

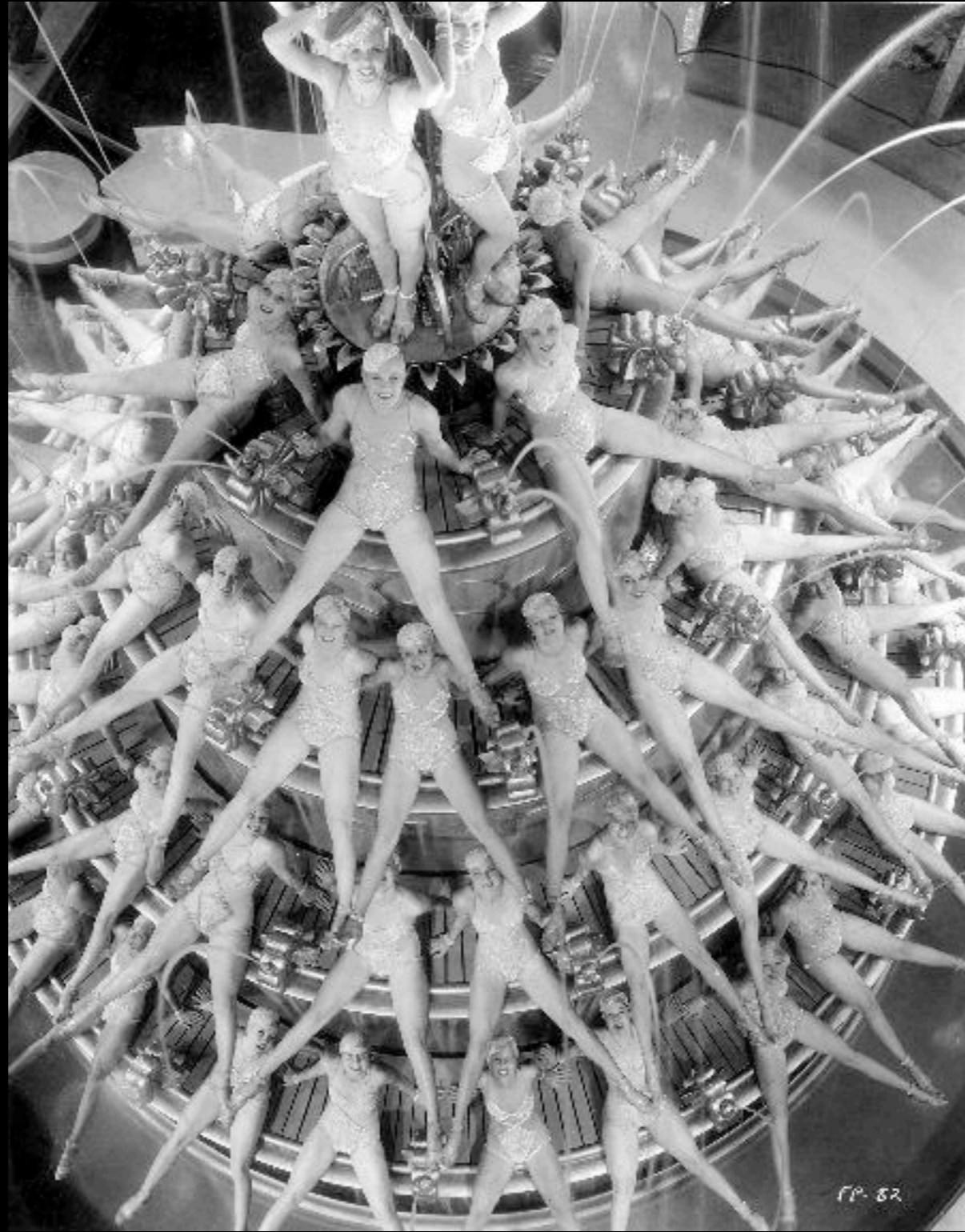
FPA 386 Week 5



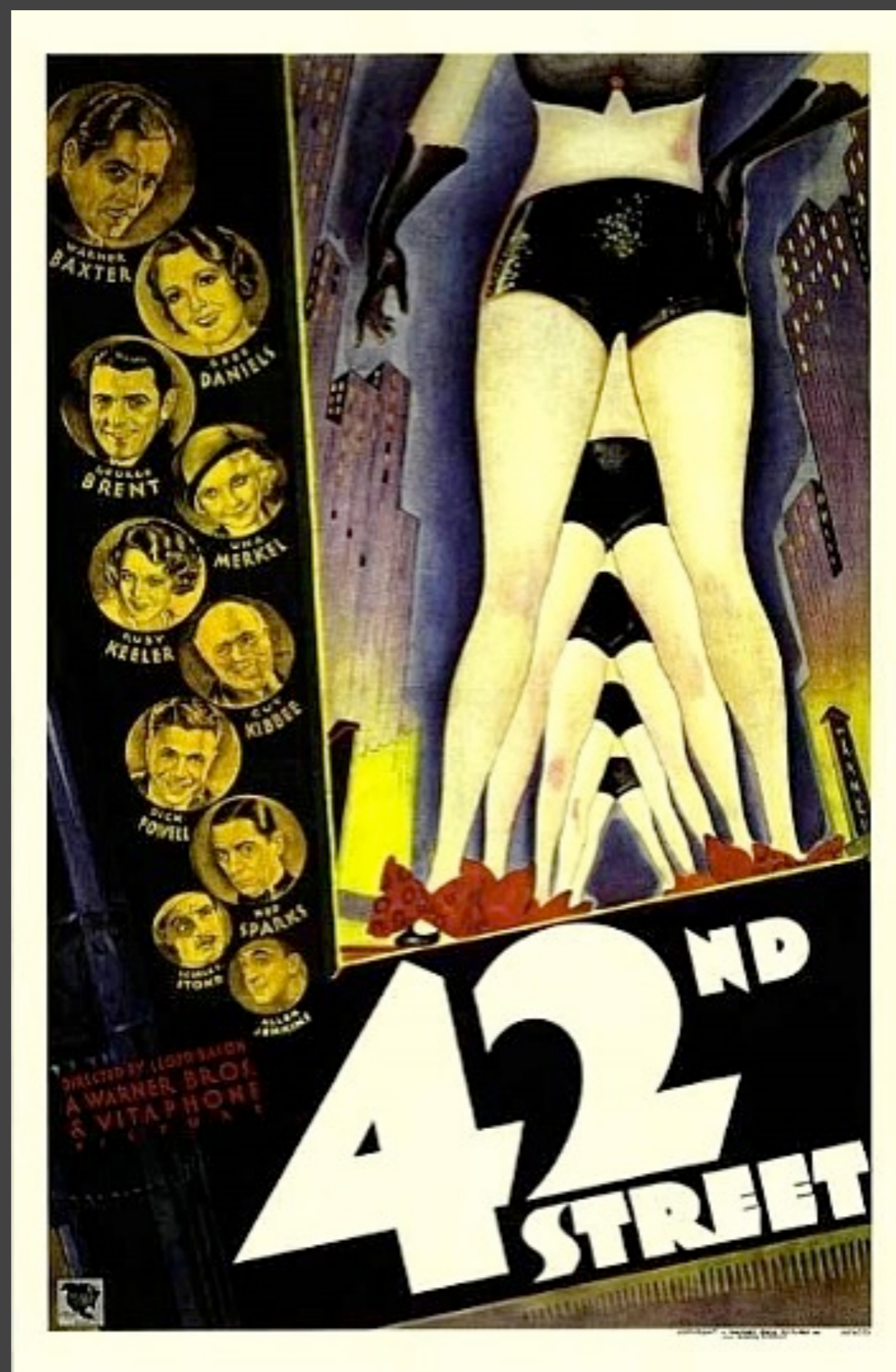


If HOLLYWOOD measured success by the quality of the criticism associated with its product, the musical would be its worst investment.

For more than 3 decades the money poured into musicals was greater than that for any genre; the best performers, writers, technology, etc. It was also the site of many important technological developments: \*\*color as early as 1929, \*\*Busby Berkely overhead moving camera techniques, \*\*split screen, \*\*playback and \*\*sophisticated recording techniques.



- There are questions that can be posed in regards to the musical;
- Is the musical genre a subset of the classical narrative category of film?
  - Given that the musical is almost always self - reflexive; Is the classical narrative category by nature reflexive?



In the musical the spectator is almost always male or takes a male position. Note the manner in which women are treated and the voyeuristic nature of the productions. (42nd St. clip as an example) The camera is positioned behind the stairs so that it may look at the women's legs!

The spectator is almost always watching an internal audience responding to the material – a common occurrence in contemporary narrative films as well – particularly for the "rousing" ending.



Question: Is the spectator positioned by the film text and form or even before they enter the theatre by their position in the culture?

The musical posits entertainment as its main goal: what about entertainment as a concept? Cynically: – How does entertainment lead us to Utopia or Utopian ideals when it embodies 2nd rate art, anti-intellectualism, total disrespect for the values of the culture

Is the musical:

- The focal point of the American myth? Because: The musical is simultaneously communal, spontaneous, folk-ethic based, and crassly commercial!
- How does entertainment lead us to Utopia or Utopian ideals when it embodies 2nd rate art, anti-intellectualism, total disrespect for the values of the culture

The musical is GESAMTKUNSTWERK in ways that not even Wagner could have imagined....

Because of its self-reflexive nature the musical can be considered a discourse on viewing and listening. The most escapist of entertainment arts should also be the most aware of its status, and thus the most complex of the Hollywood genres.



Thomas Elsaesser

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The fundamental appeal of the best of HOLLYWOOD cinema is its rigorous application of the pleasure principle – defined as the structure that governs the articulation of psychic and emotional energy. HOLLYWOOD films WORK because they are built around a psychic law not an intellectual one - thus achieving a level of coherence - difficult to analyze – YET VERY SIMILAR TO MUSIC



Central energy of the HOLLYWOOD film is superimposed on an almost infinite array of subject matters/plots: THE PURSUIT, THE QUEST, THE TREK, THE BOUNDLESS DESIRE TO GET TO THE TOP, TO GET RICH, TO MAKE IT. This equals a maximum emotional involvement for the spectator - we share the drive for gratification.



There is an intimate relationship between the psychological drives of the characters, the morale progression they accomplish, and the aesthetic gratification afforded the audience by the spectacle.



The musical is the exaltation of the artifice as the vehicle of authentic and emotional reality –

- an idealized medium where decor, color, lights change,
- where there is great freedom for composition,
- shifts from “reality” to “fantasy”
- from drama to farce
- action becomes rhythm, becomes dance, speech becomes song – a total freedom of expression.



In the musical we see manifest Hollywood's genius for characterization through significant detail. (Note old saw that Ginger Rogers did the same moves as Fred Astaire only backwards and wearing high heels...)

Musicals allow the spectator to enjoy the illusion of having escaped from the world of classical narrative and thus from ideological definition!



Alan Williams

In American musical comedy: the liberation of the image from the demands of veracity occurs only in musical numbers – which are embedded in a narrative that relies on “realistic” sound/image relationships.

**ALTERNATION BETWEEN MUSICAL NUMBERS AND NARRATIVE IS A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF THE GENRE.**

Image is only intermittently freed from the demands of veracity – because it only seems natural – actually it is very highly codified and conventionalized.



If the two channels (music and image) do not claim the same diegesis (rock video, song in television, etc) then they may run in parallel and one need not dominate the other.



Musicals depart from diegetic realism in the musical numbers. They observe two options:

- sound remains diegetic while the image becomes extra-diegetic (i.e. as in Busby Berkely)
- image remains diegetic while soundtrack introduces extra-diegetic material. (The orchestra playing in the woods, etc.) IN EACH CASE THE MUSICAL BECOMES LARGER THAN THE SPACE OF THE NARRATIVE - BUT IT IS A DISTORTION NOT A DESTRUCTION OF AN INITIALLY COHERENT SPACE.



In musical numbers (leaving aside dance only routines) music dominates the image in so far as it dictates the order and rhythm of the diegesis and it sets the semantic boundaries. There is however a very interesting distinction here: this is RECORDED MUSIC. (Aside from very early musicals) Specifically we get close-miking w/out natural ambiance – very different from the technique for recording synchronous dialogue. It of course was not usually possible to close mic sync dialogue in the first few decades of sound but it was standard practice for music recording. This distinction extends to contemporary practice: if you want music to sound diegetic – even if it doesn't have a source on screen the micing technique can help determine this information. The effect or the noticeable difference is similar to dubbing in foreign films – the naturalness is disturbed. This is not just a technical issue but an aesthetic one as well:

2·F

10106

(20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>10</sub>)**"NOBODY"-TAG**

("THE SEVEN LITTLE FOYS")

Comp. & arr. JOSEPH J. LILLEY  
Orch. SID CUTNER100 BEGUES ON  
4TH QUARTER OF  
BAR 50 OF R.V.103  
CAMERA PULLS BACK

:18<sup>3</sup>/<sub>10</sub> BEG. DISS.  
:19 MID. DISS.  
:20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>10</sub> MUSIC  
OUT.

10106~2·F~

(NOV. 17, 1954

PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION

The musical form in the HOLLYWOOD musical is almost always a thirty- two bar AABA song form. Symphonic scores until the late 50's or so were normally created of short musical motifs, Bernard Herrmann is one of the best examples of this. The form is very malleable in comparison to the song which requires more than a minute to play all the way through... song also leads to a very definite tonal centre, whereas the score may move to different keys with ease and still be "tonal". Finally the song has a strong sense of completion in its form which would be impossible for the score except for moments in the film where there is an obvious endings or closure. In the score, the tight structure of musical references is not perceived by the casual viewer – it is subliminal in its action – the music becomes thematicized – the material is modified to support the action. Songs in films form entire units AND MAY BE EXTREMELY DIDACTIC.



The musical is constantly reminding us that we are watching a film – it is an experimental discourse on the status of film-viewing and film-hearing. The typical HOLLYWOOD film is calculated to keep us from thinking that we are watching a film – the musical is entirely self-reflexive – it presents all the alienation devices associated with Bertolt Brecht and the Marxist Avante Garde - yet the musical shares none of the revolutionary purpose supposedly implied by self-reflexivity - or does it?



Musicals are not simply entertainment they are about entertainment – we are lured into believing the musical film’s fundamental honesty because this type of film admits it is only a film – we are convinced this product of big business, modern technology, and mass distribution is a down-home blend of spontaneity, togetherness and sing-a-long sensitivity.



These principles that defined Brecht's ideas about Epic Theatre, and the Verfremdungseffekt -- the Alienation or Estrangement Effect-- to be brief -- might perhaps be summed up by Brecht's statement that "Realism is not a matter of showing real things, but of showing how things really are." Brecht renounced the illusionist realism of bourgeois theatre, which as he said, "emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged "eternally human". Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every color. All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue is followed by the 'eternal' response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response.



Thus Brecht is saying that bourgeois theatre glosses the differences between classes and national cultures; it seeks to present itself as universal and real; it collapses all conflict into the psychological and individual, ignoring the cultural, historical economic imperatives behind social circumstances in the behaviour of individuals.

But Brecht's epic theatre rejects illusionist realism in favor of a dramatic presentation that because it's based in Marxism first of all acknowledges the means of production -- acknowledges its own artifice. And also constructs itself according to the dialectical process in which contradictions are not glossed over and resolved within the play, but simply presented to the audience.



Thus for Brecht, the form of a dramatic work is always political. If it seeks to treat universals or presents what are purportedly the externals of reality without any analysis, the work supports an ideology which seeks to keep people mystified about the real nature of their relations with one another. If on the other hand the approach of the work is scientific, if it presents social relations in an analytical way, which treats them as historical, as specifically dependent on economic and social circumstances, the work stands a chance at being genuinely revolutionary.

Brecht's primary contribution is that he makes FORM in a work of art a political issue, because he sees the forms of a work of art as being, like everything else, determined by the society in which they appear.



songs



The Song exists as soundtrack partially for economic reasons: Laura, High Noon, Pink Panther, Beverly Hills Cop Theme, etc., may make more \$ than the film. Films like The Bodyguard (starring the biggest selling singer of the day, Whitney Houston) , Against All Odds, put songs in montage sequences, end titles, etc. If the film has a singer as a star then it is almost de rigeur. (Image is from "Enchanted" which has 2 Academy Award nominations this year). Note previous image from Nashville - each star wrote their own song - Keith Carradine's won the Academy Award that year....



Compilation soundtracks (various artists) have been doing well for some time. Films targeted to teenagers (date movies) may exist only to sell the album. Top Gun, Boys in the Hood, Colors, Big Chill etc., etc., Thus it is not unusual for a film to be entirely scored with "songs" – note also Mean Streets, Goodfellas, Woody Allen films (jazz),. Sometimes this may not be entirely intentional: American Graffiti was an early example and the motivation was to evoke an era and the role that radio played in the lives of the characters. The songs are everywhere, coming from every car, every restaurant, every window.



The song also serves as a suturing agent - like other forms of music - save that the song, particularly the familiar song, has a known form which must be completed or at least stated completely before fading out.

The song often supports the diegesis with its lyrics, (may be quite didactic), its style (reflecting the period of the film, class of the characters, aspirations, etc.)



In a drama, characters in the film may initiate the song (diegetic) which later segues into non-diegetic score. Thus the song slips often between source & screen (diegetic/non-diegetic)

Characters may sing the song in its entirety within the diegesis (not moving into the "musical" mode: Distant Voices/ Still Lives, Butcher Boy, The Long Day Closes, (Terence Davies) and "Once".



It is becoming common (started by Homicide?) to have a song at the end of a television show to support a montage tying up the story, providing an epilog, etc. Virtually all of the Soprano episodes have no non-diegetic music save for a song at the end...



Songs (familiar, pop songs) are worth upwards of 100k US \$. It is not unusual for a cover to be used (North of Pittsburgh example).

Songs may sell a movie but actually only appear in the end titles: Titanic, Dead Man Walking, etc.

Song may play a pivotal role in the drama – Sea of Love, Play "Misty" for Me, Blue Velvet (Sandman sequence seen above), or provide the story-line: Ode to Billy Joel (1976) song from 1967, Crossroads (from a song by Robert Johnson), Mona Lisa



Song may play a pivotal role in the drama – Sea of Love, Play "Misty" for Me, Blue Velvet (here Isabella Rossellini singing the song that is fetishized), or provide the story-line: Ode to Billy Joel (1976) song from 1967, Crossroads (from a song by Robert Johnson), Mona Lisa



Song may provide fetish or focus: Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* or *Mona Lisa*, *Laura*, *Sea of Love*, *Blue Velvet*

Song may inform the entire film: *The Harder They Come*, *La Bamba*, *'Round Midnight*, *"What's Love Got to Do with It?"*, *Stand By Me*, *Tequila Sunrise*, etc. and although it is not in the title - *Magnolia* - from Amie Mann's album.

Well, I stand up next to a mountain  
And I chop it down with the edge of my hand

Yeah Well, I stand up next to a mountain  
And I chop it down with the edge of my hand  
Well, I pick up all the pieces and make an  
island  
Might even raise a little sand

Yeah 'cause I'm a voodoo child  
Lord knows I'm a voodoo child baby  
I want to say one more last thing  
I didn't mean to take up all your sweet time  
I'll give it right back to ya one of these days

*The End*