

GET UP, STAND UP! HIGHER ORDER THINKING IN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES

by

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredibly supportive wife, Rachel, and our two wonderful children, Avi and Zachary.

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ABSTRACT

GET UP, STAND UP! HIGHER ORDER THINKING IN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES

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This study focuses on the application of higher order thinking skills in general education popular music studies at the post-secondary level. The literature review explores the history of post-secondary general education music courses (also known as “music appreciation”) in the United States. The textbooks and philosophical underpinnings of popular music courses currently in widespread use are reviewed and critiqued.

Most textbooks published for general education, post-secondary use incorporate a preselected canon of artists and repertoire deemed by the authors as essential to the study of popular music as a discipline. Assessment strategies offered as companions to the textbooks require learners to demonstrate knowledge by remembering significant information about the essential artists and repertoire. This approach is in variance with what research shows facilitates deep learning. A new method for popular music studies is proposed which empowers learners to demonstrate knowledge of musical conventions by

creating original material. Creating original material requires higher-order thinking and critical thinking skills that are more in line with the liberal arts goals articulated by most post-secondary institutions. Each chapter in the method presents sequential lessons teaching learners the skills to compose original songs and lyrics.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Music is an important part of American social life and has been so for hundreds of years. In the present era, music is so ubiquitous that it is often experienced subconsciously at events and activities related to everyday life. Educators, academics, researchers, artists, and others frequently extol the social and individual benefits of musical study and participation. These benefits include contributing to a better quality of life, the enhancement of health and the development of context-free problem solving and analytical skills sometimes called “habits of mind” (Pogonowski, 1989; Woodford, 1996). By the mid-nineteenth century, the United States saw “the rapid growth of public music education” (Starr and Waterman, 2014, p. 28). Educational institutions embraced the idea of musical training as a public good. This included not only practical training in how to sing or play a musical instrument, but also the study of music as an academic discipline.

The “appreciation of music” (also called “music appreciation”) as an academic discipline emerged during the early twentieth-century in the United States and the United Kingdom. This chapter provides a review of this discipline’s emergence and examines the unique role popular music studies as a sub-specialty. The author discusses the emergence and function of a canon in popular music studies, and offers practice-oriented

suggestions for aligning teaching and learning activities with current research on the best practices in the field.

According to Prictor (2014), the expression music appreciation “implies not only enjoyment of music, but also the knowledge that can help those without previous training to go beyond enjoyment to ‘understanding’” (para. 1). Charlton and Hickock (2009) articulate this perspective in observing “Listening is the key that unlocks a passion for music and how it enhances our lives...Listening to music is a skill that must be exercised in order to develop” (p. XXIV). Traditionally, the discipline focuses on a canon of European repertoire beginning in the 18th century. More recently, educators and academics are embracing diverse genres including European Medieval and Renaissance music, jazz, film music, Broadway musicals, rock, blues, and non-western styles of music. Prictor (2014) notes that early proponents of music appreciation “were convinced of the morally, spiritually, and socially elevating properties of art music” (para. 2).

The emergence of popular music studies as a discipline began in the 1960s and 70s as a group of younger scholars explored the impact of rock music. Through the late 1970s and early 1980s, scholars and educators encountered significant institutional resistance from colleges and universities unwilling to embrace popular music studies as an academic discipline. For example, in 1976, George Mason University turned down author Robert Pielke’s request to teach a multidisciplinary course in rock music (Stephenson, 2002). Moore (2003) concurs about the academy’s resistance to embracing popular music studies in this era. He observed “twenty years ago, it was difficult to find any institutions where popular music (as a field distinct from ‘classical,’ ‘non-Western’

musics or jazz) could be found being taught to prospective musicians at the undergraduate level. It simply did not appear on the syllabus” (p.1).

Popular music scholars responded by coalescing around a well-regarded academic journal (*Popular Music*) and a scholarly society called the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) in the early 1980s. Drawing from the fields of sociology and communications, cultural studies, and pluralistic musicology, the IASPM (2014) promotes “inquiry, scholarship, and analysis in the area of popular music” (para. 1). The association’s activities “include conferences, publications and research projects designed to advance an understanding of popular music and the processes involved in its production and consumption” (Welcome to IASPM section, paragraph 1). The formation of academic communities encouraged institutions of higher learning to embrace the discipline. Moore (2003) noted “by the turn of the century, the position has changed to such an extent that not only are many undergraduate musicians enabled to study some aspect of popular music (whether that be its performance, its composition, production, sociology, analysis, its marketing, or whatever), but there are even degree programmes devoted entirely to it” (p. 2).

The emergence of popular music studies in institutions of higher learning in the late 1980s gave rise to a plethora of textbooks and learning resources. The tone and methodology of most textbooks and learning resources emerge out of the “appreciation of music” movement in the early 20th century. These resources and textbooks establish a canon of artists and repertoire deemed by their authors as essential to popular music studies at the post-secondary level. There is some minor variation in the artists and

repertoire various authors have deemed essential to the genre. However, the canon is not the most substantive issue. Rather the canonization process itself is rife with bias.

Furthermore, the approach of most texts and supplemental educational resources (like test banks) reinforce lower-level cognitive processes like remembering basic biographical information and demonstrating mastery of simple skills and tasks. This paradigm is at odds with the loftier aims of curricula valuing higher-order thinking, lifelong learning, and fostering “habits of mind” including critical thinking. A new, research-based method is required to align cognitively with the aspirational goals of teachers and institutions with the experience of learners in the classroom.

Significance and the Need for the Method

The value of and engagement with a recognized canon of repertoire plays a significant role in the field of music appreciation. Traditional music appreciation focuses on repertoire beginning with eighteenth-century European composers (Prictor, 2014). These include artists such as Antonio Vivaldi, Arcangelo Corelli, and J.S. Bach. A partial list of seminal figures included in a comprehensive course of study include Franz Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig Van Beethoven, Hector Berlioz, Piotr Tchaikovsky, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, Aaron Copland, and Edgard Varèse. Many classroom educators self-consciously embrace artists from under-represented groups including women (Barbara Strozzi, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Hildegard von Bingen), composers of African descent (Edward “Duke” Ellington, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, William Grant Still), and composers from places other than Europe or the United States (Alberto Ginastera, Manuel Ponce, Percy Granger, Astor Piazzolla), but it has become de

rigueur to include a core group of composers and specific compositions as part of a recognized canon. One can argue about the canon's exclusivity (too many dead white men), stylistic diversity (too much reliance on "classical" music), implications of a classist high/low cultural divide, or its inherent value, but one cannot simply ignore it.

The field of popular music wrestles with many of the same issues. Regev (2006) notes "canonization in the case of popular music has gone hand in hand with its very recognition as a legitimate art form. Such recognition came into being through the 1960s and 70s Anglo-American pop-rock music....Consequently, Anglo-American pop-rock music became the major ingredient in the canon of popular music. Names such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, Steve Wonder (to name the most obvious) have been consecrated as the definitive 'great artists' of popular music, and the albums they recorded as the ultimate 'masterpieces.'" (p.1).

The value of establishing such a cannon is often expressed as highlighting music of exceptional influence, popularity, or quality with attention to a diversity of styles (Covach, 2009, Joyner, 2009, Starr and Waterman, 2014). Fox-Genovese (2015) summarizes this idea in noting "the idea of a canonically based liberal education comes with the promise of excellence, balance, and humanity located in a specific body of texts" (p. 18). Joyner (2009) expresses the value of the popular music canon he selected in his book by noting that it "gives the reader a balanced perspective of cultural and historical context, an insight into the development of the music industry and music technology, biographies of significant artists and producers, and an appreciation for the formal and stylistic design of the music itself" (p. v). Indeed, the promise of a well-constructed

canon is that it encompasses the breadth and depth of the human experience within the context of the genre and embodies aesthetic values of the highest order.

The Canon's Critics

Despite the promise a canon offers, many scholars and educators have directed pointed criticisms at its role, function, and value. Specifically, the popular music canon is vulnerable to the same kinds of criticisms leveled at traditional music appreciation or other manifestations of a liberal arts cannon. Antti-Ville Kärjä (2006) objects to placing too much emphasis on issues of authenticity and rebelliousness. Others have criticized a relative paucity of women and non-Anglo-Americans in the popular music canon. More combative criticisms emanate from under-represented communities showing that the cannon embodies a mistrust and/or contempt for members of the under-represented group and has no claim on their respect or identification. O'Neal Parker (2006) articulates this position when criticizing 21st Century Hip Hop in saying "I could no longer nod my head to the misogyny or keep time to the vapid materialism of another rap song. After I could no longer sacrifice my self-esteem or that of my two daughters on an altar of dope beats and tight rhymes" (para. 6). Other critics argue that an overemphasis of rock music in academic circles lionizes a narrow aesthetic, a perspective referred to as "rockism" (Sanneh; 2004, Regev, 2006; Middleton and Manuel, 2014). Sanneh posits that this perspective "reduces rock 'n' roll to a caricature, then uses that caricature as a weapon. Rockism means idolizing the authentic old legend (or underground hero) while mocking the latest pop star" (Sanneh, 2004).

It is worth noting with irony that "rockists" who venerate artists known for

challenging established institutions with youth-oriented, counter-culture rallying cries such as “the times they are a’changin’” are charged with creating their own rigid orthodoxy assailable from a new generation of reformists. Issues of inclusion are legitimate and settling on a fixed, representative canon can never be a settled matter. There will always be efforts towards better representations of diversity. The ephemeral nature of pop culture ensures that those who consume, study, and comment upon it will forever be adjusting to a constantly moving landscape. Any canon articulated by an establishment is subject to criticisms of exclusion and elitism from those who see themselves as underrepresented.

Critics of a traditional canon in the arts and humanities usually begin by noting that the cultural legacy left to us woefully under-represents many important groups. Issues of race, gender, sexuality, and religion play a prominent role in this critique. The voice most often heard is white, male, heterosexual, and Christian. To the extent that the artist varies from this perspective, he/she is more likely to be excluded from the canon. The cultural upheaval of the 1960s began to challenge the nature and character of the canon, but the debate still lingers. As Fox-Genovese (2015) notes, “recent attempts to defend or restore the canon have been characterized by a certain political and cultural conservatism” (p. 18). All too often, this brand of conservatism fails to recognize voices from marginalized communities.

Popular music’s appeal to youth culture inoculates it against some charges of bias that plague other genres in the arts and humanities. African American cultural forms have long been at the cutting edge of popular music styles, and black artists like Chuck Berry,

Little Richard, Ray Charles, James Brown and Aretha Franklin are well represented in the popular music canon. To be sure, there are historical inequities regarding authorship, financial compensation, and other issues that have disadvantaged African American artists. Furthermore, “rockists” are often charged with interpreting black music as important only insofar as it influenced white rock music. Those guilty of such a label are inclined to see Chicago blues musicians Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf as merely the precursors to white, blues-influenced Rock music such as that created by the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton and not possessing a fully realized, mature artistic sensibility. Despite the aforementioned concerns, it is widely acknowledged that great music created by African Americans is central to the popular music canon.

With respect to young audiences, scholars such as Bakari Kitwana (2006) have noted that the multi-racial appeal of Hip Hop culture owes much to the genre’s ability to give voice to those who are socially and economically marginalized. Kitwana argues that the economic threat of globalization to the white middle class and a cultural re-evaluation of “white privilege” create conditions that attract a large numbers of white youth to the outsider messaging and class-consciousness inherent in black cultural forms like Hip Hop. Others have made similar arguments about the adoption of black cultural forms by economically marginalized white youth in bygone eras. Starr and Waterman (2014) argue that 19th-century minstrelsy can be read as more than just a projection of white racism (which was undoubtedly a major factor in the popularity of the genre). They put forth the argument that minstrelsy’s emergence among white youth in northern working-class neighborhoods like New York City’s Eighth Ward and its effort to lampoon the social

aristocracy of the time suggest that white audiences responded to their economic marginalization by identification with black cultural forms.

The intersection of black culture and youth culture is a powerful nexus and a significant driver of innovation and vitality in popular music. What Kitwana's observations about the multi-racial appeal of Hip Hop and Starr and Waterman's observations about 19th-century minstrelsy's appeal to working-class white audiences share is the appropriation of black culture (real or imagined) as a vehicle for expressing identity and resilience in the face of economic threat and social marginalization. Because of African American's unique history in the United States, black cultural forms (including many genres of popular music) are often seen as a response to social and economic oppression and an expression of perseverance.

To the extent that young people see themselves as an oppressed class, they are more likely to gravitate towards black cultural forms. Adolescents have adult desires but do not enjoy the full benefits of adulthood. And while there may be perfectly rational, reasonable reasons for this (as anyone who has driven with a teenager can attest), any class of people denied political rights, economic opportunities, and liberties are bound to feel resentment. Ice Cube, a leading member of the notoriously rebellious rap group N.W.A., described the Compton-based ensemble's music as "the sound of frustrated teenagers and 21-year-olds" (as cited in Grow, 2015, p. 19). In this light, it becomes clear how the more strident political slogans of the civil rights movement morphed into the Beastie Boys paean to adolescent frustration "(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right to Party" (1986) just as rap music was moving from the margins of pop culture to a place of

centrality. The significance of the song being recorded by rap's first major white artists should not be dismissed either. Both the message and the identity of the messengers reflect the trend of white youth culture appropriating black cultural forms as a vehicle for expressing marginalization. Music audiences often retain a particular fondness for the songs popular during their adolescence. The popularity of "oldies" and "classic" radio station formats bear witness to the enduring power of the music of one's youth. To the extent that American youth continue to identify with black cultural forms, African American culture will remain at the cutting edge of popular style. It also ensures that African American artists and genres will be well represented in any formalized popular music canon.

Race is only one factor that impacts an author's work being embraced in the liberal arts canon. Issues of gender, sexuality, and religion play a role too. Here the popular music canon begins to show many of the conventional biases. Consider Chuck Berry's hit "Maybellene" (1955). This song was Berry's first hit and provided a blueprint for a new generation of popular artists. Scholars and critics have long called Berry the "architect" of rock and roll. He is lauded for the ability to fuse virtuosic, buzzing guitar playing from R&B traditions with melodies and rhythms borrowed from country music in the service of lyrics that celebrate teenage life (Starr and Waterman, 2014; Schloss, Starr, and Waterman 2014; Campbell 2009; Covach, 2009; Appell and Hemphill, 2006). And yet, a closer look at this blueprint reveals many of the biases critics claim plague the canon in popular music, not to mention other liberal arts disciplines.

The lyric tells the story of courtship through the analogy of a car chase. Both the

subject and the analogy are especially designed to appeal to a younger generation. In the songs lyric, a “V8 Ford,” a vehicle with decidedly working-class connotations, carries the protagonist (presumably Berry himself). The object of the protagonist’s desire, “Maybellene,” is seen driving a vehicle with more aristocratic associations, a “Cadillac Coupe de Ville.” The classist divide here should not be underestimated in understanding the record’s appeal to white audiences. As we have seen with Starr and Waterman’s analysis of nineteenth minstrelsy and Kitwana’s assessment of the multiracial appeal of twenty-first century Hip Hop culture, the ability of white audiences (especially young, white audiences) to identify with black cultural forms as a means for expressing a sense of their own economic marginalization is an important part of the attraction of such forms. The V8 Ford becomes the vehicle that both gives voice to that marginalization and embodies the hopes sexual fulfillment and economic mobility by overtaking Maybellene in the Cadillac Coupe de Ville. And yet, the storytelling begs the question, where is Maybellene’s voice? The protagonist’s desire and braggadocio is clear when saying “Nothin’ will outrun my V8 Ford,” but does Maybellene want to be caught? Why is she running away? She is silent in the drama, the “object” of desire. Critics celebrate the record’s ability to appropriate the symbols of teenage life. Lhamon (1989) noted “Berry’s apparent desire was to ignore race somehow and grab the same American promise. Fords and proms, jukeboxes and guitars offered every adolescent” (p. 23). But is this it is really the story of every adolescent? Surely it is more accurate to say that Berry represents teenagers embracing a decidedly masculine, heteronormative perspective. Berry’s Maybellene has just enough structure to become an adumbration of many

pernicious cultural tropes about women. The only information we have about Maybellene is articulated in the chorus. Berry intones “Maybellene, why can’t you be true. You’ve started back doing the things you used to do.” The portrayal is sufficiently generic enough to serve as a stand-in for the listener’s own romantic infatuation. And yet, the depiction of the voiceless Maybellene is sufficiently specific to serve as the inheritor of a long history of female deception obliquely referencing classic stereotypes rooted in the biblical Eve’s betrayal of G-d in the Garden of Eden and Helen of Troy’s betrayal of Menelaus. Maybelle is at once a deceitful sexual temptress, femme fatale, and a literal vehicle of class mobility. Fox-Genovese (2015) sums up a powerful feminist critique in saying “The canon does not embody the values of my own kind. Worse, when one looks closely, it can be shown to have frequently embodied out-right mistrust of or contempt for my own kind. On what grounds can it pretend to command my respect or identification, much less the expenditure of my energy?” (p. 20).

Responses to charges of bias amongst critics and academics manifest in several ways. The most common response has been to search the deep tracks of popular music’s history and champion artists from under-represented groups not commercially or critically recognized in their time. For example, Starr and Waterman (2014) ask the rhetorical question “where were the women” in the “completely male-dominated account of the early history of roll ‘n’ roll?” (p. 230). The artists were there, they contend. The American public of the mid-1950s was just not ready for them. Artists including Wanda Jackson, Brenda Lee, Janis Martin, Jo-Ann Campbell and Lorrie Collins are frequently referenced by critics and scholars, with Jackson mentioned as a stand-out (Covacs, 2009;

Charlton, 2008). Starr and Waterman (2014) mention that “in terms of pure energy, vocal charisma, aggressive sexuality, and her stylistic mastery of both rhythm & blues and country elements, Jackson stands revealed on these records as a performer who could readily go toe-to-toe (or pelvis to pelvis) with Elvis Presley or with any other major male rock ‘n’ rollers of this period.” (p. 231-232). Many contend that the attributes the canon celebrates in male rock ‘n’ rollers like Elvis Presley were employed by female performers. By embracing Jackson, defenders of the canon argue that issues of exclusion are correctable through diversification.

The implicit assumption in this approach is that pure energy, vocal charisma, aggressive sexuality and stylistic mastery of both rhythm and blues are the objective hallmarks of an aesthetic pinnacle to which all (or most) significant popular music artists aspire. Patti Smith, the most influential female punk rock musician of the 1970s, summed up this perspective when describing the music of her youth. She said, “I looked at rock performers as masculine.....I was raised (to think) that all the rock performers were guys” (Gross, 2010). The idealized, aggressive, hyper-sexualized rock idol ultimately provided a model for many male and some female performers that followed. However, the approach of canonic correction through diversification fails to recognize that the fundamental experience of marginalized groups often leads to musical expressions embodying an entirely different aesthetic. Compelling female artists like Joni Mitchell, Diana Ross, and Carole King would never be described as “going pelvis to pelvis” with a male performer. The juxtaposition is almost comical. An argument could be made for Tina Turner and Janis Joplin, but they emerged in the more sexually permissive 1960s,

not the relatively conservative 1950s. If a more truly representative and diverse canon is desired, critics, scholars, and educators must also challenge the narrow epistemological assumptions that buttress the aesthetic values of the current one. Furthermore, the nature of the current canon begs the question, whose interests are best served by lionizing the energetic, sexually aggressive rocker? Or, more to the point, how do those interests intersect with those of the canonizers? There are significant political, social, financial, sexual, and cultural concerns to consider, which undermine the modernist certainties of a fixed canon supposedly based on objective aesthetic criteria.

Statement of the Problem

The reliance of a canon in post-secondary popular music studies begs the question “how does one assess learning?” In most cases, readers are asked to learn biographical details of seminal, canonic artists and the musical analysis of experts. In this case, the most straightforward answer to the aforementioned question involves remembering this information for recall. Instructor resources available with most popular music textbooks support this approach by including a test bank of multiple-choice and short-answer questions from which an exam can be readily made. For example, Oxford University Press (2014) includes test bank questions for Starr and Waterman’s *American Popular Music* such as “Which Alabama-born musician called himself the ‘Father of the Blues’ and composed hits such as “Memphis Blues” and “St. Louis Blues?” (question 2). The answer is W.C. Handy. This approach places encourages learners to commit information to short-term memory for recall on exams as a way of demonstrating learning.

This model employs an educational paradigm known as “objectivism” and

suggests the biformity of knowledge acquisition consists of bridging the lacuna between the learner and the learned. Biggs (1996) sums this up in saying “knowledge exists independently of the knower, and understanding is coming to know that which already exists” (p. 347). With respect to the aforementioned example, information about seminal, canonic repertoire and artists (like W.C. Handy) is transmitted to learners who receive, store, and recall the knowledge when required to do so. Context becomes peripheral to the learning process, and quantitative assessment is easily employed. Even when curriculum goals espouse loftier goals, learners will focus on lower-level cognitive processes (like rote memorization) when assessment favors the later (Frederiksen and Collins, 1989). Every educator who has labored to explore a complex, abstract concept and then fielded the query “do we need to know that for the test?” has felt that tension. A significant lacuna exists between this approach and the movement in higher education emphasizing higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and creation. Research suggests rote memorization is unlikely to facilitate deep learning (Marton and Saljio, 1976). It also models a “teacher-centered” approach (sometimes called “direct teaching”) by which knowledge of the canon is transmitted from the author (and by extension, the instructor) to students. Critics of this approach have likened “covering” material in this manner to placing a thin layer (like a bed sheet) over something. They note the approach is not conducive to deep learning (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005; Weimer, 2012).

A competing model to objectivism called “constructivism” conceptualizes learning in qualitative terms and claims that the learner constructs knowledge from

personal experience (Cole 1990, Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Biggs (1996) observed “learners arrive at meaning by actively selecting and cumulatively constructing their own knowledge, through both individual and social activities” (p. 348). He described a range of learning outcomes from remembering information to performing in novel situations. Assessment methods for remembering are easily classified as “correct” or “incorrect,” but the application of knowledge in new contexts requires an infinitely more complex feedback loop. It is also more likely to align cognitively with the higher order thinking skills to which most educators and curricula aspire.

The issue then is not the canon per se, but rather its pedagogical (or andragogical) value. For educators, the debate of who is in and who is out is akin to rearranging the proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic. The more pressing issue is that assessment based upon committing information to short term memory is an ineffective tool for fostering higher order thinking skills or deep learning. This is true regardless of the values implied by the memorized information. The cultivation of higher order thinking requires a new way of engaging popular music traditions and conventions. The author explores techniques for cultivating higher order thinking later in this chapter in the section entitled “research procedures.”

Research questions to be investigated

The longstanding convention of teaching popular music based on historical canon stands upon shaky ground from both philosophical and pedagogical perspectives. Philosophically, the canon’s construction reveals longstanding conventions of bias that

amplify some voices and silence others. More fundamentally, the pedagogical value of teaching a canon using a factual, history-based model does little to foster the higher order thinking skills valued in the 21st Century. A new approach is needed. The new approach must address the following questions:

1. What is an effective approach to help learners acquire a deeper understanding of popular music conventions?
2. What specific classroom lessons can an instructor employ to facilitate deep learning?

I will answer these questions by applying research about “best practices” in education to the field of music generally and popular music specifically.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study is delimited to the examination of popular music textbooks, books about popular music, dissertations, journals, and interviews with popular music artists. It also includes the music itself. The goal is fostering higher order thinking by having learners create original materials. The method will consider music theory only insofar as it provides learners with the tools to create original music. Advanced concepts like secondary dominance and voice leading will not be considered as they are not essential to songwriting or mastering aspects of form. Similarly, method books on instrumental technique will not be considered. Learners may bring experience as instrumentalists and singers to this method, but computer-based tools and virtual instruments are sufficient to create the materials required.

The method described forthwith is designed for implementation in post-secondary classrooms studying popular music. The main audiences for this method are instructors and learners in post-secondary classrooms studying popular music. The demands of self-regulation in this method limit its applicability to post-secondary learners and advanced secondary students.

The author is aware that his gender, age, race, education, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, economic background, region of the country in which he was raised, and other aspects of his socio-economic status too numerous to mention influenced (and continues to influence) the music with which he is most intimately familiar. This familiarity does not necessarily connote with superiority in aesthetic or educational value. It does, however, increase the likelihood that such music will appear in this method. The author made a concerted effort to include examples from popular music artists in a wide variety of genres, including those with which he was less familiar.

Definition of Terms

Walser (2002) quipped “it is often said that ‘writing about music is like dancing about architecture,’ to which I would reply that dancing about architecture might be very illuminating, if we all danced as much as we use language” (p. 22). Walser’s point is a defense of using language to describe and better understand the experience of hearing music. Language, he argues, is “an incredibly powerful and nuanced system for making sense of things and communicating our understandings” (p. 23). In principle, I am inclined to agree that there is great value in communicating with others in detail about the experience of hearing music. And yet, there is often a significant lacuna separating a

profound hearing experience and the vocabulary to describe it. Part of developing the means for communication is agreement upon terminology.

Virtually all people like some kind of music. Naturally, they tend to listen to this kind of music the most. There are also some kinds of popular music that may not speak to us. After all, one person's opinions and tastes are not necessarily shared by all. To best understand what it is about certain kinds of music that resonate with people, it is helpful to define some important terms commonly used to describe popular music. These terms fall into two categories: descriptive terms and technical terms.

Descriptive Terms often involve interpretation and describe the emotional impact of the music on a listener. There may be some variations in the descriptive terms used by different listeners. To some extent, descriptive terms are a bit like the text one might read on the back of a wine bottle; "flavors of red fruit with hints of vanilla and mocha." Not everyone will experience a song or the flavor of a glass of wine exactly the same way, but it will be similar in many, significant ways. The aforementioned wine might also be described as "filled with notes of plum and raspberry infused with a light cocoa aroma" but could never be described as "salty," "bitter," "citrusy." Likewise, descriptive terms for music should be in the same general sound-world even if they are not identical.

Descriptive terms include riff, groove, hook, affect, timbre, and genre.

Riff: a short musical phrase, usually accompanying a melody or solo, heard repeatedly in a song. *Ex. "The guitarist played a rockin' riff."*

Many songs will feature a riff throughout the entire song as a unifying element. A song that does this is said to use "riff construction." A riff doesn't have to be played at all

moments during a song, but it will usually be featured much of the time. In some cases, the song really *is* the riff! Here are a few songs that feature prominent riffs:

“You Really Got Me” by The Kinks (1964)

The song begins with a five-note riff stated in the electric guitar and is heard many times throughout the song.

“Bad to the Bone” by George Thorogood and the Delaware Destroyers (1982)

This song also features a five-note riff in the electric guitar that can be heard throughout the song.

“Superfreak” by Rick James (1981). Note: the same riff was used in “U Can’t Touch This” by M.C. Hammer (1990).

In this song, the riff is heard in the electric bass. This eight-note riff begins the song.

“Intermission Riff” by Stan Kenton (1946)

Here, the term “riff” is included in the title of the song. The infectious, jaunty rhythms played by the brass instruments are used throughout.

Groove: The quality and character of a song’s rhythmic energy. *Ex. “That song has a funky groove.”*

Stevie Wonder once said “just because a record has a groove doesn’t make it in the groove” (1976). A good **groove** (or a song that is “in the groove”) makes you *feel* a certain way. This is closely tied to the history of popular music’s association with dance music. The physical response that we often feel when listening to a song is a function of the groove and describing that physical response can sometimes be challenging. A good

rule of thumb for describing the groove is to imagine trying to describe the song to someone who has never heard it before. Common terms describing the groove of a song include: *funky, driving, laid-back, swinging, phat, stiff, jaunty, insistent* or, *relaxed*.

In some genres of music, particularly hip-hop, the concept of a groove is tied up with the distinctive way a rapper phrases his or her words. This phrasing of the words is frequently referred to as the artists “flow” and often establishes the groove of a song. For example, Snoop Dog’s tendency to hang on the back end of the beat while rapping contributes to his flow often described with groove-oriented terms like “laid-back.” Eminem’s flow is generally more aggressive and he articulates words on the front end of the beat. This contributes to words like “driving” and “insistent” describing both his flow and the groove of many of his songs.

Timbre: The color and/or texture of sound. *Ex. “That singer’s voice has a nasal timbre.”*

Understanding timbre and using the term properly can be a challenging for neophyte students of popular music. Timbre is the quality that makes a trumpet sound like a trumpet and a cello sound like a cello. It is also the quality that makes Bob Dylan sound different than Nat “King” Cole or Bruno Mars sound different than Usher.

Using the term “timbre” properly can be a wonderful opportunity to stretch one’s vocabulary. Some terms that are frequently used to describe timbre are Scratchy, Nasal, Smooth, Velvety, Gin-Soaked, Guttural, Gravely, Piercing, Shrill, Weathered, Girlish/Boyish, Bright/Dark, Raspy, Thick/Thin, and Hoarse

Another term sometimes used to describe **timbre** is **soundprint**. Usually the term soundprint is used to describe the timbre of a singer, but it can apply to instrumentalists

as well. For example, one could say “I knew that song was by Lady Gaga because of her soundprint.” This kind of uniqueness and identity is something for which many artists strive as a way of branding their music. Some instrumentalists have such a unique, distinctive, and compelling approach that they can also be said to have a soundprint. Examples include the great Motown bass player James Jamerson, the virtuosic guitarist Jimi Hendrix, and the jaunty, angular piano playing of Jazz great, Theolonius Monk.

Genre: The commercial category into which an artist or a song can be most easily classified. *Ex.*

“That song by Lyle Lovett belongs in the alternative country genre.”

This term is often used more as a marketing label than an artistic description telling us something important about the musical sounds. It is also one of the ways that the music industry, artists, and fans connect and communicate with one another.

In an era when music was commonly sold in brick-and-mortar retail establishments (like Tower Records), music records, pre-recorded cassettes and CDs were divided into genres and then subdivided alphabetically. Popular genres included such labels as “singer/songwriter,” “pop rock,” “adult contemporary,” or “soul.” In the digital environment, this distinction is less important. Still, music fans often maintain a sense of personal identity expressed by the genre of music they prefer (and the music-themed accessories they purchase like tee-shirts, stickers, and posters). Thus being a “b-boy” or “straight edge” means far less now in terms of where most fans physically go to purchase music, but still retains significance with respect to fan identity and community.

Hook: A short memorable phrase or lyrical fragment of a popular song. *Ex. “Check out the hook while my DJ revolves it” (Vanilla Ice, 1990).*

Coming up with a good hook is an important part of the songwriter’s art. A good hook is pleasing to the ear, catchy, and allows a listener to remember a song after a few hearings (sometimes even just one!). It is called a hook because it hooks the listener’s ear!

Earworm: a “persistent musical and verbal retrieval episode” (Halpern and Bartlett, 2011) *Ex. “The song ‘Macarena’ is a tenacious earworm!”*

Earworms are often thought of as annoying song fragments or words that loop inside a person’s brain involuntarily. If you have ever had a tune “stuck in your head,” you have experienced an earworm. Although sometimes thought of as distracting or bothersome, involuntary musical memory is described in recent studies as pleasant to a slight majority of respondents. Both earworms and hooks play a role in musical memory that is not fully understood. In popular music, the art of writing a “catchy” song involves creating musical material instantly recognizable and memorable to the listener.

Affect: The overriding emotional mood of a song. *Ex. Survivor’s “Eye of the Tiger” has an inspirational affect.*

Affect references the emotional content of a song. This takes into account the instrumentation, groove, lyrics, timbres, meter, and all other musical characteristics. The affect describes the mood of a song and can be sad, angry, relieved, chill, bitter, happy, distraught, remorseful, proud, or carefree. The affect of a song can be just about anything.

The challenge in using this term is coming up with the right word or short phrase that captures the nuanced emotional character of something as complex and layered as a piece of music.

Technical terms describe the objective components of a song's structure and performance as a commercial product. They are more precise and less subject to individual variation than descriptive elements, but they also do not address the way music can make you feel. To use an analogy, technical elements would be like discussing a slice of pizza by describing its temperature, shape, ingredients, price, and color. They do not address the pizza's flavor. Technical elements express the more objective characteristics of music and include form, instrumentation, meter, melody, register, tempo, and chart position.

Melody: The most important part of a song, sometimes called the “tune.” *Ex. “Demi Levato sings the melody in the song ‘Skyscraper’”*

This is the part of the song you would usually sing. In most contemporary popular music, a vocalist usually sings the melody. In some pop songs like The Champs’ “Tequila,” (1958), an instrument or instruments play the melody.

Instrumentation: The instruments used in a piece of music or specific musical passage. *Ex. “The instrumentation for that song includes guitar, electric bass, drums, saxophone and a singer.”*

Meter: The rhythmic organization of music. *Ex. “The meter of that song is simple triple”*

Meter is a way of describing the way rhythm is organized in a song. Most pop songs have a regular, repeated pulse in patterns of two, three, or four. This pulse is called the “division” of the beat. This division can be further described by a “subdivision” of the beat, usually in a pattern of two or three. The combination of the division and subdivision allows one to describe the meter of the music.

Register: The relative height or depth of a musical pitch. Can also be expressed with the term “frequency.” *Ex. “That trumpet solo is in a very high register” or “Christina Aguilera sings in a higher register than Adele.”*

Generally, smaller instruments play in a higher register than larger instruments. For example, if you look at a drum set, the largest drum is the bass drum that sits on the ground. It sounds in a very low register. The smaller drums (called “toms”) are placed off the ground and sound in a higher register.

Register is often related to timbre (see the section on timbre under descriptive elements). As an instrument or vocalist approaches the extreme ends of their range, the timbre will change. Sometimes, the most exciting part of a song is when a singer strains at the very top of his/her register. This strain affects the timbre of their voice often resulting in a great deal of tension and energy!

Form: The structural architecture of music. *Ex. That song was in AABA form.*

Common structural elements in contemporary pop songs include verses, choruses, pre-choruses, and a middle-eight.

Tempo: The relative “fastness” or “slowness” of music *Ex. “That song is played at a very fast tempo!”*

The tempo of a song is often expressed in general terms like “fast” and “slow,” but sometimes musicians will want to be more specific. In these cases, the tempo of a song is often expressed in “beats per minute” or “bpm.” A device called a metronome is designed to measure bpm. Most dance music is recorded at 120 – 130 bpm. Genres with more brisk tempi like hardcore or speed metal can approach and exceed 200 bpm.

Chart Position: The commercial sales of a recording as compiled by *Billboard Magazine* or the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) (Covach, 2009). *Ex. “That song reached #1 on the Billboard U.S. R&B chart in 1974.”*

Many scholars are reluctant to cite popular music charts appearing in *Billboard Magazine* because the methods used to create them over the years are unknown and may have been manipulated. While not the most precise measurement tool, they can still give a general sense of the commercial impact of a particular recording (Covach, 2008). Of course, some artists can be much more influential than the *Billboard Magazine* charts might suggest. For example, the Grateful Dead, one of the most influential psychedelic rock bands of the 1960s, only had one top 10 hit and this was in the 1980s! However, *Billboard Magazine* charts can still provide some valuable insight into what was popular with particular audiences at any given time.

Terms like “Certified Gold Record” or “Double Platinum” are sometimes used to describe recordings in the popular media. These terms refer to data collected by the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA). In the United States, a record is certified “gold” when it sells 500,000 units. A platinum record is one that sells 1,000,000 copies. Double platinum simply means that the record has sold 2,000,000 copies. Diamond certification means that the recording has sold over 10,000 units. Unit sales include sales of physical items like CDs, downloads, and streaming.

Review of the Textbooks used in the Field

The success of popular music studies as an academic discipline lead to a plethora of resources designed for classroom use. These resources most commonly took (and continue to take) the form of textbooks. More recently, these textbooks include digital resources to be used in consort with the printed book. Stuart, Sheeler, and Anderson (2009) defined the use for their textbook as being “created for the student with no specialized knowledge of music, taking a one-semester or one-quarter length introductory history of rock ‘n’ roll course.” (p. vii). Appell and Hemphill (2006) concur with this sentiment and describe their textbook as “an undergraduate college text for general education courses in American popular music appreciation, in humanities, or in cultural studies.” (p. xi). The audience and purpose of popular music textbooks is well defined. They are designed as learning resources for undergraduate students matriculated in general education courses at institutions of higher learning.

Most method books used in a didactic context select representative artists of major genres throughout history deemed by critics and academics as the most influential

or significant in their era. These textbooks designed for post-secondary general education classes do a fine job placing popular music and the artists who created it in historical context usually beginning with nineteenth century styles such as brass bands, ragtime, “parlour” songs, Tin Pan Alley, and minstrelsy and continuing to the present era (Joyner and Lee, 2008; Starr and Waterman, 2014; Campbell 2013). Some methods place more emphasis on rock and begin closer to the contemporary era (Starr and Waterman, 2005; Charlton, 2006; Szatmary, 2009; Setmar, 2010; Schloss, Starr, and Waterman, 2013). The majority of methods organize popular music and artists along a progressive timeline, relating historic events to the music and musicians who lived through them. For example, the work of artists such as Bob Dylan and James Brown are explored relative to the turbulent social and political environment of the 1960s. Significant concurrent styles such as (Hillbilly music and Race music emerging in the 1920s) are discussed relative to each other. Chiego (2014) sums up this approach neatly, noting “Music Appreciation textbooks are usually organized chronologically” (p. xvii).

Other recent methodologies organize artists and the work they create differently. Appell and Hemphill (2006) focus on the ethnicity of artists and the communities from which they emerge in their book *American Popular Music; A Multicultural History*. The method offers “the opportunity for students of diverse cultural backgrounds to reflect on their own musical and cultural heritages in a historical context” (p. xi). The authors preface their approach by noting “in recent years, scholars in the arts, humanities, and social sciences have developed new perspectives in order to move beyond Eurocentric conceptions of culture.” (p.3). The interaction between manifestations of a dominant

culture and subordinate cultures is central to their methodology, and the repertoire they examine. The book is divided into five sections, the first four of which explore the cultural influences of specific ethnic groups. These sections are entitled “African American Roots – The Emergence of the Dominant Culture of American Popular Music,” “European American Traditions and Influences,” “Latin Musics in America Form a New Blend,” and “Native American and Asian Influences.” Within each chapter, the authors organize material chronologically. For example, the chapter on “African Roots” begins with a discussion of African musical aesthetics, continues through the emergence of Minstrelsy and Blues, and culminates with the swing era of the 1930s. This approach has the advantage of moving quickly through a significant period of time and can show the development of key threads in popular music. For example, the use of call and response technique is heard in many African musical styles and is an important stylistic device used in the Blues and Swing. However, the context of the music and its relationship to mainstream culture (not to mention other peripheral musical styles) is obfuscated. For example, both the Classic Blues and the Rural Blues (referenced by the music industry as “Race Music”) were first recorded in the 1920s, around the same time that early Country music (referenced by the music industry as “Hillbilly Music”) was first recorded. Both these styles are based upon rural, southern traditions. They also influenced one another and drew inspiration from mainstream popular music trends. Jazz musician Louis Armstrong recorded with both Classic Blues singer Bessie Smith and the Hillbilly artist Jimmie Rodgers who is sometimes called the “Father of Country Music.” Starr and Waterman (2014) note that influential Mississippi Delta bluesman Charlie Patton (often

called the “Father of the Country Blues”) recorded “not only blues but also African American ballads, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley hits, and even church songs” (p. 138). By not considering these concurrent musical styles at the same time, understanding of their interrelationship may be obfuscated. Further complicating the organizing principle of ethnicity is a fluid cultural understanding of such social constructs as race. Segrest and Hoffamn (2004) point out that, according to Charlie Patton’s most influential protégé Howlin’ Wolf (a.k.a. Chester Burnett), Patton was of Native American decent and did not have African ancestry.

Chiego (2014) builds a methodology around the environments in which music is experienced. For example, different music used in the service of worship is grouped together. The focus is on the experience of the listener when interacting with music and musicians. Chiego (2014) observes “Music is experienced through religious observance, song, dance, celebration, mourning, etc. It is the author’s belief that examining music from a variety of eras and cultures within each experiential category elicits a true appreciation of the power and beauty of music” (p. xvii – xviii). Here, context becomes the primary organizing principle. Chapter titles such as “Music for Dancing,” “Music for the Concert Hall,” and “Music for the Movies” reflect the author’s perceptions regarding which contexts are most significant. This approach has the advantage of contextualizing music and placing it in a social context. However, it also places heavy emphasis on the influence of certain social group. For example, Chapter 2 (Music of the Religious Experience) focuses squarely on church music. The chapter discusses Gregorian chant, the Mass, the rise of polyphony in European church music, oratorios, cantatas, and

Christian Pop. “World Worship Music” is relegated to just five of the thirty-six pages in this chapter. To be fair, Chiego is attempting to relate music to the experiences of American readers. Since the dominant religion in the United States is Christianity, most readers will experience music for worship in church. Still, the criticisms of bias in the formation of this canon are significant and problematic in an academic context.

The organizing principles employed by the authors vary, but all the aforementioned methods function by establishing a core group of artists and repertoire. Information about the artist’s lives, analysis of the music, and context in which it emerged are presented to learners using language suitable for a general education audience. Collectively, they create a musical canon deemed essential to the understanding of the artform. In the field, issues of bias in canon formation, whether it be from “rockists” or “Christian-centrism,” lead many to question the value of canon formation. Regev (2006) observes “the very possibility for a canon to exist in an art form such as popular music has also been questioned” (p. 1).

Analyzing Analysis

Many popular music methodologies include expert analysis of individual songs. This frequently incorporates the interrelationship between sound, lyrics, and musical structure. For example, Starr and Waterman (2014) show how the formal structure of The Beatles’ “A Hard Days Night” reinforces the theme of dissonance resolving into consonance. This theme is articulated in the lyrics that follow where the dissonance of a busy workday resolves into the consonance of domestic bliss.

“It’s been a hard days night, I’ve been working like a dog

It's been a hard days night, I should be sleeping like a log

But when I get home to you, I love the things that you do

You make me feel all right" (Lennon and McCartney, 1964)

With respect to musical structure, the theme (dissonance resolving into consonance) is reinforced by the presence of a dissonant guitar chord at the beginning of the song and a consonant guitar line at the end of the song. Furthermore, the lyrics "But when I get home to you, I love the things that you do" are compressed, creating tension in the music that is resolved only when the song resolved back to the tonic (home) key just as the lyrics sound the words "all right." The compression of the lyrics is generated by the tension of having a lyrical structure that implies a 16-bar form but a musical structure that references the 12-bar blues.

This kind of trenchant analysis helps learners attribute meaning to sound and models aspects of higher-level thinking represented at the top of Bloom's taxonomy by terms such as "analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (Bloom, 1956). However, on its own it does not empower learners to apply analysis, syntheses, and evaluation to new repertoire. Within the context of the historical narrative in which it is presented, it does not lead to the formation of transferable and transformative skills or "habits of mind." To do this, learners need a construct allowing them to engage aspects of practices, structures and meaning in multiple contexts. How are "dissonance" and "consonance" expressed in music? What is a "bar?" What is the 12-bar blues? From the perspective of the classroom practitioner, getting learners to engage in this level of analysis necessitates a solid grounding in the structural and artistic conventions appropriate to the form. For the

approach to be practical for classroom use, it must also be created in a language and style free from unnecessarily complex academic jargon and presented in an engaging manner that will appeal to a variety of learning styles.

Fostering Higher Order Thinking

The literature in the field includes a few methodologies for employing higher order thinking in popular music analysis. Stephenson (2002) presents a detailed methodology for exploring the concept of phrase rhythm. By dividing musical phrases into periods of melodic motion and melodic rest, Stephenson describes important similarities and differences between rock music and nineteenth century songs. The method allows for a stylistic analysis of hypermetric classifications and standard phrase rhythms. For example, he uses Harry Darce's song "Daisy Bell" (1892) to exemplify the hypermetric organization of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century songs. This song models "the ratio of the lengths of the spans of melodic motion and of melodic rest" (p.2). Because the period of melodic motion is thrice as long as the period of melodic rest, Stephenson uses the moniker "3:1" to describe the hypermetric organization of the song.

With respect to phrase rhythms, Stephenson categorized rock music into categories including a "2+2 Model," "Extension-Overlap Model," "First-Downbeat Model," "1+1 Model," and "Elision Model." The "2+2" model references a melodic phrase incorporating two hypermetrically strong beats followed by two periods of melodic rest taking place during two hypermetrically strong beats. Stephenson (2002)

uses Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven" to exemplify this model which he describes as "the most common" (p. 7) in rock music.

Stephenson's book is meticulously detailed and contains clear examples of the metric examples he describes complete with transcriptions of melodic material in traditional notation often including chord symbols indicating harmonic changes. The book is perfectly appropriate for a popular music theory course designed for music majors or graduate students. For a general education audience, however, the writing style presupposes basic music literacy and the ability to read traditional notation. Early in the first chapter, Stephenson's observations are clear, well documented, and a revealing exploration of phrase structure. Unfortunately, the verbiage is unlikely to resonate with uninitiated learners in a general education context.

Machin (2012) also tackles analysis at the phrase level. He references sonic archetypes (described as a codal system of music) that "connote with specific moods, landscapes, and characters" (p. 98). The "meaning" of specific phrase shapes (ascending or descending) forms an important part of this discourse. High pitches, he observes, "are associated with brightness" and are associated with "truth" (p. 100). Low pitches, by contrast, are "associated with darkness and evil" (p. 100). Movement between pitches also connotes meaning. He states "movement from a high pitch to a low pitch indicates that the meaning is of a falling of energy. The opposite, a gradual slide from low to high pitch, gives a sense of a picking of spirits" (p. 101). Pitch range, he adds, "is akin to excitement, surprise, and anger" (p. 101). This paradigm helps explain why the limited melodic range of songs recorded by the Carter Family connotes modesty while the wide

melodic leaps used in John Williams' main theme to the movie *Superman* are more appropriate for an exciting action movie. Here the writing style is clear. This level of analysis does not lead to a particularly deep level of musical interpretation, but it is great place to begin considerations of attributing meaning to sound.

Formal structures play an important role in detailed musical analysis. Moore (2012) notes "most music is organized in terms of repeated units" (p. 51). Consequently, many music theorists (Stephenson, 2002; Covach, 2005; Bergman 2012; Moore, 2012) tackle the issue of popular musical form in a didactic context. There is widespread agreement that certain ubiquitous formal patterns occur in a wide variety of popular music styles. Covach (2005) observes "there are a number of formal types that return frequently in the repertory, crossing stylistic and historical boundaries in sometimes predictable – but also in sometimes surprising – ways" (p. 65). Bergman (2012) also observes "songwriters have repeatedly used several very common forms throughout the history of American popular music" (p. 15). The importance of formal conventions is an integral part of understanding how a songwriter communicates with his/her audience. Covach (2009) articulates this position by positing that understanding "formal structures will not only help you hear new things in the music itself, but will also help you to perceive similarities between musical styles that may otherwise seem very different" (p. 9). The primary formal structures explored in the literature include AABA form (also known as "ternary form"), blues form, verse-only form, and a variety of verse/chorus permutations referred to as "simple verse-chorus form," "contrasting verse-chorus form," "simple strophic form" and "compound form."

Several structural features that occur within larger popular music forms are also discussed in the literature. These include a pre-chorus and bridge. Stephenson (2002) describes a bridge as “A passage, usually introduced after a second chorus, used to lead back to the verse or the final repetitions of the chorus” (p. 230). This use of the term is appropriate in songs that incorporate verses and choruses. With respect to songs using the AABA form (also called ternary form or 32-bar form) Covach (2005) states “the strategy of a verse-chorus song differs in a fundamental way from that of an AABA tune” (p. 71). Here, Covach contends “the bridge exists simply to offer contrast” (p. 71).

Moore (2012) notes that a pre-chorus extends the length of the verse and is “a common formal device in heavy metal and hard rock styles” (p.83). Bergman (2012) describes the function of this device as building “both the musical momentum and the listeners’ expectations to be fulfilled in the chorus” (p.80). In most cases, a pre-chorus will occur multiple times in a popular song using the same melodic and harmonic material as well as the same lyrics (like a chorus). In other words, it is usually “invariant.” However, in the hands of some songwriters, the pre-chorus can be a variant section (such as a verse). This allows songwriters for whom storytelling is an important feature (especially in Country music) to advance character development. One example of this is *Love Story* by Taylor Swift (2008). Here, the song contains two pre-choruses. The first pre-chorus articulates the following lyrics:

“You were Romeo, you were throwing pebbles,
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet"
And I was crying on the staircase
Begging you, ‘Please don't go’”

The second pre-chorus is similar, but introduces a significant reference to a “scarlet letter.”

“Cause you were Romeo, I was a scarlet letter,
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet."
But you were everything to me,
I was begging you, ‘Please don't go.’”

The reference to Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s nineteenth-century classic *The Scarlet Letter* is startling. Are we meant to believe the protagonist is pregnant? Has she already had a child? Might this explain the absence of her Romeo? Like many great pop songs, Swift reveals as much as she conceals and leaves much to the mind of the listener. The variant nature of the pre-chorus lyrics provides both rich detail to the storytelling and necessitates closure from the audience to interpret that which is both implied and unsaid.

There is some division in the field about exactly how one should understand formal divisions in popular music. With respect to songs that contain both a verse and chorus, Covach (2005) posits “harmonic structure tends to be a primary factor in determining formal units at all levels of structure” (p. 66). There is general agreement about the importance of harmonic structure in determining form. However, Moore (2012) contends “it is the nature of the lyric (whether repeated or not) that distinguishes verse

from chorus” (p.83) noting “a chorus is often distinguishable from the verse by virtue of the fact that its lyrics repeat on each occurrence” (p.83). Bergman (2012) notes that the placement of the hook of a song using verses and choruses almost always occurs in the chorus, helping delineate aspects of formal division. These nuances, while noteworthy, should not obfuscate the importance of engaging the repertoire with respect to the structure of music. Regardless of **how** one precisely defines the formal sections of music, hearing structural elements such as verses and choruses as components of a larger whole (the song) is essential to the analytical process.

In fact, form is often central to meaning. The climax of the aforementioned “Love Story” involves a surprise marriage proposal to the protagonist (presumably Swift herself) from her “Romeo.” Here, Swift breaks with convention in two important respects. The first two choruses are invariant, as one would expect in a pop song. They state

“Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone.

I'll be waiting; all that's left to do is run.

You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess.

It's a love story, baby, just say, 'Yes.'”

The third time the chorus comes back, the lyric changes. The protagonist’s surprise at receiving a long-awaited marriage proposal is emotionally communicated to the listener by breaking with the expected convention of the invariant chorus. The emotional nadir of the song and following *dénouement* is expressed with the following lyric:

“Romeo, save me, I've been feeling so alone.

I keep waiting for you but you never come.

Is this in my head? I don't know what to think.

He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring and said

Marry me, Juliet, you'll never have to be alone.

I love you, and that's all I really know.

I talked to your dad - go pick out a white dress

It's a love story, baby, just say, 'Yes.'”

With the words “Marry me Juliet” the song modulates up a full tone, musically reflecting the uplifting character of this love story. A thorough understanding of formal conventions regarding the chorus of a pop song is central to any higher-order analysis of the meaning of this song.

Directing attention to musical elements other than harmony and lyrics can reveal new patterns. Covach (2005) notes that “organizational schemes in melodic, timbral, textural, and rhythmic dimensions frequently reinforce those found in the harmonic and lyric dimension of a song” and adds “the form of a song is thus only one aspect of its structure” (p. 66). Moore (2012) believes that issues of timbre and texture are responsible for “the feel of a record that first attracts most listeners” (p. 7). He expresses the idea that popular music “exhibits a strong tendency to display four textural layers” (p. 20). These include the explicit beat layer, functional bass layer, melodic layer, and

harmonic filler layer and can change as a song develops. Of particular note is the tendency to build a song by adding additional layers. Understanding these four layers forms the beginning of a discussion about musical texture. A more detailed understanding of musical texture can be had through conceptualization of a musical “soundbox” that provides “a way of conceptualizing the textural space that a recording inhabits” (p. 30). Described as “a heuristic model of the way sound-source location works in recordings” (p.31), the soundbox is a three-dimensional model of the location each instrument inhabits in the mix of a song. Isolating instruments to one side of the stereo mix or bringing certain sounds to the front (or back) can have a powerful impact upon the listener’s tactile experience.

With respect to inherent meaning applied to sound quality, Machin (2012) observes an important model that he calls “provenance and metaphorical association” (p. 121). The provenance model references particular meanings associated with sound. Machin mentions that pan pipes suggest “nature or simple, ancient cultures especially from Latin America” and the sitar is used to “represent the whole of Indian culture or the esoteric and mysticism in general” (p. 121). Machin feels that speech functions much the same way. Punk bands, he observes, use British accents to “signify authenticity and disrespect for mainstream values” (p. 121). Starr and Waterman (2014) concur with the importance of dialect, noting that “the ability of African-American artists such as Nat “King” Cole, Chuck Berry, and Diana Ross to ‘cross over’ to a white middle-class audience was to some degree predicated upon their adoption of a dialect widely used in the mass media” (p. 9). Of course, the ability to associate a specific sound or timbre (such

as that of the sitar) with something as general as “the whole of Indian culture” belies a cultural/conventional perspective as opposed to a natural/normative one. It is unlikely that a listener in New Dehli, India would perceive the timbre of the sitar as “meaning” the same thing as a listener in Atlanta, Georgia. After all, what is “exotic” from one point of view may be commonplace from another.

Other elements of meaning observed by Machin include “experiential meaning” which allows the listener to associate loud, booming sounds with the ominous character of a thunderstorm. The degree of tension in a sound can imply important meanings. According to Machin, the high degree of tension in the Sex Pistols’ *Anarchy for the UK* implies “pent-up tension and even aggression” (p. 122). Raspiness and distortion can be “associated with disorder” (p. 123) and nasality is often “tied in with value judgments about accents” (p. 124).

Interdisciplinary Studies

Historically, popular music maintains a powerful interdisciplinary relationship with other artistic mediums, especially film and television. Al Jolson caused a sensation in 1927 by performing in *The Jazz Singer*, which ushered in the era of “talkies” (feature films with sound). Gene Autry built his influential career by appearing as a “singing cowboy” in Western-themed action films beginning in the 1930s, and Elvis was introduced to television audiences in 1956 on the Ed Sullivan television show (despite the fact that the show’s producers would only show him from the waist up, lest his hip gyrations prove too sexual for 1950s audiences). Indeed, Mundy (1999) notes “this

alliance between popular music and the screen media – cinema, television and video – sits at the heart of contemporary popular culture” (p.1).

Academic societies supporting research in popular music studies recognize the interdisciplinary nature of the field, including contributions from disciplines including visual art, sociology, youth studies, and economics. Founded in 1981, The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) became one of the first scholarly organizations dedicated to the study of popular music. The society’s website states “to build a large and diverse body of knowledge of popular music, IASPM is an organization which is both interprofessional and interdisciplinary. It welcomes as members anyone involved with popular music” (IASPM, 2014). Scholars such as Bakari Kitwana (2005) argue from the intersection of popular music and economics. He posits that Hip Hop is better understood as a cultural movement than a musical form and that its multiracial appeal is largely a result of economic forces. As young white audiences are increasingly under economic threat from the effects of globalization and the reevaluation of “white privilege,” they are increasingly drawn to the economic voice of Hip Hop culture that gives voice and a sense of identity to those who are socially and economically marginalized.

Machin (2012) engages the iconography associated with popular music, evaluating the nature of poses, gaze, social distance, settings, and salience used in album covers. These images can be used to reinforce the message an artist wishes to convey. They can also have powerful social and political ramifications. In his survey of the Western tradition of visual representations, John Berger (1972) notes “the way we see

things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (p. 8) A careful and systematic examination of these images can reveal the assumptions implicit in the iconography about belief and knowledge.

Berger’s analysis of visual representations and the power relationships they imply is particularly relevant when considering popular music’s deep roots in “outsider” musical traditions (Punk, Blues, Country, etc.). With respect to gender representations, he observes “According to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but by no means have been overcome, the social presence of a woman is different from that of a man” (p. 45). He notes “a woman’s presence expresses her attitude to herself and defines what can and cannot be done to her” (p. 46) and later adds “men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relationship of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male; the surveyed female.” (p. 47). This convention has particular relevance in exploring representations of women by artists such as Madonna.

In her popular and influential video to the song “Like A Virgin” (1984), Madonna displays herself writhing and gyrating sexually on a gondola in Venice with the camera hovering over her possessively. In essence, the point of view inserts the viewer into the action on the screen with Madonna. The viewer (through the camera) comes to represent the surveyor within Madonna with an inherently hetero-normative, masculine perspective that effectively objectifies Madonna as a sex object.

By contrast, in the late 80s and early 90s, Madonna began to challenge traditional representations of women, often drawing the ire of social conservatives. In stage shows and videos such as “The Girlie Show” (1993), Madonna “acts” much more than she “appears.” When singing songs such as “Fever” (a cover of the song made popular by Peggy Lee), she sexually dominates two male dancers who wear nothing but small bikini-briefs. The representation not only challenges traditional representations of gender and power in popular culture, but speaks to the perspective of the audience. With so much visual attention paid to the male dancers’ bodies and their “servicing” of Madonna, can the assumptive identity of the audience still be understood as being inherently masculine and hetero-normative?

In the context of a popular music course, the analysis of iconography should be buttressed by observations about the actual music. Starr and Waterman describe Madonna’s vocal timbre in “Like A Virgin” as referencing “the soft, intimate breathiness associated with Hollywood sex symbols such as Marilyn Monroe” (p. 480). Here Machin’s categorizing of sonic meaning becomes particularly relevant. The use of a breathy timbre to reference Hollywood sex symbols falls comfortably within the same “provenance and metaphorical” paradigm allowing Western listeners to associate the timbre of the sitar with mysticism. It is reasonable for the listener to associate “breathiness” with sexual intimacy using the same “experiential” model that connotes booming timbres with thunderstorms and danger. Indeed, Machin notes “breathiness can connote delicate intimacy, as well as sensuality, eroticism, and emotional intensity” all of

which are implied by the oft-repeated lyrics of the chorus “like a virgin, touched for the very first time” (Steinberg and Kelly, 1984).

Some critics point out that the very interdisciplinary nature of the field can marginalize musical scholarship within the discipline. Part of this is due to reliance upon verbiage ill-suited to describing popular music and inaccessible to those without academic training. Starr and Waterman (2014) observe that the argot of traditional music theory taught in colleges and universities is not suited to the study of popular music. Middleton and Manuel (2014) recognized the marginalization of the music discipline stating

The most active, best populated and most strongly supported research strands have, on the whole, been identified with predominantly social and cultural studies interests. At its most reductive, this appears as ‘sociologism’, and, while there have also been excellent interpretative work and first-class studies of the industry and audiences, this focus has somewhat overshadowed the study of musical practices, structures, and meanings. (section 6)

The dearth of resources devoted to musical practices, structures, and meanings written for uninitiated audiences (i.e. “general education” students) should be of serious concern to music educators. Given that the subject of the discipline is popular music and it is taught as a music course at colleges and universities, buttressing the practice-oriented music resources available to practitioners in the field is of the utmost importance.

An educational paradigm allowing learners to engage in original analysis of popular music and the artists who create it places emphasis squarely on the experience of the learner. The approach is often described as being “learner-centered” (Huba, 2000; McCombs, 2007; Kaplowitz, 2012; Wiemer, 2013). Kaplowitz (2012) summarized this

approach by saying “Learner-centered teachers do not talk about what they are going to teach. They discuss what they want their learners to learn” (p. 4). In this context, the paradigm shift towards original analysis has the added benefit of de-emphasizing the formation of a canon. This can have a significant impact on the power balance in the classroom, with the instructor no longer making aesthetic judgments about which repertoire is “essential.” It can, however, empower the learner to use critical thinking in making value judgments about style and meaning on his/her own without being told that certain canonized artists should be championed and others derided.

Within the field of higher education and across disciplines, instructors are asked to develop a number of advanced thinking and reasoning skills among a diverse cohort of learners. A variety of expressions are used in varying disciplines to reference these skills including higher order thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, rational thought, abstract thinking, informal logic, reflective thinking, and reasoning (Cuban, 1984; Lewis and Smith, 1993; Woodford, 1996; Johnson, 2011). McMillan (1987) observed “one of the primary aims of higher education, especially at the college level, is to foster student’s ability to use judgment effectively in decision-making.” There are certainly important nuances in the use of these expressions, and a diversity of opinions about how to define specific terms. For example, White et al. (2011) focused on the importance of analysis, evaluation, and judgment in critical thinking while Beyer (1985) argues that critical thinking involves “assessing the authenticity, accuracy and/or worth of knowledge claims and arguments” (p.271). Lewis and Smith (1993) focus on the interrelatability of higher order thinking, noting that it “occurs when a person takes new information and

information stored in memory and interrelates and/or rearranges and extends this information to achieve a purpose or find possible answers in perplexing situations” (p.136). What unites these definitions and terms is an educational approach that moves beyond transferring information and encompasses thinking and reasoning skills within the context of a discipline and beyond.

Some influential educators have developed important models for better understanding higher order thinking skills. Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) emphasized analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as the skills inherent in higher-level thinking. This was part of an effort to move education past emphasis on memorization of facts and imitation of skills (Schuler, 2011). Research since the publication of Bloom’s model offers significant revisions. Krathwohl (2002) revised the taxonomy, renaming three categories, interchanging the order of two categories, and changing all category names to verb form so as to better fit learning objectives. Krathwohl places “Create” at the top of his revised taxonomy, which he describes as “putting elements together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product” (p. 215). The idea of “create” at the top of an organizational model for higher-level thinking suggests new possibilities for education in the arts, including the discipline of music. This model not only places activities such as composing and improvising at the top of the taxonomy, but places high value on the creation of original scholarship in advancing understanding of primary sources and the creative process.

Music, as a discipline, often lags behind other disciplines in the arts and humanities in many applications of higher-level thinking (Woodford, 1996). Nonetheless,

some educators advocate vociferously for the development of critical thinking in the music classroom. (Small, 1987; Pogonowski, 1989; Woodford, 1996; White and Robinson; 2001; Schuler, 2011). Woodford articulates the view that the general-thinking skills developed while studying music form a habit of mind that can be applied within the context of different disciplines and situations. These habits of mind include “the strategy of formulating counterexamples to test claims” and weighing “multiple musical interpretations of a composition.” (p. 28). Woodford’s paradigm expresses the idea that critical-thinking skills learned in one discipline are transferrable to other contexts. Schuler (2011) expanded upon this meme, expressing the idea that music training emphasizing higher-level thinking can “help students master 21st-century skills, broadly described as those necessary for future success in a rapidly changing world” (p. 12). A major problem for learners, he argues, is that “music instruction has been primarily teacher-centered – in other words, teachers have done most of the steps in the process for the students (selecting and analyzing repertoire, evaluating performance, etc.)” (p. 11). The oblique attack on teaching a pre-selected canon should not be missed. More to the point, Woodford’s polite manner should not minimize the transformative radicalism of his message. To be relevant in the 21st century, music educators must do more than encourage learners to understand information and analysis organized by others. They must empower learners to analyze and create on their own.

Pedagogical Method

There are a variety of approaches leading to an illuminating study of popular music. However, none are practice-oriented methods allowing learners to analyze musical

structures, connect them to relevant paradigms using a vocabulary appropriate for a general education audience, and culminate in the creation of original material demonstrating mastery of subject. Recent advances in technology present new opportunities for educators to help learners develop advanced higher-level thinking skills. As discussed earlier, when Krathwohl revised Bloom's taxonomy in 2002, he placed "create" at the top of the model. While it is useful to learn about the construction of pop music "hooks," free software programs such as Garage Band give learners a chance to compose their own hooks to a beat. Using this software does not require the ability to "read" traditional notation, and with some basic guidelines about length and structure, learners can experiment with creating their own original material. They can also use the program to create original songs using archetypical models. The importance and application of a "backbeat" is discussed in many sources (Covach, 2009, Dettmar, 2010, Bergman, 2012, Starr and Waterman, 2014), but with free programs such as Hydrogen or Dr. Drum, learners can create their own beats that incorporate a backbeat. Samplv1 and Audacity (both free) allow learners to experiment with sampling and adjusting musical textures by moving instruments in what Moore calls the "soundbox." No practice-oriented popular music appreciation methodology yet incorporates the creation of original material as part of a formalized course of study. The availability of sophisticated contemporary tools opens the door to new opportunities for engaging learners as creators in the study and creation of popular music.

This dissertation presents a new method for learners to engage popular music. It takes learners through a hierarchy of learning models, culminating in the creation of

original material modeling techniques and approaches central to mastery of the discipline. The classroom environment will focus on authentic learning and skills building. The goal is the obsolescence of traditional, fact-based assessment. In an era of the omnipresent search engines, the value of memorizing factual information is in rapid decline anyway. Learners will demonstrate knowledge by internalizing relevant concepts and creating original material rather than by repeating facts. Assessment will use a rubric that clearly articulates learning goals and outcomes. The classroom will become a workshop for developing original materials and receiving feedback from an instructor instead of a place for “covering” material and providing information. There is strong evidence that a method having learners create original material will appeal to Millennials and help foster skills that are in-demand in the contemporary economy. Frand (2000) observed that Millennials prefer “doing rather than knowing” (p. 17) and that “as our students enter the workforce, the ability to deal with complex and often ambiguous information will be more important than simply knowing a lot of facts or having an accumulation of knowledge” (p. 17). They also, Frand notes, tend to prefer trial and error learning.

Implications for Practice

Kaplowitz (2012) sees the roots of learner-centered teaching in many schools of educational thought including behaviorism. From behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner, Kaplowitz sees the influence of active participation, immediate feedback, reinforcement, mastery learning, chunking, modeling, teaching to individual differences, and allowing learners to move at their own pace” (p. 40). This approach is particularly important to

pioneers in performance studies such as Kaplan (2004) who note “in performance art, *understanding is doing*” (p. 29). In the context of this paradigm, one has learned when one can demonstrate or manifest learning.

With this method, learners will demonstrate understanding by doing. They will employ higher-order thinking to create original materials demonstrating mastery of musical concepts such as form and meter. To create these materials, learners will build a knowledge schema allowing for the organization of new concepts related to songwriting and analysis. The implications of this model reject the notion of the classroom as a place where knowledge is “given” by an instructor. Traditional lecturing focusing on received knowledge will no longer be the focus of classroom activity. Instead, the classroom becomes a place where knowledge is co-created. An instructor is available to assist in authentic learning as students build their own materials. The demands of “covering” content will be diminished and learners will have the opportunity to learn from one another.

Testing will also become passé. The shift from demonstrating knowledge on command to creating original material much more closely mirrors the demands of the contemporary workplace. The “production” model also lends itself to group work. Indeed, songwriting teams are the norm, rather than the exception, in the contemporary popular music environment.

Summary

General education music courses serve a large cohort of learners on college campuses. In the field of “music appreciation,” most textbooks provide summative

historical background on influential artists, the music they created, and the conditions from which the music emerged. They also provide some analysis about musical construction. Collectively, this information represents a canon. In most post-secondary contexts, learners are required to demonstrate knowledge by memorizing factual information about the canon. The result is that learners commit information about the canon to short-term memory for recall on exams. Research suggests that this paradigm is unlikely to facilitate deep learning.

Educational models encouraging higher-order thinking are sometimes called learner-centered teaching. These models place more emphasis on the experience of the learner than teaching. The goals of learner-centered teaching include fostering higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and creation. These goals are represented at the top of Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives.

Recent developments in technology make free and inexpensive music production software available to large numbers of people. This method that follows is a new approach to popular music study that fosters higher-order thinking and allows learners to demonstrate knowledge of musical techniques, devices, and forms by creating original art objects and scholarship.

CHAPTER TWO: RHYTHM AND METER

Rhythm is foundational to popular music. Many terms are used to describe the important role rhythm plays in popular music. Fans, musicians and critics will talk about the beat, groove, or flow of a song. What exactly is meant by these terms? In order to better understand the role rhythm and meter play in creating popular music, it is important to explore these terms in greater detail. The focus of this exploration is to give the reader tools to create original beats and rhythms as well as engage with a knowledgeable community about the topic as it relates to popular music.

The overwhelming majority of popular music involves regular, recurring patterns of rhythm. These recurring patterns are an important organizing principle of the music. They can also be described using the term “meter.” Meter is the rhythmic organization of music.

Most people can clap along or nod their heads to the beat of a pop song. This is something that happens intuitively, often without even thinking about it. On occasion you can even hear musicians “count off” a song, establishing the tempo by saying something like “a-one, two, three, four.” For example, you can hear Sam the Sham (aka Domingo Samudio) “count off” at the beginning of his 1965 hit “Woolly Bully.” James Brown does the same thing on his 1971 funk classic “Hot Pants,” as does Tom Waits in the song “Diamonds and Gold” (1985). In “counting off,” these musicians are organizing groups

of beats together. They are using words to communicate to the musicians (and the audience) the organizing rhythmic principle (i.e. meter) of the music and the relative speed of the music (tempo).

Both meter and tempo are essential to the way rhythm is experienced in music and are expressed when a musician “counts off.” When considering “Wooly Bully” by Sam the Sham, the speed with which he says “one, two, tres (three), cuatro (four)” expresses the tempo of the music. His use of four numbers organized the meter. A full description of the song’s meter requires describing both the division and the subdivision of the meter. These concepts will be explained forthwith.

Division

To fully describe the meter of a piece of music, it is often easiest to start by describing the division of the beats. This is usually a simple matter of counting along with the music. For some songs, you could count “**One–Two, One–Two, One–Two**” etc. along with the music. Because you are counting in patterns of two, this is called **duple meter**, which is a fancy way of saying that the division of beats per bar is in patterns of two.

For some songs, you can count “**One–Two–Three, One–Two–Three, One–Two–Three**” etc. along with the music. Because you are counting in patterns of three, this is called **triple meter**, which is a fancy way of saying that the division of beats per bar is in patterns of three.

For some songs, you can count “**One–Two–Three–Four, One–Two–Three–Four, One–Two–Three–Four**” etc. along with the music. Because you are counting in patterns

of four, this is called **quadruple meter**, which is a fancy way of saying that the division of beats per bar is in patterns of four. You are halfway toward fully describing the meter of almost any popular song! The three different divisions of the beat can be represented graphically. Each beat “One” is printed in bold type because there is a natural sense of weight in this beat.

Duple:	One	two		One	two			
Triple:	One	two	three	One	two	three		
Quadruple:	One	two	three	four	One	two	three	four

Figure 1 Example of different meters

In the case of the aforementioned songs, “Diamonds and Gold” is in triple meter. “Hot Pants” and “Wooly Bully” are in quadruple meter.

Subdivision

The **subdivision** of the meter is one of the most important parts of establishing the groove of a song. Identifying the subdivision of the meter is a matter of hearing “inside” each division of the meter. For example, let’s consider a song in duple meter. As we explored earlier, the division of the meter would look like this:

Duple:	One	two	One	two
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Figure 2 Duple meter

In between each division, the music has a pulse to it. That “in between” pulse is called the subdivision. If the subdivision is in two equal parts, this is called a **simple subdivision**. Both the division of the beat and the subdivision of the beat can be represented graphically.

Duple with simple subdivision	One	and	Two	and	One	and	Two	and
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Figure 3 Duple meter with simple subdivision

If the subdivision is in three equal parts, this is called a **compound subdivision**. Here you can see that the subdivision has three parts (One, and, uh) for each division of the beat.

DUPLE DIVISION:

One

Two

One

Two

WITH COMPOUND SUBDIVISION

One

and

uh

Two

and

uh

One

and

uh

Two

and

uh

Figure 4 Duple meter with compound subdivision

The convention for describing musical meter is to list the smallest unit first. Thus, one begins with the subdivision, and then the division of the meter. For example, with the example above, the meter would be “compound duple meter.”

These descriptions will allow you to describe the overwhelming majority of popular music. There are some songs, however, that alternate patterns of two, three, and four, which result in very unusual meters. One example is the song “Money” by Pink Floyd. This song alternates between a division of three and a division of four. These songs are described by the term **compound meter**, but are rare in popular music. The term “mixed meter” is also used to describe meters that combine patterns of two, three, and four.

Meter is something better heard than described. Below the meter chart, you will find a list of songs in each meter. Try listening to them. For those more familiar with the conventions of written notation, I have included time signatures in the chart (these are the fractional numbers in each cell).

DIVISION (OR “BEAT”)				
SUBDIVISION		DUPLE (2)	TRIPLE (3)	QUARDUPLE (4)
	SIMPLE (2)	(2/4) Example: “Immigrant Song” by Led Zeppelin.	(3/4) Also called “waltz time” (e.g., “Daughters” by John Mayer).	(4/4) Also called “common time” because of its ubiquity. By far the most common meter of popular music (e.g., “Hot Pants” by James Brown).
	COMPOUND (3)	(6/8) Example: “House of the Rising Sun” by The Animals.	(9/8) Extremely rare in pop music, but common in classical music and many folk traditions (e.g., “Fool for You” by Curtis Mayfield).	(12/8) Also called a “shuffle” (e.g., “Surfer Girl” by the Beach Boys).

Figure 5 Examples of meters

Meter	Title	Performing Artist
Simple Duple	Immigrant Song	Led Zeppelin
Simple Duple	Maybellene	Chuck Berry
Simple Duple	Straight Edge	Minor Threat
Simple Duple	Anchors Aweigh	Charles Zimmerman (composer)
Simple Triple	Daughters	John Mayer
Simple Triple	Norwegian Wood	The Beatles
Simple Triple	I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry	Hank Williams
Simple Triple	No Other One	Weezer
Simple Triple	Brand New Shoes	She & Him
Simple Triple	Diamonds and Gold	Tom Waits
Simple Triple	The Times They Are a- Changin'	Bob Dylan
Simple Quadruple	You Be Illin'	Run D.M.C.
Simple Quadruple	Hot Pants	James Brown
Simple Quadruple	Fun, Fun, Fun	Beach Boys
Simple Quadruple	Back in Black	AC/DC
Simple Quadruple	Talking Bird	Death Cab for Cutie
Simple Quadruple	Your Body is a Wonderland	John Mayer
Simple Quadruple	Billie Jean	Michael Jackson
Simple Quadruple	Love Story	Taylor Swift

Figure 6 Songs with a simple subdivision

Meter	Title	Performing Artist
Compound Duple	House of the Rising Sun	The Animals
Compound Duple	Shadows	Britney Spears
Compound Duple	No Easy Down	Carole King
Compound Duple	A Slow Song	Joe Jackson
Compound Duple	Queen of My Heart	Westlife
Compound Duple	Breakaway	Kelly Clarkson
Compound Duple	Hold the Line	Toto
Compound Duple	Crazy	Aerosmith
Compound Duple	We Are the Champions	Queen
Compound Triple	Fool For You	Curtis Mayfield
Compound Triple	Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring	J.S. Bach (composer)
Compound Triple	The Butterfly	Traditional (Irish Folk Song)
Compound Quadruple	Won't Back Down	Eminem
Compound Quadruple	Surfer Girl	Beach Boys
Compound Quadruple	Red House	Jimi Hendrix
Compound Quadruple	Blueberry Hill	Fats Domino
Compound Quadruple	It's a Man's Man's Man's World	James Brown
Compound Quadruple	Can't Help Falling in Love	Elvis Presley
Compound Quadruple	Tears on My Pillow	Little Anthony and the Imperials
Compound Quadruple	Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin'	Journey

Figure 7 Songs with a compound subdivision

Meter	Title	Performing Artist
3+4	Money	Pink Floyd
3+2	Take Five	Dave Brubeck
3+2	5/4	Gorillaz

Figure 8 Songs with a compound (mixed) meter

Interpreting the meter of a pop song sometimes involves interpretation and subjectivity. This is true of other artistic genres as well. Some might describe the color aquamarine as being blue, others might describe it as green. Yet no one would describe it as red, yellow, orange, black, purple, etc.

Meter can be thought of the same way. There may be more than one accurate description for any given song. For example, the song “End of the Road” by Boys II Men is listed above as being in simple triple meter. It is also possible to hear this same song in compound duple meter. It all depends on whether the listener hears (or feels) the meter as **One and Two and Three** or **One and uh Two and uh**. But just the like the color above would never be described as orange, this meter could never be accurately described as being in simple quadruple meter or compound triple meter.

It is important to note that any written convention designed to represent the aural phenomenon of music involves oversimplification. No written description or notation can completely capture the nuance and subtly of sound. However, the goal is to represent the music as accurately as possible for the purposed of better understanding it.

Meter and Groove

Stevie Wonder once said, “Just because a record has a groove doesn’t make it in the groove” (1976). A good groove (or a song that is “in the groove”) makes you *feel* a certain way. This is closely tied to the history of popular music’s association with dance music and the meter of a song is a major component in analyzing and understanding the character of the groove.

The physical response that we often feel when listening to a song is a function of the groove and describing that physical response can sometimes be challenging. A good rule of thumb for describing the groove is to imagine trying to describe the song to someone who has never heard it before. Journalists, critics, and musicians describe grooves with adjectives like “swinging,” “funky,” or “rockin’.” In many instances, these adjectives become co-opted by the music industry as nouns used as marketing terms. Songs with a “funky” groove become known as “Funk.” Songs with a “rockin’” groove become known as “Rock.”

The terminology for describing a song’s groove and techniques for analyzing the components of a good groove are not yet as sophisticated as those used for understanding other aspects of music. For example, Western tonal music has a very well-developed analytical framework largely based upon pitch organization and large-scale formal structures. Iyer (2002) notes that advanced systems like this are not transferable to the study of grooves, referencing music by James Brown that “has precious little melodic or

harmonic material and is highly repetitive, but would never be described as static.”

Grooves are effective because they make us *feel* a certain way often tied to physical motion. Iyer (2002) stresses the physicality of the term “groove” in observing “the act of listening to rhythmic music involves the same mental process that generates bodily motion” (p. 392). That physicality can be connected to the way musicians use their bodies to generate sounds from their instruments as well as forms of social dancing associated with musical styles. It can also convey powerful associations for listener.

Machin (2010) calls this level of musical communication “provenance and metaphorical association” (p. 121). The provenance model references particular meanings associated with sound. Machin is primarily concerned with the quality of sound. For example, he mentions that pan pipes suggest “nature or simple, ancient cultures especially from Latin America” and the sitar is used to “represent the whole of Indian culture or the esoteric and mysticism in general” (p. 121). Machin feels that speech functions much the same way. Punk bands, he observes, use particular British accents to “signify authenticity and disrespect for mainstream values” (p. 121). These sounds do not connote with ideas in an absolute sense. In a natural/normative sense, there is nothing “disrespectful” about certain British accents or “mystic” about the sound of the sitar. Rather, these are cultural/conventional meanings that belie a specific perspective. When shared with large numbers of people, these connections become a powerful tool used for musical communication.

Using the same associative connections, songwriters can use regular, rhythmic pulses to create distinctive grooves that communicate powerfully with audiences. Depending upon the rhythms, timbres, and tempi of these grooves, listeners are likely to associate them (consciously or subconsciously) with physical body motions, including breathing, swaying, walking, sexual intercourse, or speech (Iyer, 2002). Combining associative timbres and tempi becomes an alchemical process of artistic creation with profound expressive possibilities. They can also have profound social and political ramifications. All human beings have a body, but the way bodies are used and displayed socially is the stuff of social revolutions!

Consider Hank Ballard and the Midnighter's 1954 classic, "Work with Me, Annie." The song was considered so raunchy by the standards of the time that it was banned by the Federal Communications Commission. This was partly a function of the lyrics, which contained clear sexual references. Lyrics like "Annie please don't cheat, give me all my meat" and "Oh, our hot lips kissing, Girl, I'll beg mercy" were clearly risqué by the standards of the time. But were they really more objectionable than Big Joe Turner's *Shake Rattle and Roll* released just two months later without incurring the censor's ire? Turner's song contained the lyrics "You wear those dresses, the sun comes shinin' through. I can't believe my eyes, all that mess belongs to you" and "I'm like a one-eyed cat peepin' in a seafood store." One can hardly imagine that the standards of "social decency" had moved so much in a matter of weeks as to make the latter song suddenly acceptable. When evaluating "Work with me, Annie," the censors must have been concerned (consciously or not) with the sexualized moaning of "ah-ooo" throughout the

song and its contribution to a steady, pulsating groove. The timbre of the moaning is very sexual when considered within the context of provenance and metaphorical association as discussed by Machin.

Backbeat

Most contemporary American popular music (but by no means all) uses quadruple meter. Placing extra emphasis on beats two and four of a song has become an important convention of most popular post–World War II musical style in quadruple meter. These emphasized beats are called **backbeats** and give the music a strong sense of motion that contributes to the character of the groove. Starr and Waterman (2014) note that this gives the music “a powerful but fluid sense of forward momentum – that is so often cited as a core aesthetic value in African American musical traditions” (p. 29). Below is a list of songs with pronounced backbeats. They are in a wide range of styles and were recorded over more than half a century, but what they share in common is a pronounced backbeat.

“Gimme Something Good” by Ryan Adams (2014)

“American Idiot” by Green Day (2004)

“Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now) by C+C Music Factory (1990)

“Pour Some Sugar on Me” by Def Leppard (1987)

“The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1982)

“Heartbreaker” by Led Zeppelin (1969)

“Shotgun” by Junior Walker and the All Stars (1965)

“Tears on My Pillow” by Little Anthony and the Imperials (1958)

“Get a Job” by The Silhouettes (1957)

Aspects of groove (like a backbeat) can also have political and ideological implications. With respect to the presence of a backbeat in early rock and roll, Taylor (1992) opines that a pop backbeat “has ideological implications, since it is a deliberate thwarting of western European conventions where “natural” accents tend to fall on the odd-numbered beats” (p.33). When exploring and developing grooves, it is important to consider those conventions one will follow, and those one will thwart. This work is primarily concerned with exploring the conventions of popular music creation, but it is often the ways in which a song breaks with conventions that make it interesting. Thus, the conventions about building grooves should be understood as simply that; conventions. Ultimately, the songwriter may choose to reject the convention for purposes of making an artistic statement.

Building a Basic Rock Beat

A basic rock beat in simple quadruple meter involves three major elements. These elements establish the subdivision of the beat, marking beats one and three and stress the backbeat (beats two and four). In most cases, particular categories of percussion instruments (or electronically generated sounds that bear a resemblance to these instruments) are used for each of these functions. The basic rock beat involves three instruments; a hi-hat (two cymbals loosely attached to one another), a snare drum, and a bass drum usually operated by a foot pedal. These three instruments form the core of a basic rock drum kit.

In building a basic rock beat, the hi-hat articulates the subdivision of the beat. This is a metal instrument struck by a wooden stick and has a “clicking” sound. Similar sounding electronic instruments can serve the same function as the hi-hat. In the following chart, the “count” of the beat is listed in the top row. To indicate that the hi-hat is sounded on each subdivision of the beat, the cell below each beat count is shaded. The colors alternate between black and grey to show that the sound is rearticulated on every subdivision of the beat.

	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and
Hi-hat:								

Figure 9 Use of the hi-hat in a basic rock beat

In a basic rock beat, the bass drum is sounded on the odd-numbered beats. The bass drum is a large instrument struck with a mallet. A foot pedal that can be depressed, striking the drum to generate a deep “thud” usually controls this mallet. Because of this, the drum is sometimes called a “kick drum.” We can show the bass drum’s relationship to the hi-hat by adding it to our graphic model.

	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and
Hi-hat:								
Bass:								

Figure 10 Use of the hi-hat and bass drum in a basic rock beat

Finally, we can add the snare drum to our visual model of the basic rock beat. The snare drum is usually supported horizontally on a stand and has metal springs on the underside of the instrument allowing the drum to have a sharp, banging sound when struck with a drumstick. The ability of this instrument to be heard over many other instruments combined with its placement on the even-numbered beats helps give rock music a pronounced backbeat. The following model shows the basic rock beat with the snare drum added.

	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and
Hi-hat:								
Bass:								
Snare:								

Figure 11 Use of the hi-hat, bass drum, and snare drum in a basic rock beat

There are many examples of popular songs that use this basic rock beat or minor variations thereof. One song that uses this basic rock beat is “Gimme All Your Lovin’” by ZZ Top. The song was a Top 40 hit in 1983, and the back-to-basics, blues/rock groove of this song helped define ZZ Top’s signature sound. Michael Jackson’s #1 hit “Billie Jean” (1982) uses this pattern as does Queens of the Stone Ages’ “If I Had a Tail” (2013).

Hydrogen

Many drum machines and Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) use a graphic model similar to the one used above to build new beats. One very powerful, useful, and free program that does this is Hydrogen. It is available for Mac, Windows, and Linux. The graphic interface allows for the easy creation of multiple beat patterns, and there are a wide variety of free sounds that can be imported into the software. Below is a screen-shot of Hydrogen. The instrument's names are listed in the left-hand column. "Open HH" stands for "Open Hi-Hat." "Kick" is the bass drum. "Snare Jazz" is a snare drum (Snare Rock is another similar sound that could be used here). You will see that the hi-hat is articulated every subdivision of the beat, the bass drum (or kick drum) is articulated on odd beats, and the snare drum established the backbeat on every even beat.

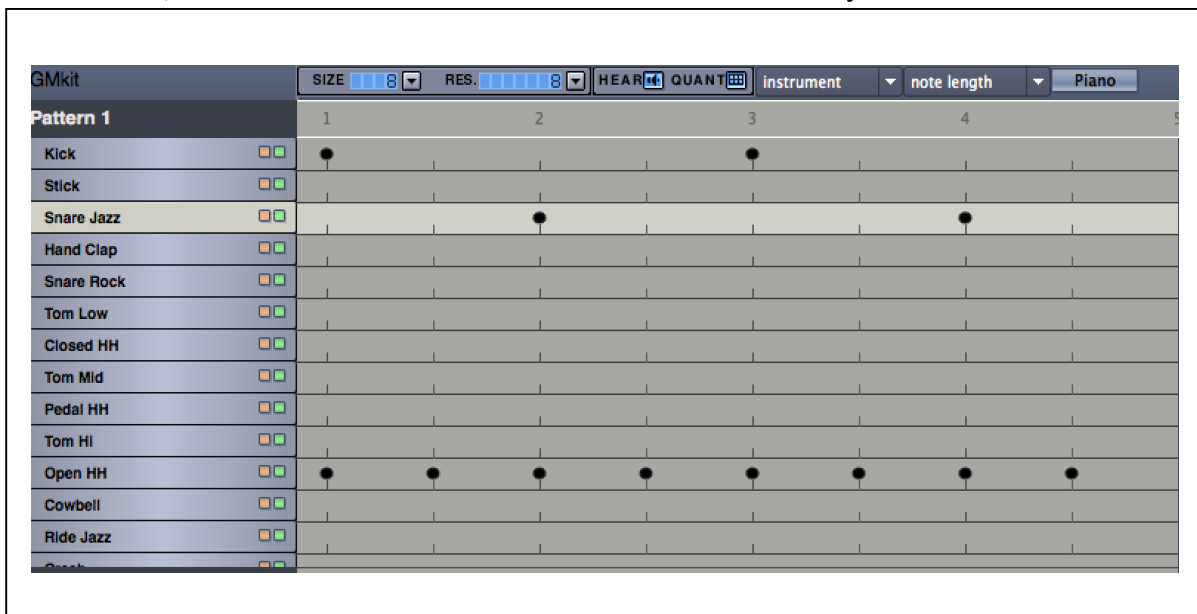


Figure 12 Basic rock beat in Hydrogen

By experimenting with just these three basic sounds, you can generate many different kinds of beats. For example, by shifting the kick drum to beats two and four, the groove becomes a “one drop” beat used in Reggae music. It is called this because the expected sound of the bass drum on beat one is “dropped.” Jamaican musicians like Bob Marley and Carlton Barrett (the drummer for Marley’s band the Wailers) popularized the one-drop beat in songs like “No Woman, No Cry” (1975). Songs that use the one drop style are usually played at a slower tempo than rock songs like “Gimme All Your Lovin’.”

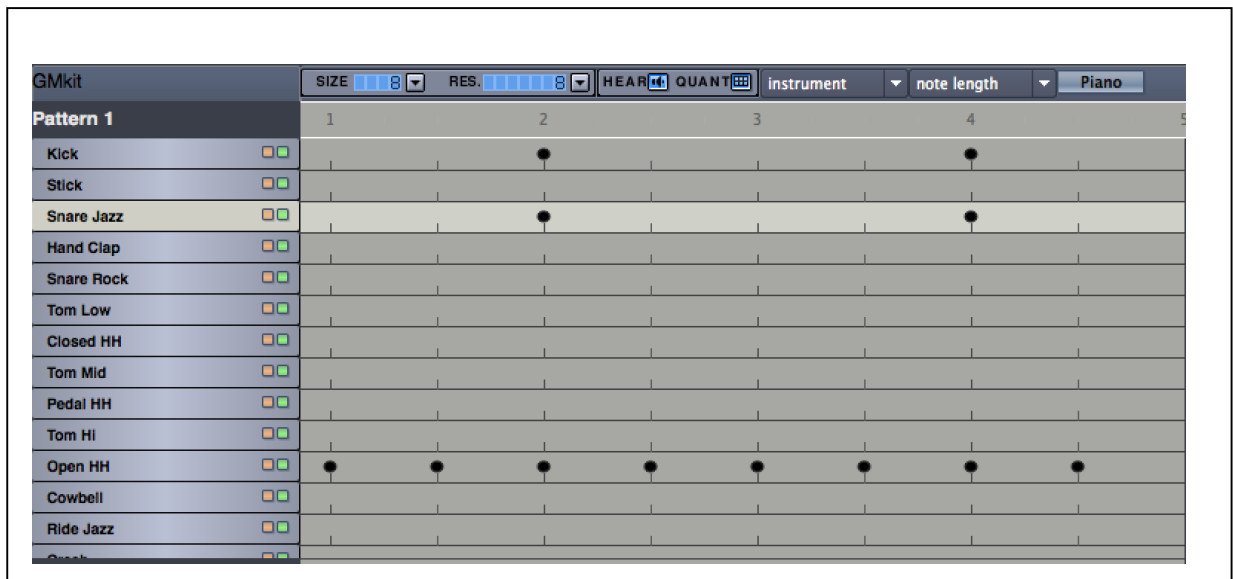


Figure 13 One-drop beat in Hydrogen

Compound Subdivisions

The aforementioned examples using Hydrogen are meters with a simple subdivision. Great beats and grooves can also be created using compound subdivisions of the beat. To accomplish this, each beat needs to be divided into three subdivisions. To create a rock beat, the hi-hat still articulates each subdivision of the beat, the bass drum is articulated on the odd beats, and the snare drum is articulated on the even beats. Fats Domino’s 1956 version of “Blueberry Hill” uses this beat, which is sometimes called a “shuffle” because of the unique “shuffling” feeling of this groove.

	One	and	uh	Two	and	uh	Three	and	uh	Four	and	uh
Hi-hat												
Bass Drum												
Snare Drum												

Figure 14 Shuffle beat (compound quadruple meter)

This pattern can also be transferred to Hydrogen. To do this, the size of the grid needs to be expanded. A simple quadruple beat has eight vertical slots into which audio information can be entered (4 beats and 4 subdivisions). A compound quadruple subdivision has 12 vertical slots into which audio information can be entered (4 beats

with 3 subdivisions each). To adjust this, change the number in the blue rectangle in the upper left-hand side of the grid from “8” to “12.” One limitation of Hydrogen is that the horizontal numbers to the right of the row labeled “Pattern 1” will not change to reflect that you are now creating a compound quadruple beat. However, the sound of the rhythm will be correct, and the metric organization reflected in the grid should be clear.

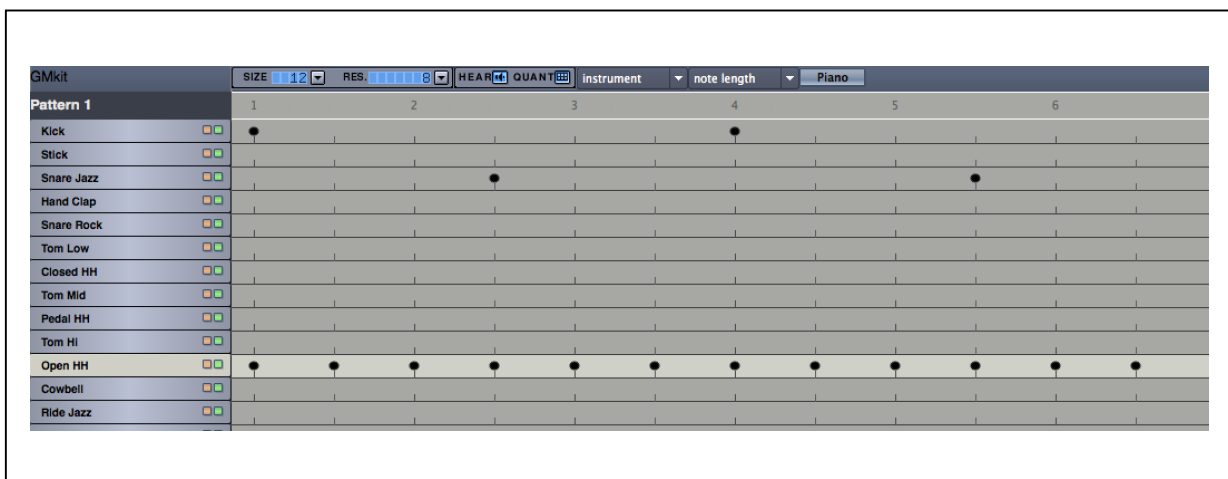


Figure 15 Shuffle beat (compound quadruple) in Hydrogen

It is not necessary to articulate every single subdivision in a beat to establish the meter of a groove. The meter refers to the general organizational structure of the rhythm in a song. To create interesting beats, consider leaving some elements out. Sometimes a delayed or denied sense of expectation is just the thing to make a great groove. Elements that obfuscate the clarity of the meter can also make it more interesting to hear.

Syncopation is an important technique that does this.

Syncopation

Syncopation is a major feature of most contemporary popular music styles. Syncopation has origins in many genres of music from around the world. Starr and Waterman (2014) note that syncopation is “one unifying feature of many African musical genres” (p. 28). Syncopated techniques are also found in European styles of music. French composers Rameau (1722) and Rosseau (1768) described the use of syncopation in 18th century Western European classical music.

What exactly is syncopation? Opinions vary amongst music scholars. Leong (2011) notes syncopation “is normally defined as the contradiction, though not overturning, of a dominant rhythmic structure by rhythmic stresses” (p. 111). The notion of tension in the rhythmic structure of a song is central to this understanding of syncopation. Stressing the “off-beats” or spaces after each numbered beat is articulated heightens this contradiction. Apell and Hemphill (2006) highlight the way this practice plays with expectations by defining syncopation as “rhythms that place the accent off the expected beat” (p. 8). Starr and Waterman (2014) also see this conflict as central to the use of syncopation in defining syncopation as “off-beat patterns in which the sounds produced by the musicians are played very precisely apart from or against the underlying steady pulse of the music” (p. 28). When done competently, they add, syncopation “has the effect of intensifying the beat and creating rhythmic momentum” (p. 61).

The following example from Hydrogen is taken from the Beatles 1963 hit “I Want to Hold Your Hand.” The handclaps are syncopated relative to the basic rock beat. All the elements of the basic rock beat are there (the hi-hat, kick drum, and snare), but rhythmic

“handclaps” are added. The handclaps stress the off-beats creating a pattern that contradicts the dominant rhythmic structure thereby creating rhythmic interest and complexity. The best way to develop a feel for syncopation is to play with combining different rhythmic combinations in ways that sound good to you!

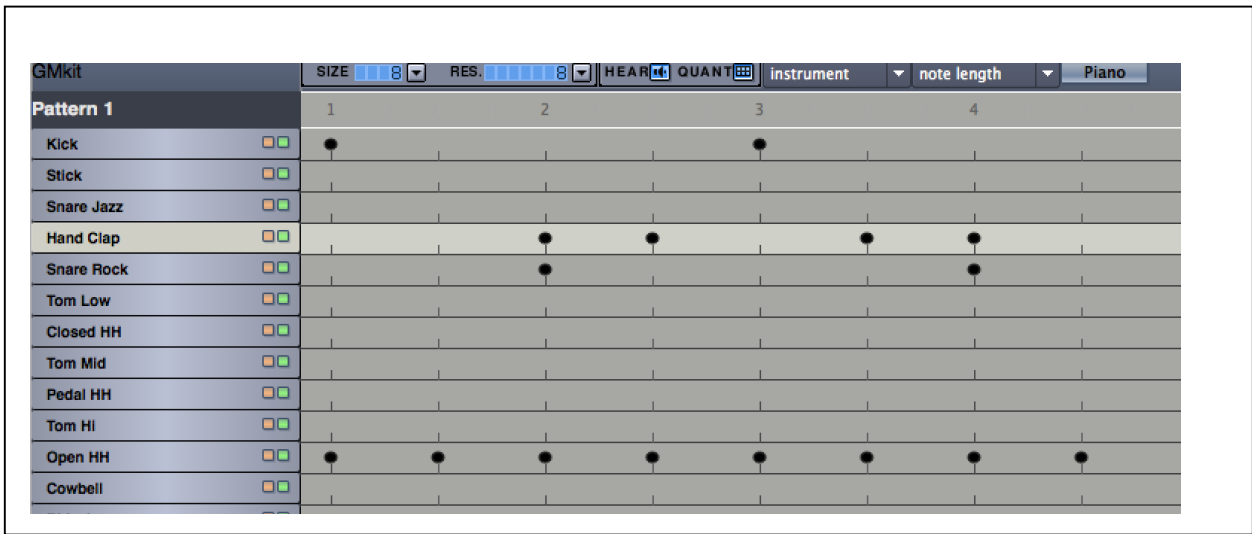


Figure 16 Transcription of the handclaps used in the Beatles’ “I Want to Hold Your Hand”

Once you have created your own beat, the audio file can be exported and then imported into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) for use in building a complete song. To export the audio file, select the “Project” menu at the top of the page and select “export song.” We will be using these beats later to help build a complete song.

Assignments

1. Using the program Hydrogen, recreate the basic rock beat described above and used in Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" and ZZ Top's "Gimme All Your Lovin'."
2. Choose a popular song and recreate (transcribe) the beat in Hydrogen.
3. Compose your own pop beat in Hydrogen. Include at least one element of syncopation.
4. Export a beat as an audio file and import it into DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION (DAW) like Garage Band or Mixcraft 7.

CHAPTER THREE: HOOKS

The word “hook” references the ability of a short sound fragment to grab or “hook” the ear. A well-written hook is catchy, instantly recognizable, and never outstays its welcome. It is the heart of a great pop song and a crucial element in the success of commercial pop music.

A great musical hook has a way of grabbing a listener’s attention, and can often become an “earworm.” Described by Halpern and Bartlett (2011) as “persistent musical and verbal retrieval episodes” (p.?) earworms are often thought of as song fragments or words that loop inside a person’s brain involuntarily. If you have ever had a tune “stuck in your head,” you have experienced an earworm. Although sometimes thought of as distracting or bothersome, involuntary musical memory is described in recent studies as pleasant to a slight majority of respondents. Both earworms and hooks play a role in musical memory that is not entirely understood. In popular music, the art of writing a “catchy” song involves creating musical material instantly recognizable and memorable to the listener

Opinions vary among popular music teachers, academics, performers, listeners and songwriters about the precise definition of a hook. Traut (2005) acknowledges that the ambiguous nature of the term is not generally a problem for fans or those in the music industry, but it creates “headaches for music scholars” (p. 57). The Miriam-Webster

(2014) offers a succinct definition of the term “hook” as “a device especially in music or writing that catches the attention.” Undoubtedly the term “hook” implies something that captures our attention like a hooked fish. However, many posit that garnering attention is insufficient for something to be legitimately called a hook. Stuessy and Lipscomb (2009) mention that a hook is “intended to be particularly appealing and memorable” (p. 391). Mercer-Taylor concurs, using the term “seductive” (p. 3) to describe hooks. When applying these definitions, a blood-curdling scream or a fire alarm could not qualify as a hook. They might get our attention, but are not particularly appealing or seductive sounds. Charlton (2008) concurs about the appealing nature of hooks, observing that a hook is “a catchy melodic or rhythmic pattern that “hooks” or attracts the listener to want to listen to the rest of the song” (p. G-5). It is especially significant that she defines hooks as either melodic or rhythmic. That certainly seems to define most hooks, but is this definition sufficiently broad as to include all hooks? The barking dog in Patti Page’s *How Much is that Doggie in the Window*, the sexualized moaning in Donna Summer’s *Love to Love You Baby* and the growling motorcycle engine in The Shangri-Las’ *Leader of the Pack* are very memorable, appealing musical moments attracting the listener. Yet they do not qualify as melodic or rhythmic. Any sufficient definition of a hook must be broad enough as to include memorable musical moments like these. For the purposes of this work, a hook will be defined as “a generally appealing and easily remembered musical moment.”

The importance of a good hook cannot be overemphasized. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) describe a hook as “the single most important component of commercial songwriting.” Laufenberg (1995) concurs, noting “a song is only as good as the hook” (p. 70). Songwriters employ a number of techniques to create and emphasize memorable hooks. A good hook need not use all, or even most, of the techniques described below. However, it is a good idea to have a number of tools at your disposal to analyze successful hooks and to create your own. It is also important to incorporate your hooks into a song in a way that maximizes its “catchiness.”

Types of Hooks

Songwriters, instructors, and academics have many ways of categorizing and describing hooks in popular music. The categories reflect differing views on the songwriting process. For Burns (1987), “songwriting involves mainly the manipulation of textural elements” (p. 2). Thus, textural elements play a prominent role in his typology of pop hooks, including melody, harmony, lyrics, instrumentation, tempo, dynamics, improvisation and accident, sound effects, editing, mix, channel balance, and signal distortion. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) express greater concern for musical form and its impact on the commercial appeal of popular songs. They observe there is “something reassuring in the use of familiar song organization that can help a songwriter sound immediately more professional and commercial” (p. 53). Within the context of this organization, the hook is the part that “sells the song and makes it commercially irresistible” (p. 75). Melodic hooks are singled out as “perhaps the most persuasive element in a songwriter’s tackle box” (p. 77). Fortunately, hooks are usually very short.

This means that one can experiment with lots of combinations of sounds and hopefully come up with a few good ideas. They need not be long or elaborate to be effective.

We will consider four types of hooks commonly used in popular music. The goal is not to be fully comprehensive and describe every possible type of hook, but to provide tools and resources for learners to understand the important role hooks play in popular music by creating your own! The four types of hooks that we will consider are melodic hooks, lyrical hooks, special-effects hooks and rhythmic hooks.

Composers use many techniques to reinforce the hook of a song and help make it memorable. The most important of these techniques are repetition, highlighting, and strategic placement.

Repetition is the most obvious technique a songwriter uses to reinforce the hook of a song. This can work with both an instrumental hook and a lyrical hook. “Yeah!” recorded by Usher uses a two-bar, eight-note instrumental hook played by a synthesizer repeating dozens of times throughout the song. The fragment is simple, involves just three notes, and is instantly recognizable to anyone who has heard the song.

Highlighting involves drawing the listener’s attention to the hook. One common way of doing this is to drop all other sounds out so that the only thing a listener will hear is the hook the songwriter desires to reinforce. One song using this technique is “U Can’t Touch This” by M.C. Hammer. In this case, the songwriter stops everything else in the song while M.C. Hammer says “U Can’t Touch This” (or the abridged “Can’t Touch This”). The different techniques of reinforcing a hook are not mutually exclusive. In this case, highlighting is used in conjunction with repetition.

Strategic placement is also an important technique for reinforcing a hook. Hooks frequently occur in specific places in a song depending upon the structural form used by the songwriter. Scholars often call these places “power positions” or “hot spots” and note they are closely associated with the title of the song (Pattison, 1991; Stolpe, 2007; Petrik, Autin, and Lynn, 2010). The end of the chorus is the most obvious and common place for a lyrical hook. The beginning of the chorus can also be a power position. It is possible for the middle of a chorus to serve as a power position depending on the structure of the lyrics, but this is very rare. A more detailed discussion of hook placement is explored in chapter three.

Melodic Hooks

Creating a good melodic hook is frequently the most important part of a good pop song. It can also be among the most daunting tasks of a songwriter. Sitting down in front of a blank piece of paper or computer screen can be intimidating. Fortunately, there are a few techniques that can get you started. A successful hook will not use all of these devices, and some may not use any of them. However, these are places to begin your work process. Have courage! Jump in and start playing around in the musical “sandbox.” Who know? You may just write the next big thing!

Melodic hooks are short, memorable, pitched musical fragments. They usually begin a pop song and are heard in part or in whole throughout a song. It is typical to hear the melodic hook at the beginning of a song, after each chorus, and during the coda or outro.

To better understand the nature and function of hooks, it is instructive to examine successful hooks used in popular songs from a variety of genres. This requires a brief explanation of musical concepts like “keys” and “scales.” It also requires a few words about the musical notation.

Methodology: Keys and Scales

When musicians talk about music, they frequently speak of the “key” in which a song is played. This is a way of organizing pitches in a song so that there is a blueprint of where to play each note relative to each other. The key of a song may be changed to accommodate the voice of a singer with a particularly high or low voice so that the music is comfortable to sing. Also, some people feel that specific keys go better with specific emotions or affects.

The key of a song determines which specific notes will be used most often in the song. These notes form a scale. There are many different types of scales. However, almost all popular music songs are based upon either a major scale or minor scale. These scales are a combination of just seven notes. When put in the correct order, they can create many well-known songs. One can begin a major or minor scale on any note. For example, the key of C major uses the following scale.

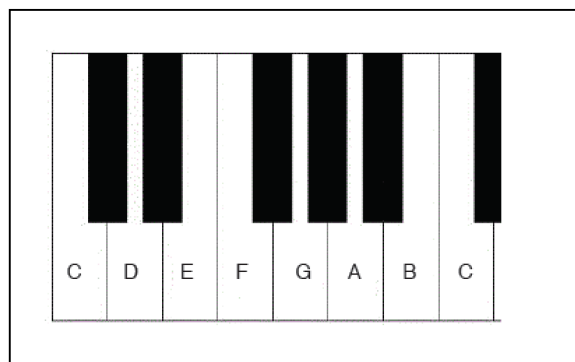


Figure 17 C major scale

The same notes in a slightly different order can make up the A minor scale.

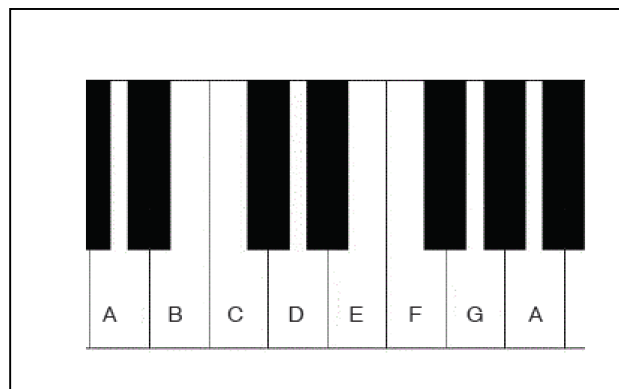


Figure 18 A minor scale

These scales have a different character to them and imply different harmonies. This will be discussed in greater detail later. However, because they use the same notes (albeit in a different order), they are like cousins to one another. In music theory, they are said to be “relative” to one another. A minor is the relative minor of C major. C major is the relative major of A minor.

Major and minor scales can begin on any note, as long as the distance between the individual pitches remains the same. For example, if you look at the C major scale, the distance between the first two pitches (C and D) is two notes (this distance includes the black and white keys on the piano). The distance between the second and third pitches is

also two notes, and the distance between the third and fourth pitches is one note. A major scale can be built beginning on any note by maintaining the relative distance between all the pitches.

Because this method is primarily concerned with providing learners with the tools to create their own music, all of the examples appear in the key C. This involves a process called transposition and allows learners to get the “feel” of the hooks referenced without being overly concerned with advanced keyboard skills. In other words, we will be building songs in the key of C major or A minor.

This is done for a couple of important reasons. First of all, it is easier to focus on the white keys on a keyboard. They are simply easier to play for beginners. Also, most Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) use the key of C major as a default. The ultimate goal is giving learners the tools to understand the components of songwriting and working with a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) such as GarageBand or Mixcraft 7. When creating original material, a songwriter may feel that his/her music sounds better a little higher or a little lower. It is a relatively simple matter to shift the key higher or lower while maintaining the same relative relationship between all the pitches. For these reasons, creating music in the key of C is a great place for beginning songwriters to start!

Notation

Musical excerpts will be presented in two ways. Song quotes transposed to the key of C major (or A minor) will appear in the text using standard music notation and an alternate form of notation. The alternate notation is designed for learners who do not have experience with traditional notation. The note names used are referenced vertically at the beginning of the excerpt. The relative length of each pitch is represented horizontally. When repeated pitches are used, the color will alternate between black and grey. This allows learners to play through the musical excerpts on a keyboard without advanced musical training on a keyboard instrument.

Figure 1: A musical score and a corresponding 4x16 grid. The musical score is in G major, 4/4 time, and consists of a single melodic line. The grid below the score is a 4x16 matrix where rows are labeled G, E, D, and C from top to bottom. Black squares indicate a note is present, and gray squares indicate a note is absent. The grid shows the presence of notes G, E, D, and C across 16 measures.

Figure 19 “Mary Had a Little Lamb” excerpt in traditional and alternate notation

Pentatonic Melodic Rhythmic Hooks

We know that a musical scale has seven notes. But are all these notes equally effective in writing hooks? Many hooks focus on a collection of just five of these seven notes called the pentatonic scale. The great thing about these pentatonic notes is that it is

nearly impossible to choose a “wrong” note. They all work in combination with one another. In addition, it will be easy to choose chords to go along with a pentatonic hook when we begin adding harmony later.

The pentatonic scale is used in a wider variety of popular music styles, especially those connected to the rock and blues tradition (Everett, 2005, Biamonte, 2010). Putting the notes of the pentatonic scale together in just the right way may lead you to create a timeless classic! George Gershwin did this with his 1930 hit *I Got Rhythm*. This song became one of the best-known American songs ever written and inspired a whole collection of jazz songs called “Rhythm Changes” because they borrow the structure of Gershwin’s *I Got Rhythm*.

In the key of C Major the pentatonic scale most often used includes the following notes:

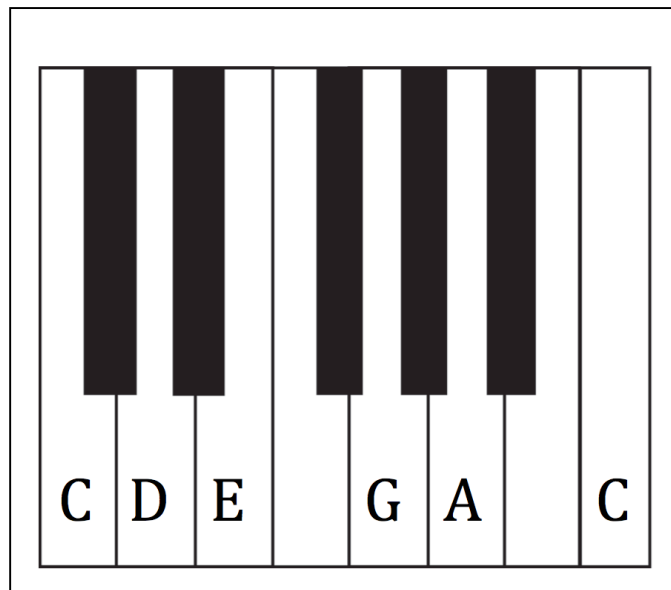


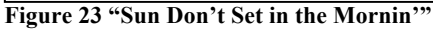
Figure 20 C major pentatonic scale

The right combination of just these few notes can be used to create catchy, memorable pop hooks. An excellent way to start writing a melodic hook is to start playing around with these pitches. Experiment with different combinations. Try to get the sound of these intervals in your ear.

It is also helpful to explore how traditional songs and successful songwriters have used the pentatonic scale to create memorable tunes and hooks. The pentatonic scale has a lot of history! It is used in many folk songs and music that evokes folk-like elements. Because of this, a pentatonic hook can evoke an “old-timey” feel in your song. In the right context, it can suggest African American spirituals, Appalachian music, and even classical music. A few songs that use this pentatonic scale in this way include the following:

Title	Composer	Genre
Alabama Gal	Traditional	Folk
Sun Don't Set in the Mornin'	Traditional	African American Spiritual
Cotton Eyed Joe	Traditional	Folk
Camptown Races	Stephen Foster	19th Century American Song
Symphony #9 (From the New World)	Antonin Dvorak	Classical

Figure 21 Historic uses of pentatonic melodies



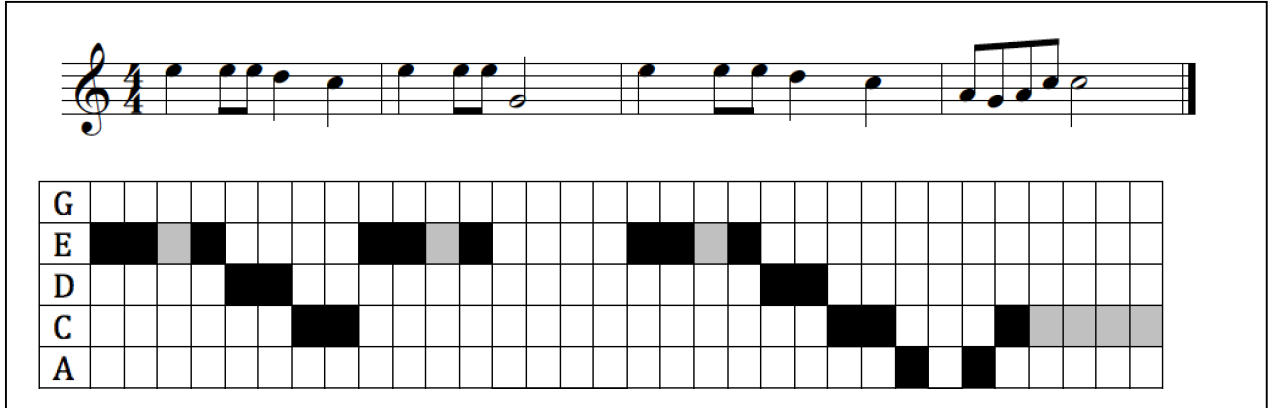


Figure 24 "Cotton Eyed Joe"

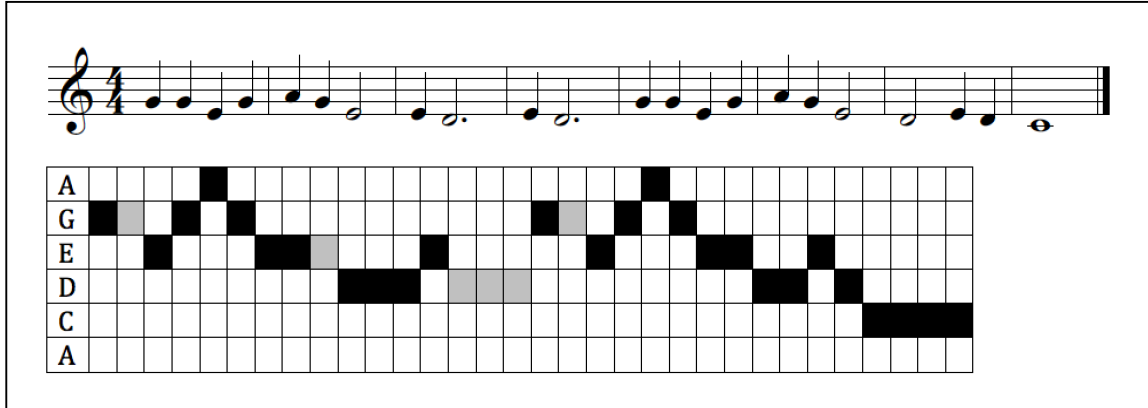


Figure 25 Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races" (1850)

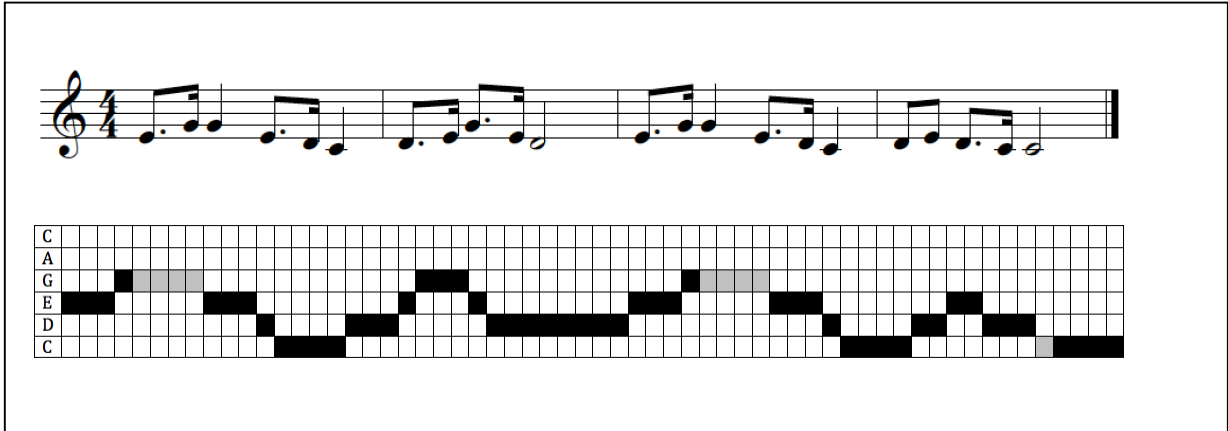


Figure 26 Symphony #9 (From the New World” by Antonin Dvorak (1893)

The notes in the pentatonic scale are also used as hooks in many contemporary popular songs. Often, the hook uses some combination of the pitches in the scale, but not all of them. Of primary importance is that by using only the limited combination of pitches in the pentatonic scale, songwriters created very catchy, memorable hooks! These hooks hail from a wide variety of musical genres. Some notable examples include the following:

Title	Performing Artist	Instrument
Somebody New (2014)	Joywave	Electric Guitar
Apache (Jump On It) (1999)	Sugarhill Gang	Keyboard
Pawn Shop (1996)	Sublime	Electric Guitar
Fuck Wit Dre Day (And Everybody's Celebratin') (1992)	Dr. Dre	Keyboard
We Didn't Start The Fire (1989)	Billy Joel	Keyboard
Low Rider (1975)	War	Bass
Lady Marmalade (1974)	Patti Labelle	Bass/Keyboard
Honky Tonk Woman (1969)	The Rolling Stones	Electric Guitar
Your Precious Love (1967)	Marvin Gaye	Bass

Figure 27 Contemporary songs using pentatonic hooks

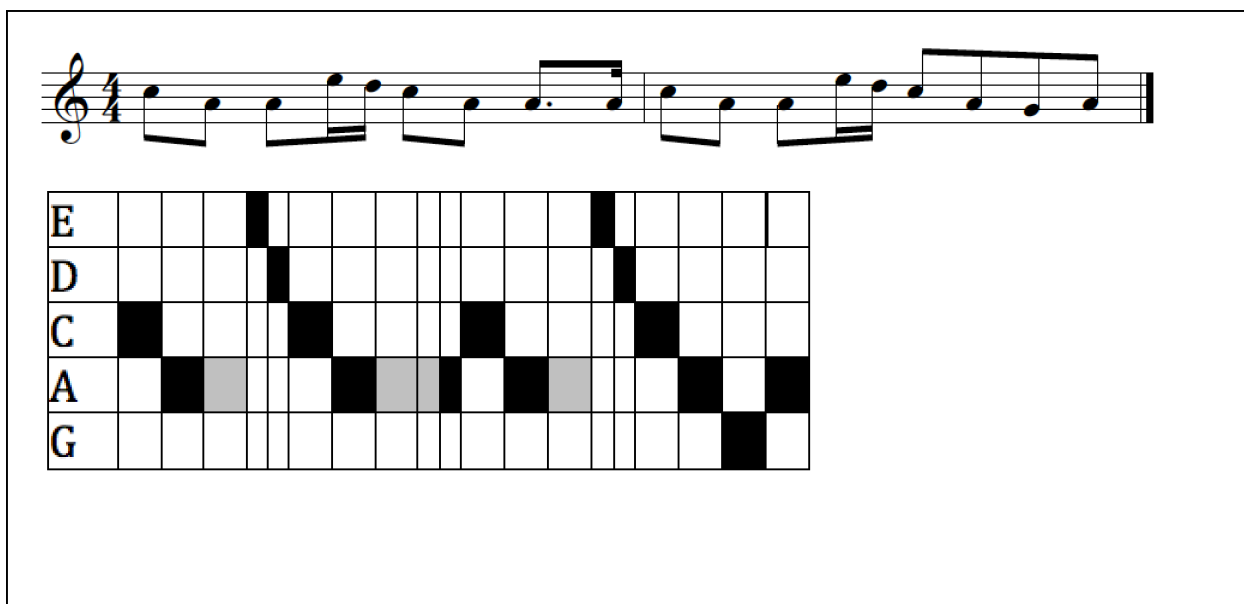
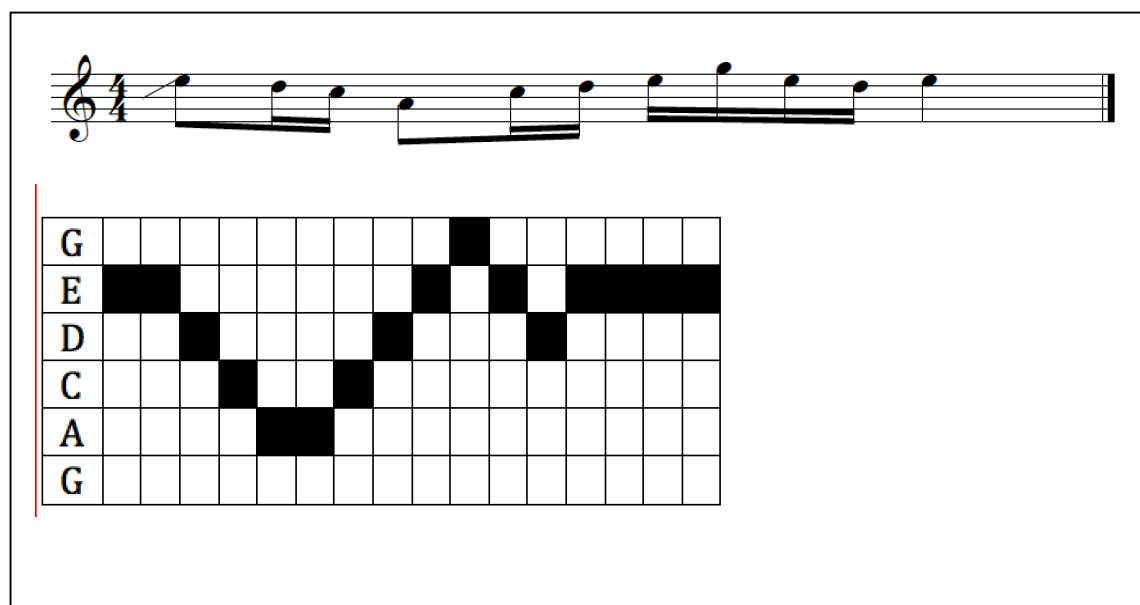


Figure 28 "Somebody New" by Joywave (2014)



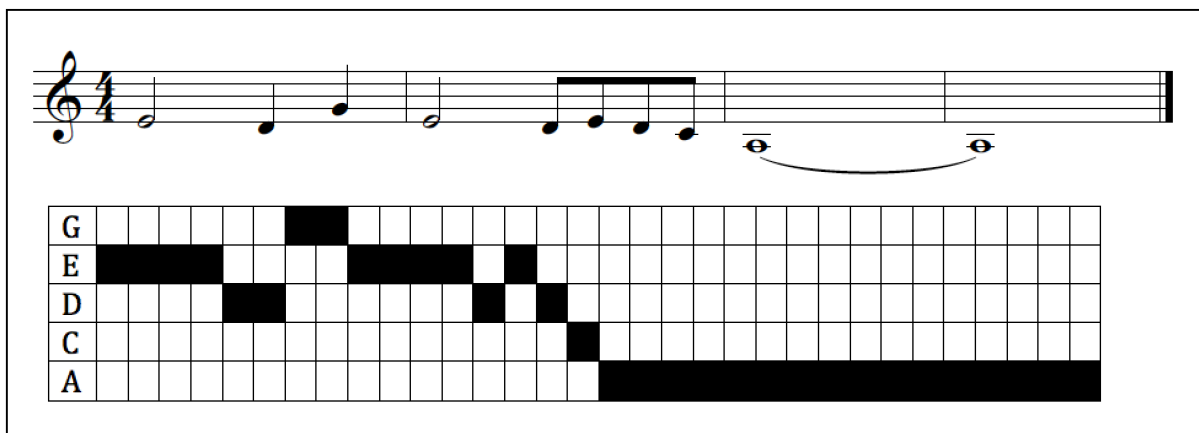


Figure 30 "Fuck Wit Dre Day (And Everybody's Celebratin') (1992) by Dr. Dre

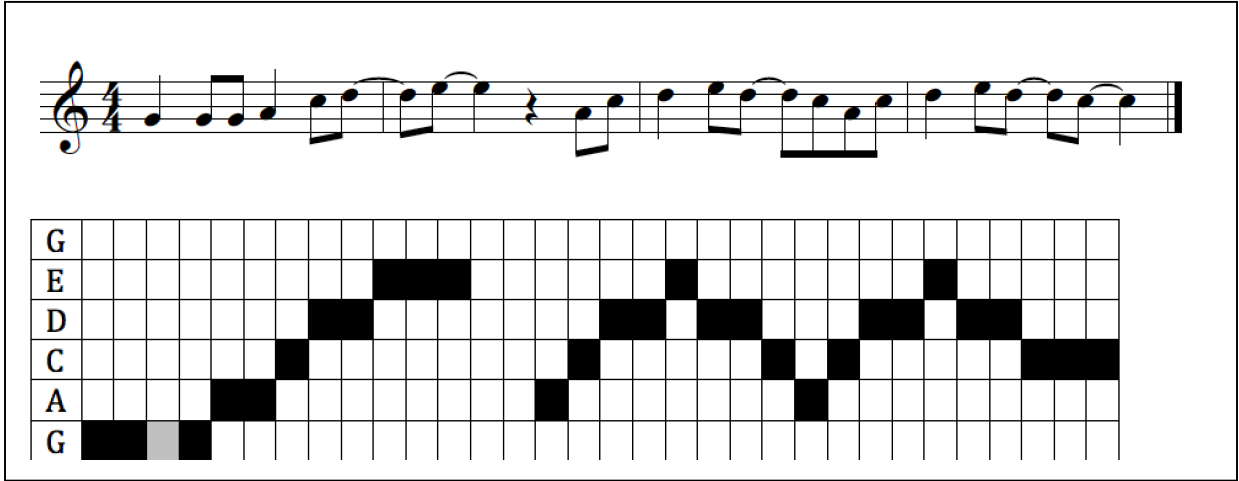


Figure 31 “We Didn’t Start the Fire” (1989) by Billy Joel

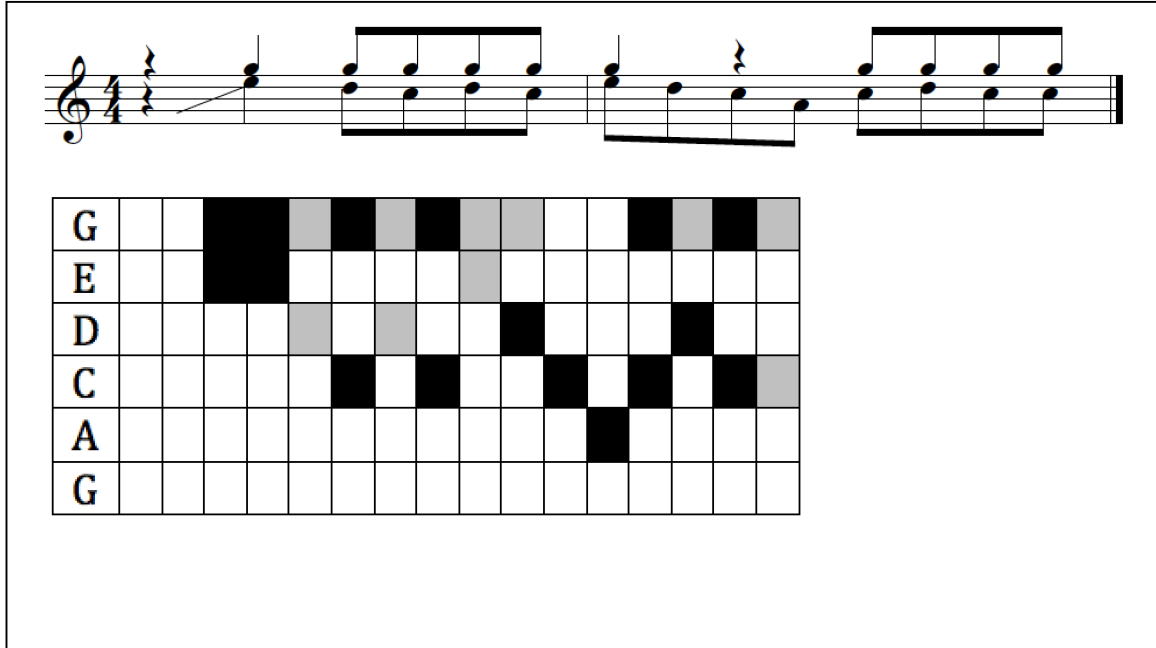


Figure 34 "Honky Tonk Woman" by the Rolling Stones (1969)

Pentatonic Writing Exercises

1. Play through some of the pentatonic hooks and melodies transcribed in this segment on the keyboard. Create an original beat in Hydrogen (or another drum machine or Digital Audio Workstation) and set one of the melodies to this beat.
2. Compose three melodic hooks using the pentatonic scale. Remember to keep them short and catchy!
3. Export the beat patterns you developed for the section of meter into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) like GarageBand or Mixcraft 7. Compose three pentatonic melodic hooks that will fit with those beat patterns.

Blues Melodic Hooks

There is a great deal a skilled songwriter can do with the five notes in the pentatonic scale. This does not mean, however, that a songwriter should be limited to those five notes. By adding different pitches, a songwriter can change the flavor of the music the same way a chef can change the flavor of a dish by adding a new spice. One musical flavor that can add some “spice” to a pentatonic hook is by incorporating “blue” notes. These pitches are “in-between” notes in the pentatonic scale and can be used to connect notes in a way that adds a layer of musical interest.

The diagram below shows the pentatonic scale used earlier, but with two added notes. This pitch D# is often used to add a bluesy feel to the music. This note, when added to the notes in the pentatonic scale, makes up something called the “blues scale.”

Another note sometimes used in the key to generate a bluesy sound is G#. Although not usually included in the “blues scale,” this note is often used to carry the hook from G to A and is used in bluesy hooks. These are the “wrong” notes that can sound so “right!”

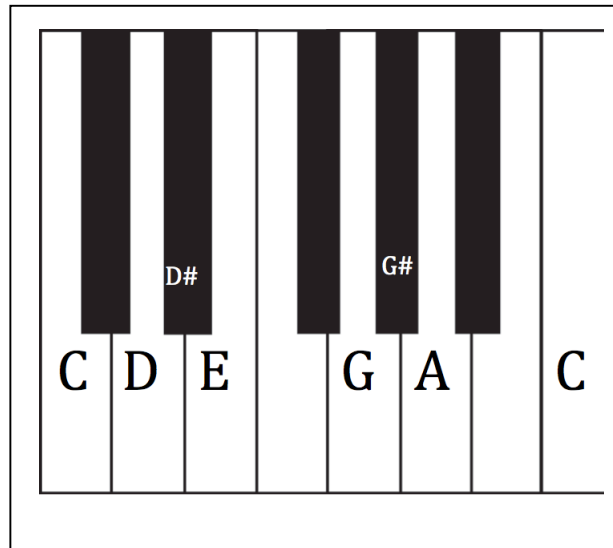


Figure 36 Notes used in blues hooks (key of C)

Title	Performing Artist	Instrument
Bad (1987)	Michael Jackson	Keyboard
Smoke on the Water (1972)	Deep Purple	Electric Guitar/Bass
Black Dog (1971)	Led Zeppelin	Electric Guitar/Bass
Iron Man (1970)	Black Sabbath	Electric Guitar
Sunshine of Your Love (1967)	Cream	Electric Guitar/Bass

Figure 37 Examples of songs with blues hooks

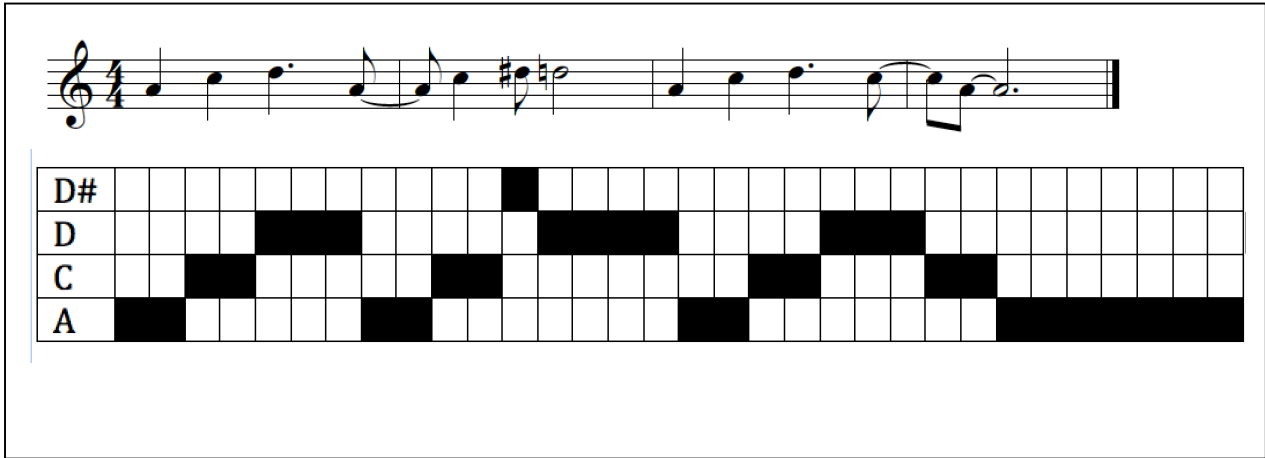


Figure 39 “Smoke on the Water” by Deep Purple (1972)

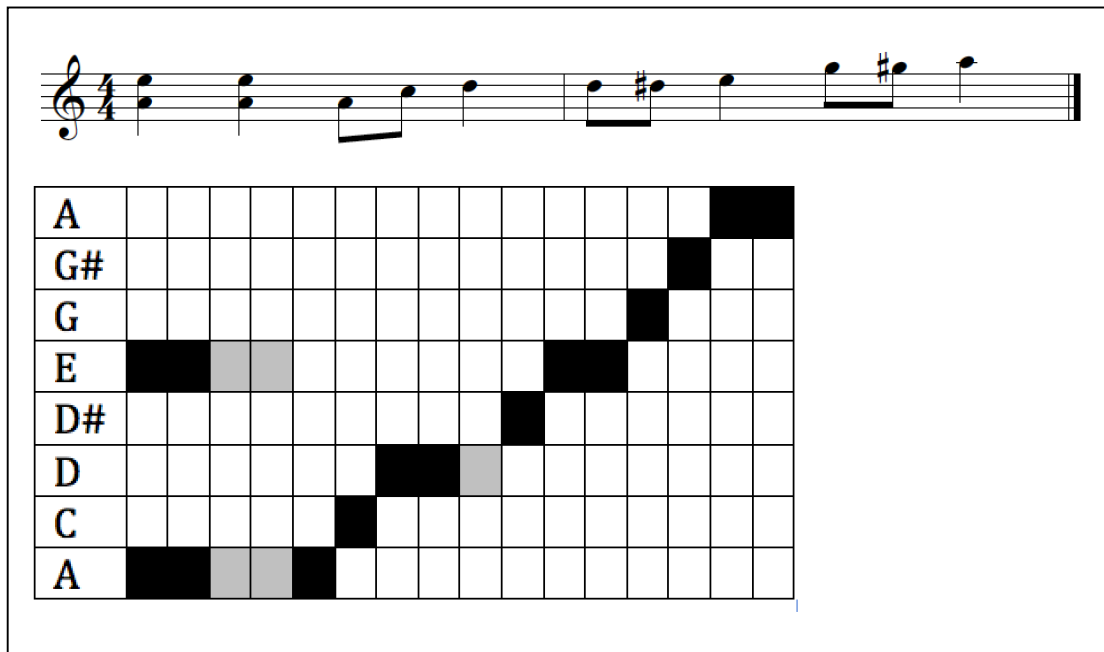


Figure 40 "Iron Man" by Black Sabbath (1970)

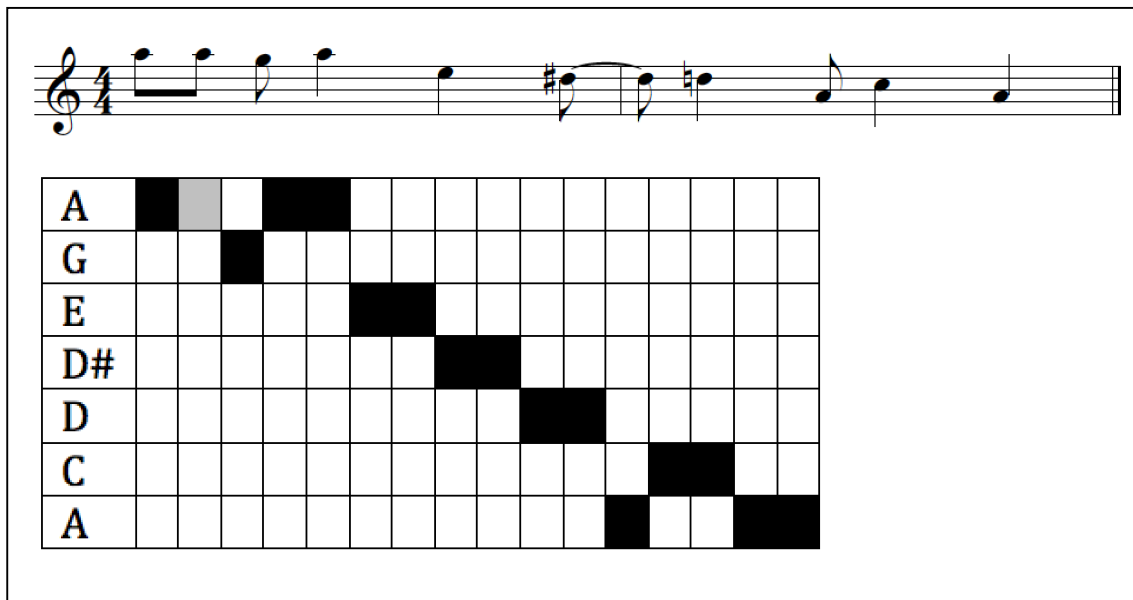


Figure 41 "Sunshine of Your Love" by Cream (1967)

Pentatonic melodies and blues scales are excellent tools to help you write catchy, melodic hooks. However, you shouldn't feel limited by using only these pitches. If another note sounds good, include it! Let your ear be your guide.

Any white note on the keyboard is in the home key of C major and A minor. Virtually every song has a home "key." Experiment with adding some additional white-key notes that are not in the pentatonic scale to see how they add to the character of your hook. You can, of course, add black keys too, but these tend to make your melody sound less stable. However, this may be exactly what you want, especially if your song is about something particularly dark.

Blues Writing Exercises:

1. Play through some of the blues hooks transcribed in this segment on the keyboard. Create an original beat in Hydrogen (or another drum machine or Digital Audio Workstation) and set one of the melodies to this beat.
2. Compose three melodic hooks using the blues scale. Remember to keep them short and catchy!
3. Export the beat patterns you developed for the section of meter into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) like GarageBand or Mixcraft 7. Compose three bluesy melodic hooks that will fit with those beat patterns.

Triads in Melodic Hooks

While all of the white notes on the piano are in the home key of C major and A minor, most hooks tend to make use of some notes more than others. The five notes of the pentatonic scale are used a great deal. There are also specific notes that sound more stable than other. These notes can form a scaffold around which a songwriter can write a great hook.

In looking at the white keys of the piano, we can see that there are seven distinct notes. After the seventh note, the notes repeat one octave higher.

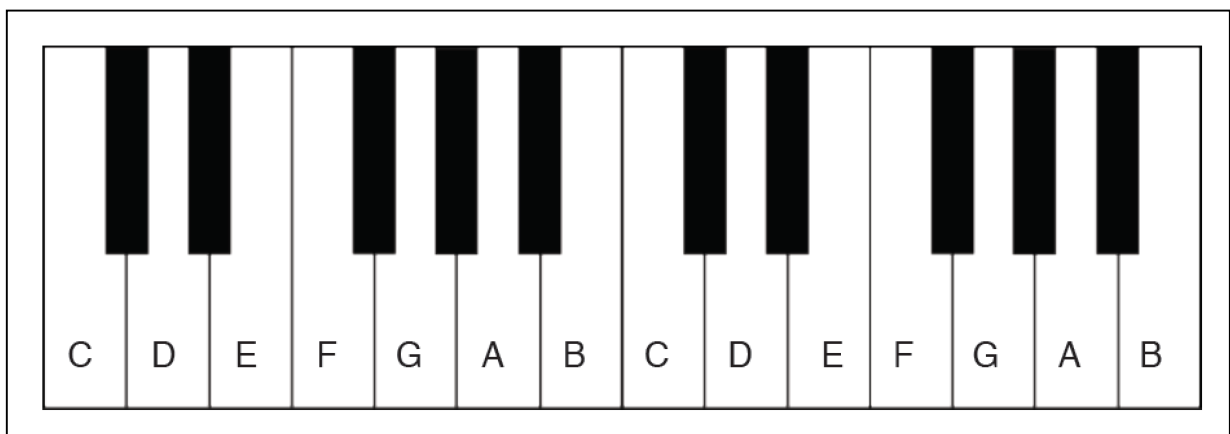


Figure 42 Two octave C scale

One can build a three-note collection of pitches (called a triad) out of each one of these notes from which the harmony of a song is drawn. More specifics about harmony will be covered later, but for now, it is sufficient to say that the pitches in the triad built from the first note in the scale (sometimes called the home key) are the most stable

pitches. They firmly establish the “home” key of a song. For this reason, they are used in pop hooks more often than other pitches. The pitches built on the first note in the C major scale (called a “one” chord because they are built on the first note of the scale) are “C,” “E,” and “G.”

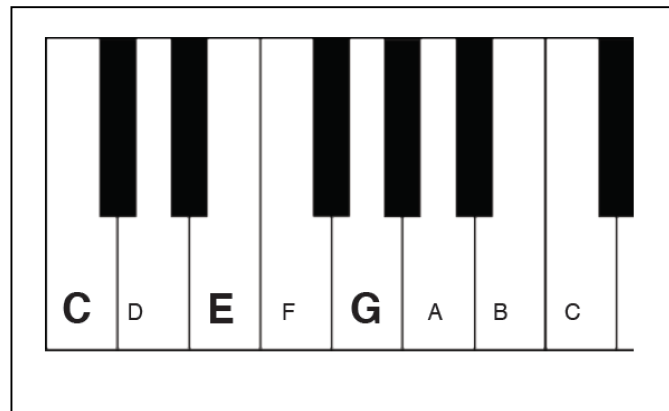


Figure 43 C Major scale emphasizing the home triad

The pitches built on the first note of the A minor scale are “A,” “C,” and “E.”

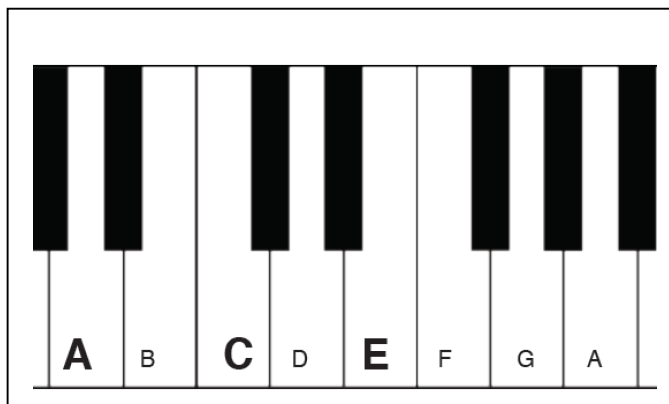


Figure 44 A minor scale emphasizing the home triad.

Some hooks use these three notes exclusively, as in this example from Taylor Swift’s song “Blank Space” (2014). Here you can see that she uses just the notes drawn from the major triad of the home key (C,” “E,” and “G” in C Major).

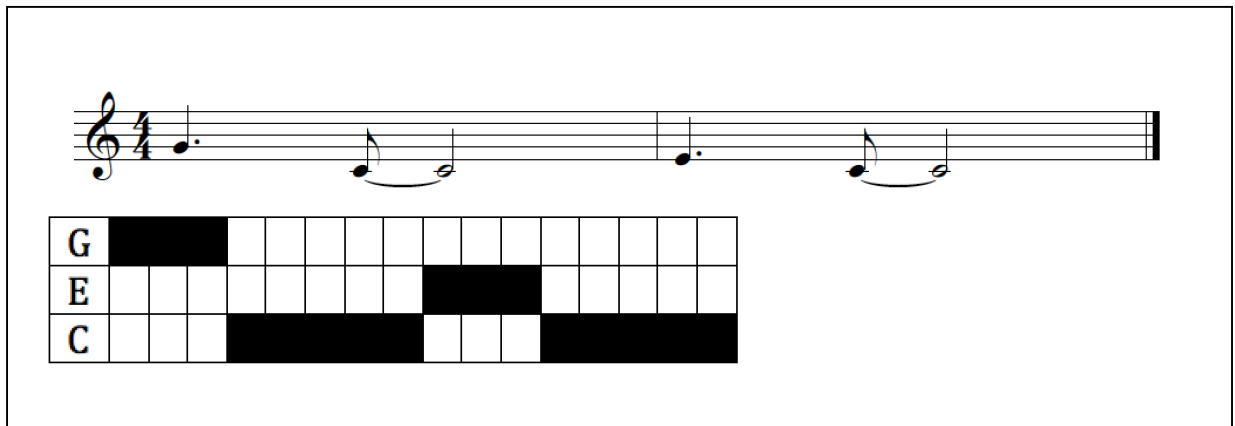
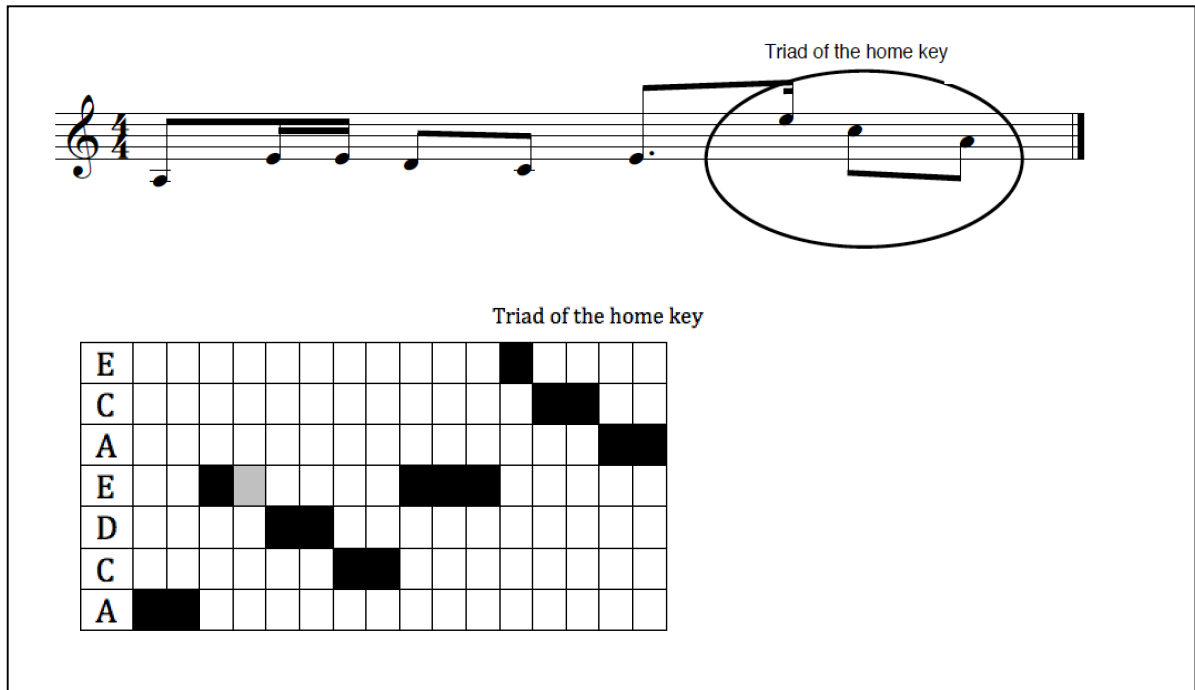


Figure 45 “Blank Space” by Taylor Swift (2014)

However, it is more common for songwriters to use the triad from the home key as part of melodic hook. The hook from Macklemore’s “Thrift Shop” is a great example of this. In this case the hook uses the notes in the minor triad. Note how the last three notes of the hook articulate each pitch in the home key. This firmly established the key of the song. The rest of the pitches in the hook also include the same triad with the inclusion of just one extra note (the fourth note is a “D”).



Steve Miller's "Abracadabra" (1982) uses the notes of a minor triad almost exclusively. There is just one added note towards the end ("G") that does not belong in the triad of the home key.

Melodic hooks can be built in any number of ways. The use of pentatonic scales, blues scales, and triads common in constructing memorable hooks and serve as a guideline for beginning songwriters to construct their own hooks. These guidelines should not be thought of as rigid rules, but rather as places begin an exploration of melody.

Rhythmic Hooks

Rhythmic hooks are short, memorable, usually percussive musical moments in a song. Unlike melodic hooks, they characterized by a lack of specific melodic pitches. The timbres used in the rhythmic hook are almost always used to help create the groove of the song, even if the specific rhythmic patterns in the rhythmic hook do not recur.

Rhythmic hooks almost always begin a song, and can be categorized into three types. “Groove-hooks” begin with the percussive, rhythmic pattern used for major sections of the song. This kind of hook establishes the groove of the song before the rest of the instruments join in and continues for significant portions of the music. A good example a Groove-hook is the percussive introduction of Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off” (2014)

Other types of rhythmic hooks are distinct from the percussive pattern used throughout a song. They may reappear in whole or in part at significant times in a song, but are less likely to do so than melodic hooks, which almost always reappear during a song. Rhythmic hooks that recur in a song (in whole or in part) are called “recurring

rhythmic hooks.” Rhythmic hooks that do not recur in a song are called “non-recurring rhythmic hooks.”

Well-written rhythmic hooks begin a song and allow a listener to identify the song right away. Consider the distinctive opening drumbeat of the Ronnette’s “Be My Baby.” With this opening, Starr and Waterman (2014) note “the listener is hooked immediately by an aggressive, distinctive rhythmic pattern on the solo drum” (p?). The rhythmic hook effectively sets up the mood of the song. In this case, the rhythmic hook is recurring, making a second appearance at the end of the song (2:07) providing a beautiful sense of symmetry in the song. The timbre of the bass drum, snare drum, clapping sounds, and castanets upon which the rhythmic hook create the distinctive beat of the song in both the verse and chorus. It is important to note, however, that the rhythmic pattern used in this hook is distinct from the pattern used in the body of the song.

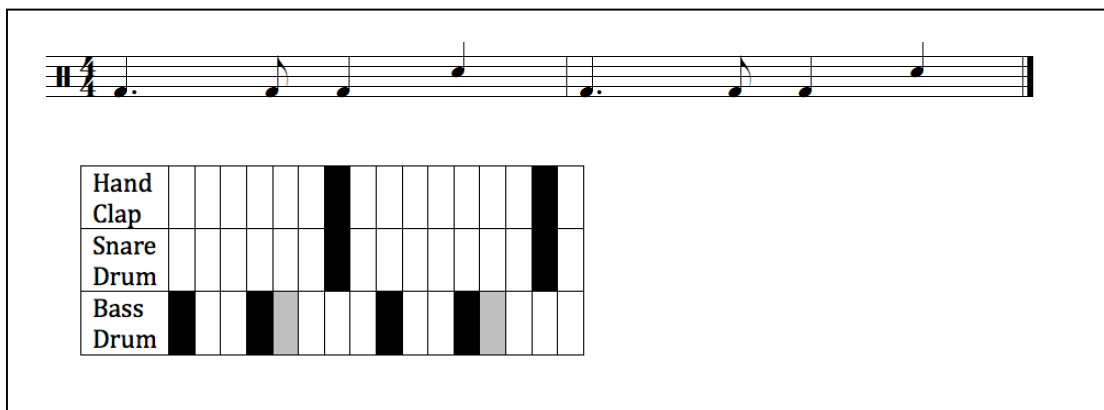


Figure 48 “Be My Baby” by the Ronettes (1963)

All three types of rhythmic hooks are used in a wide variety of popular music styles over the course of many decades. Examples of the three kinds of rhythmic hooks are listed in the chart below:

Title	Performing Artist	Type
Shake It Off (2014)	Taylor Swift	Groove-Hook
It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp (2005)	Three 6 Mafia	Nonrecurring Rhythmic Hook
Rocket (1983)	Herbie Hancock	Recurring Rhythmic Hook
Mickey (1982)	Toni Basil	Recurring Rhythmic Hook
My Sharona (1979)	The Knack	Groove-Hook
Take the Money and Run (1976)	Steve Miller Band	Nonrecurring Rhythmic Hook
Money (1973)	Pink Floyd	Nonrecurring Rhythmic Hook

Figure 49 Different types of rhythmic hooks in popular music

Writing Exercise (Rhythmic Hooks)

Compose three rhythmic hooks using the sounds in the beat patterns you developed in the section about meter in Hyrdogen. Export one hook and into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) and use it as the introduction to one of the beat/hook combination you developed in the section about pentatonic, blues, and triadic hooks

Lyrical Hooks

There is no magic formula for writing a lyrical hook, but there are some important guidelines and general characteristics that most lyrical hooks employ. Lyrical hooks are

usually (though not always) synonymous with the title of the song. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) note that the best titles “literally sum up what you are going to say in the song itself” (p. 112).

Topical Hooks

Great hooks can be topical and offer social and political commentary. Songs like The Black Eyed Peas’ “Where is the Love?” (2002), Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come” (1964), Harburg and Gorney’s “Brother Can You Spare a Dime” (1930) and Grandmaster Flash’s “White Lines (Don’t Do It)” (1983) all address current events in a meaningful, succinct way. The lyrical hooks are short, memorable, synonymous with the title, and address the subject of the song. A topical lyrical hook is perfect for songwriters who wish to make a strong social statement. Toby Keith wrote “Courtesy of the Red White and Blue” (2002) as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This song serves as an outstanding example of a topical lyrical hook. The entire chorus is quoted so that the hook (appearing in bold type) is seen in context.

“Hey Uncle Sam put your name at the top of his list
And the Statue of Liberty started shakin’ her fist
And the eagle will fly, man, it’s gonna be hell
When you hear Mother Freedom start ringin’ her bell
And it feels like the whole wide world is raining down on you
Brought to you **Courtesy of the Red White and Blue**”

Lyrical Rhythmic Hooks

Sometimes the sounds of the words themselves create a memorable lyrical hook.

The Black Eyed Peas’ “Boom Boom Pow” (2009) is an excellent example of this type of hook. The title of this song makes great use of onomatopoeia. The sound of the words “Boom” and “Pow” reflect their meaning. When coupled with the rhythmic phrase that introduces the song (“Gotta Get That”), a powerful and infectious polyrhythmic hook emerges that grabs the listener!

The figure displays a musical staff in 4/4 time. The first three measures contain the word "Boom" on a dotted quarter note, a half note, and a dotted quarter note respectively. The fourth measure contains the words "got - ta" on a dotted quarter note and a half note. The fifth measure contains the words "get" on a dotted quarter note and a half note. The sixth measure contains the word "that" on a dotted quarter note and a half note. Below the staff is a rhythmic grid for the phrase "Got-ta Get That".

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Words																
C																
C																

Figure 50 “Boom Boom Pow” by the Black Eyed Peas (2009)

Salt-N-Peppa’s hit “Shoop” (1993) uses a similar technique. Here the sound of the word “shoop” emphasizes the backbeat in the chorus of the song and mimics the sound of the snare drum. MC Hammer’s song “U Can’t Touch This” (1990) is filled with rhythmic utterances of the song’s title. The result of these rhythmic lyrics is a tenacious hook that anchored a top-ten hit.

When writing rhythmic lyrics, it is helpful to incorporate words that use “hard” consonant sounds (see the description of plosives in chapter 5). “ch” and “ts” sounds can also be used to great effect. Trace Adkins’ song “Brown Chicken Brown Cow” (2010) employs these vocalizations. The sound of the title (also functioning as a lyrical rhythmic hook) imitates the sound of 1970’s funk guitar riffs commonly associated with the adult film industry.

Vernacular and Colloquial Language

Vernacular speech is everyday, informal speech. The rules of “proper” grammar ain’t always no good when writin’ lyrics. Devo’s smash hit “Whip it Good” (1980) would not be nearly as infectious with the title “Whip it Well.” The same could be said for Fat’s Domino’s classic “Ain’t That a Shame” (1955). Calling the song “Is it not disappointing?” somehow misses the flavor and character of the original. Dropping the “g” from words like “rocking” and “jamming” are expected in pop genres that emphasize authenticity.

Colloquial speech (common, informal expression) is to be encouraged when developing lyrical hooks. Phrases like this can help a song resonate quickly with audience. Some examples of successful colloquial phrases turned into lyrical hooks include the following:

Title and Hook	Performing Artist	Year
Come & Get It	Selena Gomez	2013
Never Say Die	Dixie Chicks	1998
Crazy For You	Madonna	1985
Beat It	Michael Jackson	1983
Swearin' to God	Frankie Valli	1975
Let It Be	The Beatles	1970

Figure 51 Vernacular/Colloquial hooks

Multiple Meanings

Often a lyrical hook can make use of a word or phrase that can be interpreted multiple ways. These double (or triple) meanings are an important part of the impact of these lyrical hooks. Consider the Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (1967). This song was an integral part of the Beatles landmark psychedelic album, *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*. On one level, the phrase reflects the whimsical, child-like imagery evoked in the song. On another level, the first letters in "Lucy," "Sky," and "Diamonds" are "LSD." This is part of the reason the song is widely interpreted to be about the psychedelic experience of taking the drug, LSD.

The lowly pun has been used many times to create clever titles. Roy Orbison penned the witty classic "Blue Bayou" (1963) which later became a major hit for Linda Ronstadt. The title references a fictional place as well as the idea of heartbreak (Blue By You – get it?!?). Gerry Goffin and Carole King wrote the song "Loco-motion" (1962) for the performer Little Eva. The title suggests crazy ("loco" in Spanish) teenage dances and

even describes the dance steps in the song. It also evokes trains, which have long been used as a metaphor in blues-inspired popular music.

While the Loco-motion is used for humorous entertainment, other uses of multiple meanings can be deadly serious. One such example is Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads" (1988). On the surface, the song is a zombie movie cliché in which mindless corpses destroy a city. However, there is a much deeper meaning lurking under the surface. The songwriters are really describing the ravages of the crack epidemic in the inner cities of American during the 1980s. With this context, the word "base" (or "bass") can refer to three things. It references the deep, low sound of the musical instrument. It references to "freebasing" which is a way of consuming crack cocaine. And it can refer to a lack of moral fortitude (i.e. a base instinct). All three meanings give the hook of this song tremendous weight when Chuck D says "I'm talkin' 'bout bass."

Other lyrical hooks seem like they are leading the listener in one direction, but then end in a way that changes the meaning of the hook. Elvis Presley's most influential recordings were made in 1953 and 1955 for Sun records and included a song with the clever hook "I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone" (1955). Shania Twain's hit "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!" (1997) incorporates a clever play on references to gender.

Writing Exercise (Lyrical Rhythmic Hooks)

Write three lyrical phrases that could be developed into hooks. These may include phrases with topical relevance (for instance, "Courtesy of the Red White and Blue"), a strong rhythmic character (for instance, "Shoop"), a vernacular expression (for instance,

“Come and Get It”), or word with multiple meanings (for instance, “Loco-motion”).

These potential hooks will be used to develop your writing of song lyrics later in this method.

Sound Effect Hooks

Songwriters will often insert evocative sounds in a song that will grab a listener’s attention. These sounds can evoke humor, reinforce the theme of the song, or evoke a specific emotion or experience. Petrik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) observe that a well-written sound effect “can create mood, evoke emotion, and solicit responses unlike with using pure lyric or melody” (p. 84). The sound effect hook is used with other hook devices much more often than it is used on its own. In most cases, the sound effect emphasizes the impact of a lyrical hook.

Sound effects are often associated with novelty songs. Popular since the 1940s, novelty songs are characterized by their use of humor and catchy gags designed to entertain and surprise audiences. Sound effect hooks used in novelty songs use sound to reinforce the theme of the material. When songs about animals make appearances on the pop charts, songwriters often incorporate the sound of those animals into the song. Patti Page, the best-selling female artist of the 1950s, had a #1 hit with the novelty song “How Much is That Doggie in the Window” in 1953. The chorus features the distinctive sound effect of a small dog barking after Patti Page sings “how much is that doggie in the window?” Rick Dees & His Cast of Idiots had hits in 1976 with satirical, comedic songs like “Dis-Gorilla” and “Disco Duck.” The former song incorporates ape-like grunting in

the chorus while the latter features Donald Duck-like quacking. Other animal-themed sound effect hooks can be heard in the Beatles' "Hey Bulldog" (1969) and the Stray Cats' "Stray Cat Strut" (1981).

A distinctive sound effect can help set the mood and context of a song. The classic growl of a motorcycle engine is the perfect complement to the lyrical hook "the leader of the pack" in the Shangri-Las #1 hit from 1964 "The Leader of the Pack." Kip Addotta used the sound of a submarine sonar ping throughout his pun-filled hit "Wet Dream" from 1984. He also begins the song with the gurgling sound of air bubbles passing through water to set the mood of this aqua-themed novelty song. In yet another example, the screaming airplane jet is used to great effect to "transport" the listener in the Beatles' "Back in the U.S.S.R." (1968).

Some sounds are so powerfully evocative they can say much more than words. Body Count's 1992 song "Cop Killer" and M.I.A.'s song "Paper Planes" (2008) courted controversy in part because of the way they incorporate violent lyrics and the sound of gunshots in their songs. In the case of "Paper Planes," M.I.A. uses the sound of four gunshots in tandem with traditional lyrics in saying "All I wanna do is (sound of four gunshots)." She also incorporates the sound of a cash register paired with the lyrics "and take your money." Here, the sound effects are fully embedded into the chorus of the song. The song takes on multiple layers of meaning since she is clearly using the implied violence to satirize mainstream society's fear of immigrants and the perception that they desire to commit violent crime. In this case, the immediacy of the sound effect speaks in ways that words do not.

Other examples of effective sound effect hooks include the kettle drum glissando in the Crew Cut's recording of "Sh-Boom (Life Could Be A Dream)" (1956), the ecstatic laughter beginning the Surfari's "Wipe Out" (1962) and the sexual breathing and moaning featured in Donna Summers' "Love to Love You Baby" (1975), Duran Duran's "Hungry Like the Wolf" (1981), and Madonna's "Justify My Love" (1990).

CHAPTER FOUR: HARMONY AND MELODY

Harmonic Theory (C Major)

In the previous sections we discussed the seven notes in a C major scale. We also explored the use of the home triad in composing an effective melodic hook. We can combine what we know about the C major scale and triads to build a basic understanding of harmony and create chords. These chords can provide richer, fuller sounds in songs and offer powerful expressive possibilities. Because there are seven notes in a scale, there are also seven chords that can be built with this scale.

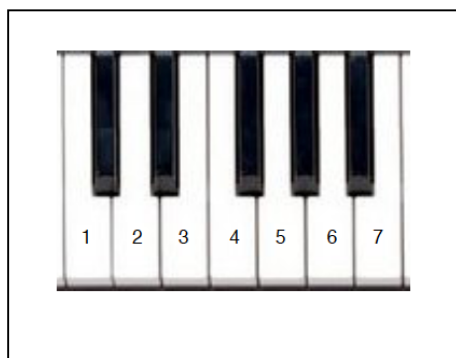


Figure 52 Scale degrees

Each of these chords can be named for the note in the scale upon which it is based. For example, the chord built from the first note in the scale (sometimes called “scale degree one”) is called a “one chord.” Because this chord starts with the note “C”, it is also a “C chord.” Each chord has three notes. To find the three notes, you start with

the scale degree (i.e. the number of the note in the scale) for which the chord is named (in this case scale degree one or the note “C”), and add every other note in the scale until you include three notes. Here, the complete chord uses the notes C, E, and G (scale degrees one, three, and five).

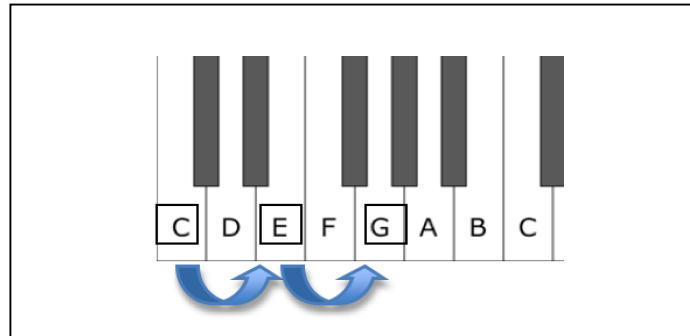


Figure 53 C major triad in the C major scale

The chord built from the second note in a major scale is called a “two” chord or a “D chord.” As explained earlier, the complete chord is built by adding every other note in the scale until you include three notes. The notes in this scale are D, F, and A (scale degrees 2, 4, and 6).

As you can probably guess by now, chord built from the third note is called a “three” chord. This pattern continues through all seven notes in the C major scale.

There is just one final thing we need to know about these chords before using them to build songs. In addition to being named for the scale degree or note from which they begin, they can also be described with respect to their quality. This quality is not good or bad, but a description of the “feeling” of the chord which comes from the relationship of the notes to one another.

Take a look at the notes in the “one” chord in C major. You will notice that when you include all the notes (black and white) the first and second notes in the chord are four intervals apart and that the first and third notes are three intervals apart. This relationship gives the chord a “major” quality that is sometimes described as “happy” or “bright.”

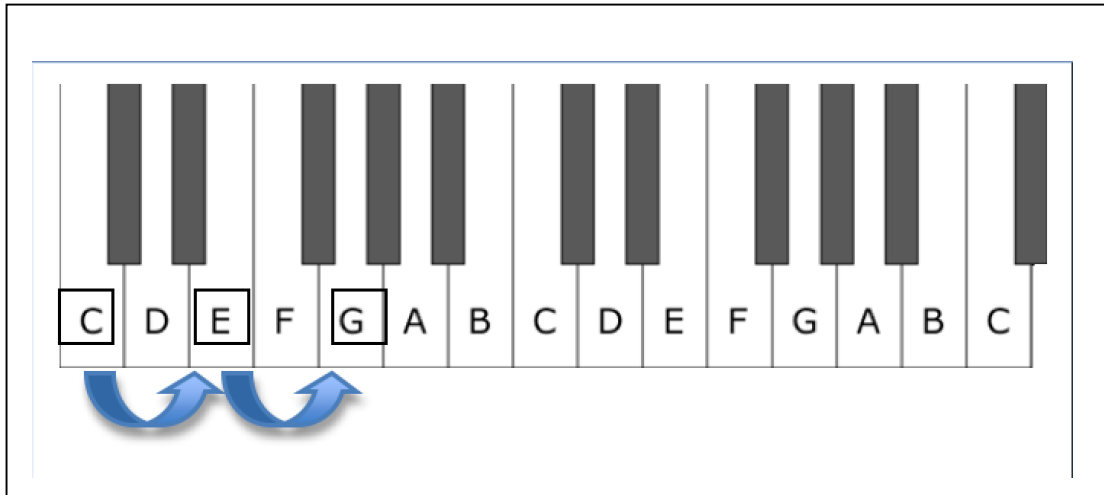


Figure 54 Intervals in the C major chord

By contrast, the “two chord” has just three intervals between the first and second note in the chord in addition to seven intervals between the first and third note. This gives the chord a “minor” quality that is sometimes described as “sad” or “dark.”

The most common chords for building songs have a major or minor quality. The “seven” chord is unusual in that it has just six intervals between the first and third note in the chord. This gives it a character called “diminished” which is neither major nor minor. There are special ways that diminished chords function. However, because of its unusual character, diminished chords are not nearly as common in popular music as major and minor chords. For this reason, this method does not explore the use of diminished chords.

Scale Degree	Name	Notes	Quality
1	C	C,E,G	Major
2	D	D,F,A	Minor
3	E	E,G,B	Minor
4	F	F,A,C	Major
5	G	G,B,D	Major
6	A	A,C,E	Minor

Figure 55 Common chords in C major

Chord Progressions in C Major

There are many apps that allow beginning songwriters to electronically generate a chord progression on a guitar, piano, or other keyboard instrument by simply pushing a button indicating the chord sound that you desire. GarageBand for iOS has a powerful collection of virtual instruments. For android users, free programs like “Virtual Guitar” incorporate some of the same functionality.

When building a chord progression there is nothing wrong with experimenting with diverse combinations of chords. This can be an effective method of finding a combination of sounds that you like! There are, however, a few conventions often followed which may help you get started.

To understand these conventions, it is helpful to divide the chords into three functional categories. Category one chords (also called “tonic” chords) are those that share notes in common with C major (the “home” key). Because they share notes with the

home key, they sound the most stable and have the least need to resolve to another chord. Chords in this category include C major, A minor, and E minor.

Category two chords (also called subdominant chords) sound a little farther removed from C major. These chords include F major and D minor. By convention, they are a kind of middle station between category one chords and category three chords. Their character possesses some instability and impulse to resolve, but not to the same degree as a category three chord. The category three chord (also called a dominant chord) sounding the farthest away from C major is G major. Once a song gets to a category three chord, it usually has a great deal of energy.

Category 1 (home)	Category 2 (a little distant)	Category 3 (very distant)
C major (CEG)	F major (FAC)	G Major (GBD)
E minor (EGB)	D minor (DFA)	
A minor (ACE)		

Figure 56 Categories of chords in C major

In general, songs move very freely between the chords in category one and two. However, once they advance to a category three chord (G Major), a resolution back to a category one chord is expected. Movement from category three to category two is unusual in a popular music context (with the exception of some blues traditions).

These harmonic conventions are the result of hundreds of years of musical tradition informing our experience as listeners. We have been hearing the world and absorbing these sounds since a time before we were born (Decasper, Lecanuet, Busnel,

Granier-Deferris, & Maugeais, 1994). Musical “rules” are constructs of a cultural/conventional framework, not a natural/normative one. In other words, there is not a universal, scientific law stating that one type of sound must follow another in the same way that gravity always draws mass together. Rather, these are agreed upon conventions allowing human beings to communicate with one another using sound. As a songwriter you are free to thwart expectations and encouraged to do so when it serves an expressive purpose. Effective songwriters are aware of the musical conventions and how they can be used to express oneself to others who share a common musical/cultural vocabulary.

One way of conceptualizing conventional chord changes is to use the following charts. Chord progressions in the chorus almost always begin and end in the home key (for our method, either C Major or A Minor). Chord progressions for the verse usually begin on a chord from category one and end on a chord from category one or three. The chart in figure 1.7 allows a learner to build a logical chord progression in C major by selecting a path along the directional arrows.

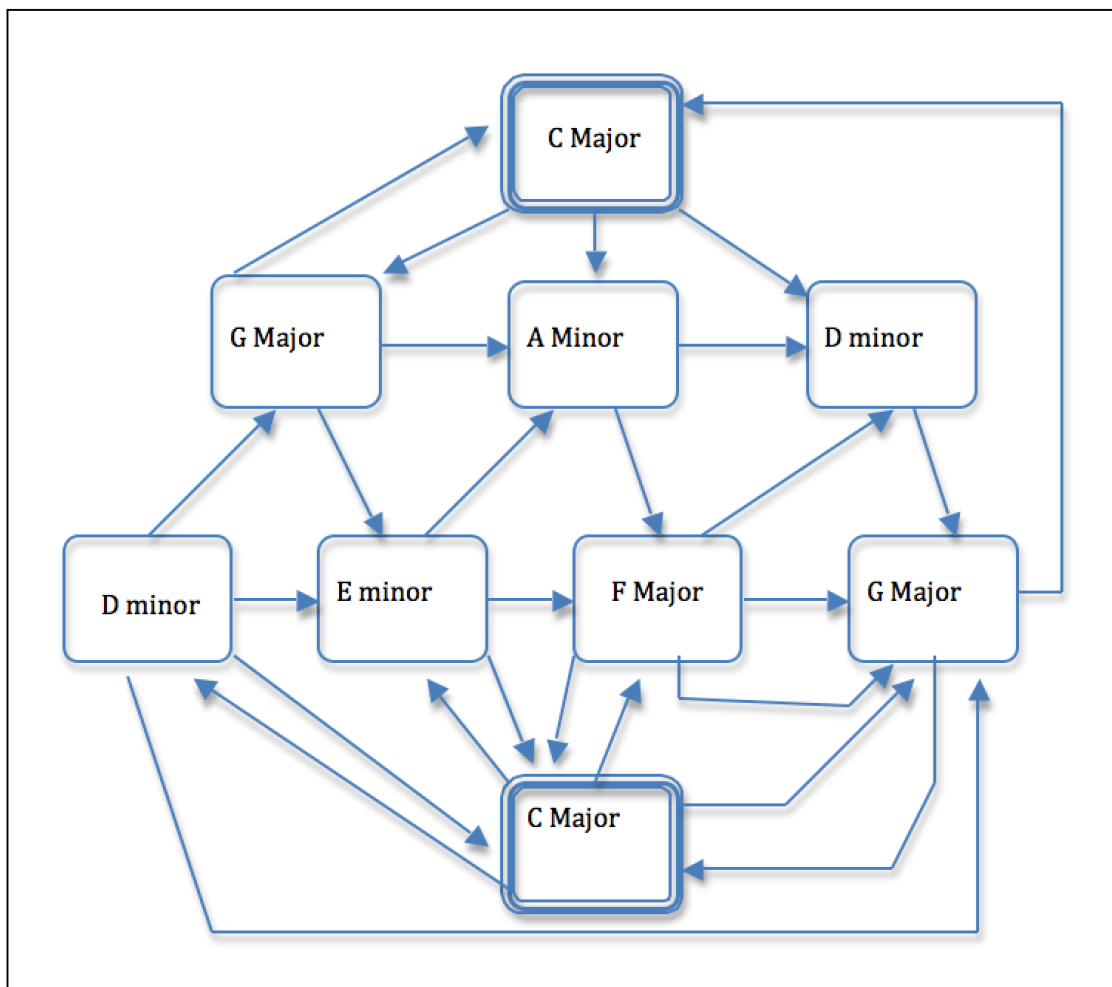


Figure 57 Directional chart for chord progressions in C Major

Writing Exercise, C Major

Writing a compelling chord progression takes practice. Depending upon the way a composer is feeling, the instrument a composer is using, and the composer's musical intuition, certain chords will feel like they belong together. The best way to gain experience with composing a chord progression is simply to start doing it. To begin, create a progression of 8 chords that begin and end with C major. You can write the names of the chords on a piece of paper to remember then. Then, using a virtual instrument, practice playing this chord progression over one of the beats you created for the section on meter. When you are ready, record this progression in your Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) of choice (like Garage Band or Mixcraft 7).

Harmonic Theory (A minor)

Songs in a minor key usually have a darker, more somber character. Selecting chords and the properties they employ to music is similar to that when composing in a major key. However, there are some important distinctions.

The A minor scale incorporates the seven distinct pitches sounded with white keys of the piano starting with A.

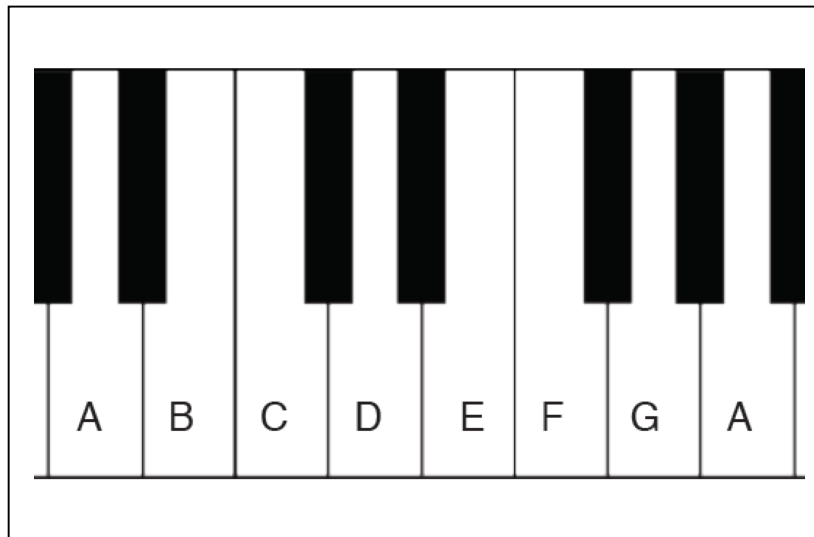


Figure 58 A natural minor scale

Just like the C major scale, chords can be built on the same scale degrees. The “one” chord for A minor uses the first, third, and fifth scale degrees that correspond to the pitches “A,” “C,” and “E.”

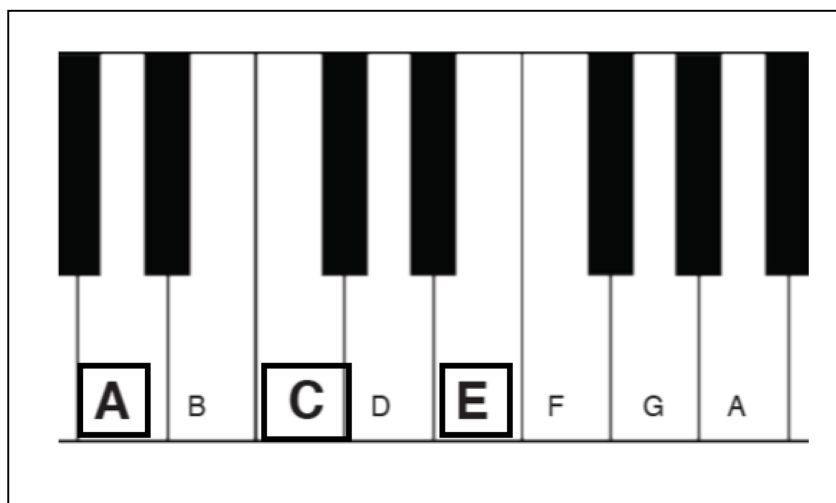


Figure 59 A minor chord and A minor scale

In a minor key, the “two” chord has the same notes as the “seven” chord in a major key and is not commonly used in contemporary popular music. For the same reasons explained above about the “seven” chord, we will forego using that chord in this method.

The “five” chord in a minor key incorporates an altered note. The “leading tone” or penultimate note in the key is raised to be as close to the first note of the scale as possible. This helps generate additional tension that will be resolved at the return of the home key. In this case, the note G is raised one note higher to a black key (G#) when a song in A minor uses the “five” chord.

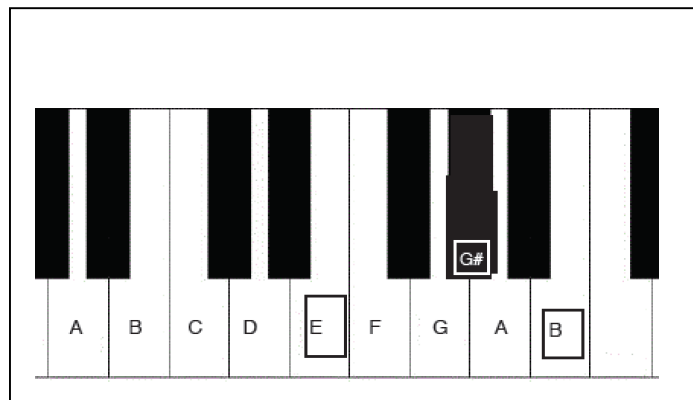


Figure 60 Five chord in A minor

The standard chords used in A minor include the following:

Scale Degree	Name	Notes	Quality
1	A	A,C,E	Minor
3	C	CEG	Major
4	D	D,F,A	Minor
5	E	E, G#, B	Major
6	F	F,A,C	Major
7	G	G,B,D	Major

Figure 61 Qualities of chords in A minor

Like major keys, the chords in minor keys can also be organized into categories. Conventionally, chords in categories one and two can flow freely from one to another. However, the chords in category three have the strongest impulse to lead to a chord from category one. As mentioned earlier, these are not “laws,” but conventions. Understanding these conventions will help you when initially constructing chord progressions, but ultimately you should let your ear be your guide.

Category 1 (home)	Category 2 (a little distant)	Category 3 (very distant)
A Minor (ACE)	D Minor (DFA)	E Major (E G# B)
C Major (CEG)		G Major (GBD)
F Major (FAC)		

Figure 62 Categories of chords in A minor

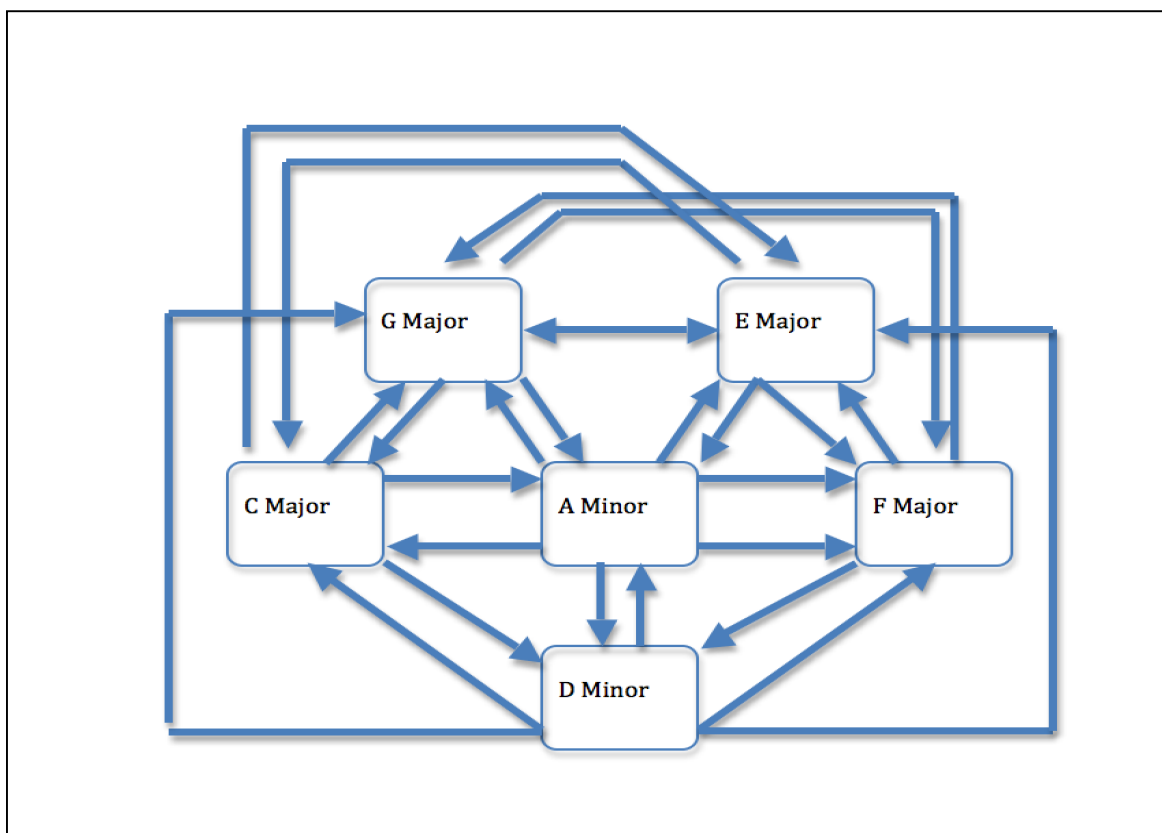


Figure 63 Directional chart for chord progressions in A minor

Writing Exercise (A minor)

Compose a chord progression of 8 chords that begins and ends in A minor.

Superimpose this chord progression over one of the beats you created for the section on meter.

Form (Verses and Choruses)

Form is a way for musicians to describe the architectural structure of a song.

Unlike visual art, sculpture, or architecture that develops over space, music develops over time. As such, we can't observe the entire work of art at once. On occasion, when analyzing music, it is useful to make a chart that graphically represents the music in order to "see" the whole song.

According to usage and conventions, songwriters have repeatedly used several very common forms throughout the history of American popular music. When examining these common forms, it is important to keep in mind that the models we will use refer to songs that share significant but broad characteristics. The best songwriters are aware of these characteristics and the conventions of form but never treat them as immutable laws. Not every song you will encounter conforms to the conventions we will explore in this book, and not every song that alludes to these forms will conform to a template in every respect. In fact, it is often the unexpected or unconventional approaches that we find most original and compelling as music fans. But understanding the more predictable aspects of these forms, and recognizing when a songwriter does something unusual, can only enhance our understanding and appreciation of the composer's art.

Simple strophic (also called “verse only” form) involves the repetition of a single structural unit of musical material (called a “strophe”) usually to a set of changing words. A great example of a strophic song is “The Ants Go Marching” (based on a popular nineteenth century American song, “When Johnny Comes Marching Home”).

The song begins with this strophe:

*“The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah
The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah
The ants go marching one by one
The little one stops to suck his thumb
And they all go marching down into the ground
To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!”*

The second strophe is sung to the same melody but the words differ:

*“The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah
The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah
The ants go marching two by two,
The little one stops to tie his shoe
And they all go marching down into the ground
To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!”*

Each successive strophe (marching two by two, marching three by three, etc.) is set to same repeating melody and slight variations of the words. Musicians sometimes find it useful to make a visual chart of a song's form. If you were to do this with "The Ants Go Marching," your chart might look something like this:

A (marching 1x1)
 A' (marching 2x2)
 A'' (marching 3x3)
 A''' (marching 4x4)
 etc.

Each letter "A" represents strophe, and the apostrophe after the letter "A" indicates that there are minor variations (i.e., the words) in the sound of each successive strophe. This is one of the simplest musical forms. Examples of popular songs using this form include "Tomorrow Never Knows" by the Beatles (1966) and "Walk The Line" by Johnny Cash (1957).

Strophe 1	"I keep a close watch on this heart of mine... I walk the line"
Strophe 2	"I find it very, very easy to be true... I walk the line"
Strophe 3	"As sure as night is dark and day is light... I walk the line"
Strophe 4	"You've got a way to keep me on your side...I walk the line"
Strophe 5	"You've got a way to keep me on your side...I walk the line"
Strophe 6	"I keep a close watch on this heart of mine...I walk the line"

Figure 64 Form of "Walk the Line" by Johnny Cash (1957)

To create some variation in the song, some composers will insert a repeating chorus (also called a refrain) between verses. Usually a chorus is placed between each verse, but a songwriter may decide to place two verses together on occasion. Sometimes the song will even begin with the chorus. This is another kind of strophic form and is sometimes called verse/chorus form or verse/refrain form. This form can be represented by the following pattern showing the alternation of a verse and chorus:

(C) V¹ C V² C V³C etc.

The first chorus is in parenthesis because this form can begin with either the chorus or the verse. One example of a song in verse/chorus form is “Gospel Ship,” a popular song recorded by the Carter Family in 1935. In this case, the song begins with the chorus.

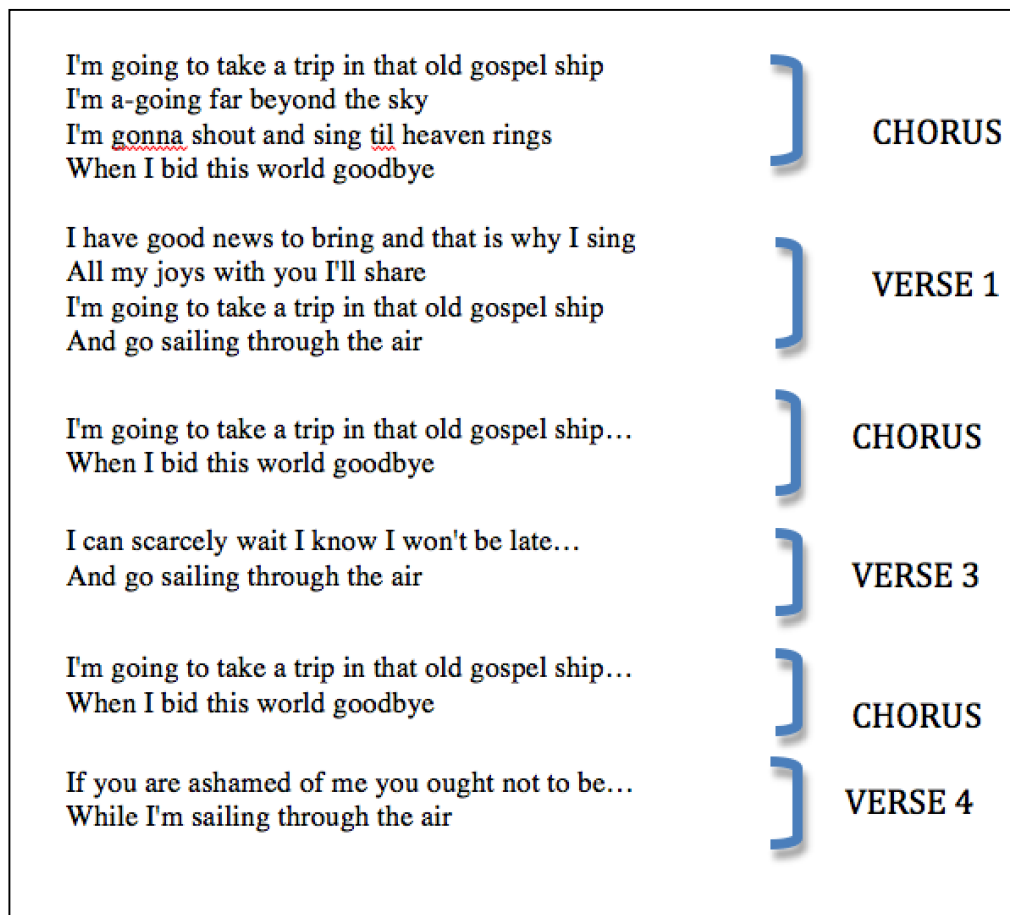


Figure 65 Form of the Carter Family's "Gospel Ship" (1935)

You can see (and hear) that the words change for each verse while the melody stays the same. Another way of saying this is that the verse is variant (varies each time) and the chorus is invariant (does not change each time).

This kind of form (verse/chorus form) is common in contemporary popular music too. A good example of this structure is Eminem and Rihanna's No. 1 hit from 2010, "Love the Way You Lie." The song alternates between verses featuring Eminem rapping to changing lyrics (variant) and the repetition of a chorus inserted in between verses sung by Rihanna for which the words do not change (invariant).

"Just gonna stand there and watch me burn... love the way you lie"	CHORUS (invariant)
"I can't tell you what it really is..."	VERSE (variant)
"Just gonna stand there and watch me burn... love the way you lie"	CHORUS
"You ever love somebody so much..."	VERSE
"Just gonna stand there and watch me burn... love the way you lie"	CHORUS
"Now I know we said things..." (note how the phrase extension "I'mma tie her to the bed..." builds tension)	VERSE
"Just gonna stand there and watch me burn... love the way you lie"	CHORUS

Figure 66 Form of Eminem and Rihanna's "Love the Way You Lie" (2010)

This song exemplifies another important convention in verse/chorus form. The hook of the song (usually synonymous with the title of the song) is heard in the chorus. In this case, the hook "love the way you lie" is repeated twice at the end of each chorus.

“Just gonna stand there and watch me burn
 But that’s all right because I like the way it hurts
 Just gonna stand there and hear me cry
 But that’s all right because **I love the way you lie**
I love the way you lie”

Note: The hook (synonymous with the title) is printed in bold at the end of the chorus.
 This is the most typical place to find the hook in a song using verse/chorus form.

Figure 67 Chorus of “Love the Way You Lie” with the lyrical hook in bold type

Chords in the Chorus (Strength Chords)

In most popular music songs, chords that are built on scale degrees one, four, and five are particularly strong. That is one reason these chords are frequently used in chorus of songs. These “strength” chords for C major and A minor are listed below:

Strength Chords for C Major		
Category One	Category Two	Category Three
C Major	F Major	G Major
Strength Chords for A Minor		
Category One	Category Two	Category Three
A Minor	D Minor	E Major

Figure 68 Strength chords in C major and A minor

It is also a good idea to provide some contrast in the verse of your song so that your music is more interesting. A good way to do this is to begin by composing the chord progression for the chorus first, ensuring the strength chords are well-represented. Once this is complete, select a progression for the verse by swapping out the strength chords with substitutes from the same category. This usually results in a nice mix of major and minor chords, but also ensures that you have some stylistic continuity in your song ensuring the general flow in both sections will be similar.

For example, your chord progression for the chorus of a song in C Major might include the following eight chords

Chord	C Maj.	F Maj.	G Maj.	C Maj	F Maj.	C Maj.	G Maj.	C Maj.
Category	1	2	3	1	2	1	3	1

Figure 69 Sample Chord Progression in C Major for a chorus

One can create a verse by replacing chords from options in the same category. In this case, it might look like this:

Chord	E Min.	D Min.	G Maj.	A Min.	D Min.	A Min	G Maj.	A Min.
Category	1	2	3	1	2	1	3	1

Figure 70 Sample chord progression in C major for a verse

A chord progression for a verse in A Minor might include the following chords:

Chord	A Min.	A Min.	D Min.	E Maj.	A Min.	D Min.	E Maj.	A Min.
Category	1	1	2	3	1	2	3	1

Figure 71 Sample chord progression for a verse in A minor

In this case, substituting chords in the verse might lead to a chord progression like this:

Chord	F Maj.	C Maj.	D min.	E Maj.	C Maj.	D min	G Maj.	C Maj.
Category	1	1	2	3	1	2	3	1

Figure 72 Sample chord progression for a chorus in A minor

As always, your ear should be your guide. If you like a particular chord, use it even if it seems to break the “rules.” With songwriting, it is more important to be true to your own voice than to be correct in a technical sense.

“Hook” Progressions

Burns (1987) identified seven chord progressions so ubiquitous that they function like a hook, grabbing a listener’s attention. Employing these chord progressions can also suggest an intertextual relationship with other songs incorporating the same harmonic pattern. Because of their ubiquity, these harmonic progressions are a great place for neophyte songwriters to begin building catchy chord changes.

Of the seven progressions mentioned by Burns, two incorporate non-diatonic chords not covered in this basic method and one is the 12-bar blues pattern that is increasingly uncommon in contemporary, mainstream popular music. The remaining four progressions are articulated below, realized in C Major and A minor. A list of well-known songs employing these progressions follows. Burns mentions some songs that use these harmonic progressions. His list is updated to include repertoire recorded since the article was published in 1987.

C Major	A Minor	F Major	G Major
Examples of songs using this progression:			
Song Title	Year	Artist	
Girl on Fire	2012	Alicia Keys	
Baby	2010	Justin Bieber	
She's Everything	2006	Brad Paisley	
Complicated	2002	Avril Lavigne	
Lucky	2000	Britney Spears	
The Sign	1993	Ace of Base	
A Teenager In Love	1969	Dion and the Belmonts	
Stand By Me	1961	Ben E King	
Heart and Soul	1938	Hoagy Carmichael	

Figure 73 Hook progression 1 in C Major

C Major	F Major	G Major	F Major
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Examples of songs using this progression:

Song Title	Year	Artist
Everybody Talks	2011	Neon Trees
How Do You Do!	1992	Roxette
Big Boys	1979	Elvis Costello
Red Red Wine	1968	Neil Diamond
Wild Thing	1966	The Troggs
Hang on Sloopy	1965	The McCoys

Note: This progression includes the motion from G Major to F Major. This is an example of motion from a category three chord to a category two chord. Also called a “retrogression,” this harmonic motion references blues music first recorded in the 1920s. It is sometimes used even though it breaks one of the “rules.” A good songwriter is never a slave to convention. If something sounds good to you, go for it!

Figure 74 Hook progression 2 in C Major

A minor	G Major	F Major	G Major
Examples of songs using this progression:			
Song Title	Year	Artist	
Rolling in the Deep	2010	Adelle	
Before He Cheats	2006	Carrie Underwood	
My Heart Will Go On	1997	Celine Dion	
Smooth Criminal	1987	Michael Jackson	
You Can Do Magic	1982	America	
In The Air Tonight	1981	Phil Collins	
(Don't Fear) The Reaper	1976	Blue Öyster Cult	
All Along the Watchtower	1967	Bob Dylan	

Figure 75 Hook progression 1 in A minor

A minor	G Major	F Major	E Major
Examples of songs using this progression:			
Song Title	Year	Artist	
Feeling Good	2005	Michael Bublé	
Oh Yeah	2003	Big Bad Voodoo Daddy	
Stray Cat Strut	1981	Stray Cats	
Sultans of Swing	1978	Dire Straits	
Happy Together	1967	Turtles	
Hazy Shade of Winter	1966	Simon and Garfunkel	
Hit The Road Jack	1961	Ray Charles	

Figure 76 Hook progression 2 in A minor

These progressions are a fine place to begin experimenting with chord progressions, and to hear how other successful artists have employed common progressions to create successful pop songs.

Writing Exercise (Chord Progressions)

A good chord progression can be the backbone of a great song! Experiment with putting chords together. Once you find some combinations that are compelling to you, compose one progression of eight chords in C Major and one progression of eight chords in A Minor. Emphasize the “strength” chords in this progression and consider it a chorus.

Next, use substitute chords from the same category to create an eight-chord companion verse for your chorus. Superimpose these chord progressions over one of the beats you already created. Use a different beat or variation of the same beat to distinguish

between the verse and chorus. You are now well on the way to composing a complete, original song!

Melody

What exactly is a melody? Opinions amongst scholars and musicians vary. There is general agreement that melody is frequently central to the listener's musical experience. Bie (1916) noted "Very generally speaking, we understand music in the aggregate as melody" (p. 402). Watt (1924) succinctly summed up a definition of melody by describing melody as "a pattern of notes of the same or different pitch set in a certain rhythm" (p. 272). While the definition is certainly broad, it fails to distinguish between patterns of notes connected in meaningful ways and patterns of notes not connected in meaningful ways. More to the point, it does not describe **how** the notes and rhythms are connected and the relationship this has to their function and meaning. In virtually all cases, the function of a melody is to be pleasing to the ear. In vocal music, the melody frequently reflected important aspects of the text. Unfortunately, the technical language used by musicologists to explain and understand melody is much less developed than that used to describe harmony and harmonic function. Stefani (1987) noted "current musicology has not developed such a methodical or systematic knowledge of melody as it has of other aspects of music" (p. 21). As such, he opts for a narrower, if less precise definition of melody as "singable music" (p. 23).

Jazz great Charlie Parker described his approach to music making as "trying to play clean and looking for the pretty notes" (Levin and Wilson, 1949). This is great

advice for songwriters searching for a catchy melody, and this approach emphasizes selecting pitches that sound good in relation to the harmony. The “clean” notes in a pop melody are those that match those in the chord progression. As described earlier in the chapter, each chord has three notes. For review, the notes used in each chord in C Major and A Minor are listed below:

Scale Degree	Name	Notes	Quality
1	C	C,E,G	Major
2	D	D,F,A	Minor
3	E	E,G,B	Minor
4	F	F,A,C	Major
5	G	G,B,D	Major
6	A	A,C,E	Minor

Figure 77 Notes used in C Major

Scale Degree	Name	Notes	Quality
1	C	C,E,G	Major
2	D	D,F,A	Minor
3	E	E,G,B	Minor
4	F	F,A,C	Major
5	G	G,B,D	Major
6	A	A,C,E	Minor

Figure 78 Notes used in A minor

As an example, consider one of “hook” chord progressions (see chapter 3) mentioned by Burns (1987). The chart below shows the chord progression and the “clean” notes available.

Passing Notes

The melody for Gene Chandler’s “Duke of Earl” (1962) uses this harmony and, for the most part, sticks to the “clean” notes. Just before the change to A Minor, the melody incorporates the note “B” while the harmony is still in C Major. In this case, the note B is called a “passing tone.” It leads from the “C” to the “A” and does not sound discordant. Passing tones are great ways to allow a melody to flow from one note to another.

When composing your melody, one approach is to choose a few “clean” notes for each chord and connect them using passing tones.

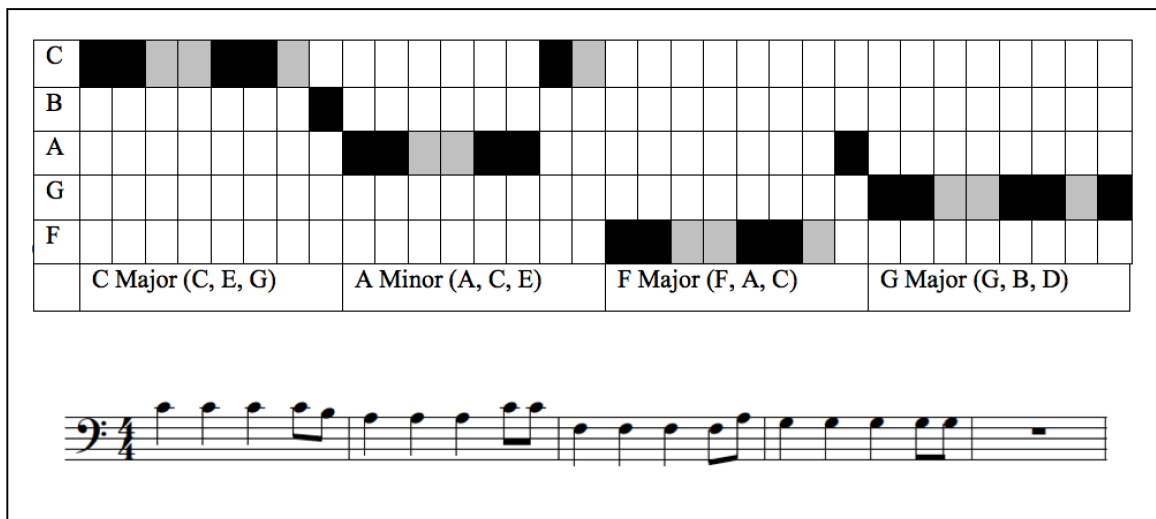


Figure 80 Gene Chandler's "Duke of Earl" (1962)

Another approach used by many successful songwriters is to choose a melodic shape that belong to one chord and repeat it over related chords. In the following example of Avril Lavigne’s “Complicated” (2002), Lavigne sings a catchy melody over C major

chord. Note that she uses the “F” as a passing tone between the “clean” notes of “G” and “E.”

This melody is repeated in totality over the “A minor” chord and partially repeated over the “F” chord. In doing this, Lavigne sings a few notes that don’t belong in the harmony. However, the stylistic consistency of using the same material and shape multiple times keeps the material familiar, and the sound of the same melody over multiple chords holds the listener’s attention. The dissonant notes do not sound "wrong" at all. If you discover melodic material that sounds good over one chord, try the same melodic material over related chords to see if that works. You may need to change a note or two, but reinforcing the general shape by using it multiple times will help it sound “catchy” to your audience.

The diagram illustrates the harmonic structure of the song "Complicated" by Avril Lavigne. It consists of a 12x12 grid where rows represent pitch classes (F to C) and columns represent time measures. Black squares indicate the presence of a note in the melody. Below the grid, the chords for each measure are listed: C Major (C,E,G) for measures 1-3, A Minor (A,C,E) for measures 4-6, F Major (F,A,C) for measures 7-9, and G Major (G,B,D) for measures 10-12. At the bottom, a musical staff in 4/4 time shows the melody, which is a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, and C3.

Figure 81 Avril Lavigne’s “Complicated” (2002)

Today, most pop melodies are performed by singers. This means that any melodies that you write will need to work well with your lyrics. Some songwriters prefer to write their melodies first and then put words to them. Paul McCartney famously used the words “Scrambled Eggs” when composing the song that would become “Yesterday.” The melody came first. Later, Lennon and McCartney found the perfect words to go along with it. Brian Wilson composed the melody for “Good Vibrations” using the nonsense syllable “Bom-Bom-Bom.” Mike Love later suggested the words “I’m Picking Up Good Vibrations” and the result was one of the most iconic pop songs ever written.

Other times, a melody will remain relatively static to focus attention on the lyrics. Examples of songs like this include Tracy Chapman’s “Talkin’ Bout a Revolution” (1988), REM’s “Losing My Religion” (1991) and Melle Mel’s “White Lines (Don’t Do It)” (1983).

Writing Exercise (Melody)

Compose two melodies that fit with the chord changes you composed for a verse and chorus combination. Sing your melodies to nonsense syllables (like “la la las”) and add them to the chord progressions and beats you have already composed in a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). Give some thought to words that might fit the melody you composed as McCartney did when using “Scrambled Eggs.” It may help inspire you when you begin composing the actual lyrics!

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSITIONAL STRUCTURES

The “pre-chorus” and “middle episode” are structural elements designed to add variety to popular songs. Functionally, they are unstable. They are designed to **lead** somewhere, not **be** somewhere. It is highly unusual for a song to conclude with a transitional structure since they do not serve as arrival points. Rather, they transition a song from one formal section to another. By design, these sections create a sense of momentum and anticipation in a popular song. They almost always appear in predictable places within a song’s structure and can introduce new melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, textural, and lyrical elements.

The Pre-Chorus

In the 1960s, many popular songwriters expanded familiar verse/chorus structure with the introduction of a pre-chorus. This section occurs between the verse and chorus and builds both the musical momentum. A good pre-chorus will create expectation in the listeners’ mind that will be fulfilled in the following chorus. It tends to be harmonically unstable, creating a sense of forward motion and is sometimes called a “channel” because of the way it directs the listener's attention towards the chorus (Peterik, Austin, and Lynn, 2010). Pattison (2009) also notes that this momentum-building section of a song is “called by many names: Pre-chorus, Vest, Ramp, Climb or Lift, Verse Extension, Prime” (p. 61).

Not all songs use a pre-chorus, but many do. When composing a pre-chorus, variety is essential. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) observed “a good pre-chorus has some fresh chords that the verse hasn’t used” (p. 64). Chords from category two and three dominate pre-choruses. Often (though not always) the pre-chorus will end on a category three chord (usually the “V” chord) which helps set up a tension that is resolved by beginning the chorus with a category one chord (usually the “I” chord).

A song exemplifying these characteristics is “Absolutely (Story of a Girl)” by Nine Days (2000). Lyrically, the pre-chorus segues between the rhetorical questions posed in the verse with the description of the subject in the chorus.

Harmonically, category two and three chords are the most represented. The pre-chorus builds towards an extended presentation of the “V” chord. The chord is heard for two full bars, building a sense of expectation that is later resolved by moving to the “I” chord in the chorus. The absence of any lyrics in the last two bars also helps build the listener’s sense of anticipation to be fulfilled in the chorus. As with this chart and the ones that follow, the chord labels used reference the quality and function of the chord. In keeping with this method’s purpose of being a primer for neophyte songwriter, the transcriptions show larger structural patterns. They may omit some finer details reflecting nuances more appropriate for advanced music students. Some of the details omitted in the transcriptions show inversions, upper partials, or non-chord tones.

<p>How many days in a year? She woke up with hope but she only found tears. And I can be so insincere, Making her promises never for real. As long as she stands there waiting, Wearing the holes in the soles of her shoes. How many days disappear? When you look in the mirror so how do you choose?</p>	Verse
<p>Your clothes never wear as well the next day, And your hair never falls in quite the same way, But you never seem to run out of things to say...</p>	Pre-chorus
<p>This is the story of a girl Who cried a river and drowned the whole world And while she looks so sad in photographs I absolutely love her When she smiles</p>	Chorus

Figure 82 Form of Nine Days' "Absolutely (Story of A Girl)" (2000)

Lyric	Your clothes never wear as	well the next day, and your	hair never falls in	quite the same way. But you
Chord type	ii	I	IV	V
Category	Two	One	Two	Three
Transposition to C Major	d minor	C Major	F Major	G Major

Lyric	never seem to run out of	things to say		
Chord type	I	IV	V	V
Category	One	Two	Three	Three
Transposition to C Major	C Major	F Major	G Major	G Major

Figure 83 Harmonic progression in the pre-chorus of “Absolutely (Story of a Girl)” (2000)

Katy Perry’s recording of “California Gurls” (2010) is an excellent example of how a composer can create variety by thwarting the listener’s expectation. In this song, the verse, chorus, and introduction all use the chords “I,” “IV,” “V,” and “vi.” In the pre-chorus, the “I” chord is withheld and only uses the “IV,” “V,” and “vi” chords. The listener must wait until the following chorus of the song for the satisfaction of coming back to the home key. Here “vi” chord is used as a substitute for “I” and extended time spent on the “IV” chord. The result is that the arrival to the “I” chord in the chorus is immensely satisfying after the time spent away in the pre-chorus.

I know a place where the grass is really greener Warm, wet and wild, there must be something in the water Sippin' gin and juice, laying underneath the palm trees (undone) The boys break their necks trying creep a little sneak peek (at us)	Verse
You could travel the world But nothing comes close to the golden coast Once you party with us You'll be falling in love Oooooh Oh Oooooh	Pre-chorus
California girls we're unforgettable Daisy Dukes, bikinis on top Sun-kissed skin so hot we'll melt your popsicle Oooooh Oh Oooooh	Chorus

Figure 84 Form of “Califoia Gurls” by Katie Perry (2010)

Lyric	You could travel the	world	but nothing comes close to the	golden coast
Chord type	V	vi	IV	IV
Category	Three	One	Two	Two
Trasposition to C Major	G Major	A minor	F Major	F Major

Lyric	Once you party with us	you'll be	falling in love	Ooooooh Oh Ooooooh
Chord	V	vi	IV	IV
Category	Three	One	Two	Two
Trasposition to C Major	G Major	A minor	F Major	F Major

Figure 85 Harmonic progression in the pre-chorus of “California Gurls” (2010)

Bruno Mars' "Treasure" (2012) also avoids the home key in the pre-chorus by making use of the substitute iii and vi chords. The song builds to an extended presentation of the V chord that generates anticipation for the upcoming chorus.

Gimme your, gimme your, gimme your attention, baby I gotta tell you a little something about yourself You're wonderful, flawless, ooh, you're a sexy lady But you walk around here like you wanna be someone else	Verse
Oh whoa-oh-oh I know that you don't know it, but you're fine, so fine (fine, so fine) Oh whoa-oh-oh Oh girl, I'm gonna show you when you're mine, oh mine (mine, oh mine)	Pre-chorus
Treasure, that is what you are Honey, you're my golden star You know you can make my wish come true	Chorus

Figure 86 Form of Bruno Mars' "Treasure" (2012)

Lyric	Oh woah-oh-oh	I know that you don't know it but you're	fine so fine	(fine so fine)
Chord	IV - iii	ii - IV	iii - V	vi - V
Category	Two - One	Two	One - Three	One - Three
Trasposition to C Major	F Major – E minor	d minor – F Major	E minor – G Major	A minor – G Major

Lyric	Oh woah-oh-oh	oh girl I'm gonna show you when you're	mine all mine	(mine all mine)
Chord	IV - iii	ii - IV	V	V
Category	Two - One	Two	Three	Three
Trasposition to C Major	F Major – E minor	d minor – F Major	G Major	G Major

Figure 87 Harmonic progression of Bruno Mars' "Treasure" (2012)

The Middle Episode

Another transitional structure common in popular music is a “middle episode.”

This device is extremely popular in pop and mainstream country music and typically occurs after the recitation of a second chorus. This structural feature is known by many names, including a “bridge” because it bridges iterations of verses and choruses. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) noted that songwriters John Lennon and Paul McCartney “called it the middle eight, referring to the standard length of a typical bridge” (p. 123). Pattison (2009) notes “this section is often called a ‘release,’ or boredom breaker” (p. 57). Stylistically, the middle episode introduces new musical material in the middle of the

song, breaking up the pattern of alternating between a verse and chorus. This section of a pop song serves as an additional opportunity to create variety, both musically and lyrically. (Bergman, 2012).

Middle episodes share many characteristics with pre-choruses. Their purpose is to create variety, and they are harmonically unstable. Chords from category two and three dominate and substitute chords for “I” are *de riguer*. They also frequently end on the “V” chord. Adele’s hit “Someone Like You” (2011) serves as an excellent model for incorporating both a pre-chorus and a middle episode.

Lyric	Nothing compares	no worries or cares	Regrets and mistakes,	they're memories made
Chord	IV	IV	vi	vi
Category	Two	Two	One	One
Trasposition to C Major	F Major	F Major	A minor	A minor

Lyric	Who would have known	how bittersweet	this	would
Chord	IV	IV	vi	I
Category	Two	Two	One	One
Trasposition to C Major	F Major	F Major	A minor	C Major

Lyric	taste	
Chord	IV	V
Category	Two	Three
Trasposition to C Major	F Major	G Major

Figure 88 Middle episode of Adele’s “Someone Like You” (2011)

Like many pre-choruses, the middle episode used in this song emphasizes chords from category two and three. It also uses an extra bar to highlight the sense of anticipation leading towards the chorus.

Generally, transitional structures such as middle episodes and pre-choruses exemplify the following characteristics:

1. An emphasis on chords from category two and three
2. An avoidance of the use of the “I” chord. If the “I” chord is used in the pre-chorus, it is almost never heard at the end of these sections. When chords from category one are used, they are often substitutions.
3. A general motion towards the “V” chord at the end of the pre-chorus
4. A sense of conclusion to the lyrics a bar before the end of the pre-chorus. The lyrics sometimes contain nonsense syllables (like oohs and aahs) or the background singers may enter, but the main thrust of the lyric concludes before the end of the pre-chorus or middle episode. This opens up a space in the lyrics that build anticipation for the next formal section of the song (usually a chorus).

Instrumental Solos

Some pop songs, especially those with a strong rock influence (or another musical genre emphasizing instrumental virtuosity), will eschew a middle episode in favor of an instrumental solo. Typically the solo is based upon the musical material heard in the

verse and segues into a vocal chorus, but this is not always the case. Sometimes the instrumental solo uses the structure of the chorus and occasionally the instrumental solo is based upon new material. Vocals are rarely heard during an instrumental solo, and it is often an opportunity for an instrumentalist to show off his or her technical skills. The electric guitar is often featured in this capacity, an approach sometimes called “shredding” in rock music.

Pullback and Outchorus

One very common technique designed to create emotional peaks and valleys in a pop song is a pullback, usually heard immediately after the middle episode. With a pullback, the songwriter changes the musical texture to make it less intense, and often more intimate, drawing the listener in. This sets up the final chorus that is often the most intense, exciting part of the song. This can be a chance for the songwriter to “pull out all the stops” and it is not at all unusual to hear additional elements of syncopation, subtle harmonic changes, or additional instruments at this point. Because this final chorus frequently ends the song, it is sometimes called the “out chorus.”

In the case of the aforementioned song “Someone Like You,” the tempo briefly slows (called a ritard) after the middle episode. The previously active, accompanying riff in the piano and is replaced by stark, block chords. This leaves Adele’s voice unsupported, vulnerable, and “naked”. The song ends with the active riff coming back, with additional elements of syncopation added to the melody of the out chorus.

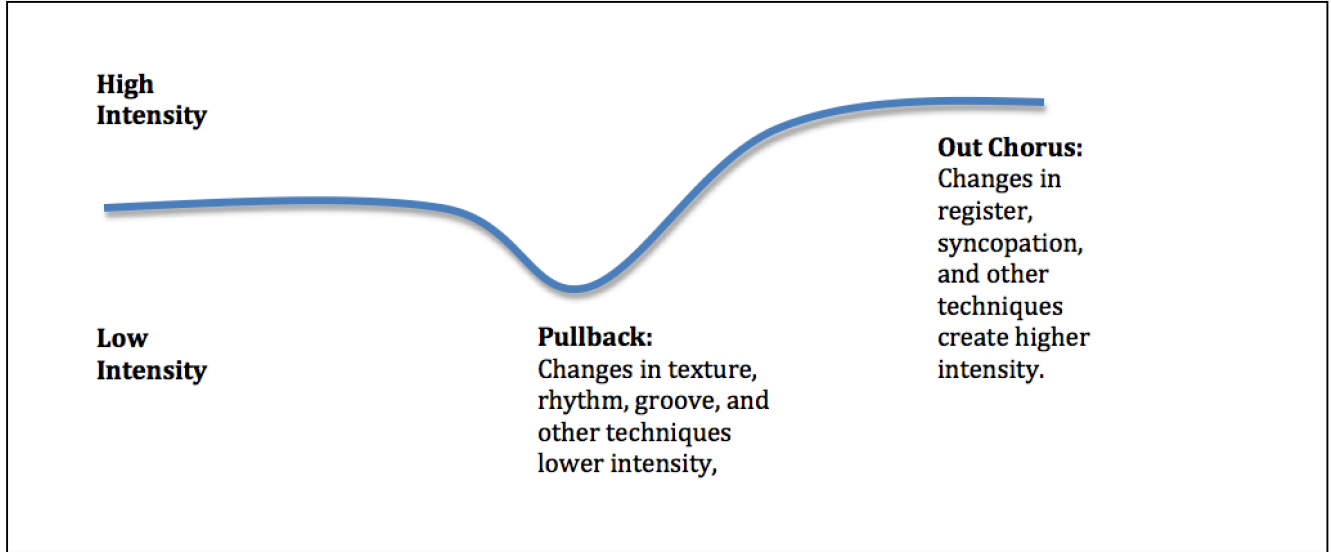


Figure 89 Diagram of a pullback and out chorus

Coda (a.k.a. Outro)

A short musical segment at the end of the final chorus in a pop song is called a coda. The term “outro” is another term frequently used that means the same thing. An “outro” is like an “intro” but it takes the listener “out” of the song instead of “in” to it. The coda is often an opportunity to reinforce the hook that introduced the song, and frequently includes syncopated and improvisatory musical elements that complement the hook and maintain the energy and intensity of the out chorus just a little bit longer. The song “My Front Porch Looking In” by Lonestar (2003) includes an extended coda after the conclusion of the out chorus. The two-bar melodic hook played by the violin that introduces the song returns and is stated eight times to conclude the song. Improvisatory elements in the violin and voice maintain the intensity.

The Coda is a songwriter's last chance to reinforce the hook of a song. However, care should be used not to let a hook overstay its welcome. There is not a magic rule about the number of times a hook should be heard in a song. Finding the right number of times to present a hook to an audience is an essential part of the art of great songwriting.

Collision

The Coda of "My Front Porch Looking In" makes use of a musical technique called a "collision." A collision occurs when musical elements from separate sections of a song are played together at the same time. In this song, Richie McDonald sings the words "There's a carrot top who can barely walk. A little blue-eyed blond with her shoes on wrong" excerpted from the beginning of the chorus while the background singers sing "From My Front Porch Looking In." These two musical phrases are separated in the body of the song but they collide here. The Zac Brown Band's song "Homegrown" (2015) employs a similar technique. In the coda, the lyrical hook "homegrown" collides with the previous line in the chorus "I got everything I need and nothing that I don't." Collisions in codas are common. In these songs, fragments from the chorus are sounded together to create an exciting blend of musical elements.

The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" (1966) is another great example of a collision. This song tells the story of two lonely, disparate people (the titular Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie) leading lonely, disparate lives. The characters never meet one another until the end of the song when Father McKenzie buries Eleanor Rigby. The lyrics are very dark, stating "Eleanor Rigby, died in a church and was buried along with her name. No

one was saved” (Lennon and McCartney, 1966). And yet, a glimmer of hope is suggested by the music. Two musical fragments kept apart and distinct from one another in the body of the song collide. The lines “Ah, look at all the lonely people” and “All the lonely people, where do they all come from” are sounded harmoniously at the same time suggesting the hint of connection in the pervading darkness.

Putting It All Together

By convention, most contemporary pop songs follow a standardized form. The following outline can be used as a kind of blueprint or roadmap for song construction. Knowing this form is extremely useful for songwriters looking to manage the expectations of their audience. Breaking with some conventions can help engage the listener and avoid being too predictable. Breaking with all or most of the conventions can make it more challenging for an audience to relate to a new song.

1. Introduction
 - a. Introduce the hook (choose at least one of the following)
 - i. Melodic Hook
 1. Pentatonic melodic hook
 2. Blues Melodic Hook
 3. Triadic Hook,
 - ii. Rhythmic Hook
 - iii. Lyrical Hook
 1. Topical Hook
 2. Rhythmic Lyrics
 3. Vernacular or Colloquial Hook
 4. Multiple Meaning Hook
 - iv. Sound Effect Hook

2. Verse
 - a. Create a chord progression
 - i. Consider one the “Hook Progressions” mentioned by Burns (1987)
 - b. Consider using a similar progression to that used in the chorus, but select substitute chords from the same category (i.e. iii or vi for I if the song is in a Major key and III and VI if the song is in a minor key)
3. Possible pre-chorus
 - a. Avoid the “home” key unless in passing.
 - b. Build towards an extended “V” chord at the end of the pre-chorus
4. Chorus
 - a. Emphasize the “strength” chords (I, IV, V in a major key and i, iv, V in a minor key)
 - b. Place your lyrical hook at the end of the chorus
5. Verse 2
6. Possible pre-chorus
7. Chorus
8. Possible Middle Episode (or Instrumental Solo)
 - a. Avoid the “home” key unless in passing
 - b. Build towards an extended “V” chord at the end of the pre-chorus
9. Chorus with Pullback
 - a. Same harmony and melody as the other choruses, but change the texture to make it less intense
10. Out Chorus
 - a. Same harmony and melody as the other choruses, but change the texture to make it more intense
 - b. Consider adding additional elements of syncopation
11. Possible Coda
 - a. Reintroduce the hook that begins the song

CHAPTER SIX: RHYMING

Popular music is constructed using the aforementioned organizing principles of meter and form. Well-written lyrics not only communicate using the meaning of the words, but the sound of the words as well. These sounds can be organized in patterns that create and enhance expression in music. They contribute multiple layers of meaning that communicate to listeners. Rhyming is one crucial way that song lyrics are organized. Almost all songs with lyrics incorporate rhyming. Pattison (1991) observed “Rhyming is a powerhouse. It affects all parts of structure” (p. 34).

Types of Rhymes

Stolpe (2007) identified five types of rhymes by the degree to which they provide closure in a song. Closure, she argues, is defined as “the degree of perfection to which the rhyme causes finality.” (p. 33). Closure is not inherently good or bad. Sometimes an artist may want to communicate a sense of finality. Other times, he/she will prefer to leave things open-ended.

The five types of rhymes described by Stolpe listed in order of those providing the most closure to the least closure are as follows; Perfect, Family, Additive/Subtractive, Assonance, and Consonance.

Perfect rhymes are the most familiar and provide the most closure. The ending consonant and the vowel sounds match “perfectly.” For example, the words “June” and

“soon” are perfect rhymes. The vowel sound and final consonant are identical. Eddy Grant’s “Electric Avenue” (1981) incorporates perfect rhymes in every other line. The words “done” and “sun” in the lyrics are perfect rhymes. The nature of the rhyme provides a strong conclusion to the juxtaposition between social unrest and domestic labor that are tied together using the concept of “work.”

“Now in the street, there is violence
And-and a lots of work to be done
No place to hang out the washing
And-and I can't blame all on the sun”

Family rhymes incorporate identical matches with respect to the vowel sound and close matches with respect to the consonant sound. Determining the relative closeness of a consonant match requires defining the three most common categories of consonant sounds used in popular songs. These consonant sounds fall into one of three categories; plosives, fricatives, and nasal consonants. (Lashibes, 2013). Maddieson (2015) described plosives as sounds “in which air flow from the lungs is interrupted by a complete closure being made in the mouth” (p. 1). They include sounds that begin with the letters b,d,g,p,t,q, and k. Plosives have a strong rhythmic quality and are often used to mimic the sound of struck percussion instruments including many kinds of drums.

Fricatives include sounds made by the letters v, th, z, zh, j, f, s, sh, and ch and are described by Maddieson (2015) as sounds “in which the air passes through a narrow

constriction that causes the air to flow turbulently and thus create a noisy sound.” They can be percussive, but sound less “hard” than plosives. These sounds can be used to imitate some percussion instruments that are rubbed, scraped, or shook including a snare drum played with brushes or shakers.

Nasal consonants include the letters m and n. They involve directing sound through the nasal cavity. They are the “softest” or least percussive of all the consonant sounds. When two words share the same vowel sound and end in a consonant of the same type (plosive, fricative, or nasal), they are a family rhyme. The words “buck” and “pub” are family rhymes.

Consider the following lyrics from Eminem’s hit “Love the Way You Lie” (2010).

“I can't tell you what it really is
I can only tell you what it feels like
And right now there's a steel knife
In my windpipe.”

The words “like” and “windpipe” are family rhymes because they share a vowel sound and both end with a plosive consonant sound. They create a strong sense of closure. The word “knife” from the third line is also a rhyme. In this case, it is an assonance rhyme (explained below), but not a family rhyme because “knife” ends with a

fricative (the “f” sound) while “like” and “windpipe” end with plosives (“k” and “p” respectively).

Plosives	Fricative	Nasals
b, d, g, p, t, q, k	v, th, z, zh, j, f, s, sh, ch	m, n

Figure 90 Consonant Categories

Additive/Subtractive rhymes have matching vowel sounds but an ending consonant has been added or subtracted. Consider the following lyrics from Townes Van Zandt’s “Poncho and Lefty” (1972).

“The day they laid poor Pancho low

Lefty split for Ohio

Where he got the bread to go

There ain't nobody knows”

Here, the final word, “knows,” creates an additive rhyme with “low,” “Ohio,” and “go” due to the addition of the “s” at the end of the word.

Assonance rhymes have matching vowel sounds but end in a consonant with a different character. The words “tick” and “pin” are assonance rhymes. So are the words “countryside” and “pine” from the Zac Brown Band’s song “Homegrown” (2015).

“I got a piece of land
Out in the countryside
Lay back and smell the sun
Warm up the Georgia pine”

Consonance rhymes share a consonant sound articulated at the beginning or the end of the words. The word “pot” forms a consonance rhyme with “pick” because they both start with the letter “p.” “Pot” also forms a consonance rhyme with “flit” because both words end in the letter “t.” A consonance rhyme creates the least amount of closure. Snoop Doggy Dogg’s “Who Am I (What’s My Name)” (1993) uses a consonance rhyme in the following excerpt:

“Like I said, niggaz can't fuck with **this**
And niggaz can't fuck with **that**
shit that I drop cuz ya know it don't stop
Mr. One Eight Seven on a motherfuckin’ cop”

Note how each pair of lines is connected with a rhyme. The first two lines (this/that) are connected with a consonance rhyme and the last two lines are connected with perfect rhyme at the end of each line (stop/cop). This particular excerpt also makes use of internal rhymes. The words “fuck” in the first two lines are connected by rhyme as is the word “drop” to “stop” and “cop” in the third and fourth line.

Consonance rhymes can be used in consort with other rhyme types to create multiple connections in the same text. One example of this is Chamillionaire’s “Ridin’” (2005) which makes use of several kinds of rhymes and rhyming patterns. Notice that the first two lines of text below are connected with a consonance rhyme (Bone/babies).

“Girl you ain't know, I'm crazy like Krayzie **Bone**

Just tryin to bone ain't tryin to have no **babies**

Rock clean itself so I pull in ladies

Laws of patrolling you know they hate me”

The consonance rhyme is not the only way these lines of text are connected. The use of the word “Krazie” (the penultimate word in the second line), forms an additive/subtractive rhymes with the last word in lines two, three, and four (Krazie/babies/ladies/me).

“Girl you ain't know, I'm crazy like **Krayzie** Bone

Just tryin to bone ain't tryin to have no **babies**

Rock clean itself so I pull in **ladies**

Laws of patrolling you know they hate **me**”

Other rhymes include the perfect rhymes of “crazy” and “Krayzie” in the first line and the use of the word “bone” in the first and second line. Clever lyricists can create rhyme schemes imbued with multiple kinds of connections.



 More Closure Less Closure 	Perfect Rhyme (ex. “June/soon”)
	Family Rhyme (ex. “tip/pick”)
	Additive/Subtractive Rhyme (“chunky/hunk”)
	Assonance Rhyme (ex. “call/pawn”)
	Consonance Rhyme (ex. “pill and pole”)

Figure 91 Types of rhymes and their degree of closure

Writing Exercise:

Incorporating the various types of rhymes takes practice. Being comfortable with the different ways of lyrical lines can open up unexpected expressive possibilities. Try

experimenting with rhyming by filling in the blank spaces in the table below. The first row is already completed.

	PERFECT	FAMILY	ADDITIVE/ SUBTRACTIVE	ASSONANCE	CONSONANCE
Gun	Fun	Hum	Bunny	Rug	Brown
Top					
Lip					
Damn					
Love					

Figure 92 Rhyming exercise

Connecting Meter and Rhyme

For a song to be effective, the meter and the lyrics must work in consort with one another. The natural pulse of the music and the natural flow of the words should support one another and contribute to the groove of the song. The success of the lyrics and the music are dependent upon one another. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) observed “Lyrics can make or break a great melody” (p. 111)

Just as the subdivision of the beat is the smallest rhythmic unit determining the meter of a song, (see discussion of meter in chapter 2), the smallest rhythmic unit of

language used in music is the syllable. Pattison (2007) noted that to “understand lyric rhythm, we have to understand its basic building blocks, syllables” (p. 19). She later adds “a syllable is usually made up of one vowel sound and one or more consonant sounds” (p.19). The exception to this rule (one syllable per vowel sound) is the diphthong. Diphthongs are words with two vowel sounds adjacent to one another. For example, the word “high” is a monosyllabic word using the “I” and “E” vowel sounds. In music, diphthongs may be treated as a monosyllabic word or a multisyllabic (more than one syllable) word.

In the natural use of language, some syllables have more stress than others. This provides a natural cadence to one’s speech. Consider the following lines that are part of a well-known children’s song.

“Twinkle, twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are”

Every other syllable gets slightly more stress when one speaks or sings these words. One way of graphically representing this pattern of alternate stresses is as follows:

TWINKle TWINKle Little STAR
HOW I WONder WHAT you ARE

Figure 93 Stressed and unstressed syllables in “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”

What figure 5.3 lacks in subtly, it (hopefully) makes up for in clarity. All verbalized language has a natural cadence to it. The best songs incorporate that cadence in a way that enhances and heightens the musical experience.

Single syllable words (also called monosyllabic words) can be stressed or unstressed. Their level of stress is dependent upon the context in which they appear. In the aforementioned example, the monosyllabic words “I” and “you” are unstressed. The monosyllabic words “star,” “how,” “what,” and “are” are stressed. The flexibility of monosyllabic words can be a great boon to songwriters working within a particular musical context.

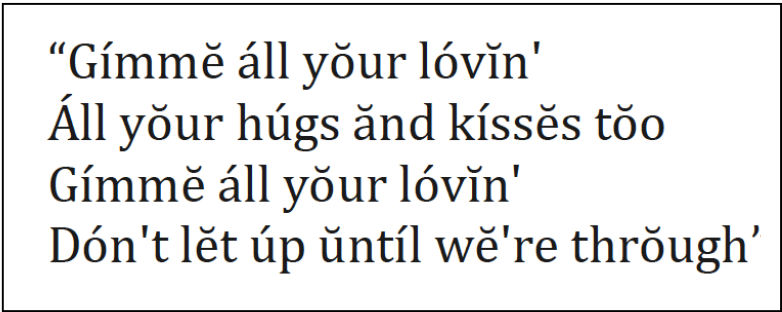
When speaking or singing words with multiple syllables (multisyllabic), some syllables inherently have a natural stress. Consider the word “music.” The first syllable has a natural stress to it; **Mu**-sic. This type of stress can be indicated with a kind of symbol called a “diacritic.” In this case, a slash called an “acute accent” indicates a stress and is marked like this; “**Músic.**” Non-stressed syllables can be marked with a symbol called a “breve.” Adding a breve allows the meter of this two-syllable word to be marked like this; “**Músĭc.**”

Some multisyllabic words have secondary stresses that can be marked with a double acute accent. The double acute accent consists of two acute accent marks. All three symbols can be used to analyze the meter of a four-syllable word like “intonation.” In this case, the word would be marked thusly; “**íntõna”tíon.**”

Let's look at an example. Consider the song mentioned in chapter 2, "Gimme All Your Lovin" by ZZ Top (1981). The lyrics in the chorus are

"Gimme all your lovin'
All your hugs and kisses too
Gimme all your lovin'
Don't let up until we're through"

When diacritic marks are placed over the words to indicate stresses, a general pattern emerges that alternates between stressed and unstressed syllables.



"Gímmě áll yǒur lóvĭn'
Áll yǒur húgs ănd kíssēs tōo
Gímmě áll yǒur lóvĭn'
Dón't lět úp ũntíl wě're thrŏugh'

Figure 94 ZZ Top's "Gimme All Your Lovin'" with diacritic stress markers

The pattern of alternating between a single stressed syllable and a single unstressed syllable strongly suggests that the lyrics belong in a song with a simple metric subdivision (in this case, simple quadruple meter).

Lyric	Gím	mě	áll	yöur	lów	ǐn'		
Metric Count	One	and	two	and	three	and	fou	and

Lyric	Áll	yöur	húgs	ǎnd	kís	sěs	töö	
Metric Count	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and

Lyric	Gím	mě	áll	yöur	lów	ǐn'		
Metric Count	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and

Lyric	Dón't	lět	úp	ǔn	tíl	wě're	thröugh	
Metric Count	One	and	two	and	three	and	four	and

Figure 95 Lyrics in the chorus of “Gimme All Your Lovin’” with metric count

It is also important to note that in this excerpt, most of the odd beats (beats one and three) are punctuated by a plosive consonant. Most contemporary popular songs are in quadruple meter and liberally use plosive consonants on the odd-numbered beats. This helps reinforce the meter of the music and co-align the sound of the lyrics with the metric pattern of the rhythm.

When lyrics follow the general pattern of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, this suggests that the music will have a compound subdivision or be

in simple triple meter. Consider the following lyrics from Eminem's "Won't Back Down" (2010), which is marked with diacritic symbols to show the pattern of stresses.

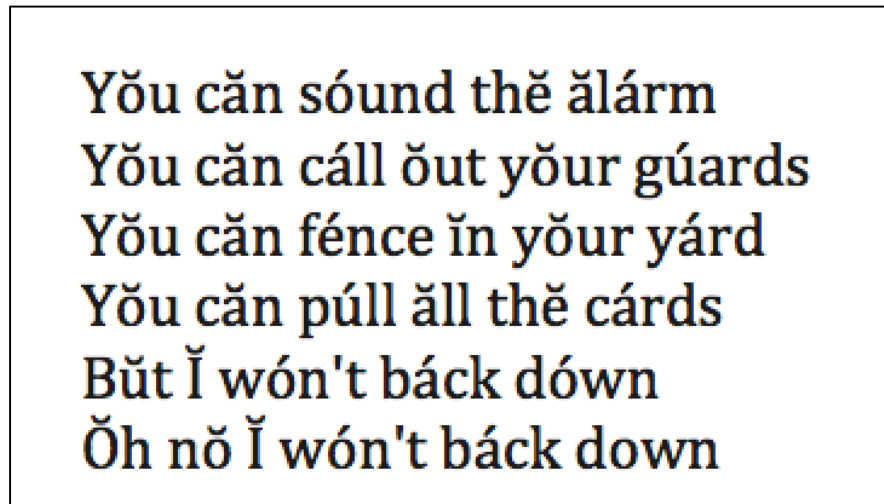
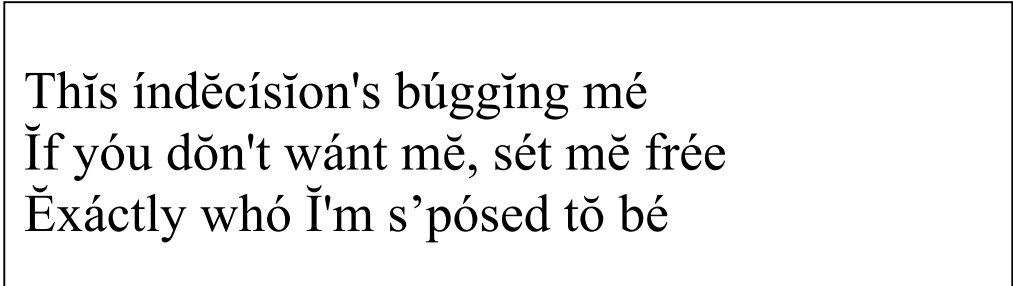


Figure 96 Eminem's "Won't Back Down" (2010) with diacritic stress marks

This song is in compound quadruple meter, and the stressed syllables in the lyrics align with the rhythmic beats of the song. The unstressed syllables articulate the subdivision of the beat.

also perceived as disingenuous and inauthentic. Pattison (2009) noted “If the rhyme appears too obvious, the listener is more likely to doubt that what we’re saying is true” (p. 33).

The use of regular metric patterns creates a sense of expectation in the listener that can be thwarted for emotional impact. One example of this is The Clash’s “Should I Stay or Should I Go” (1981). The third verse begins with the following three lines:



Thĭs ĩndĕcĭsĭon's bŭggĭng mĕ
Ĭf yŏu dŏn't wănt mĕ, sĕt mĕ frĕe
Ĭxăctly whŏ Ĭ'm s'pŏsed tŏ bĕ

Figure 98 The Clash’s “Should I Stay or Should I Go” (1981) with diacritic stresses

Given the pattern, we have every reason to expect that the fourth line will follow this metric and rhyming pattern. Instead, the lyric thwarts convention in three significant ways:

1. The natural emphasis of the speech pattern is distorted so that the musical stress falls on the “wrong” syllable. When speaking the following words, the natural stress of the lyric suggests a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables as follows;

Dŏn't yŏu knŏw whĭch clŏthes ĕvĕn fĭt mĕ?

Rather than adopt this formulation, The Clash articulate the metric pattern of the lyric thusly:

Dõn't yóu knõw which clõthes évẽn fít mě?

The stress on the words “you” and “which” instead of “know” is surprising because this setting mixes up the natural expectation of stressed and unstressed syllables. The result is an awkward, ill-fitting setting of the words in conflict with the established pattern in the first three lines.

2. The line of text adds an additional syllable that moves the perfect rhyme on to an unstressed syllable. This is in variance with the established pattern in the first three lines.

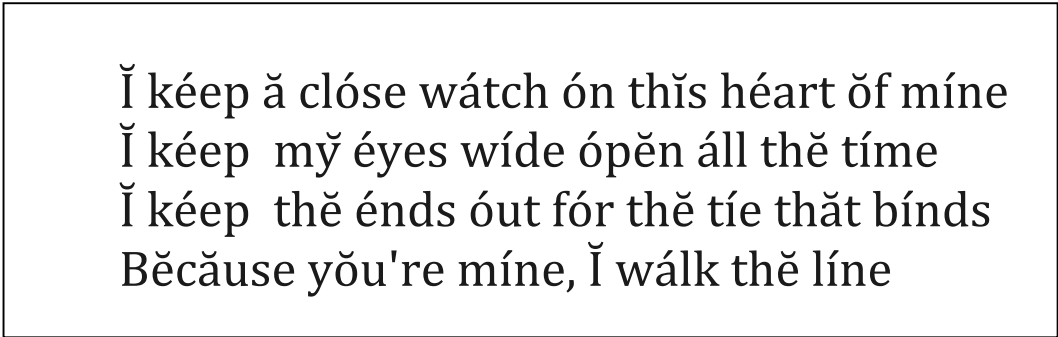
3. The metric pattern is distorted. The first three lines of the third verse (and all the previous verses) articulate a pattern using three pairs of syllables alternating between an unstressed syllable and stressed syllable. This occurs three times until the end of the lyrical line ends which concludes two unstressed syllables. The fourth line of the text deliberately breaks with this convention. In lieu of a single, final weak syllable, this line concludes with a stressed and unstressed syllable.

Why break a pattern that was working perfectly well? In this case, one must consider the meaning of the words. These lyrics are about feeling like a misfit. The context of the “wrong” rhyming pattern reinforces the meaning of the text. Here, manipulating the listener’s expectations (which are informed by the conventions of rhyme and meter) help communicate the artists’ feelings and adds to the expressiveness

of the song.

Divergent Patterns: Syncopated Rhythms

In most songs, each line of text corresponds to a consistent amount of music. Generally, one line of text corresponds to two, four, or eight bars of music. This is reinforced by the rhyme scheme that connects the last word in each line. For example in the song “Walk the Line” by Johnny Cash (1956), each line of text corresponds to two bars of music and the rhyming words are placed at the end of each line. Musically, all of the rhymes occur in the same part of the beat:



Ĭ kēep ă clōse wáтч ón thĭs héart ǒf míne
Ĭ kēep mŷ éyes wíde ópĕn álł thĕ tíme
Ĭ kēep thĕ énds óut fór thĕ tíe thăť bĭnds
Běcăuse yǒu're míne, Ĭ wáłk thĕ líne

Figure 99 Johnny Cash’s “Walk The Line” (1959) with diacritic stresses

Some songwriters break with this convention by placing rhymes in unpredictable places. Because they don’t always occur regularly at the end of a musical phrase, they create a metric pattern in conflict with the meter of the music. This can generate some exciting tension between the regular pattern of the music and the irregular pattern of the lyrics. Consider the following lyrics for “Night of the Living Baseheads” by Public Enemy (1988).

“Here it is, bam!

And you say, Goddamn

This is the dope jam”

In this excerpt, the connections in the text are defined by the placement of the perfect rhymes (bam, Goddamn, and jam). In context, it is important to note how these lyrics fit into the rhythmic scheme of the music. They rhymes are clear, but they are placed in unpredictable places in the music. Chuck D (the rapper) stresses the rhyming words to reinforce their relationship, but he is also creating a pattern that plays against the meter of the music. The rhymes come in unexpected places, thereby creating some very exciting tension in the music.

Lyric			Hěre		ĩt	
Metric Count	Four	e	&		uh	

Lyric	ís						Bám						In	your	face	
Metric Count	One	e	&	uh	Two	e	&	uh	Three	e	and	uh	Four	e	&	uh

Lyric		God	dámnn				Thĩs	ĩs		thě	dőpe	jám				
Metric Count	One	e	&	uh	Two	e	&	uh	Three	e	and	uh	Four	e	&	uh

Figure 100 Public Enemy’s “Night of the Living Baseheads” (1988) with metric count

Rhymes do not need to line up in expected places to be compelling or to be connected. In fact, the unpredictable rhyme placement is a wonderful tool to help keep lyrics from being boring and obvious.

Rhythmic Structure

The placement of rhymes in song lyrics depends a great deal upon the music with which it is paired. Stolpe (2007) noted “musical phrases are markers that suggest where rhymes fall” (p. 44). Most popular music incorporates phrases falling into four-line and six-line patterns with each line is determined by the presence of a rhyming pattern.

Four-Line Structures

Four-line structures are the most common in popular music. They are ubiquitous in many musical genres, and can be heard in well-known material like “Jingle Bells” (Pierson, 1857)

Dashing through the snow
In a one-horse open sleigh
O'er the fields we go
Laughing all the way!

In this case, the first and third lines are connected through a perfect rhyme (snow/go). Since these lines are connected, we can label them with the letter “A.” The

second and fourth line are also connected through a perfect rhyme (sleigh/way), but the rhyme is different from that used in the first and third line.

Thus, we could show a connection by labeling them with the letter “B”.

Once labeled, the rhyming structure of this four-line excerpt would look like this:

Dashing through the snow (A)

In a one-horse open sleigh (B)

O'er the fields we go (A)

Laughing all the way! (B)

This four-line section of “Jingle Bells” has a structure of ABAB. This is one of the five most common structures for four-line structures. These structures include AAAA, AAAB, XAXA, ABAB, AABB. The use of these structures provides opportunities for a lyricist to finish an idea, or suggest to the listener that more information is coming. This is often referred to as “closure.” Different rhyming patterns imply varying degrees of closure. A good songwriter can fine-tune the sense of closure in the lyric through the selection of different types of rhymes.

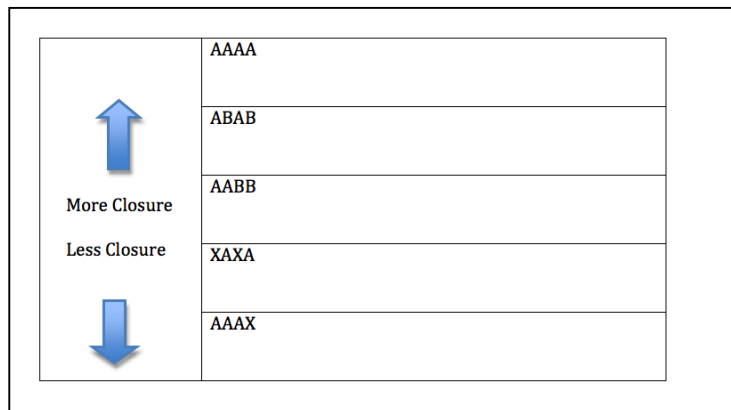


Figure 101 Four-line rhyme structures and their relative degrees of closure

AAAA Structure

Songs that use the AAAA structure have a rhyme at the end of each line. Johnny Cash's "Walk The Line" (1957) uses this structure

I keep a close watch on this heart of mine (A)

I keep my eyes wide open all the time (A)

I keep the ends out for the tie that binds (A)

Because you're mine, I walk the line (A)

The regular and more predictable aspects of this rhyming pattern provide a very strong sense of closure. This makes it most appropriate for songs that have a verse-only form. It is common for the last line to reappear throughout the song, be synonymous with the title, and function as a hook, as it the case for "Walk The Line."

ABAB Structure

The ABAB structure provides a strong and satisfying degree of closure with both the odd numbered lines rhyming and the even number of lines rhyming. Dire Straits' "Brothers in Arms" (1985) uses this structure.

Now the sun's gone to hell **(A)**

And the moon riding high **(B)**

Let me bid you farewell **(A)**

Every man has to die **(B)**

Because this structure includes a rhyme in every line, it can be challenging to use and still sound natural and authentic. To compensate for this, songwriters who use this structure often incorporate many different kinds of rhyme to give them more flexibility in their choices of words. In this following two stanzas (also in the ABAB structure) from Ryan Adam's "Gimme Something Good" (2014), Adams incorporates one perfect rhyme (talk/walk) and three assonance rhymes (blank/say, see/here, rise/tide) to tie the form together. The use of the assonance rhyme lessens the degree closure relative to songs using perfect rhymes in this structure (such as "Brothers in Arms").

I can't talk **(A)**

My mind is so blank **(B)**

So going for a walk **(A)**

I've got nothing left to say **(B)**

I can't see (A)

The darkness on the rise (B)

I'll be waiting here (A)

Until the under tide (B)

AABB Structure

The AABB structure (like the ABAB structure) has two pair of rhyming lines. However, in this case, the structure is bifurcated by having the first two lines of text connected by rhyme and the last two lines of text linked by rhyme. An example of this structure is "Ice Ice Baby" by Vanilla Ice (1989).

All right stop, Collaborate and listen (A)

Ice is back with my brand new invention (A)

Something grabs a hold of me tightly (B)

Flow like a harpoon daily and nightly (B)

The repeating pattern of rhyming couplets results in a satisfying is somewhat predictable rhyming pattern with a strong degree of closure.

XAXA Structure

The XAXA structure is a close cousin to the ABAB structure. Closure is provided by the connection of the odd numbered lines of text. However, the even lines do not have

a rhyming relationship. Because of this, letter “X” represents these lines. Incorporating text unbound by the need to rhyme can free the songwriter to express himself/herself. It also diminishes the degree of closure. “Rappers Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang (1979) incorporates this structure.

See, I am Wonder Mike (X)

and I'd like to say hello (B)

To the black, to the white, the red and the brown, (X)

The purple and yellow. (A)

AAAX Structure

Songs that use the AAAX structure have an open-ended quality since the connection of the last line of text to the rest of the material is tenuous. This rhyming scheme is almost always used in for the verse of a song using a verse/chorus structure since the open-endedness of the form implies another formal section like a pre-chorus or chorus is on the way. This structure does not create a strong sense of closure within the four-line stanza. An example of the AAAB structure is Carly Rae Jepsen’s “Call Me Maybe” (2012)

I threw a wish in the well (A)

Don't ask me I'll never tell (A)

I looked at you as it fell (A)

And now you're in my way (X)

Songs that use this structure often have a rhyming connection between final lines that tie different four-line stanzas together. Van Stephenson's "Modern Day Delilah" (1984) exemplifies this connection. Note that in addition to the "shears/years/dears" rhyme in the first stanza, the word "touch" and "much" which conclude each stanza are perfect rhymes and tie both four-line stanzas together. The unification of the two stanzas significantly increases the sense of closure.

She's a wizard with her shears (A)

She's been turning heads for years (A)

All the darlings and the dears (A)

Say she's got the touch (X)

An exclusive clientele (A)

Oh she knows each one so well (A)

No one dares to kiss and tell (A)

She knows too much (X)

This structure works well when a song's lyric portrays a single individual or event since the rhyming scheme binds multiple four-line stanzas together. It is less effective in

songs where each stanza is an independent chapter of a story or stands alone in other significant ways.

Six-Line Structures

Another structure used in popular songs involves six lines of text and are called “six-line structures.” Stolpe (2007) noted that these structures are “used in popular songs over and over again” (p. 46).

AABCCB Structure

The most common six-line structure has a rhyming scheme of AABCCB. Tim McGraw’s “Somethin’ Like That” (1999) exemplifies this structure.

I had a barbecue stain on my white tee shirt **(A)**
She was killing me in that mini skirt **(A)**
Skippin' rocks on the river by the railroad tracks **(B)**
She had a suntan line and red lipstick **(C)**
I worked so hard for that first kiss **(C)**
And a heart don't forget something like that **(B)**

When using this structure for the chorus, the third and/or sixth line (labeled with the letter “B”) frequently contains the title and/or the lyrical hook of the song. This is especially true when this structure is used in the chorus of a song. Both conventions are the case

with “Somethin’ Like That.” It is also the case in Brooks’ and Warren’s “That’s Amore” (1952)

When the moon hits your eye (A)

Like a big pizza pie (A)

That’s amore (B)

When the world seems to shine (C)

Like you’ve had too much wine (C)

That’s amore (B)

AABBCC Structure

Bob Merrill’s “Mambo Italiano” (1954) exemplifies another six-line structure commonly used popular song lyrics. In this form, every two lines are connected by a rhyme. This structure began to fall out of fashion by the 1960s, but may hold interest for songwriters interested in referencing a “classic” sound.

Hey gumba (A)

I love a how you dance rhumba (A)

But take a some advice paisano (B)

Learn how to mambo (B)

If you gonna be a square (C)

You ain't a gonna go nowhere (C)

While the AABCCB structure and the AABBBCC structure are the most common six-line structures used in popular songs, other combinations are not only possible, but can be powerfully expressive. For example, Chris Brown's "Love More" (2013) uses an AAAABB structure with the first four lines connected through the utilization of an assonance rhyme and the last two lines connected through the use of a family rhyme. The uneven phrase lengths and asymmetrical pattern highlight the imbalance and instability in the relationship being described.

You say all you need is consistent love (A)

When I try I swear it's never enough (A)

I messed up (A)

Maybe this thing here just ain't meant for us (A)

Baby you let go, And I'll pull you back (B)

I let go, You ain't having that (B)

Not all songs will incorporate conventional four-line or six-line structures. Whitesnake's "Here I Go Again" (1982) uses very unconventional and asymmetrical rhyming schemes reinforcing the lyrical theme of being lost and "searching for an answer."

Tho I keep searching for an answer (X)

I never seem to find what I'm looking for (X)

Oh Lord I you give me the strength to carry on (X)

Cause I know what it means (A)

To walk along the lonely street of dreams (A)

Writing Exercises: Incorporating Structure

It may take some practice before writing with these lyrical structures becomes comfortable. Below are some open-ended lyrics that could begin a song's verse or chorus. Choose three that appeal to you. Use these lines in complete stanzas that incorporate two of the four-line structures and one of the six-line structures.

1. "The love you gave was never free"
2. "The music carries me away"
3. "My eyes on the road and my mind on you"
4. "Get up and dance!"
5. "Living in your world just isn't enough"
6. "Your breath on my skin makes my heart skip a beat"
7. "I'm lookin' fine and so are you"
8. "This old tractor's my best friend"
9. "Check it, check it, check it out"
10. "Holding you while holding on"

Songwriting Lyrics and Structure

As with all songwriting conventions, lyrical patterns inform the listener's expectations and can be used to help an artist express themselves by fulfilling those expectations or thwarting them for dramatic and/or expressive effect.

Each formal section of a song serves a different function that is reflected in the musical and lyrical content. Often, the chorus is the first part of a song to be written. It is usually tied to the title and summarizes the song's theme. (Peterik, Austin, and Lynn, 2010). Stolpe (2007) noted "the function of the chorus is to give every tiny, experiential detail purpose and value" (p.76). Most choruses are summative and built around a catchy lyrical hook. This hook usually appears at the end of the chorus (Bergman, 2012).

Verses function as a way to introduce important ideas to the listener (Pattison, 1991). It pulls the listener in and reveals additional, important information during each subsequent verse. This is where listeners will be drawn into the drama of the lyric, a process central to the appeal of the song and one ideally happens very quickly. Peterik, Austin, and Lynn (2010) note that the verse should express the concept of the song and that the opening line opening line of a song is "all important" (p. 120).

Transitional sections like Middle Episodes and Pre-Choruses offer opportunities to sum up, comment upon, or offer contrasting material to the verse and chorus. If the verse and chorus would not benefit from additional commentary, a transitional section is not necessary. Middle Episodes and Pre-choruses, while common, are not prerequisites for a successful pop song.

CONCLUSION

Facilitating creative, higher order thinking in the context of post-secondary general education is the goal of this method. Engaging the creative process is not always that easy for instructors or learners. Webster (1990) noted that teaching “convergent factual information about music in conventional ways is relatively easy,” but “teaching for divergent, imaginative thinking is hard work that requires careful planning and innovative techniques. (p. 21). The explanations and lessons presented in this method are designed as an instructional tool to help with that hard work. The method encourages both divergence and imagination through the study of formal and structural conventions in pop songwriting. The conventions explored include those related to melody, harmony, rhyme, hooks, and form.

Unlike educational paradigms that dominate post-secondary general education requiring short-term, rote memorization, the creative process facilitates higher order thinking skills applicable in many contexts. Root-Bernstein (2001) noted “creative thinking is trans-disciplinary and transferable from one field to another” and that pattern-recognition, imaging, analogizing and analysis is central to both the process of musical composition and the scientific method (p.64). It is precisely this kind of thinking that educators reference when they discuss the “habits of mind” fostered by arts education (Pogonowski, 1989; Woodford, 1996). The process of composing a song by integrating

smaller units (such as verses, hooks, and choruses) into a larger, coherent work such as a song is not dissimilar to other intellectual, scholastic, and creative endeavors.

Understanding the conventions of cultural forms (like songwriting) and the ways artists knowingly digresses from those conventions is central to understanding “meaning.” This is true of music, dance, literature, sculpture, visual art, fashion, film, and any other form of artistic expression.

Providing learners effective tools to engage the creative process of songwriting is integral to the educational process. Composer and educator Dana Wilson (2001) observed that one “way to get students started is to provide certain material and limit the parameters of other materials that they may use...Often, the more a teacher limits the parameters, the more interesting the ideas that students generate” (p. 29). This method has limited the parameters of songwriting by explaining the compositional process relative to formal conventions associated with mainstream popular music of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Divergence from convention is encouraged as an expressive device, but always relative to the listener’s expectations informed by formal conventions appropriate to the genre.

The tension between convention and innovation is at the heart of the creative process. Lapidaki (2007) commented on this dichotomy in observing “Most composers need to build on musical material of the past, in order to produce a new and personal style. Thereby the past is seen as being comprised by a static system of rules and techniques that needs to be innovated and emancipated during the composer’s search for their own musical identity” (p. 102). Even The Beatles, arguably the most influential and

innovative popular music ensemble of the twentieth century, were cognizant of past conventions even as they created new material. In Lennon and McCartney, the band had two of the finest songwriters in history at their disposal. And yet, their first album, *Please Please Me* (1963) contained 14 tracks, almost half of which were cover songs.

Recent developments in technology are opening up new possibilities for music education. Randals and Sullivan (2013) observed “music education might be best served by embracing all areas that computers can augment” (p. 56). The ubiquity of free and inexpensive Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) opens up new creative opportunities, for learners. This is especially true for those without the benefit of formal musical training. It is not necessary for songwriters to read or write traditional music notation in order to create beats, melodies, hooks and chord progressions. Furthermore, access to a professional recording studio is not a pre-requisite for creating high-quality original songs. Songwriters can compose complete songs on a laptop or tablet.

A complete analysis of all popular music forms, types of hooks, and rhyming schemes is beyond the scope of this method. Rather, the goal is presenting enough information about songwriting conventions to help learners create their own original materials. Wilson (2001) noted “As with finger painting, students do not have to be given a lot of instruction before they can begin to combine sounds and decide what works and what doesn’t work for them” (p.33). With musical composition, context is central to the decision-making process about “what works.” An essential grounding about the history and conventions of form, melody, harmony, hook usage, and rhyming schemes are part

and parcel to the creative songwriting process. This method codifies that context in a systematic manner.

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BIOGRAPHY

Double Bassist, composer, author, and educator Mark Elliot Bergman is currently the Director of Strings at Sheridan College in Sheridan, Wyoming. In addition to leading the strings program, he teaches music history, composition and directs the Sheridan College Viol Consort. Mark is a former faculty member and ensemble director at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia where he lead M3E, the Mason Modern Music Ensemble. An active orchestral bassist, Mark served as the Principal Double Bassist of the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra, National Philharmonic Orchestra, Fairfax Symphony Orchestra, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, and the Mato Grosso Chamber Orchestra in Cuiaba, Brazil. Mark spends his summers performing with the Britt Festival Orchestra in Jacksonville, Oregon and with Assisi Performing Arts in Assisi, Italy.

In 2006, Mark founded Virginia Virtuosi, a string trio dedicated to innovative chamber music programs and arts education. The ensemble maintains a very active performing schedule and won the first Yale University Alumni Ventures Award in 2008. Fairfax Connections recently cited the trio for “turning classical music cool.” The ensemble receives support from the Virginia Commission for the Arts to tour statewide and has performed regionally at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Corcoran Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art, George Mason University, Montgomery College, and other venues. Mark also has extensive experience performing klezmer music throughout the Northeast. He recorded for Mel Bay Publications and his performance on the CD companion to Mel Bay’s Easy Klezmer Tunes has been described as “world class.”

Mark’s compositions are published by Recital Music. His orchestral works have been performed by the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, Mato Grosso Chamber Orchestra, Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, Virginia Virtuosi, and other ensembles. He received the 2011 Strauss Fellowship from the Arts Council of Fairfax County supporting the creation of Shenandoah Suite, a string trio commemorating the 75th anniversary of the founding of Shenandoah National Park. He was a winner in the second British International Bass Forum Composition Contest (2002) and the Kappa Gamma Psi Composition Contest (1990).

Cognella Academic Press published Mark’s book *In The Groove: Form and Function in Popular Music* in 2012. Mark also created extensive supplemental learning resources for music textbooks issued by Oxford University Press. He regularly appears as a double bass recitalist and lecturer at academic conferences and reviews manuscripts and submissions for *American String Teacher* and the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.