**Jadey O’Reagan – The entire history of pop in one hour**

>> Welcome to the podcast series of Raising the Bar Sydney. Raising the Bar in 2017 saw 20 University of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney. All on one night. In this podcast, you'll hear Jadey O'Regan's talk, "The Entire History of Pop in One Hour". Enjoy the talk.

[ Applause ]

>> Hello. Thank you, Katie. I'm very excited to have my Madonna mic on tonight. I've never had one of these before. I feel famous. So, thanks everyone. Thank you to, thanks. Thanks to Mojo Record Bar for hosting this. This is just the best place to talk about pop music. And, thanks to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and also to all of you for coming tonight to hang out with me after work and talk about pop music. So, cheers. Cheers. Yeah. Excellent. All right. Let's get to it. So, I'm Jadey O'Regan, and I'm an academic who specialises in the study of popular music. So, like Katie said, I did my Ph.D. on the music of the Beach Boys because that's a thing you can do. Right? It's crazy. So, yeah, I spent four or five years investigating their music, the early 1960s music. So, all the surf, cars, girls stuff. That was my area. So, if you want to chat about the Beach Boys later, see me after class. So, that's something you can do. But, I love all kinds of popular music of the last 70 years, and I'm going to talk a little bit about it tonight. So, a lot of my expertise is about how we analyse popular music because it's really different to classical music which is what you'd normally probably associate with the Sydney Conservatorium. So, I'm going to show you a bit of nerdy analysis tonight. We're all nerds, right? Nerds rule the world. But, you don't have to have any musical training at all. So, all those lines and sticks and dots stuff that you learnt back in high school, if you did music back then, can throw them out tonight. They're still important, but we'll just leave them outside tonight. All you're going to need is your ears to be able to play along. But, by the end of tonight, I hope that you'll have a deeper understanding of how our favourite songs work, an appreciation of how clever they are. Which you can then reflect on if you're listening in the car, at the gym, or just dancing around at home. I'm going to play a few songs tonight, so if the mood strikes you, feel free. So, I wanted to start tonight with a little story, and it's a story about a song. When you're ready for a bedtime story. So, I want you to imagine a band of four guys, four young guys. They've just recorded what will be one of their most popular records, and on it is a song that they'll be known for for the next 40 years. They take this song to the record label, and the record label laughs in their face. In fact, the quote was, I did get a quote. They said, "What the fuck is this." Yeah. So, firstly, it was a song that's over six minutes long. No radio station's going to play a single that's six minutes long. Could barely fit on a 45, you know. One of those guys. Yeah. I think they could fit about seven minutes, depending on how you etch them. But, yet, it was a very long song. Secondly, it was like five songs stuck together. It was like, sad ballad. Then, it's like hard rock, and then, kind of opera, and then, just a giant gong at the end. Just to, you know, just to wrap it up. So, it had no chorus. Kind of important for a pop song. No chorus. So, this isn't what pop music was supposed to sound like, so the record company said, "Nope." But, the band was really sneaky. So, what they did is they got a tape of this new song to a radio DJ in the UK, and he loved it. He loved it. He played it 14 times over the next 48 hours. So, if you do the math, so it's like once every three hours. And, suddenly, we have a hit. Does anyone know what song I'm talking about?

>> "Bohemian Rhapsody".

>> Oh, [inaudible] to this person in the front. High distinction. Excellent. I am talking about "Bohemian Rhapsody". So, it's a really complicated song that most people kind of know every note to. Everyone knows that solo, right? [guitar sound]. So, good. Have a listen.

[ Music ]

Do that headbanging bit, like in "Wayne's World", right? [inaudible].

[ Music ]

My glasses are going to fall off. [laughs]

[ Music ]

All right. So, this is a little bit of "Bohemian Rhapsody" to start our evening together. So, like much great pop music, like "Bohemian Rhapsody", this broke all the rules, especially in terms of its song structure. So, tonight, I'm going to talk a little bit about the history of pop in 30 minutes. I know I was billed as an hour, but I only get 30 minutes with you guys. So, I'm going to do my best, but there's a little caveat. There's a little asterisk. Don't tell anyone. I'm going to talk about the history of one part of popular music, because that's impossible otherwise. So, what I'm going to talk to you about is the development of song structures. So, that sounds a bit technical, but don't worry. I promise it's not scary. It's stuff that you already know about music from listening for years and years to your favourite songs. So, a song structure's basically just the order in which a song goes from its beginning to its end. And, there are rules about that. Throw me out some parts of a song. What's the bit that you all want to listen to? Chorus. Thank you, Bruce. What else? The bridge. Oh, I love a good bridge. Excellent. That's very smart [inaudible] already up the bridge. This is good. What else? What's other important parts? The verse. Yeah, we love a good verse. All right. See, you already know. These are song structures. So, these are the bits of the song that I want to talk about tonight. We've got our intro and outro. So, it starts out song and finishes our songs. Sometimes, it's a fade out. Kind of want the fade out to come back. We don't get fade outs in pop anymore. It was just like, I don't know how to end it. Let's just let it roll. That'll do. Yeah. So, you've got an intro and outro. We've got our verse which is usually where the narrative happens. So, we get the story, essentially, of our song. What's happening. There's a really sneaky little song structure that I really like, and it's called a pre-chorus. And, it's a little, tiny snippet of a song that goes at the end of the verse but it's not quite the chorus yet. So, it leads us to the bit we really want to get to. It's different musically. It's usually got different words, but sneaky little section I want to come back to. So, don't forget our old friend pre-chorus. Then, we get the chorus, the bit we all like to sing along to. Excellent. It's repeated the same each time, usually. And, usually has the song title in it, too, which makes it easy to sing. And then, we have the bridge. So glad someone mentioned the bridge. So, that kind of does what it says on the box. It connects the front of the song with the back of the song. It's the bridge. Or, if you want to get fancy, the middle eight. That's the old timey, the old timey term for it. But, it's usually very different. It takes us somewhere else, and then we come back again for that chorus. It feels really good. So, what are they for? Why do they matter? What happens if a song is in the wrong structure? If we turn on the radio, would we want to hear a song that was like verse, verse, verse, bridge? Or, would we want to hear a song that's like solo, chorus, bridge, solo, verse? It would feel weird. It would feel really weird for us, and it's because all of these kinds of song structures are ingrained in us from all of this listening that we've done over our entire lives. We have expectations about what we're going to hear in a song and when we want to hear it. So, great pop song structures play with those kinds of expectations. And, that's what great pop does. So, during my talk tonight, I'm going to talk a little bit about these rules of songwriting and song structures, but also how great pop always breaks the rules and has tried to break those rules for a very long time. But, we're not there yet. We're going to learn the rules first before we break them. So, let's get into some rules. Okay. Here's our simplest song structure that you will hear in pop music. It's called the simple verse, and it's real simple. It's just verses over and over and over again. Can anyone think of a kind of music where simple verse would make a lot of sense? Folk music. High distinction for this lovely lady over here. Excellent. Head of the class. Folk music. Absolutely. That's where this kind of simple verse form really comes from. It comes from folk music which is, you know, music for folks. It's supposed to be easy. If you've got [inaudible] pick up a guitar, three chords and the truth. Let's do it. [laughs] Right? It's a really simple structure because what's really important about folk music, the words. So, everything is in support of those words. It really is music for folks. So, a really great example that you guys might know, Bob Dylan. A lot of his early songs verse, verse, verse, verse, verse, verse, verse. Giant story. Not, no real chorus. It's just all of this stuff going over and over again. Where it comes into pop music is when we get to the 1950s and we get the birth of rock and roll, one of my favourite things to talk about. I which I had all night. But, we don't, but you'll remember, you will recognise the simple verse in stuff from Little Richard or Chuck Berry or Jerry Lee Lewis, even though he's a terrible person. The worst. Him and Phil Spector. It's a race to the bottom. Garbage rock and roll people, but I do love their music. But, still, it's tense. So, but in rock and roll, what they do in simple verse is they, they attach it to something called the twelve-bar blues. So, the twelve-bar blues is a cord progression. Yeah, this guy's got it right down here. You want to come and do that into my mic? [humming] Yeah, you know it. And so, a lot of early rock and roll will have this simple verse, the same thing all the way through. But, they attach it with this twelve-bar blues thing, and we really see the meshing of folk and of country music and of the blues. And, in that, we get the birth of rock and roll. So, have a little listen to some Little Richard. Oh, hang on. Let me get it right to the start. Don't want to miss the beginning.

[ Music ]

It's hard to believe that song was so scandalous at the time when it came out. "Got a girl named Sue, she knows just what to do." What a hussy that Sue.

[ Laughter ]

It's rough. This table's my favourite. They laugh at all my dumb jokes. This is great. I love this. So, but you hear this all the way through rock. So, something like "Kiss" by Prince which is a really minimalist kind of song. But, it's using exactly the same thing, the simple verse and also the twelve-bar blues underneath. But, the way Prince does it, it's really, it sounds very different. But, what's going on under the surface is actually quite similar. So, we see that thread of the history of pop running all the way through. Here's another rule. I think you're ready for one more difficult one. You ready? Let's do this. All right. So, I want to talk to you about another kind of rule. It's the AABA, so, ooh. I know. Love a good acronym. So, the AABA form which really just spelled out in a way that it is. It's just got an A section, and then we repeat it. They've got a B section that's kind of like a bridge, and then we come back to the A section again. So, we feel grounded before the song's over. So, the history of the AABA form stems all the way back to Tin Pan Alley. So, Tin Pan Alley, I don't know if that's a term that you're familiar with, but if you love jazz music, you might be. So, Tin Pan Alley was essentially a group of buildings in New York. It was the first music factory, basically. It was a lot of music publishing buildings all together in the same area. And so, I get writers like Cole Porter or George Gershwin who would essentially clock on. Like, going to work today. Going to write "Night and Day". Going to write "Summertime". It was a job. It was a job, like a nine to five job. They go, have a room. There's a piano. Let's churn out the hits. And then, they turn that into sheet music. And then, that would be distributed. That was the main form of how music was communicated all the way back to the turn of the century. You got to Woolly's, get your bread and your milk and your sheet music. It's on the list. That's it. That's how you do it. And, you go home, and you play it on your piano at home with your family. So good we have television.

[ Laughter ]

Right? Oh, man. Yeah. So, but the AABA form was this really tidy 32 bars, in and out, short and sweet. So, all your favourite jazz standards, that's what's happening underneath. But, there's a sneaky little bit because we haven't invented the chorus yet. We seem to think that the chorus is something that's always existed. Totally hasn't. We really only go to it in the 1960s. But, until we get the chorus, we have something else that's sort of like it. It's called the refrain. So, the refrain is usually a one line repeated phrase at the end of a verse. It's a bit we all like to sing along to. Sometimes, it's at the top, so something like "Night and Day" by Cole Porter, "Night and day, you are the one," is at the top. That's the refrain, the bit we all remember. But, this continued on until the 1960s, too. And, we're not quite at the '60s yet. But, I want to give you kind of a really easy example of how, of how the AABA form works. And, this is with my friends The Beach Boys. I promise I won't talk about them lots. I do like that they're on the wall over there. Look. They get a mention. It's nice. Yes. Thank you. All right. Sorry. I'm scrapping my talk, and I'm going to talk about The Beach Boys now. Cool. Here's some cards I prepared earlier. It's my crafternoon [phonetic]. It's a good time of the day. So, I'm going to play, I'm going to play "Little Deuce Coupe" for you because it's a perfect example of the AABA form. So, have a listen with me.

[ Music ]

So, hear their A section.

[ Music ]

Refrain. Refrain. Oh, it went back to the A.

[ Music ]

There's our refrain. Oh, here's our B section.

[ Music ]

All right. There's "Little Deuce Coupe" for you to. They're just the best.

[ Laughter ]

I love my boys. All right.

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>> So, this is really earl 1960s, that's 1964, into 1963, 1964. But, then we hit the mid-60s, and this is where you start to see these rules breaking down. We get the verse chorus form. Hurray. Chorus is here. But, this is underpinned by so many other things that are happening in the 1960s, countercultural stuff, psychedelia, civil rights, feminism, AIDS, drugs. The '60s were really good at drugs. Like [inaudible] in drugs. So, we get all of this stuff influencing how popular music sounds. So, we get the verse chorus form which is in pop music all the way up until today. We'll probably never be rid of it, but what was great about the verse chorus form was that suddenly we could have longer song. We weren't restricted to just these verses or these AABAs. We could have heaps of verses. We could have many choruses. We could have a bridge. We could have solos, guitar solos. How exciting. So, we had longer songs, and we could also discuss a lot of more different themes. So, we get the shift from singles music to album music. Really serious album music that you listen to in your beanbag with your headphones on. Legit. [inaudible] the best places. Come on. [inaudible] whole bunch of records. Cool. So, we get the verse chorus form. So, lot of psychedelic music uses this. Here's a little taste for you.

[ Music ]

So, this is a perfect '60s pop chorus there, but also a bit psychedelic there with Cream. That's "Sunshine of Your Love". But, from the sublime to the ridiculous, the chorus continues.

[ Music ]

Right. So, all right. Tossing up between that or, like, Smash Mouth or something. So, you got Rick Astley. Yes. So, so, we get the verse chorus form, and that extends all the way through to modern pop, too. But then, in the 1990s, early '80s into the 1990s which is my era which is cool to talk about. And, that's songs that break the rules again. And, I'm really kind of talking about electronic dance music or EDM music where I can't stand EDM music. It's like an ATM machine. EDM, where the point of this music is dancing. So, it's got to be really the same all the way through because you don't want to suddenly change the mood and have people awkwardly go, "What? Now I'm over here." Right? That's how I dance normally. But, you know, if you're a good dancer, you want it to be the same all the way through. And so, what you get with EDM is you get songs that the structure of it is defined by its mix. So, you'll have the arrangement define what a song is. So, you'll have one bit where, like, a guitar comes in and then it comes out. Or then, you'll have, like, the bass have a moment, and then it comes out. So, there's these really subtle changes that keep things interesting but also don't break the mood for dancing. So, really great example of this "Around the World" by Daft Punk which really just says "around the world" like 40, 50 times for four minutes. It's got a great video clip if you haven't seen it, but have a listen. I want you to really listen hard for that mix. You'll see, you'll hear these instruments come in and out in a real sneaky way.

[ Music ]

Here we go.

[ Music ]

So, we get the bass having a little moment here.

[ Music ]

High hat coming in a moment.

[ Music ]

Bass is doing a little something different here. Yeah, so really sneaky, clever song that actually uses the whole mix, the whole arrangement as what that song structure is. So, yeah, lots of really clever stuff in EDM. And, also ambient stuff, too. Ambient kind of genres draw on this as well. So, I'd like to jump to sort of modern times and talk about how modern pop songs on the charts are starting to bend the rules of what we think pop songs are supposed to sound like and how they're structured. So, here's a nice recent example which is "Uptown Funk" by Mark Ronson, and it's got Bruno Mars. This is from 2004. Oh, it's pop-tastic. And, that's a proper academic term, right? Pop-tastic. Same with guitarmonies [phonetic]. That's another one of my favourites. Yeah. Good time. I'm a musicologist. That's legit. Guitarmonies. I don't often get to draw that card. Please let me play it. Right. So, I'm going to play you a little bit of "Uptown Funk", and I want you to have a listen to what's going on. This is a song that essentially has two pre-choruses which is totally bizarre. It uses a build and a drop which is something we're seeing a lot in pop music that's bled over from EDM. We have a chorus that hardly has any words in it. It's like almost instrumental. It's totally bizarre. So, have a little listen. I've got some cards. I'll hold them up, so we can all play along. Oh, man. Pressed it. Let's get them. Thank you. Thanks to my helper. Awesome. All right. Let's listen to "Uptown Funk".

[ Music ]

Here's that pre-chorus two.

[ Music ]

Here's our pre-chorus and build.

[ Music ]

Here's our drop into the chorus.

[ Music ]

Yeah. Sneaky, right? So, it's flipping on its head what a chorus is supposed to do. The chorus is supposed to be the bit we all sing along to, and there's nothing happening. It's totally, almost totally instrumental. It's just got that "Don't believe me just watch" bit. So, it's the verse and the pre-chorus are where all the business is happening. And then, the chorus is like, I'll just chill out for a bit. And, it's really clever. It's really clever way of reversing what those song structures are supposed to do. Another really great one, this is one of my favourite pop songs of the last, when was this? 2011. God, that seems so long ago now. 2011. Going to end with some Queen B. Beyoncé had a track that was, it's called "Love on Top".

>> Yes!

[ Laughter ]

>> Yes! Sir, this goes out to you. Yes. Yeah, "Love on Top". It's so, it's just like, the most joyous, beautiful pop music. But, it does some really interesting things in terms of structure. It kind of invents a new, a new piece of a song where there's a bit after the chorus which I just called like a chorus tag because it kind of tagged on the end, but it's not quite a chorus. Got a lot of problems with terminology. Popular music studies is tough, but I'm just going to call it a chorus tag which is just as catchy as the chorus. But, it's a kind of other section, and then, it's got this beautiful outro. Let me play you the chorus just so you remember it. It's the best.

[ Music ]

Oh, it's so good. Yeah, it's "Love on Top". So, what I want to do is play you the back part of this song. It's so strange when you add it up. This song is like 80% chorus. It's got two verses and then nothing else. It's just chorus, chorus, chorus because it's the best bit. Have a listen to this outro. It's just gorgeous. Here we go. Enjoy. So, here's our chorus tag, the weird bit that's not part of the chorus.

[ Music ]

All right. Here's our chorus.

[ Music ]

All right. You ready?

[ Music ]

All right. You ready?

[ Music ]

Here we go.

[ Music ]

All right. Ready?

[ Music ]

Here we go.

[ Music ]

Oh, isn't that just the best? Oh. Such an amazing vocal performance, and just like pure joy on a record. Just, oh, the best. If it was a person, I would hug that song. So, yeah, this is a pop song that kind of invents a new song section, but then, what it does with these choruses is that they don't just repeat. What's happening?

>> They're modulating.

>> Oh, this lady right here.

>> Oh, my god.

>> Australian Idol does that all the time.

>> Yeah, well, that's, there's a different. Yeah. I can talk about that. In a, in pop songwriting, that's called a truck driver. That's a truck driver key change because it's like gunk. Here we go. Here we go. Yeah. So, it's really, it's quite curious that they've got this huge, big, long, long chorus section which modulates. Yes, that means changes key. It goes higher and higher and higher. I reckon she could just still keep going forever. Like, dogs can hear it.

[ Laughter ]

Yeah. So, there are some, like, modern pop. There's lots of examples of this. Taylor Swift's another one. "Blank Space" is kind of a song that essentially has two choruses which is really weird. So, there's lots of really weird stuff about song structures and about pop breaking these rules that have been established for a really long time. Ariana Grande like, "Problem" is another one. That's another great song that it's all verse. And then, the chorus is like nothing happening. It's going to be minimalist. Just repeat "problem" over and over again. Yeah, it's really curious. All right. Let's wrap up. Let's get to our outro, the outro of our song. Okay. So, we've had a bit of whirlwind through the history of pop with examples from every decade over its last 70 years. One of the things that ties all of this music together are the kinds of song structures upon which all this other musical stuff that we love hangs on. They wouldn't work if it didn't have this underlying framework. It's really important. It's not the kind of thing that most people hear in a song at first, but once you hear it, you can't unhear it and you can't unhear that thread that connects all of these 100 years' worth of music. So, what I hope is that you'll have a few more musical words to add to your vocabulary. Look [inaudible] smart. But, also, be able to appreciate and listen to your favourite songs on a deeper, more rewarding level. I also hope that you can hear sneaky ways that great pop breaks the rules. All the musical examples I played tonight kind of break the rules in some way, some really obviously. Like, Queen. Some, a bit more subtle like Beyoncé. But, great pop and great songs that last are often the ones that break the rules. So, I wouldn't be a proper academic if I didn't cite my sources. Give my reference list. So much of this paper is pulled from my Ph.D. which is about the music of The Beach Boys, but I've also drawn on the work of academic journalist Tim Byron who's hanging out down here. Yay. So convenient. Thanks for. Thanks. Yay. But, also the work of John Covach and Ralf von Appen and Melissa Everett who were three awesome musicologists who've written a lot about analysing pop music. So, if you, this was cool and fun and you want to get nerdy with it, check them out. They're in the library. I checked. So, that's kind of it for me. I'd just like to say thanks again to Raising the Bar, to Mojo, to Katie, to Doug who have looked after me tonight. Bruce who was awesome. And, also to you. Thank you so much for coming after work and listening to me talk about pop music. Thanks. Rock on.

[ Applause ]

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