



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

Conservatorium
of Music

YEAR 12 ATAR DESIGNATED WORKS 2023-2026

UNIT 4 – INNOVATIONS

Queen: *Bohemian Rhapsody*

Lisa Young: *Tha Thin Tha*

John Adams: *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

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Resource prepared by UWA Conservatorium of Music staff

Paul De Cinque (Brass & Music Education), James Ledger (Composition), Adam Pinto (Keyboard & Aural), Ashley Smith (Woodwind) and Cecilia Sun (Musicology), plus Melissa Skinner (Director of Music, Hale School).



ATAR Music Resources for Students & Teachers

Academic staff here at the UWA Conservatorium of Music have developed a range of online resources to support music teachers and students across WA.

This suite of resources have been carefully designed around the new ATAR Music Syllabus, but include a wide range of topics that will support student learning across a number of contexts.

Bite-size videos cover elements of Analysis, Performance and Musical Literacy and are accompanied by written documents, quizzes and further study links that will help support student learning beyond the classroom.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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ATAR Music Workbook

Unit Four: Innovations



Queen: *Bohemian Rhapsody*

Lisa Young: *Tha Thin Tha*

John Adams: *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

Resource prepared by faculty members from the UWA Conservatorium of Music, *Paul De Cinque (Brass & Music Education)*, *James Ledger (Composition)*, *Adam Pinto (Keyboard & Aural)*, *Ashley Smith (Woodwind)* and *Cecilia Sun (Musicology)*, plus *Melissa Skinner (Director of Music, Hale School)*.

FOREWORD

Congratulations for entering the final unit of the ATAR music sequence. Having looked at Identities, Narratives and Elements, this final unit is entitled Innovations, and will examine the new ways in which music creators have expressed themselves. The history of music filled with each generation trying to find new ways to be more expressive—to communicate more about the human condition through sound.

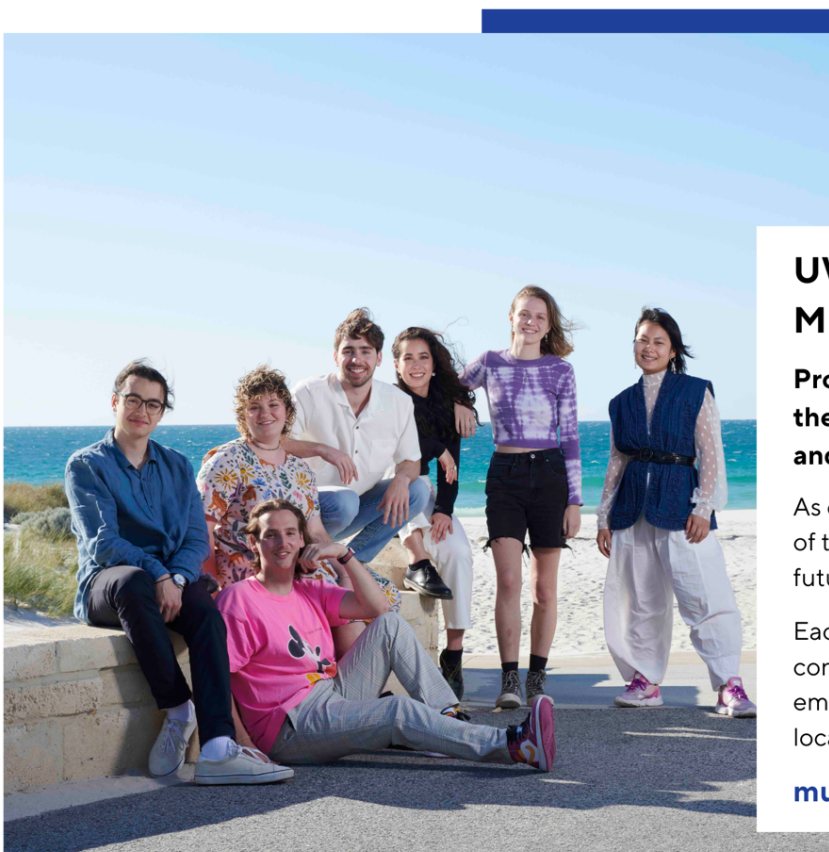
Music is a fundamental part of life, even for those who have had no musical training themselves. Since the first music emerged in early humans, people have innovated to produce new music, to find new ways of communication. Some of these innovations have been great leaps forward; others incremental changes to ways of making or creating music. What lessons can we learn from these innovations as we strive to think about new music?

These documents have been prepared by staff from the University of Western Australia's *Conservatorium of Music*. They are experts in the field, and performing musicians who analyse and discuss music. These documents are a starting point for the study of music. Music has a profound impact on the lives of so many—as a performer or listener. The study of music can be a stepping off point for your aspirations.

I hope you enjoy studying music. Be excited by the power of all genres, and listen to as much music as you are able!

Alan Lourens

Head of the UWA Conservatorium of Music



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Queen: “Bohemian Rhapsody” (1975)

Background (prepared by Dr. Paul De Cinque)



With “Bohemian Rhapsody” being one of the most famous pop songs released in the past fifty years, it is almost impossible for people to not be aware of Queen. While high-school students may not have seen *Wayne’s World* (a seminal 1992 comedy film), the scene with “Bohemian Rhapsody” remains one of the most iconic moments of 1990s films, and a scene Freddie Mercury himself loved.

Few bands can boast a film documenting their journey, as happened with the release of the 2018 film, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (starting Rami Malek as Mercury). A chain of international hits, including “We Will Rock You,” “We Are the Champions,” “Another One Bites the Dust” *Bohemian Rhapsody*,” have made the band famous in Western society. As a result, the band were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001.

IMAGE 1 (above): *The cover of Queen’s second studio album, Queen 2. This image has become one of the most iconic images of the band in history. This image would be the basis for the beginning of the music video for Bohemian Rhapsody.*

This document aims to summarise some key information about Queen. However, there are a number of excellent resources with details about the band and their music that can be found online and in print.

Formation of the Band and Early Period (1968–1973)



IMAGE 2 (above): *The Queen logo, designed by Freddie Mercury. The use of lions, fairies, and the crab represent the star signs of the band members, the Q and crown represents the band name. The symbol also bears a strong resemblance to the United Kingdom’s royal family coat of arms.*

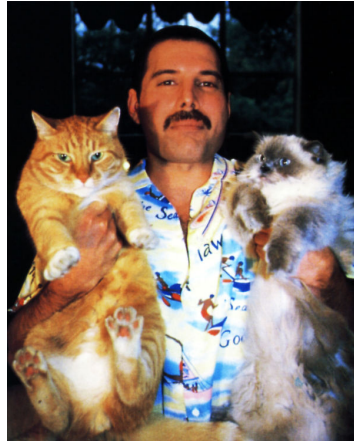
- Brian May, Tim Staffel (a friend of May) & Roger Taylor formed a band called “Smile” in 1968 in London
- Mercury signed Smile onto their label in 1969
- Freddie Bulsara was a fan of Smile, and went to all their shows
- Staffel left Smile in 1970 and the band looked for a new lead singer
- Freddie Bulsara became lead singer and suggested to the other members that they should change the name of the band from “Smile” to “Queen”
- In 1971, Freddie Bulsara changed his name to Freddie Mercury
- John Deacon joined the band as bass guitarist in 1971
- They played their first show as a four piece at Surrey College on July 2, 1971
- The band were signed by Trident and EMI in 1973

Band Members

Lead Singer: Freddie Mercury
birth name Frederick Bulsara

5 September 1946 (Zanzibar)–
24 November 1991 (London)

IMAGES 3 AND 4
*Freddie Mercury with his cats, and
performing on stage*

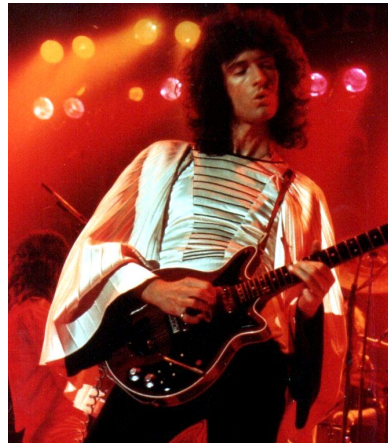


- Mercury had a four-octave voice range (from F2 to F6)
- Mercury wrote a number of Queen's major hits, including "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Killer Queen," "We Are the Champions," among others
- Mercury was a very theatrical performer and dresser on stage
- Mercury as a person was very different to his performance persona, he referred to himself in the following manner: "When I'm performing I'm an extrovert, yet inside I'm a completely different man."
- Mercury released two solo albums, *Mr. Bad Guy* (1985) and *Barcelona* (1988)
- He had several romantic relationships—the most important being with Mary Austin & Jim Hutton
- Mercury died from bronchial pneumonia, as a result of AIDS.

Guitarist: Brian May

Born 19 July 1947 (Hampton,
Middlesex)

IMAGES 5 AND 6
*Brian May performing with Queen in
the 1970s, and more recently with his
wife Anita Dobson*



- May was ranked as the 26th best guitarist in 2011 by *Rolling Stone* magazine as part of their series "100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time"
- Often uses a coin instead of a plastic plectrum because he feels the rigidity gives more control
- He is influenced by Cliff Richards, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Who, and Jimi Hendrix
- Plays a guitar he made with his father, referred to as the Red Special
- Married twice, firstly to Christine Mullen (1976-1988) and now to Anita Dobson (since 2000)

Bass Guitar: John Deacon
Born 19 August 1951 (Leicester)

Drums: Roger Taylor
26 July 1949 (Kings Lynn)

IMAGES 7 AND 8
John Deacon (L) and Roger Taylor (R)



Brief Discography (with Freddie Mercury)

July 13, 1973	Queen
March 8, 1974	Queen II
November 8, 1974	Sheer Heart Attack <i>featuring Killer Queen</i>
November 21, 1975	A Night at the Opera <i>featuring Bohemian Rhapsody and You're My Best Friend</i>
December 10, 1976	A Day at the Races <i>featuring Somebody to Love</i>
October 28, 1977	News of the World <i>featuring We Will Rock You and We Are the Champions</i>
November 10, 1978	Jazz <i>featuring Bicycle Race, Fat Bottomed Girls, and Don't Stop Me Now</i>
June 22, 1979	Live Killers (live album)
June 30, 1980	The Game <i>featuring Crazy Little Thing Called Love and Another One Bites the Dust</i>
December 8, 1980	Flash Gordon (soundtrack) <i>featuring Flash</i>
October 26, 1981	Greatest Hits (compilation album)
May 21, 1982	Hot Space <i>featuring Under Pressure</i>
February 27, 1984	The Works <i>featuring Radio Ga Ga and I Want to Break Free</i>
June 2, 1986	A Kind of Magic
May 22, 1989	The Miracle <i>featuring I Want it All</i>
February 4, 1991	Innuendo
October 28, 1991	Greatest Hits II (compilation album)

General Style

It is hard to describe the general musical style of a band like Queen, given their style is so wide-ranging. Musicologists describing their style include references to glam, progressive rock, hard rock, art rock, arena rock, pop rock, and heavy metal, amongst others.

Masterclass.com has an interesting episode on progressive rock (“prog rock”), commenting on six key characteristics of the genre. When we consider these characteristics in regard to a song like “Bohemian Rhapsody,” it is clear to see the prog rock elements of Queen.

- 1) Musical ambition (the harmonies used in the opening section and multi-part structure of the song)
- 2) Expanded instrumentation (the use of piano)
- 3) Embrace of technology (the multi-tracking of lines is key across the entire *A Night at the Opera* album)
- 4) Close Ties to Classical Music (the operatic style elements of the song)
- 5) Concept albums (some argue *A Night at the Opera* is a concept album, but regardless, most agree that *Queen II* is a concept album)
- 6) Literary lyrics (the song “Nevermore” on *Queen II* takes inspiration from Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven”).

In contrast, “We Will Rock You” is considered an example of arena rock. This is a genre that was more commercial friendly and featured anthemic style works. “We Will Rock You” and “We Are the Champions” are of a similar nature. Indeed, May’s comment on “We Are the Champions” that “we wanted to get the crowds waving and singing” shows the anthemic approach to the creation of the song.

Complex song structures are a key part of prog rock. Even a brief listen to “Bohemian Rhapsody” confirms the song does not conform to the normal verse-chorus structure. For another example, it is worth considering the song “The March of the Black Queen” from *Queen II*. The song is six-and-a-half minutes long and does not have any repeated verse-chorus structure form. It is an interesting song to consider alongside “Bohemian Rhapsody” in terms of its structure. This use of complex and long song structures in rock music has continued to this day. Billie Joe Armstrong (from Green Day) was inspired by Queen, commenting that when writing “Jesus of Suburbia” from their *American Idiot* album, he had a secret, not very punk ambition: to write “the ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ of the future.”¹

Harmony and multitracking is a key aspect of Queen’s writing. In the studio, the harmonies of Queen’s songs were multitracked in a very sophisticated way. Braae explains this process,

Three of the band members—Freddie Mercury, guitarist Brian May, and drummer Roger Taylor—were singers; the three of them would sing each note of each chord into the microphone at the same time. Thus, a three-note chord would be sung by nine voices. Each chord would then be recorded up to four times, with the total arrangement either being spread across the centre of the stereo image or split for the left and right channels. Accordingly, a three-part vocal arrangement could feature up to 36 voices in the mix.

¹ Green Day and the Palace of Wisdom, Matt Hendrickson, *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 2005

This saturation of pitch allows for a rich tone, and balanced with close chord voicings, creates the unique “Queen” sound. Generally, Brian May sang the lower notes in chords, Roger Taylor the higher notes, and Mercury the middle pitches.

Queen sought to use a rich palette of sound sources in their studio recordings and live performances. Beyond the basic rock band instrumentation (vocals, electric guitar, bass guitar, and drums), the piano became a core aspect of the band’s sound from early on, including the song “Seven Seas of Rhye” on *Queen II*. Indeed, “Bohemian Rhapsody” would be an incredibly different song without the piano. Other keyboard instruments used in their work include a harpsichord, Hammond organ, and a honky-tonk piano. The synthesiser became a commonly used at their performances during the 1980s.



IMAGES 9 AND 10
Two still images from the music video
for *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Queen were also one of the first bands to popularise music videos. In fact, “Bohemian Rhapsody”’s [video](#) was released years before MTV started in 1981 and the video is considered by many to be the first promotional music video ever released. They had released videos prior to “Bohemian Rhapsody.” For example, you can watch videos from their debut album ([Liar](#) and [Keep Yourself Alive](#)). Both are fairly traditional, a video where the band is on a “stage” performing their song. The “Bohemian Rhapsody” video takes a step forward in production value. The opening scene recreates the image from the cover of *Queen II* (shown in Image 1 above). Added to this, the use of image cuts, slow fades between shots, more elaborate lighting and costumes, and some psychedelic imagery such as seen in Images 9 and 10 to the left made this a very progressive video for the 1970s. For an example of how much further they moved beyond “videos on a stage” later in their career, you may want to watch the video for [Breakthru](#) from the 1989 album, *The Miracle*.

This is a highly abbreviated discussion of Queen’s style. For more information, please refer to secondary sources available in print and online.

Tours and Performances

The band toured extensively from the early 1970s, although Mercury’s health meant that there were no live performances after the “A Kind of Magic” tour. After Mercury’s passing, Queen performed at a tribute concert for Mercury, with proceeds towards AIDS health. The band continues to tour now with original members Brian May and Roger Taylor still present.

Queen toured Australia with their original line-up twice. The first tour was in 1976, for their “A Night at the Opera” world tour. They performed at the Perth Entertainment Centre (a building which was situated roughly where the Perth Arena currently stands) on April 11. They returned to Australia in 1985 for their “The Works” tour. For this tour, they only performed in Melbourne and Sydney.

Arguably, their most iconic performance was that at Live Aid in 1985. The band performed this concert to 72,000 fans at Wembley Stadium in London, but the performance was watched on television by an estimated 1.9 billion fans. The concert opened with an abridged performance of “Bohemian Rhapsody,” alongside “Radio Gaga,” “Hammer to Fall,” “Crazy Little Thing Called Love,” “We Will Rock You,” and “We Are the Champions.” Video recordings of this performance are available on YouTube. In 2005, a music industry poll voted this performance at LiveAid as the “world’s greatest rock gig,” beating out performances by influential artists such as The Sex Pistols, David Bowie, Nirvana, and Radiohead.

Queen’s live performance style included many theatrical and exciting elements. Mercury often dressed in flamboyant outfits (such as in Image 4), and changed costumes during a concert to highlight the music performed. Mercury also performed without the base of his microphone stand; this choice is often credited to an accident where a microphone stand broke during a gig, and he liked the freedom of the new setup. The thoughtful and extensive use of lighting also heightened the concert experience. May made the following comment about lighting in their performances,

For that two-and-a-half hours that we’re on stage, we are in complete control of the environment – that means the sound, the lights, the temperature, everything. We’ve always thought the lights are not just objects to illuminate, they’re objects in themselves and they’re part of the environment. And that’s a kind of rock’n’roll thing, I think. I think we imbibed that from seeing stuff that we enjoyed when we were kids.

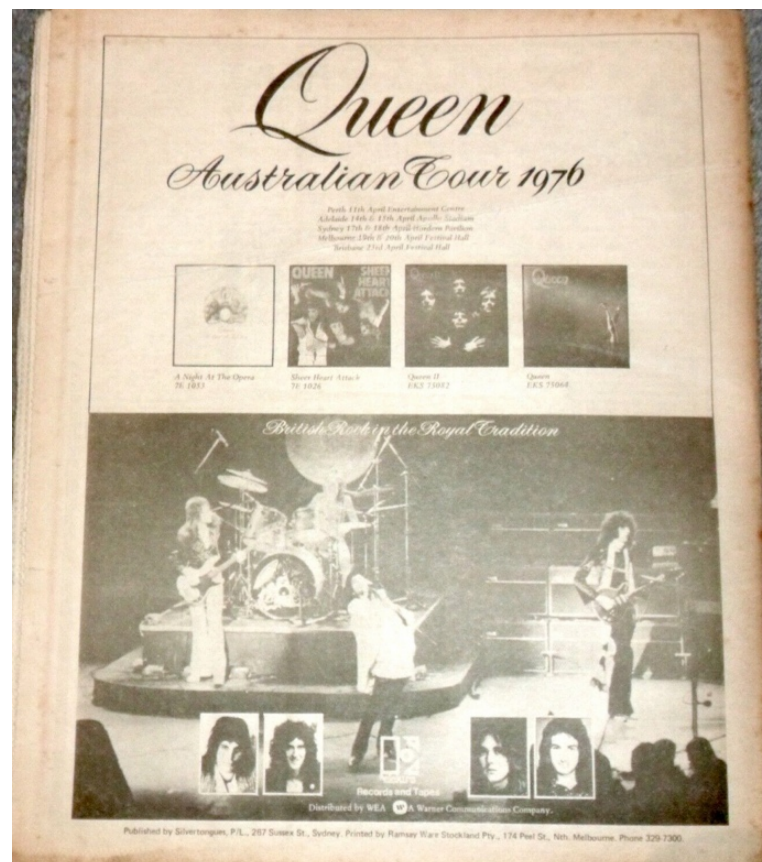


IMAGE 11

Newspaper advertisement for Queen 1976 tour to Australia (including Perth)

Influences

There are many musicians who influenced members of Queen, and far too many to name in this document. Some however are notable,

- Elvis Presley influenced Freddie Mercury (Brian May commented that Mercury was fond of Elvis and *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* is a tribute to Presley)
- David Bowie influenced Freddie Mercury (Mercury praised his “remarkable talent” and they then worked together for *Under Pressure*)
- Mercury was a fan of Montserrat Caballé and Luciano Pavarotti (opera singers). Mercury & Caballé worked together for his 1988 solo album *Barcelona*
- May refers to Led Zeppelin as an influence for the band “We were boys trying to do our thing and hoping that one day we might be rock stars and live their life, and listening to *Communication Breakdown* and *Good Times Bad Times*”

Many groups have been influenced by Queen as well,

- Katy Perry “The first one I heard was *Killer Queen* and *Don’t Stop Me Now...Don’t Stop Me Now*, all the analogies that are [in that song] are amazing. ... Freddie Mercury was—and remains—my biggest influence.”
- George Michael “Absolutely my musical mentors would be Stevie Wonder, Queen, and Elton and maybe Pink Floyd... going to see people like Freddie Mercury and realising that was something you wanted to aim at in terms of a physical presence on stage.”
- Kurt Cobain “I used to take a nap in the van and listen to Queen. Over and over again and drain the battery on the van. Then we’d be stuck. That happened a few times. We’d be stuck with a dead battery because I’d listened to Queen too much.”
- Dave Grohl “Every band should study Queen at Live Aid. I consider Freddie Mercury the greatest frontman of all time.”
- Katy Perry

A Night at the Opera (specific history/context)



IMAGE 12 AND 13

A Night at the Opera album cover & *Bohemian Rhapsody* single cover

- Fourth studio album by Queen
- Recorded from August to November 1975
- Released 21 November 1975

- Singles included *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Death on Two Legs*, *You're My Best Friend*, and *Love of My Life*
- Rolling Stone Magazine named the album #128 on their 2020 "500 Greatest Albums of All Time" list
- Queen worked with producer Roy Thomas Baker
- Cost £40,000 to record (the most expensive album ever at that point)
- Significant use of multi-tracking for vocals
- Named after the Marx Brothers film "A Night at the Opera" (1935)
- The record label didn't want *Bohemian Rhapsody* to be a single, they didn't feel it would be commercially viable
 - o While some prog rock songs were longer and in more sections, radio singles tended to be shorter (3-4 minutes long) and didn't have multiple sections. The label probably felt this song wasn't appropriate for a music single.
- The band disagreed and gave their DJ friend Kenny Everett a copy of *Bohemian Rhapsody* to play on the radio
- Everett played *Bohemian Rhapsody* on the radio fourteen times over two days
- *Bohemian Rhapsody* was released as a single on 31 October 1975
- *Bohemian Rhapsody* spent nine weeks at #1 in the UK charts
- *Rolling Stone* named the song #17 on their 2021 "500 Greatest Songs of All Time" list

Further Listening

You may want to listen to these other songs for further context around *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Title	Artist	Album	Year	Listen for...
God Only Knows	The Beach Boys	Pet Sounds	1966	Intricate harmonies. The Beach Boys were influences on a number of prog rock bands
Life on Mars?	David Bowie	Hunky Dory	1971	Extensive use of piano, strings, and percussion. Bowie was a contemporary of Queen, and worked with them for <i>Under Pressure</i>
Starship Trooper	Yes	The Yes Album	1971	Multiple section song. Yes were an important early prog rock band.
Trilogy	Emerson, Lake & Palmer	Trilogy	1972	Multiple section song. Another important prog rock band.
Us and Them	Pink Floyd	The Dark Side of the Moon	1973	Multiple section song, and of the saxophone as a solo instrument. One of the most influential bands of the 1970s.
The March of the Black Queen	Queen	Queen II	1974	A song that is a clear precursor to <i>Bohemian Rhapsody</i> from their second album.
Pull Me Under	Dream Theater	Images and Words	1992	An influential prog metal band who gained prominence in the late 1980s.
Paranoid Android	Radiohead	OK Computer	1997	Multiple part song that shows influences from songs like <i>A Day in the Life</i> and <i>Bohemian Rhapsody</i> . An influential alternative band from the 1990s.
Jesus of Suburbia (explicit language warning)	Green Day	American Idiot	2005	Multiple part song that had similar issues as a single, due to its length. Comes from a concept album released by this influential punk rock American band.
Survival	Muse	The 2 nd Law	2012	The use of operatic style is common in a number of Muse songs, and the extensive use of harmonies in the singing evokes some of Queen's aesthetic.

Also, you should consider watching some live performances from Lady Gaga, an American pop musician who has been active throughout the 21st century. Her stage name is clearly derived from Queen's song, *Radio Ga Ga*. She is known for her flamboyant persona, extensive use of costumes in performance, and epic stage shows. This [performance](#) at half time during Super Bowl LI gives some indication of her performance style.

Analysis (prepared by Dr. Ashley Smith)

Outline of Form

The song is in a through-composed form of a rhapsody—a single-movement work comprised of distinct musical episodes. Three contrasting episodes (here termed ballad, operatic and hard rock) are framed by an introduction and coda. The transitions between sections can be very abrupt or very subtle: the clunky modulation and shift in texture between the ballad and operatic episodes contrasts with the complex metric modulation that bridges the hard rock episode to the coda.

The form may also be understood in terms of the literary genre of a *Bildungsroman*, whereby a protagonist undergoes a psychological transformation. The lyrical progression of the protagonist through loss, journey, conflict and maturity roughly corresponds to the episodic unfolding of the musical form.

Despite the through-composed nature of the song, repetition does exist. The ballad section comprises of an AAB bar form, which is repeated twice. Further, several musical figures make reappearances across different episodes, most notably the ‘planing’ figure of bar 10, and the ‘closing’ figure of bar 32.

Texture

An enormous diversity of musical textures are explored within and across the song’s episodes. The introduction explores four different types of vocal writing: a capella, supported lead, independent lead, and choral writing. Instrumental solos, call and answer technique and vocal/instrumental rhythmic unisons add further dynamism to the song’s musical texture.

The instrumental writing is highly refined. The staggered initial entry of each instrument is almost imperceptible: the drum set enters with a subtle cymbal roll in bar 12, and the guitar subtly doubles the piano octaves in bar 33. Similarly, the first appearance of the backing vocals of Taylor and May occurs subtly in the background in bar 44.

Technology

For its time, the song makes highly experimental use of recent advances in multi-track studio technology. Most prominent is the use of vocal layering, most notably with the over-dubbing of Mercury’s voice in the introduction, and the layering of Mercury’s, Taylor’s and May’s voices in the operatic episode. There is playful use of stereo panning (the distribution of the audio signal from left, right and centre), most notably in the operatic episode.

Section by Section Analysis

Section	Time	Lyric Cue	Vocal Activity	Instrumental Activity	Tonal Centre
Introduction: (1–14)	0:00	'Is this the real life'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A capella four-part harmony (overdubbing and doubling of Mercury) Word painting of 'real life?' (harmonically ambiguous Bb6/Gm chord) and 'reality' (harmonically resolved Bb major chord) 		Initially ambiguous, but resolves to B flat major
	0:14	'Open your eyes'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word painting of 'look up' (melodic contour) and 'see' (widest melodic interval so far, major 6th) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piano enters with arpeggiated figure 	B flat major
	0:25	'I'm just a poor boy'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change from a capella to supported lead vocal texture 		B flat major
	0:31	'Because I'm easy come'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmonic planing (chordal parallelism) chromatically stepwise around Bb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piano doubles harmonic planing 	Chromatic (due to planing), but centred around B flat
	0:38	'Any way the wind blows'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to supported lead texture, which is overtaken by a capella texture mid-phrase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piano returns to arpeggiated figure Word painting of 'wind blows' with cymbal descent 	B flat major
Ballad episode (15–54): (17–24: AA of AAB bar form)	0:48	'Mama, just killed a man'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st ballad verse—solo voice (Mercury) with piano accompaniment Word painting of 'thrown it all away' (ascending vocal growl and cymbal roll) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arpeggiated figure in piano with octave doubling of non-harmonic tone on beat 3, resolving on beat 4 First appearance of electric bass (simple I, vi, ii, V7 progression) 	B flat major, modulating in bars 23–24
(25–32: B of AAB bar form)	1:22	'Mama, ooh' E-flat major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocal belting technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drums enter with hard rock rhythmic foundation (accenting beats 2 and 4) Section concludes with a closing figure in piano (this will be repeated in bar 74) 	E flat major, modulating in bar 30 (Cb is the pivot pitch—note the significance of this on the word 'nothing')

Section	Time	Lyric Cue	Vocal Activity	Instrumental Activity	Tonal Centre
(33–42: AA of AAB bar form)	1:48	'Too late, my time has come' B-flat major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd ballad verse • Superb vocal technique: moving between head and chest voice and ornamentation through vibrato and vocal fry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arpeggiated figure in piano with added bass. Octave doubling of beats 3 and 4 subtly doubled by electric guitar (left stereo pan) • Word painting of 'shivers' (chimes) • Electric guitar pronounced entry at conclusion of section 	Return to B flat, followed by modulation in bars 41–42
(43–46)	2:22	'Mama, ooh' E-flat major tonality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocal belting technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensified version of previous B section: addition of electric guitar and backing vocals by May and Taylor (2:27) 	E-flat major
	2:49			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtuoso electric guitar solo based on melody of A section, • Contrary motion: Incrementally rising contour in electric guitar against harmonic descent in bass • Chromatic descent in bass (2:56) modulates key to new section 	E-flat major, modulating via chromatic descent in bars 53–54
Operatic episode: (55–95)	3:02	'I see a silhouette'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call and response of short solo and choral phrases, emphasised by stereo panning • Vocal layering (Mercury, May and Taylor) across multiple octaves achieved by 180 layers of overdubbing. • Nonsensical English and Italian lyrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staccato chord accompaniment in rhythmic unison with voices, mimicking textures in Italian comic opera. • Bass and drums enter in rhythmic unison in denser choral phrases. 	A major, modulating via d minor
Opera parody 1 (68–73)	3:22	'I'm just a poor boy'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reappearance of chromatic planing figure of bar 10 (this time in solo voice), followed by rapid declamation from chorus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piano again accompanies harmonic planing figure • Bass and drums reinforce choral sections in rhythmic unison 	Initially chromatic (due to planing), but resolves to E-flat centre

Section	Time	Lyric Cue	Vocal Activity	Instrumental Activity	Tonal Centre
Interlude (73–74)	3:31			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piano plays reappearance of closing figure of bar 32 	Interlude (73–74)
Opera parody 2 (75–87)	3:33	'Easy come, easy go'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further reappearance of planing figure, followed by even more rapid choral declamation, reinforced by stereo panning from left, right and centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bass and drums reinforce choral sections in rhythmic unison Call and response on repeated V-I cadences that build in tension 	Initially chromatic (due to planing), but resolves to E flat centre
Opera parody 3 (87–95)	3:54	'Oh mama mia'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further call and response between solo and choir Choral pedal point on V7, with 3 octave vocal range 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swell in instrumental texture, diminution of rhythmic subdivision in drums 	E-flat major
Hard rock episode: (96-122)	4:07	'So you think you can stone me'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rock belting technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electric guitar riff with distortion, hard rock rhythmic foundation in drum set in 12/8 with strong back beat Rhythmic fill of guitar and drums between vocal phrases 	E-flat major
(114–122)	4:37			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electric guitar riff (now without distortion) doubled octave below by bass Call and response of hemiola melodically ascending figures across over-dubbed electric guitars, emphasised by left and right stereo panning (4:43) Bar 122: Metric modulation in piano (rit = 2 quavers gradually replace the space of 3) 	E-flat major
Coda: (123–138)	4:55	'Ooh'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to choral texture of opening, this time with wider voicing across multiple registers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returns to tempo of introduction Electric guitar main voice, reminiscence of figures from solo at bar 47. 	E-flat major
	5:11	'Nothing really matters'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solo voice (Mercury) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final reappearance of piano closing phrase (5:27), which melodically develops further and is joined by electric guitar Gong strike (5:47) 	E-flat major (bars 133-135) to F major

Lisa Young: Tha Thin Tha (2013)

Background (prepared by Dr. Adam Pinto)



Dr Lisa Young is an Australian jazz vocalist, collaborative-artist, composer, arranger, and educator based in Melbourne. Her most well-known compositions are a collection of choral works which are now performed widely throughout Australia and are gaining international recognition. One of these choral works, composed for *Gondwana Choirs*, titled “Sacred Stepping Stones” was awarded “Work Of The Year: Choral” in the 2021 Australian Art Music Awards. *Gondwana Choirs* was initially founded in 1989 as *The Sydney Children’s Choir*

but has now grown into a national choral organisation which includes the *Gondwana National Choirs*, and the *Gondwana Indigenous Children’s Choir*. Lisa Young’s relationship with *Gondwana Choirs* has continued over many years and includes the workshopping and performance of her own choral arrangement of your ATAR set-work “Tha Thin Tha” as part of the National Choral School in 2014.

Lisa Young also performs herself as a jazz vocalist in two innovative contemporary ensembles which provides useful context in understanding her creative process and studying your ATAR set-work.

Coco’s Lunch



Together with Sue Johnson, Lisa Young co-founded the a cappella vocal ensemble *Coco’s Lunch* in 1994. With a musical style drawn from a diverse range of influences including jazz, Western art, Carnatic and African traditions the group has received two ARIA nominations. One of their most recent of seven albums, *Misra Chappu*, includes Young’s own compositions including the song “Other Plans” which was awarded “Best Song” in the *Australian A Cappella Awards*. This album also includes an a cappella arrangement of your ATAR set-work. Listening to these arrangements of “Tha Thin Tha” would be valuable to provide context and breadth to your

understanding of the music.

The Lisa Young Quartet



The Lisa Young Quartet is a jazz/world music ensemble which has released four albums. In this jazz combo Lisa performs with Ben Robertson on double bass, guitarist Steve Magnusson, and drummer Dave Beck. Their fourth album titled *The Eternal Pulse*, which was released in 2021, was conceived by Lisa Young as a wordless song-cycle. Lisa Young’s performance on the the album, and in your set work, involves an ancient and sophisticated style of vocal percussion referred to as *konnakkol*. Her unique vocal performance practice was developed

through extensive immersion in Indian classical musical traditions, aspects of which are documented in her PhD dissertation which she completed at Monash University in Victoria.

The Carnatic Tradition: Tāla, Solkattu and Konnakol

Carnatic music and dance from South India have evolved over thousands of years from ancient Hindu traditions. Along with Hindustani music from the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent, it is one of the two main sub-genres of the Indian “classical” music tradition. Within the Carnatic tradition the metre (or rhythmic cycle) of the music is referred to as “tāla”. This contrasts with “rāga” which is a framework of pitches used for improvisation in the Indian classical music tradition.² An integral technique within the study and performance of Carnatic music is the marking of the tāla with cyclical hand gestures which can include clapping, waving and finger tapping.

In the Carnatic musical tradition Solkattu and Konnakol are rhythmic systems used to represent, learn, and provide a conceptual framework to perform the complex rhythms. (These include rhythmic techniques we would refer to in the Western tradition as polyrhythms and metric modulations). Solkattu is the system of rhythmic syllables which is used to represent and vocalise rhythms. These syllables allow for the representation of different aspects of the rhythm such as beats, metrical divisions and cyclical rhythmic patterns. Some Solkattu syllables include “ta ka” “di mi” and “jo nu” which are used to represent two-note groups.³ Some of these syllables can be heard in the introduction to the *Coco’s Lunch* recording of “Tha Thin Tha” (in Western music notation we would refer to these as quavers or eighth-notes, or “ti ti” using the Kodály method).

Konnakkol is found specifically in the Carnatic musical tradition and is best described as a style of vocal percussion. Lisa Young, in her PhD thesis, refers to konnakol as “the performance art form of the intoned rhythmic recitation of solkattu, the vocalised rhythmic syllables of South Indian classical music and dance.”⁴ As the study of konnakol is a predominantly oral musical tradition in which techniques and musical skills are passed from Guru to student through demonstration and imitation, a great diversity in konnakol syllables and notation has evolved.

A group of four subdivisions of the beat could be recited as “tha ka thi mi”, a group of three subdivisions of the beat could be recited as “tha ke da”, while a more complex internal subdivision of seven could be recited as “tha ke da tha ka thi mi” or as “tha - thin - ke na thom”.⁵ These particular spellings are used by Lisa Young, whose own creative research (including her PhD thesis and various instructional videos) are an engaging resource on this sophisticated vocal tradition.

² Regula Qureshi, Harold S. Powers, Jonathan Katz, Richard Widdess, Gordon Geekie, Alastair Dick, Devdan Sen, Nazir A. Jairazbhoy, Peter Manuel, Robert Simon, Joseph J. Palackal, Soniya K. Brar, M. Whitney Kelting, Edward O. Henry, Maria Lord, Alison Arnold, Warren Pinckney, Kapila Vatsyayan, Bonnie C. Wade, and Inderjit N. Kaur. “India, subcontinent of,” *Grove Music Online*, (2001): accessed September 29, 2023, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043272>.

³ Brandon Keith Wood, “South Indian ‘Solkattu’ and Western Music Pedagogy: Creating New Rhythmic Perspectives,” *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 4 (2013): 67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432113483839>.

⁴ Lisa Young, “The Eternal Pulse: Creating with Konnakol and its Adaptation into Contemporary Vocal Performance” (Ph.D., Monash University, 2015), 1.

⁵ Young, “The Eternal Pulse”, 132–137.

Lisa Young: Konnakkol and Scat in the Creative Process



Lisa Young began studying konnakkol in Melbourne with M. Ravichandhira in 1994 and, from 1997, studied with Guru Kaaraikkudi Mani (pictured to the left) in Chennai. It was over this extended period that the solkattu language became an integrated part of her vocal performance and creative process. Lisa Young describes this integration of konnakkol into her performance (a synergy which developed and matured for her over many years) as an augmentation of the jazz-vocal technique known as scat.⁶

Scat is “a technique of jazz singing in which onomatopoeic or nonsense syllables are sung to improvised melodies.”⁷ In a striking similarity with the practice of konnakkol, some scholars have suggested that the origins of scat singing lie in a West African musical practice of using wordless syllables to imitate percussion rhythms within vocal lines. However, the earliest examples of scat singing can be heard in New Orleans jazz. The most often-cited recorded example is by Louis Armstrong, performing “Heebie Jeebies” with his jazz-band *Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five* in 1926. It was the charismatic Armstrong, who was also virtuosic trumpet player, who is credited with initiating the jazz-tradition of scat singing.⁸

Ella Fitzgerald took the imitation of jazz instruments to even greater heights in the 1940’s. Her recording of “Flying Home” made with *Vic Schoen and His Orchestra* for Decca in 1945 is a remarkable example of her sophisticated scat improvisations. It could be argued that in the sophisticated performances such as given by Ella Fitzgerald and Lisa Young the definition of scat provided above could be amended. The scat syllables used by Ella Fitzgerald to imitate the virtuosity of her instrumental colleagues and the konnakkol syllables used by Lisa Young which directly emulate percussion-timbre, and have obvious cultural import, transcend mere “nonsense” sounds.

Jazz Ensembles: Combos to Big Bands

Ensembles dedicated to jazz performance can exist in a variety of sizes and instrumentations: from the jazz “combo” with as few as three musicians; to the “big band” with multiple musicians organised into sections. This would seem to make the classification of these jazz ensembles problematic. However, considering the style of jazz performed by a particular ensemble, and the venues in which they perform are useful characteristics to consider when describing these ensembles. There are also jazz ensembles, such as “swing” bands, that are closely associated with a particular style, period or place.

Regardless of the number of performers, structurally most jazz ensembles are divided into two sections: the “front-line” melody instruments (sometimes referred to as the “horn section”) and the accompanying instruments which are referred to as the “rhythm section”. The main instruments in the rhythm section are usually piano, guitar, a bass instrument, and a drum set.

⁶ Young, “The Eternal Pulse”, 2–3.

⁷ J. Bradford Robinson, “Scat singing,” *Grove Music Online*, (2001): accessed September 20, 2023, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000024717>.

⁸ J. Bradford Robinson, “Scat singing,” *Grove Music Online*, (2001): accessed September 20, 2023, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000024717>.

However, there can be a great variety in this line-up: banjos are common in some jazz ensembles; the bass instrument could comprise a double bass, electric bass, tuba, or bass saxophone; and if there is no bass instrument in the ensemble, the piano could easily play any required bass line instead.

With the origins of early New Orleans jazz ensembles rooted in the brass-band tradition, the front-line instruments (or horn section) generally consist of wind instruments such as the trumpet or cornet, clarinet, saxophone, and trombone. Although slightly out of place in a horn section, a violin or singer could also form part of these front-line instruments. Much like the concert-hall symphony orchestra, as the size of the big bands increased these instruments would be organised into “sections” of like instruments, such as brass, woodwind, string, and of course, rhythm.

Improvisation and Arrangement: It’s all in the “Head.”

Improvisation can be considered a defining characteristic of jazz performance. However, due to the number of performers in larger big bands there becomes a need for the music performed to be arranged. These “arrangements” of either original compositions or jazz standards can increase the complexity of the music performed, allow for greater cohesion and interaction between the different sections of larger big bands, and provide soloists the opportunity to improvise on the originating melody and chord structure. This originating melody and chord structure (or theme) on which a jazz performance (or arrangement) is based is referred to as the “head”.

An arrangement in jazz does not imply a mere copy of an original. Arrangements can be highly creative re-compositions of the head in which an imaginative arranger can fashion a finished product more colourful than the original. There are also highly effective, but more rigidly-composed “stock arrangements”. These were created for publication and for use by a variety of standard ensembles common in the 1940s such as big bands, military bands, jazz orchestras and saxophone quartets.⁹

Your ATAR set-work—“Tha Thin Tha”—is an original composition performed by the *Lisa Young Quartet*. In this jazz/world music ensemble there is only one performer on each instrument (double bass, guitarist, drummer and vocalist). This compact instrumentation allows all the musicians in the ensemble great scope for collaborative creation before a performance and freedom during a performance in which to improvise. This provides the opportunity to create what is often referred to as a “head arrangement”. These arrangements are usually not written down, or perhaps only partially sketched in musical notation, and are created primarily through a process of collaboration between the performers who draw ideas from the head.

It is possible to reduce the structure of a head arrangement (which is also common in blues, rock and popular music) simply as a statement of the head, followed by a series of improvised solos based on the head, and concluding with an often more elaborate restatement of the head. However, this form of arrangement can in practice be a sophisticated process of collaboration involving the integration of various players’ contrasting ideas, a workshopping of individual instrumental and vocal parts, more performative improvised contributions, and often requiring what can be an impressive memorisation of the finished arrangement. Considering the structure

⁹ Gunther Schuller, “Arrangement (jazz),” *Grove Music Online*, (2003): accessed September 23, 2023, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000015900>.

of *The Lisa Young Quartet's* performance of "Tha Thin Tha" will be an important part of your analysis and contextual understanding of the work.

Links to works discussed

[Lisa Young in rehearsal with Gondwana Choirs - "Tha Thin Tha"](#)

[Coco's Lunch Perform "Tha Thin Tha"](#)

[Gondwana Choirs sing "Tha Thin Tha" in concert](#)

[Ella Fitzgerald - "Flying Home"](#)

[Lisa Young "Check Your Pulse" \(resources\)](#)

[Gondwana Choirs](#)

[Lisa Young's Research](#)

Analysis (prepared by Melissa Skinner)

Tha Thin Tha – composed by Lisa Young + Ben Robertson

The composition “Tha Thin Tha” draws on standard jazz conventions but reveals an innovative fusion of jazz and Indian music, specifically through the inclusion and usage of ‘Konnakol’. It is essentially the recitation of ‘Solkattu’: the vocal syllables related to the sounds of the Mridangam drum, considered the principal percussion instrument in Karnatic Music.

In the jazz genre and art form, improvisation is a key feature. Typically, this improvisation would draw on jazz-style rhythms and tonal groupings (modes and scales) to express musical ideas. In “Tha Thin Tha”, these improvised ideas, along with other features of the composition, are drawn from Indian classical music elements, including Konnakol, and then further developed and interwoven with jazz scat syllables. The composition’s melody also draws heavily on the inclusion of a ‘jazzified’ version of Konnakol ideas, resulting in a distinctively Indian-Jazz fusion sound.

Innovation is demonstrated in the composition and performance of this work, realised through the fusion of Konnakol rhythms with Western tonal pitches, using the jazz genre as a platform to merge the sounds and rhythms of Konnakol with jazz tonal and rhythmic language.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation heard in this piece is that of a typical jazz small group line-up: vocals (Lisa Young), guitar (Steve Magnusson), double bass (Ben Robertson), and drums (Dave Beck). However, as noted, the vocalist employs Konnakol rather than singing lyrics. Nylon string guitar is played on this recording, and Magnusson has altered his tone projection by modifying his playing technique: playing closer to the bridge, which produces a tighter, brighter treble sound (‘bitey’) to achieve a ‘ringing’ almost Sitar-like sound.

Form/Structure

The form of this composition is extended; with extra sections adding colouring through the different ways the Konnakol is used/integrated. The piece aims to exhibit the use of both intoned and pitched Konnakol as a fully integrated vocal and musical expression in a Western jazz context. However, it still follows the jazz conventions of Head (melody), Solos, Head.

Intro: Intoned vocal percussion

A: Melody/Head 1 – melodic lines, sung with Konnakol syllables/rhythms

B: Interlude 1 – Pitched vocal percussion riff/ostinato supporting the featured bass/guitar line

C: Interlude 2 – Guitar/Bass line feature with melodic phrase: repeated melody, sung with scat sounds- set ‘sound bank’ language.

D: Solos – begins with trading between voice (intoned Konnakol phrases based on Karaikudi Mani’s¹⁰ structures for mridangam) & drums (free interpretation of the rhythms used), then moves to an open solo section (8-bar section repeated).

A: Melody/Head returns (modulates from A to D), then a short one-bar tag ending.

¹⁰ Karaikudi Mani was a significant influence and Guru for Lisa Young throughout her study of classical Indian music.

Harmony

The harmonic structure of the melody is loosely based around A Mixolydian and uses slash chords to create harmonic interest through the chord sequence. It is worth noting that Indian classical music is a modal art form, and in jazz composition and explorations, there are also significant ties to modal music.

In the A section (melody/head), the bass plays a descending line underneath an A Maj triad, e.g. Bassline: A-G-F#-F (F⁺) -E-D (B-/D) - then returning to F#-F, repeating back to the beginning of this section. Again, this technique is commonly used in jazz compositions.

From B onwards, the harmony is loosely based on A7#11, with passing tones played in the guitar and bass (typically A7#11 would use notes taken from A Lydian Dominant: A, B, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A). This melodic riff has an additional D natural.

Melody

The introduction to this tune uses Konnakol through intoned vocal percussion, establishing a rhythmic pulse and stylistic direction before the melody and harmony enter at A.

The melody at A is almost entirely diatonic, centred around A Mixolydian (NB, there are no G's present in this melody, so, in isolation, it is ambiguous whether this is Major or Mixolydian, but due to the rhythm section applying a modal—'Mixolydian' approach to the harmony, Mixolydian has been nominated here).

At B, the melody is delivered as pitched vocal percussion, employing Konnakol. The score identifies the pitches used for this VP section A, B, G, E: all notes found in with A Mixolydian.

At C, the melody is loosely based on A Lydian Dominant scale, with added chromaticism / passing tones.

Accompaniment

At B, there is a prominent Ostinato/Riff played in bass and guitar. The phrase is highly syncopated and employs a 3-beat rhythmic pattern over 4, resulting in a rhythmically displaced motif. Harmonically, the line is a slightly 'crunchy' riff line, using mostly Lydian dominant + passing tones. The first two bars of the phrase is built on chord tones from A. In bar 3 & 4 of the phrase, the harmony in the phrase is developed through falling triads of B & C#, providing 'colour-tones' to the line.

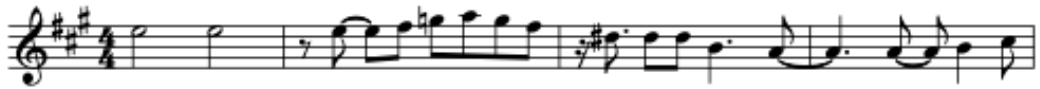
Improvisation

At D, there is a 28-bar section (+ 2-bar break) where the vocals and drums trade. Again, this technique is often used in jazz performances. In this instance, the trade section employs a "Reduction Structure" – common to Indian classical music. when these sections are divided by minims, the trade lengths are: 4 – 4 – 3 – 3 – 4 – 4 – 3 – 6 (last 6 minims played together).

Two bars after E, there is an Open Improvised solo section. The first 8 bars of the guitar solo have been transcribed. The notes used in this solo fragment are aligned with the Lydian Dominant mode, known in Indian classical music as: "Raag Vachaspati". (1,2,3,#4, 5,6,b7)

Lydiant Dominant mode on A

1

**Steve Magnusson's first 8 bars solo
-Tha Thin Tha (Lisa Young Quartet)**

John Adams: *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986)

Background (prepared by Dr. Cecilia Sun)

John (Coolidge) Adams (b. 1947)



John Adams—not to be confused with his namesakes the second and sixth presidents of the United States, or fellow composer John Luther Adams (b. 1953)—is a composer, conductor, and writer. Adams is part of the generation of US composers inspired initially by John Cage, and then by minimalism, but his compositional style quickly expanded to feature aspects of American popular culture as well as harmonic language derived from European Western art music. More so than any composer who has been labelled a “minimalist,” Adams has made his career writing in traditional forms like opera, and for standard ensembles like the

symphony orchestra. He has, for example, maintained long-standing relationships with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Adams has become one of the United States’ most performed contemporary composers, and has received widespread recognition through awards (including a Pulitzer Prize and a number of Grammys); honorary doctorates from prestigious institutions including the University of Cambridge and his alma mater Harvard University; and significant commissions such as *On the Transmigration of Souls* (2002)—a piece commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to commemorate the lives lost in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th, 2001 (an event now referred to simply as “9/11”).

Biography

Adams started his musical life as a clarinetist, initially taking lessons from his father. He started studying composition at the age of 10 and had his first work played by a community orchestra at the age of 14. He completed an undergraduate degree (1965–71) and an MA (1972) at Harvard University, where his teachers included Roger Sessions and David Del Tredici.

In 1971, Adams moved to San Francisco and he been based primarily in the Bay Area ever since. He quickly became enmeshed in the area’s New Music scene, not only as composer, but also as the conductor and commissioner of new works by significant experimental composers. In 1978, he started his long association with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra as its New Music advisor and then later its composer-in-residence. Works written for this orchestra, such as *Harmonium* (1981) and *Harmonielehre* (1985) brought Adams national attention. *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986) dates from this period and was a commission for the Great Woods Festival of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Adams began perhaps his most significant collaboration in 1983 when director Peter Sellars approached him to write an opera about President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. The two of them, along with librettist Alice Goodman, produced *Nixon in China*, which premiered in 1987 to enormous critical success. Adams, Sellars, and Goodman would work together again on the controversial *Death of Klinghoffer* (1991). Adams’s other stage works with Sellars include the opera-oratorio *El niño* (2000): a retelling of the Nativity with texts by Hispanic women poets. In addition to operas, Adams has also written in other traditional genres such as the concerto. His

output includes: a violin concerto (1993), *Gnarly Buttons* for clarinet (1996), *Century Rolls* for piano (1996), and *The Dharma at Big Sur* for solo electric violin (2003).

Hallelujah Junction, Adams's memoirs, bears the subtitle: *Composing an American Life*. Overt references to various aspects of Americana characterize Adams's compositions from his earliest works. *Shaker Loops* (1978), for example—one of his first major works—uses the minimalist oscillating “shaking” of the strings to evoke the Shakers, a religious cult based in the United States known for their ecstatic dancing during religious services. The foxtrot, marches, big band music, and cartoon music of Adams's youth find their way into such works as *The Chairman Dances* (1985), *Chamber Symphony* (1992), and *Gnarly Buttons* (1996). *The Dharma at Big Sur* (2003) pays homage to the coastline of his adopted California, as well as quintessential California composers Terry Riley and Lou Harrison.

Minimalism



Although Adams's style was always more complicated and eclectic than the early pulse minimalism of Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, the influence of minimalism is obvious in a significant number of his works, including *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*.

Minimalist music takes its name from its counterpart in the visual arts. Artists such as Carl Andre and Robert Morris were producing large works that featured the same kind of stripped down, process-based aesthetic that critics found in the music of La Monte Young,

Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. (See, for example, Sol Le Witt's *All Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, which is exactly as it sounds, and Robert Morris's *Untitled*, which is a simple 4ft x 4ft x 8ft plywood box.) The picture above is a 1971 reproduction of Morris' *Untitled* constructed from mirror glass and wood, held by Tate London.

The earliest forms of minimalism are the experiments in drones from New York-based composers including La Monte Young, Tony Conrad, John Cale and changing membership of the Theater for Eternal Music. (There is not much music available from this period, but readily available examples of this kind of drone music include Conrad's *Four Violins*, various bootlegs of The Theater of Eternal Music you can find online, and the influenced of drone minimalism that are clearly audible in the Velvet Underground's first two albums when their membership included Cale.)

More relevant to our understanding of Adams is the pulse-based process minimalism. This is music that is characterized by:

1. An obvious process (see discussion of Reich below for more details);
2. Simplicity of basic material (although complexities can and do arise as the processes play out);
3. Music that tries to ward off signification, that is, music that does its best to prevent you from listening through it to some other musical or extra-musical meaning;
4. Repetition;
5. Clear underlying pulse;
6. Significant length.

Examples:

Terry Riley, *In C* (1964)

In C premiered at the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1964, with a star-studded ensemble that included Pauline Oliveros (accordion), Morton Subotnick (clarinet), Steve Reich (electric piano), and Riley himself (electric piano). The premise of the piece is simple: the score sets out fifty-three melodic snippets—more or less around the note C. Players navigate through the score at their own pace, repeating each module as many times as they like. They are, however, cautioned to listen carefully so they are neither too far ahead nor behind. The most notorious part of the piece—as least for early reviewers—is the steady pulse played out on octaves Cs. This is not in the score. Indeed, it was not part of Riley’s conception of the work. Reich came up with this as a way of keeping the ensemble together when that proved a challenge during rehearsals.

There are now many recordings of *In C* available, including performances by an orchestra of traditional Chinese instruments, six pianists, and electronics. The link below takes you to the original 1968 recording, which unexpectedly became a hit and put minimalism on the radar of a wider audience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbTn79x-mrl>

Score: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/219018417/In-C-Terry-Riley>

Steve Reich, *Come Out* (1966)

Reich’s essay “Music as a Gradual Process” is the classic statement of process minimalism. (http://musicgrad.ucsd.edu/~dwd/2014_music14/reich.pdf) In it, he explains process as a compositional device that determines every aspect of the work. Just as importantly, this process must be “perceptible”: “I want to be able to hear the process happen throughout the sounding music.” In perhaps the most-quoted lines from the essay, Reich writes in favor of music that shows its workings in an obvious and easy-to-perceive manner: “The use of hidden structural devices in music never appealed to me. Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfying all.”

Come Out is an early tape example of the process Reich calls phasing, that is, two identical parts that play at slightly different speeds so that one slowly drifts away from the other. The source material for this work comes from a recording of 19-year-old Daniel Hamm who describes a beating he took in Harlem’s 28th police precinct and the aftermath in which he had to demonstrate an obvious need for medical attention: “I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them.” After playing the quote in its entirety, Reich just uses “come out to show them.” As the tapes drift further apart, the “c” and “sh” of the short quote become increasingly prominent until all meaning from the words have been obliterated. Reich moved his use of phasing from these early tape works to human performers in pieces such as *Piano Phase* (1967) and *Drumming* (1970–1).

Further Listening

John Adams, *Phrygian Gates* (1977–78)

An early work that clearly shows minimalism's influence at the beginning of Adams's compositional career. A substantial work for solo piano that clocks in at just under half an hour, *Phrygian Gates* shows its minimalist roots in its used of repetition, and a process-based harmonic structure. Adams takes the "gates" in the title from electronics, where it is used to denote an abrupt shift. The work alternates between Lydian and Phrygian modes with the latter gradually taking over.

This link below is to a recording by American pianist Ursula Oppens, one of the great interpreters of 20th- and 21st-century music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skqORNf33oY>

John Adams, *Nixon in China* (1987)



Adams's first opera. Created in close collaboration with director Peter Sellars and librettist Alice Goodman, *Nixon in China* would come to be known as a "CNN opera"—a work that is based on recent history, in this case, U.S. President Nixon's visit to the People's Republic of China in 1972. Adams's minimalist-inspired musical voice is still evident, but so are influences from jazz (especially big band), earlier 20th-century neoclassicism, and operatic history, including Wagner. The opera even includes an old operatic trope: a storm scene.

The video from the opera's Houston debut is available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUIDKaKtRKo>

Highlights include:

- the opening chorus and Nixon's "News" aria (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFnQrbVV3_U);
- Madam Mao's coloratura aria "I am the wife of Mao Tse Tung" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mtMI_huRtY); and
- Adams, Sellars, and Goodman's reimagining of the communist opera the Nixons watched in China (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-vK4IV4giw>).

Further Reading

The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer. Edited by Thomas May. Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006.

First extensive collection of writings about Adams. Also includes interviews with the composer himself, as well as key collaborators such as director Peter Sellars, pianist Emanuel Ax, and librettist Alice Goodman.

John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2008.

Adams's memoirs covers not only his life story and musical influences, but also the composer's thoughts of contemporary musical life.

Analysis (prepared by Dr. James Ledger)

Commissioned by the Great Woods Festival to celebrate its inaugural concert at Great Woods, Mansfield, Massachusetts.

First performance: June 13, 1986, Mansfield, Massachusetts. Pittsburgh Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas.

Short Ride in a Fast Machine is a short orchestral fanfare. It is highly energetic and exuberant. Just before writing it, the composer John Adams had taken a ride in a friend's Italian sports car and had found the whole experience rather terrifying. As Adams says "the piece is somewhat of an evocation of that experience!"

Short Ride follows multiple techniques of minimalism: a strong sense of pulse, repeated phrases and static or slow-moving harmony. All these elements combine to create a work of high-energy and exuberance.

Orchestration

WIND:

2 piccolos, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, cor Anglais, 4 clarinets, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon

BRASS:

4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba

PERCUSSION:

timpani, high/medium/low woodblocks, triangle, xylophone, crotales, glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, sizzle cymbal, snare drum, pedal bass drum, large bass drum, large tam-tam, tambourine

KEYBOARDS:

2 synthesisers (optional)

STRINGS:

Violins I, violins II, violas, cellos, double basses

The orchestra is fairly typical with one or two surprises. Firstly, there is the inclusion of two (optional) synthesiser parts. Secondly, there is a very large percussion section and Adams gives a great deal of prominence to the three woodblocks – pitched low, medium and high. They are given the role of an all-powerful metronome for most of the work. The orchestra has to lock into the rhythmic precision of the woodblocks before they are allowed more freedom in the final moments.

The piece opens with three loud ticks on the high woodblock – signalling the tempo for the orchestra – very similar to how rock bands start a song in a live show.

There is a lot of influence from American big-band and jazz traditions: the high-octane walking-bass line, the brass jabs and the rim-shot on the snare drum are all typical of these traditions.

Form

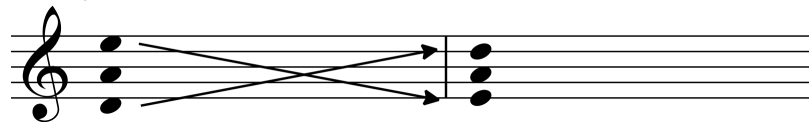
The work can be broken up into the following sections (marked by double bar lines in the score).

- A. b.1–51: exposition of pitch material moving towards E major sonority
- B. b.52–81: first appearance of strings and new sonority around Bb
- C. b.82–121: first occurrence of moving melodic material and it's in the bass instruments
- D. b.122–137: bridge on pedal notes alternating between C and A
- E. b.138–180: 'fanfare' melodies in horns with cellos and trumpets
- CODA. B.181–188: a quick recapping flourish of the opening before walloping final D major chord.

Pitch organisation

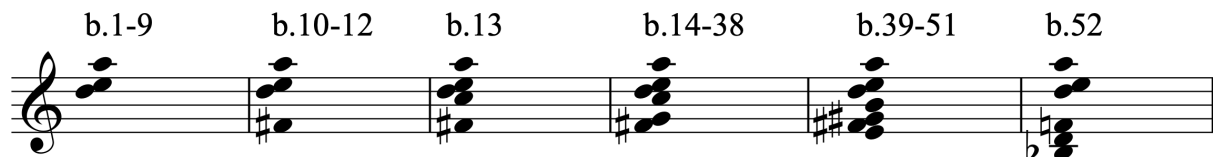
The harmonic language of the work revolves around quartal harmony. This is a chord stacked of fourths. Quartal harmony is used in jazz music and is also strongly favoured by American composers. The 'openness' of the harmony has now become synonymous with the sound of Americana. Listen to *Appalachian Spring* by Aaron Copland.

There is also the lesser used term "quintal" harmony, which is a chord of stacked fifths. Due to the inversionsal similarity of fourths with fifths, the resultant sonorities are extremely similar:



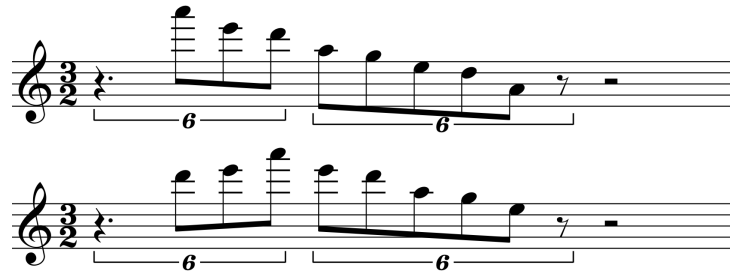
As can be seen above, a stack of fifths produces the same pitches as a stack of fourths (ignoring octaves). In triadic harmony – the harmony used in classical music and popular music of today – the chords are stacked in thirds. Adams uses a combination of both for *Short Ride*.

Below is the pitch content for section A.

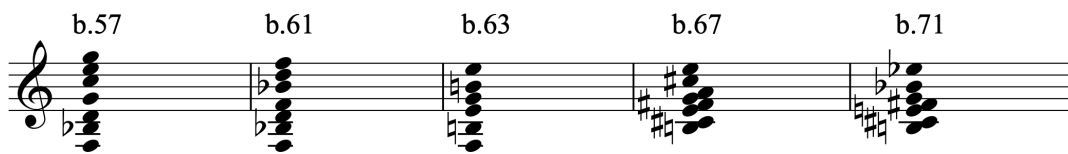


The first sonority (b.1–9), is a suspended fourth chord on A. (Asus4). This is three stacked fifths (or fourths). A new note is added at b.10 (F#), a C at b.13, and G at b.14. The order of the notes follows a cycle of fifths (either perfect or diminished). At b.39, Adams subtly adjusts the harmony by moving the C to a B and the G to a G# to produce a chord entirely of stacked fifths, i.e.: D,A,E,B,F#,C#,G#. Another way to look at this chord would be to describe it as E major and D major stacked together or E11.

In this opening section, special mention should be made of the flourishes in the piccolos, flutes and oboes (b.16–38). These rapid fragments outline the harmony and give a fluorescent buzz to the musical activity underneath.



At b.52 (Section B) there comes a surprise: the E-major chord is replaced with Bb major. Notice how the voicing of the A sus4 chord remains at the top. Bb is a tritone away from E (a diminished 5th) and with this surprising tonal shift comes a shift in orchestration – the string section (except double basses) are added for the first time. From here the harmonic activity becomes denser – triads alternate with polytonal chords. These are chords made up of two or more triads to create complex, often saturated harmony.



At b.82 (Section C) contrabassoon, trombone, tuba, cellos and double basses begin their off-kilter walking bass line. The percussion and brass crank up the excitement with ‘stabs’ that increase in frequency.

There is a bridging section (Section D, b.122–137) that features pedal notes on low C and A an octave and a 6th higher. This has a dramatic effect: the sense of crashing down to the low C from the A is palpable. The harmony whittles away to the opening Asus4 to set up the final section.

At b.138 (Section E) the incessant click of the woodblocks ceases and two ceremonial melodies are allowed to take over, one in the horns and cellos the other in the trumpets. Notice how a great deal of the melodic writing hinges around perfect 4ths and 5ths. These two melodies interact with the moving bass line to create a counterpoint of three lines.

Rhythm

One aspect of minimalism is a strong sense of pulse, and that is certainly true in *Short Ride*. In addition to the steady beat of the woodblocks, there is a great deal of pulsing crotchets throughout the orchestra, often remaining static for long periods. The woodwinds, for example, play nothing but rapid crotchets between b.79 to b.120. The same goes for the upper strings from b.133 to b.180. Adams generates excitement by layering two static rhythms of different beat lengths together. Combined these are known as cross-rhythms or polyrhythms.

b.2 Clarinet 1

Clarinet 2

High Wood Block

The above diagram on the left shows the clarinets as they are notated in the score. On the right the notes are grouped in repeating patterns of three – as we hear them. For every four of these clarinet figures, the woodblock strikes three times. Therefore, this is a polyrhythm of 4 against 3.

At bar 10 the trumpets introduce a new rhythmic figure:

b.10 Trumpets

High Wood Block

The woodblock continues with its minim pulse, creating a strong 3/2 feel. The trumpet pattern is a dotted minim long creating a 6/4 feel. So for every three woodblock strikes, there are two repeating figures in the trumpets. This is a 3 against 2 polyrhythm. It should be noted that at the point (b.10), the clarinets are still playing the 3 quaver pattern so a more complex polyrhythm is created through very simple means.

In a similar way to the harmonic saturation Adams achieves, he also creates a sort of 'rhythmic saturation'.

b.111 Upper strings

Brass

Low strings & brass

Bear in mind that the tempo marking for *Short Ride* is Delirando (delirious!) $h = 152$. This means that $q = 304$. The rapid tempo combined with the rhythmic activity makes for a highly energetic and delirious work.



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