

Mozartian Perfection in Jazz

Module 9 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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Biography

- Professional development
 - Studied at Pittsburgh Musical Institute
 - PMI (est. 1915) was one of 4 top music schools in USA.
 - Located nearby in Oakland.
 - Trained many jazz greats.
 - Merged with Pitt Music Dept, 1963.



Pittsburgh Musical Institute
615 12th Boulevard Ave.

Outline

- Biography of Billy Strayhorn
- Analysis of *Satin Doll*

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Biography

- Professional development
 - Studied classical music at PMI
 - Preferred Ravel and Stravinsky
 - Encountered racial barriers in classical music
 - Turned to jazz and wrote *Lush Life (1:33)*, age 19



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Biography

- Billy Strayhorn, 1915-1967
 - Grew up in Pittsburgh
 - Born in Dayton, Ohio
 - Soon moved to Pittsburgh
 - Attracted to music while staying with grandmother in North Carolina.
 - Attended Westinghouse High School.
 - Studied piano.



High school yearbook photo

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Biography

- Professional development
 - Met Duke Ellington, age 23
 - Backstage at Stanley Theater (now Benedum Center).
 - Showed Ellington *Lush Life* and his arrangement of an Ellington piece.
 - Ellington invited Strayhorn to join him in NYC to write for his band.
 - But Strayhorn had to follow up.



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Biography

- Professional development
 - Relocated to NYC
 - Ellington told Strayhorn to [Take the A Train](#) to reach his apartment in Manhattan.
 - This piece, written by Strayhorn, became [the signature song](#) of Ellington's band, also a jazz standard.



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Biography

- Relationship with Ellington
 - Strayhorn got *some credit* for his work.
 - He was listed as a coauthor on some later pieces.
 - But most of his own work was credited solely or jointly to Ellington (this was common for big bandleaders of that day).
 - His name was omitted from many joint compositions.
 - Strayhorn was shy and modest about his contributions.



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Biography

- Relationship with Ellington
 - One of the *strangest professional relationships* in musical history.
 - Ellington never gave Strayhorn a contract or a salary.
 - But Ellington put him up in his huge apartment and paid all his bills.



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Biography

- Some Strayhorn songs
 - *Lush Life*, 1933-38
 - *Take the A Train*, 1939
 - *Something to Live For*, 1939
 - *Chelsea Bridge*, 1941
 - *Day Dream*, 1941
 - *My Little Brown Book*, 1942
 - *Lotus Blossom*, 1947
 - *Satin Doll*, 1953
 - *A Flower Is a Lonesome Thing*, 1957
 - *UMMG*, 1959



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Biography

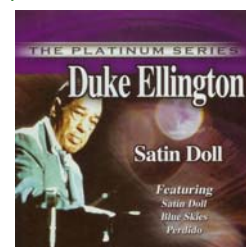
- Relationship with Ellington
 - Strayhorn was in many ways the brain behind Ellington's music.
 - Ellington described him as "my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head, my brainwaves in his head, and his in mine."
 - Strayhorn was more interested in musical development.



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Satin Doll

- A song with Mozartian perfection
 - Has the elegance and behind-the-scenes cleverness of Mozart.
 - Ellington used it as closing number in many of his concerts.



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Satin Doll

[Audio file \(Ellington and orchestra\)](#)

- What makes it work? A guess...
 1. Classical form (AABA)
 2. Apparent simplicity (as in Mozart)
 3. Repeated **ii - V - I** progression
 - Large-scale and locally
 4. Distinctive chromatic **bass line**
 5. Clever **pivot** that combines 3 and 4.
 6. Counterpoint between melody and **bass line**.
 - Both rhythmic and melodic

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Repeated ii-V-I progression

[Audio file](#)

In the exposition & recap...

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Classic form

[Audio file \(original sheet music\)](#)

I-II-V-I in exposition (major **II** allows for sequence, up 1 step)
V slides through **Vb** (more on this later)

Exposition (repeat)

SATIN DOLL

Words and Music by JOHNNY MERCER, DUKE ELLINGTON and BILLY STRAYHORN

Moderately with a beat

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Repeated ii-V-I progression

In the development...

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Exposition (repeat)

Development

Standard **IV-V** in development again allows for sequence, up 1 step

Recapitulation

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Distinctive chromatic bass line

[Audio file](#)

Chromaticism echoed in introduction!

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Pivot on tritone combines ii-V-I with chromatic bass

[Audio file](#)

Underlying relationship:
Same tritone interval appears in dominant 7th chords of keys a tritone apart (C and G \flat)

Piano

C: V7 G \flat : V7

B-F tritone B = 3rd C \flat -F tritone C \flat = 7th
 F = 7th (C \flat = B) F = 3rd
 of chord of chord

The 2 notes of the tritone swap roles in the chord.

Pivot on tritone combines ii-V-I with chromatic bass

[Audio file](#)

Pivot to G \flat and deceptive resolution to tonic preserves chromatic bass line.

C: ii⁷ V^{b57} I⁶ G \flat : ii⁷ V^{b57} I⁶ G \flat : ii⁷ V^{b57} C: I⁶ (decep.)

ii-V-I in C ii-V-I in G \flat (after pivot) Resolve to C major rather than G \flat major

Pivot to G \flat allows half step in bass!
D \flat - C