



Pearson

The Beatles: Four songs from *Revolver* (for component 3: Appraising)

Background

The Beatles were a British rock band who changed the face of pop music in the 1960s. They achieved worldwide fame, becoming as popular in the United States as they were in the UK. In their early music their approach was influenced by rhythm and blues performers such as Chuck Berry, but by the time of the album *Revolver* they had developed their own unique style. This included elements of Indian and classical music, as well as the psychedelic rock styles of the second half of the decade. Twentieth-century avant-garde techniques also occasionally featured – notably *musique concrète* – the use of manipulated tape loops.

Most of the songs were written by Paul McCartney (bass guitar and voice) and John Lennon (guitar and voice). McCartney was mainly responsible for the lyrical aspect of the melodies, while Lennon was famous for his unique text-writing skills. The other members of the group were George Harrison (lead guitar) and Ringo Star (drums).

Their producer George Martin was a crucial element in their success. He wrote many of the arrangements for their studio recordings. His classical training resulted in the kind of instrumentation we find in ‘Eleanor Rigby’ and other songs. The studio techniques used in the album were groundbreaking.

‘Eleanor Rigby’

The lyrics of the song have very different subject matter from what was found in the usual love songs of the time. They discuss issues of loneliness and aging.

Instrumentation and texture

- Almost all pop songs of the period had the standard instrumentation of rhythm guitar, lead guitar, bass guitar and drums. This song, with its use of **string quartet** textures, broke new ground. There are actually **eight instrumentalists** on the recording, though the parts are mostly **doubled** with two players on each part. Occasionally the violin parts are divided (*divisi*), though **double stopping** is often used.
- In general the strings just play simple **block chords**. In the intro these are **staccato** and **accented**. The chords are more sustained elsewhere.
- The cellos generally play repeated or sustained notes (rarely pedal notes because of the slow rate of harmonic change). The chorus, for example, has a continuous held bottom E. In the last verse, on the words ‘wiping the dirt from his hands’ the cellos **double the voice**.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

- The violas have a **four-bar repeated descending chromatic phrase in semibreves** in the chorus.
- Otherwise the strings play occasional phrases to **fill** between the vocal lines – for instance, the violin quavers between the phrases sung by the backing vocals in the Intro. The violin 1 part also echoes the final phrase of the refrains.

Structure

The music consists of an eight-bar **intro**, then a series of three **verses** and an **outro**. Each verse consists of a main section with an unusual ten-bar length, followed by an eight-bar **refrain**.

The ten bars of the main verse section are divided into two five-bar phrases, this could be interpreted as three-bar vocal phrase followed by a one-bar instrumental with the fifth-bar an additional vocal phrase or as a four-bar phrase with the extra bar containing a one-bar vocal phrase (e.g. 'lives in a dream').

The outro combines elements of the intro (the backing vocal phrase) and the refrain. It is extended by a further bar with a short concluding phrase for the strings.

Harmony

Just two chords are used almost throughout the song – C and E minor (note the use of A Min in bars 56-57). The **harmonic rhythm** (rate of chord change) is **slow**. In the verse there are three bars of E minor, then two of C. The refrain is made up of a single chord of E minor, though the **chromatically descending** viola part adds **dissonance**.

The vocal part frequently adds mild dissonance – for instance, the first notes of the verse and refrain have an A that acts as an **appoggiatura** to the notes of the E minor chord that follows.

Melody

- The vocal music in the verse is **diatonic** in the **Dorian mode**, whereas the backing vocal music has a flattened sixth C^b, making it **Aeolian** in character.
- The melody of the verse is mainly **conjunct** (stepwise).
- The refrain has a distinctive **octave leap**, which is extended later to a **rising tenth** ('where do they all belong?').

Rhythm

- The pattern of **repeated crotchets** in the strings is distinctive. Note also the **sustained semibreves** in the refrain.
- The vocal phrases have continuous quaver movement with **syncopation**.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

‘Here, There and Everywhere’

This is a **slow ballad**.

Instrumentation and vocal style

- The instrumentation is much **reduced** from what might be found in a standard pop song of the period. The drums are used only rarely and are almost inaudible when they do appear. There’s no lead guitar, just simple backing guitar chords emphasising the second and fourth beats.
- The vocal lines, coached by the producer George Martin, are more in the style of American **close harmony barbershop** singing.
- There are **spread chords** in the guitar at the beginning.
- There is a **mandolin** sound in the **chromatic** guitar phrase in the B section, produced by using a **Leslie cabinet** in the studio.
- The vocal line frequently has a high **tessitura** (pitch range), a distinctive feature of Paul McCartney’s singing style. There are top G and A notes above the staff.

Structure and tonality

The song uses an altered version of the standard 32-bar AABA structure, reduced to 28 bars by using a shortened B section. There is an unusual **three bar intro**, with **free rhythm** and a **chromatic** slip from B minor to B \flat major chords. Then the sections are:

- **A section** – G major, but with excursions to E minor. Eight bars (conventional)
- **A section repeated**
- **B section** (from bar 13) – B \flat major (a **remote key** relationship). Four bars divided into a three-bar and a one-bar phrase – so **unusual phrase lengths** and a short B section.
- **A section** – as before, but with additional vocal harmony the last time.
- **B section repeated**
- **A section repeated**

Finally there is a short **outro**.

Harmony

The music features the **four-chord progression** technique. The G major section starts with rising **parallel root position** chords moving up the scale: G–Am–Bm–C.

The B section uses a four-chord progression, starting in B \flat major and moving to G minor, of I–vi–ii–III⁷, where chord III⁷ becomes a pivot chord (chord V⁷) in G minor and creates a perfect cadence to the following bar.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

'I Want to Tell You'

This song was written and sung by George Harrison, the group's guitarist. Harrison was particularly influenced by Eastern philosophy and musical styles and was beginning to study the sitar.

- The song ends with **melismatic chant** almost like a call to prayer.
- The extreme **dissonance** of the **minor ninth** F \flat against an E7 chord (bar 10) may also reflect his understanding of Indian musical style. This produces a not entirely attractive four-bar ostinato figure produced by the two notes F \flat and E.
- The lyrics, for instance 'maybe next time around' reflect Hindu philosophy.
- He was also starting to experiment with the drug LSD and some of the lyrics may be influenced by this.

Instrumentation and vocal style

The instrumentation is more conventional for a pop song of the period, with more prominent drums. A piano is used to provide block chords. George Harrison's guitar provides the intro music, featuring triplet crotchet rhythms and a **flat seventh** over a pedal A (bars 1–4). **Close harmony vocals** are again a feature. Although the backing vocals rise high, Harrison's vocal line has a **narrow range**, mainly confined within the interval of a fourth from A up to D.

The recording techniques include **fade in** and **fade out**.

Structure and harmony

- **Intro (four bars repeated)** over **pedal A** with **tonic and subdominant** chords alternating.
- **Verse 1** – an unusual 11 bars, with three and a half bars on A before moving up a tone to B7 and then four bars of dominant harmony with the distinctive minor ninth.
- **Verse 2.**
- **Bridge (b 27)** – eight bars. On B minor (**supertonic**). There are also **diminished** chords (e.g. bar 28, where there is a vocal **appoggiatura** C \sharp above).
- **Verse 3.**
- **Bridge.**
- **Verse 3 repeated.**
- **Coda/outro** – guitar music as for the intro, with tonic pedal as before. Combined with the 'I've got time' phrase from the verse. The music ends with the melismatic chanting mentioned earlier.

***Note:** These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.*

‘Tomorrow Never Knows’

The song was mainly written by John Lennon, though it is credited to both him and Paul McCartney. The lyrics derived partly from a book called *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Lennon wrote the song under the influence of the hallucinatory drug LSD. The words ‘Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream’ and other parts of the lyrics refer to the effect of the drug.

Instrumentation and vocal style

- This shows the most direct influence of **Indian music** of any of the four selected songs.
- There is a **tambura drone** throughout. A tambura (various anglicised spellings are used) is a string instrument found on the Indian subcontinent. It usually has four strings which are plucked continuously to provide a drone accompaniment. It has no frets and can’t be used to play a tune.
- The music also uses a **sitar**, the main melodic string instrument of the Indian subcontinent. It is used particularly as a pre-recorded **fill** between verses.
- The drum track continues **unchanged** throughout and is much more prominent than in the other three songs. The drum sound was altered using studio techniques, including ‘reverse’ cymbals.
- The bass guitar **riff** also remains unchanged.
- The electric guitar solo is **distorted** using tape techniques, including being played in **reverse**.
- The group recorded around 30 short tapes of music and sound effects. George Martin, the producer used 16 of these at various points in the song as **tape loops**, continuously repeating. Manipulated tape techniques including **speeding up** and **reversing**, as well as superimposing various different short recordings on top of each other, was part of a technique used by Stockhausen and other mid-20th-century avant-garde composers. The technique was called **musique concrète** and was first introduced by a group of French composers, including Pierre Schaeffer. The tape effects include **natural sounds** such as laughing – the tape of laughing is played at double speed to produce the ‘seagull’ sound.
- The vocal style includes the then new technique of **artificial double tracking**. Lennon’s voice was first recorded and then added to the mix slightly later, as well as being altered in other ways, including speed and frequency manipulation.
- Lennon wanted to sound like a hundred Tibetan monks chanting. An artificial way of producing something like the effect he wanted was to use the ‘**Leslie cabinet**’ to alter the vocal sounds in the studio.

Structure

The song is **strophic** (each verse is set to the same music). In addition, there is an instrumental **intro**, an **instrumental** between the third and fourth verses, and a coda/**outro**.

Melodic style

The vocal melody is in the **Mixolydian mode**, with its characteristic **major third** and **flattened seventh** (E and B \flat in the C transposition here). The guitar solo (pre-recorded and played backwards) uses a **blues scale** on C with characteristic **flattened thirds**. It is a variation of a **pentatonic** (five note) **scale**.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

Rhythm

There is a continuous **rock rhythm** on the drums in **common time**. The vocal line produces a number of **cross-rhythms** (not always shown in the score as performed in the song). These include a **three against two** crotchet rhythm in bar 4 of the vocal line.

Syncopation, off-beat entries and lombardic rhythms abound in the chaotic instrumental solo.

Harmony

The use of continuous chords instead of a chord sequence was a new idea at the time. An implied C chord continues throughout most of the music, though the only clearly heard chord is of the flattened seventh B \flat , played on the organ.

Note: *These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.*