

# FORM IN ROCK MUSIC

## A Primer

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John Covach (University of Rochester) began his career with a Fulbright to the University of Vienna for research in the areas of music aesthetics and philosophy. He also continued both performing and teaching classical and jazz guitar. In recent years, his research has shifted to the emerging field of popular music study by music theorists.

Covach's interest in form in rock music derives from fascination and pragmatism. Since many styles of popular music do not include music notation (except perhaps after the fact, in the form of a transcription), rock performers need to organize musical sections of any given song conceptually in order to keep the song and the arrangement fixed in memory. Thus, in the present essay, Covach provides a comprehensive introduction to various forms that rock musicians have used over the past five decades. Applying technical terms to familiar rock forms, Covach's survey details what forms are common to much rock music, as well as how formal structure articulates and distinguishes rock as a stylistic category.

### INTRODUCTION

In its almost fifty-year history, rock music has presented its listeners with a wide variety of styles and approaches. From the swing-influenced early rock and roll of Bill Haley and the Comets through the bouncy two-minute singles of the early Beatles and the Supremes to the ambitious epics such as Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, rock music has encompassed both the simple and the complex, the serious and the frivolous, the emotionally direct and the technologically mediated. This essay will provide an introduction to the types of formal structures that can be found in rock music. Considering the wide range of music that could be classified as rock, this survey will provide only a glimpse of some typical structural features of the repertory. Despite such broad stylistic diversity, however, there are a number of formal types that return frequently in the repertory, crossing stylistic and historical boundaries in sometimes predictable—but also in sometimes surprising—ways. This essay will identify some of the most common formal schemes to be found in rock music.<sup>1</sup>

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Some reminders: (1) all words in **bold** are defined in the glossary; (2) full citations for incomplete references are found in the selected bibliography; (3) the authors use their preferred notational system (e.g., Roman numeral, form label, and register notation). Most of the essays denote register by middle C as C<sup>4</sup>.—Ed.

1. The analysis of rock music has received increasing attention among theorists in recent years. See, for instance, Allen Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993); *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*; and *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*.

Generally speaking, harmonic structure tends to be a primary factor in determining formal units at all levels of structure. Typically the analyst determines the meter of the song, analyzes the chord progressions, and charts the number of measures in a section considering phrases within that section where applicable. These sections then add up to articulate the form of the song, which will often fall into one of the general types that will be explained below. In considering form in rock (as in many other types of song), it is also helpful to separate out harmonic concerns from those regarding the lyrics, at least provisionally. As will be shown, for instance, the pacing and repetition of harmonic materials need not always align with that of the lyrics: lyrics can be repeated over different sets of chord progressions, and the same progression can support different lyrics. It is thus helpful to remain mindful of the dialectical tension that can arise between these dimensions of the musical fabric, as such relationships can be useful in making important formal distinctions (as will be seen below). Organizational schemes in the melodic, timbral, textural, and rhythmic dimensions frequently reinforce those found in the harmonic and lyric dimensions of a song, though detailed analysis will often reveal distinct schemes that complement the overriding formal one. The common strategy of building up an arrangement by adding new layers to the texture as a song progresses, for instance, is one example of such a scheme. The form of a song is thus only one aspect of its structure.

For the purposes of this broad introductory survey, consideration will be limited to the twelve-bar blues as an organizational pattern and to several formal types: AABA, contrasting and simple verse-chorus, simple verse, and compound forms. A wide range of formal variation in rock music can be understood in terms of these basic schemes, and while these schemes cannot account for all rock, they offer a solid foundation for the formal analysis of much rock music. This essay should be studied with the recordings of the songs discussed below readily at hand. The examples provided for discussion are well-known songs in the style—all of them are hit records that are likely to be both familiar and easily accessible to most readers who listen to rock music. In general, earlier songs have been chosen over later ones, though no claim is made that any of the songs is the first instance of a given formal type.

## THE TWELVE-BAR BLUES

The influence of post-World War II rhythm and blues on rock and roll in the 1950s is obvious in many ways. In the great rush toward providing music for the craze created by this new youth-oriented musical style, many white acts re-recorded songs that had become hits for black artists on the rhythm and blues charts. These “cover” versions were in many cases hardly different from the originals, though frequently lyrics were changed to remove references that white middle-class listeners might find offensive. As these cover versions climbed the pop charts, original rhythm and blues recordings of other songs also charted, crossing over from the rhythm and blues charts to the pop ones. These crossover and covers make up much of the original rock and roll of the mid 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

2. For a fuller account of cover versions and crossover hits in the 1950s, see Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 391–424; Steve Perry, “‘Ain’t No Mountain High Enough’: The Politics of Crossover,” in *Facing the Music*, ed. Simon Frith (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 51–52; David Brackett, “The Politics and Musical Practice of ‘Crossover,’” in *Popular Music: Style and Identity*, ed. International Association for the Study of Popular Music Seventh International Conference on Popular Music Studies, ed. Will Straw, Stacey Johnson, Rebecca Sullivan, and Paul Friedlander (Montreal: Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions, 1995), 23–31; and John Covach, “Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in Late-1970s American Progressive Rock,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, 113–34.

Measures (beats)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	1234	1234	1234	1234								
Chords	I	(IV)	I	I	IV	IV	I	I	V	IV	I	V
Phrases	Question -----				Question again -----				Answer -----			

**Example 6.1.** The twelve-bar blues (Muddy Waters, "Train Fare Blues" [1948])

In terms of organizational patterns, one clear model for much rock and roll—since the 1950s and up to the present day—is the twelve-bar blues. This pattern derives mostly from the kinds of blues played by blues and jazz bands in the years before the Second World War; while solo blues artists were sometimes much freer in terms of phrasing and meter, musicians playing together in a group setting were able to play easily by simply following this twelve-bar scheme. Good examples of this pattern may be found in tracks such as Muddy Waters's "Train Fare Blues" (1948), Howlin' Wolf's "Evil" (1954), and many others.<sup>3</sup>

The pattern is made up of three phases, each four measures in length (see example 6.1). The first phrase prolongs the tonic harmony. The second phrase moves to the subdominant for two measures and then returns to the tonic for two measures. The lyrics and melody from the first phrase are often (though not always) repeated in the second, making the second phrase a contrasting restatement of the first. The third phrase moves from dominant harmony through a passing subdominant harmony to tonic, while offering contrasting lyrics and melodic material. The musical effect of these three phrases can be understood as analogous to posing a question, reposing the same question, and then providing an answer, and this scheme serves to unify the three phrases into a single twelve-bar unit that then can be repeated as many times as the musicians see fit. Improvised solos tend to respect this question-question-answer scheme as well, frequently withholding the strongest melodically cadential material for the conclusion of the third phrase.

Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" provides a nice example of the twelve-bar blues in a rock and roll context. In light of the discussion above, it is worth noting that this tune was a rhythm and blues hit for Turner in 1954 but became a pop hit when Bill Haley and the Comets covered it in 1955. A formal diagram of Turner's version of "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" can be found in example 6.2.<sup>4</sup> Note that after a four-measure introduction vamping on the tonic chord, the remainder of the tune consists of eight times through the twelve-bar blues in the key of Eb. This song follows the practice of repeating the lyrics to the first phrase in the second, with the third phrase offering the completion of the idea that began in the first two. The song differs somewhat from traditional blues by providing a **chorus** (the catchy "shake, rattle, and roll") in which the lyrics remain constant each time it sounds. This verse-chorus scheme based on the twelve-bar blues can be found in many other early rock and roll hits, including Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock around the Clock" (1955) and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode," though these songs do not repeat the first-phrase lyrics of the **verse** in the second phrase. A suc-

3. See Dave Headlam, "Blues Transformations in the Music of Cream," *Understanding Rock*, 59–92; and "Does the Song Remain the Same? Questions of Authorship and Identification in the Music of Led Zeppelin," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, ed. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 313–63, for detailed consideration of how blues models make their way into British rock in the 1960s and 1970s.

4. The formal diagrams provided in this study provide both measure counts and CD timings. CD timings should be understood as approximate, since some deviations can occur between re-released versions of the same recording.

0:00-0:07	<b>Introduction</b> , 4 mm.
0:07-0:25	<b>Verse</b> , 12 mm.
0:25-0:43	<b>Verse</b> , 12 mm.
0:44-1:02	<b>Verse</b> , 12 mm.
1:02-1:21	<b>Chorus</b> , 12 mm.
1:21-1:40	<b>Verse</b> (instrumental), 12 mm., sax solo
1:40-1:58	<b>Verse</b> , 12 mm.
1:58-2:17	<b>Chorus</b> , 12 mm.
2:17-2:36	<b>Verse</b> , 12 mm.
2:36-3:00	<b>Chorus</b> with ending, 12 mm.

verse = twelve-bar blues in E<sup>b</sup>, as shown above without optional harmonies in parenthesis

**Example 6.2.** Big Joe Turner, "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," words and music by Jesse Stone (Charles Calhoun), produced by Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler. Reached no. 1 on the Billboard Rhythm and Blues Chart in late 1954.

cession of twelve-bar verses without chorus can be found in Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" (1956) and Little Richard's "Lucille" (1957), among many others. Discussion below will focus on larger formal issues concerning these songs. For present purposes, it is enough to point out that despite a certain amount of variation in the handling of the lyrics and melodic material, a formal scheme consisting of repetitions of the twelve-bar harmonic pattern made up of three four-bar phrases remains constant among all these tracks.

The twelve-bar pattern can itself be modified, leading to eight-bar and sixteen-bar schemes. Example 6.3 shows Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel," in which two four-bar phrases replace the three phrases discussed above. In this case, the first phrase is consistent with the twelve-bar version while the second is not. This second phrase can be seen as something of a conflation of the second and third phrases found from the twelve-bar arrangement, with mm. 5 and 6 matching the beginning of phrase 2 while mm. 7 and 8 do not strictly correspond to any pair of measures from the twelve-bar pattern. These last two measures serve to drive the eight-bar pattern to harmonic closure, and in this way can be seen to parallel—at least in function—the last four bars in the twelve-bar scheme. Example 6.4 shows a sixteen-bar scheme, and a comparison with the twelve-bar version in this instance reveals much clearer parallels. The first phrase of Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock" expands the usual four measures to eight, while the remainder of the pattern duplicates the second and third phrases of the twelve-bar blues. While the harmonic schemes of these tunes have clear links to the twelve-bar pattern, both "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Jailhouse Rock" break with the question-question-answer lyric pattern of the traditional blues.

0:00-0:22	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm.
0:22-0:42	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm.
0:42-1:01	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm.
1:01-1:21	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm.
1:21-1:42	<b>Verse</b> (instrumental), 8 mm., 4 mm. guitar + 4 mm. of piano
1:42-2:05	<b>Verse</b> with ending, 9 mm.

verse = E: I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | IV | IV | V | I | I | I  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

**Example 6.3.** Elvis Presley, "Heartbreak Hotel," words and music by Mae Boren, Tommy Durden, and Elvis Presley, produced by Steve Sholes. Reached no. 1 on the Billboard Pop and Country Charts in early 1956; reached no. 5 on the Billboard Rhythm and Blues Chart.

0:00-0:06	<b>Introduction</b> , 4 mm.
0:06-0:29	<b>Verse</b> , 16 mm.
0:29-0:52	<b>Verse</b> , 16 mm.
0:52-1:15	<b>Verse</b> , 16 mm.
1:15-1:26	<b>Partial Verse</b> (instrumental), 8 mm.
1:26-1:48	<b>Verse</b> , 16 mm.
1:48-2:11	<b>Verse</b> , 16 mm.
2:11-2:21	<b>Fade on Vamp</b>

verse = Eb: I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | IV | IV | I | I | I | I | V | IV | I | I | I | I |

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

**Example 6.4.** Elvis Presley, "Jailhouse Rock," words and music by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, produced by Steve Sholes, Jerry Leiber, and Mike Stoller. Reached no. 1 on the Billboard Pop, Country, and Rhythm and Blues Charts in late 1957.

## AABA FORM

While the twelve-bar blues addresses how a verse or chorus may be constructed, in terms of overall form, this scheme only requires that the twelve-bar (or eight- or sixteen-bar) pattern be repeated, determining little about the specific larger form of a song. Rock music does operate according to a number of larger formal designs, however, and one frequently employed formal scheme in rock music is the AABA pattern. While this form can be found in much music in the Western tradition, rock musicians have been influenced most by the use of the thirty-two-bar AABA scheme in American popular song during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> While other thirty-two-bar schemes can be found among Tin Pan Alley pop songs, the formal design shown in example 6.5 is one of the most common. After a four-measure introduction, the first verse of "Over the Rainbow" consists of eight bars, which are then repeated for the second verse. Note that the verses are harmonically closed, cadencing in the home key of Ab major. The eight-bar **bridge** presents contrasting material, and while it does not modulate in this instance, modulations during this section—often referred to as the "middle eight"—are common. The bridge is harmonically open, ending with a dominant sonority in the home key that pre-

0:00-0:11	<b>Introduction</b> (4 mm.), Ab: I   I   I   iv V <sup>7</sup>
0:11-0:34	<b>Verse</b> (8 mm.)
0:34-0:55	<b>Verse</b> (8 mm.)
0:55-1:18	<b>Bridge</b> (8 mm.)
1:18-1:40	<b>Verse</b> (8 mm.)
1:40-2:01	<b>Verse</b> (8 mm.)
2:01-2:25	<b>Verse</b> (8 mm.)
2:25-2:46	<b>Partial Bridge</b> (4 mm.)

verse = Ab: I vi | iii V<sup>7</sup>/IV | IV vii<sup>07</sup>/iii | iii V<sup>7</sup>/ii | ii iv | I V<sup>7</sup>/ii | ii V<sup>7</sup> | I (V) |

bridge = Ab: I | V<sup>7</sup> | I | ii V | I | V<sup>7</sup>/iii | iii | ii V<sup>9</sup><sub>#5</sub> |

**Example 6.5.** Judy Garland with Victor Young and his Orchestra, "Over the Rainbow," words by E. Y. Harbaugh, music by Harold Arlen. Reached no. 5 in the Billboard Pop Chart in fall 1939.

5. For a fuller analytical account of the music of Tin Pan Alley songs during this period, see Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924-1950*.

0:00-0:08	<b>Introduction</b> (4 mm. prolongation of G: V drawn from <i>d</i> )
0:08-0:29	<b>Verse</b> (12 mm., $4a + 4a + 4b$ )
0:29-0:51	<b>Verse</b> (12 mm.)
0:51-1:11	<b>Bridge</b> (11 mm., $4c + 7d$ )
1:11-1:33	<b>Verse</b> (12 mm.)
1:34-1:54	<b>Bridge</b> (11 mm.)
1:54-2:22	<b>Verse with tag</b> (15 mm., $4a + 4a + 7e$ )

*a* = G: I | V | vi | iii |

*b* = G: IV V | I vi | IV V | I |

*c* = C: ii | V | I | vi |

*d* = C: ii | V | I

G: IV | V | V | V | V |

*e* = G: IV V | I vi | IV V | III | IV V | IV | I ||

**Example 6.6.** The Beatles, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” words and music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, produced by George Martin. Reached no. 1 in UK charts in late 1963 and no. 1 on the Billboard Pop Chart in early 1964.

pare the return of the verse. The last verse returns after the bridge, rounding out a thirty-two bar scheme made up of four eight-bar phrases that can be labeled AABA overall.

It is important to note that Tin Pan Alley songs typically consist of two sections, often called the “verse” and the “**refrain**” but perhaps better labeled the “sectional verse” and “sectional refrain.” The sectional verse is a kind of lead-in to the song, with lyrics that set up the sentiment expressed in the sectional refrain. The sectional verse tends not to be heard much in modern performances, and the sectional refrain is what most listeners would recognize as the song itself. Example 6.5 thus accounts only for the sectional refrain of “Over the Rainbow,” and care must be taken not to confuse the term “verse” as it is used in this example from the other sense of the term, used to describe a larger section that is not under analytical consideration here. Singers and big bands frequently dispensed with the sectional verse, and recorded versions of Tin Pan Alley songs usually feature the complete thirty-two bar sectional refrain, which is then repeated within the time constraints of the 78 rpm record of the time. In the case of “Over the Rainbow,” the full AABA scheme is followed by an abbreviated **reprise** featuring two verses and an ending crafted out of material drawn from the bridge.

Professional songwriters in the late 1950s and early-to-mid 1960s (especially those working out of the Manhattan’s Brill Building) frequently employed modified versions of the thirty-two bar AABA form that was standard among the earlier Tin Pan Alley songwriters. Individual sections often deviated from the eight-bar model, with verses sometimes running to twelve or sixteen bars, and bridge sections may also have exceeded eight measures in length. Under the influence of these American songwriters, John Lennon and Paul McCartney also employed the AABA form with abbreviated reprise in many of their early British-invasion hits. Example 6.6 shows the formal design of “I Want to Hold Your Hand.” Note that after a four-measure introduction, the verses are each twelve measures in length. Harmonic progressions are represented by italic lowercase letters (see the bottom of the example), and thus  $4a + 4a + 4b$  in the first verse indicates that four measures of the *a* progression are repeated and followed by four measures of the *b* progression.<sup>6</sup> The bridge is modeled on the eight-bar scheme, with three measures added by extending the dominant sonority of m. 8 in mm. 9–11. The turn to the subdominant key

6. While this song would never be considered blues, it is interesting to note that the harmonic and melodic structure here matches the question-question-answer model described above.

area of C major here is strongly reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley practice. Note also that the verses are harmonically closed, while the bridge is open. The abbreviated reprise brings back only the bridge and verse, with the last articulation of the verse extended by three measures. These three measures employ a “tag,” which in this case is the repetition of the IV–V–I cadential formula from the last two measures of *b*, here modified in m. 4 of *e* to land on a major mediant sonority, and in m. 6 on a subdominant sonority before the cadence on the tonic in m. 7.

Instances of the AABA form can be found in Jerry Lee Lewis’s “Great Balls of Fire” (1957), The Everly Brothers’ “All I Have to Do Is Dream” (1958), The Shirelles’ “Will You Still Love Me” (1960), The Beach Boys’ “Surfer Girl” (1963), and Beatles numbers from early (“From Me to You,” 1963) to late (“Hey Jude,” 1968), among many others. The AABA form is common in 1950s and 1960s rock, and its use generally marks the influence of the Tin Pan Alley professional songwriter pop tradition. As the 1960s progressed, however, there was a trend away from the AABA form as it occurs in these songs and toward versions of the verse-chorus form.

## VERSE-CHORUS FORM

In an AABA song, the focus of the music is in the verse sections; the bridge exists simply to offer contrast, making the verse seem fresh on its reappearance. In a verse-chorus song, by contrast, the focus of the song is squarely on the chorus. In a way that parallels on a smaller scale the larger sectional verses and refrains of Tin Pan Alley songs, the verse serves primarily to prepare the return of the chorus. Thus the strategy of a verse-chorus song differs in a fundamental way from that of an AABA tune. The Ronettes’ “Be My Baby” (see example 6.7) offers a clear example of this. After a four-measure Introduction, a sixteen-bar verse leads to the focus of the song, the eight-bar chorus. The second verse and the chorus that follows it bring back the same music. The variously repeated “be my baby” lyrics set to the conventional I–vi–V–V harmonic pattern combine to form the song’s “hook”—that part of the song meant to catch the ear of the listener. Note that the third verse is played instrumentally but only contains the first eight bars of the previous verses, proceeding directly to the chorus; after an abbreviated return to the Introduction, the chorus then repeats twice more and fades. In the course of two and a half minutes of music, the chorus appears five times. Since each iteration of the chorus

0:00-0:08	<b>Introduction</b> , 4 mm. (2 mm. drums alone plus 2 mm. on E: I)
0:08-0:37	<b>Verse 1</b> , 16 mm., $4a + 4a + 8b$
0:37-0:52	<b>Chorus</b> , 8 mm.
0:52-1:22	<b>Verse 2</b> , 16 mm.
1:22-1:37	<b>Chorus</b> , 8 mm.
1:37-1:52	<b>Partial verse</b> (instrumental), 8 mm., $4a + 4a$ only
1:52-2:07	<b>Chorus</b> (8 mm.) as before
2:07-2:10	<b>Reprise of intro</b> (2 mm.), drums only
2:10-2:36	<b>Chorus</b> (2 x 8 mm. chorus then fade)

$a = E: I | I | ii | V |$   
 $b = E: V^7/vi | | V^7/ii | | V^7/V | | V^7 | |$   
 chorus = E: I | | vi | | IV | | V^7 | |

**Example 6.7.** The Ronettes, “Be My Baby,” words and music by Phil Spector, Jeff Barry, and Ellie Greenwich, produced by Phil Spector. Reached no. 2 on the Billboard Pop Chart in late 1963.

0:00-0:14	<b>Verse 1</b> , 8 mm., <i>8a</i>
0:18-0:35	<b>Verse 2</b> , 8 mm., <i>8b</i>
0:35-0:52	<b>Chorus</b> , 8 mm.
0:52-1:09	<b>Verse 3</b> , 8 mm., <i>8a</i>
1:09-1:26	<b>Verse</b> (instrumental), 8 mm., <i>8b</i>
1:26-1:42	<b>Chorus</b> , 8 mm.
1:42-1:59	<b>Verse 4</b> , 8 mm., <i>8a</i>
1:59-2:16	<b>Verse 5</b> , 8 mm., <i>8b</i>
2:16-2:33	<b>Chorus</b> , 8 mm.
2:33-2:58	<b>Chorus</b> , 9 mm., 8 mm. in B, with 1 m. added at end

*a* = B: I | ii V | I | i | i/g# bass | bVI<sup>7</sup> | V<sup>4+3</sup> | V<sup>4+3</sup> |

*b* = B: I | ii V | I | i | i/g# bass | bVI<sup>7</sup> | V<sup>4+3</sup> | IV |  
A: V<sup>4+3</sup> |

chorus = A: I | I<sup>6</sup> | IV | | I | I<sup>6</sup> | IV | B: V |

**Example 6.8.** Beatles, “Penny Lane,” words and music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, produced by George Martin. Reached no. 2 in the U.K. charts and no. 1 on the Billboard Pop Chart in early 1967.

takes fifteen seconds, one minute and fifteen seconds—almost half the song—is devoted to this section.

Another instance of verse-chorus form can be found in the Beatles’ “Penny Lane” (see example 6.8). Here two verses and a chorus are grouped together and sound three times overall, with the chorus repeated once more at the end. Both the verse and chorus sections are eight measures in length. While the verse and chorus in “Be My Baby” were in the same key (E major), the verse and chorus in “Penny Lane” are in contrasting keys: the verse is in B major while the chorus is in A major. Note that the appearance of the V sonority in A in the last measure of the verses using *b* material and the V of B in last measure of each chorus make the modulations between B and A go smoothly. When the dominant of B arrives in the penultimate chorus, it leads to a repetition of the chorus in the home key of B (instead of A), allowing the song to end in the same key in which it begins. Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water” provides a representative example of the way verse-chorus forms are handled in the 1970s (see example 6.9). The scheme consists of four iterations of a verse-chorus pair, with the same distinctive guitar riff (marked “interlude”) preceding each. The prominence of the guitar riff combined with a full verse-chorus guitar solo emphasize the increased focus on instrumental playing and virtuosity that characterizes much 1970s rock. It also exemplifies a general approach to form that tends to present some kind of contrasting material after the second verse-chorus section; in this instance it is the guitar solo, with the chorus altered slightly. As we will see in the discussion of example 6.11 below, this tendency can result in an entire contrasting section.

Despite their differences, “Be My Baby,” “Penny Lane,” and “Smoke on the Water” each use a scheme that employs different music for verse and chorus, and this formal type will be called “contrasting verse-chorus form.” A large number of other songs are in contrasting verse-chorus form, including Buddy Holly’s “That’ll Be the Day” (1957), The Beach Boys’ “California Girls” (1965), The Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love” (1967), Jimi Hendrix’s “Foxy Lady” (1967), and Bad Company’s “Can’t Get Enough” (1974).

Joe Turner’s “Shake, Rattle, and Roll” (discussed above, see example 6.2) provides another instance of a verse-chorus form; in this case the chorus lyrics bring back the phrase “shake, rattle, and roll,” while the verse lyrics change with each new verse. As was men-

- 0:00-0:51 **Introduction**, 24 mm., 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 using 4mm. guitar riff
- 0:51-1:25 **Verse 1**, 16 mm., 4a + 4a + 4a + 4a  
1:25-1:38 **Chorus**, 6 mm., 4 + 2
- 1:38-1:55 **Interlude**, 8 mm., 4 + 4 using 4 mm. guitar riff  
1:55-2:28 **Verse 2**, 16 mm.  
2:28-2:41 **Chorus**, 6 mm.
- 2:41-2:58 **Interlude**, 8 mm.  
2:58-3:31 **Verse** (instrumental), 16 mm.  
3:31-3:39 **Chorus** (instrumental), 4 mm., based on chorus, g: IV | IV | bII | bII |
- 3:39-3:56 **Interlude**, 8 mm.  
3:56-4:29 **Verse 3**, 16 mm.  
4:29-4:42 **Chorus**, 6 mm.
- 4:42-5:35 **Coda**, 16+ mm., 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 using 4 mm. guitar riff, then fade on vamp

a = g: i | i | bVII i |  
chorus = g: IV | bII i | | IV | bII |

**Example 6.9.** Deep Purple, "Smoke on the Water," words and music by Ritchie Blackmore, Ian Gillian, Roger Glover, Jon Lord, and Ian Paice, produced by Deep Purple. Contained on the album *Machine Head*, which reached no. 1 in the U.K. and no. 7 on the Billboard Album Chart in mid 1972. Reached no. 4 on the Billboard Pop Chart when released as a single in mid-1973.

tioned above, this song is based entirely on the twelve-bar blues pattern; and thus, while the lyrics are structured according to a verse-chorus pattern, the harmonic scheme offers no contrast between these sections. Such a scheme will be termed a "simple verse-chorus form." While many songs use a blues scheme to structure the verse and chorus, it is also possible to employ a scheme not derived from blues practice, and The Kingsmen's "Louie Louie" (a 1963 cover version of a Richard Berry song written in imitation of Jamaican music) or Ritchie Valens's "La Bamba" (a 1959 hit based on a Mexican wedding celebration song) provide good examples.

Another formal pattern that can be clearly distinguished from both kinds of verse-chorus forms but that is similar in many respects to the noncontrasting verse-chorus form is the "simple verse form." Santana's "Evil Ways" provides a clear example in which music is repeated from verse to verse and no chorus is present (see example 6.10). The harmonic progression on which the song is based consists of a move from a tonic G-minor chord to a subdominant C major, suggesting the **dorian** mode. This one-measure progression—and variants of it—make up almost all of the music; the one exception oc-

- 0:00-0:18 **Introduction**, 8 mm., vamp on g: i IV |
- 0:18-0:47 **Verse 1**, 14 mm., 4 + 4 + 4 on vamp, plus 2 mm. on V
- 0:47-0:55 **Interlude**, 4 mm. on vamp  
0:55-1:23 **Verse 2**, 14 mm.
- 1:23-2:25 **Instrumental solo** (organ), 30 mm., on vamp, in 2-bar phrases
- 2:25-2:53 **Verse 3**, 14 mm.  
2:53-3:53 **Instrumental solo** (guitar), 30 mm., on vamp with fade

**Example 6.10.** Santana, "Evil Ways," words and music by Clarence Henry, produced by Brent Dangerfield and Santana. Contained on the album *Santana*, which reached no. 4 on the Billboard Album Chart in late 1969. Single reached no. 9 on the Billboard Pop Chart in early 1970.

curs at the end of each verse, where two measures of dominant set up a return to the two-chord progression. The introduction is based on this progression, as are the two instrumental solos. Songs in simple-verse form can sometimes feature an instrumental bridge that is contrasting, and this occurs in The Byrds' "Eight Miles High" (1966), The Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" (1966), and Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" (1967), among others. Traditional blues songs without chorus are often in simple verse form, and blues-influenced numbers such as "Heartbreak Hotel," "Jailhouse Rock," "Hound Dog," and "Lucille" (discussed above) are good examples.

## COMPOUND FORMS

The formal types discussed thus far or features of them can be combined to create more complicated forms. Boston's "More Than a Feeling" (1976) serves as a representative example of such a formal type (see example 6.11). After a six-measure introduction, a verse-chorus pair appears once and is repeated. After the second chorus, a bridge section occurs that functions much like a bridge in an AABA form: it prepares the return of the third verse-chorus pair, which follows immediately. Thus the features of a contrasting verse-chorus form are combined with those of an AABA to form a "compound AABA form." Note that when compared to "Smoke on the Water" (discussed above, example 6.9), "More Than a Feeling" can be seen to solve the problem of providing contrast after the second chorus in a more ambitious manner; while "Smoke on the Water" employs an instrumental verse that provides contrast by focusing the listener's attention on the guitar solo, here the guitar solo is set to new music, creating a more independent contrasting section. Compound AABA form can be found in the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" (1964), Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" (1969), and Tom Petty's

0:00-0:18	<b>Introduction</b> , 6 mm., $2a + 2a + 2a$ (fade in)
0:18-0:42	<b>Verse 1</b> , 11 mm., $2a + 2a + 2a + 5b$
0:42-1:17	<b>Chorus</b> , 16 mm., $(2c + 2c) + 2c + 2c + 2c + 6d$
1:17-1:51	<b>Verse 2</b> , 15 mm., $(2a + 2a) + 2a + 2a + 2a + 5b$
1:51-2:30	<b>Chorus</b> , 18 mm., $(2c + 2c) + 2c + 2c + 2c + 8e$
2:30-2:55	<b>Bridge</b> , 11 mm., $11f$ (harmony-guitar solo)
2:55-3:48	<b>Verse 3</b> , 24 mm., $(2a + 2a) + 2a + 6b$
3:48-4:41	<b>Chorus</b> , 20 mm., $(2c + 2c) + 2c + fade$

$a = D: I | \flat VII | IV |$

$b = D: I | \flat VII | IV |$

$G: I | ii | I | V |$  (to  $c$ )

$c = G: I | IV | vi | V |$

$d = G: I | IV | \flat VI | vi$

$D: ii | IV | IV | IV | I$  (elides to  $a$ )

$e = G: I | IV | \flat VI | vi$

$D: ii | IV | vi | IV | V^+ | ^3 |$

$f = D: I | IV | I^6 | V | I | IV | I^6 | V | I | IV | vi | V | I | vi | ii | V | IV | IV | I |$

*Note: parentheses in the notation of verses and choruses above indicates instances of the given pattern that do not feature singing*

**Example 6.11.** Boston, "More Than a Feeling," words and music by Tom Scholz, produced by John Boylan and Tom Scholz. Reached no. 5 on the Billboard Pop Chart in September of 1976. Contained on the album *Boston*, which reached no. 11 on the U.K. charts and no. 3 on the Billboard Album Chart.

0:00-0:17	<b>Introduction (instrumental)</b> , 8 mm., 8a
0:17-0:33	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm., 8b
0:33-0:49	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm., 8a
0:49-1:06	<b>Bridge 1</b> , 8 mm.
1:06-1:22	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm., 8b
1:22-1:43	<b>Bridge 2</b> , 10 mm.
1:43-1:59	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm., 8b
1:59-2:15	<b>Verse</b> , 8 mm., 8a
2:15-2:32	<b>Bridge 1</b> , 8 mm.
2:32-3:01	<b>Verse (with extension)</b> , 14 mm., 8b + last 4 mm. of 8b + 2 mm. of vi
3:01-4:05	<b>Coda</b> , 28+ mm., 4c + 4c + 4c + 4c + 4c + 4c + fade

a = Ab: I | | vi | | IV | V | I | I |  
 b = Ab: I | | vi | | IV | V | vi | I |  
 bridge 1 = Ab: IV | | I | | V/V | | V | I |  
 bridge 2 = Ab: bVI | | bVII | | bVI | | bVII | | bVI | I |  
 c = Ab: I | | vi | IV |

**Example 6.12.** The Police, "Every Breath You Take," words and music by Sting, produced by Hugh Padgham and the Police. Reached no. 1 on the both the U.K. charts and the Billboard Pop Chart in mid 1983.

"Refugee" (1979), among many others. It is perhaps surprising that as rock music in the mid-1960s tends to move away from AABA forms and toward verse-chorus forms, the music of the 1970s shows a strong tendency toward compound AABA forms.

Another instance of compound form can be found in The Police's "Every Breath You Take" (1983). Here a clear thirty-two-bar AABA form frames a central bridge section (marked "Bridge 2" in example 6.12), making the overall form a compound ABA. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of "Every Breath You Take" is the way in which the use of a thirty-two-bar AABA scheme constitutes a clear reference to earlier practice. The harmonic pattern of I-vi-IV-V harkens back to 1950s doo-wop ballads, which make such extensive use of it that any parody of the style is bound to include it. While The Police are not offering a parody in this instance, the combination of this harmonic pattern with the formal type most often employed with this earlier style of music makes the stylistic reference clear. This example indicates one way in which formal designs can be used to invoke other styles within rock music, allowing formal structure to participate in an interstylistic dialectic that may also include other dimensions of the music. This last point especially brings out an important aspect of the role of formal structure in rock music. While it is crucial to understand the formal design of any song under analytical consideration, often the most interesting features of a song involve the ways in which the form interacts with other dimensions of the music.

This survey of common formal types in rock music merely provides an overview of the patterns of structural organization that may be found in this music; much has had to be left out. Aspects of form in Motown songs, large-scale song structure in concept albums such as Jethro Tull's *A Passion Play*, and formal issues in highly improvised music, for instance, could each be topics of entire chapters.<sup>7</sup> Still, the formal types surveyed here will apply to much of the rock repertory, especially if handled flexibly. In many ways, form in rock music raises a number of interesting questions about form in music

7. See my "Progressive Rock, 'Close to the Edge,' and the Boundaries of Style," in *Understanding Rock*, 3-31, for an extended consideration of a twenty-minute track by Yes that turns out to be a version of the compound AABA form described above.

generally. For instance, the examples above are all based on recordings, not on printed scores. A second recorded version of the same song may well differ from the first—and this can happen even when both versions are by the same band or artist. The sections themselves will not be altered much in most cases; rather, the way in which sections are repeated or extended is likely to be the primary source of the differences. In rock music, like in most popular music, the precise formal arrangement often varies from version to version. Perhaps this ought to encourage analysts to think of form in more flexible terms when dealing with other music as well. Even this brief consideration of such concerns suggests the interesting issues that the careful study of rock music can present for music theorists and analysts.

### FURTHER READING

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Everett, Walter, ed. *Rock Music: Critical Essays on Composition, Performance, Analysis, and Reception*.

Covach, John, and Graham Boone, eds. *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*.