Master Songwriter
Module 11 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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Outline

• Biography of Harold Arlen
• Analysis of *Stormy Weather*
Biography

• Harold Arlen, 1905-1986
  – Born Hyman Arluck in Buffalo, NY
    • Son of Jewish cantor
    • Loved to sing
    • Began studying piano at 9 but hated practicing
  – Formed a combo (Snappy Trio) as a teenager
    • Wrote arrangements for it.
Biography

• **Career**
  – Wanted to be a professional singer
    • But his arrangements were always more popular than his singing.
    • Moved to NYC, age 22
  – Met lyricist Ted Koehler
    • They wrote *Get Happy*, 1929, Arlen’s first hit.
    • Wrote for Cotton Club, 1930-34.
    • *Stormy Weather* also a hit.

Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler
• **Career**
  – **Wizard of Oz**
    • Arlen teamed with lyricist Yip Harburg for the movie
    • He felt the movie needed a ballad with a broad, sweeping melody.
    • It came to him while driving on Sunset Blvd…
Biography

• Career
  – *Over the Rainbow*
    • *Over the Rainbow* was cut from the film 3 times.
    • Associate Producer Arthur Freed, who hired Arlen, lobbied to have it restored
    • Ranked *Best Song of the Century* by Recording Industry Association of America.
    • Named *Best Movie Song of All Time* by American Film Institute.
Stormy Weather

• Music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Ted Koehler
  – A lament
    • Illustrates Arlen’s gift for expressive melody
  – First performed 1933
    • by Ethel Waters at Cotton Club
    • She made first recording same year.
    • Also sung by Frank Sinatra, Lena Horne, Billie Holiday

Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler
Audio file
(first recording, by Ethel Waters)
Just can't get my poor self together.
I'm weary all the time.

So weary all the time.
When he went away the blues walked in and met me.
If he stays away old rockin' chair will get me.

All I do is pray the Lord above will let me walk in the sun once
This repeated motif emphasizes yearning

...as does this prolonged leading tone

Dramatic octave drop suggests exhaustion and release
Drop of a fourth or third echoes octave drop earlier (also used by Chopin)

Anticipates middle section

Echoes motif from first section

Inspired by chorus of African American spiritual

Extra 2 bars. Standard is 32 bars, here it is 34.

Solid rhythm and repetition contrast with opening lament
Melody echoed in accompaniment
**Harmony**

**Audio file**

Repeated **ii-V-I**

Melody is suspended over **ii<sup>7</sup>**, resolves after chord change

**Diminished chord provides passing tones**

**ii<sup>7</sup>** is suspended over **V**, resolves after chord change
IV – I pattern is common in spirituals
Dissonant 7 chord marks return to lament (we heard it in Satin Doll)