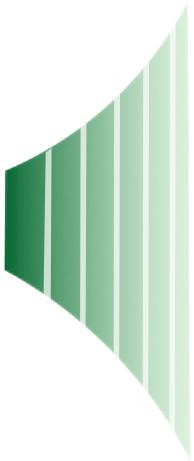
CHAPTER 9
MELODIC ID

Why do some melodies stick in your head — easy to remember and instantly recognizable — while others don't? This opening chapter of Spinning Gold, Volume 2 will give an answer, discussing various musical elements that help define a "weak" vs. "strong" pop / rock melody.

Essential Concepts / Skills
covered in chapter 9



Recognizing weak vs. strong "melodic ID" in pop & rock melodies, as determined by the following melodic elements –

- **range and variety of pitches**
- **contour, interval size (step-wise motion vs. leaps)**
- **use of sequences**
- **note and phrase lengths**
- **melody / lyric connection**
- **songwriting: creating focal points with melodic devices**

Weak Melodic ID

Some pop & rock songs have a melody with a "strong ID" meaning that the tune is memorable and recognizable just by whistling or humming it. In these songs the melody has enough interest and character to stand on its own, without background instruments or the original recording.

However, there are probably more pop & rock hits with a "weak melodic ID" — ie. if you took the vocal melody and played it on a piano or a flute, it would be nearly impossible to identify the song from the melody alone. In fact, if only the melody line is played without words, it would be hard for most listeners to distinguish the difference between many famous pop & rock songs, such as Led Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks," Elvis's "Jailhouse Rock," Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," or Tim McGraw's "Down on the Farm."

In Chapter Four (Volume 1), we mentioned that in these pieces the artistic interest lies in other musical elements besides melody, such as a driving, syncopated rhythm or a unique timbre on the guitar or synthesizer. This is why some 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.

The weak melodic character of many rock songs should come as no surprise, since so much of pop & rock music over the last 70 years has been influenced by American blues, a music with a generally weak melodic ID. Of course blues has obvious power and strength in other musical elements like rhythm, lyrics, or vocal timbre. But the basic melodic outline — aside from improvised vocal embellishments — is rather simple, often alternating between only two or three notes. Blues-based pop & rock melodies usually have the following characteristics -

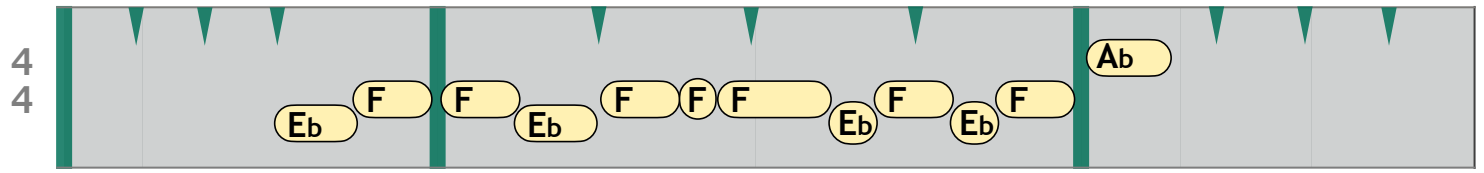
Characteristics of a Weak Melody

- ★ ***FEW PITCHES*** (often only 2 or 3 different notes)
- ★ ***NARROW RANGE*** (often only half an octave)
- ★ ***BASICALLY FLAT CONTOUR***
- ★ ***DEPENDENT ON OTHER ELEMENTS TO CREATE ARTISTIC INTEREST*** (rhythm, harmony, timbre, lyrics)

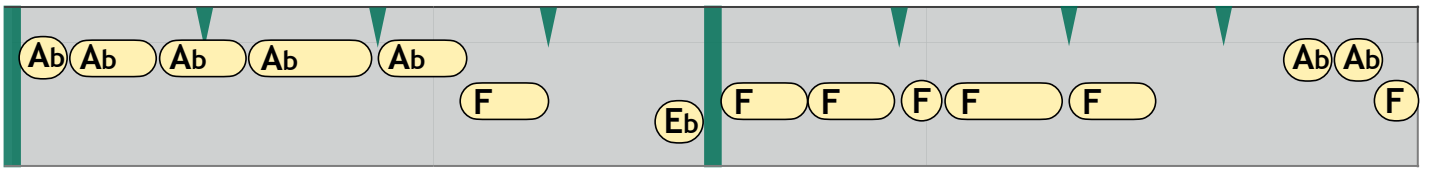
Def Leppard's 1992 song "Let's Get Rocked" offers a good example of weak melodic ID. As you can see below, the melody has **only 3 pitches** (Eb, F and Ab), with the Eb and Ab revolving around the home pitch of F. The **contour is basically flat** and the **range is very narrow**. START LISTENING AT **0:23**.

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 forward to the desired starting point.

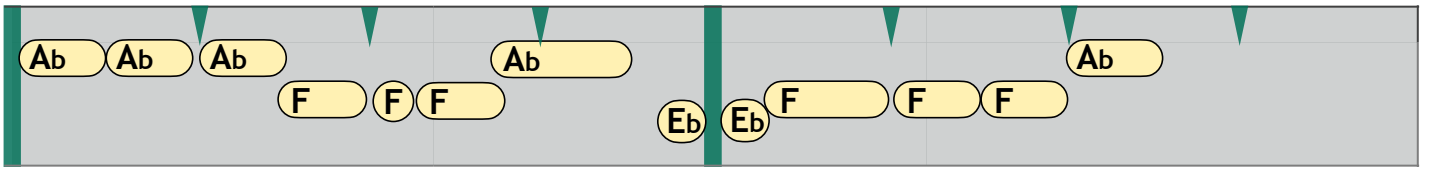
“Let’s Get Rocked” — Def Leppard — 1992 | **F blues** | 1



0:23 VERSE *I’m your aver-age or - din-ar - y . . . . . .*



. . . . . what I ___ did. I got a



mil - lion . . . . . don’t a - gree

A Word About Music Notation

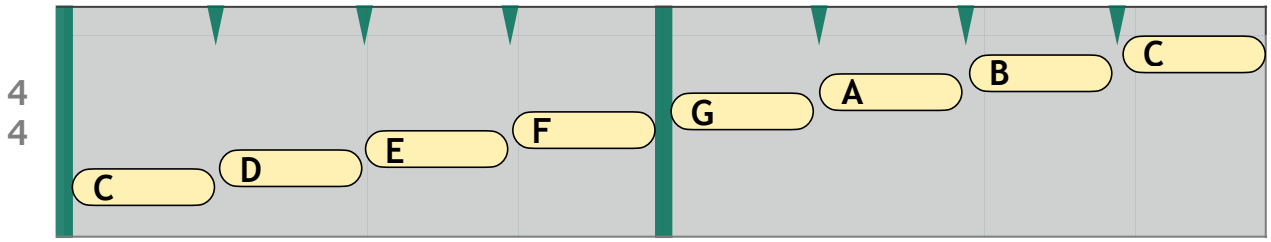
If you have not completed Chapters One through Eight (Volume 1) of Spinning Gold, then you will not be familiar with the **graphic notation system** shown above for “Let’s Get Rocked.” As mentioned in the Preface of this book, using copyrighted standard notation (five-line staff) to illustrate song elements like melodies and riffs would quickly become cost-prohibitive. In order to keep this textbook available at a reasonable price without sacrificing

significant content, Spinning Gold will present these song excerpts using the alternative graphic notation system shown above. (If you need to see the standard notation for any song in this book, visit one of the many websites offering sheet music online, such as Sheet Music Plus or Sheet Music Direct.)

The new notation system will not feature a five-line staff. Instead, there will be a single horizontal banner (shown in gray above). Barlines are written as thick green lines that extend from top to bottom, and each barline represents the beginning of beat one. Moving left to right, beats 2, 3, and 4 are marked along the top with short green arrows.

Individual notes appear as yellow horizontal shapes with rounded corners. The **horizontal length** of the shapes will be proportionate to the number of beats for each note, defining the difference between whole, half, quarter, 8th, and 16th notes. Rests do not need individual symbols, since periods of silence are simply indicated by the amount of horizontal space between the yellow notes.

As with standard notation, changes in pitch will be reflected in the vertical dimension, so an ascending step-wise scale of all quarter notes would look like the following:



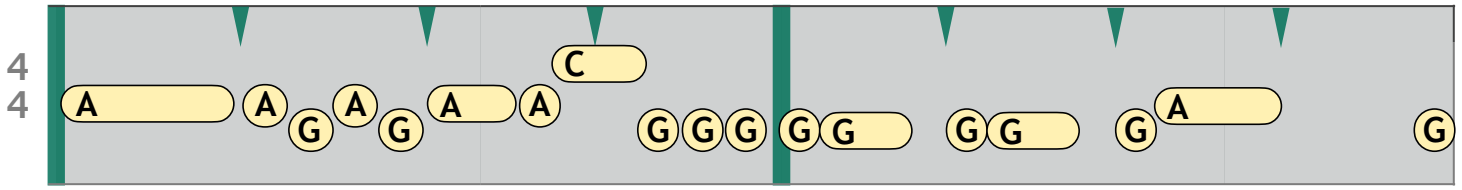
In the new system, there is no indication of clef or pitch register. However, keep in mind that the new notation is not meant for sight reading an unfamiliar piece. All examples in the new notation will be excerpts from familiar pop songs and are meant to be studied while listening to the accompanying audio file. It will be obvious from the audio whether the example is illustrating low bass notes or high treble notes. In fact, understanding the overall register of these examples is not the important issue. Rather, the excerpts are notated to illustrate other elements such as melodic contour, range, pitch variety, phrase and note length, or the type of scale or harmony being used.

We now return to our discussion of weak melodic ID. As mentioned in earlier chapters, many pop & rock songs with weak, blues-based melodies have a strong guitar riff that sounds more interesting and important than the actual vocal melody. This is true for some of the most iconic hits in rock history, like “Satisfaction,” “Layla,” “Back in Black,” or just about any Led Zeppelin classic.

For example, if we look at Led Zeppelin’s “Heartbreaker,” we find a memorable guitar riff, but a weak melody. Just like “Let’s Get Rocked,” the melody has a **narrow range**, a basically **flat contour**, and **three total pitches** (A, G, and C, pivoting around A as the home pitch). Most rock fans could not identify ”Heartbreaker” from the melody line alone, but they would instantly recognize it if you included Jimmy Page’s repeating guitar riff.

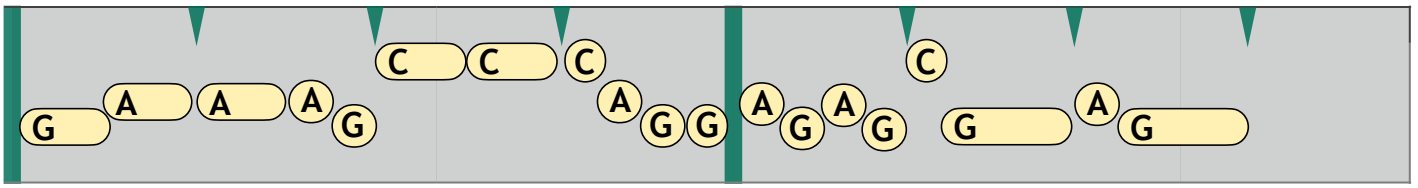
START LISTENING AT **0:26**

“Heartbreaker” — Led Zeppelin — 1969 | **A blues** | 2



Hey _____ fellas have ya . . . . . back in town _ It

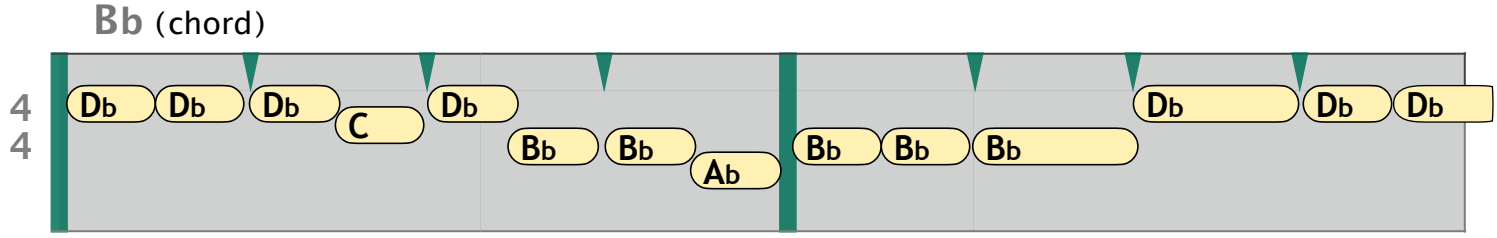
0:26 VERSE



won’t take long . . . . . money ___ down ____

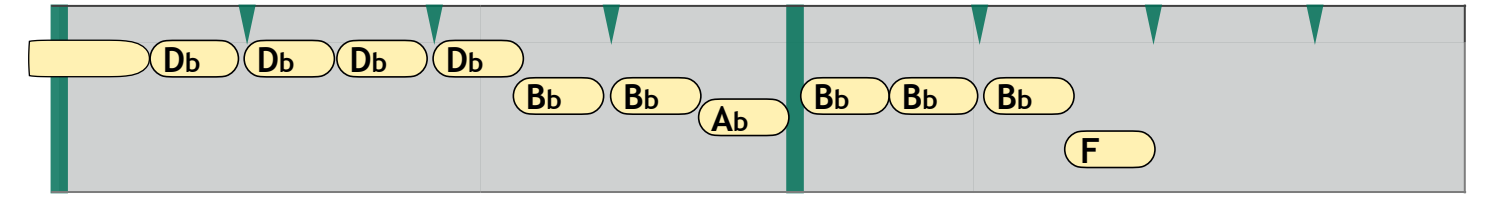
Here's a blues-based example from the country charts, featuring a melody with similar characteristics to the previous rock examples. START LISTENING AT **0:34**

"Down on the Farm" — Tim McGraw — 1994 | **Bb blues** | 3



Ed's been on a trac - tor . . . . . .

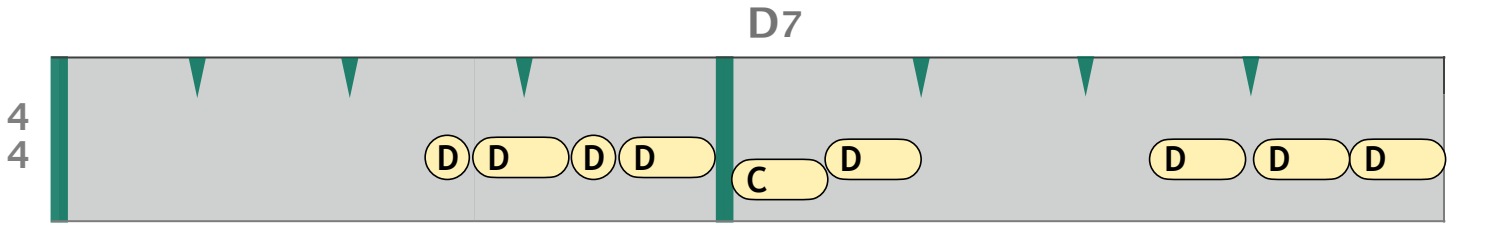
0:34 VERSE



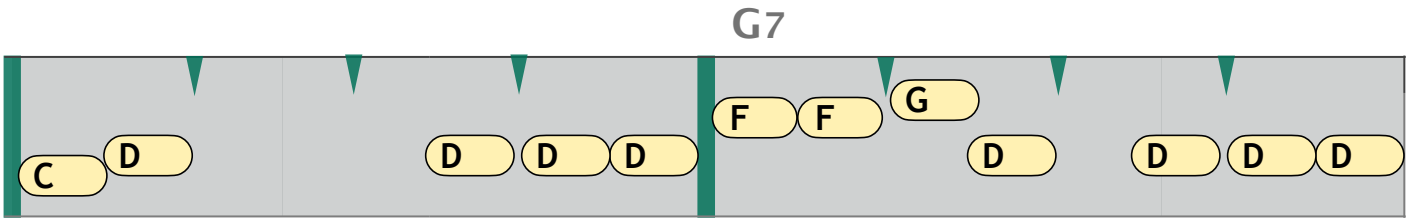
. . . . . down to the creek

With its prominent synth chords and pulsing dance beat, the following 1980s hit "Obsession" has a totally different style from the previous examples. However, the music is still blues-based, with a repeating I 7 - IV7 vamp (discussed in Chapter Four) and another weak melodic ID pivoting around the key note (D). START LISTENING AT **1:05**

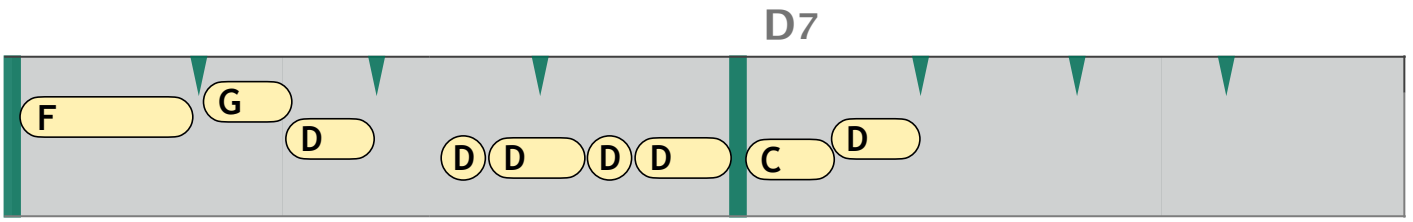
"Obsession" — Animotion — 1985 | **D blues** | 4



1:05 CHORUS *You are an ob - ses - sion you're my ob -*



ses - sion . . . . . .



. . . . . *You are an ob - ses - sion* ***etc*** . . . . . .

Additional songs with WEAK MELODIC ID (vocal melody)

1956	***Hound Dog***	Elvis Presley	C blues
1957	***Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On***	Jerry Lee Lewis	C blues
1957	***Jailhouse Rock***	Elvis Presley	Eb blues
1958	***Good Golly, Miss Molly***	Little Richard	G blues
1958	***Johnny B. Goode***	Chuck Berry	Bb blues
1965	***Midnight Special***	Johnny Rivers	G blues
1966	***Barefootin'***	Robert Parker	Db blues
1967	***Gimme Some Lovin'***	Spencer Davis Group	G blues

1967	*Purple Haze*	Jimi Hendrix	E blues
1973	*What Is Hip*	Tower of Power	E dorian
1974	*Sweet Home Alabama*	Lynyrd Skynyrd	D mixo
1983	*She's Sexy and Seventeen*	Stray Cats	E blues
1983	*Crosscut Saw*	Eric Clapton (orig. Hollins / A. King)	A blues
1987	*Bad*	Michael Jackson	Bb dorian
1987	*Keep Your Hands to Yourself*	Georgia Satellites	A blues
1991	*Close to You*	Stevie Ray Vaughan	Ab blues
2004	*Redneck Woman*	Gretchen Wilson	F# blues
2009	*Let It Rock*	Kevin Rudolf	D blues
2018	*I'm Getting Better*	The Record Company	G blues

Strong Melodic ID

Let's now check out a few pop & rock melodies with a strong ID. As mentioned, a strong melody has enough interest and character to stand on its own, without background instruments or the original recording. In fact, these tunes are often successfully re-recorded by later singers as cover versions. (There are dozens of Beatles songs that fit this description, but the ultimate example is the Beatles' tune "Yesterday," with the most cover versions of any song in pop history.) Below is a list of possible traits for a strong melodic ID. They do not all have to be present in the same song, but generally the more traits used, the more memorable the tune.

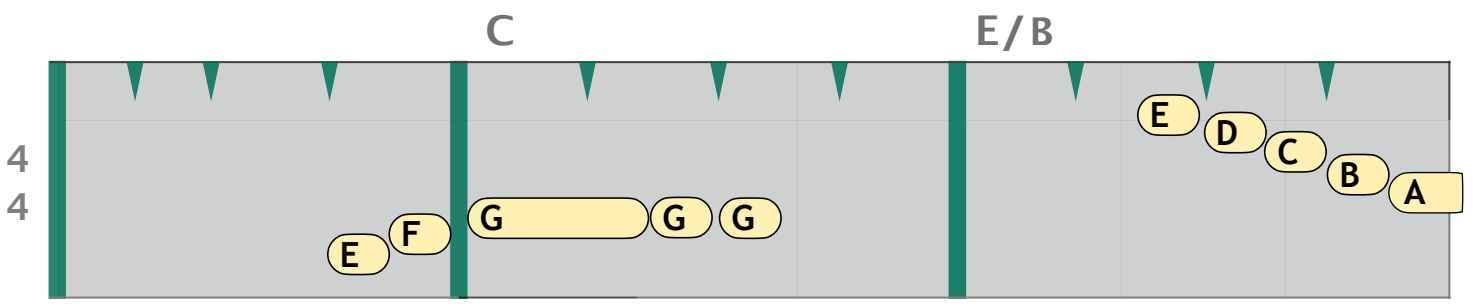
Characteristics of a Strong Melody

- ★ ***WIDE VARIETY of PITCHES*** (often over 8 different notes)
- ★ ***WIDE RANGE*** (usually over an octave)
- ★ ***LOW-PITCHED VERSE, HIGHER CHORUS*** (adds drama)
- ★ ***VARIED CONTOUR, DRAMATIC LEAPS***
- ★ ***USE of SEQUENCES***
- ★ ***CONTRASTING NOTE LENGTHS***
- ★ ***CONTRASTING PHRASE LENGTHS***
- ★ ***MELODY STANDS ON ITS OWN*** (independent of other elements)

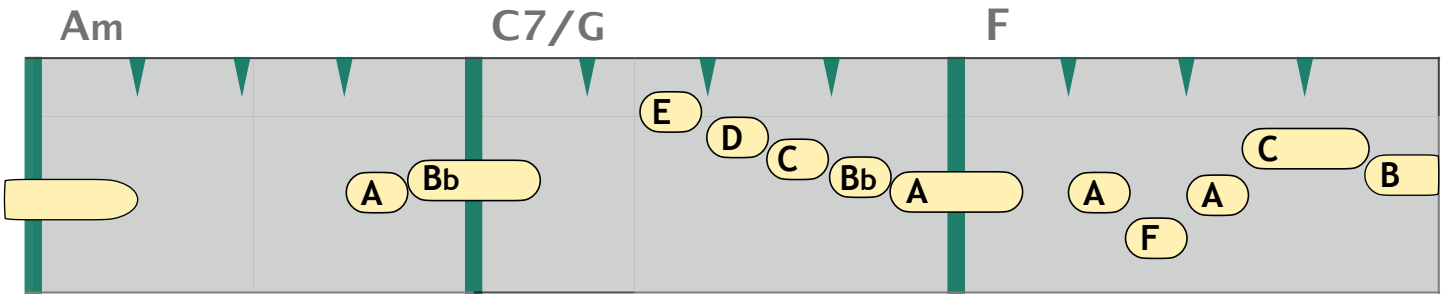
WIDE VARIETY of PITCHES

As you can see in the above list, several of these traits are the exact opposite of the earlier list for weak melodies. For example, instead of the narrow range and minimal pitches of blues-based tunes, a stronger melody often has a wide range and a wide variety of pitches. Let's look at the tune on Herman's Hermits hit "There's a Kind of a Hush," recorded in 1967. It has **10 different pitches** (including octaves), ranging from the E above middle C up to the high F on the third line — quite a contrast from the 3-pitch melodies of "Heartbreaker" and "Let's Get Rocked."

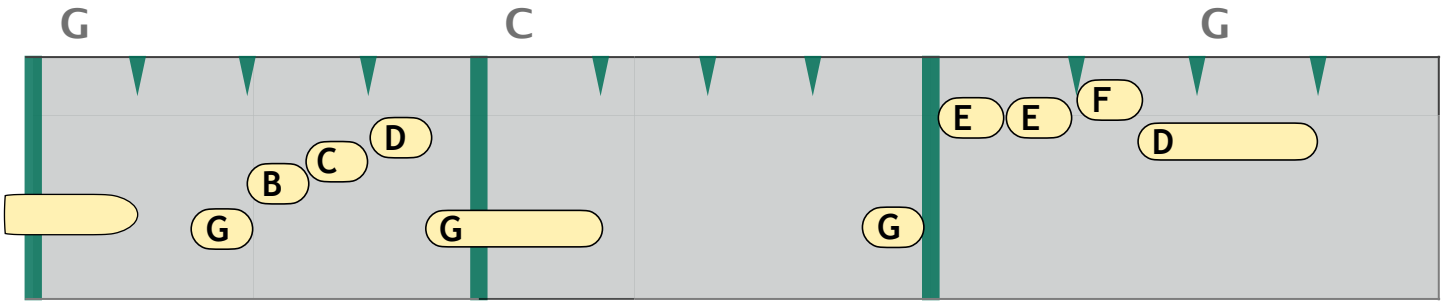
"There's a Kind of a Hush" — Herman's Hermits — 1967 | C major | 5



0:07 VERSE *There's a kind ____ of hush . .* . . . . . .



. . . . *you can hear the sound*



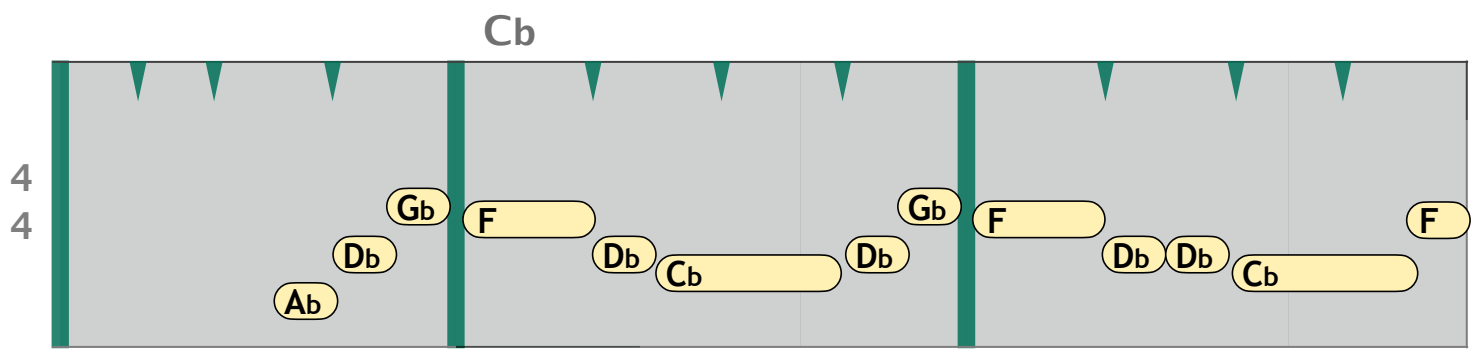
. . . . *know what I mean*

"You've Lost That Lovin Feelin" is another good example of pitch variation from the 60s. The song's verse features **13 different pitches** in the melody, distributed over a wide range of an octave and a sixth.

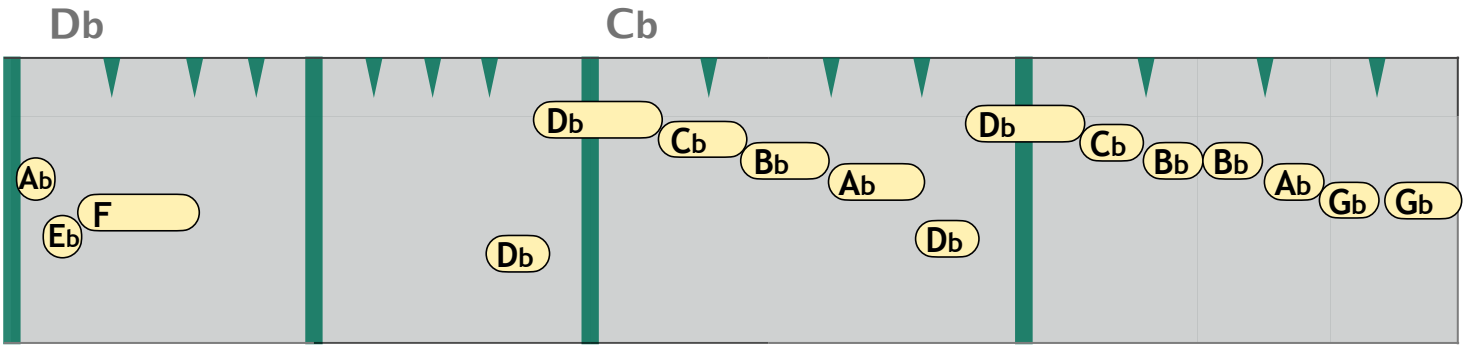
"You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" — The Righteous Brothers — 1965

ver - Db mixo
chor - Db major

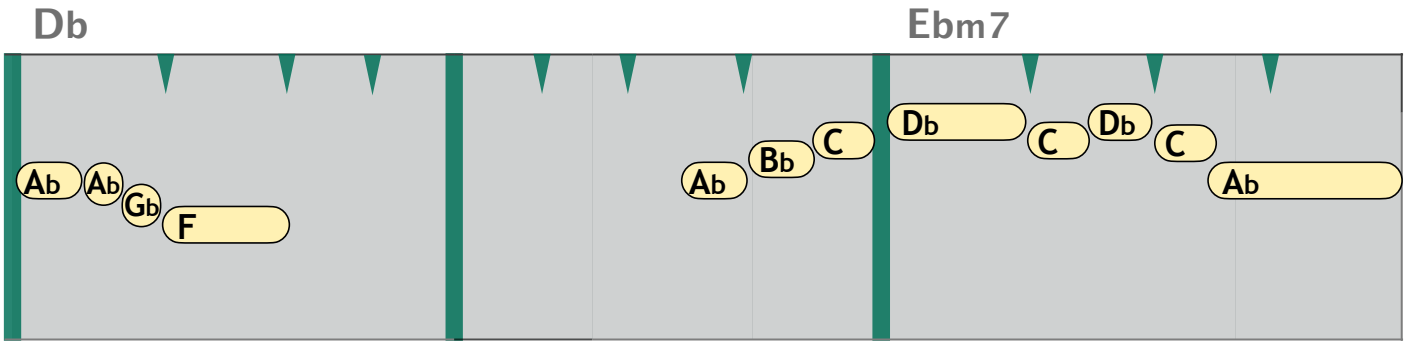
6



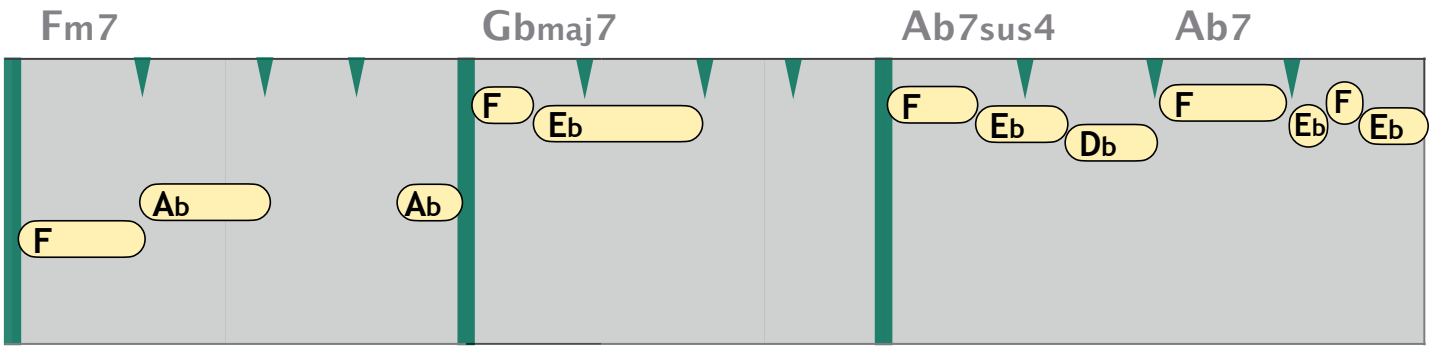
0:00 VERSE *You nev-er close* . . . . . .



lips_____ There's no . . . . . fin- ___ ger



tips_____ You're trying . . . . . .



. . . . . but ba- by _____ . . . . . know it ____

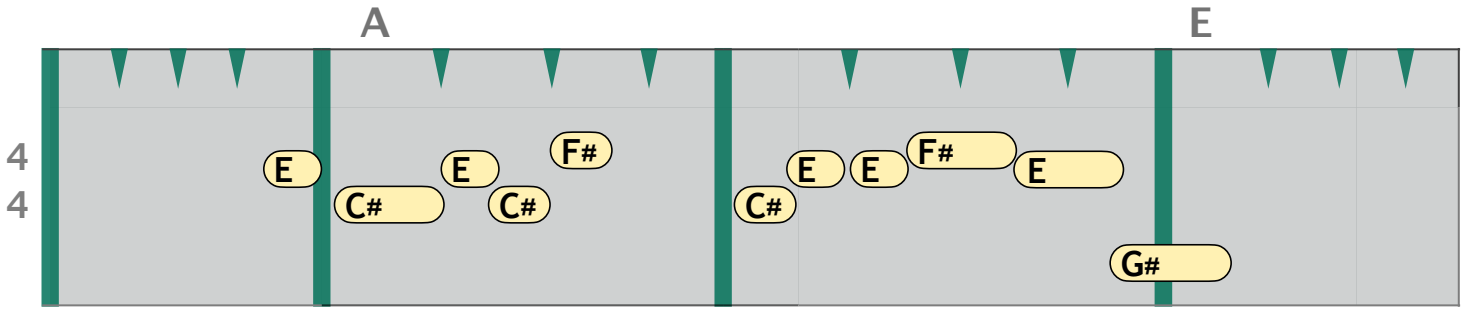
WIDE RANGE

Other songs with a wide melodic range include Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi," shown below. This piece spans an **octave and a m3rd** — from low G# on the first line to high B on the third line. START LISTENING AT **0:11**

"Big Yellow Taxi" — Joni Mitchell — 1970

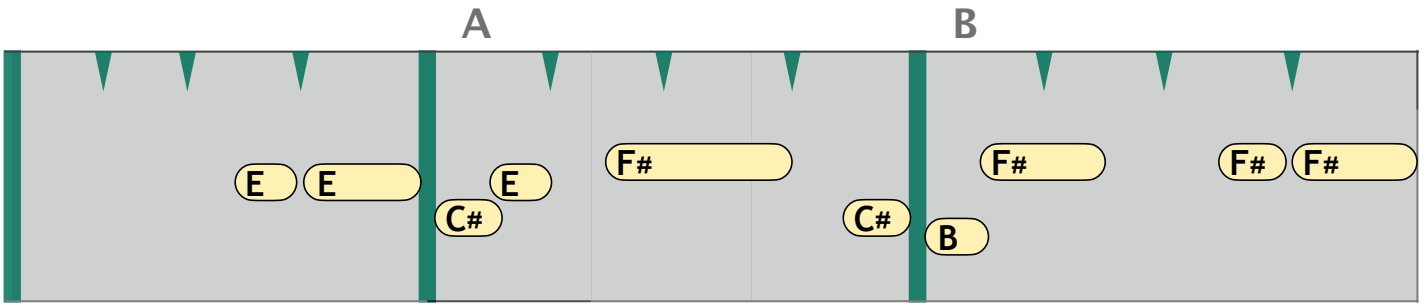
E major

7

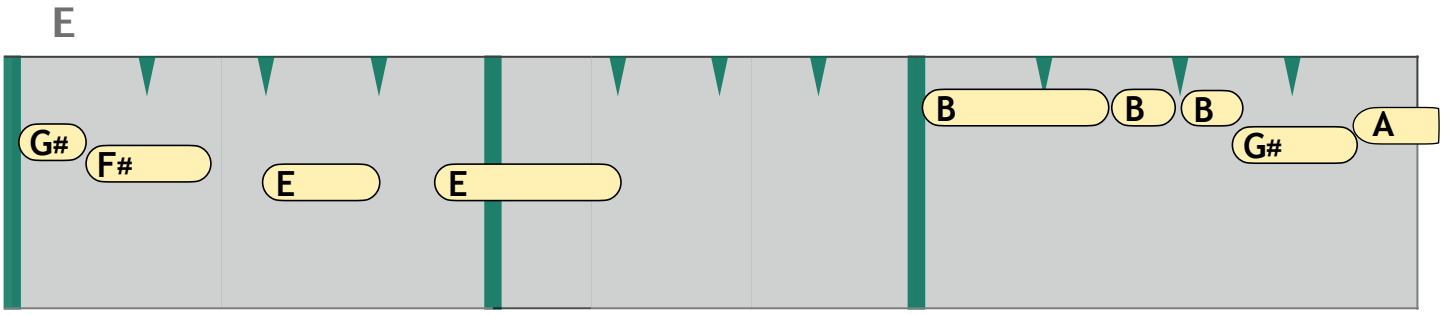


They paved par- a- dise . . . . . .

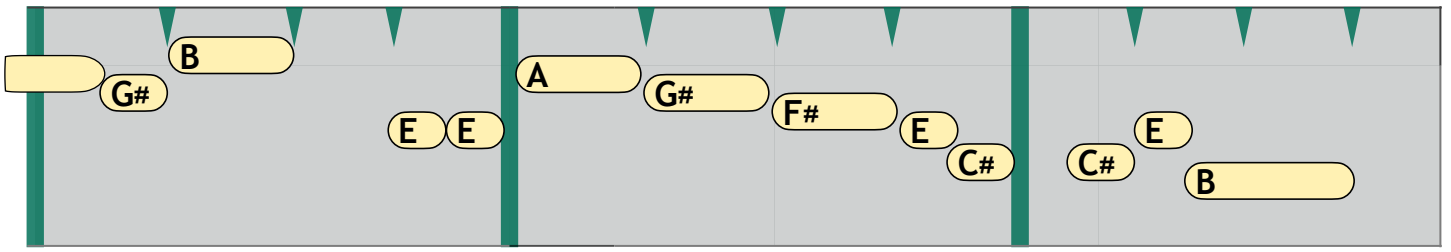
0:11 VERSE



With a ___ . . . . . .



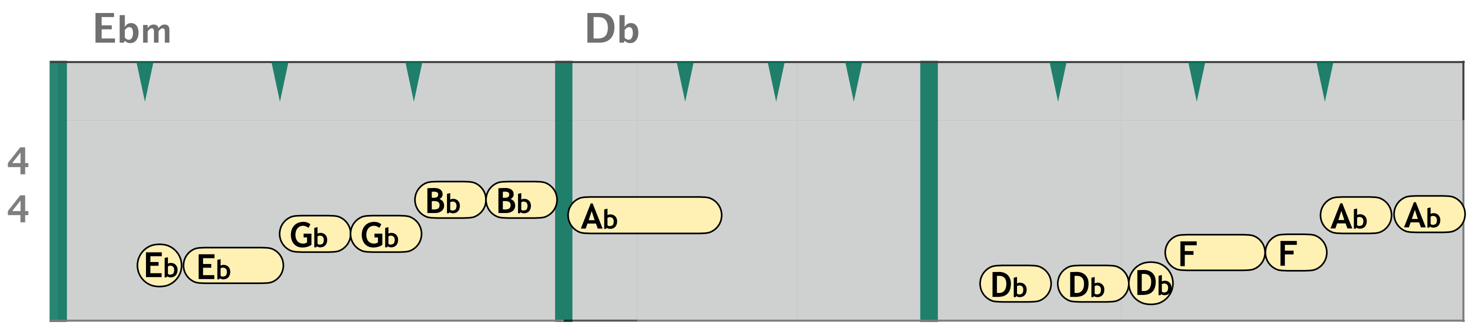
. . . . . hot ___ spot _____ Don't _____ it . . . . . .



. . . . . 'til it's gone ____

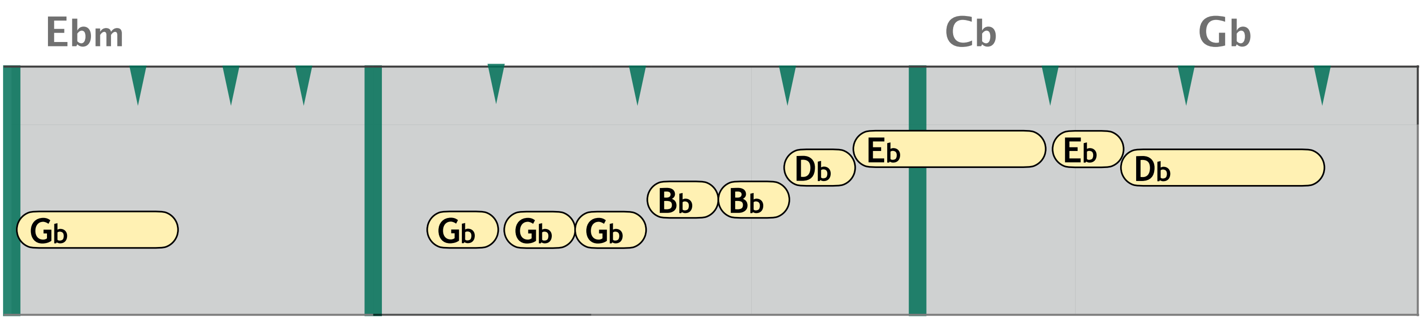
The melody on the next Simon & Garfunkel classic has a range of an **octave and a 4th** — from a low Db to a high Gb.

"Sounds of Silence" — Simon & Garfunkel — 1966 | **Eb minor** | 8

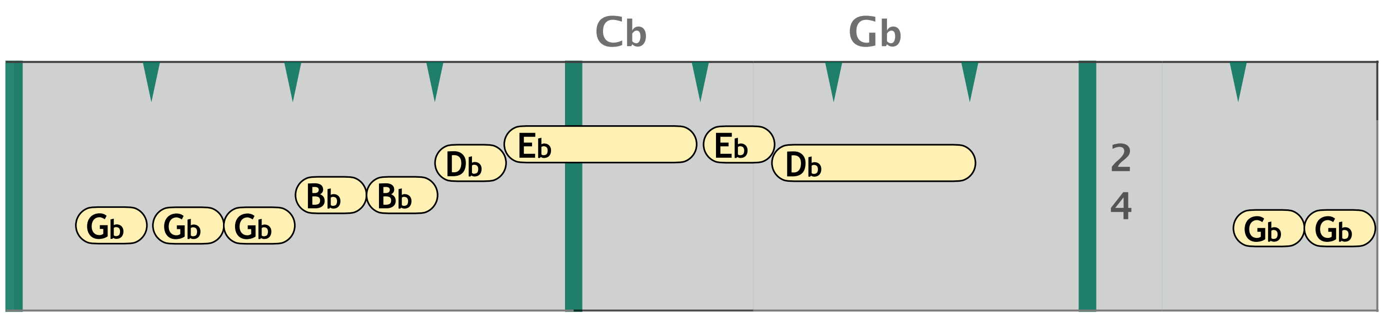


Hel-lo darkness . . . .

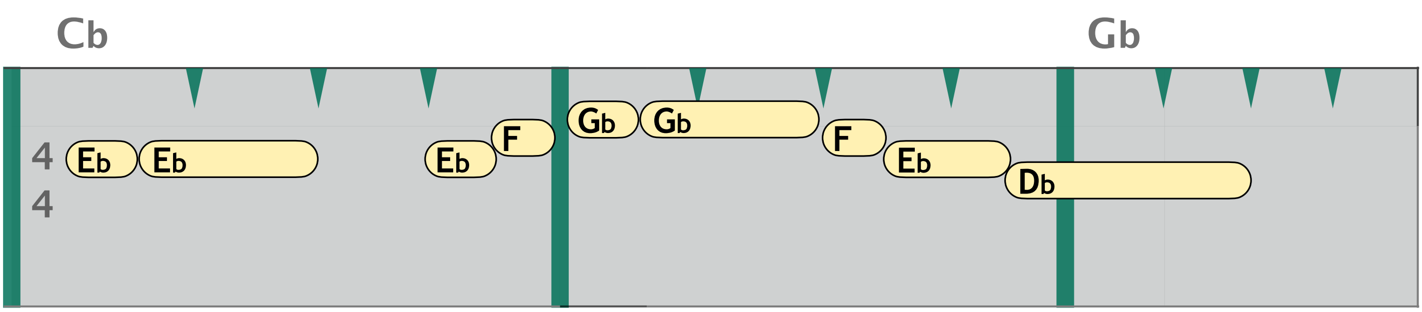
0:03 VERSE



. . . . be- cause a . . . .



. . . . . and the



vi - sion _____ . . . . in my ___ brain _______

LOW-PITCHED VERSE, HIGHER CHORUS

In the songwriting sections of Chapters Two and Five, we heard “Cryin’ Shame” and “Sentimental Lady,” two songs where the highest melody note was saved for the entrance of the chorus, highlighting that important focal point. Here in this chapter, we will expand our discussion to include a comparison of **overall pitch levels** between sections.

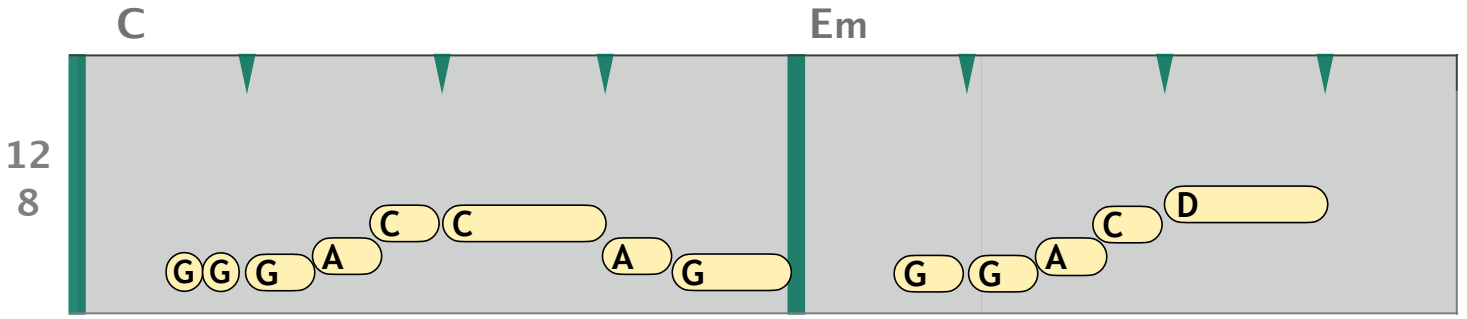
As we have seen in previous chapters, pop songs sometimes have a pre-chorus inserted between the verse and chorus. Across these three sections, the pitch level of the melody often rises — the **verse is low**, the **pre-chorus is mid-range**, and the **chorus is highest**. This type of melody is found on Meghan Trainor’s 2015 hit “Like I’m Gonna Lose You,” shown below. START LISTENING AT **0:14**

“Like I’m Gonna Lose You” — Meghan Trainor — 2015
feat. John Legend

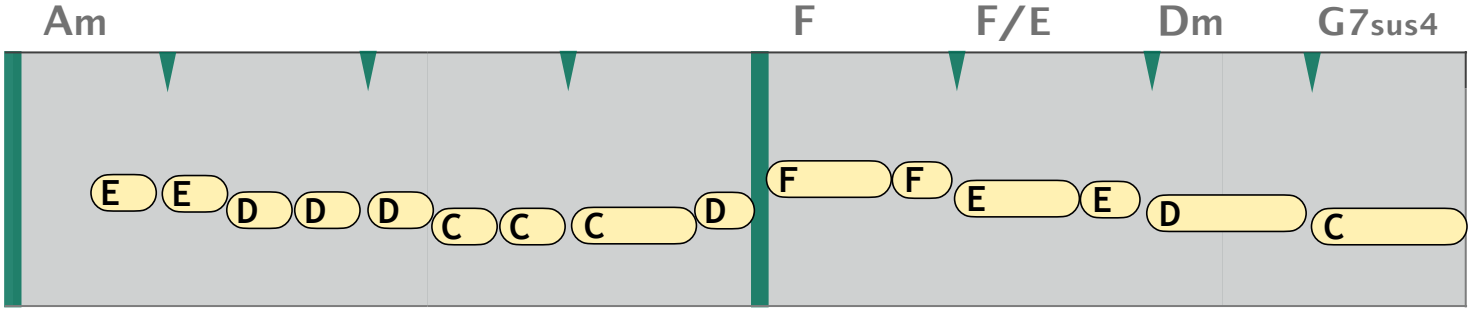
C major

9

0:14 VERSE – LOWER PITCHES

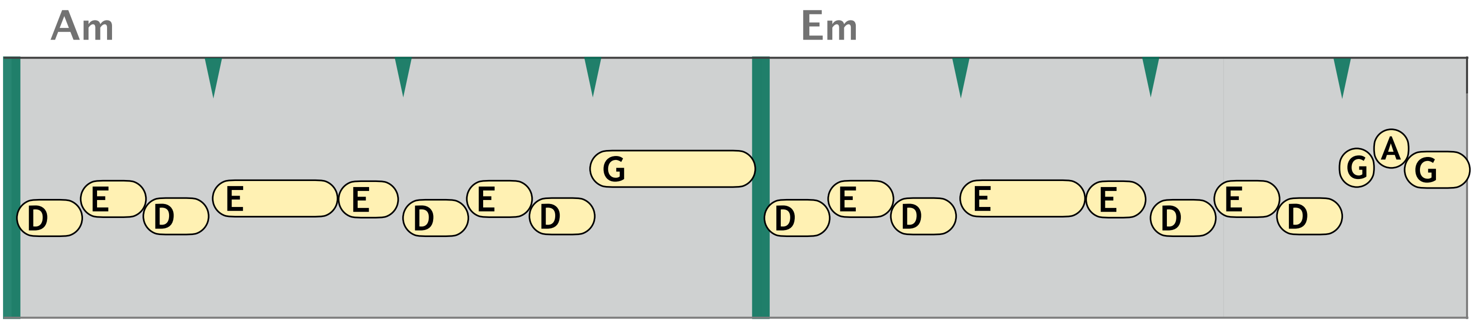


We were walkin on . . . . . close _____

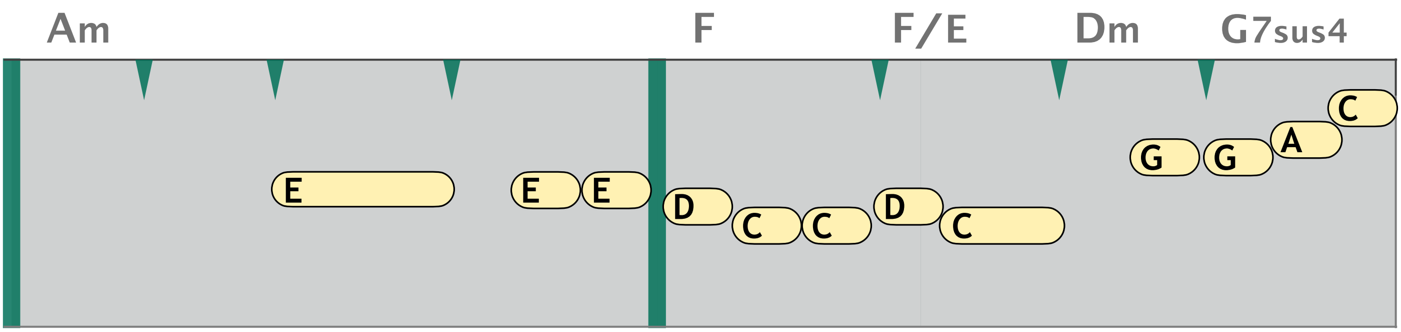


Split sec- ond . . . . . a - lone _____

0:27 PRE-CHORUS – MID-RANGE PITCHES

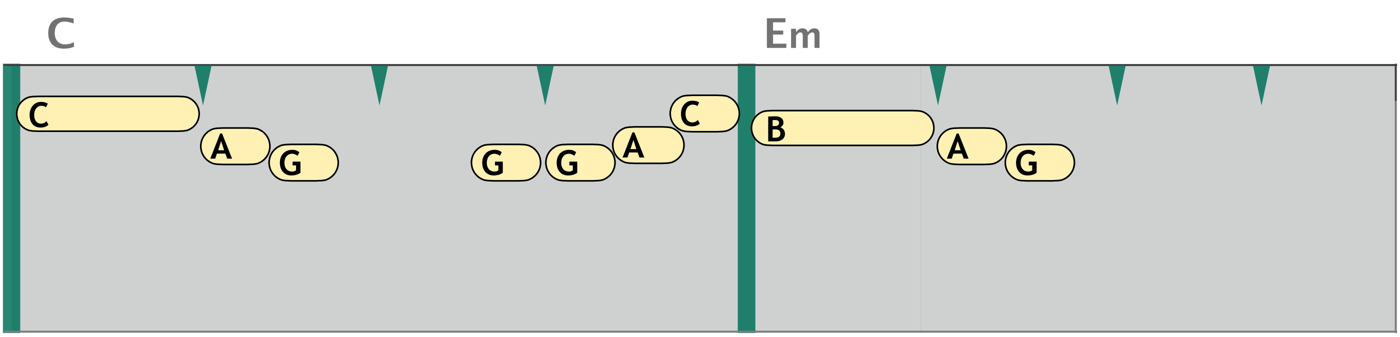


Woke up in . . . . re - a - lized



No _______ we're not . . . .

0:41 CHORUS – HIGHER PITCHES



love _____ you ____ like I'm gon-na lose______ you ___ etc . . . .

On the 2014 song "Burning Gold," we again have lower pitches in the verse, and mid-range notes in the pre-chorus. There is a brief stop time pause at the end of the pre-chorus, and when the chorus takes off at the **1:00** mark, we hear the highest melody notes so far (shown below in simple outline form with time markers). START LISTENING AT **0:21**

"Burning Gold" — Christina Perri — 2014 **G major** 10

— **0:21** (verse 2) **LOWER pitches** in melody.

— **0:41** (pre-chorus) **MID-RANGE pitches** Also brief **SUSPENSION of RHYTHM,** like a soft stop time, adds **TENSION**

— **1:00** (chorus) **RESOLUTION** **HIGHER pitches** announce the entrance of the chorus.

Here's one more example featuring rising pitch levels, courtesy of Katy Perry.

START LISTENING AT **0:32**

"Firework" — Katy Perry — 2010 **ver - Ab mixo, chor - Ab major** 11

— **0:31** (end of verse) **LOWER pitches**

— **0:39** (pre-chorus) **RISING pitches** Repeated short phrases start climbing in pitch like ascending a staircase, building excitement and anticipation. **TENSION**

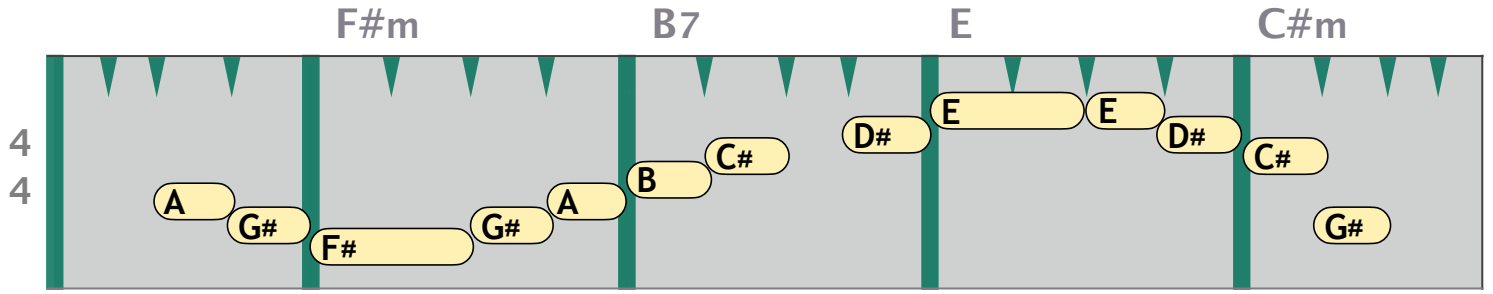
— **0:54** (chorus) **RESOLUTION** **HIGHEST pitches** Melody peaks on highest note of the song of the song.

VARIED CONTOUR, DRAMATIC LEAPS

As a melody moves forward, the distance in pitch from one note to another can vary considerably. Some melodies move predominantly in **stepwise** motion, meaning small intervals of only a half or whole step. The opening phrase of The Beatles "All My Loving" is

a good example, descending briefly to F#, then gradually climbing to high E before falling off again at the end. The step-wise motion creates a **smooth, rounded contour** not unlike going up and down rolling hills on a country drive.

"All My Loving" — The Beatles — 1964 | **E major** | 12

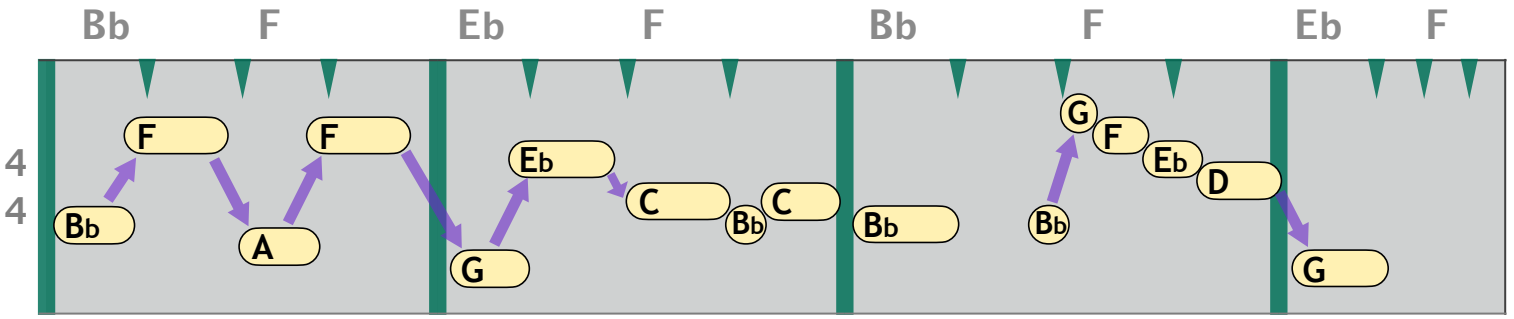


Close your eyes . . . . . miss you

0:00 VERSE

Other phrases may move in small leaps of 3 or 4 half steps, or even large leaps of over an octave. Usually the leaps are spaced out a bit, with some stepwise motion inbe-tween, but let's go for a dramatic example. The following Sophie B. Hawkins tune has **several big leaps** in a row to start the chorus (highlighted in purple below), creating an arresting, **jagged contour** that calls attention to the song's title. START LISTENING AT **0:25**

"As I Lay Me Down to Sleep" - Sophie B. Hawkins - 1995 | **Bb major** | 13



As I lay me down to sleep . . . . . me dear

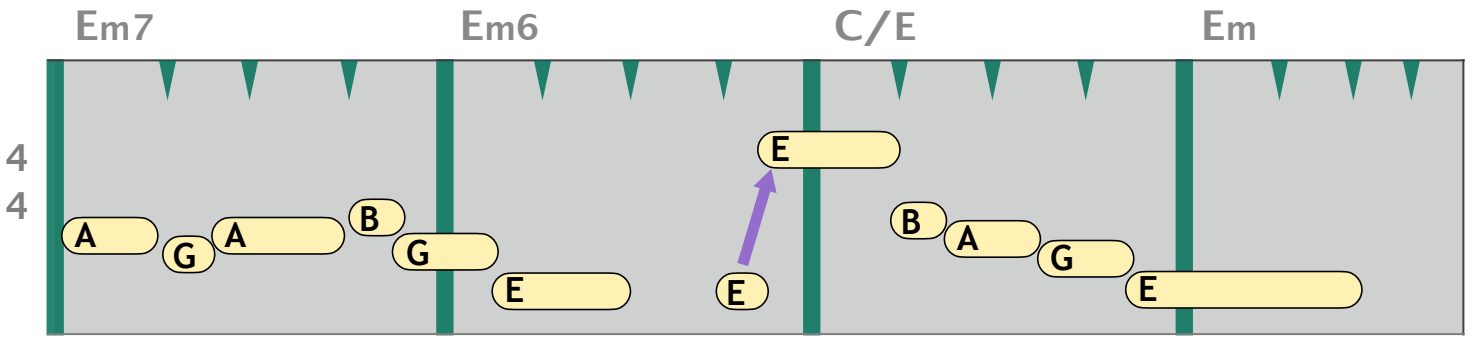
0:25 CHORUS

Here's a more typical example with a mixture of step-wise intervals, small leaps, and two very large leaps (in purple). The varied contour and occasional dramatic leaps make this Beatles melody instantly recognizable, no matter what instrument it is played on.

START LISTENING AT **0:32**

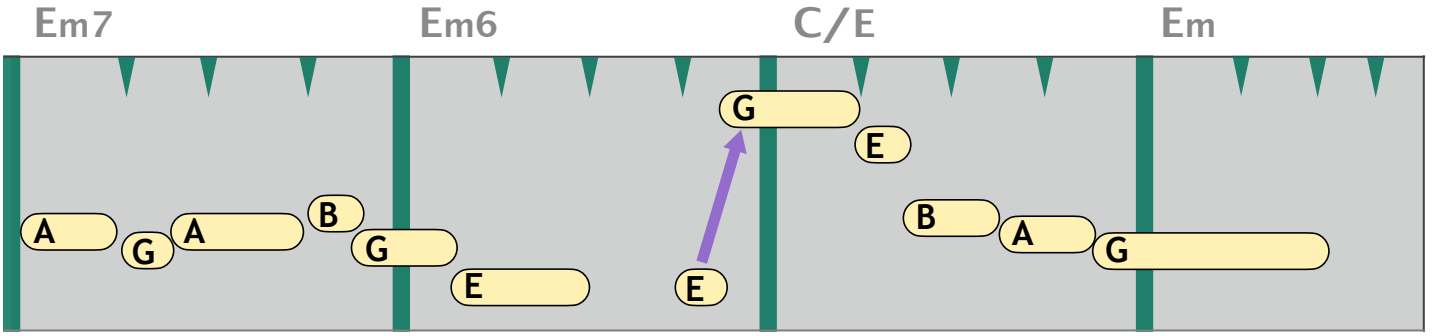
"Eleanor Rigby" — The Beatles — 1966

E minor 14



All the lonely . . . . . come from ____

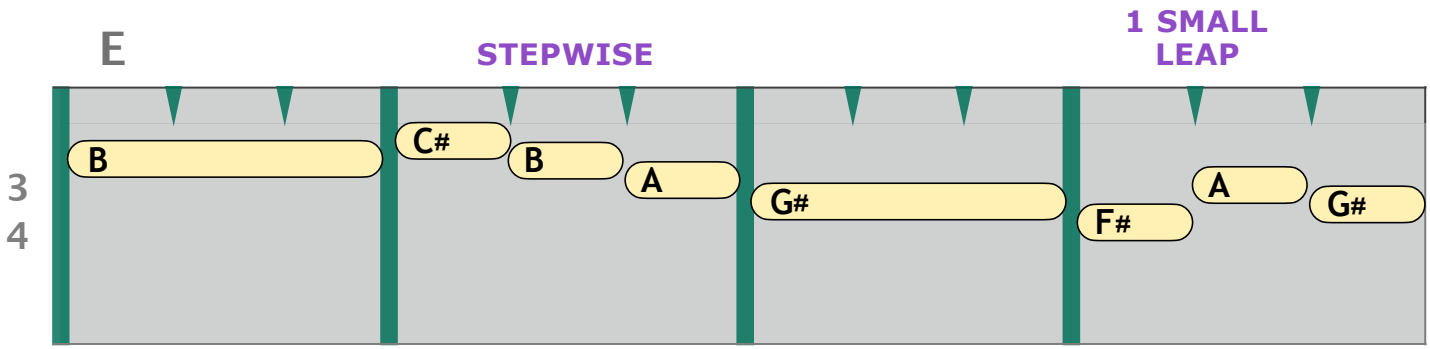
0:32 REFRAIN



All the lonely . . . . . be - long _____

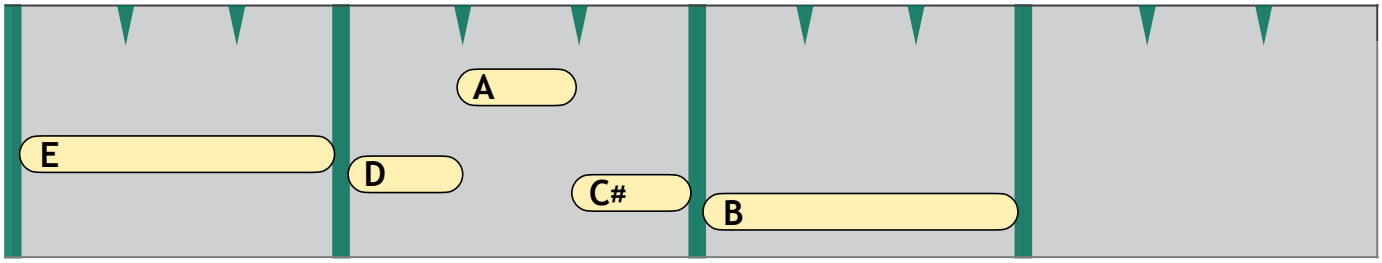
Instead of the abrupt leaps of "Eleanor Rigby," the next Beatles tune offers a more gradual contour contrast. The verse starts with a smooth stepwise descent, then opens up a bit with a small leap from F# to A, followed by a "full blossoming" of two big leaps that finish the phrase with an exclamation point.

"Norwegian Wood" — The Beatles — 1965 | E mixo | 15



I _____ once . . . . . .

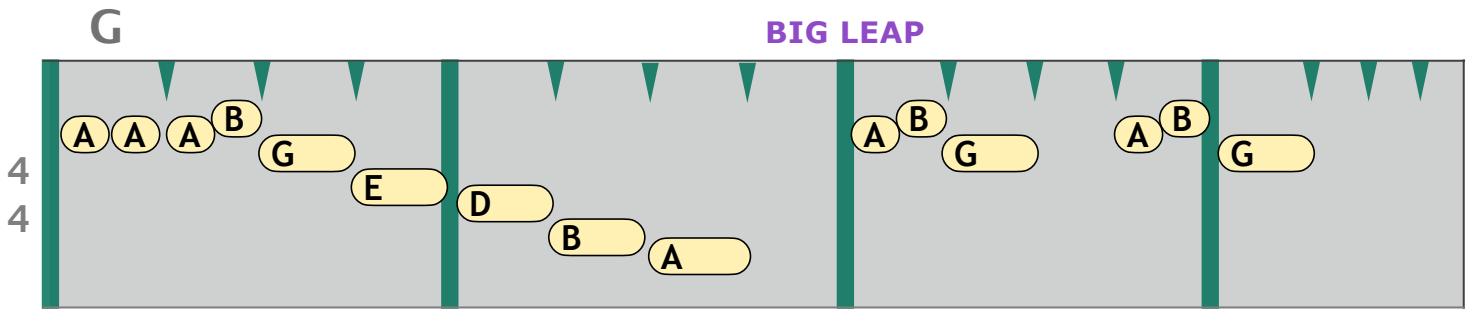
0:16 VERSE



. . . . . had __ me _____

On this next Taylor Swift song, 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." START LISTENING AT **0:47**

"Shake It Off" — Taylor Swift — 2014 | G major | 16



I'm just gonna . . . . . shake it off shake it off

0:47 CHORUS **song title**

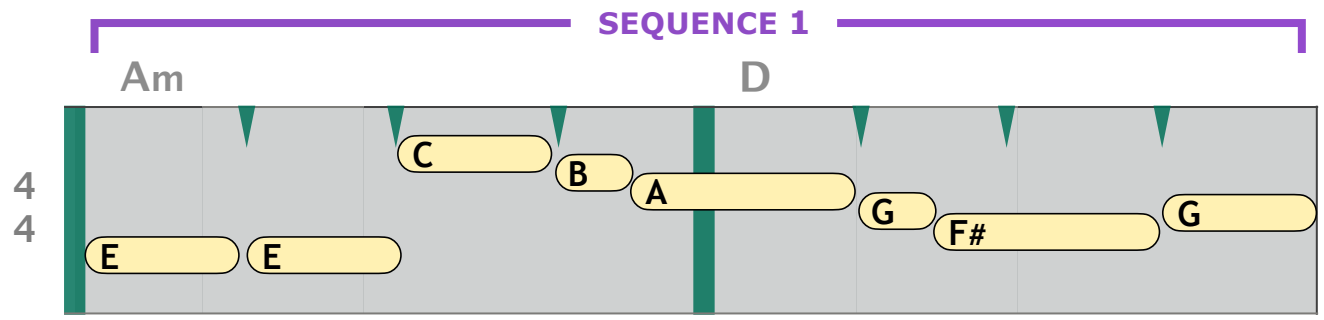
(For additional examples, we could return briefly to three songs heard earlier. Listen again to “You’ve Lost That Lovin Feelin,“ “Big Yellow Taxi,” and “Theres a Kind of a Hush.” All these tunes feature varied contour and occasional leaps, contributing to their strong melodic ID.)

USE of SEQUENCES

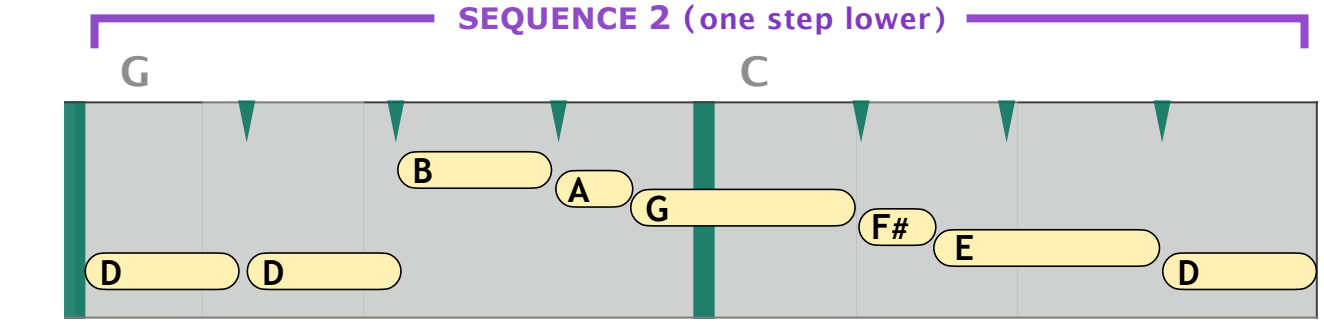
Sometimes a melodic phrase is repeated with the same note values (identical rhythm pattern), and the same series of intervals (identical contour), but at a different pitch level (higher or lower). These repeated patterns are called **melodic sequences.** If the patterns are repeated several times, it is likely that one or more may be modified slightly. Sequences help organize the melody, making it memorable and easier to sing, by giving the listener something familiar and predictable. However, it is more than just exact repetition, since the different pitch levels provide variety as well.

Our opening example of sequences is the Pitbull / Christina Aquilera hit “Feel This Moment.” The song begins with an **eight-note sequence** shown below on the first line. On the second line, the sequence is repeated one step lower. Notice the ending notes are different on each line. START LISTENING AT **0:14**

“Feel This Moment” - Pitbull w. Christina Aguilera - 2012 **G major** 17

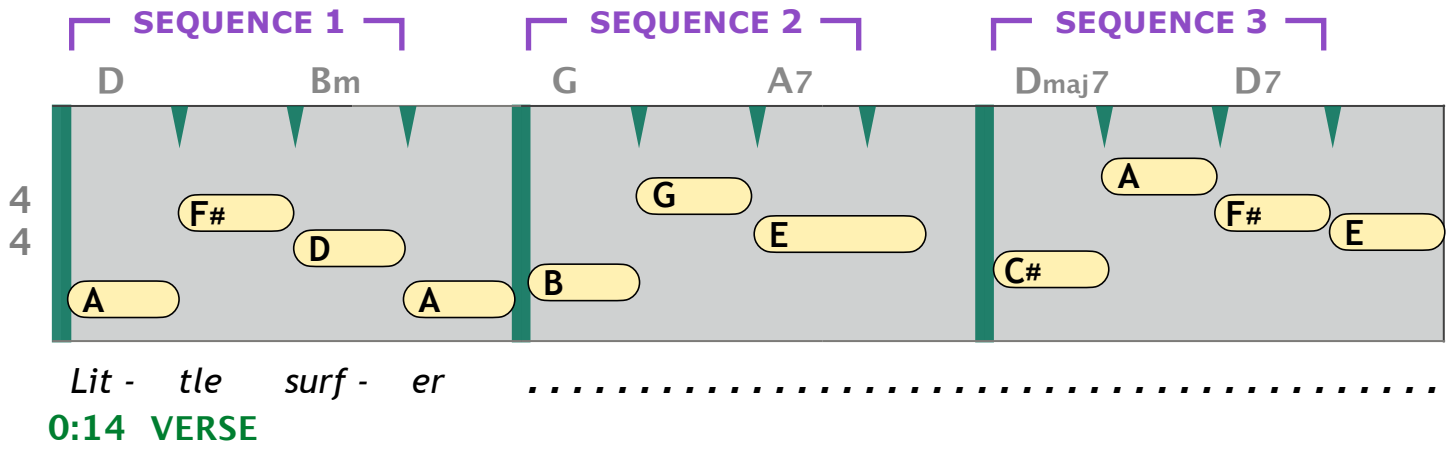


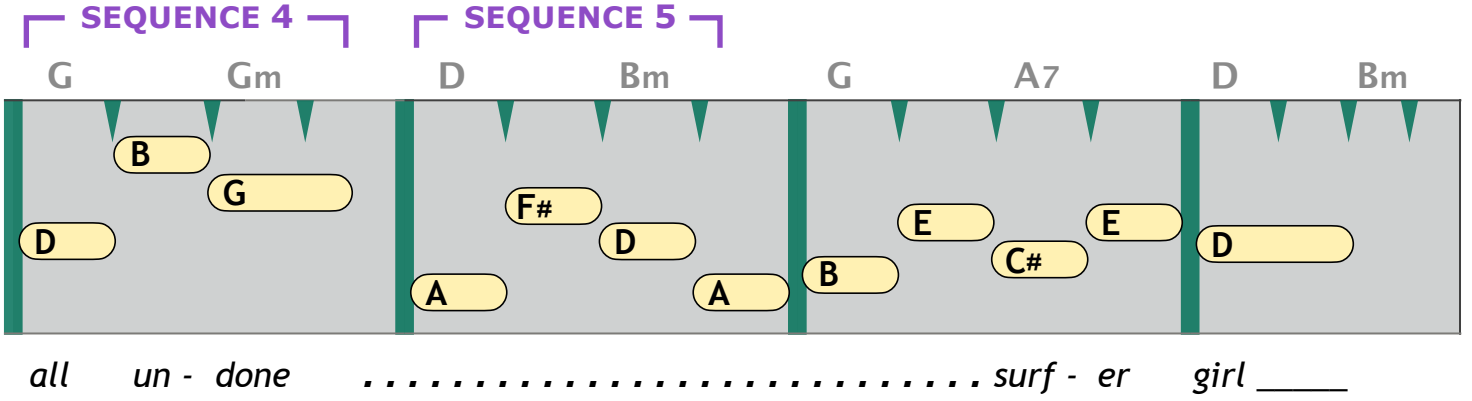
0:14 CHORUS



Here's another good example of sequence, this time by The Beach Boys. A **three-note pattern** starts with a big leap upward, followed by a smaller leap downward. Notice that the **pitches gradually get higher** with each repetition, as the sequence starts on an A note, then B, then C#, and finally D before returning to the original A for the last sequence.

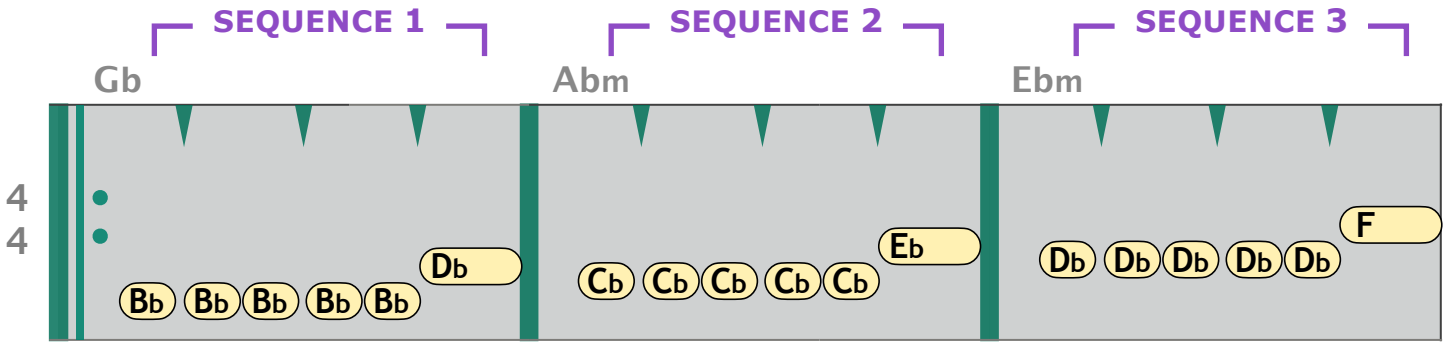
"Surfer Girl" — The Beach Boys — 1963 | **D major** | 18





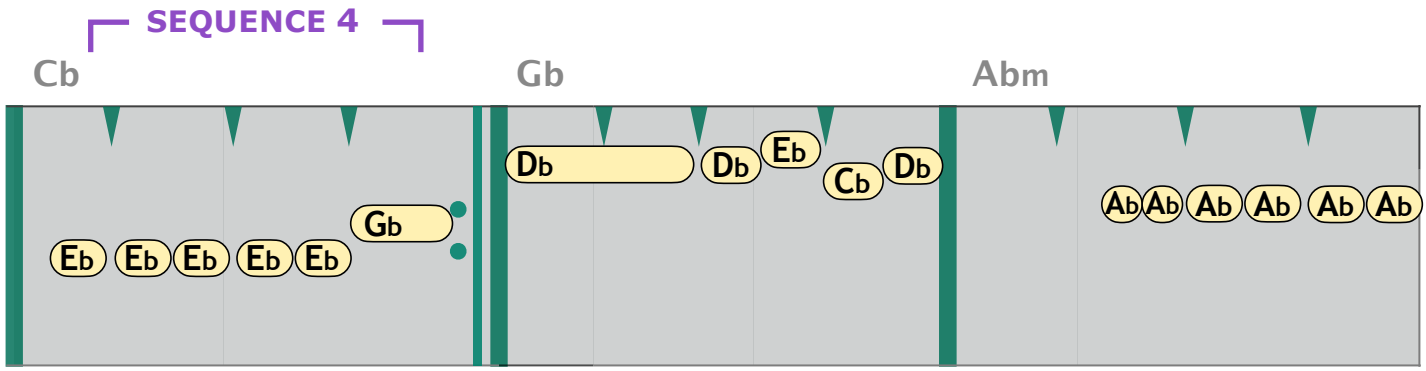
The pre-chorus of Chappell Roan's "Pink Pony Club" also has a series of sequences that **gradually ascend**, creating tension that helps highlight the dramatic chorus entrance that follows. Once again, the **highest note** of the melody starts the chorus, adding extra energy. This is the same dynamic heard earlier on songs by Meghan Trainor or Katy Perry, where the pitch range rose from verse to pre-chorus to chorus. START LISTENING AT **0:27**

"Pink Pony Club" — Chappell Roan — 2024 | Gb major | 19



I'm having wicked dreams . . . . . .

0:27 PRE-CHORUS



. . . . . *God, what have you done?* . . . . . *etc.*

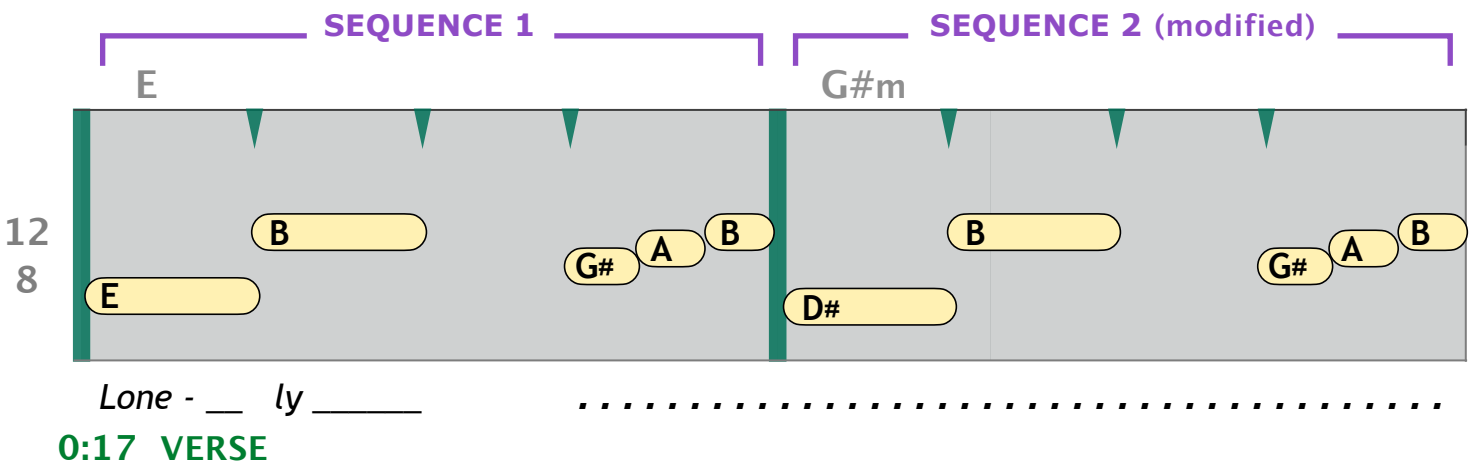
TENSION

0:46 CHORUS 1

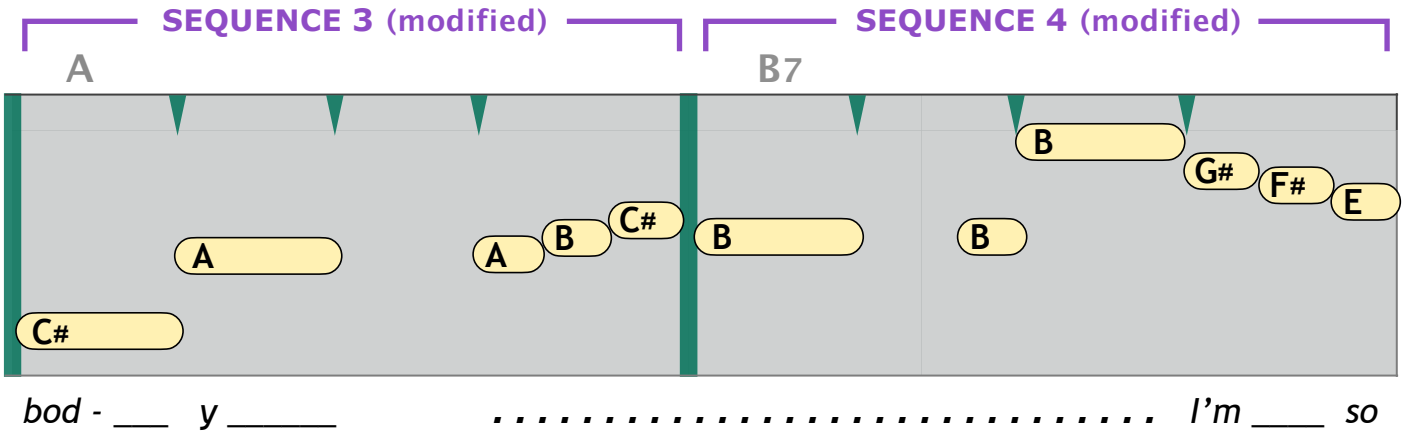
RESOLUTION

On Bobby Vinton's 1964 hit "Mr. Lonely," there are **four sequences, with slight modifications each time**. In the second sequence, only the first note is changed, creating a bigger leap to start the pattern. Then in the third sequence all the notes are changed, with a slightly different contour. The fourth sequence again changes the contour, and the opening leap now jumps an entire octave, soaring to the highest note of the song. However, the rhythm pattern is exactly the same all three times, so our ears easily recognize the similarity:

"Mr. Lonely" — Bobby Vinton — 1964 | E major | 20



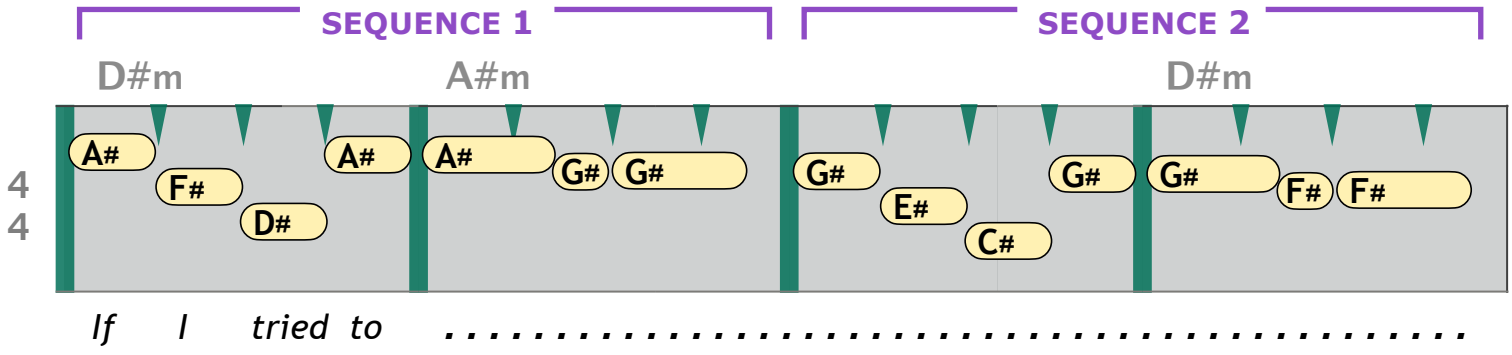
0:17 VERSE

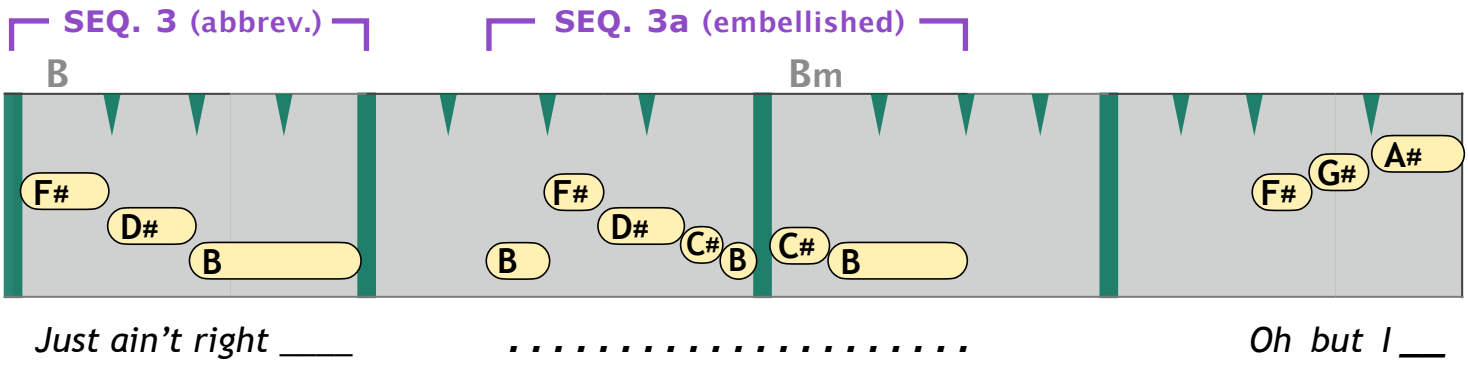


Our last example in this section, shown below, has **<u>two different sets of sequences</u>** - a short one in the pre-chorus and a longer one in the chorus. You will note that the short sequence is quite abbreviated at the beginning of the second line (sequence 3), then repeated again (sequence 3a) with embellishment. START LISTENING AT **0:27**

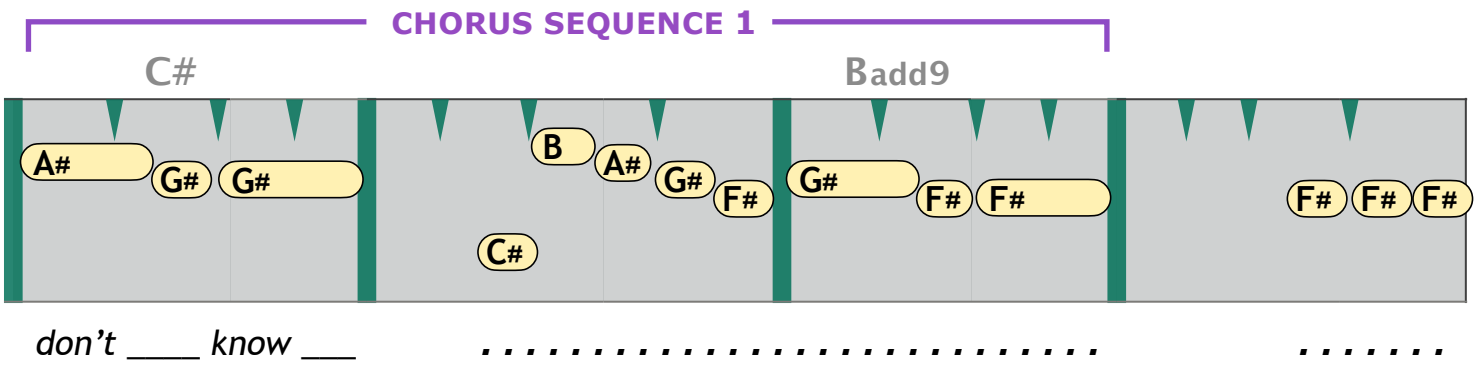
"Beautiful Disaster" — Kelly Clarkson — 2003 **F# major** 21

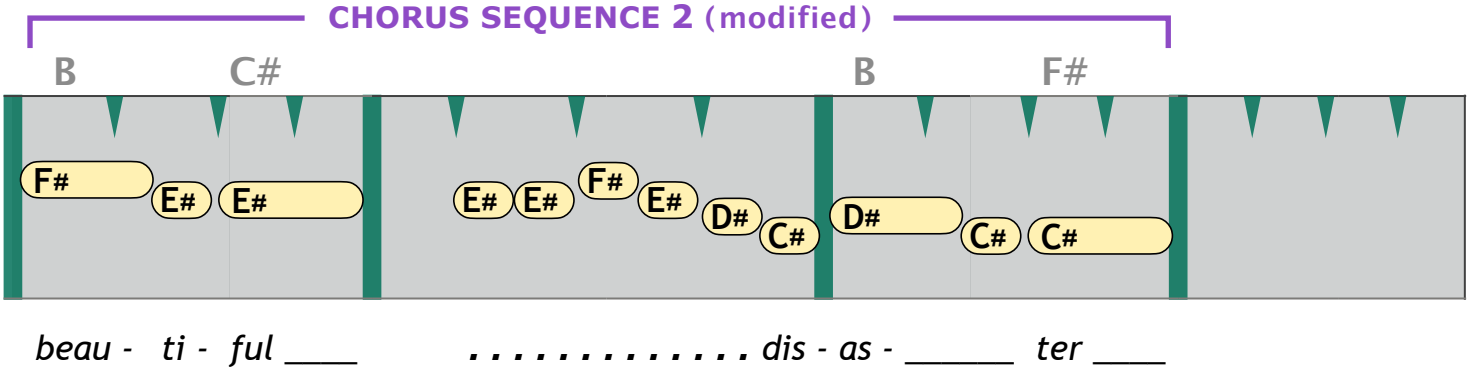
0:27 PRE-CHORUS





0:46 CHORUS – **different** sequence from pre-chorus





Identifying the sequences is much easier when you can follow a written score like the one above while listening. However, with a little practice, you can start to recognize melodic patterns solely by ear. See if you can hear a melodic sequence repeating at different pitch levels in the following examples:

Additional songs with MELODIC SEQUENCE

1960	*El Paso*	Marty Robbins	ver - D major, chor - G major
1961	*Runaway*	Del Shannon	ver - Bb minor chor - Bb major
1966	*Nowhere Man*	The Beatles	E major
1966	*Strangers in the Night*	Frank Sinatra	F major
1967	*Happy Together*	The Turtles	ver - F# minor chor - F# mixo
1967	*Up, Up, and Away*	5th Dimension	F, Ab, B, and G mixo
1967	*Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite*	The Beatles	C minor, D minor
1969	*Sweet Caroline*	Neil Diamond	F# major
1975	*At Seventeen*	Janis Ian	C major, C minor
2014	*Ain't Got Nobody*	Weezer	Db major
2019	*Only Human*	Jonas Brothers	D minor

CONTRASTING NOTE LENGTHS (melodic rhythm)

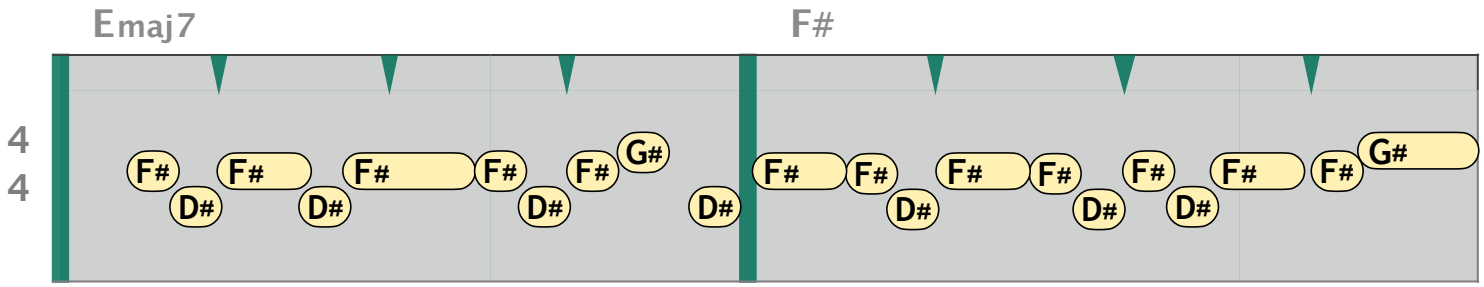
Most people think of melody in terms of pitch. Thus far in our discussion, pitch has indeed been dominant, including the topics of contour, leaps, range, and variety of pitches. The only topic involving rhythm has been the previous section on melodic sequences. Yet, surprisingly, rhythm is just as important as pitch in creating a memorable melody with strong ID.

One element of rhythm in melody is the choice of **note lengths**. A compelling melody will usually have a variety of lengths, mixing quarters, halves, 8ths, 16ths, etc. Often there is a contrast between phrases, or even entire sections. The verse could have shorter notes

(mostly 8ths and 16ths), while the chorus has longer ones (mostly quarters and halves). This is often described using the term "**melodic rhythm.**" The verse is said to have a faster melodic rhythm, and the chorus a slower one.

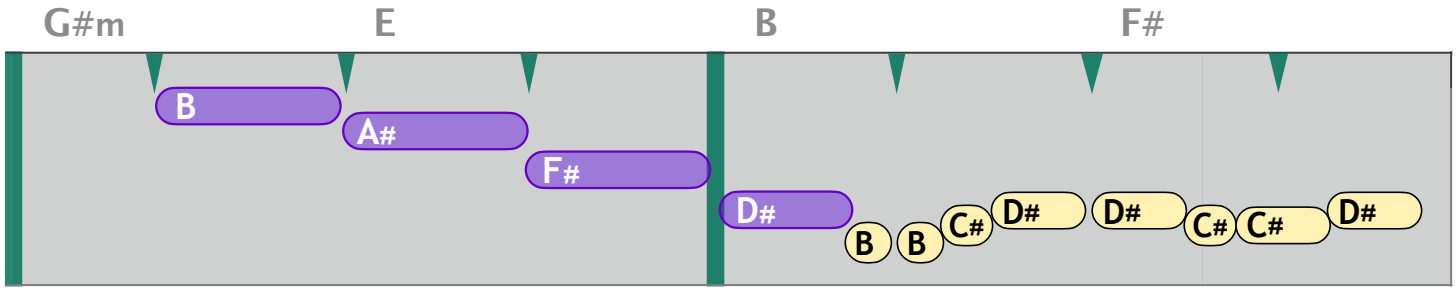
On our first example, "Why Can't I" by Liz Phair, a fast melodic rhythm is established in the verse with mostly 8th and 16th notes. However, the chorus starts with **four long notes** (in purple below), briefly slowing the melodic rhythm. This contrast calls attention to the entrance of the chorus (and also the song's title). START LISTENING AT **0:35**

"Why Can't I" — Liz Phair — 2003 | **B major** | 22



What if this . . . . . go swim-ming

0:35 PRE-CHORUS



Why _____ can't _____ I _____ . . . . . a - bout you

0:41 CHORUS

You will notice several other melodic elements featured in this song (listed below). These elements are all working together to make the hook at the beginning of the chorus so powerful. This recalls our previous discussions about focal point devices in Volume 1 (songwriting sections at the end of Chapters Two thru Eight), and more will be said about these devices later in the Chapter Nine songwriting section.

PRE-CHORUS melody – a **tense, restricted feeling** with:

LIMITED PITCHES – mainly bouncing back & forth between only 2 notes (F# and D)

RELATIVELY LOW PITCHES

NEARLY FLAT CONTOUR

CHORUS melody – an **open, expansive feeling** with:

WIDE RANGE – entire octave from high B to low B

HIGHER PITCHES – highest note of song starts chorus

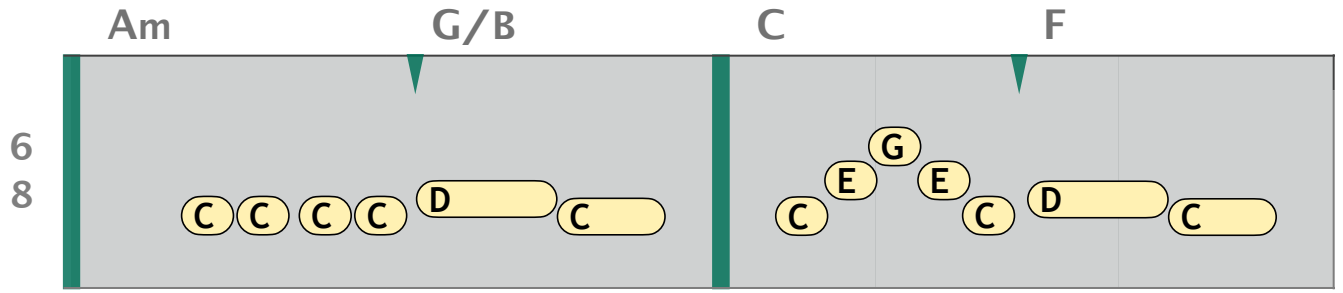
DRAMATIC CONTOUR – steep drop, 3 consecutive leaps (A# to F# to D# to B)

Kelly Clarkson's 2004 hit "Breakaway," offers a similar contrast in note lengths. Near the end of verse two, the melodic rhythm slows from busy 8ths and 16ths to longer notes (only two per measure). Then right before the chorus, the notes get even longer (one per measure), like the slowing melodic rhythm is going to freeze up and come to a halt. This creates a moment of great tension and anticipation. In the lyrics, the singer is praying that she can become unstuck and "break away." Then right on cue, the chorus makes its dramatic entrance. The melody takes off in a series of high quarter notes, gliding along as Kelly breaks free, "spreading her wings" and "touching the sky."

Like the previous song "Why Can't I," this example also has other elements that are helping to strengthen the entrance of the chorus. After relatively **low notes in the verse**, the **chorus starts on the highest note** of the song, reinforcing the idea of flying. You will also notice the **V to I resolution** in the harmony, as the tension V chord (**G**) resolves to the tonic I chord (**C**) at the chorus entrance. START LISTENING AT **0:45.**

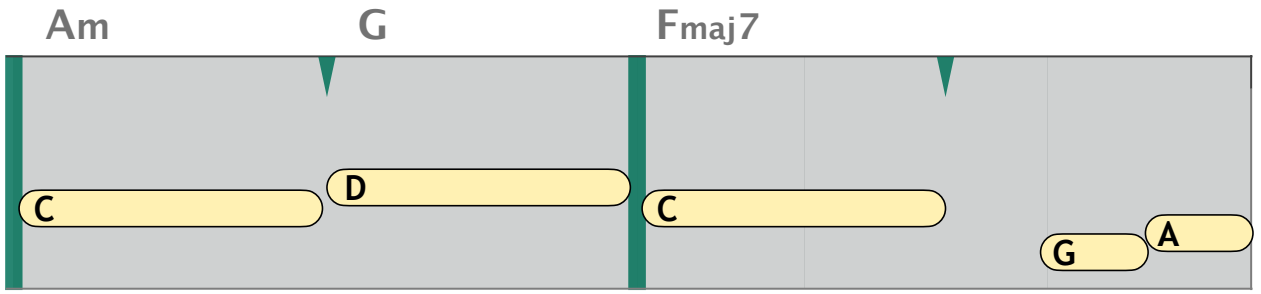
"Breakaway" — Kelly Clarkson — 2004 **C major** 23

0:45 last half of VERSE 2 – SHORTER NOTES



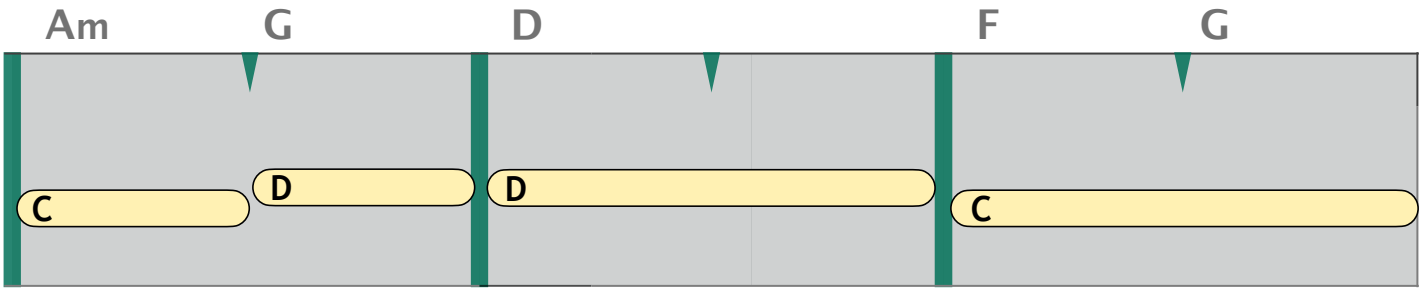
Want-ed to . . . . . wrong here

LONGER NOTES (slows melodic rhythm)



So _____ I _____ . . . . . .

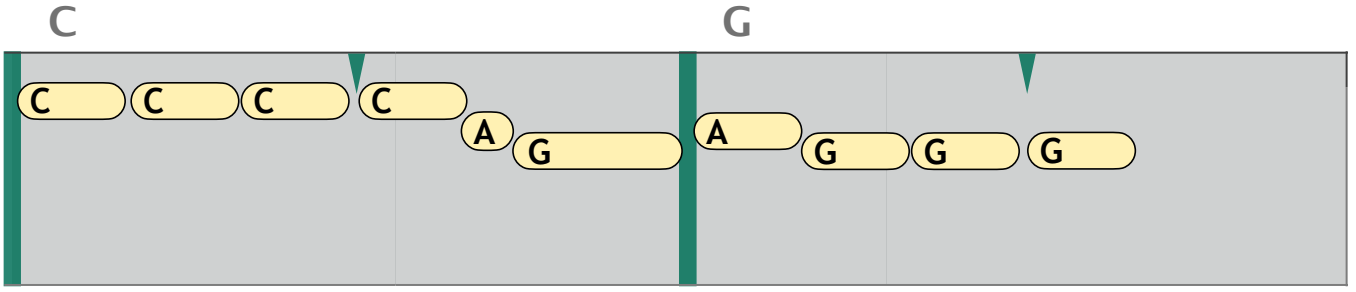
(mel. rhythm almost suspended)



break _____ a - _____ way _____

TENSION

1:01 CHORUS – MEDIUM NOTES (mel. rhythm begins "moving" again)



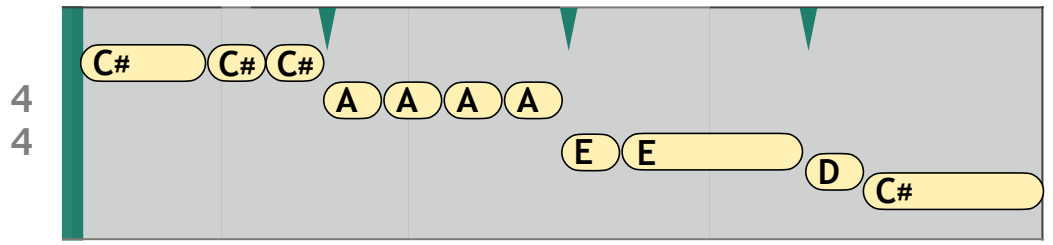
I'll spread my wings . . . . . to fly

RESOLUTION

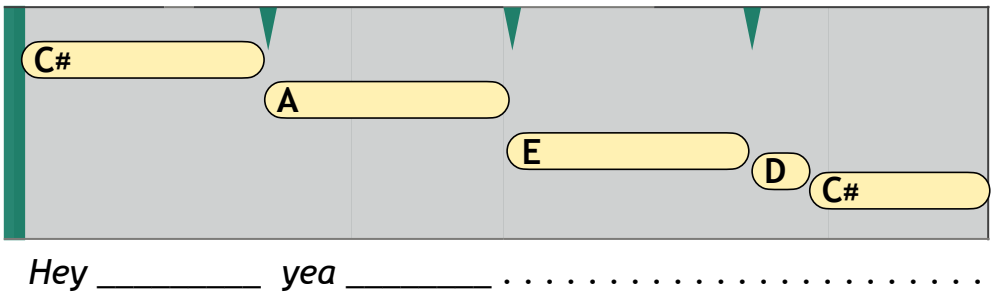
In this next hit from 1993, the chorus starts with the exact same pitch order used several times in the verse - high C# descending through A, E, D, to low C#. However, in the chorus the lengths of the **first three notes are longer**, creating a similar feeling to the hook on "Why Can't I." LISTEN AT **1:12,** AND AGAIN AT **1:26**

"What's Up" — 4 Non Blondes — 1993 | **A major** | 24

1:12 VERSE – SHORTER NOTES



1:26 CHORUS – LONGER NOTES (same sequence)



CONTRASTING PHRASE LENGTHS

In addition to contrasting note lengths, a strong melody will also have a variety of **phrase** lengths. Of course, this goes hand in hand with the writing of the lyrics – or for that matter, writing of any kind. Good prose has a flowing rhythm or cadence, constructed of short, medium, and long phrases all mixed together. This can be explained in this very paragraph. All the sentences should not be the same length. This will be evident as you

read on. As you see, the phrases are becoming the same. Each phrase has roughly the same length. Try reading this section out loud. Things are starting to sound choppy. You could say a bit robotic. I guess you get the point.

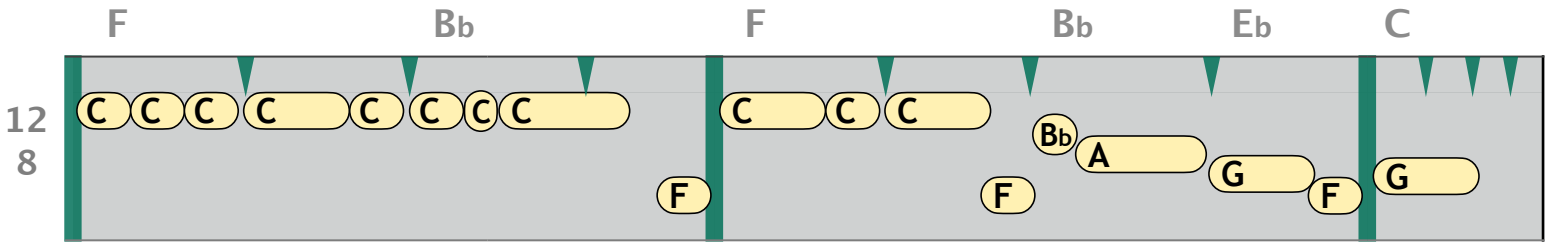
Just like the contrasting note lengths between verse and chorus in the previous three songs, there is often a similar **contrast of phrase lengths** in song sections. In Sonny & Cher's "I Got You Babe," the verse has long phrases, but the chorus phrases are very short. In fact, the first "phrase" of the chorus is about as short as you can get - one word with one note. START LISTENING AT **0:36**

"I Got You Babe" — Sonny & Cher — 1965

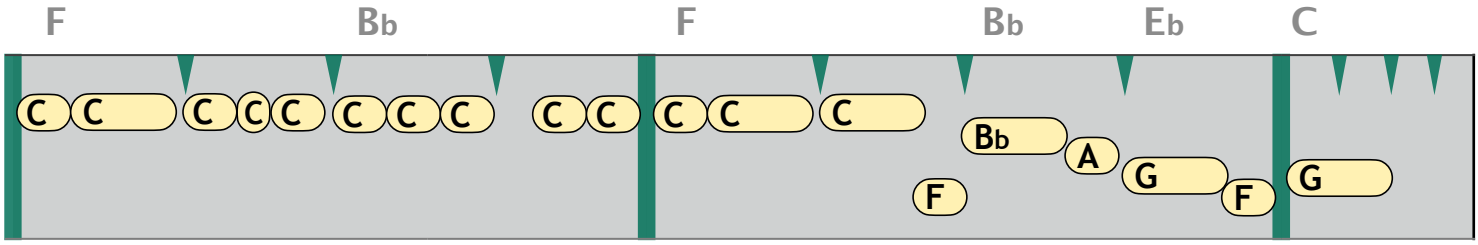
F major
F# major

25

0:36 END of VERSE – LONG PHRASES – very little breathing room

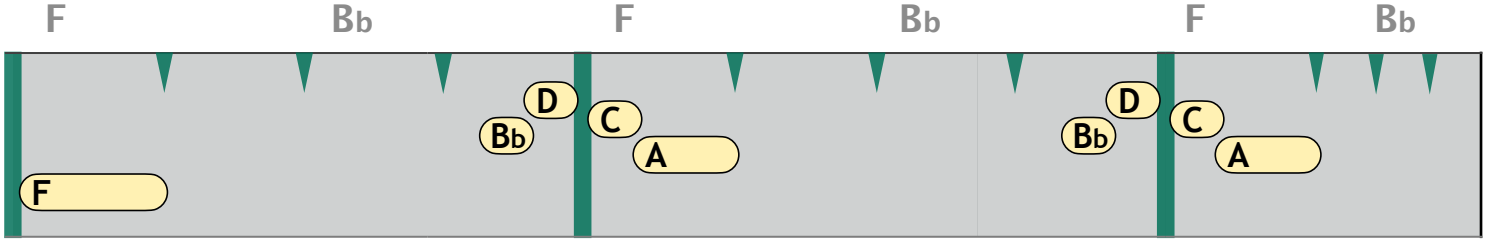


They say our love . . . . . all been spent



Guess that's so . . . . . things we got

0:56 CHORUS – SHORT PHRASES – lots of space



Babe I got you babe I got you babe

Additional songs with STRONG MELODIC ID (vocal melody)

1958	*Who's Sorry Now*	Connie Francis	Eb, E major
1961	*Moon River*	Henry Mancini	F major, D major
1965	*Yesterday*	The Beatles	F major
1965	*California Girls*	The Beach Boys	B major
1966	*Here, There, & Everywhere*	The Beatles	G major
1966	*Homeward Bound*	Simon & Garfunkel	Bb major
1968	*Both Sides Now*	Judy Collins (J.Mitchell)	Ab major
1968	*Wichita Lineman*	Glen Campbell	F major, D major
1970	*Let It Be*	The Beatles	C major
1973	*You Are The Sunshine Of My Life*	Stevie Wonder	B, C major
1976	*I Write the Songs*	Barry Manilow	F, A, B maj
1978	*Sentimental Lady*	Bob Welch	E major
1997	*Sunny Came Home*	Shawn Colvin	ver - B min chr - D maj
1999	*I Want It That Way*	Backstreet Boys	A major
2004	*Boulevard of Broken Dreams*	Green Day	F minor
2012	*Clarity*	Zedd feat. Foxes	Ab major
2012	*Good Time*	Owl City & Carly Rae Jepsen	Eb major
2012	*Just Give Me a Reason*	Pink feat. Nate Ruess	G major
2013	*Stay the Night*	Zedd feat. Hayley Williams	Ab major
2023	*Heart Still Beating*	Nathan Dawe & Bebe Rexha	B bl. rock

Melody / Lyric Connection

Although we have been talking about listening to a melody without the lyrics, we can't ignore the important connection between melody and words. In fact, books on pop song-writing usually focus more on lyrics, and less on musical elements. As mentioned earlier, there are dozens of well-written volumes on the subject. We will, therefore, be very brief in our discussion of lyrics in this book, and leave the rest for other authors. Our focus will be on how melodies illustrate with musical sound the literal meaning of the words. We heard this earlier on "Breakaway," where lyrics about flying matched the highest note of the melody.

The idea of "high" and "low" is perhaps the most common melody / lyric connection in pop and rock. When Garth Brooks sang "I got friends in low places" in 1992, he dipped to the bottom of his vocal range on the word "low." On the 1983 hit "Dirty Laundry," Don Henley sings "kick em' when they're up, kick em' when they're down," with the pitch rising on "up" and falling on "down." The title phrase of the 5th Dimension's 1967 hit "Up Up and Away" rises in pitch just like a balloon. Likewise, the title phrase of Weezer's recent recording "I've Had It Up to Here" climbs to the song's highest note on the word "here." In other songs, the connection may be purely rhythmic, as on the 1987 hit "Jacob's Ladder," when Huey Lewis sings the lyrics "step _ by _ step _, wrung _ by _ wrung" in deliberate, incremental fashion.

In the following Beatles song "Fool on the Hill" (shown below), there are several melody / lyric connections, all involving pitch in some way. Listen for these phrases:

"day after day" **-** repeats **same note** like repeating days

"alone on a hill" - **notes gradually rise** stepwise like climbing a hill

"perfectly still" - notes repeat (no movement up or down), then the **melody is stationary** ("still")

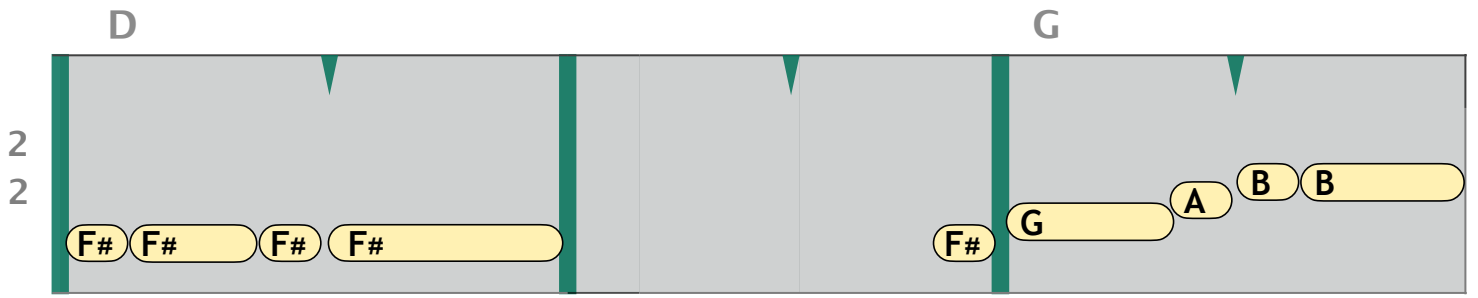
"just a fool" - **3 leaps in a row** (compared to the rest of the melody, this is the most active sequence, with crazy jumps like a fool)

"Fool on the Hill" - The Beatles - 1967

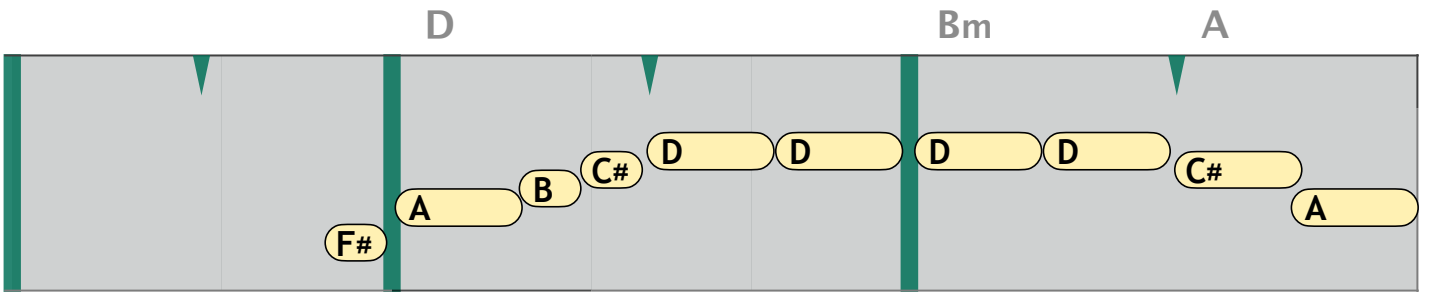
D major

26

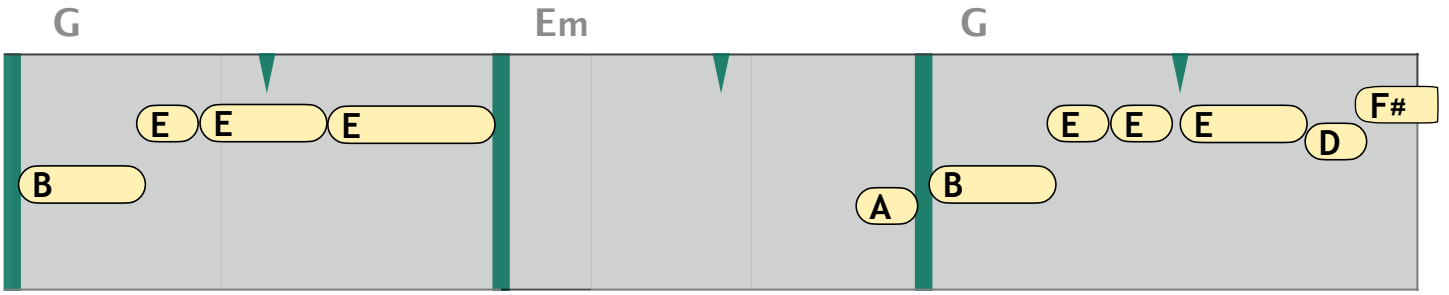
0:04 VERSE



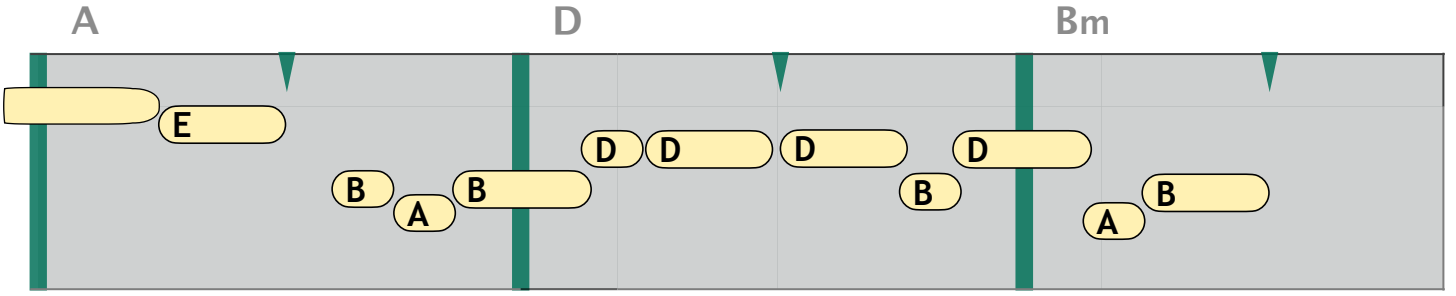
Day af - ter day _____ a - lone ____ on a hill ____



. . . . . .



per - fect- ly still ____ . . . . . .



. . . . . *just a fool _____*

In the following hit by Tommy James and the Shondells, the lyric connection is with the **harmony instruments**, rather than the vocal melody:

"I Think We're Alone Now" - Tommy James - 1967	A major	27

0:23 *"running just as fast . . . . . ."* — guitar strum speeds up, followed by rapid bass notes

0:38 *"I think we're alone now . . . ."* — volume drops and texture thins (all instruments pause, except for bass and minimal drum)

0:49 *"the beating of our hearts . . . . . ."* — soft drum imitates a heartbeat

Additional songs with STRONG MUSIC / LYRIC CONNECTION

1966	*Yellow Submarine*	The Beatles	F major
1967	*Up, Up, and Away*	5th Dimension	F, Ab, B, and G mixo
1983	*Dirty Laundry*	Don Henley	F dorian
1987	*Jacob's Ladder*	Huey Lewis & The News	F major, F blues
1992	*Friends in Low Places*	Garth Brooks	A major
2014	*I've Had It Up to Here*	Weezer	C major

Songwriting Focal Points

Following the format established in Spinning Gold, Volume 1, there will be a brief section at the end of each chapter in Volume 2 discussing songwriting and the creation of focal points in pop music. For Chapter Nine, we will look at how four melodic elements discussed throughout the chapter (pitch range, contour, phrase lengths, and note lengths) are specifically used as focal point devices in two songs – Tim McGraw's "It's Your World" and the Turtles' "Happy Together."

The 2013 hit "It's Your World" by Tim McGraw (composers: Shane McAnally, Josh Osborne, and Scott B. Stepakoff) employs the following three melodic devices:

Contrast in Pitch Range

We heard several songs in this chapter that used a **lower-pitched verse**, **mid-range pre-chorus**, and then **higher-pitched chorus** to create excitement and highlight the chorus entrance, including "Breakaway" and "Like I'm Gonna Lose You." Tim McGraw's song follows this same sequence to great effect.

Contrast in Melodic Contour

Likewise, we have seen songs that used a contrast in melodic contour to highlight the chorus. On Liz Phair's "Why Can't I," the verse had step-wise motion and was nearly flat. This served to highlight the chorus, which entered with several leaps in a dramatic descent. On McGraw's "It's Your World," the leaps are in the verse and especially the pre-chorus, where an arresting, **jagged contour** creates tension for eight bars leading into the chorus. This time the chorus enters with a **smoother contour**, but it still grabs attention, thanks to contrast with the jagged pre-chorus. In fact, the step-wise motion of the chorus is a welcome relief as the melody soars on the highest pitches of the song.

Contrast in Phrase Lengths

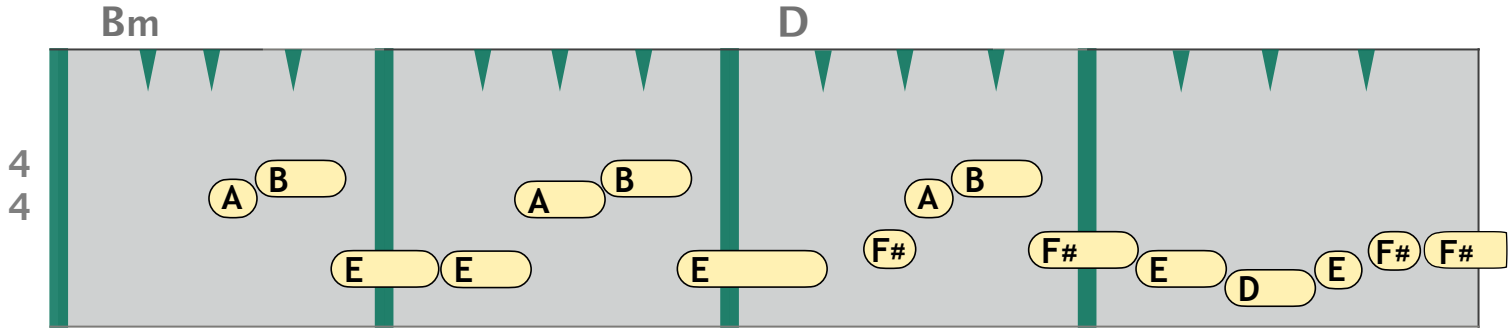
"It's Your World" also has a contrast of phrase lengths, starting with **longer phrases** in the verse. In the pre-chorus the phrasing becomes a bit disjointed with a series of **short, repeating phrases** (going hand in hand with the jagged contour). These phrases interrupt the flow of the lyrics and the repetition creates tension as we anticipate a return to a smoother flow. The entrance of the chorus resolves this tension as **longer phrases resume**.

"It's Your World" — Tim McGraw — 2013

ver - B min
ch - D major

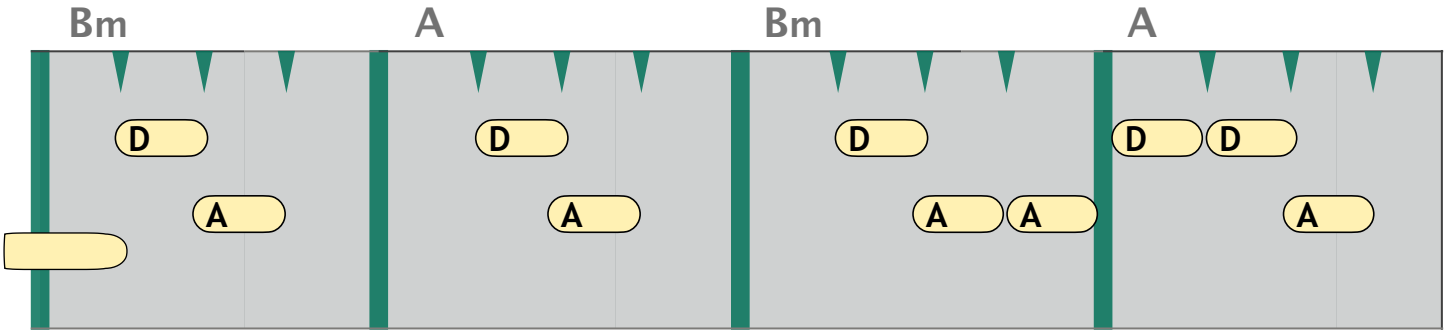
28

0:24 VERSE

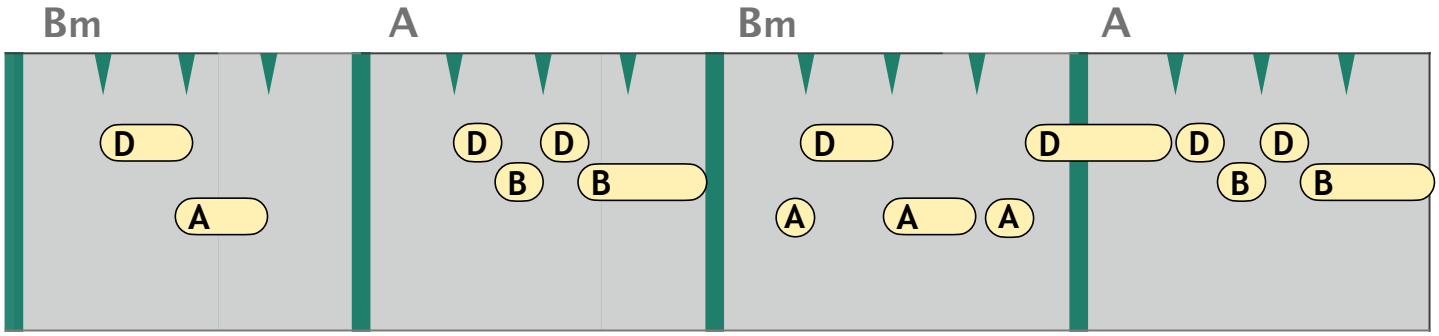


It's your night . . . . . it's your__ call

0:31 PRE-CHORUS



Your rain . . . . . .

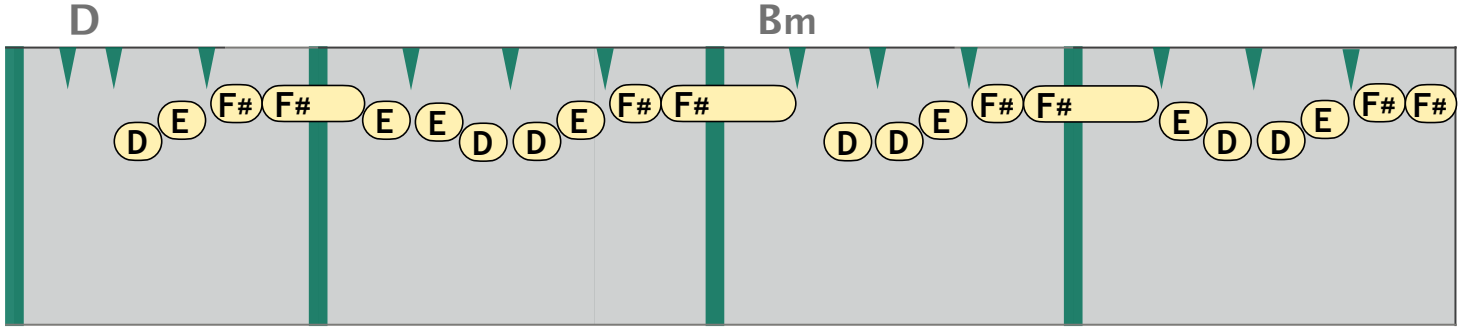


Your end . . . . . It's your world . . . . . .

TENSION

stop time

0:46 CHORUS



You leave your . . . . . cal- i- co brush

RESOLUTION

You may have noticed that two songwriting devices from previous chapters were also used in this song to strengthen the focal point:

V to I RESOLUTION from tension V chord (**A**) at end of pre-chorus, to resolving I chord (**D**) at the chorus entrance

STOP TIME adds tension, one bar before the chorus (with **title phrase**).

Our second song, "Happy Together" by the Turtles (composers: Garry Bonner and Alan Gordon) features another melodic device mentioned earlier in the chapter – **contrasting note lengths**.

Contrast in Note Lengths (melodic rhythm)

"Happy Together" has **mostly 8th notes in the verse**, establishing a fairly fast melodic rhythm. However, the chorus enters with a sequence of **four deliberate quarter notes** (shown in purple), briefly slowing the melodic rhythm before returning to more active 8ths.

Also listen in this song for two of the melodic devices heard in "It's Your World" (constrasting pitch range and contour), plus two devices from previous chapters (V to I resolution and drum fill). There is even a preview of a device we'll cover in greater detail in the next chapter – modulation (changing keys). All totaled, that's quite a lot to keep track of, so you probably will want to listen to this example several times to catch all the elements. Here they are in list form: (START LISTENING AT **0:23**)

Focal Point Devices on "Happy Together"

CONTRAST IN MELODIC CONTOUR

Verse – mainly **step-wise** motion.

Chorus – numerous **leaps**, starting with a dramatic drop

CONTRAST IN PITCH RANGE

Verse – overall **lower** pitches.

Chorus – overall **higher** pitches. Starts w highest melody note

CONTRAST IN NOTE LENGTHS

Verse — mainly **8th notes**
Chorus — **four consecutive quarter notes** at entrance of chorus

V to I RESOLUTION

End of pre-chorus — **tension V** chord (**C#**)
Entrance of chorus — **resolving I** chord (**F#**)

DRUM FILL

Last bar of verse — increases tension

UPLIFTING MODULATION

Verse — **darker, F# minor** key.
Chorus — **brighter F# mixolydian** key

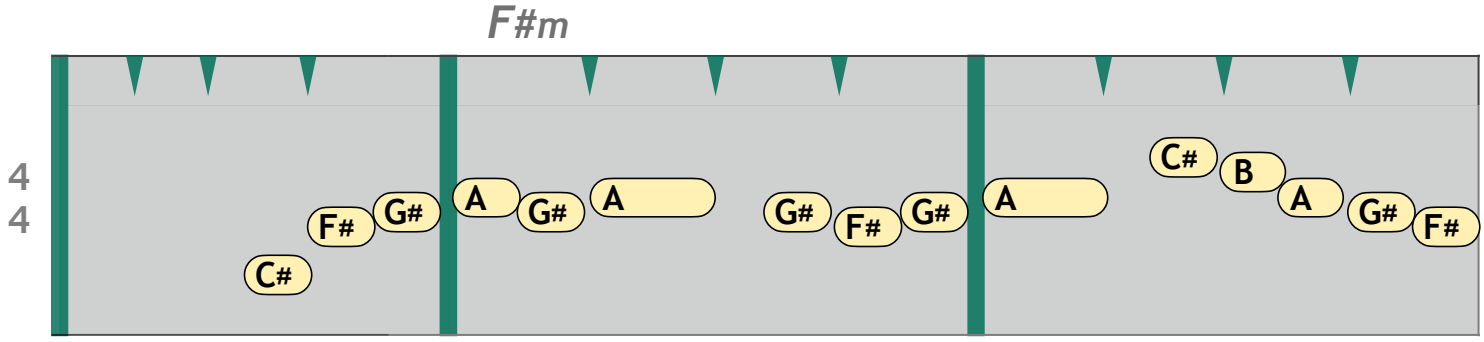
"Happy Together" — The Turtles — 1967

ver - F# minor,
chor - F# mixo

29

0:23 VERSE TWO

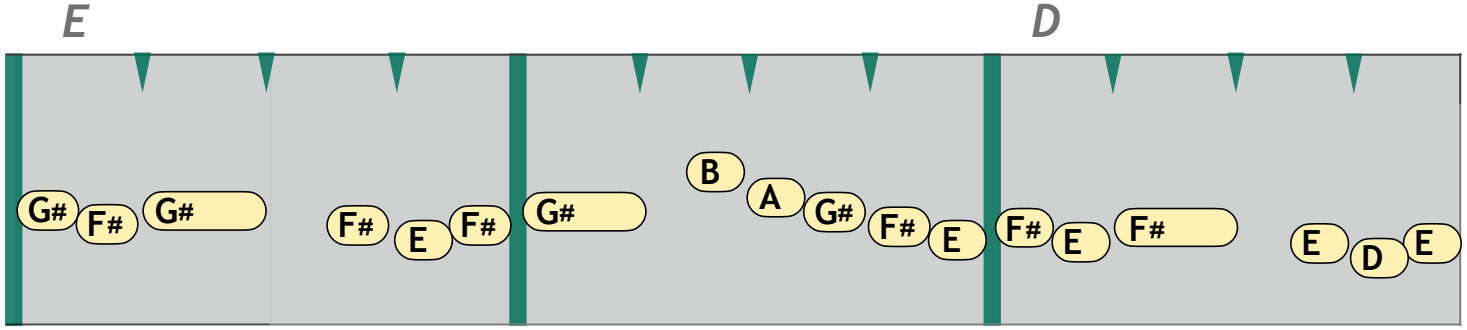
SEQUENCE 1



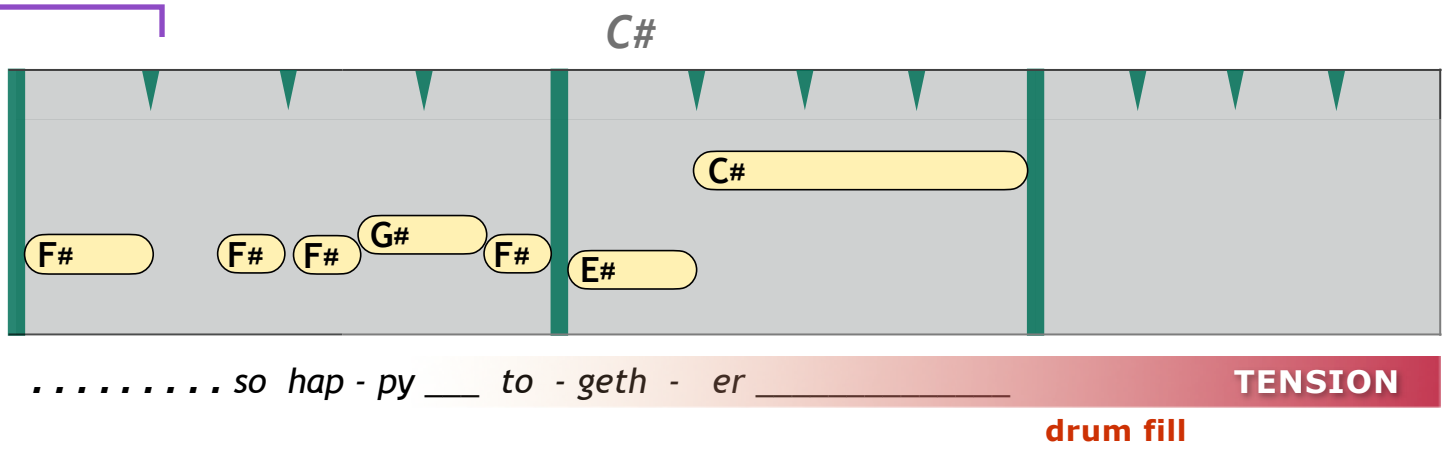
If I should call . . . . . be -

SEQUENCE 2

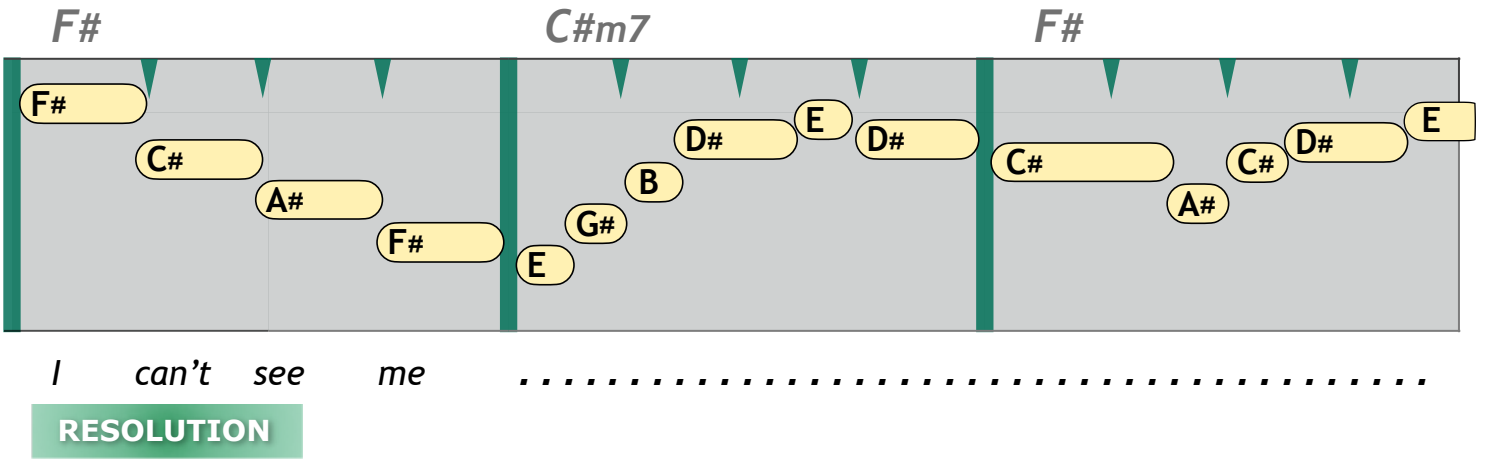
SEQ. 3 (abbrev.)



long to me . . . . . world could be . . . . . .



0:40 CHORUS



Of course you also noticed that this song has **melodic sequences**, thanks to the labeling in the score above. These only add to all the other melodic elements to make this a strong and memorable melody.