



1970s Soft Rock, Baroque Pop, and
'Prog-Lite':
Or, what does middle-of-the-road
popular music sound like?

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‘Middle-of-the-Road’ Popular Music

- ❖ Synonymous with or closely related to: ‘easy listening’ (Scott 2004), ‘prog-lite’ (Holm-Hudson 2005), major label ‘pop’ (Stanley 2014), ‘corporate’ rock (Covach 2003), ‘smooth’ music and ‘yacht rock’ (Crumsho 2006)
- ❖ The ‘large listening space’ between between the ‘somewhat intellectualised course of progressive rock’ and ‘pop’ (Moore 2012)
- ❖ 1970s artists: Queen, ABBA, Eric Carmen, Elton John, Billy Joel
- ❖ Classical training: Freddie Mercury (Grade 5/6 piano), Eric Carmen (piano / violin), Elton John (Royal Academy of Music)
- ❖ What compositional strategies define their work in the 1970s?
- ❖ How do they land ‘in the middle’?

1. Queen, 'The March of the Black Queen'

E. Gtr

trm

trm

Musical score for 'The March of the Black Queen' in E major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The score consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff for the electric guitar, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for the piano accompaniment. The guitar part features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a 7/8 time signature change. The piano accompaniment includes chords and a bass line with a 7/8 time signature change.

2. Queen, 'The Millionaire Waltz'

You make me feel_ Like a mil - lion-aire

trm

Musical score for 'The Millionaire Waltz' in E major (three sharps). The score consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff for the vocal line, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for the piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts in 12/8 time and changes to 3/4 time. The piano accompaniment includes chords and a bass line with a 7/8 time signature change. A drum part is indicated by a 'trm' symbol above the piano staff.

3. ABBA, 'S.O.S', Introduction and Pre-Chorus

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The first two measures are in 4/4 time, featuring a melody of dotted quarter notes in the treble staff and a bass line of whole notes. The third measure changes to 3/4 time, with a melody of eighth notes and a bass line of whole notes. The fourth measure returns to 4/4 time, with a melody of quarter notes and a bass line of quarter notes.

The second system of musical notation consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The first four measures feature a melody of eighth notes in the treble staff and a bass line of quarter notes. The fifth measure changes to 3/4 time, with a melody of eighth notes and a bass line of quarter notes. The sixth measure returns to 4/4 time, with a melody of quarter notes and a bass line of quarter notes.

Classical Music Figuration

- ❖ Cadential trills: 'The March of the Black Queen', 'Millionaire Waltz'
- ❖ Descending thirds: 'S.O.S'
- ❖ Rapid arpeggios: 'In the Lap of the Gods', 'Death on Two Legs'
- ❖ Quotation: 'Never Gonna Fall in Love Again', 'All By Myself', and Rachmaninoff
- ❖ A lack of specificity in the borrowing; reference to a general classical style, cf. specific idioms / composers (see Covach 1991)

4. Billy Joel, 'If I Only Had the Words'

The image shows a musical score for the song 'If I Only Had the Words' by Billy Joel. It consists of three staves of music in the key of A major (indicated by three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The first staff contains the first line of the melody with lyrics: 'If I on-ly had_ the words to__ tell you If you on-ly had the time to un-der-stand'. The second staff continues the melody with lyrics: '___ though I know it would-n't change your___ fee - lings__ and I'. The third staff concludes the melody with lyrics: 'know you'll car - ry on_____ the best__ you can_____'. Above the notes are guitar chords: A, A/C#, D, A/C#, Bm7, Dm6/F, E, A, A/C#, D, A/C#, Bm7, E7(sus4), E, A, C7, E. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' over a bracket in the second staff.

A A/C# D A/C# Bm⁷

If I on-ly had_ the words to__ tell you If you on-ly had the time to un-der-stand

Dm⁶/F E A A/C# D A/C# Bm⁷

___ though I know it would-n't change your___ fee - lings__ and I

E⁷(sus4) E A C⁷ E

know you'll car - ry on_____ the best__ you can_____

‘Contour-Rich’ Melodic Construction

- ❖ Balanced, arch melodies: ‘If I Only Had the Words’, ‘Tomorrow is Today’
- ❖ Sequences: ‘Goodbye Yellow Brick Road’ [Elton John]; ‘The Winner Takes It All’ [ABBA]
- ❖ Infiltration of sequential melodic elements into hard rock: ‘Now I’m Here’

5. Queen, 'Now I'm Here'

what - e - ver came of you

Sight Ooh what - e - ver came of you

and me A - me - ri - ca's new bride to be

and me A - me - ri - ca's new bride to be

Rich Harmonic Language

- ❖ Influence of the Beatles
- ❖ Voice-leading patterns: 'Mamma Mia'
- ❖ Modal mixture: 'All By Myself'
- ❖ Extensive secondary dominants: 'Mona Lisas and Mad Hatters', 'Border Song'
- ❖ Confluence of harmonic features: 'Killer Queen'

Descending bass

E \flat Gm/D E \flat ⁷/D \flat Ab/C Abm/C \flat E \flat /B \flat

Musical staff showing chords and a vocal line. The chords are E \flat , Gm/D, E \flat ⁷/D \flat , Ab/C, Abm/C \flat , and E \flat /B \flat . The vocal line includes the text "BV's Ooh".

Lead

Musical staff with a lead line and lyrics: "Built in a - re-me-dy for Krus-chev and Ken-ne-dy for a - ny-time an in - vi - ta - tion".

Ascending harmonic sequence

Ab/B \flat B \flat ⁷ G Cm B \flat ⁷ E \flat

Musical staff showing chords and time signature changes. Chords: Ab/B \flat , B \flat ⁷, G, Cm, B \flat ⁷, E \flat . Time signatures: 6/8, 12/8, 12/8.

Musical staff with a lead line and lyrics: "you can't de - cline Ca-vi-ar and ci-ga-rettes Well versed in e - ti-quette Ex".

D⁷ Gm F B \flat Dm Gm Dm

Musical staff showing chords and lyrics: "She's a kil - ler queen Gun pow - der ge - la - tine".

Musical staff with a lead line.

Between Formal Convention and Experimentation

- ❖ In progressive rock: multi-sectional songs, non-recapitulating sections, irregular patterning of episodes
- ❖ Non-song-like forms in MOR pop
- ❖ ‘Funeral for a Friend’: a triple theme-and-variations? Or a passacaglia-derived form?
- ❖ Three distinct sections: overture—march—Lloyd Webber pastiche—march (return)
- ❖ Departure-and-return narrative; see also, ‘Millionaire Waltz’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’
- ❖ Or, ‘episodic song forms’: extended verse-chorus structures (‘Burn Down the Mission’, ‘Levon’ or ‘Tiny Dancer’); addition of extra material to a verse-chorus/AABA template (‘Bat Out of Hell’, ‘Scenes From An Italian Restaurant’, ‘Love of My Life’)

The Pop Middleground

- ❖ General consensus: progressive rock *elevated* pop songs (Sheinbaum 2002; Moore 2003; Lundberg 2014; Palmer 2015; cf. Keister and Smith 2008)
- ❖ ‘Prog-lite’ - suggests a retreat from progressive rock
- ❖ Or, a partial elevation from the pop song?
- ❖ Middleground from below (cf. classical tradition; Chowrimootoo 2016)