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Bruce Springsteen and the Wave Model of Development

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Springsteen, Criticism, and the Discourse of Evolution

- ❖ *Wrecking Ball* (2012): “few, if any, moments of musical innovation here” (Gill, *The Telegraph*);
- ❖ “It] finds Springsteen still firing on all cylinders—writing with poetic urgency, drawing on traditions old and new, singing and playing with prime strength and energy, and delivering a new set of killer melodies with fresh sonic wallop” (Leftridge, *PopMatters*)
- ❖ “Just for a change it’s encouraging to hear a big sound that’s linked not to individual aggrandizement or indulgence, but to something more unselfish...It also...holds some of Springsteen’s most elaborate studio concoctions since ‘Born to Run’” (Paraeles and Caramanica, *New York Times*)
- ❖ “[M]usically *Wrecking Ball* is the most innovative album of Springsteen’s career...” (Masur, *PopMatters*)

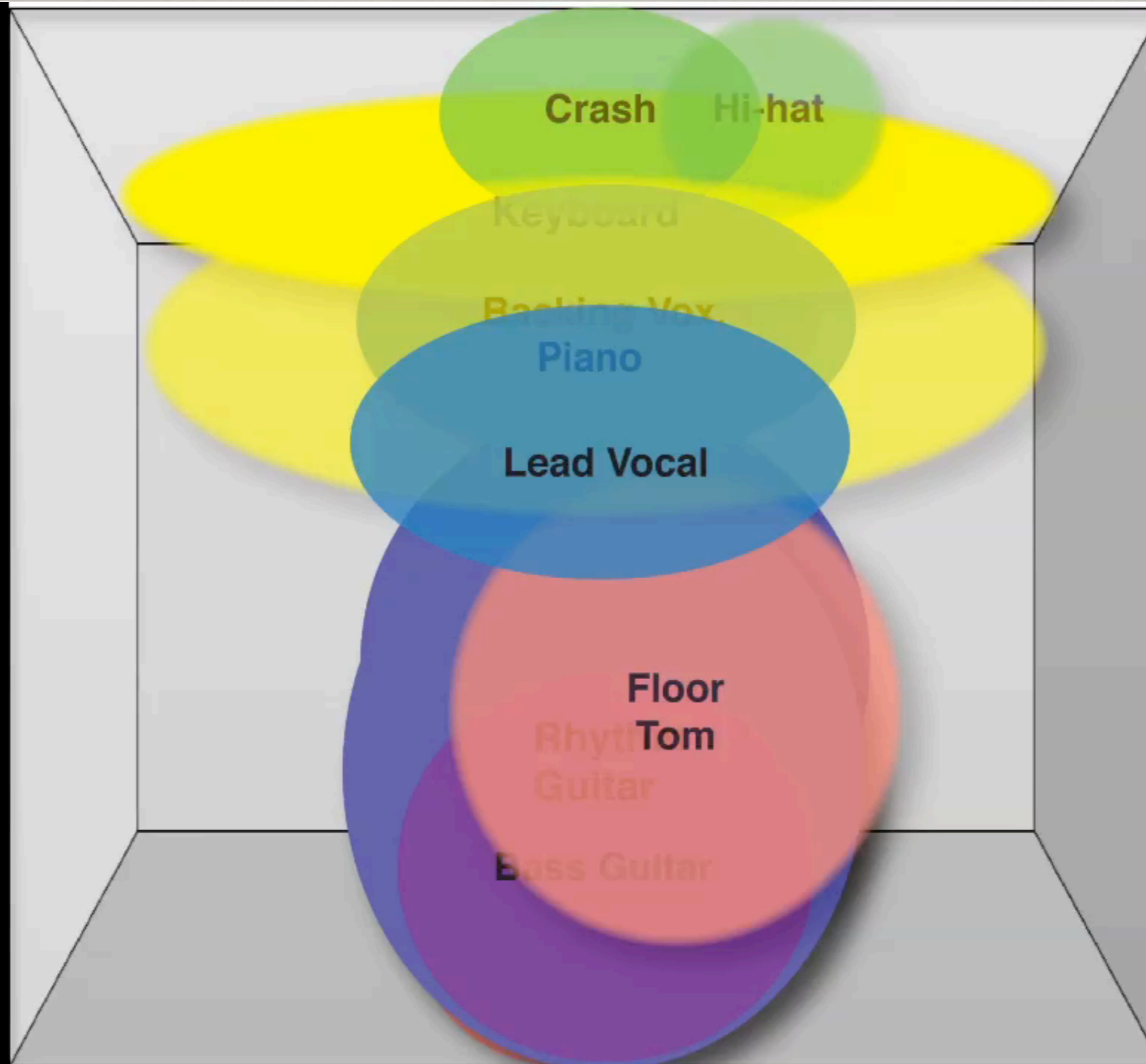
Musical Development and Popular Music Historiography

- ❖ Braae (2014): analysis of Queen's musical development, 1973-80; focus on identifying and understanding musical changes over time
- ❖ "Expedition" narrative and Queen (Braae 2014); "elliptical" model and Radiohead (Moore and Ibrahim 2009)
- ❖ The "wave" model and Springsteen

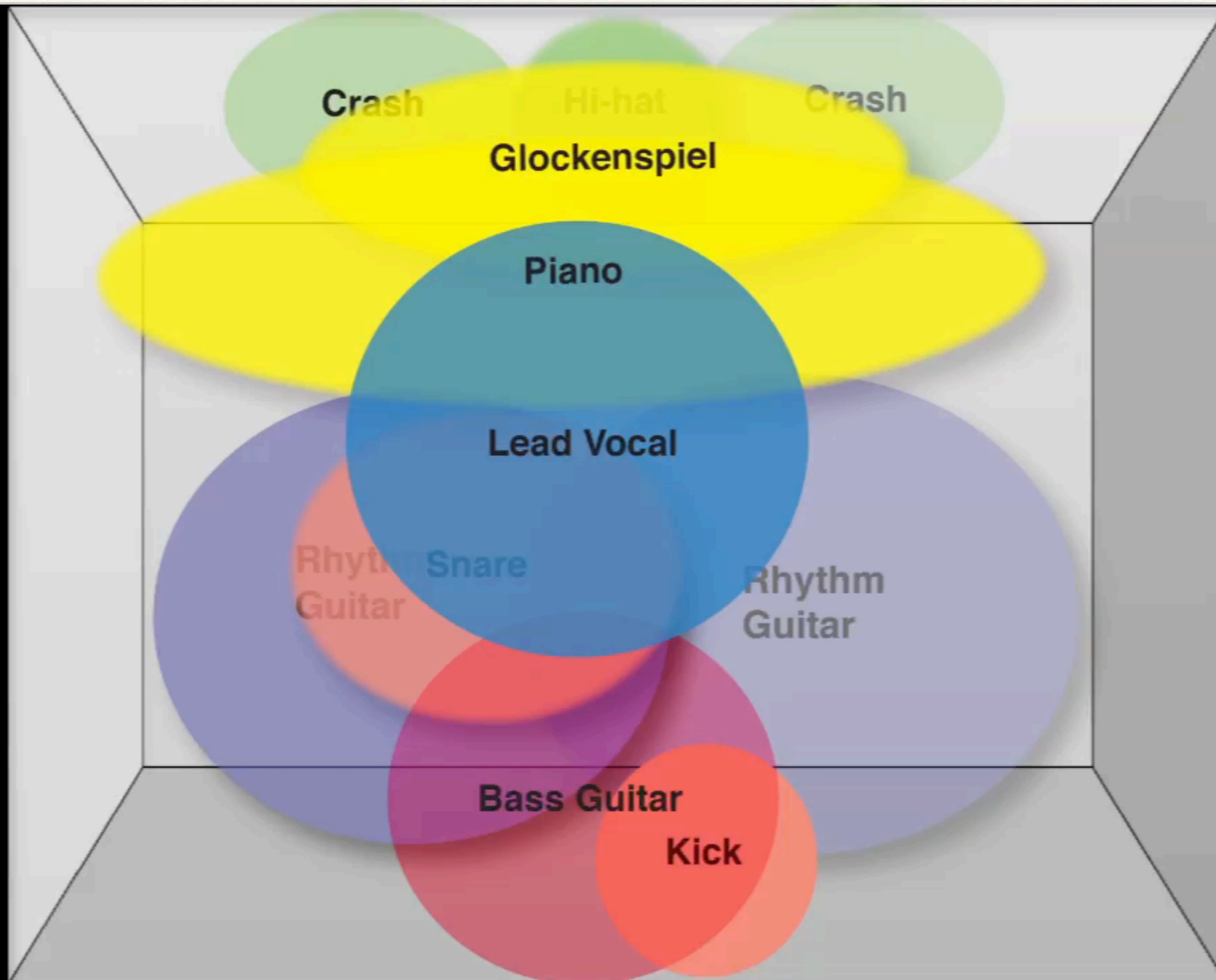
Born to Run (1975)

- ❖ “Wall-of-sound” style production (Zagorski-Thomas 2010)
- ❖ Droning saxophone of “Born to Run” cf. The Ronette’s “Do I Love You?” or Ike and Tina Turner’s “River Deep, Mountain High”; glockenspiel like Darlene Love’s “The Boy I’m Gonna Marry”
- ❖ Stratification of texture: dense middle-low register (bass, acoustic/electric guitars) plus sparkling upper register keyboards

“She’s the One” and “Thunder Road”



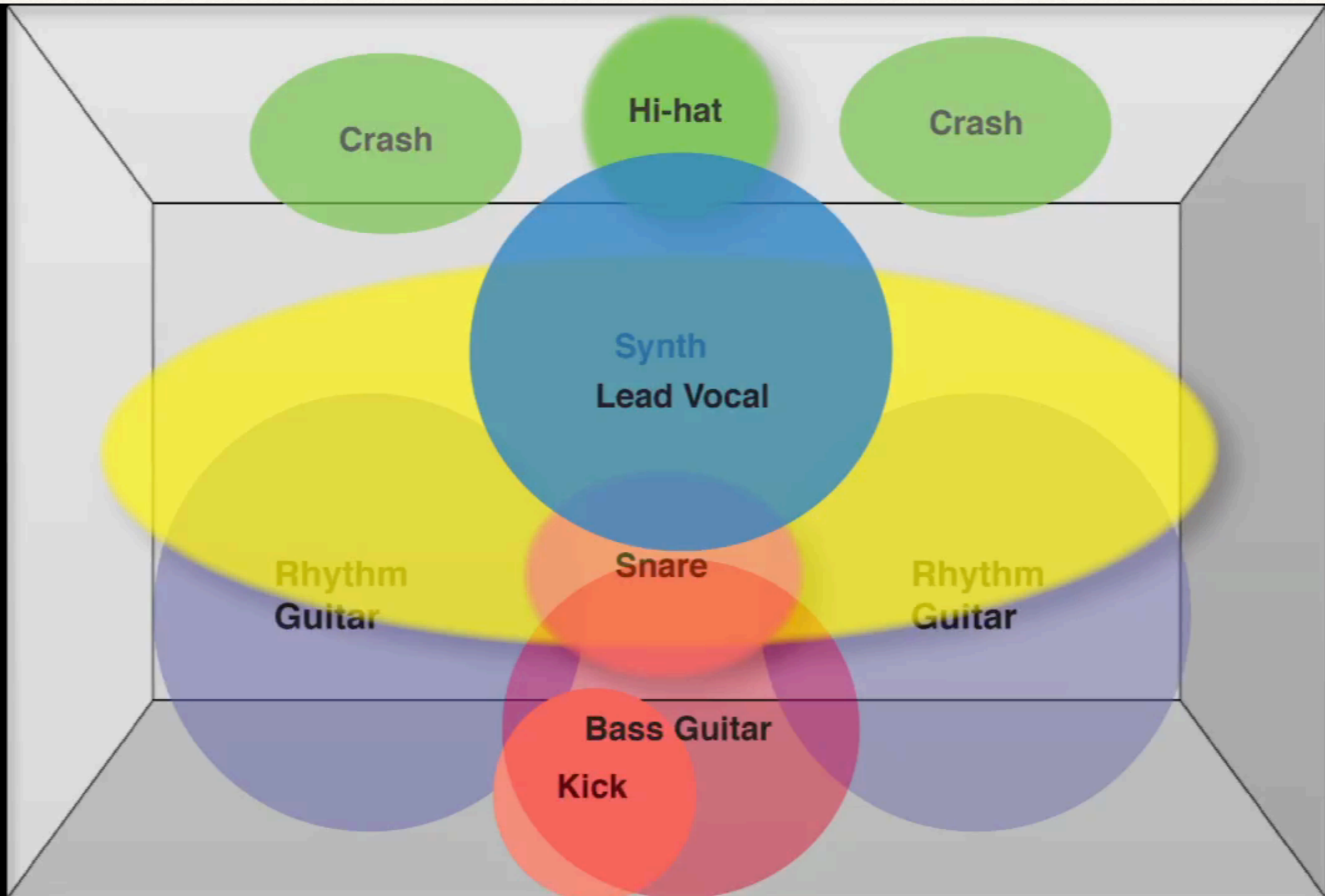
“Darkness on the Edge of Town”, “I’m a Rocker”,
“Ramrod”



Born in the USA

- ❖ Textural stasis (aligning with limited harmonic movement)
- ❖ Various layers—bass guitar, electric guitars, keyboards—converge into single harmonic layer; limited counter-melodic embellishments

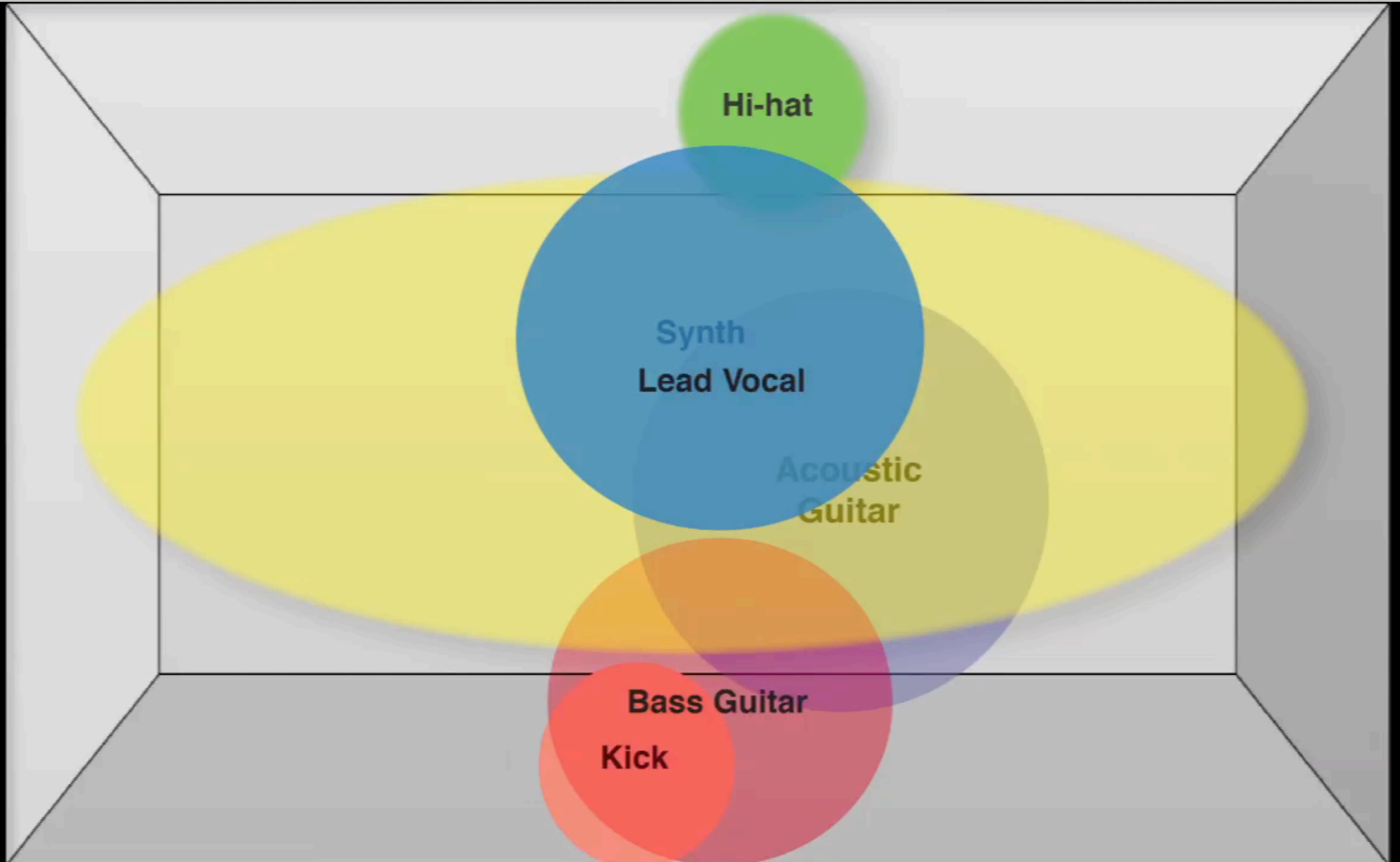
“Born in the USA”



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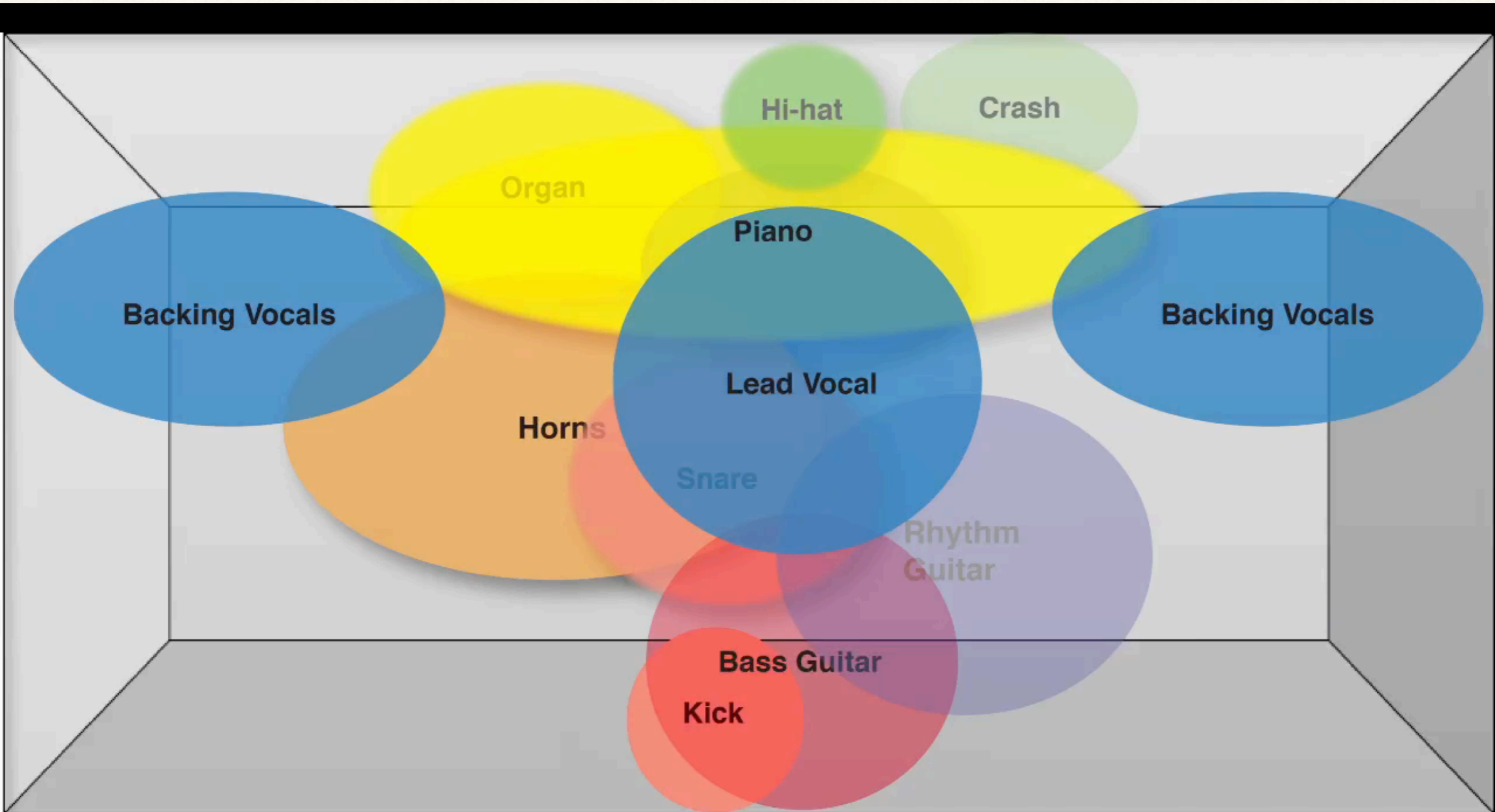
“Walk Like a Man”, “Living Proof”



The Rising-present

- ❖ Additions to the backing band: backing vocal sections (gospel choir); strings and / or horns; extra organs (beyond Hammond)
- ❖ Active, swirling, and dense middle register, but also the return of stratified upper layers (piano / organ)

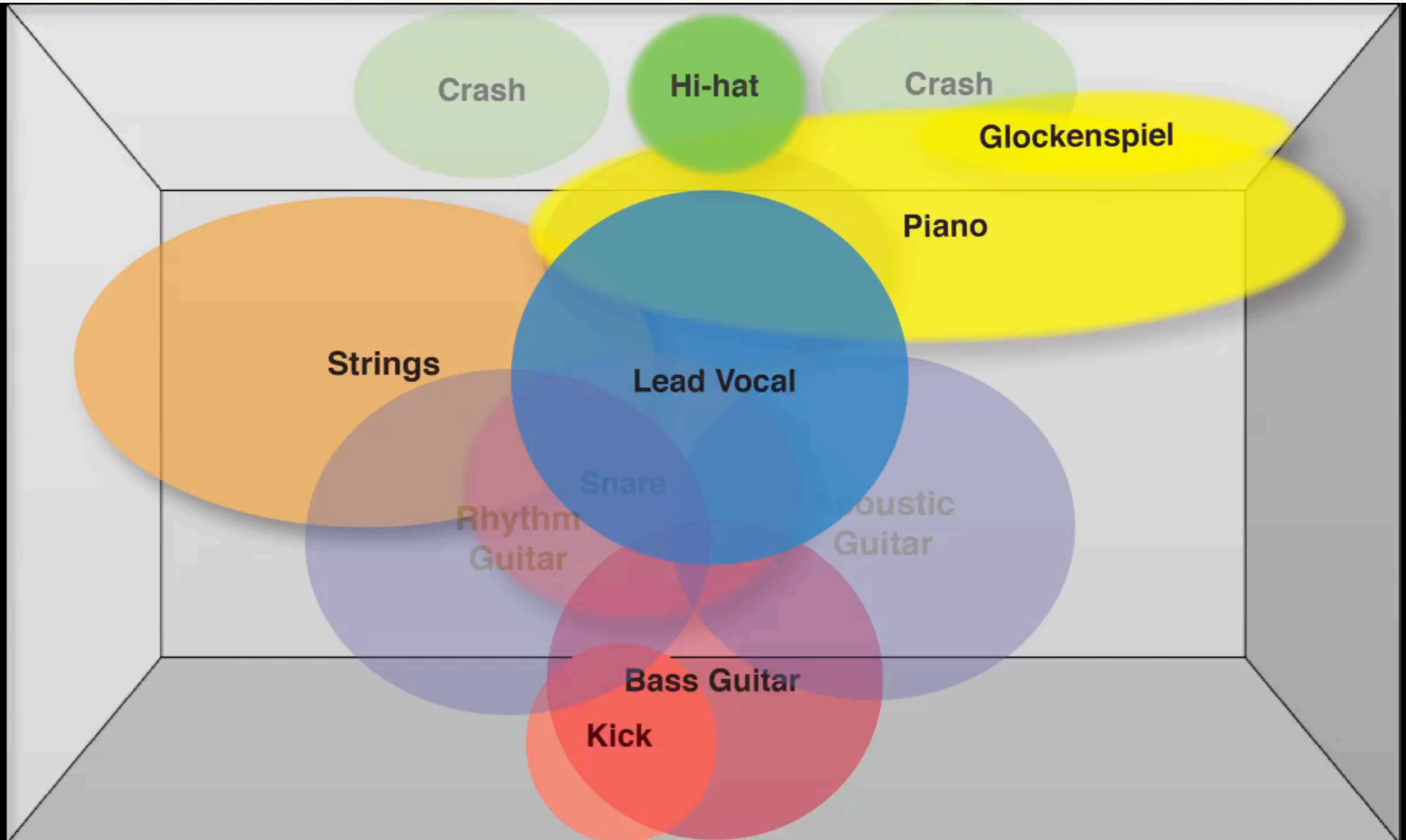
“Mary’s Place”



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“I’ll Work For Your Love”, “Gypsy Biker”



Springsteen and Record Production Historiography

- ❖ A cyclical model?
- ❖ The wave model: phases of sonic signatures
- ❖ Reflects continuities across eras (e.g. “The Wrestler” (2009) and 1980s style), analogous to water washing back out to sea
- ❖ Lack of fixed evolutionary points over time, so much as retrospective identification of “breaking” and continuity
- ❖ Little sense of linear evolution; emphasis on change and renewal

The Outliers

- ❖ *Nebraska* (1982); *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (1995); *Devils and Dust* (2005)
- ❖ Stripped-back acoustic sound; outside major waves of Springsteen's career
- ❖ Or...necessary stylistic ruptures in Springsteen's narrative
- ❖ "Productive tension" between modernist and folk visions of Romanticism (Keightley 2001)