Probing the QCD phase structure with proton number fluctuations in heavy-ion collisions

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NT Seminar @ LBNL

September 7, 2022

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INSTITUTE for NUCLEAR THEORY

QCD phase structure

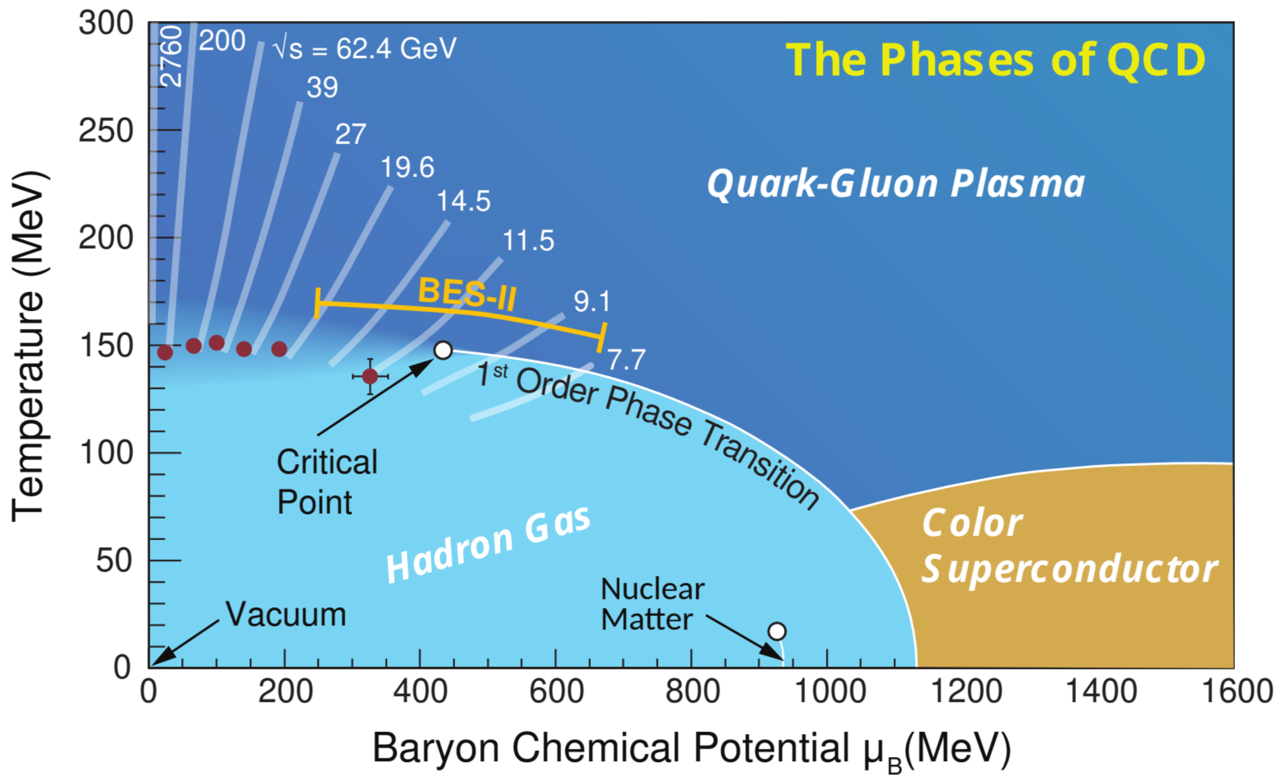


Figure from Bzdak et al., Phys. Rept. '20

- Dilute hadron gas at low T & ρ_B due to confinement, quark-gluon plasma high T & ρ_B
- Nuclear liquid-gas transition in cold and dense matter, lots of other phases conjectured

Is there a critical point and how to find it with heavy-ion collisions?

Event-by-event fluctuations and statistical mechanics

Cumulant generating function

$$K_N(t) = \ln\langle e^{tN}\rangle = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \kappa_n \frac{t^n}{n!}$$

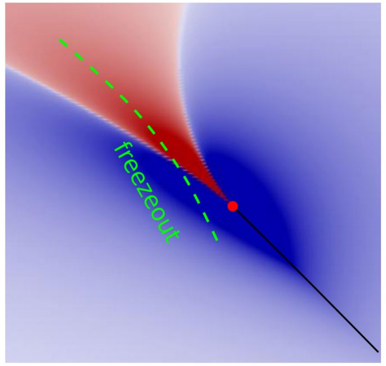
Grand partition function

$$\ln Z^{\rm gce}(T,V,\mu) = \ln\left[\sum_N e^{\mu N/T} Z^{\rm ce}(T,V,N)\right]$$

$$\kappa_n \propto \frac{\partial^n(\ln Z^{\rm gce})}{\partial \mu^n}$$

Cumulants measure chemical potential derivatives of the (QCD) equation of state

- **(QCD) critical point** – large correlation length, critical fluctuations of baryon number



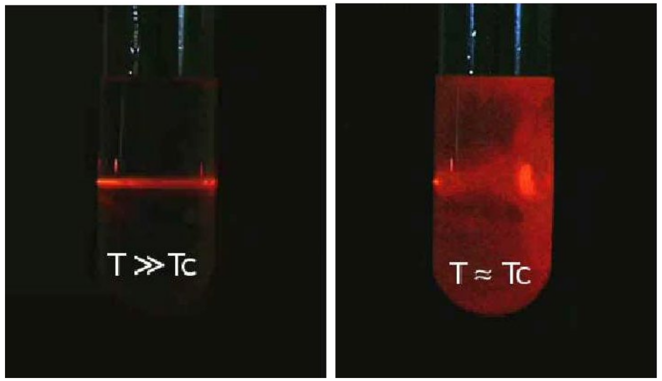
M. Stephanov, PRL '09, '11
Energy scans at RHIC (STAR)
and CERN-SPS (NA61/SHINE)

$$\kappa_2 \sim \xi^2, \quad \kappa_3 \sim \xi^{4.5}, \quad \kappa_4 \sim \xi^7$$

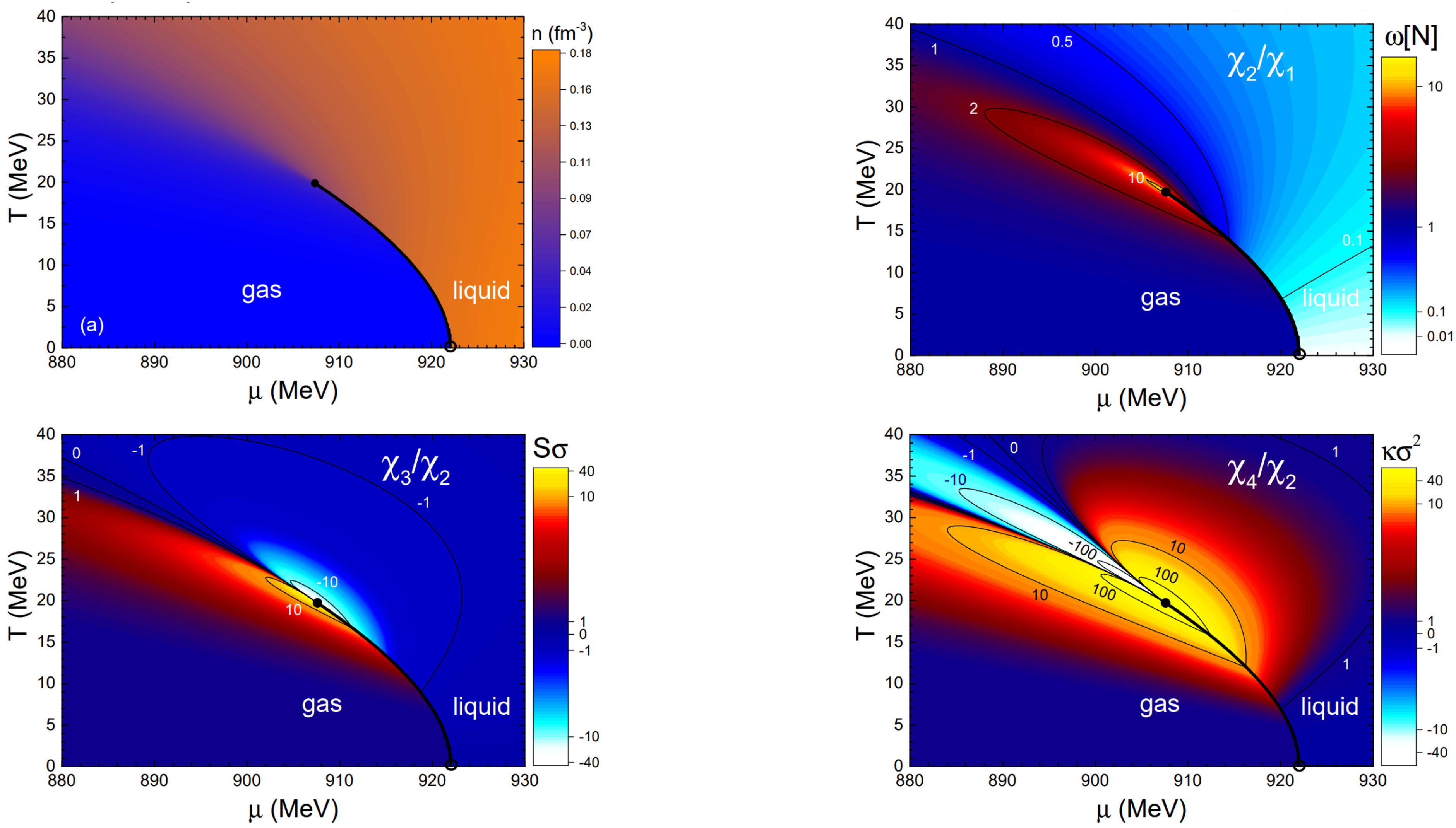
$$\xi \to \infty$$

Looking for enhanced fluctuations
and non-monotonicities

Critical opalescence



Example: Nuclear liquid-gas transition



VV, Anchishkin, Gorenstein, Poberezhnyuk, PRC 92, 054901 (2015)

Example: Lennard-Jones fluid

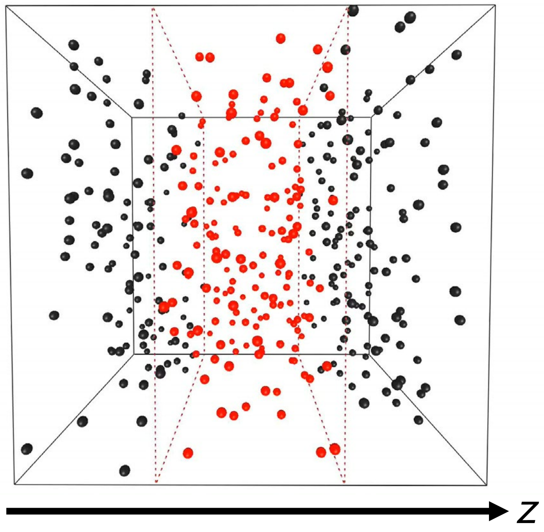
Kuznietsov, Savchuk, Gorenstein, Koch, VV, Phys. Rev. C 105, 044903 (2022)

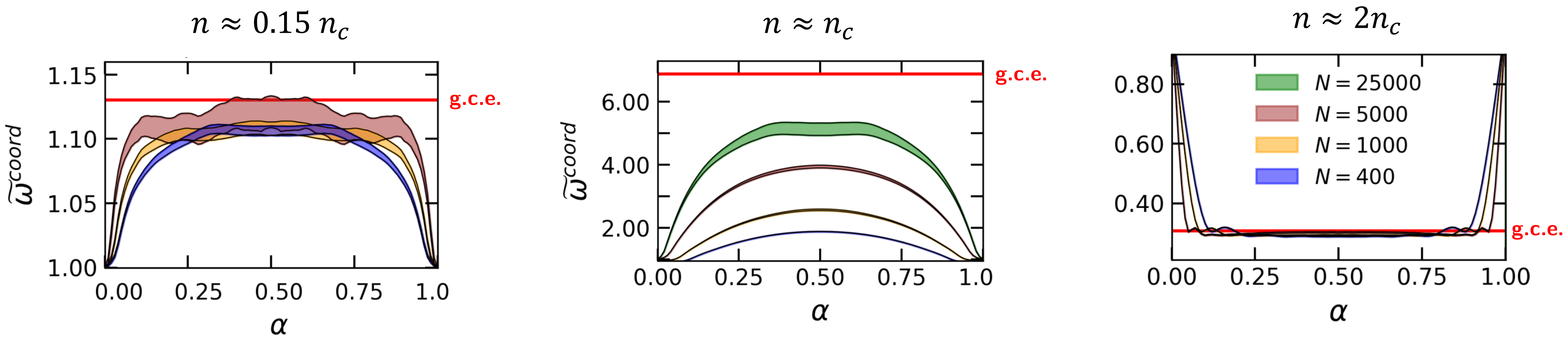
Classical molecular dynamics simulations* of a **Lennard-Jones fluid** along the (super)critical isotherm of the liquid-gas transition

Microcanonical (const. *EVN*) ensemble with periodic boundary conditions

Variance of conserved particle number distribution inside coordinate space subvolume $|z| < z^{max}$ as time average

$$\tilde{\omega}^{\text{coord}} = \frac{1}{1-\alpha} \frac{\langle N^2 \rangle - \langle N \rangle^2}{\langle N \rangle}$$



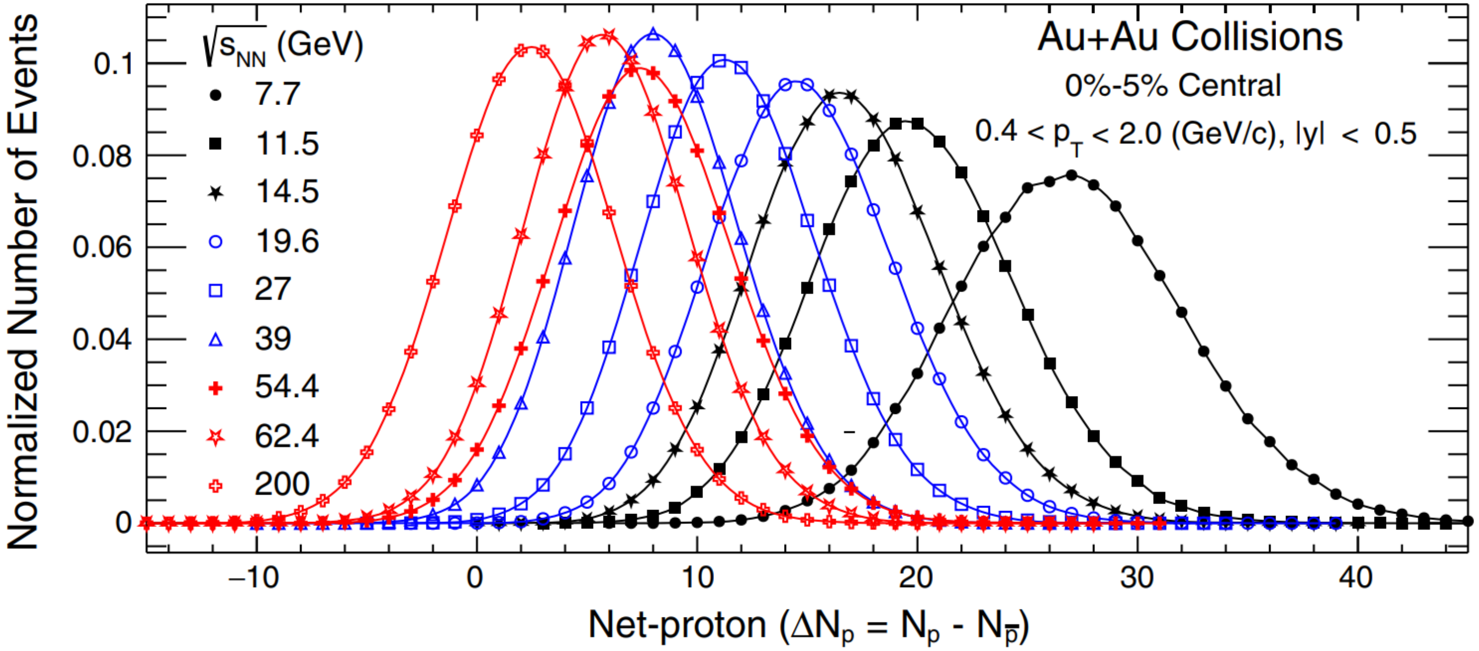


*Molecular dynamics code from https://github.com/vlvovch/lennard-jones-cuda

Measuring cumulants in heavy-ion collisions

Count the number of events with given number of e.g. (net) protons $P(\Delta N_p) \sim \frac{N_{\text{events}}(\Delta N_p)}{N_{events}^{total}}$

STAR Collaboration, Phys. Rev. Lett. 126, 092301 (2021)

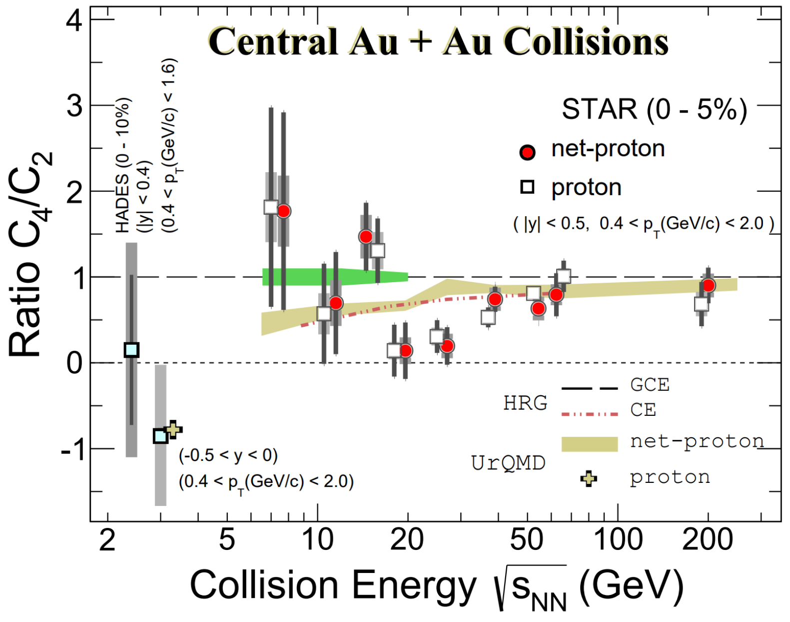


Cumulants are extensive, $\kappa_n \sim V$, use ratios to cancel out the volume

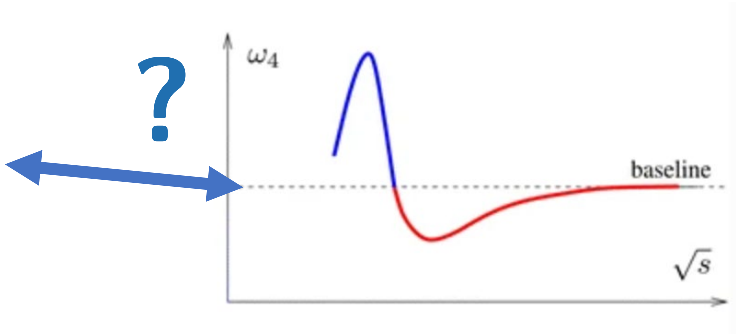
$$\frac{\kappa_2}{\langle N \rangle}, \quad \frac{\kappa_3}{\kappa_2}, \quad \frac{\kappa_4}{\kappa_2}$$

Experimental measurements

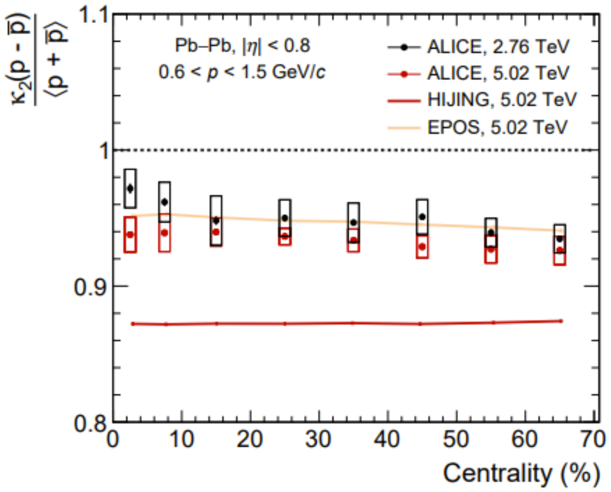
Beam energy scan in search for the critical point (STAR Coll.)



STAR Coll., Phys. Rev. Lett. 126, 092301 (2021); arXiv:2112.00240



M. Stephanov, Phys. Rev. Lett. (2011)



ALICE Coll., arXiv:2206.03343

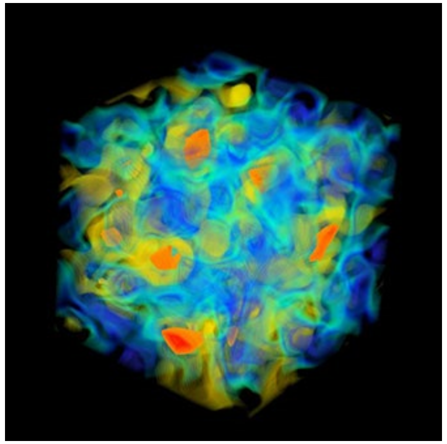
Reduced errors (better statistics), more energies, to come soon from RHIC-BES-II program, STAR-FXT etc.

Can we learn more from the more accurate data available for κ_2 and κ_3?

Other measurements: LHC-ALICE, GSI-HADES & CERN-NA61/SHINE Collaborations

Theory vs experiment: Challenges for fluctuations

Theory



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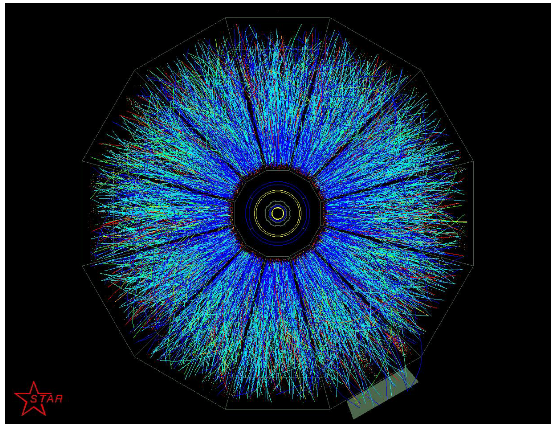
- Coordinate space
- In contact with the heat bath
- Conserved charges
- Uniform
- Fixed volume

Experiment



STAR event display

- Momentum space
- Expanding in vacuum
- Non-conserved particle numbers
- Inhomogenous
- Fluctuating volume

Need dynamical description

Dynamical approaches to the QCD critical point search

1. Dynamical model calculations of critical fluctuations
   - Fluctuating hydrodynamics
   - Equation of state with tunable critical point

   Under development within the Beam Energy Scan Theory (BEST) Collaboration

   BEST COLLABORATION [X. An et al., Nucl. Phys. A 1017, 122343 (2022)]

2. Molecular dynamics with a critical point

   [V. Kuznietsov et al., Phys. Rev. C 105, 044903 (2022)]

3. **Deviations from precision calculations of non-critical fluctuations**
   - Include essential non-critical contributions to (net-)proton number cumulants
   - Exact baryon conservation + hadronic interactions (hard core repulsion)
   - Based on realistic hydrodynamic simulations tuned to bulk data

   [VV, C. Shen, V. Koch, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014904 (2022)]

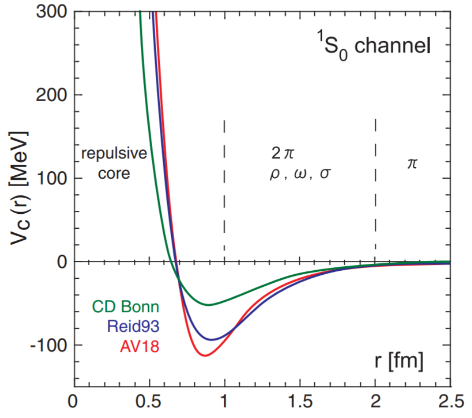


Figure from Ishii et al., PRL '07

Excluded volume effect

Incorporate repulsive baryon (nucleon) hard core via excluded volume

VV, M.I. Gorenstein, H. Stoecker, Phys. Rev. Lett. 118, 182301 (2017)

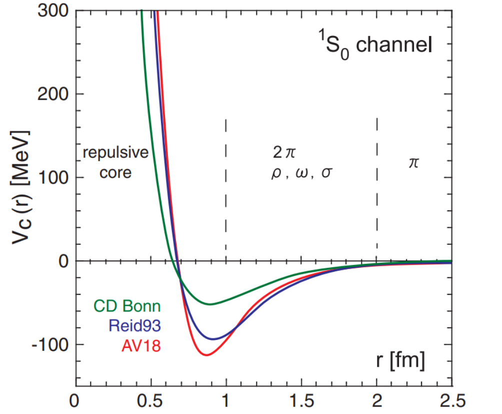
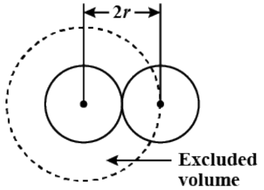


Figure from Ishii et al., PRL '07

Amounts to a van der Waals correction for baryons in the HRG model

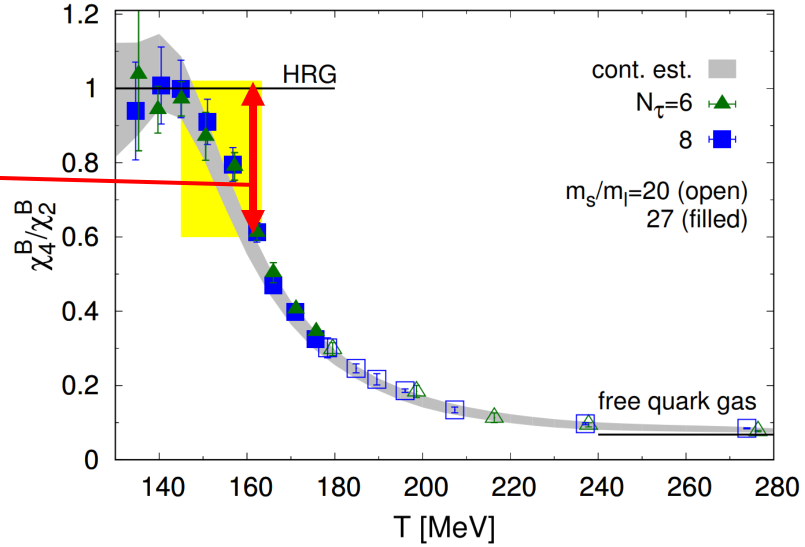
$$V \to V - bN$$



$$p^{\mathrm{ev}}_{B(\bar{B})} = p^{\mathrm{id}}_{B(\bar{B})}\, e^{-b p^{\mathrm{ev}}_{B(\bar{B})}/T}$$

- Net baryon kurtosis suppressed as in lattice QCD

$$\frac{\chi_4^B}{\chi_2^B} \simeq 1 - 12 b \phi_B(T) + O(b^2)$$



- Reproduces virial coefficients of baryon interaction from lattice QCD

Excluded volume from lattice QCD: b ≈ 1 fm^3

VV, A. Pasztor, S. Katz, Z. Fodor, H. Stoecker, Phys. Lett. B 755, 71 (2017)

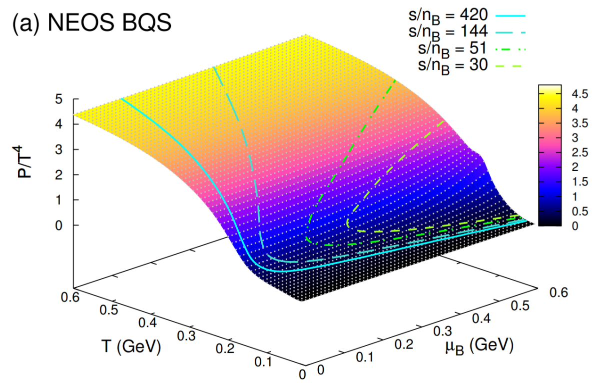
Hydrodynamic description within non-critical physics

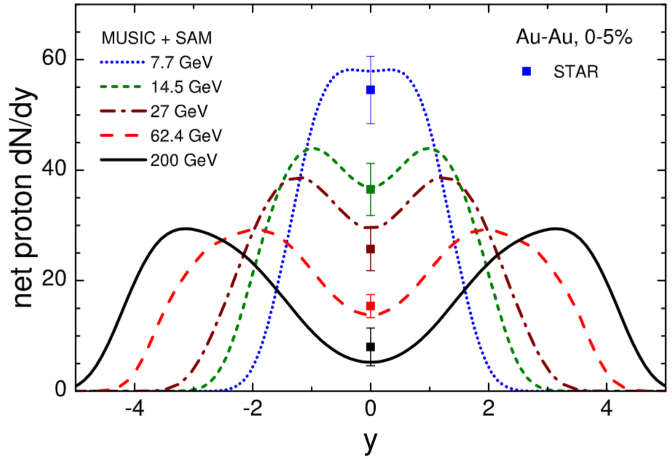
VV, V. Koch, C. Shen, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014904 (2022)

- Collision geometry based 3D initial state
  - Constrained to net proton distributions [Shen, Alzhrani, Phys. Rev. C '20]
- Viscous hydrodynamics evolution – MUSIC-3.0
  - Energy-momentum and baryon number conservation
  - Crossover equation of state based on lattice QCD [Monnai, Schenke, Shen, Phys. Rev. C '19]
- Cooper-Frye particlization at $\epsilon_{sw} = 0.26$ GeV/fm^3

$$\omega_p \frac{dN_j}{d^3p} = \int_{\sigma(x)} d\sigma_\mu(x)\, p^\mu \frac{d_j\, \lambda_j^{\mathrm{ev}}(x)}{(2\pi)^3} \exp\left[\frac{\mu_j(x) - u^\mu(x) p_\mu}{T(x)}\right].$$

- Particlization respects QCD-based baryon number distribution
  - Incorporated via baryon excluded volume b = 1 fm^3 [VV, V. Koch, Phys. Rev. C 103, 044903 (2021)]
- Incorporates exact global baryon conservation (and other charges) [VV, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014903 (2022)]





Calculating cumulants from hydrodynamics

- **Analytic approach** VV, V. Koch, C. Shen, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014904 (2022)
  - Calculate proton cumulants in the experimental acceptance in the grand-canonical limit using the Cooper-Frye formula
  - Apply correction for the exact global baryon number conservation (SAM-2.0)
    VV, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014903 (2022)

  Pros: Calculate high-order cumulants (up to 8^{th} order) without the need for large statistics

  Cons: The method is approximate and not easily extendable to other observables

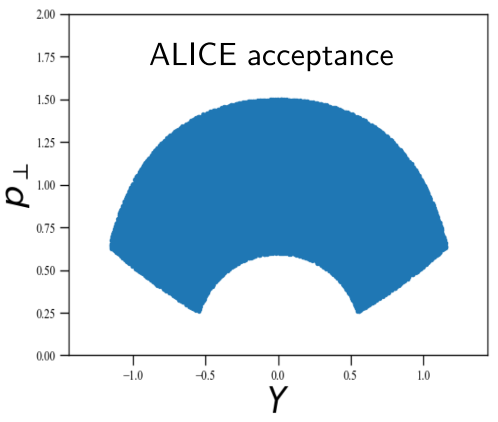
- **Monte Carlo approach (FIST sampler)** VV, arXiv:2208.13693; https://github.com/vlvovch/fist-sampler
  - Event generator (Cooper-Frye particlization)
  - Conservation laws (baryon number but also charge and strangeness) via rejection sampling
  - Excluded volume effect by rejecting coordinate space overlap of baryons

  Pros: Flexibility of an event generator, more accurate

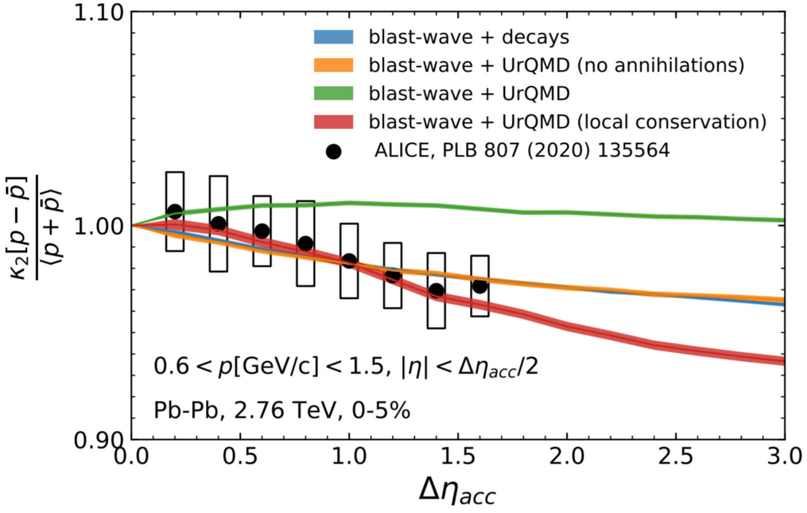
  Cons: Need large statistics for higher-order cumulants

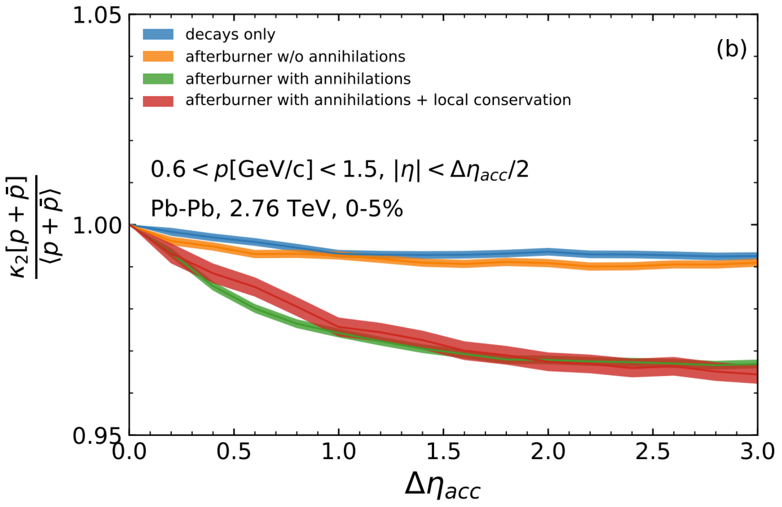
Net-particle fluctuations at the LHC (blast-wave model)

- Net protons described within errors and consistent with either VV, Koch, Phys. Rev. C 103, 044903 (2021)
  - global baryon conservation without $B\bar{B}$ annihilations in the hadronic phase
    see e.g. ALICE Coll. arXiv:2206.03343
  - or local baryon conservation with $B\bar{B}$ annihilations in the hadronic phase
    O. Savchuk et al., Phys. Lett. B 827, 136983 (2022)



$0.6 < p < 1.5$ GeV/c, $\Delta\eta_{acc} = 1.6$

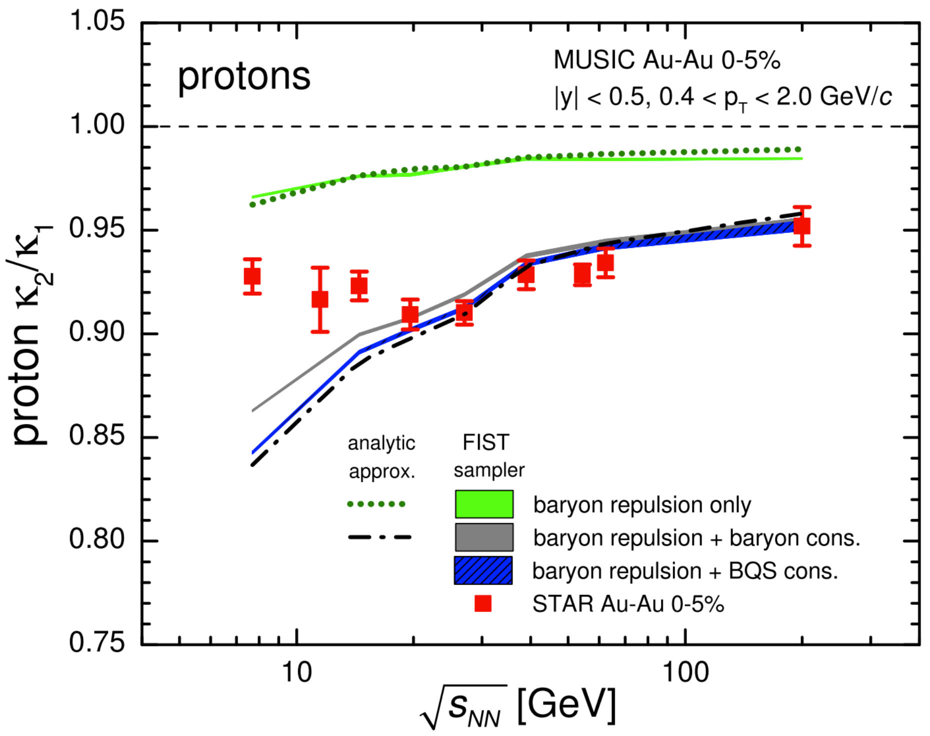




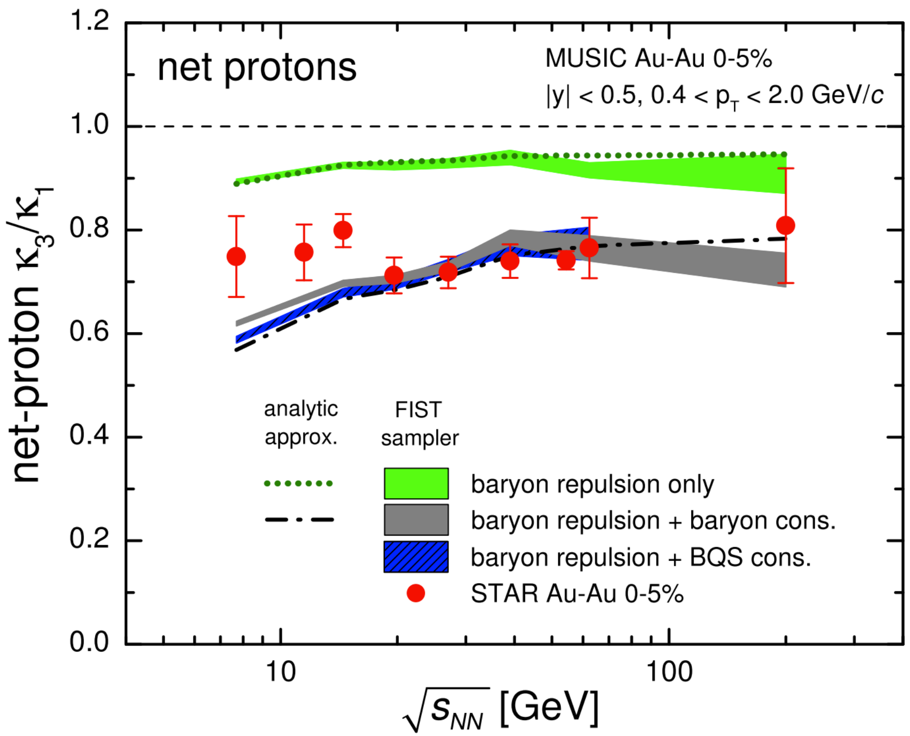
Data on (net-)proton fluctuations can constrain the effect of annihilations in the hadronic phase

RHIC-BES: Net proton cumulant ratios (MUSIC)

Proton κ_2/κ_1



Net-proton κ_3/κ_1



- Data at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \geq 20$ GeV consistent with non-critical physics (BQS conservation and repulsion)
- Effect from baryon conservation is larger than from repulsion
- Excess of fluctuations in data at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} < 20$ GeV – *hint of attractive interactions?*

VV, V. Koch, C. Shen, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014904 (2022); VV, arXiv:2208.13693

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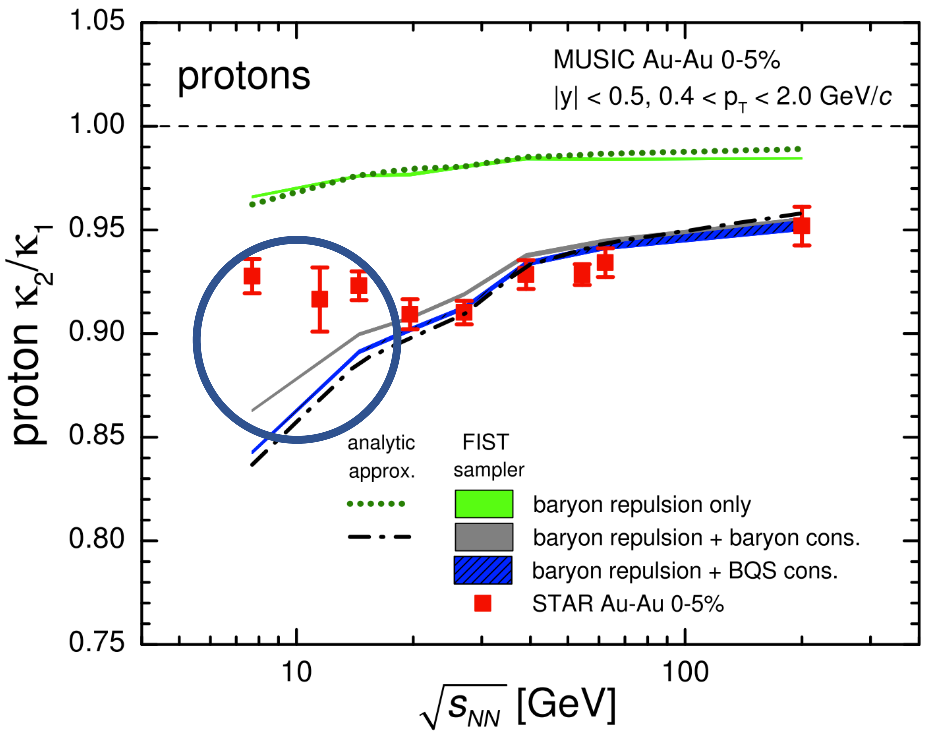

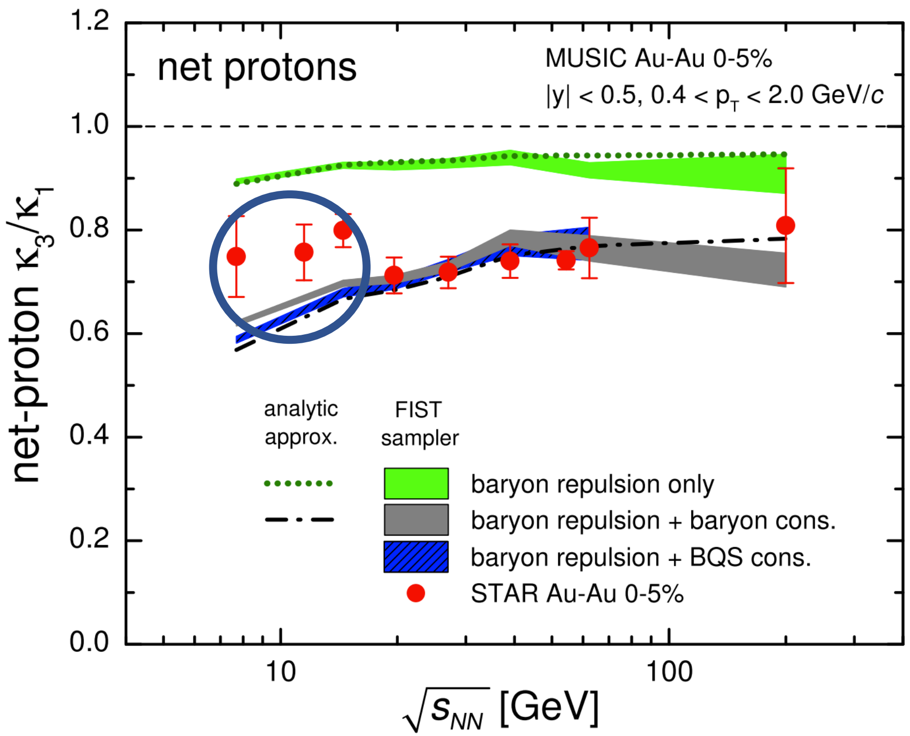

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VV, V. Koch, C. Shen, Phys. Rev. C 105, 014904 (2022); VV, arXiv:2208.13693

Correlation Functions

- Analyze genuine multi-particle correlations via **factorial cumulants** $\hat{C}_n$
  [Bzdak, Koch, Strodthoff, Phys. Rev. C '17]

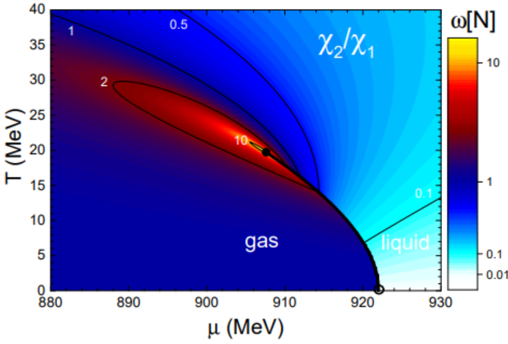
$$\hat{C}_1 = \kappa_1, \qquad \hat{C}_3 = 2\kappa_1 - 3\kappa_2 + \kappa_3,$$
$$\hat{C}_2 = -\kappa_1 + \kappa_2, \quad \hat{C}_4 = -6\kappa_1 + 11\kappa_2 - 6\kappa_3 + \kappa_4.$$

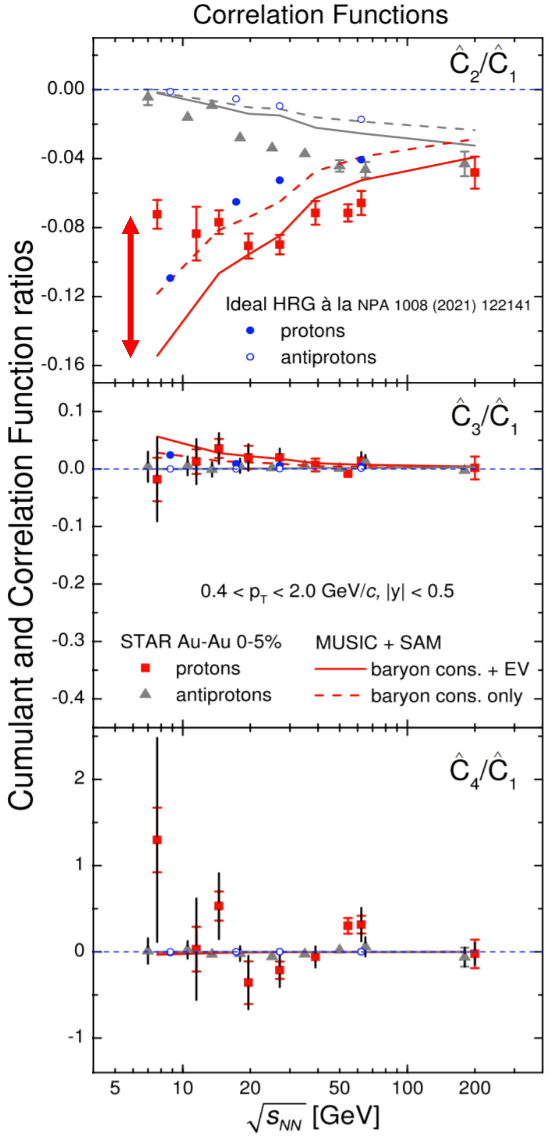
$$\hat{C}_n^{\text{cons}} \propto \alpha^n, \qquad \hat{C}_n^{\text{EV}} \propto b^n$$

[Bzdak, Koch, Skokov, EPJC '17] [VV et al, PLB '17]

- Three- and four-particle correlations are small without a CP
  - Multi-particle correlations expected near the critical point [Ling, Stephanov, PRC '15]

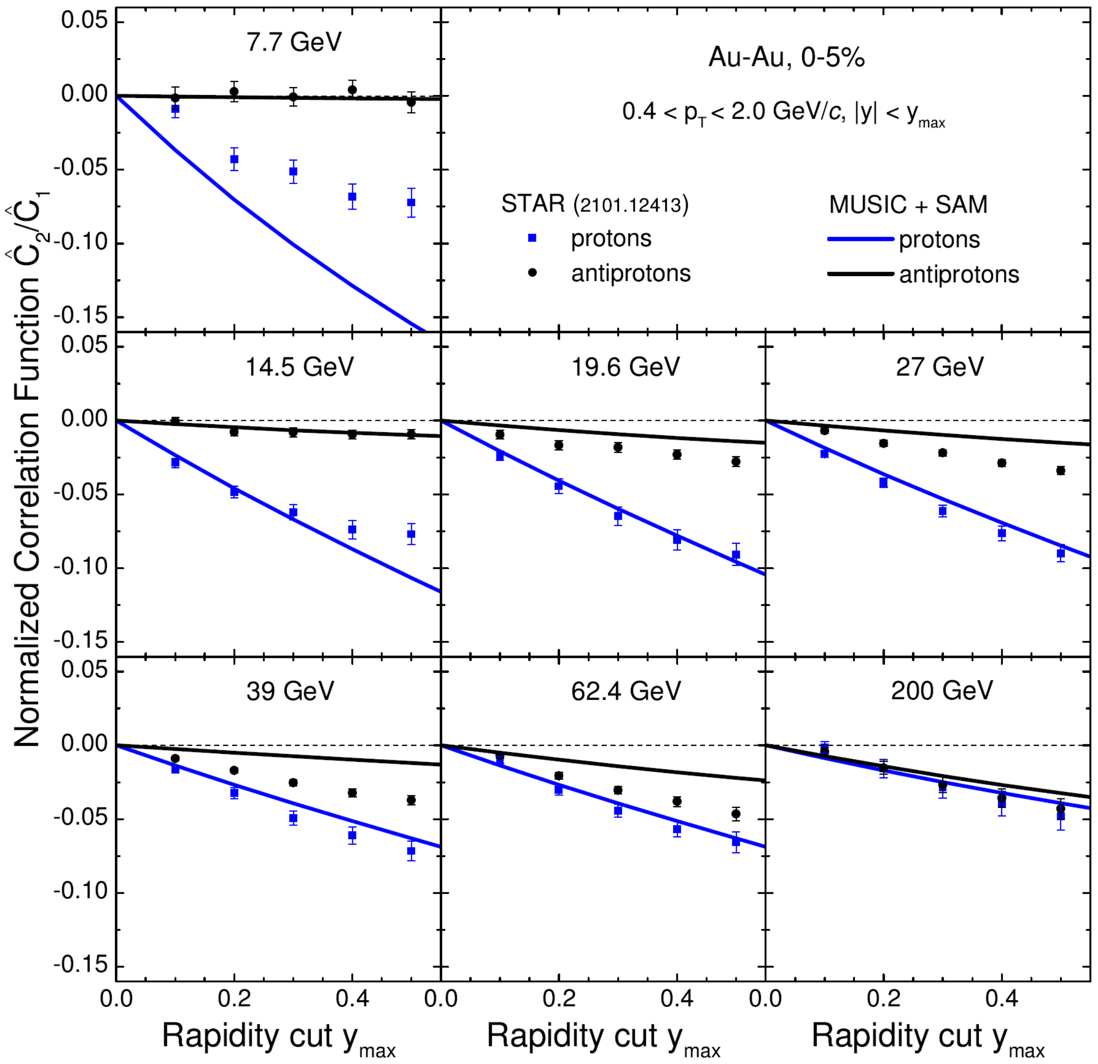
- Signals from the data at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 20$ GeV
  - Excess of two-proton correlations
  - Possibility of significant 4-proton correlations
  - ***Critical point?***





Acceptance dependence of two-particle correlations

- Changing y_{max} slope at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 14.5$ GeV?



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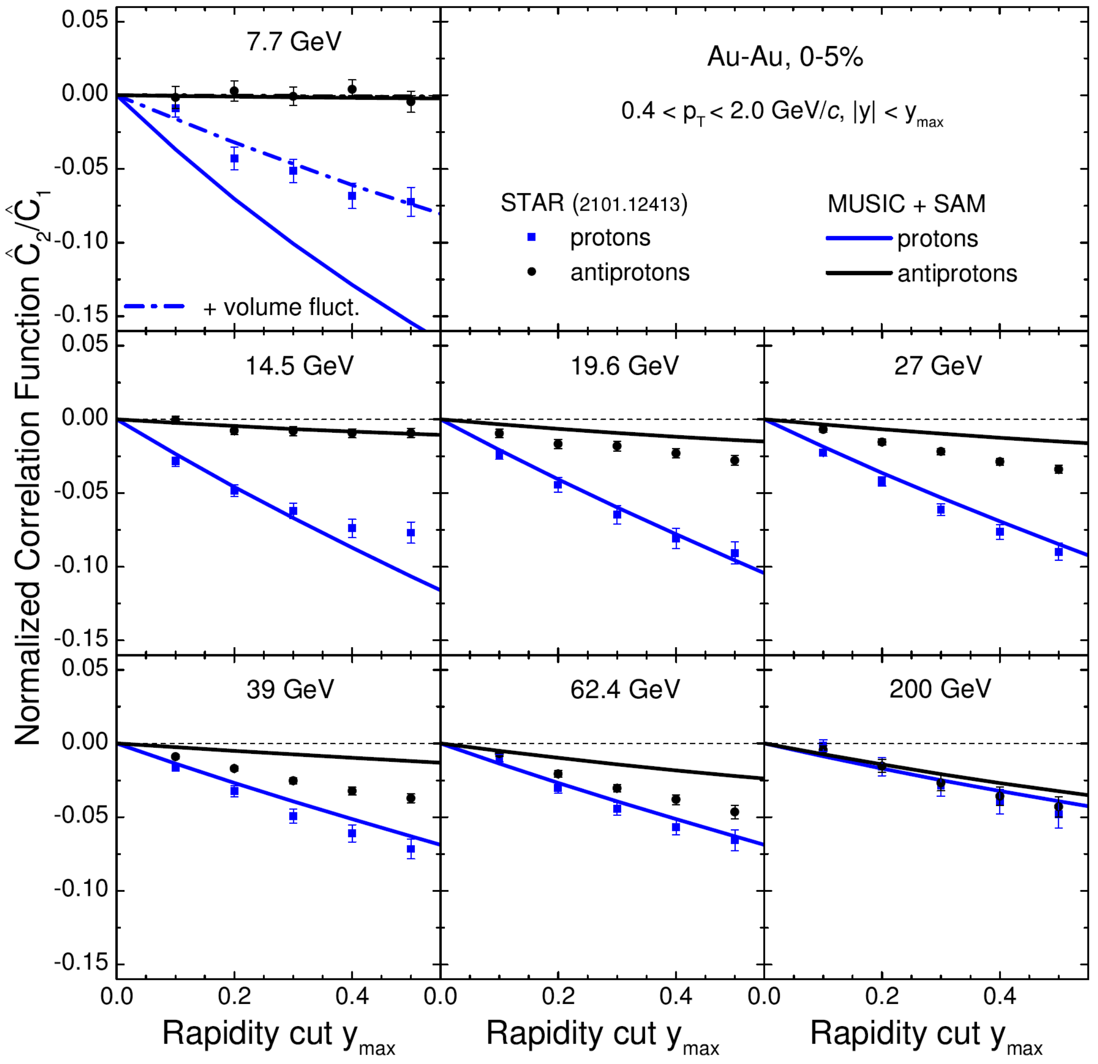
- Changing y_{max} slope at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 14.5$ GeV?
- **Volume fluctuations?** [Skokov, Friman, Redlich, PRC '13]
  - $C_2/C_1 \mathrel{+}= C_1 * v_2$



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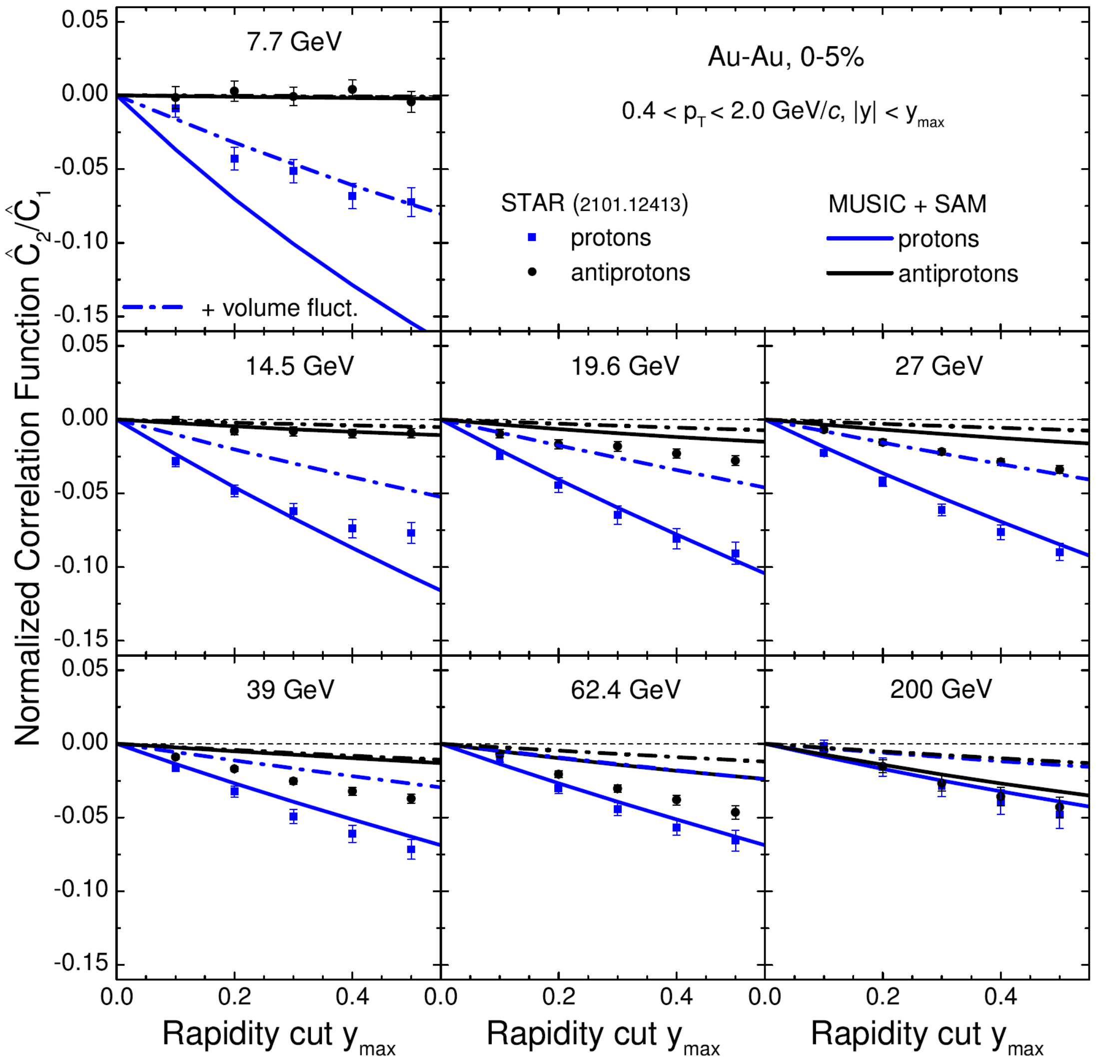

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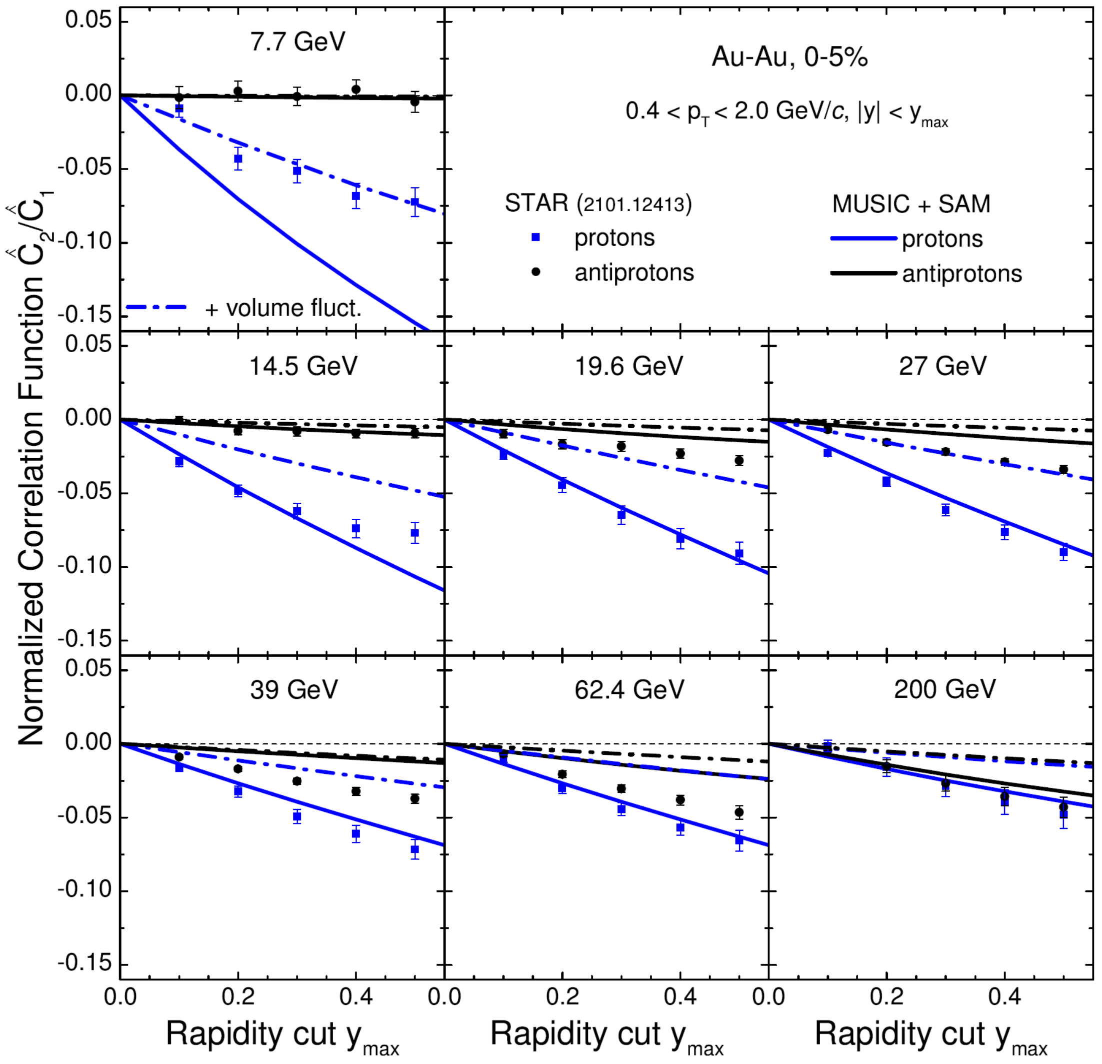
  - $C_2/C_1 \mathrel{+}= C_1 * v_2$
  - Can improve low energies but spoil high energies?
- **Exact electric charge conservation?**
  - Worsens the agreement at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 14.5$, higher energies virtually unaffected



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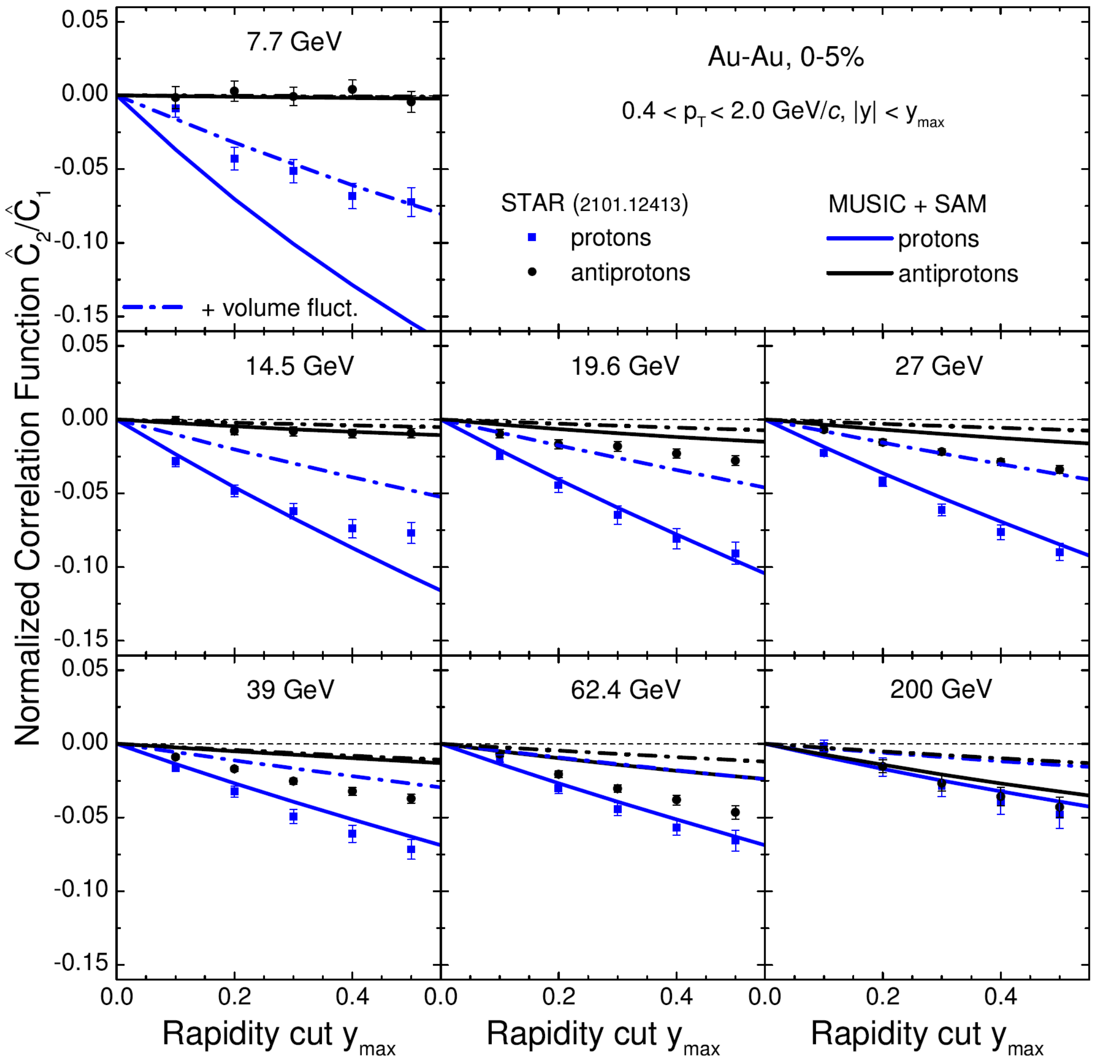
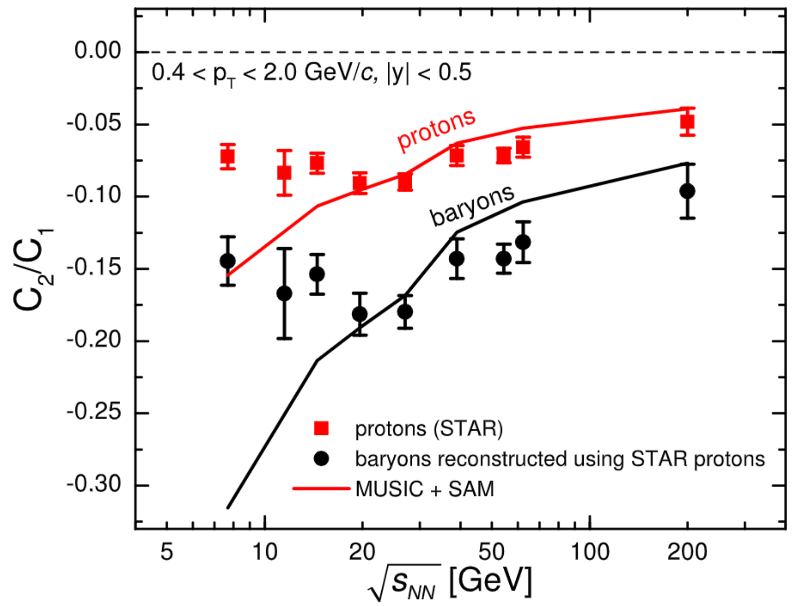
- Volume fluctuations? [Skokov, Friman, Redlich, PRC '13]
  - $C_2/C_1 \mathrel{+}= C_1 * v_2$
  - Can improve low energies but spoil high energies?
- Exact electric charge conservation?
  - Further suppression at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 14.5$, higher energies virtually unaffected
- **Attractive interactions?**
  - Could work if baryon repulsion turns into attraction in the high-μ_B regime
  - **Critical point?**



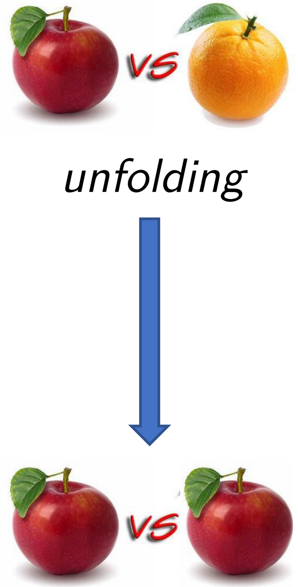
Baryon cumulants from protons

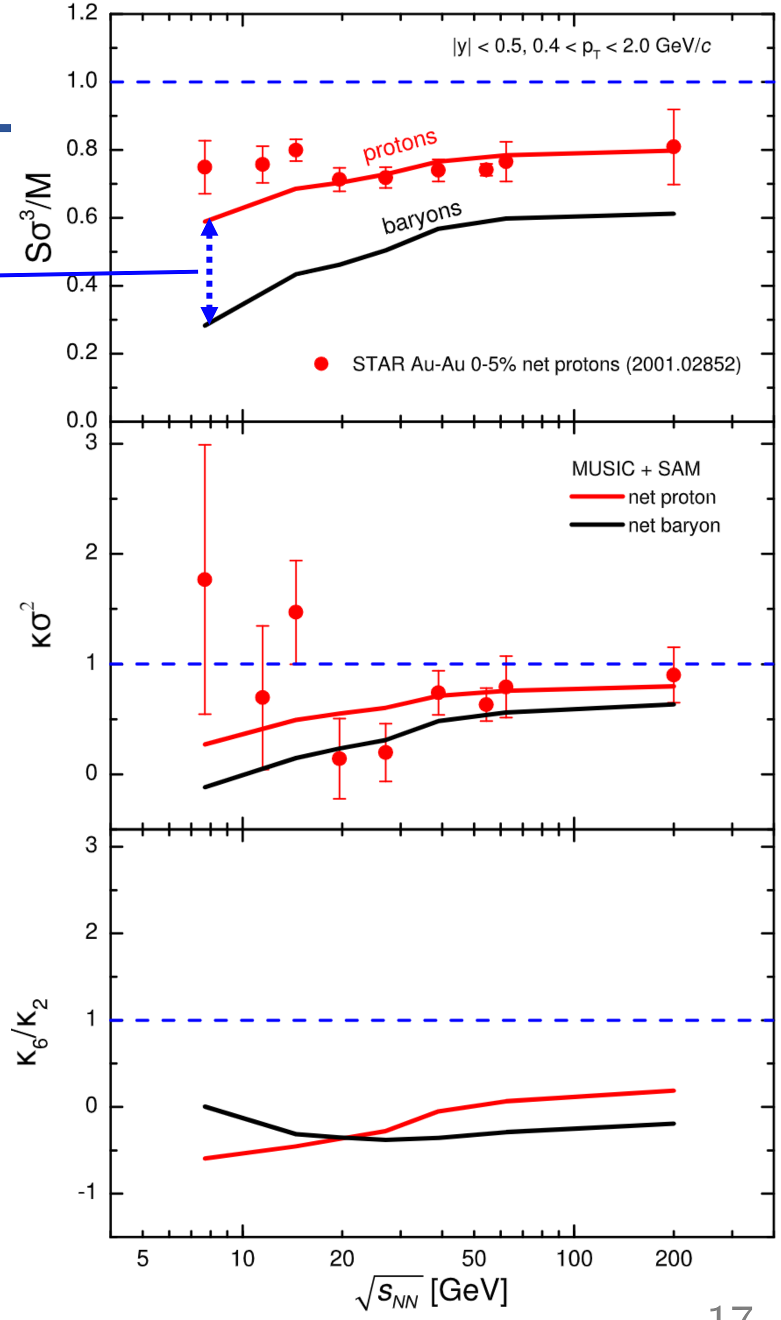
- **net baryon** $\neq$ **net proton** (protons are ***subset*** of all baryons)

- Baryon cumulants can be reconstructed from proton cumulants via binomial (un)folding based on isospin randomization [Kitazawa, Asakawa, Phys. Rev. C 85 (2012) 021901]
    - Amounts to an additional "efficiency correction" and requires the use of joint factorial moments, only experiment can do it model-independently



$$\frac{\hat{C}_2^B}{\hat{C}_1^B} \approx 2\,\frac{\hat{C}_2^p}{\hat{C}_1^p}$$





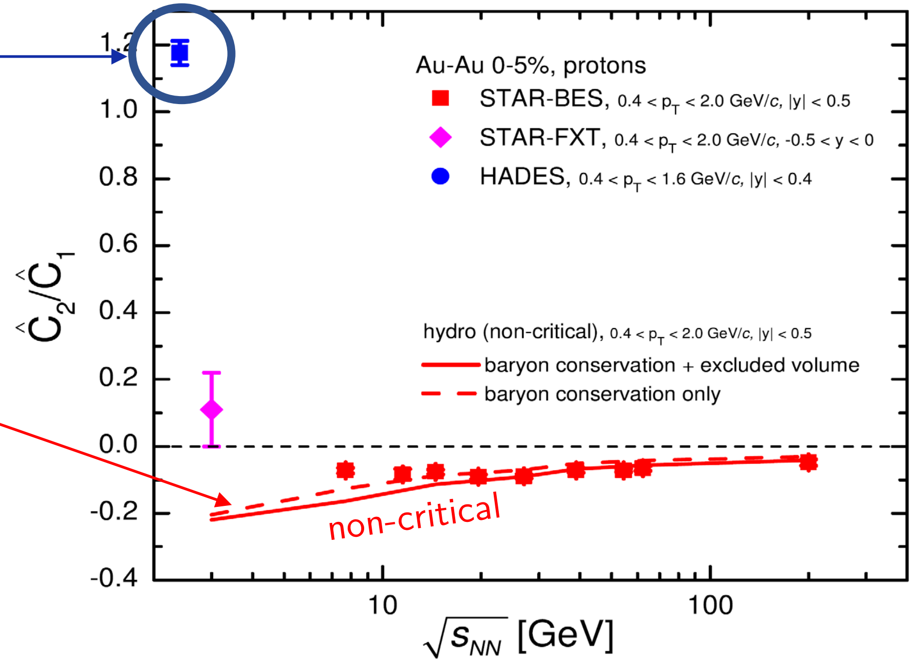
Lower energies $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 7.7$ GeV

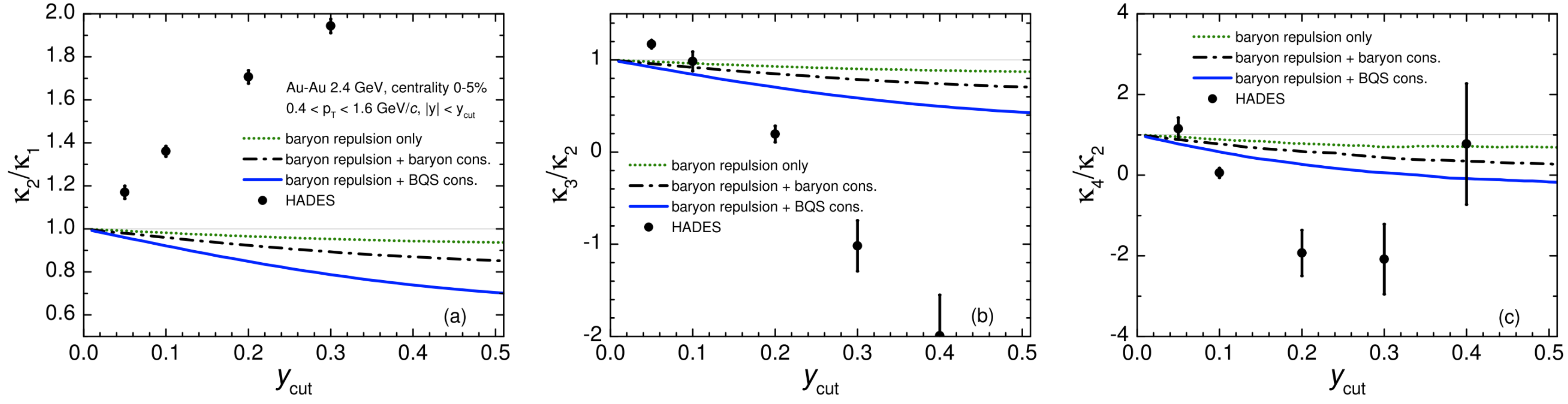
- Intriguing hint from HADES @ $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 2.4$ GeV: huge excess of two-proton correlations!

  [HADES Collaboration, Phys. Rev. C 102, 024914 (2020)]

- No change of trend in the non-critical reference

- Additional mechanisms:
  - Nuclear liquid-gas transition
  - Light nuclei formation





VV, arXiv:2208.13693

Thermodynamic analysis of HADES data

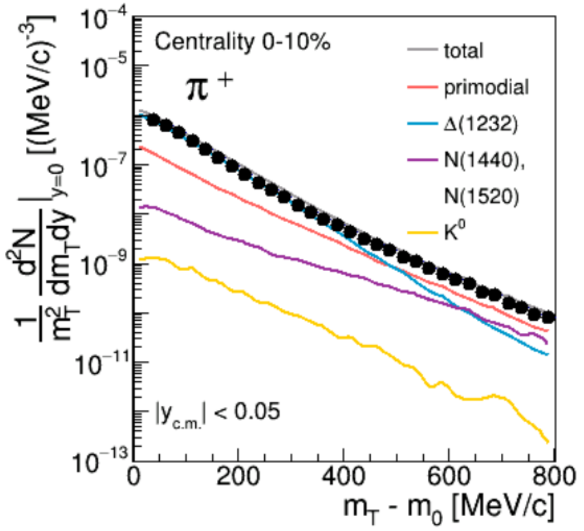
VV, Koch, Phys. Lett. B 833, 137368 (2022)

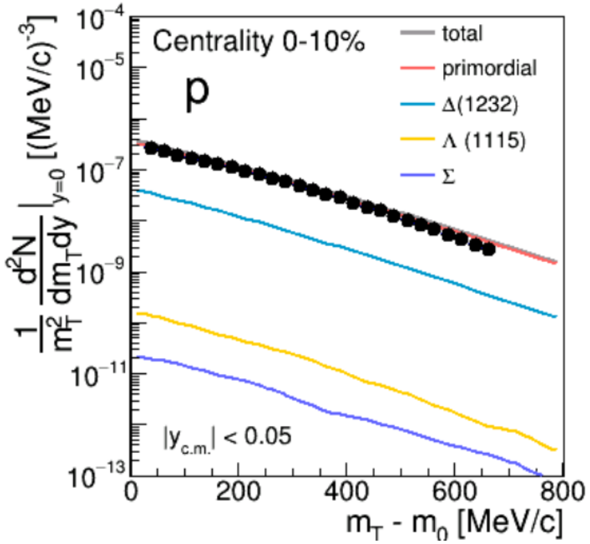
- Single freeze-out scenario: Emission from Siemens-Rasmussen hypersurface with Hubble-like flow

  → Pion and proton spectra o.k.

  [S. Harabasz et al., PRC 102, 054903 (2020)]

- Uniform $T \approx 70$ MeV, $\mu_B \approx 875$ MeV across the fireball [A. Motornenko et al., PLB 822, 136703 (2021)]





- Fluctuations:
  - Same as before but incorporate additional binomial filtering to account for protons bound in light nuclei
  - Uniform fireball → Final proton cumulants are linear combinations of baryon susceptibilities χ_n^B at freeze-out

$$\kappa_n^p = \sum_{m=1}^{n} \alpha_{n,m}\, \chi_m^B$$

Extract χ_n^B directly from experimental data

A closer look at the HADES data

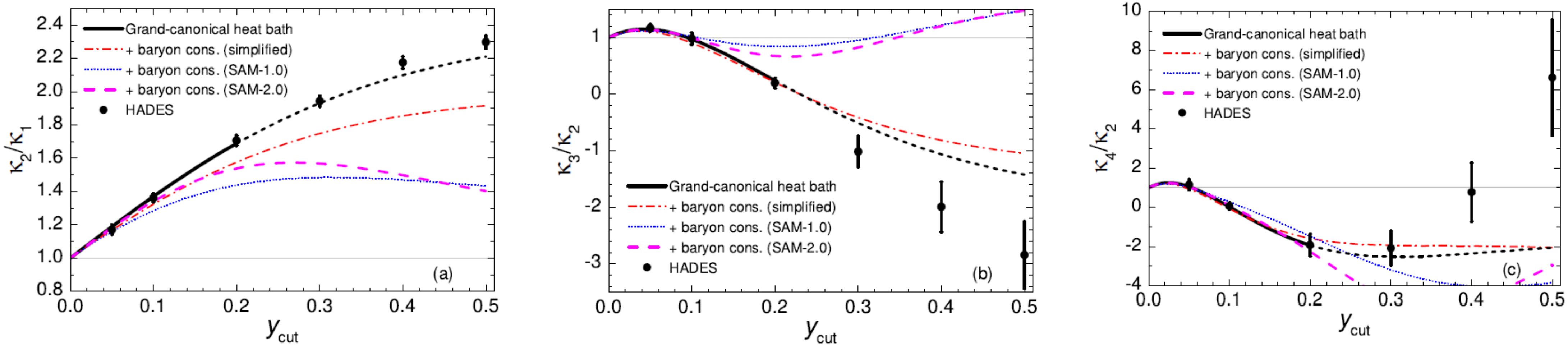
VV, Koch, Phys. Lett. B 833, 137368 (2022)

- Fit baryon susceptibilities to data within a fireball model (Siemens-Rasmussen*)

- In the grand-canonical limit (no baryon conservation, small y_{cut}) the data are described well with

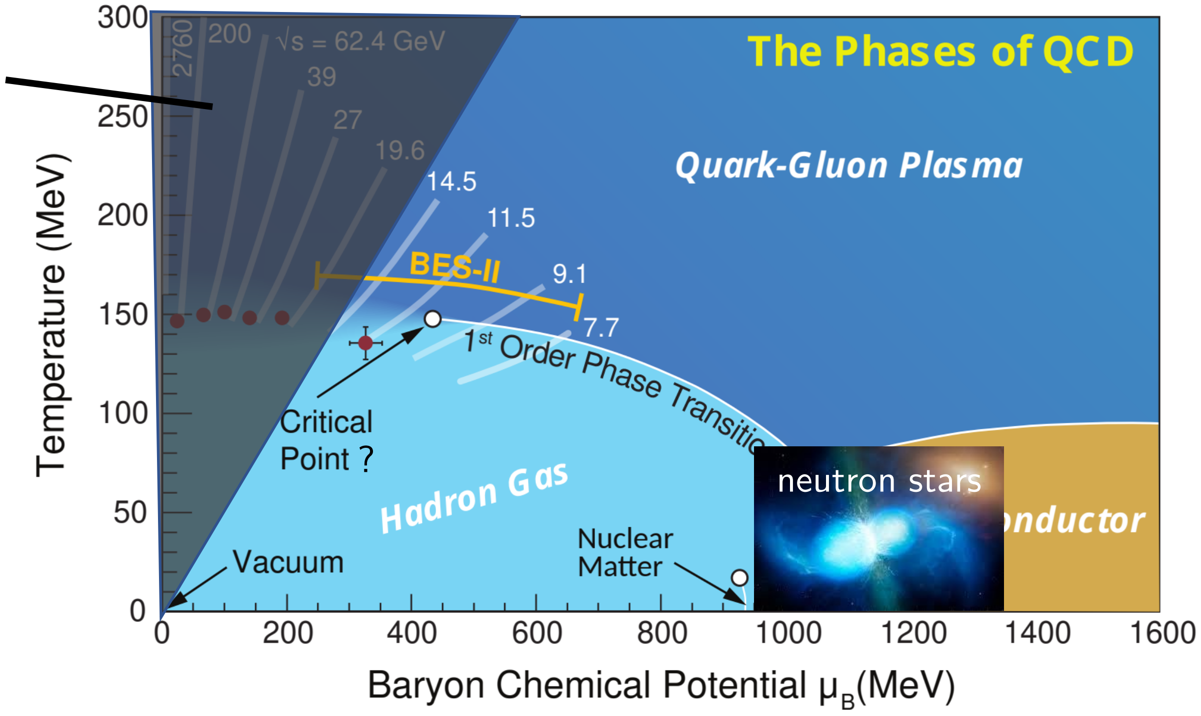
$$\frac{\chi_2^B}{\chi_1^B} \sim 9.17 \pm 0.21, \qquad \frac{\chi_3^B}{\chi_2^B} \sim -33.1 \pm 0.8, \qquad \frac{\chi_4^B}{\chi_2^B} \sim 691 \pm 50, \quad \text{i.e.} \quad \chi_4^B \gg -\chi_3^B \gg \chi_2^B \gg \chi_1^B$$

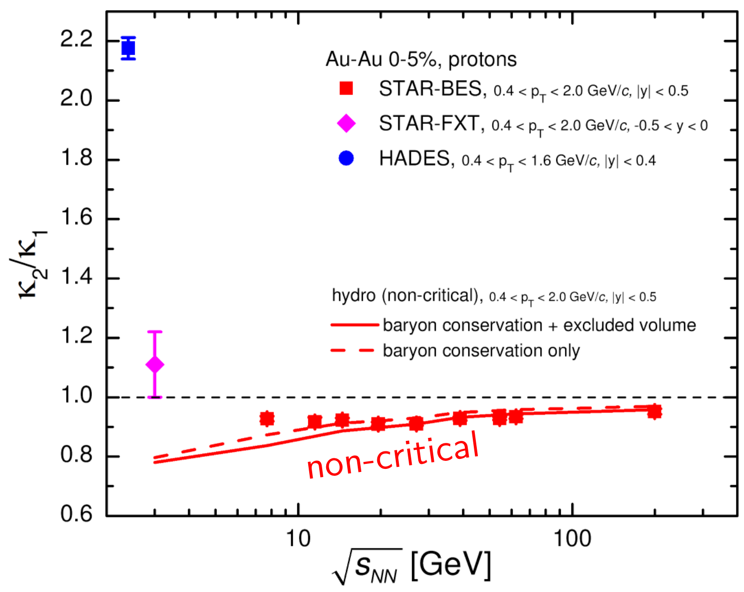
- Could be indicative of a *critical point* near the HADES freeze-out at T~70 MeV, μ_B~875 MeV
- However, the results for $y_{cut} > 0.2$ are challenging to describe with baryon conservation included



Summary: What we learned so far from fluctuations

Critical point disfavored





- Data at high energies ($\sqrt{s_{NN}} \geq 20$ GeV) consistent with "non-critical" physics
  - Disfavors QCD critical point at $\mu_B/T < 2$-3, consistent with what we know from lattice QCD
- Interesting indications for (multi)-proton correlations at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} \leq 7.7$ GeV, better modeling required

Thanks for your attention!