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MI Curriculum Series

Series Sponsor: Jon Clayden, Vice President of Academic Affairs

Creative Director & Executive Editor: Donny Gruendler, Vice President of Instruction and Curricular Development

Managing Editor: Joe Bergamini

Published for MI by WBH MusicWorks LLC

Executive Producers: Rob Wallis, Joe Bergamini, Mike Hoff

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Chapter 1: Notation, Structure and Concepts

Left-Hand Bass

Keyboard players from Stevie Wonder to Ray Manzarek of the quintessential '60s rock group The Doors helped to make synth bass a prominent feature in modern music. Using early synthesizers such as the Minimoog and Taurus, keyboard players were able to generate fat, low-end tones that took on the role of the electric bass, filling the need for an actual bass track. Later, producers such as Quincy Jones took this concept and created specific lines that were doubled by electric bass and bass synth, creating a production value and sound common to pop/R&B records in the 1980s; today's keyboardists use keyboards such as the newer microKORG for this purpose. Modern producers working with popular artists rely heavily on keyboard bass, and it is often the driving force behind the groove of today's dance music. Artists such as Lady Gaga, Imagine Dragons and Katy Perry use synth bass to its fullest potential in their songs. In popular music it is quite common for keyboardists to play some sort of bass line, reinforcing the bass guitar and adding another element to it—or replacing it entirely. A left-hand bass line can be generated on a separate keyboard, but it can also just be part of a piano riff, which strengthens the chord. In this unit, we will explore examples of effective left-hand bass in a rock setting and learn how to move smoothly from bass-line playing to comping for our chart of the week, "Get Together." "Get Together" is a slow rock tune at quarter note = 74 BPM, featuring a prominent left-hand bass pattern. We will begin by looking at common left-hand bass patterns.

Left-Hand Bass Patterns

Ex. 1.1 Single bass line with anticipations and tied notes.

G



This is a very common left-hand bass pattern featuring single notes. It can be employed in any style of music but is particularly common in pop and rock music.

Ex. 1.2 Single bass line with staccato eighth note phrasing.

Gm



This is a funky variation of a single-note line featuring staccato phrasing. This type of bass line is prevalent in R&B and dance music, and would sound very good on a fat bass synth patch.

Ex. 1.3 Octave bass



Doubling the bass line in octaves is a common approach for big pop ballads as well as power rock music: it gives the bottom end of the mix extra reinforcement.

Ex. 1.4 Octave bass combined with single note phrasing.



A variation of example 1.3 (above), employing octave doubling in combination with single notes gives the doubled section more power and helps the rhythm of that section to stand out dynamically.

Non-Standard Song Forms

In Keyboard Performance 1, we studied common popular music song forms. Today's chart is somewhat unusual in that it does not have the typical verse, chorus and bridge structure we normally find in pop songs. Instead, there are four distinct parts:

- A) A four bar "hook" line or introduction
- B) An eight-bar verse
- C) A two-bar tag
- D) A two-bar "breakdown"

In addition, there's a solo over the verse pattern, shared between keyboard and guitar (letters D and E).

The song begins with a four-bar bass intro riff: Ex. 1.5

KEYBD (Wurli EP)

Wurli, bass & gtr



This catchy riff forms one of two strong hooks that make the song enjoyable and memorable. A hook is a phrase that repeats often enough in a song so as to be easy for the audience to sing back and remember.

The verse section of this song is eight bars long, containing the 1, V and 1V chords in a progression similar to a blues:

Ex. 1.6



Following the second and third verses is a section really too short to be considered a chorus. Rather, it's something we might call a *tag*: a short passage, which has the effect of "finishing up" the phrase that comes before it. A tag can be an interlude within the song form that separates a chorus from a re-hash of the verse, or a repeated section at the very end of the song. In classical music, we might call letter A the *antecedent* phrase and letter B the *consequent* phrase; however, these terms are not generally used in pop/rock terminology.

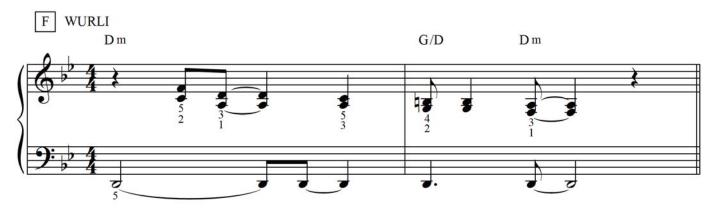
Ex. 1.7



After this tag section, we return the intro, second verse (letter A again) and tag (letter B). Letter D consists of a keyboard solo over the first four bars of the verse, with the guitar taking over at letter E.

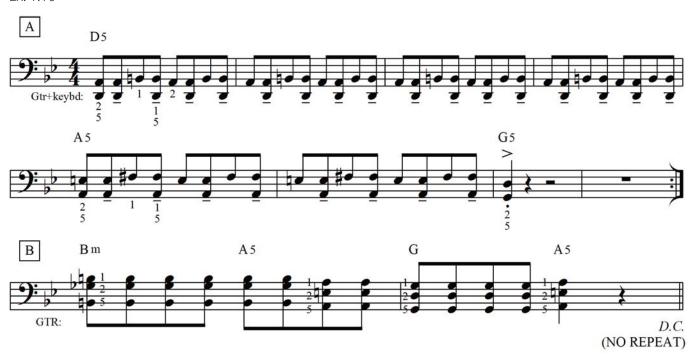


The guitar solo simply hangs on the V chord for four bars before dissolving into the breakdown at letter F. Ex. 1.9



You can think of the song as being a sort of modified blues form, similar to the "bluesy rock" style popularized by Ray Charles (see Keyboard Performance 1, Unit 10). When you add the verse section and the tag, it comes out to ten bars.

Ex. 1.10



The extra two bars of letter C combined with letters A-B equal the same number of bars as a traditional blues form (12).

Ex. 1.11



Chapter 2: Chart Talk-Down

The Lowered Seventh Scale Degree

The chart begins with a keyboard bass riff (or "hook") played in tandem with the bass player. In Unit 10 of Keyboard Performance 1, we studied the lowered seventh scale degree and its role in the blues/rock sound. We can find the same emphasis on the lowered seventh in the opening hook of this week's chart, as it is the "landing" note of the phrase:

Ex. 1.12

KEYBD (Wurli EP)



At letter A, the first verse begins. The pattern as indicated could be played with either hand, but is more characteristic of left-hand playing. The movement of an open fifth interval to a sixth and back is characteristic of blues/rock guitar playing. To get a feel for this, listen to how the guitar plays it.

In the last two bars, there is a break, allowing for a kick drum solo:



When we hit the repeat sign, it's back to the top of the tune and through letter A again. This time, we continue on to letter B. Note the fifth voicings at letter B (also known as power chords). Ex. 1.14



Power Chords: Rock at Its Simplest

A power chord is essentially just a two-note structure containing a root and a fifth. For instance, a C power chord is simply the two notes C and G played together. Power chords offer a strong foundational sound while simultaneously being ambiguous in their tonality: they are neither major nor minor in quality, as they contain no third, and thus can be used to evoke a more open sound that is often characteristic of modern rock music. When heavy riffing is required (a la rock or funk music) power chords suit the situation well. Sometimes the composer requires a feeling of strong rhythm and groove and will ask for these chords to underlay the harmony of the song's progression, either supporting more fleshed-out chords voiced above, or acting as the sole harmony for the section.

At the end of letter B, the D.C. (da Capo) directs us back to the top of the chart again, to play through letters A and B again, this time with no repeat:

Ex. 1.15



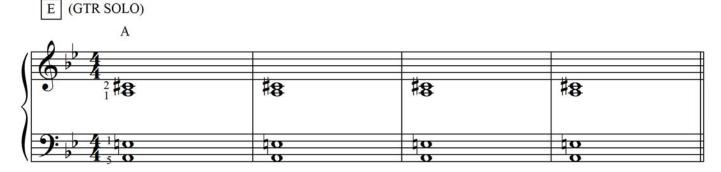
There is no mention of a coda, so we proceed on to a repeat of the intro at letter C, and then the keyboard solo (letter D), which is written out. This solo is over the A minor chord, similar to the verse at letter A. Learning one hand at a time for this section will probably prove easier than trying to play both at once. Ex. 1.16

D WURLI SOLO



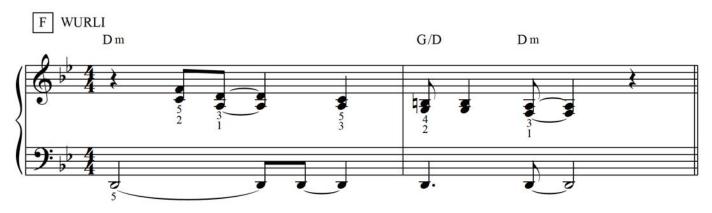
When we reach the V chord at letter E, the guitar takes over the solo and the keyboard just holds down whole note chords (loosely referred to as "goose eggs" or "footballs" in musicians' lingo!). We expect to hear it drop to the 1V chord or G for the last two bars, as it does in the verses, but this song is full of surprises and this does not happen:

Ex. 1.17



Letter F is a little breakdown section. The Wurlitzer keyboard plays this figure alone, with just the hi-hat holding the backbeat on two and four:

Ex. 1.18



Letters G and H comprise the last verse and are fundamentally identical in structure to letters A and B: Ex. 1.19



Letter I brings us back to the opening hook one more time. Ex .1.20



