Musical Form

• Breaking down a musical work into smaller sections
  – Patterns, repetition, variation

• Edgar Varèse defined music as “organized sound”
  – Very broad definition

• Could all sound be musical if we understood its structure, or form?
Form/Structure

• Any song or piece of music can be divided into smaller parts or sections
• This could be labeled with letters, i.e. ABABCB

• Popular music (especially with vocals), is often organized with terms like verse, chorus, bridge

• Example of the form of a song:
  Verse/Chorus/Verse/Chorus/Bridge/Chorus
Form/Structure (cont.)

• How is music divided into smaller sections?
• How do we know when there is a new section or different musical idea?
  i.e.: Lyrics, melody, specific instruments, overall feel, etc.

• You can structure music around: beats, bars, repeating chord patterns, lyrical patterns, etc.
Form/Structure (cont.)

Examples

• Repetition: AAA
• Contrast: ABAC
• Variation: AA’BABB’
  (‘=prime; almost the same)

• Strophic Form: Repeated musical ideas, AAA
• Binary Form: 2 musical ideas, often contrasting, ABAB
Strophic Form

• Old folk songs; ballads, story-songs (African Griots)
• Work songs, church hymns
• Different singers can add or take away verses

• AAAA, etc.
• Same musical ideas, different lyrics
• Could be labeled $A^1$, $A^2$, $A^3$, etc.
  – Can repeat sets of lyrics, or have instrumental sections
Strophic Form

Ex: Robert Johnson – “Rambling On My Mind” (1936)
• 12 bar blues form that repeats with new lyrics

Ex: Elvis Presley – “Heartbreak Hotel” (1956)
• $A_1, A_2, A_3, A_4, A_{\text{instrumental}}, A_2$

• One chord blues
32-Bar Chorus Form: AABA

• Tin Pan Alley Pop Song
  – Jazz standards

Ex: Chick Webb – “I Got Rhythm” (1937)
• Gershwin pop, jazz standard
• Chord changes

Ex: Patsy Cline – “Crazy” (1961)
• AABA A’
32-Bar Chorus Form: AABA

Ex: Jerry Lee Lewis – “Great Balls of Fire” (1957)

• AABA x2

• How could a strict repetition of an AABA form be seen as a strophic form?
Verse/Chorus Song Form: AB

• Structure: two or three verses, and a second distinct musical idea, called a chorus
• Verses and Choruses can be of varying length, but are usually 4, 8, 12 or 16 bars long

• How is this different from an AABA form?
• The Chorus or Refrain repeats, usually 3 times or more
Verse/Chorus Song Form: AB

- Same chords (harmony) throughout
  - Simple Verse-Chorus form

Ex: Big Joe Turner – “Shake, Rattle And Roll” (1954)
- VVVC V’VC VC
- Chorus is repeated 3 times
Verse/Chorus Song Form: AB

- Contrasting chords for verses and choruses
  - Contrasting Verse-Chorus Form

Ex: Cream – “Sunshine of Your Love” (1967)

Verse/Chorus/Bridge Form: ABC

• 2-3 verses, a repeated chorus, and a third, distinct, contrasting section called a bridge

Ex: The Everly Brothers – “All I Have To Do Is Dream” (1958)

Ex: Otis Redding – “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay” (1968)
Verse/Chorus/Bridge Form: ABC

Ex: Toots & The Maytals – “54-46 (That’s My Number)” (1968)
  • 3-4 different sections
    – Bridge 1 and Bridge 2?
  • Same chords/harmony throughout

Ex: Linda Lyndell – “What A Man” (1968)
  • Contrasting harmony in bridge only
Other elements of AB or ABC form

• Intro
• Pre-chorus - function
• Instrumental solos (often over verse chords)
• Outro (with or without vocal ad-libs)
• Others?

• Arrangements (2+ meanings)

Ex: Derek & The Dominoes – “Layla” (1970)

• Outro/Coda – almost like a second song
• Coda: Last part of a song, usually different from previous sections
  – “Tag” in jazz; Outro in most popular music forms

- Intro
- Pre-Chorus
- “Break”
- Outro
ABC+

Ex: Lady Gaga – “Bad Romance” (2009)

• Multiple sections

• See Word File of song from guitar lessons
Songs with More Complex Forms

Ex: The Beatles – “Happiness Is A Warm Gun” (1968)

• At least four sections, no repetition
Modulation

• A specific kind of **key change** in a song
  – The chord progression stays the same, but moves up a tone
  – Usually at the end of a song (repeated chorus)
  – Non-modulation key changes are often used in songs with distinct sections: new chord progressions in a new key

• Modulation can be seen as a **distinct section of a pop song**

**Video Ex:** Whitney Houston – “I Will Always Love You” (1992) (1:15, 3:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JWTaaS7LdU

**Ex:** The Ramones – “I Wanna Be Sedated” (1979) (:30)