

EVERY LOVE BUT TRUE LOVE: UNSTABLE RELATIONSHIPS IN COLE PORTER'S „LOVE FOR SALE“

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No one would mistake Cole Porter's „Love for Sale“ for a love song. Yet this less-than-subtle song about the world's oldest profession, from the 1930 musical „New Yorkers“, confronts the nature of love and, by extension, the love song genre. Because of its daring text, it was not only banned in Boston but was considered so risqué that at the time it could not even be played on radio stations across America.¹ In this chapter, I will argue that Porter's musical setting of those infamous lyrics also deviated from the normative structures found in contemporaneous popular – and especially love – songs, and that his structural departures were not simply motivated by relatively obvious concerns for text painting. Before commencing an analytical investigation of „Love for Sale“, we will briefly examine two more typical exemplars of this genre.

In the so-called Golden Era, love songs (and, indeed, most popular songs) tended to be relatively predicably numbers. With traditional four-square phrase structure and resolutely functional harmonic syntax, the love song only rarely challenged our harmonic or formal expectations. Even Cole Porter, who by all accounts was among the most sophisticated songwriters of his time, seldom deviated from convention when portraying mutual affection.²

1 In fact, it was not just his text that was socially problematic. The prostitute character in „The New Yorkers“ was initially white. Porter switched to an African-American prostitute to make the show more palatable to a white audience. (McBrien, William (1998): Cole Porter. A Biography. New York: Knopf, p. 137).

2 Indeed, if there is a single adjective that has been most commonly applied to Cole Porter, it is undoubtedly „sophisticated.“ That Porter was sophisticated has even been declared in a book title: Citron, Stephen (1993): Noel and Cole. The Sophisticates. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Admittedly,

Example 1 reproduces the first sixteen bars of the refrain from Cole Porter's 1955 ballad „True Love.“ These four phrases follow an alternating pattern. In the first and third phrases, the tonic is introduced and expanded through neighboring plagal motions and common-tone diminished seventh chords, followed in the even phrases by „true love, true love“ set to a simple but firm dominant-tonic affirmation. It is charming, if a bit sappy, and it still holds a deserved place among the wedding reception canon.

In Porter's somewhat unconventional 1941 love song „I Hate You, Darling,“ the singer deceptively declares animosity for his true love. The opening sixteen bars are shown in Example 2. While our protagonist is „hating“ his darling, his harmonies are atypical and do little to affirm the home key of E-flat major.³ But everything settles down harmonically as we approach the end of the initial section and the singer explains that he hates his darling because he „loves her so.“ Only at that point does Porter invoke a strong dominant/tonic motion, quelling any of our notions that his character might be harboring genuine animosity.

Mutual love was not typically a harmonically interesting topic during the Golden Era. Such matters befit virtuosity and repetition, but only seldom do they invoke harmonic originality.⁴ But, again, Cole Porter's „Love for Sale“ can be thought of as an anti-love song. Though the primary topic of the song and one of its most frequent lyrics is, in fact, „love,“ this song is more about the absence of love – not in the silly, playful manner of „I Hate You, Darling,“ but in a much more real and disturbing sense. This, I suggest, gave Porter license, and perhaps even a mandate, to confront some of the tonal and contrapuntal norms of this genre.

this designation was primarily attributable to Porter's (and Coward's) flair for lyrics and to their well-known social status.

- 3 One particularly slippery (and beautiful) moment comes at the lyrics „all else above“ in mm. 11-12. At that location, a melodic B-flat is held as the bass descends from C to C-flat, recalling the famous transition from verse to refrain in Porter's song „Night and Day“ (at the lyrics „So a voice within me keeps repeating, you, you, you. Night and Day, you are the one...“).
- 4 „Night and Day“ (1932) stands apart as a notable exception in Porter's oeuvre. I do not mean to imply that Cole Porter's songs were formulaic, indeed his works exhibit tremendous variety (consider love songs as diverse as „So in Love,“ „Do I Love You,“ „I Get a Kick Out of You,“ „I love Paris,“ „Every Time I Say Goodbye,“ „I've Got You Under My Skin,“ „Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love),“ „You're the Top,“ and „You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To“), but any harmonic or contrapuntal anomalies do tend to be ironed out within sixteen bars, just as they were in „I Hate You, Darling.“

Such confrontations run throughout „Love for Sale.“ The introductory verse, which in this song forms something of a dramatic imperative, comprises two rather exceptional ten-bar phrases. Phrases longer than four measures are atypical of this literature, but these phrases are also remarkable for the manner in which they establish the key. Contrapuntally, both phrases complete stepwise octave descents that seem to meander through a variety of tonal regions. The overall linear motion seems goal directed; the moment-to-moment harmonic progression often does not.

Prior to considering the song's counterpoint and its dramatic motivation, it is worth mentioning that by most accounts Porter meticulously worked out his own published piano/vocal scores (at least in his music of this period) and, unlike some contemporaneous successful songwriters, he did not hire others to harmonize or arrange them. Matthew Shaftel produced a compendium of evidence for this in his 1999 *Journal of Music Theory* article on „Night and Day“.⁵ Throughout this article, I will adopt the position of Shaftel, Forte, and others, and treat these piano/vocal scores as authoritative sources, worthy of the same analytical scrutiny as scholarly editions of classical concert music.⁶

The Verse

Example 3 presents an analytical view of the verse of „Love for Sale“, excluding the piano introduction. Almost throughout the first ten-bar phrase (mm. 5-14, shown in the top half of Example 3), the melody and bass move in parallel sixths, each descending a complete octave. This stepwise pattern initially progresses by whole tone until m. 8 in the melody and m. 9 in the bass. Both parallel counterpoint and especially motion by whole tones effectively oppose any sense of tonal function (or directionality), creating a musical fog that only lifts slightly at the „lonesome cop's“ arrival in m. 10. The cop is the first character to enter this scene and his presence is melodically uplifting. Structurally, however, the descending line presses onward. The „lonesome“ G-flat arises from a

5 „Porter was personally involved in nearly all levels of his sheet music publication including the correcting of proofs and fair copies so that the printed versions differed only superficially from his own manuscripts.“ Shaftel, Matthew (1999): *From Inspiration to Archive. Cole Porter's „Night and Day“*, *Journal of Music Theory* 43 (2), p. 316.

6 See Shaftel (1999); Forte, Allen (1993): *Secrets of Melody. Line and Design in the Songs of Cole Porter*, *Musical Quarterly* 77 (4), pp. 607-47; and id. (1995): *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924-1950*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

voice exchange between the melody and bass; it signals an abandonment of the initial upper voice in the upper register.⁷ As my sketch in Example 3 illustrates, that contrapuntal line continues in the accompaniment where, in m. 10, the suspended E-flat descends to D-flat, and then to C in m. 11, and finally to B-flat in m. 13. To summarize: the initiating B-flat⁴ in m. 5 descends an octave over the course of that unusual ten-bar phrase, moving from outer to inner voice when the cop arrives.

Meanwhile, the hopeful and unexpected leading tone (A4) sung in m. 11 is left unresolved in that register when the singer leaps down an augmented second just as her character „opens shop“. That dominant in m. 11 is further undermined by the bass's stepwise descent in m. 12 (through a passing dominant⁴), resulting in a first-inversion tonic arrival at the cadence. The endpoints of this initial descent also highlight one of the song's central musical dichotomies: between major and minor tonic, or, more specifically, between D-natural and D-flat, two notes that respectively signify hope and alienation throughout much of the song.

The second ten-bar phrase (mm. 15-24) resembles the first one, except that the harmonies are uniformly first-inversion dominant seventh chords (not triads), and the octave descent now progresses entirely by whole-tone in the outer voices from mm. 15-18. The tonally grounding half step from mm. 7-8 is notably missing in mm. 17-18, where the „wayward ways of this wayward town“ initiate a wayward tonicization of A major, surreally setting the word „smile“. The descending octave line briefly loses its momentum at this tonicization, but, as „smiles“ turn to „smirks“, any sense of A major as a local tonic is bluntly eradicated by Porter's surprisingly direct progressions to A-flat and then F-major triads. In very short order, Porter guides us from an extraordinary tonicization of the major leading-tone triad to a functional dominant in the home key. Only the smooth voice leading provides a measure of continuity throughout this passage. Indeed, were it not for the unfailingly parsimonious counterpoint, the melodic leading tone on which we circuitously arrive in m. 22 might not feel so badly abandoned as the vocal part leaps away yet again, this time diving a perfect fifth to complete the octave descent with a long-awaited perfect authentic cadence at „I go to work“. Ella Fitzgerald, in her otherwise conservative Cole Porter Songbook recording (arranged and conducted by Buddy Bregman), took the liberty of resolving the leading tone in m. 22 properly. It sounds lovely, but I am not sure that „lovely“ is exactly what is called for here. To my ears, Porter's blatantly „improper“ resolution acts as an important signifier in set-

7 I am invoking the contrapuntal sense of „voice,“ which moves by step and is distinct from a „melody,“ which can articulate several voices.

ting the words „I go to work“ and preparing us – in a sense – for the well-known refrain.

Refrain

At least in terms of formal structure, the refrain is far more normative than the verse. It follows a standard **AABA** song form, with each section lasting sixteen measures, divided into four four-bar hypermeasures (not all are bona fide phrases⁸); the final A section concludes with an eight-bar coda-like cadential prolongation (mm. 89-96). Porter's adherence to standard formal design might well belie the highly idiosyncratic tonal and contrapuntal structure of this refrain.

The B-flat major foundation that was strongly established in the introductory verse is immediately challenged at the beginning of the refrain. As I suggest on the foreground sketch in Example 4, the oscillating E-flat major and B-flat minor chords that occupy the first nine refrain bars (mm. 25-33) can reasonably be interpreted in at least two different tonal contexts. I personally tend to hear this passage as tonic and minor dominant chords in E-flat major, rather than as plagal motions in B-flat.⁹ It is only with the words „slightly soiled“ in m. 36 that I feel convinced we are genuinely in the key of B-flat.

This Chopinesque play of tonality that obscures the roles of tonic and subdominant commences all three A sections of the refrain. E-flat major plays a particularly prominent role at the beginning of the final A section (labeled **A3**), where it is tonicized by the climactic progression that ends the bridge (**B** section). This tonicization and its significance will receive considerably more attention later in this chapter.¹⁰ Whether E-flat is heard as tonic or subdominant, it seems to represent a certain hopeful optimism, whereas B-flat – especially B-flat minor – correlates with cold reality. E-flat major depicts „Love“ and even „Appetizing young love“; B-flat minor sets the word „sale.“ B-flat is our tonic, but

8 C.f. Rothstein, William (1989): *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, New York: Schirmer Books, pp. 1-32.

9 Despite the tonally conclusive introductory verse, the refrain sounds to me like an auxiliary cadential structure. I have, however, polled others and heard both interpretations articulated (i.e. in E-flat and B-flat major).

10 Perhaps this bespeaks my own harmonic gullibility, or perhaps I am just overly willing to be swayed by tonicization, but I find myself convinced of E-flat major's viability each time we return to the tune's famous opening. I simply do not hear that section-initiating E-flat chord as subdominant, even when I know that it must be by virtue of the cadence in B-flat that it both follows and eventually precedes.

perhaps the key of E-flat is where we long to be. Porter's setting of „Love“ is hopeful, but in this song it simply is not real.

Cole Porter's counterpoint also reveals a great deal about the song's protagonist. As illustrated in Examples 4 and 5, the refrain begins with a relatively static melody that operates in two distinct registers (see the opening eight bars: mm. 25-32). The upper line only begins to move in m. 33 at „love that's fresh and still unspoiled“. B-flat ascends to C, and the accompanying harmonic motion would certainly suggest that the line should continue to D-flat. However, the ascending line is cut off at the next clause: „love that's only slightly soiled.“ The melodic A-flat that descends to G-flat at that point is not part of the same line of counterpoint; it originates as an inner voice and achieves melodic prominence.¹¹

The line initiated by the B-flat-C gesture in mm. 33 and 34 does continue to ascend, but only after being transferred into an inner voice. It reaches D-flat in m. 35 and continues to ascend to a neighboring E-flat in m. 36 before dropping back down to D-flat in m. 37. The textual connection involved with the subjugated upper voice seems almost too obvious. The ascending „love that's fresh and still unspoiled“ is taken by the primary voice, while the descending „love that's only slightly soiled“ is relegated to a contrapuntal inner voice. Analogously, „Love“ at the beginning of the refrain belongs to the primary voice, while „for sale“ comes in an inner voice.

The refrain's first legitimate dominant-tonic resolution underscores the section-ending lyric „love for sale“ in mm. 37-40. The melodic closure on a low B-flat marks the reunification of the vocal part with what had been the top contrapuntal voice. Though this utterance of „love for sale“ articulates a descending minor tonic triad, both the fifth and the third are supported by dominant harmony: a cadential six-four and its resolution.¹² As such, this authentic cadence is distinctly imperfect.

The second sixteen bars of the refrain, labeled section **A2** on the sketches, follow essentially the same model as the first sixteen bars. The initial eight bars of **A2** (text: „Who will buy? Who would like to sample my supply?“) reflect little more than a surface-level elaboration of the refrain's opening: „Love for sale, appetizing young love for sale.“ But over the next eight bars, the melodic ascent from B-flat to C continues upward

11 Motivically, „love that's fresh and still unspoiled“ and „love that's only slightly soiled“ mirror each other, a clever association of musical and textual inversion.

12 In this literature, one frequently hears $\hat{3}$ substituting for $\hat{2}$ at the dominant (this might be called a „sub6“ chord). However this substitution is more complex: $\hat{2}$ is replaced by flat- $\hat{3}$ (rather than natural- $\hat{3}$), invoking the parallel minor mode.

– in the same contrapuntal voice, that is – to D-flat. The melodic goal here is the same as in the first sixteen-bar section, but where the character's line was initially derailed (text: „love that's only slightly soiled“), this time it clearly continues (text: „who's prepared to pay the price for a trip to paradise?“). However, just as soon as we arrive on D-flat in m. 52 that goal is undermined: at the word „paradise,“ the melody once again dips into the inner voice. Some measure of self-assurance has been gained, but the F in m. 53 that sets the word „love“ still occupies the lower register, and „paradise“ has pretty clearly been lost.

Only in the final refrain section (A3) does the melody ascend all the way to F5, the song's apex. This dramatic ascent to $\hat{5}$ is animated by the text „if you want to buy my wares, follow me and climb the stairs,“ reaching the high note on the following word, „Love.“ And while from a Schenkerian perspective it might seem that this note, not D-flat, should serve as the song's true head tone (Kopftone), it simply appears too late. The arrival on F in m. 85 occurs at the structural dominant, and the song cannot at this point support a complete linear descent from $\hat{5}$. But by ascending to this height, Porter not only fulfills a long-standing melodic goal (suggested by the earlier E-flat neighbor tones), he also brings the singer to rest on B-flat in the initial (obligatory) register, creating a firmer sense of closure than in earlier cadences. The structural cadence in m. 87 really is the first contrapuntally and harmonically conclusive moment in the song. The three A-section ascents can be most easily compared in Example 5, which provides an analytical summary.

In the song's final eight bars, which I somewhat equivocally deemed „coda-like,“ the title lyric is restated and melodically expanded. This is analytically sketched in Example 6. Though the song has already attained structural closure by this point, Porter's harmonies here are worth at least brief comment. In particular, the word „sale“ in m. 93, which should carry both melodic and harmonic resolution, instead conveys only the former. The harmonic denouement is extended with a chromatic motion to the minor subdominant (E-flat minor) in m. 94. This plagal ending – a mere surface interruption of the authentic cadence – reminds us of the plagal versus authentic ambiguities in the refrain's opening and definitively confirms the weaker role of E-flat, even while undermining the strong closure that we expect. If E-flat *major* represented love and hope, this E-flat *minor* gesture conveys something very different as the song concludes, now finally, on B-flat major.

This conflict between major and minor tonic is subtly foreshadowed in the song's four-bar introduction, which initiates the dichotomy between D and D-flat. According to Shaftel, „Porter usually wrote the piano introductions last and thus could highlight important features of a

song from the very outset.“¹³ As shown both on the score and in the analytical sketch in Example 7, the introduction melodically outlines a B-flat *minor* triad, followed by a B-flat *major* triad, and yet Porter harmonically presents neither B-flat major nor minor in this passage. Instead, the initial tone is supported by a lowered submediant (flat-VI), a harmony that plays a significant role in the song's B section (bridge).

Linear analysis provides a valuable means for uncovering some of the motivic connections between the bridge and the outer sections of the refrain. A voice-leading sketch of the bridge appears in Example 8. The play of D and D-flat becomes harmonically recontextualized in this section as those tones are stripped of their associations with the (major and minor) tonic triad. What I find most striking about this section, however, is the chromatic linear descent from D-flat to B-flat that, from a merely melodic or motivic standpoint, seems to mimic the way the song achieves melodic closure – except that this descent is built upon the shakiest of harmonic pillars. The melodic D-flat (flat- $\hat{3}$) is supported in Schubertian fashion by the expansion of the lowered mediant triad (flat-III),¹⁴ but in mm. 70-72 the outer voices descend in parallel fourths, many of which are augmented. This musical passage underscores the climactic text „old love, new love, every love but true love“ and the culminating words, „true love,“ are set to parallel tritones – quite a far cry from the sincere setting of „true love“ in Porter's song of that title.

Porter creates a sense of enjambment as the bridge moves seamlessly into the last statement of the refrain tune at m. 73 (text: „every love but true love. Love for sale.“). Not only does Porter immediately reiterate the word „love,“ but he does so on the same pitch. Many singers take advantage of this by eliding the repeated word „Love.“¹⁵ Contrapuntally, the last tritone of „every love but true love“ is harmonized as a dissonant

13 Shaftel, p. 325.

14 This expansion of flat-III is foreshadowed both in the first measure of the song's piano introduction and in the A sections of the refrain (e.g., „Love that's only slightly soiled“). Moreover, like the instances of the lowered submediant in the A sections, here too the progression ultimately leads to a minor subdominant. What is truly exceptional is that the bridge's subdominant never makes its way to a dominant, but instead merges into the tonicized major subdominant chord that begins the A3 section.

15 In 1931, the well-known and controversial torch singer Libby Holman produced one of the earliest recordings of this song. She does not repeat the word „love“ at this moment, but merely holds it through the seamless section change: „Every love by true love — for sale.“ This recording was preserved by the Indiana Historical Society and re-released in a three-disk set of Porter's songs from the thirties. See *You're the Top: Cole Porter in the 1930s* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1992), disk one: DMC1-1020.

dominant of E-flat (a so-called French V $\frac{4}{3}$ of E-flat, or a second-inversion dominant seventh chord with a lowered fifth), providing a weak tonicized return to E-flat which, as in the previous A sections, has only seemed to be our home (key). E-flat, in this sense, perhaps functions more as a hotel room than a residence. And love, by association, is both untrue and unreal.

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Film

- Indiana Historical Society, *You're the Top. Cole Porter in the 1930s*, Indianapolis 1992, disk one: DMC1-1020.

Appendix

Refrain (Rather slow)

I give to you and you give to me

5

True love, true love. So,

9

on and on it will al-ways be

13

True love, true love.

Example 1. Cole Porter, „True Love,“ refrain, mm. 1-16

Refrain (*with expression, but rhythmically*)

I hate you dar-ling, my tur-tle dove, I hate you
 dar-ling, all else a-bove I hate you
 dar-ling, Be-cause I love you so.

Example 2. Cole Porter, „I Hate You, Darling,“ refrain, mm. 1-16

First Ten-Bar Phrase

m. 1 5 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6
 empty street heavy feet heavy tread
 octave line moves to inner voice
 I⁶ IV⁶ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷

Second Ten-Bar Phrase

m. 11 15 16 17 18 19 20
 moon gazing down wayward ways smirk begins go to work
 octave line moves to inner voice
 I⁶ IV⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷ V⁷

Example 3. Voice-leading analysis of the introductory verse

Section A1

initial melodic ascent

25 33 37

Love for sale for Love Love slightly soled for sale

Appetizing young love for sale for Love

still unopened Love

E♭: I 5 - 6 v♭ I 5 - 6 v♭ I IV IV²
 B♭: IV⁵ - 6 i♭ IV⁵ - 6 i♭ IV ♭VII ♭III⁶ iv 5-6 V ♭4-3 i

37 Dital arrives in near vocal

Section A2

initial melodic ascent, now in correct register

41 49 53

Who will buy? Who's pay the price for a trip to paradise for sale

Who would like to slip-ply Love Love

E♭: I 5 - 6 V I 5 - 6 V I IV IV²
 B♭: IV⁵ - 6 I IV⁵ - 6 I IV ♭VII ♭III⁶ iv 5-6 V ♭4-3 i

53 Dital arrives in correct register, then dips to lower voice

Example 4. Voice-leading analysis of the refrain A sections

Section A3

initial melodic ascent (now up to 57)

73 81

Love for sale for sale for sale for sale

Appetizing young love for sale for sale

Follow me climb the stairs

buy my wares if you buy my wares

E♭: I 5 - 6 v♭ I 5 - 6 V I IV IV²
 B♭: IV⁵ - 6 i♭ IV⁵ - 6 I I IV ♭VII ♭III⁶ iv⁶ 8-7 V ♭4-3 i

81 final descent to tonic, now in correct (initial) register

Example 4, continued

Musical score showing voice leading analysis for the bridge (B section), mm. 55-72. The score includes two systems of music with lyrics and Roman numerals (Bk, Dk) indicating harmonic structure.

System 1 (mm. 55-61):
 Bk: I
 Dk: ii♯, V, I, 6, ii♯, V, I, 6
 = ♭III

System 2 (mm. 62-72):
 Bk: [V7], iv, 6, ♭VI, IV
 Dk: 1) A3, 2) 73, 3) 4, 4) ♯4, 5)

Example 8. Voice-leading analysis of the bridge (B section), mm. 55-72

VOICES OF PRINCE. ZUR POPSTIMME

CHRISTIAN BIELEFELDT

„Popular music is overwhelmingly a ‚voice music‘“
 (Middleton 1990, S. 261).

Die Stimme hat in letzter Zeit einen starken Aufschwung als Gegenstand kulturtheoretischer sowie medien- und theaterwissenschaftlich ausgerichteter Untersuchungen erfahren, in einer Art Gegenbewegung zur „Verdrängung der gesprochenen Sprache, ja überhaupt von Sprechkultur und Sprachmusik“ (Meyer-Kalkus 2001, S. 446) in den Jahrzehnten davor. Ins Visier geriet dabei eine derartige, von verschiedensten Fachdisziplinen bestückte Fülle literarischer, theatraler, rhetorischer, philosophischer, politischer, religiöser und auch juristischer Stimmpraktiken, dass man durchaus geneigt ist, den Herausgeberinnen des 2006 erschienenen Suhrkamp-Bands zuzustimmen, die von der Stimme als „Nukleus dessen [sprechen], worum Geistes-, Human- und Kunstwissenschaften kreisen“ (Kolesch/Krämer 2006, S. 7) und auch das passende Schlagwort dazu parat haben: „The humanities are, at their core, voice arts“ (Peters 2004, S. 85).

Im bunten Reigen der Stimme-Forschung ist allerdings eine auffällige Lücke zu verzeichnen. Sieht man von wenigen, verstreuten Ausnahmen ab, ist im Konzert akademischer Auseinandersetzungen mit der Sprech-, Theater- und Politikerstimme, der mechanischen, technisch übertragenen und simulierten Stimme sowie der mythologischen und der Traum-Stimme ausgerechnet dasjenige Phänomen entschieden unterrepräsentiert, das nach wie vor und quer durch die Kulturen des anbrechenden 21. Jahrhunderts einen der prominentesten Plätze beanspruchen darf: die Singstimme, in all ihren Nuancen zwischen Geräusch, Gesang und Schrei, den sie sich im Zuge der musikalischen Innovationsgeschichten des 20. Jahrhunderts erschlossen hat. Ein erstaunlicher Befund, weil es andererseits gerade Klanglichkeit und *Sound* der Stimme sind, die vieler dieser Studien gegenüber der stimmlichen Darstellungsfunktion akzen-