

What Makes a Good Song?

Exploring Popular Songs



A. Form and Structure in Pop Songs

FORM AND STRUCTURE – the different sections of a piece of music or song and how they are ordered.

INTRO – The introduction sets the mood of a song. It is often instrumental but can occasionally start with lyrics.

VERSES – Verses introduce the song theme. They are usually new lyrics for each verse which helps to develop the song's narrative, but the melody is the same in all verses.

PRE-CHORUS - A section of music that occurs before the **CHORUS** which helps the music move forward and "prepare" for what is to come.

CHORUS – All the choruses have the same lyrics. This section relays the main message of the song and this part of the song is repeated identically each time with the same melody and music (although this sometimes changes key –

MODULATES – before the **CODA**) - which mean "changes key" to add drama!

MIDDLE 8/BRIDGE – This section adds some contrast to the verses and choruses by using a different melody and chord progression.

Sometimes the Middle 8/Bridge features an **INSTRUMENTAL SOLO** – Solos are designed to show off an instrumentalists' skills. Rock, jazz and blues often feature solos on instruments such as piano, saxophone, guitar and drums.

CODA/OUTRO – The final section of a popular song which brings it to an end (Coda is Italian for "tail"!)

B. Typical Pop Song Structure

INTRO
VERSE 1
VERSE 2
CHORUS
VERSE 3
CHORUS
BRIDGE/
MIDDLE 8
CHORUS
CODA

C. Key Words

MELODY – The main tune of a popular song, often sung by the **LEAD SINGER** or sometimes played on instruments within the band *e.g.* **LEAD GUITAR**. A melody can move by **STEP** using notes that are next to or close to one another this is called **CONJUNCT MOTION**, or a melody can move by **LEAPS** using notes that are further apart from one another which is called **DISJUNCT MOTION**. The distance between the lowest pitched and highest pitched note in a melody is called the **MELODIC RANGE**.

CHORD – A group of two or more pitched notes played at the same time.

BASS LINE – The lowest pitched part of a song, often performed by bass instruments such as the **BASS GUITAR**. The bass line provides the harmonies on which the chords are constructed.

ACCOMPANIMENT – Music that accompanies either a lead singer or melody line – often known as the "backing" – provided by a band or **BACKING SINGERS**.

LYRICS – The words of a song performed/sung by the singer or backing singers.

TEXTURE – Layers of sound combined to make music – in a pop song this could be the bass line, chords and melody.

HOOK - A 'musical hook' is usually the 'catchy bit' of the song that you will remember. It is often short and used and repeated in different places throughout the piece.

RIFF – A repeated musical pattern often used in the introduction or in the **MIDDLE 8/BRIDGE** or **INSTRUMENTAL SOLOS** of a song. **RIFFS** can be rhythmic, melodic or lyrical, short and repeated.

D. Instrumentation (What instruments are used in a popular song)



Pop Bands often feature a **DRUM KIT** to provide the rhythm along with **ELECTRIC GUITARS** (**LEAD GUITAR**, **RHYTHM GUITAR** and **BASS GUITAR**) and **KEYBOARDS**. Sometimes **ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTS** are used such as the **PIANO** or **ACOUSTIC GUITAR**.



ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTS are often found in pop songs such as the **STRINGS**, **SAXOPHONE**, **TROMBONE** and **TRUMPET**. Singers are essential to a pop song - **LEAD SINGER** – Often the "frontline" member of the band (most famous) who sings most of the melody line to the song. **BACKING SINGERS** – Support the lead singer providing **HARMONY** and don't sing all the time but just at points within a pop song.