

# The Music Circle - Hits and Hooks

## Hooks Vocabulary (to show 18)

### THE ORCHESTRA (18)

- Just Give Me A Reason from Pink. Starts out pretty quiet, a singer songwriter feel. Then the energy continues to build as we move further and further into the song. And the creme de la creme of that bigness is when the orchestra comes in. Besides that hook of bigness, and expensiveness that comes with the addition of an orchestra, it also provides a critical function, the pad. That lush understated background wall of sound above which the rest of the instruments dance. And the big thing, that that gives us, functionally speaking, is a huge contrast hook to what had just been playing beforehand.

### THE INSTRUMENTAL SOLO (18)

- The instrumental solo, and the use of the orchestra, in popular song, are, in one way, kind of related. Something I think we inherited from the classical music heyday, about what is quote 'good music' were the association of both virtuosity, and the sound of many many instruments. If it's really hard to do, as in incredible virtuosity, or expensive to create, as in, having many musicians in an orchestra which costs a lot of money, it kind of carries with it an immediate acceptance. Is that good? Is that bad? I don't know, it just is.

### MELODY (17)

- Melody, is one of the cornerstone elements of any song. It is, most times, the thing we remember about a song, a song that gets, stuck in our head, as we like to say.

- Melodies can be constructed in various ways. Repetition, is usually, part of the melody, in one way or another. Have a listen to the vocal melody in **Wouldn't It Be Nice** by The Beach Boys. Notice that the melody is a series of fairly short phrases, each repeated once before moving on to a different phrase. Melodies are, speaking broadly, a rhythmic sequence of pitches, or notes. And, also speaking broadly, a melody's shape, is either moving up, moving down, staying flat (used a lot in modern pop), or moving up and down like a wave.

- Melody fits with the layers of sound that surrounds it but, also seems to not be locked down by those sounds. It can depart from the expected beat with anticipations, before the beat, and delays after the beat. And indeed, these anticipations and delays give a melody, life, character. Nor does a melody always stick to the harmony of the surrounding sound. Vocal melody especially, can be, really, all over the place, with slides, bends, wavers, and something we call, neighbour tones, notes in the scale of the key, but not in the chord of the moment.

### VOCALIZATIONS (16)

- Vocalizations. Something of an undersung hero in the world of hooks, often overlooked by newbie songwriters. This is, singing without lyrics. Anyone can sing along with these, which makes them easy to remember, which makes them, engaging. They show up in chorus' a lot.

'Oh - ahhhhhh', 'Ah-ooooo', 'I'm tryin tryin tryin try'. 'Ah ma ma ma ma'.... are just a few examples taken from some of the show songs.

### **SLAPBACK DELAY (15)**

- A big part of the Beatles sound is the slapback delay in John's vocals. In the fifties when tape recorders, were starting to be used for recording, there was an effect discovered, by feeding the 'slap back' delay, back into the mix. The slapback delay comes from the physical distance between the playback head and record head on a tape recorder. This created a subtle vocal doubling sound, a bit like reverb and a bit like people singing together. John loved using this effect on his voice, when he sang.

### **HUMOUR (15)**

- Humour. It came up last week with that Duppy Gunman song. What is humour? Like, what makes something funny? Hmmm, good question. When we hear a joke, it's like we're led down a garden path, and then suddenly, the punch line makes us quickly see things, in a different perspective. I think that's one thing that makes something, funny. If as an adult, we act like a child, for a moment people might think we, lost are marbles, but then when they realize, we're doing that on purpose, that's funny. If we crack our voice in a song, someone might think that we, 'made a mistake', oops, but then when they realize we did that on purpose, it's funny. When we lead people into a song about Spain, and then talk about working at the local Pizza Pizza, and vacuuming the turf at the skydome in Toronto, it's funny. And funny, is a hook. That mental heat generated as we re-calculate the map based on the punch line information, it's engaging. We, are, good, at, figuring things out. We like, puzzles. We're good at it. It engages us.

- Humour. What else is funny? Sadly, humour comes out of fear, sometimes. We don't like to be made a fool. Why? Well, my working theory is that in times of great upheaval, like drought, war, floods, outrageous food prices, etc etc it'll be the strongest people who survive. And strong people have control of their environment. So to be made a fool, is to feel out of control, and our reptilian brain doesn't like that too much. So, when we do something deliberately to act a fool, there's that conflict, in the minds of our audience, between what our reptilian brain really wants, security, control, and what we appear to be foolishly doing. And that paradox creates mental heat recalculating the map. How do we make sense of something so senseless. That's funny.

- Humour. Ok, one more idea. In our lives many things, just, go together. Like potatoes, plate, fork, peeler, boiling water, all kindof go together from, our day to day experience. Right? But, potatoes, blue sky, mountain, water skis, and running. Don't really go together, easily. But, with a bit of work, they could, maybe, like.... One fine blue-sky day I was eating my lunch of leftover potato pancakes at the top of the mountain I had just climbed, and there, off in the distance, I could see that my brother was zipping around the lake on water skis, and so, I went running down, to see what was going on, as my brother had never skied before. Ok, that was hard work, but possible, and kind of fun. So when we hear words, or beats, or vocalizations or instrument sounds that don't really go together, or don't go with the context, of say a serious

radio show like this one, we get caught up in the mental heat of recalculating the map. Making sense of it. And maybe there is no reason. And then, it's just, funny.

### **MELODY (15)**

- Studying saxophone with a Jazz musician, I spent a lot, a lot, a lot of time working with harmony, or chord changes. But I asked him once what he felt was the most important aspect of a song, full expecting harmony to be the answer. He said, Melody. Melody rules. Melody, that sequence of pitches, or notes, strung together in a rhythmic pattern, and repeated several times in a song, either by the lead vocal, or an instrument, or both. I'd say that Beat and Melody are the two things, easiest to remember about a song, 'cause we can hum them back to ourselves.

### **BASS (14)**

- One thing we can easily identify in the bass of a song, is whether it's an 'active bass', 'beat bass', or 'minimal bass'. An active bass really pushes things along, like we got somewhere to get to. A minimal bass, is more introspective, standing still and looking around. For a minimal bass a low pitch bass guitar may mostly just hit a single note.

### **A HOOK EVERY 7 SECONDS (13)**

- I've been saying a well produced song has a hook every 10 seconds. Actually the quoted line in the biz, is every, 7 seconds.

### **DISTORTION - DISTORTED GUITAR SOUND (13)**

- The distorted guitar is quite an indistinct sound really. It's loud, and in-your-face, but functionally, it's acting in the same way as a thickening orchestral string pad would. What is it about distorted guitars that makes them so interesting. I claim that everything we like in music, relates to some aspect of human experience. Our lives are so entwined with the operations of machines, motors etc. It's an important human adaptation to recognize when machines are reaching overload, about to explode. We've become good at picking out those kinds of sounds. So, of course, we make use of that capacity in music.

### **QUOTES (12)**

- Music, they say, and I would agree, is a language. And just as in spoken language we have idiomatic phrases that we use almost as if they were single words. And we like to use them a lot. Ditto, in our shared cultural universe of music we have phrases that appear often, and in different contexts.

### **MELODIC STRUCTURE (12)**

- We can have short melodic phrases, usually repeated several times inside a verse. We can have medium length melodic phrases of 4-6 bars often repeated once in a verse. Or we can have long melodic phrases, usually only stated once in a song section. With shorter melodic

phrases a song really needs a chorus to break things up. Not so necessary for longer ones, and even if there is a chorus the verse can go on longer before the chorus comes in.

### **IN SYNC VOCAL HARMONIES (12)**

- In sync vocal harmonies. Several people singing together. This human experience goes back to the beginning of time I expect. There's a feeling of confidence and security that comes from singing together. It's not the uncertainty of conversation, that, by its nature, changes and evolves as we go along. Rather, it's the certainty of having agreed on something that we want to do together. There's a calmness about in-sync vocal harmonies.

### **INTERNAL RHYMES (10)**

- What's an internal rhyme you ask. We're used to rhymes coming at the end of phrases. To speed things up, create forward motion, and catch our attention, songwriters will make rhymes between the half way point and the end of a phrase.

### **SOUND SEPARATION - Stereo, Volume, Frequency (10)**

- In stereo placement there are basically 5 positions, far left and right, down the middle, and half way on each side at 10 and 2 o'clock  
- Good separation is a big focus for record producers. We've got 3 things producers can use for separation and clarity of elements. These are stereo spread, volume level and frequency range.

### **TEMPO, TIME SIGNATURE, SUBDIVISION and FEEL (10)**

- Tempo is the rate at which the main beat goes by. The time signature is the number of beats in a basic packet of music. It is felt by the accenting of the beats. So 3/4 time has three beats in a packet with the first beat accented. 4/4 time has 4 beats in a packet with the first beat accented and usually the 3rd beat accented a bit. Subdivision are the points between main beats where notes might be positioned. Subdivisions are typically 3 or 4. The combination of subdivision and time signature give rise to the 'feel' of a song.

### **DOWNWARD STEPWISE HARMONIC MOTION (8)**

- An underlying harmony who's root tone descends by a whole or half step through the chord progression. It's very catchy.

### **LYRICS in NATURAL RHYTHM (8)**

- There is an accent pattern for spoken words of any language. This accenting is very important for understanding. When words are spoken with the culturally accepted pattern, it's clear what's being said. Different cultures accent things in different way, it should be noted.  
- When the rhythm of the sung lyric is different from how we would speak it then it's not so clear what's being said. When they don't match, it's usually due to a fight between, sticking to a melody, and natural spoken rhythm. Sometimes melody wins out. The tension that arises

from the confusion, can be a hook. As long as it's not too hard to figure out, we listeners are engaged to decipher what's being said.

### **LYRICS THAT DON'T MAKE SENSE (7)**

- Lyrics that make sense, tell a story, ok, fine. Lyrics that don't make sense, I maintain, act as hooks in songs. They're usually very image laden words and phrases. I think these lyrics are acting like hooks, grabbing our attention and engaging us to make some sense out of something that, doesn't really make sense.

### **FILLS (6)**

- Another tool for adding forward motion to a song is the hook called a fill. It most often refers to drums, but other instruments can perform the function. A fill is a musical clip, usually of a faster rhythm, that appears just before a song section change.

### **LYRIC EXPECTATIONS and HOOKS (6)**

- Regarding song lyrics, what do we expect? Do we expect to understand every word of the song? No. And they say that lyrics are actually far down the list in importance regarding what attracts us to a song, behind groove, melody, hooks, vocal delivery and production hooks, and probably a few more. In fact, does it even really matter if we don't understand the language?

- The expected rhyming pattern of lyric lines is either two lines rhyming back to back, OR, alternate lines rhyming. Delivering the expectation adds to our sense of home in the song. Deviating from the expectation is a hook that engages to keep listening for the resolution. The default expectation is rhyme, not lack of rhyme.

- The critics of hip hop might say there's nothing much going on musically. No melody, not much instrumentation. But lots of beat, and, lots of clever lyrics. So rhyme patterns are super important in this genre.

- When the instrumentation is rich in a song, and lots of beat, the lyrics take a back seat. The vocal delivery remains really important but the lyrics themselves, na. I find that there only needs to be a few lyrics that stand out here and there. But when we have a minimally arranged song the lyric story becomes way more important.

- I have one more point to make about lyrics, and that's the use of cliché's. Cliché's in a sense 'disappear'. They've been so overused that they've lost all relevance.

### **SEQUENCING (5)**

Sequencing is the repetition of a melodic phrase at a different pitch position. It works as a hook by giving us familiarity and difference at the same time.

### **ENDINGS (4)**

The ending is not a hook in the sense that it engages us to keep listening to the song. But it is an important element in the song structure. And I suppose we could say that it engages us to perhaps listen to the song again

- The ending of A Train is known as the A Train ending in Jazz circles

- The slow down.
- Power loss ending (unusual)
- Fade out ending
- Repeat and fade ending
- Abrupt ending

### **VOCAL HARMONY (4)**

Vocal Harmony is basically more than one voice singing at the same time. Usually but not always the additional voices sing the same lyrics as the lead. And I should note that in-sync vocal harmony is different from second voice, where the extra vocals sing at a different time from the lead.

- Used for thickening on a chorus
- Can be closely synced or a bit ragged
- Often used to emphasize a particular word or phrase

### **STABS (4)**

Stabs are often how horns get used as an instrumental texture in songs. Horns are powerful instruments. Using them in short bursts gives the big horn texture without occluding the lead vocal.

### **STOP TIME (4)**

Stop Time is a powerful hook when used sparingly. All of a sudden the music stops and we're thinkin' whoa, what happened, the song's not over is it, wow, short song. Then the music starts in again often with a big burst of energy. And we say, whew, all is well again. Stop Time has great, what we call, 'forward motion'.

### **KEY CHANGE (4)**

If a song has been sitting in a level vibe for a while, a hook that gets often use to infuse some new energy is to change keys. The instruments and vocal lift up in pitch a bit, usually a whole tone. I've never ever heard it move down in pitch. L

### **KICK + BASS = POWER (3)**

The kick drum sound is a big low thud. And bass is the low notes played usually on a bass guitar or standup string bass. As it turns out, if you play a strong kick drum and strong bass note on beat 1 it really adds power to the song. Kick + Bass = Power, or 1 + 1 is way greater than 2.

### **SECOND VOICE (3)**

Second voice is a vocal contribution, usually from someone other than the lead singer, that is sung away from the lead vocal, not with it as a harmony would do. Harmonies say I'm with you, I got you're back. Second voice is more of a conversation, Oh that's interesting, and here's what I think. Second Voice is, a big, I say BIG, technique used in records ,to engage us.

### **HEARTFELT HONESTY (3)**

Heartfelt honesty is more of a song type I suppose. But it engages we listeners to keep listening so I include it in our vocabulary of hooks. It pulls at our emotional soft spots. Usually the tempo is slow, the melodies are lofty with lots of long notes, and pads are used extensively.

### **GROOVE (3)**

Groove is a rhythmic assemblage of various instruments that entices us to move our body in a repetitive manner. It's a human desire, need even, to exercise the capabilities we have, cognitive and physical. We like to do that for extended periods of time. Groove taps into our need to move. Bopping our heads, tapping our fingers, walking to the beat, dancing. Groove is built on a foundation of beat. It comes alive with a mix of different percussive sounds, not always drums. And it comes alive with interesting subdivisions of the main beats. And it comes alive with some beats being left out even, so that we the listener, can fill them in, in our heads, and in our bodies. All combined, it's a thick assemblage of sounds that invite us to move. That's groove.

### **RIFFS (2)**

A riff is a repeating catchy sound bite, usually instrumental.

### **EMOTIONAL CONTOUR (2)**

Emotional Contour is, how a song develops in emotional energy. That usually translates into how the intensity of the vocal, and volume of the music develops, but not always. A drop to a very quiet but lyrically important section, after a big peak, could still be an emotional high point of the song. Usually the emotional contour, builds, quite significantly, as the song progresses. If it doesn't though, then, certainly, there will be some other hook, or hooks, driving our engagement.

### **REPETITION (2)**

In broad strokes, in a song, we establish home, go away from home, and come back home. Repetition, helps us establish 'home', in a song. It gives us the hook of recognition, when a segment comes around again, after not hearing it for a while.

### **CONTRAST (2)**

Contrast takes us away from home, and gives us variety. Repetition, is in a push pull relationship, with contrast.

### **PADS (2)**

Pads, are unobtrusive lush washes of sound, that sit in behind the other instruments, and vocals, of a song. They support the vocal without distracting, and usually add energy to the section, where they appear.



## **SONG FORM (1)**

- Song form is the manner, by which we sequence, song sections like verses, choruses, bridges, solos, and such.
- A very big picture view, of song structure, is that we start by establishing 'home'. Then we go away from home. Then we come back home.
- How we do this is usually played out as the song form

## **UNUSUAL SOUNDS (1)**

- A recognizable feature in the evolution of popular music, is new sounds appearing in the songs as time marches on.

## **VIRTUOSITY (1)**

- Virtuosity.... performances in a song, that we perceive to have taken extra special talent and many practice hours to perfect. It can be instrumental, or vocal. It's a very strong hook, and often something that we remember most about a song.
- It's a human characteristic to appreciate and seek out the witnessing of extraordinary things, in my opinion.
- Musical virtuosity is one of those things, that quite often translates to, 'playing fast'

## **MELODIC LEAPS (1)**

- A melodic leap, is a deliberate insertion, of a jump in pitch, into the melody.
- "Some-where over the rainbow" "Some-where" "Some-where". Hear the leap on Some-where?

## **BEAT (1)**

Beat is one of those basic song elements like tempo, scale, time signature  
Some common beats...

- Back beat, on beat 3.... 1 2 snare 4
- On the off-beats, beats 2 and 4... 1 snare 3 snare.
- 4 on the floor beat. Named after a kick drum beat emerging in the 50's with the kick drum heard on all 4 beats

## **IMAGERY (1)**

Using imagery in lyrics is a great way to engage the listener, because describing an image is open ended. The listener actually creates the image from their own experience.