

CHAPTER 9

The POST CHORUS DROP



Looking back, we have heard over a hundred songs in the previous chapters. On most of these songs, the high point in terms of energy and prominence has been the chorus. In contrast, the verse has often been more subdued with lower volume, lower melody notes, and fewer instruments or vocal layers.

To create a strong focal point that highlights the chorus, we have noted over two dozen devices that have been employed in various combinations in either the verse or pre-chorus to build up tension leading to the chorus entrance. The chorus has then delivered with powerful and satisfying harmonic / melodic / and rhythmic resolutions, often containing memorable hook phrases and repeated statements of the song's title. After the chorus there is usually a decrease in energy, with maybe a few bars of instrumental chords that allow us to catch our breath and reset back to the verse to begin the journey again.

However, we have seen an interesting departure from this script in the last 15 years with the rising influence of EDM (Electronic Dance Music) on the pop charts. Dance-pop hits from producers like Calvin Harris, David Guetta, Avicci, and Zedd have often shifted the focal point and energy climax to a new section after the chorus. This section has come to be known as the “**Post Chorus**,” and the entrance to the section is often called “**The Drop**.”

As you will recall, one of the most powerful tension devices is the temporary suspension of the main rhythmic groove in the pre-chorus. We heard dozens of songs where the rhythm is cut loose and “coasts,” building tension until it powerfully returns at the chorus entrance. However, on many dance-pop hits the dynamic is different — the entrance of the chorus now becomes the place where the groove is suspended. Tension

then builds and the main groove doesn't return until the post chorus. Often the return of the groove is more forceful than before, with extra bass and volume. On some songs, the main rhythm groove may not even be introduced until this post chorus. Basically, there is still a strong focal point, with a flow from tension to resolution, but the sequence is now shifted. In this chapter, we will listen to song examples that feature this new dynamic, and examine several variations of the post chorus drop.

DROP with INSTRUMENTAL HOOK

The 2012 hit “Don’t You Worry Child” by Swedish House Mafia features a drop with an **instrumental hook**. The rhythm groove is established halfway through the verse (**0:22**) when the bass kick drum enters with steady quarter notes on the beat. However, the kick quarters are very soft at this point.

At the chorus entrance (**0:53**) we hear what seems like the main vocal hook (with the title phrase “Don’t you worry, don’t you worry child”). But the energy we expect at this point is abruptly cut, and the groove that was previously established is suspended. A few seconds later a soft drum roll sneaks in the background and increases in volume, building tension.

At the instrumental drop (**1:07**), the main groove returns in full force (with more volume and energy than before) and there is a strong instrumental hook (synth chords riff). If you are trying to determine the high point or climax of the song, this can be a bit confusing. Once we hear the post chorus drop, we realize that even though the previous vocal chorus contained the main vocal hook and song title, this instrumental-only section is actually more important and memorable in terms of energy. The post chorus section (and instrumental hook) are repeated at (**1:21**), but now the main vocal hook is added, combining peak instrumental energy and peak vocal energy.

***“Don’t You Worry Child” - Swedish House Mafia - 2012
feat. J. Martin***

B minor



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.

- **0:06** (verse) Vocal with synth chords.
- **0:22** Bass kick drum softly enters with steady quarter-notes, establishing the groove. Volume gradually increases.
- **0:52** (chorus) Main vocal melody with kick drum **GROOVE SUSPENDED**.
- **1:03** Soft drum roll sneaks in the background and increases in volume, building some slight **TENSION**
- **1:07** (POST CH. DROP) **RESOLUTION**
MAIN GROOVE (kick drum) returns, but much deeper and louder.
INSTRUMENTAL HOOK (synth chords riff).
- **1:21** Main vocal melody returns while groove continues.

The following example from Mike Posner also has a drop with an instrumental hook, but this time the **main rhythm groove is not introduced until the post chorus**. You will also note that the signature “instrumental” riff in the post chorus actually comes from a digital sample of Mike’s voice, processed through a synthesizer.

“I Took a Pill in Ibiza” - Mike Posner (Seeb remix) - 2016

Bb major



- **0:00** (verse) Vocal with synth chords.
- **0:20** (chorus 1) Bass and soft “fingersnap” backbeat enter. Vocal and chords continue.
- **0:39** (chorus 2) Everything continues.

— **0:56** One bar suspension of bass, backbeat, and vocals adds a slight bit of

TENSION

— **0:57** (POST CH. DROP)

RESOLUTION

MAIN GROOVE INTRODUCED (deep kick drum quarters). Backbeat and bass return.

INSTRUMENTAL HOOK (synth with processed voice), followed by very brief lyric “I know a sad song”

DROP with VOCAL HOOK

On the 2012 hit “Clarity,” the post chorus hook is clearly vocal. In fact, the signature **vocal riff** (a long, drawn-out “Haaaay”) sneaks into the background already in the pre-chorus (**at 0:39**) and continues throughout the chorus, waiting until the drop to emerge with full power. Like the previous song, the full rhythm groove does not enter until the post chorus. However, this time there is more of a tension buildup, with a **soft snare roll** entering at **1:02** and increasing in volume before the drop.

“Clarity” — Zedd feat. Foxes — 2012

Ab major



— **0:09** (verse) Vocal with synth chords.

— **0:39** (pre-chorus) Preview of post chorus vocal riff (long, drawn-out “Haaaay”) sneaks softly into the background.

Vocal and chords continue.

— **0:54** (chorus) Main vocal melody enters while “Haaays” continue, gradually increasing in volume.

— **1:02** Soft snare roll enters, gradually increasing in volume.

TENSION

1:09

(POST CH. DROP)

RESOLUTION

MAIN GROOVE INTRODUCED (deep kick drum quarters).

VOCAL HOOK (“Haaays” vocal riff now louder and more prominent).

- **1:39** Main vocal melody from chorus enters while groove and vocal hook continue.

DROP with NO HOOK

On the next example by David Guetta and Sia, there is **no vocal or instrumental riff** in the post chorus, only a steady instrumental texture with the main groove. Notice that there is a dramatic buildup of tension at the end of the chorus, thanks to a **pulse increase** in the snare hits. At **1:01** the snare begins steady quarter notes, then switches to 8ths and finally 16th notes. (You will recall our discussion of pulse increases earlier in Chapter Two, including songs by Lady Gaga and Calvin Harris.)

“Titanium” — David Guetta feat. Sia — 2011

C minor



- **0:15** (verse) **MAIN GROOVE** starts with synth bass, heavy kick drum. Plucked chord arpeggios accompany the vocal melody.
- **0:45** (chorus) **GROOVE SUSPENDED** - NO synth bass or kick drum.
Chords switch to a light, airy wash in the background, creating a floating feeling while vocal melody continues.
- **1:01** Steady quarter notes start on snare drum.
- **1:12** **PULSE INCREASES** - drum switches to 8th notes.

— **1:14** Drum speeds up to 16th notes, creating extra **TENSION**

— **1:16** (POST CH. DROP) **RESOLUTION**

MAIN GROOVE returns with heavy kick drum, bass, and loud synth chords.

NO vocal or instrumental riff.

DELAYED RHYTHM DROP

Sometimes the return or entrance of the **main groove is delayed** until midway through the post chorus. This can be heard on the Calvin Harris hit “Feel So Close,” shown below. The post chorus begins at **0:30**, with only the sound of the instrumental hook (synth riff). No bass or rhythm instruments are heard until **0:37**, when a snare drum enters with steady 8th notes. Tension builds until **0:45**, when the main groove is finally introduced with heavy bass and kick drum. (We might call this specific entrance the “rhythm drop.”) The main groove and instrumental hook then continue until the end of the post chorus.

“Feel So Close” — Calvin Harris — 2012

G major



— **0:00** (chorus) Vocal with piano chords and “clap” backbeat.

— **0:30** (POST CHORUS) **INSTRUMENTAL HOOK** (synth riff).
NO other instruments

— **0:37** Snare drum enters with steady 8th notes, creating some **TENSION**

— **0:45** (“RHYTHM DROP”) **RESOLUTION**

MAIN GROOVE INTRODUCED (deep kick drum quarters with backbeat). Bass line enters, synth riff continues.

PREVIEW OF INSTRUMENTAL HOOK

Our last example, “Heart Still Beating,” features a brief **preview** of the post chorus instrumental hook (a synth riff) in the song’s intro. You will also notice that this song has a very strong chorus, with a **memorable vocal line**. The melody climbs an entire octave with numerous leaps, creating a distinctive melodic contour that outlines the tonic B chord. Then it descends back to its starting point as shown below.



0:34 CHORUS MELODY

This vocal hook is given extra power by the melody line at the end of the pre-chorus, where arresting high notes (jumping up an octave at **0:30**) highlight the chorus entrance.

With such a strong chorus, it is a bit surprising that the post chorus drop still feels equally important. Of course, the power of the drop is due in part to the sheer volume increase, as the main groove is introduced. But other elements also contribute, such as the strength of the instrumental hook (synth riff), and the slight amount of tension built up at the end of the chorus, created mainly by repeated note values. Throughout the chorus, the bass plays steady 8ths, and the vocal line features a very deliberate sequence of almost all quarter notes (see above). All this repetition and a gradual increase in volume creates some suspense, serving to highlight the post chorus entrance.

"Heart Still Beating" - Nathan Dawe, Bebe Rexha - 2023

B major



- **0:00** (intro) Synth riff offers brief **preview** of post chorus instrumental hook. Background chords, but no rhythm except occasional “heart beats” played by soft kick drum.
- **0:06** (verse) Vocal melody (same as synth riff).

- **0:20** (pre-chorus) Soft “clap” backbeat enters, vocal melody changes.
- **0:30** Arresting high vocals highlight the chorus entrance.
- **0:34** (chorus) Main vocal hook with steady 8th note bass line that gradually increases in volume, creating some **TENSION**
- **0:47** (POST CH. DROP) **RESOLUTION**
MAIN GROOVE INTRODUCED (deep kick drum, bass, and clap backbeat).
INSTRUMENTAL HOOK (synth riff repeated 2x - song title is sung after each synth riff).

Additional songs with POST CHORUS DROP

2011	<i>We Found Love</i>	Rihanna, Calvin Harris	F# major
2012	<i>Sweet Nothing</i>	Calvin Harris feat. Florence Welch	G# minor
2012	<i>Stay the Night</i>	Zedd, feat. Hayley Williams	A major
2012	<i>Feel This Moment</i>	Pitbull, feat. Christina Aguilera	G major
2013	<i>Wake Me Up</i>	Avicii	D major
2014	<i>Animals</i>	Martin Garrix	F minor
2022	<i>I'm Good (Blue)</i>	David Guetta, Bebe Rexha	G minor
2023	<i>In the City</i>	Charlie xcx, Sam Smith	C# minor



This concludes our discussion of focal points for The Art of the Hook. Hopefully you have gained new insights into how pop hits are constructed and the many devices that are used to create memorable and powerful hooks. We have listened to almost 120 songs and discussed 28 focal point devices covering rhythm, melody, harmony, form, and timbre.

After taking such a deep dive into the details of music theory, all the numbers we have encountered (scale degrees, Roman numerals, etc.) make songwriting seem like math and science. Remember that music is also art and emotion. As we have seen throughout this book, numbers in music are connected to subjective feeling, thanks to the existence of musical tension, resolution, and focal points.

If you are a songwriter armed with all these new tools, it might be easy to assume that the more devices you use, the better the song. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not the sheer number of devices, it is how even one device can be used to help create the full artistic and emotional experience intended by the songwriter. As we have said throughout this book, commercial pop songs are meant to grab your attention with strong, memorable focal points. On some songs, only one device may be needed. Since music is an art, and musical taste is famously subjective, you will ultimately decide what is best for your song.