

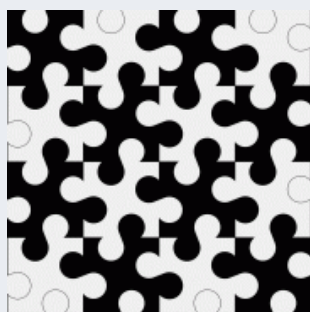


Repeated Musical Patterns

5 MINUTES READING #1

“Essentially my contribution was to introduce repetition into Western music as the main ingredient without any melody over it, without anything just patterns, musical patterns.”

- Terry Riley



Questions to think about:

1. If a musical pattern was to simply be repeated over and over again, it would become boring. Can you think of musical ways you could change or vary a repeated musical pattern to prevent it becoming “boring”?
2. Why do you think concert-goers in the Eighteenth Century “could not listen (to a piece of music) again”?
3. Can you think of any other “art forms” where repeated patterns feature or are important?

Repetition is important in music where sounds or sequences are often repeated. While repetition plays a role in all music, it is especially prominent in specific styles.

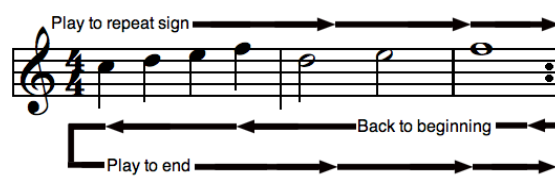
“Repetition is part and parcel of symmetry. You may find a short melody or a short rhythm that you like and you repeat it through the course of a melody or song. This sort of repetition helps to unify your melody and serves as an identifying factor for listeners. However, too much of a good thing can get annoying. If you repeat a melody or rhythm too often, it will start to bore the listener”. (Miller, 2005)

“Music is based on repetition...Music works because we remember the sounds we have just heard and relate them to ones that are just now being played. Repetition, when done skillfully by a master composer, is emotionally satisfying to our brains, and makes the listening experience as pleasurable as it is”. (Levitin, 2007)

During the Eighteenth Century, musical concerts were high-profile events and because someone who liked a piece of music could not listen to it again, musicians and composers had to think of a way to make the music ‘sink in’. Therefore, they would repeat parts of their songs or music at times, making their music repetitive, without becoming dull.

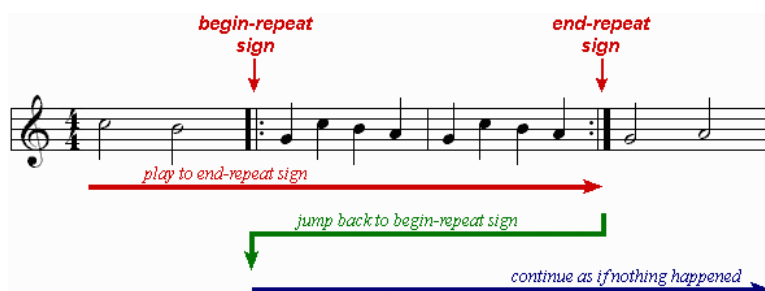
Repeat Signs and Symbols

Repeated musical patterns are often written down using a musical sign called a **REPEAT SIGN**, shown by two dots and a double-bar line. A repeat sign is a symbol that indicates a section of music should be repeated. If the piece has one repeat sign alone, then that means repeat from the beginning and then continue as shown in this illustration:



A corresponding sign facing the other way, as shown on the illustration below, indicates where the repeat is to begin.

See if you can follow the music correctly with your finger, taking note of the **REPEAT SIGNS**.





Ostinatos

5 MINUTES READING #2

"If the cadence may be regarded as the cradle of tonality, the ostinato patterns can be considered the playground in which it grew strong and self-confident."

- Edward E. Lewinsky



Questions to think about:

1. Can you think of any examples within a film where a film soundtrack which using an Ostinato or a "Rossini Crescendo" could be used to enhance the on-screen action?
2. Apart from "Pachelbel's Canon", can you think of any other pieces of music that you've heard that are based on or use an OSTINATO?
3. Can you think of any other types of World Music which feature or use OSTINATOS?

Another good way of laying a foundation for a piece of music is to use an **OSTINATO**. Like a drone, this is something that goes on and on – but instead of one or two held notes, an **OSTINATO** consists of a short rhythm or melody, repeated over and over again.

An **OSTINATO** can be very short, or it can be a longer, more complicated pattern of notes – but still easily recognisable.

OSTINATO is the Italian word meaning 'obstinate'. You can see why its musical meaning is appropriate – an **OSTINATO** refuses to give up! The plural of **OSTINATO** can be **OSTINATOS** (English spelling) or **OSTINATI** (Italian spelling).

Computers are a very good at playing **OSTINATOS** because they are able to repeat things exactly, without making a mistake.

A famous type of **OSTINATO** is called the **ROSSINI CRESCENDO**, after the famous musical composer Rossini. Here, a repeated musical pattern (an **OSTINATO**) is performed over and over again, but getting slightly louder each time it is repeated. Repeating the **OSTINATO** in this way gives a sense of excitement and suspense and Rossini often ended his **ROSSINI CRESCENDO** with a dramatic solo for a singer.

Another type of **OSTINATO** is the **BASSO OSTINATO**, or Ground Bass. Here, the repeated musical pattern forms the **BASS LINE** (performed at the lowest pitch) of the piece of music and is repeated over and over again. However, different melodies, harmonies and instruments perform "over the top" of this repeating bass line to prevent it becoming boring! A famous piece of music using a **BASSO OSTINATO** is "Pachelbel's Canon" which you may be familiar with – this is probably due to the "memorable" feature of the **BASSO OSTINATO** being repeated many times. The **BASSO OSTINATO** is shown to the right. "Pachelbel's Canon"

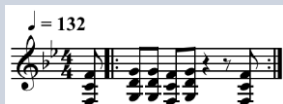
begins with the **BASSO OSTINATO** being played once through, but as it's



repeated over and over, more and more instruments and melodies are added.

Ostinatos in World Music

Many other types of music from around the world use **OSTINATOS**: African Drumming is often based on many repeated rhythmic **OSTINATOS**, Latin-American music such as Samba and Salsa also features repeated rhythmic and melodic **OSTINATOS** and Indian Music also features a type of repeated rhythm pattern played by the Tabla player (drummer).



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**.





hooks

5 MINUTES READING #4

"I most enjoy sitting down with the acoustic guitar and just fiddling around and trying to come up with something like a hook or some sort of melodic line. That's something that I do habitually."

- James Mercer



Questions to think about:

1. Every song in the "Top 40" is there for a reason. Choose 3 songs which are currently in the "Top 40" and think about: Does it have a musical **HOOK**? What is the **HOOK**? Is the **HOOK** melodic, rhythmic, verbal or a combination of these?
2. What makes a "good **HOOK**"?
3. Can you write a short "Dictionary Definition" of the musical meaning of the word **HOOK**?

What is a HOOK?

A **HOOK** is a musical idea, often short, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and "catch the ear of the listener". One definition of a **HOOK** is: "A musical or lyrical phrase that stands out and is easily remembered". A **HOOK** is repetitive, attention-grabbing, memorable, easy to dance to and has commercial potential – the **HOOK** is what song-writers hope will 'sell their song!' A **HOOK** has also been described as "part of a song, sometimes the title or key lyric line, which keeps recurring".

Hooks in Music

The term **HOOK** generally applies to popular music, especially Rock, R&B, Hip-Hop, Dance and pop. In these forms of popular music, the **HOOK** is often found in, or consists of the **CHORUS**. In Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby", the lyrics even contain the word **HOOK**: "Check out the **HOOK**, while my DJ revolves it", leading straight into the chorus itself.

Different types of HOOKS

A **HOOK** can either be **MELODIC**, **RHYTHMIC** or **VERBAL**.

- **MELODIC HOOK** – a **HOOK** based on the instruments and the singers
- **RHYTHMIC HOOK** – a **HOOK** based on the patterns in the drums and bass parts
- **VERBAL HOOK** – a **HOOK** based on the rhyming and/or repeated words of the chorus

Musical **HOOKS** are used in songs to help the listener remember the piece.

HOOKS need to be 'catchy' and 'stick in our heads'. The **HOOK** in the piece is what the performer is hoping will sell their song. If they create and effective and memorable **HOOK**, people will remember it and buy the song either in shops or online.





The habanera and Carmen

5 MINUTES READING #5

**“I’d love to play
Carmen – it’s the
perfect mezzo role.”**

- Katherine Jenkins



Questions to think about:

1. Can you think of the names of any other operas or songs from operas that you may have heard?
2. Why do you think Bizet based his Habanera on an **OSTINATO**? What effect do you think this repeated musical pattern has on the song?

In an opera, the music tells the story. The music helps us to understand the actions and feeling of the characters as the story unfolds. The opera *Carmen* has some very colourful and interesting characters.

About the Composer

Georges Bizet (shown left) could read both words and music by the age of four! He entered the Paris Conservatory (music school) when he was only nine and wrote his first symphony at 17. Though he earned many prizes at music school, he was not considered a “great composer” during his lifetime. All through his career, Bizet began work on operas that he never finished. In 1872, when Bizet was 34, he began work on the opera *Carmen*. Not all people liked the story and the first performance was not a success. At its premiere in 1875, the audience found the risqué plot, with its robbers, gypsies and cigarette-girls too hot to handle! Three months later, Bizet died a discouraged man. He never knew that *Carmen* was to become one of the most popular operas ever written!

The Opera

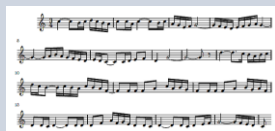
Bizet filled the opera *Carmen* with the colour and sound of Spain. The amazing thing was that he had never even been to Spain. Everything he learned about Spain and its music came from books in the Paris library. The story of *Carmen* is a story of love, violence and unhappiness about a passionate but self-destructive gypsy girl and her dramatic murder at the hands of her jealous soldier lover. Bizet based his opera on a short novel of the same name by Prosper Mérimée.

The Habanera

One of his most popular compositions from the opera is *Habanera*. This type of song and dance are now associated with Spain, although they originally came from Cuba. The lead character, Carmen, sings this song as a solo when she first appears on stage in the opera. The opening words of the song are: “*L’amour est un oiseau rebelle*” (Love is a rebellious bird). Bizet uses a repeated musical pattern – an **OSTINATO** – in the bass line of the Habanera which repeats over and over again:



Carmen has been the subject of several popular-music adaptations over the years including the 1943 Broadway musical *Carmen Jones* and the Habanera has featured on the soundtracks of numerous movies including *Up*, *Superman Returns*, *Bad Santa* and *Trainspotting*.

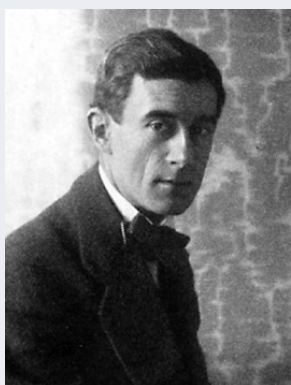


bolero

5 MINUTES READING #6

“It is a piece for orchestra without music.”

- Maurice Ravel on Bolero



Questions to think about:

1. Bolero was given its first performance at the Paris Opera in 1928. The premiere was acclaimed by a shouting, stamping, cheering audience in the midst of which a woman was heard screaming: “Au fou, au fou!” (“The madman! The madman!”). Why do you think she was reacting like this?
2. Do you agree with Ravel that Bolero is “devoid of music?”

Bolero is an incredibly simple yet daring piece of music. It is made up of three ideas that **REPEAT OVER AND OVER** for 16 minutes with little changes, other than a gradual thickening of **TEXTURE** and an increase in **DYNAMICS**. Over the course of the piece, Ravel uses every instrument of the orchestra as soloist and in unique combinations with others.

About the Composer

Maurice Ravel (*shown left*) was born in France close to the Spanish border. His Spanish mother was an amateur musician and his father was an inventor of engines and machines. The family moved to Paris when Maurice was only months old but his mother’s Spanish heritage and father’s mechanical brain greatly influenced Ravel and nowhere more so that in his Bolero composition of 1928. Ravel had piano lessons from the age of 6 and progressed quickly performing in public at the age of 14 and eventually studying at the Paris Conservatoire. After WW1 and the death of Debussy he found himself at the top of the French music scene. His experiences during the war had added a touch of melancholy to his music which, coupled with his unique rhythmic energy and luscious orchestrations appealed to many. Ravel died in 1937 after five years of declining health brought on by a major blow to the head sustained during a taxicab accident in New York. He is now considered to be one of France’s greatest ever composers and until recently was the highest earning French musician of all time, out-earning even Elvis Presley!

About Bolero

Bolero is the longest single-idea **CRESCENDO** in the history of music as well as being the most repetitive piece ever written. Ravel created the main melody of Bolero by “doodling at the piano with just one finger” and was taken with the melody’s insistent nature and decided to try and repeat it over and over whilst increasing the size of the orchestra.

The piece consists of one repeating **BASS LINE**, one repeating **OSTINATO** rhythm (*shown right*)

and two melodies that alternate. Each time either melody is heard



it is given to a new combination of instruments and the accompaniment grows thicker in **TEXTURE** and louder in **DYNAMICS**. Critics were divided in their opinion on Bolero, whilst audiences universally loved it and Ravel became sick of hearing it and considered it to be a simple experiment “devoid of music”.