Strictly Second Line: Funk, Jazz, and the New Orleans Beat

By Benjamin Doleac

Abstract: In 1976, filmmaker Maurice Martinez asked Mardi Gras Indian Chief Jake Millon to describe the characteristic rhythm that underlies the music of black New Orleans. “Some people call it funk,” Millon replied, “but to us it’s strictly second line.” “Funk” has several different meanings in American popular discourse, but since the 1970s it has largely connoted a heavily syncopated, groove-centered style of African-American music. “Second line,” on the other hand, refers to the rhythms of a black parading tradition originating in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Since the 1960s, when James Brown essentially invented funk music by building on rhythms introduced to him by two New Orleans-schooled drummers, the relationship between “second line” and “funk” rhythms has been increasingly symbiotic. Herein I offer a historical survey and a comparative analysis of two musical examples to illustrate the varied usages of second line rhythm in jazz, rhythm and blues, and funk music.

It would not be outrageous to claim that the musical traditions of New Orleans were the wellspring of twentieth-century popular music. The city’s music has been most profoundly influential in its approach to rhythm. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, black musicians in New Orleans developed a unique rhythmic syntax which underlies Crescent City jazz, rhythm and blues, and funk music. “Some people call it funk,” notes Big Chief Jake Millon in James Hinton and Maurice Martinez’s 1976 documentary *The Black Indians of New Orleans*, “but to us it’s strictly second line.” Taking its name from the black street parading tradition in which it was developed, second line rhythm has spread around the world through the music of jazz pioneer Louis Armstrong and “Godfather of Soul” James Brown, among others. Due in part to their widespread influence, second line rhythms are a foundational component of many international jazz and popular music styles today.

In second line parades, two drummers establish the central rhythm. As with a typical marching band, the bass drummer plays on the one and the three. The snare drummer, however, improvises march-style beats that often depart from the standard accents on the two and the four. Second line drummers vary the standard march beat with syncopations, added notes, and shifting patterns of accents, while revelers joining the parade provide additional layers of rhythm with hand percussion, bottles, sticks, and improvised instruments (Stewart 2003:620). The rhythms of the second line parade are a composite of native and imported musical traditions that include features of standard marches, African-American church music, Caribbean rhythms like the *son* and the *rumba*, and black slave dances both sacred and secular. While many musicological and historical studies have focused on the absorption of second line rhythm into jazz drumming styles, studies of the relationship between second line rhythm and the highly syncopated, groove-centered genre known as funk are a relatively recent development. As Jim Payne has written in his 1996 book *Give the Drummers Some*, James Brown, the progenitor of the funk genre and arguably the single most important American musician of the late twentieth century, transformed the rhythmic vocabulary of popular music by adapting rhythms taught to him by a pair of New Orleans-schooled drummers. Likewise, Alexander Stewart’s 2000 article “Funky Drummer” demonstrates the roots of funk rhythm in specific Afro-Cuban and second line rhythms from New Orleans through historical investigation and comparative analysis.

In this essay I hope to expand on the work of Stewart, Payne, and other scholars through a historical and musicological exploration of the relationship between second line rhythms and funk, as well as a comparison of the usage of second line rhythms in contemporary jazz and funk contexts. Where Stewart’s and Payne’s analyses typically focus on one instrument at a time, however, my intention herein is to illustrate the interaction of multiple instruments within a piece and the ways they articulate elements of second line rhythm both together and individually. The first piece, which appropriately enough is simply titled “The 2nd Line,” is a New Orleans jazz standard performed by the Marsalis Family. The second, “Hey Pocky-a-Way,” is an original song, based on an old Mardi Gras Indian chant, by “second line funk” group the Meters. As my analysis of these examples illustrates, jazz and funk musicians draw on many of the same basic features of second line rhythm—including the *clave*, the “Big Four,” and “between the cracks,” all terms that I will later explain in more detail—but shape and contextualize these elements differently according to the dictates of the genre.

Second Lining Through History: The Development of a Tradition in Music, Dance, and Display

In its primary sense, “second line” refers to an African-American processional form codified in New Orleans in the late 1800s. A typical second line parade features brass-and-percussion ensembles playing a syncopated march, accompanied by revelers who add chants, dances, and rhythms of their own. Michael P. Smith defines the second line as follows:

> Strictly speaking, the “second line” is the mass of people who follow a traditional African-American parade in New Orleans. In common speech, however, when people refer to a “second line,” they imply the whole event—generally a brass band or black Indian parade or a jazz funeral sponsored by any of the city’s large number of traditional black social clubs and civic societies. (1994:27)

Variants of the second line are an essential component of many of the city’s black expressive traditions, including jazz funerals, Mardi Gras Indian parades, and various street festival parades throughout the year. Rooted in the Sunday slave dances of Congo Square, second line parades persist to the present day, making up an essential part of the city’s musical and cultural fabric.

Numerous scholars, including Richard Brent Turner (2009); Charles Hersch (2007); and Berry, Foose, and Jones (1986) have traced the origins of the second line to the performative traditions of West African and Caribbean festival culture. With intimate ties to both regions through the transatlantic slave trade, successive eras of Spanish and French colonization, and the mass influx of white Creole landowners and their African slaves following the Haitian Revolution in 1804, New Orleans first saw these traditions converge in the multiracial Tremé neighborhood’s Congo Square marketplace. Smith notes that unlike in the British colonies, slaves in the French and Spanish New Orleans of the eighteenth century were granted a limited degree of personal autonomy (1994:23). On the weekends, they were often allowed to come and go from the plantations as they pleased, and many would gather in Congo Square (then know as the Place des Nègres) with drums, banjos, violins and other instruments to perform traditional African music and dances. European accounts of slave dances in the Americas date from as early as 1640, and when African-descended residents of New Orleans began gathering in Congo Square in the mid-1700s they performed the *Calenda*, a dance first observed in Martinique in 1694 (Smith 1994:77). Another dance performed in Congo Square, the *bamboula*, had an accompanying rhythm analogous to the Afro-Cuban *clave*. The *bamboula* and the *clave* are both crucial building blocks of second line rhythms. Figures 1 and 2 contain illustrations of the *bamboula* and the *clave* rhythms, respectively:

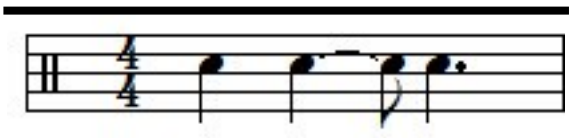


Figure 1. Bamboula *rhythm. Transcribed by author.*

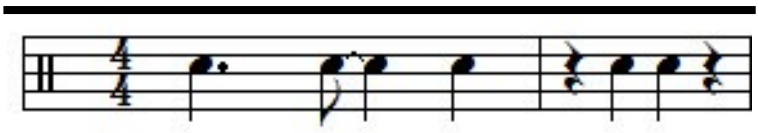


Figure 2. Cuban son clave *rhythm. Transcribed by author.*

The first measure of the *clave* is known as the *tresillo*. Although *tresillo* literally means “triplet,” in practice it refers to the pattern of beats with a duration of 3-3-2 (in 4/4, two dotted quarter notes followed by a regular quarter note). This pattern and other 3-3-2 patterns are examples of what African music scholar J.H. Kwabena Nketia calls “additive rhythm” (1974). In contrast to the divisive rhythm typical of Western classical music, in which larger rhythmic units are divided equally, in additive rhythms the larger rhythmic or metrical unit is divided unequally. Where a Bach chorale might divide a measure of 4/4 into two groups of four eighth notes, for instance, the *clave* or *tresillo* of West African bell patterns, Cuban *son* and *rumba*, and New Orleans second line rhythms would divide this same measure into two groups of three eighth notes (or two dotted quarter notes) and one group of two eighth notes (or one quarter note). When repeated regularly, additive rhythms often function as a “time line,” a common

organizing feature of Afro-diasporic musics that Richard J. Ripani defines as “a short rhythmic pattern that serves as a reference rhythm for the entire ensemble” (2006:50). Another crucial feature of New Orleans second line rhythm and the jazz and funk traditions that sprung from it is the use of unequal or “swung” eighth notes. In his book *The World That Made New Orleans*, Ned Sublette writes that this rhythmic feature, derived both from the musical traditions of the Senegambia region in West Africa and from the *notes inégales* of French baroque music, is evident in existing records of New Orleans music from as far back as the 1730s (2008:72).

Features of West and Central African culture survived to a greater degree in New Orleans than in other parts of the United States in part because of the city’s distinct political situation. The slave codes of the Spanish colonial period, which lasted from 1763 to 1803, allowed blacks some freedom of movement and expression outside of their long working hours, permitted slaves to own property, and offered a legal path for slaves to purchase their freedom. Ned Sublette writes that while slavery was brutal and inhumane in Spanish New Orleans as elsewhere, “the slave was treated more as a human being, albeit an enslaved one” there than in the French and British colonies (2008:97). The limited freedoms granted to free and enslaved blacks during this time period would allow them to develop a relatively autonomous community and preserve ancestral traditions more effectively than anywhere else in colonial America. By the 1780s several support societies (later known as “Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs”) had emerged among the city’s African-descended residents. These societies observed a number of traditional African customs and provided for the health and welfare of their members. One feature common to all of the African social aid societies was the processional form later known as the second line.

After New Orleans was acquired by the United States as a part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, restrictions on slaves’ activities tightened considerably, and one effect was that the Sunday festivities of the city’s blacks, both free and enslaved, were even further concentrated in Congo Square. Instead of discouraging creative expression among slaves, however, the new slave codes ultimately brought “Congo Square music” to international attention. Ned Sublette cites the bewildered testimony of traveler Christian Schultz, who witnessed and wrote one of the first detailed accounts of a Sunday Congo Square dance in 1808 (2008:281). Sublette notes that Schultz aptly recognized a spiritual undercurrent in the dance and music of Congo Square; most probably, black New Orleanians were using drums and dance to commune with the spirits as their West African forebears had done (2008:282).

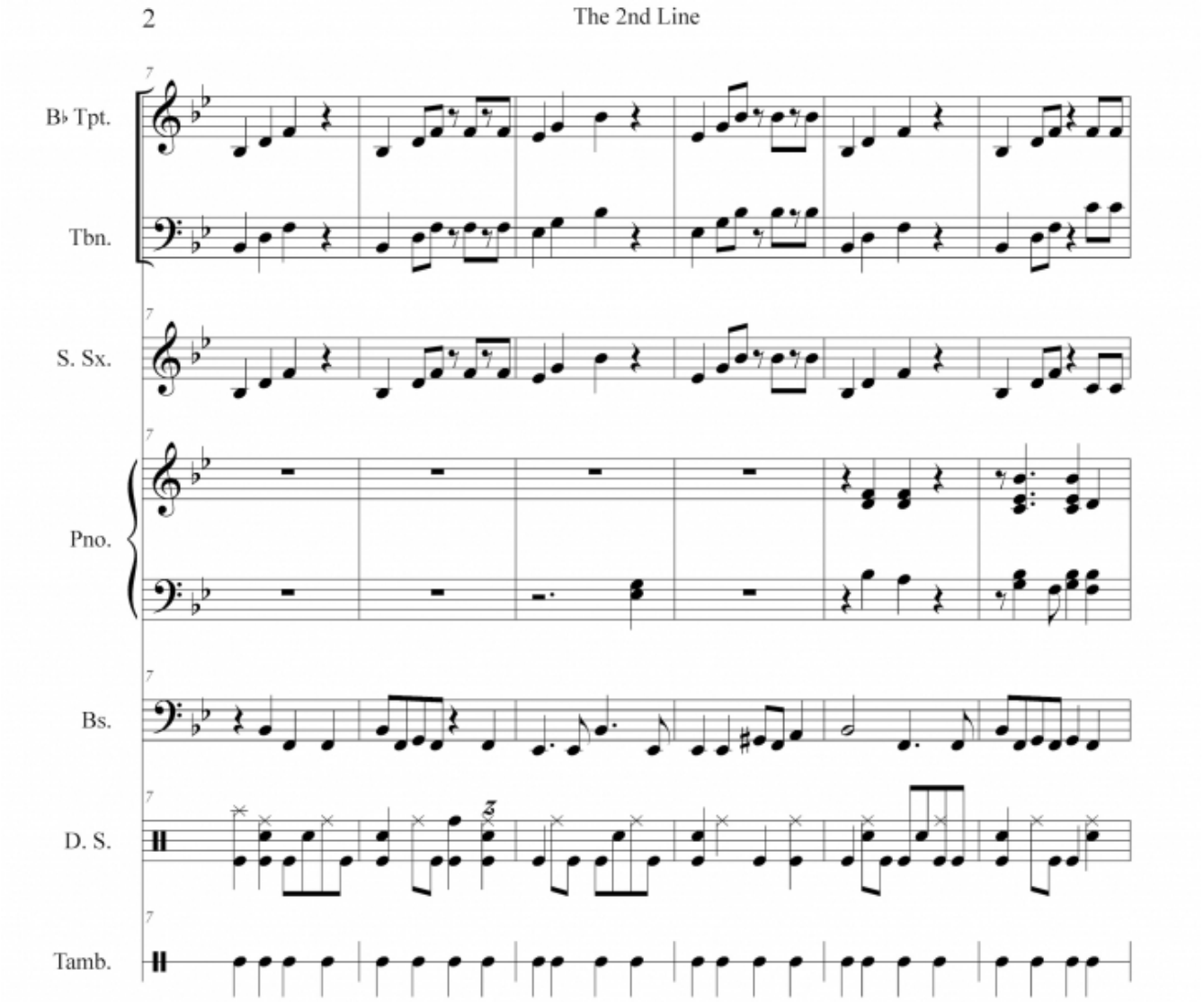
Daniel E. Walker notes in his book *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* that the Congo Square dances were part of an African slave performance tradition which had numerous other manifestations throughout the Americas (2004:3-4). Derived from West African festival culture, such performances were to prove formative to black New Orleans culture in their blending of the sacred and secular, their incorporation of “African dance, dress, song, music, and instrumentation,” and their frequent use of processions and masquerades (Walker 2004:4). Although Congo Square performances originally featured such native African instruments as the tam tam and the jaw bone, they later grew to incorporate stringed instruments like the African-derived banjo and the European violin.

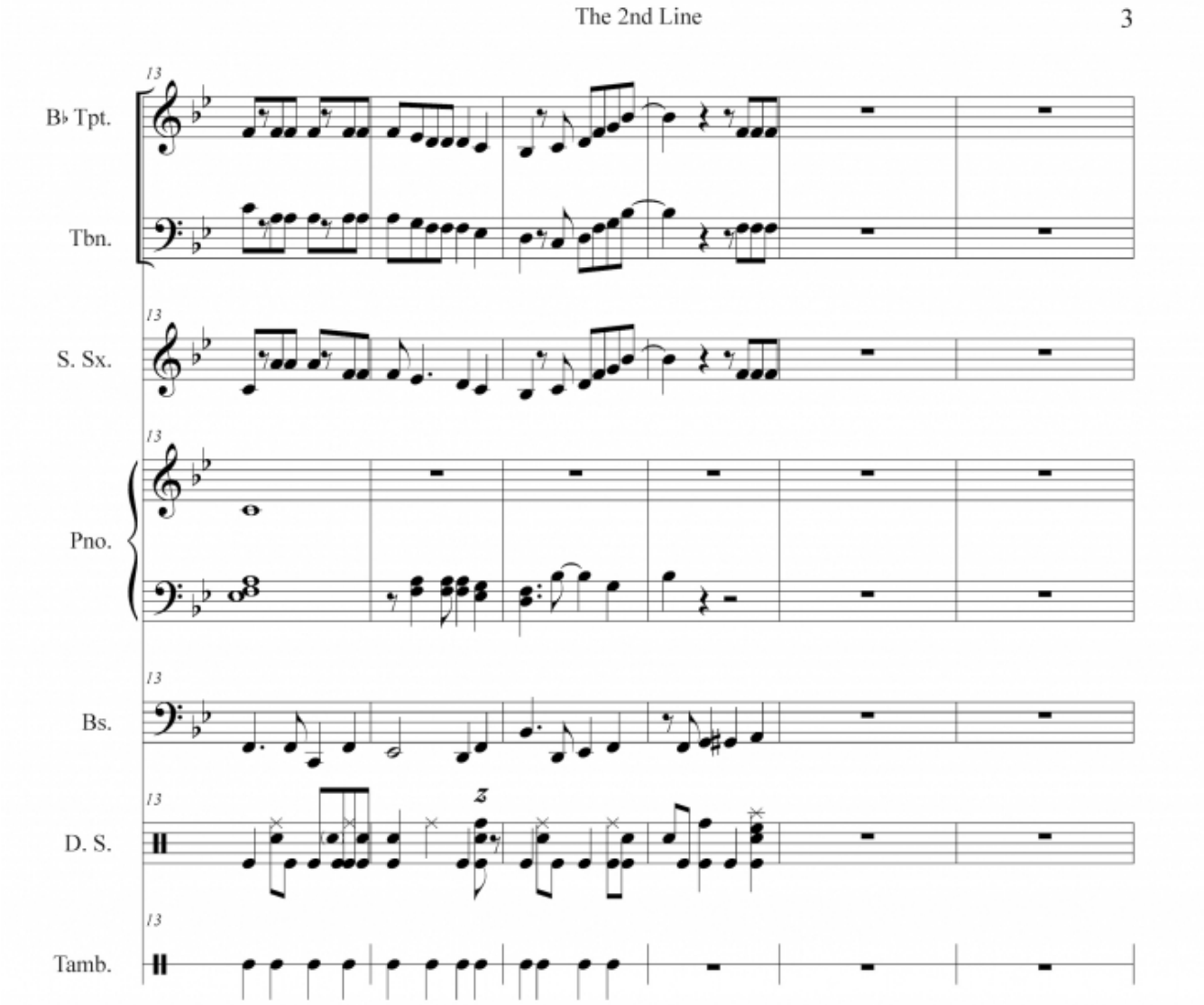
While the Congo Square dances and black mutual-aid societies of the early nineteenth century provided the basic rhythmic, social, and spiritual framework for the later emergence of the second line parade, its instrumentation was adapted from the European-style brass marching bands that were popular across the country during the same era. Military bands had a presence in New Orleans from at least 1815, when a black militia drummer named Jordan Little led the American forces into line against the British at the Battle of New Orleans, the last major battle in the War of 1812 (Kmen 1966:233). The city’s brass-band craze reached an early peak when several downtown theaters began to host competitive performances between rival groups in the 1830s. While European brass, ballroom, and theater ensembles flourished in the period leading up to the Civil War, however, avenues for black musicians began to dry up as restrictions on the activities of free and enslaved blacks increased after the Code Noir was abolished in 1850 (Smith 1994:91). As the social climate and music scene became more hostile to blacks, the black fraternal organizations first established at the end of the previous century went underground.

When Union troops arrived to occupy the city in 1862, black social societies sprang to life once again, and the final years of the Civil War saw an explosion of brass-band activity throughout the city. In the streets of New Orleans, black Union bands mixed with German marching bands, both combining with local brass ensembles to march and play for a variety of annual festivities (Smith 1994:93). As military bands were dissolved at the close of the Civil War, members began to hawk their instruments to the pawn shops on Rampart Street, and New Orleans was suddenly awash in inexpensive secondhand brass instruments (Lichtenstein and Danker 1993:21). By the 1880s, the city’s first black civilian brass bands began to emerge, almost all of them sponsored by one of the black fraternal organizations now known as Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs.

A further development that had a substantial impact on the city's black musicians was the creation of the red-light Storyville district in 1887. Formed out of an ordinance that restricted prostitution to a 37-block area south of Canal Street, the "barrelhouses and bordellos" of Storyville provided employment for some 200 musicians during its thirty-year existence. Paid to keep patrons drinking, celebrating, and cohabiting, Storyville musicians began to experiment with more flexible timing and ragged, danceable, "funky" syncopations. It was in this context that jazz first began to take shape, with Storyville trumpeter Buddy Bolden credited both by historians and many early players as its first true practitioner. Wynton Marsalis claims that it was Bolden who introduced the concept of the "Big Four," a syncopation that represented the first departure from the standard march beat, freeing up the rhythm and providing a springboard for jazz improvisation to emerge. Though Bolden met an early demise due to alcoholism and mental illness, his successors carried his ideas forward with the wide fluctuations of timing and accentuation later known in New Orleans as "between the cracks."

Analysis: "The 2nd Line"


2
The 2nd Line
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
S. Sx.
Pno.
Bs.
D. S.
Tamb.



Early New Orleans jazz and the profusion of styles that resulted from it all employed variations on second line rhythm. The Marsalis Family's rendition of "The 2nd Line," a traditional New Orleans song, combines aspects of many of these styles, as I indicate in my analysis below. My aim is to demonstrate both how second line rhythms serve as a common thread connecting these styles and how the different variations of second line rhythm set these styles apart. "The 2nd Line" also provides an instructive pre-funk contrast with the second example, "Hey Pocky A-Way," which will demonstrate how second line rhythms shaped the development of the funk genre in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Notating second line rhythm poses considerable difficulties for the transcriber. Foremost is the challenge of capturing the "between the cracks" feel of second line drumming, which is somewhere between shuffle (eighth- or sixteenth-note triplets) and "straight" rhythms. This caused me some confusion in my own transcriptions, as I initially heard the rhythm of both "The 2nd Line" and "Hey Pocky A-Way" as triplet shuffles. To test my initial impressions of both pieces and make transcription of the piano and guitar parts easier, I attempted to reproduce what I was hearing with a MIDI program called Sonar Home Studio. I found that I could not replicate the rhythms of either piece using triplets or straight eighths, and it was only then that I realized the true feel of both songs lay somewhere in between. Since a "between the cracks" feel cannot be captured using standard Western notation, most compositions that use it are notated in common time, often with a textual indication of the approximate degree of swing above the staff. After some deliberation, I opted to follow this procedure in both of my transcriptions (see below for a more detailed explanation of how I determined the degree of this "between the cracks" swing). In order to capture exactly what "between the cracks" meant in each of my examples, however, I have supplemented each transcription with a spectrographic analysis of the recorded performance that explores the irregular timing of the underlying eighth-note pulse in greater detail (Figures 5 and 6).

The Marsalis Family's "The 2nd Line" was recorded in concert for a CD entitled *Music Redeems*, released in 2010 to benefit the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music. Although a relatively straightforward rendition, both the instrumentation and the performance style suggest a hybrid of traditional (pre-bop) jazz, brass band music, and early rhythm and blues. The group on the recording consists of Wynton Marsalis on trumpet, Branford Marsalis on saxophone, Delfeayo Marsalis on trombone, Ellis Marsalis, Jr. on piano, Eric Revis on bass, and Jason Marsalis on drums. The credits on the record label's website also indicate the presence of drummer Herlin Riley and pianist Harry Connick, Jr. The section of the performance that I have transcribed ends shortly before the entrance of a second piano line, so only one piano part is indicated on the staff. While it is conceivable that one of the drummers played the snare and the other played the bass drum as is traditional in second line parades, a constant tambourine line and other percussion instruments which appear later in the performance suggest an arrangement of one trap drummer and one percussionist. The instrumentation, then, is more typical of a small jazz group than a traditional New Orleans brass band. Unlike in brass bands, there are two chordophones (the pianos), and a string bass is used in place of the sousaphone.

Harmonically, "The 2nd Line" is essentially a 12-bar blues. The lyrics of a 12-bar blues typically feature an African-derived "call and response" structure, with the first eight bars containing a four-bar lyrical "call" on the I chord, a four-bar repetition of the call on the IV chord, and a four-bar "response" which begins on the V chord, passes through the IV and concludes on the I chord. Occasionally, the melody of the response will conclude on the V chord after returning to the tonic, though that is not the case here. After the clarion call and audience response of the first four bars in my transcription, the basic 12-bar form begins on bar 5. Bars 5 to 8 are on the I chord, with bars 9 to 12 moving to IV, bar 13 on the V chord, bar 14 revisiting the IV chord, and bars 15 through 16 returning to the I chord. The one minor departure from typical 12-bar form is bar 14, which submerges the typical IV chord in a four-chord turnaround that actually passes down through every chord in the key from V to II, touching the IV chord only before moving to the III chord and then to the II.

Though they will later diverge both melodically and rhythmically, the horns play most of the "head" section of "The 2nd Line" in unison. In setting a 12-bar blues over a swinging march beat, "The 2nd Line" shares some key features with the "jump blues" style, a small-ensemble predecessor of rhythm and blues music, popular in the 1940s and early 1950s, that combined elements of blues and swing music. Like jump blues and most early rhythm and blues music, "The 2nd Line" is played "between the cracks," with a duple march beat underlying layered syncopations based on an uneven eighth-note pulse. Unlike in either of these styles, however, the march feel is not consistently articulated by the combination of the bass and the snare. Until measure 16—where an around-the-kit roll and several dropped accents signal the end of the opening section—the bass drum hits beats 1 and 3 consistently, as would be expected in a standard march beat. The snare drum, meanwhile, plays variations on a pattern that is effectively an offset *clave*:

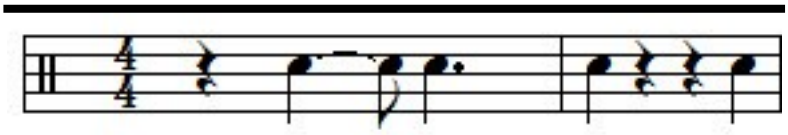


Figure 3. Basic snare pattern, "The 2nd Line." Transcribed by author.

This interplay between the steady 1-3 march of the bass drum and the syncopated accents of the snare is a central characteristic of second line drumming. Note that although beats 2 and 4 are not both accented by the snare on each measure, the phrase begins on the 2 and ends on 4. The end of this snare phrase, which is further accented with a press roll in measures 8 and 14 of "The 2nd Line," is an example of what's known in New Orleans music as the "Big Four." An emphasis on the fourth beat of every other measure, it is a key component of brass band marches and jazz (as I will demonstrate in my analysis of "Hey Pocky A-Way," the "Big Four" is closely linked to what is known in funk music as "the One"). This "and-3, 4" sequence is introduced before the main drum pattern is even established, with the entering fill on measure 6. With the snare playing a displaced *clave*, it falls to the ride cymbal to establish the 2 and 4 of the march beat throughout. Together with the straight, constant quarter notes of the tambourine, it provides an essential rhythmic stability that helps to hold the song together.

The syncopations of the bass and the snare drum in "The 2nd Line" serve to further emphasize both the strong beats and the various manifestations of Afro-Cuban style rhythms. In measures 8 and 14, the "Big Four" is anticipated and further emphasized by the "and-3" of the bass drum and the string bass. In fact, the bass drum is so closely locked in with the string bass that it is often hard to tell them apart. I should note that while I was transcribing the song, I tried to separate these two elements to the fullest extent that I could, but due to their close

synchronization and occasional inaudibility on the recording, the resultant transcription is more of an approximation of their different roles than an exact record.

It is the tension between the straight fourths of the tambourine and the uneven eighth-note subdivisions characterizing the other instrumental lines that make this performance a classic example of second line rhythm. In order to better explicate the "between the cracks" feel of "The 2nd Line," it is necessary to determine exactly how the eighth notes vary in duration. I undertook a spectrographic analysis of the recording's wave form for just this purpose. Although the bass drum and upright bass provide the most consistent articulation of the "between the cracks" pulse, they are too far back in the recording's mix too be readily identified through visual inspection of the wave form alone. As a result, I chose to analyze the horn line, which is far more prominent and visible on the graph. Even so, it took some manipulation to identify the particular points where notes changed. I did not have at my disposal any phrases in "The 2nd Line" that featured eighth notes throughout an entire measure. Instead, I compared the durations in a run of four eighth notes in measure 15 and a three-eighth-note run in measure 16. These two runs are highlighted in figure 4:

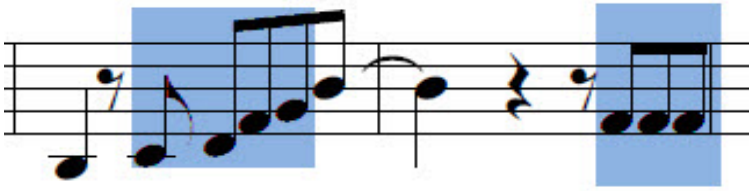


Figure 4. Eighth-note runs in "The 2nd Line," measures 15 and 16. Transcribed by the author.

Audible evidence suggested that the basic pattern would consist of alternating longer and shorter eighth notes. This turned out to be the case both on "The 2nd Line" and on "Hey Pocky A-Way," although the pattern broke down somewhat more neatly on the latter tune. With a high density of musical events making it difficult to pick out the points where notes changed by sight alone, I slowed down the recording by half and began a painstaking process of playing back brief sections and attempting to split the clip at the exact instant where a note changed. After using the "scissors" tool in my recording program to make a cut at each point where one note changed to the next, I measured the distances between split points using a ruler. I found that, indeed, there was a consistent pattern of alternating long and short eighth notes, though the proportions were not especially consistent. The spectrograph of the four-eighth-note run in measure 16, with the length of each note measured visually in centimeters, is as follows:

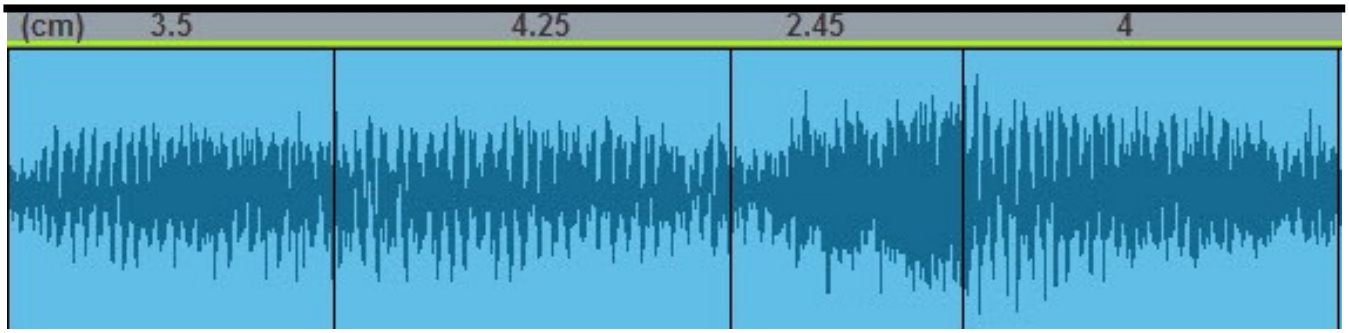


Figure 5. Eighth-note durations in measure 15 of "The 2nd Line."

The above figure displays the durations of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh eighth notes in measure 15. The odd-numbered eighth notes are somewhat longer in duration than the even-numbered ones, as is the case in the graph of the sixth, seventh, and final eighth-notes of measure 16:

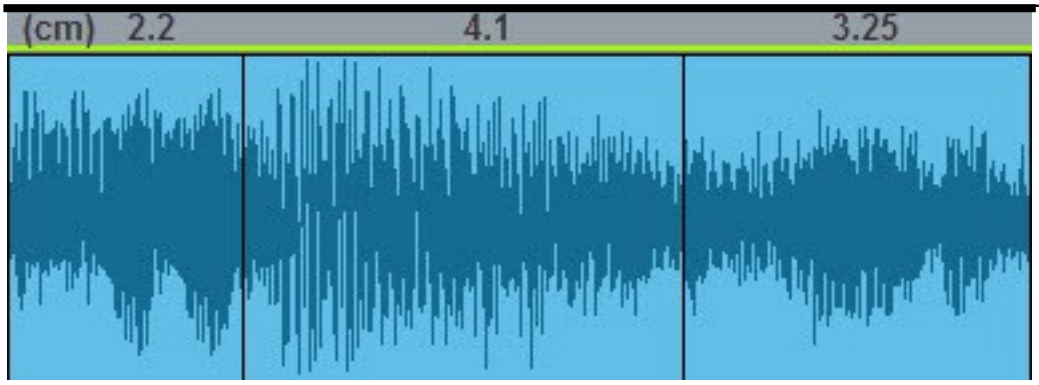


Figure 6. Eighth-note durations in measure 16 of "The 2nd Line."

While the long eighth notes are of a fairly consistent length, there is considerable variance in the duration of the short eighth notes. For the purposes of my transcription, I averaged the durations of the long and short eighth notes and came up with an average long-to-short ratio of roughly 4:3. This ratio is indicated in the expressive note below the drum stave at the beginning of my transcription of "The 2nd Line." It is not accurate in representing the range of eighth-note durations both long and short, however, hence the graphic representations above. Figure 7 illustrates the duration of each eighth note of the two runs I analyzed in measures 15 and 16:

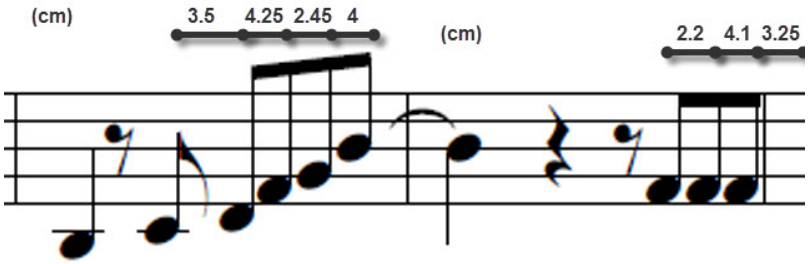


Figure 7. Transcription and durations of eighth notes in measures 15 and 16 of "The 2nd Line." Transcribed by the author.

It appears that the duration of eighth notes in the song is dependent both upon their position within the measure (as the durations of the sixth and seventh eighth-notes are very similar between the two measures, but diverge considerably from other eighth-note durations within the same measure) and the overall shape of the phrase. This sort of durational flexibility is an essential component of both second line rhythm and the principles of jazz timing that developed out of it.

From Jazz to Funk

Through the circuitous routes that black New Orleans musicians of the mid-twentieth century took around the country and across an ever-changing musical landscape, second line rhythms were adapted and absorbed into a variety of popular genres. As big-band swing evolved into jump blues, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll, shuffle rhythms began to decline in popularity and were largely replaced by a straight-eighths pulse (Stewart:297). This shift opened up a space for New Orleans musicians to experiment further with the mixed feel of the second line. In the 1940s and 1950s, pianist Professor Longhair incorporated additive Afro-Caribbean rhythms and layered straight beats against swung beats to create a new R&B piano style known as the "piano rumba." Shortly thereafter, drummers like Earl Palmer, with their mixture of duple march beats in the foreground and "between the cracks" accents in the background, came into high demand as session players on R&B and pop records. Among the foremost proponents of New Orleans R&B in the late 1950s and early 1960s were Dave Bartholomew, who combined the innovations of Longhair and Palmer in a series of hit productions for artists like Fats Domino, and producer and pianist Allen Toussaint, who added second line brass band arrangements to the mix.

Drummers Charles Connor and Clayton Fillyau were two of the many musicians schooled in the mixed feel of

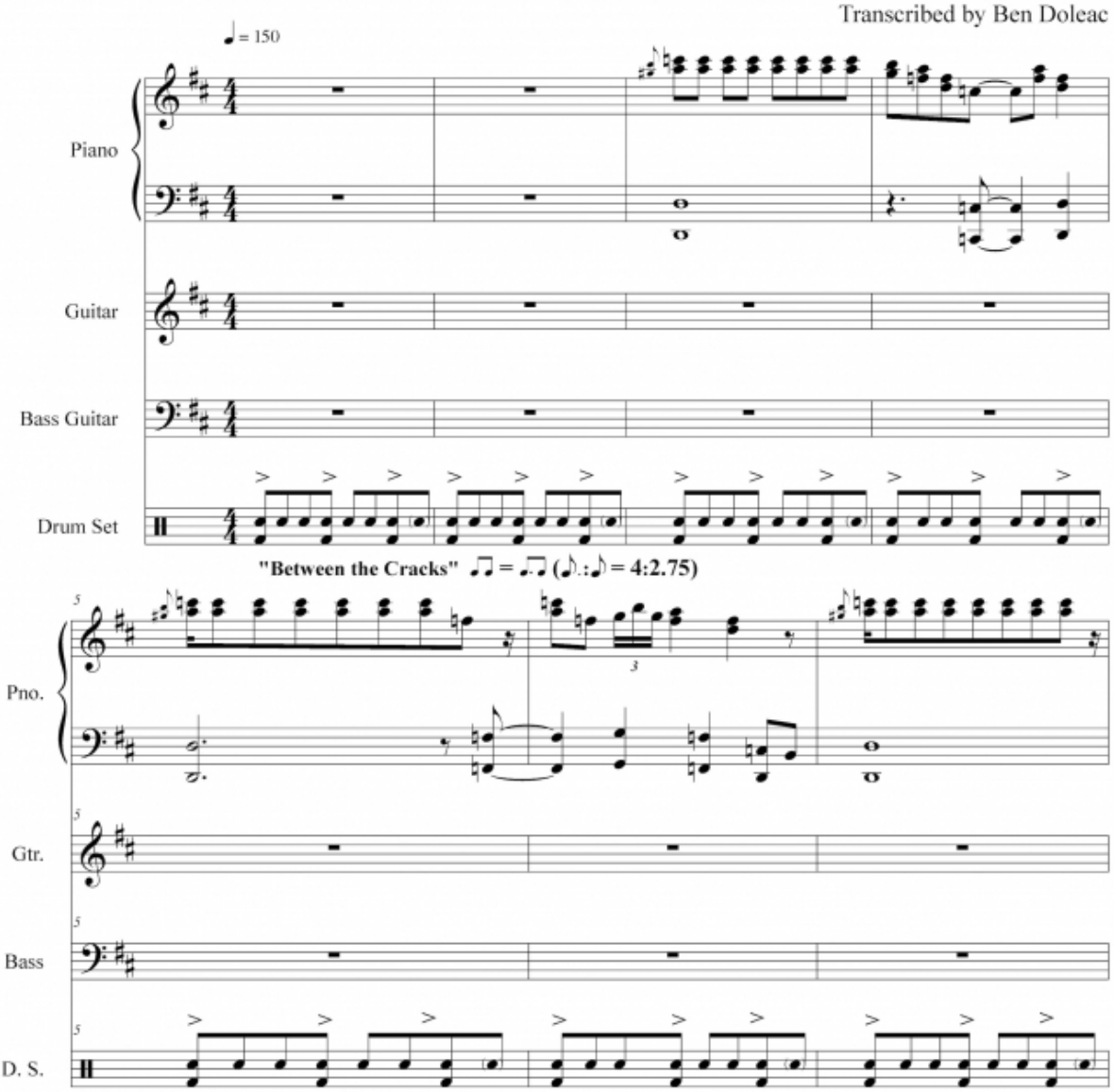
second line and New Orleans R&B rhythms. While the former was a native of the city who followed second lines and worked with Professor Longhair as a teenager, the latter hailed from Tampa. Both worked for “Godfather of Soul” James Brown in the early 1960s, and the rhythmic principles they introduced to the band would have a profound impact on Brown’s groundbreaking later work. As with most Afro-diasporic musics, the thickening cross rhythms and “schizophrenic” feel of straight against swung beats in New Orleans R&B were held together by a recurring accented beat. Whereas in early New Orleans jazz this beat lay at the end of a one- or two-bar phrase and was known as the “Big Four,” in New Orleans R&B of the 1950s and 1960s the strong beat lay at the beginning of each measure. As taught to Brown by Fillyau, this beat was known as “The One.” Brown was so entranced by “The One,” and the astonishingly complex rhythmic tapestries that could be built upon it, that he used it as the basis to create an epochal new musical style known as “funk.” Applying the innovations of Earl Palmer and Professor Longhair to every instrument in his ensemble, Brown subordinated harmonic development and traditional pop song form to the increasingly dense rhythmic fabric of the groove.

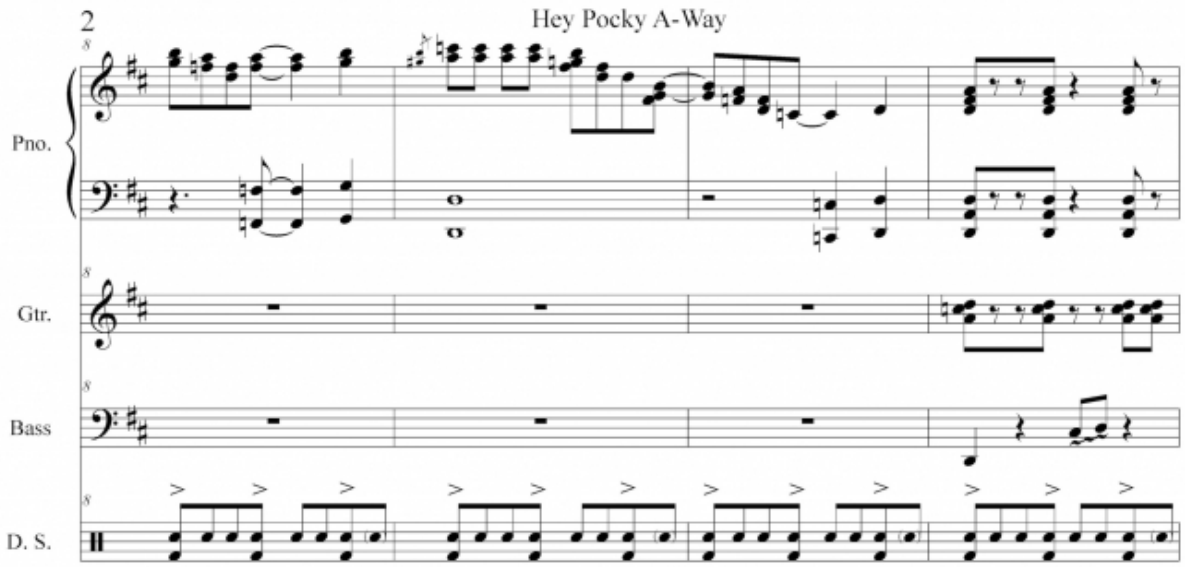
Funk groups sprang up all across the country in the wake of James Brown’s groundbreaking late 1960s singles, offering their own variations on Brown’s transformation of the second line beat. In New Orleans, young musicians brought Brown’s innovations full circle by mixing funk with the local styles—second line brass band music, Mardi Gras Indian songs, and piano rumbas—from which it sprang. Foremost among New Orleans funk bands were the Meters, who had links to nearly all of funk’s pioneering figures in New Orleans. Leader and keyboardist Art Neville, who had his first hit as a teenager in 1954 with “Mardi Gras Mambo,” was one in a long line of Longhair disciples (such as Huey “Piano” Smith and Dr. John), while the whole group served as the studio band on the majority of Toussaint’s late 1960s and early 1970s productions. Their own records combined these hometown influences with the staccato funk grooves James Brown had forged out of many of the same sources. In the following analysis, I detail how the group’s use of key second line rhythmic principles—in particular their deployment of additive Afro-Caribbean 3-3-2 rhythms and a “between the cracks” feel—is shaped by the stylistic framework of the funk genre.

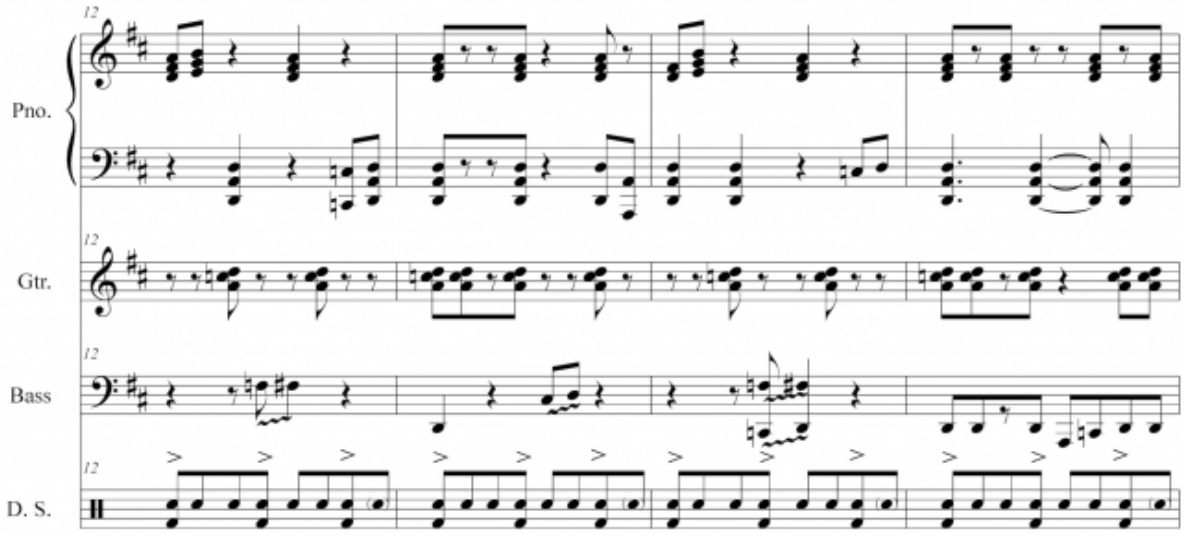
Analysis: “Hey Pocky A-Way”

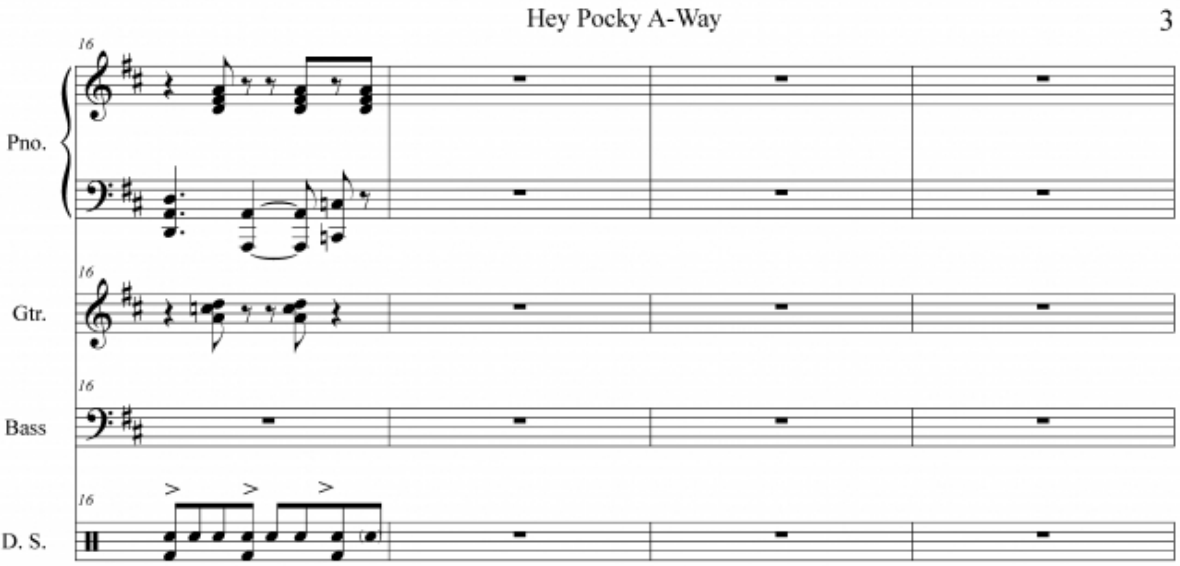
Hey Pocky A-Way

Composed and Performed by the Meters
Transcribed by Ben Doleac




2
Hey Pocky A-Way
Pno.
Gtr.
Bass
D. S.


12
Pno.
Gtr.
Bass
D. S.



Taking its name and refrain from a Mardi Gras Indian chant, the Meters' 1975 song "Hey Pocky A-Way" provides a very different take on second line rhythm than "The 2nd Line." Drummer Zigaboo Modeliste plays a modified "between the cracks" shuffle beat. As with "The 2nd Line," the reader should keep in mind that the underlying feel is somewhere in between a triplet shuffle and a straight quadruple meter. As in my transcription of "The 2nd Line," I have indicated the relative durations of long and short eighth notes in "Hey Pocky A-Way" with a ratio, in this case 4:2.75. I will explain how I arrived at this ratio and provide a more detailed look at the fluctuating eighth-note pulse later in this analysis. In "The 2nd Line," the ambiguity of the "between the cracks" feel was offset somewhat by the duple (1-2, 1-2) march time feel of the ride-bell and tambourine pattern, but there is no such stabilizing framework here. Instead, the most prominent rhythm is the *tresillo*, or the first half of the *clave* (shown in full in Figure 2). This rhythm is articulated by a pattern of snare accents on the 1, the "and" after 2, and the 4, as shown in figure 8:

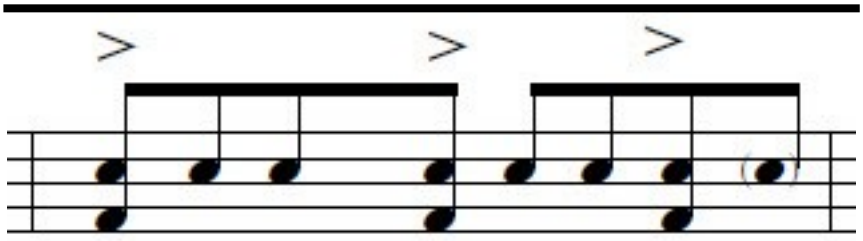


Figure 8. Drum beat. "Hey Pocky A-Way." Transcribed by author.

The underlying groove of "Hey Pocky A-Way" is heavily dependent upon the different ways in which the snare drum is accented. Without these alternating strong and weak accents, all we have is a flat pattern of half-swung eighth notes. The accented beats are indicated by a caret above the note, while a weak final beat on the snare—the "and" of beat 4—is indicated with the note head in parentheses. Each accented snare beat is doubled by the bass drum. Note that both the first beat ("The One") and the fourth (the "Big Four") are emphasized here, although the particularly weak final eighth note has the effect of giving greater weight to the One, which immediately follows it. This basic snare pattern is unchanging throughout the song; such repetition is characteristic of funk music, where each instrument often plays a one- or two-bar figure or riff over and over again. Typically, these individually simple figures overlay one another in a rhythmically intricate pattern, with different instruments emphasizing different parts of the beat.

Though accent patterns in funk music almost always emphasize off-beats or in-between beats (the "ands" between 1-2-3-4), it is the One which holds the entire rhythmic structure together. Typically, the bass and the drums will anchor the syncopations of their own and other instruments' lines by accenting the One on every measure. The guitar, horns, and other instruments in the ensemble may regularly accent the One beat as well. On "Hey Pocky A-Way," the drums establish a strong "on the one" feel through a bass drum and snare accent on every downbeat. Note that the piano also accents the One throughout. In measure 15, the bass guitar settles into a standard staccato funk pattern that also emphasizes the One.

Following the two bars of unaccompanied drum beat at the beginning of the song, the piano comes in playing in a dense, Professor Longhair-influenced fashion heavy with such ornaments as sixteenth triplets (measure 6), grace note slides (the beginning of the figure repeated in bars 3, 5, 7, and 9), and "blue notes," which are approximated by striking two adjacent keys (the 3 beat and the "and" beat after 4 in bar 9). Finally, in bar 11, the song's groove is established, with piano and guitar accenting variations of the 3-3-2 pattern found so frequently in second line music. While the drums continue to articulate a *tresillo* pattern (or the "three side" of the *clave*), the guitar and piano figures are two-measure variations of the *son clave* we saw in figure 2. The song's basic guitar and piano grooves are illustrated in figures 9 and 10:

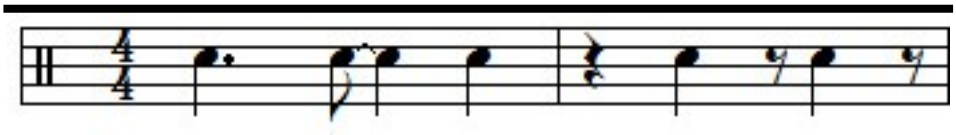


Figure 9. Basic guitar groove, "Hey Pocky A-Way." Transcribed by author.

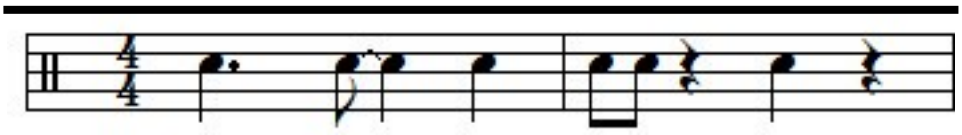


Figure 10. Basic piano groove, "Hey Pocky A-Way." Transcribed by author.

While the first measure of these two grooves is essentially identical, the piano and guitar diverge in the second measure, playing accents off of one another and creating something of a "call-and-response" effect. I should also note that the transcription of the guitar groove indicates only the accent pattern, though in fact every eighth note is played. The accented notes are played in a staccato, partially muted style typical in funk, while the other beats, notated as rests in my transcription, are played with the strings fully muted so that only the rhythm of the strumming is heard. This technique is called palm muting. This highly percussive style, centered as much around the rhythm and accent patterns of the guitar strum as it is on the tones of the chord being played, is the song's most overt nod to the funk genre. As played by James Brown's guitarist Jimmy Nolen, it was sometimes known as "chicken scratch." Also characteristic of funk is the static harmony of "Hey Pocky A-Way"; although the piano plays brief two-note chords in the fifth and flat seventh of the key during the song's introduction, there are no true chord changes in the section I have transcribed. Most of the development is rhythmic rather than harmonic/melodic, with each of the instruments interlocking in a composite rhythmic pattern.

The "between the cracks" feel of "Hey Pocky A-Way" is established most clearly by the drums, which play two solo measures at the beginning of the song. The groove sounds almost like a triplet shuffle at first, which is somewhat unusual for funk. However, because it is in fact between triplet and straight rhythm it is possible, for example, for the funk bass line of measure 15 to feel like straight eighths against the shuffle of the drums without either element seeming out of phase. As with "The 2nd Line," I undertook a spectrographic analysis of the song's waveform to measure the uneven eighth-note durations that give "Hey Pocky A-Way" its "between the cracks" feel. Since the basic rhythm of "Hey Pocky A-Way" consists entirely of these uneven notes, and since I had two unaccompanied measures of drums to work with, this proved to be a much easier task than on "The 2nd Line." Through visual inspection of the wave form I was able to identify the peaks that represented each stroke of the drum, and I recorded the duration of each beat by measuring the distance between these peaks (once again, in centimeters). Figure 11 illustrates the waveform of the first two measures of "Hey Pocky A-Way," with the durations of each eighth note (in centimeters) indicated on a line above the graph:

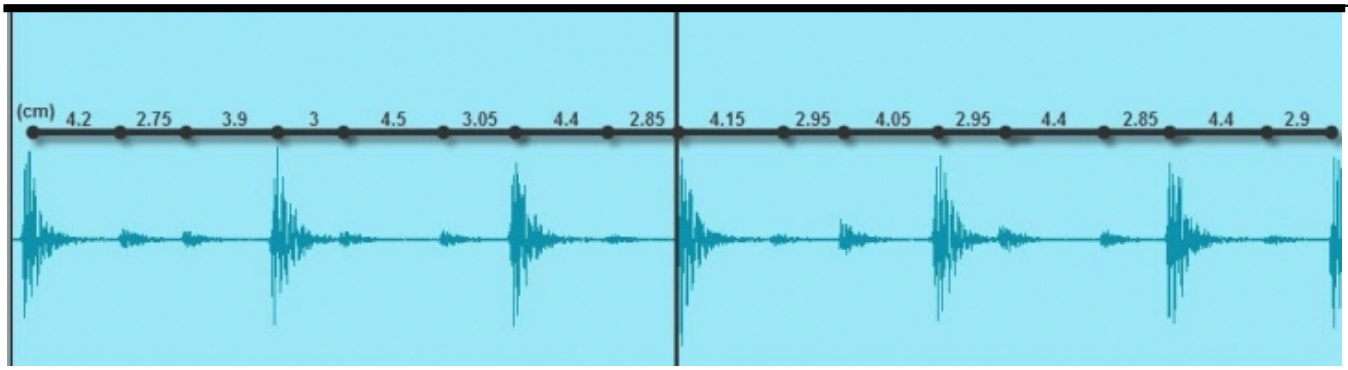


Figure 11. Eighth-note beat durations, "Hey Pocky A-Way" measures 1 and 2.

As on "The 2nd Line," the basic pattern is alternating long and short eighth notes. The vertical line in the middle of the figure indicates the bar division. We can see that the durations of each eighth note remain fairly consistent between the two measures (the 4.2 cm duration of the first eighth note in measure 1 is very close to the 4.15 cm duration of the first eighth note in measure 2, for instance) but that, within each measure, the durations of the "long" and "short" eighth notes fluctuate somewhat. The fifth and seventh eighth notes are the longest in each measure, while the second and sixth are the shortest. It seems that, as in "The 2nd Line," the duration of each eighth note depends upon its place in the measure. Still, the durational fluctuations between each long eighth note and between each short eighth note are less extreme here than in "The 2nd Line," perhaps reflecting the fact that funk rhythms are typically more controlled and regular than those of jazz. The "between the cracks" feel has a number of different varieties particular to specific genres.

After measuring the durations of each eighth note of the first two measures, as shown in figure 11, I averaged the duration of the long and then the short eighth notes of each measure. In both measures, the long eighth notes averaged 4.25 cm, while the short eighth notes averaged 2.9125 cm. The resultant ratio of 4.25:2.9125 can be simplified to a ratio of roughly 4:2.75, which is the ratio I indicated in the expressive text below the first two measures of the drum staff in my transcription. Since the durational ratio of long to short eighth notes in "Hey Pocky A-Way" differs from that in "The 2nd Line," we can see once again that the "between the cracks" feel may vary from piece to another, or indeed from one style to another.

Conclusion

Through this analysis I hope to have demonstrated a few of the different ways in which features of second line rhythm are utilized in different genres of New Orleans music. I have devoted particular attention to two features—additive 3-3-2 rhythms and an uneven, "between the cracks" feel—that have been adopted in a wide variety of American popular and jazz styles, and through my analysis of these features one basic point has become clear: Western musical notation is woefully unequipped to illustrate any feel or pulse aside from straight or triplet-shuffle rhythm. Even the latter requires an artificial accommodation and is impractical to notate throughout a piece. A "between the cracks" rhythm, on the other hand, cannot be adequately notated whatsoever. Instead, it can only be learned through listening and actual practice. Perhaps the figures I have provided in each of my analyses, which illustrate the durations of each eighth note as accurately as was possible for my study, could serve as a starting point for a new notational model that indicates duration spatially. Additive rhythms are also somewhat awkwardly represented using traditional Western notation, with bar lines and note ties sometimes dividing beat cycles in an unnatural fashion. Since these features underlie so much American and global popular music, it is clear that a notational system that can better describe them must be devised. My analyses herein represent just a preliminary step in that direction; there are countless other instances across jazz and popular music genres where additive rhythms and a "between the cracks" rhythmic feel are deployed in different ways. Through analyses of some of these examples, we can begin to work towards more comprehensive models, both prescriptive and descriptive, of how second line rhythmic principles function across the world's musics.

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