

# GCSE MUSIC—Conventions of Rock and Pop

## **Rock and Roll**

Popular music is a general term covering the many different styles and genres of music around since the late 18th Century that are considered to be part of modern everyday culture.

Rock 'n' roll is a style of popular music that emerged from America in the 1950s. It has its roots in various African-American styles of music, such as blues, jazz and gospel, and in country music. It was played by both African American and white musicians.

There were many technological developments during this era. Audiences could listen to rock 'n' roll music on the radio and increasingly watch them on television. Mass production of 45 rpm vinyl records, or singles, meant that music could be bought cheaply and easily.

The introduction of the electric guitar was a key development in the sound of rock 'n' roll.

Teenage culture started to develop in the 1950s. Rock 'n' roll was the first style of music to appeal to the new young audience.

Teenagers could identify with rock 'n' roll songs. Lyrics were about subjects such as young love, school, parents and cars. Rock 'n' roll songs allowed young people an opportunity to express their emotions and experiences.

Rock 'n' roll songs were meant for dancing to. They had fast tempos, simple time and syncopated rhythms in the melody.

Instruments that are used in Rock and Roll music are:

Piano, acoustic/electric guitar, bass guitar, double bass, vocals, saxophone, trumpet, drum kit.

A rock and roll piece consists of:

Melody, chords, walking bassline, rhythm and improvisation.

Music is in 4/4 time-signature

Quite often the pieces are in a major tonality

The main performer often improvises over the tonality provided.

Rock and Roll music is still based over the 12 bar blues.

A walking bassline is a repeated pattern based of the structure of 12 bar blues.

The piece uses primary chords I, IV and V within the structure of 12 bars blues.

The instruments consist of: Piano, Guitar, Double Bass, Harmonica, Trumpet, Saxophone, Drum Kit.

The music is structured in song form – verse and chorus.

**Chuck Berry** (October 18, 1926 – March 18, 2017) was an American singer, guitarist and songwriter who pioneered rock and roll. Nicknamed the "Father of Rock and Roll", he refined and developed rhythm and blues into the major elements that made rock and roll distinctive with songs such as "Rock and Roll Music" (1957) and "Johnny B. Goode" (1958).

**Bill Haley and the Comets** (July 6, 1925 – February 9, 1981) was an American rock and roll musician. He is credited by many with first popularizing this form of music in the early 1950s with his group Bill Haley & His Comets and million-selling hits such as "Rock Around the Clock", "See You Later, Alligator", "Shake, Rattle and Roll".

**Elvis Aaron Presley** (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977), often referred to as **Elvis**, was an American singer and actor. Known as the "King of Rock and Roll", he is regarded as one of the most significant cultural figures of the 20th century.

**Charles Hardin Holley** (September 7, 1936 – February 3, 1959), known as **Buddy Holly**, was an American singer and songwriter who was a central and pioneering figure of mid-1950s rock and roll.

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## Rock Anthems

During the 1960's Rock 'n' Roll evolved into more guitar-dominated music known simply as rock. Like the 12-bar blues rock songs ten to be based around the chords 1, 4 & 5. Songs are often in 4/4 with a steady drum rhythm & follow a verse - chorus structure.

It can come in many different styles but usually features: electric guitar, bass guitar, drum kit

The songs written by rock bands usually have powerful lyrics and the music underpinned by a heavy beat.

They feature a verse and chorus structure and there will often be a middle eight.

This means changing the normal sound of a guitar in order to make it more 'fuzzy'.

**Structure** - As rock developed so did the structure (this tended to mean longer songs!). At first the structures were similar to the Rock 'n' Roll of the 1950's & early 1960's but as time moved on Rock bands became more experimental, adding long guitar/drum solo's, psychedelic jams & even concept albums that were one long piece of music.

**Instruments** - As rock music developed, more instruments were added. In some songs bands might use a string section, a brass section or a wind section.

They also may have used keyboard instruments such as Synthesisers, Hammond Organs and Pianos. This is in addition to the standard instruments of Drums, Bass Guitar, Electric Guitar and Vocals

**Sub-Genres** - Over time, rock has branched into a number of sub-genres such as Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Glam Rock, Arena Rock, Progressive (Prog) Rock and Punk Rock.

Classic Rock songs are known as Anthems. They usually have memorable, singable choruses.

**Tempo** - Moderate to Medium Fast (*Allegro Moderato*) 110-120 bpm. 4/4 Time Signature. Strong steady "Rock Beat".

**Harmony & Tonality** - Early Rock uses mainly Primary Chords (I, IV & V) but later Rock uses Auxiliary Chords, Chromatic Chords, Added Sixth Chords, First and Second Inversion Chords and Altered Note Chords. Power Chords (chords which don't contain the 3rd e.g. C5) are a key feature of Rock Music

**Melody** - Performed by the lead singer with lyrical vocal phrases featuring repeated patterns.

**Dynamics** - Due to heavy amplification, Rock Music is designed to be performed very loudly – *Fortissimo (ff)*.

**Rhythm** - Strong and Driving Rhythms. Incessant Drumming Patterns. Use of a heavy Bass Drum and continuation of use of Backbeat (emphasising the 2nd and 4th beats of the bar on the Snare Drum).

**Texture** - Homophonic (Melody and Accompaniment) Texture although thick Polyphonic Textures are often used when singers, guitars and drums play different rhythms at the same time.

**Articulation** - Effects added to guitars: Distortion, Echo, Reverb, Overdrive, Delay, Wah-wah and Feedback (

**Accompaniment** - Lead singer accompanied by band that provide the accompanying rhythm, bass line and chords, although there are opportunities for virtuosic instrumental solos.

**Form & Structure** - Verse-Chorus Form. Long Intros. Modulation in the Bridge (extended instrumental solo improvisation). Memorable Chorus.

**Vocal Performance & Technique** - Mainly male vocal lead-singer singing with a growly, raspy and husky-style of singing using very high pitch screams singing with Vibrato but not Falsetto.

**Technology** - Amplification technology developed – louder volumes. New sounds and effects: Distortion, Wah-wah, Delay, Overdrive. Multi-track recording

**Led Zeppelin** were an English rock band formed in London in 1968. The group comprised vocalist Robert Plant, guitarist Jimmy Page, bassist and keyboardist John Paul Jones, and drummer John Bonham.

**The Eagles** are an American rock band formed in Los Angeles in 1971. With five number-one singles and six number-one albums, six Grammy Awards and five American Music Awards, the Eagles were one of the most successful musical acts of the 1970s in North America.

**James Marshall "Jimi" Hendrix** (born **Johnny Allen Hendrix**; November 27, 1942 – September 18, 1970) was an American guitarist, songwriter and singer. Although his mainstream career spanned only four years, he is widely regarded as one of the most influential electric guitarists in the history of popular music, and one of the most celebrated musicians of the 20th century.

**Black Sabbath** were an English rock band formed in Birmingham in 1968 by guitarist Tony Iommi, drummer Bill Ward, bassist Geezer Butler and vocalist Ozzy Osbourne.

**Deep Purple** are an English rock band formed in London in 1968. They are considered to be among the pioneers of heavy metal and modern hard rock, but their musical approach has changed over the years.

**Queen** are a British rock band formed in London in 1970 by Freddie Mercury (lead vocals, piano), Brian May (guitar, vocals) and Roger Taylor (drums, vocals), later joined by John Deacon (bass).

## Ballads

They tell stories with a twist at the end – it keeps people listening. Quite often they are about relationships and love.

The ballad is one of the oldest forms of poetry in the English language. Across Europe, ballads were sung and performed to ordinary people and noble people alike. People remembered them and passed them on by reciting them to others. In the 15th century ballads began to be written down.

Ballads are associated with music and were passed on by travellers through song, in order to share news and stories orally. The catchy rhythm and rhyme scheme of ballads meant it was easy to remember them, and to pass them on to another village or community.

Ballads were written about many topics. These included sharing real life events and reporting news, the more shocking the better! Sometimes they were political, being rude about leaders and politicians, or campaigning for change. Later 'literary' ballads told romantic and supernatural stories with ghosts and visions, often looking back in time to the days of knights and ladies.

- It uses repetition within its music.
- Accompaniment in homophonic
- Inversion of motifs sung in melody
- Reflects theme of lyrics

**Structure:** Verse and Chorus. Each verse has the same rhythm and tune, but different lyrics. Chorus has a different tune to the verses. If catchy, and the lyrics don't change. Both the verse and the chorus is 8 or 16 bars long. A middle 8, or bridge, is used to stop a song getting repetitive. Usually finishes with a coda or outro. It is an 8 bar section in the middle of the song with new chords and lyrics.

**Melody** - There is often a lead singer singing the main tune and backing vocalists singing harmonies sometimes in call and response

Sometimes there is a higher vocal line called the decant

Sometimes the singers sing in unison, sometimes they sing in harmony

The **tempo** is often slow

**Technology** - Amplification technology developed – louder volumes. New sounds and effects: Distortion, Wah-wah, Delay, Overdrive. Multi-track recording created increasingly complex texture

**Venue** - Louder amplification = increasingly larger audiences in stadiums, sports arenas and pop festivals. Performances feature special effects – light shows and pyrotechnics

**Instruments** – Electric guitar, acoustic guitar, bass guitar, piano, drum kit, synths are sometimes used and also string orchestra

Ballads are very expressive

**Tonality** – These can be written in a major or minor key signature

### **Elton John – Sir Elton Hercules**

**John** CH CBE (born **Reginald Kenneth Dwight**; 25 March 1947) is a British singer, pianist and composer. Acclaimed by critics and musicians, particularly for his work during the 1970s and for his lasting impact on the music industry, his music and showmanship have had a significant impact on popular music.

**Whitney Houston - Whitney Elizabeth Houston** (August 9, 1963 – February 11, 2012) was an American singer and actress. Nicknamed "the Voice", she is one of the best-selling music artists of all time, with over 220 million records sold worldwide.

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## Solo Artists—1990s to Present Day

Solo artists have been around for ages! But, your music exam will only focus on solo artists from the **1990s** up to **present day**.

Different styles of Popular Music will use similar instrumentation. Solo artists use lots of Music technology, but they use traditional instruments as well. Drum kit or Drum machine, Bass guitar (electric), Electric Guitar and/or Acoustic Guitar, Vocals (and backing vocals), Synthesizer, Piano (sometimes)

**Other instruments sometimes included...**String section (e.g. violins and cellos), Brass section (e.g. trumpets and trombones), Wind section (e.g. saxophones and oboes), Technology—Technology continues to develop and musical artists are always finding new ways to incorporate music technology into their songs. Advancements in technology meant that musical artists could become more experimental. If you are asked to identify how technology has been used by a solo artist, the following answers will get you a mark.

**TOP TIP:** *you will not be asked to explain what these forms of music technology are. If you are asked to list how technology has been used single worded answers for this type of question are perfectly fine.*

### Auto Tune

This is an effect applied to vocals. It can be used in small amounts to correct the tuning of recorded vocals to make it perfectly in tune or it can be used as an effect. When used as an effect it makes singing sound robotic. Daft Punk use this effect a lot. [Click here](#) to listen to a Daft Punk song; can you hear the Auto Tune effect being used on the vocals at around 1:05?

### Reverb

This is like an echo. It is usually used on guitars and vocals.

### Delay

This is a type of effect, usually used on guitars and vocals. The delay effect will reproduce something you say into a microphone or play on the guitar. The band U2 use a lot of delay on the guitar riffs they use. [Click here](#) to find out more about **reverb** and **delay** and what they sound like.

### Synthesizer

A synthesizer is the correct name for a keyboard. Synthesizers can replicate many different sounds. They are an electronic instrument; the sound they produce comes from circuit boards rather than from moving strings etc.

### Multitracking

This is a recording technique. It allows you to record something, rewind back to the start and then record something else alongside the first thing you recorded. This technique is used to create multiple layers in a song. Have you ever listened to a band with just one guitarist or one singer but the song has lots of backing singing and multiple guitar lines and wondered how they did it? The answer is multitracking! [Click here](#) to find out more about multitracking.

### Sampling

Sampling is when an artist will take a piece of a song that already exists and then use it in their song. They can speed it up, slow it down and change the pitch. It is normally played on a loop within the song. [Click here](#) to here examples of songs where sampling has been used.

### Amplification

Electric instruments are nothing without an amplifier! Electric guitars and basses plug into an amplifier; this is how we hear them!

### Singing

Quite often, solo artists are singers! So the singing is quite important and, if solo artists comes up on your exam, you will probably be asked about the singing.

Singers will use the same techniques as other styles of Pop music.

## Ed Sheeran - Edward Christopher

**Sheeran** born 17 February 1991) is an English singer-songwriter. Born in Halifax, West Yorkshire, and raised in Framlingham, Suffolk, he began writing songs around the age of eleven. In early 2011, Sheeran independently released the extended play *No. 5 Collaborations Project*. He signed with Asylum Records the same year.

**Adele - Adele**, byname of **Adele Laurie Blue Adkins**, (born May 5, 1988, Tottenham, London, England), English pop singer and songwriter whose soulful emotive voice and traditionally crafted songs made her one of the most broadly popular performers of her generation

**Falsetto** - Using head voice to reach a higher pitch. [Click here](#) to hear it.

**Glissando** - Sliding from one note to another note. [Click here](#) to hear it.

**Melisma** - Stretching a word or syllable over multiple notes. [Click here](#) to hear it.

**Narrow range of notes** - This is typical of a Pop song. A ballad might use a wider range - use your ears before putting this as an answer.

**Layered / Multitracked** - Solo artists often record their voice several times to fill out the texture of the music. [Click here](#) to listen to an Ed Sheeran song. Can you here there is more than one voice in the chorus? He has recorded his vocals several times both in unison and in harmony.