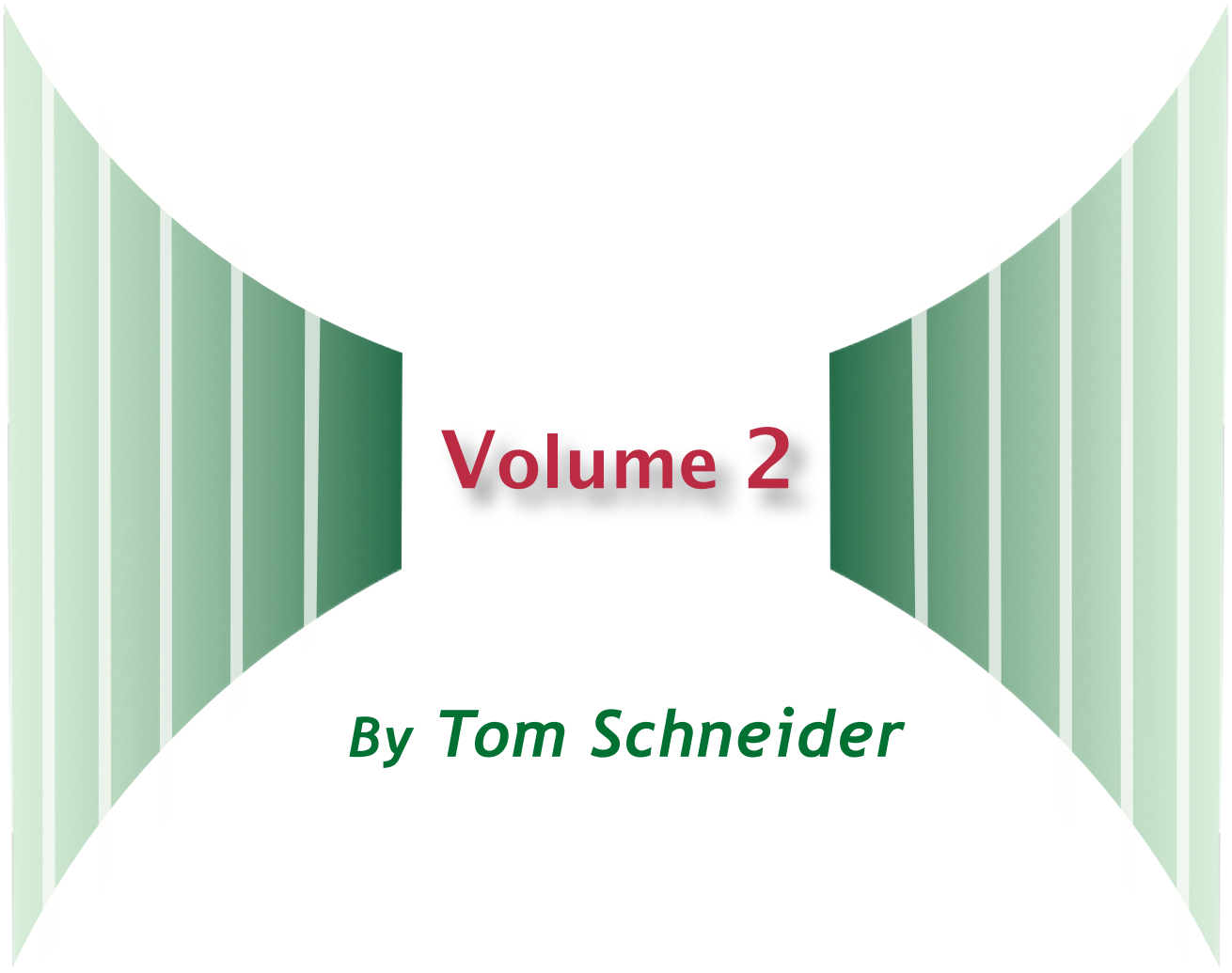
Spinning Gold

A Musical Analysis of Pop & Rock



Volume 2

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PREFACE

Welcome to Volume 2 of Spinning Gold. As mentioned in the introduction to Volume 1, these books are for music students and songwriters of all levels who have been waiting for a theory textbook geared specifically for pop and rock. Here you will find the detailed analysis and terminology of traditional theory books, but each concept is illustrated exclusively with hits from the pop charts. There are no old folk-songs, Broadway show tunes, or classical music examples. There is no information regarding the rules of counterpoint for four-part fugues. This book simply presents the theory that is needed to understand and write commercially successful pop and rock music.

Volume 1 (Chapters One thru Eight) started with basic elements, and no previous knowledge of music was required. However, in Volume 2 (Chapters Nine thru Fifteen) the topics will be more advanced so it is highly recommended that you study Volume 1 first. For those who are advanced enough to start with this book, let me briefly repeat some background info.

General highlights and features in Volume 2 will be similar to the previous volume, including:

- **Over 40 song examples per chapter with audio**
- **WRITTEN EXERCISES within the text (could be used as graded assignments, or just optional worksheets)**
- **Harmonic EAR TRAINING EXERCISES with audio**
- **Numerous SONG LISTS for "Additional Listening " (for further ear training & improv practice)**
- **5 PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS with student's choice of song (for further study and class discussion)**
- **Special sections on "Songwriting Focal Points"**
- **Chapter-ending QUIZZES**

As mentioned, Spinning Gold is the culmination of 20 years of personal research, based on an original database created from analysis of over 4,200 chart hits. Songs were equally sampled across seven decades of pop music history, including roughly 60 hits from each year 1955 to 2025. 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. Despite its comprehensive nature, Spinning Gold does not get lost in endless statistics and data lists. It is written in a clear and engaging tutorial style — sequentially progressing through various levels of music theory instruction.

The opening chapter of Volume 2 (Chapter Nine) presents an analysis of pop and rock melodies, discussing elements like pitch range, note & phrase lengths, sequences, contour, and melodic motion (step-wise, leaps, etc.). Chapter Ten covers different types of modulations, including half-step, whole-step, P4th, parallel key, relative key, and pivot chords.

Chapter Eleven discusses a unique pop & rock tonality called "Blues-Rock" that is based on the I, bIII, IV, and bVII chords. This represents a mixture of the major and minor keys and contains the characteristic b3rd / natural 3rd ambiguity that helps define the blues, something discussed earlier in Volume 1.

Secondary and substitute dominants are covered in Chapter Twelve, including topics like secondary IIm - V's, extended doms, interpolated IIm's, and sequences with root motion of a 5th. Chapter Thirteen follows with a discussion of modal inter-change, including chords borrowed from parallel minor, mixolydian, and dorian modes.

Chapter Fourteen presents the numerous line cliches that are common to pop and rock, and introduces the 6th, m6, and augmented chords. Also covered are dim7 chords and their typical functions in chord progressions. The discussion of more advanced chord forms continues in Chapter Fifteen, including 9th, maj9, m9, 7b9, 7#9, 9sus4, add9, and 13th chords as well as hybrid chord structures.

All chapters except Chapter Nine have ear training exercises with accompanying audio. As mentioned in Volume 1, the ear training is **harmonic** only (using chords), rather than rhythmic or melodic. This may be too difficult for those who haven't previously studied melodic intervals with solfege singing. For this reason, some colleges may decide to require a basic musicianship or ear training course as a prerequisite, or teachers may want to consider the ear training as optional, assigning it to music majors only.

Each chapter also has numerous song lists for "Additional Listening," found throughout the chapters. These lists include the key and tonality of every song. By covering up this info and later using it as an answer check, the songs can be used for practicing ear training (finding the key and/or chords) and also provide an oppor-tunity to work on improvisation. (A workbook for guitarists is also being planned that will eventually supplement this text with various scales and patterns.)

As mentioned in Volume 1, 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 vs. resolution. For example, the roman numeral V (dominant chord), or the 7th degree of the major scale (leading tone) usually repre-sent 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). As with Volume I, there will once again be a brief section titled “Songwriting Focal Points” at the end of every chapter in Volume 2. In these sections, one hit song with a strong musical hook will be analyzed, discussing the various tension devices that help create the focal point and make the song memorable.

Each chapter also contains written theory exercises, presenting opportunities to drill important skills like chord spelling and scale spelling that will become the foundation for more advanced topics in later chapters. Teachers may want to use these exercises as graded homework assignments or just optional worksheets.

There are also special “Projects for Further Study & Discussion” that accompany each chapter. In these projects, students may choose their own song to analyze, as long as it meets the criteria of the assignment. Teachers may want to use these projects to provide a greater opportunity for student input and discussion in the class.

Regarding the need for students to sight-read music scores, the concepts of music theory presented in this book do not require anything beyond a minimal knowledge of staff notation. Only rhythmic elements found in basic musicianship courses, such as note values and certain time signatures (4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 12/8, and 6/8) will be needed.

Pitch elements (note locations on the staff in treble and bass clef) will not have to be read fluently, or even memorized, thanks to the unique **graphic notation** system developed specifically for this book (introduced previously in Volume 1.) You will remember that in this alternative system, notes were always labeled with their proper letter names. This alternative notation keeps the book at an affordable price, since there are a large number of written examples (over 150 songs), and the

expense of using copyrighted standard notation (5-line staff) on these excerpts would quickly become cost-prohibitive due to legal issues. As with Volume 1, theory concepts like scale and chord construction will still be presented in standard notation, but notes will also be clearly labeled with letter names for non-staff readers.

Even the melodic analysis in Chapter Nine does not require fluent sight reading. Many of the concepts (such as contrasts in melodic contour, range, dramatic leaps, and melodic sequences) can also be understood through close attention to visual shapes, vertical boundaries, and rhythm values, without fluent identification of pitch names.

It is important to keep in mind that unlike Western art music ("classical" music), the composing and performance of pop music does not rely very heavily on written scores. Pop and rock music comes primarily from an oral tradition, where musicians have learned their craft and exchanged songs and ideas by ear rather than reading sheet music. Adding to this is the value placed on the ability to improvise. Therefore, it is felt that ear training skills should be emphasized over sight reading ability.

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