

THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Because music is a multi-dimensional, multimedia phenomenon, the design of a musical composition can be described on several levels. The “Elements of Music” described below offer you specific terms and concepts that will help you better understand and describe any kind/style of music—from Classical to Rock:

ELEMENT	Related Terms
Rhythm:	(beat, meter, tempo, syncopation, polyrhythm)
Dynamics:	(crescendo, decrescendo; forte, piano, etc.)
Melody:	(pitch, range, theme)
Harmony:	(chord, progression, key, tonality, consonance, dissonance)
Tone color:	(register, range)
Texture:	(monophonic, polyphonic, homophonic)
Form:	(binary, ternary, strophic, etc.)

RHYTHM

Rhythm is the element of TIME in music. When you tap your foot to the music, you are "keeping the beat" or following the structural rhythmic pulse of the music. There are several important aspects of rhythm:

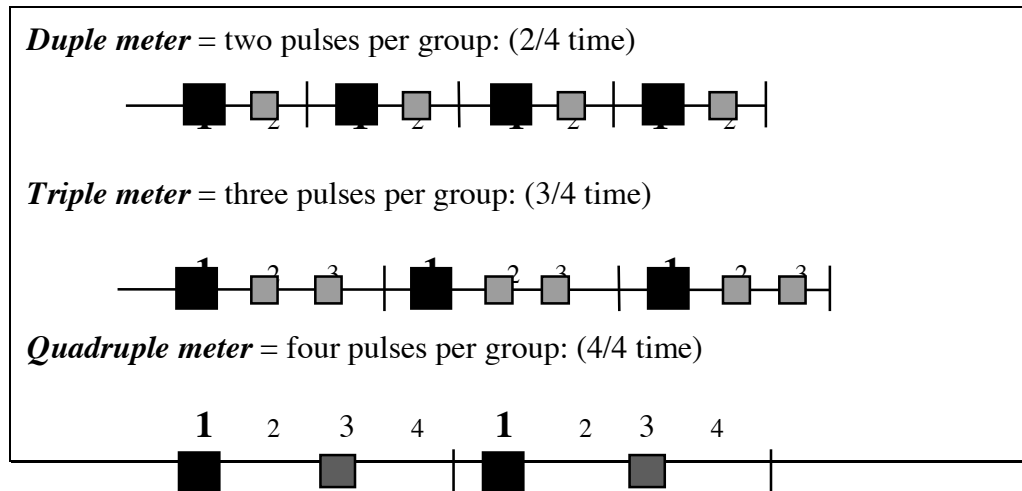
- **DURATION:** how long a sound (or silence) lasts.
- **TEMPO:** the speed of the BEAT, which can be described by the number of beats/second (or in Classical music by standard Italian terms)

Here is a comparative example of relative tempos from several different rock and roll styles:

	<-----SLOWER			FASTER----->		
<i>Italian terms:</i>	<i>Adagio</i>	<i>Andante</i>	<i>Moderato</i>	<i>Allegro (assai)</i>	<i>Vivace</i>	<i>Presto</i>
	•	•	•	•	•	•
<i>Beats/minute</i>	60	80	96	140	175	
	Blues	Pop	Funk	R & B	Rock and Roll	

• **METER:**

When *beats* are organized into recurring accent patterns, the result is a recognizable *meter*. The most common *meters* are diagrammed below:



Other important terms relating to *Rhythm* are:

Syncopation: Putting accents "off-the-beat" (Between the counted numbers)

Ritardando: gradually SLOWING DOWN the tempo

Accelerando: gradually SPEEDING UP the tempo

Polyrhythm: more than one independent rhythm or meter happening simultaneously

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DYNAMICS

The relative loudness or quietness of music fall under the general element of *dynamics*.

In Classical music the terms used to describe dynamic levels are often in Italian:

<i>pianissimo</i>	[<i>pp</i>]	=	(very quiet)
<i>piano</i>	[<i>p</i>]	=	(quiet)
<i>mezzo-piano</i>	[<i>mp</i>]	=	(moderately quiet)
<i>mezzo-forte</i>	[<i>mf</i>]	=	(moderately loud)
<i>forte</i>	[<i>f</i>]	=	(loud)
<i>fortissimo</i>	[<i>ff</i>]	=	(very loud)

<----- Quieter			LOUDER ----->		
<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i> (<i>fff</i>)
Examples: Muzak	Acoustic/Folk-rock	Rockabilly	Hard rock	Heavy metal/Punk	

An **ACCENT** is accomplished by "punching a note harder" or "leaning into a note" to temporarily emphasize it.

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MELODY

Melody is the element that focuses on the HORIZONTAL presentation of *Pitch*.

- **PITCH**: the highness or lowness of a musical sound
- **MELODY**: a linear series of *pitches*

Almost all famous rock songs have a memorable *melody*. Melodies can be derived from various **SCALES** (families of pitches) such as the traditional *major* and *minor* scales of *tonal* (home-key centered) music, *blues scales*, or *modes* (such as dorian, mixolydian).

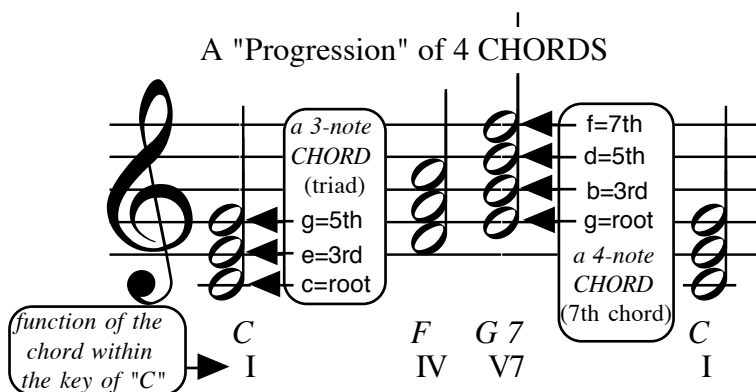
Melodies can be described as:

- **CONJUNCT** (smooth; easy to sing or play)
- **DISJUNCT** (disjointedly ragged or jumpy; difficult to sing or play).

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HARMONY

Harmony is the VERTICALIZATION of pitch. Most often harmony is thought of as the art of combining pitches into *chords* (several notes played simultaneously as a "block"). These chords are then arranged into sentence-like patterns called *progressions*.



Harmony is often described in terms of its relative HARSHNESS:

- **DISSONANCE**: a harsh-sounding harmonic combination
- **CONSONANCE**: a smooth-sounding harmonic combination

Dissonant chords produce musical "tension" which is often "released" by resolving to *consonant* chords. Since we all have different opinions about consonance and dissonance, these terms are somewhat subjective.

HARMONY in rock music has undergone various phases of expansion—particularly in the mid-60s through the influence of **The Beatles**.

Standard ‘50s/’60s “song-form” harmonic progression:

Key of G

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Phrase 1 **I vi IV V I vi IV V I vi IV V I vi IV V**

A 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Phrase 2 **I vi IV V I vi IV V I vi IV V I IV I** **V7 of IV**

B 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

Phrase 3 **IV I IV I IV I V7 of V V**

A 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Phrase 4 **I vi IV V I vi IV V I vi IV V I IV I**

“Help” by The Beatles:

Key of G

8-bar intro 1i 2i 3i 4i 5i 6i 7i 8i

ii VII V7 I
"Help! I need somebody . . ."

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Phrase 1 **I iii vi IV bVII I**
"When I was younger . . ."

A 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Phrase 2 **I iii vi IV bVII I**
"But now these days are gone . . ."

B 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

Phrase 3 **ii bVII**
"Help me if you can . . . and I do appreciate . . ."

A 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Phrase 4 **V7 I**
"Help me get my feet . . . Won't you please, please help me!"

TONE COLOR

If you play a "C" on the piano and then sing a "C", you and the piano have obviously produced the same *pitch* —but why doesn't your voice sound like the piano? It is because of the laws of physics and musical acoustics. Although these scientific principles are far beyond the scope of this course, it is safe to say that each musical instrument or voice produces its own characteristic sound patterns and resultant “overtones,” which give it a unique "*tone color*" or *timbre* (pronounced "TAM-BER"). Composers use *timbre* much like painters use colors to evoke certain atmospheres on a canvas. The upper *register* (portion of its *range* or *compass*) of an electric guitar, for example, will produce tones which are brilliant and piercing while in its lower register achieve a rich and dark timbre. A variety of timbres can also be created by combining instruments and/or voices.

Standard Instrumental “Colors” used in Rock Music:

String Instruments:

- Electric Guitar
- Electric Bass
- Acoustic 6-string Guitar
- Acoustic 12-string Guitar (used in folk or country rock)

Percussion Instruments:

- Drum Set (many, many colors offered here: bass drum, snare drum, tom-tom, cymbals, etc)
- Hand-held percussion (tambourines, maracas, claves, etc.)
- Electronic drum pad (or drum machine)

Keyboard Instruments:

- Acoustic Piano
- Synthesizer (became popular in the late 60s)—offers unlimited sound colors
- Organ (popular in 60s rock)

Wind Instruments: (mostly used in Soul or Art-Rock)

- Saxophones
- Trumpets
- Trombones

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TEXTURE

Texture refers to the number of individual musical lines (melodies) and the relationship these lines have to one another.

Monophonic texture: One melody with no harmony—rarely used in rock music.

Homophonic texture:

This texture features **two or more notes sounding at a the same time**, but generally featuring a **prominent melody** in the upper part, **supported by a less intricate harmonic accompaniment** underneath (often based on **chordal harmony**—homogenous BLOCKS of sound). *Rock songs* often use this texture.

Example: “Mr. Tambourine Man” by Bob Dylan

The diagram illustrates the homophonic texture of "Mr. Tambourine Man" by Bob Dylan. It features two staves: Voice and Guitar. The Voice staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, showing the melody: Hey, Mis - ter Tam - bou - rine Man . . . The Guitar staff shows three strummed chords: G, A, and D, which are aligned with the lyrics. A caption below the guitar staff reads: "Strummed chords—not an independent melody".

Polyphonic texture:

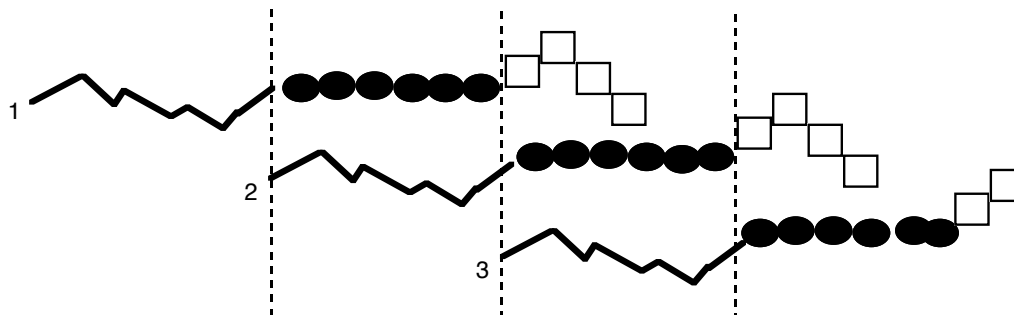
Music with **two or more independent melodies sounding at the same time**. (The more different the melodies are from one another, the more **polyphonic** the texture.) The most intricate types of polyphonic texture such as **canon** (strictly echoing) are found in some types of art-rock music.

Example: “One of These Nights” by The Eagles (1975)

The diagram illustrates the polyphonic texture of "One of These Nights" by The Eagles. It shows four instrumental parts: Guitar 3 (High), Guitar 2 (Medium), Guitar 1 (Low), and Bass (Very low). The notation is spread across two measures of 4 beats each. Guitar 3 has off-beat accents on beats 2 and 4. Guitar 2 holds a chord for 2 measures. Guitar 1 uses slide techniques on beats 2, 3, and 4. The Bass holds a note for 1 measure on beats 1 and 3. The lyrics "One of these nights," and "one of these crazy . . ." are written below the bass line.

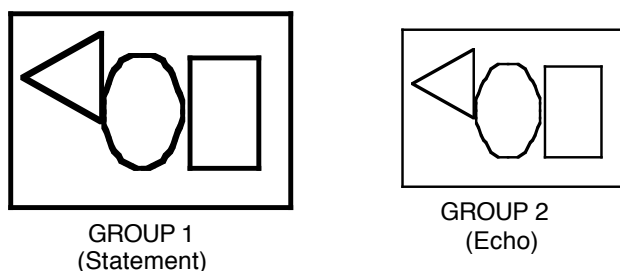
Imitative texture:

Imitation is a special type of polyphonic texture produced whenever a musical idea is ECHOED from one performer to another.



Antiphonal texture:

Antiphonal texture is created when two or more groups of performers alternate back and forth, and then play together. In Rock-and-roll, this texture is heard particularly in various types of Soul, Funk and Rap music.



Other Considerations:

What is the meaning of the text?

How does the music relate to the text being sung? Are there specific examples of *word-painting* (the technique of illustrating the meaning of the words through specific musical imagery)?

How is the text handled in the music ?

Syllabic: each syllable of text is given only one note.

Melismatic: each syllable of text is given three or more notes per syllable of text.

Vibrato (an ornament): Rapid "shaking" of a pitch—often used by vocalists, guitarists, and synthesizer players to add interest to long-held notes.

Tremolo (an ornament): The most common type of *tremolo* in rock music is achieved when a guitar player rapidly alternates the pick back and forth on a string.

Trill (an ornament): rapid alternation of a two nearby pitches. Trills are commonly used by rock guitarists, keyboardists and brass players.

BASIC MUSICAL FORMS

The large-scale **form** of a musical composition can be fashioned from any combination of the musical elements previously studied; however, form in Western music has been primarily associated with melodic, harmonic and rhythmic events (or the text) in a piece. Letters (*i.e.*, A, B, C) are used to designate musical divisions brought about by the repetition of material or the presentation of new, contrasting material. With this in mind, some of the most common forms in rock and roll can be seen below:

(Note: Vocal music often follows the form of its text)

Strophic Form: A structural design created whenever the same music is used over and over for several different verses (strophes) of words. This type of verse design can be used separately as its own song-form or in conjunction with another form such as binary or ternary form (see below). A rather blatant example of simple **strophic** design is the old tavern song “99 Bottles of Beer”:

Verse 1: “99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall . . .”
Verse 2: “98 Bottles of Beer on the Wall . . .”
Verse 3: “97 Bottles of Beer on the Wall . . .”
[et cetera]

Binary Form A two-part form (A vs. B) in which the basic premise is CONTRAST—Example: “Blowin’ In The Wind” by Bob Dylan (1963)

This song combines strophic and binary designs—it has 3 different verses, each with the following “A” vs. “B” (binary) design:

A three similar phrases	"How many roads must a man walk down . . ."
	"How many seas must a white dove sail . . ."
	"How many times must the cannonballs fly . . ."
B contrasting section	"The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind . . ."

Here is a look at the larger-scale *strophic* design of the song:

Verse 1	A three similar phrases	"How many roads must a man walk down . . ." "How many seas must a white dove sail . . ." "How many times must the cannonballs fly . . ."
	B contrasting section	"The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind . . ."
Verse 2	A three similar phrases	"How many times must a man look up . . ." "How many ears must one man have . . ." "How many deaths will it take 'til he knows . . ."
	B contrasting section	"The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind . . ."
Verse 3	A three similar phrases	"How many years can a mountain exist . . ." "How many years can some people exist . . ." "How many times can a man turn his head . . ."
	B contrasting section	"The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind . . ."

Verse/Chorus Song Form Is a type of *binary-strophic* created by the alternation of a story-telling *verse* (with new words each time) contrasted with a recurring *chorus* (with the same words each time).

Example: "Like A Rolling Stone" by Bob Dylan (1965)

Verse 1	A	"Once upon a time . . ." (20 measures: 4+4+4+4+4)
Chorus	B	"How does it feel? . . ." (10 measures: 4+4+2)
Verse 2	A	"You've gone to the finest schools . . ." (20 mm.)
Chorus	B	"How does it feel? . . ." (12 measures: 4+4+4)
Verse 3	A	"You never turned around to see . . ." (20 measures)
Chorus	B	"How does it feel? . . ." (12 measures: 4+4+4)
Verse 4	A	"Princess in the steeple . . ." (20 measures)
Chorus	B	"How does it feel? . . ." (12 measures: 4+4+4)

Ternary Form A three-part form (A B A) featuring a return of the initial music (“A”) after a contrasting section (“B”)

Example: “Yesterday” by Paul McCartney and John Lennon (1965)

A	"Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away . . ."
"A" repeated with new words	"Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be . . ."
B	"Why she had to go I don't know . . ."
contrasting section	
A	"Yesterday, love was such an easy game to play . . ."
returns	

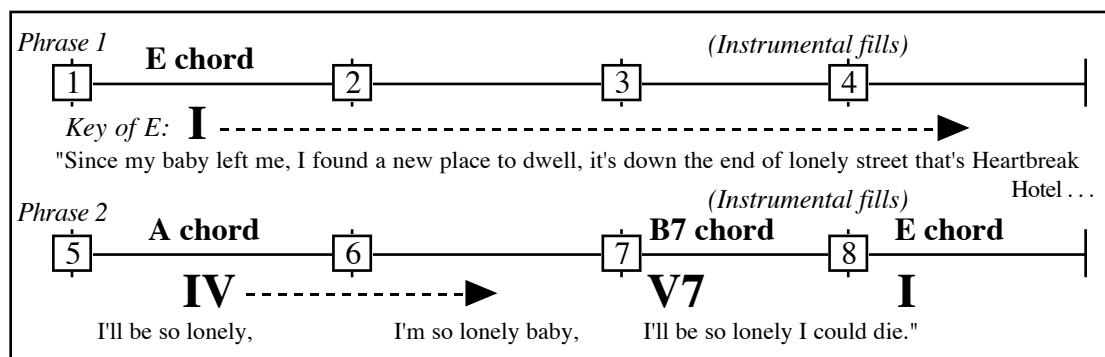
A closer look at “Yesterday” reveals a common type of pop/rock music design called “A-A-B-A” or “**song-form**.” This form was derived from pop music and the Tin Alley musical traditions in the first half of the 1900s.

Within this basic framework, the typical large-scale outline of an AABA song from the ‘50s and ‘60s was (approximately 2-3 minutes in total length):

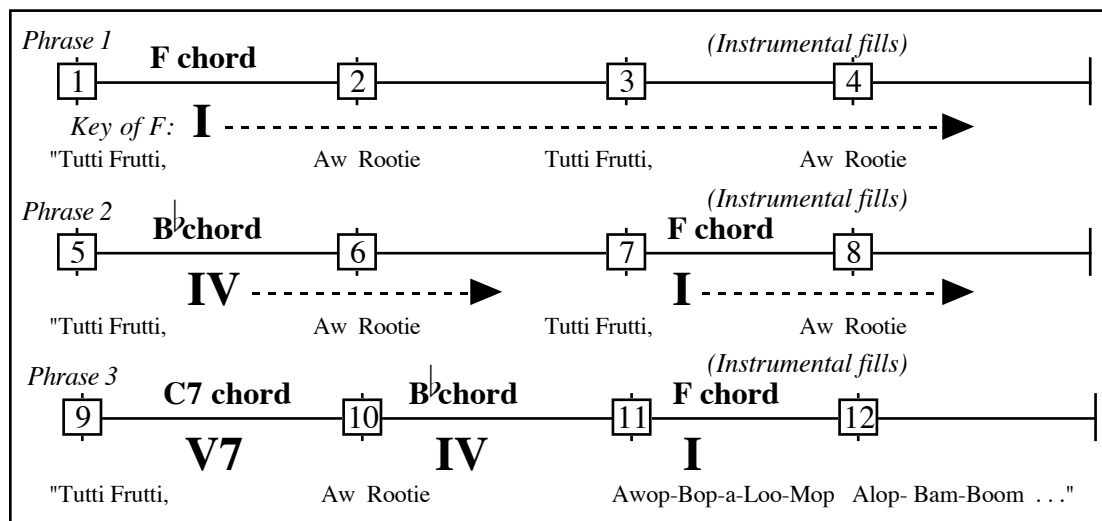
<i>Intro</i>	Verse		Chorus	Instrumental break	Chorus	Verse	<i>Ending</i> (fade out)
	A	A'				A''	

Blues Forms: The most common are 8-bar blues, 12-bar blues and 32-bar blues (used in Jazz). A “bar” is a measure/metrical grouping: in 4/4 time, a measure is every group of four numbers 1-2-3-4 [barline/end of measure], etc.

8-Bar Blues—Example: “Heartbreak Hotel” by Elvis Presley (1956)



12-Bar Blues—Example: “Tutti Frutti” by Little Richard (1955)



Within this basic framework, the typical large-scale outline of a 12-bar blues song from the ‘50s and ‘60s was

Intro	CHORUSES:12-bar			Instrumental break	CHORUSES:12-bar		Ending (fade out)
	A	A	(etc)		A	(etc)	

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Through-composed Form: a continuous, non-repetitive, musical design (with no readily-apparent form).

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BASIC MUSICAL ANALYSIS USING MUSICAL ELEMENTS

Rhythm & Blues vs. Rockabilly

Below is a revealing comparison of two different concurrent renditions of a 1950s Classic:

"Shake, Rattle and Roll" (1954)		
	<i>Big Joe Turner</i>	<i>Bill Haley and His Comets</i>
<i>Genre</i>	• Jump R & B	• Rockabilly
<i>Form</i>	• 12-bar blues	• 12-bar blues
<i>Tempo</i>	• 140 beats per minute	• 176 beats per minute
<i>Meter</i>	• 4/4	• 4/4
<i>Accomp.</i>	• Rhythm Section: - boogie-woogie piano - acoustic bass (on beat) - handclapping/snare drum on backbeats (2 and 4)	• Rhythm Section: - piano and country guitar in shuffle rhythm - acoustic bass (on beat) - less obvious backbeat
<i>Fills</i>	• Saxes playing repeated notes or riffs in the choruses	• Sax and guitar using different riffs than Turner's band (guitar plays jazz-like fills)
<i>Improv.</i>	• Improvised baritone sax solo in the 5th chorus	• No extended improvisation in the instrumental breaks
<i>Lyrics</i>	• Sexual references abound (in bed; looking through her dress, etc.)	• Sexual references removed; replaced by "she done me wrong" attitude
<i>Form</i>	• 9 blues choruses	• 7 blues choruses
<i>Ending</i>	• Sax line from Duke Ellington's "Take The A Train"	• Short country-blues lick added as a final tag ending

Notice the significant increase in tempo brought on by rockabilly, which helped compensate for the “toning down” of the black R & B tradition in regards to overall rhythmic ingenuity (punching the backbeat, hand-clapping), improvisation, subject matter, and breadth of form.

“Good Vibrations” by The Beach Boys (1966)

Note the various textures and unusual tone colors in this free-flowing formal design

A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High voice (multitracked unison—echo) accompanied by organ and bass • Repeated verse with touches of percussion added (snare drum, tambourine) • Triplet rhythm and dynamic crescendo
<i>Verse</i>	
<i>Transition to Chorus</i>	
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low bass voice "I'm pickin' up Good Vibrations . . ."; Background vocals added ("ooh, bop, Good Vibrations"); High voice added on "Good Vibrations . . ." <p>Colorful "vibration" sound of a Theramin (an electronic touch rod tone generator invented in 1924)</p> <p>Harmony keeps modulating higher and higher with multi-layered instrumental background</p>
<i>Chorus</i>	
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verse returns with new words
<i>Verse</i>	
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chorus returns (as before)
<i>Chorus</i>	
<i>Contrasting Episode</i>	
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acoustic piano and extremely quiet humming sound with tinges of percussion color gradually crescendos into into another complex web of vocal polyphony.
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive voice texture suddenly halts leaving behind what sounds like a church-organ playing chords in the background with a hint of percussion (maracas, etc.)
<i>Retransition to Chorus</i>	
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-range unison 'chant' style begins on "Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happening with her"; Bass and upper voices are gradually added • Voices fade out again; then a sudden rush of sound on "Ooh" [powerful jazz harmony]
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chorus returns midway, at the height of its power—"Good, good, good, Good Vibrations . . ."
<i>Chorus</i>	
Coda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends with fade out of Theramin "vibration" from chorus
<i>Ending</i>	

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