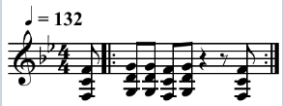
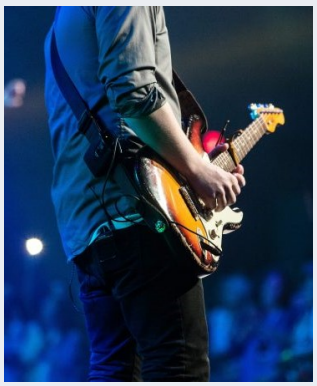


Riffs

5 MINUTES READING #3

"When I write a song, it's all about the riff – the riff first, then the words come later."
- Evan Dando



Questions to think about:

1. *If you had to compile "The Top Three Greatest Guitar Riffs of All Time" – what songs would you include and why?*
2. *Can you think of any songs which you listen to now which contain **RIFFS**? Are these **RIFFS** a short melody, a bass line or a series of chords?*
3. *If you were writing a "Pop Song" and basing it on a **RIFF**, how would you prevent the song from becoming "boring?*

What is a RIFF?

The word **RIFF** means a repeated musical pattern – usually short – sometimes two or four bars long. The word **RIFF** entered 'musical slang' in the 1920's. A **RIFF** may change its shape slightly, or move up or down to a different pitch level, to fit with the accompanying harmonies. A **RIFF** is often a short melody or tune, often played by the rhythm section or solo instruments and **RIFFS** often form the basis or accompaniment of a musical composition, piece or song. As well as being a short series of notes (a melody or tune), a **RIFF** can also be a chord pattern, a bass line or musical phrase.

Rikky Rooksby states: *"A **RIFF** is a short, repeated memorable musical phrase, often pitched low on the guitar, which focuses much of the energy and excitement of a rock song"*.

Riffs in Music

RIFFS are used a lot in rock music, heavy metal, Latin-American music, funk and also in popular music. "Classical" musicians use the word **OSTINATO** when talking about repeated musical patterns, but the words **OSTINATO** and **RIFF** mean much the same thing. **RIFFS** are often used by jazz musicians as a repeated phrase that a soloist improvises over.

Riffs in Rock 'n' Roll

Several musicians transformed Rock 'n' Roll in the late 1950's with fast tempos and complex rhythm and blues. Some of the musical pioneers who created the very first guitar **RIFFS** include Chuck Berry, Link Wray and Dave Davies.

Riff-Driven Popular Songs

Some popular songs can be described as **RIFF-DRIVEN**. This describes a piece of music that relies on a repeated instrumental **RIFF** as the basis of the most important part of the song and is often the main melody that remains in the listener's ear – the part of the song which people remember it by. Often, a **RIFF** is used as an introduction to a song, such as a guitar **RIFF**.

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