

Teaching guide: Area of study 2 – Pop music

Introduction

This resource is a teaching guide for Area of Study 2 (Pop music) for our A-level Music specification (7272).

In the listening part of the exam students will be tested on their recognition of musical elements heard in unfamiliar music from this Area of study.

In the essay part of the exam students will be required to answer **one** question, focusing on the work of **two** of the named artists. Students will always be able to choose which artists to write about, but they will usually be expected to make detailed reference to at least two contrasting examples of their work. The 'suggested listening list' is exactly what it says; students and their teachers are encouraged to use the list as a starting point from which to build a small library of recordings which they know well and can recall and write about convincingly in the exam.

Familiarity with the styles of **all** the named artists is needed for the listening questions, but it is envisaged that detailed study of particular pieces could be limited to two or three artists in preparation for the essay section.

Glossary

The list below includes terms found in the specification, arranged into musical elements, together with some examples.

Melody

Riff/ostinato

A riff is repeated melodic and/or rhythmic pattern, often found in the bass line. The term 'riff' is synonymous with 'ostinato', though the former is more usually applied in pop and jazz styles. A riff will normally be short; perhaps 1-4 bars in length. Many pop songs rely heavily on riffs, such as 'Superstition' by Stevie Wonder. The genre of funk often uses riffs in multiple layers over each other.

Pitch bend and glissando/slide

The technique of glissando is literally, sliding from note to note, so that the pitch rises or falls in a completely smooth line. The trombone, operated by slide, is obviously capable of a very effective glissando, as are fretless string instruments. Glissando on the guitar is perfectly possible with the finger sliding up or down the fretboard, often producing a slightly uneven effect as the finger slides across the frets. On other wind instruments, a combination of embouchure and throat control, gradual uncovering of tone holes (clarinet, saxophone) or half-valving (trumpet) can overcome the fact that pitches are normally produced in discrete semitones. On keyboard instruments, a glissando is essentially a very rapid scale, usually executed using a sweeping gesture with the fingernail. Glissando in the bass synthesizer can be heard very clearly near the start of Stevie Wonder's 'Maybe Your Baby'.

Pitch-bend is related to glissando and consists of moving away from and then usually back to the original pitch of a note using a small-scale glissando; typically a pitch-bend will cover a small interval (anywhere between microtones and minor thirds). On the

guitar, this effect can be produced by pulling the string with the fingers of the left hand. On a modern electric keyboard or synthesizer, pitch-bend can be controlled using a dial, wheel or toggle.

Melisma/syllabic

In vocal music there is a distinction between different kinds of word-setting. Most of the time, each syllable of the lyric will be sung to a separate note; this is called syllabic setting. Sometimes, for a more expressive effect, a syllable may be extended over several notes; this technique is called melisma. Melisma is a feature of much slow, expressive vocal music, but is especially typical of contemporary R&B, where performers often improvise elaborate, usually descending, melismas at the end of a phrase. An impressively virtuosic rising melisma can be heard at the start of Beyoncé's song 'Countdown'.

Hook

A hook is a memorable melodic fragment, used to capture (or 'hook') the listener's attention. An excellent example would be the two-bar sampled instrumental riff used in Beyoncé's 'Crazy in Love'.

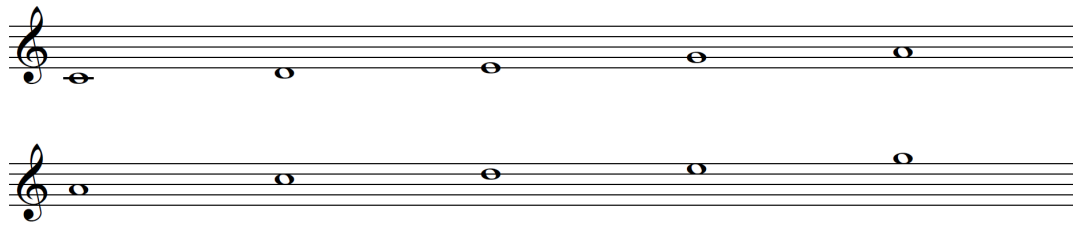
Blue notes and the blues scale

One theory for the origin of 'blue notes' is that a distinctive style of vocal music developed in the southern USA as the descendants of the black slave population sang improvised melodies using the 'minor' version of the pentatonic scale against harmony that was essentially major. The resulting mixture of different chromatic versions of the same scale degrees – major/minor 3rd and major/minor 7th – sounded particularly expressive and came to be associated with the genre of blues. Hence the flattened 3rd and flattened 7th came to be known as 'blue notes'. These may be flattened by a full semitone, or sometimes by smaller intervals ('microtones'), making them all the more expressive because not 'in tune' in the conventional sense. Jazz musicians used the flattened 5th a similar way. The combination of these phenomena into a scalic shape is known as a 'blues scale'.

Harmony and tonality

Pentatonic scale

As the name suggests, this is a five-note scale, usually found in the form C D E G A ('major' form) or A C D E G ('minor' form). This scale is found in ancient societies all over the world. It plays a vital part in the origins of western popular music because it is present both in the folk traditions of Western Europe and in those of West Africa, from where millions of people were transported to the New World to work as slaves. The blues and early jazz styles which developed in America evolved from pentatonic melody. The scale was originally used in music that is primarily melodic rather than harmonic in conception and it does not contain any of the semitones which help define tonality in the major/minor system.



Modes

Modes are alternative scale formations to the standard major and minor scales of western classical music. The seven modes (see illustration) have been used and written about since ancient Greek times and were the principal method of categorising melody in the medieval period. Each of them corresponds to a 'white note' scale on a keyboard, thus they have the same notes as a C major scale, but because they each have different 'tonics', they have different patterns of tones and semitones. These patterns may be transposed to start on any note, thus it is possible to use, for example, a Lydian mode on C, which would consist of the notes C D E F# G A B.

The Dorian and Aeolian modes are closely related to the minor pentatonic scale as they use the minor 3rd and minor 7th. They are both frequently encountered in European folk music and in blues-influenced music, and therefore common in pop melodic styles. Songs by Stevie Wonder in the funk genre often use the Dorian mode transposed up a semitone to E flat (e.g. 'Superstition', 'I Wish'). The vocal melody of Beyoncé's 'Crazy in Love' is essentially in the Dorian mode.

The seven principal modes, showing the position of semitones:

Ionian mode (= major scale)

Dorian mode

Phrygian mode

Lydian mode

Mixolydian mode

Aeolian mode (= natural minor scale)

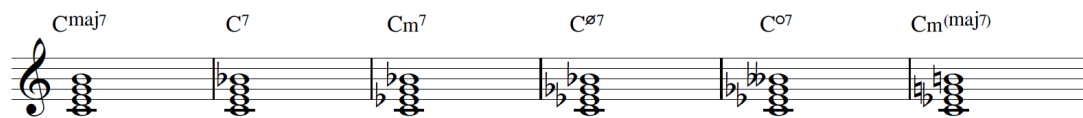
Locrian mode

Chord extensions and additions

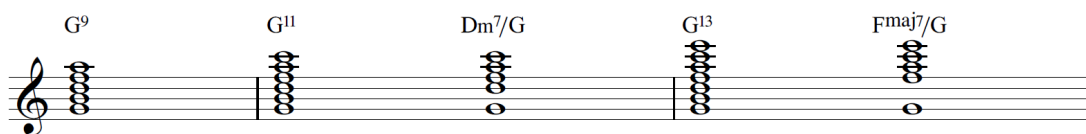
Pop music encompasses a very wide spectrum of levels of harmonic complexity. Many pop songs rely on a restricted and simple chord vocabulary; perhaps only the three primary triads (I, IV and V). However, some artists enjoy working with an enriched palette of sounds, often drawing on influences from jazz and classical music.

The addition of notes to a triad (or exchange of certain notes for others) is an important way of generating a variety of different harmonic 'colours' without changing the function of the chord root. Sevenths are extremely common extensions of triads; for example, a twelve-bar blues progression using chords I, IV and V will often turn each of these chords into a 'dominant 7th' by placing a minor 7th above the major triad.

Various types of added 7th chords with their common notation. Left to right: major seventh, dominant 7th, minor 7th, half-diminished 7th, diminished 7th, minor triad with major 7th:

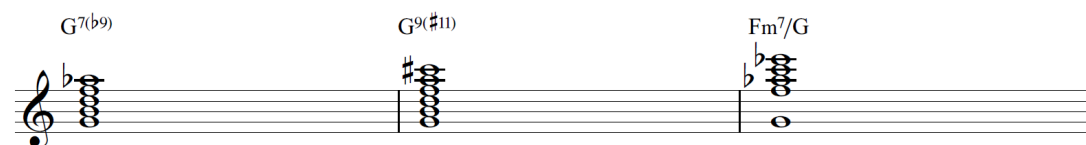


Further extensions of triads by placing additional thirds above the triad+7th are possible, creating progressively richer and more dissonant harmony; 9th, 11th and 13th chords are all commonly featured in jazz from a relatively early period. These higher discords are most characteristically heard over a dominant function chord; the additional notes create a further sense of tension which needs resolution through a cadence. The example below shows dominant 9th, 11th and 13th chords in the key of C major (i.e. rooted on G). For the 11th and 13th, it is common not to present the whole chord, thus avoiding the clash of a minor ninth between the 3rd (B in this case) and the 11th (C). This can lead to alternative methods of notation shown here; the 'D minor 7th over a G' is effectively an incomplete G¹¹ and likewise the incomplete G¹³ looks like 'F major 7th over G'. As long as the function is understood, jazz musicians tend not to be over-fussy about notation.



The chords are assumed to be diatonic unless an accidental (or a + or – symbol) is placed next to a particular figure.

Some common chromatic alterations. Left to right: a dominant 7th with flat 9th, a dominant 9th with sharp 11th, a dominant 7th with flat 9th and flat 13th.



For copious instances of the use of extended and altered chords, the output of Stevie Wonder in his 'classic period' can be recommended. The song 'You are the Sunshine of My Life' provides a concise example.

Pedal note

A pedal note is a repeated or sustained note in the bass, over which the harmony changes (which may produce dissonance in passing). The name comes from the bass register notes played by playing the pedal board on a pipe organ. A pedal note played at the top of the texture is called an 'inverted pedal' and one played in the middle of the texture an 'inner pedal' or 'internal pedal'. A clear example of a tonic pedal is heard at the start of 'Butterflies and Hurricanes' by Muse; the repeated octave Ds in the bass act as a tonic pedal, over which the chords change gradually through chromatic alteration.

Power chord

A power chord is one consisting only of the root and fifth; these notes may be doubled in higher octaves. This chord originates from guitar performance technique, especially of electric guitarists of the 1950s-1960s. The amplified sound of the open fifth and octave makes a very strong and simple sound, free of the complexities of higher overtones produced by major or minor 3rds; hence the name. As the lower strings of the guitar are tuned in 4ths, the chord is usually produced by playing the root on a fret of a lower string while the 5th and octave are played two frets higher on the next two strings up. They are an extremely common feature of guitar-based rock music. The chord symbol notation e.g. E⁵ shows that the 5th only (and not the 3rd) is to be used:



Sus4 chord

Another common chord type is produced by substituting a 4th for a 3rd in a triad; this is known as a sus4 chord, implying a relationship with the idea of a suspension in classical music, although there is no need to prepare or resolve the sus4 chord.



Structure

Verse and chorus

Much pop music is based on simple repetition of a melody with its accompanying chord progressions. A 'verse' is the unit of the lyrics sung to the same recurring melody. Some songs consist only of a string of verses, with different lyrics set to the same music; this is called 'strophic' form and may be represented as AAAA (etc.). Examples of this approach are often found in folk-like songs, such as 'The Priest' and 'Blue Boy' by Joni Mitchell.

A slightly more common structure is to alternate the changing lyrics of a verse with a recurring unit of lyrics called a 'chorus' which has its own music to contrast it with the verse. This can be represented as ABABAB (where A is the verse and B the chorus). A very straightforward example of this approach can be seen in Joni Mitchell's 'Big Yellow Taxi' in which the recurring lines 'Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone/They paved paradise/And put up a parking lot' are set to the same music at the end of each verse.

Intro/outro

Introduction has often been abbreviated to 'intro' and the term 'outro' has been coined to suggest a symmetrical balance and relationship between opening and closing sections.

The length and function of an introduction may be very varied; it may simply set up the chord pattern and rhythmic groove to be used in the song, as in Stevie Wonder's 'I Wish', or it may offer a complex, multi-layered soundscape, as in 'Knights of Cydonia' by Muse. The same may be said of an outro; a common feature is simply to fade out on a repeated riff, as in 'Get Lucky' by Daft Punk. Alternatively, a whole new world may open up in an extended coda, as happens in Muse's 'United States of Eurasia' whose conclusion quotes from Chopin's Nocturne Op.9 no.2.

Middle 8/bridge

The 'middle 8' is the B section in an AABA standard song form. Many songs follow this traditional pattern, in which each section is eight bars long.

The term 'bridge' is sometimes applied to this 'middle 8' though this is more common in jazz. In pop songs, 'bridge' is more frequently used to describe a section of music offering some contrast to the verses and choruses and is usually placed about three quarters of the way into a song. An example is the section beginning 'Don't treat me to these things of this world' in Beyoncé's song 'Single Ladies'.

Breakdown

A breakdown section is one in which the texture suddenly thins to just one or a few parts; for example, just the bass and/or drums or a vocal a cappella. A breakdown is often a feature of electronic dance music; an example is the section from about 1:05 to 1:35 in 'Aerodynamic' by Daft Punk, in which there is an extended electric guitar solo section based on a repeated riff.

Instrumental

Another way in which contrast can be created in a pop song is by dropping the voices out and letting the instruments take over the main melodic interest. This can take the form simply of the instruments playing the music of the vocal verses and/or choruses, as can be heard in c.2:20-2:40 in Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition'. Alternatively, it could be a whole new section with its own melody and character; a particularly dramatic example of this can be heard in 'Butterflies and Hurricanes' by Muse in which the passage from c.2:40-4:00 gradually evolves into a classical style piano cadenza.

In the context of a pop album as a whole, some artists like to include wholly instrumental tracks as a contrast; for example in Stevie Wonder's double album 'Songs in the Key of Life', the instrumental track 'Contusion' appears between the songs 'Village Ghetto Land' and 'Sir Duke'.

Break

A break is simply a short solo passage, usually for an instrument, which interrupts (or 'breaks') the textural flow of the music.

Drum fill

A particular type of break is often found at the end of a line of lyrics or of a section, in which the performer bridges over the gap between lines or sections with a short solo called a 'fill'. The drum kit is very often used to fulfil this function. A drum fill will often feature a very rapid and virtuosic succession of different drum sounds in a complex rhythm, driving the music forward to the start of the next section.

Tempo, metre and rhythm

bpm (beats per minute) and mm (metronome marking)

In pop music, especially that generated in a studio, it has become conventional to represent the tempo of a song using beats per minute. This contrasts with classical tradition, which tends to show tempo using an Italian description (such as 'allegro') and a metronome mark, which shows how many notes of a particular durational value (e.g. a crotchet/quarter-note) are played in a minute. Bpm is a more straightforward concept to understand for those who do not read music and it offers DJs a precise way of matching the beats of successive songs on a playlist.

Groove

It is a little difficult to define 'groove', but it is essentially the rhythmic 'feel' of a piece of music. This will relate to the kinds of rhythmic pattern (e.g. riffs) used but also to aspects of performance, for example whether quavers (8th notes) and/or semiquavers (16th notes) are swung or straight. 'Swung' refers to a pattern found in jazz from the early 20th century onwards in which pairs of equal notes are made slightly unequal by lengthening the first and shortening the second in relation to each other. Groove is a particularly important element in music which is rhythmically driven, such as funk, hip-hop and rock.

Backbeat

A backbeat is a feature of various types of popular music from the 1940s onwards. It consists of a strong accent on the 2nd and 4th beats of a 4/4 bar, which are classically thought of as the 'weak' beats. In pop music, the backbeat is often emphasised by a loud snare drum stroke on beats 2 and 4 (usually alternating with bass drum on beats 1 and 3).

Irregular metre

While the vast majority of popular music is written in 4/4, some musicians, especially those influenced by the 'progressive rock' movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, have experimented with asymmetrical or changing metres. In Stevie Wonder's 'Living for the City', the wordless interlude first heard at 1:10-1:25 includes several changes between 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 to bring some variety to the steady 4 in a bar of the verses.

Introduction to the named artists

For each artist, the following has been provided:

- a short biographical introduction
- select discography
- suggestions for related research topics
- a suggestion of a passage of their work to listen to and write about as an exercise in practising for the 10-mark unprepared listening questions on the exam paper; a commentary on the passage is provided.

Stevie Wonder

Life and career

Early years: Born Steveland Hardaway Judkins, 13 May **1950**, in Saginaw, Michigan USA. His mother was a songwriter. He was born prematurely and this led to the development of a condition which caused him to lose his sight.

In **1954**, Stevie's mother and father divorced; he moved to Detroit with his mother and took a new surname – Morris. Stevie learned several musical instruments including harmonica, piano and drums.

In **1961**, aged 11, he auditioned for Berry Gordy (CEO of the recording label Tamla) and was offered a recording contract. He was marketed as 'Little Stevie Wonder'. His royalties would be paid into a fund to which he would have access from the age of 21. He received an allowance of \$2.50 per day and his mother was paid expenses (including for a tutor).

Child star: Stevie was teamed with the producer and songwriter Clarence Paul. Two albums were recorded and several singles were released, but none did very well. In 1963, a live recording of a tour performance was released, including the track 'Fingertips', which made Stevie, at 13, the youngest person ever to have a no.1 single. He also made his film debut. His voice was beginning to change, which led to uncertainty over his future. However, he co-wrote and recorded many hits (e.g. 'Tears of a Clown' for Smokey Robinson, 'For Once in My Life', 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours').

The 'classic' period: A few important milestones coincided for Stevie; in 1970, he got married to the singer and songwriter Syreeta Wright, with whom he would collaborate on several songs; he turned 21 and allowed his contract with Tamla-Motown to lapse in order to assert his own independence.

Stevie Wonder's albums of this period (c.1970-79) are characterised by:

- A much stronger degree of control over all aspects of the music; Stevie wrote music and lyrics, sang and played many instruments and had a hand in production;
- A more unified approach to albums; not just a collection of singles, B-sides and covers;
- A desire to tackle contemporary social issues, especially to do with injustice related to race and class.

He won many awards and had many hits during this period, but he was also sometimes criticised for being difficult or pretentious. The major albums from this time frequently appear on top-100-of-all-time lists. He recovered from a serious car accident in 1973.

The ‘commercial period’ (1980-1990): Stevie Wonder was at the height of his fame at this time. This period was characterised by:

- A return to simpler hit-writing;
- Collaboration with many celebrity musicians – anyone from Barbra Streisand to Bruce Springsteen;
- High-profile charity work, especially helping the anti-apartheid movement.
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Later career (1991-now): His rate of output of new songs slowed down, but he continued to write, tour and lend his star quality to important causes.

Overview of albums

	Early period	Key singles/comments
1962	The Jazz Soul of Little Stevie	‘Fingertips’; material mainly by Clarence Paul and Henry Cosby
1962	Tribute to Uncle Ray	covers of Ray Charles songs
1963	With a Song in my Heart	covers of jazz standards
1964	Stevie at the Beach	covers of surfer songs, to tie in with beach movies
1966	Up-Tight	mix of covers and original songs; ‘Uptight (Everything’s Alright)’
1966	Down to Earth	mostly covers
1967	I was Made to Love Her	The title track was co-written with his mother (others mostly covers)
1967	Someday at Christmas	Christmas special...
1968	Eivets Rednow	Instrumentals; mix of originals and covers
1968	For Once in My Life	More original/co-written work by Wonder. 1 st use of Clavinet.
1969	My Cherie Amour	Title track is an original; mix of originals and covers
1970	Signed, Sealed & Delivered	Title track is an original; mix of originals and covers
1971	Where I’m Coming From	All songs by Wonder and Syreeta Wright; anticipates next period

	Classic Period	Key singles/comments
1972	Music of My Mind	All songs by Wonder/Wonder & Wright; Wonder plays most instruments
1972	Talking Book	Album charted at #3 and earned Wonder a Grammy; 'You Are the Sunshine of My Life', 'Superstition' both #1 singles
1973	Innervisions	Album peaked at #4, several hit singles: 'Living for the City', 'Higher Ground', 'Don't You Worry 'bout a Thing'
1974	Fulfillingness' First Finale	Album peaked at #1; hit singles include 'Boogie on Reggae Woman', 'You Haven't Done Nothin''
1976	Songs in the Key of Life	Ambitious double album, possibly his high-point; hit singles incl. 'I Wish', 'Sir Duke', 'Isn't She Lovely'
1979	Stevie Wonder's Journey through 'The Secret Life of Plants'	Unusual double album, which began life as soundtracks to a documentary; many purely instrumental tracks, with much use of synthesizers; not well received

	Commercial Period	Key singles/comments
1980	Hotter than July	'Master Blaster (Jammin')' was a #1 hit, celebrating through the use of Reggae style, the end of the war in Zimbabwe; 'Happy Birthday to You' was a #2 hit, calling for Dr Martin Luther King's birthday to be made a public holiday in the USA
1984	The Woman in Red	Soundtrack to rom-com film; 'I Just Called to Say I Love You' was a huge #1 hit and won both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for best original song
1985	In Square Circle	Another very popular album, featuring the #1 hit 'Part-Time Lover'
1987	Characters	Although receiving several nominations, this was not so popular and failed to win any awards

	Later Period	Key singles/comments
1991	Jungle Fever	Soundtrack to Spike Lee's movie of the same name
1995	Conversation Peace	Felt to be a return to the feel of the 'Classic' period; included the hit single 'For Your Love'

2005	A Time to Love	Featured several celebrity cameos – Prince, Paul McCartney – and a performance by Wonder’s daughter
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Research suggestions

- Instruments: Clavinet, Fender Rhodes piano, Moog synthesizer
- Genres: Funk, Soul
- Politics and Society: Music and the Civil Rights movement in the USA

Listening exercise

[‘Bird of Beauty’ from ‘Fulfillingness’ First Finale’ \(1974\)](#)

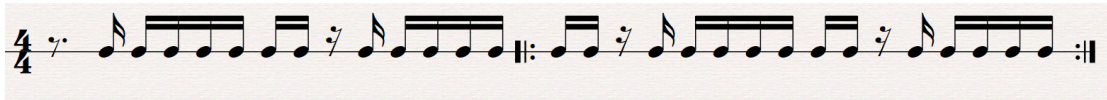
Commentary on 0:00-1:45

Typical of Stevie Wonder’s fusion of funk and Latin genres

- Constant semiquaver groove, typical of a Latin-Funk fusion
- Harmony features added notes (7ths, 9ths) and chromatic shifts, tritone substitutions
- Tempo and metre: relaxed 4-in a bar

0:00-0:25 Introduction

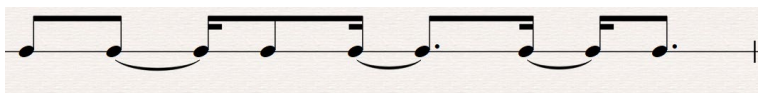
- A distinctive ‘sawing’ or ‘laughing’ sound (produced by the cuíca, a Brazilian drum with variable pitch)



- Drum-kit: kick-drum on beat 1, snare and hi-hat in a complex riff
- On repetition (after 2 bars), wordless female backing vocals are added; chromatically descending 7th chords in parallel (3 voices); singing the syllable ‘doo’ in sustained chords, then repeated notes in syncopated rhythm

Vocal rhythm:

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- Electric (synth) bass also descends with the voices: chromatic chord progression $\text{iii}^7\text{-flat iii}^7\text{-ii}^7\text{-V}^{\text{b5}}\text{-I}^9$
- This 4-bar pattern is repeated with the voices changing to ‘aah’ for the chromatic descending chord sequence

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0:25-1:05 Verse 1

- Solo voice begins with a rising octave anacrusis (on the dominant), then follows the descending chromatic line of the harmony
- The first two phrases of the verse (1st eight bars, 0:25-0:45) repeat the chord sequence and backing of the intro
- Next phrase begins with a sequential repetition of the melody, up a step (moving to the supertonic minor)
- Harmony moves from supertonic to dominant (ii to V) via a tritone substitution of ii at 0:56-1:01

- Backing is the same as in the intro, but without the backing vocals

1:06-1:46 Verse 2

- Backing vocals are reintroduced as in the intro
- Repetition of same structure as Verse 1
- Repetition of same backing as Verse 1
- Slight change of harmony at the end to move towards chorus: chromatic step down from dominant to flat V (on way to IV for start of chorus)

Joni Mitchell

Life and career

1943 Born in Alberta, Canada as Roberta Joan Anderson. She was raised in small-town western Canada where her father was a shopkeeper and her mother was a teacher.

Childhood Mitchell did not do particularly well in school, but found important creative outlets in poetry, painting and music. She taught herself the guitar and was attracted to country music. She had a severe case of polio as a child, which weakened her hands; to help her play the guitar, she experimented with different tunings to compensate for this. This became a defining feature of her mature style. By the age of 18, she had broadened her listening and performing interests and had had her first paid work as a musician.

1964 Having dropped out of art college, Mitchell began to work as a freelance folk musician and had some local radio work. However, she felt she must move to a bigger city to get on and left for Toronto. This was a very difficult time financially and personally; she found she was pregnant and had to give her baby daughter up for adoption. She worked in the fringe of the music business and was forced to write original material because established artists would not allow cover versions of their songs to be performed.

1965 Mitchell moved to New York City with American folk singer Chuck Mitchell, whom she married that year. In the late '60s she toured widely and came to the attention of the influential musician David Crosby (founder member of The Byrds and Crosby, Stills and Nash). This eventually led to a recording contract with Reprise records.

1970 Her second album *Clouds* won her a Grammy Award (for best Folk Performance), while her third, *Ladies of the Canyon* became a huge hit. It contained the single *Big Yellow Taxi*, which became a key song of the environmental movement. This album shows her widening stylistic range, moving away from simple acoustic and guitar-based textures to embrace studio effects, with several songs conceived at the piano rather than on guitar. This was followed in **1971** by *Blue*, which cemented her reputation as one of the greatest singer-songwriters of all time.

1975-80 During this time, Mitchell began to move away stylistically from her folk-pop origins and towards jazz. She collaborated with the bass player Jaco Pastorius on the albums *Hejira* and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*. During this time, she also named an album after jazz legend the bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus, who had heard her music and asked to work with her. This change in style did not prove so popular with her established fan-base, but she regarded it as her most personal work so far.

1980s During this decade, Mitchell signed to a new record company – Geffen Records – entered into a second marriage – to bassist Larry Klein – and embarked on world tours. She continued to produce new material and began to incorporate synthesizers and drum machines into her work.

1990s Mitchell's reputation as a singer-songwriter was renewed by her album *Turbulent Indigo* (1994). She and Klein divorced. Her voice by now had changed significantly, partly through age and overuse and partly through the long term effects of her childhood polio and long-term smoking habit.

2000 *Both Sides Now* released; this featured covers of several of her old songs and some jazz standards. Compilations and retrospectives formed an increasingly large part of her recorded output. From **2005** she gave very few public performances.

2015 Mitchell suffered a brain aneurysm and was hospitalised for a time, but made sufficient recovery to perform again after a year.

Selected discography – studio albums

Year	Title	Key singles/comments
1968	Song to a Seagull	
1969	Clouds	Original version of 'Both Sides Now'
1970	Ladies of the Canyon	'Big Yellow Taxi', 'Woodstock'; her breakthrough album
1971	Blue	Regarded as one of the greatest albums of all time. 'River', 'Carey', 'A Case of You'.
1972	For the Roses	
1974	Court and Spark	Her most commercially successful album; 'Court and Spark', 'Free Man in Paris'
1975	The Hissing of Summer Lawns	'In France they Kiss on Main Street'
1976	Hejira	'Coyote', 'Black Crow'; features Jaco Pastorius on bass guitar
1977	Don Juan's Reckless Daughter	A double album in an experimental jazz fusion style (also with Pastorius)
1979	Mingus	Some of the music is by Charles Mingus himself (with lyrics by Mitchell)
1982	Wild Things Run Fast	Influenced by the synth styles of 80s music.
1985	Dog Eat Dog	As above only more so (no acoustic guitar!)
1988	Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm	
1991	Night Ride Home	
1994	Turbulent Indigo	Regarded as something of a comeback to form
1998	Taming the Tiger	
2000	Both Sides Now	Two covers of Mitchell originals; 'Both Sides Now' and 'A Case of You'. Lush orchestral backings.

2002	Travelogue	Similar retrospective idea to 'Both Sides Now' but more of her own material
2007	Shine	

Research suggestions

- Genres: folk-rock; jazz-rock fusion
- Instruments: Drop-D and other alternative guitar tunings
- Politics and Society: music in the 'hippie' 'counter-culture' of the 1960s; the female perspective in song lyrics

Listening exercise

['Woodstock' from Ladies of the Canyon \(1970\)](#)

Commentary on 0:00-1:53

- Begins with an improvisatory electric piano solo with a fuzzy tone and tremolo, using the minor pentatonic scale with occasional chromaticism (e.g. in the opening flourish). There are many examples of open 5ths and 4ths in the harmony, making a folk-like drone and creating a timeless feeling.
- 0:35: a rhythmic riff begins in a steady 4/4, with broken 4ths and 5ths in the left hand and mid-register 2-part chords in the right.
- 0:46: the vocal melody begins – at first simply alternating between the tonic and flat 7th
- This eventually reaches up to the higher flat 7th and then further to the high tonic an 8ve higher than the original pitch; the harmony moves to the subdominant and then back again (the use of I and IV being another folk-like element)
- 1:07: a second strain of the vocal melody begins as the first; there is a slight hiatus before the word 'band' on the high tonic at 1:14-1:15
- The final words 'my soul free' are extended and sustained in 1:22-1:24
- There is an expressive melisma on the word 'stardust' at 1:30
- At 1:40-1:45, the voice descends into a low register for 'to the garden', moving via the Dorian raised 6th
- 1:45: backing voices enter in harmony in a wordless chordal riff, with an insistent repeated rhythm (all 8 quavers of the bar articulated, except the 3rd)

Muse

Career

- A British alternative rock band
- Formed in **1994** in Devon, where they met as college students
- Members:
 - Matt Bellamy (lead vocals, guitar, keyboards)
 - Chris Wolstenholme (bass guitar, backing vocals, keyboards)
 - Dominic Howard (drums, percussion)
- Musically, very accomplished players – multi-instrumentalists
- Debut album released in **1999**
- Interested in a variety of musical genres; influences include
 - 'progressive rock', heavy rock and glam rock
 - the guitar playing of Jimi Hendrix (extended techniques/effects)
 - classical and romantic period music
 - science fiction
- Grew in popularity during the early 2000s
 - **2004** headlined at Glastonbury Festival
 - Won MTV Europe awards
 - **2005** signed to Warner Bros. record label
 - **2006** 'Black Holes and Revelations' reaches #1 in UK Album Charts
- **2006-8** Toured Europe, Australia, US: the band gained a reputation as one of the best live rock bands ever
- **2012** Wrote the official single of the London Olympics and also played at the closing ceremony

Discography – Studio albums

Year	Title	Key singles/comments
1999	Showbiz	UK #29 Album. Modest commercial success. The album contained material from the last few years that the band thought would be commercially viable (therefore avoiding their more experimental work). Compared with Radiohead by critics.
2001	Origin of Symmetry	UK #3 Album Features string arrangements. Includes cover of 'Feeling Good'.
2003	Absolution	UK #1 Album; also their 1 st to chart in the US 'Time is Running Out' made top 10 singles Overall theme of Apocalypse; 'symphonic rock' influence present in some tracks
2006	Black Holes and Revelations	UK #1 Album The band took a more active role in producing. 'Supermassive Black Hole' #4 in singles chart.

		Political and sci-fi themes.
2009	The Resistance	UK #1 Album Includes the 3-part 'symphony' 'Exogenesis' and the single 'Uprising'
2012	The 2 nd Law	UK #1 Album Includes 'Survival', chosen as official song of the London Olympics. 'Madness' nominated for Grammy award.
2015	Drones	UK and US #1 Album Returns to a more straightforward rock sound. Title refers to political themes; critical of western military interventions.
2018	Simulation Theory	Based on the idea that reality is a simulated illusion; the album draws on 1980s synth pop

Research suggestions

- Instruments: Electric guitar techniques and effects
- Genres: Progressive (Prog) Rock; Glam Rock

Listening exercise

['Resistance' – from 'The Resistance' \(2009\)](#)

Commentary on 0:00-2:03

Typical features of Muse's style:

- Driving rock drums
- Eerie, melancholy minor key harmony (with a classical/baroque idea of ground bass descending A-G-F-E)
- Mixture of acoustic and electronic instrument/effects

0:00-1:09 Introduction

- Begins with low pitched synthesizer tone, gradual rising glissando
- 0:06 fast rhythmic electronic pulsing sound enters; fades in and fades out at about 0:12
- 0:12 quiet synth chords enter (quasi-vocal tone)
 - minor key
 - 3-part chords – 3rd at the top
 - bass descends by step from tonic to dominant; x2
 - upper parts move after the bass, creating syncopation and suspensions
- 0:31 distant sounding drum-fill
- 0:31-0:41 slight modification of the synth sound (higher octave added and more vibrato)
- 0:41 distant sounding piano enters
 - single line melody
 - much reverb on the sound
 - melody is based on a repeated rhythm (featuring a 3-quaver anacrusis) and arch-shaped melody



- On downbeat of piano riff (0:44), constant semiquaver pulse in tom-toms enters
- Along with repeated quavers in bass guitar
- Synth chords continue as background
- Drum fill at end of section just before voice enters (1:08-1:10)

1:10-1:37 Verse

- Voice enters with rising dominant 7th arpeggio in crotchets, followed by suspension and resolution in dotted rhythm
- This melodic shape is repeated in a kind of sequence
- Drum kit becomes more prominent with typical pattern of kick drum on 1 and 3, snare on 2 and 4; constant semiquavers continue in tom-toms and other drums in a more varied pattern
- Chord sequence is still based on the intro
- 1st phrase ends on an imperfect cadence at 1:23
- Then the melody is repeated (1:24-1:37)
- Second phrase turns to VI (making an interrupted cadence)

1:37-2:03 Pre-chorus

- Antiphonal exchange between backing voices (in harmony on 'it could be wrong') and lead vocal
- New, more rhythmically active melody:



- Melody used in sequence
- Prominent lead guitar doubles the backing voice and lead voice melody
- The 8-bar sequence is repeated starting at 1:52 with a distant sounding vocal descant, including several dissonant suspensions

Beyoncé

Life and career

1981 Born Beyoncé Giselle Knowles in Houston, Texas, USA. Her mother was a hairdresser/salon owner; father a sales manager for Xerox.

She showed early promise in singing and dancing at school and performed as a soloist and group member in many school and church groups. Eventually, she appeared on a TV talent show in an all-girl group (but they failed to win the competition).

1995 Her father gave up his job in order to manage the group. This put a lot of strain on the family, and Beyoncé's parents separated for a while.

1996 The all-girl group changed its name to 'Destiny's Child'. They released their first album in 1997. This had modest success, but the group gradually gained more popularity and critical nominations, culminating in *Survivor* (2001). During this time, there were tensions between group members and their management. Beyoncé began to develop an independent singing and film acting career.

2003 Beyoncé released her first solo album *Dangerously in Love* which reached no.1 in the album charts and included two no.1 singles (*Crazy in Love* and *Baby Boy*). An important feature of the album was her collaboration with rapper Jay-Z, who eventually became her husband; she had already featured on his single '03 *Bonnie and Clyde*. The album was nominated for many awards and led to a successful concert tour.

2005 Destiny's Child disbanded, leaving Beyoncé free to pursue her solo career exclusively.

2008 Beyoncé and Jay-Z married, becoming the most prominent 'power couple' of contemporary American popular music. Her albums and singles continued to dominate the charts and she appeared in more films. She starred as blues singer Etta James in the film 'Cadillac Records'.

2009 Beyoncé sang at President Barack Obama's inauguration ceremony.

2016 Beyoncé released *Lemonade*; a combined film and album.

Discography (solo studio albums)

Note: all these albums occupied the #1 slot in the US album charts

Year	Title	Key singles/comments
2003	<i>Dangerously in Love</i>	Includes #1 singles <i>Crazy in Love</i> and <i>Baby Boy</i> . B became 1 st female artist to simultaneously top the singles and albums charts in both the US and UK
2006	<i>B'day</i>	Includes #1 single <i>Irreplaceable</i> 10 weeks at the top. Other singles include: <i>Déjà vu</i> <i>Beautiful Liar</i> (duet featuring Shakira) Many themes of the album relate to the film <i>Dreamgirls</i> in which Beyoncé starred.

2008	I am ... Sasha Fierce	Double album, supposed to show 2 sides of Beyoncé (Sasha Fierce being a bold, outspoken alter ego for the singer). Includes #1 single Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It). Other singles include: If I were a Boy Halo
2011	4	Singles include: Run the World (Girls) Best Thing I Never Had Love on Top
2013	Beyoncé	Singles include: Drunk in Love (reached #2) 7/11
2016	Lemonade	Multi-media release; album/film Singles include: Formation Sorry

Research suggestions

- Genres: Contemporary R&B; Hip-hop; Rap
- Production: Sampling; 'beatmaking'
- Beyoncé as a performer: her voice; her dancing; her image and commercial success
- Social/political: female empowerment and sexuality in music; US racial politics

Listening exercise

['Countdown' from '4' \(2011\)](#)

Commentary on 0:00-1:34

The song has a playful, quirky character which comes from:

- the fast tempo (about 160 bpm)
- the use of slightly mechanical or childlike repetitions and sequences
- the 'artificial' synth sounds
- the mixture of features from different styles/genres

0:00-0:02

- opens with wordless solo vocal melisma on a rising pentatonic line which covers more than an octave (compound minor 3rd); basically following a triadic shape;
- timbales come in just at the end with a fill taking us to the main part of the song (suggestion of reggae style)

0:03-0:15

- Verse 1 Voice melody begins in high register (starts on 5th of chord); features typical R&B melisma and vibrato;
- accompaniment uses 4 chord pattern d minor – g minor – F major – C major
- played by a horn section (trumpets, saxes) in staccato repeated notes in a rhythm which sounds on the edge between being playful and aggressive (like a speeded up reggae or Afrobeat or a military march); the rhythm uses a mixture of patterns (of quavers and semiquavers) in a rather unpredictable sequence
- percussion sounds include; top line of horn section doubled by xylophone sound; military sounding bass drum and cymbals used to punctuate phrases

0:15-0:24

- Repeats the previous section, but with addition of:
 - repeated constant cymbal semiquavers
 - strings added to the horn chords
- instruments drop out towards the end of the section, leaving a synth gliss

0:25-0:37

- this section features a vocal sample of a male group counting down from 10 to 1 in chromatically descending chords (this is a sample from the opening of the song 'Uhh ahh' by Boyz II Men);
- the chords are built on 4ths;
- the sample intertwines with the female vocal lead, which circles round a few notes in a narrow riff (spanning a 3rd);
- the snare drum (drum machine) keeps a constant 4-to-the-floor pulse
- there are rising electronic tones (filter sweeps) which gradually get higher as the chords in the vocal sample descend;
- timbale fill just before the end of the section (on 'one').

0:37-0:49

- texture reduces again – just voice, some drum machine sounds and synth
- synth part has a high-pitched staccato riff (doubled by soft rim-shot sound)
- bass answers high pitched synth
- vocal melody very simple 3-2-1-7-1 shape repeated x3 (with dip down to lower 5th as a melisma at end of each phrase)
- very rapid drum machine fill at end of section

0:49-1:00

- based on previous section, but brass riff returns;
- some vocal overdubbing of solo part at phrase ends (harmonising in 3^{rds});
- drum machine part more prominent;

1:00-1:11

- similar to previous section

1:12-1:34

- same music as at 0:37-0:49, but with added bass brass riff filling each phrase end

Daft Punk

Career

1987 Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter met at secondary school in Paris. Guy-Manuel played guitar and Thomas bass guitar and they formed a band together with a friend. This rock band was formed in **1992** but soon disbanded after negative reviews.

1993 Guy-Manuel and Thomas formed a new duo partnership, taking their name from a poor review they had received, which referred to 'a daft, punky thrash'. The new 'Daft Punk' was based on synthesizers and drum-machine, rather than guitars.

1994 Their debut single 'The New Wave' was released, followed the next year by the much more commercially successful 'Da Funk'. These singles formed the core of their first album 'Homework' in **1997**.

1996 The duo went into partnership with Virgin Records. A period of international performances to a small but growing fanbase in Europe and the USA began.

1999 In public performances, the duo started to wear helmets and costumes designed to make them appear robotic, to match their heavily electronic musical style. They have since always avoided exposing their 'real selves' to the glare of media publicity, preferring the music to speak for itself and avoiding interview.

2001 Their second album 'Discovery' was released; its slightly more straightforward pop style won them many new fans.

2005 'Human After All' released. The duo became an increasing presence at major festivals e.g. Coachella. A live album followed in **2007**.

2009-10 Daft Punk wrote most of the music for the science-fiction film 'Tron: Legacy'.

2013 The album 'Random Access Memories' was released, featuring much more use of acoustic instruments and collaborations with many major artists such as Nile Rogers (guitar) and Pharrell Williams (singer-songwriter/rapper/producer). This was phenomenally successful, going platinum and reaching the no.1 album spot in many countries. The album was released by Columbia, with whom the duo had signed a new contract, having left Virgin.

Discography – studio albums

Year	Title	Key singles/comments
1997	Homework	'Da Funk', 'Around the World'; influenced by the French House scene
2001	Discovery	'One More Time', 'Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger'; much use of samples from '70s and '80s music
2005	Human After All	'Robot Rock', 'Technologic'
2013	Random Access Memories	'Get Lucky', 'Lose Yourself to Dance'; a multi-award winning album, featuring collaborations with many acclaimed artists

Research suggestions

- genres: Disco; House; Electronic Dance Music (EDM)
- instruments/production: sequencing; vocoder; drum machine;

Listening exercise

['Instant Crush' from 'Random Access Memories' \(2013\)](#)

Commentary on 0:00-1:48

The sound is dominated by electronic instruments:

- synthesizers
- drum machine
- the voice has been fed through a vocoder
- in addition, there is a bass and a lead guitar

As is typical of their style, the song features much use of repeated loops in a minimalist, understated texture. This, and the deliberately directionless harmony in the verse section, gives a rather melancholy feeling.

0:00-0:29 Intro

- Drum machine: constant alternation between bass drum and snare on odd and even beats; hi-hat cymbal on constant quavers
- Bass guitar line has roots of chords in repeated quavers
- Quiet synth riff uses syncopated rhythm, circling around G flat in a stepwise motion:



- This is then transposed to fit with chord changes.
- A 4-chord pattern is used: Gb major – Eb minor – Bb minor – Ab major (difficult to decide which chord is the tonic, as the chords circle round in a modal way); chords change once every two bars
- On the repetition of this 8-bar pattern (starting at 0:20), a higher synth melodic line is added in groups of 3 arpeggiated quavers, which sometimes clash with the continuing riff

0:29-1:30 Verse

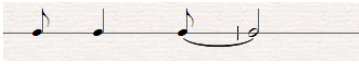
- Interestingly, the voice enters half way through the repetition of the intro's chord sequence
- Voice melody uses a quiet, 'deadpan', almost expressionless tone in a relatively high register for male singer (in head voice)
- Vocal melody structured as a rhythmic riff/sequence, always starting on the 2nd quaver of the bar:



- At 0:41, the chord sequence begins again and the voice goes into a higher register
- This happens again at 0:56
- At 1:22 the voice jumps into a much higher register and is slightly louder, coming to rest on a monotone B flat (tonic?)
- Short descending vocal melisma on 'Oh' at 1:28-1:30

1:30-1:48 Chorus

- A more active rhythmic groove is created:
 - constant semiquavers in shaker



- The bass moves in parallel with the synth melody
- The chords change every bar, so there is a faster harmonic rhythm, emphasised by the descending scalar bass:
 - B flat minor – G flat major – E flat minor – A flat major (feels like vi-IV-ii-V in D flat major BUT there is a constant B flat pedal in the synth in the middle of the texture)
- The voice melody is also much more rhythmically active, featuring several repeated semiquavers and descending lines (almost like a diminution of the verse melody)

Labrinth

Life and career

1989 Born Timothy McKenzie in London. He was introduced to studio-based music by his older brother.

2009 He produced his first track and began working with various British rappers, singers and producers e.g. Tinie Tempah and Professor Green.

2010 He was signed by Simon Cowell's 'Syco' record label, who released his debut single 'Let the Sun Shine' that year.

2011 His second single, 'Earthquake', became a major hit, also featuring Tinie Tempah.

2019 He wrote the music for the American TV series 'Euphoria'.

He continues to be a major contributor to the British pop scene as a collaborative artist; singer-songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist.

Discography – studio albums

Year	Title	Key singles/comments
2012	Electronic Earth	'Let the Sun Shine', 'Earthquake', 'Beneath Your Beautiful'
2019	Imagination & the Misfit Kid	'Misbehaving'; The album is currently available via digital download or streaming (due to be released in hard media in 2020)

Research suggestions

- Mp3 format; digital storage and downloading of music
- Remixing

Listening exercise

['Express Yourself' from 'Electronic Earth' \(2012\)](#)

Commentary on 0:00-1:45

The song is typical of Labrinth in taking a soul classic ('Express Yourself' by Charles Wright and the 103rd St. Rhythm Band – also covered by NWA) and putting modern production sound around it.

0:00-0:15 Intro

- High-pitched synth with bell/glockenspiel tone playing single line melody in slow note values
- Whole tone scale used; melodic line seems strange/disjointed
- Pitch line moves down a major 3rd, up an aug 4th, down a minor 6th etc.
- Much delay and vibrato on the sound, giving an other-worldly 'sci-fi' effect
- Harmony in major 2nds added at 0:08
- Added vibrato tone at 0:10
- 0:11-0:12 rising synth with crescendo

0:15 Verses

- Relaxed tempo and funky groove begins
- A retro sound with EQ/filter on voice for a 'scratchy' rough effect

- Drum sample (from James Brown 'Funky Drummer') and guitar riff:



- Harmony in 2-bar repeating pattern: I – Ib – IV – V
- 0:27 backing voices join in harmony
- 4th phrase in lead voice reaches higher
- 0:33 vocal phrase begins with an anacrusis 'whatever you' to a high note with a downward bend on 'do'
- Vocal phrases ('Whatever you do') leave large gaps for instrumental response
- 0:39 horn section staccato stab added; constant semiquavers in tambourine; repeated tonic pedal in guitar
- 0:43 high tonic in falsetto for 'do'

0:53 Choruses ('Express Yourself')

- Still based on the same chords as the verse
- Bigger sound with syncopated kick drum and synth brass sound
- Sampled backing vocal loop

1:13 Verse

- 1:22 sustained synth sound
- 1:33 'do-do' backing vocals in chords in syncopated rhythm