

Researchers such as Ralf von Appen and Trevor de Clercq have in recent years presented the results of corpus studies of popular music that have shown historical norms for form and harmony, with specific attention to popular music of the 1960s. My research of the Rolling Stones' music demonstrates how statistical analysis of a single artist's work can interact with this existing large-scale corpus research. I show how in the period between late 1965 and early 1967 the Rolling Stones turned toward AABA form at a time when this form was statistically in decline in popular music as a whole, and that their use of the form correlated with a sudden increase in their original song output, with the expansion of their harmonic palette, and with decreased reliance on 12-bar blues patterns. The Stones' turn toward AABA form and toward greater harmonic variety is specifically associated with up-tempo songs with caustic lyrics like "Mother's Little Helper" and "19th Nervous Breakdown" that make ironic use of a form most closely associated with the Tin Pan Alley songwriters of a previous generation. I discuss the specific correlations between the use of AABA form by the Rolling Stones and harmonic, textural, and lyrical patterns, showing how popular music forms interact closely with parameters often thought of as more directly expressive. Finally, I discuss how the Rolling Stones' approach to form and harmony during this period relates to their earlier work that relied much more exclusively on American blues and R&B traditions.