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by Jane Werry

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the Areas of Study for the 9-1 OCR GCSE, AoS5 on Conventions of Pop is likely to be the one where students already have at least some familiarity with the music.

However, although they may think they know a lot about it, chances are they will need to be provided with activities that will allow them to build a picture of the chronology and evolution of pop styles. Some of the older styles and artists may be unfamiliar to the millennials in our classes. After all, the 1950s and 1960s probably seem like ancient history to most students.

As well as being given an overview of the historical and cultural background to the conventions of pop, students will need to be trained to identify the constituent parts of a pop song, and use the correct terminology to describe what's happening in the music.

As ever, the most efficiently *musical* way of getting acquainted with any style is by experiencing it from the inside, in other words by performing examples of the music itself. If students do this as a class, the process will necessarily involve having to talk about what they are doing, which is where the teacher can provide examples of relevant terminology, so that students are describing what they are doing accurately from the outset.

This process will make doing exam-style listening questions a whole lot easier later on, as not only will they be better at identifying the layers and structures of the song in question, but they will also be able to correctly use the musical terms that will gain them marks.

## USING A KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

### What a knowledge organiser is for

A knowledge organiser is not a summary of absolutely everything that students need to know about a particular topic, but instead, a framework upon which to hang a whole sequence of lessons, and a useful overview.

For any topic, in any subject, there will be a certain quantity of factual information that students must be able to recall swiftly and consistently if they are to do well in the final exam. Using a knowledge organiser sets out this idea from the very beginning, and can help to give students an understanding of what the area of study will involve. Having this overall plan in place right from the start makes it much easier to create the mental constructs necessary for deep understanding.

It can also be an extremely useful tool for revision and frequent testing. If the organiser is presented in its entirety right at the beginning, then as practical work is done in each style, they can be encouraged to identify which terminology and ideas are relevant at any one time. After each style has been covered, the teacher can then use the knowledge organiser to set homework tasks where those terms are learnt in advance of a test the following lesson.

Over time, the knowledge from previous styles should be added to what is being covered currently, so that tests cover both the present topic and the previous ones. In this way, things from past work will not be forgotten, and will be recalled frequently enough to be committed to long-term memory. This will make the instant recall required for the exam much easier to acquire, without the need for last-minute cramming.

## A Conventions of Pop knowledge organiser

Here is a knowledge organiser for AoS5 Conventions of Pop:

| Knowledge organiser AoS5: Conventions of Pop     |   |                                 |   |
|--|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Key ingredients of a pop song                    |   | Key terms                       |   |
| 1. Layers: melody, chords, bassline and beat     | The melody is the main tune, usually sung by the <b>lead singer</b> . The <b>lead guitar</b> may also play melodies. Chords are played by the <b>rhythm guitar</b> , or perhaps added on <b>piano</b> or synthesizer, or even sung by <b>backing singers</b> . The bassline is usually played by a <b>bass guitar</b> . The beat is usually played on <b>drum kit</b> . | 1. <b>A cappella</b>            | Voices, without instrumental accompaniment.   |
|  |   | 2. <b>Backbeat</b>              | Emphasis on second and fourth beats of the bar.   |
|  |   | 3. <b>Bridge</b>                | A section that links the verse and chorus. Sometimes called a <b>pre-chorus</b> .                                 |
| 2. <b>Optional layers</b>                        | There may be <b>countermelodies</b> played by the lead guitar, sung by backing singers, or put in on extra instruments such as synth, strings or anything else.   | 4. <b>Broken chord</b>          | Each note played separately. On guitar, usually done with <b>finger-picking</b> .                                 |
| 3. <b>Structure</b>                              | <b>Verse-chorus</b> structure is the most common. There is likely to be an <b>intro</b> , a <b>coda</b> , and a <b>middle eight or instrumental break</b> .   | 5. <b>Call and response</b>     | Often used between the lead vocalist and the backing singers, who repeat or answer what the lead singer has sung. |
| 4. <b>Other ingredients</b>                      | The bassline or guitar part might feature <b>riffs</b> . There may be a particularly catchy part: this is the <b>hook</b> . Some songs also have a <b>modulation</b> .  | 6. <b>Coda</b>                  | The end section of a song.  |
|  |   | 7. <b>Distortion</b>            | An effect used on guitars: a dirty, fuzzy sound.  |
| <b>Instruments/voices and what they might do</b> |   | 8. <b>Fill</b>                  | At the end of a phrase, the drummer plays a more complex part to fill in.   |
| 1. <b>Singers</b>                                | 1. <b>Vibrato</b> , where the note wobbles in pitch slightly. Makes the sound warmer and more expressive.   | 9. <b>Flanger</b>               | A guitar effect that makes a whooshing sound.   |
|  | 2. <b>Portamento</b> is a slide between notes.  | 10. <b>Glissando</b>            | A slide between two notes, where separate, quick, individual notes can be heard, eg on piano.                     |
|  | 3. <b>Falsetto</b> is when a man sings very high. Michael Jackson, Sam Smith and Freddie Mercury all sing falsetto some of the time.  | 11. <b>Harmonic pace</b>        | How often the chords change, ie one chord per bar, two chords per bar, etc.                                       |
|  | 4. <b>Rubato</b> , expressive speeding up and slowing down.   | 12. <b>Hook</b>                 | The catchy part of the song, often in the chorus.   |
|  | 5. <b>A cappella</b> – singing with no instrumental accompaniment.  | 13. <b>Instrumental break</b>   | A section where the singing stops and there is a solo on an instrument.   |
|  | 6. <b>Scat</b> is when singers sing nonsense syllables like 'doo'.  | 14. <b>Looping</b>              | Technology-based method of repeating a short musical idea.  |
|  | 7. <b>Riffing</b> is when a singer ornaments the melody with a lot of extra notes, usually at the end of a phrase. Mariah Carey does this, for example.   | 15. <b>Melisma (melismatic)</b> | Lots of notes sung to a single syllable.  |
|  | 8. Vocals may be <b>multi-tracked</b> , or may have effects such as <b>autotune</b> or <b>vocoder</b> applied to them.  | 16. <b>Middle eight</b>         | The section of a song where there is a new, different tune.   |
| 2. <b>Guitars</b>                                | 1. The <b>lead guitar</b> plays melodies. These might be <b>solos</b> or <b>riffs</b> , or perhaps <b>countermelodies</b> over the singer's tune. Sometimes effects such as <b>distortion</b> , <b>chorus</b> or <b>flanger</b> are used.   | 17. <b>Modulation</b>           | A key change.   |
|  | 2. <b>Rhythm guitar</b> can be acoustic or electric, and plays <b>chords</b> . These might be <b>strummed</b> or <b>picked</b> (to make broken chords).   | 18. <b>Multitracking</b>        | Nearly all pop songs are recorded like this: each part is recorded separately and then put together.              |
|  | 3. <b>Bass guitar</b> plays the bassline – the lowest notes. Bass guitar does not play chords. Sometimes adds <b>glissandos</b> .   | 19. <b>Panning</b>              | Putting more or less sound through each speaker, so that a sound comes from the left or right.                    |

|                     |  |                                    |   |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>3. Drum kit</b>  | 1. A drum kit is made up of <b>snare, hi-hat, bass (or kick) drum, tom-toms</b> and <b>ride and crash</b> cymbals.   | <b>20. Picking (fingerpicking)</b> | On guitar, playing one note at a time (as opposed to strumming).        |
|                     | 2. Often the snare emphasises the <b>backbeat</b> .  | <b>21. Portamento</b>              | When a singer slides between notes.                                     |
|                     | 3. At the end of phrases, the kit may play <b>fills</b> .  | <b>22. Reverb</b>                  | Adds a sense of space to a sound.                                       |
|                     | 4. <b>Drum pads</b> or <b>drum machines</b> are digital alternatives to an acoustic kit.   | <b>23. Riff</b>                    | A repeating melodic or rhythmic idea.                                   |
| <b>4. Keyboards</b> | 1. <b>Piano</b> or <b>synthesizers</b> are the main kinds of keyboards found in pop, although <b>electric organs</b> may be used too.  | <b>24. Riffing</b>                 | Highly decorated singing.   |
|                     | 2. <b>Piano</b> is often used in <b>ballads</b> . It can play <b>chords, basslines</b> and <b>melodies</b> . Some artists, eg Elton John, make a real feature of the piano part.                           | <b>25. Rubato</b>                  | Expressive slight changes of tempo.                                     |
|                     | 3. <b>Synthesizers (synths)</b> are electronic keyboards capable of playing any kind of sound. Because of this they are very adaptable, and can imitate the sound of anything else or make unique timbres. | <b>26. Sampling</b>                | When a short extract of another recording (a sample) is used in a song. |
|                     |  | <b>27. Strumming</b>               | Playing all the strings of a guitar at once to play chords.             |
|                     |  | <b>28. Syllabic</b>                | Each syllable is sung with one single note.                             |
|                     |  | <b>29. Unison</b>                  | Everyone singing/playing the same notes.                                |

## INVESTIGATING THE STYLES

This Area of Study comprises four separate styles:

- Rock'n'roll of the 1950s and 1960s
- Rock anthems of the 1970s and 1980s
- Pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s
- Solo artists from the 1990s to the present day

As well as knowing the main artists in each style, and a little about the historical background to each, students will need to have a firm understanding of features that are common to all four styles, and features that are particular to each one.

It will be helpful to have a grid that students fill in over time, as they tackle each style in turn through performing and listening. This will then supplement the information found in the knowledge organiser. It can be an A3 sheet so there is plenty of room to write in the main features, and if it is on coloured paper it will be easy to find. Students should be encouraged to use the terminology from the knowledge organiser when filling out their grid.

The blank grid may look something like this:

|                     | When                   | Main artists and songs | Background | Musical features |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------------|
| <b>Rock'n'roll</b>  | 1950s and 1960s        |                        |            |                  |
| <b>Rock anthems</b> | 1970s and 1980s        |                        |            |                  |
| <b>Pop ballads</b>  | 1970s, 1980s and 1990s |                        |            |                  |
| <b>Solo artists</b> | 1990s to now           |                        |            |                  |

An extremely helpful online reference resource is Music Map. This gives concise information on all rock and pop styles, showing how they interlink. There are also playlists. It could be very useful for setting homework tasks.

Contrary to what you might expect, I suggest tackling the styles in reverse chronological order. By starting with solo artists of the 1990s to the present day, we can begin by using the music that is already most familiar to students to get them analysing song structures and layers of sound. It is also a good place to start applying the correct use of musical terminology.

## SOLO ARTISTS OF THE 1990S TO THE PRESENT DAY

Start by performing a song, either as a class, or in smaller groups: you will be able to organise this to best suit your students' abilities and prior experience. This may form valuable practice for the ensemble performance. It would be great if students could choose a song by a solo artist of recent times: you will be able to judge how much you will need to guide their choices. There are so many good songs to choose from in this category that are relatively easy to perform. Here is a selection that work well for class performance, and are likely to be familiar to students:

If you want classes to be able to play along with the original track, but are transposing into an easier key to play, free Audacity software can be used to easily change the key of the audio. There is an explanatory video here.

| Artist            | Title                  | Chords used                                  | Comments  |
|-------------------|------------------------|--|---|
| Adele             | Someone Like You       | A E F#m D Bm; easier key: G D Em C Am        | Most of the song uses a repeating A-E-F#m-D chord sequence.   |
| George Ezra       | Blame it On Me         | Eb Ab Gm Cm Bb; easier key: C F Em Am G      |   |
| John Legend       | All of Me              | F Db Ab Eb Fm Bbm; easier key: A F C G Am Dm |   |
| Sia               | Cheap Thrills          | F#m D A E; easier key: Am F C G              | The chord sequence is unchanged throughout this song, making it an easier option.                               |
| Adele             | Rolling in the Deep    | C G Bb Ab Bb Gm7 Cm                          | This is a more complex option. There are full resources for this song in the book <i>Rock Your GCSE Music</i> . |
| Wiz Khalifa       | See You Again          | Gm Bb Eb F Cm7; easier key: Am C F G Dm7     | Most of the song uses an unchanging Gm-B-Eb-Bb sequence.  |
| Justin Bieber     | Sorry                  | Ab Cm Bb Fm7; easier key: C Em D Am7         | Nearly the whole song relies on an Ab-Cm-Bb chord sequence.   |
| Ed Sheeran        | Thinking Out Loud      | D G A Em Bm                                  | Most of the song uses a D-G-A chord sequence.   |
| Justin Timberlake | Can't Stop the Feeling | C Am F Bb                                    | Most of the song uses a C-Am-F-Am chord sequence.   |

There are many ways that you could approach performing a song, and how you do this depends very much on the level of ability of your students. If they are working in smaller groups, you could even vary the approach for each group to provide more challenge or more scaffolding, as necessary.

More individual challenge and support could be provided for specific students through careful planning of what material is given, and what students are required to work out for themselves. Here is a range of strategies:

- Workshop as a class, using lots of teacher modelling, building up the song a layer or section at a time.
- Provide audio of the song (transposed to an easier key if required), lyrics and a list of the chords involved. Students work out the rest by ear.
- Provide a lead sheet in the same key as the audio, so students can see where the chords need to change.
- Provide full staff notation/tab as appropriate.
- Provide YouTube tutorials.
- Use RiffStation. This is a website that shows ukulele, guitar or keyboard chords in real time with the original song. (RiffStation does not provide for transposing into easier keys, however.)
- Set students a challenge of finding whatever materials they need on the internet: tutorials, chords, tab, lyrics.

Whichever songs you and your class choose, and whichever strategy you use to get students performing it, it will be essential to use some key terminology right from the start. What you are aiming for is for students to

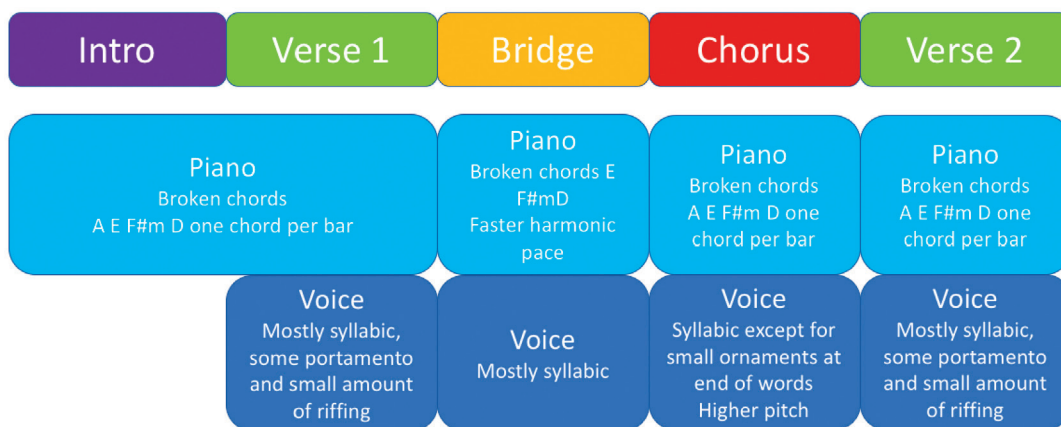
Students will need to know the basic processes of how a pop song is produced in a studio. If you have a studio, and perhaps have A level music technology students, you could organise a live demonstration of this, and perhaps even record the GCSE students' performance. Otherwise, here is a very useful ten-minute video outlining the process.

Note that there is some ambiguity in the term 'bridge'. For some people, 'bridge' and 'middle eight' are synonymous. I prefer to use the term 'bridge' for what some people call the 'pre-chorus'. I think that as long as you're consistent, it doesn't matter which term you use.

be analysing the song as they go, using musical terms accurately to discuss what is going on. This is where the knowledge organiser can be used. Using the key terms from the organiser, ask students to answer the following questions:

- What is the structure of the song?
- What layers of sound are there? What instruments play each layer? Does the texture change?
- Are there any modulations?
- What is the harmonic pace, and does this change at all?
- What playing or singing techniques are used in the original recording?
- How has technology been used to produce this song?

Once a good discussion has taken place, and any misconceptions sorted out, it can be extremely helpful for students to create a song map. This shows the structure and layers of a song, and will be a useful tool to compare different songs and styles as students progress through the Area of Study. Here is an example, taken from the first part of 'Someone Like You' by Adele:



This is a very simple example, because the only accompaniment in 'Someone Like You' is the piano, which plays a more or less unchanging broken-chord pattern. Other songs have many more instruments and layers of sound, and so would have more extensive and complex maps. It is the process that is most important here, with students identifying what is going on in the music, and describing it accurately using the correct terminology.

Completing maps for a variety of songs by solo artists, whether these have been performed by students or analysed aurally, will demonstrate the huge variety that this part of the AoS displays. Each solo artist freely demonstrates their own musical style, and even this may change over time or between contrasting songs. As a consequence, filling in the 'musical features' box on the summary sheet does present some difficulties. The sheer diversity of this section of the AoS is its defining feature. As long as students are well equipped to describe what they hear in the listening exam, using correct terminology, there is no need to try to find overarching characteristics.

# POP BALLADS OF THE 1970S, 80S, AND 90S

Now that students are armed with a good deal of knowledge regarding the way that pop songs are put together, tackling pop ballads will be relatively straightforward. As we aim to let students experience the music first-hand before much talking takes place, it would be good to start by performing another song. Here are some songs that would be ideal for this:

| Artist       | Title                 | Chords used   | Comments  |
|--------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| Bob Dylan    | Make You Feel My Love | C G Bb F Fm D7; easier key: A E G D Dm B7   | A relatively simple song that students will probably know from Adele's cover.   |
| Bette Midler | Wind Beneath My Wings | Bb Eb Cm F Gm; easier key: G C Am D Em  | Another relatively simple song with straightforward pop ballad characteristics.   |
| Elton John   | Candle in the Wind    | E A B B7 C#m; easier key: D G A A7 Bm   | This is one of the simplest Elton John songs, and could be a good option if you are looking for something relatively easy.  |
| Elton John   | Your Song             | Eb Am7 Bb G Cm Ab Fm; easier key: C Fm7 G E Am F Dm   | This is quite a lot more complex, but it's worth looking at certain chord sequences (see below) and can be useful for considering texture, even if students don't perform all of it.  |
| Sting        | Shape of My Heart     | Main chord sequence:<br>F#m C#m/E Bm C#7 <sup>sus</sup> C#7<br>D C#m/E Bm C#7 <sup>sus</sup> C#7<br>D6 A <sup>sus2</sup> A C# D C# <sup>sus</sup> /G# F#m<br>Easier key:<br>Em Bm/D Am B7 <sup>sus</sup> B7<br>C Bm/D Am B7 <sup>sus</sup> B7<br>C6 G <sup>sus2</sup> B B C B <sup>sus</sup> /F# Em | This is complex, but can be very useful if you want to think about added-note chords, suspensions, and creating basslines out of inversions. Making a song map is also a worthwhile listening activity with this song, as it uses layers of sound in a way characteristic of pop ballads. |
| Eric Clapton | Tears in Heaven       | A E F#m D C#m Em F# Bm; easier key: G D Em C Bm Dm E Am   | A relatively simple song with a strong descending bassline.   |

Strategies for tackling the songs would be exactly as before. It is noticeable that some of these ballads have much more complex chord patterns than the ones previously encountered when looking at the music of recent solo artists. Even if your students do not yet have the skills to perform something as complex as 'Your Song' or 'Shape of My Heart', it is worth looking at some small examples of chord sequences.

A good example of a strong bassline can be found in 'Your Song'. Here, Elton John keeps one chord going, while he changes the bass note underneath:

|                  |    |        |    |        |
|------------------|----|--------|----|--------|
| <b>Chord</b>     | Cm | Cm     | Cm | A flat |
| <b>Bass note</b> | C  | B flat | A  | A flat |

Here is the same progression in a key that is easier to play:

|                  |    |    |         |   |
|------------------|----|----|---------|---|
| <b>Chord</b>     | Am | Am | Am      | F |
| <b>Bass note</b> | A  | G  | F sharp | F |

This is a very simple idea, but one that works extremely well. It is a good example of how you can make the most of two chords and make them last for four bars, while maintaining a sense of direction in the music. Descending bassline patterns always provide a sense of movement and direction – this is the main reason why they are so popular in all kinds of music. Examples can be found everywhere – 'Tears in Heaven' is another pop ballad that uses a descending bass to good effect. In 'Your Song', a feeling of tension is set up by the G in the bass in the second bar, which is heightened by the movement to F sharp in the third bar. This is resolved in the fourth bar; it feels as if the A flat chord is the *only* place that the Cm/A could possibly lead to.

This could lead to an investigation of basslines in pop ballads. Even if students' performing skills are relatively limited, you could write up the notes of the bassline for any chosen (or suggested) pop ballad, and get students to play along with the recording. They could use any available tuned instruments for this. Playing the basslines could be followed by looking at the chords, and picking out which chords have the root of the chord

in the bass, which have another chord note (and are therefore inversions), and which have a non-chord note as a bass note. More able students could be challenged to work out bass parts aurally. After exploring a few songs in this way, the class could vote on their 'best pop ballad bassline of all time'. This activity will also set students up very well for composing their own songs.

Texture is also an extremely important musical feature of nearly all pop ballads, and is often used to maintain emotional intensity over the course of repeated verses and choruses. 'Your Song' is a good example of this, and could provide students with useful practice of identifying instruments and describing what they are playing. Provide a blank version of this song map for them to fill in. Here, the answers are provided:

|               | Instruments   | Describe in detail what they are playing: performing techniques but most importantly <b>exactly what</b>                                      | Anything else: effects? Panning l-r?               |
|---------------|---|---|--|
| Intro 0:00    | Piano   | Right hand plays broken chords, mostly semiquavers and quavers, two chords per bar.<br>Left hand plays tonic pedal octave leaps in crotchets. |  |
| Verse 1 0:08  | Piano<br>Double bass<br>Acoustic (steel string) guitar                              | As before, but left hand now moves.<br>Pizzicato.<br>Broken chords, mostly semiquaver movement.   | Panned left<br>Panned right                        |
| Verse 2 0:40  | As before, plus cellos  | Cellos play sustained chords.   | Reverb is used to give strings a warm, lush sound. |
| Chorus 1 1:12 | As before, with violins added to cellos<br>Acoustic (Spanish) guitar added<br>Flute | Overall pitch of string chords now higher.<br><br>Added guitar plays broken chords, mostly semiquavers.<br>Counter melody at end of chorus.   | Panned left  |
| Bridge 1:46   | Piano<br>Strings  | Music as per intro, but now with sustained string chords.   |  |
| Verse 3 1:54  | Drumkit<br>Two guitars<br>Double bass<br>Strings                                    | Piano stops, or is now very far back in the mix.<br>String chords are now more active.  |  |
| Verse 4 2:25  | As Verse 3, but with harp added   | Harp plays broken chords, mostly in semiquavers   |  |
| Chorus 2 2:57 | As Verse 4, with flute added at end of chorus                                       |   |  |
| Coda 3:46     | All instruments except piano and flute  | Reprises intro music.   |  |

# ROCK ANTHEMS OF THE 1970S AND 80S

Towards the end of the 1960s, advances in studio technology had made it possible to multitrack more parts, and the ingenuity of bands such as the Beatles had brought an array of new sounds into rock music. Orchestral sounds and instruments from all over the world were included in rock songs, and producers experimented with effects. By the beginning of the 1970s, a bigger, grander style of rock song was emerging: the rock anthem. Intended for stadium audiences, rock anthems had big tunes and awe-inspiring guitar solos.

Some rock anthems, though huge in impact, are relatively simple musically, while others, such as 'Bohemian Rhapsody', are mind-bogglingly complex, and beyond the performing capabilities of all but the most extraordinary GCSE class. Here are some suggestions of songs that could be tackled by students:

| Artist                 | Title                 | Chords used  | Comments   |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| Free                   | All Right Now         | Verse pattern: A D A<br>Chorus pattern: A D7 A G D7 A  | One of the most straightforward rock anthems, and a great example for students to try out.   |
| Queen                  | We Will Rock You      | Only uses one chord – E – for much of the song. C and A are used as it moves to the guitar solo. | Relies on a very simple rhythmic riff and a gutsy vocal performance. Easy for a class to replicate.  |
| Queen                  | I Want It All         | Mostly Bm G A D<br>Key change in the middle eight: B E F#  | Characteristic Queen vocal harmonies in the chorus. A good example of a middle eight modulation.   |
| Paul McCartney & Wings | Live and Let Die      | G Bm7 C6 D7 A7 D Bb G7 C C#dim<br>Em F   | A much more complex song, rhythmically and harmonically. Included in the book <i>Rock Your GCSE Music</i> : would be a great challenge for more able groups. |
| ZZ Top                 | Gimme All Your Lovin' | G5 Bb5 C5 G5   | A relatively simple song that provides an excellent example of use of power chords.  |
| Eric Clapton           | Layla                 | Main riff and chorus: Dm Bb C Dm<br>Verse: C#m G#7 C D E E7 F# B A                               | This would be good to do if you have a guitarist who can play the main riff. The verse is in a different key to the chorus.                                  |
| Bon Jovi               | Livin' on a Prayer    | Em C D Am G<br>After key change: Gm Eb F Bb  | Accessible for most GCSE groups, and likely to be popular with students.   |

It is noticeable how high the vocal line is in many of these songs, and male students may struggle to sing them in the original key. 'Livin' on a Prayer', in particular, is extremely high after the key change, and it is noticeable that Jon Bon Jovi does not use falsetto even for the highest notes. The fact is that the very top of a man's vocal range is where he will be able to produce the most power, and a tone that is full of raw energy. This suits the nature of a rock anthem extremely well, and enables the vocals to stand up to the power of the guitar sound. You will notice that although girls will be able to sing the pitches much more easily, the songs will not have quite the same impact, simply because the notes are lower in a girl's range, so there is a lot less tension in the sound.



Having performed and listened to some pop ballads and rock anthems, the differences between them should be quite straightforward to define. Considering they are from almost the same period in pop history, they are at opposite ends of the mood spectrum, and there should be little danger of students getting the two styles confused.

|                    | Pop ballads  | Rock anthems  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>Mood/lyrics</b> | Intimate, gentle. Tells a story or is on the general theme of love.  | Bold, sometimes brash, loud and rousing.  |
| <b>Tempo/metre</b> | Often in 4/4, but could very well be in triple time or even an irregular metre. Moderate or medium slow tempo.                           | Nearly always in 4/4, moderate to medium fast tempo.  |
| <b>Instruments</b> | Often uses piano or acoustic guitar, broken chords used. Orchestral instruments, especially strings, may feature. Variations in texture. | Heavy electric guitar sounds, perhaps with distortion, matched by bold bass and drums.                        |
| <b>Vocal style</b> | Soft, 'crooning' style of singing, male or female.   | Nearly always male vocalist, often singing at a high pitch, but not falsetto. A more shouty style of singing. |

## ROCK'N'ROLL OF THE 1950S AND 1960S

Our journey back in time finds us at the dawn of the age of the teenager: the first style of music that young people saw as being their own. Musically and technologically, rock'n'roll is very simple, and many songs are based on a 12-bar chord sequence.

|    |    |   |                      |
|----|----|---|----------------------|
| I  | I  | I | I                    |
| IV | IV | I | I                    |
| V  | IV | I | I (V for turnaround) |

If students have covered 12-bar blues at KS3, it should be an easy job to revise the chord sequence and fit basslines to it. Here are some ideas for how to approach rock'n'roll as a practical activity:

- One of the easiest rock'n'roll songs to do is 'Hound Dog', because the bass line consists simply of the notes of the triad:



- Those with a walking bass, such as 'Rock Around the Clock', are only a little more difficult, and most students will be able to learn the formula for translating the chords into the bass pattern:



Whatever key you play in, the basic pattern goes up the chord notes, up a tone, up a semitone, then back down on the same notes. The only exception to this is in the last line of the chord structure, where you only have one bar of V and one bar of IV, so here you just play the first four notes of the pattern. And the exception to this are those songs where there is a second bar of V in bar 10 of the verse, which is actually what happens in 'Rock Around the Clock' – making it slightly less fiddly.

- Another rock'n'roll song that uses a variation on 12-bar blues is 'Great Balls of Fire' by Jerry Lee Lewis. This uses an eight-bar pattern for the verse:

I – I – IV – IV – V – IV – I – I

- If you have any guitarists in your class, it would be quite straightforward for them to learn some characteristic Chuck Berry licks, for example the intro to 'Johnny B Goode'. There are plenty of YouTube tutorials for this.
- Two rock'n'roll songs that are not based on 12-bar blues, but are nevertheless very simple to play, are 'Twist and Shout' and 'La bamba'. These use an identical D-G-A chord pattern, so it is possible to make a mashup of the two songs. The vocal build-up on an A7 chord – a distinctive feature of 'Twist and Shout' – is something that students will enjoy recreating.
- 'Jailhouse Rock' is included in the book *Rock Your GCSE Music*.

Musical features that students should be able to deduce from their playing and listening, and add to their summary sheet, will include these:

- Very simple chord structures, often using 12-bar blues but usually using no more than three chords.
- Repetitive chord sequences.
- Energetic vocal performances, usually by male vocalists.
- Walking bass or broken-chord style basslines.
- 'Stop-time' used to vary texture.
- Lead guitar solos feature, often using chords with two notes a perfect 4th apart.
- Shuffle rhythms.