1.** "Slipknot!" Part 1

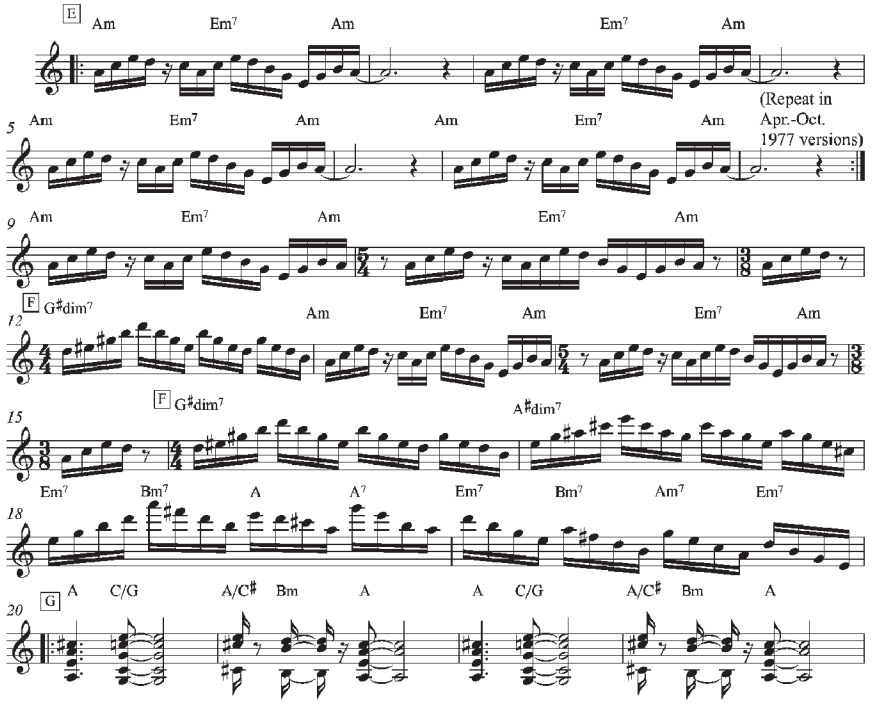



"Slipknot!," by Jerry Garcia. © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Transcription by author.

that lasts only six beats before another bar of diminished seventh arpeggios, identical to the first although transposed up a whole tone, lead into two bars of rapid chord changes before finally resolving to A minor at section C, at which point—as the transcription shows—the harmonic rhythm (i.e., the number of chords used) then slows considerably.[7]

Although relatively harmonically stable, the differences foregrounded in the following section are instead found in the shifting of metrical placement as the new melody first begun on the downbeat is delayed by an eighth note when repeated, as if to purposefully frustrate the listener's expectations and even, as happened more than once in performance, the performers' skills (mm. 12–17). After the group's subsequent improvisations (in which, unusually, lead guitarist Jerry Garcia always used a highly distorted guitar tone, perhaps reflecting the piece's overall baleful mood)

**Example 2.2.** "Slipknot!" Part 2



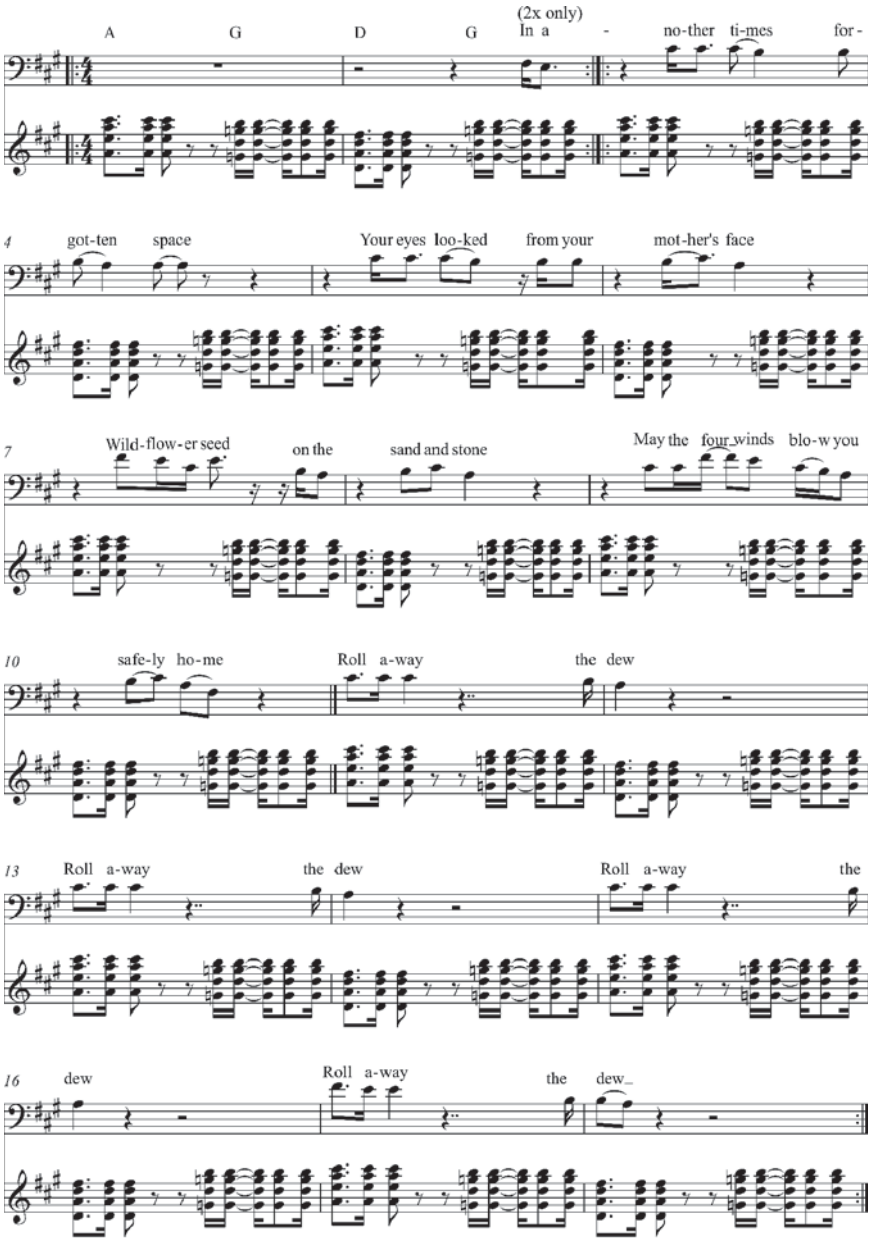

"Slipknot!," by Jerry Garcia. © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc., adm. by Universal Music Corp. Transcription by author.

the group begins an ascending scalar motif, as if to attempt to escape the prevailing darkness that through ten bars builds up to a dramatic harmonic shift to D major—suggesting perhaps the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel (the penultimate measure of example 2.1). But it is not to be, for this shift to major lasts only two bars before the music drops back down to A minor, setting the stage for four or eight repetitions (ex. 3, section E) of a fragment of the earlier melody from section C, suggesting a warming up of sorts for the final trial yet to come.

And that is precisely what occurs with the following metrical shifts, two bars of diminished seventh arpeggios and exact repetition of the two bars of changing-harmony-every-beat arpeggios through which the piece earlier modulated to A minor. But this time the music shifts to the parallel key of A major (at section G). This key, however, is immediately compromised by a C/G chord that simultaneously recalls the earlier A minor (all the notes of C/G are within the compass of A minor 11th) while foreshadowing the strong presence of G major in what follows—suggesting, again, a synthesis of sorts, of the future and the past within the immediate musical present.

After the many twists and turns of "Slipknot!," the beginning of "Franklin's Tower" marks a number of dramatic changes. First, the music is clearly in a major key for the first time since the beginning of the triptych. Second, the vocals return after an extended period of absence. Third, the repetition of the same three chords with rhythmic consistency and metrical regularity are in sharp contrast to the harmonic and metrical irregularities of what has come before. And, rather than the searching, expectant yet uncertain lyrics of "Help on the Way" and the ominous connotations of "Slipknot!," "Franklin's Tower" abounds with references to returning home and the achievement of clarity and understanding through the power of sound—the ringing of a bell turning "night to day"; "if you get confused just listen to the music play"—and the transformation of the darkness of night into the light of dawn (ex. 3). Just as it is the rising sun that rolls away the morning dew, "Franklin's Tower" functions similarly within the overall arc of the triptych, as the dawning of a new day, the lighthouse that brings one safely home, indeed the very help that was earlier said to be on its way.

**Example 3.** "Franklin's Tower"




"Franklin's Tower," by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter. © Ice Nine Publishing Co., Inc. adm. by Universal Music Corp. Transcription by author.

Such interconnectedness supports the parallel mentioned earlier between the relationships within "Help on the Way" and that of the entire triptych, as narrating a negotiation between the self and the other, between darkness and light. But such a parallel is also supported by a similarity in form. The three strophes and their A–B–A divisions in "Help on the Way" anticipate the ternary form of the entire triptych, both in their threefold divisions and the rough synthesis of what has come before in the third section of each section. These reciprocal relationships recall the band's close associate Owsley Stanley's hermetically-influenced motivation for the design of the Dead's Wall of Sound system with which they amplified their music in 1973–74: "as above, so below," or what happens on the macro level should map onto the micro.[8] However, these relationships also point to the way in which the "Help > Slip > Frank" triptych mirrors the structures of the Dead's performances in narrating the archetypal movement from order through disorder and back to order, doing so not only through the exploration of differences of tempo, timbre, texture, and style, but also in the forms and lyrics of their songs through the metaphorical contrast between darkness and light.

The importance of such musical differentiation is what Bob Weir seemed to be pointing to in an interview, where he stated, "a show has to breathe. You can't just keep slamming the audience all night … You have to bring it up, you have to let it fall back down dynamically speaking, a fair bit to, in my estimation, to create a complete experience" (Jarnow 2011). Band lyricist Robert Hunter similarly pointed to the importance of differences within musical performance, writing: "Tension, release, tension, release. Drop back now and again, or you got nowhere to go. Bands that don't learn that might sell more records but drop by the wayside" (1995, [2]). Rather than the penchant for the realization of such differences as merely accidental or unconscious, then, what these statements show is that for the Dead it was an intentional aesthetic strategy, one that came to permeate all aspects of their musical practices.

## Conclusion

In his late essay "Vers une Musique Informelle," Theodor Adorno at last offered a positive account of the kind of progressive and emancipatory

music that he critiqued so many others for not realizing from the 1920s on. There he described something intriguingly similar to what the Dead realized in the creation of "Help > Slip > Frank":

> A form of music whose concrete elements move towards each other, or collide with each other, like monadic cells without becoming infected by the residues of organic idiom … throws some light on the category ... of equilibrium, *the generation of tensions and their resolution through the total form*. This norm was the apotheosis of the traditional notion of the organic. In Schoenberg the totality becomes for the last time what the pure particularity of the dominant-tonic succession once was ... *A composition as a whole creates tension and resolution*, just as used to happen in the tonal idiom with its primal model, the cadence. This shift to totality, however, has stripped the parts of their power. In order to become equal to the task, then, which at present remains hidden, it would be necessary to construct down to the last detail the entire texture of the composition … Relationships have to be established between events which succeed each other directly and indirectly—and this applies to events within simultaneous complexes—relationships which themselves provide the necessary stringency. (Adorno 1998, 311. Emphases mine)

Due to Adorno's privileging of modernist musical works and compositional methods, there are some substantial differences between what he described and the Dead's practices, for whom "organic idioms" and eschewing the "construct[ion] down to the last detail the entire texture of the composition"—at least prior to each performance—were the band's musical lifeblood. But there are also some striking similarities that suggest both the substance of the Dead's style within "Help > Slip > Frank" as well as the band's overall concert form—if understood in their entirety as compositions. Such labels as consonance, dissonance, and resolution, then, do not solely describe tonal relationships, but are rather, in this wider sense, applicable to the dynamic interaction of *all* musical parameters: dynamics (i.e., volume), texture, idiomatic differences, and lyrical references. Furthermore, the Dead showed a consistent desire to create "relationships … between events which succeed each other directly

and indirectly" whether in such composed forms as "Help > Slip > Frank," or in their broader improvisational performance practice. Thus, while no evidence suggests that members of the Dead were explicitly influenced by Adorno's aesthetic theory, their collective musical practice does reveal useful resemblance to his prescriptions, even if their contexts were in many ways so different.[9]

Philosopher Philip Jackson, expanding on John Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience, points out that what is special about such experiences "are the enduring changes that they produce. They leave in their wake a changed world … The experiencer changes by undergoing a transformation of the self, gaining a broadened perspective, a shift of attitude, an increase of knowledge, or any of a host of other enduring alterations of a psychological nature" (1998, 5). And it is the embracing of just such experiential relationships between the Dead's music, and the realization of difference as its defining attribute, that is one of the group's most important musical legacies. It also explains the prevalence of tropes of such phenomenologically foundational importance as darkness and light in their lyrics, as well as metaphorically in the structures of their music.

The foregrounding of such differences points to the Dead's musical practices as constituting a neo-Deweyian—even neo-avant-garde—attempt to reintegrate art and life after the triumph of the autonomous principle of modernist aesthetics in the 1950s.[10] Rather than for the most part apolitical, then, as they have often been characterized, the Dead represent one of the most significant attempts in the latter half of the twentieth century to fulfill Dewey's understanding of artistic experience as integral to the realization of an appropriate balance of collective power and individual freedom, to which the difference between light and dark—metaphorically, oneself and the other—so powerfully speaks.

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## Notes

1. Hart joined the band in September 1967, left the group in February 1971, and rejoined in the summer of 1975. Some notable particularly loud examples of "The Other One" include the one from their famous show in Binghampton, New York,

on May 2, 1970, released as Dick's Picks 8 (1997) and from their performance on February 8, 1978, in Cedar Falls, Iowa, released on Dick's Picks 18 (2000).

2. Dewey explains: "By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has esthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being. And, if one is to go beyond personal enjoyment into the formation of a theory about that large republic of art of which the building is one member, one has to be willing at some point in his reflections to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens … of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration … The one who sets out to theorize about the esthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our own homes and on our own streets" (1934, 2–3).

3. A proto-version was performed during a concert on June 17, 1975, though without lyrics to "Help on the Way," which was entirely instrumental. The first performance of the complete version of the "Help on the Way" > "Slipknot!" > "Franklin's Tower" triptych was on August 13, 1975.

4. Any audience recording of its performance will give evidence of such an audience response, but one early example is their performance at Winterland Auditorium on June 9, 1977 (1977b). This version is also notable for its faster than usual tempo as well as its overall high quality.

5. "After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3.24).

6. "Dark Night of the Soul" is, in fact, the name of a sixteenth-century poem by Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross that narrates the journey of the soul through various trials and tribulations before reaching an eventual union with God (see Green 1986).

7. Although I have marked oscillations between A minor and E minor, one could understand all the notes of the C section as part of an overall A minor 11th chord since the notes of E minor 7th—E, G, B, D—are, respectively, its 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th. Notably, on those official releases of live recordings by the Dead that have "Help on the Way" and "Slipknot!" as separate tracks, it is at section C, the resolution to A minor, that the track division occurs, rather than on the first metrical shift, as I suggest. In contrast, the transcription of "Slipknot!" in *Without A Net* begins at the same point as section A, ex. 2.1.

8. As Stanley explained, "I decided that the sound the band produced in a rehearsal situation was the best, they could hear each other and enjoyed playing. My task was to figure out how to make the onstage sound work in the same way. Once that was done, the next task was to 'sample' that onstage sound and amplify it, and present it to the audience. Phil Lesh and I used to call this the 'Microcosm and

the Macrocosm,' after the alchemical Principle of Correspondence: 'As Above, so Below' from the *Kybalion*" (2007, 3).

9. Though the reasons for the similarity between Adorno's aesthetic theory and the Dead's musical practices are beyond the scope of this article, some preliminary thoughts are useful here. In the 1950s, when Adorno wrote "Vers Une Musique Informelle," the future of the musical avant-garde was a concern for many. After the total serialism of Boulez and Stockhausen, and the embrace of chance and aleatoric techniques by Cage—which, though radically different in their compositional procedures, sounded sometimes remarkably similar—it was not clear to what new avenues contemporary art music should move. Although supportive of Schoenberg and of Berg and Webern's move into atonal composition around 1910, Adorno had found less to like in the increasing systematization in Schoenberg's twelve-tone method of composition in the 1920s, which became the basis of postwar serialism.

Adorno (1998) was also less than enamored of Cage's practices. Although he appreciated Cage and his school's radical gestures as "a joke they hurl into people's faces, a fate which both culture and people richly deserve … [it] turns sour when it appeals to an exotic, arty-craft metaphysics and ends up with an exaggerated version of the very positivism which it set out to denounce" (314). It is in "Vers une Musique Informelle" that Adorno most clearly (though given the usual opacity of his prose this judgment is highly relative) sets out the direction in which he thinks music should move: *vers*, meaning "towards," and *musique informelle*, Adorno's name for the kind of music he would like to see, meaning not "informal music" in its usual English meaning of "relaxed, friendly, or unofficial," but rather music which lacks a preexisting definitive form or structure. Instead, he thinks, musical form should arise immanently from subjectively derived, though objectively shaped, musical materials.

Similarly, Phil Lesh has recounted his own frustration with trying to be a composer in the early 1960s, in the aftermath of the same musical history Adorno was responding to, and how taking up the electric bass with the Dead, and the profound role he had in shaping the band's music, was his answer to his compositional frustrations (2005, 34–39; cf. Childs 1974).

10. On the interpretation of the artistic avant-garde as a response to the increasing autonomy of modernist art, see Bürger 1984, 35–54.

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