

Oasis

Don't Look back in Anger

Background Information and Performance Circumstances

The *Oasis* band was formed in 1991 and became one of the leading exponents of the Britpop style. Britpop had begun at the end of the 1980s with groups like *Suede* and *Blur* reacting against electronic hard rock and the distorted, angry sounds of American grunge. The style looked back to the era of *The Beatles* and *The Kinks*.

The main characteristics of Britpop are:

- An essentially British sound which has been less successful in America
- Recreation of the styles of the 60s and 70s, especially that of the *Kinks* (*Suede*) and the *Beatles* (*Oasis*)
- Lyrical, tuneful vocal melodies
- Guitar-led, traditional pop music line-up: singer, guitar, bass and drums. *Oasis* had a five man line-up with an additional instrumentalist playing piano for this song. The use of a tambourine perhaps typifies the style – you're unlikely to find it in American grunge!
- Use of a verse-chorus structure
- Regular four bar phrases
- Simple root position chords

The main members of the group were the brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher. The personnel changed gradually and Noel left the band in August, 2009.

The song *Don't Look back in Anger*, composed by Noel Gallagher and recorded as part of their second album (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory?* was released as a single in 1996. It was the first time that Noel featured as the lead singer instead of his brother.

The intro to the song, with its simple quaver chords on the piano and pair of semiquavers, was clearly inspired by John Lennon's song *Imagine*. The words referring to starting a revolution 'from my bed' were quoted from John Lennon's description of one of the more unusual twentieth century press conferences - Lennon and his new wife Yoko Ono in bed discussing peace.

As well as recording the music (at a slightly sharp pitch), the band tended to include the song (at normal pitch) in all their live performances at stadium concerts and rock festivals.

Instrumentation

- The instrumentation is not very different from the guitar-based line-up that would have been expected in Beatles songs of the 60s, with the addition of a featured

piano at the beginning as in John Lennon's *Imagine* from 1971, and a small amount of electronic backing.

- The piano plays simple root position quaver chords. Its only solo section is at the beginning.
- The lead guitar has occasional licks between vocal phrases, for instance in the Pre-Chorus – as well as in the build up to the Chorus itself. It also has a long improvised solo over the pre-chorus chords before the final chorus. Light distortion is used (compared to the heavy distortion of American grunge music). There is occasional use of pitch-bend, e.g. last bar of pre-chorus (bar 24). The guitar solo reaches top A in bar 42.
- Liam Gallagher plays the tambourine from half way through the pre-chorus and throughout the chorus.
- The bass guitar part has an unusually low tessitura (i.e. low register). It is played almost entirely on the two bottom strings (E and A).
- There is a string part recorded on a mellotron – a type of 60s keyboard instrument, which plays recordings of instrumental sounds on tape.
- The drum part has occasional fills and also a drum-break at the end of the guitar solo.

Vocal style

- Noel Gallagher sings with a high tessitura (high register), going up to top A on a number of occasions. The chorus begins on a top G.
- The style is mainly syllabic (one note to a syllable), with occasional short melismas at the ends of phrases, e.g. on *find*, near the beginning.
- The music is double-tracked, i.e. two recordings of the same solo voice are superimposed to produce a fuller sound.

Texture

- The texture is mainly melody dominated homophony. The melody in the vocal line is accompanied by guitar and keyboard chords and a simple bass line.
- Some variety is provided by the guitar licks, which often continue during parts of the vocal phrases, e.g. bar 10.

Structure

There are two verses and four choruses, as well as vocal and instrumental pre-choruses, an intro and an outro (coda).

The order is:

Intro.	4 bars	Instrumental – with ref. to John Lennon <i>Imagine</i>
Verse 1	8 bars	<i>Slip inside the eye of your mind...</i>

Pre-chorus	12 bars	<i>So I start a revolution...Ends with 2 bars of dominant chord</i>
Chorus (at double bar)	8 bars	<i>And so Sally can wait...</i>
Link	4 bars	Instrumental – with Pachelbel <i>Canon</i> quote
Verse 2 (after repeat double bar line)	8 bars	<i>Take me to the place where you go...</i>
Pre-chorus	12 bars	
Chorus	8 bars	
Pre-chorus	12 bars	Instrumental (guitar solo) - on same chords
Chorus	8 bars	
Chorus	9 bars	
Outro (coda)	4 bars	Slower

Tonality

- The whole song is in C major, emphasised by the root position chords at the beginning and elsewhere. There are no modulations.
- The verses and choruses are almost completely diatonic in that key (i.e. they contain no notes outside that scale – apart from the G sharp in the E major chord).
- Other chromatic notes are contained in the substitution chords of Fm7 and also the G#dim chord, both in the pre-chorus (see notes on harmony).
- Much of the music is pentatonic (G-A-C-D-E), including the whole of the verse melodies.

Harmony

- The simple root position chords of the beginning and elsewhere have already been mentioned.
- In the intro, tonic and subdominant chords alternate with a slow harmonic rhythm of one chord per bar.
- The chord scheme of the verse begins as in Pachelbel's *Canon*, but changes later, with the inclusion of E major, instead of E minor as the 4th chord.
- Chords are arranged in 4 bar groups. In the verses, the harmonic rhythm speeds up further at the end of the 4 bars, so that there is one chord per beat (Am-G bar 12).
- The rare chromatic chords include the substitution chord of Fm7 (replacing F). Another example is the G# diminished chord, also in the pre-chorus.
- The pre-chorus ends with an extended dominant chord (two bars) to lead into the chorus after the double bar.
- The song ends with a simple tonic chord.

Melody (see also notes on vocal style)

- The entire verse melody is pentatonic (G-A-C-D-E). The range here is narrow (only a 6th from G to E).
- The chorus melody, beginning with the title hook, is still diatonic in C, adding a 6th note, F, to the pentatonic scale. This could be called a 6 note or hexatonic scale.
- There are occasional blue notes, e.g. the E flat on the word summertime in the pre-chorus (also in the guitar solo).
- The chorus begins with a distinctive upward leap of an octave. The remaining notes of the chorus tend to be quite conjunct (i.e. with stepwise motion).
- There is some use of melodic repetition, e.g. at the words Don't look back in anger in the Coda.

Rhythm and Metre

- The continuous quavers in the piano introduction are a distinctive feature of the song, as is the pair of semiquavers in bar 2, both features derived from Lennon's Imagine.
 - The drum music has a continuous 8 beat rhythm from the beginning of the verse.
 - The bass drum plays on beats 1 and 3, with the snare emphasising the backbeats (2 and 4).
 - The tambourine has continuous semiquavers, starting half way through the pre-chorus.
 - Syncopation is most pronounced in the vocal line, e.g. right from the start.
 - The syncopation in the chorus is less pronounced.
 - Drum fills include sextuplets just before the third chorus at bar 44.
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