

What Comes Next? – The Rhythmic and Formal Language of Contemporary Metal Music

by Jose M. Garza, Jr.
Texas State University
jmgjr23@txstate.edu
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Poster Abstract

While many popular songs tend to follow a standard – albeit occasionally modified – form, such as verse-chorus, contemporary metal compositions often contain discrete sections characterized by their underlying rhythmic patterns. Middleton (1990) acknowledges the role of rhythm in rock music in creating “syntactic units” that serve as the foundation of “structural frameworks” (Middleton 1990, 281-282). These syntactic units are especially crucial in metal, offering listeners “cues” as to how to experience the music. Following Phillipov’s (2012) and others’ writings on metal music and incorporating my own research, I will present the origins, characteristics, and significance of the syntactic units employed by contemporary metal musicians, supplementing my presentation with both audio and transcribed examples. This will be the first such comprehensive consolidation of contemporary metal music’s rhythmic syntax, and thus provide a convenient resource for further research on rhythm and form in metal music.

References:

- Middleton, Richard. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1990.
- Phillipov, Michelle. *Death Metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012.