

# **Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop**

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This file includes the abstract, keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop” by Eron F. S. This video-essay may be found at <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv085eron>

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**Abstract for  
Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop**

**by Eron F. S., SMT-V 8.5**

In post-2000s pop, particularly synth-driven, dance-style pop, Flat 2 has become a *sonic signal of hotness*. Drawing on a collection of 75+ songs, this video explains how Hot Flat 2 usually appears in this style of music, the meanings associated with its sound, and what happens as we approach the boundaries of these sounds and meanings. Usually, Flat 2, defined as “the note a half step above the home note,” typically appears in isolation as part of a bassline or backing track rather than as part of a triad. In most of the songs where it appears, the lyrics center on “hotness,” defined as an expression of confidence, sexuality, or both. One possible reason for this is the “exotic” association with Flat 2—pop songs sometimes use “foreign” sounds to connote a non-specific other and conjure fetishizing stereotypes about Black and brown women’s bodies. This legacy of Orientalism and racism becomes even more apparent when songs reinforce Hot Flat 2 with lyrics, timbres, and augmented seconds. The sparser the pitch context, the less a note might sound like Flat 2, and as we approach or leave the boundaries of the pop genre, the hotness associations can fade altogether. With all this in mind, what starts as noticing a distinctive note becomes a way to notice genre boundaries and cultural connotations in the music we hear around us.

**Short Keyword List**

Flat 2, hotness, exoticism, pop, scale degree

**Extensive Keyword List**

Flat 2, hotness, exoticism, racism, orientalism, colonialism, pop, scale degree, Hot Flat 2, post-millennial pop, post-2000s pop, neighbor note, chromatic scale, genre, confidence, sexuality, genre boundaries, popular music, fetishization, foreignness, stereotypes, half step, cultural connotations, lowered note, timbre, augmented second, Beyoncé, Naughty Girl, Meghan Trainor, Nicki Minaj, Nice to Meet Ya, Me Too, Majesty, Miley Cyrus, Can’t Be Tamed, Usher, So Many Girls, Justin Timberlake, SexyBack, Filthy, Britney Spears, Outrageous, If You Seek Amy, Black Eyed Peas, Action, Christina Aguilera, Desnude (Get Naked), Not Myself

Tonight, Selena Gomez, Ring, Alessia Cara, Okay Okay, Labrinth, Eminem, Rihanna, Phresh  
Out the Runway, Jump, Shakira, Rabiosa, corpus, The Pussycat Dolls, When I Grow Up, Katy  
Perry, Blackpink, How You Like That, Jason Derulo, 2 Chainz, Talk Dirty, Cardi B, Money,  
P!nk, Pink, U + Ur Hand, LazyTown, Cooking by the Book, K-pop, Phrygian, erotic,  
objectification, topic

### **About the Author**

Eron [ˈi,ɹən] F. S. is a Ph.D. candidate at the Eastman School of Music. Originally from  
Decatur, GA, she earned her B.A. in music from Pomona College and her M.A. in music theory  
at Eastman. Her main areas of research are post-2000s pop music, Classical concerto form and  
voice-leading, and music-language intersections and parallels. She believes that research,  
teaching, and social justice are all intertwined acts of compassion and communication, and that  
music theory is the use or formulation of any theory about any music.

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## Supplementary Materials

The full (and growing) database of Flat 2 examples, with links to YouTube videos, can be found [here](#).

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### Filmography Used

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