

JM

THE JOHNNY MERCER  
FOUNDATION

SONGS OF JOHNNY MERCER

# AN ACTIVITY GUIDE TO MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS FOR KIDS



This material was created by Bill Nittler as part of a graduate assistantship through the Georgia State University Library and School of Music. The assistantship was made possible through generous support from **The Johnny Mercer Foundation** (JMF). This booklet is intended for educational use only, and it is hoped that teachers and students will utilize the content to learn the basic elements of music through songs written by Johnny Mercer and other songwriters of The Great American Songbook.

For more information on Johnny Mercer and The Great American Songbook, visit **The Johnny Mercer Foundation** at [johnnymercer.org](http://johnnymercer.org).

## JOHNNYMERCER.ORG

All photographs from the Popular Music and Culture Collections, Special Collections and Archives, **Georgia State University Library**.

**Photograph credits:**

Page 17: Frank Carroll

Page 19: Jay Seymour

**Song credits:**

"Something's Gotta Give"

© 1954 Warner-Chappell Music Corp.

"Satin Doll"

© 1958 Warner-Chappell Music Corp., Sony/ATV Harmony, Reservoir Media Music

"Blues in the Night"

© 1941 Warner-Chappell Music Corp.

"Autumn Leaves"

© 1950 Morley Music Co., Enoch and Cie

▼ THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK	03
▼ JOHNNY MERCER	05
▼ THE HOOK	07
▼ RHYTHM	09
▼ MELODY	13
▼ FORM	17
▼ HARMONY	21
▼ TONALITY & CHARACTER	23
▼ STYLE	25
▼ GLOSSARY	27



# 03 THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK

The **Great American Songbook** (aka **The Songbook**) is a very large collection of songs written in the 20th century, the majority between 1920 and 1960. It isn't actually a book nor a fixed number of songs; it isn't even an agreed upon list. What it is is a vast catalog of American songs that were popular or had some impact on popular culture. Many of these songs became so widespread and well-loved they are known as **American Standards**, or just **Standards**.

The Great American Songbook is gloriously, uniquely American. In the rapidly changing first half of the 20th century, particularly in the 1920s through 1940s, composers were writing music that resonates with listeners and performers to this day. Beginning with the jazz age then heading into the great depression and the war years, the music being created was truly hopeful and uplifting, a great part of the soundtrack of our growing nation.

The Songbook's earliest tunes written around the turn of the century, and its roots are in Tin Pan Alley, the area in New York City that was the hub of songwriting and music publishers. There, composers wrote songs for publication, first as sheet music, then for sound recordings. Quickly, songs written for Broadway and then Hollywood joined the collection.

In America before rock-n-roll, when the songwriter playing their own music became the norm, the majority of songs were written for someone else to perform. The songs in The Songbook were most often created by professional songwriters, working as a two-person team of a composer (the writer of the music) and lyricist (the writer of the words). Whether written for purpose like a musical or movie or just for publication, a good song would be noticed and then recorded by different vocalists, all doing their own interpretation.

## WHAT MAKES THE SONGS IN THE GREAT AMERICAN SONG BOOK GREAT?

The inclusion of a song is based on popular tastes combined with critical opinion: The song is of high quality, with interesting and engaging lyrics and has immediate musical appeal. Many songs have had lasting popularity, becoming well known all over the world and recorded by hundreds, if not thousands, of performers. Standards remain as popular today as they were half a century ago, and musicians from very different music fields continue to record and perform songs written 70, 80, and even 100 years ago.

# 04



# 05 JOHNNY MERCER



**Johnny Mercer** is one of the most prolific songwriters represented in the **Great American Songbook**. He wrote the words to more than a thousand songs! While he was primarily a lyricist working with other composers, he was also composer himself, and several of his own songs are included in **The Songbook**.

WE ARE GOING TO CHECK OUT FOUR STANDARDS JOHNNY MERCER EITHER COMPOSED HIMSELF OR CO-WROTE WITH OTHERS TO SEE HOW THEY WORK.

## “SOMETHING’S GOTTA GIVE” (1954)

COMPOSED BY JOHNNY MERCER



The song, nominated for an Academy Award, is from the Mercer scored film *Daddy Long Legs*. Mercer said he woke up in the middle of the night, walked to his piano and picked out the melody with one finger and wrote the words, finishing it the next day. He attributed it to his subconscious, possibly being worried about finishing the movie score.

Before he became known for songwriting, Mercer started his music career as a singer with Paul Whiteman's band in New York in the early 1930s. With Whiteman, he was able to write and perform his own songs, which led to his meeting other songwriters like Hoagy Carmichael, with whom he wrote his first hit, "Lazybones." He continued to perform and even had his own radio show in the early 1940s. At the same time he started writing for Broadway, and then Hollywood. Considered one of the greatest American songwriters, particularly as a lyricist, Mercer wrote more than 1,400 songs and won four Academy Awards.

These four songs were composed between 1941 and 1954, and were written at different times for different purposes. In spite of their differences however, these songs, and most of the songs in the Great American Songbook, share many, many of the same musical elements.

## “SATIN DOLL” (1953)

WRITTEN WITH COMPOSERS DUKE ELLINGTON AND BILLY STRAYHORN



“Satin Doll” was an instrumental tune, composed for a big band to perform. The song is often referred to as Ellington's last “pop” hit. Already considered an instrumental Standard when Mercer wrote the lyrics in 1958, “Satin Doll” became even better known, recorded and performed throughout the world. An audience favorite, Ellington would usually close performances with the song.

Edward “Duke” Ellington is considered one of the greatest composers, musicians, and bandleaders America has ever produced. His contributions to music helped to define twentieth century America. He was a great pianist and led his own band for over thirty years. While his primary style was jazz, he refused to be categorized and referred to his music as American Music. When composing Ellington thought more in orchestral terms than in jazz, writing extended compositions, suites and film scores in addition to many short tunes: he wrote more than two thousand pieces of music! Ellington had a writing and arranging partner for many years named Billy Strayhorn, who contributed greatly to Ellington's musical legacy. Strayhorn wrote “Satin Doll” with Ellington, adding harmonization, arranging it, and even writing the original lyrics.



# 06





# THE HOOK

Think of a song you really like. How does it make you feel? Does it make you want to move? Tap your foot, or hum a melody? Whatever it does, the song is going to stay with you and make you want to hear it again. Think of more songs, do you like them for the same reason? Probably not, because every song is different and stands out in its own way.

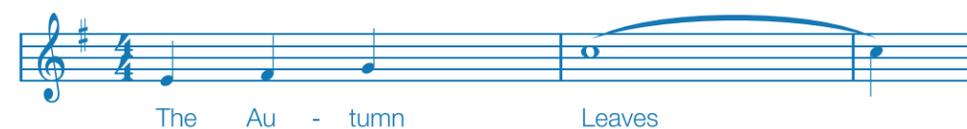
## WHAT MAKES A SONG STAND OUT AND GET OUR ATTENTION? THE HOOK.

The **Hook** is central to the song: the part that makes the song catchy and memorable, which you will find yourself humming or moving to, even after the song ends. It grabs or “hooks” you by the ear and won’t let go. The hook is a musical device made up of short melodic and/or rhythmic ideas, often but not always with words. **Phrases, riffs, grooves:** any or all of these can be the hook. The cool thing is that you don’t think about it while you are listening, but the hook seizes and keeps your interest, making the song memorable and fun.

The hook can happen anywhere; the very beginning, a few phrases into the song, in the chorus, or in between.

### FOR EXAMPLE, THE HOOK MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE FIRST THREE OR FOUR NOTES:

## “AUTUMN LEAVES”



OTHER TIMES IT HAPPENS IN THE FIRST PHRASE:

## “BLUES IN THE NIGHT”



OR AT THE END OF THE FIRST VERSE:

## “SOMETHING’S GOTTA GIVE”



OR IT CAN EVEN HAPPEN IN THE LAST PHRASE:

## “SATIN DOLL”



IN ADDITION TO THE HOOK, POP SONGS ARE MADE UP OF FOUR BASIC PARTS:

### RHYTHM

**Rhythm** you feel. It is the **pulse** and the **groove** that keeps a song going.

### MELODY

**Melody** is what you really focus on: the strongest, most memorable line that is sung or played.

### FORM

**Form** is the shape of the whole song: different sections put together in a specific order to create structure.

### HARMONY

**Harmony** is the backbone: the nuts and bolts notes that provide a sonic foundation for the melody and give the song depth and direction, making it more interesting.

## RHYTHM



The first thing we hear when listening to a song is the **RHYTHM**, even if we don't notice!

**Rhythm** is the **Pulse** and the **Feel** in music. It is a combination of **strong and weak sounds, repeated pulse patterns,** and notes with **long and short durations.**

IMAGINE LONGER AND SHORTER SOUNDS AS LONGER AND SHORTER SIZE LINES:



Longer and shorter notes are combined to create the rhythm in a song. For example, say the rhythm for "Autumn Leaves":

"short short short loooooooooong"



The dominant pulse, the one we feel strongest, is called the Beat. The beat is steady, like a heartbeat or ticking clock, and is what we find ourselves clapping with or tapping our foot to.

LISTEN TO A MERCER SONG LIKE "AUTUMN LEAVES" AND TAP OR CLAP THE PULSE THAT YOU FEEL.

DOES IT FEEL LIKE THERE IS A PATTERN, OR A GROUP OF BEATS? HOW MANY BEATS? DO YOU HEAR 3 BEATS, 4 BEATS, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

IN SONGS, THE PULSE FORMS INTO REPEATED GROUPS OF BEATS. THESE GROUPS OF BEATS ARE CALLED THE METER, AND THE MOST COMMON METER IS THE FOUR BEAT PATTERN, OR JUST "4":



The majority of songs in the Songbook, as well as in rock, jazz, dance music, hip-hop, etc., are in **4**, but there are plenty of songs in other meters, especially ones in **3** and **6**.

Meter is notated as **Time Signatures**; the top number is the **meter**, indicating how many beats are in a **measure (bar)**. The bottom number specifies what kind of note is counted as the **beat**.

**4 = 4 BEATS IN EVERY BAR**

**4 = THE QUARTER NOTE IS COUNTED AS THE BEAT**

NOTICE THAT ALL FOUR OF OUR SONGS ARE WRITTEN IN  $\frac{4}{4}$

Now take those beats, use them to make **Notes** with different lengths (called their **duration**) and give them names. Each of these notes can also be **rests** (where there is silence instead of sound):

WHEN THE TIME SIGNATURE IS  $\frac{4}{4}$

ONE SOUND FOR ONE BEAT IS A QUARTER NOTE | SILIENCE FOR ONE BEAT IS A QUARTER REST

Then they can be added together to make longer notes.

ONE SOUND FOR TWO BEATS IS A HALF NOTE | SILIENCE FOR TWO BEATS IS A HALF REST

ONE SOUND FOR FOUR BEATS IS A WHOLE NOTE | SILIENCE FOR FOUR BEATS IS A WHOLE REST

Notes that are shorter than a beat are made by subdividing it.

TWO SOUNDS FOR ONE BEAT IS TWO EIGHTH NOTES | THIS IS A SINGLE EIGHTH REST

FOUR SOUNDS FOR ONE BEAT IS SIXTEENTH NOTES

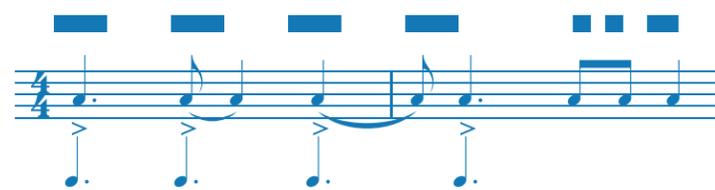
THIS IS A SINGLE SIXTEENTH REST

## TAKE THOSE LONG AND SHORT NOTES (AND RESTS), PUT THEM TOGETHER AND IT MAKES A RHYTHM! A SONG'S RHYTHM IS AS COMPLICATED OR AS SIMPLE AS THE COMPOSER WANTS TO IT TO BE.

"Autumn Leaves" keeps it simple: all quarter and whole notes. Notice the **tie** creating a five beat note.



"Something's Gotta Give" has repeated dotted quarter notes.



The other songs all have **dotted notes**, which are created by taking a note and making it longer, by adding to it half its value. For example, a half note plus a quarter note is written as a dotted half note.



A quarter plus an eighth note is written as a dotted quarter note and is equal to three eighth notes.



The repeated dotted quarter notes makes the rhythm feel off the beat, or **Syncopated**.

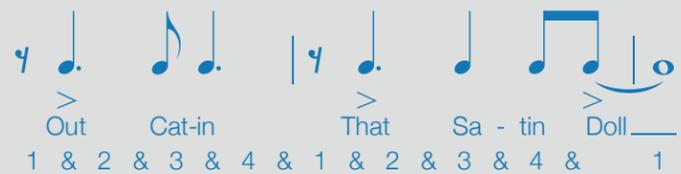
### TRY THIS

While keeping a steady beat, say the words with the rhythm in **EXAMPLE 1**.

#### EXAMPLE 1

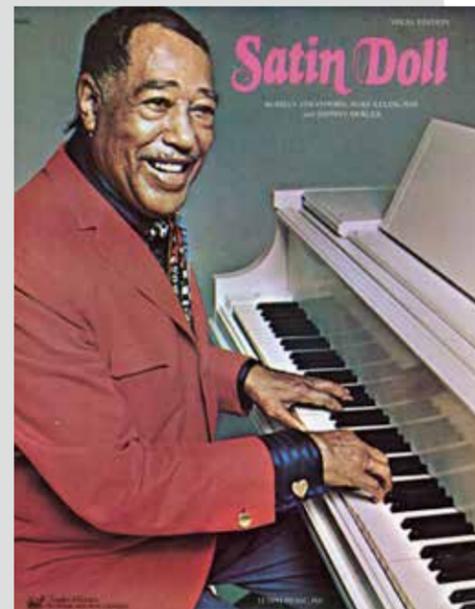


#### EXAMPLE 2



Then say them with Duke Ellington's rhythm in **EXAMPLE 2**.

Notice that the words in **EXAMPLE 2** are **anticipated**, making it feel like it **swings**.



● **TOP:** Johnny Mercer on the Ray Anthony Show, **MIDDLE:** Benny Goodman Orchestra, **BOTTOM:** Johnny Mercer

## DOTTED RHYTHMS SUBDIVIDE BEATS INTO UNEVEN LONG AND SHORT NOTES, USING DOTTED NOTES.



"Satin Doll" uses dotted rhythms - dotted eighth notes and dotted quarter notes.



The dotted eighth/sixteenth note rhythm gives this a strong **swing feel**. When there are three notes where you usually see two, it is called a **Triplet**.

Eighth note Triplets have three sounds to a quarter note:



Quarter note Triplets sound three to a half note:



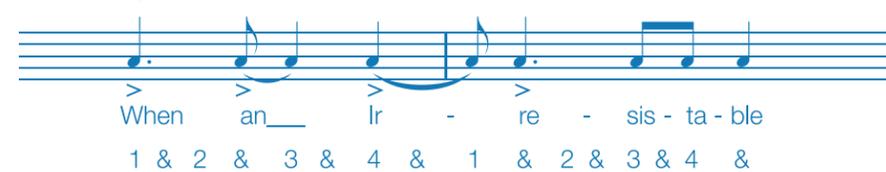
"Blues in the Night" makes use of Triplets.



## THERE ARE COOL TRICKS THAT COMPOSERS DO WITH RHYTHMS TO MAKE THEM INTERESTING.

The previously mentioned **Syncopation** is popular device in songs, especially in jazz. It is the way we describe a rhythm that is uneven or irregular, and feels off the beat. **Syncopation** is usually created by shifting the rhythm by an eighth note, putting the strong note emphasis on the **upbeat** (the &).

"Something's Gotta Give"



A syncopated phrase might feel like it starts later than it should or jumps in too soon, or have notes that sound **anticipated or delayed**. **Anticipations** are used throughout "Satin Doll."



## MELODY



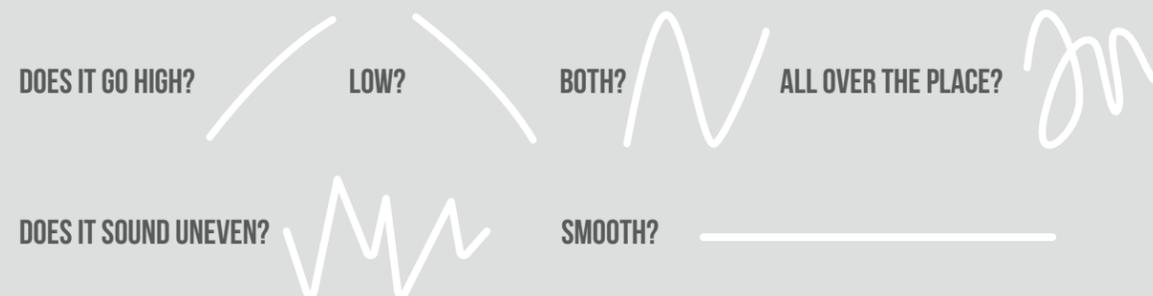
Have you ever heard a song you wanted to hum along with? That song's hook is probably its melody. While a song's rhythm is likely to get you to snap your fingers or dance, the melody gets in your head.

NOW, WE TAKE THE RHYTHM AND ADD PITCH TO IT, TO CREATE **MELODY**.

The **melody**, or **tune**, is the most important element in a song. When we hear a song we will feel the rhythm, but the melody is the part we focus on and really listen to. It is the centerpiece of the song, the memorable part that we keep humming afterword.

## TRY THIS

THINK OF A SONG YOU LIKE TO HUM.  
PICTURE IN YOUR MIND WHAT HAPPENS IN THE MELODY.  
THEN DRAW THE SHAPE OF THE MELODY.



A SONG IS MADE UP OF DIFFERENT SECTIONS, SO YOU WILL PROBABLY HEAR MORE THAN ONE MELODY. EACH OF THOSE MELODIES CREATED BY PUTTING A BUNCH OF DIFFERENT PARTS TOGETHER.



"GOODY GOODY"



"MOON RIVER"



"AND THE ANGELS SING"

START WITH THE SMALLEST PARTS: **MOTIVES**

A **Motive**, (or **Motif**), is a short musical idea, sometimes just a few notes, that reoccurs in a song and helps define how it sounds. A motive can be a piece of melody or a short rhythm, or both. Motives repeat in a song; sometimes they are exactly the same, and sometimes with changed pitches or rhythms, but you will still recognize them as a motive.

**RHYTHMIC MOTIVES REPEAT THE SAME OR SIMILAR RECOGNIZABLE SHORT RHYTHM:**

On "Something's Gotta Give", notice that rhythm stands out more than the pitches.

"Something's Gotta Give" has to be rhythmically interesting because the first melody motive only has one note! The melody would look like this:

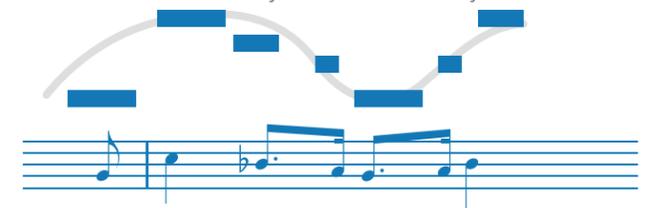


When an ir - re - sis - ta - ble

**Melodic Motives** repeat the same **short melodic idea**, sometimes in different parts of the key, but always recognizable.

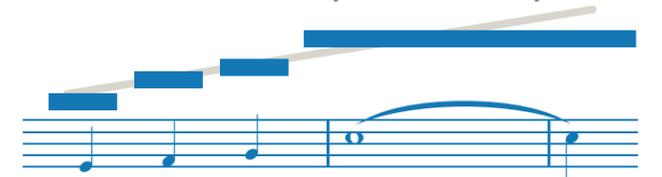
On "Satin Doll" and "Autumn Leaves," the pitch is the more interesting part of the motive.

"Satin Doll" Add the rhythm to the melody:



She's no - bod - y's fool so I'm

"Autumn Leaves" Add the rhythm to the melody:



The Au - tumn Leaves





As you see, a **Melody** is made up of a bunch of small parts combined to make bigger parts. **Motives** are put together to create **Phrases**, and when you put phrases together you create **Sections**. A section usually has a set number of bars or measures, and when one or more sections are combined, they **Form a Song!**

### ALL SONGS HAVE A FORM.

The sections that make up different parts of songs have names. Song form terminology has changed over time, but nowadays most people agree on these names for song sections.

The sections most commonly used are the **verse**, **bridge**, and the **refrain** or **chorus**. A **Verse** is a repeated section, usually with very little change in rhythm or melody, but different lyrics for each repeat. A **Bridge** is section of different or contrasting music that comes between, like a bridge, other sections such as verses. The **Refrain** or **Chorus** refers to a contrasting section that uses the same lyrics every time it repeats, and is often the catchiest part of the song. We label sections by using letters of the alphabet: **A, B, C, D** etc.

The most widely used song form for Great American Songbook composers has been the **32-bar AABA** form, now known as the **American popular song form**. Each section is usually 8 bars long.

**A = Verse** and **B = Bridge**, so the form is **Verse (A), Verse (A), Bridge (B), Verse (A)**

Both "Something's Gotta Give" and "Satin Doll" are songs with the **32-bar AABA form**. All the verses use the same melody, and a bridge that has a different melody.



## "SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE"

### VERSE 1 (A)

When an irresistible force such as you, (phrase 1)  
Meets an old immovable object like me, (phrase 2)  
You can bet just as sure as you live, (phrase 3)  
SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE, SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE, SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE. (phrase 4 and the hook)

### VERSE 2 (A)

When an irresistible smile such as yours,  
Meets an old implacable heart such as mine  
Don't say no because I insist,  
Somewhere, Somehow, Someone's gonna be kissed.

### BRIDGE (B) (NEW MELODY)

So en garde, who knows what the fates have in store,  
From their vast mysterious sky.  
I'll try hard ignoring those lips I adore,  
But how hard can anyone try?

### VERSE 3 (A)

Fight, fight, fight, fight, fight with all of our might,  
Chances are, some heavenly star-spangled night,  
We'll find out just as sure as we live,  
SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE, SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE, SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE.



There are complicated songs out there, but almost all composers of popular songs use simpler forms. For example, a simple song form might have just an A section, just a bunch of verses, so it would be AAAA form.

The most popular form for modern rock and pop songs is Verse/Chorus, which we could call AB form.

Another popular American Song Form is the **12-Bar Blues**. A 12-Bar Blues is made up of three 4 bar phrases. The first two phrases (**A**) are usually similar, but the third phrase (**B**) is different and often is an “answer” to the first 2 phrases. This makes the form **AAB**. The blues often tells a story of a hardship:

## “MY BABY BLUES” (BILL NITTLER)

**PHRASE 1 (A)** My ba-by left me,\_\_\_ And I feel so bad\_\_\_\_\_

**PHRASE 2 (A)** Oh, My ba-by left me,\_\_\_ And I feel so bad\_\_\_\_\_

**PHRASE 3 (B)** She was the best girl\_\_\_ That I\_\_\_ ev - er had.\_\_\_\_\_

“Blues in the Night” is a cool variation of this: every **Verse (A)** is a 12-bar blues! It also contains a Bridge that repeats (**BB**) and a **Coda (C)**.

A **Coda** is a separate section, happening **only at the end of the song** that consists of different music from the verse, chorus or bridge:

## “BLUES IN THE NIGHT”

**CODA (C)** My ma-ma was right, there's Blues\_\_\_\_\_ in the Night.

Since there are two verses, the bridge, and another verse, the overall form for “Blues in the Night” is **AABBAC**.

The form of “Autumn Leaves” is different from most songs. It has a repeated **8 bar Verse**, followed by a **16 bar Chorus**, making the form **AAB**.

All our songs contain these parts, but there are other sections composers often add.

Many songs in The Songbook originally included an **Intro** (short for **introduction**), which happens only at the beginning. Usually sung **Rubato** (slowly and freely), Intros were popular with the Songbook composers, but are rarely performed with the songs today.

Sometimes, as a fancy way to end a song, the last phrase or two are **tagged** or repeated a few times. This is called a **Tag**.

When playing “Satin Doll”, the performer often **Tags** the last phrase a couple of times:

## “SATIN DOLL”

**TAG** And that “n” my Sa-tin Doll,\_\_\_ And that “n” my Sa-tin Doll.\_\_\_\_\_

### TRY THIS

Listen to recordings of different songs and identify the form by finding all the different parts. Listen for phrases, repeated melodies, parts that change, etc.

Is there a **verse** that repeats plus a **chorus**?

How many bars long is each section?

Is there an **introduction** that is performed **rubato** before the main song starts?

Is there new or different music at the end, like a **coda**?

Can you figure out the form?

It might take listening through it a couple of times to hear all the parts.

### SOME GOOD SONGS TO CHECK OUT:

“In the Cool Cool Cool of the Evening”  
by Dean Martin

“Accentuate the Positive”  
by Johnny Mercer and The Pied Pipers

“And the Angels Sing”  
by Edyie Gorme

“Hooray for Hollywood”  
by Rosemary Clooney

“Day in Day Out”  
by Nat King Cole

## HARMONY



All by itself, a melody made of notes played one at a time can sound a little lonely, so we add more notes to provide a foundation for the melody, creating HARMONY.

LISTEN TO THE SONG “ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE” [ON THE JMF WEBSITE]

<https://www.johnnymercerfoundation.org/audio-player/>

## WHAT DO YOU HEAR?

There is the melody of course, and drums keeping the beat, but what else is going on? There are other instruments: bass, guitar, horns and strings, and other vocals, that are playing notes other than the melody. All these other notes provide a foundation for the melody and help give the song direction.

Composers and arrangers know how to take a melody and add more notes or combinations of notes to make it more interesting.

While you are listening, try to pick out and hear the individual instruments. Start with the bass (the low, low notes).

The bass is playing single notes, mostly half and quarter notes, keeping the pulse and moving the song forward. The horns and guitar add other short and long notes and phrases to accompany the melody. When the vocals come in, they are singing with the melody, but using different notes.

An easy way to **Harmonize** with a melody is to play or sing it while starting on a different note. This can sound really good or really bad, it depends on your starting note.

Rounds like “Row Row Row Your Boat” are a good example, as **harmony** is created when the melody is performed by two or more people starting at different times.

The vocals are **harmonizing** with the melody on “Accentuate the Positive.”

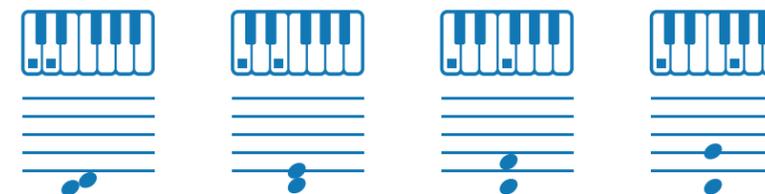
The other way to create harmony with the melody is with **Chords**. A chord is two or more notes played together that accompany the melody. Some chords will sound better with the melody, while others will not.

The guitar is using chords to accompany the melody in “Accentuate the Positive,” and the horns playing together also create chords.

● **BOTTOM:** Johnny Mercer and Nat King Cole.

## TRY THIS

On a piano or keyboard: Play two notes, first one at a time, then together at the same time, listening to how they sound. Start by playing two notes that are next to each other. Next, keep the same note on the bottom, skip a key to the next note up and play them. Play more pairs of notes, making the distance between them larger, until you get to the same note both low and high.



Did all the pairs of notes sound the same, or did they mostly sound different from each other? Play three or four notes together in different combinations.



Did some chords sound more pleasant than others? Were there some **chords** that sounded harsh or made you cringe? Songs use both kinds of these chords all the time.

Harmony is not there only to accompany the melody, it is also important for keeping the song moving forward. Harmony that moves between the pleasant (**consonant**) sounding chords and the harsh (**dissonant**) sounding chords helps to hook our ears and keeps us interested in where the song is going. The way we put these chords together is called **Chord Progressions**. Chord progressions take different chords, both consonant and dissonant, and puts them in order in a way where one chord naturally leads to another. This works because dissonant sounds create tension, then resolve to consonant sounds. Just like with rhythm, when we are listening to a song we don't notice the chords changing, but we do hear it happening. While it would be hard to write an interesting song that has just one chord, a song with just two or three chords can sound great.

Listen one more time to “Accentuate the Positive” and try to hear how the harmony is leading you. Can you hear how the chord progression guides you through each section?



# 25 TONALITY & CHARACTER

## WHEN LISTENING TO A MELODY, YOU AREN'T JUST HEARING A BUNCH RANDOM NOTES PUT TOGETHER.

Almost all songs feel like they have a **tonal center**. This is because they are composed using a group of pitches that sound good together. These pitches form the heart of the melody, and within that set of pitches there will be one note, called the **Tonic**, that feels like home base; it is as if the melody is pulling you there. We refer to these pitches as the **Key**. In Western music, while there are **twelve** different pitches in total, the key is centered around just **seven notes**. Those notes determine how the song will sound overall, and give it character we call **Tonality**.

The remaining **five notes** that are not in the key can be added to enhance a phrase, or the entire song's character. These notes are called **Accidentals** and are notated using **Flats**, **Sharps**, and **Naturals**.

Most songs will have accidentals, to help define it's own unique characteristics and keep it interesting.

A simple way to describe a song's overall character is by one of two different tonalities: **Major** and **Minor**. Words that describe the difference in the sound of major and minor could include bright and dark, cheerful and somber, or simply, happy and sad. However, while a song might have a major or minor tonality, it does not mean the song itself is going to be joyous, miserable, or in between. All the other parts, including the words, will determine that.

"Autumn Leaves" is the only one of our four songs that is in **Minor Key**, with sad lyrics that reflect it.

**[BUT I MISS YOU MOST OF ALL, MY DARLING, WHEN AUTUMN LEAVES START TO FALL]**

**b FLATS**  
1/2 STEP LOWER

**# SHARPS**  
1/2 STEP HIGHER

**♮ NATURALS**  
REMOVE A SHARP OR FLAT

The seven notes that make up the key and create the tonality developed from pitches played in a sequence of **whole** and **half steps**.

The closest distance between two notes is a **Half Step**. Two half steps combine to make a **Whole Step**. Notes played **step-wise** in a pattern of whole and half steps create **Scales**.

In Western music, the most important scale is the **Major Scale**. The way we compose music, notate music, and talk about music: all of it evolved from the major scale.

It is also the most well-known scale, you've probably heard it sung with the syllables **DO RE MI FA SOL LA TI DO**.

# 26

THE MAJOR SCALE STARTS ON THE TONIC [DO]:

whole whole half whole whole whole half

DO RE MI FA SOL LA TI DO

THE MINOR SCALE USES THE SAME NOTES OF THE MAJOR SCALE BUT STARTS ON THE SIXTH NOTE [LA]:

LA TI DO RE MI FA SOL LA

WE HEAR SCALES AND SCALE PATTERNS IN MELODIES ALL THE TIME.

The **Minor scale** is cool; it has really interesting variations. Composers will add accidentals to a minor melody to add more character to the song, making it catchier. For example, raising, or **sharpening** the seventh note, or both the sixth and seventh notes in "Autumn Leaves".

Bars 7-8, fourth phrase:

Sharp 6 Sharp 7

Adding accidentals can change a song's character in other ways. A **Blue Note** is the lowering, or **flattening**, of a specific pitch that gives the phrase a "bluesy" character. **Flattening the 3rd** note is most common, but **flat 7ths** and **5ths** are also used. "Blues in the Night" uses **blue notes** a lot.

Bar 10

Flat 3rd Flat 7th

### TRY THIS

TAKE THE MAJOR SCALE AND SING OR PLAY IT, THEN ADD SOME ACCIDENTALS.

THIS IS A C MAJOR SCALE. IT USES ONLY THE WHITE KEYS ON A KEYBOARD, STARTING ON C:



FIRST TRY ADDING SHARP OR THREE:



THEN FLAT DIFFERENT NOTES:



There is one note in the scale that, when changed, makes major sound minor. Can you find and identify which note? Is it flattened or sharpened?

Do certain notes you changed sound better than others? Figure out the changes you think sound best, then use them to invent your own scale. Write it down.

You are working the same way composers do, starting with a set of notes that creates tonality for the song, then adding and changing notes to create what you feel sounds best.



## THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SONGS THAT MAKE UP THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK

The Great American Songbook **Genre** was broadly defined in the introduction of this booklet. Within The Songbook, there are many various types of songs that were written for all kinds of reasons.

One way we categorize and label these types of songs is by **Style**. Composers often write a song in a particular style for a certain purpose, but a song often changes and ends up being used for other purposes, especially as it becomes more popular over time. Take “Autumn Leaves” for example. At first, the song was composed for a French movie, then rewritten with English lyrics for American audiences - eventually becoming a standard used in other movies, and performed by musicians and singers all over the world. Originally considered a ballad, but Jazz musicians are just as likely to perform “Autumn Leaves” as a swing tune.

Some of the song styles and/or categories found in the Great American Songbook include **Jazz Standards, Ballads, Swing Dance Tunes, Blues, Show Tunes and Movie Songs, Novelty Songs, and Torch Songs.**



SOME OF THE SONG STYLES AND/OR CATEGORIES FOUND IN THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK INCLUDE **JAZZ STANDARDS, BALLADS, SWING DANCE TUNES, BLUES, SHOW TUNES AND MOVIE SONGS, NOVELTY SONGS, AND TORCH SONGS.**

**Jazz Standards** are part of a jazz musician's popular **Repertoire** that are performed regularly and well known by the listeners. As noted earlier, many Great American Songbook tunes are standards and plenty of these songs have become jazz standards.

A **Ballad** is a slow song. Historically, a ballad told a story about love, heartbreak or other sentimental topics, but in modern times the name mostly refers to the slow **tempo** of a song.

**Swing Dance Tunes** were written for just that purpose. The term **Swing** comes from **jazz** and refers to the way the **syncopated rhythm** feels and how it makes you want to move or dance.

The **Blues** is a both a genre and a song form. It uses specific **chord progressions**, and variations like **blue notes**, and the words tend to be about lamenting all the sad or bad things in one's life.

**Show Tunes and Movie Songs** are songs that are composed either for a specific stage production (like a Broadway musical), or for use in a movie in Hollywood. The lyrics often relate directly to the story, or to a specific scene or action in a production.

**Torch Songs** refer to the lyrics. They are typically sad melodramatic love songs, usually about having a broken heart.

**Novelty Songs** are written specifically with the purpose of being funny or silly. Songbook songs that were hugely popular include “Yes, We Have No Bananas,” and “All I Want For Christmas is My Two Front Teeth.”



# GLOSSARY

- ▶ **12-Bar Blues:** Song form with three 4-bar phrases.
- ▶ **AABA Form:** A 32-bar song form that was commonly used in jazz and early popular music.
- ▶ **Accidental:** Symbols that change a note up or down, such as a sharp, flat or natural.
- ▶ **Anticipation/Delay:** A phrase that feels like it comes in too soon or starts too late.
- ▶ **Beat:** The steady pulse in music, measured as a unit of musical time.
- ▶ **Blue Note:** Certain notes that are lowered or played flat, giving a melody a bluesy feeling.
- ▶ **Bridge:** The middle section of a song that connects verses or other sections of music.
- ▶ **Chord:** Notes played together creating one sound.
- ▶ **Chord Progression:** Chords combined in specific orders, creating a song's harmonic structure.
- ▶ **Chorus/Refrain:** The section of a song that uses the same lyrics each time it repeats.
- ▶ **Coda:** A different section of music added at the end of a song.
- ▶ **Consonance/Dissonance:** The pleasant and unpleasant sound quality of chords. Dissonant sounds create tension that resolves to consonant sounds giving a song harmonic direction.
- ▶ **Dotted Note:** A note's duration that increased by half of its value.
- ▶ **Downbeat:** Beat 1 of the first bar in a song. Also, the first note in a pair of eighth notes, with the second note being the Upbeat.
- ▶ **Duration:** Length of time a note is to be played.
- ▶ **Flat:** To lower the pitch, also the symbol for a lowering the pitch a half step.
- ▶ **Flat 3rd:** Lowering the 3rd of a chord to create a minor or bluesy sound.
- ▶ **Form:** The arrangement of a song's parts or sections.
- ▶ **Half Step:** The closest distance between two pitches.
- ▶ **Harmonize:** Performing notes to accompany the melody.
- ▶ **Harmony:** Sounds added to accompany the melody. Can be single voices or chords.
- ▶ **Intro:** A song's introductory section, performed only at the beginning.
- ▶ **Key:** The set of notes, or scale, that a melody revolves around.
- ▶ **Major:** Tonality based on the major scale.
- ▶ **Bar/Measure:** The space between bar lines on a staff that divides the music up into pieces, based on the meter.

- ▶ **Melodic Motive:** A short reoccurring musical idea.
- ▶ **Melody:** Notes played in sequence, including motives and phrases, that are often combined with words.
- ▶ **Meter:** The pulse, grouped by number of beats, that is felt in a piece of music.
- ▶ **Minor:** Tonality based on the minor scale.
- ▶ **Motive:** A short musical idea that that reoccurs in a song.
- ▶ **Natural:** A note that is not flat or sharp, also the symbol for removing a flat or sharp.
- ▶ **Note:** A pitch that is named and notated.
- ▶ **Phrase:** A musical sentence, created by combining motives.
- ▶ **Pickup:** A phrase that starts before the downbeat.
- ▶ **Pulse:** The repeated beats in music.
- ▶ **Rest:** Notated silence.
- ▶ **Rhythmic Motive:** A short reoccurring rhythmic idea.
- ▶ **Round:** A song that is performed by two or more voices, each starting at a different time.
- ▶ **Rubato:** Music performed without a sense of rhythm or pulse.
- ▶ **Scale:** Notes sequenced in an order of whole and half steps that creates the key and tonality.
- ▶ **Sequence:** A phrase that is repeated on a higher or lower pitch.
- ▶ **Sharp:** To raise the pitch, also the symbol for raising the pitch a half step.
- ▶ **Swing Feel:** Rhythm that swings. Usually associated with jazz.
- ▶ **Syncopation:** Rhythm played off the beat, with the strong emphasis on the upbeat.
- ▶ **Tag:** Repeating the last phrase to end a song.
- ▶ **Tempo:** The speed that a piece of music is performed.
- ▶ **Tie:** A curved line between two notes of the same pitch, adding their duration together.
- ▶ **Time Signature:** The meter as notated on the staff. It looks like a fraction, showing the number of specific beats per bar.
- ▶ **Tonality:** The character of sound created by the created by a scale.
- ▶ **Tonic:** The home-base pitch that the key is centered around.
- ▶ **Triplet:** To play three notes in the time of two notes.
- ▶ **Upbeat:** The second note in a pair of eighth notes, the "and".
- ▶ **Verse:** Repeated section of a song, usually with changing lyrics.
- ▶ **Whole Step:** Two half steps added together.

---

**JOHNNYMERCER.ORG**

---