

## 53. Ray Davies

### Waterloo Sunset

(For Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

#### Background information and performance circumstances

- *Waterloo Sunset* was written by the English singer, guitarist and song writer Ray Davies (born 1944).
- It was released as a single by his band, the Kinks, in May 1967, and reached Number 2 in the British charts. It was very successful in Australia, New Zealand and Europe, but failed to make the charts in the USA, perhaps because of its very specific British references.
- Although much early 1960s pop music in Britain was strongly influenced by American Rhythm and Blues and Rock 'n' Roll, British bands (especially the Beatles and the Kinks) had by 1967 established a style which was more individual, and less reliant on Blues influences.
- The song lyrics reference London landmarks, such as Waterloo station, and are very different in nature from the 'traditional' love songs that dominated pop music at the time.
- The song includes a narrative element, like a ballad, as told from the viewpoint of a slightly detached outsider, who seems to need nothing more in life than to be able to observe the movement of crowds around London, and of course, the 'Waterloo sunset'.
- Terry and Julie, the couple mentioned in the song, were long assumed to be, sixties icons Terence Stamp and Julie Christie, but Davies has since made statements in interviews suggesting that they were variously his sister and her boyfriend, or that Terry was his nephew, Terry Davies.
- To add to the confusion, Davies also claimed, in 2010, that the original title for the song was 'Liverpool Sunset', opening up the possibility that the Liverpool suburb of Waterloo was in his mind when working on early drafts. Certainly, Liverpool and the 'Mersey Sound' of the early 1960s were a great influence on all British bands of the 1960s.

#### Performing forces and their handling

- At the time of the recording, the Kinks were a four-piece 'Beat combo' or group, consisting of Ray Davies (lead vocals and acoustic guitar), his brother David (lead guitar and backing vocals), Pete Quaife (bass guitar and backing vocals), and Mick Avory (drums). In addition, the female backing vocals for this, and a lot of Kinks tracks of the period, were provided by Rasa Dodzpetris, Ray Davies's first wife.
- Ray Davies's lead vocals on this track are quite restrained and 'English', avoiding the strident vocal tone, slides and growls of the rhythm and blues styles. The tone quality of the main vocal line is slightly clipped and 'tinny', perhaps as a result of double tracking, a technique where the part is recorded onto two tracks, which are then played back together.

- The main vocal line has a range of a thirteenth (B-G#) and at the top end Davies often uses the falsetto range of his voice.
- The backing vocals sing almost throughout the song, providing a mixture of sustained 'Oo's and punctuating 'La's and 'Sha la la's. This scat style backing provides a smooth and stylish foil to the words, while the 'Sha la la' in bars 24 and 28 act as an effective link into and during the middle eight. The only words sung by the backing vocals in the song are at the end of the middle eight in the turnaround back into the verse, and during the fade. On both occasions, they imitate the lead vocals' 'Waterloo sunset's fine'.
- The lead guitar part is prominent from the very beginning of the track, where the individual quality of the sound chosen is evident both in the dominant pedal of bars 1-4 and in the 'lick' in bars 4-7 that pre-echoes the main hook of the song. The sound here was created by the use of a tape delay echo, where the physical gap between the play and record heads of a tape machine allowed a delayed repeat of the sound, a technique popular on guitar instrumentals of the 1950s, but interpreted anew here. The lead guitar works largely in dialogue with the lead vocals, filling in the gaps between phrases at times and acting quasi-imitatively at others. A more rock-like guitar texture is used in the middle eight section (bars 25-30), where open fifths on the lowest two strings alternate with four-note chords in the higher register. A very brief guitar 'solo' in between verse 3 and the coda is simply a slightly ornamented version of the verse melody, but there is no improvisation here, nor any slides, blue notes or other guitar techniques.
- Ray Davies plays the acoustic guitar part, which plays accented chords on the beat of every bar of the piece.
- The bass guitar line is higher and more melodic than traditional walking or alternating tonic and dominant styles. The rhythmic impetus is provided by the drums and guitars, so the bass can play semibreves in the A sections of the verse, and even provides a heterophonic version of the vocal melody during the middle eight. The descending scalar shape of the bass line is distinctive here, although hardly unique even in 1967. The Beatles' 'Day in the Life', for example, has a very similar pattern.
- The drums play a 'standard' rock beat, in straight quavers, with accents on the backbeats 2 and 4 on the snare drum. This is broken up by regular quaver and semiquaver fills at the end of four-bar sections. At tension-building moments, for example the middle eight, every beat is accented, and the syncopations of the backing vocals are articulated in bars 24 and 28.

## Texture

- The texture is mainly homophonic, with attention firmly focused on the vocal melody.
- There are layers of sounds within the texture which do at times work independently; for example, the lead guitar plays in a kind of dialogue with the vocals, sometimes restating vocal ideas.
- There is an example of an heterophonic texture from bar 25 to bar 30, where the bass guitar plays a simplified version of the vocal melody an octave below.
- The backing vocals are involved in two passages of quasi-imitation with the lead vocals in bars 31-32 and 55-58.

- Pedal points are used frequently, e.g. bars 1-4, 31-34, and at the Coda, where an unresolved dominant pedal signals the beginning of the fadeout.

## Structure

Section	Bar	Commentary
Introduction	1-8	Dominant preparation
Verse 1	8 <sup>3</sup> -24	AABA (16-bar song form, where the B section contrasts repetitions of the A section)
Middle 8	25-32	Textural and key contrast
Turnaround	33-34	Dominant pedal to return to the verse (bars 31-34 are a repeat of bars 1-4 of the Introduction in the accompaniment)
Repeat of Verse 3	8 <sup>3</sup> -34 34 <sup>3</sup> -50	Creates Verse 2, Middle 8 and turnaround into AABA
Guitar solo	50 <sup>3</sup> -53	A section melody
Coda	54-fade	Dominant pedal section based on material from bar 31 to bar 34

- Structure is based largely on 4- and 8-bar sections, with repetitions of the main hook unifying the piece.
- The two-beat anacrusis of the hook is used to overlap and link sections, avoiding predictability.
- Repeated rhythms within the individual sections of the piece ensure unity, while the changes of chord sequence and key in the bridge and middle 8 provide contrast.
- Although musically bars 25-32 are definitely a middle 8, the unchanged lyrics at this point in verses 1 and 2 suggest a chorus-like function.

## Tonality

- The piece is firmly in E major. The A sections of the verse underline this by their use of the primary triads (I, IV and V).
- The B section of the verse (bars 17-20) creates contrast by stressing F# minor (supertonic minor).
- The middle 8 modulates to B major (the dominant).
- The turnaround returns to the tonic by use of the B7 (dominant 7<sup>th</sup>) chord.
- The piece ends with an unresolved dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord, and a dominant pedal.

## Harmony

- The harmony is diatonic and largely functional.
- The Verse's A sections use chords I, IV and V in E major:
  - E-B<sup>7</sup>-A-A, using the subdominant to return to the tonic, as in 12-bar blues.
- The Verse's B section uses chord II (F# minor) by way of contrast – the C# major chord (bar 18) can be interpreted as a secondary dominant (V of II). Bars 18-20 create a cycle of 5ths (C#-F#m-B<sup>7</sup>), which lead back to the tonic.
- Parallel chords introduce the Middle section (A-G#m-F#) at bar 24.
- The Middle 8 is only in B major for six bars, as the B chord has a seventh added to create the turnaround back into E major for the repeat and on to verse 3.
- The harmony avoids V-I progressions in the verses, preferring the 'plagal' sounding move of IV-I.
- The modulation to B major is established by V-I (perfect) cadences in bars 25-27.
- Harmonic rhythm moves in one- or two-bar units, although the pedal points at the turnaround and at the end are more lengthy.
- There are examples of various pedal points:
  - inverted pedal B in the guitar parts in bars 1-4
  - bass pedal in bars 54 to the fade.
- All the pedal points are on the dominant note (B).
- 'Push and pull' (anticipation and retardation) rhythms throughout create brief suspensions, mostly of a 6-5 type.

## Melody

- The main 'hook' uses a 5-note cell –C# B E C# B (note the rising fourth – descending third – descending second) which dominates the song.
- The second phrase develops this idea sequentially, a fourth lower, while the third phrase expands the fourth to a sixth and reverses the order of the third and second.
- The notes of this idea create a strong feeling of the E major pentatonic scale.
- The verse's B section balances upwards and downward phrases and includes the highest note in the vocal line.
- The middle 8 melody is largely stepwise, moving down from the dominant to the tonic in B major, and starting the second phrase with an octave leap.
- Unlike much rhythm and blues of the time, there is no use of 'Blue notes', although the A naturals used just before the F# major chords in bars 24 and 28 create a fleeting false relation effect.
- The writing is syllabic throughout.
- The vocal phrases are mostly of two or four bars in length, with shorter phrases in the B section of the verse and longer phrases in the middle 8.

## Rhythm and metre

- Strong 4 in a bar rhythm throughout, with some emphasis on the backbeats – 2 and 4 - in some parts.
- The medium tempo is suitable for the narrative qualities of the lyrics.
- The accompaniment is relatively 'four square', with 'straight' quavers acting as a foil to 'push' and 'pull' syncopations in the melodic line.
- The hook and all other verse figures begin on the third beat as anacrusis figures.
- Accompaniment syncopations are most prominent in the linking anacrusic figures into and during the middle 8.
- Drum fills create rhythmic variety and link phrases.
- Vitality is supplied by the semiquaver guitar pedals at bars 1-4, 31-34, 56-60 and by the quaver/semiquaver rhythms in the Middle 8.