



ANALYSING A TUNE

You need to develop skills in analysing music to understand what makes a good song. Try the following tips to improve the way you listen to music:

LISTEN to different radio stations, e.g. pirate radio, community radio, different genre radio for example, ethnic music broadcasts, overseas radio. Think about the different musical styles you can identify. Analyse the main elements of music – use P12 - P23 to help.

LISTEN to another musician's demo. What do you like and what don't you like and why?

LISTEN to your music as if you were an A&R person from a record label or publishing company. Don't listen to the performance, listen to the song. What is the hook? Does it keep your interest? Who will it appeal to?

KEY ELEMENTS OF A SONG



TEMPO / SPEED

To count the number of bars in each section tap along with the tune to establish the pulse then count ‘1-2-3-4, 2-2-3-4, 3-2-3-4’ etc from the start to the end of each section. (Most music has 4 beats in a bar.)

You can establish the tempo with a metronome or the click in a sequencer like Cubase. Or, you can use a stop watch to count the number of bars in a minute. Multiply this by 4 for the tempo, which represents beats per minute (bpm).

When trying to work our bpm, think of the standard click track on Cubase – this is usually set at 120 bpm.



RHYTHM

A rhythm is a pattern of heavy and light beats. Depending where the heavy beats fall, the rhythm will sound different.

A simple rhythm is one that falls mostly on the beat. It will sound fairly ‘safe’ and probably quite fluent – rolling out without too many breaks or jumpy bits. A syncopated rhythm is much more angular, jagged, falling in between beats.

An example of a simple rhythm is the theme from Eastenders.

An example of a syncopated rhythm is La Bamba.



MELODY

A melody is a tune – but it doesn't have to be pleasant to the ear! Some tunes are discordant – they sound at odds with the chords that are played underneath.

To be able to analyse the melody, you need to know it really well – sing along with it.

Things To Look Out For In The Melody

- 1 Does it cover a wide range of notes, or stay round just a few?
- 2 Are the phrases (often a sentence, a line in the lyric) long or short or varied?
- 3 Do the notes fit neatly with the chords or do they sometimes clash?
- 4 Are there ‘extra’ melodies, maybe counter - melodies from another vocal line or instrument?

A hook is any element of a piece of music that gives it a unique and appealing identity. The chorus of a song will usually have one particular, short line that you recognise as a main theme. But a hook could be a catchy instrumental riff, or a sound or any quirky feature.

Ring tones are an example of hooks from tunes that instantly identify a particular piece of music.



Music theory and harmony is a big subject! Look in the ‘want to know more’ section if you’d like to go into the subject in more detail!



CHORDS

A chord is 2 or more notes played together. Chords can also be implied, where notes of a chord are broken up or played by several instruments. The most common chords are major or minor; these basic chords can have notes added or altered to make more ‘colourful’ chords.



Major chords sound 'happy', minor chords sound 'sad'.

Songwriters often describe chords using numbers – roman numerals are common.

Minor chords are shown as ‘m’ or min

Major chords are shown as just the letter (G = G major) or sometimes with a Δ or maj.

G / D means play G major with a D note in the bass.

Find out more about unusual chords – diminished, 7th chords, sus4 chords – by looking at the weblinks at the end of the chapter.

Common Chords

Some chords fit very naturally together in a chord progression, feeling like they belong to the same ‘family’. These are chords ‘from the key’. You can build a chord on every note of a scale – whether the chord is major or minor depends on which numbered note it starts on.

Build a chord on every note of a major scale, using notes from that scale alone.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I Major	II Minor	III Minor	IV Major	V Major	VI Minor	VII Diminished
G Major	A Minor	B Minor	C Major	D Major	E Minor	F# Diminished

Some common patterns are as follows:

Two Chord Songs

Two chords a tone apart is a very popular cycle, especially with the second chord minor as in **I - II^m** ; this would be **C - D^m, G - A^m, D - E^m**. Keeping both chords major gives it a rockier feel, as in the Kinks’ 'You really got me'. Lots of two-chord songs are also based on the **I - IV** change.

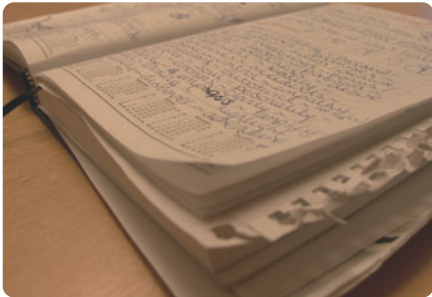
Three Chord Trick

This is the famous **I - IV - V** pattern – **C - F - G**, for example as in 'La Bamba' and 'Twist and shout'. **12 Bar blues** also uses these chords.

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	V

Four Chord Songs

An example of a standard chord sequence using four chords is **I - VI - IV - V** for example, using **C - A^m - F - G** as in almost every Doo - wop song from the 1950s.



LYRICS

Understanding lyrics

It’s difficult to talk about the true meaning of songs because the things we feel when we hear them are personal, and we are all different.
A great song usually involves the way the music and words interact with each other.

English Folk song

Words – use themes about the countryside, lost love or war.

Music – uses simple structure to tell a complex and long story, so the music doesn't get in the way of the story.

Lyrics and music are working together in an obvious way.

Trinidadian Calypso

Words – often about political issues such as corruption and oppression.

Music – sounds positive and uplifting, to disguise the true meaning from those in power.

Lyrics and music are working together in a 'twisted' way.

Gershwin’s Summertime

Words – describes the hardship of life for a servant.

Music – sounds like a mother singing a lullaby to a child.

Lyrics and music are working against each other, to add weight to the true meaning of the song.

Rhyming

There are no rules in writing lyrics, but most songs still rhyme in some way.

There are perfect rhymes and imperfect rhymes

Perfect rhyme "take care of me, be there for me"

Imperfect rhyme "Will you do or die, will you despise"

Use a rhyming dictionary if you're struggling.

Scanning / meter

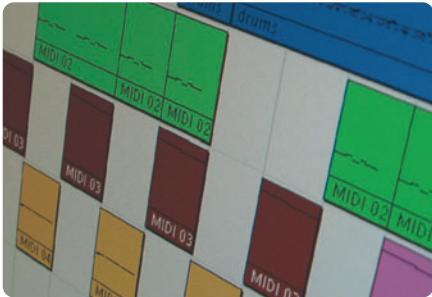
We've talked about heavy beats and light beats to produce a rhythm in music. The same is true of spoken words. Listen to a lyric – where are the stressed parts of the words? Do the lines all match in length? Although songs, like poems, can have an irregular rhythm, most lyrics still 'scan' in some way.

“Simply predictable, simple the rhyme
Watching and waiting and biding its' time”

This rhyme fits into 3s, both lines scan perfectly i.e. add up to the same number of beats per line, without the words having to sound emphasised in the wrong places.

“Bolder and stronger, you think that I care
I'll take the lion's share”

This rhyme does not 'scan' perfectly, it doesn't fall into a rhythm, but you could still find a way to use it if that's the effect you want to create.



STRUCTURE

You can name each different section of a song :

Intro
the introduction

Verse
sets the scene, tells the story

Bridge
provides a development between 2 contrasting sections (like verse and chorus). This is often where a twist in the story comes out, or where solos and improvisations live. It is also used to alter the mood of the song altogether, and in the verse or chorus that follows there’s often a key change or a shift in rhythm or dynamics.

Chorus
resolves the verse, provides the climax, delivers the main statement

Link or Interlude
fills in after a verse or chorus, like a new intro.

Middle 8
takes the song somewhere completely different.

Solo
an improvised section, perhaps over the chords and feel of a verse or chorus.

Instrumental
a section of non - vocal melody.

Breakdown
where the song ‘thins out’, often before building up again.

Outro or Coda
the conclusion

Or you can use letters to describe each 'theme' in the music,

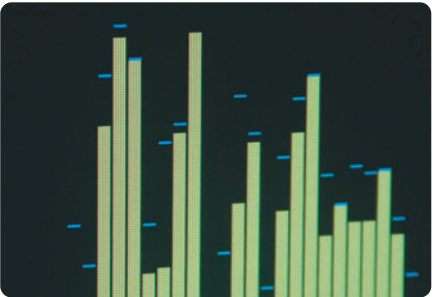
e.g. Verse = A Chorus = B Middle 8 = C

Here are some examples :

ABAB
= verse, chorus, verse, chorus

AABA
= two verses, a chorus and another verse

BAABAB
= the Beatles' song 'She Loves You' starts with a chorus



DYNAMICS

You can use a line or graph to show where the dynamics and intensity of the music rise and fall.

Dynamics
changes in volume (louder, softer).

Intensity
changes in emotional feel.

There are many ways of increasing intensity – introduce more notes, or more unusual chords, or a faster tempo, or more instruments, or more aggressive playing and numerous others musical techniques.

HOW TO ANALYSE A SONG

Here’s an example of how you might analyse a song. The song is Shooting Star by Tinman, released by RF Records. Hear or download it online at www.citycol.com/rfrecords/cds/olm/tinman_shootingstar.MP3

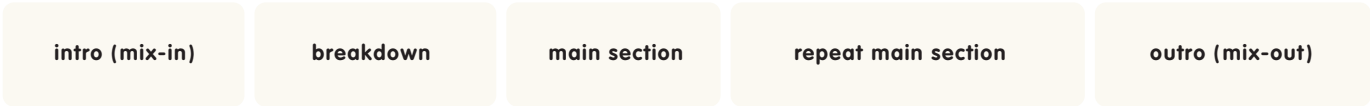
Each box represents a different section of the song.

Shooting Star by Tinman
the tempo is 132 bpm



The structure of this song is quite typical of many pop songs, but there are no rules in musical structure, as long as your music goes on a satisfying journey.

If you’re analysing a dance track, then there may be no verse-chorus structure, where the grooves, textures and samples are more important than song structure.
You might identify an introduction (a ‘mix-in’ section to make it suitable for a DJ set), a main section, a breakdown, a repeat of the main section and an outro (a ‘mix-out’).

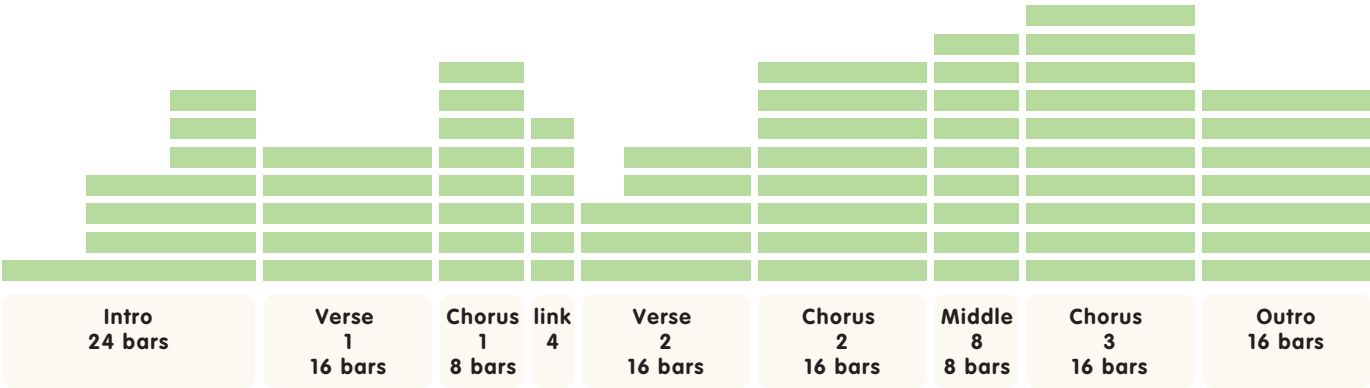


DYNAMICS and INTENSITY

Now a line or graph is used to show where the dynamics and intensity of the music rise and fall.

Dynamics changes in volume (louder, softer) **Intensity** changes in emotional feel

There are many ways of increasing intensity – introduce more notes, or more unusual chords, or a faster tempo, or more instruments, or more aggressive playing and numerous others musical techniques.
Here’s an intensity and dynamics diagram for Shooting Star. It starts off at a low level, goes through various rises and falls before reaching a peak at the last chorus.



MELODY

In this song the vocal range is wide (more than 1 and a half octaves) and the melody moves up and down a lot. It is very syncopated and ‘jazzy’, in that it uses elaborate turns and phrasings. It’s quite difficult to sing. The vocal range in the chorus is generally higher than the range in the verses. The chorus melody only uses a few different notes (from the pentatonic minor scale) and it repeats the main line (“Shooting Star that’s what you are”) several times.

CHORDS

Any 2 notes played together form a chord, though generally expect to hear 3 or more notes together. Chords can also be implied, where notes of a chord are broken up (like picked guitar chords) – we might only hear one note at a time, but we still feel that a chord is there. The most common chords are major or minor; these basic chords can have notes added or altered to make more ‘colourful’ chords.

To work out the chords of a song, play along on guitar or keyboard, listening to check that what you play is what you hear.

Some chords fit very naturally together in a chord progression, feeling like they belong to the same ‘family’. These are chords ‘from the key’; if a piece of music is in C major then C major, F major and G major chords will sit very comfortably along side each other.

These are known as the primary chords, built on the 1st, 4th and 5th steps of C major scale. Throw a chord of G# minor in with them and it will sound more unusual – but not necessarily wrong!

Music theory and harmony is a big subject! Look in the ‘want to know more’ section if you’d like to go into the subject in more detail!

In this song most of the chords are from the key. The key is A minor (that’s to say the chord of A minor is ‘home’, the place where this music most naturally rests). The song mostly uses just 2 chords – A minor and D minor – but it sounds more complex because of the many jazzy extensions and alterations to the chords.

Here’s the chord chart.

Shooting Star by Tinman

Intro	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
Verse 1	Am9	/	Dm9	/	Am9	/	Dm9	/
	Am9	/	Dm9	/	Am9	/	Dm9	/
Chorus 1	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
Link	Am9	/	/	/				
Verse 2	Am9	/	Dm9	/	Am9	/	Dm9	/
	Am9	/	Dm9	/	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
Chorus 2	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
Middle 8	Fmaj7	/	G13	/	Fmaj7	/	G13	G#dim
Chorus 3	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
Outro	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13
	Am9	/	Dm9	G13	Am9	/	Dm9	G13

LYRICS

What’s the song about? Does it tell a story or reflect an emotion? Are the lines equal or unequal in length? Do lines rhyme?

RHYTHMS

In this song we could describe the rhythms as very syncopated in all the main instruments. Listen to the drums in the chorus and the electric piano in the middle 8.

HOOKS

The main hooks in Shooting Star are the chorus vocal melody and the pizzicato riff.



Have you protected your copyright in the songs you have written?

Your copyright is created as soon as you have set your music down in a fixed form. However you may want to prove that you are the copyright owner if there is a problem later on. The easiest way to do this is to send a copy of your music by 'Recorded and Signed For mail' to yourself. Use the © symbol with your name and date, only put one work in the envelope and mark that work on the outside of the envelope.

For more information about the important subject of copyright, go to Workbook 7 Chapter 2.

TIPS FOR
WRITING
MUSIC



Sampling from existing records is also a good way to get started, but remember that if you want to release a recording commercially, any samples will have to be cleared by the original owners.

➤ WORKBOOK 7 – COPYRIGHT, LEGAL AND MANAGEMENT
– CHAPTER 2

When you get stuck: try experimenting with unusual features like odd chords, or odd length bars and phrases (most music is in 4/4, built in 4 bar phrases). Do something that goes against what you already have, such as melody notes that clash with the chords, or ideas from opposing styles.

Don't be frightened about 'pinching' ideas from existing music, as long as you don't simply copy and infringe copyright!

Focus on what you're trying to say.

Try playing your favourite chord sequence backwards; if this is too much, just reverse part of it. Also try converting a song you know into a minor key.

Build as much variation and contrast into the structure of your songs as possible. If your verse has lots of short words in a choppy rhythm, for instance, try using longer, sustained ones in the chorus. Also, vary the length of the sections, and add extra bars, bridges and so on.

Start your compositions from a range of different basic ideas – a chord sequence, a key, a different time signature, a riff, a melody, a groove, a lyric, a sample, a sound. If you always start from the same place all your compositions can end up sounding the same. Try different instruments.

Write or jam with someone else; their strengths might complement your weaknesses, and vice versa. Creating need not be a lonely experience.

Be inspired!
Go for a walk, be in a different environment. Take time out from writing, return to it in a different frame of mind or even different time of the day, this may change your mood or outlook.

Keep it simple!
'Less is more' – it's a cliché, but so often true. A simple idea honestly and convincingly presented, communicates very strongly. Quality, not quantity.

Use existing songs as a launch-pad for your own material. Write new words for an existing song, then put a new tune to these words.

Sing a tune over one constant chord, or bass note.

Listen to other types of music to learn new tricks and get ideas, for example, some country/roots type artists will throw in a chord which is totally out of the key used in rest of song. For example an E - A - B turn around followed by a "C" chord. Especially effective in bridges and middle 8.

Legal stuff

Song writing splits should be agreed at the time to save arguments later. The rights to the song are shared equally 50/50 between lyrics and music (although this rule is not strictly adhered to).

➤ WORKBOOK 7 – COPYRIGHT, LEGAL AND MANAGEMENT

Use technology – sequencers and drum tracks are good for setting up loops and other backing for you to play over.

Vary the dynamics so the song peaks and subsides, rather than staying on the same level. Altering the tempo can also work well to add drama or excitement.



"Singers are nothing without the songwriters because without the song, what would they sing?"

Albert Hammond



"One good thing about music, when it hits you feel no pain"

Bob Marley

TIPS FOR
WRITING
LYRICS

TIP

Write about something someone else told you about, and try to describe what you think it felt like for them.

Learn to simplify. Many songwriters stress the importance of having only one main theme or subject in a song. Always edit your work to narrow its focus and sharpen its impact.

Listen out for lines on TV, films, in the street, etc.

Good titles conjure up images before a song is even heard. Collect strong titles.

Write about something personal, try to describe what it felt like.

Read a lot. Books, poetry, plays, magazines etc can be a useful source of inspiration, as can newspapers.

Make notes always, not just when you sit down to write. Don't leave it to the last minute unless you work best under pressure.

Try to use as many lyrical hooks as possible. Anything that grabs the listener's attention can be a hook – the opening line, a single repeated phrase in the chorus, a neat line buried in the verse. Also, don't be afraid to use catchphrases, slang and everyday phrases.

Rhyming dictionaries and a thesaurus come in handy.

Lyrics : write about what you feel, or what someone has told you, or what you imagine. Look out for lines in movies, books, newspapers, on TV, radio or in conversations that seem to capture a moment.

Keep a notebook or a dictaphone with you all the time to record ideas for lyrics, song titles, overheard phrases, etc.

Have a notice board or wipe board, with titles and ideas on it, hung where you play.

Don't worry about grammar – that's for written words.

When you have an idea for a song, try 'brainstorming' or 'mind-mapping'. This means writing down everything that comes into your head about the subject, without worrying whether it's of any use or not. This can throw up interesting ideas or lead you down a new path.



CASE STUDY

TOM HINGLEY Front man of the Lovers and Inspiral Carpets

How would you describe your job?

Performer, songwriter, record company owner and manager.

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?

With a guitar.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?

My guitar and my 8 track recorder.

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?

The tune and the lyrics.

Do you take influences and ideas from outside your genre?

I take influences and ideas from everywhere.

Do you like to collaborate with others in writing and recording?

Yes and I generously share co-writes!! I'm a good listener and a good initiator.

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers, what would it be?

Don't simply look for a record deal. Most young musicians think that a deal is the pinnacle of every musical career. If I could have had a website which streamed music live on the web when I was 16, that is what I would have done. It's all about marketing your profile online now, not getting record deals.

TOM HINGLEY photography © Ian Tilton www.iantilton.com



CASE STUDY

HENRY PRIESTMAN Writer and musician with The Christians

How would you describe your job?

Writer, composer, producer.

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?

No particular way, maybe a chord sequence, a groove, a sample, a loop, melody, lyrics, a sound – I’ve used each approach.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?

Piano and audio recorder

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?

Melody and chord sequence.

Do you take influences and ideas from outside your genre?

All the time!

Do you like to collaborate with others in writing and recording?

Yes.

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers, what would it be?

Listen to as much music as possible, especially old music....discover the past....and learn from it.

photograph supplied courtesy of **HENRY PRIESTMAN**



CASE STUDY

PAUL MORTLOCK Aspiring singer / songwriter

How would you describe your job?

Writer, producer, composer, arranger, re-mixer. I think it's important to have a good sense of music direction. To that end, to have just one skill is not enough. Be a control freak!

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?

I mostly write with my guitar, moving through chord sequences and finding a melody.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?

Guitar and piano.

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?

Melody and arrangement.

Do you take influences and ideas from outside your genre?

Yes, I'll pinch from anyone.

Do you like to collaborate with others in writing and recording?

Sometimes, it depends on the tune, and who is around at the time. I collaborate on recording. It's very easy to get too absorbed, lose your objectivity and decide that it's all rubbish!

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers, what would it be?

Find great people to work with.

photograph supplied courtesy of **PAUL MORTLOCK**