

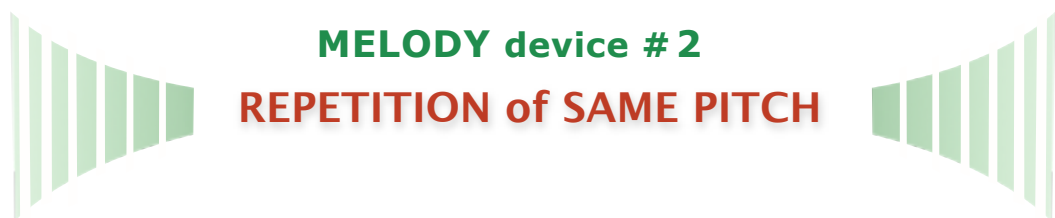
CHAPTER 4

REPETITION



Perhaps the simplest way to create tension is to just **repeat something** over and over. The tension builds as we wonder when and how the repetition will end. Repetition can create tension in not only music, but other arts, including language. For example, I could create tension by simply repeating this word, word, word, word, word, word, whatever I say next takes on added significance as the tension is released.

In music we can repeat a phrase, a musical section, or even a single note. The repetition could involve the pitch, or the rhythmic timing, or both. We'll start with **repetition of the same pitch**.



Our first example comes from Elvis Presley and his classic “Jailhouse Rock.” Even though the blues-based melody already has a narrow range with only 3 basic pitches, the last 2 bars of the verse (scored below) still stand out because they feature a single pitch for 8 straight beats. Tension is created as the melody gets “stuck” on this one pitch (a bluesy Gb), and we wait and wait for the melody to move on. The tension is finally resolved by the tonic Eb melody note on the next line at the entrance of the refrain. Note that while the melody resolves to the key note, the harmony doesn’t resolve completely until two bars later on the tonic Eb chord. Also notice the stop time at the beginning of the fourth line, further highlighting the focal point.

"Jailhouse Rock" — Elvis Presley — 1957

Eb blues



For AUDIO, see the "Song Examples" playlist in the right sidebar, and click on track 1 song title. To navigate within the audio track, slide the progress bar to the desired starting point.

Chord progression: I Eb D Eb D Eb D

Warden through a party you

0:06 VERSE

Chord progression: I Eb

REPETITION OF SAME PITCH

should've heard those let's

STOP TIME TENSION

Chord progression: IV Ab I Eb

rock Every - bod - y let's rock etc.

0:18 REFRAIN

MELODIC RESOLUTION

The next example is similar to the previous song, but this time the song title occurs right at the entrance of the refrain.

"The Times They Are a Changin'" - Bob Dylan - 1964

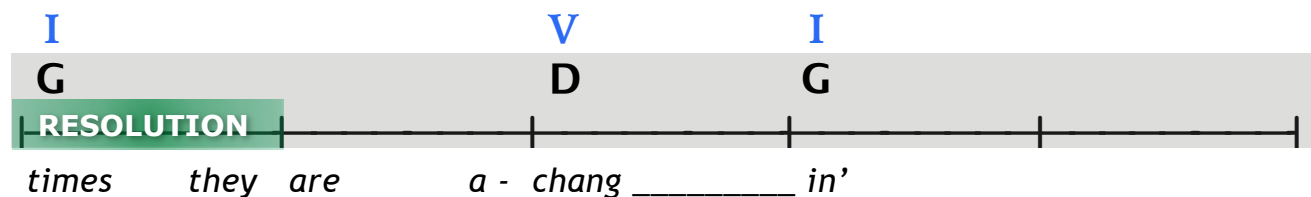
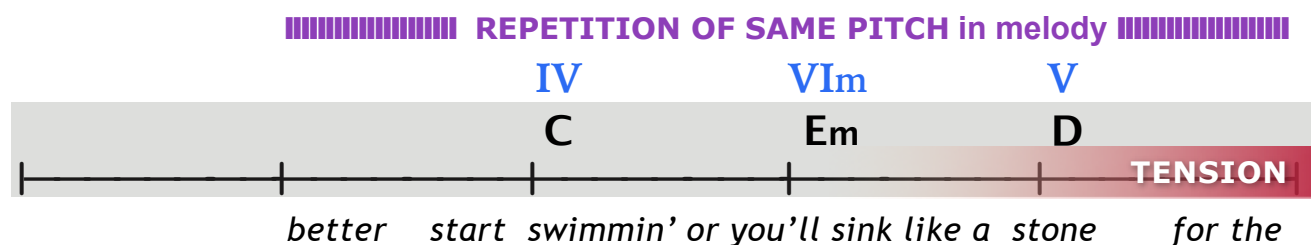
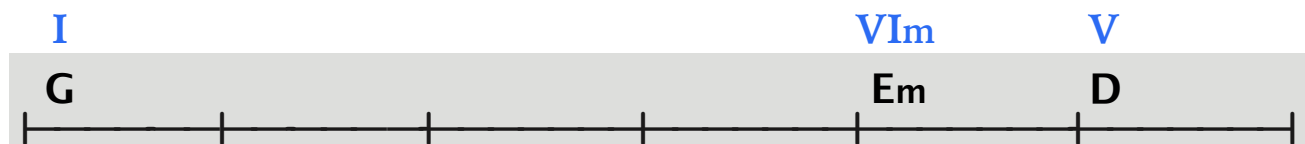
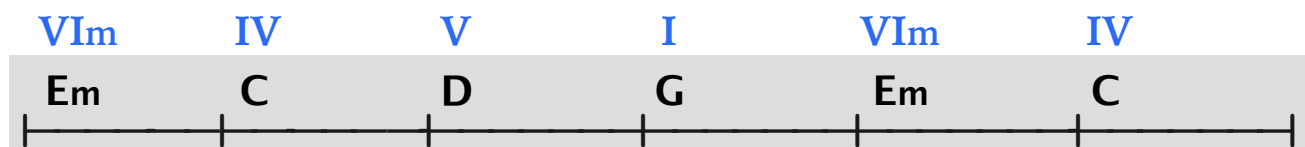
G major



Chord progression: I G VIIm Em IV C I G

The Times They Are a Changin'

0:03 VERSE



0:28 REFRAIN w song title

The pitch repetition is slightly different on the 2012 hit “Everybody Talks.” Instead of literally repeating only one pitch at the end of the verse, the melody pivots between two pitches (Ab and G), always returning to the Ab note as a repeated anchor. The overall effect is still the same, with tension created as we wait for the repetition to end. As the chorus enters, the melody breaks loose and soars to the highest notes heard so far. Be listening for the following other devices that are also working to make this hook so powerful:

- **STOP TIME** occurs at the very end of the melodic repetition.
- The **V TENSION CHORD RESOLVES to I CHORD** at the chorus entrance.
- The **I CHORD is AVOIDED** for 6 bars leading up to chorus.

"Everybody Talks" — Neon Trees — 2012

Eb major



I Eb **IV** Ab **I** Eb

Hey baby won't you Hey baby

0:06 VERSE

IV Ab **I** Eb **IV** Ab

. I'm a sorry

V7 Bb7 pivot on Ab note

I found out that every bod -y talks every bod -y talks every bod -y

I Eb **IV** Ab

talks It started with a whis- per etc.

STOP TIME

0:31 CHORUS

TENSION

RESOLUTION

Additional songs with REPETITION of SAME PITCH

1966	Yellow Submarine	The Beatles
1978	Sentimental Lady	Bob Welch
2012	50 Ways to Say Goodbye	Train
2014	Big Girls Cry	Sia

MELODY device #3

REPETITION of SHORT PHRASE

Another melodic device for creating tension would be the **repetition of a single phrase**. However, it is important that the phrase be short. To use language again as an example, a single word or sentence is short enough, but repeating an entire chapter or book is too long, making it difficult to recognize something is being repeated. This is especially true with music, since listeners are much less familiar with musical vocabulary than spoken language. To ensure the casual listener will recognize repetition in songs and feel the tension, the repeating musical segments must be short to be effective.

On Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart," a short phrase (circled below) is repeated four times during the lingering V chord, adding to the harmonic tension. Also note the avoidance of the I chord leading up to the hook. Start listening at **0:23**.

"Piece of My Heart" — Janis Joplin — 1968

E major



I IV V IV I IV V IV I IV V
E A B A E A B A E A B

0:23 VERSE

VI_m V bVII V
C#m B D B

Each time I tell myself Won't you just

0:41 PRE-CHORUS

REPETITION OF MELODIC PHRASE 4x

come on, come on, come on, come on,

TENSION

Take it etc.

0:59 CHORUS

RESOLUTION

In this song by Glenn Frey, the phrase “*Tell me can you feel it*” is repeated three times at the end of the pre-chorus, creating tension for the focal point. Start listening at **0:24**.

“The Heat Is On” — Glenn Frey — 1985

D mixo



— **0:24** (verse)

— **0:57** (pre-chorus)

— **1:07 REPETITION OF MELODIC PHRASE 3x**

“*Tell me can you feel it . . .*”

TENSION

STOP TIME

— **1:13** (chorus) **RESOLUTION** w song title.

The following example from Shania Twain also features three repetitions in the lyrics leading to the chorus. If you count the bars in the pre-chorus, you will also discover that an extra 7th bar has been added, increasing the power of the hook. Start listening at **0:20**.

“When” — Shania Twain — 1997

E major



— 0:20 (verse)

— 0:36 (pre-chorus) **REPETITION OF MELODIC PHRASES 3x**

“When will I wake up”

“Why did we break up”

“When will we make up”

— 0:48 (pre-chorus) **EXTENSION OF FORM** extra 7th bar **TENSION**

— 0:50 (chorus) **RESOLUTION** w song title.

Additional songs with REPETITION of SHORT PHRASE

1978	<i>Sentimental Lady</i>	Bob Welch
2010	<i>Firework</i>	Katy Perry
2013	<i>It's Your World</i>	Tim McGraw
2014	<i>Ain't Got Nobody</i>	Weezer
2015	<i>Cold, Cold, Cold</i>	Cage The Elephant

HARMONY device #4

REPETITION of ONE NOTE LENGTH

We will now turn our attention to focal point devices that use repetition in the harmony, rather than the melody. The first device is the **repetition of one note length**, either from a chord or a single harmony note. This is heard on the following 1966 hit “Do You Believe in Magic.”

This song is a bit unusual. It only has one part, which we will call the chorus (although you may prefer the label “verse”). The lyrics start immediately with the song title, and tension then builds at the end of the chorus, created by a repetition of 8 quarter notes on the last V chord. This tension highlights the song title each time the form repeats. You will notice several other devices that also contribute in creating the focal point:

- **DRUM FILL** one bar before song title (when chorus repeats)
- **V to I TENSION - RESOLUTION**, end of chorus leading into repeat
- **I CHORD is AVOIDED** for 6 bars before repeat
- **EXTENSION of FORM** chorus has extra 13th bar on the V chord

"Do You Believe in Magic" — Lovin' Spoonful — 1966

C major



0:07 CHORUS w song title

0:30 repeat CHORUS

RESOLUTION

The 1978 disco anthem “Y.M.C.A” also uses harmonic repetition of one note length to highlight the hook. Notice at the end of the verse how a series of horn blasts (five consecutive quarter notes) announces the entrance of the upcoming chorus and song title. Several other focal point devices are also used, including stop time, a drum fill, and the V to I cadence. Start listening at **0:28**.

"Y.M.C.A." — Village People — 1978

F# major



I
F#

VIIm
D#m

0:27 VERSE 2

IV
B

V/3
C#/E#

IV/3
B/D#

V
C#

IV
B

I/3
F#/A#

V/5
C#/G#

V
C#

5 horn blasts

DRUM FILL

TENSION

STOP TIME

I
F#

VIIm
D#m

RESOLUTION

0:45 CHORUS with song title

On the 2016 song “Dominos,” there are two focal points in the form. One occurs in the usual spot where the pre-chorus transitions to the chorus, as seen below at the end of the third line. This focal point is created by stop time in the rhythm, a Vm to Im resolution, and the avoidance of the Im chord (Em) for eleven bars leading up to the chorus. Also highlighting the entrance of the chorus is an interruption in the rhythmic groove just before the stop time. All instruments join forces in rhythmic unison, pounding out a rhythm pattern with eighth notes and quarter notes.

However, the second focal point at the end of the chorus is of greater interest for our discussion. It features a slightly different rhythm figure, repeating one note length for eight consecutive 8th notes. This puts an exclamation point on the chorus, highlighting the song’s title and perfectly matching the theme of the lyrics as the eighth notes fall “like dominos.” Start listening at **0:36**.

"Dominos" — Peter, Bjorn, and John — 2016

key **E dor**

I^m **IV** **bIII** **IV** **I^m** **IV** **bIII** **IV**

Em **A** **G** **A** **Em** **A** **G** **A**

0:36 VERSE 2

key **E min**

IV^m **bVI** **bVII** **IV^m** **bVII** **bVI**

Am **C** **D** **Am** **D** **C**

0:47 PRE-CHORUS

bVII **IV^m** **V^m**

D **Am** **Bm**

STOP TIME

TENSION

I^m **bIII** **IV^m** **bVI** **V^m**

Em **G** **Am** **C** 3x **Bm**

1:01 CHORUS

song title

**Additional songs with
REPETITION of ONE NOTE LENGTH**

1971	<i>Wild World</i>	Cat Stevens
1979	<i>Sure Know Something</i>	Kiss
1983	<i>Talking in Your Sleep</i>	Romantics



HARMONY device #5

REPETITION of SHORT PATTERN (Progression or Riff)

Repetition in the harmony can also come from **repeating a very short chord pattern**. Often this is just an alternation between two chords. This can be heard in the pre-chorus of the next song by The Turtles, where the III^m and II^m chords (circled below) alternate four times, building up tension leading into the chorus. Also notice the avoidance of the I chord in the pre-chorus, and the saving of the tension V for maximum impact right before the hook.

"It Ain't Me Babe" — The Turtles — 1965

G major



4/4

I	II ^m	III ^m	II ^m	I
G	Am	Bm	Am	G

0:06 VERSE

III ^m	II ^m	III ^m	II ^m	IV	V
Bm	Am	Bm	Am	C	D

0:21 PRE-CHORUS

REPETITION of PATTERN 4x

0:21 PRE-CHORUS

I	IV	V	I	IV	V	I
G	C	D	G	C	D	G

0:41 CHORUS

The repeated chord pattern on the next example is still only 2 bars, but much more active with 6 chord changes in the pattern (circled below). The short progression is repeated 4 times in the pre-chorus, and is linked with repeated 2-bar phrases in the

melody as well. As we have seen on several songs in this chapter, there are multiple devices at work, all serving to build tension and highlight the entrance of the chorus. Listen for the following in addition to the repeated chord and melody patterns:

- **STOP TIME** on last bar of pre-chorus
- **V to I TENSION - RESOLUTION** leading into the chorus
- **I CHORD is AVOIDED** for 9 bars leading up to chorus
- **HIGHEST MELODY NOTE** highlights the chorus entrance

"If This Is It" — Huey Lewis & The News — 1984

G major



	I	VIIm	I	VIIm	I	VIIm	bVII	IV/3	Vm7	V9sus4
4	G	Em	G	Em	G	Em	F	C/E	Dm7	D9sus4
4	: ————— :									

0:22 VERSE

	IIIm	IIIIm	IV	V	V/IIIm	IIIm	IIIIm	IV	V	V/IIIm		
	Am	Bm	C	D	E9sus4	E	Am	Bm	C	D	E9sus4	E
	—————					—————						

REPETITION of PATTERN 4x

0:42 PRE-CHORUS

	IIIm	IIIIm	IV	V	V/IIIm	IIIm	IIIIm	IV	V9sus4	
	Am	Bm	C	D	E9sus4	E	Am	Bm	C	D9sus4
	—————					—————				

TENSION

. STOP TIME

	I	IIIIm	Vm7	V/IIIm	IIIm	IIIIm	IV	V
	G	Bm	Dm7	E7	Am	Bm	C	D
	: ————— :							

RESOLUTION

1:01 CHORUS w song title

**Additional songs with
REPETITION of SHORT PATTERN (progression or riff)**

1973	<i>Rosalita</i>	Bruce Springsteen
1984	<i>Jump</i>	Van Halen
1985	<i>I Want to Know What Love Is</i>	Foreigner
2002	<i>Just Like a Pill</i>	Pink