

Year 7 – What Makes A Good Song?

Knowledge Organiser

Within popular music there are a number of features that make a song more effective.

The core parts of a popular song are:

Lyrics (words) - set to a melody

Chords – these are the musical blocks that fit underneath the melody. Guitars and keyboards often play full chords. Bass guitars often play the bottom note of each chord.

Rhythm – a song fits within a ‘groove’. This is the drum beat that best suits the feel of the song.

Riffs

A riff is a repeated pattern that either loops or keeps returning in the song.

Some famous riffs can be found in:

Under Pressure by Queen
Thriller by Michael Jackson
Mission Impossible Theme

Structure

Most popular songs follow a very similar structure. The key structural building blocks are:

Intro An instrumental opening of a song (sets the ‘feel’ of the song)

Verse Contains the first block of lyrics at the start. A second verse normally has the same melody at verse 1 but different lyrics

Chorus This is the most catchy part of the song and usually contains some kind of ‘hook’ that is very memorable. Choruses repeat with the same words and melody.

Bridge A short section that contrasts with the verse and chorus. It usually comes after the listener has heard a couple of verses and choruses. This comes as a welcome break before the chorus is heard again.

Outro The closing part of the song. This might include a ‘fade out’.

A song might also include an instrumental section after the chorus has been heard a couple of times. Sometimes this is called the ‘**middle 8**’.

Some songs feature a ‘**pre-chorus**’ which is usually a couple of lines that come after each verse, leading into the chorus.

A typical song structure is:

Intro → Verse 1 → Chorus → Verse 2 → Chorus → Bridge → Chorus → Chorus → Outro

Lyrics are an important feature of songs and usually convey a message or tell a story. The most popular theme in popular songs is love. It is very common for lyrics to rhyme.

There are different types of **chords**. The main kinds are **major** and **minor**. Some examples are:

The C major chord is made up of the notes C E G

The A minor chord is made up of the notes A C E

Instruments

Instruments used in a song often depend on the style of the music.

Rock songs usually feature drum kit, bass guitar and electric guitar

Acoustic rock songs usually feature acoustic guitar instead of electric guitar

A number of styles depend more on electronic instruments or computer generated sounds, such as r’n’b and hip hop.

Keyboard instruments like piano, organ or electronic keyboard are also prominent in popular music

History

Composers have been writing songs for thousands of years. Over time different styles evolve. As you listen to a modern style of music you can trace its development from earlier music. For example, acoustic rock finds its roots in both rock music and country music.