PLEASE NOTE -

The audio player for this book sample (see lower right sidebar) is the embed player provided by Spotify. By default, it will only play a 30 second preview of each song, taken randomly from the middle of the song track. To hear the full tracks from the beginning, you must log in with a free Spotify account, then come back and refresh this page. This is important, because most of the musical elements being discussed occur at or near the start of each song.

Unfortunately, Spotify does not provide full tracks when you use their embed player with iPads or Safari. For this reason, you will need to use a laptop or desktop with either a Firefox, Chrome, or Edge browser to hear the full songs in the player.

If you prefer, you can bypass the player completely and go directly to the playlist page on the Spotify website. Just use the “Alternate Link” button at the bottom, which will open Spotify in either a new tab or a new window. You will then have to resize (shrink) the new Spotify window so it fits on the right side of the chapter text.

The audio player provided in the paid version of Art of the Hook is a much-improved CUSTOM AUDIO PLAYER, built exclusively for this website. It will always play the full song on any laptop, desktop, or tablet with all major browsers.

The Art of the Hook
in Pop Music

By Tom Schneider

PREFACE

Welcome to The Art of the Hook. This book is first and foremost a celebration of pop music, exploring the creativity and craft behind the hits. It attempts to answer a fundamental question — What makes a pop song so appealing and memorable? This topic may be of interest to a wide range of music lovers, including everyone from casual listeners to devoted fans of a particular artist or genre. However, Art of the Hook is intended primarily as a textbook for music students, and it will speak most obviously to songwriters and producers who want to broaden their audience and achieve more commercial success.

The book will present a detailed discussion of how pop and rock hits are constructed, particularly the creation of hook phrases and focal points. Over 125 song examples will illustrate specific **focal point devices**, covering all aspects of music, including rhythm, melody, harmony, form, and timbre. It should be noted that the focus will be primarily on musical elements rather than lyrics. There is no doubt that lyrics are very important in pop songwriting, and they will be mentioned occasionally. But there are already several books and websites that do a great job with lyric writing. In contrast, not as much has been written about the music itself, so the discussion here will be mainly on the music.

For songwriting students, most of the focal point devices in this book do not require an advanced knowledge of music theory to be understood. However, there will be a few devices that assume a basic acquaintance with fundamentals like scales and diatonic triads in major and minor keys. Roman numeral analysis will be included for all chord progressions in chapters three through eight, mainly to aid in recognizing the dominant V to I cadences at most focal points. In some songs, non-diatonic chords (secondary doms, modal interchange, dim7, etc.) will occasionally be found. A detailed knowledge of these may be helpful, but it is not necessary for understanding our main topic of hooks and focal points. All these terms and concepts can be found in the companion textbooks Spinning Gold, Vol. 1 and 2, available on the Learn Pop Theory website.

Art of the Hook is the culmination of 20 years of personal research, based on an original database created from analysis of over 3,500 chart hits. Songs were equally sampled across seven decades of pop music history, including roughly 60 hits from each year 1955 to 2024. All songs made at least the top 40 of either the Billboard singles or album charts in a variety of genres. Thanks to this wealth of information, topics throughout the book are backed up with numerous playlists for additional listening.

As you progress through any music book with some theoretical analysis, it's possible to become overloaded with numbers — think of trying to memorize a maj7th chord as 1, 3, 5, 7, or a minor scale as 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7, or the doowop progression as I - VIm - IV - V, etc., etc. In fact, music is often compared to mathematics. However, the crucial difference is that numbers in music are connected to emotions, thanks to the existence of musical tension and resolution. For example, the roman numeral V (dominant chord), or the 7th degree of the major scale (leading tone) usually represent a feeling of tension, and the number 1 represents a feeling of "home base" or resolution in both scales and chord progressions. Therefore, music theory should ultimately be experienced as a feeling, not just numbers.

Pop songwriters typically exploit this emotional quality, creating focal points or "hooks" that grab the listener's attention — the tension peaks at the end of one section (verse or pre-chorus) and resolves at the beginning of the next section (usually a chorus). Art of the Hook clearly explains the numerous musical devices that can be used to create tension and memorable focal points, making the numbers truly come alive.

One final note — please use good quality headphones or speakers to listen to the song examples. If you use a laptop with no headphones or added external speakers, you will not hear all the music, especially the important bass line and kick drum, which are the foundations of the harmony and rhythm.

Best wishes on your musical journey,
Tom Schneider

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to HOOK PHRASES & FOCAL POINTS

The word “hook” is often used when describing pop songs, but how would you define it? What exactly is a “hook”? If we save specific details for later chapters, we could simply say that a hook is a **musical part that grabs your attention** and **sticks in your head,** even after the song is over. We can divide hooks into two types:

1. Short **“HOOK PHRASES**,**”** and
2. Larger areas of the song form that we will call **“FOCAL POINTS.”**

Hook Phrases

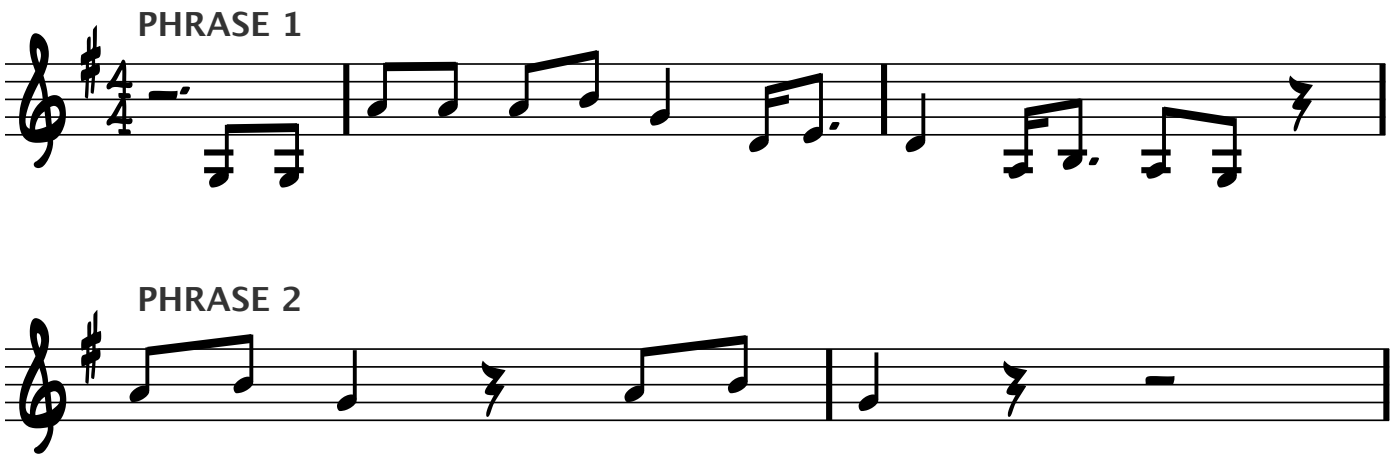
A short hook phrase could be something like an **instrumental riff** (usually on guitar or synth), or a **repeated phrase in the vocal melody**. These hook phrases usually last for only a few bars and are often repeated. In terms of vocal melody, think of Beyonce’s repeated phrase “If you liked it then you should’ve put a ring on it,” or Queen’s classic hook “We will, we will, rock you.” A more recent example might be Chappell Roan’s spelled out song title “H - O - T - T - O - G - O.”

A variety of elements can contribute to the strength of a hook phrase, including pitch, rhythm, or even timbre. Let’s look at another famous vocal hook where **pitch** is the main factor. This melody (shown below) is so distinctive and memorable that it can be recognized standing on its own, without the original voice or recording. See if you can name the song from this piano version.

Listening Ex. - Melody 1

Track 1

For AUDIO, see “Listening Exercises” on top-right sidebar, and click on Track 1



You probably recognized that this hook came from the chorus of Taylor Swift’s song “Shake It Off.” What makes this vocal hook so strong and memorable? Phrase 1 certainly stands out with the following elements:

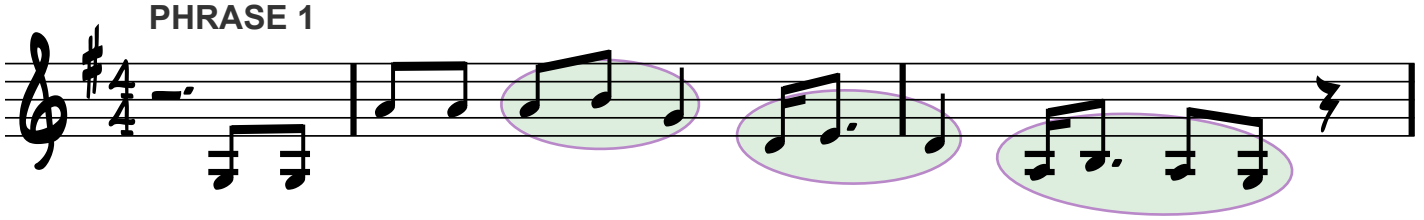
— **dramatic melodic leaps**

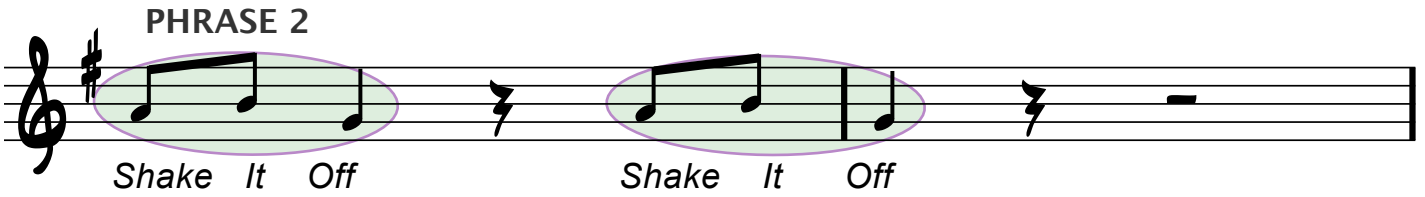
— **distinctive descending contour** (over an octave)

— **a wide variety of pitches**

Just to make sure we remember it, phrase 1 is **repeated 3 times** to start the chorus. When the repetition is finally broken, the chorus is capped off with Phrase 2, leaving the **title words** stuck in our head.

Perhaps you also noticed a **short melodic pattern** that adds to the distinctive contour. As you can see below, the pattern is almost like a melodic sequence — repeated several times at different pitch levels with slight variations.





Adding to the impact, the melody nicely compliments the sentiment of the lyrics. Just as we are feeling low, having descended over an octave to hit rock bottom on the low G, the melody springs back up with a huge leap, **highlighting the optimistic title words** "shake it off."

If you are unfamiliar with this song, you can hear it in the Song Examples playlist, Track 2. The chorus begins at **0:42**.

"Shake It Off" — Taylor Swift — 2014 **G major** 1

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.

Hook phrases are placed at prominent places in the song form. This is usually the very beginning of a song (especially for instrumental riffs), or during the chorus (especially for vocal hooks).

We'll encounter many more short hook phrases as we proceed through this and subsequent chapters However, our main topic moving forward will be the larger type of hooks mentioned earlier, known as "Focal Points."

Focal Points

In a typical hit song, songwriters and producers use a wide variety of musical devices to create peaks and valleys in the flow of musical energy. Simply put, **focal points** are the areas where the energy increases and peaks.

Of course, most people recognize the **chorus** as the most important and memorable section in a pop song. The chorus usually contains the song title and main theme of the lyrics, lots of repetition, and often a short hook phrase (either vocal or instrumental). However, we are even more interested in the **ENTRANCE** of the chorus. This is the spot most likely to grab your attention and stick with you.

Now one way to guarantee a prominent entrance would be to place the chorus at the very beginning of the song. However, most songs save the chorus for later in the song form, usually after a verse or pre-chorus. This allows the songwriter and producer to work their magic, creating musical elements that help "set up" the chorus and make the chorus entrance even stronger.

So what devices do songwriters and producers use to highlight the chorus on a pop record? Let's briefly start with some of the simplest, then move on to more specific songwriting devices that can be used to make this focal point even more powerful and memorable.

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HARMONY device # 1

ADDING an INSTRUMENTAL HOOK PHRASE

Another way to highlight the chorus is to add an **instrumental hook phrase**. On the next example by Paul Simon, the chorus is marked by a synthesized horn riff that accompanies the vocals. However, you will also notice that the hook phrase is

previewed in the song's intro without the vocals. This type of preview occurs on many pop songs, giving the listener a heads-up regarding the signature riff of the song. When that riff returns, it feels a little more powerful because it's familiar.

"You Can Call Me Al" — Paul Simon — 1986 | **F major** | 2

— **0:00** (intro) Signature **HORN RIFF** is introduced in the intro.

— **0:15** (verse) Horn riff disappears

— **0:44** (chorus) **HORN RIFF RETURNS** highlighting the chorus

TIMBRE device # 2
ADDING A SIGNATURE TIMBRE

Sometimes the instrumental hook phrase is really just a **signature SOUND**. So instead of a melodic riff that you could sing or whistle, the only thing that makes the hook phrase unique and memorable is the **timbre** — a completely new sound, skillfully crafted and mixed with multiple layers by the sound engineer.

A WORD ABOUT TIMBRE

We have already used the word timbre several times in our discussion, but perhaps we should pause here for a moment, just to clarify the term and underline its importance in pop and rock.

Timbre is the specific **sound quality** that distinguishes one instrument from another. Timbre can be described in terms of "bright" vs. "dull" or "smooth" vs. "rough," but it should not be confused with pitch, which describes "high" vs. "low." For example, you could play a middle C on piano and a middle C on saxophone. It would be the exact same pitch, but it would sound very different on each instrument, due to their unique timbres.

Even within a single instrument, the timbre can change. Think of a trumpet player using a mute, a blues vocalist growling, or as we heard with the Third Eye Blind song, a rock guitarist switching from clean to distorted sound. In fact, rock guitarists often spend hours carefully crafting their timbre by programming electronic effects and choosing from dozens of foot pedals during a performance.

Traditional musical analysis often focuses on other elements like melody or harmony, and the element of timbre is sometimes overlooked. However, timbre is often crucial to the overall presentation of a pop & rock song — sometimes more important than any other element, including melody.

We have already noted how many pop songs have melodies that are not distinct enough to "stand on their own" when removed from the original recording. Often the chord progression is also not compelling, with only a four-bar loop or even just one chord. The creativity may lie in the rhythm or lyrics, but if not, then it is most likely the unique timbre or "sound" of the record that makes it so appealing. This is why some rock songs that sounded great on the original recording just don't translate well to marching band or string quartet, no matter how good the musicians are.

So that brings us back to our idea of a "signature sound." As we mentioned, on some songs the signature hook is not a melodic riff, but just a unique timbre. The following song by Taylor Swift offers a good example, featuring the signature sound of delicate, treble chimes. Once again, the hook is previewed in the intro.

"Clean" — Taylor Swift — 2014 | **E major** | 3

— **0:00** (intro) Song starts with only bass & drums.

— **0:09** **SIGNATURE SOUND** enters (treble synth sounds like chimes)

— **0:18** (verse) Chimes sound disappears.

— **1:04** (chorus) **SIGNATURE SOUND** of chimes returns, marking the chorus

Notice that the delicate sound of the chimes matches the lyric line. Swift sings "The rain came pouring down . . . . ," and if you use your imagination, the signature sound may remind you of raindrops gently falling.

MELODY device # 1
HIGHEST NOTE STARTS CHORUS

On many pop songs the **highest note of the melody** is sung right as the chorus enters, once again calling attention to this important focal point.

The 2013 song “The River” features a signature sound AND the highest melody note working together to highlight the chorus entrance. The signature sound comes from a high treble guitar sounding like ringing bells. As the signature sound pairs with the highest melody note, a triumphant feeling is created. This totally matches the uplifting lyrics, as the singer proclaims “Reach, it’s not as bad as it seems.” Once again, the signature sound is previewed in the intro.

“The River” — Imagine Dragons — 2013 | **Db major** | 4

— **0:00** (intro) **SIGNATURE SOUND** of ringing bells opens the song.

— **0:23** (verse) Much quieter - signature sound disappears.

— **0:45** (chorus) **HIGHEST MELODY NOTES** and **SIGNATURE SOUND** create a triumphant feeling.

CHAPTER 2

RHYTHMIC TENSION / RESOLUTION

Almost all types of music — whether it's pop, rock, jazz, or classical — have places where musical tension is built up and then released, like the twists and turns of a good book or movie plot. This helps create the focal points we have been talking about.

As mentioned in Chapter One, pop & rock songs are definitely meant to grab the listener's attention, so songwriters try to carefully manipulate the tension so that it peaks at the end of one section (verse or pre-chorus), followed by a satisfying resolution at the beginning of the next section (usually a chorus). That exact moment of maximum tension, the musical hook, can be very arresting, and often a listener that has begun to daydream will tune back in for those few seconds.

The only type of music that doesn't call attention to itself is music meant specifically to be in the background. This would include songs for relaxation or meditation. These songs run very smoothly, with no peaks or valleys or focal points that will distract you from your quiet reverie.

There are many musical devices that create moments of tension and resolution. If you are acquainted with Roman numeral analysis, you are probably familiar with **harmonic** tension, where the dominant V chord resolves to the tonic I. However, we will save the discussion of harmonic tension for the next chapter. Instead, we'll start here with a simpler kind of tension created by **rhythmic** elements like stop time, "disjointed" rhythm patterns, and suspension of the main rhythmic groove.

RHYTHM device # 1
STOP TIME

Stop time is a brief break in the main instrumental accompaniment, usually on beats 2, 3, and 4 of a single measure. However, the pause can last for up to four bars in

some songs. Of course the term is a bit misleading - the background instruments may stop playing, but like any rest in standard notation, the beat keeps going during the silence and the tempo is maintained. Also, the vocal melody or drums may continue while the other instruments pause. This rhythmic device can be a brief, but very effective way to create a focal point because the abrupt break in the song's instrumental flow obviously attracts attention. If the pause is long enough, a great deal of tension is created as we anticipate the return of the established rhythm pattern.

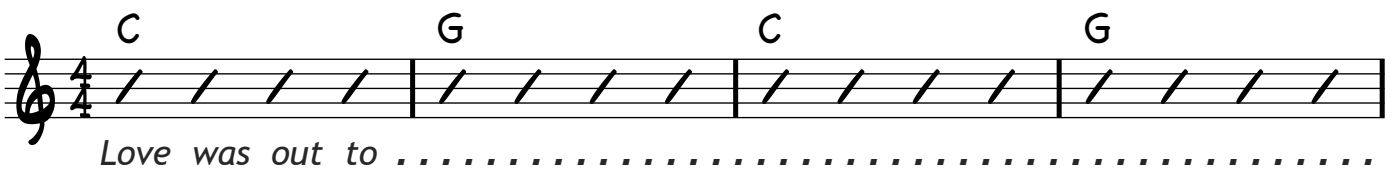
STOP TIME BEFORE CHORUS

Stop time is often used right before the chorus which highlights the chorus entrance. This can be heard on the song "I'm a Believer," a hit for the Monkees in 1966, and later used in 2001 for the movie Shrek. On the last measure of the verse, all instruments hit the downbeat, followed by 3 beats of rest. Note that the vocals continue through the rest. Start listening at **0:16**.

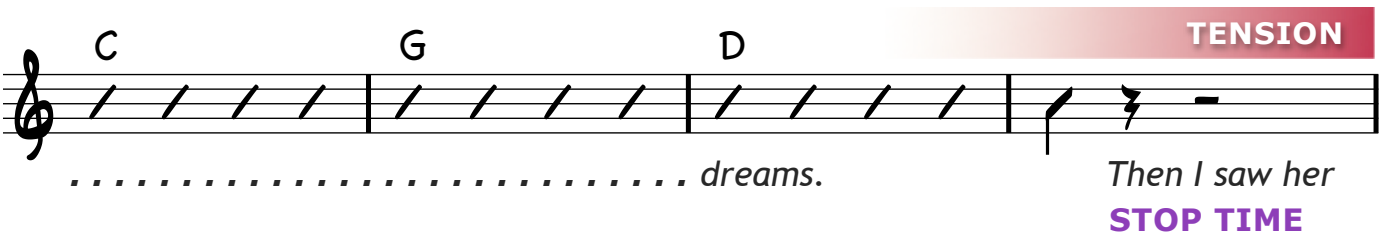
"I'm A Believer" - The Monkees - 1966

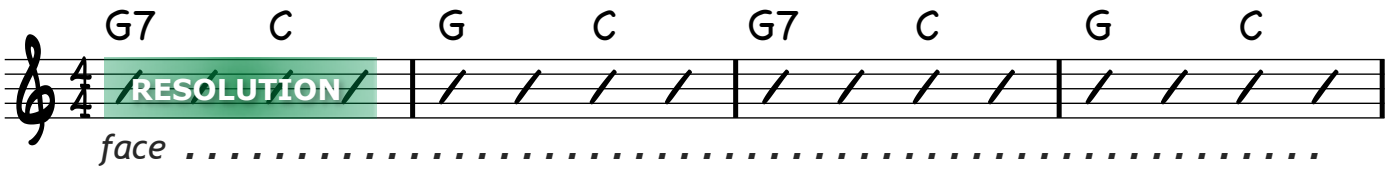
ver - G major
ch - G mixo

5



0:16 end of VERSE





0:28 CHORUS

Additional songs with STOP TIME BEFORE CHORUS

1964	*Glad All Over*	Dave Clark Five
1984	*Heart of Rock & Roll*	Huey Lewis & The News
2002	*Don't Let Me Get Me*	Pink
2011	*Set Fire to the Rain*	Adele
2012	*50 Ways to Say Goodbye*	Train
2012	*Everybody Talks*	Neon Trees
2014	*Spotlight*	Shakira
2017	*Smooth Like the Summer*	Thomas Rhett
2020	*Bragger*	Kelsea Ballerini
2023	*Kismet*	The Beaches

STOP TIME BEFORE TITLE PHRASE

As we have heard, stop time often highlights the title of the song at the entrance of the chorus. However, there is another common place to sing the title words — at the **very end** of a chorus, refrain, or even a verse. In this case, the title emphatically concludes the section, like a period finishing a sentence. This can help the listener remember it, since the words of the title stay fresh in our mind as the singing stops. If the song has a brief instrumental space (1 to 4 bars - no vocals) between sections, we even have time to repeat the title in our head before the next section starts. Not surprisingly, stop time is used quite often to highlight these "closing titles."

Here's a great example by the Georgia Satellites. Note how the stop time highlights the title phrase.

"Keep Your Hands to Yourself" - Georgia Satellites - 1987 **A blues** 6

— **0:00** (verse) 12-bar form

— **0:30** (end of verse) **STOP TIME** on bar 11 with **title phrase** **TENSION**

— **0:33** (4-bar instrumental interlude) **RESOLUTION**

— **0:42** (next verse)

(Pages are omitted from this sample)

Additional songs with STOP TIME at TITLE PHRASE

1957	*All Shook Up*	Elvis Presley
1958	*Great Balls of Fire*	Jerry Lee Lewis
1959	*Teenager in Love*	Dion & The Belmonts
1965	*Love Potion #9*	The Searchers
1970	*Make It with You*	Bread
1972	*From the Beginning*	Emerson, Lake, & Palmer
1977	*I Just Want to Make Love to You*	Foghat
1990	*Hard to Handle*	The Black Crowes
1999	*Man! I Feel Like a Woman*	Shania Twain
2008	*Freeze*	T-Pain ft. C. Brown
2011	*Made in America*	Toby Keith

(pages omitted from this sample)

RHYTHM device #3
MAIN GROOVE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

In the previous songs, we have heard how effective the abrupt break of stop time can be in creating a quick focal point. However, sometimes the interruption of the instrumental and rhythmic flow is more subtle over a longer period of several bars or an entire section. The **main rhythm groove is temporarily suspended**, replaced by a thinner, simpler texture. This would be a typical scenario for most pop songs:

Verse — **MAIN RHYTHM GROOVE** is established

The main rhythm groove often features

- **Drums with a backbeat** (often with **heavy bass kick drum** playing steady quarter notes on the beat)
- A **bass line**
- Some type of **rhythm pattern on a chording instrument**. (often a steady 8th-note pulse with guitar strum or synth chords)

Pre-Chorus — **MAIN GROOVE is SUSPENDED**

- The **instrumental texture thins** out with minimal drums & bass. Often there is no backbeat

- The **rhythm pattern becomes more deliberate**, with the chording instrument often switching to whole note chords.

- The **overall effect is one of coasting** — like the gears of the main rhythmic engine have just become disconnected for a few bars. Usually the vocals continue during this part and the chords keep changing underneath the melody. **Tension** is created as we anticipate the return of the groove.

Chorus — MAIN GROOVE RETURNS

Then, at the entrance of the chorus, the energy of the main groove returns, giving us a satisfying resolution.

Lady Gaga's 2013 hit "Donatella" is a great example of this kind of rhythmic suspension. During the pre-chorus the heavy, driving groove is cut loose, and the song briefly floats like a glider with a light, ethereal sound for 6 bars. At 1:01 the glider gently comes to rest and we wait for 2 more bars . . . . anticipating the return of the main instrumental pattern and the rhythmic resolution.

"Donatella" — Lady Gaga — 2013 | **A minor** | 7

— **0:19** (verse) **MAIN GROOVE** starts with heavy synth bass & kick drum, then adds treble synth chords

— **0:49** (pre-chorus) **INSTRUMENTAL GROOVE SUSPENDED**

- NO synth bass, kick drum
- Synth switches to lighter piano sound
- Light percussion continues
- Airy, reverbed vocal adds to floating feeling

— **1:03** Everything shuts down like a soft stop time **TENSION**

— 1:05 (chorus) **RESOLUTION**

– **MAIN GROOVE** returns in rhythm with
- Song title
- Highest melody note

Additional songs with MAIN GROOVE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

1969	***Maxwell's Silver Hammer***	The Beatles
1972	***Listen to the Music***	The Doobie Brothers
2005	***Crying Shame***	Jack Johnson
2017	***No Distraction***	Beck
2017	***Swish Swish***	Katy Perry feat. Nicki Minaj
2020	***Hallucinate***	Dua Lipa
2023	***Rush***	Troye Sivan

RHYTHM device #5

DISJOINTED TO SOLID RHYTHM PATTERN

Another way to create some tension leading to a focal point is to start with a **"disjointed"** rhythm pattern in the verse or pre-chorus and resolve to a more **"solid"** pattern for the chorus. In this case, "disjointed" basically means **no backbeat**.

[NOTE: If you are unfamiliar, the term "backbeat" refers to accents on beats 2 and 4. It is a hallmark of virtually all pop and rock songs that are in 4/4 meter, and usually comes from the snare drum, but it can also be a handclap, a tambourine, or even a dead guitar strum.]

The disjointed section may also have prominent **off-beat accents**, which creates tension and an unbalanced or uneasy feeling that resolves when the familiar and steady backbeat returns.

(Pages are omitted from this sample)

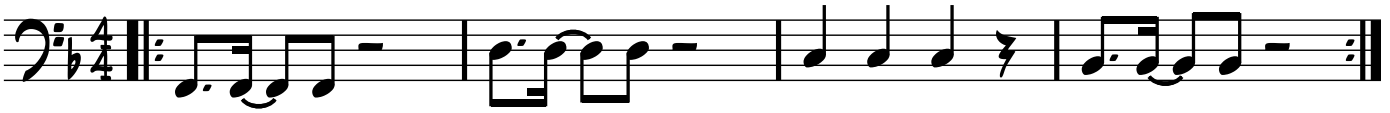
On the 1987 hit "Jacob's Ladder," there is an unbalanced feeling in the verse created by the snare hitting only on beat 4 (half of the backbeat), and an unusual bass pattern (shown below). The full backbeat starts already with the pre-chorus, but the irregular guitar strum (also shown below) still keeps the feeling uneasy. However, when the chorus enters, the guitar starts playing smoother whole notes and the rhythm seems perfectly in step with the lyrics — climbing Jacob's ladder "rung by rung".

"Jacob's Ladder" - Huey Lewis & The News - 1987

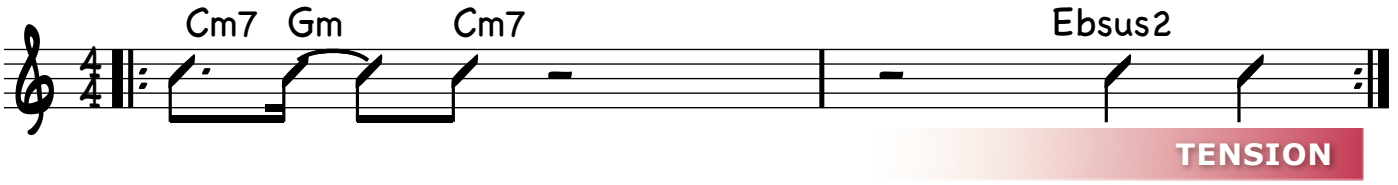
F major,
F mixo,

8

— **0:13** (verse) Snare hits only on beat 4 (half of the backbeat). Bass plays the following **DISJOINTED PATTERN**



— **0:37** (pre-chorus) Snare starts **FULL BACKBEAT** but the **DISJOINTED PATTERN** in the guitar strum keeps things uneasy.



— **0:45** (chorus) **RESOLUTION** **STEADY BACKBEAT** continues while guitar switches to smoother pattern.

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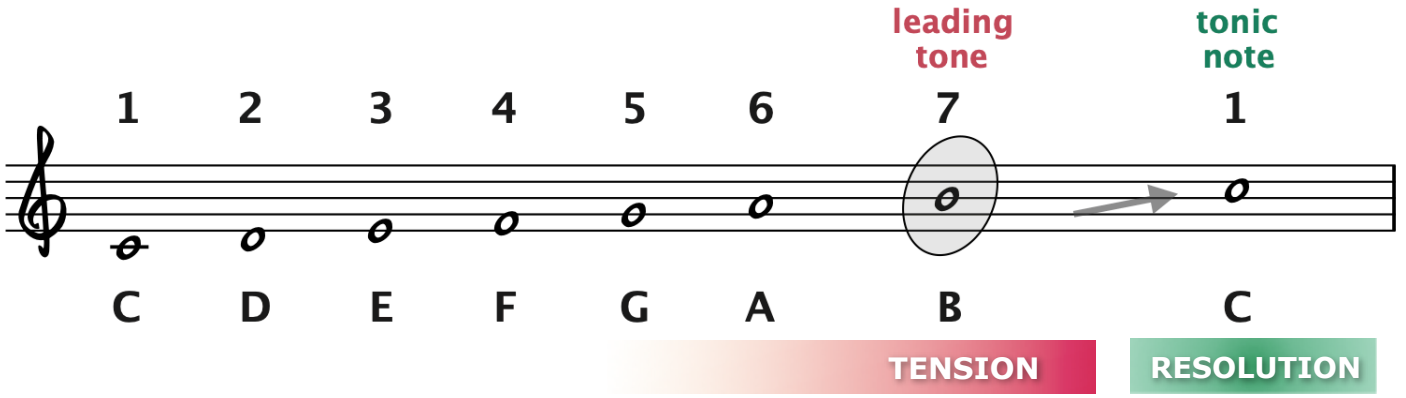
CHAPTER 3

HARMONIC TENSION / RESOLUTION

Thus far, we have discussed several rhythmic devices that create tension. We will now turn our attention to harmonic devices, particularly the movement from the dominant V chord to the tonic I, known as a V to I cadence. If you have taken a basic theory or fundamentals course, you are familiar with harmonic tension. If not, here's a quick review of some basic points.

In terms of major scales, you know that the first note of the scale, also called the **key note** or **tonic note**, is the resolving point or "home base" where all other notes eventually return. The note with the most tension is the seventh degree, also called the **leading tone**.

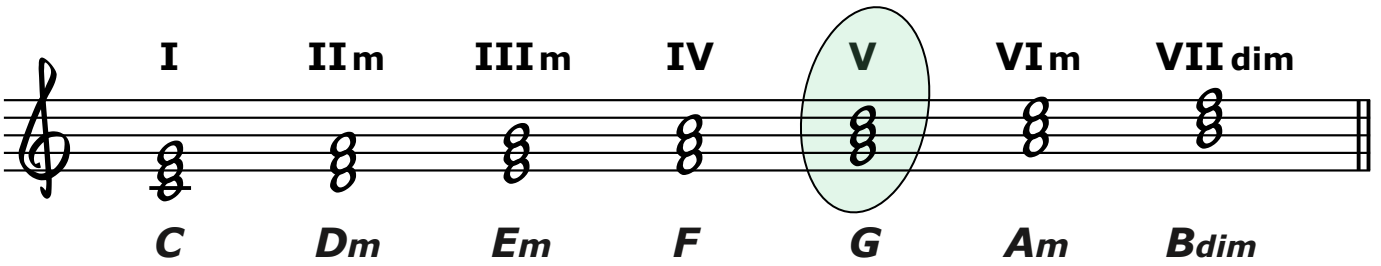
The C Major Scale



The leading tone B is considered most unstable because it is only a half step away from returning to home base (the tonic C). Try playing or singing the scale in ascending order, but **stop on the B note** . . . . . You will feel the tension until you eventually play the tonic C note to resolve the sound. For this reason, the last melody note at the very end of a song is almost always the tonic note.

You will also remember that there are **seven diatonic chords** — one built on each note of the scale.

Seven Diatonic Chords – Key of C



These chords have similar characteristics in terms of tension and resolution. The I chord acts as home base and all other chords will carry some tension until the progression eventually resolves back to I. Therefore, most songs also end on the I chord.

In terms of tension, the VII dim triad (B dim chord in the key of C) certainly has instability with the leading tone B as its root note, but this chord is very rare in pop and rock. We will focus instead on the **V chord** — another strong tension producer with the leading tone in the middle of the chord. (In the key of C, this would be a G chord, containing the notes G, B, and D.) Of the three most common chords in any major key - I, IV, and V - it is the dominant V that has the greatest feeling of anticipation:

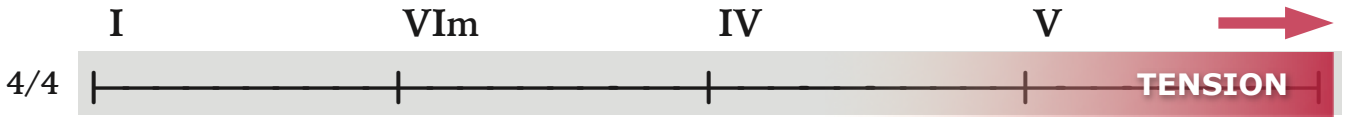
tonic	**I chord**	**"home base" resolution point — no tension**
sub-dominant	**IV chord**	**transition — small amount of tension**
dominant	**V chord**	**building anticipation — maximum tension**

As we heard in Chapter Two, rhythmic tension is often at its greatest in the last two or three bars of the verse or pre-chorus, leading into the chorus. This is also true for harmonic tension. However, exactly where the V to I cadence occurs in the form (ie. which measure) can have a big impact on the transition from verse to chorus. Should the sound resolve to I on the last measures of the verse, or should the resolution wait until the first bars of the chorus?

OPEN VS. CLOSED HARMONIC SEGMENTS

In terms of measures, most sections or phrases in pop & rock songs are in multiples of four — ie. 4-bar, 8-bar, 12-bar, or 16 bar segments. The resolution to the I sometimes occurs on the last bar of a section or phrase, wrapping things up before moving on to the next segment. In this case the segment is said to be **"closed"** harmonically. Here is an example of the common four-bar "doowop" progression that is closed, resolving back to I within the four bar segment:

However, it is more common in pop music to have an **open** segment like the following version of the doowop progression:



In this open-ended version, the tension of the V chord is not resolved within the four bars. We must wait until the entrance of the next segment to hear a possible resolution to the I chord. Pop and rock music is often constructed with a steady stream of open-ended phrases, creating great **forward momentum in the harmony**. An entire song may be based on repetitions of the four-bar doowop progression, constantly tumbling forward. In these songs the progression may never come to rest on the I chord for any extended period. In fact, there may even be a fade out, with no final ending on the I at all.

Just as with the smaller four-bar segment, larger sections like a verse or chorus may be open-ended or closed. If the goal is to create the most dramatic and memorable entrance possible for the chorus, then the **end of the verse should be open and unresolved** — preferably ending on the tension V chord. A closed resolution to I before the chorus would dampen the forward momentum and dilute the power of the chorus entrance.

It should be added that this idea actually applies to all types of tension, not just harmonic. You will recall that the rhythmic tension discussed in Chapter Two was also open and unresolved, with the resolution saved for the chorus entrance.

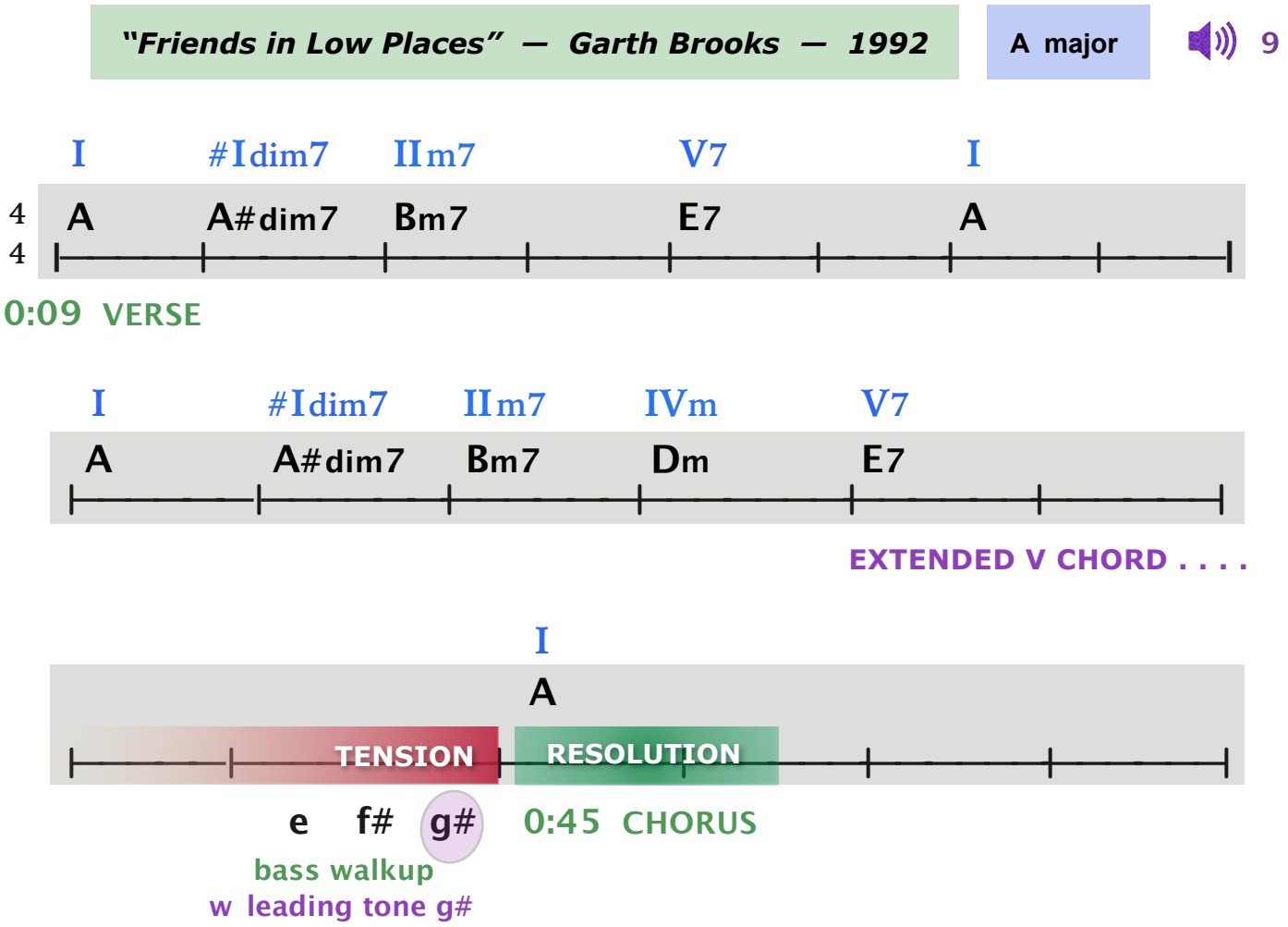
HARMONY device # 2

V TO I TENSION / RESOLUTION

V to I - VERSE to CHORUS

The following song by Garth Brooks is a great example of the V to I cadence at the chorus entrance. You will notice how the chord progression hangs on the tension V for 4 bars — **extending the V chord** for extra tension.

On the last line you can see how the bass line also contributes to the focal point. On the last 3 beats before the chorus, the bass walks up with the notes E, F#, and G#. We are in the key of A major, so this leaves us hanging on the **leading tone G#**, just before the resolution to the tonic I chord.

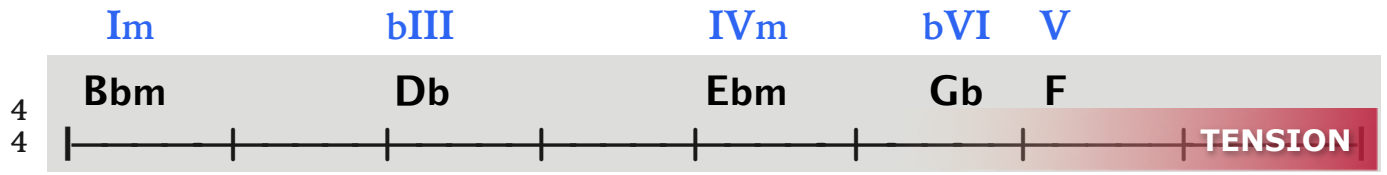


The song "Liar" by Jelly Roll offers an example of the V to I cadence in a natural minor key. In this case, the V chord stands out because it is borrowed from harmonic minor, and includes the leading tone (the defining note that transforms natural minor into harmonic minor). Start listening at **0:21.**

"Liar" — Jelly Roll — 2024

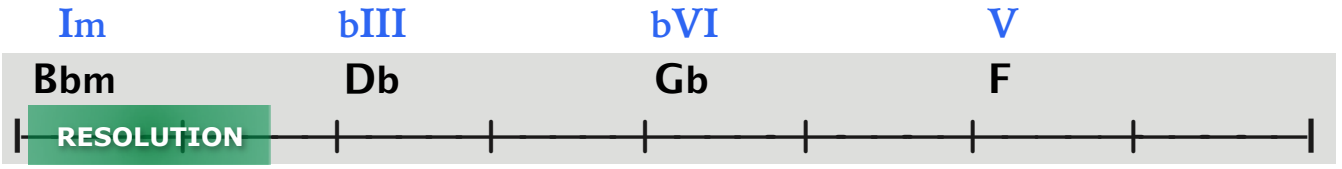
Bb minor

10



0:21 last half of VERSE

STOP TIME



0:37 CHORUS w title

(Pages are omitted from this sample)

CHAPTER 5

ASCENDING / DESCENDING ELEMENTS

We will now look at how ascending and descending elements in the melody line and harmony work to highlight a song's chorus or song title, including several examples where the linear direction of these elements helps focus our attention, pointing towards the hook.

HARMONY device #6
ASCENDING CHORD PROGRESSION

(Pages are omitted from this sample)

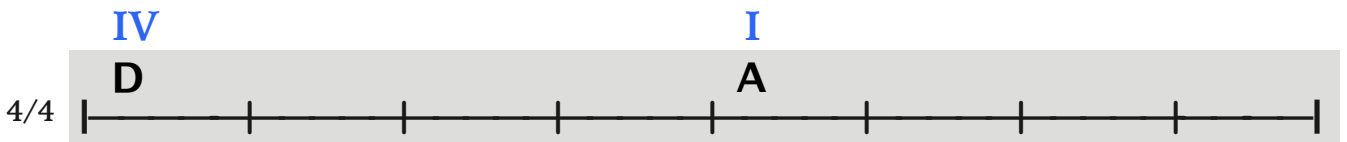
Here's a great example where chord inversions create a strong chromatic bass line ascending to the chorus, courtesy of Kenny Loggins. This song also has **3 devices mentioned previously** —

— **STOP TIME**

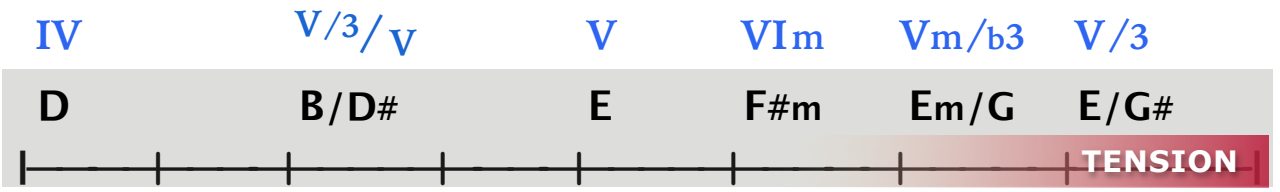
— **V to I CADENCE** at the chorus entrance. Notice that the V chord is in first inversion (V/3), with the leading tone in the bass. This creates extra tension before the resolution in the chorus.

— **I CHORD IS AVOIDED** for 8 bars leading up to the chorus. (You will recall our discussion from Chapter Three — the longer you stay away from the I, the more you want to hear it.)

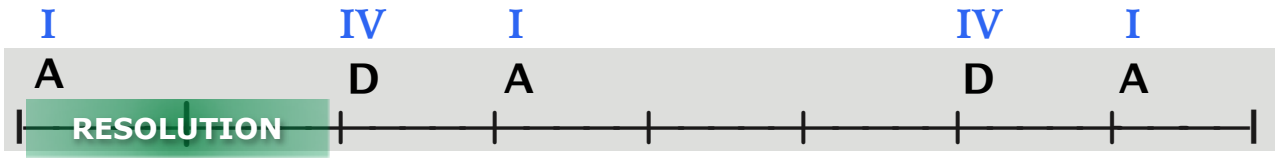
"Footloose" — Kenny Loggins — 1984 | **A major** | 11



0:42 partial VERSE



ASCENDING CHORD PROGRESSION . . . . . STOP TIME



0:57 CHORUS

MELODY device #4
ASCENDING PITCHES

Some songs feature a series of **ascending pitches in the melody,** rather than the harmony. Once again the rising notes help create some excitement and anticipation leading up to the chorus.

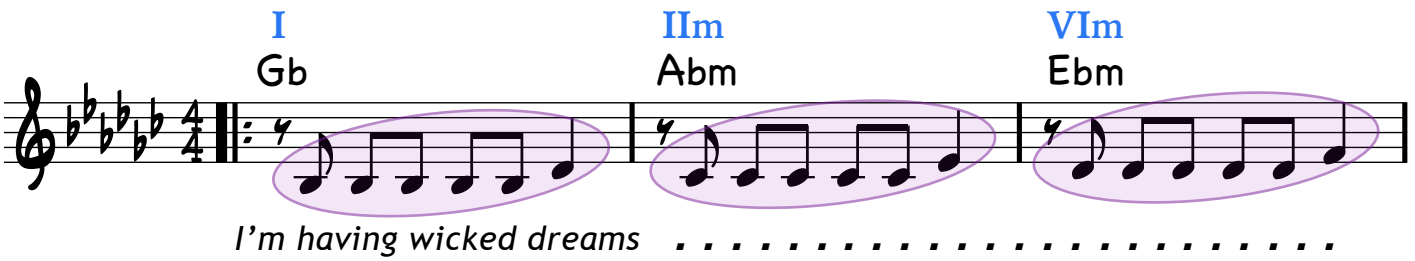
(pages omitted from this sample)

The pre-chorus of “Pink Pony Club” by Chappell Roan offers another example of a melodic climb. However, this time the melody is based on a repeated **melodic sequence**. A short, one-bar pattern is repeated 4 times at different pitch levels, ascending step-wise each time. Notice that the climb is repeated once, then peaks on the song’s **highest note** at the entrance of the next section.

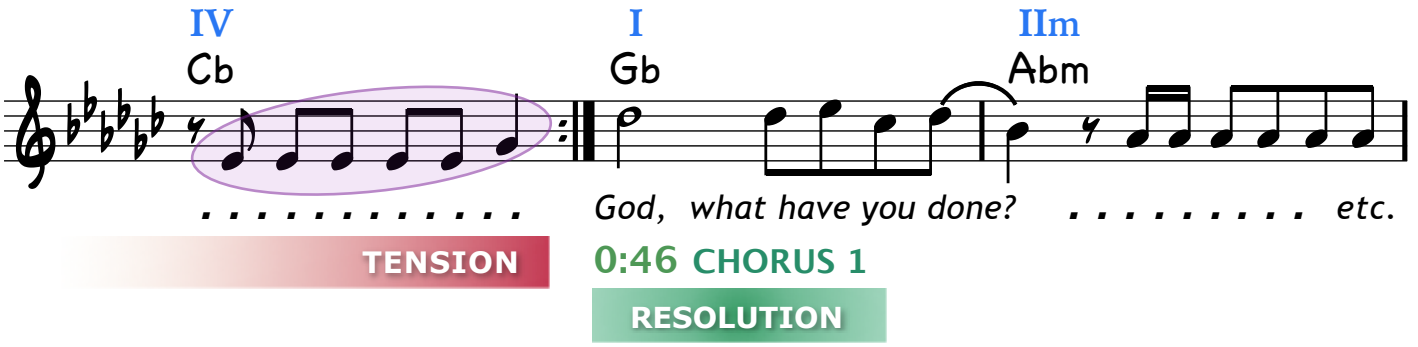
“Pink Pony Club” — Chappell Roan — 2024

Gb major

12



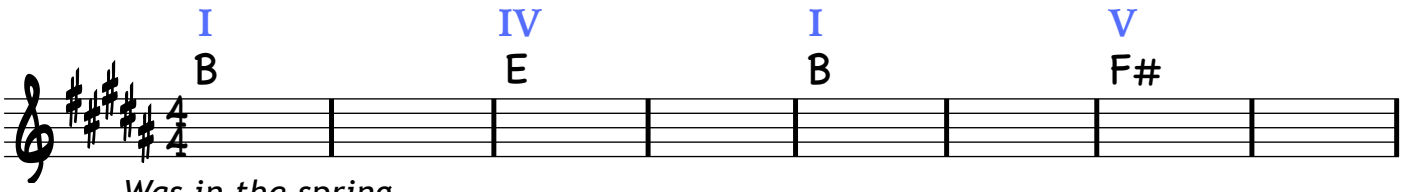
0:27 PRE-CHORUS ASCENDING SHORT PHRASES



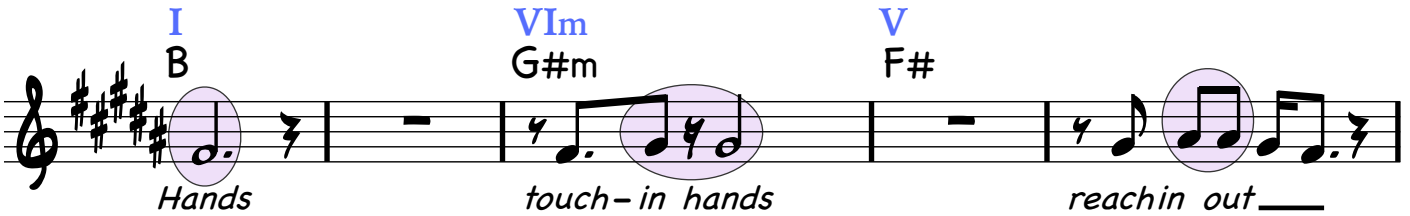
Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" also has a pre-chorus with ascending short phrases. However, this time there is not a true melodic sequence that is repeated.

Also notice that in this song there is a rise in **overall pitch level** from section to section. The verse has the lowest pitches, followed by the rising notes in the pre-chorus, and the highest notes are saved for the chorus. Listen starting at **0:29.**

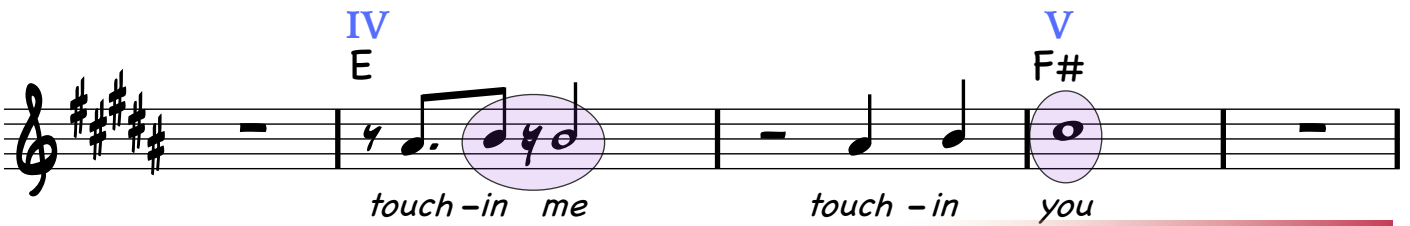
"Sweet Caroline" - Neil Diamond - 1969 **B major** 13

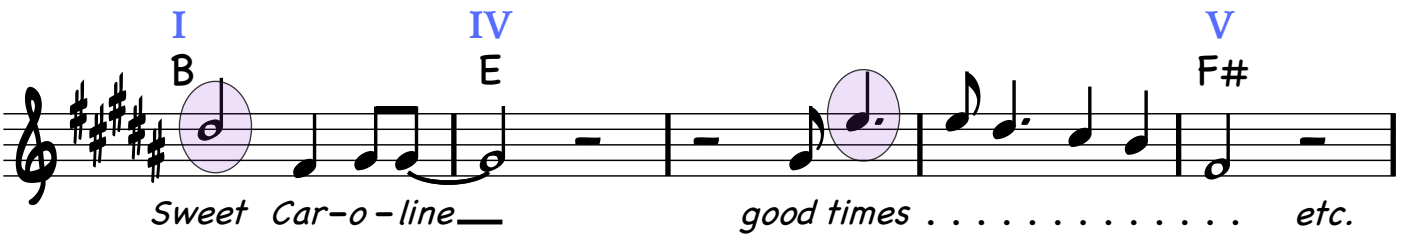


0:29 VERSE with **OVERALL LOWEST PITCHES . . . . . .**



0:44 PRE-CHORUS **REPEATED SHORT PHRASES** with **RISING PITCHES . . . . . .**





1:03 CHORUS with HIGHEST PITCHES . . . . . .

RESOLUTION

As you may have noticed, “Sweet Caroline” also has **2 devices mentioned previously**:

— **V to I CADENCE** at chorus entrance

— **I CHORD IS AVOIDED** for 9 bars leading up to the chorus.

Adding to the drama of the chorus is a **Contrast in Melodic Contour**. During the pre-chorus, there is the long climb, as the melody inches ever so slowly upward by whole or half step, creating a lot of tension. When we reach the peak at the chorus entrance, the melody seems to cut loose and soar with several **dramatic leaps** that create an open, expansive feeling.

Of course, adding to the expansive feeling is the 3-note instrumental riff that immediately answers the opening title. Now everyone seems to sing that “BUM, BUM, BUM,” louder than the actual melody, particularly baseball fans at Fenway Park. So there you have it. “Sweet Caroline,” the unofficial anthem of the Boston Red Sox.

Here’s a song by Aretha Franklin with **6 focal point devices** that we have mentioned earlier — all working together to create a very powerful hook. Listen for the following, starting at **0:23.**

— an **ASCENDING CHORD PROGRESSION** that leads up to V chord.

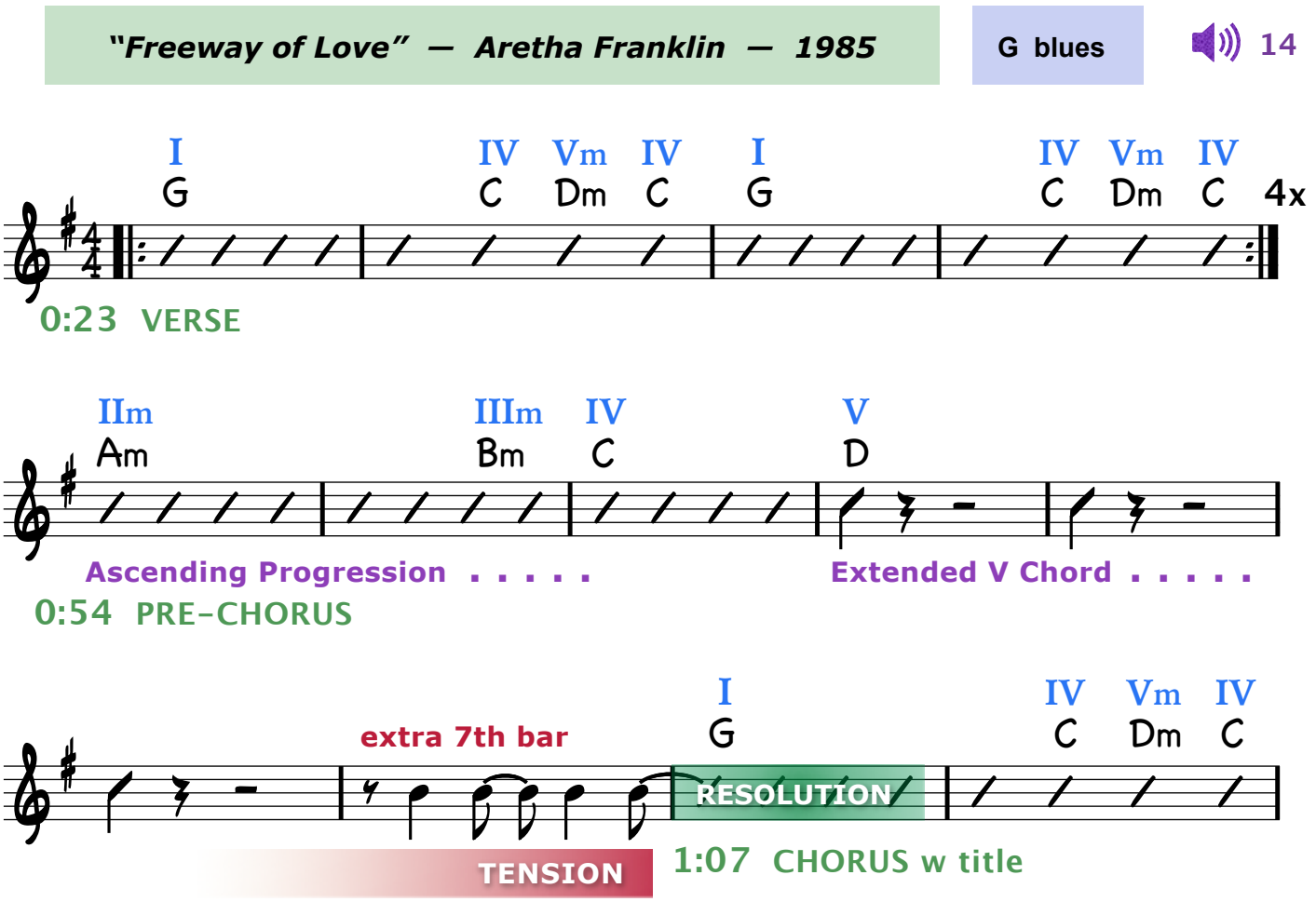
— an **EXTENDED V CHORD,** as the progression gets "stuck" on the V for 4 measures

— a **V to I CADENCE,** from pre-chorus to chorus.

— also note that the **I CHORD is AVOIDED** for the entire pre-chorus (7 bars).

— there is **STOP TIME** before the chorus

— and finally, there is an **EXTENSION OF FORM** with the pre-chorus extended beyond the usual even number of bars for an extra 7th measure.



As you heard, the stop time on this song is a bit different from previous examples. There are a series of 3 stop time bars, creating extra tension before the chorus. If we

refer to the lyrics, it's almost like the car on the freeway is sputtering and threatening to stall. Then the instrumental groove finally kicks in at the chorus entrance, and we are once again running smooth and cruising down the "Freeway of Love."

This concludes the sample preview for The Art of the Hook. We have hit some of the main points in the book, but as mentioned earlier, there are over 100 more song examples and additional musical devices in the full volume. To purchase the book, use the Purchase button on the Learn Pop Theory home page, next to the picture of the book's cover.

Hopefully you have gained new insights into how pop hits are constructed and discovered some new devices you can use to create memorable hooks — even with this limited sample.

If you are a songwriter armed with 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 you intended as a songwriter. Since music is an art, and musical taste is famously subjective, you will ultimately decide what is best for your song.

Best wishes on your musical journey !