Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Conventions of pop

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Rock and roll, and rock anthems

- Rock and roll (1950s and 1960s): built on the 12-bar blues, with a fast swing or shuffle beat, walking bass, electric guitar, piano and drum kit. Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard.
- Rock anthems (1970s and 1980s): big songs for stadiums, with **power chords**, distorted electric guitar, guitar solos, powerful drums and a chorus the crowd can sing. Queen and Bon Jovi.
- **Riffs** (short repeated patterns) and **hooks** (catchy bits you remember) are at the centre of both.

Pop ballads

- Pop **ballads** (1970s to 1990s) are slow, emotional songs, usually about love.
- They often start quietly with piano or acoustic guitar, then build up with strings, drums and backing vocals.
- A key change (**modulation**), often up a semitone or tone for the last chorus, lifts the end of the song. Singers show off a wide range and expressive vocal techniques.
- Elton John, Whitney Houston and Celine Dion are well-known **ballad** singers.

Solo artists and song structure

- Solo artists (1990s to today) are singer-songwriters and pop stars who use music technology: synthesisers, drum machines, samples, loops and auto-tune. Adele, Ed Sheeran and Beyoncé.
- Song structure: intro, verse, pre-chorus, chorus, **middle 8** (or bridge), outro. The verse tells the story; the chorus repeats the main **hook**.
- Vocal techniques: **falsetto**, belting, **riffs** and runs (**melisma**), vibrato, and backing vocals in harmony.

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Key terms

Riff	A short repeated musical pattern.
Hook	The catchy part of a song that you remember.
Power chord	A chord of just the root and fifth, played loudly on electric guitar.
Middle 8	A contrasting section, usually eight bars, before the last chorus.
Modulation	A change of key.
Falsetto	A high, light singing voice above the normal range.
Melisma	Several notes sung to one syllable.
Ballad	A slow, emotional song, usually about love.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which chord pattern is rock and roll often built on?
2. What is a power chord?
3. What is a riff?
4. What is a hook?
5. What often happens to the key in the last chorus of a pop ballad?
6. What is the middle 8?
7. What is falsetto?
8. What is melisma?

Answers

1. The 12-bar blues
2. A chord of just the root and fifth, played loudly on electric guitar
3. A short repeated musical pattern
4. The catchy part of a song you remember
5. It goes up, often by a semitone or tone
6. A contrasting section, usually eight bars, before the last chorus
7. A high, light singing voice above the normal range
8. Several notes sung to one syllable

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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