

Leitmotifs in Hamilton: the Broadway Musical

Presented to the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Completion of the Program

Stern College for Women

Yeshiva University

May 12, 2022

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to my professor and thesis mentor, Dr. Glaser for his time, wisdom, and for enabling me to write on a topic I'm extremely passionate about.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Wachtell, the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program, and Stern College for the educational opportunities they've given me these past three years.

I want to acknowledge my parents for their support throughout this process, and my sister Arielle, for introducing me to Hamilton.

My most sincere apologies to Tehila, Tamar, Yael, Meira, Eliana, and Esther, who were living with me when I was first introduced to Hamilton.

A special thanks to Malkie, Ian Weinberger, and the Stern College Music Department for sharing with me all the tools and information I needed to write this paper.

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History of Hamilton

Over the past two hundred seventy years, countless Broadway musicals have come and gone, yet there is something about Hamilton, the 2016 musical by Lin Manuel Miranda, that entranced audiences like few before.

The inspiration for Hamilton the musical came from an airport bookshop, where veteran Broadway lyricist and composer Lin Manuel Miranda, came across Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton. Miranda had done a research paper on Hamilton in the eleventh grade, and vaguely remembered some of Hamilton's background, so, he bought the book to have something to read on his flight.¹ It was then he says he first got the idea of writing a musical biography about the lesser known founding father. This was in 2008, 7 years before Hamilton The Musical, would premiere on Broadway.

Many of those years were spent writing. Miranda wrote the music and lyrics himself, while composer Alex Lacamoire, who worked with Miranda on In The Heights, helped with the arrangements. At the White House Poetry Jam in 2009 Miranda introduced and performed the first song and the opening number from the musical he was working on, "Alexander Hamilton". The idea of a rap musical about a founding father sounded ridiculous and was met by laughter from the audience, among whom was President Barack Obama. Not deterred, by 2012, Miranda was performing early versions of some of what would become the most popular songs from the score, dubbed "The Hamilton Mixtape". Some of the songs, like "That Would Be Enough", which took Miranda 45 minutes, were written quickly.² Others, like "My Shot", took several years to write.³ In January of 2015 Hamilton began off-Broadway performances, transferring to Broadway that August.

¹ ["Lin-Manuel Miranda talks about writing Hamilton"](#), May 4, 2020, YouTube video, 1:10.

² Miranda and Carter, "Hamilton: The Revolution", (Grand Central Publishing, 2016) p110.

³ Miranda and Carter, "Hamilton: The Revolution", p27.

The production was met with glowing reviews from theatergoers and critics alike. The New York Times described the show as “Young Rebels Changing History and Theater”.⁴ At the 2016 Tony Awards, Hamilton received a record 16 nominations in 13 categories and won 9 awards, the second most in history. That same year the Original Broadway Cast Recording won the Grammy for best Musical Theatre Album. In July of 2020 the rights to the professionally shot production of Hamilton were sold to the streaming service Disney+ for 75 million dollars: quite possibly the most expensive film acquisition of all time.⁵ As of April 2023, there have been seven international productions of Hamilton (Broadway, Los Angeles, Chicago, West End UK, Australia Tour, Germany, and Toronto), and three U.S. National Tours.

It wasn't long after its release that the name Hamilton became more commonly associated with the musical about the founding father than with the founding father himself. After the release of Hamilton, people began to develop a renewed interest in the history of the founding era of America. People have called this interest the Hamilton effect. Hamilton reportedly saved historical sites like the Schuyler Mansion in Upstate New York, which after prolonged inactivity saw a surge in visitors amidst the growing popularity of Hamilton.⁶

Lin Manuel Miranda⁷

Lin Manuel Miranda was born to Puerto Rican immigrant parents on January 16, 1980. Miranda's mother is a clinical psychologist, and his father founded and co-runs the political

⁴ Brantley, [“Review: ‘Hamilton.’ Young Rebels Changing History and Theater”](#) (The New York Times, August 6, 2015)

⁵ Fleming Jr., [“Disney Paid \\$75 Million For Worldwide Movie Rights To Lin-Manuel Miranda’s ‘Hamilton’: Biggest Film Acquisition Deal Ever?”](#) (Deadline, February 3, 2020)

⁶ Skala, [“The Hamilton Effect: How One Musical Made the Founding Fathers Cool, and What it Means for Historic Sites and the Academic World”](#), (University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository, Spring 2018), p4.

⁷ [“Lin Manuel Miranda Biography”](#), (Biography.com, April 14, 2016)

consulting firm, The MirRam Group. Miranda and his older sister grew up in the Manhattan neighborhood of Inwood. He attended Hunter College Elementary and High School, where he got involved with the school theatre productions. Miranda attended Wesleyan University, where he graduated with a degree in Theatre Studies. In his sophomore year he put on a production of his original musical “In the Heights”. After graduation he worked as an English teacher in Hunter High School and would also write political jingles, a gig his father graciously got for him.

Then, in 2008, Miranda resumed his work on In the Heights, fine tuning the show which eventually made it to Broadway. In the Heights, set in Miranda’s childhood neighborhood, tells of the identity struggles of a group of Latin American immigrants and their children. Miranda starred as the show’s lead, Usnavi, an orphan immigrant from Puerto Rico whose bodega reportedly sells a winning lottery ticket. The show won four Tony Awards including Best Musical. In 2021 In the Heights was adapted into a major motion picture.

After In the Heights, Miranda went on to help with the Broadway production of Bring It On!, and guest starred on a number of TV shows, including House and How I Met Your Mother. Every year the Tony Awards feature a musical number opening. Miranda has co-written a few of these opening numbers, the most iconic of which was the 2013 Awards number, co-written by Tom Kitt, performed by actor and Broadway Vet Neil Patrick Harris, titled “Bigger”, which won Miranda an Emmy. In 2014 Miranda wrote and produced the short off Broadway Production “21 Chump Street”. The 14 minute long show is based on the true story of Justin LaBoy, an ambitious straight A student, who was arrested in a drug operation after unknowingly getting some weed for the undercover cop he became romantically interested in. Since the release of Hamilton, Miranda has worked on a number of projects for Disney, writing the music for the family friendly musicals Moana, Encanto, and Mary Poppins.

The Hamilton Creative Team

Although Hamilton is more or less Miranda's brainchild, the show's success would likely not have been possible without the rest of the show's award winning creative team. While Lin was responsible for the music and lyrics, Alex Lacamoire, a Broadway composer and orchestrator, helped arrange and orchestrate the songs, Director Thomas Kail brought Hamilton's story to life, and Andy Blankenbuehler choreographed the show. While each member of the team had their own job, the group has described their work as extremely collaborative.⁸

Notable Artistic Choices

Two of the most notable things about Hamilton are the use of color blind casting for the main characters and the choice of rap music as the dominant musical genre. Miranda explained these choices as he intended for Hamilton to be the story of America in 1776 told by America in the 2000s.⁹ America today is far more culturally diverse now than it was at its inception, hence the colorblind casting. Music trends have also changed; although classical music once was a popular genre of music in America, today, hip-hop far better reflects what music is currently popular. On a functional level the rapping allows for the story to be told in 2 hours and 45 minutes, due to the fast pacing and constant lyrical flow rap music is known for. Studies have shown that if the pacing of Hamilton were consistent with the average Broadway show, the run time would be between 4 to 6 hours.¹⁰

⁸ "Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales", (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 27:42

⁹ Delman, "How Lin-Manuel Miranda Shapes History" (The Atlantic, September 29, 2015)

¹⁰ Libresco, "['Hamilton' Would Last 4 To 6 Hours If It Were Sung At The Pace Of Other Broadway Shows](#)" (FiveThirtyEight.com, October 5, 2015)

Leitmotifs

Leitmotifs are recurring musical phrases that are associated with a character, setting, or idea.¹¹ The term was coined by Friedrich Wilhelm Jähns in describing the music of Carl Maria von Weber, however, the term is now more closely associated with the 19th century German composer, Richard Wagner, who was known for his use of leitmotifs throughout his mature work, most notably in his series of operas, The Ring Cycle. Interestingly, during “Helpless”, as Eliza and Hamilton are getting married, Wagner’s “Treulich geführt”, more commonly known as “Here Comes the Bride”, accompanies the company as they sing “in New York you can be a new man”, one of the musical’s leitmotifs.

Hamilton is filled with reappearing melodies and accompaniments, however unless they have apparent ties to a character, setting, or idea, they do not qualify as leitmotifs. In my research for this paper, I compiled a list of over fifty repetitive melodies and accompaniments. Some are single words that are always sung to the same tune, and others are large main accompaniment figures. In this paper, I will identify a handful of these repeated musical structures, demonstrating they are leitmotifs based on their association with a certain character, setting, or idea, and share or hypothesize how these leitmotifs are symbolic, adding depth to the musical.

¹¹ [Merriam-Webster. Leitmotifs](#)

List of Musical Numbers

Act I

1. "Alexander Hamilton" – Aaron Burr, John Laurens, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Eliza Schuyler, George Washington, Angelica Schuyler, Maria Reynolds, and Company
2. "Aaron Burr, Sir" – Hamilton, Burr, Laurens, Marquis de Lafayette, Hercules Mulligan, and Company
3. "My Shot" – Hamilton, Laurens, Lafayette, Mulligan, Burr, and Company
4. "The Story of Tonight" – Hamilton, Laurens, Mulligan, Lafayette, and Company
5. "The Schuyler Sisters" – Angelica, Eliza, Peggy Schuyler, Burr, and Company
6. "Farmer Refuted" – Samuel Seabury, Hamilton, Burr, Mulligan, and Company
7. "You'll Be Back" – King George III and Company
8. "Right Hand Man" – Washington, Hamilton, Burr, Mulligan, and Company
9. "A Winter's Ball" – Burr, Hamilton, Laurens, and Company
10. "Helpless" – Eliza, Hamilton and Company
11. "Satisfied" – Angelica, Laurens, Hamilton, and Company
12. "The Story of Tonight (Reprise)" – Laurens, Mulligan, Lafayette, Hamilton, and Burr
13. "Wait for It" – Burr and Company
14. "Stay Alive" – Hamilton, Washington, Laurens, Lafayette, Mulligan, Charles Lee, Eliza, Angelica, and Company
15. "Ten Duel Commandments" – Laurens, Hamilton, Lee, Burr, and Company
16. "Meet Me Inside" – Hamilton, Burr, Laurens, Washington, and Company
17. "That Would Be Enough" – Eliza and Hamilton

18. "Guns and Ships" – Burr, Lafayette, Washington, and Company
19. "History Has Its Eyes on You" – Washington, Hamilton, and Company
20. "Yorktown" – Hamilton, Lafayette, Laurens, Mulligan, Washington, and Company
21. "What Comes Next?" – King George III
22. "Dear Theodosia" – Burr and Hamilton
 "Tomorrow There'll Be More of Us" – Laurens, Eliza, and Hamilton (not on the soundtrack)
23. "Non-Stop" – Burr, Hamilton, Angelica, Eliza, Washington, and Company

Act II

24. "What'd I Miss?" – Jefferson, Burr, Madison, and Company
25. "Cabinet Battle #1" – Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison
26. "Take a Break" – Eliza, Philip Hamilton, Hamilton, and Angelica
27. "Say No to This" – Maria Reynolds, Burr, Hamilton, James Reynolds, and Company
28. "The Room Where It Happens" – Burr, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Company
29. "Schuyler Defeated" – Philip, Eliza, Hamilton, and Burr
30. "Cabinet Battle #2" – Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison
31. "Washington on Your Side" – Burr, Jefferson, Madison, and Company
32. "One Last Time" – Washington, Hamilton, and Company
33. "I Know Him" – King George III
34. "The Adams Administration" – Burr, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, and Company[a]
35. "We Know" – Hamilton, Jefferson, Burr, and Madison
36. "Hurricane" – Hamilton, Burr, Washington, Eliza, Angelica, Maria, and Company

37. "The Reynolds Pamphlet" – Jefferson, Madison, Burr, Hamilton, Angelica, Mr. Reynolds, and Company
38. "Burn" – Eliza
39. "Blow Us All Away" – Philip, Martha, Dolly, George Eacker, Hamilton, and Company
40. "Stay Alive (Reprise)" – Hamilton, Philip, Eliza, Doctor, and Company
41. "It's Quiet Uptown" – Angelica, Hamilton, Eliza, and Company
42. "The Election of 1800" – Jefferson, Madison, Burr, Hamilton, and Company
43. "Your Obedient Servant" – Burr, Hamilton, and Company
44. "Best of Wives and Best of Women" – Eliza and Hamilton
45. "The World Was Wide Enough" – Burr, Hamilton, Angelica, Philip, and Company
46. "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story" – Eliza, Washington, Angelica, Burr, Jefferson, Madison, Lafayette, Laurens, Mulligan, and Company

Hamilton Synopsis

The show opens with an introduction to the protagonist, as Aaron Burr narrates and the cast shares the details of Alexander Hamilton's early life, and how he got to New York City from his birth country of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Each main character foreshadows his or her involvement with Hamilton ("Alexander Hamilton"). We're taken to New York City, circa 1776, where Hamilton meets fellow revolutionary Aaron Burr, who advises him to conceal his opinions ("Aaron Burr, Sir"). He also meets John Laurens, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Hercules Mulligan, whom he impresses with his quick, decisive thinking as he expresses his desire for a chance to prove himself ("My Shot"). Over drinks, Hamilton, Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan bond over their mutual dedication to the revolution ("Story of Tonight").

The scene changes and the audience is introduced to Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy Schuyler, the daughters of the wealthy Phillip Schuyler, as they walk around the town square and revel at living in the epicenter of historic social upheaval ("The Schuyler Sisters"). The mood in the square is interrupted by Samuel Seabury, a British Loyalist who reads a declaration of loyalty to King George III, Hamilton interjects and the two argue over what is in America's best interest ("Farmer Refuted"). King George III introduced via a message to the colonies about loyalty, and he sings a love song to the colonies who abandoned him ("You'll Be Back"). The audience meets General George Washington as the Revolutionary War picks up speed, and Hamilton is offered the position as Washington's aide-de-camp. Although this position doesn't satiate Hamilton's desire to lead a command, he accepts ("Right Hand Man").

The year is 1780. Hamilton and Burr attend a ball hosted by Philip Schuyler, at which the Schuyler Sisters are seen by gentlemen suitors as the "crown jewels" ("A Winter's Ball"). At the ball, Eliza Schuyler falls madly in love with Hamilton, and the two marry ("Helpless"). Taken

back in time, it is revealed that Angelica Schuyler also fell in love with Hamilton at the ball, but selflessly suppressed her feelings as she supported her sister's marriage to Hamilton (Satisfied). Hamilton, Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan celebrate Hamilton's marriage over drinks. Burr comes to offer his congratulations, both men express their jealousy at the other's military position, and it is revealed that Burr has fallen for the wife of a British officer (Story of Tonight (Reprise)). Burr compares himself and Hamilton, perplexed at how Hamilton has grown so prominent whereas he feels consistently challenged with continued adversity (Wait For It).

As the war continues, the Revolutionary Army's supplies and hopes of victory dwindle. General Charles Lee disobeys orders and is dismissed from his post by Washington. In retaliation Lee proceeds to denigrate Washington to anyone who will listen. Laurens, with Hamilton's support and backing, challenges Lee to a duel in an attempt to defend Washington's name (Stay Alive). The audience is schooled in standard dueling procedure as Laurens duels with Lee, shooting him (The Ten Duel Commandments). Washington arrives and reprimands Hamilton for his actions, relieving him of his military duty (Meet Me Inside). Hamilton comes home to a pregnant Eliza, at which point he learns that Eliza asked Washington to send Hamilton home, and though Hamilton still wants to fight, he obliges (That Would Be Enough).

The fighting continues as the Revolutionary Army begins to gain traction and Washington, at the bequest of Lafayette, calls Hamilton back to the war, putting him in charge of a battalion (Guns and Ships). Washington reflects on his mistakes and warns Hamilton that as a leader the stakes are higher, and that his actions may now have historical ramifications (History Has Its Eyes on You). At Yorktown, Hamilton and his fellow revolutionaries lead their troops to battle, and ultimately to victory, as the British surrender ("Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)").

With the British defeated, King George III asks the newly independent country how they plan on governing, expressing confidence in their imminent failure (“What Comes Next?”). Burr and Hamilton both welcome newborn children, and assure them they will do anything to protect them, and vow to work towards building a new country for them to grow up in. As the war comes to an end, it is revealed to Hamilton that John Laurens was killed in a postwar conflict, the result of delayed communication that the British had succeeded (Tomorrow There’ll Be More of Us), struck with grief Hamilton immerses himself in his writing, focused on building a successful new nation. The company, led by Burr, expresses their mixed emotions about Hamilton’s ceaseless work ethic as Hamilton goes on to work as a lawyer, and authors 51 of the 85 Federalist Papers, and despite Eliza’s begging, accepts a position as the Secretary of Treasury under Washington’s political leadership (Non-Stop).

Act 2 begins with the arrival of Thomas Jefferson from France, following Jefferson as he is caught up on what has happened since he left, and is offered a position as Secretary of State in Washington’s Cabinet, alongside Hamilton (“What’d I Miss”). Hamilton and Jefferson are thrown into a heated debate about whether the Union should assume the state’s debts, with Hamilton arguing the affirmative. Hamilton is warned by Washington that if his financial plan is not approved, he risks facing removal from office (Cabinet Battle #1). Hamilton once again throws himself into his work.

With the arrival of Angelica from her new home overseas, Eliza begs him to take time off and head upstate and spend some time with their family, but Hamilton refuses (“Take A Break”). Overwhelmed with work, Hamilton is seduced by Mariah Reynolds, and has an affair with the married Mrs. Reynolds. James Reynolds, Mariah’s husband finds out, and extorts Hamilton in exchange for his silence and permission to carry on with his infidelity (“Say No To This”).

Behind closed doors, Hamilton continues trying to petition for more votes for his financial plan, which he gets in exchange for moving the capital further South. Burr tries desperately to be included, but continues to find himself left out of the conversation (“Room Where It Happens”). Burr switches political parties and runs for senate, defeating Hamilton’s father in law, Phillip Schuyler Sr. (“Schuyler Defeated”).

Hamilton and Jefferson once again find themselves face-to-face in contention during a cabinet meeting on whether they should intervene in the French Revolution on the peoples’ behalf. Washington sides with Hamilton, and Jefferson retorts that Hamilton is nothing without Washington’s support (“Cabinet Battle #2”). Plotting Hamilton’s downfall, Jefferson, Burr, and Madison share their frustration and jealousy over Washington’s constant support of Hamilton (“Washington On Your Side”).

Washington calls Hamilton to his office and informs him that Jefferson has decided to run for president, and that to distinguish America, he has decided to resign from office, giving Hamilton the task of writing his Farewell Address (“One Last Time”). King George III enters and becomes thoroughly amused as he discovers that Washington has resigned, and that John Adams has been elected president (“I Know Him”). Hamilton is fired under Adams and retaliates by publishing his response, in which he verbally attacks President Adams (“The Adams Administration”).

Jefferson, Burr, and Madison, inform Hamilton that they know he embezzled government funds, a clear abuse of power, and flaunt their ability to destroy his political career. Hamilton explains that he never stole, but rather moved around his personal funds, revealing how Reynolds blackmailed him following the affair with his wife, and begs the trio not to publicize the information (“We Know”). Unsure whether or not they are good for their word, Hamilton weighs

his options, noting his track record with strategically using words and writings for his continued survival, and ultimately decides to publish a pamphlet explaining everything, so that his political opponents can't use the information against him ("Hurricane"). The Reynolds Pamphlet is published, and Hamilton's political career is nevertheless demolished. Angelica returns home to console her sister and Hamilton is left with his life in ruin ("The Reynolds Pamphlet"). Eliza dwells over how Hamilton's used words to enchant her and decides to symbolically burn all the love letters he wrote her in order to absolve herself from his control ("Burn").

Fast forward, and Hamilton's eldest son Phillip Hamilton has now graduated college, and decided to confront George Eacker, an act to defend his fathers legacy. The young Hamilton finds himself in a duel with Eacker, where he is mortally wounded ("Blow Us All Away"). As he is rushed to the hospital he is met by a distraught Eliza and guilt-ridden Hamilton. Moments later Phillip succumbs to his injuries ("Stay Alive (Reprise)"). Hamilton and Eliza mourn the death of their son which brings them closer together and they make amends ("It's Quiet Uptown").

In the year 1800 Burr and Jefferson are running against one another in the presidential election. Still grieving the loss of his son, Hamilton is put on the spot and asked who he would endorse, ultimately choosing Jefferson who goes on to win the election ("The Election of 1800"). Angered by Hamilton's endorsement of Jefferson, Burr confronts Hamilton and the confrontation escalates to a duel ("Your Obedient Servant"). Hamilton wakes up early and bids Eliza goodbye before heading out to the duel ("Best of Wives and Best of Women"). Hamilton and Burr duel and Burr shoots Hamilton. Hamilton is rushed to the hospital but dies. Burr reflects on what led him to this point and the position he cemented for himself in history as a villain ("The World Was Wide Enough"). The show ends with all the characters, with Eliza front and center, discussing Hamilton's ultimate legacy ("Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story").

Leitmotifs

Alexander Hamilton Introduction and Accompaniment

“My name is Alexander Hamilton, and there’s a million things I haven’t done, but just you wait, just you wait.” - Alexander Hamilton, “Alexander Hamilton”

The opening number, “Alexander Hamilton” introduces a number of prominent musical leitmotifs: the “Alexander Hamilton Introduction”, the “Door Leitmotif”, and the “Hamilton Chord Progression”. While there are technically separate motifs with different functions, they are all tied to narration, specifically historical narration by Burr. The exception to this rule is in “Right Hand Man”, where the narration is done by the several members of the company to appropriately set the scene.

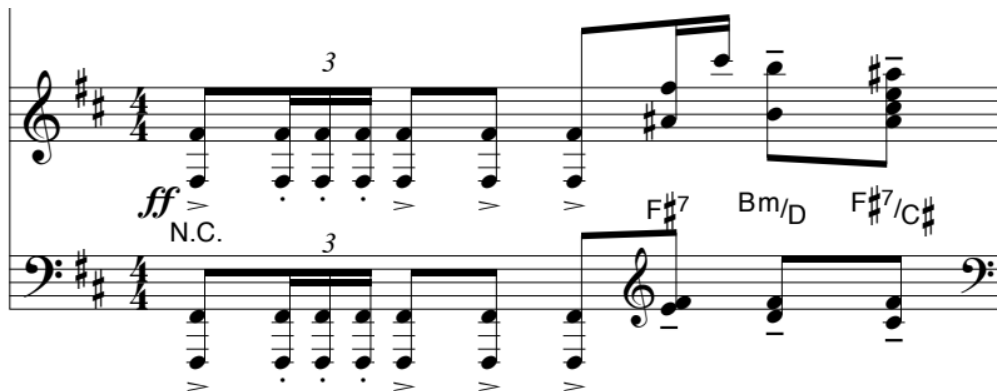


Figure 1: The “Alexander Hamilton Introduction” as seen in measure 1 of Alexander Hamilton

The “Alexander Hamilton Introduction” is a musical motif made of two phrases. The first phrase is seven repetitions of the dominant, spanning over four octaves. The rhythm of the phrase is an eighth note, triplet sixteenths, and three more eighth notes. The second phrase begins on the dominant, leaps up a perfect fifth to the supertonic, and then descends by step, to the leading tone. The “Alexander Hamilton Introduction” kicks off the musical and reappears throughout. It both begins and ends the opening number “Alexander Hamilton”, and similarly starts off the songs “A Winter’s Ball”, “Guns and Ships”, and “The Adams Administration”,

which are all variations of “Alexander Hamilton”. This leitmotif almost always precedes a question of “how does” from Burr, followed by narration to bring the audience back to speed.

Not Throwing Away My Shot Rhythm

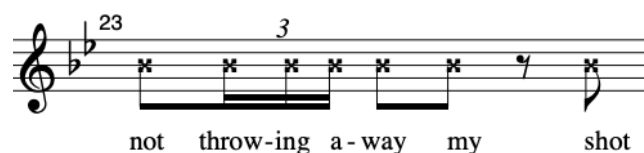


Figure 2: “Not Throwing Away My Shot Rhythm” as seen in measure 23 of “My Shot”

The first phrase in the “Alexander Hamilton introduction” has the same rhythm as Hamilton’s seven-syllable catchphrase, “not throwing away my shot”, which appears in the numbers “My Shot”, “Right Hand Man”, “Yorktown”, and “Non-Stop”. It inadvertently is tied to Hamilton’s ambition and continued accomplishments throughout the show. Miranda has shared publicly that this was a connection he didn’t realize himself until a few months into performances, it is an interesting similarity nonetheless.¹² With that in mind, whether or not this rhythm is considered its own leitmotif is contingent on whether the composer must have intent when a repeated piece of music is associated with a person, setting, or idea.

The Door Leitmotif



Figure 3: “The Door Leitmotif” as seen in measure 10 of “Alexander Hamilton”

¹² [“Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales”](#), (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 26:02



Figure 4: The door sound effect cue as seen in measure 1 of “Your Obedient Servant”

The second phrase of the “Alexander Hamilton Introduction” is actually its own leitmotif: “The Door Leitmotif”, a door shutting musically notated.¹³ Earlier demos of the song actually feature the original sound effect of a heavy, creaky door slamming closed.¹⁴ While the effect has since been removed, it lives on in the introduction of “Your Obedient Servant”. This leitmotif accompanies narration

The numbers “Alexander Hamilton”, “Right Hand Man”, “A Winter’s Ball”, “Guns and Ships”, “What’d I Miss”, “The Reynolds Pamphlet” and “Your Obedient Servant” all contain the lone “Door Leitmotif” in their accompaniment. In all but three of these numbers, the “Door Leitmotif” appears as part of a sequence. The exceptions are “Your Obedient Servant”, in which the phrase appears only once, and “Right Hand Man” and “What’d I Miss”, where all the instances of the “Door Leitmotif” are in the same position. The notes in the sequence outline a progression of i-V-vi. Each sequential repetition of the phrase is preceded by a bass of the tonic, a lower neighbor, and the tonic again. These repetitions establish the first half of the “Hamilton Chord Progression”

¹³ Miranda and Carter, “Hamilton: The Revolution”, p16.

¹⁴ Ian Weinberger, interview by Emily Zrihen, August 3, 2022.

Hamilton Chord Progression

The overall chord structure of the opening number is yet another leitmotif, called the “Hamilton chord progression”. It is a i-V-VI-III-vii^o4/2 progression, and serves as the foundational structure for the opening number and several later songs, namely “A Winter’s Ball”, “Guns and Ships”, and “The Adams Administration”. The Act II opener, “What’d I Miss” begins with a variation of the “Hamilton Chord Progression”, While the bassline is identical, the dominant in the “Hamilton Chord Progression” is substituted for a minor fifth. Again, this progression accompanies narration during these songs.

“Alexander Melody”

“My name is Alexander Hamilton, and there’s a million things I haven’t done, but just you wait.”

- Alexander Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton

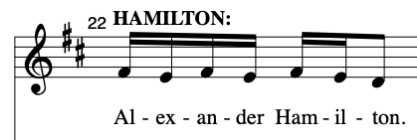


Figure 5: “Alexander Melody ” as seen in measure 22 of “Alexander Hamilton”

Every time Hamilton’s full name appears in a melody, the “Alexander” part is always sung the same. It is either four sixteenth or eighth notes that toggle between two neighboring notes. The “Hamilton” part of “Alexander Hamilton” is generally seen as depicted above, but there is a variation for the “Alexander Hamilton” melody. Miranda has described “Alexander Hamilton” as a very musical name.¹⁵ Since the inception of the musical, this is how Hamilton’s name was sung.¹⁶

¹⁵ Miranda and Carter, “Hamilton: The Revolution”, p17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The “Alexander Melody” is a leitmotif, as it is repeated countless times throughout the show, always in connection to Hamilton’s character. The melody appears in “Alexander Hamilton”, “Satisfied”, “Guns and Ships”, “What’d I Miss”, “Room Where It Happens”, “The Reynolds Pamphlet”, but most interestingly it appears in “Burn”. In “Burn”, Eliza sings “you are paranoid in every paragraph how they perceive you. You, you, you”. In this statement, directed at Hamilton, Eliza sings the “yous”, with a lot of emphasis and emotion, in the toggle of the “Alexander Melody”. This is melodically fascinating, because Eliza’s words are clearly meant for Alexander, but she sings the melody of his name instead of saying it. This tells the listener that Eliza is feeling so much such pain and emotion she can’t even bring herself to say his name.



Figure 6: “You”s as seen in measures 67 and 68 of “Burn”

“Aaron Burr Chord Progression”

“Talk Less, smile more” - Aaron Burr, “Aaron Burr, Sir”

Figure 7: “Aaron Burr Chord Progression” as seen in measures 2 and 3 of “Aaron Burr, Sir”

In Hamilton, the part of Aaron Burr has two functions. He serves as the narrator for most of the show, providing context and background when needed, but the rest of the time he functions as a character in the story. The “Burr Chord Progression” appears in association with

Burr as a character. More specifically, it appears when there is a conversation between Burr and Hamilton, or when he is reflecting on his relationship with Hamilton, his friend turned nemesis.

The “Burr Chord Progression” is I-vi-iii. Miranda has said that Burr’s chord progression has a “dance hall quality to it”, describing it as “slippery”, because it is harder to get a hold of the rhythm.¹⁷ This is an effective characterization of Burr, whose whole position is not to let anyone know where you stand or how you feel. The contrast between Burr’s progression and Alexander’s quick but dynamic chords in “My Shot” is really apropos, as it further solidifies them as foils.

The “Burr Chord Progression” first appears in “Aaron Burr, Sir”, when Hamilton is introduced to Burr. Hamilton and Burr meet again in “Right Hand Man”, where the “Burr Chords” accompany their brief conversation. In “Story of Tonight (Reprise)” they appear, on cue, as Burr enters the scene, and continue as the song segues into “Wait For It”, a ballad in which Burr compares his life trajectory to Hamilton’s. In “Non-Stop” the “Burr Chords” serve as the musical background during the conversation between Burr and Hamilton. In the synthesized bass line in “Election of 1800” the chords appear faintly as Hamilton and Burr converse. The chords can be heard for the final time in “The World Was Wide Enough”, after Burr assassinates Hamilton as he reflects on his relationship with Hamilton.

It is worth noting that “Wait For It” and the end of “The World Was Wide Enough” most similarly relate to one another. They both feature the “Burr Chords” and an arpeggiated “Burr Chords” accompaniment, and lyrically parallel each other. Interestingly, these are the two songs with the “Burr Chord Progression” where Burr is commentating on Hamilton rather than conversing with him. The Burr/Hamilton conversation in “Non-Stop” also utilizes an

¹⁷ [“Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales”](#), (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 26:56

embellished version of this arpeggiated accompaniment, however, here the chords and accompaniment are set in a minor key.



Figure 8: “Burr Arpeggiated Melody” as seen in measures 1-4 of “Wait For It”



Figure 9: ““Burr Arpeggiated Melody” in minor, as seen in measures 1113-1116 of “Non-Stop”

“My Shot Accompaniment”

“I’m just like my country I’m young, scrappy, and hungry, and I’m not throwing away my shot”

- Alexander Hamilton, “My Shot”

It is important for any musical to have a good “I Want Song”. Usually the third number, in the “I Want Song” the main character sings about what they want. It is usually fairly evident which song serves this purpose, as at some point the character will sing or say some variation of “I Wish”, “I Want”, or “I Need”. Notable examples include “The Wizard and I” from *Wicked*, “Maybe” from *Annie*, and “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” from *The Wizard of Oz*. “I Want Songs” are the audience’s way of getting to know and relate to the main character. This is often achieved as the show’s lead shares their deepest thoughts and greatest desires.

In *Hamilton*, the “I Want Song” is “My Shot”. Hamilton shares with his audience of Lafayette, Laurens, Mulligan, and Burr what he wants, and by proxy, shares this with the audience. Hamilton’s want is a shot, which is a play on words, as he yearns for both an opportunity to build himself a legacy and earn a commanding role for the revolutionary army. To

him these two desires are one in the same, because in his fantasy his military leadership role enables him to die a martyr, cementing his legacy. The accompaniment of “My Shot” is a leitmotif that represents Hamilton’s desire.



Figure 10: “My Shot Accompaniment” as seen in measures 27-30 of “My Shot”

The chord progression of “My Shot” is i-vii⁶-iii^o-iv-iv⁶-V⁶, with an ascending bass line that goes from G to Eb, before falling back to D. The ascent is stepwise in the diatonic key of G minor, with the exception of a B natural passing note between Bb and C. This ascent intentionally parallels Alexander’s rise as a prominent political figure, but also hints at his “downfall”.¹⁸ The articulation of the chords also reflect Hamilton’s character.¹⁹ The chords are loud and quick, with strong attacks, just like Hamilton’s character, who is notoriously vocal and quick witted, and always ready for a fight.

The leitmotif later appears in “Blow Us All Away”, which in many ways parallels “My Shot”. “Blow Us All Away” is Hamilton’s son, Phillip Hamilton’s “I Want Song”. The repurposing of the musical accompaniment tells us this, showing us the commonality between him and his father. Ironically this is Phillip’s Want. Phillip wants to be like his father, and

¹⁸ [“Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales”](#), (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 23:55

¹⁹ Ibid. 26:29

continue the “Hamilton legacy”. Here, the music is effective at comparing the young Hamilton to his father. The relationship between the two titles also draws that similarity; both are figures of speech that describe the two character’s respective wants. This is in addition to a number of lyrical parallels that Hamilton has said or sung in previous numbers, like “only nineteen but my mind is older” and “I prob’ly shouldn’t brag, but, dag, I amaze and astonish”. Even “blow us all away”, was a phrase used by Hamilton to describe the potential he saw in Phillip when he was an infant. Miranda clearly intended to parallel the two characters, and used music and leitmotifs as an effective way of achieving this goal.

“Whoas”

“Shout it from the rooftops” - John Laurens, My Shot

The next leitmotif is first presented in “My Shot”, after Hamilton has met Lafayette, Laurens, and Mulligan, Hamilton shares his opinions on needing to capitalize on the opportunity he and the colonies have. After Hamilton makes a clear impression on the trio of revolutionaries, Laurens leads as the others sing this tune, with the orchestral accompaniment mirroring the melody.

The musical score for "Whoas" is presented in four staves. The first staff is for LAUR: (John Laurens), starting at measure 95. The second staff is for HAM/LAF/MULL: (Hamilton, Lafayette, and Mulligan), also starting at measure 95. The third staff is for the instrumental accompaniment, starting at measure 97. The fourth staff is for the instrumental accompaniment, starting at measure 98. The lyrics for the first two staves are: "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Hey! Whoa!" and "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Whoa!". The lyrics for the third and fourth staves are: "Wooh! Whoa! Ay, let 'em hear ya! Lets go!" and "Whoa! Yeah!".

Figure 11: “Whoas” as seen in measures 95-98 of “My Shot”

There are two types of “whoas” that make up the three measures in the “Whoas Leitmotif”. The first type is the short “whoas”. Each short “whoas” is a rhythmic toggle between octaves of a minor tonic. The leitmotif begins with two short “whoas”. Combined, these short “whoas” last a beat and a half. Then, there are three long “whoas”. The long “whoas” together take up the remainder of the three measures. The first long “whoa” starts on the tonic, and descends to the subtonic, and then to the dominant. The second “whoa” is a variation of the first “whoa”. It begins on the dominant, leaps to up the subtonic, and then descends to the submediant. The third “woah” is the same as the second. The entire “Whoas Leitmotif” is then looped, eventually fading into the background, becoming part of the accompaniment.

In an interview, Miranda shared the origin and inspiration for this leitmotif: it is based on the AOL dial in modem.²⁰ AOL messenger was an early automatic electronic messenger service. To Miranda this tone was his musical association with the outside world. The “Whoas” represent Hamilton’s words reverberating and spreading amongst his peers. They are symbolic of his ability to influence others with his writing.²¹

The “Whoas” reappear in the accompaniment of “Right Hand Man”, as Hamilton is offered the position as Washington’s secretary, giving him a platform to share his writings on a grander scale. Later, the “Whoas” can be heard in “History Has Its Eyes On You”, when Hamilton is given a militia to command. It’s here where he once again finds himself in a position of authority. They are also included in the introduction of “What’d I Miss”, where they replace the “Door Leitmotif” in the “Alexander Hamilton Introduction”. This shows the similarity in Jefferson and Hamilton, both of whom have seen tremendous success because of their writing. Lastly, the “Whoas” can be heard faintly on a glockenspiel at the beginning of “The World Was

²⁰ [“Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales”](#), (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 24:07

²¹ Ibid.

Wide Enough”, just before Hamilton is killed, the result of the political influence he achieved through writing.

King George Accompaniment

“I will kill your friends and family to remind you of my love” - King George, “You’ll Be Back”

In the show, King George III is a comedic relief cameo role, with three solo numbers and two non-musical appearances. The King’s three main songs, “You’ll Be Back”, “What Comes Next?”, and “I Know Him” are all vastly different from all the other songs in the show, yet are similar to each other. All three songs are set in the key of G major, have the same chord structure with a predominant chord progression of I, IV, ii7, V, and feature King George’s signature refrain: the “Ya-Da-Da-Da-Das”.

The Kings’ songs are infused with inspiration from the Beatles.²² The most apparent of these musical similarities is to “Penny Lane” and “Getting Better”. Miranda has noted that much of Hamilton is written in the style of hip-hop because it’s the popular style of music that he associates with America.²³ Similarly, the Beatles are almost synonymous with the British Invasion, the 1960s cultural phenomenon where aspects of British culture, most notably British rock and pop music, became popular overseas in the United States. It is therefore fitting that the style of the King’s songs are an homage to modern, popular, British music.

Lyrically and thematically, there are a lot of similarities between “Penny Lane: and “You’ll Be Back”, the King’s first and longest song. “Penny Lane” was written by the Beatles’ Paul McCartney as an ode to his hometown of Mosley Hill, a suburb of Liverpool. The song’s melody is upbeat which connotes endearment, but its lyrics tell of the unusual locals of Penny

²² Miranda and Carter, “Hamilton: The Revolution”, p.52

²³ Delman, [“How Lin-Manuel Miranda Shapes History”](#) (The Atlantic, September 29, 2015)

Lane. This juxtaposition emphasizes the unconventional relationship Paul has with “Penny Lane”, as he fondly reminisces of the oddballs from his past. The same juxtaposition is characteristic of “You’ll Be Back”; a love song to the colonies that pairs an upbeat accompaniment with undertones of tyranny and direct threats under the guise of love. This is conveyed through lyrics like “I will kill your friends and family to remind you of my love” and “I will send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love”. The two also share similar chord progressions that begin with descending bass-lines, are both in major, but at points venture towards their parallel minors, and contain refrains that are modally inflected by the melodic flat seventh.²⁴

There is reason to argue that the King’s later songs are simply reprises, and that complete reprises should be kept independent of leitmotifs. However, I believe these songs, by definition, qualify as leitmotifs. It is the consistent musical theme that the audience learns to associate with the King that ties these three numbers. The King appears center stage in three different contexts to speak about three different situations. It’s the musical theme that is consistent, thereby building the association for the audience, linking these three scenes.

²⁴ Pollack, “Notes on [“Penny Lane”](#),” (Soundscapes.info)

Satisfied Accompaniment

“You’re like me, I’m never satisfied.” - Alexander Hamilton, “Satisfied”

Figure 12: “Satisfied Accompaniment” as seen in measures 1-4 of “Satisfied”

The musical number “Satisfied” features an eight measure long motive that is the song’s main accompaniment figure. In the motive every two measures, except the last two, are grouped together, with the group outlining the harmony of a chord in a $i7-III9-iv11-IV7-V7$ minor progression. The motive’s overall structure is $XX YY XX X Z$. The two measures in the paired groups are melodically identical, and the melodies in first and third groups are also identical to each other. The X measures are arpeggiated minor dominant chords with an added subdominant and subtonic. The arpeggiated chord ascends and then descends. The Y measures are arpeggiated mediant chords in second inversion with an added subdominant. The X and Y measures are melodically the same except for the first note in each measure, which is the tonic in X and the subtonic in Y. The Z measure begins on the flattened subtonic which descends to the dominant and subdominant, which is played twice, the second time finishing the descent by stepwise motion to the supertonic. This descent leads the melody back to the tonic where the motive is repeated.

The “Satisfied Motive” is the main accompaniment for “Satisfied” and “Take A Break”, but parts of the motive appear in “Non-Stop”, “The Reynolds Pamphlet”, and “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story”. The “Satisfied Accompany” qualifies as a leitmotif, as the repeated musical motive is tied to Angelica and the show’s theme of satisfaction, as Angelica and Hamilton are characterized as people who will “never be satisfied”. Angelica’s dissatisfaction stems from the fact that although she loves Hamilton, she also loves her sister, and knows that ultimately, for her sister’s sake, she can not be with him. When present, the “Satisfied Leitmotif” demonstrates Angelica’s feelings of longing for Hamilton.

The audience is first introduced to Angelica, in the “Schuyler Sisters”, where we see Burr trying to betroth Angelica. As she rejects him, a variation of the “Satisfied Accompaniment” plays subtly. This variation continues as Angelica talks about not being “satisfied” with the new social landscape as long as women aren’t included in the rhetoric, yet another way in which Angelica is not satisfied.

In “Satisfied”, we hear, from Angelica’s perspective, how Hamilton met Angelica and Eliza. Hamilton characterizes Angelica as “a woman who has never been satisfied”, and reveals the same about himself. Angelica reveals to the audience she has romantic feelings for Hamilton, but ultimately realizes he is meant to be with her sister Eliza, leaving her self prophetically, dissatisfied.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Non-Stop". It consists of three staves: a vocal line and two piano accompaniment staves. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). The time signature is 4/4. Measure 181 is marked with a '181' above the first measure of the vocal line. The lyrics for measure 181 are: "He is not a lot of fun, but there's no-one who can match you for turn of phrase...". Measure 182 is marked with a '182' above the second measure of the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a repeating eighth-note figure in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Chord symbols are provided: Ebm for the first measure and Gb^{add9}/Db for the second measure.

Figure 13: “Satisfied Accompaniment” as seen in measure 181 of “Non-Stop”

Later, in “Non Stop” the audience learns that Angelica has married. She cryptically implies to Hamilton that a “turn of phrase” best describes how she feels about her marriage. This interaction is accompanied by a variation of the “Satisfied Motive”, demonstrating musically she doesn’t feel content in her marriage, as isn’t satisfied without Hamilton.

The first part of “Take A Break”, features exchanges of letters between Angelica and Hamilton. While Hamilton letters focus on problems in his work, Angelica focuses on subtleties in Hamilton’s letters that might demonstrate how he feels about her romantically. As they exchange letters the “Satisfied Motive” serves as the background accompaniment, highlighting both Hamilton’s insatiable work ethic and Angelica’s emotional dissatisfaction without Hamilton. At the end of the number, Hamilton ultimately rejects Eliza’s pleas for him to go away with her and her family, and a variation of the “Satisfied Motive” closes out the number and segues into “Say No To This”, where Hamilton further proves *his* insatiability.

The image shows a musical score for four measures (96-99) of the song "Take A Break". The score is written for piano, with a treble clef and a bass clef. Measure 96 is marked "Slower" and contains a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line with a chord labeled "Fm". Measure 97 contains a melodic line and a bass line with a chord labeled "Ab/Eb". Measure 98 contains a melodic line and a bass line with a chord labeled "DbMaj7". Measure 99 is marked "rit." and contains a melodic line and a bass line with a chord labeled "Db7". The score ends with a "Segue" instruction.

Figure 14: “Satisfied Accompaniment” as seen in measures 96-99 of “Take A Break”

In “The Reynolds Pamphlet” the world learns of Hamilton’s infidelity and Angelica returns home. Given their demonstrated connection Hamilton is relieved at the sight of Angelica, thinking she understands the reasoning why he published The Reynolds Pamphlet. Hamilton fails to recognize that Angelica has already proven her loyalty to Eliza over him. She dismisses him, retorting “you could never be satisfied. God I hope you’re satisfied”, a clever play on words. In the background of this interaction the “Satisfied Motive” is played. This is yet another instance where Angelica has to prioritize Eliza and push aside her feelings towards Hamilton.

In the final number, “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story”, Eliza shares her reliance on Angelica after Hamilton’s death and her role in helping share his story. In the background there is the arpeggiated ascent from an X measure. This is the last instance of the “Satisfied Leitmotif”. It demonstrates her commitment to her sister and the emotional effect of Hamilton's death.

Burn Accompaniment

“I hope that you burn” - Eliza Hamilton, “Burn”



Figure 15: “Burn Accompaniment” as seen in measures 1-4 of “Burn”

The “Burn Accompaniment” is a leitmotif associated with Hamilton’s betrayal of Eliza. Although Alexander only cheats in the middle of the second act, the accompaniment appears throughout the first act to foreshadow this betrayal. This leitmotif’s shining moment is in “Burn”, as Eliza distances herself from Hamilton, literally burning the letters that symbolize their relationship.

In “Burn” the main accompaniment is four of consecutive eighth notes, set in minor and 6/8 time. Variations set in 4/4, add rests to fill the extra beat. The first measure is an ascending and then descending arpeggiated tonic triad with an upper neighbor. The second measure is an arpeggiation of a dominant triad, again with an upper neighbor, but in first inversion. The third measure is melodically the same as the first. The fourth measure is just two statements of the three note descent from measures one and three that descend from the upper neighbor to the mediant. The harmonies outlined by the arpeggiated chords follow a *i-V-VI7-III-iv* progression.

The “Burn Accompaniment” first appears in the bass “Satisfied”, foreshadowing Hamilton’s infidelity in his relationship with Eliza. The song characterizes Hamilton as unable to be satisfied, which he later demonstrates by cheating on his wife.

It can later be heard at the end of “The Reynolds Pamphlet” where the world learns Hamilton cheated on Eliza. The accompaniment functions as a segue into “Burn”, playing as the company expresses their sympathy towards Eliza and disgust towards Hamilton.

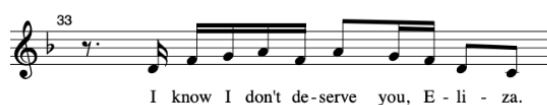


Figure 16: “Burn Leitmotif” as seen in measure 33 of “It’s Quiet Uptown”

The “Burn Accompaniment” also appears in the melody of “It’s Quiet Uptown”. As Alexander is apologizing to Eliza for his role in Phillip’s death he sings “I know I don’t deserve you Eliza”, in the melodic pattern evidently similar to a measure of the “Burn Accompaniment”. Through this melody he demonstrates that his infidelity is the reason why he is not deserving of her.



Figure 17: “The Burn Leitmotif” as seen in measures 26 and 27 of “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story”

Finally, an embellished “Burn Theme” underscores the verse in “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story” building up to the reveal that Eliza dedicates the rest of her life to building Hamilton’s legacy by reinserting herself in the narrative. The “Burn Theme” might be

included here because the music is picking up from “Burn”, where we last saw Eliza removing herself from the narrative Hamilton’s story.

The Duel Count

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine” - Company, “The Ten Duel Commandments”

The image shows a musical score for the 'Duel Count' from the musical 'Hamilton'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'Five, six, se - ven, eight, nine—' on the top staff and 'One, two, three, four, five, six, se - ven, eight, nine—' on the bottom staff. Above the vocal staff, there are two measures of rests with the notation 'W1/W2/W3/W4/W5' and 'FEG/W3/W4/W5'. Above the piano staff, there are several chords with figured bass notation: 'MULL/M1/M2/M5 LAUR/LAF/M3/M4/M6' for the first measure, 'LAUR/MULL/M1/M2/M5 LAUR/M1/M5 MULL/M2/M3 LAUR/M1/M2/M5 MULL/LAF/M3/M4/M6' for the second measure, and 'LAUR/M1/M2/M5 MULL/LAF/M3/M4/M6' for the third measure. A diagonal line is drawn through the final notes of both staves, indicating the end of the count.

Figure 18: “Duel Count” as seen in measures 1 and 2 of “The Ten Duel Commandments”

One of my personal favorite leitmotifs is the “Duel Count”. The “Duel Count Leitmotif” is associated with duels and the Phillip Hamilton, a connection that foreshadows his untimely death in a duel.

In Hamilton, ten is a symbolic number when it comes to dueling; the instructions for dueling are given in ten steps or “commandments”, and the duels commence with a count to ten. It is therefore fitting that the “duel accompaniment” is paired with a lyrical count from one to nine, with an implied tenth count. Consistent with the way numbers ascend in value, the duel count melody’s overall direction is ascending, working its way from the tonic to the dominant by leaping up a third and then moving down a step. The harmonic quality of the third leaps alternate between major and minor throughout the sequence. The only inconsistency with this melodic pattern is the “seven count”. Each number in the count is notated as one eighth note that ascends through disjunct motion, except for seven. Seven is notated as two sixteenth notes which ascend

by conjunct motion, a lone embellishment. This embellishment emphasizes the “seven count”, which later proves symbolically significant.

The image shows a musical score for the "Duel Count" from the play "Take a Break". It consists of ten staves of music, alternating between Eliza and Philip. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are in French and English. The French lyrics are: "Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf." and "Sept, huit, neuf." The English lyrics are: "One two three four five six se-ven eight nine!". The score includes measure numbers 3 through 9. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and a final flourish at the end.

Figure 19: “Duel Count” as seen in measures 3-9 of “Take a Break”

The duel count is first introduced in “The Ten Duel Commandments”, where the melody and dueling are linked. Then, in “Cabinet Battle #1”, a synthetic version and while this initially feels out of place it makes perfect sense as debates are verbal, rather than physical, duels. Immediately following, in “Take A Break”, we are introduced to the young Phillip Hamilton. As he and Eliza are sitting at the piano, counting to nine in French, they play the “Duel Count” and then a variation in imitative polyphony. At measure seven, on the seventh numerical count of the variation, Phillip restates his line from the original “duel count” melody rather than continuing to imitate his mother’s variation.

In “Blow Us All Away” Phillip prepares himself for a duel against George Eacker. As the duel commences, we hear the count just like in “The Ten Duel Commandments”. At seven, however, the count gets interrupted, as the trigger-happy Eacker fires prematurely. In “Stay Alive

(Reprise)” Phillip is rushed to the hospital as he and Eliza sing the polyphonic, French, piano part from “Take A Break”, with the same variation. Phillip dies as he reaches sept, seven in French, in his count. The last time duel count appears is in the “World Was Wide Enough” when Burr and Hamilton duel.

As mentioned before, this leitmotif not only has ties to dueling but also foreshadows Phillip Schuyler’s death. The foreshadowing is accomplished by distinguishing the seventh count in the melody with the inclusion of a passing tone, by linking the “duel count” melody to dueling and Phillip independently, before linking them together, and by having Phillip’s melody stray from his mother’s at seven in “Take a Break”.

“It’s Quiet Uptown Descent”

“I know I don’t deserve you Eliza” - Alexander Hamilton, “It’s Quiet Uptown”



Figure 20: “It’s Quiet Uptown Descent” as seen in measure 1 of “It’s Quiet Uptown”

The “It’s Quiet Uptown Descent” is most prominent in “It’s Quiet Uptown”, hence the name. In “It’s Quiet Uptown” documents Eliza and Alexander’s grief over losing their child, ultimately leading to reconciliation, as they had been distant ever since the Reynold’s Pamphlet. Nevertheless, it appears in a few other songs as well. The first time it is heard in the show is at the end of “That Would Be Enough”, in which Eliza begs Hamilton to stay safely at home with her in anticipation of the birth of their child. It also appears in “Best of Wives and Best of Women”. This leitmotif’s function is less apparent, but it adds to the complexity and emotion of Eliza and Hamilton’s relationship, arising at key moments.

The “It’s Quiet Uptown Descent” is a series of 12 descending sixteenth notes, and single eighth note. It starts with tonic, which is played 4 times, moving down to the dominant, which is played 4 times, moving to the mediant, which is also played 4 times, before finally moving down to the supertonic, and then to the tonic, ending an octave lower than where the melody began.

Look Around and That Would Be Enough

“Look at where you are, look at where you started” - Eliza Hamilton, “That Would Be Enough”



Figure 21: “Look Around Motif” as seen in measure 3 of “That Would Be Enough ”

“Look Around” is a melodic leitmotif. Unlike most of the other leitmotifs discussed, this one is only one measure long and is highlighted in the melody. The leitmotif starts with an eighth note rest before jumping into two sixteenth notes that move from the mediant up to the subdominant. It is followed by a dominant dotted eighth note that scoops down to the mediant for the length of a sixteenth note, followed by another mediant sixteenth note, a subdominant sixteenth, and finally, a dominant eighth note which again scoops down to the mediant. The “Look Around Leitmotif” is so named because it is the tune sung to the lyrics “look around, look around”, and is generally followed by the rest of the phrase “at how lucky we are to be alive right now”.

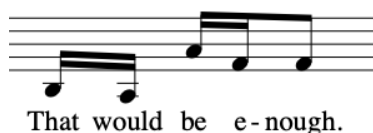


Figure 22: “That Would Be Enough” as seen in measure 22 of “That Would Be Enough ”

Related to the “Look Around Leitmotif”, is the “That Would Be Enough Leitmotif”, which is also associated with Eliza, and demonstrates a disconnect between Eliza and Alexander. She doesn’t fully understand that she will never be enough for him, as he will “never be satisfied”. The “That Would Be Enough Leitmotif” is a five-note beat and a half-long melody, made of four sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note. The first sixteenth note starts on the submediant, moves down to the dominant, and then leaps up an octave before moving down to the mediant which is played twice.

Although the “Look Around” Leitmotif is most often associated with Eliza’s character, it is actually introduced by Angelica in “The Schuyler Sisters”. As Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy revel with excitement at how fortunate they are to be living in the epicenter of historic times, Angelica turns to her sisters and exclaims, “look around, look around, at how lucky we are to be alive right now”, a few lines later Eliza echos her sister, and eventually claims this lyrical phrase as her own. In “That Would Be Enough”, Eliza uses the phrase to connect with Alexander and emphasize the importance of him staying home while she is pregnant with their child. From here on out, in all instances where the “Look Around Leitmotif” appears, it is sung in conjunction with a plea from Eliza to Hamilton or vice versa.

“That Would Be Enough” is also the first song where the “That Would Be Enough Leitmotif” appears. In “Non-Stop”, as Eliza sings the leitmotif “Helpless”, again begging Alexander to stay with her, he sings in response, “look around, look around”, begging her to understand his decision to leave to help Washington as he founds the nation’s political system. This is Hamilton’s way of weaponizing Eliza’s theme against her to get what he wants.²⁵ Eliza responds “isn’t this enough?” and “would that be enough?” to the tune of “that would be

²⁵ [“Lin-Manuel Miranda Hamilton interview with Leigh Sales”](#), (ABC TV + iview, April 16, 2023), 30:23

enough”. It is almost as if the characters are conversing by only using their respective themes. Angelica answers her sister’s question with a warning: “he will never be satisfied”.

During “Take A Break”, Eliza once again uses the phrase to level with Alexander and convince him to stay. Finally, in “It’s Quiet Uptown” when Alexander apologizes to Eliza for the role he played in their son’s death, he again sings the leitmotif, this time begging her for forgiveness. In response Eliza sings to Hamilton “it’s quiet uptown”, only it is set to the tune “that would be enough”. This is Eliza’s only line in the song and is her way of letting Alexander know that she has forgiven him and is ready to move on. The last time the “that would be enough” melody appears is in “Best of Wives and Best of Women” when Eliza asks Hamilton to come back to bed with her but he refuses and instead prepares for his duel with Burr.



Figure 23: “Look Around Motif” as seen in measure 3 of “That Would Be Enough ”

History Has Its Eyes Accompaniment

“You have no control who lives, who dies, who tells your story.” - George Washington, “History Has Its Eyes on You”



Figure 24: “History Has Its Eyes Accompaniment” as seen in measure 1 of “History Has Its Eyes”

The “History Has Its Eyes Accompaniment” features a suspension beginning on an eighth note that moves up a step where the second note is held for the remainder of the measure. This

suspension is then generally repeated sequentially in a i-III-iv-iv6-V6/5 progression. There are, however, times the suspension is played just once.

The “History Has Its Eyes” leitmotif is associated with legacy. Hamilton is obsessed with his legacy. It is the focus of the show. In Act I Hamilton is obsessed with dying a war hero. He tells us straight out “as a kid in the Caribbean I wished for a war” because he knew it was a way for him to “rise up” and build himself a legacy. In Act II, the war has ended, his son is born, and Hamilton realizes that his legacy can be building a nation for his newborn son. As he is about to die, he defines legacy as “planting seeds in a garden you never get to see”, a metaphor for laying the political foundation for generations to come. The “History Has Its Eyes Accompaniment” reflects Hamilton’s obsession with legacy throughout the show, but also has ties to Washington and his legacy.

In “My Shot” Hamilton monologues about his desire to die a heroic death in war, an easy way to solidify his legacy as a revolutionary martyr (“I imagine death so much”). In “Right Hand Man”, Washington identifies this desire and warns Hamilton that acting upon it would be an act of cowardice retorting, “dying is easy young man, living is harder”. Washington offers Hamilton an alternative means of building a legacy by becoming his right-hand man. Then, in “History Has Its Eyes on You”, before sending him off with a command, Washington tries to dissuade Hamilton from leading his men on a suicide mission, arguing that he has no control in making sure the suicide mission will ensure him the legacy he fantasizes about. For this reason, in “Right Hand Man”, Washington asks: “Are these the men with which I am to defend America?”. Expressing his concern that he might fail again due to factors beyond his control, knowing that another failure could cement that as his historic legacy.

Later, in “Non-Stop” Washington offers Hamilton a position that allows him to become a part of history and build himself a legacy. Finally, “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story”, is a summary of Hamilton’s ultimate legacy. Each of these scenes is centered around the concept of legacy and all feature the “History Has Its Eyes” accompaniment.

Washington Bass Line

“The venerated Virginian veteran, whose men are all lining up to put me up on a pedestal”
 - George Washington, “Right Hand Man”



Figure 25: The standard “Washington Bass Line”, as seen in measures 17 and 18 of “Right Hand Man”

The “Washington Bass Line” is a leitmotif associated with President George Washington, appearing whenever Washington is in a position of authority. The bass line has a standard version, and embellished variations. All versions of the “Washington Bass” are played staccato or portato, in the bass clef, fortissimo, and in a minor key.

The standard variation is a repeated statement of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note rest. There is no melodic motion, the function of this bass line is purely rhythmic.



Figure 26: An embellished “Washington Bass Line”, as seen in measures 9 and 10 of “Right Hand Man”

The embellished variations also accent the first and third beats with two identical eighth notes, however instead of a subsequent quarter note rest, the embellished versions fill that space

with additional musical statements. There is a new harmony every two beats, and the notes in the embellished variations outline a chord progression of $i-IV6- \flat iv^{\circ}-IV6$. To create this progression, on the second and fourth beats, the embellished note moves chromatically by step from the dominant to a raised submediant and back. While there are nuanced variations of the embellishments, they all outline the described chromatic motion on weak beats.

Both the standard and embellished versions of the bass first appear, as Washington is formally introduced to the audience in “Right Hand Man”, and plays on and off throughout the number as Washington leads the revolutionary forces. The accompaniment features both standard and embellished bass lines. “Stay Alive” also features both versions of the bass line, whereas “Meet Me Inside” only has the standard version. At the end of “Cabinet Battle #1” an embellished variation can be heard accompanying a conversation between Hamilton and Washington.

The bass line is not only associated with Washington, but it also reflects his character. The leitmotif has an intense quality to its sound, building tension in the music. It helps distinguish Washington as an intense and important figure, and sets the tone for his presence.

Conclusion

Throughout Hamilton, the same melodies and accompaniments are constantly recycled, and the way this is done gives the music a unique power in the show. Many of these repetitive musical statements, seventeen of which were examined in this paper, are leitmotifs: musical statements with apparent ties to a character, setting, or idea. As tunes reappear, they begin to develop an association for the viewer. Further analysis of the apparent repetitions of a given leitmotif, enables listeners to discover additional, more subtle and nuanced instances of leitmotifs. These repetitions give music the power to subtly communicate what a given character might be feeling, and connect character, concepts, and scenes in really meaningful ways .

Take for example, the “Satisfied Accompaniment”. Alone, the accompaniment is nice enough, but, once it becomes associated with Angelica and the concept of satisfaction, the accompaniment is granted symbolic significance. The symbolic significance now allows the listener to better understand Angelica’s feelings when she marries, corresponds with Hamilton, or has to confront a disgraced Hamilton. This is just one of dozens of examples of Lin Manuel Miranda’s brilliant use of music in Hamilton to add depth and dimension to the show.

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