October 17, 2013

Preliminary Report: Comparison of “Got to Give It Up” and “Blurred Lines”

Materials Reviewed and Methodology

1. The following recordings were acquired from iTunes for review:

2. The following sheet music was obtained for reference:

3. A preliminary analysis and comparison was conducted of the above recorded musical works. Transcriptions of portions of both songs were prepared for the purposes of comparison. A transcription is a written representation of the sounds heard in a musical performance.

4. Regarding key, the tonal center of “Got to Give It Up” is A, while in “Blurred Lines”
the tonal center is G.¹ Both songs contain tones of the major scale as well as tones outside of the major scale (such as the lowered third and seventh scale steps and the raised fourth scale step, often associated with the “blues” scale). However, we follow common practice in the report below, by showing both songs in the context of the key of A major (based on the tonal center of “Got to Give It Up”), for ease in comparison.²

5. The above recorded works will be referred to in the report below as “Give It Up” and “Blurred,” respectively.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

6. A preliminary review comparing “Give It Up” and “Blurred” has revealed a constellation of eight substantially similar features thus far, although a more comprehensive review would likely identify additional significant and substantial similarities between the works. Their substantially similar elements in both their vocal melodies and instrumental accompaniments occur simultaneously in each work, coinciding to form a similar “constellation” of features.

7. The two songs’ substantial similarities surpass the realm of generic coincidence, reaching to the very essence of each work.

8. In listening to these two songs, the ordinary “lay” listener would likely recognize the substantial similarities between them.

9. Both songs are comprised of multiple vocal and instrumental themes. The primary vocal melodic themes in “Blurred” are as follows: the signature phrase (sung to the lyrics “And that’s why I’m gon’ take a good girl”), the hook (“take a good girl,” “You’re a good girl,” and so

¹ “Key” refers to the tonal center or primary pitch of a musical composition, and to the scale or series of pitches that create the melodic and harmonic material of the music. Whether a key is “major” or “minor” is determined by the series of pitches in the scale. Within the tradition of music in our Western culture, the most common scales are called “major scale” and “minor scale,” each containing seven tones. The first tone is the foundation of the scale, and is also referred to as the “tonic” or “home.”

² In the key of A major, the pitches (tones) are A, B, C-sharp, D, E, F-sharp and G-sharp. The lowered third scale step is C-natural, the lowered seventh scale step is G-natural, and the raised fourth scale step is D#. 
forth), the core theme of the verse (beginning with “If you can’t hear”), and the backup hook (“Hey, hey, hey”). The primary instrumental themes in “Blurred” are found in its bass lines and keyboard parts. Additional identifying elements are found in the percussion parts. All of these elements are found similarly, in various locations, throughout “Give It Up.”

**Context of Shared Creative Choices**

10. The composer of a musical work makes a series of creative choices that result in the final composition – its character, identity, and all of the sounds heard by the listener. When the composers of two songs each make many of the same creative choices – particularly of primary identifying elements – then the songs often sound substantially similar to one another.

11. This is the case in comparing “Blurred” with “Give It Up.” The composers of “Blurred” made a number of the same fundamental creative choices regarding identifying elements as did the composer of “Give It Up,” resulting in substantially similar features.

**Preliminary Findings**

12. The particular features thus far identified as similar are discussed below.

**Similarity 1: Signature Phrase in Main Vocal Melodies**

13. “Give It Up” and “Blurred” contain very similar signature phrases. In “Blurred,” this similar signature phrase is sung to the lyrics “And that’s why I’m gon’ take a good girl.” In “Give It Up,” this similar signature phrase is sung to the lyrics “I used to go out to parties.” In both songs, this signature phrase is positioned similarly, heralding a new section of the song, and is one of the crucial elements of the song’s identity.

---

3 A “hook” is the term used in popular and commercial music for the most important melodic material of the work, that which becomes the memorable melody by which the song is recognized. In the case of songs, it is usually the passage in the chorus in which the title lyrics are sung, such as in the hit recording “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” (1979, recorded by Cyndi Lauper). In instrumental music, it is the signature theme by which the listener recognizes which song is being performed.

4 A phrase is a passage within a longer melody, similar to a sentence within a paragraph or a line within a poem. In vocal music, phrases are often determined by the pauses between lyric lines as the singer takes a breath. The signature phrase is a primary identifying feature of a song and one of its most memorable elements.
14. In comparing the first occurrences of the signature phrases (found at :19 seconds in “Give It Up” and at :47 seconds in “Blurred”), both songs share the following identifying elements:

   a. Both repeat their starting tone several times
   
   b. Both contain the identical scale degree sequence of 5-6-1 followed by 1-5
   
   c. Both contain identical rhythms for the first six tones
   
   d. Both use the same device of a melodic “tail” (melisma) on their last lyric, beginning with the scale degrees 1-5
   
   e. Both contain substantially similar melodic contours (melodic outlines/design).

See Musical Examples 1A and 1B below, where brackets show the above similar elements a, b, c, and d, and identical scale degrees are indicated with arrows.

---

5 “Scale degrees” refer to the position in a particular scale of each tone. The traditional scale contains seven consecutive tones, and, for example, in the scale of C major, the tone C is scale degree 1, D is scale degree 2, E is scale degree 3, and so on. Two melodies containing a similar series of scale degrees with similar rhythms usually sound similar.

6 Rhythm describes the duration of one tone or rest (silence) followed by the next. Rhythms are defined by the length of beats they occupy. For example, a quarter note usually occupies one beat, an eighth note a half beat, a sixteenth note a quarter beat, and so on.

7 A “melisma” describes a vocal melody in which one syllable or lyric is held while sung with several successive pitches, rather than a single pitch for each syllable.

8 Melodic “contour” describes the overall “shape” of a melody, whether it rises or lowers in register (going up to a higher note or down to a lower note) as it progresses on its course from one note to the next.

9 In all musical examples in this report, “Blurred” (in the key of G major on the recording) is transposed to the key of “Give It Up” (A major) for the purposes of comparison. “Transpose” refers to the process of changing a melody line (or chords) to another key. This does not change the recognizability nor internal relationships between notes. In other words, a transposed melody sounds virtually the same as its original version. Transposition is a necessary and musicologically valid process required when musically comparing two different melodies.
15. The above musical examples show that both songs combine their shared identifying elements in similar ways. The result is that the two songs are similar in their signature phrases.

16. This signature phrase in “Give It Up” is very significant to the song and provides the basis upon which much of the song’s subsequent vocal material is developed. It is the first vocal phrase, introducing the song, and it enables the listener to recognize the song immediately. Much of the main vocal melody in “Give It Up” is an outgrowth of this signature phrase, using the same scale degrees and other similar elements.\(^\text{10}\) This outgrowth material is found in the main

\(^{10}\) In music, melodies are often varied for color and interest after they are initially stated. This can be done by shifting the order of pitches, adding repetition, or modifying rhythms or phrase endings, for example. These variations of the initial theme are described as “outgrowths,” as their origins are clearly in the first statement of the theme. Composers use this technique to create continuity, and maintain interest, while prolonging their works.
vocal melody throughout Bars 8-56 and 80-113 (out of 118 bars in total) in “Give It Up.”

17. In “Blurred,” the main vocal melody also contains phrases that are outgrowths of this similar material, such as the melodies sung to the lyrics “What do they make dreams for, when you got them jeans on, what do we need steam for?” (at 1:21) and “I got this from Jamaica…Dakota to Decatur” (at 3:15), where many of the identical scale degrees are found in reverse order as compared to “Give It Up.”

**Similarity 2: Hooks**

18. The first occurrence of the hook in “Blurred,” located within its signature phrase (described above), is sung to the lyrics “take a good girl.” This melody in “Blurred” is very similar to one of the hook phrases in “Give It Up,” sung to the lyrics “Keep on dancin’.”

19. In “Blurred,” this first hook occurrence is heard at :49 and is repeated later in the song. In “Give It Up,” this hook is repeated seven times at four-bar intervals starting at 3:12. See Musical Examples 2A and 2B below for a comparison of these hooks, where identical scale degrees are indicated with arrows.

---

11 Musical pieces are divided into groups of beats, and each group is referred to as a “bar” or “measure.” In describing a musical piece, one usually refers to the location within a piece by bar number. The number of beats per bar is usually two, three, four, or six. In musical notation, bars are separated by vertical lines called “bar lines.”
Musical Example 2A: “Give It Up” Hook

Musical Example 2B: “Blurred” Hook

Similarity 3: Hooks with Backup Vocals

20. In both songs’ hooks as described above, backup vocal parts are sung simultaneously with the main vocal melodies. In “Blurred,” this multi-part backup chorus – with its bright anthem-style setting – highlights the key words “good girl.” This material is substantially similar to the pairing of the main vocal and backup vocal melodies in the hook in “Give It Up” sung to the lyrics “Keep on dancin’.”

See Musical Examples 3A and 3B below for a comparison of the first occurrences of these hooks combined with backup vocals. Scale degrees are stacked vertically above tones that are sung simultaneously, and arrows indicate identical scale degrees.
Musical Example 3A: “Give It Up” Hook with Backup Vocals

Musical Example 3B: “Blurred” Hook with Backup Vocals

Similarity 4: Core Theme in “Blurred” and Backup Hook in “Give It Up”

21. In “Blurred,” the core material of the song’s verse (Theme X) is substantially similar to the backup hook (Theme X) in “Give It Up.”

22. Theme X in “Give It Up” is sung 28 times in the backup vocals to the lyrics “Dancin’ lady,” starting at 3:13. In “Blurred,” Theme X is introduced as the first phrase of the verse section (at :18) with the lyrics “If you can’t hear,” and it serves as the melodic core from which much of the remaining vocal material throughout the entire song is developed.

23. In comparing Themes X in “Give It Up” and “Blurred,” the songs share the following substantially similar elements:

   a. Scale degrees: In “Give It Up,” Theme X contains scale degrees 3-3-#2-3. In “Blurred,” the same scale degrees are found in numerous phrases in various ways, including in

---

12 Musical works are divided into smaller sections, much as books are divided into chapters. In popular songs, these sections are often alternating “choruses” and “verses,” as well as transitional sections such as “bridges” and “interludes,” and ending sections called “codas” or “outros.”
the exact reverse order, 3-#2-3-3, as well as in the same order as “Give It Up,” with the final pitches repeated, such as 3-3-#2-3-(#2-3) sung to the lyrics “Okay, now he was close.”

b. Some identical rhythms are shared.

c. A distinctive melodic pattern: both descend, then ascend a half step to a non-scale tone.\(^{13}\) This is preceded by a repeated pitch in “Give it Up” and the exact opposite (followed by a repeated pitch) in “Blurred.”\(^{14}\) The shared use of a non-scale tone is significant in that each song deviates from the traditional scale in the same way, using a chromatic feature.\(^{15}\)

24. In “Give It Up,” Theme X occurs 28 times in 28 consecutive bars in (starting at 3:13).

25. In “Blurred,” Theme X is the core of the entire verse as well as other significant vocal phrases throughout the song. This substantially similar note sequence occurs many times throughout “Blurred” – while lyric and pitch variations do occur, the fundamental shared elements of Theme X are intact and contribute to the songs’ sounding similar.

See Musical Examples 4A, 4B, and 4C below for a comparison of the first three repeats of Theme X (backup hook) in “Give It Up,” with Theme X in Phrases 1 and 3 in Verse 1, and Phrases 1 and 3 of Verse 2 in “Blurred.” Identical scale degrees are indicated with arrows, while “R” above the arrows indicates that shared scale degrees are found in reverse order, and brackets indicate identical scale degrees that are repeated.

---

\(^{13}\) Half steps describe the movement in a melody to the nearest adjacent tone, either higher or lower. For example, moving from the tone F to F-sharp describes moving a half-step higher; moving from B to B-flat describes moving a half-step lower. A series of half-step movements in a melody are often described as “chromatic” tones.

\(^{14}\) The technique of reversing the order of musical pitches in a melody is termed “retrograde.”

\(^{15}\) A chromatic series of pitches is one in which the pitches immediately adjacent to one another are sounded, and as such deviate from the standard series of pitches in a scale. For example, a chromatic scale played on the piano would be performed by striking consecutive black and white keys in succession, such as C-C-sharp (#), D-D#-E, and so on.

The pitches in “Blurred” are not always sung precisely. Sometimes the chromatic feature in Theme X of “Blurred” is less pronounced.
Musical Example 4A: “Give It Up” Backup Hook - Theme X

Musical Example 4B: “Blurred” Theme X (Verse 1, Phrases 1 and 3)\(^\text{16}\)

Musical Example 4C: “Blurred” Theme X (Verse 2, Phrases 1 and 3)

26. Theme X also occurs within the signature phrase of “Blurred,” (shown above in Musical Example 1B) sung to the lyrics “And that’s why I’m” (at :47). See Musical Example 4D below.

Musical Example 4D: “Blurred” Theme X (as found in Signature Phrase)

\(^{16}\) In Musical Example 4B, Theme X in “Blurred” is transposed down one octave for the purposes of comparison.
27. Additionally, Theme X in “Blurred” is the melody used for subsequent variations of the song’s hook found in the chorus section, such as at 1:12 with the lyrics “But you’re a good girl.” (Here, the melody is transposed to a different starting pitch so that the actual scale degrees are 5-5-#4-5, but it is the same melodic structure as shown above.) See Musical Example 4E below.

Musical Example 4E: “Blurred” Hook Variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>#4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1:12 But you’re a good girl

Similarity 5: Backup Hooks

28. Another very important theme in “Blurred” is found in the backup vocals—it is so significant to the song that it will be referred to as the “backup hook.” This is set to the lyrics “Hey, hey, hey.” The backup hook in “Blurred” is similar to the backup hook (Theme X) in “Give It Up” in that both songs share the feature of distinctive chromatic (half step) sequences, and both do this specifically within the function of the backup hook. The backup hook set to the lyrics “Hey, hey, hey” in “Blurred” first occurs at :09 and is repeated a total of 21 times throughout the song.

See Musical Examples 5A and 5B below for a comparison of the backup hook (Theme X) in “Give It Up” and the backup hook in “Blurred.”

---

17 In this hook variation of “Blurred,” the similar melody is transposed to a different starting pitch. Because of this, the scale degrees differ in comparison to “Give It Up”; however, the melodies sound similar because the internal relationships between the notes are intact. Musical Example 4D shows the phrase “But you’re a good girl” with the same starting pitch as in Musical Examples 4A-4C, for the purposes of comparison. In order to show this accurately within the context of a key, Musical Example 4D is shown in the key of F# major.
Musical Example 5A: “Give It Up” Backup Hook - Theme X

Musical Example 5B: “Blurred” Backup Hook

Similarity 6: Bass Melodies

29. The bass lines in Bars 1-4 of both songs are similar in their scale degrees and rhythms. Although not identical, they share many of the same distinctive syncopated rhythms, in the same locations and often with identical scale degrees, which makes them sound very similar.

See Musical Examples 6A and 6B below, where identical rhythms for both pitches and rests are indicated with “x,” and identical scale degrees are indicated with arrows.

---

The similar melodies, Theme X in “Give It Up” and the backup hook in “Blurred,” differ in scale degrees. The similarity due to their shared use of chromatic tones is heard nonetheless. Musical Example 5B shows the phrase “Hey, hey, hey” with the same ending pitch as in Musical Example 5A, for the purposes of comparison. In order to show this accurately within the context of a key, Musical Example 5B is shown in the key of F# major.

“Blurred” also contains a pre-intro bar, Bar 0, heard at :00-:02 on the recording.

“Syncopation” refers to a disturbance of the normal pulse within the music, which creates an uneven effect, such as a short rhythm, followed by a long rhythm. This is found in such songs as George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm.”

A rest is a period of silence within a melody. Rests are assigned specific rhythmic values, just the same as if they were notes. Consequently, a whole rest in a traditional four-beat bar would last four beats, a half rest two beats, a quarter rest one beat, and so on. The rests are one of the distinctive features in both songs’ bass lines here.
Musical Example 6A: “Give It Up” Bass Line Bars 1-4

Musical Example 6B: “Blurred” Bass Line Bars 1-4

30. The above material is heard prominently in the instrumental introduction of “Give It Up,” and is subsequently varied throughout the song. In “Blurred,” this similar material is also heard prominently in the instrumental introduction, and is subsequently repeated at 8-bar intervals throughout the entire song (i.e. in Bars 1-4, 9-12, 17-20, and so forth).

31. Additionally, both songs combine the above similar features in their bass lines with a substantially similar descending melody, also in their bass lines, from scale degrees 5 to 1. This similar descending bass melody recurs intermittently throughout the verse of “Give It Up” (with variation) and at every eighth bar in “Blurred” (Bars 8, 16, and so forth). This descending melody serves an important structural feature in “Blurred,” as it occurs at the end of each section to herald the beginning of a new portion of the song.

See Musical Examples 6C and 6D below, for a comparison of one of the variations of the descending bass melody in “Give It Up,” with “Blurred.” Solid arrows indicate identical scale degrees, hollow arrows indicate nearly identical scale degrees, and parentheses indicate scale degrees that are repeated in a different register.

---

22 The bass line in “Give” is transposed one octave higher than heard on the recording, for comparison purposes.
Musical Example 6C: “Give It Up” Descending Bass Melody

Musical Example 6D: “Blurred” Descending Bass Melody

Musical Example 6D: “Blurred” Descending Bass Melody

Similarity 7: Keyboard Parts

32. The keyboard parts in both songs are very similar, containing chords in rhythms that emphasize the offbeats, performed with staccato articulation. Additional similar elements include:

   a. Shared pitches: the keyboard part in “Blurred” alternates between two chords, with each chord repeated consecutively for four bars at a time, for the entirety of the song. In Chord 1 of “Blurred,” two out of three pitches in each iteration are identical to the first chord in “Give It Up” (first heard in consecutive repetition in Bars 1-16 of the song). In Chord 2 of “Blurred,” two out of three pitches in each iteration are identical to the third chord of “Give It Up” (first heard in Bar 18).

   b. Both songs contain a distinctive rhythmic feature in which the keyboard stops

---

23 Musical phrases are divided into groups of beats, which alternate between strong and weak beats. The “off beat” represents a tone that is struck after the main part of the beat and is considered to be in a weaker position than if it were to occur immediately on the beat. This technique often results in a distinctive rhythm, as is the case here. In music performance, articulation refers to the manner in which a particular note or group of notes is physically performed; for example, short, with a sharp attack (“staccato”); smoothly connected (“legato”); long but separated, and so on.
playing on beat 4, creating a rhythmic suspension until the following bar. This first occurs in Bar 2 in “Give It Up,” and in Bar 1 (followed by Bar 2) in “Blurred.”

See Musical Examples 7A and 7B below for excerpts comparing the keyboard parts in Bars 1-2 in “Blurred” (Chord 1) and Bars 1-2 in “Give It Up.” Scale degrees are stacked vertically above tones that are played simultaneously; arrows indicate identical scale degrees, and brackets indicate repeated scale degrees.

**Musical Example 7A: “Give It Up” Keyboard Bars 1-2**

![Sheet Music for Give It Up](image1)

**Musical Example 7B: “Blurred” Keyboard Bars 1-2**

![Sheet Music for Blurred](image2)

**Similarity 8: Unusual Percussion Choices**

33. Both songs contain two very prominent percussion lines with distinctive sonorities, as described below:²⁴

a. Cowbell part: both songs contain syncopated rhythms played by

²⁴ “Sonority” refers to the quality of a sound, such as that of a particular instrument, and is one element that contributes to the distinctiveness of a given recording.
Although their cowbell parts are not identical, this feature performs the same function in both songs, adding a very specific color and identity to the rhythm section. The cowbell part is a shared deviation from the standard drum set instrumentation, and it is an indispensable feature in both songs’ identities.

b. Open hi-hat playing on the second half of beat 4 occurs in both songs.26 In “Give It Up,” the open hi-hat is introduced prominently even before the bass and keyboard enter, launching the instrumental introduction, and it appears repeatedly throughout the song. In “Blurred,” the open hi-hat appears prominently in every second bar throughout the song. In both songs, this open hi-hat rhythm is placed on the weakest beat of the bar, creating a distinctive “splash” that is in sharp contrast to the stable rhythms of the drums. This identical open hi-hat rhythm is crucial to the character of both songs.

34. The above similarities are somewhat unusual and represent the same specific creative choices made by the composers of both songs.

**Constellation of 8 Similar Features**

35. In both “Give It Up” and “Blurred,” Similarities 6-8 (found in the instrumental accompaniment) function as a group of simultaneously occurring features, repeated continuously throughout both songs. These similar features combine to drive both works. Similarities 1-5 are the defining phrases in the vocal melodies of “Give It Up” and “Blurred.” When they occur, they always appear simultaneously with the group of features, Similarities 6-8.

**Additional Distinctive Similarities**

36. The scoring and arrangement choices represented in the recordings enlarge the circle

---

25 A cowbell is a metal percussion instrument with a distinctive sound.
26 A hi-hat is one of the instruments found in a standard drum set. It is constructed of two cymbals placed horizontally on a stand and connected to a pedal, that when pressed and released, opens and closes the two cymbals against each other to create a muted percussive sound. It can also be played by striking it with a drumstick or brush, either with the cymbals brought together (“closed”) or kept apart (“open”), as is the sound represented here.
of similarities to the listener. For example, the songs both use the same instrumentation and sonorities for their similar instrumental material.

37. Both songs use distinctive falsetto in their vocal parts.²⁷

38. Both songs deviate from the norm in their instrumental scoring by omitting a guitar.

39. Both songs contain party noises as one of the accompanimental elements throughout the song.

40. The above traits enhance the perception of similarity between “Give It Up” and “Blurred” and represent additional shared creative choices made by the composers of both songs.

Summary

41. “Give It Up” and “Blurred” both contain substantially similar constellations of defining features.

42. The substantial similarities found in “Give It Up” and “Blurred” surpass the similarities that result from their shared genre, and are the result of many of the same deliberate creative choices made by their respective composers. Consequently, rather than merely resembling one another stylistically, these two works sound substantially similar in many of their most distinctive features.

43. Many of the main vocal and instrumental themes of “Blurred” are rooted in “Give It Up,” particularly the signature phrase, vocal hook, backup vocal hook, their variations, and the keyboard and bass lines in “Blurred” as discussed above. In addition, the shared departures from convention, such as the unusual cowbell instrumentation, omission of guitar, and use of male falsetto, all contribute further to the finding of substantial similarity here.

44. In listening to these two songs, the ordinary or “lay” listener would likely recognize

²⁷ Falsetto is a singing technique in which a singer vocalizes outside his or her normal vocal range. In this case, the male singer sings in the high register of a female voice, which is distinctive.
similarities between them.

45. This is a preliminary report comparing “Give It Up” and “Blurred.” The substantial similarities include, but are not necessarily limited to, the features compared here. Further study would likely identify additional important similarities between these two works.

46. I have listened independently to the works compared in this report. I believe that the ordinary observer would recognize the substantial similarities between these songs. I have also read of the many opinions regarding this case on the internet, and understand why so much of the lay public finds the two songs so similar.

47. It is improbable that a single third-party work could be found that would contain all of these similar features coinciding in a similar “constellation” as described above. Our preliminary conclusion is that it is that “Blurred” was not created independently of “Give It Up.”

Report submitted on October 17, 2013 by:

Judith Finell, Musicologist and President
Judith Finell MusicServices Inc.