



# Pop music from the 1950s to the present day

## WHAT IS POP?

'Pop music' has become an umbrella term for a huge range of musical styles. The term 'pop music' is simply short for 'popular music'. As we will see, a lot of very different styles of music have been popular at different times.



## Post-World War Two

**Western popular music of the post-Second World War era was dominated by ballads and sentimental songs by artists such as Bing Crosby, Perry Como and Frank Sinatra.**

Many of these artists were also actors and television personalities, and their soft and wholesome **crooning** helped to transport American and European families traumatised by war to a safe, familiar place.

The youth of the early 1950s didn't connect with this kind of music. When rock 'n' roll appeared in the mid-1950s, young people embraced the rebellious nature of the music and dance moves. The fact that rock 'n' roll was heavily influenced by black **rhythm and blues** music made it even more exciting and rebellious for white teenagers, who lived in a racially divided society.

### Post-1950s

**Rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, and even country music - all from America - have had a huge influence on the popular music that we listen to today.**

The 1960s were defined by the melodic pop of artists such as The Beatles and The Beach Boys; the 1970s introduced more experimental music from the likes of Led Zeppelin and David Bowie, alongside highly commercial groups like ABBA and



The Jackson 5. The 1980s introduced **sampling** and popularised synthesisers and drum machines. The 1990s saw a large number of dance music and hip hop artists, whose music often relied heavily on sampling. By this time, most music involved computers in the recording process. Technology developed further throughout the 2000s, with music producers just as likely to use sampled and synthesised sounds as live instruments, and many pop vocalists relying on **auto-tune** to perfect their singing.

## Technology

**Music and recording technology changed dramatically over the latter half of the 20th century.**

Initially record producers and artists had to record entirely live performances, because they only had one track to record on. The introduction of **multi-tracking** meant that producers could record voices and instruments separately, giving them much greater flexibility. Also, the individual volumes and effects used on those instruments could be altered after they had been recorded. This transformed pop music recording, making it a much longer and more detailed process. The Beatles' first album, *Please Please Me* (1963) was recorded in one day, while modern pop albums take months, sometimes years, to record.

## Focal points

**This Area of Study focuses on the following four styles:**

- Rock 'n' roll of the 1950s and 1960s
- Rock anthems of the 1970s and 1980s
- Pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s
- Solo artists from 1990s to the present day.

For each of these genres, you will be expected to know the names of major artists and bands and the context in which the music was written, as well as having a general overview of the changing nature of song structure, and how the popular music industry grew.

You will not know in advance which songs will come up in your exam. However, the 'Practice Listening Grid' (page 52) and the sample questions in this chapter should give you a guide as to the kind of answers you will be expected to write.

# Rock 'n' roll of the 1950s and 1960s

Here are three examples of the distinctive sound of rock 'n' roll:

- Elvis Presley: 'Hound Dog' (1956)
- The Beatles: 'Twist And Shout' (1963)
- The Beach Boys: 'Surfin' USA' (1963)

## The launch of rock 'n' roll

When the film *Rock Around The Clock* hit cinemas across America and Europe in 1956, the style of music engaged the teenage generation like no other music had done before.

The older generation considered the genre controversial: after the squeaky-clean ballads of the 1930s and 1940s, the lyrics and dance moves were seen as raunchy and sexualised. Rock 'n' roll targeted the teenage generation, who were trying to distinguish themselves from their parents.

Rock 'n' roll music combines elements of rhythm and blues music and aspects of country music, essentially combining the music of the black and the white American populations. **Rhythm and blues** brought an edgy sound (drums and electric guitars) to popular music. Although Bill Haley And His Comets' *Rock Around The Clock* attained mass appeal, it was certainly not the first rock 'n' roll hit. (*Rocket 88*, released by Jackie Brenston in 1951, is often cited as the first.)

Bill Haley And His Comets



## Musical features of rock 'n' roll

- Rhythmic drive and energy
- **Swing** or boogie-woogie rhythm
- Emphasis on **primary chords**
- Often **12-bar blues** chord structure
- **Walking bass line** (played by bass guitar or pizzicato double bass)
- Instrumental solo section
- Beats 2 and 4 emphasised by the snare drum (**backbeat**)
- Intense, 'shouty' vocals (e.g. The Beatles' 'Twist And Shout').

The instruments often used in rock 'n' roll are:

- Electric and/or acoustic guitar
- Double bass (or bass guitar)
- Drum kit
- Piano
- Saxophones, though they were less popular after the 1950s
- Lead vocals, sometimes accompanied by backing vocalists singing in close harmony.

## Elvis Presley: 'Hound Dog'

'Hound Dog' was first recorded in 1952 by 'Big Mama' Thornton. The song and her performance were heavily influenced by blues music.

The original lyrics are about a 'hound dog' - a waster boyfriend - who is about to be kicked out. Elvis Presley's version of the song, recorded in 1956, sold around 10 million copies globally.

### ELVIS PRESLEY FACT FILE

- Born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi
- Attended church regularly as a boy, sang a lot of gospel music
- Had numerous hits including 'Heartbreak Hotel', 'Love Me Tender', and 'Blue Suede Shoes'
- Notorious for his hip-swivelling and provocative dance moves.

## SWING

In jazz and rock 'n' roll, the quaver notes are often **swung**. These means that the first quaver in a pair is always longer than the second, creating an unequal rhythm (similar to, but not the same as a dotted rhythm).



Musical elements  
and devices

## Features heard in 'Hound Dog'

Instruments and  
timbre (acoustic  
and electric)

- Lead singer (Elvis Presley)
- Backing vocals
- Upright bass (Bill Black)
- Electric guitar (Scotty Moore)
- Drum kit (D. J. Fontana)
- Hand claps.

Pitch and melody  
(including bass  
lines and riffs)

- The bass line is based on the triad of the relevant chord and is **syncopated**, which contributes to the rhythmic drive:



- The vocal melody is limited to a small range of notes. Much of it involves repeated notes.
- The guitar solos mix together chords and a solo melody line. Other features include: improvisation; lots of repeated notes and **licks**; fast notes; starting at a low pitch and then moving high.
- On the upbeat before the final chord, there is a chromatic chord, a semitone above the tonic. This is a very familiar blues ending.

## Rhythm and metre

- $\frac{4}{4}$ , swing rhythm
- The drummer emphasises beats 2 and 4 (backbeat)
- You will hear a repeated, syncopated clapping riff throughout:



## Tempo

The tempo is fast, designed to get people onto the dance floor.

## Texture

Melody and accompaniment.

- Notice how the guitar drops out for line two in every verse, and provides interjecting quavers only before returning for line three.
- In the instrumentals, when the guitar takes the solo line, backing vocal 'aahs' (in three parts) are added to fill in the chords.
- All accompaniment stops after the final 'you ain't ever caught a rabbit', before they come crashing back in to close the song.

**Structure and phrasing**

- Each verse is based on the 12-bar blues chord sequence
- There are only really two verses:

**Verse 1:** 'You ain't nothin' but a hound dog, crying all the time.'

**Verse 2:** 'They said you was high classed, but that was just a lie.'

**Verse 1 repeat**

**Instrumental:** solo guitar and close-harmony backing vocals.

**Verse 2 repeat**

**Instrumental:** solo guitar and close-harmony backing vocals.

**Verse 2 repeat****Verse 1 repeat**

- There is a drum roll and a stop between each of the verses.

**Harmony and tonality**

This song uses primary chords of I, IV and V. As this is a blues, the key is effectively major, although you'll often hear the minor 3rd and flattened 7th in the vocal and guitar parts.

**Dynamics, expression and articulation**

- Elvis sings in a raspy, gospel style, perhaps referencing Mama Thornton's original recording of the song.
- The dynamics remain largely the same throughout the song.

**Repetition, ostinato and sequence**

- As with many 12-bar blues songs, the first two lines of each verse are nearly identical, with the third being different.
- Ostinato rhythms appear in the bass and claps, which provide the rhythmic energy of the song.

**Technology**

**Overdrive** and echo effects are used on the electric guitar, creating a very distinctive rock 'n' roll sound.

**TECHNOLOGY USED IN ROCK 'N' ROLL**

- Electric guitars (and sometimes electric bass guitar) played through amplifiers.
- Guitar amplifiers were often overdriven (effectively turned up too loud) to create a slightly distorted sound.
- Very basic technological effects: the only common effects were **reverb** and **echo**.



Elvis Presley, also a successful actor, was known as 'The King of Rock 'n' Roll'

## Suggested performing ideas

**Get into a small groups of around three to five players. Use the following materials to create a 12-bar blues performance.**

**Include:**

- Chords (repeated swung quavers as in *Hound Dog*)
- Bass line (see next page)
- Melody

1. Sing a well-known 12-bar blues rock 'n' roll song over the top (e.g. 'Hound Dog' or 'Johnny B. Goode').
2. Using the blues scale, improvise some solos over the 12-bar blues. Take one line each! You will find that the notes of the blues scale will fit over all of the chord sequence.



**Chord sequence and bass line:**

The musical notation shows a walking bass line in 4/4 time across three staves. The first staff is for a C major chord (C, E, G, Bb, C), the second for an F major chord (F, Ab, C, Eb, F), and the third for a G major chord (G, Bb, D, F, G). The bass line consists of crotchets moving up the scale of each chord, including the 7th note.

This is a typical walking bass, where the bass player moves in crotchets, starting on the root note of the chord and moving up the chord, including the 7th. This is a typical feature of many rock 'n' roll songs. All of the chords can be played as 7th chords.

**Blues scale in C:**

The blues scale in C is shown on a single staff in treble clef. The notes are C, Eb, F, Gb, G, Bb, C, each with a chord symbol below it.

The Beatles recorded several cover versions of rock 'n' roll songs.



## The Beatles: 'Twist And Shout' (1963)

'Twist And Shout' was first successfully recorded by the Isley Brothers in 1962, and covered by The Beatles in 1963. The song is available on the Beatles album *Please Please Me*.

John Lennon sang lead vocals and had a cold at the time of recording. The producer (George Martin) knew that the song, which was at the top of Lennon's vocal range, would make Lennon's voice suffer, so he left the song until last, with only 15 minutes of recording time remaining. The result was a memorable vocal performance, raw and raucous.

### BEATLES FACT FILE

- British pop/rock group originating from Liverpool who shaped the course of rock 'n' roll and inspired countless pop and rock musicians.
- The band members were: John Lennon (singer, guitarist), Paul McCartney (singer, bassist), George Harrison (guitarist, backing vocalist) and Ringo Starr (drummer).
- The Beatles were songwriters as well as performers – their inventive, often experimental songs moved rock music away from the simplicity of blues towards a more complex style that often involved unusual harmonies, rhythms and instrumentation.
- Famous albums include *Please Please Me*, *Help*, *Rubber Soul*, and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The music charts different periods within the band's history, reflecting the ever-changing style of the band's music.

### Comparison: 'Twist And Shout' vs. 'Hound Dog'

#### Similarities

- Both songs use only three chords.
- Both songs have electric guitar solos.
- The instrumentation is very similar (both use drum kit, electric guitar, lead and backing vocals).

#### Differences

- 'Twist And Shout' is based on the repeated chord sequence D-G-A, rather than a 12-bar blues sequence.
- In 'Twist And Shout', the harmony backing vocals are much more prominent. They imitate the lead vocals after every line, singing in 3rds.
- Unlike the improvised guitar solos in 'Hound Dog', the instrumental break in 'Twist And Shout' contains a guitar riff over the D-G-A chord sequence.
- After the instrumental break in 'Twist And Shout', the band prepares for the verse by singing a sustained chord on the dominant 7th, which culminates in some shouts and whoops.



## The Beach Boys: 'Surfin' USA' (1963)

The lyrics to 'Surfin' USA' were written by Brian Wilson but set to the music of 'Sweet Little Sixteen', written by Chuck Berry.

It was first recorded by the Beach Boys and released as a single in March 1963. The song has come to represent both the sound and lifestyle of California in the 1960s.

Structure	Highlights
<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A short introduction on the electric guitar before the lead vocal enters.</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 1</b> ('If everybody had an ocean')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The drum kit plays a backbeat, the guitar provides the chords and the backing vocals sing 'oohs' in three parts. This accompaniment (apart from the bass drum) stops every bar to let the solo voice stand out. All the vocalists sing the final line, 'surfin' USA'.</li> <li>■ The bass riff comprises notes of the triad in crotchets.</li> </ul>
<b>Chorus 1</b> ('You'd catch them surfin' at Del Mar')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The chorus uses the same chord sequence as the verse. The backing vocals change, singing the repeated line 'inside, outside USA'.</li> <li>■ Now that the accompaniment is playing continuously, the chorus has more rhythmic energy and drive. In the penultimate line ('Everybody's gone surfin'...'), the vocal melody rises as Brian Wilson then takes the lead, using his falsetto range to sing this phrase.</li> <li>■ The chord sequence is based mainly on chords I and V, with one move to chord IV.</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 2</b> ('We'll all be planning that route')	As above.
<b>Chorus 2</b> ('Haggerty's and Swami's')	
<b>Instrumental break (the length of one verse)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The organ plays a solo, most of which is syncopated and chordal. The electric guitar takes over from the organ for what would be the final two lines of the verse, using notes from the blues scale.</li> </ul>
<b>Repeat to fade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 'Everybody's gone surfin', surfin' USA.'</li> </ul>

## BEACH BOYS FACT FILE

- American rock and pop band formed in 1961 in California.
- The group were seen to represent Californian youth culture, and the lyrics of their early songs were almost exclusively about surfing, cars, girls and dancing.
- The Beach Boys' style can be characterised by its catchy melodies, close-harmony vocals (influenced by doo-wop and barbershop groups), detailed production and inventive arrangements.
- Singer, songwriter and bassist Brian Wilson was the creative force behind the band and was very keen to introduce new instruments and recording techniques.
- Famous hits include 'Good Vibrations', 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' and 'God Only Knows'.

## Use of technology

Reverb and overdrive (a more subtle type of distortion) has been added to the electric guitar – this is most noticeable during its solos. Also, the lead and backing vocals are double-tracked. This means that the singers recorded two identical versions of their parts, making the vocals sound richer.

### FURTHER LISTENING

- Little Richard: 'Tutti Frutti' (1955)
- Bill Haley And His Comets: 'Rock Around The Clock' (1954)
- Ritchie Valens: 'La Bamba' (1958).

## TEST YOURSELF

### Roll Over Beethoven

Listen to Chuck Berry singing 'Roll Over Beethoven' from 0:00–0:48.

1. In which decade was this music written? (1)  
i. 1930s    ii. 1950s    iii. 1970s    iv. 2000s
2. The chord sequence used is typical of this style. Give the name of this chord sequence. (1)
3. Give two features of the instrumental introduction that are typical of this style. (2)
4. Give the name for the bass line that is typical of this style. (1)

See answers on page 176.



# Rock anthems of the 1970s and 1980s

**With its roots in rock 'n' roll, rock music broke away from more conventional pop music and became a genre in its own right, with darker, more serious lyrics and a heavy emphasis on the electric guitar.**

Rock music is viewed as a more serious genre than regular pop music, and to some extent was a protest against commercialised pop music. However, rock music soon became extremely popular and commercially successful – in the 1970s, rock music dominated the music industry, and 'stadium rock' groups like Led Zeppelin, Kiss and Queen played to huge audiences around the world.

**Key features of rock anthems from the 1970s and 1980s:**

- Most rock music is in  $\frac{4}{4}$  time, with a heavy backbeat.
- Instruments usually included electric guitar, electric bass, drums, keyboards and vocals.
- Distorted electric guitars, using additional effects such as **delay**, chorus and wah-wah.
- The rise of the guitar hero – guitarists who combined playing riffs with long, virtuosic, improvised solos.
- Although there is much more emphasis on instrumental sections, songs often follow a conventional verse-chorus structure.
- Lyrics have a darker mood than standard pop music lyrics.

Rock music soon splintered into a number of smaller sub-rock cultures, including psychedelic rock, heavy metal, folk rock, progressive rock, and many more.

## BLUES INFLUENCE

Rock music has been heavily influenced by blues music – just listen to the famous riff from Cream's 'Sunshine Of Your Love' or Jimi Hendrix soloing on 'Hey Joe' and you'll hear rock music's debt to blues music.

## WHAT IS AN ANTHEM?

The use of the term 'anthem' here is comparable with its use in the phrase 'national anthem': a song or piece of music that stirs the listener's emotions and even inspires them to join in.

Rock anthems often have memorable (and sometimes repetitive) melodies and lyrics, especially during the chorus. The very simple chorus to Queen's 'We Will Rock You' was written specially for fans to sing along to during concerts.

## QUEEN FACT FILE

- British rock band formed in London in 1970.
- Original members: Freddie Mercury (lead vocals, piano); Brian May (guitar, vocals); John Deacon (bass guitar); and Roger Taylor (drums, vocals).
- The band's earlier works were influenced by progressive rock and heavy metal, but eventually the band moved to more conventional and radio-friendly songwriting.

## Queen: 'We Will Rock You' (1977)

Listen to 'We Will Rock You', which was recorded for Queen's album *News Of The World*. It was released as a single, together with 'We Are The Champions', and the two songs are often played in succession.

The song has some very distinctive features:

- Until the final 30 seconds where the guitar solo begins, the song only features vocals, accompanied by a simple rhythmic ostinato performed by members of the band stamping and clapping. **Delay** has been added to the percussive sounds to create a whole chorus of clamps and stamps.
- The simple rhythmic ostinato was written so that the audience could participate.



- The structure is a verse-chorus form, with solo vocals in the verse and the backing vocals singing the famous chorus.
- The vocal melody uses a lot of repeated notes, and focuses on quite a small range (the interval of a 5th). The chorus melody is very simple and therefore easy to remember.
- You can hear the guitar play a sustained pedal note (E) in the chorus before it comes in, using **feedback** from the amplifier.
- The electric guitar is heavily distorted, an effect caused by **overdriving** the amplifier.



## Bon Jovi: 'Livin' On A Prayer' (1986)

The song is about a fictional couple (Tommy and Gina) who struggle with their relationship and find it difficult to make ends meet.

This song was written during the era of President Ronald Reagan (Republican president of the USA from 1980–88), and the lyrics are partly a protest on behalf of the American working classes.

### BON JOVI FACT FILE

- American rock band from New Jersey, formed in 1983.
- Core members were Jon Bon Jovi (lead vocals, rhythm guitar) and Richie Sambora (lead guitar, backing vocals).
- Richie Sambora is famous for using a talk box – an effects unit that directs sound from an instrument into a musician's mouth (via a tube), allowing the player to create 'vocalised' sounds from their instrument.

#### Musical elements and devices

##### Pitch and melody (including bass lines and riffs)

#### Features heard in 'Livin' on a Prayer'

- The opening riff, performed on a guitar **talk box** (see description above) has become iconic and makes the song instantly recognisable:



- The chorus melody is extremely high in the male range, especially after the **modulation**, resulting in a more abrasive, intense performance.

##### Rhythm and metre

- Heavy backbeat.



- Some drum fills, leading into a change of section
- Unexpected  $\frac{3}{4}$  bar during the modulation.

**Texture**

- Mostly melody and accompaniment, although the introduction builds up the texture, starting with a sustained keyboard chord, followed by bass guitar and finger cymbals, before the drum kit comes crashing in, along with the guitar riff.
- The texture varies between the verse, bridge, and chorus. You can hear how the keyboard changes from repeated quavers in the verse to crotchets in the bridge.
- A harmony backing vocal joins in the bridge, followed by several backing vocals in the chorus.

**Structure and phrasing**

This song is in a typical verse-chorus structure, with a bridge section before the chorus.

- Intro
- Verse 1
- Bridge 1 'She says we've gotta hold on...'
- Chorus 1
- Link (2 bars)
- Verse 2
- Bridge 2
- Chorus 2
- Guitar solo
- Middle eight ('We gotta hold on ready or not...')
- Modulation to final choruses, now transposed up a minor 3rd.

**Harmony and tonality**

- The overall tonality and 'feel' of the verse is (E) minor.
- The overall tonality of the chorus is major. While it starts on an E minor chord, the other chords used here are the primary chords of G major (the relative major of E minor).
- At the end of the third bridge section, the music modulates and the final chorus begins in a higher key (B $\flat$  major) - a typical feature of pop music.

**Repetition, ostinato and sequence**

- Repeated phrases include the bass and guitar riffs, repeated chords in the keyboard, and the C-D-E minor chords at the end of the phrases.

**Technology, including amplification and recording techniques**

- The use of technology is crucial to the sound of the guitar riff. This explains the 'ooh waa ooh waa' effect.
- The guitars are heavily distorted.
- Almost all instruments have reverb applied to them.



## Guns N' Roses: 'Sweet Child O' Mine' (1987)

Listen to Guns N' Roses, 'Sweet Child O' Mine'. This song contains one of the most famous guitar riffs in popular music.

It features on the band's debut album *Appetite For Destruction*, and was released in 1988 as a single. It became the band's first and only No. 1 US single.

Guitarist Slash's riff apparently has its roots in a 'string-skipping' exercise that he devised; it has since become one of rock music's most recognisable riffs.

### GUNS N' ROSES FACT FILE

- American rock band formed in 1985 in Los Angeles.
- The core members of the band were: Axl Rose (lead vocals) and Slash (lead and acoustic guitar).
- The band has released six studio albums to date, with sales of over 100 million records worldwide.
- Famous tracks include 'November Rain', 'Paradise City', and 'Patience'.

### Notable features of the song

'Sweet Child O' Mine' has several interesting features:

- All of the guitars are tuned down one semitone - the band play as if the song is in D major, but because of the detuning, the resulting key is D $\flat$  major. This is fairly common in rock music.
- The song is essentially in verse-chorus form, but there are several guitar solo sections, as well as extended intro and outro sections.
- The outro section (where we hear the lyrics 'Where do we go...?') is in a different key to the rest of the song (E $\flat$  minor).
- There are several tracks of guitars that have been recorded via multi-tracking, including a **chorus-effected** electric guitar part in the verses and an acoustic guitar, which plays during the instrumental breaks.



Improvised electric guitar solos are an important feature of rock anthems

**FURTHER LISTENING**

- Queen: 'We Are The Champions' (1977)
- Van Halen: 'Runnin' With The Devil' (1978)
- AC/DC: 'Highway To Hell' (1979)
- Bryan Adams: 'Summer of '69' (1984)
- Europe: 'The Final Countdown' (1986).

**TEST YOURSELF****'Layla'**

Listen to the following two extracts:

**Extract A:** Derek and the Dominos, 'Layla' (0:00–1:00) from the album *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*

**Extract B:** Eric Clapton, 'Layla', from the album *Unplugged* (0:00–1:15)

Using the grid below, give differences and/or similarities for each feature as it is used in both extracts.

<b>The tempo and rhythm</b>	(2 marks for any comparison, only award 1 for statements)	(2)
<b>The pitch</b>	(2 marks for any comparison, only award 1 for statements)	(2)
<b>The guitar part</b>	(2 marks for any comparison, only award 1 for statements)	(2)

See answers on page 176.

**COMPARING MUSIC**

When asked to compare extracts, use comparative language, e.g. 'Extract B is slower/faster'. Or connect two statements, e.g. 'Extract B is slow, whereas Extract A is fast'.



# Pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

**The first form of ballad was a folk song - a story sung to a simple melody - but it is now better known as a sentimental, popular song. The pop ballad of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is usually a slow song, with sentimental or romantic lyrics.**

## Key features of the pop ballad

- Usually in  $\frac{4}{4}$ ; slow tempo.
- Verse-chorus structure.
- Often (but not always) includes piano or electric piano.
- Sustained 'lush' chords in the instrumental accompaniment.
- Drum pattern usually accents beats 2 and 4 on the snare drum.
- Opportunities for the vocalist to express emotion through **rubato**, ornamentation and melisma.
- The lead singer often provides ornamentation and melisma at the climax of the song.
- Harmonic language strays a little beyond the primary chords but it remains firmly in the key. **Inversions** of chords are popular, which often create descending and rising bass lines (by step).
- A typical ballad usually increases in instrumentation and dynamics, arriving at a climax during a 'big' chorus or an instrumental section.
- Sentimental or romantic lyrics.
- There is often a lot of reverb added to the lead and backing vocals, especially in ballads from the 1980s.

## CHORD INVERSIONS

Any note from a chord can be played as the bass note of that chord. For example, a C major chord (notes: **C E G**) can have an **E** in the bass (chord: **E G C**), or a **G** in the bass (chord: **G C E**). These different 'inversions' have a specific character, and they can also help to make a smoother transition between chords.

## Bette Midler: 'Wind Beneath My Wings' (1988)

- This version of the song was recorded for the soundtrack to the film *Beaches*. (It is available on numerous Bette Midler compilation albums.)
- The use of the electric piano and the heavy use of reverb is typical of pop music of the 1980s.

Structure	Highlights
<b>Intro</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Opens with a syncopated melody on an electric piano.</li> <li>■ Vocalist enters with a short, possibly improvised phrase.</li> <li>■ A soft roll on the cymbals with brushes leads us into the first verse. This is a popular feature of the pop ballad.</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Legato vocal melody.</li> <li>■ An electric piano accompanies the solo voice, playing chords.</li> <li>■ The drum kit plays quietly. The 2nd and 4th beat are emphasised on the hi-hat (played with brushes).</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 2</b> 'So I was the one...'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sustained (synthesised) strings join the accompaniment.</li> </ul>
<b>Chorus 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Backing vocals enter and sing sustained chords.</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental break</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The syncopated motif from the intro is played here again.</li> <li>■ As well as a crescendo into Verse 3, a drum fill leads us into the next verse.</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The drums play a backbeat, with the snare doubled by a tambourine.</li> <li>■ The bass guitar also enters.</li> </ul>
<b>Chorus 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The synth strings play a <b>countermelody</b> at a higher pitch than in Verse 2.</li> <li>■ Midler begins to vary the vocal melody.</li> </ul>
<b>Chorus 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Midler changes the melody significantly in terms of rhythm and pitch, soaring to the top of her range in order to convey the climax of the song.</li> </ul>

## Elton John: 'Candle In The Wind' (1973)

This song was written in memory of Marilyn Monroe, and was adapted for Princess Diana's funeral in 1997.

We will be focusing on the original version, available on the compilation album *Rocket Man*:

### TEST YOURSELF

#### 'Candle In The Wind'

The structure is as follows:

Intro

Verse 1

Chorus 1

Instrumental break

Verse 2

Chorus 2

Instrumental break

Verse 3

Chorus 3

1. Write down the instruments you hear accompanying each section in the table above.
2. Describe how the instrumentation of the accompaniment develops throughout the song.

See answers on page 177.



## Take That: 'Back For Good' (1995)

Written and co-produced by Gary Barlow, 'Back For Good' was released in 1995 as the second single from the album *Nobody Else*.

### MIDDLE EIGHT

The middle eight is nominally an eight-bar section found between the middle and end of a song (often just before the final chorus). It serves to break up the verse-chorus structure. The chord sequence is usually different from the verse or the chorus. Beware that the 'eight' is just an approximation - in this song it lasts for 10 bars!

### Features of this song

- Written in a verse-chorus structure, with a **middle eight** just before the final chorus.
- Two acoustic guitars strum during the introduction, with sustained strings accompanying.
- Barlow takes the lead vocals, with the rest of the band on backing vocals.
- The verses are accompanied by a piano, guitar chords and drum kit.
- The synth strings enter in the bridge before the chorus (0:42).
- Backing vocals enter in the first chorus (0:52) with 'oohs' and short phrases: 'Want you back, want you back, want you back for good.' The final phrase is harmonised.
- Whilst the instrumentation is stripped back again for the second verse, the backing vocals sing in this verse, unlike the first verse.
- In the second chorus, the backing vocals introduce a countermelody which features later on again, in the final chorus, when the lead and backing vocals swap their roles (3:15).
- There is a short **rit.** (slow-down) at 2.46 before the final chorus.
- As the song progresses, the sustained strings become higher in pitch - a typical device to build up the song and stir the emotions!

### FURTHER LISTENING

- Simon & Garfunkel: 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' (1970)
- Lionel Richie and Diana Ross: 'My Endless Love' (1981)
- Billy Joel: 'And So It Goes' (1989)
- Richard Marx: 'Right Here Waiting' (1989)
- Eric Clapton: 'Tears In Heaven' (1991)
- Bob Dylan: 'Make You Feel My Love' (1997)
- Celine Dion: 'My Heart Will Go On' (1997).

## TEST YOURSELF

### 'She's Always A Woman'

Listen to Billy Joel: 'She's Always A Woman' (1977) 0:00-1:29.

1. 0:00-0:30 (Verse 1):

Identify the instruments **i.** and voices **ii.** in this verse and describe their roles:

**i.** \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

**ii.** \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

2. Compare the features of the piano part in the first verse and second verse (0:31-0:56). (2)
3. Which instruments join in Verse 2? (2)
4. Which instrument plays in harmony with the lead singer from 0:56-1:29? (1)
5. Give three features you can hear which are typical of a pop ballad:

**i.** \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

**ii.** \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

**iii.** \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

See answers on page 177.