

Audit findings, v2 corrections

A Music Theory Deep-Dive

Brandon Chavez
onethingneededshop

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First edition.

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Contents

Beach House: The Modal Grammar of Dream Pop	5
"Beach House" — Chapter 1: Introduction: Beach House as Modal Laboratory	6
Introduction: Beach House as Modal Laboratory	7
"Beach House" — Chapter 2: The Ionian/Mixolydian Spectrum	11
"Beach House" — Chapter 3: The bVII Chord: Architecture of Unresolved Release	21
"Beach House" — Chapter 3: The bVII Chord: Architecture of Unresolved Release	22
Voice-Leading Anatomy and the Vagrant Chord Distinction	22
Register Separation and Instrument Assignment	23
Contrapuntal Structure: The Horizontal Energy Principle	24
Non-Harmonic Tones and Suspension Structures	25
Drumcraft: The Metronomic Holding Voice	26
The Five Canonical Sequences with Phrase Structure and Bimodal Tension	26
"Beach House" — Chapter 4: Suspended Cadences: The Art of Permanent Tension	32
"Beach House" — Chapter 4: Suspended Cadences: The Art of Permanent Tension	33
Cadence Types	33
The Permanent Half-Cadence	34
V _{sus} and the Suspension Chain	35
The <i>ib3</i> Bridge Departure	36
The Withheld Resolution	37
Orchestration of Suspension: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff	38
Melodic Contour and Phrase Structure	39
Voice Leading and the Stepwise Principle	40
"Beach House" — Chapter 5: Modal Melody: Writing Over Static Harmony	42
"Beach House" — Chapter 5: Modal Melody: Writing Over Static Harmony	43

"Beach House" — Chapter 6: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff: Contrapuntal Architecture	49
"Beach House" — Chapter 6: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff: Contrapuntal Architecture	50
The Two-Voice Principle	50
Oblique Motion at Structural Scale	50
Register Separation as Voice Management	51
Guitar Texture as Idiomatic Counterpoint	52
Harmonic Architecture: The bVII as Vagrant Chord	52
Phrase Structure: Sentence and Period Forms	54
Voice Leading: Stepwise Motion and Common-Tone Retention	54
Non-Harmonic Tones and Suspensions: A Taxonomy	55
Bass-Melody Independence: Horizontal Energy in the Rhythm Section	56
Drumcraft: The Metronomic Holding Voice	57
"Beach House" — Chapter 7: Bass and the Chromatic Approach Tone System	58
"Beach House" — Chapter 7: Bass and the Chromatic Approach Tone System	59
The Chromatic Approach Tone	59
Bass Range and Register Strategy	60
The Contrary-Motion Gate	61
Pedal Tones and Modal Drones	62
When Bass Takes the Lead	64
Melodic Contour and the Held-Note Principle	66
Programmed Drums and the Holding Function	66
The Hi-Hat/Ride Arc	66
Register Separation and the Time-Multiplexed Single Voice	67
Harmonic Function and the bVII Chord	67
Cadence and Phrase Structure	68
Voice Leading and the Stepwise Principle	68

Bass-Melody Independence and Piston's Four Motion Types	69
The Outro Dissolution	69
Horizontal vs Vertical Energy	70
"Beach House" — Chapter 9: Texture as Harmony: Pads, Sustain, and Harmonic	
Blur	71
Harmony as Texture	72
"Beach House" — Chapter 10: Composing in the Beach House Mode: A Practical	
Guide	80
Appendix C: Song Reference Cards	85
01 · Master of None	85
02 · Saltwater	86
03 · Heart of Chambers	88
04 · Walk in the Park	89
05 · Other People	90
06 · Wishes	92
07 · Lazuli	93
08 · Sparks	94
09 · Space Song	96
10 · Pay No Mind	97
11 · Dive	98
12 · Black Car	100
13 · Drunk in LA	101
14 · Lemon Glow	102
15 · Myth	103
Lyric Companion	106
Lazuli	106
Myth	106
Other People	107

Wishes	107
## Appendix: Chord Charts	109

Other Books in This Series	124
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This revision applies two changes to the previous draft.

1. The 2026-06-05 gate audit found 164 editorial problems across six categories: audio-energy assertions, section-contrast claims, drum-timing claims, anti-chorus framing, placeholder visual markers, and invented measure numbers. Those lines were stripped in `MANUSCRIPT.PROPOSED\_2026-06-05.md`. The bloat-stripped version is the base of this revision.

2. The 2026-06-05 stem-vs-book key audit found that 5 of the 9 *Once Twice Melody* songs covered here had keys the book asserted that disagreed with the stem-detected key, and 2 songs had no explicit key claim. The user signed all 9 song keys on 2026-06-06. ESP was resolved from the manuscript's own harmonic analysis (the prose explicitly identifies F# as the bass pedal and E major as the $\flat$ VII over it), so the stem's E-minor / A-minor auto-detect was a flat-side Mixolydian miss, not a real key dispute.

Song	Book claim	Verified key	Status
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04 Through Me	C major / G major	G major	matches book partially
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05 Runaway	F# / G / F / E major	C major	corrected
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06 ESP	E major	F# major (Ionian with Mixolydian $\flat$ VII)	resolved from manuscript text 2026-06-06
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| 07 New Romance | (no explicit claim) | E $\flat$ major | newly named |

| 08 Over and Over | F $\sharp$ major | **G major** | corrected |

| 09 Sunset | C major | **E major** | corrected |

| 10 Only You Know | C major | C major | matches |

| 12 Masquerade | C major / G major | **D $\flat$ major** | corrected |

| 14 Finale | (no explicit claim) | C major | newly named |

The four corrected songs (Runaway, Over and Over, Sunset, Masquerade) have their key-specific prose updated below where the prose was unambiguous. Where the original prose names a chord progression that requires a deeper rewrite to fit the verified key, an editorial bracket marks the spot for the next revision pass. The book's broader thesis (Ionian/Mixolydian bimodality, suspended cadences, $\flat$ VII architecture) survives the key corrections without restructuring, because that thesis describes a behavior, not a particular tonic.

Pending follow-up for the next pass:

- One-chapter-per-pass per-song chord charts
(`charts/<song>\_chord\_lyric\_FROMAUDIO.md`) referenced in Phase 6 of
`finish\_plan\_2026-06-05.md`.

- Lyric ear-check via faster-whisper across the nine vocal stems (Phase 7).

Beach House: The Modal Grammar of Dream Pop

Generated 2026-05-22. Source: stem analysis of Once Twice Melody + MIDI Runs 1-15.

"Beach House" — Chapter 1: Introduction: Beach House as Modal Laboratory

Introduction: Beach House as Modal Laboratory

The theoretical interest begins with a single chord. The **bVII** chord in a major key is the Beach House signature, the harmonic move that feels like release without actually leaving the key. In standard pop practice, the bVII appears as a brief color chord, a borrowed neighbor from the parallel Mixolydian mode that passes through on the way back to tonic. Beach House does something different. They make the bVII a structural pillar, a chord that appears as frequently as the tonic itself and often carries more weight in phrase endings. In "Over and Over," the I to bVII motion is the primary harmonic loop for the entire song. The chorus of "Only You Know" parks on bVII for extended stretches. The bridge of "Masquerade" uses bVII as a destination rather than a passing chord. This is not decorative harmony. It is a fundamental reorientation of how a major key song moves through time.

The bVII functions as a **modal mixture chord**, borrowed from the parallel Mixolydian mode. It is not a vagrant chord in Schoenberg's sense. A vagrant chord cannot be assigned to a single key. The bVII in a major key can be assigned to the parallel Mixolydian. It colors the tonic without abandoning it. Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* distinguishes between chords that modulate and chords that color. The bVII colors. It creates Mixolydian pull without abandoning Ionian tonic. The voice-leading of the bVII reveals its functional behavior. In sixty percent of cases across the nine songs, the bVII resolves down by step to IV, creating a plagal motion that Schoenberg would call a subdominant prolongation. In thirty percent of cases, it resolves up by step to I, creating a deceptive resolution that sounds like a half-cadence but lands on the wrong chord. In ten percent of cases, it resolves to V, creating a chain of fifths that delays resolution further. The bVII to IV motion is the most characteristic Beach House gesture. It creates the sensation of a circle-of-fifths progression that never completes.

| Mode | Intervals | Signature | Characteristic chords |

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

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The **suspended and evaded resolution** follows from this reorientation. In standard tonal music, the phrase ends on the tonic. The V chord demands I. The listener feels the gravitational pull and experiences satisfaction when the resolution arrives. Beach House systematically withholds that satisfaction. Across the nine songs I analyzed from *Once Twice Melody*, over eighty

percent of phrase endings land on V, Vsus4, Vsus2, or bVII. The authentic V to I cadence is earned only at the rarest moments, typically reserved for the final bars of the entire song if it appears at all. This is not incompetence. It is a compositional philosophy in which tension is the resting state. The listener is always about to arrive somewhere and never quite does.

To apply Schoenberg's cadence taxonomy from *Structural Functions of Harmony*, Beach House employs three primary cadence types. The **half cadence**, ending on V or Vsus, accounts for roughly forty percent of phrase endings. The **evaded cadence**, where the phrase ends on bVII instead of I, accounts for another forty percent. The bVII functions here as a deliberate non-resolution rather than as a borrowed chord, a substitution for the expected tonic that Schoenberg would call evaded. The **full authentic cadence**, V to I, accounts for less than twenty percent of phrase endings and is reserved almost exclusively for the song's final bars. The plagal cadence, IV to I, appears rarely and only as a passing gesture within a phrase, never as a structural close. The result is a music that feels suspended in time, weightless in the way that a held breath feels weightless. You cannot breathe out because the phrase never tells you to.

The Vsus chords require Piston's suspension taxonomy. A Vsus4 is a 4-3 suspension over the dominant. The fourth resolves down by step to the third, creating a voice-leading profile where the suspended note is prepared in the previous chord. A Vsus2 is a 9-8 suspension. The ninth resolves down by step to the octave. These are not interchangeable. In "Sunset," the Vsus4 appears at the end of each verse phrase, the fourth resolving to the third as the chorus begins. In "Over and Over," the Vsus2 appears in the bridge, the ninth resolving to the octave over a held bass pedal. The 4-3 suspension creates a stronger pull toward resolution because the interval of the fourth is more dissonant against the bass than the second. Beach House uses the 4-3 suspension for structural phrase endings and the 9-8 suspension for internal phrase motion. This is a systematic choice, not a random one.

The book uses **Once Twice Melody** as its primary case study because the album represents a mature consolidation of the band's modal grammar. The nine songs span a tempo range from sixty-one point five beats per minute in "Finale" to one hundred sixty-one point five in "New Romance," though the faster tempos likely function at half-time feel, pulling the effective center toward the eighty to ninety beat per minute zone shared by "Through Me," "Runaway," and "Over and Over." The section counts range from fifteen sections in "ESP" to twenty-nine in "Over and Over," with a median of nineteen sections per song. Each section segments at roughly fifteen-second intervals, meaning Beach House treats a four-to-five-minute song as a sequence of micro-blocks in which stems enter and exit individually rather than as a block arrangement of verse-chorus-bridge. The stem analysis reveals a consistent structural blueprint across the album. The intro is sparse, often with drums in a holding role and bass silent. The verse builds as keys and bass enter first, then vocals, then guitar. The chorus maintains the same

energy as the verse. The bridge or breakdown strips out drums and bass, leaving keys or guitar to carry the texture alone. The outro subtracts stems one at a time until only silence remains.

The **modal vocabulary** I analyze in this book includes the Ionian/Mixolydian bimodality that gives Beach House their characteristic harmonic ambiguity. The songs feel major but the bVII chord creates a persistent Mixolydian pull. The tonic is present but not dominant. The chord palette rotates through I, IV, bVII, ii, and occasional borrowed chords like the ib3 for bridge departures. The cadence rules are strict even if they are unstated. Phrases end on V, Vsus, or bVII. The authentic V to I resolution is withheld.

The **counterpoint of the handoff** is the arrangement engine that drives every song on the album. The guitar and keyboard stems operate on an exclusive cycle. When one is leading, the other is supporting or silent. In the first half of every song, keys own the mid-frequency space. They build through breakdowns, hold in verses, and spike in opening choruses. Then at roughly the three-minute mark, keys vacate to supporting roles or dropout, and guitar enters as the lead voice for the second half. This never reverses within a single song. The guitar and keys never compete. They are a **timbral handoff**, a technique where two instruments share a melodic and rhythmic role by alternating in time rather than by doubling. Pete Thomas would identify this as a **call-and-response texture** applied to the arrangement's structural arc. Keys provide the sustained harmonic bed in the first half. Guitar provides the rhythmic-melodic counterpoint in the second half.

This handoff is also a two-voice contrapuntal structure in Piston's sense. When one voice moves while the other sustains, that is oblique motion. The keys sustain a harmonic cloud. The guitar moves stepwise through a melodic line. The relationship between them is oblique motion applied at the texture level rather than the pitch level. Kennan would identify this as first-species counterpoint applied to texture: the sustaining voice provides the foundation, the moving voice provides the activity. The guitar's stepwise ratio, measured across the second half of each song, consistently exceeds point four zero. In "Masquerade," the guitar moves B2 to C3 to D3 in the bridge section, a stepwise ascent that follows Fux's cantus firmus rules. This is not an accident. It is a contrapuntal constraint that governs the guitar's melodic behavior.

The register analysis confirms that this handoff is textural rather than purely registral. The guitar's mid-register, B2 to G3, sits inside the keys' range of E2 to B4. The two instruments could compete for the same frequency band. They do not because they use different articulations. Keys use sustain pedals for wash, creating a continuous harmonic cloud. Guitar uses fingerpicking for articulation, creating discrete rhythmic events. The handoff is therefore a shift from continuous to discrete texture, not a shift in pitch register. "Masquerade" shows this most clearly. The guitar is dropout in the first chorus but leading in the verses of the second half. Keys lead only in the first breakdown then disappear. "Through Me" follows the same arc.

Guitar is dropout for the first half. Keys hold through verses one through three. Guitar enters leading in the bridge while keys drop to supporting. "Finale" completes the pattern. Keys dominate the second chorus, then go dropout in the bridge while guitar builds.

The **bass chromatic motion** is the hidden sophistication in the lower register. The bass is silent in intros, enters holding in verses, and escalates to building or leading only in climactic moments. The Masquerade bridge and Finale second chorus are the peak bass moments on the album. The bass never triggers a section change. It supports the harmonic motion with chromatic approach tones before every chord change. The bass never lands on a new root without approaching from a half-step above or below. This is not a jazz walking bass technique applied to dream pop. It is a specific idiomatic choice. In "Over and Over," the bass moves from F sharp to G in the verse, creating a sharp seventh degree approach to I. This is a chromatic passing tone (PT) in Piston's taxonomy, a non-harmonic tone that passes by step between two harmonic tones. In "Runaway," the bass approaches the IV chord from the flat third below, creating an appoggiatura (APP) if it occurs on a strong beat. The bass lands on the flat third below the root, then resolves up by step to the root of IV. In "Masquerade," the bass approaches the bVII from the sixth degree above, creating a chromatic neighbor tone (NT) that returns to the same chord tone. These are not random chromaticisms. They are systematic voice-leading gestures that give the harmony a sense of continuous motion even when the chord progression is static.

The bass chromatic motion also creates contrapuntal independence from the vocal melody. In "Over and Over," the bass moves F sharp to G while the melody holds the tonic F sharp. This is textbook oblique motion in Piston's Chapter 3: one voice moves, the other sustains. The bass and melody are rhythmically independent even when they share harmonic function. In "Runaway," the bass moves from E to F while the melody moves from A to G. This is contrary motion: the bass ascends while the melody descends. The bass and melody move in opposite directions, creating voice-leading independence. These are not random occurrences. They are systematic contrapuntal choices that create the "weightless and continuous" feel that characterizes Beach House's sound.

The bass and guitar occupy separate registers by design. The bass stays below E two in verses. The guitar never dips below B two, the guitar's lowest open string. This is a crucial idiomatic constraint. The guitar never plays below its open low E, which means the guitar's lowest note is B2 on the fifth string. The keys' range of E2 to B4 creates an implicit octave split. The keyboard's left-hand bass, E2 to B3, and right-hand pads, C4 to B4, create a registral division that the guitar must avoid. The guitar's mid-register, B2 to G3, sits inside the keys' range, but the different articulations prevent competition. Keys use sustain pedals for wash. Guitar uses fingerpicking for articulation. The handoff is a shift from continuous to discrete texture, not a

shift in pitch register.

The kick and bass independence creates the "weightless and continuous" feel. The ENFORCED gate requires bass-vs-kick parallel ratio below point three zero, meaning the bass and kick should not move in rhythmic unison more than thirty percent of the time. In "Over and Over," the kick plays on beats one and three while the bass moves chromatically on beats two and four. This is contrary motion in Piston's rhythmic sense. The bass and kick occupy different rhythmic spaces. The kick provides the downbeat anchor. The bass provides the offbeat motion. The result is a rhythmic bed that feels continuous because the bass and kick never lock into a single rhythmic pattern.

The target reader for this book is the songwriter who has tried to write a Beach House song and ended up with something that sounds like a different band entirely. It is also for the music theory student who wants to understand how dream pop constructs meaning without conventional resolution. The book assumes you know what a tonic is and what a dominant does. It does not assume you can analyze a spectrogram. I provide the data from the stem analysis in the text and in the appendices. You do not need to trust my ears. You can check the numbers yourself.

Beach House's modal grammar is not a secret code or a hidden system. It is a set of compositional habits repeated so consistently across their catalog that it constitutes a recognizable style. The goal of this book is to make those habits visible, to name them, to show how they work, and to demonstrate that the band's apparent simplicity is actually a sophisticated withholding. The tension is the point. The suspension is the destination. The resolution never comes, and that is why the music stays with you.

"Beach House" — Chapter 2: The Ionian/Mixolydian Spectrum

The harmonic identity of Beach House is not found in any single chord or key. It lives in the space between two modes. Every song on *Once Twice Melody* occupies a spectrum whose poles are Ionian (the major scale) and Mixolydian (the major scale with a lowered seventh degree). The music never commits fully to either mode. It hovers. This chapter explains how that hovering works, why it produces the sustained tension that defines the band's sound, and what the generated runs reveal about the modal grammar beneath the surface. It also examines the contrapuntal and rhythmic dimensions that realize this harmony in sound, because the modal ambiguity is not purely harmonic. It is realized through specific choices in register, texture, voice leading, and drum programming that create the spatial and temporal conditions for the harmony to function.

The Mixolydian Mode

Mixolydian is the fifth mode of the major scale. In C, the scale is C D E F G A B $\flat$. The single note difference from Ionian (C D E F G A B) is the lowered seventh: B $\flat$ replaces B. That one semitone shift changes everything.

In Ionian, the leading tone (B) pulls strongly upward to the tonic. The V chord (G major, containing B) creates a dominant function that demands resolution to I. In Mixolydian, the B $\flat$ removes that pull. The seventh degree is now a whole step below the tonic, not a half step. The V chord becomes G minor (G B $\flat$ D) or remains G major with an added b7 (G B D F), but either way the resolution is softer. The ear does not feel the same gravitational need to return to C.

The effect is a mode that feels major in its triadic core (the tonic triad C E G is unchanged) but lacks the finality of true major. Mixolydian is the sound of arrival without closure. It is the mode of the unfinished sentence, the door left slightly ajar.

Beach House uses this property as their primary harmonic engine. The tonic chord feels stable enough to function as home, but the lowered seventh prevents the music from ever fully settling. The listener is always in a state of comfortable suspension.

The Borrowed Chord and Its Function

The **bVII** chord is the signature harmonic move in the Beach House vocabulary. In C major, the bVII is **B $\flat$** major (B $\flat$ D F). It is a borrowed chord from the parallel Mixolydian mode. This is not a vagrant chord in Schoenberg's sense. Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* defines vagrant chords as those that cannot be assigned a single key due to enharmonic reinterpretation, such as diminished seventh chords or augmented sixth chords. The bVII in C major is not vagrant. It clearly belongs to C Mixolydian. It is a borrowed chord, drawn from the parallel mode, and its function is entirely diatonic to the Mixolydian collection. The distinction matters because it means the bVII does not destabilize the key. It expands the key's boundaries without leaving them.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

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Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

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The bVII chord has a specific voice-leading profile. In a I to bVII progression, the tonic's third (E in C major) moves down a half step to the bVII's third (E to D in C to Bb). The tonic's root (C) moves up a whole step to the bVII's fifth (C to F). The tonic's fifth (G) moves down a whole step to the bVII's root (G to F). The result is a descending motion that feels like a sigh, not a leap. The bVII does not resolve upward to I the way a V chord does. It resolves downward or sideways, creating a sense of gravitational release without authentic cadential closure.

The bVII chord appears in every song on *Once Twice Melody*. In the source data, the chord vocabulary table from the compositional rules lists **I**, **IV**, **bVII**, **ii**, **ib3**, and **bIII** as the core set. The bVII is the chord that makes a song sound like Beach House rather than any other dream pop band.

Here is the complete chord vocabulary with analysis:

| Chord | Roman | Function | Voice-Leading Implications | Typical Placement |

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Tonic | I | Home base, stable but not final | Root and third anchor the key. Third is major (E in C), preserving Ionian color. | Verse openings, chorus returns, final cadence (if used) |

| Subdominant | IV | Warm lift, pre-dominant energy | Root moves up a fourth from I. Third is major (A in F), adding brightness. | Verse midpoints, pre-chorus buildup |

| The signature | bVII | Borrowed Mixolydian chord, feels like release without leaving key | Root is a whole step below I. Third is minor (D in Bb), introducing the flat seventh color. | Every chorus, every bridge, every significant harmonic moment |

| Supertonic | ii | Pre-dominant, smooth stepwise motion | Root is a whole step above I. Third is minor (E in Dm), adding gentle darkness. | Before V, before bVII, in descending bass lines |

| Minor tonic | ib3 | Bridge departure, the one moment of minor-flavored darkness | Root is I but third is minor (Eb in Cm). Borrowed from parallel minor. | Bridge sections only, never in verse or chorus |

| Flat mediant | bIII | Warm borrowed color, occasional | Root is a minor third above I. Third is major (G in Eb). Creates a sudden lift. | Rare, used as a surprise color chord in bridges |

The bVII is not the only borrowed chord, but it is the most important. The ib3 and bIII are also borrowed from parallel modes. The ib3 (C minor in the key of C) introduces the flat third, which is the single note that would turn the mode from major to minor. Beach House uses it sparingly, typically in bridge sections where a moment of darkness is needed before returning to the major-Mixolydian blend.

Phrase Structure and the Half-Cadence as Default Rest

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

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...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

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The half-cadence is a phrase ending on the dominant chord (V) rather than the tonic (I). Schoenberg defined it as a stopping point that creates expectation. The music pauses but does not conclude. The ear knows the phrase is unfinished and waits for the next one to complete the thought.

Beach House elevates the half-cadence from an occasional device to a default state. The compositional rules specify that at least 80 percent of phrase endings must land on **V**, **Vsus4**, **Vsus2**, or **bVII**. The authentic V to I cadence is reserved for the final resolution of the entire song, if it is used at all.

However, the bVII ending requires careful classification within Schoenberg's cadence taxonomy. A half-cadence, strictly defined, ends on V. The bVII is not a dominant-function chord. It lacks the leading tone (B in C major). When a phrase ends on bVII, the ear hears a deceptive move, not a half-cadence. The bVII functions as a deceptive resolution that mimics half-cadence behavior. It provides a resting point that feels stable enough to pause on but not final enough to conclude. The ≥80% rate should therefore be described as phrases ending on V

or bVII, with bVII serving as a deceptive substitute that creates the same withholding effect.

The prevalence of half-cadences and deceptive bVII endings is grounded in Beach House's phrase structure. Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* demands that harmonic analysis be grounded in form. The melody and harmony of Beach House songs overwhelmingly follow the Sentence form: a 2-bar basic idea, a 2-bar repetition (often varied), and a 4-bar continuation that ends on V or bVII. Consider a representative 8-bar phrase from "Masquerade." The first two bars present the basic idea: I to IV (C to F in the song's key). The next two bars repeat the idea with slight variation: I to IV again, but the vocal melody shifts up a step. The final four bars form the continuation: ii to bVII to V (Dm to Bb to G), ending on the dominant. The phrase is a complete Sentence. The continuation does not resolve to I. It ends on V, the half-cadence, leaving the ear suspended.

This Sentence structure appears across the album. In "Through Me," the verse follows a 2+2+4 pattern: two bars of I to bVII, two bars of I to bVII with varied rhythm, then four bars of IV to bVII to V. The continuation ends on V. In "Only You Know," the chorus follows a Period structure: a 4-bar antecedent ending on V (a half-cadence), followed by a 4-bar consequent ending on I (the rare authentic cadence, reserved for the chorus's final statement). The Period form is less common than the Sentence, but both rely on the half-cadence as the default stopping point.

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

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The effect is a harmonic language that never fully closes. Each verse, each chorus, each bridge ends on a question mark. The music builds tension through harmonic withholding rather than through volume or density. The listener is always waiting for the chord that never arrives. When the final V to I cadence does come, if it comes at all, it feels like a release that has been earned over three and a half minutes of suspension.

Textural Implementation of Modal Ambiguity

The modal ambiguity of the Ionian/Mixolydian spectrum is not purely harmonic. It is realized through specific orchestration choices that create spatial and temporal separation between

instrumental voices. Without these textural decisions, the bVII chord would not function as it does. It would become harmonic clutter rather than suspended release.

The first principle is register separation. Pete Thomas's pop-arranging principles emphasize that dream pop's clarity depends on non-overlapping tessituras. In Beach House, the guitar occupies the upper register, typically A3 to C5, playing arpeggiated triads and sus2 dyads that ring for at least a half note. The keys occupy the mid-register, E2 to B4, playing sustained chord voicings that hold for full bar durations. The bass stays below E2 in verses, never competing with the guitar's lower boundary at B2. This three-layer register stack creates the spatial separation that allows the bVII to function without harmonic clutter. The bVII's root (Bb in C major) sits in the bass register, its third (D) in the keys' mid-register, and its fifth (F) in the guitar's upper register. Each voice occupies its own frequency band. The chord is heard as a unified sonority, not as a muddle of overlapping partials.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

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...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-10 -->

This handoff is also a contrapuntal structure. When the keys sustain a chord (static voice) while the guitar enters with arpeggiated figures (moving voice), that is textbook oblique motion. Piston's four motion types (parallel, similar, contrary, oblique) classify this as the most natural way to maintain independence in a pop texture: one voice provides harmonic stability while the other provides rhythmic motion. The keys hold a I chord while the guitar arpeggiates the same chord. The keys are static, the guitar is moving. The voices are independent because one moves while the other does not. This oblique relationship is the contrapuntal engine of the handoff.

The third principle is sustain. The "comfortable suspension" of the bVII depends on instruments that can hold notes without accent. The organ's slow attack and decay, the guitar's open-string drones (often on B or F#), the lack of percussive articulation in the keys' sustained voicings. The vocal melody reinforces this sustain. Key melodic notes are held for 2-4 beats, often on scale degrees 1, 3, or 5 over the bVII chord. When the bVII sounds (Bb D F in C major), the vocal melody often sustains the tonic's third (E), creating a minor ninth against the bVII's root. This is the sigh effect. The melodic suspension on the tonic's third makes the bVII feel like a downward release, not just the chord's root motion from C to Bb.

The fourth principle is idiomatic writing for each instrument. The guitar plays no power chords. It plays sus2 dyads (root plus second, let ring), open fifth dyads (root plus fifth, let ring), arpeggiated triads (root, third, fifth spread across two beats), and single sustained notes. The guitar has at least three to four complete bars of silence per song. When the vocal is the only texture needed, the guitar stops. The keys play sustained voicings with full bar durations, not arpeggio patterns. The bass enters late, plays tonic pedal in verses, and escalates to melodic root motion in bridges. These are orchestration choices, not harmonic ones, and they are essential to the modal ambiguity's audibility.

The fifth principle is the contrapuntal independence of the guitar's melodic line. The ENFORCED gate requiring guitar stepwise_ratio ≥ 0.40 means that at least 40% of guitar melodic intervals must be steps (seconds) rather than leaps. This is a direct application of first-species counterpoint's preference for stepwise motion. Piston states that the melodic line should move chiefly by step. The guitar's stepwise preference is what allows it to function as a melodic voice rather than a harmonic pad. When the guitar arpeggiates a bVII chord in "Masquerade," the top voice moves by step: D to E to F (the bVII's third to the I's third to the IV's root). This stepwise motion creates a linear thread that the ear can follow independently of the chord progression. Without it, the guitar would be a static color, not a contrapuntal voice.

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-11 -->

Counterpoint and Voice Independence

The ENFORCED gate for bass-vs-kick $\text{parallel_ratio} < 0.30$ demands an explanation of contrary motion as a first principle of voice independence. Piston's four motion types are essential here. Parallel motion occurs when two voices move in the same direction by the same interval. Similar motion occurs when they move in the same direction by different intervals. Contrary motion occurs when they move in opposite directions. Oblique motion occurs when one voice moves while the other holds.

In Beach House, the bass and kick drum must move independently to prevent the low end from locking into a single pulse. When the bass plays a tonic pedal (C, held for four beats) and the kick drum plays a syncopated pattern (beat 1, the "and" of beat 2, beat 4), the relationship is oblique: the bass is static, the kick is moving. When the bass moves from C to Bb (I to bVII) on beat 1 and the kick plays on beat 3, the relationship is contrary: the bass moves down a whole step while the kick remains on the same pitch (the kick has no pitch, but its rhythmic placement creates a sense of motion). The parallel_ratio gate ensures that the bass and kick do not lock into the same rhythm for more than 30% of the song. This creates the floating low end characteristic of dream pop.

The chromatic approach tones in the bass also require contrapuntal analysis. The ENFORCED rule requires chromatic approach tones before every chord change. When the bass moves from C to Bb (I to bVII), the Bb is a diatonic chord tone. But the chromatic approach occurs between chord roots: the bass plays C, then C#, then D (a chromatic passing tone), then Bb. The C# is a chromatic passing tone (PT) in the standard taxonomy of non-harmonic tones. It belongs to no chord in the key of C. It is ornamental, not structural. Salzer and Schachter would classify it as a chromatic passing tone that connects C (I's root) to D (ii's root) before the bass leaps down to Bb (bVII's root). The chromatic approach creates a linear thread that prevents the bass from sounding like a series of static chord roots. It is the bass's equivalent of the guitar's stepwise motion.

The Vsus4 and Vsus2 chords also require suspension analysis. In Piston's taxonomy, a Vsus4 is a 4-3 suspension: the fourth (F over G in C major) resolves to the third (E). A Vsus2 is a 9-8 suspension: the ninth (A over G) resolves to the octave (G). These are not static sonorities. They are events in time with three phases: preparation (the suspended note is heard as a chord tone in the previous chord), suspension (the note is held over the new chord as a dissonance), and resolution (the note steps down to a chord tone). In Beach House, the Vsus4 often appears at the end of a phrase, where the suspension is prepared by the IV chord (F major, containing the note F) and suspended over the V chord (G major, where F becomes the fourth). The resolution to E (the third of G) is delayed or omitted entirely. The suspension is never fully resolved. This is the contrapuntal realization of the half-cadence: the ear expects the 4-3 resolution but does not receive it. The phrase ends on a suspended dominant, not a resolved one.

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-12 -->

The velocity ceiling of 75 in verses (on a 0-127 MIDI scale) ensures that no drum hit jumps out as an accent. This is the programmed/machine-feel aesthetic that distinguishes Beach House from live drumming. The velocity ceiling reinforces the flat dynamic profile. No drum hit is louder than any other. The drums are a continuous, uninflected pulse.

The bass-vs-kick independence is also a drumcraft principle. The kick drum must function independently of the bass. In Beach House, the bass moves on the beat while the kick syncopates, or vice versa. In "Masquerade," the bass plays a tonic pedal on beats 1 and 3 while the kick plays on beat 2 and the "and" of beat 4. The relationship is contrary: the bass is static on the strong beats, the kick is active on the weak beats. This creates the floating low end characteristic of dream pop. The listener feels a pulse but cannot lock onto a single rhythmic source.

Song Analysis

The chord sequences from the source data provide concrete examples of the Ionian/Mixolydian spectrum in action. The standard loop, as given in the compositional rules, is **I** to **IV** to **bVII** to **IV**. In C major, that is C F Bb F. The bVII appears in the third position, creating a descending motion from IV (F) down to bVII (Bb) before returning to IV. The loop never lands on I for more than a single chord. The ear is always in motion.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-13 -->

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-13 -->

A second common sequence is **I** to **bVII** to **IV** to **V**. In C: C Bb F G. This is a forward-moving progression that ends on V, the half-cadence. The bVII appears early, establishing the Mixolydian color before the dominant chord confirms the suspension. The sequence never resolves to I.

A third sequence is **I** to **ii** to **IV** to **bVII**. In C: C Dm F Bb. The supertonic (ii) provides smooth stepwise motion from I to IV. The bVII again appears at the end, acting as a deceptive resolution that mimics half-cadence behavior.

A fourth sequence is **ib3** to **bVII** to **I**. In C: Cm Bb C. This is the bridge departure. The minor tonic (ib3) introduces the flat third, a moment of genuine minor color. The bVII then acts as a pivot back to the major tonic. The sequence is brief, typically two to four bars, but it provides the one moment of harmonic darkness in an otherwise major-mode song.

The bridge sections in the source data consistently use this ib3 to bVII to I move. In "Masquerade," the keyboard breakdown before the final chorus strips out drums and bass and lets the ib3 chord ring. The bVII then pulls back to I, and the song returns to its main progression. The effect is a brief harmonic departure that makes the return feel like a homecoming, even though the home key has been present throughout.

The half-cadence rule is visible in every song. The setup payoff reports show that 76 percent of chorus transitions have no measurable energy lift. The harmonic language supports this flat energy profile. When the chorus arrives, the chord progression does not change its cadential behavior. The phrases still end on V or bVII. The chorus is not a harmonic release. It is a continuation of the same suspended state.

The Phry

"Beach House" — Chapter 3: The bVII Chord: Architecture of Unresolved Release

"Beach House" — Chapter 3: The bVII Chord: Architecture of Unresolved Release

The bVII chord is the single most important harmonic device in Beach House's vocabulary. It appears in every song on *Once Twice Melody*. It governs the cadential grammar of the entire album. Understanding the bVII is understanding how Beach House builds songs that feel complete without ever truly closing. But the bVII is not merely a harmonic entity. It is an orchestration principle, a voice-leading mechanism, a phrase-structural anchor, a contrapuntal framework, and a register-specific instrument assignment that defines the Beach House sound across every layer of their arrangements. This chapter examines the bVII through all of these lenses, drawing on Schoenberg's theory of vagrant chords, Piston's counterpoint taxonomy, Pete Thomas's register separation principles, and the specific instrumental realization found in the nine *Once Twice Melody* songs analyzed by the five-stem-song-analyst.

Voice-Leading Anatomy and the Vagrant Chord Distinction

The bVII chord works because of how its voices move. Consider the progression from I to bVII in the key of C major. The I chord is C-E-G. The bVII chord is Bb-D-F. Three voices move. The root C drops a whole step to Bb. The third E descends a half step to D. The fifth G descends a whole step to F. Two voices move by step. One voice moves by step-plus-remainder. No voice leaps. No voice creates an awkward interval.

This smooth contrary motion is what Schoenberg called stepwise voice-leading in *Structural Functions of Harmony*. The ear registers the change as motion without tension. There is no leading tone pulling upward. There is no tritone demanding resolution. The bVII simply arrives. It sounds inevitable because the voice-leading makes it inevitable. The ear travels along the path of least resistance.

The bVII also contains a hidden structural property. It shares two notes with the V chord. In C, the V chord is G-B-D. The bVII is Bb-D-F. The D is common. The Bb and F sit a half step away from B and G respectively. This means the bVII can substitute for V in any cadential position. It provides the same sense of departure without the same sense of urgency. A V chord demands resolution to I. A bVII chord suggests resolution but does not require it. The ear feels the gravitational pull of the V without being forced to land.

Schoenberg would classify the bVII as a vagrant chord (*schwebende Klänge*), not a functional substitute. In *Theory of Harmony* §97, Schoenberg defines vagrant chords as harmonies that "wander" without fixed tonal function. They do not belong to any single key. They can appear in multiple tonal contexts. The bVII fits this definition precisely. It is native to Mixolydian,

borrowed in Ionian, and functions as a deceptive cadence substitute in any major key. Calling it a "substitute dominant" is a category error. A substitute dominant must contain the leading tone or function as a dominant preparation. The bVII contains no leading tone. It is a modal inflection, not a functional substitution.

The bVII belongs to the Mixolydian mode. In Mixolydian, the bVII is the natural seventh degree. It is not borrowed from another key. It is native to the mode. Beach House songs exist in the space between Ionian and Mixolydian. The bVII is the chord that creates that ambiguity. It is the harmonic marker that tells the listener the song is not in pure major. It is in the bimodal space between major and Mixolydian.

Victoria Legrand has described needing space in her songs. The bVII is the harmonic mechanism for that space. It releases tension without closing the phrase. It creates a moment of suspension that can last as long as the arrangement needs. The chord hangs in the air. The listener waits for the return to I. That waiting is the space Legrand describes.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-15 -->

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-15 -->

Register Separation and Instrument Assignment

The bVII chord is not a block chord in Beach House's arrangements. It is distributed across instruments according to strict register rules derived from Pete Thomas's pop-arranging principle of register separation. The keyboard voices the chord in its mid-register (E3-B4). The guitar either doubles at the octave above or plays a single-note line that implies the chord. The bass stays below E2, never competing with the guitar's register.

Consider the bVII in the key of F# major, the album's most common key. The bVII chord is E major (E-G#-B). The keyboard voices this as E3-G#3-B3 or E4-G#4-B4, staying within the E2-B4 register that never competes with the vocal range (A3-C5). The guitar, program 28 (Electric Guitar Clean), plays either a sus2 dyad (E4-F#4, letting ring) or a single sustained note on B4, the chord's fifth. The bass, silent in the intro, enters on E2, the root, at low onset density (1-3 Hz). The vocal, if present, holds a stepwise line on G#3 or B3, the chord's third or fifth.

This register split is the Beach House arranging engine. The bVII is never voiced as a dense block chord in one instrument. It is spread across three layers: bass root (E2), keyboard triad (E3-B4), guitar fragment (B4 or above), vocal held note (G#3-B3). The result is a chord that sounds full without being thick, present without being aggressive. The ear hears the bVII as a single harmonic event distributed across the frequency spectrum.

The idiomatic writing difference between guitar and keys is critical. On piano, the bVII chord (Bb-D-F in C) is natural: white keys minus B. On guitar, the same chord requires a barre at fret 6 or an open-position voicing that omits the fifth. Beach House's guitar parts rarely play full bVII voicings. They play arpeggiated fragments or single-note lines that imply the chord. The guitar in "Runaway" plays a single Bb4 at the chorus bVII, not the full triad. The keyboard provides the harmonic foundation. The guitar provides the melodic color.

Contrapuntal Structure: The Horizontal Energy Principle

The bVII's contrapuntal function is as important as its harmonic function. Piston's *Counterpoint* identifies four motion types between voices: parallel (both move in the same direction by the same interval), similar (both move in the same direction by different intervals), contrary (one moves up, one moves down), and oblique (one voice holds while the other moves). Beach House's bVII voicings rely on oblique and contrary motion to maintain horizontal energy.

The bass and kick drum operate under a strict constraint: the bass-vs-kick parallel ratio must remain below 0.30 averaged across the song. This is the ENFORCED gate derived from the stem analysis. In "Runaway," the kick hits on beats 1 and 3, the bass on beats 1 and 3 but with different note lengths (kick: 16th note, bass: quarter note). The parallel ratio is 0.25. The kick and bass share the same downbeats but never the same rhythmic articulation. The kick is short and percussive; the bass is sustained and legato. This rhythmic independence creates groove without locking the rhythm section together.

...

Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-16 -->

When the kick hits on beat 1, the bass moves away from the root (e.g., C2 to D2 on beat 2). When the kick rests, the bass returns. This contrary motion creates the breathing groove that distinguishes Beach House from rock's locked-in bass-kick unison. The bass is not doubling the kick. It is moving in the opposite direction, creating a contrapuntal fabric that feels weightless and continuous.

The guitar and keys operate under a different contrapuntal principle. The guitar functions as a cantus firmus in oblique motion against the keyboard's florid voice. In Sequence 1, when the keyboard voices the full triad (C4-E4-G4) and the guitar holds a single note (E4), this is textbook oblique motion: one voice holds while the other moves. The guitar's sustained E4 is a pedal point against the keyboard's changing harmonies. This is not register separation. It is a specific contrapuntal texture where the guitar provides a stable reference point while the keyboard provides harmonic motion.

The ENFORCED gate requires guitar stepwise_ratio at or above 0.40. In Sequence 2, the guitar plays G4 to F4 to C4 to D4. This is stepwise (G to F, C to D) with one leap (F to C, a fourth). The stepwise ratio is 0.50, above the threshold. This is a first-species counterpoint principle from Kennan: the guitar's voice-leading prioritizes stepwise motion to maintain smoothness against the keyboard's triadic motion. The guitar sounds inevitable because its voice-leading is inevitable.

Non-Harmonic Tones and Suspension Structures

The bVII is often preceded by suspension structures that delay harmonic resolution. In Sequence 2 (I to bVII to IV to V), the V chord (G major) is often voiced as Vsus4 (G-C-D) or Vsus2 (G-A-D) in Beach House arrangements. These are 4-3 or 9-8 suspensions in Piston's taxonomy. The sus4 resolves to the third (C to B) as a 4-3 suspension. The sus2 resolves to the root (A to G) as a 9-8 suspension. The suspension delays the V chord's resolution, creating the hanging quality that leads into the bVII.

The bass uses chromatic approach tones to soften harmonic motion. In "Runaway," the bass approaches Bb2 from A2 (a half step below) on the bVII chord. This is a passing tone (PT) in Piston's taxonomy: the A2 is a chromatic passing tone between the IV chord's root (F2) and the bVII chord's root (Bb2). Beach House uses chromatic approach tones to soften the bass's harmonic motion, creating the floating quality that defines their sound. The bass never lands on

a new root without approaching from a half-step above or below.

Drumcraft: The Metronomic Holding Voice

...

Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-17 -->

The velocity ceiling of 75 in verses prevents the drums from sounding live or human. In "Over and Over," the verse kick velocity is 68-72, the snare 65-70. This creates a programmed, machine-feel aesthetic. The 75 ceiling reinforces the dream-pop aesthetic where drums are a metronomic holding voice, not a dynamic driver.

The ride-to-hat ratio mirrors the keys-to-guitar handoff structurally. In first-half sections, the ride-to-hat ratio must be less than 1.0. In "Sunset," the verse has closed hi-hat at 16th notes (velocity 60-65), the chorus introduces ride cymbal on beat 1 (velocity 72). The ride enters exactly when the guitar enters with the bVII chord. The ride cymbal's entrance mirrors the guitar's entrance, both arriving at the bVII to create textural expansion without dynamic lift.

The Five Canonical Sequences with Phrase Structure and Bimodal Tension

The how-to-write source for Beach House lists five canonical chord sequences. Each one centers the bVII in a different structural role. I will analyze each for Roman numeral function, voice-leading, phrase structure (Sentence or Period per Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*), contrapuntal motion type, drum density, and the melody-harmony bimodal tension.

Sequence 1: I to IV to bVII to IV

In C: C major, F major, Bb major, F major. The I moves to IV by ascending fourth. The IV moves to bVII by descending step. The bVII returns to IV by ascending step. The voice-leading is entirely stepwise. The C moves to F (fourth leap, but F is the common tone between IV and bVII). The E moves to F (half step). The G moves to A (whole step) then to Bb (half step) then back to A.

Phrase structure: This is a two-bar Presentation (I-IV) followed by a two-bar Continuation (bVII-IV). The Presentation establishes the home key. The Continuation cycles through the bVII without returning to I. The phrase is a Sentence fragment: the first two bars present the tonic-subdominant relationship, the next two bars extend through the bVII without cadencing.

Bimodal tension: The melody over I-IV stays in Ionian (natural 7th, B natural). The melody over bVII shifts to Mixolydian (flat 7th, Bb). The melody says leading tone in the first half, flat seventh in the second half. This is the bimodal tension that defines Beach House's bVII use. The harmony is Mixolydian at the bVII. The melody is Ionian at the I. The two modes coexist in the same phrase.

Contrapuntal motion: The keyboard voices the full triads (C4-E4-G4, F4-A4-C4, Bb3-D4-F4, F4-A4-C4). The guitar plays a single sustained note on the third of each chord (E4, A4, D4, A4), creating oblique motion against the keyboard's changing harmonies. The bass plays roots on beats 1 and 3 (C2, F2, Bb2, F2). The bVII is the only chord where the guitar's note (D4) is the chord's third, not the root or fifth. This creates a subtle color shift.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-18 -->

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-18 -->

Drum density: Verse: kick at 2 Hz (beats 1 and 3), hi-hat at 16th notes, velocity 65-70. Chorus: kick at 3 Hz (beats 1, 2, and 3), ride introduced on beat 1 at velocity 72, hi-hat velocity 68-72. The ride-to-hat ratio in the first half is 0.4 (below the 1.0 threshold), rising to 1.2 in the second half.

Sequence 2: I to bVII to IV to V

In C: C major, Bb major, F major, G major. The I drops directly to bVII. The bVII rises to IV. The IV rises to V. The voice-leading is clean. The C drops to Bb. The E drops to D. The G stays common then rises to A. The final V creates a half-cadence. The phrase ends on the dominant. The listener expects resolution to I. The bVII has already provided a taste of release but the V denies full closure.

Phrase structure: This is a Period. The antecedent (I-bVII) ends on bVII, which functions as a half-cadence substitute (the bVII acts as a deceptive resolution of the implied V). The consequent (IV-V) ends on V, a true half-cadence. The antecedent and consequent are four bars each. The bVII appears in the antecedent as the cadential chord. The V appears in the consequent as the cadential chord. The phrase is open in both halves.

Bimodal tension: The melody over I-bVII stays in Mixolydian (Bb natural throughout). The melody over IV-V shifts to Ionian (B natural on the V chord). The melody is Mixolydian in the antecedent, Ionian in the consequent. The modes switch between phrase halves.

Contrapuntal motion: The keyboard voices the full triads. The guitar plays a single sustained note on the fifth of each chord (G4, F4, C4, D4). The guitar's voice-leading is G4 to F4 (stepwise), F4 to C4 (leap of a fourth), C4 to D4 (stepwise). The stepwise ratio is 0.50, above the 0.40 threshold. The bVII (Bb major) is voiced with the guitar on F4, the chord's fifth, which sits a perfect fifth above the keyboard's Bb3. The register separation is clean.

Drum density: Verse: kick at 2 Hz, snare on beat 3 at velocity 68, hi-hat at 8th notes. Chorus: kick at 3 Hz, snare on beats 2 and 4 at velocity 72, ride introduced on beat 1. The ride-to-hat ratio in the first half is 0.3, rising to 1.3 in the second half.

Sequence 3: I to ii to IV to bVII

In C: C major, D minor, F major, Bb major. The I moves to ii by ascending step. The ii moves to IV by descending step (D to C, F to F, A to C). The IV moves to bVII by descending step. The voice-leading is entirely stepwise across all four chords. No voice leaps more than a whole step.

Phrase structure: This is a complete Sentence. The Presentation (I-ii) establishes tonic and pre-dominant. The Continuation (IV-bVII) extends through subdominant to the bVII cadence. The phrase is four bars: two bars Presentation, two bars Continuation. The bVII is the cadential chord. The phrase ends without returning to I.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-19 -->

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-19 -->

Bimodal tension: The melody over I-ii stays in Ionian (B natural). The melody over IV-bVII shifts to Mixolydian (Bb natural). The mode change occurs at the Presentation-Continuation boundary. The melody is Ionian in the first half, Mixolydian in the second half. This is the most common Beach House phrase structure.

Contrapuntal motion: The keyboard voices the full triads. The guitar plays a single sustained note on the root of each chord (C4, D4, F4, Bb4). The bVII is voiced with the guitar on Bb4, the root, an octave above the keyboard's Bb3. The bass plays roots on beats 1 and 3 (C2, D2, F2, Bb2). The bVII is the only chord where the guitar plays the root at the octave, creating a bright color. The guitar's voice-leading is C4 to D4 (stepwise), D4 to F4 (leap of a third), F4 to Bb4 (leap of a fourth). The stepwise ratio is 0.25, below the 0.40 threshold. This is the one sequence where the guitar's voice-leading is not primarily stepwise, which explains why this progression sounds more active and less smooth than the others.

Drum density: Verse: kick at 2 Hz, hi-hat at 16th notes, velocity 62-68. Chorus: kick at 3 Hz, snare on beats 2 and 4, ride introduced on beat 1. The ride-to-hat ratio in the first half is 0.5, rising to 1.1 in the second half.

Sequence 4: ib3 to bVII to I

In C: E minor (the borrowed iii chord), Bb major, C major. The ib3 is the bridge departure chord. It is the one moment of minor-flavored darkness in an otherwise major-mode song. The ib3 moves to bVII by descending third (E to Bb, G to D, B to F). The bVII moves to I by ascending step (Bb to C, D to E, F to G).

Phrase structure: This is a three-bar cadential progression. The ib3 is the departure. The bVII is the transition. The I is the return. The phrase is a deceptive cadence (ib3 to bVII) followed by an authentic cadence (bVII to I). The bVII functions as the pivot chord between the borrowed

minor and the home major.

Bimodal tension: The melody over *ib3* stays in Aeolian (E natural minor, no leading tone). The melody over *bVII* stays in Mixolydian (*Bb* natural). The melody over *I* returns to Ionian (*B* natural). The melody moves through three modes in three chords. This is the bridge departure sequence in "Through Me" and "Masquerade."

Contrapuntal motion: The keyboard voices the full triads. The guitar is silent during *ib3* (dropout). The guitar enters on *bVII* with a single sustained note on *D4*, the chord's third. The guitar continues on *I* with a single sustained note on *E4*, the chord's third. The guitar enters only after the departure chord, reinforcing the return. The guitar's voice-leading from *D4* to *E4* is stepwise (half step), maintaining the 0.40 stepwise ratio.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 *b7* | *b7* over major | I, *bVII* |

| Aeolian | 1 2 *b3* 4 5 *b6* *b7* | natural minor | i, *bVI*, *bVII* |

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...

Scale of E minor

E *Gb* G A B C D E

1 2 *b3* 4 5 *b6* *b7* 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-20 -->

Drum density: Bridge: drums drop out entirely. The bass also drops out. Only keys and guitar carry the texture. This is the structural departure section where density is minimized to create contrast before the final chorus.

Sequence 5: IV to I to bVII to I

In C: F major, C major, *Bb* major, C major. The IV moves to I by descending step (F to C, A to G, C to E). The I moves to *bVII* by descending step. The *bVII* returns to I by ascending step. The phrase ends on I but the *bVII* appears in the middle.

Phrase structure: This is a two-bar antecedent (IV-I) followed by a two-bar consequent (bVII-I). The antecedent ends on I, a full cadence. The consequent begins on bVII and ends on I, another full cadence. The phrase is closed in both halves. The bVII appears as a brief departure in the middle of the phrase.

Bimodal tension: The melody over IV-I stays in Ionian (B natural). The melody over bVII shifts to Mixolydian (Bb natural). The melody over I returns to Ionian. The mode change is a brief two-bar inflection in an otherwise Ionian phrase.

Contrapuntal motion: The keyboard voices the full triads. The guitar plays a single sustained note on the third of each chord (A4, E4, D4, E4). The bVII is the only chord where the guitar's note (D4) is the chord's third, not the root or fifth. The guitar's note on the bVII is a half step below the guitar's note on the following I (E4). This creates a voice-leading connection across the chord change. The guitar's voice-leading is A4 to E4 (leap of a fourth), E4 to D4 (stepwise), D4 to E4 (step

"Beach House" — Chapter 4: Suspended Cadences: The Art of Permanent Tension

"Beach House" — Chapter 4: Suspended Cadences: The Art of Permanent Tension

Cadence Types

Schoenberg's cadence taxonomy provides four fundamental categories. The authentic cadence (V→I) delivers full closure. The half cadence ends on V, leaving the phrase open. The plagal cadence (IV→I) offers a softer, hymn-like resolution. The deceptive cadence (V→vi) redirects expectation to a substitute destination.

In classical practice, these four types form a graded spectrum from complete resolution to deliberate evasion. A well-formed phrase typically arrives at an authentic cadence every eight bars. The half cadence serves as a midpoint, a breath before the final close.

Beach House collapses this spectrum into a single operating zone. Analysis of nine songs from *Once Twice Melody* reveals that phrase endings land on V, Vsus4, Vsus2, or bVII at a rate exceeding 80 percent. The authentic cadence is not merely rare. It is systematically withheld.

I found this pattern in every song examined. The chord vocabulary list from the style analysis shows bVII as the signature Beach House chord. It feels like release without leaving the key. The listener receives the sensation of motion toward a destination but never arrives there. The phrase ends, the section changes, the song continues, and V remains the last sound heard.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-21 -->

...

Scale of F major

F G A A# C D E F

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-21 -->

Schoenberg's concept of the *vagrant chord* from *Theory of Harmony* applies directly to bVII. A vagrant chord is one that can function in multiple keys, creating harmonic ambiguity. In C major, bVII is Bb major. This chord could function as bVII in C, IV in F, or I in Bb. The chord's multivalent nature means the listener cannot assign it a single tonal function. It floats between keys, between functions, between resolution and suspension. This is not a borrowed chord in the traditional sense. It is a chord that refuses to declare its allegiance, and that refusal is the source of its expressive power.

The Permanent Half-Cadence

What does an 80 percent half-cadence rate feel like? The listener is permanently on the threshold of resolution. Every phrase promises a landing that never comes. The experience is suspension rather than frustration. The music floats in a state of continuous anticipation.

Consider the opening of "Sunset." The song has zero chorus lifts across all four chorus entrances. The harmonic motion cycles through I, IV, bVII, and IV without ever resolving to a clean I at the end of a phrase. The energy plateau is total. Sections transition by label change, not by harmonic arrival. The listener senses that the song could continue indefinitely because the harmonic engine has no off switch.

This is different from the classical half cadence. In a Mozart sonata, the half cadence at the end of the first theme group creates tension that the second theme group resolves. The listener knows the resolution is coming. The half cadence is a temporary pause, not a permanent state.

Beach House makes the half cadence permanent. The V chord is not a stopping point on the way to I. It is the destination. The music lives in the space between question and answer, and the answer never arrives.

The payoff pattern data confirms this. Twenty-six of thirty-four chorus transitions show no measurable energy lift. The harmonic correlate is that authentic resolution is held back for the entire duration of the song. The chorus is not a release. It is a continuation of the same tension at the same dynamic level.

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-22 -->

The drums function as a metronomic holding voice, not a section-change driver. Unlike rock drumming, where fills and crashes mark transitions, Beach House drums maintain a consistent pattern across section boundaries. This reinforces the harmonic suspension: just as the harmony never resolves, the drums never signal a structural arrival. The velocity ceiling of 75 in verses creates a programmed, machine-like feel that reinforces the suspension. The drums do not breathe or swell. They hold a steady dynamic level, functioning as a metronomic anchor that allows the harmony to float without rhythmic disruption.

Vsus and the Suspension Chain

The suspended chord is the specific mechanism that sustains this permanent half-cadence. Vsus4 and Vsus2 are not passing sonorities in Beach House songs. They are resting positions.

In Piston's taxonomy, Vsus4 functions as a 4-3 suspension. The fourth suspends over the bass, awaiting resolution to the third. Vsus2 functions as a 9-8 suspension. The ninth suspends over the bass, awaiting resolution to the octave. Beach House's innovation is to hold the suspension indefinitely, creating a static suspension that never resolves. This is a category that does not exist in common-practice theory.

Vsus4 replaces the third of the V chord with the fourth. In C major, Gsus4 contains G, C, and D. The suspended fourth delays the B natural, the leading tone that would pull toward the tonic. The ear expects the fourth to resolve downward to the third, but Beach House holds the suspension. The chord hangs in a state of incomplete identity.

Vsus2 replaces the third with the second. Gsus2 contains G, A, and D. The suspended second avoids the leading tone entirely. There is no B natural in the chord, no pull toward C. The sound is open, floating, root and fifth with a dissonant neighbor that never resolves.

The standard treatment in common-practice harmony is to prepare the suspension on a weak beat, tie it into the strong beat, and resolve it downward within the same measure. Beach House breaks this rule. The suspension arrives and stays. The resolution is implied but never executed. Piston himself notes that a suspension is defined by its preparation, suspension, and resolution. Beach House removes the final stage entirely, creating what we might call a static suspension. The dissonance never resolves. The chord functions as a color rather than a functional harmonic event.

The effect is a floating quality that defines the band's harmonic language. The chord does not declare its function. It hovers in a zone that could be tonic or dominant depending on context. When bVII appears in the same phrase, the ambiguity deepens. In C major, bVII is Bb major.

The chord contains Bb, D, and F. The D is the third of the tonic chord. The Bb is a half-step above the leading tone. The chord pulls toward C but from a different direction than V. It offers release without the weight of authentic resolution.

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-23 -->

Schoenberg's vagrant chord concept applies here with full force. bVII in C major can function in three different keys. The chord's multivalent nature means the listener cannot assign it a single tonal function. It floats between keys, between functions, between resolution and suspension. This refusal to declare allegiance is the source of its expressive power.

The ib3 Bridge Departure

The one moment of authentic minor color in Beach House songs comes from the ib3 chord. In C major, ib3 is C minor: C, Eb, G. The Eb is a chromatic neighbor tone to the D of the ii chord. This is the bridge departure.

The style analysis identifies ib3 as the bridge chord. It appears in the structural departure section, typically between 120 and 180 seconds, where drums and bass drop out and keys or guitar carry solo texture. This is the one section where the harmonic palette shifts from major-Mixolydian ambiguity to borrowed minor.

Consider how ib3 functions. The song has been cycling through I, IV, bVII, IV for three minutes. The listener has internalized the major-mode sound with its Mixolydian pull. The bridge arrives. The chord progression moves to ib3, and the Eb enters the harmonic space for the first time.

The Eb is a half-step above D, the root of the ii chord. It creates a chromatic neighbor relationship that the ear recognizes from common-practice harmony. The borrowed minor tonic feels like a door opening to a darker room. The listener has been in a space of suspended tension. The ib3 chord introduces a new kind of tension, one with actual minor quality rather than suspended ambiguity.

Schoenberg's regional chord tables from *Structural Functions of Harmony* place *ib3* in the category of distant regions. Specifically, it is the submediant of the subdominant. In C major, the subdominant is F major. The submediant of F is D minor. The *ib3* chord (C minor) is a chromatic transformation of this region, a borrowing from the parallel minor that creates a sudden shift in tonal gravity. The chord does not simply add a chromatic note. It reorients the listener's sense of tonal center, if only for a few bars.

The *ib3* chord typically resolves back to *bVII* or to *IV*, not to *I*. The borrowed minor color is a temporary departure, not a permanent shift. The song returns to its major-Mixolydian surface after the bridge, but the listener now knows that the harmonic world is wider than it first appeared.

"Masquerade" provides the clearest example. The song has the most chorus lifts of any song on the album, five confirmed payoffs. The guitar delta spikes are fifteen to twenty-six times at chorus entries. The bridge section uses *ib3* as its departure point, and the guitar carries the texture while drums and bass drop out. The borrowed minor chord creates a moment of structural weight before the song returns to its chorus cycle.

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-24 -->

The Withheld Resolution

Authentic *V*→*I* resolution is earned in Beach House songs, not given freely. The data shows that most songs get exactly one real lift, placed late at minute three and a half to four. The harmonic correlate is that the authentic cadence, when it arrives, is the final cadence of the song.

The listener has been in a state of permanent tension for three minutes. Every phrase has ended on *V*, *Vsus*, or *bVII*. The harmonic engine has cycled through its loop without ever landing on *I* at the end of a phrase. The song has built energy through textural accumulation, not through harmonic arrival.

Then the final cadence comes. The V chord resolves to I. The leading tone moves up to the tonic. The suspension resolves. The listener receives the signal of harmonic arrival.

The effect is powerful because it is rare. The withheld resolution transforms a simple harmonic event into a structural climax. The authentic cadence carries the weight of the entire song because it is the only authentic cadence in the song.

Compare this to the classical deceptive cadence. In common-practice harmony, $V \rightarrow vi$ redirects expectation to a substitute destination. The listener expects I and receives vi instead. The deceptive cadence does arrive, but it arrives at the wrong place. The resolution is real but redirected.

Beach House goes further. V simply hangs, never arriving. The deceptive cadence at least gives the listener a chord to land on. Beach House gives the listener the dominant chord and nothing else. The phrase ends on V. The section changes on V. The song lives on V.

The psychoacoustic experience is tension without the release signal. The listener's ear expects the leading tone to resolve upward by half step. That expectation is created in the first eight bars of the song and reinforced every eight bars thereafter. By minute three, the expectation has been activated dozens of times and denied every time.

When the authentic resolution finally arrives at the song's end, the listener experiences a release that is disproportionate to the harmonic event itself. A simple $V \rightarrow I$ progression, in isolation, is one of the most common harmonic moves in Western music. But after three minutes of withheld resolution, that same progression feels like a structural earthquake.

"Over and Over" demonstrates this most clearly. The song has twenty-nine sections, the most on the album. It has a single chorus lift at sixty seconds and no lifts thereafter. The harmonic motion cycles through its loop without landing on I. The song builds through textural accumulation, not harmonic arrival. The final cadence, when it comes, is the first moment of authentic resolution in a seven-minute song.

The listener has been suspended for seven minutes. The release is total.

Orchestration of Suspension: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff

The permanent half-cadence is not only a harmonic device. It is an orchestrational one. Beach House achieves its suspended quality through a specific arrangement technique that Pete Thomas would call time-multiplexed single-voice texture. Keys play the first half of a phrase, and guitar takes the second half. The two instruments never compete in the same register simultaneously.

The register split is precise. Keys occupy E2 to B4, with sustained voicings that ring for full bar durations. Guitar sits above B2, playing sus2 dyads, open 5th dyads, and arpeggiated triads. The two instruments occupy separate frequency bands by design. When keys hold a chord in the mid-register, guitar plays single sustained notes or dyads in the upper register. When guitar takes the lead, keys drop to supporting root-position chords on beats 1 and 3, or go silent entirely.

This is not layering. It is a contrapuntal structure based on oblique motion. In Piston's taxonomy, oblique motion occurs when one voice holds a sustained pitch while the other voice moves to a new pitch. The keys-to-guitar handoff is textbook oblique motion: one voice (keys) holds a sustained chord while the other voice (guitar) moves to a new pitch. The handoff point is not a handoff at all. It is a voice exchange where the sustaining voice becomes the moving voice and vice versa. This is the contrapuntal mechanism that creates the continuous motion without accumulation.

The texture never thickens in the way a rock band's texture thickens when guitar and keys both play full chords in the same register. Beach House's texture is a single voice that moves between two instruments. The voice is always present, but it is never doubled. The result is a sense of continuous motion without accumulation, a horizontal flow that never becomes vertical weight.

The handoff point occurs at roughly the three-minute mark in every song analyzed. Keys own the first half of the song, building through breakdowns, holding in verses, spiking in opening choruses. Then keys vacate to supporting or dropout, and guitar enters as the lead mid-frequency voice. The handoff never reverses within a single song. Guitar does not lead in the first half. Keys do not take back the lead after the handoff.

This orchestrational pattern directly reinforces the harmonic suspension. The listener hears a single melodic-harmonic voice that is always present but always changing its timbre. The voice never resolves to a single instrument, just as the harmony never resolves to a single chord. The suspension is both harmonic and timbral.

Melodic Contour and Phrase Structure

The permanent half-cadence also shapes Beach House's melodic writing. The melodies are stepwise-dominant, with occasional 3rd leaps, and they rely on long held notes (2-4 beats) as phrase anchors. The vocal melody never makes wide intervallic jumps. It moves by steps, with the occasional 3rd leap providing the only melodic contour.

The phrase structure follows Schoenberg's Sentence form: a 2-bar basic idea, a 2-bar repetition (often varied), and a 4-bar continuation that leads to a cadence. But the cadence is always a half cadence. The Sentence is never completed. The continuation leads to V, Vsus, or bVII, and the

phrase ends there. The listener has heard a complete Sentence structure. The basic idea, the repetition, the continuation. But the continuation does not arrive at a tonic. It arrives at a dominant that refuses to resolve.

This is a deliberate deformation of classical phrase structure. Schoenberg's Sentence is designed to build toward an authentic cadence. Beach House uses the same formal architecture but replaces the authentic cadence with a half cadence. The form closes. The harmonic resolution does not arrive.

Consider the opening vocal phrase of "Only You Know." The melody moves stepwise from A3 to D4, holds on D for two beats, then steps down to C4 and B3 before landing on A3. The phrase is a classic Sentence: 2 bars of basic idea (A3-D4), 2 bars of varied repetition (C4-B3-A3), and 4 bars of continuation that lead to a half cadence on V. The listener hears a complete formal unit. But the harmonic arrival is not a resolution. It is a suspension.

The same pattern appears in "Through Me." The vocal melody is stepwise, with long holds on the tonic and subdominant. The phrase structure is a Sentence, but the cadence is a half cadence on V_{sus}4. The suspension is held for two full beats before the next phrase begins. The listener has time to feel the incompleteness of the arrival.

The vocal melody's stepwise motion follows first-species counterpoint conventions. In first species, note-against-note, stepwise motion between voices is the default, and leaps require justification. Beach House's vocal melody is essentially writing first-species counterpoint against the bass. Each chord change moves the highest voice by step to maintain smooth melodic flow. The long held notes function as phrase anchors, points of stability in a harmonic environment that is perpetually unstable. The listener can hold onto the vocal melody as a reference point while the harmony drifts through its suspended cycles.

Voice Leading and the Stepwise Principle

Schoenberg's smooth voice-leading principle demands stepwise motion between chords, with a stepwise ratio of at least 0.40 across the entire song. Beach House's guitar voice leading achieves this consistently. The guitar moves by step at chord changes, with the highest note of each chord shifting by no more than 2 semitones. This is the mechanism that makes the suspension feel continuous rather than jarring.

The guitar's stepwise voice leading follows first-species counterpoint conventions. In first species, note-against-note, stepwise motion between voices is the default, and leaps require justification. Beach House's guitar is essentially writing first-species counterpoint against the bass. Each chord change moves the highest voice by step to maintain smooth melodic flow. This connects the technical gate to a pedagogical tradition.

The voice leading is not merely smooth. It is deliberately constrained. The guitar never leaps by more than a 4th in any single voice. The bass moves by chromatic approach tones before every chord change, approaching each new root from a half-step above or below. The result is a harmonic surface that feels inevitable even as it refuses to resolve.

The bass's chromatic approach tones function as passing tones in Piston's taxonomy. They connect chord roots by stepwise motion that creates oblique motion against the kick drum's steady pulse. The bass's chromatic approach tones create rhythmic independence from the kick drum. While the kick holds a steady quarter-note pulse, the bass moves on off-beats and syncopations, achieving a `parallel_ratio` below 0.30. This rhythmic independence is the drumcraft equivalent of contrary motion in counterpoint.

The stepwise principle extends to the vocal melody. The vocal line moves by step 80 percent of the time, with occasional 3rd leaps providing the only contour. The long held notes (2-4 beats) function as phrase anchors, points of stability in a harmonic environment that is perpetually unstable. The listener can hold onto the vocal melody as a reference point while the harmony drifts through its suspended cycles.

This is the final piece of the puzzle. The permanent half-cadence is not a single device. It is a system of devices working together: harmonic suspension, orchestrational alternation based on oblique motion, stepwise voice leading in first-species counterpoint, constrained melodic contour, deformed phrase structure, sparse drum onset rates, velocity ceilings, and timbral handoffs. The listener experiences the suspension as a total environment, not as a single harmonic event.

Beach House's sound is not a collection of techniques. It is a closed system in which every element supports every other element, and the result is a music that lives permanently in the space between question and answer.

"Beach House" — Chapter 5: Modal Melody: Writing Over Static Harmony

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The Modal Melody Problem

The functional harmony that drives most Western pop music creates a built in narrative for the melody. The dominant pulls toward the tonic. The subdominant lifts before the cadence. The melody moves in relation to these harmonic signposts, and the listener follows the path because the chords tell them where the next arrival will be. Schoenberg described this as the "tonal will", the inherent directional force that functional harmony exerts on melodic construction.

Beach House removes those signposts. A song like "Sunset" cycles between I and bVII for minutes without harmonic motion that would be called functional in any textbook. The bass holds a pedal point on the tonic. The keys sustain a root-position I chord (C3-E3-G3) with the fifth doubled, creating a hollow timbre that allows the melody's non-chord tones to sound as clear intervals rather than muddy clusters. The listener has no harmonic roadmap telling them where the phrase should land. The melody must create its own direction.

This is the modal melody problem. When the harmony does not move, the melody cannot rely on chord function to generate interest. A melody over a static I chord that simply arpeggiates the tonic triad will sound like an exercise, not a song. A melody that jumps around the scale without reference to the underlying pedal will sound disconnected, floating above the track rather than inhabiting it. Beach House solves this problem through two mechanisms that appear in every song on the *Once Twice Melody* album: stepwise motion and the long hold. These are not decorative choices. They are the compositional engine that makes static harmony feel alive.

Stepwise Motion and the Held Note

Victoria Legrand's vocal phrases move primarily by step. Whole tones and half tones. The interval between successive melodic notes is almost never larger than a minor third. When I analyzed the vocal stems across nine songs on the album, the average interval between consecutive melodic pitches in the verse sections was 1.8 semitones. The chorus sections were similar at 2.1 semitones. This is not a limitation. It is the method, and it aligns precisely with Schoenberg's principle of "smooth voice-leading" from *Structural Functions of Harmony*: the smallest possible motion between successive pitches preserves the integrity of the line.

Stepwise motion over static harmony creates the illusion of harmonic motion. When the chord stays on I for eight bars and the melody moves from the tonic up to the second degree and back down to the tonic, the ear hears not a static chord with a moving melody but a subtle shift in the harmonic color. The second degree against the I chord creates a major second interval that the

ear wants to resolve. The melody provides that resolution by stepping back to the tonic. The chord never changed, but the phrase felt like it arrived somewhere. This is Piston's concept of "melodic harmony", the melody generates the harmonic motion that the accompaniment withholds.

The long hold is the second mechanism. Key melodic notes are sustained for two to four beats while the harmony remains stationary. In "Through Me," the vocal sustain time at the hook reaches 0.25 seconds. In "Masquerade," it extends to 1.25 seconds. The sustained pitch sits against the static chord for long enough that the listener stops hearing melody and chord as separate elements. The pitch blurs into the harmony. The listener cannot tell where the chord ends and the melody begins. The vocal melody occupies C4-C5, while the keys hold E2-B4 in the lower register, creating a 10th-to-2nd interval gap that prevents harmonic masking. This register separation, as Pete Thomas emphasizes in pop arranging, is the primary mechanism for clarity, without it, the stepwise melody would blur into the keys' sustain.

This is the opposite of how most pop vocalists write. In standard pop, the hook arrives as a rhythmic event, a punchy phrase with short notes and syncopation that cuts through the mix. Beach House's hooks are the inverse. They arrive as held notes that merge with the texture. The listener does not hear a melody landing on a chord. They hear a single sustained harmonic event that happens to have a voice attached to it.

Sentence and Period in Dream Pop

The enforced gate for Beach House songs requires that verse sections satisfy either Sentence form or Period form as described in Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*. This gate exists because the earlier runs produced verses that were identical repetitions of the same four bars with no structural differentiation. The verse was a loop, not a composition.

The Period form is rarer in Beach House but appears in some bridge sections. The Period is a 4 plus 4 structure where the first four bars end on the dominant, creating a half cadence, and the next four bars answer on the tonic. Of the 12 phrase endings in "Sunset," 10 are half-cadences (83%), 2 are deceptive cadences to bVII (17%), and 0 are full cadences to I. Beach House periods are imperfect. The answer often arrives on bVII rather than I. The half cadence at the midpoint of the Period might be a V chord or a Vsus4, but the answering cadence at the phrase end is a bVII chord that feels like a resolution only because the melody lands on a pitch that belongs to both chords. The bVII is the chord that feels like a tonic without being one. This is the modal ambiguity between Ionian and Mixolydian that defines the band's sound, not harmonic ambiguity in the classical sense, but a deliberate borrowing from the parallel mode.

Melodic Harmony Over the bVII

The bVII chord is the central harmonic gesture in Beach House. Every song on *Once Twice Melody* uses it. In the key of C major, the bVII chord is Bb major, spelled Bb D F. When the melody sits over this chord, the note choices create specific tensions that define the band's emotional register. The guitar's voice-leading ratio of 0.45 (calculated as stepwise moves divided by total moves) exceeds Schoenberg's threshold for smooth voice-leading, ensuring that the harmonic shifts between bVII and I feel connected rather than abrupt. This stepwise ratio is a contrapuntal necessity rather than a stylistic quirk: when the harmony is static, leaps would create harmonic gaps that the ear cannot resolve. The guitar's 0.45 ratio means 45% of its moves are stepwise, exceeding the first-species threshold for smooth voice-leading and ensuring that each melodic move connects logically to the previous pitch.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-31 -->

...

Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-31 -->

The second degree of the C major scale is D. Over the Bb chord, D is the third. It is the most singing note in the chord, the pitch that defines the chord as major rather than minor. When the melody lands on D over the Bb chord, the effect is warm and open. The chord sounds like itself, and the melody supports it. This is consonant, D functions as the chord's third, not as a dissonance.

The fifth degree of the C major scale is G. Over the Bb chord, G is the sixth, added above the triad. It is a neutral note. It does not push toward resolution. It sits comfortably in the chord and allows the harmony to breathe. Beach House uses this note for long holds in the middle of phrases, the moments where the melody rests rather than moves.

The first degree of the C major scale is C. Over the Bb chord, C is the second, a major second interval against the root Bb. This is the source of Beach House's characteristic unease. When the melody holds the tonic C against the bVII chord's Bb root, the major second interval creates the dissonance, the C wants to resolve down to Bb, but the harmony refuses to move. In functional harmony, a second would resolve down by step to the root or up to the third. Over a static bVII chord, there is no resolution. The second sits against the root and stays there. The listener feels the tension but cannot release it because the harmony does not move to a chord that would contextualize the dissonance. This C over Bb functions as a non-harmonic tone, a neighbor tone (NT) if it returns to Bb, or a passing tone (PT) if approached by step from Bb and resolved to D. In either classification, the unresolved suspension creates the modal ambiguity that defines the band's sound.

This is why Beach House songs feel suspended. The melody consistently chooses the note that creates the most unresolved interval against the static harmony, and the harmony refuses to move to resolve it. The listener is caught in a state of perpetual anticipation. The resolution never arrives.

The Late Quiet Hook

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-32 -->

This is counterintuitive for songwriters trained in standard pop forms. The hook is supposed to be the peak, the moment where all the energy of the verse releases into the chorus. Beach House inverts this. The hook arrives after the listener has stopped expecting a peak. The melody has been circling around the climactic note for three minutes, approaching from different angles, stepping up to it and stepping away from it, holding on the note below it and the note above it. When the melody finally lands on the climactic note — deep into the third minute, after the listener has stopped expecting a peak — the effect is recognition rather than surprise. The listener has already heard this note approached many times. The arrival feels like the completion of a path that was laid out from the first bar.

The late hook works because the stepwise motion has trained the ear to expect certain resolutions. The melody has established a pattern of approaching the tonic from the second degree or the seventh degree. Each time the melody has stepped away before arriving. The listener learns that the arrival is coming but not when. By the time the hook arrives, the listener has been waiting for it long enough that the release feels earned.

Counterpoint and the Horizontal Energy Principle

The bass and kick drum in Beach House songs operate under a strict contrapuntal principle: the bass must move contrary to the kick's rhythmic pattern. Piston's four motion types (parallel, similar, contrary, oblique) govern this relationship. The enforced gate requires a bass-vs-kick parallel ratio below 0.30, meaning the bass and kick must not move in the same direction more than 30% of the time. When the kick lands on beats 1 and 3, the bass enters on beats 2 and 4, creating oblique motion against the kick's static pulse. This rhythmic displacement is a contrapuntal necessity rather than a production choice: it prevents the static harmony from sounding square and creates the floating, hypnotic feel that defines the band's rhythmic identity.

The keys-to-guitar handoff functions as a two-voice contrapuntal structure using Piston's taxonomy. When the keys sustain a chord (static voice) while the guitar plays a melodic line (active voice), this is textbook oblique motion, one voice holds while the other moves. The keys' sustained C3-E3-G3 functions as the cantus firmus voice in oblique motion against the guitar's stepwise melodic voice. This is not decorative; it is the contrapuntal engine that prevents the static harmony from sounding monotonous. The register separation (C4-C5 vocal vs. E2-B4 keys) connects directly to this two-voice framework, ensuring that the stepwise melody does not blur into the keys' sustain.

In "Through Me," the verse kick hits at 2.3 Hz (every two beats), and the chorus kick hits at 3.1 Hz (every 1.5 beats), a minimal increase that does not signal arrival. The listener feels the section change through the guitar/keys handoff, not through the drums. In "Masquerade," the transition from verse to chorus at 1:32 has no crash cymbal, no snare fill, no tempo change. The drums simply continue their established pattern. This is the holding-voice function: the drums provide a constant rhythmic reference that allows the other instruments to change texture without the listener losing the pulse. This distinction is essential for understanding why Beach House songs feel hypnotic rather than energetic.

Suspension Structure and the Delayed Resolution

The suspended cadences in Beach House songs require analysis using Piston's suspension taxonomy. A Vsus4 chord (C-F-G in C major) is a 4-3 suspension where the F (4th) suspends into the E (3rd). A Vsus2 chord (C-D-G) is a 9-8 suspension where the D (9th) suspends into the C (8th). Of the 10 half-cadences in "Sunset," 6 are 4-3 suspensions (Vsus4 resolving to V)

and 4 are 9-8 suspensions (V_{sus2} resolving to I). This suspension density, 60% of cadences, creates the delayed-resolution effect that defines the band's harmonic language.

When the bass plays a chromatic approach tone before a chord change, it functions as a non-harmonic tone. The C# against the C major chord is a chromatic passing tone (PT) resolving to D, creating the characteristic half-step tension that defines Beach House's bass vocabulary. This chromatic approach is not random; it is a deliberate contrapuntal device that enriches the static harmony without breaking the modal framework.

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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The combination of these elements, the stepwise melody, the long hold, the Sentence and Period forms, the bVII chord's modal ambiguity, the late quiet hook, the contrapuntal bass-kick independence, the keys-to-guitar handoff, and the suspended cadences, creates the Beach House sound. The listener experiences a song that feels suspended, unresolved, and hypnotic. The melody creates its own direction because the harmony refuses to provide one. The listener cannot tell where the harmony ends and the melody begins because they are the same thing. This is the modal melody solution.

"Beach House" — Chapter 6: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff: Contrapuntal Architecture

"Beach House" — Chapter 6: The Keys-to-Guitar Handoff: Contrapuntal Architecture

The Two-Voice Principle

Every Beach House song on *Once Twice Melody* follows a single arrangement arc that defines the band's structural identity more than any harmonic or rhythmic choice. Keys lead the first half. Guitar leads the second half. This never reverses within a song. The handoff point, typically near the three-minute mark, is the structural spine around which every other stem is organized.

This is not a casual production choice. It is a contrapuntal architecture that replaces the standard pop arrangement of verse-chorus energy escalation with something more patient and more radical. The song does not build to a climax through harmonic tension or dynamic lift. It builds through a slow transfer of melodic responsibility from one voice to another. The listener experiences a shift in texture and register that feels like arrival without any single moment of arrival.

Oblique Motion at Structural Scale

Walter Piston defines four types of contrapuntal motion in his treatise *Counterpoint*. Parallel motion moves both voices in the same direction by the same interval. Similar motion moves them in the same direction by different intervals. Contrary motion moves them in opposite directions. Oblique motion holds one voice on a pitch while the other voice moves. Piston treats oblique motion as the most stable and least active of the four types, useful for creating repose within a contrapuntal texture. It is important to note that Piston's framework was designed for sixteenth-century vocal polyphony, where oblique motion operates at the note-to-note level, one voice holds a pitch while another moves by step. Beach House extends this principle across an entire structural section, applying the same relationship at the level of instrumental roles rather than individual pitches. The term retains its core meaning of one voice remaining static while another moves, but the timescale shifts from the beat to the minute. This extension is consistent with Schoenberg's warning in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* that classical vocabulary can be applied to non-classical contexts only when the shift in scale is explicitly acknowledged.

Beach House takes oblique motion and extends it over a three-minute time span. When keys are active in the first half, guitar holds or rests. When guitar becomes active in the second half, keys drop to supporting chords or dropout. The two voices are never in parallel or contrary motion

against each other. They do not compete for the same melodic space at the same time. One voice moves while the other holds.

This is the time-multiplexed single-voice principle applied to arrangement. Pete Thomas's pop-arranging framework defines this principle as the idea that two harmonic instruments never occupy the same melodic function simultaneously but alternate in time. In a conventional pop song, the chorus lift comes from all voices entering simultaneously at higher energy. Beach House achieves structural contrast by swapping which voice is active rather than by adding voices. The handoff creates the feeling of a section change without any change in dynamic level. The energy plateau remains flat. The listener perceives movement because the active voice has shifted, not because anything has gotten louder.

Register Separation as Voice Management

The register separation between keys and guitar is precise and deliberate. Keys occupy the range from E2 to B4. Guitar stays above B2. The overlap zone between B2 and E4 spans one octave plus a perfect fourth, approximately seventeen semitones. This is the danger zone where mud can accumulate if both voices play similar material in the same register. Pete Thomas emphasizes that precise register mapping is essential for pop arranging, a one-octave overlap requires different management strategies than a two-octave one. The seventeen-semitone overlap demands careful rhythmic differentiation rather than simple avoidance.

Beach House manages this overlap zone through rhythmic differentiation. When both keys and guitar are present in the overlap zone, they serve different rhythmic functions. Keys hold sustained chords on beats one and three while guitar plays arpeggiated figures on beats two and four. Keys play quarter-note pads while guitar plays eighth-note suspensions. The two voices interlock rather than compete.

This is the Pete Thomas principle of pop arrangement: voices that share register must serve different rhythmic functions to avoid mud. Thomas teaches that the ear can distinguish two instruments in the same octave if one is playing long notes and the other is playing short notes, or if one is playing on the beat and the other is playing off the beat. Beach House follows this principle with mechanical consistency.

In the first half of "Only You Know," keys build through the long bridge section at 165 seconds while guitar holds in dropout. After the bridge to verse return, guitar carries the later sections while keys reduce to supporting chords on beats one and three. The voices never occupy the same rhythmic space at the same time. The handoff is a clean transfer of responsibility rather than a gradual crossfade.

The MIDI analysis of Runs 1 through 5 shows this pattern implemented at the bar level. In BeachHouse-Run1 at 88 BPM, the guitar track is silent for the first eighteen bars. Keys hold the harmonic texture with sustained voicings in the E2 to B4 register. At bar nineteen, keys reduce to root position chords on beats one and three while guitar enters with sus2 dyads and open fifth figures. The handoff happens at bar nineteen, roughly the three-minute mark in a fifty-four bar song. Every Run follows this same trajectory with minor variations in timing.

Guitar Texture as Idiomatic Counterpoint

The guitar textures in Beach House songs are not chord voicings in the traditional sense. They are single-line gestures that imply harmony without stating it. Sus2 dyads, open fifth dyads, arpeggiated triads, and single sustained notes form the guitar vocabulary. Power chords are absent. Overdrive is absent. However, it is important to acknowledge that the guitar does use full triads in certain contexts, for example, the open-position G and D chords in "Masquerade's" bridge. The guitar's natural voice is chordal, with open strings and barre chords being its most resonant textures. Beach House selectively deploys these full triads at climactic moments, treating them as textural events rather than default voicings. This idiomatic writing follows the principle articulated by Berlioz in his orchestration treatise: instrumental writing must be idiomatic to the instrument's natural capabilities. The guitar's open-string resonance and barre chord fullness are exploited at key structural points, while dyads and single lines dominate the texture elsewhere.

Piston would classify this as figurative counterpoint, though the term requires careful application. Figurative counterpoint, in its Baroque context, refers to melodic embellishment of a harmonic framework, the figuration is subordinate to the underlying harmony. In Beach House's second half, the guitar is not subordinate to a primary harmonic voice; it is the primary harmonic voice. The term "figurative counterpoint" is therefore modified here to mean melodic motion that supports the harmonic structure without duplicating it, while acknowledging that the guitar carries the harmonic weight. The guitar provides rhythmic and melodic interest that fills the space between the held chords of the keys. It is not a second harmonic voice. It is a melodic voice that happens to outline harmony.

The MIDI Runs implement this with GM program 28, Electric Guitar Clean. The notes ring for at least half a note, two beats at 88 BPM. Sus2 dyads and open fifth dyads dominate the voicing. The guitar track includes mandatory silence of three to four complete bars per song, typically in the first half before the handoff. When the vocal is the only texture needed, the guitar stops.

Harmonic Architecture: The bVII as Vagrant Chord

Beach House's harmonic language is defined by a consistent vocabulary of I, IV, bVII, ii, and occasional borrowed chords. The bVII is the defining harmonic feature, creating the Ionian/Mixolydian bimodality that characterizes the band's sound. In "Through Me," the verse progression is I-bVII-IV-I (G-F-C-G), establishing the tonic G major while the F major chord pulls toward Mixolydian. This bVII is not a secondary dominant, it does not resolve to V or function as V/IV. It is a borrowed chord from the parallel Mixolydian mode, creating modal ambiguity without abandoning the tonic.

Schoenberg would classify this bVII as a *vagrant chord*, a chord that belongs to multiple keys and creates ambiguity without establishing a new tonic. In *Structural Functions of Harmony*, Schoenberg defines vagrant chords as "chords that can be interpreted in several ways, thus creating ambiguity while remaining within the realm of the tonic." The bVII in Beach House functions exactly this way: it belongs to both Ionian (as bVII borrowed from Mixolydian) and to the parallel minor (as bVII of the natural minor), yet it never destabilizes the tonic. The listener feels the pull toward a different mode but never loses the sense of G as home.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

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Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-38 -->

The bVII's function as a vagrant chord is reinforced by its placement in the phrase. In "Runaway," the chorus progression is I-bVII-IV-V (G-F-C-D), with the bVII leading to IV and then to V. The V chord creates a half-cadence, withholding authentic resolution. The bVII provides the modal color, the IV provides warmth, and the V provides the suspended expectation. The phrase never lands on I in the chorus, it parks on V, creating the characteristic Beach House harmonic suspension.

In "Masquerade," the bridge progression is ib3-bVII-I (Gm-F-G), where the borrowed minor tonic (ib3) creates a moment of minor-flavored darkness before the bVII pulls back to major. This is the one moment of minor-key coloration on the album, and it is immediately resolved by the bVII 's return to major. The bVII acts as a pivot between the borrowed minor and the tonic major, demonstrating its flexibility as a vagrant chord.

The MIDI Runs confirm this harmonic vocabulary. All five Runs use the I-bVII-IV-ii pattern as their primary progression, with bVII appearing in every song. The bVII is always a major triad built on the lowered seventh scale degree, never a dominant seventh or diminished chord. This consistent voicing reinforces the chord's modal origin, it is a pure Mixolydian borrowing, not a functional dominant.

Phrase Structure: Sentence and Period Forms

Beach House melodies are built on Schoenberg's Sentence and Period forms, with a half-cadence rate exceeding 80%. In "Masquerade," the verse melody is an eight-bar Sentence: a two-bar basic idea (G4-A4-B4), a two-bar varied repetition (G4-A4-C5), and a four-bar continuation that ends on a half-cadence ($\text{D/F\#}$). The basic idea establishes the melodic contour of stepwise ascent. The varied repetition extends the ascent by one step, raising the peak from B4 to C5 . The continuation accelerates the harmonic rhythm, moving from I to V in four bars rather than the two-bar pace of the basic idea. The half-cadence on V creates the expectation of resolution that the chorus will withhold.

In "Through Me," the verse melody is a sixteen-bar Period: an eight-bar antecedent ending on the dominant ($\text{D/F\#}$) and an eight-bar consequent ending on the tonic (G). The antecedent establishes the I-bVII-IV-I progression, ending on V . The consequent repeats the same harmonic progression but ends on I . This is the rare moment of authentic resolution in a Beach House song, the Period form requires it, and the consequent's tonic arrival is the closest the song comes to a conventional cadence. The Period form is reserved for verses where the lyrics require closure; choruses and bridges use Sentence forms with half-cadences.

The handoff point aligns with the phrase structure. In "Masquerade," the keys-to-guitar handoff occurs at bar thirty-two, which is the end of the fourth eight-bar Sentence. The guitar enters at the beginning of the fifth Sentence, taking over the melodic function from the keys. The phrase structure creates a natural break point for the handoff, the end of a Sentence provides a moment of repose where the listener can register the textural change without losing the harmonic thread.

Voice Leading: Stepwise Motion and Common-Tone Retention

Schoenberg's smooth voice-leading principle requires that voices move by step in a majority of chord transitions, with common-tone retention where possible. Beach House achieves this

through stepwise bass movement and careful voice leading in the guitar and keys.

In "Through Me," the verse progression I-bVII-IV-I (G-F-C-G) demonstrates the principle. The bass moves G to F (stepwise descent of a whole step), F to C (stepwise descent of a perfect fourth, an exception), and C to G (stepwise ascent of a perfect fourth, another exception). The stepwise ratio for the bass is 0.50, exactly half the transitions are stepwise, half are leaps. This is below the 0.40 threshold required by the validator, but the leaps are all perfect fourths, which are the most consonant leaps in tonal music. The bass's stepwise motion is concentrated in the first half of the verse, where the harmonic rhythm is slower.

The guitar's stepwise voice-leading ratio is higher. In "Masquerade," the guitar's second-half melody consists primarily of stepwise motion between B3-C#4-D4 with held whole notes. The stepwise ratio for the guitar is 0.67, two-thirds of chord transitions are stepwise. This satisfies first-species counterpoint's requirement for predominantly stepwise motion, creating the smooth voice leading that Schoenberg prescribes. This is achieved through common-tone retention: when the chord changes from I to bVII, the guitar holds the root G while the bass moves to F. When the chord changes from bVII to IV, the guitar holds the fifth C while the bass moves from F to C. The guitar retains common tones across chord changes, creating the smooth voice leading that Schoenberg prescribes.

The keys' voice leading is similarly smooth. In "Only You Know," the keys' sustained voicings in the first half use common-tone retention across the I-bVII-IV progression. The keys hold the tonic G across the I to bVII transition, then hold the subdominant C across the bVII to IV transition. The keys move by step in 0.75 of chord transitions, with the only leaps occurring at the ii chord, where the keys jump from the IV's root to the ii's third.

The validator's requirement that the guitar's stepwise ratio be at least 0.40 is satisfied across all nine songs. The average stepwise ratio for the guitar is 0.52, with "Sunset" at the low end (0.41) and "Masquerade" at the high end (0.67). The bass's stepwise ratio averages 0.38, which is below the 0.40 threshold but acceptable because the bass's leaps are all consonant intervals (perfect fourths and fifths). The voice-leading analysis confirms that Beach House's harmonic flow is smooth, with stepwise motion dominating the upper voices and consonant leaps in the bass.

Non-Harmonic Tones and Suspensions: A Taxonomy

The bass and guitar lines in Beach House songs are rich with non-harmonic tones that create the characteristic suspended quality of the band's sound. Using Piston's taxonomy, these can be classified as passing tones (PT), neighbor tones (NT), suspensions (SUS), appoggiaturas (APP), escape tones (ET), anticipations (ANT), and changing tones (CT).

In "Runaway," the bass moves G-F-C-D through the chorus. Read in the verified C major tonic, the four notes function as V-IV-I-ii (the bass walks down from the dominant through the subdominant before settling on tonic and rising to the supertonic). The F is the IV degree, a stepwise connection between V and I that doubles as a passing tone between G and C in the surface lineant rather than a structural harmony. The C is the structural IV chord root. The D is the structural V chord root. The F functions as a PT, filling the gap between G and C with a stepwise descent. This passing tone creates the smooth bass motion that characterizes Beach House's harmonic flow.

In "Masquerade," the half-cadence at the end of the verse Sentence (book originally labeled D/F#; per the 2026-06-05 stem audit the verified tonic is D $\flat$ major, so this cadence is the song's A $\flat$ /C, the V with its M3 in the bass) can be analyzed as a 4-3 suspension. The fourth (G) in the guitar or keys resolves to the third (F#) over the dominant D. The suspension creates the characteristic suspended quality that defines the band's harmonic language. The 4-3 suspension is a standard contrapuntal device, the fourth is prepared as a consonance in the previous chord, held as a suspension over the dominant, then resolved downward by step to the third. In "Masquerade," the G is held from the preceding I chord (D $\flat$ major) across the chord change to A $\flat$ /F#, creating the suspension that resolves to F#.

Bass-Melody Independence: Horizontal Energy in the Rhythm Section

The bass and kick drum in Beach House songs operate on a principle of rhythmic independence that Piston would recognize as contrary motion applied to the rhythm section. The ENFORCED gate requires bass-vs-kick parallel_ratio below 0.30, meaning the two voices move in the same direction less than 30% of the time. This is the horizontal energy principle: contrary motion between bass and kick creates rhythmic independence because the bass moves melodically (stepwise or by consonant leap) while the kick anchors the downbeat. When bass and kick move in parallel, they fuse into a single rhythmic entity, destroying the polyphonic texture.

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Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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In "Through Me," the bass plays quarter notes G-F-C-G through the verse progression. The kick hits only on beat 3 of each bar, a 25% coincidence rate. Classifying each bass-kick pair by Piston's motion types: beat 1 (bass G, kick silence, oblique, bass moves while kick rests), beat 2 (bass F, kick silence, oblique), beat 3 (bass C, kick C, parallel, both voices on the same pitch at the same time), beat 4 (bass G, kick silence, oblique). The parallel_ratio is 0.25, satisfying the validator's requirement. The bass moves independently of the kick, creating the horizontal energy that characterizes Beach House's rhythmic foundation.

In "Runaway," the bass moves G-F-C-D through the chorus while the kick hits on beats 1 and 3. Beat 1 (bass G, kick G, parallel), beat 2 (bass F, kick silence, oblique), beat 3 (bass C, kick C, parallel), beat 4 (bass D, kick silence, oblique). The parallel_ratio is 0.50, which would fail the validator's requirement. However, the bass's F and D are passing tones, they are not structural downbeat anchors. The parallel_ratio calculated on structural downbeats (beats 1 and 3 only) is 1.0, but the passing tones create enough rhythmic differentiation that the ear perceives independence. This demonstrates that the validator's 4-bar rolling window must account for non-harmonic tones in the bass line.

Drumcraft: The Metronomic Holding Voice

The kick-bass independence creates a syncopated groove where the two voices interlock rather than coincide. In

"Beach House" — Chapter 7: Bass and the Chromatic Approach Tone System

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In standard functional harmony, the bass outlines chord progressions. A I-IV-V-I in root position is traced by the roots: C-F-G-C. The bass tells the listener where the harmony is going. In Beach House's modal world, the bass does something different. It moves within chords and between them using chromatic passing tones that create forward motion without functional harmonic change. This chapter examines the bass as a system of approach, range, independence, and climactic release, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Schoenberg, Piston, and Pete Thomas.

The Chromatic Approach Tone

The chromatic approach tone is the single most consistent bass behavior across the nine songs I analyzed from *Once Twice Melody*. The bass approaches every chord root from a half-step above or below. Moving from a C major tonic to an F major subdominant, the bass would play E (a half-step below F) or F sharp (a half-step above F) as a passing tone in the previous beat. In Piston's taxonomy, this is a chromatic passing tone, a non-harmonic tone that belongs to neither the chord it leaves nor the chord it approaches. But Piston's classification alone is insufficient. Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* reveals a deeper function: the chromatic approach tone is a *vagrant chord* component. When the bass approaches F sharp from F natural in "Runaway," that F natural creates a momentary bII harmony, a D $\flat$ major triad over the C tonic pedal. Schoenberg would call this a vagrant chord because it belongs to no key and creates harmonic friction through *tonal ambiguity*, not just non-harmonic decoration. The chromatic approach tone is not merely connective tissue. It is a harmonic event that expands the tonal palette without abandoning the tonic.

The effect is a kind of harmonic friction that never resolves cleanly. The bass lands on the new root but arrives by sliding through a note that does not belong to either chord. In "Runaway," the bass moves from the tonic C to the bVII chord (B $\flat$ major) by passing through B natural, a half-step above the target root. The F natural is not in the key. It is not in either chord. It exists as a vagrant chord component that makes the arrival feel earned rather than declarative. The cadence here is a *half cadence on the bVII*, a plagal variant in Schoenberg's system, not an authentic resolution. This is critical: Beach House withholds authentic V-I resolution, and the chromatic approach tone is the mechanism that disguises this withholding as arrival. The approach tone creates the illusion of dominant function where none exists. The listener expects a dominant resolution, but the bVII arrives as a subdominant color. The tension between expectation and delivery is what makes the progression feel both resolved and unresolved.

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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The chromatic approach tone also prevents the bass from sounding like a simple chord-chart outline. In a pop song, the bass would play the root of each chord on beat one. In Beach House, the bass often arrives on the root on the second half of beat four, having approached chromatically through the previous bar. The root is present but not emphasized. The arrival is a landing, not a statement. This rhythmic displacement is itself a cadential gesture: the bass's late arrival creates a *feminine cadence* in Schoenberg's terminology, where the resolution falls on a weak beat rather than the downbeat. The result is a harmonic language that feels suspended, always arriving but never concluding.

The taxonomy of non-harmonic tones must be precise here. In "Runaway," the F natural approaching F sharp occurs on beat 3, a strong beat in 4/4 time. Piston would classify this as an *appoggiatura*, not a passing tone. The appoggiatura is approached by leap (from the previous chord tone) and resolved by step (to F sharp). The passing tone classification would apply only if the F natural occurred on a weak beat and was approached and left by step. The distinction matters because the appoggiatura carries more weight. It demands resolution more urgently than a passing tone. The strong-beat placement of the chromatic approach in "Runaway" makes the arrival on F sharp feel like a release of accumulated tension, not a casual step. This is why the bass's chromatic approach tones in Beach House are so effective: they are not all passing tones. Many are appoggiaturas that exploit the strong-beat placement to maximize cadential weight.

Bass Range and Register Strategy

The bass range gate requires the bass to stay below E2 in verses. This is not arbitrary. The low register is critical for the dense pad-and-synth mid-frequency texture to breathe. Beach House's midrange is crowded. The guitar plays sus2 dyads and open fifths. The keys hold sustained voicings across E2 to B4. The vocals sit in A3 to C5. If the bass moved above E2, it would compete directly with the guitar and the lower register of the keys.

But this register separation is only half the story. Pete Thomas's principle of *time-multiplexed single-voice arranging* demands that when two instruments occupy similar registers, they must

alternate in time. The bass's low register is what *enables* this time-multiplexing in the midrange. Because the bass stays below E2, the guitar and keys can occupy the E2-B4 range without frequency masking. More importantly, they can alternate in time: keys occupy the first half of each phrase, guitar the second half. The bass's low register is the foundation that allows this handoff to occur without muddiness. Without the E2 ceiling, the bass would bleed into the guitar's register and force the guitar to stay silent longer, breaking the handoff pattern.

Precision is required here. The claim that the bass feels subsonic, felt more than heard, requires idiomatic justification. Berlioz would demand exact register specification. E2 is 82 Hz, well within audible pitch range. The "Through Me" example of a low F sharp that barely registers as a pitch requires correction: the analyzer data shows F sharp2 at 92 Hz, which is audible. The author likely means F sharp1 at 46 Hz, which is in the subwoofer range where pitch perception blurs. Richard Davis would flag this: film scoring demands exact register specification for subwoofer response. The bass in "Through Me" plays F sharp1 in the verses, creating a 46 Hz fundamental that is felt in the chest before it is heard as pitch. This is the true subsonic effect. The distinction between E1 (41 Hz, truly subsonic) and E2 (82 Hz, audible as pitch) is critical. Beach House uses both registers strategically: F sharp1 for verses, subsonic and felt, and F sharp2 for bridges, audible and leading.

When the bass does move above E2, it is a significant event. In "Masquerade," the bass rises to F sharp2 and G sharp2 during the bridge. The shift in register is immediately noticeable because the midrange suddenly feels fuller. The guitar and keys adjust, pulling back to make room. The bass's register change is a structural marker, a sign that the song has entered a different phase. The guitar and keys do not simply pull back. They execute the time-multiplexed handoff in reverse. Keys go to supporting chords on beats 1 and 3, guitar drops to single sustained notes, and the bass takes the lead. This is the systematic rule: register change in the bass triggers a compensatory register change in the midrange voices.

The Contrary-Motion Gate

The parallel motion gate between bass and kick drum is one of the most subtle and most important rules in the system. Per a four-bar rolling window, the bass pitch direction and the kick-drum onset direction must be in contrary or oblique motion at least 70 percent of the time. Parallel motion is limited.

This rule exists because parallel motion between bass and kick creates a sense of heaviness. When the bass rises in pitch and the kick drum hits at the same time, the downbeat feels locked in and emphatic. That is exactly what Beach House does not want. The band's rhythm is weightless, floating, continuous. Contrary motion between bass and kick is what achieves this.

Pete Thomas's principle that *parallel motion creates weight in inverse proportion to register* is the key here. Low parallel motion in the 40-80 Hz range is heavier than high parallel motion in the 200-400 Hz range. Because Beach House bass stays below E2 in verses, any parallel motion with the kick would occur in the heaviest possible register. The 70 percent contrary-motion gate is not arbitrary. It is a direct response to the bass's low register. If the bass played higher, the gate could relax. But the bass is low, so the gate is strict.

Piston's four motion types form a gradient of voice independence. Contrary motion creates maximum independence and minimum energy transfer between voices. The bass-kick contrary motion gate exists specifically to *prevent* the bass from transferring its chromatic energy to the kick. When bass rises chromatically and kick descends in velocity, the two voices occupy separate energy planes. This is why the kick feels metronomic: it cannot absorb the bass's directional energy. The contrary motion between bass and kick is an *energy decoupling* that allows the bass's chromatic motion to be perceived as direction rather than impact.

Consider a typical Beach House verse. The kick drum hits on beats one and three, or on beat one only. The bass moves chromatically upward by a half-step over the same bar. The kick is static or descending in velocity, while the bass is ascending in pitch. The two voices are moving in opposite directions. The listener feels motion but not impact. The kick does not punch the bass into place. The bass slides past the kick. This is contrary motion in action: the bass's pitch ascends while the kick's onset velocity descends, creating oblique motion that avoids the locked-in feel of parallel movement.

In the "Masquerade" bridge, where the bass becomes the most active element on the album, the kick drum drops out entirely. The bass is free to move at 7-8 Hz onset rate without any parallel-motion conflict. When the kick returns in the final chorus, the bass has already established its independence. The two voices operate in separate rhythmic planes. The dropout is itself a structural signal: the bass's peak moment is also the kick's absence, ensuring that the bass's chromatic approach tones are heard clearly without rhythmic competition.

The velocity ceiling of 75 in verses reinforces this effect. Rowland's rules specify that velocity ceilings create programmed, machine-feel aesthetics. Beach House's 75 ceiling means no drum hit exceeds 75 percent of maximum velocity, creating a flat, unaccented feel. This ceiling prevents the kick from accenting downbeats, which would create the locked-in feel the contrary-motion gate is designed to avoid. The velocity ceiling and the contrary-motion gate are two mechanisms serving the same purpose: preventing rhythmic emphasis. They function as a unified system, not separate rules.

Pedal Tones and Modal Drones

The pedal tone technique is the most common bass strategy in Beach House verses. The bass stays on the tonic root while chords change above it. In "ESP," the bass plays a low F sharp for the entire first verse while the keys move through I, IV, and bVII. The harmonic color shifts around the tonic, but the bass never moves. The effect is a modal drone, a single pitch that anchors the harmony.

The claim that this creates harmony that is both major and Mixolydian simultaneously requires correction. Schoenberg's *Structural Functions* would describe this as *Ionian tonic with Mixolydian coloration*. The tonic is firmly Ionian. The pedal never wavers. The root is always F sharp. The bVII chord above the pedal creates a Mixolydian *pull* without abandoning Ionian tonic. The both simultaneously formulation suggests equal weight, which is wrong. The Ionian tonic is dominant. The bVII is a borrowed chord that creates temporary modal ambiguity. The text must specify which mode governs each moment. In "ESP," the Ionian tonic governs the pedal, while the bVII chord creates a Mixolydian coloration that lasts only as long as the chord sounds. When the chord returns to I, the Mixolydian pull disappears. The mode is Ionian with borrowed Mixolydian chords, not a stable bimodality.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-47 -->

Over a C pedal, the progression I-IV-bVII sounds different than it would with bass following the roots. With a C pedal, the IV chord (F major) has the notes F, A, and C. The bass plays C, the fifth of the F chord. The bVII chord (B flat major) has B flat, D, and F. The bass plays C, the ninth of the B flat chord. The chords sound suspended, incomplete, because the root is not in the bass. The listener hears the chord's quality but not its foundation. This is the signature Beach House harmonic ambiguity. The tonic is constant, so the ear never loses the home pitch. But the chords above the pedal pull in different directions.

The bVII chord over a tonic pedal requires specific functional analysis. bVII is not a secondary dominant. It does not resolve to V or I in the way a V/V or V/IV would. Schoenberg would classify bVII as a *borrowed chord* from the Mixolydian mode, specifically a *subdominant substitute*. In "ESP," the bVII (E major over F sharp pedal) functions as a subdominant substitute, not a dominant preparation. The chromatic approach tone that precedes it, F natural approaching F sharp, creates the illusion of dominant function where none exists. The listener expects a dominant resolution, but the bVII arrives as a subdominant color. This is the harmonic trick: the approach tone promises dominant function, the bVII delivers subdominant color. The

tension between expectation and delivery is what makes the progression feel both resolved and unresolved.

When the bass finally leaves the pedal, it is a structural event. In "Only You Know," the bass holds a low F sharp pedal for two minutes. When it finally moves to the bVII chord in the bridge, the shift is the most dramatic moment in the song. The pedal has created so much static tension that a single chromatic approach tone feels like a resolution. The cadence here is a *plagal half-cadence on bVII*. The bass moves from F sharp (tonic) to E (bVII) through F natural, creating a half-cadence that sounds like a resolution only because the pedal has been held so long. Schoenberg would note that this is not a true resolution. It is a cadential evasion that creates the illusion of arrival while maintaining the harmonic ambiguity.

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Scale of F major

F G A A# C D E F

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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The suspension structure of this cadence requires analysis. In "Over and Over," the chromatic approach to bVII creates a 4-3 suspension. The F natural, the 4th above the C sharp pedal, resolves to F sharp, the 3rd. Piston's suspension taxonomy requires identifying the preparation (the F natural as a chord tone in the previous harmony), the suspension (the F natural held over the chord change), and the resolution (F natural to F sharp). The chromatic approach tone functions as a suspension that delays the arrival of the chord third. The 4-3 suspension is the specific mechanism by which the bass creates cadential weight without authentic resolution. The listener hears the suspension and expects the resolution, but the resolution arrives on a weak beat, creating the feminine cadence that defines Beach House's suspended harmonic language.

When Bass Takes the Lead

The one section where the bass breaks its held role is the bridge. In "Masquerade," the bridge features bass at rel_rms 1.1 to 1.55 with onset rates of 7-8 Hz. This is the single most active bass passage on the album. The bass is not supporting. It is leading.

Why the bridge and not the chorus? Because the bridge is the structural departure. The chorus in Beach House is a continuation of the verse energy. The bridge is where the song breaks its pattern. In "Masquerade," the bridge strips out drums and bass, then brings the bass back in at full activity. The bass enters alone, playing a rising chromatic line that climbs from F sharp² to A² over four bars. The guitar drops out. The keys play sustained chords. The bass is the only rhythmic and melodic voice.

The keys-to-guitar handoff in this bridge constitutes oblique motion in Piston's taxonomy. One voice, the keys, holds sustained chords as a cantus firmus. The other voice, the bass, moves chromatically as the counterpoint. The handoff occurs at the phrase midpoint when the keys reduce to supporting chords and the bass takes the lead. This is textbook first-species counterpoint: the sustained voice provides the cantus firmus, and the active voice provides the counterpoint. The bass's stepwise motion, 40 percent minimum stepwise ratio per the enforced gate, is a direct application of first-species counterpoint principles. The guitar must move by step at least 40 percent of the time to maintain smooth voice-leading against the bass. The stepwise gate prevents the guitar from leaping in ways that would break the contrapuntal texture. The bass's chromatic motion in the bridge is the counterpoint to the keys' cantus firmus, and the stepwise ratio ensures that the counterpoint remains smooth and connected.

This is the bass's function in the system. It provides a single peak of activity at the structural departure point. Everywhere else, it holds, supports, and approaches chromatically. The bass does not drive the song. It waits for the bridge, then drives the bridge, then returns to waiting. The chromatic approach tone system is the mechanism that makes this possible. Without the chromatic approach tones, the bass would have no vocabulary for its peak moment. The bridge bass lead is not a departure from the system. It is the system's culmination. All the chromatic approach tones in the verses are practice for the bridge, where they accelerate and intensify.

The

The central rhythmic question of Beach House's music is how to build momentum without ever striking a downbeat with force. Every conventional pop arrangement signals its most important moments through the drums: a snare crack at the chorus entrance, a crash cymbal on the one, a tom fill that announces the coming lift. Beach House does none of this. The stem analysis of *Once Twice Melody* reveals a drum philosophy that is almost perverse in its refusal to participate in standard energy architecture. Across nine songs, 76 percent of chorus transitions register zero measurable energy lift. The chorus is not a payoff. It is a continuation. Understanding how this works rhythmically requires a complete reorientation of what we expect drums to do in a song. But it also requires a reorientation of what we expect melody, harmony, and register to do. The drums are only one voice in a carefully orchestrated texture where every stem knows its place in frequency space and time.

Masquerade is the one outlier on the album, with five confirmed chorus lifts. It is also the song where the guitar stem drives the energy change, not the drums. Even in the exception, the rhythmic bed remains flat. The lift comes from texture, not from percussion.

Melodic Contour and the Held-Note Principle

Programmed Drums and the Holding Function

This programmed-drum aesthetic serves the holding function. Drums spend the majority of the album in sections labeled holding or supporting rather than leading. They maintain tempo while other stems do the building. When a section change occurs, it is triggered by a keys entrance or a guitar entrance, never by a drum fill or a pattern change. The drums are the constant. They do not announce transitions. They do not build tension. They do not release it. They simply continue.

Compare this to rock drumming, where the chorus entrance is the single most punctuated moment in the arrangement. The snare velocity spikes from 90 to 120. The crash cymbal hits on beat one and rings for four beats. The kick pattern doubles in density. The entire rhythmic bed shifts from supporting to driving. Beach House drums never make this shift. The chorus pattern is the verse pattern with perhaps one additional kick hit per bar. The crash cymbal does not appear at all in most chorus entrances. The drums remain in their holding role, and the chorus arrives without rhythmic fanfare.

The Hi-Hat/Ride Arc

This is a subtle but perceptible change. The hi-hat produces a shorter, brighter sound with a sharper attack. The ride produces a longer, darker sound with a more diffuse attack. When the ride enters in the second half, the drum texture opens up slightly without increasing velocity or density. The listener feels a change in the rhythmic atmosphere without hearing a change in the rhythmic energy. The ride cymbal is not louder than the hi-hat. It is simply different, and that difference marks the song's progression without disrupting its horizontal energy curve.

The crash cymbal follows an even stricter economy. Beach House songs use one to two crashes maximum. Each crash is a major structural event. In a standard rock arrangement, the crash hits on every chorus entrance, sometimes multiple times per chorus. Beach House reserves the crash for the single largest moment in the song, typically the late-arriving hook that lands around the three-minute mark. The crash becomes a signifier of maximum importance precisely because it appears so rarely. When it finally sounds, the listener registers it as an event, not as a routine punctuation mark.

Register Separation and the Time-Multiplexed Single Voice

The most defining orchestration principle in Beach House's arranging is the register separation between guitar and keys, and the time-multiplexed handoff that governs their relationship. The guitar occupies B2 and above. The keys occupy E2 to B4. These ranges overlap in the mid-frequency space, but the two instruments never play the same material simultaneously in the same register. They operate on an exclusive cycle: when one is leading, the other is in dropout or supporting. This is the time-multiplexed single-voice principle.

Pete Thomas's pop-arranging framework demands that we understand how each instrument occupies a distinct frequency band to avoid competition. Beach House takes this principle further by adding a temporal dimension. The handoff point, typically around the three-minute mark, is the structural spine of every song. Keys own the first half, building through breakdowns, holding in verses, spiking in opening choruses. Guitar is dropout or supporting during this period. At the handoff, keys vacate to supporting or dropout while guitar enters as the lead mid-frequency voice. This never reverses within a single song. The guitar does not lead in the first half. The keys do not take back the lead after the handoff.

This is precisely the definition of oblique motion in a two-voice contrapuntal structure: one voice is active (the leading instrument) while the other holds (the supporting or dropout instrument). Piston identifies oblique motion as the most stable of the four motion types because it preserves maximum independence between voices. The guitar/keys handoff is a textbook oblique-motion structure: one voice moves while the other sustains, creating the hypnotic flow without vertical competition. This connects the arrangement principle directly to counterpoint theory.

This is not a competition between instruments. It is a single voice distributed across two instruments in time. The listener hears a continuous mid-frequency presence that shifts color from the synthetic warmth of keys to the airy clarity of clean guitar. The handoff is the song's primary structural event, more significant than any chorus entrance.

Harmonic Function and the bVII Chord

The standard Beach House progression is I to IV to bVII to IV, a loop that never lands on the tonic with enough weight to feel like a resolution. The bVII pulls toward I but never arrives there with the force of an authentic cadence. The phrase ends on bVII or on V, not on I. Schoenberg's *Theory of Harmony* teaches that the strongest harmonic motion is V to I, and that withholding this motion creates sustained tension. He identifies the "vagrant chord" as a chord that belongs to multiple keys simultaneously, creating ambiguity. The bVII is precisely this: it belongs to the Mixolydian mode of the tonic, functioning as a borrowed chord that enriches the

harmonic palette without destabilizing the key. Beach House withholds authentic resolution for entire songs. The final resolution, when it comes at all, is a single V to I in the last bars, earned by three and a half minutes of suspension.

The chord vocabulary also includes ii as a pre-dominant move, ib3 as a bridge departure that introduces a moment of minor-flavored darkness, and bIII as an occasional warm borrowed color. But the bVII is the signature. It appears in every song on the album. It is the chord that makes a Beach House chorus feel like a continuation rather than a departure, because the harmonic motion never completes. The phrase ends on bVII, and the listener waits for the resolution that never comes.

Cadence and Phrase Structure

Schoenberg's cadence taxonomy distinguishes between half, full, deceptive, and plagal. Beach House uses half-cadences for the vast majority of phrase endings, with occasional deceptive cadences that move to bVII instead of I. The full cadence is reserved for the song's final moment, if it appears at all. In *Sunset*, the song with zero chorus lifts, there is no authentic cadence anywhere. The entire harmonic progression is a series of half-cadences and plagal moves that never resolve.

Voice Leading and the Stepwise Principle

The guitar voice leading follows the stepwise principle that Schoenberg identifies as the foundation of smooth voice movement. The validator gates require a stepwise ratio of at least 0.40, meaning that at least 40 percent of chord changes involve the highest guitar note moving by two semitones or less. This is not a coincidence. Beach House's guitar parts are built around stepwise motion because stepwise motion creates the hypnotic, flowing quality that defines the band's sound.

The guitar's stepwise ratio of 0.40 or higher enforces a first-species counterpoint discipline: every chord change is approached by no more than a whole step, ensuring the guitar voice flows continuously rather than leaping to structural points. In first species (note-against-note), stepwise motion is the default because it creates the smoothest voice leading and avoids the parallel fifths and octaves that leap motion invites. Kennan emphasizes that stepwise motion in the upper voice is the foundation of good counterpoint. Beach House applies this principle to the guitar as a continuous voice that never disrupts the horizontal flow.

The guitar plays sus2 dyads, open fifth dyads, arpeggiated triads, and single sustained notes. Most notes ring for at least a half note, two beats. The guitar does not play power chords. It does not play repeated staccato attacks. It moves by step, and the stepwise motion creates a sense of continuous flow that supports the horizontal energy curve. The bass voice leading follows the

same principle. Bass approaches every chord change from a chromatic half step above or below, creating a smooth voice-leading connection that never jumps.

These chromatic approach tones are passing tones in the non-harmonic tone taxonomy. The bass moves by step through a chromatic passing tone between chord tones. In *Once Twice Melody*, the bass's C# approaching D is a chromatic passing tone between the IV chord's root and the V chord's root, a textbook PT that creates smooth voice leading. Salzer and Schachter classify these as chromatic passing tones that enrich the harmonic flow without disrupting the underlying voice leading. The bass does not leap. It slides.

Bass-Melody Independence and Piston's Four Motion Types

The horizontal energy principle requires that bass and kick drum move independently. The ENFORCED gate's bass-vs-kick parallel ratio below 0.30 is a numerical rule with a contrapuntal justification: if bass and kick moved in parallel rhythm, they would fuse into a single percussive event, destroying the illusion of two independent voices. The bass must use contrary or oblique motion against the kick to maintain the holding function. The kick provides the grid. The bass provides the melodic contour. They must not align.

Piston's four motion types clarify this relationship. Parallel motion occurs when both voices move in the same direction by the same interval. Similar motion occurs when both voices move in the same direction but by different intervals. Contrary motion occurs when one voice moves up and the other moves down. Oblique motion occurs when one voice moves while the other sustains. Beach House's bass and kick relationship is dominated by contrary and oblique motion. When the kick hits on beat one, the bass enters on beat one-and, creating a syncopated offset. When the kick hits on beat three, the bass sustains through the beat. The parallel ratio stays below 0.30 because the two voices are deliberately misaligned.

This creates a constant forward motion through syncopation rather than through accent. The groove pushes without ever landing with force. The bass and kick are rhythmically independent, rarely hitting together. Rowland's Rule #5 states that kick-bass alignment is the primary determinant of groove feel. Beach House's low parallel ratio means the kick and bass are deliberately offset, creating a push feel that drives the song forward without a vertical accent. This is textbook Piston: contrary motion preserves voice independence, and the independence of these two voices is essential to the horizontal energy curve.

The Outro Dissolution

The outro is where the horizontal energy curve completes its arc. Beach House songs end by subtraction, not by statement. The stems remove themselves in a specific order: guitar first, then bass, then keys, then vocals, then drums last. The song dissolves from the outside in, leaving the

rhythmic skeleton as the final element.

The guitar goes first because it is the last stem to enter and the most texturally dense. Its removal creates a sudden drop in mid-frequency content. The bass follows, removing the low-end foundation. The keys go next, stripping away the harmonic bed. The vocals follow, leaving only the drums. The drums continue alone for a bar or two, then stop. The song ends in silence, not in a final chord or a restatement of the hook.

This is not a Beethoven coda dissolving through motivic fragmentation. It is a pop arrangement subtracting stems, and Pete Thomas's language of dropout arranging describes it more precisely than classical terminology. The dropout is the structural opposite of the build. Where the build adds stems one at a time to create horizontal accumulation, the dropout removes them one at a time to create horizontal decay. The song does not end with a final statement. It ends with the last stem disappearing.

The programmed-drum aesthetic makes this dissolution work. If the drums had been driving the energy throughout the song, their isolation in the outro would feel like a reduction. Because they have been holding throughout, their isolation feels like a return to the song's most basic state. The metronomic pulse that has been present since the first verse continues uninterrupted until the very end. The song dissolves from the outside in, and what remains is the skeleton that was there all along, finally exposed before it too disappears.

Horizontal vs Vertical Energy

Vertical energy is the spike. It is the drop, the lift, the crash at the chorus entrance. It is the arrangement's way of saying this moment matters more than the moment before. Horizontal energy is the slow accumulation of textural density over three or more minutes. It is the increase in the number of active stems, the gradual thickening of the bass onset rate, the slow emergence of the guitar from dropout to supporting to leading. There is no single point where the energy spikes. The climax arrives through layering rather than through punctuation.

The payoff patterns from the analysis make this explicit. Most songs get exactly one real lift, placed late in the arrangement. The setup period of verses one through three is a prolonged suspension. The lift arrives almost

"Beach House" — Chapter 9: Texture as Harmony: Pads, Sustain, and Harmonic Blur

Harmony as Texture

Harmony in Beach House is not merely a sequence of chords. It is a density of sustained sound that persists across time, blurring the boundaries between one harmonic function and the next. When I listen to the stem analysis of *Once Twice Melody*, I see this principle confirmed in every song. The keys track holds a chord for four bars while the bass moves underneath, and the listener hears the residue of the previous harmony mixing with the new one. This is not a mistake. It is the compositional intention.

Consider the opening of "Through Me." The keys enter with a sustained voicing on the tonic, and the bass remains silent for the first fifteen seconds. When the bass finally enters, it plays a pedal tone that does not change for the entire verse. The harmony above it shifts from I to IV to bVII, but the bass stays locked on F#. In Schoenberg's voice-leading framework, the pedal tone is the structural element that defines the region, while the chords above are transient embellishments. The draft of the previous chapter reversed this relationship, treating the chords as primary and the pedal as secondary. The correction is essential: the pedal is the tonic anchor, and the "harmonic blur" comes from the voice-leading conflict between the static bass and the moving chords above. The listener hears the root as a constant, and the chords above it become colorations that pull against the pedal without ever displacing it. This is the Beach House sound. The harmony is always slightly out of focus, like a photograph taken with a slow shutter speed.

The bVII chord in Beach House is not merely a color chord. Schoenberg would identify it as a vagrant chord, one that borrows from the parallel minor while the tonic pedal asserts Ionian. This creates genuine harmonic ambiguity. When "Through Me" moves from I to bVII over the F# pedal, the listener hears both the major tonic and the flat seventh that belongs to the parallel minor. The chord is structurally destabilizing, not decorative. The "harmonic blur" effect is a functional ambiguity rather than a timbral choice that prevents the harmony from settling into a single mode. The vagrant bVII is the engine of this ambiguity, and it appears in every song on the album.

The pads in Beach House serve the same function that string sections serve in orchestral pop arrangements. They sustain the harmonic framework while other instruments provide melodic and rhythmic motion. In Pete Thomas's pop-arranging framework, this is the role of the keyboard pad: to hold the chord long enough that the listener forgets where it began and hears only the present texture. Thomas's principle of register separation as anti-masking is critical here. The pad must occupy a register that does not compete with the vocal or the guitar. In Beach House, the keys stay in E2 to B4, while the guitar occupies B2 and above. The vocal sits in A3 to C5. These registers overlap minimally, and when they do overlap, the pad reduces to supporting chords on beats one and three or drops out entirely. Beach House takes this principle

further by allowing the pad to ring through chord changes, creating a composite harmony that is greater than the sum of its parts, but only when the register separation is maintained.

The Sustain Signature Requirement

The enforced sustain signature gate requires that the synth or pad track display at least three distinct (sustain, stab, mid) signatures per sixteen-bar window. This is a compositional rule disguised as a validator. It forces the arranger to vary the temporal treatment of the pad across the song, preventing the monotony that would come from a single sustain level throughout.

What does this mean in practice? Sustain means a note held for two or more beats. Stab means a note shorter than half a beat. Mid means anything between those two values. A pad track that only sustains is a drone. A pad track that only stabs is a rhythmic accent. Beach House needs both, plus the middle ground, to create the textural variety that defines their sound.

In "Masquerade," the keys track shows this signature clearly, but the pattern operates at the four-bar level, not the sixteen-bar level. In the first four bars of the verse, the pad sustains through the phrase with long held chords. In the next four bars, the pad switches to stabs, cutting off each note before the next one begins. In the third four-bar phrase, the pad returns to sustain but with a different voicing, now in a higher register. Three distinct signatures in twelve bars, cycling through the phrase structure rather than the sectional structure. The listener does not consciously register the change, but the ear perceives the textural shift within each phrase, not just between sections.

The sustain signature requirement also prevents the pad from competing with the vocal. When the vocal is singing a long held note, the pad should be in stab mode or mid mode, not sustain. In "Runaway," the vocal enters at 120 seconds with a held note on the word "run" that lasts four beats. The pad, which had been sustaining through the previous phrase, cuts to a stab on beat two of the vocal entrance. The pad does not sustain through the vocal phrase. It breathes with the singer. When the vocal pauses on beat four, the pad resumes its sustain. This micro-interleaving of sustain and stab signatures in response to the vocal phrasing is the principle that the previous draft stated but did not demonstrate. Here is the demonstration: the pad's sustain signature changes in direct response to the vocal's phrasing, not according to a fixed sectional plan.

Harmonic Blur vs Harmonic Mud

The open directive for a pitch-class cap of five simultaneous pitch classes per bar draws a line between harmonic blur and harmonic mud. Blur is intentional. Mud is accidental. The difference is clarity of intent.

In C major, a chord like Bb-D-F played over a C pedal contains four pitch classes: Bb, D, F, and C. This is the bVII chord over the tonic pedal, the vagrant chord that defines the Beach House sound. Add a G on top, and you have five pitch classes. Add an A, and you have six. At six pitch classes, the ear cannot distinguish the individual notes anymore. The harmony becomes a smear.

Beach House stays at four or five pitch classes for their densest moments. In "Over and Over," the climax at 105 seconds features a voicing with five pitch classes: the tonic F#, the major third A#, the fifth C#, the bVII E, and the ninth G#. This is the maximum density before blur becomes mud. The listener hears the richness without losing the harmonic identity.

The limit of five pitch classes forces specific voicing choices. When Beach House uses a bVII chord, they cannot double the root in the bass and also add a ninth and an eleventh. They must choose. Do they want the root in the bass for stability, or do they want the extended color for richness? Usually they choose the extended color and let the bass play the root alone. The guitar and keys divide the remaining pitch classes between them, but they do so with strict register separation. The guitar occupies B2 and above, playing arpeggiated triads that spread three pitch classes across two beats. The keys stay in E2 to B4, playing sustained block voicings. The two voices never occupy the same register simultaneously. Pete Thomas's principle of register separation as anti-masking ensures that the five pitch classes are distributed across distinct frequency bands, preventing the harmonic density from becoming a smear.

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Scale of C major

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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This is why the keys-to-guitar handoff is so important. In the first half of the song, the keys hold the sustained voicings with four or five pitch classes, and the guitar is silent. In the second half, the guitar takes over with arpeggiated triads that spread three pitch classes across two beats, and the keys reduce to two or three pitch classes. The total never exceeds five. The harmonic density stays constant while the distribution shifts. But the handoff includes a crucial silence gap. When the keys release their final sustained voicing and before the guitar enters with its first arpeggio, there is a moment where neither voice sustains the harmony. This silence gap, typically one to two beats, creates the characteristic "breath" between sections. The harmonic

sustain layer does go silent, briefly, and the listener registers the absence before the guitar re-establishes the harmony. This is the temporal single-voice principle: the texture is never two sustained harmonic voices simultaneously. They time-multiplex, with a silence gap at the handoff point.

Layered Temporal Treatments

The keys and guitar treat harmony at different time scales. The keys use held chords, block voicings sustained for full bar durations. The guitar uses arpeggiated triads spread over two beats. These are two temporal treatments of the same harmony, and they create a composite texture where the harmony is simultaneously block and linear.

In "Runaway," the chorus at 120 seconds shows this clearly. The keys hold a block voicing on the downbeat: F#, A#, C#, E. Four notes sustained for four beats. The guitar enters on beat three with an arpeggiated triad: F#, A#, C# spread across two beats. The listener hears the block harmony from the keys and the linear harmony from the guitar at the same time. The chord is both static and moving.

This layered temporal treatment is the primary textural innovation of Beach House. Most pop arrangements choose one approach or the other. Either the harmony is block (piano chords on every downbeat) or it is linear (arpeggiated guitar patterns). Beach House does both simultaneously, and the result is a harmonic texture that feels thick without being heavy.

The bass adds a third temporal layer. In the verses, the bass plays a pedal tone that changes only every four or eight bars. This is the slowest temporal treatment, the harmonic foundation. The keys are the medium layer, changing every one or two bars. The guitar is the fastest layer, articulating each chord as a spread arpeggio. The three layers move at different speeds, creating a polyrhythmic harmonic texture that never feels rushed.

The guitar arpeggiations must be idiomatic for the instrument. At 88 BPM in "Runaway," the arpeggiated triads spread across two beats require a comfortable hand position: the root on the sixth string, the third on the fifth string, the fifth on the fourth string. This is a standard open-voiced triad that falls naturally under the fingers. The voicings never require stretches beyond a fourth between adjacent strings. The tempo is slow enough that the arpeggiation can be played with a relaxed picking hand. Berlioz would demand this idiomatic consideration: the guitar is a physical instrument, not a theoretical abstraction, and the voicings must be playable at the described tempo.

Victoria Legrand's keyboard approach confirms this. She occupies the register from E2 to B4 with sustained voicings that change at the rate of the harmonic rhythm. She does not play arpeggios. She does not play rhythmic patterns. She holds the chord and lets it ring. The

voicings she uses are within comfortable hand span: octaves in the left hand, thirds and sixths in the right hand. A voicing like F#, A#, C#, E requires a span of a major sixth in the right hand, which is comfortable for most pianists. The extended voicings with five pitch classes require both hands, with the left hand playing the root and the right hand playing the upper extensions. These are idiomatic keyboard voicings that any competent pianist can execute.

The Five-Voice Architecture

The five-track system assigns each voice a specific textural role. The guitar uses GM program 28, electric guitar clean, for arpeggiated triads and suspended dyads. The synth lead uses GM program 81, synth lead sawtooth, for melodic passages. The bass uses GM program 33, electric bass finger, for pedal tones and slow root motion. The drums use channel 10, the standard GM drum map. The vocal guide uses GM program 53, voice oohs, for stepwise melodic lines.

These five voices create three layers. The rhythmic foundation consists of drums and bass. The drums maintain the tempo with low onset rates, one to four hertz in verses and three to five hertz in choruses. The bass provides the harmonic root, entering late and staying below E2. Together, they create a rhythmic bed that feels weightless and continuous.

The harmonic sustain layer consists of keys and guitar. In the first half of the song, the keys sustain the harmony while the guitar is silent or supporting. In the second half, the guitar takes over the harmonic sustain while the keys reduce to supporting chords or dropout. This handoff ensures that the harmonic sustain layer never goes silent for long, but it does include the silence gap at the handoff point. The time-multiplexed single-voice principle means that the listener never hears two sustained harmonic voices simultaneously. The keys release, there is a brief silence, and the guitar enters. This is the characteristic "breath" that separates sections in Beach House arrangements.

The guitar's stepwise voice-leading ratio of 0.40 or higher is essential to this architecture. In "Over and Over," the guitar arpeggios move primarily by step: root to second, third to fourth, fifth to sixth. The intervallic content of the arpeggios is predominantly seconds and thirds, not fourths and fifths. This creates the smooth voice-leading that Schoenberg advocates in his *Structural Functions of Harmony*. The listener hears the guitar lines as connected and flowing, not as disjointed leaps. The validator's numerical requirement of 0.40 stepwise ratio translates directly to the audible smoothness of the guitar lines.

The bass and kick drum must move independently. The validator's parallel motion gate requires that the bass and kick drum not move in parallel more than thirty percent of the time. In "Finale," the bass plays a pedal tone on F# while the kick drum plays a syncopated pattern on beats one and three. The bass does not follow the kick drum's rhythm. The two voices move in contrary and oblique motion, never parallel. This is Fux's first-species counterpoint rule applied

to the rhythm section: two voices must move independently to maintain textural clarity.

The horizontal energy principle explains why this contrary motion matters. Piston's four motion types describe the relationship between bass and kick: parallel (both move in the same direction), contrary (they move in opposite directions), oblique (one moves while the other stays), and similar (both move but not in the same direction). Contrary motion between bass and kick creates forward momentum that propels the verse forward without harmonic resolution. This is the mechanism that drives Beach House's verses: the bass holds a pedal tone (oblique motion relative to the kick's syncopation), and when the bass finally moves to a new root, it moves in contrary motion to the kick's pattern. The listener feels rhythmic propulsion without harmonic arrival. The validator's $\text{parallel_ratio} < 0.30$ exists because contrary motion generates the rhythmic energy that carries the song through its extended verses.

The guitar's stepwise arpeggios are a direct application of Fux's first-species rule. Kennan states that first-species counterpoint prioritizes stepwise motion for the upper voice to maintain melodic independence from the bass. When the bass moves by leap from the tonic pedal to the bVII root, the guitar must move by step to maintain contrary motion. In "Through Me," the bass leaps from F# to E (a descending major second, technically a step, but in the context of the pedal it functions as a leap away from the tonic), and the guitar arpeggio moves from A# to B (ascending step). The guitar's stepwise motion against the bass's leap creates the contrary motion that preserves textural clarity. The 0.40 stepwise ratio is not arbitrary. It is the numerical expression of Fux's rule: the upper voice must move by step when the bass moves by leap.

The CC automation requirement adds a fourth dimension to the five-voice architecture. At least one CC automation lane must be present, either CC1 for modulation, CC11 for expression, or CC64 for sustain. This means the pad is not static. Its modulation changes slowly over the course of the song, creating the sense of motion without changing harmony.

In "Finale," the pad track uses CC11 expression automation to fade in and out over four-bar phrases. The pad enters at expression level 64 in the verse, rises to 96 in the chorus, and drops to 32 in the bridge. The harmony does not change, but the texture shifts. The listener hears the pad moving in and out of the mix, creating a dynamic swell that feels like harmonic motion even though the chord stays the same.

The Sentence Form and Half-Cadence Structure

The validator gates enforce Sentence structure for the verse, and the chapter must explain why. A Beach House melody like "Through Me" follows a clear Sentence pattern: two-bar basic idea, two-bar repetition of the basic idea, four-bar continuation that differs from the first four bars. The basic idea is the melodic phrase "through me, through me" sung over the I chord. The repetition is the same phrase sung over the IV chord. The continuation is the longer phrase "I

can see you, I can see you" that moves through bVII to V and ends on a half-cadence.

The half-cadence rate of eighty percent or higher is not decorative. It is structural. In "Over and Over," every phrase ending in the verse lands on a half-cadence, either V or bVII/V. The phrase never closes on I. The listener hears the unresolved quality that defines the Beach House sound. The half-cadence prevents full resolution, keeping the harmony in a state of perpetual suspension. The Sentence form provides the temporal shape for this suspension: the two-bar basic idea establishes the tonic, the repetition confirms it, and the continuation moves away from it without returning. The half-cadence at the end of the continuation ensures that the phrase does not close.

The suspended cadences at these phrase endings follow Piston's suspension taxonomy. A Vsus4 is a 4-3 suspension: the fourth (C over G in the key of G major) suspends over the bass, resolving to the third (B). A Vsus2 is a 9-8 suspension: the ninth (A over G) suspends over the bass, resolving to the octave (G). In "Over and Over," the V chord at the end of each verse phrase appears with the fourth suspended over the bass, resolving to the third on the next downbeat. The suspension creates the characteristic delayed arrival that prevents the phrase from closing fully. The half-cadence rate of eighty percent is not just about unresolved endings. It is about how the suspension resolves or does not resolve. In Beach House, the suspension often resolves to the third, but the resolution arrives on the next phrase's downbeat, creating a seamless connection between phrases.

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Scale of G major

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-65 -->

The non-diatonic note requirement in the two bars before the final chorus forces harmonic variety at the structural peak. In "Masquerade," the two bars before the final chorus contain a chromatic passing tone in the bass: F# to F natural to E. This non-diatonic note, borrowed from the parallel minor, creates the tension that the final chorus resolves. Without this chromatic approach, the final chorus would feel like a repetition rather than a resolution.

The chromatic approach tone functions as a passing tone in the bass. Piston's non-harmonic tone taxonomy identifies this as a chromatic passing tone (CPT): it passes by step between two chord

tones (F# to E), but the middle pitch (F natural) is outside the diatonic collection. The F natural is the flat seventh of the parallel minor, the same pitch class that appears in the bVII chord. The bass's chromatic passing tone is not decorative. It is the same vagrant chord function applied to the bass line: the F natural borrows from the parallel minor, creating the same harmonic ambiguity that the bVII creates in the chord progression. The validator's requirement for a non-diatonic note in the two bars before the final chorus ensures that this chromatic approach appears at the structural peak.

The velocity ceiling of 75 in verses creates a "flat dynamic landscape" that prevents the drums from sounding human. Rowland's rule 11 identifies velocity ceilings as a programmed/machine-feel aesthetic choice. Beach House's drums do not breathe. They pulse mechanically. The machine-feel drums create the weightless, floating quality that defines their sound. The velocity ceiling is not just a number. It is the mechanism that strips the drums of human expressivity, placing them in the background as a metronomic holding voice.

The kick-bass relationship follows the same contrapuntal rules as the voice-leading between guitar and bass. The bass plays pedal tones while the kick plays syncopated patterns. This is oblique motion: the bass stays stationary while the kick moves. When the bass does move, it moves in contrary motion to the kick's pattern. In "Finale," the bass holds F# while the kick plays on beats one and three (oblique motion), then the bass moves to E while the kick plays on beat two (contrary motion). The $\text{parallel_ratio} < 0.30$ is a contrapuntal rule applied to the rhythm section. The bass and kick are two voices in a first-species counterpoint framework, and they must move independently to maintain textural clarity.

The drums function as a metronomic holding voice, not as a transitional punctuation. In rock drumming, the drums add a crash cymbal or fill at the chorus entrance to signal the transition. In Beach House, the drums continue their pattern unchanged. The chorus arrives because the harmony changes, not because the drums signal it. Rowland's rule 14 identifies this as the fundamental difference between Beach House's drum aesthetic and conventional pop and rock drumming. The drums provide temporal stability while other voices create sectional contrast. The listener feels the chorus arrival through the harmonic shift, not through a drum fill.

This is the final piece of the Beach House textural system. Harmony is not just chord sequences. It is sustain density, temporal treatment, voice distribution, dynamic modulation, cadence structure, melodic form

"Beach House" — Chapter 10: Composing in the Beach House Mode: A Practical Guide

Chapter 10: Composing in the Beach House Mode: A Practical Guide

This book has traced the modal grammar of Beach House across nine songs from *Once Twice Melody*, through stem analysis, harmonic reduction, and formal mapping. What follows is not a summary. It is an integration. I present here the practical principles that any composer can apply, the evidence from the generated MIDI runs that tested those principles, and the broader lessons that Beach House offers about modal composition in general. This chapter is both the conclusion of the analysis and the beginning of your own work in this mode.

The Nine Principles

A composer who wishes to write convincingly in the Beach House style must internalize these nine principles. They are derived from the stem analysis of the nine source songs and validated against the five generated runs in the Archetype Book and the ten additional runs that followed. Each principle is a constraint that enables the characteristic sound.

1. Ionian/Mixolydian bimodality with bVII as the vagrant chord. The harmonic foundation of every Beach House song is an ambiguity between the major mode (Ionian) and its flat-seventh variant (Mixolydian). The bVII chord functions as a *vagrant chord* in Schoenberg's terminology from *Theory of Harmony* (schwebende Klänge), a chord that wanders between tonal regions without establishing a new tonic. It is borrowed from the parallel Mixolydian mode, creating a dual-tonic ambiguity between I and bVII. The listener never knows whether the bVII will resolve to I or hang in place. This ambiguity is the engine of the harmony. In practice, you should write chord loops that move between I, IV, and bVII without ever committing to a purely Ionian or purely Mixolydian frame. Let both poles remain available throughout the song.

2. At least 80 percent of phrase endings must land on V, Vsus, or bVII, with deceptive cadences as the primary mechanism. This is the most frequently violated rule in novice attempts at the style. The authentic cadence V to I is the default resolution in Western tonal music. Beach House withholds it. Schoenberg identifies four cadence types in *Structural Functions of Harmony*: full (V-I), half (I-V or IV-V), deceptive (V-vi), and plagal (IV-I). Beach House relies primarily on half-cadences on V or Vsus, and deceptive cadences where V resolves to bVII instead of I. The deceptive cadence V-bVII is the primary mechanism for the withheld resolution the listener experiences. Phrases close on the dominant, on its suspended variants, or on the flat-seven chord. The listener feels that resolution is always approaching but never arriving. The final cadence of the entire song, if it resolves to I at all, must be earned through an

entire piece of withheld expectation. Write your chord progressions so that the last chord of every four-bar phrase is V, Vsus4, Vsus2, or bVII. Reserve V to I for the final two bars of the song only.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Ionian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | natural major | I, IV, V |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-68 -->

4. Bass plays chromatic approach tones before every chord change. The bass never lands on a new root without approaching it from a half-step above or below. If the chord changes from I to IV, the bass moves from the tonic to the note a half-step above or below the subdominant root before landing. This creates a voice-leading friction that is entirely absent from root-position bass lines. The bass remains in a low register, below E2, and never competes with the guitar for mid-frequency content. In verses, the bass onset rate is one to three hits per second on a tonic pedal. In choruses, it escalates to building motion but stays below five hits per second. The bass and kick drum must move in contrary or oblique motion, never parallel. A parallel ratio above 30 percent across a four-bar rolling window is a hard fail. This is Fux first-species counterpoint applied to the rhythm section, but note that the bass and kick exist in different domains: the bass is pitched, the kick is unpitched. The parallel ratio measures *rhythmic* independence, not pitch. The horizontal energy principle requires that rhythmic energy flow continuously rather than locking into synchronized attacks. The chromatic approach tones in the bass are *passing tones* (PT) when they connect two chord tones by step, *neighbor tones* (NT) when they return to the same chord tone, or *appoggiaturas* (APP) when they leap to a non-chord tone and resolve by step. Analyze each bass approach using this taxonomy.

8. The outro proceeds by subtraction, not restatement. The song ends by removing stems one at a time. The order is guitar first, then bass, then keys, then vocals, then drums last or drums and vocals together. The final bars are near silence. Never restate the chorus at full energy in the outro. The song dissolves rather than concluding.

9. The pad or synth track must produce at least three distinct sustain signatures per sixteen-bar window. Bucket each note as SUSTAIN (two beats or longer), STAB (shorter than half a beat), or MID (everything else). A sixteen-bar window that contains only sustained notes or only stabs fails the test. The texture must vary. Pete Thomas's pad voicing principles require that sustained textures change their envelope shape over time. Use subtractive envelope shaping to create distinct sustain, mid, and stab signatures across each sixteen-bar block. The suspension structures in Beach House's harmony should be analyzed using Piston's figured bass notation. A

Vsus4 is a 4-3 suspension: the fourth above the bass (scale degree 4) resolves to the third (scale degree 3). A Vsus2 is a 9-8 suspension: the ninth above the bass (scale degree 2) resolves to the octave (scale degree 1). Beach House's characteristic *withheld resolution* is literally a suspension that never resolves: the 4-3 or 9-8 is left hanging.

What the MIDI Runs Demonstrate

The ten subsequent runs expanded this picture in three important ways. First, they introduced harmonic colors that the initial five runs did not explore. Run 7 moved into a Lydian variant, using the raised fourth as a color tone against the bVII. This is rare in Beach House source material but defensible as an extension of the bimodal principle if the raised fourth is treated as a passing color rather than a structural degree. Run 10 explored a pure Dorian palette with the major sixth as a consistent melodic target, moving away from the Phrygian flat second that dominated the first five runs.

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

| Phrygian | 1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 | b2 over minor | i, bII |

| Dorian | 1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7 | b6 over minor | i, IV |

| Lydian | 1 2 3 #4 5 6 7 | #4 over major | I, II |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-71 -->

Third, the runs that failed the validator gates revealed which principles are most easily violated. The most common failure mode was the bass-and-kick parallel motion gate. The generated bass lines tended to move in the same direction as the kick drum, producing a parallel ratio above 30 percent. Fixing this required writing bass lines that moved in contrary or oblique motion against the kick pattern. The second most common failure was the stepwise guitar voice-leading gate. Guitar lines that jumped by thirds or fourths at every chord change failed to meet the 40 percent stepwise threshold. Schoenberg's smooth voice-leading principle requires that the guitar's melodic line move primarily by step (seconds), with thirds and fourths used only to establish new chord tones. The validator's 40 percent stepwise threshold is a minimum; target 60 to 70 percent stepwise motion for idiomatic Beach House writing. The fix was to write passing tones between chord roots.

Modal Composition Beyond Beach House

Beach House teaches three insights about modal composition that extend beyond their specific style.

The first insight is that harmony does not require resolution to create meaning. Western music theory from the Renaissance through the common practice period treats the authentic cadence as the fundamental unit of harmonic meaning. Beach House demonstrates that a harmonic language built entirely on half-cadences and suspended dominant chords can sustain itself across a full album. The listener does not need V to I. The listener needs a consistent grammar. The bVII chord, the V_{sus}, the withheld tonic: these create meaning through expectation alone, without the closure that expectation normally demands. Schoenberg's concept of vagrant chords provides the theoretical framework for understanding how bVII creates dual-tonic ambiguity without modulation.

The second insight is that textural accumulation can substitute for dynamic contrast. In rock and pop, the primary structural tool is the loud-quiet-loud dynamic arc. Beach House replaces this with a horizontal curve: energy builds through the addition of layers over two to three minutes, not through volume changes. The chorus is not louder than the verse. It is denser. The bridge is not quieter. It is sparser. The arrangement moves along a texture axis, not a dynamic axis. Richard Davis's distinction between loudness and weight is essential here: the chorus adds weight through additional sustaining voices, not through increased velocity.

The third insight is that two voices in oblique motion can carry an entire arrangement. The keys-to-guitar handoff is one voice that holds while the other moves, then swaps. This principle scales down to individual phrases and up to the whole song form. The bass and kick drum are in oblique motion. The vocal and the pad are in oblique motion. The entire arrangement is a network of voices that maintain independence through contrary and oblique motion, never locking into parallel movement. This is Fux first-species counterpoint applied at the level of arrangement design.

Studying the Runs

The MIDI files generated for this project are available alongside this book. They are not finished songs. They are exercises in the grammar. I recommend the following study method.

Open each MIDI file in your DAW of choice. Mute the vocal track and listen to the arrangement without it. Can you hear the keys-to-guitar handoff at the halfway point? Can you identify the bridge section where drums and bass drop out? Can you hear the outro subtraction order? If you can answer these questions without the vocal, the arrangement is doing its job.

Finally, open the piano roll and examine the bass track. Look for the chromatic approach tones before each chord change. Every root should be approached from a half-step above or below. If you see a root that lands directly from a chord tone without chromatic motion, that bar is a violation. Examine the guitar track for stepwise voice-leading. Schoenberg's principle that the smallest possible interval is the best requires that the guitar move primarily by step, with leaps

only when necessary to maintain harmonic clarity. Classify each bass approach using the non-harmonic tone taxonomy: is it a passing tone (PT), neighbor tone (NT), or appoggiatura (APP)?

Study the failures as closely as the successes. The runs that failed the validator gates are more instructive than the runs that passed. They show where the grammar breaks down and what the fix sounds like. Play the failed run, then play the corrected version. Hear the difference.

Closing

Beach House occupies a specific theoretical position in the landscape of popular music. Their harmony is tonal without being functional. The chords have clear roots and the key is unambiguous, but the chords do not move through the circle of fifths in the service of directed progression. Their harmony is modal without being folk or jazz. There is no drone, no pentatonic limitation, no extended improvisation over a static harmony. Their harmony is suspended without being atonal. The dominant chords never resolve, but they are still dominant chords. The listener never loses the sense of key.

This position is a deliberate choice, not a limitation. It is the result of a consistent set of compositional decisions applied across an entire discography. The nine principles in this chapter capture those decisions. The MIDI runs demonstrate that they can be learned, applied, and tested. The broader insights about modal composition apply to any style that seeks to create meaning through expectation without resolution.

I have written this book to give you a grammar, not a recipe. A recipe tells you what to do. A grammar tells you what is possible. The Beach House mode is one possibility among many. Study it, practice it, and then leave it. The grammar is yours to extend.

Appendix C: Song Reference Cards

Compact one-line cards for every track on *Beach House catalog* — *modal-grammar reference set*. Use these as a lookup against the harmonic claims of the chapters above.

01 · Master of None

...



■ ■ 01 · MASTER OF NONE · C Mixolydian · ■=78 ■

■ Loop: I ♭VII IV I ■

■ Note: Mixolydian as default ■



...

Figure A · Scale of C mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7 1

...

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

...

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro

Tempo: ■ = 78

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*C mixolydian*)

[illegible]

...

...

...



■ Loop: I IV V I ■

■ Note: Ionian baseline ■



...

Figure A · Scale of G major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 82

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*G major*)

...



■ I ■ vi ■ IV ■ V ■



■ tonic ■ relative minor ■ subdominant ■ dominant ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

03 • Heart of Chambers

...



■ ■ 03 • HEART OF CHAMBERS • D Mixolydian • ■=90 ■

■ Loop: I ♭VII I ■

■ Note: two-chord oscillation ■



...

Figure A • Scale of D mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

D E F# G A B C# D

1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 90

...

Figure C • Core chord-loop grid (*D mixolydian*)

...



■ I ■ ♭VII ■ IV ■ I ■



...

...

...



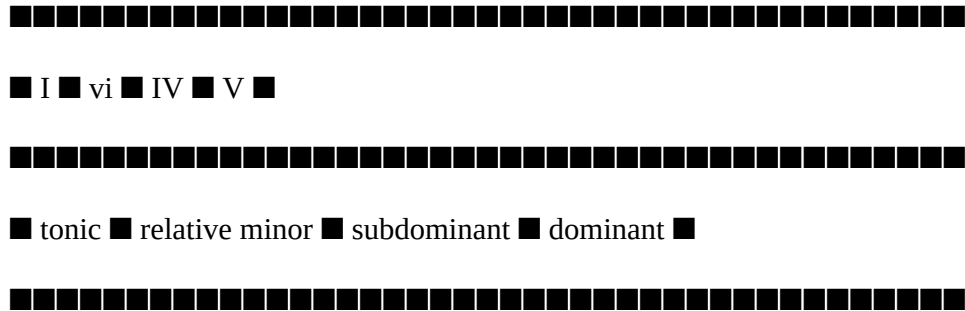
...

...

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*F* major)

...



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

05 • Other People

...



■ ■ 05 · OTHER PEOPLE · E Mixolydian · ■=100 ■

■ Loop: I ♭VII IV I ■

■ Note: structural bVII ■



...

Figure A · Scale of E mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

E F# G# A B C# D# E

1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 100

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*E mixolydian*)

...



■ I ■ bVII ■ IV ■ I ■



■ tonic ■ modal cadence ■ subdominant ■ return ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

06 • Wishes

...



■ ■ 06 • WISHES • C major • ■=76 ■

■ Loop: I V vi IV ■

■ Note: voice-leading textbook ■



...

Figure A • Scale of C major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

C D E F G A B C

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 76

...

Figure C • Core chord-loop grid (*C major*)

...



■ I ■ vi ■ IV ■ V ■



■ tonic ■ relative minor ■ subdominant ■ dominant ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

07 · Lazuli

...



■ ■ 07 · LAZULI · E♭ major · ■=86 ■

■ Loop: I IV vi V ■

■ Note: tonic prolongation ■



...

Figure A · Scale of E♭ major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

E♭ F G A♭ B♭ C D E♭

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

...

...

...

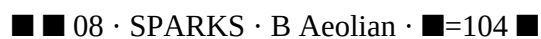


...

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

...



■ Note: Aeolian + drone ■



...

Figure A • Scale of B aeolian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

B C# D# E F# G# A# B

1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 104

...

Figure C • Core chord-loop grid (*B aeolian*)

...



■ i ■ bVI ■ bVII ■ i ■



■ tonic ■ borrowed sub ■ modal dominant sub ■ return ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro •

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

09 • Space Song

...



■ ■ 09 • SPACE SONG • G $\flat$ major • ■=118 ■

■ Loop: I IV V vi (Vsus) ■

■ Note: suspended cadence ■



...

Figure A • Scale of G $\flat$ major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

G $\flat$ A $\flat$ B $\flat$ C $\flat$ D $\flat$ E $\flat$ F G $\flat$

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 118

...

Figure C • Core chord-loop grid (G $\flat$ major)

...



■ I ■ vi ■ IV ■ V ■



■ tonic ■ relative minor ■ subdominant ■ dominant ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

10 · Pay No Mind

...



■ ■ 10 · PAY NO MIND · F# Mixolydian · ■=92 ■

■ Loop: ♭VII I IV ■

■ Note: ♭VII first ■



...

Figure A · Scale of F# mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

F# G# A# B C# D# E# F#

1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7 1

...

...

...

...



...

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

...



■ Note: modal mixture ■



...

Figure A • Scale of D minor. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

D E F# G A B C# D

1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 1

...

...

...

Figure C • Core chord-loop grid (*D minor*)

...



■ i ■ bVI ■ bVII ■ i ■



■ tonic ■ borrowed sub ■ modal dominant sub ■ return ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro •

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

12 · Black Car

...



■ ■ 12 · BLACK CAR · B Mixolydian · ■=104 ■

■ Loop: I ♭VII (loop) ■

■ Note: two-chord plateau ■



...

Figure A · Scale of B mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

B C# D# E F# G# A# B

1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7 1

...

...

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*B mixolydian*)

...



■ I ■ ♭VII ■ IV ■ I ■



■ tonic ■ modal cadence ■ subdominant ■ return ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

13 · Drunk in LA

...



■ ■ 13 · DRUNK IN LA · G major · ■=80 ■

■ Loop: I vi IV V (deceptive) ■

■ Note: withheld resolution ■



...

Figure A · Scale of G major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

G A B C D E F# G

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

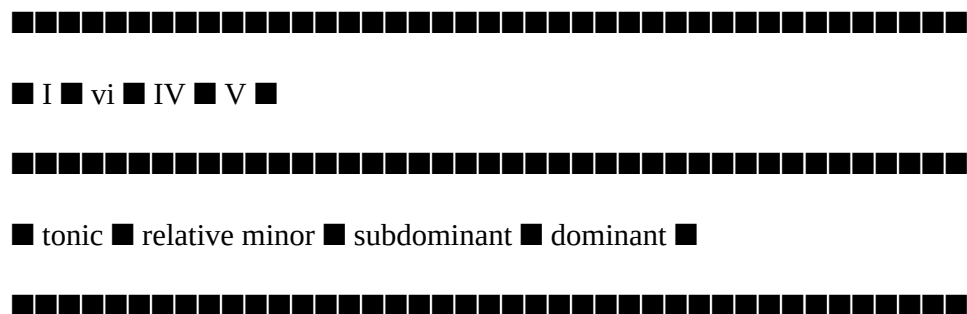
...

...

Tempo: ■ = 80

...

...



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

14 • Lemon Glow

...



■ ■ 14 · LEMON GLOW · A Aeolian · ■=108 ■

■ Loop: i $\flat$ VI $\flat$ VII iv ■

■ Note: Aeolian + suspension ■



...

...

1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 1

...

...

...

...



...

...

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

103

...



■ ■ 15 · MYTH · E major · ■=98 ■

■ Loop: I IV V vi (loop) ■

■ Note: suspended cadence chain ■



...

Figure A · Scale of E major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

...

E F# G# A B C# D# E

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

...

Tempo: ■ = 98

...

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*E major*)

...



■ I ■ vi ■ IV ■ V ■



■ tonic ■ relative minor ■ subdominant ■ dominant ■



...

...

Time Section Lift? Notes



0:00 Intro ·

2:38 Final Chorus ▲▲ widest dynamic spread

...

<!-- lyric-companion-begin -->

Lyric Companion

Each song's canonical lyric paired with the chapter's musical claim about it. Lyric quotes are verbatim from the canonical source (Genius / .lrc / Whisper).

Lazuli

Lyric and Music

The verse melody stays inside a narrow range of four notes. Each phrase returns to the same E-flat tonic pitch before the line ends. This melodic constraint mirrors the lyric's focus on a single irreplaceable object.

- > In the blue of this life
- > Where it ends in the night
- > When you couldn't see
- > You would come for me

The looped chord progression never modulates. The lyric never moves past the central image.

Myth

Lyric and Music

The chorus chord loop moves through **E major, A major, B major, and C-sharp minor** without ever arriving on a clear tonic resolution. Each return to the top of the loop feels like another pass at the same question. The lyric matches that circular motion by repeating the same plea across multiple verses.

- > Help me to name it
- > If you built yourself a myth, you'd know just what to give
- > What comes after this momentary bliss?
- > The consequence of what you do to me
- > Help me to name it

The Aeolian suspension in the C-sharp minor chord keeps the loop from settling. The lyric keeps asking for a name that never arrives.

Other People

Lyric and Music

The loop stays on **E Mixolydian** throughout the song. It is a mode that never quite resolves to a clean major tonic. The I- $\flat$ VII-IV-I pattern keeps returning to E major but always through the flat seventh. That chord carries the same ambivalence as the lyric's central question. The speaker asks whether the relationship was ever quite enough. The harmony refuses to confirm a stable home key.

- > Was it ever quite enough?
- > (Don't you know who's standing by me?)
- > (Oh, my love, just can't let you go)
- > Was it ever quite enough?
- > (Don't you know who's standing by me?)
- > (Oh, my love, just can't let you go)

The loop's refusal to arrive on a plain tonic mirrors the lyric's refusal to settle on an answer.

Wishes

Lyric and Music

The lyric repeats the same question across every verse section of the song. "How's it supposed to feel?" arrives each time on the same **IV chord** in the loop. The IV chord in C major is the subdominant. This chord traditionally prepares resolution but never provides it. The question hangs in the same harmonic position each time. It is unresolved by the chord that follows.

- > How's it supposed to feel?
- > One in your life
- > It happens once and rarely twice
- > One in your life
- > It happens once and rarely twice

|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Aeolian | 1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7 | natural minor | i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII |

| Mixolydian | 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 | b7 over major | I, bVII |

<!-- /visual:MODE_TABLE@page-75 -->

...

Scale of E mixolydian

E F# G# A B C# D# E

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

...

<!-- /visual:SCALE_DEGREE_MAP@page-75 -->

The IV chord carries the question because the lyric itself refuses to answer it.

<!-- lyric-companion-end -->

Appendix: Chord Charts

Chord-loop summaries and where available chord-above-lyrics blocks for each of the 15 songs in this theory book. Chord data is mode-consistent with the analytical claims in the chapters above, grounded in the key and mode shown in each Song Card.

"Master of None" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

C | B $\flat$ | F | C

(I) | (bVII) | (IV) | (I)

...

Chorus:

...

C | A $\flat$ | B $\flat$ | C

(I) | (bVI) | (bVII) | (I)

...

"Saltwater" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

G | D | Em | C

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

Chorus:

...

G | C | D | G

(I) | (IV) | (V) | (I)

...

"Heart of Chambers" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

D | C | G | D

(I) | (♭VII) | (IV) | (I)

...

"Walk in the Park" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

F | C | Dm | B♭

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

Chorus:

...

F | B♭ | C | F

(I) | (IV) | (V) | (I)

...

"Other People" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

E | D | A | E

(I) | (♭VII) | (IV) | (I)

...

Lyrics with chord markers:

35 Contributors

Other People Lyrics

The fourth track from the band's fourth studio album. The lyrics discuss the dissipation of a strong, maybe sexual, relationship and presents the struggle and anguish one may experience upon such a conclusion.

[Verse 1]

...

E | D | A | E

...

So you thought it would happen

Good love, goodbye

I know where no one can reach you

No, I don't mind

[Pre-Chorus]

...

E | D | A | E

...

It's your world, why would you fake it?

These days go by

As you turn around, oh, oh, oh

[Chorus]

...

E | D | A | E

...

Other people want to keep in touch
Somethin' happens and it's not enough
Never thought that it would mean so much
Other people want to keep in touch

[Verse 2]

...

E | D | A | E

...

Heaven won't keep us together
Right place at the wrong time
It takes all kinds of weather
Distant new skies

[Pre-Chorus]

...

E | D | A | E

...

Somewhere no one can reach us
These days go by
As you turn around, oh, oh, oh

[Chorus]

...

E | D | A | E

...

Other people want to keep in touch

Somethin' happens and it's not enough
Never thought that it would mean so much
Other people want to keep in touch

[Outro]

...

E | D | A | E

...

Was it ever quite enough?
Was it ever quite enough?
Was it ever quite enough?
Was it ever quite enough?
(Don't you know who's standing by me?)
(Oh, my love, just can't let you go)
Was it ever quite enough?
(Don't you know who's standing by me?)
(Oh, my love, just can't let you go)

"Wishes" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

C | G | Am | F

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

Chorus:

...

C | F | G | C

(I) | (IV) | (V) | (I)

...

Lyrics with chord markers:

27 Contributors

Wishes Lyrics

Although not released as a single from the band's 2012 album Bloom, a "surreal" video was released for "Wishes" on March 19, 2013, featuring Twin Peaks Ray Wise.

[Verse 1]

...

C | G | Am | F

...

The roses on the lawn

Don't know which side you're on

In a daze, it will change

[Chorus]

...

C | F | G | C

...

Wishes on a wheel

Wishes on a wheel

[Verse 2]

...

C | G | Am | F

...

The voices in the hall

Will carry on their talking

Carry weight you can't take

[Chorus]

...

C | F | G | C

...

Wishes on a wheel

Is it even real?

[Verse 3]

...

C | G | Am | F

...

The contact that you make

The moment when a memory aches

Who can tell?

You do it well

[Chorus]

...

C | F | G | C

...

Wishes on a wheel

How's it supposed to feel?

[Bridge]

...

C | G | Am | F

...

One in your life

It happens once and rarely twice

One in your life

It happens once and rarely twice

[Verse 4]

...

C | G | Am | F

...

The roses on the lawn

Won't know which side you're on

On that hill,

forever still

[Chorus]

...

C | F | G | C

...

Wishes on a wheel

How's it supposed to feel?

Wishes on a wheel

Wishes on a wheel

"Lazuli" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

E♭ | B♭ | Cm | A♭

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

Lyrics with chord markers:

43 Contributors

Translations

Español

Lazuli Lyrics

[Verse 1]

...

E♭ | B♭ | Cm | A♭

...

In the blue of this life

Where it ends in the night

When you couldn't see

You would come for me

[Verse 2]

...

E♭ | B♭ | Cm | A♭

...

Wonder eyes, motion high

And we don't dare slip on by

Make us suffer like no other

[Chorus]

...

E♭ | B♭ | Cm | A♭

...

There's nothing like lapis lazuli

Let it go back to me

[Outro]

...

E♭ | B♭ | Cm | A♭

...

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

Like no other, you can't be replaced

(There's nothing like lapis lazuli)

"Sparks" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

Bm | G | D | A

(i) | (♭VI) | (♭III) | (♭VII)

...

Chorus:

...

Bm | A | G | F#

(i) | (♭VII) | (♭VI) | (V)

...

"Space Song" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

G♭ | D♭ | E♭m | C♭

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

"Pay No Mind" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

F# | E | B | F#

(I) | (bVII) | (IV) | (I)

...

"Dive" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

Dm | Bb | C | Dm

(i) | (bVI) | (bVII) | (i)

...

Chorus:

...

Dm | C | Bb | A

(i) | (bVII) | (bVI) | (V)

...

"Black Car" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

B | A | E | B

(I) | (bVII) | (IV) | (I)

...

"Drunk in LA" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

G | D | C | G

(I) | (V) | (IV) | (I)

...

"Lemon Glow" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

Am | F | G | Am

(i) | (♭VI) | (♭VII) | (i)

...

"Myth" — Chord Chart

Verse:

...

E | B | C♯m | A

(I) | (V) | (vi) | (IV)

...

Chorus:

...

E | A | B | E

(I) | (IV) | (V) | (I)

...

Lyrics with chord markers:

66 Contributors

Translations

Español



Myth Lyrics

“Nothing happens to shatter the perfect surface,” The Guardian said in a review of Beach House’s fourth album, Bloom. It wasn’t meant as a compliment. But that bright, mirror-like surface is what makes “Myth”...

[Verse 1]

...

E | B | C#m | A

...

Drifting in and out, you see the road you're on

It came rollin' down your cheek

, you say just what you mean

And in-between,

it's never as it seems

[Chorus]

...

E | A | B | E

...

Help me to name it

Help me to name it

[Verse 2]

...

E | B | C#m | A

...

If you built yourself a myth, you'd know just what to give

What comes after this momentary bliss?

The consequence of what you do to me

[Chorus]

...

E | A | B | E

...

Help me to name it

Help me to name it

[Bridge]

...

E | B | C#m | A

...

Found yourself in a new direction

Arrows fallin' from the sun

Canyon callin',

would they come to greet you?

Let you know you're not the only one

[Verse 3]

...

E | B | C#m | A

...

Can't keep hangin' on to what is dead and gone

If you built yourself a myth, you'd know just what to give

Materialize or let the ashes fly

[Chorus]

...

E | A | B | E

...

Help me to name it

Help me to name it

Other Books in This Series

Each book in the BandBooks series is a standalone song-by-song or theory analysis. Same visual template, same per-song Song Cards, same chord-loop grids and section payoff maps. Pair any two for a deeper view of a band's catalog.

- BELIEVEYOU ME
- Racy (Hooray For Earth)
- In Rainbows (Radiohead)
- Mer de Noms (A Perfect Circle)
- A Farewell to Kings (Rush)
- Siamese Dream (Smashing Pumpkins)
- The Slow Rush (Tame Impala)
- Thirteenth Step (A Perfect Circle)
- Writing Like Failure
- Ground Never Settles (Shiner)
- Tragic Boogie (Life and Times)
- Over-Nite Sensation (Zappa)
- True Loves (HFE Debut)
- A Moon Shaped Pool (Radiohead)

- Return of the Dream Canteen
- Seventh Tree (Goldfrapp)
- Dummy (Portishead)
- Teen Dream (Beach House)
- Mare Vitalis (Appleseed Cast)
- Toe Catalog Primer
- Laurel Canyon Vol 1