

# WHAT'S THAT SOUND?



**An Introduction to Rock and Its History**  
**JOHN COVACH AND ANDREW FLORY**

FIFTH EDITION

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TO ROCK AND ITS HISTORY

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**John Covach**

University of Rochester  
and the Eastman School of Music

**Andrew Flory**

Carleton College



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# WHAT'S NEW IN THE FIFTH EDITION?

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The structure and many features of the Fifth Edition will be familiar to users of previous editions. We have made some revisions and additions to the content in order to clarify historical content, expand coverage of areas that seemed to require it, and react to major changes in the music industry during the last decade. As time passes, the 1980s and 1990s have come into clearer focus historically and this is reflected in the text. The music since 2000 is still settling in, but we have made every attempt to capture a responsible survey—even if the subject is something of a moving target.

Among the additions in this new edition is an increased coverage of rock's impact outside the United States. It would take another book at least as long as the current one to provide a comprehensive account of rock's history outside of the United States, and so we make no claims that this new material accomplishes this. It does, however, serve to remind students that there is more to the history of rock music than the particular way it unfolded within the United States. Rock has sounded a wide range of resonances around the globe since the mid 1950s, and these new passages throughout the text provide examples of the ways in which this happened. Another new feature are paragraphs in several chapters called "A Performance That Launched a Career." These provide glimpses into performances that in some cases seemed to forecast a band or artist's future success, and in others serve to emphasize how great things can come from small beginnings.

Those who know the Fourth Edition will notice that a few new Listening Guides have been added throughout the book, providing a more balanced number of guides for each chapter. We have also added dozens of new guides online, as well as included guides from previous editions of the book. Our goal is to provide instructors with the broadest and most varied collection of Listening Guides possible, and we hope this assists them as they use the book and supporting materials to design a course that best fits their individual pedagogical and scholarly emphases. We have retained the What's That Source readings from the Fourth Edition to provide experience in source readings for students. The collection of brief essays by top pop scholars and writers remains an online resource, providing students with other voices than those of the authors in the telling of rock's history.

When John first began writing *What's That Sound?* in the late 1990s, most instructors still taught from CDs and records and depended on print resources for biographical and historical information and data. This new edition marks the first one published at a time when many undergraduates who will use it were born after the first introduction of Napster (1999). File sharing has changed the world of music in such fundamental ways over the almost two decades since that it may be

tough for students to imagine a world in which the only music you could hear was either on the radio, television, on a record, tape, or CD, or live. Today's students have more music available to them than at any other time in civilization (that we know of, at least) and it is all accessible with a click or two on a phone, tablet, or other device. The recent resurgence of vinyl, though, seems to reflect an attempt to get back to something more authentic or even somewhat nostalgic. Analog, once the only option, has become a hip alternative to digital ease and convenience. Online reference sources such as Wikipedia have put facts about rock and pop music at students' fingertips. As useful as these technologies are, they also make it all the more important that we work hard to recover the conditions of pop and rock music as they were before the digital revolution. These conditions are now outside of the experience and memory of most college undergraduates. Indeed, one of the themes that runs throughout the book is how technology has played an important role in shaping the development of rock music. For many millennials, the challenge may be to imagine a world with far less access to music and to information about the music and the artists.

## DIGITAL MEDIA

[digital.wwnorton.com/whatsthatsound5](http://digital.wwnorton.com/whatsthatsound5)

A talented team of Norton specialists and college instructors has updated the digital media array to accompany the Fifth Edition. Cary Campbell (Weber State University) focused on the new Interactive Instructor's Guide; Joe Gennaro (University of Central Florida) developed the test bank, and Chris Reali (Ramapo College of New Jersey) revised and updated the online practice quizzes.

Elements for the Fifth Edition include:

**Playlists.** Available from [digital.wwnorton.com/whatsthatsound5](http://digital.wwnorton.com/whatsthatsound5), **Playlists** provide links to the songs on Spotify, iTunes, Amazon and authorized YouTube videos. Forty-five author videos are also accessed from the Playlists. The videos help students learn what to listen for in a song and address overarching themes.

**Chapter Quizzes.** Accessible free of charge, **Chapter Quizzes** prepare students for their exams and help them understand the textbook's coverage. Each chapter includes 35–40 questions.

**Chapter Resources.** Also available free of charge, **Chapter Resources** include *Backstage Pass* articles from a list of prominent rock historians, Chapter Outlines and additional Listening Guides.

**For Instructors.** A testbank of over 1000 questions is available for download. The NEW Interactive Instructor's Guide (IIG) is an easy-to-use, searchable and sortable online resource that includes topics for classroom discussion, lecture ideas, chapter outlines, video links for each chapter, and a list of additional recordings referenced in the text. All the art from the text is available in PowerPoint and JPEG format.

**Ebook.** Now integrated with Spotify, the **Ebook** streams music off the page, offering students an immediate listening solution, accessible on laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. An Additional Selections playlist of songs referenced in each chapter is also included to round out the listening experience.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like most textbooks, the one you are about to read developed over the course of many years—in this case, over twenty years of teaching university-level courses in rock music. As a consequence of this prolonged period of gestation, we owe debts of gratitude to many more people than we can list here. Our apologies in advance to those we may have overlooked.

The genesis of the book occurred during John's time at the University of North Texas College of Music, where Thomas Sovik and David Joyner gave him the chance to teach courses in the history of rock music. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, John Nadas, James Haar, Jon Finson, and Mark Evan Bonds were especially supportive in helping John to establish a series of rock-music courses there. At the University of Rochester, John is most grateful for the continued support of Tom Leblanc (now at the University of Miami), Peter Lennie, Joanna Olmsted, Kim Kowalke, Jamal Rossi, and the late Doug Lowry. These colleagues have supported his research and teaching in more ways than he can list here. Andy is especially grateful to current and former colleagues at Shenandoah University and Carleton College. At Shenandoah, Tracy Fitzsimmons, Bryon Grigsby, Michael Stepniak, Keith Salley, Adam Olson, and Golder O'Neil were especially helpful in establishing and inspiring courses in rock music, and at Carleton, Justin London, Ron Rodman, Melinda Russell, Hector Valdivia, Alex Freeman, Nikki Melville, Larry Archbold, Lawrence Burnett have provided administrative support, professional inspiration, and personal encouragement.

We owe a significant debt to the thousands of students who have taken our courses over the years. Much of what is contained in this book was tried out on them first, and we have benefited immensely from their feedback. Over the years, many of John's students helped to educate him on a number of the finer points of rock history. This special group of students includes Mark Spicer, David Carson Berry, Tim Hughes, John Brackett, Paul Harris, Marc Medwin, Akitsugu Kawamoto, Sarah Nicholson, Jason Titus, Anna Stephan-Robinson, Martha Bausch, Christina Brandt, Jonathan Hiam, Joel Mauer, Joe Gennaro, Richard Rischar, Trevor deClercq, Crystal Asmussen, David Leblanc, and Christopher Gupta. Several incredibly knowledgeable students provided Andy with administrative assistance during in his early time working on this book; these include including Robbie Taylor, Alan Weiderman, Billy Barry, Miles Campbell, and Jen Winshop.

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Most of all, we would like to thank our families, Julie, Jonathan, and Ricky Covach, who suffered John’s many obsessed moments over the years with grace and loving support, and Kate, Charlotte, Ben, and Alexander Flory, whose love and patience made the Fifth Edition possible.

John Covach  
*Rochester, New York*

Andrew Flory  
*Northfield, Minnesota*

September 2017

The book cover features a large, dark grey, stylized letter 'S' on a black background. A diagonal cyan triangle cuts across the left side of the cover. The title 'WHAT'S THAT SOUND?' is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters, positioned over the 'S'. Below the title, the text 'FIFTH EDITION' is written in smaller, cyan, all-caps capital letters.

**WHAT'S  
THAT  
SOUND?**

**FIFTH EDITION**





U-7316  
N.M.P.C.  
B.M.I.

Vocal  
Jackie Brenston

ROCKET "88"  
(Jackie Brenston)  
JACKIE BRENSTON  
and his  
Delta Cats  
1458

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# STUDYING ROCK

**R**ock music was born out of controversy, and its rebellious image has always appealed to fans. In the mid-1950s, many adults accustomed to the fatherly crooning of Bing Crosby and the suave, swinging delivery of Frank Sinatra were shocked by Elvis Presley's emphatic **blues**-influenced singing and suggestive dance moves. Teenagers, of course, loved him. Similarly, the Beatles' mop-top haircuts upset a lot of parents in the mid-1960s, while setting a fashion trend among youngsters. Rock continued to push the envelope in later years: artists such as Jim Morrison, Alice Cooper, and David Bowie challenged cultural values in the late '60s and early '70s, while Madonna and Prince did the same in the 1980s. Issues such as payola and obscene lyrics have even been the focus of federal government hearings. While only a small portion of rock has been the source of controversy or cultural struggle, nonconformity and misbehavior are central to the rock movement.

blues

Considering rock's frequent (and sometimes militant) opposition to the status quo, some people are surprised to learn that colleges and universities across the country have been offering courses in rock for many years. As music historians look back on the last century, it is obvious that popular music has played an enormous role in the recent development of the Western musical tradition, and rock music has been dominant among popular styles. Even music historians whose work focuses on other genres and decades must take into account the many and often far-flung effects rock has had on the world of music in general.

Despite the acknowledged importance of rock music, determining exactly what "rock" means is not easy. Some scholars use the term "rock and roll" to describe the first wave of rock from 1954 to 1959 (covered in Chapter 2). Other scholars describe music after 1964 as "rock." Using these two distinct terms preserves what many scholars and fans see as an important difference. This book will employ the term "rock" in a broad sense, however, using the term to designate popular music that is produced specifically for a youth audience. But even this more encompassing usage is still problematic and includes seeming contradictions. Is rock defined by race, or musical style, or specific musical elements, such as instrumentation or lyrical content? Can 1960s soul be considered rock? How about folk or rap? Is all pop also rock, and is all rock also pop? Moreover, how do we think about rock music after its musicians and audience have grown up? While it seems obvious that artists such as Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, the Police, and U2 were central to the rock movement, artists like the Supremes, Madonna, and the Kingston Trio are harder to categorize.

Recorded in 1951 by Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, "Rocket '88" is considered by many to be the first rock and roll record. Though it was first released as a 78-rpm single, this is a photograph of a 1955 pressing—one of only a handful of "Rocket '88" 45s still in existence.

This book will not completely resolve these kinds of questions. Rather, it will tell a history of popular music that focuses on rock but includes many other styles. The chapters that follow consider rock in an inclusive manner, discussing artists as diverse as the Andrews Sisters, Bessie Smith, Bill Haley and His Comets, the Supremes, Santana, Parliament Funkadelic, Metallica, and Britney Spears. The main purpose of the book is to organize this repertoire—an enormous body of music that covers over sixty years of popular-music history—to make it easier to understand and appreciate. Today there is more popular music available to listeners than at any other time in the history of recorded music. The rock era included a vast amount of music, more than can be covered in a typical university course, which only scrapes the surface of rock music. In the chapters that follow, we organize the music into styles and eras to make the rock repertoire easier to understand and appreciate and to provide broad stylistic and historical perspectives.

## ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

**Rock History in the Media.** Studying rock is not new, and most fans will have had some exposure to background information on artists and their music. For those who have not studied rock as an academic subject, this historical information will probably have come from general interest publications, radio, television, the Internet, and even biographical movies. Magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Mojo* provide readers with useful information about rock musicians, their music, and aspects of the entertainment industry. Books targeted at the general reader—often written by journalists and music critics—are plentiful and varied. Cable networks such as VH1 and MTV regularly offer profiles of artists and styles, frequently taking larger historical patterns into account. The development of the classic-rock radio format in the early 1990s also encouraged a growing sense of rock's history, along with the time-tested oldies format that has existed for decades. All these sources of information about the history of rock can be useful, and many have been employed in the writing of this textbook—a list of some of the best general sources follows this introduction, and references to more focused material are provided at the end of each chapter. Be aware, however, that a scholarly approach to rock will differ significantly from general interest books or media accounts. In many cases, information found in the popular media is designed primarily for entertainment rather than educational or research purposes. Some of this information may be accurate, well researched, and balanced, but some of it is also skewed, gossipy, and unreliable. Remember that magazines and broadcast stations generate revenue through the sale of advertising; the worst thing that can happen in such businesses is for people to put the magazine down, change the radio station, or turn off the TV. It is in the best interests of media outlets to deliver what they believe people want most, which can lead to a focus on the more sensational and titillating aspects of biography, rather than serious consideration of musicians and their music. This can be especially true of biopics.

This textbook will attempt to provide a balanced and fair account of the history of rock music. Many more artists and groups will enter the story than may typically appear in general interest accounts. Some artists or groups were more important in



Rock is difficult to define. Almost any listener would agree that “rock” includes Jimi Hendrix (top left). But what about Taylor Swift (bottom left) or the Supremes (bottom right)?



their day than they have been since. Other artists have become more popular over time. There will be no attempts to convince you to like a style of music, to elevate one style over another, or to dismiss or otherwise discredit any artist or group. The following chapters will provide reliable information, historical context, and informed debate. We hope this book will elicit informed discussion of contested issues in rock, such as the relevance of popularity to historical importance, the role of gender and masculinity in rock’s history, and the responsibility of music executives to share profits with musicians.

**I Know What I Like: The Fan Mentality.** Many fans of rock are passionate about the music they like. But what does it mean to be a fan? Fans of rock music listen frequently to the music of a particular artist, group, or style and gather interesting facts about both the artists and the music. As fans, there is absolutely nothing wrong with ignoring artists, groups, or styles that do not interest us. This is per-

fectly natural. But as students of rock music, we cannot simply ignore music we do not like. We must strive to be balanced as we study rock's history and development, which often forces us to consider carefully music we probably wouldn't choose to listen to otherwise. If you were studying American history, it wouldn't be acceptable to study only those presidents who shared your political persuasion. An objective history of the last few decades of the twentieth century would consider John F. Kennedy *and* Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan *and* Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton *and* George W. Bush. When it comes to studying music, you don't have to suspend your sense of judgment, but you do have to work to keep the fan mentality at bay.

**The Ups and Downs of Chart Positions.** This book will make frequent reference to chart positions. Almost everyone is familiar with charts that rank hit songs and albums by popularity for a given week, and the best-known American charts appear in *Billboard* magazine. Charts help us draw general conclusions about the popularity of a song or album at the time it was released. It can also be useful to compare how certain songs did on pop charts with the way they fared on rhythm and blues or country charts, or even on the British charts. More important for this book is that charts can help us avoid the fan mentality—in a sense, they keep us honest. Among scholars, charts are viewed with understandable suspicion because little is known about how they have been put together in the past, making them susceptible to manipulation. Clearly, charts are not precision instruments for measuring a song or an album's success or popularity, and they do not accurately reflect the popularity or influence of some songs or albums. A record can chart well and have little influence, or chart moderately well (or even poorly) and have a lot of influence. But in a broad sense, charts are still the best instruments we have available to judge listeners' changing tastes, even if chart measurements are flawed. Ideally, we would have access to comprehensive radio playlists of various eras, or the actual number of records sold of any song or album. However, playlist data are not plentiful and record companies often manipulate sales numbers (a frequent complaint of artists and bands since the beginning of recording). The Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) does award gold records for sales of 500,000 units and platinum records for sales of 1 million units, which can be helpful in measuring the success of an album or single. The RIAA website ([www.riaa.com](http://www.riaa.com)) allows you to look up any hit record and track its award history. The popular Google Books search engine also provides access to an extensive collection of *Billboard* magazines, allowing us to consider aspects of advertising and industry news at a particular date.

**The Four Themes.** The following chapters each take a three- to ten-year period of rock's history and organize the music along stylistic lines. Some chapters cover the same years from different angles. For example, the mid-1960s are covered in three chapters: Chapter 4, which is devoted to the British invasion; Chapter 5, which discusses the American response to it; and Chapter 6, which focuses on black pop. Each chapter also raises a set of interpretive issues that provide insight into scholarly and critical debates about the music and its historical circumstances or aesthetic impact and value. In the discussion of psychedelia in Chapter 7, for instance, the differences between mainstream popular culture of the mid-1960s and the hippie subcultures in both London and San Francisco are highlighted; the questions that arise in this discussion are representative of the issues that can surface whenever strong

subcultures overlap. While interpretive angles change from chapter to chapter, four important themes are pursued throughout the book: social, political, and cultural issues; issues of race, class, and gender; the development of the music business; and the development of technology.

Each of these themes plays an important role in the development of rock music as a musical style and a force in popular culture. The music business has changed dramatically since the early 1950s, as the rock element of the business has grown from small independent upstarts to some of the most successful and dominant corporations of the modern age. In the realm of technology, the rise of radio in the 1920s and the emergence of television after World War II are central factors in rock's explosion into mainstream American culture in the mid-1950s. Just as important is the development of cable television that facilitated the introduction of MTV in the early 1980s and the rise of file sharing and streaming after 2000. Issues of race, class, and gender are also essential to understanding the origins of rock, the constant challenge of stereotypes in this music, and the ever-present struggle for authenticity in a form that blends down-home vernacular sensibilities with public adoration and extreme wealth. As the chapters unfold, you will be urged to examine how these themes fit into the story of rock's development. No style of music exists in a vacuum, and consideration of these broader perspectives will help us identify and appreciate the forces that have shaped the repertoire and the ways it has been interpreted, both by scholars in academia and by writers in the popular media.

**Tracking the Popularity Arc.** As we study rock's history and progress from the 1950s through the 1990s and beyond, you may notice a pattern of styles and their popularity. In many cases, a specific style will appear within a relatively restricted geographic region and remain unknown to most fans of popular music. For instance, few rock fans were aware of the punk scene in New York during the mid-1970s, and bands such as Television, the Ramones, and Blondie played to small, local audiences. The American punk style, which would morph into new wave by the end of the decade, developed within this small subculture before breaking into the national spotlight in 1978. By the early 1980s, some artists formerly associated with punk embraced styles and commercial strategies of the rock mainstream, while the more die-hard, aggressive groups retreated back into the punk underground. The rise of punk from a small, regional underground scene to mainstream pop culture, and its subsequent retreat, follows a pattern that we might think of as a "popularity arc." Over and over, the stories of specific styles in rock music follow this template. Typically, histories of rock music account for the time each style spends in the pop limelight—the peak of the popularity arc—creating a chronology without examining a style's pre-mainstream roots or existence after the commercial boom years. In a sense, it is difficult to avoid such a historical account, and similar problems arise in histories of other musical styles (such as jazz and classical music). To keep the popularity arc in mind for any given style, ask yourself the following questions: How did this style arise? When did it peak in popularity? Does it still exist in a subculture somewhere? How are elements of this style incorporated into current mainstream pop?

This book will give you the information you need to answer the first two questions. But you will probably need to do your own research to answer the last two. You may be surprised to discover how many older rock styles are still thriving, often long after they have fallen out of the mainstream spotlight.

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★ JACKIE BRENSTON ★  
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 WITH  
 ★ IKE TURNER ★  
 "THE KING OF THE PIANO"  
 AND  
 ★—"HIS KING OF RHYTHM"—★  
 JACKIE IS GONNA TEAR THE HOUSE DOWN

Jackie Brenston (foreground) is credited with writing "Rocket '88.'" In this poster for a Memphis appearance, Brenston (with saxophone) is shown with Ike Turner (at the piano). Turner and His Kings of Rhythm band played with Brenston on the "Rocket '88'" record.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR IN ROCK

Throughout this book, Listening Guides will direct your attention to individual songs that illustrate specific musical features of the styles discussed. While the circumstances surrounding a style, band, or song may be interesting, the way the music sounds is the element that attracts most listeners. The analysis of rock music can require a high level of specific music-analytical training. Books, articles, and doctoral dissertations demonstrate the many dimensions of rock's musical structure. The Listening Guides in this book will help you identify the structural features of rock music, with a focus on musical form. In the broadest sense, musical form refers to the structure and organization of different sections in a song or piece. Rock generally uses a limited number of common formal types; once you are familiar with these types, you will notice that most songs fit relatively neatly into one form or another (with certain exceptions). Understanding formal structure will help you hear new things in the music itself and perceive similarities between musical styles that may otherwise seem very different. The basic formal types are introduced here, along with short explanations of rhythm, instrumentation, and recording techniques. Instrumentation, or the types of instruments used in a given recording, can drastically change the way a song sounds and allow for variation within a performance. A familiarity with basic techniques used to record rock music will also help us understand some of the important differences between studio recordings, which form the bulk of the repertoire discussed in this

book, and live rock performances. In addition to the sounds of rock, we will also consider the sights of rock, with a special introduction to viewing rock in its multiple contexts.

**"Rocket '88.'" Before delving into greater detail, it may be helpful to look closely at some of these features in a brief analysis of a classic track: Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats' 1951 single, "Rocket '88.'" Recorded in Memphis and produced by Sam Phillips (Elvis Presley's first producer), "Rocket '88'" is considered by many to be the first rock and roll song. While it is legally credited to Brenston, he may have written only the lyrics and lifted the music from an earlier song called "Cadillac Boogie" (such "borrowings" are relatively common in early rock and roll). To show how the song is laid out, the book provides a **formal diagram** that breaks it into sections and lists them according to music timings. These timings simply give you an idea of where in the song a specific section begins and ends. Each section**

### formal diagram

is also marked by a snippet of lyrics or some other description to help you locate it. The formal diagram for “Rocket ‘88” is in the following Listening Guide. “Rocket ‘88” is in what we call **simple verse form**. It repeats a single section of music eight times and, as you will see in the diagram, each section is labeled either “**verse**” or “**instrumental verse**.” The only exception is verse 2, which slightly alters the structure found in all the other sections. Simple verse form is common in rock music, and we will see many instances of it in the chapters that follow.

In the first section, labeled “Instrumental Verse” in the diagram, note that the description “12 mm.” is given. This indicates that the section is twelve **measures** in length (“mm.” is commonly used to abbreviate measures in musical writing). You have probably heard musicians begin a song by counting out “one, two, three, four!” Musicians commonly count the **beats** in music in groups of four (though groups of two or three beats can also be found). This simply means that you count “one, two, three, four” and continue counting “one, two three, four” again rather than “five, six, seven, eight.” Each group of four beats is called a “measure” or **bar** of music—these terms are synonymous and used interchangeably. Note that each

**simple verse form**  
**verse**  
**instrumental verse**

**measures**

**beats**

**bar**

## Listening Guide

### Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, “Rocket ‘88” Chess 1458

Words and music by Jackie Brenston, produced by Sam Phillips. “Rocket ‘88” hit #1 on the *Billboard* “Best Selling Retail Rhythm and Blues” and “Most Played Juke Box Rhythm and Blues” charts in 1951.

**FORM:** Simple verse.

**TIME SIGNATURE:** 4/4.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Piano, drums, saxophones, solo vocals, distorted electric guitar playing a repeated boogie-woogie pattern.

Timings	Section	Description
0:00–0:19	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., piano featured.
0:19–0:38	<b>Verse 1</b>	12 mm., “You women have heard of jalopies . . .”
0:38–0:57	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., saxophones featured.
0:57–1:10	<b>Verse 2 (partial)</b>	8 mm., “V-8 motor . . .”; breaks off early.
1:10–1:28	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., sax solo.
1:28–1:47	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., sax solo continues.
1:47–2:05	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., sax solo continues.
2:05–2:23	<b>Verse 3</b>	12 mm., “Step in my rocket . . .”
2:23–2:46	<b>Instrumental verse</b>	12 mm., sax and guitar featured.