



RockStudy Music

The Theory Behind Rock & Pop

Topic 5

Form and Structure Part A

By Lachlan Wilson

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Form & Structure Part A

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Overview

Rock and roll music developed throughout America from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. Young adults, then known as teenagers, looked to identify their contemporary status by way of specific clothing fashion, young role models, who were often film actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, and most importantly, a new musical style that projected optimism, excitement, and rhythmic vitality.

The emerging rock and roll musician was inevitably young, enthusiastic, and musically untrained. However by varying and adapting much of the musical language of previous styles, particularly Rhythm and Blues and Country music, a new form of music evolved, one that spoke clearly to the young people of America and subsequently throughout the whole world. This evolution has continued to develop over several decades thereby influencing the many stylistically variations within the genre.

Furthermore, many rock musicians have developed considerable technical skills without any real understanding of music notation and how the theoretical aspect of musical language relates to performance. There can be little doubt that a thorough understanding of music theory can further enhance performance and compositional skills within the musician, which ultimately leads to a more overall proficient musical artist.

About the Author

Melbourne based musician Lachlan Wilson was drawn to Rock and Roll music from a very young age, and this involvement has since spanned many decades. Whilst also embracing many other musical styles, it was the initial impact of Rock music that has always remained a strong influence throughout his musical career.

As a performer Lachlan has played saxophone and flute in several groups and ensembles throughout Australia dating from the 1960's, through to more contemporary times.

The desire for a more comprehensive understanding of music theory saw him undertake further study where he completed a Bachelor of Music at the University of Melbourne, later leading to additional Post Graduate studies in both composition and education.

Lachlan has subsequently taught harmony and counterpoint at tertiary level for more than 20 years in contrasting musical genres ranging from the Renaissance era through to contemporary non-tonal theoretical practices.

During these educational sessions, the energy and authority of the musical language associated with Rock and Pop music has formed the basis of these instructive modules.

User's Guide

The headphone symbol lets you know that there is listening material available via the links provided.



The vinyl record symbol lets you know when a specific piece of music is being discussed. The title, artist and composer will be listed here.



Analysis and notation examples are indicated by the image of a treble clef.



Generally notation examples are designed to reinforce the audio examples and offer support for different levels of music theory knowledge. Examples include:

The chord symbol or name. Amaj, Dmin, etc.

The chord's functional name: Tonic, Dominant, Mediant, etc.

The chord's function, represented as a Roman Numeral: I, ii, iii, IV, V etc. It should be noted that in this style an upper case numeral indicates a major chord, and a lower case numeral indicates a minor chord. Additional symbols provide further information such as o denotes that the chord is a diminished triad and the + sign denotes that the chord is an augmented triad. The musical notes, key signature and time signatures will also be laid out across a musical staff.

Additionally each topic will also have its own playlist available on Spotify. These playlists include the original artist version of the songs examined as well as extra listening examples related to the topic. Click [Here](#) to listen to Spotify playlist for this book.

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Introduction

Form and Structure in Rock and Pop music. Part A.

There are several elements involved in creating a successful song regardless of the genre. The most obvious elements are melody, harmony, rhythm, and lyric content if applicable. However an equally significant aspect of the music is its formal structure, put simply, how the music material has been packaged.

The manner in which the music has been constructed and organised is vital to the overall cohesion of any given piece of music. The process of deciding the most appropriate form will generally determine the success or otherwise in unifying the various components.

This module will examine the various types of formal structure found in Rock and Pop music, and how additional sections can contribute to the overall success of the music.

In terms of Rock and Pop music, regardless of whether the piece is either vocal or instrumental, the overarching structure is 'song form', a more condensed type of form in which repetition plays an important role. The use of 'song form' obviously predates Rock and Pop music with several Classical and Romantic composers incorporating these types of pieces, along with most of the American popular songs, particularly those taken from Broadway musicals of the early 20th century, which also explored this structure. In fact, given that the early Rock and Roll songwriters were musically untrained, it was only natural that existing formal structures be borrowed and incorporated into this new style of popular music.

In the formative years of the Rock and Roll era, songwriters and artists looked to where possible adapt existing musical categories, most often the Blues and Country music, to the new type of composition and performance style. This resulted in two particular types of form being predominantly evident in the early songs. The most popular forms used were 12 bar blues, which dated back to the turn of the 20th century, and the 32 bar AABA structure as found in the majority of American popular tunes, which were also regularly used as vehicles for the mainstream jazz genre.

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Playlists

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Go to

<https://www.vmta.org.au/online-store/rockstudy-music-online-theory-courses/>

Topic 1 - The introduction

Before examining the varying types of formal structure it is important to consider the role played by the introduction, heard prior to leading into the main body of the piece. Similar to songs from previous eras and other genres, the introduction may be instrumental or vocal, and its purpose is to act as an initial aural presentation introducing the songwriter's creative intentions. These introductions can be quite short, being simply a bar or two, right through to large-scale segments that could arguably be considered a complete section itself. Furthermore there are a number of very successful songs that are without any introduction at all. Consider the following highly successful song written by Neil Diamond in 1967 and since covered by many artists.



"Red Red Wine"
Neil Diamond



Click on your preferred streaming platform link to listen to "Red Red Wine" from 0:00 - 0:12



Just a single bar can even act as an introduction, instantly identifying the music that is to follow. Note the distinctive chord at the opening of "Hard Days Night" by the Beatles. The chord voicing, which contains several perfect 4ths and 5ths, along with other conventional harmonic intervals, immediately distinguishes this song.



"Hard Days Night"
John Lennon/Paul McCartney



Click on the link to listen to "Hard Days Night" from 0:00 - 0:10



Short two bar instrumental introductions were quite common during the early Rock and Roll years. Note how Buddy Holly makes use of this brief instrumental opening in the hit song “That’ll Be The Day”



“That’ll be the Day”
Buddy Holly/Jerry Allison/Norman Petty.



Click on the link to listen to
“That’ll be the Day ” from 0:00 – 0:10



As the Rock and Pop genre developed, more elaborate and independent instrumental introductions regularly appeared, at times becoming quite an autonomous feature of the music. Note the following examples. A typical 4 bar piano introduction taken from the popular Elton John song, “Don’t Let the Sun go Down on Me”, which also had considerable success years later as a duet with George Michael.



“Don’t Let The Sun Go Down On Me”
Elton John/Bernie Taupin.



Click on the link to listen to
“Don’t Let The Sun The Sun Go Down On Me”
from 0:04 – 0:25.



By repeating a four bar melodic passage, an eight bar introduction could be incorporated into the music as found in this popular 1960's Van Morrison song.



"Brown Eyed Girl"
Van Morrison



Click on the link to listen to
"Brown Eyed Girl" from 0:00 - 0:20



An unusual length opening of 10 bars can be found in the following song by Huey Lewis and the News, taken from the 1980's cult film "*Back to the future*"



"The Power Of Love"
Huey Lewis/Chris Hayes/Johnny Colia.



Click on the link to listen to
"The Power of Love" from 0:00 - 0:25



Naturally a typical 12 bar blues tune will often call for an introduction that also follows the 12 bar format. Probably the most revered and copied 12 bar introduction is the opening to “Johnny B Goode” played by arguably Rock and Rolls most important pioneer Chuck Berry.



“Johnny B. Goode”
Chuck Berry.



Click on the link to listen to
“Johnny B. Goode” from 0:00 – 0:20



Finally what is probably considered to be the most significant instrumental introduction in all Rock and Pop music is the extended 16 bar opening that instantly makes the listener aware of the iconic song “Stairway to Heaven” released in 1971 by the English Rock group Led Zeppelin.



“Stairway To Heaven”
Jimmy Page/Robert Plant



Click on the link to listen to
“Stairway To Heaven” from 0:00 – 1:05



At times an introduction may be heavily influenced by rhythm rather than any melodic material. Consider the unusual and dominant drum kit introduction to “Cream” by Prince taken from his highly successful 1991 album “*Diamonds and Pearls*”.



“Cream”
Prince.

In this case the initial 4 bars are highlighted by novel vocal glissandi above a persistent cowbell that gives way to a solid drum rock feel. This is then followed by a further 8 bars which includes a two chord vamp over the solid and driving percussive rhythm.



Click on the link to listen to
“Cream” from 0:00 – 0:35



An interesting harmonic effect can also be achieved by placing the instrumental introduction in a key other than that of the actual song itself. Brian Wilson composed the introduction to “Wouldn’t it be Nice” taken from the Beach Boys landmark *Pet Sounds* album, in the key of A major prior to modulating to an unrelated key of F major for the beginning vocal line.



“Wouldn’t It Be Nice”
Brian Wilson/Tony Asher/Mike Love.



Click on the link to listen to
“Wouldn’t It Be Nice” from 0:00 – 0:12



Vocal introductions.

Lengthy vocal introductions regularly accompanied Broadway tunes during the first half of the 20th Century. Composers such as Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, and Richard Rogers would often include a sung introductory passage, mainly 16 bars in length that could rightly constitute a complete section in itself. These introductions were mostly dispensed with for later cover versions and when used in a Jazz context. However in the Rock and Pop genre vocal introductions are rarely used, rather there is a distinct preference for instrumental openings. Although a couple of examples are worth noting. The first is a short 3 bar vocal introduction by Paul McCartney to the song “Here There and Everywhere” by the Beatles.



“Here There and Everywhere”
John Lennon/Paul McCartney



Click on the link to listen to
“Here There and Everywhere”
from 0:00 – 0:15



The second excerpt is a tempo free vocal beginning to Roy Orbison’s 1962 work song inspired piece “Working for the Man”.



“Working For The Man” from 0:00 –
0:32



Click on the link to listen to
“Working For The Man” from 0:00 – 0:32



A well-defined musical introduction has the potential to reappear at times throughout the piece and also serve as a very effective outro that can round out the composition in a very unified manner and many examples of this composition method can be found throughout the history of the genre.

Exercises and Activities. Form and Structure Book A



Topic 2 - The 12 Bar Blues Format

As previously mentioned one of the first types of form chosen by Rock & Roll songwriters and performers was the 12 bar blues format. This form was a natural choice given the influence of Rhythm and Blues music had on this new style. Furthermore the relatively simple 3-chord structure could easily be adapted to the more exciting and driving rhythm.

Example 1.

The musical notation for Example 1 is presented in three staves, each representing a line of the 12-bar blues format in 4/4 time. The notation uses slash marks to indicate chord changes and rests. The first staff shows the first four bars: Bar 1 (I C), Bar 2 (I C (or F)), Bar 3 (I C), and Bar 4 (I C). The second staff shows bars 5 through 8: Bar 5 (IV F), Bar 6 (IV F), Bar 7 (I C), and Bar 8 (I C). The third staff shows bars 9 through 12: Bar 9 (V G), Bar 10 (IV F), Bar 11 (I C), and Bar 12 (I C (or G)). The notation is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature.

There were a couple of variations to the above pattern and these have been indicated in brackets. However the three chords and 12 bars generally remained constant.

Furthermore it should also be noted that the triads as shown above were often extended out to Dominant 7th chords (although not always functioning as a dominant chord). This enabled the inclusion of the lowered 7th degree acting as a colourful “blue” note. Whilst by far the majority of Blues songs are written in major keys, there are also occasional instances of 12 bar minor blues tunes. This will be examined in further modules relating to chord progressions. Consider the following example that shows the use of this form in the early days of Rock and Roll music. This example is the Elvis Presley cover of an earlier Blues Song written by the prolific Rock and Roll song-writing team of Lieber and Stoller and initially recorded by Big Mama Thornton in 1952 titled “Hound Dog”. This is a clear case of how the 12 bar blues structure was an ideal vehicle for the new emerging musical style.



“Hound Dog” Jerry Lieber/Mike Stoller



Click on the link to listen to
“Hound Dog” from 0:00 – 0:17



Early types of Blues music, regardless of whether the category was urban Blues as sung by artists such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey with lyrics relating to the hardship and mistreatment experienced mainly by city women, or country blues, generally sung by men such as Robert Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson, where the lyric content revolved around prison life and work gang songs.

Common elements in both categories were three line stanzas with a repeated statement or question followed by a reply. Each lyric phrase would involve two bars performed by the vocalist followed by 2 bars of an instrumental response. This response could be cornet or piano in Urban Blues, or guitar in country blues, most likely to be played by the performer. This then provided a 12 bar structure that could be repeated over and over to suit the story line of the music.



“Give Me One Reason” Tracy Chapman

In some cases Rock music closely followed the early blues stanza format, albeit within the Rock music context, and an excellent example can be found in Tracy Chapman’s blues influenced Rock music hit, “Give Me One Reason”. Listen to the short vocal lines with the following instrumental guitar response after the first 12 bar verse.



Click on the link to listen to
“Give Me One Reason” from 1:01 – 1:33



The 12 bar blues form also works very well for the developing strong driving Rock song where the typical 3 line stanza is replaced by regular free flowing lyrics with robust delivery. This hard-edged approach works very well in the Bryan Ferry cover of the song “Let’s Stick Together”



“Let’s Stick Together”
Wilbert Harrison.



Click on the link to listen to
“Let’s Stick Together” from 0:22 – 0:48

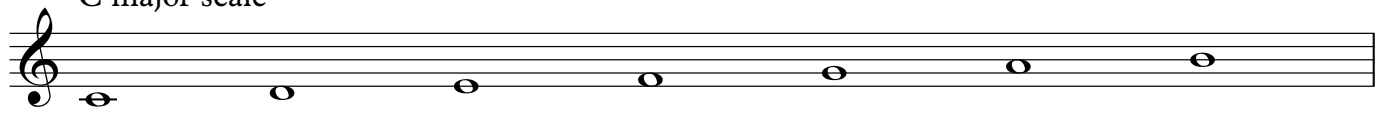


When a piece of music has been labeled as a 12 bar blues tune, there are a number of elements that can normally be implied in the music in addition to the actual length of each repeating section. Firstly the inference is that the harmonic framework will mainly involve the I chord, the IV chord, and the V chord in a particular sequence, although this can be varied slightly from song to song. The melodic material will generally be drawn from the Blues scale with its’ altered pitches providing dissonant “Blue notes” in both the vocal line and any accompanying instrument passages.

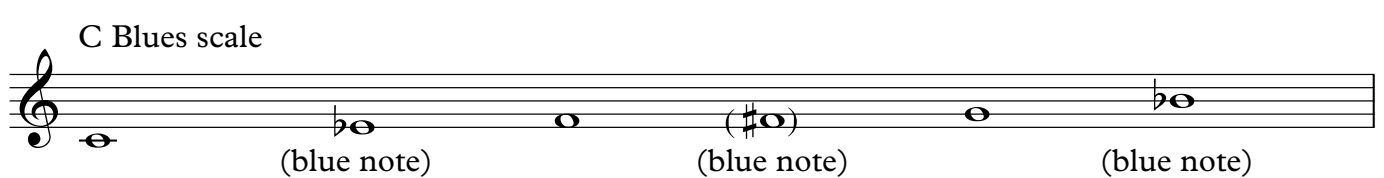
Refer to the following musical example showing the regular C major scale and the C Blues scale with its' altered blue notes which provide the characteristic dissonances associated with this style of music, particular when heard against the major quality chords mostly found in 12bar blues songs.

Example 2.

C major scale



C Blues scale



However whilst the description may identify the tune as being a 12 bar blues song, it does not always follow that the music will comply to a strict 12 bar format. Some early Blues songs were actually shorter than 12 bars and when used within the Rock genre it is not unusual to extended each verse by an extra bar or two. This is quite noticeable in the Rolling Stones recorded cover of the old blues standard “Little Red Rooster”.



“Little Red Rooster”
Willie Dixon

This piece varies the harmonic sequence slightly and after a 4 bar introduction the band performs the first verse over 14 bars. The following stanza actually contains 13 bars, whilst the final verse includes two extra 2/4 bar to that of the previous section thereby equating to 14 bars of regular



Click on the link to listen to
“Little Red Rooster”
from 0:00 – 2:30



Exercises and Activities.
Form and Structure Book A



Topic 3 - Th AABA

Probably the most common formal construction of the American popular song and Broadway tune written during the first half of the 20th Century is what is generally referred to as AABA form. This structure enabled composers to compose songs in a strophic manner that allowed the three A sections to have similar melody and chord progression whilst introducing new lyric content for each segment. The contrasting B section would then contain new melodic, harmonic, and lyric material, although importantly it should be noted that this section would be of equal significance in the composed song.



“All I Have to Do is Dream”
Felice and Boudleaux Bryant.

An excellent early example of the AABA structure on Rock and Pop music is the 1958 Everly Brothers hit tune “All I have to do is Dream”. In this case after the brief vocal introduction both the repeating A 8 bar sections and the differing B section, also comprising 8 bars are clearly defined.



Click on the link to listen to
“All I Have to Do is Dream”
from 0:09 – 1:25



It is important at the outset to differentiate between AABA and Verse Chorus form, as these categories are regularly addressed under similar terminology, even though there are definite variances between each of the forms. Simply put, both the A sections and the B section are of similar importance within the AABA structure, and as a result carry equal weight in the tune, whereas in a Verse/Chorus song it is the Chorus that intentionally overshadows the Verse and is the most vital element, and as such is immediately identified and recalled by the listener. Often the songs lyrics may assist in identifying the difference between the two as songwriters regularly save the title of the piece until the Chorus in Verse/Chorus form, whereas the title may appear in an A section in AABA form. This structural contrast will be further reinforced with well-known music examples in both cases.

Whilst the overall form is categorised as AABA, this indicates a complete cycle of the songs components and is generally extended by repeating some or all of the sections later during the piece. This extension allows an instrumental solo or vocal repetition of previously heard material.

Along with 12 bar blues format, the emerging Rock and Roll songwriters would regularly borrow the 32 bar AABA form and incorporate this element into their new musical style. At times Rock and Pop performers would even cover existing popular standards, albeit with a new contemporary approach to the performance style.



“Somewhere Over The Rainbow ” Harold Arlen/Yip Harburg

Note how the Australian Rock legend Billy Thorpe, along with his band The Aztecs, deliver their rendition of the song “Somewhere over the Rainbow” which was originally composed for the 1939 musical film *Wizard of OZ*. In this case the music follows the standard 32 bar AABA pattern where it should be noted that each A section and the B section hold similar levels of importance in the overall composition.



Click on the link to listen to
“Somewhere Over The Rainbow”
from 0:00– 2:20



This type of form is quite versatile and can be used effective within various Pop musical styles. Listen to the popular reggae inspired UB 40 cover of the Elvis Presley song “I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You”, once again noting the clearly defined 32 bar AABA form.



“I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You” Hugo Peretti/Luigi Creatore/George David Weiss.



Click on the link to listen to
“I Cant Help Falling in Love with You”
from 0:35 – 1:55





“Yesterday”
John Lennon/Paul McCartney.

Whilst the most common type of AABA form consisted 32 bars, 8 bars per section, this was regularly modified in the Rock and Pop idiom and often varied, even between each section. The best-known example of altering the standard equalized format of 32 bars can be found in the famous Beatles song “Yesterday” composed by John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

The structure is quite different with each of the A sections containing 7 bars, whilst the B section has 8 bars, yet this unusual type of AABA containing 29 bars maintains a complete sense of balance.



Click on the link to listen to
“Yesterday” from 0:00 – 1:00



“December 1963 (Oh What a Night)”
Bob Gaudio/Judy Parker.

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s the AABA format maintained its role as one of the most versatile types of form, and at times even adding additional segments to the main musical layout. This is evident during the Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons hit “December 1963 (Oh What a Night)” in which an additional part instrumental and part vocal interlude has been added to the standard 32 bar format. This addition may best be labeled as a C-section due to the fact that this segment also reappears later in the song. Listen to the various sections, noting once again how each of the 8 bar subdivision carries equal importance within the overall tune.



Click on the link to listen to
“December 1963 (Oh What a Night)”
from 0:35 – 2:10



Conclusion

This module has examined how successful composers and songwriters have packaged their musical material into a cohesive structure and thus ensuring popular success with the music-loving public. During Book 1 (part A) the more common types of form used in Rock and Pop music, those being the 12 bar blues and AABA structures, have been discussed. Although the all embracing “song form” as used in this musical genre can be further subdivided into a number of different categories, each maintaining an important role in the musical framework of the piece.

During the following module, Form and Structure Book 2 (Part B), other common types of musical forms that have developed throughout the Rock and Pop era will be examined. These include the extremely popular Verse-Chorus, plus several others forms, including hybrid structures and other supplementary song sections that form an important part of the music as a whole.

RockStudy. Form and Structure Part A.

Listening examples.

Title. “Red Red Wine”

Songwriter. Neil Diamond

Recording artist. Neil Diamond

Title. “Hard Days Night”

Songwriter. John Lennon/Paul McCartney

Recording artist. The Beatles

Title. “That’ll be the Day”

Songwriter. Buddy Holly/Jerry Allison/Norman Petty.

Recording artist. Buddy Holly

Title. “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me”

Songwriter. Elton John/Bernie Taupin

Recording artist. Elton John

Title. “Brown Eyed Girl”

Songwriter. Van Morrison

Recording artist. Van Morrison

Title. “The Power of Love”

Songwriter. Huey Lewis/Chris Hayes/Johnny Colia

Recording artist. Huey Lewis and the News

Title. “Johnny B. Goode”

Songwriter. Chuck Berry

Recording artist. Chuck Berry

Title. “Stairway To Heaven”

Songwriter. Jimmy Page/Robert Plant

Recording artist. Led Zeppelin.

Title. “Cream”

Songwriter. Prince

Recording artist. Prince.

Title. “Wouldn’t it be Nice”

Songwriter. Brian Wilson/Tony Asher/Mike Love

Recording artist. The Beach Boys

Title. “Here There and Everywhere”

Songwriter. John Lennon/Paul McCartney

Recording artist. The Beatles

RockStudy. Form and Structure Part A.

Listening examples.

Title. “Working for the Man”

Songwriter. Roy Orbison

Recording artist. Roy Orbison

Title. “Hound Dog”

Songwriter. Jerry Lieber/Mike Stoller

Recording artist. Elvis Presley

Title. “Give Me One Reason”

Songwriter. Tracey Chapman

Recording artist. Tracey Chapman

Title. “Let’s Stick Together”

Songwriter. Wilbert Harrison

Recording artist. Bryan Ferry

Title. “Little Red Rooster”

Songwriter. Willie Dixon

Recording artist. The Rolling Stones

Title. “All I Have To Do Is Dream”

Songwriter. Felice and Boudleaux Bryant

Recording artist. Everly Brothers

Title. “Somewhere Over The Rainbow”

Songwriter. Harold Arlen/Yip Harburg

Recording artist. Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs

Title. “I Can’t Help Falling in Love With You”

Songwriter. Hugo Peretti/Luigi Creatore/George David Weiss

Recording artist. UB 40

Title. “Yesterday”

Songwriter. John Lennon/Paul McCartney

Recording artist. The Beatles

Title. “December 1963(Oh What a Night)”

Songwriter. Bob Gaudio/Judy Parker

Recording artist. Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons