

## BACKGROUND

<b>Title</b>	Ticket to Ride
<b>Recording Date</b>	February 15, 1965
<b>Meter</b>	4/4
<b>Key</b>	A major
<b>Song Form</b>	Verse/Chorus with Primary Bridge
<b>Phrasing</b>	Verse: <i>aab</i> Chorus: <i>aab</i> Primary Bridge: <i>aaab</i>
<b>Recording</b>	<i>Help!</i> 1965 EMD/CAPITOL

Lennon claimed that “Ticket to Ride” was the first heavy metal record in pop history. While that assertion might be up for dispute, it is certainly true as far as the Beatles’ repertoire is concerned. The song’s 12-string guitar introduction automatically lightens its impact, but the strident beat and feel of the song is heavier than any previous Beatles song.

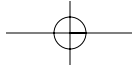
As the story goes, it was Paul who came up with the song’s characteristic syncopated drum pattern. His emphatic bass line and screaming high harmonies also contributed greatly to accomplishing Lennon’s heavy-metal vision for this song (Dowdling, 1989).

“Ticket to Ride” was included in the Beatles’ second movie, *Help!* The song was released as a single in England on April 9, 1965 and in America on April 19. Both sides of the single were one-hundred-percent Lennon songs: Side A was “Ticket to Ride” and side B was “Yes It Is,” John’s attempted rewrite of “This Boy” (1963). Previously, John and Paul had split the A-sides and B-sides. “Ticket to Ride” also appeared on the *Help!* album, which was released later that summer on August 6, 1965 in England and exactly one week later in America.

## STRUCTURE

### Song Form

The form for “Ticket to Ride” is an interesting variation on the AABA format. It is one of the earliest pop songs to push the envelope on this standard form. The song is an embryonic form of the verse/chorus with primary bridge format, though it sounds very close to the standard classic AABA. Both the verse and chorus are eight bars long, creating a 16-bar section that may be thought of as an A section. The



“middle eight” takes the form of the 9-bar primary bridge, which may be thought of as B. The modern interpretation of this form is:

A	A	B	A
Verse/Chorus	Verse/Chorus	Primary Bridge	Verse/Chorus
8 + 8 bars	8 + 8 bars	9 bars	8 + 8 bars

### Lyric Content

The lyric tells the story of a young man who appears to be losing the affection of his girlfriend. In the two verses, the singer tells of his sadness at the imminent departure of his lover, for he had made her feel imprisoned.

The bridge lyric, however, counters with an “instant karma” warning. He advises her to be sure that she has thought everything through completely before taking action. This lyrical strategy is found in many of Lennon’s songs. He delivers a story or observation passionately in the verse, but then balances it in the bridge with the opposite side of the story. As we shall see throughout his works, Lennon had a proclivity for embracing contradiction as a means of expressing the mixed emotion that so often accompanies humanity’s deepest experiences.

## PHRASING

### Verse

#### Harmonic Phrasing

The harmonic chord progressions for the verse and the chorus are diametrically opposed. That is, the verse utilizes a slow harmonic rhythm and ends with open harmony. The chorus, in contrast, utilizes a fast harmonic rhythm and ends closed. The slow harmonic rhythm in the verses creates a contemplative mood as the lyric muses, “I think I’m gonna be sad,” and “she said that living with me is bringing her down.” Note the slower harmonic rhythm in the verse:

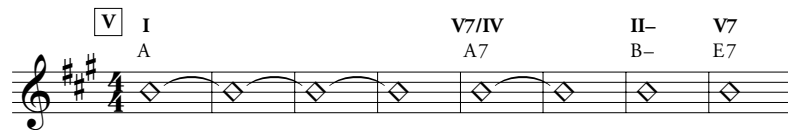
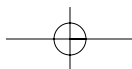
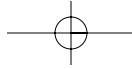


Fig. 4.1. Verse harmonic phrasing





Staying on the single chord builds tension and creates an effective build-up to the heavy rock sound that Lennon unleashes in the chorus. The tension continues to build at bar 5, with the move from the A triad to the A7 chord. The final II–V cadence (B minor to E7) sweeps the verse away from its grounded tonic to the chorus.

An oddity about the verse: the guitar lyric that is contained in the introduction continues over the first four bars while the A triad is being sounded:

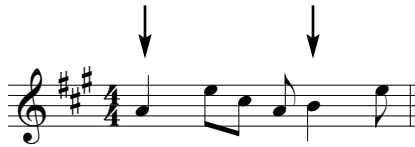


Fig. 4.2. “Ticket to Ride” guitar riff

The arrows above the A and the B, the tonic and 2nd scale degrees, indicate the two most potent notes in the riff. The riff ends on the B, while the E eighth note acts as a pickup note to the repeated riff. Ending repeatedly on the B has two dramatic effects. Its repetition drives the verse forward like mad. Second, the note gives the A triad a more unsettled nature by creating an Asus2 (or A(add9)) feel. Suspended chords, abbreviated as “sus,” lack the definitive 3rd of the chord and as a result always have a somewhat uncertain, ambiguous sound.

Lennon’s combination of these two treatments—the long sojourn on the tonic chord and the interjection of the competitive sus2 guitar riff—causes the opening bars of the verse to generate tension and forward motion into the chorus.

#### ► **Melodic Phrasing**

The phrasing employed for the verse section is simple, making the song very easy to sing along with after just one or two hearings:

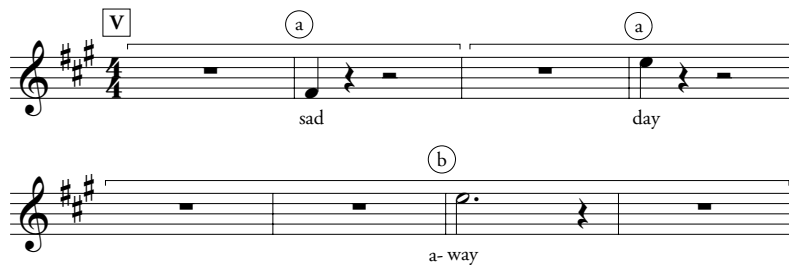
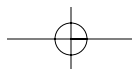
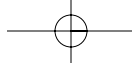


Fig. 4.3. Verse melodic phrasing





There is a good reason that “Ticket to Ride” is one of the most singable of all of Lennon’s compositions: its symmetrical phrasing. Utilizing a standard 8-bar section, Lennon constructs the verse, beginning with two simple 2-bar (a) phrases. Then he answers those two phrases with a complementary 4-bar (b) phrase, creating an easily grasped *aab* inner form for the verse.

Both of the 2-bar statements create an accelerated effect, because they end on weak bars 2 and 4. The 4-bar phrase introduces deceleration, because longer phrases following a short phrase tend to slow the overall motion of the phrase. The 4-bar phrase also ends on the strong bar 7, supporting the deceleration slightly. This deceleration sends out a signal of change, which is the coming chorus section. The chorus arrives with a return to the accelerated phrasing pattern that began the verse.

## Chorus

### Harmonic Phrasing

The harmonic progression for the chorus is much more active than the grounded verse section. The chorus is where the song takes off, making a splendid contrast to the verse.

Fig. 4.4. Chorus harmonic phrasing

Like many classic choruses, this one starts on a chord that gives movement, the tonic substitute, F# minor. It leads into a final cadence on tonic, A major. At the end of the chorus, the melody is on Do, the harmony is on the I chord, the rhythm of the melody ends on beat 1, and the lyric ends with a conclusive, “and she don’t care.” This provides well-defined harmonic closure to support closure in the song’s other main elements: melody and lyric.

### Melodic Phrasing

The same *aab* phrasing is used for the chorus. This repetitive phrasing pattern lends an accessibility and familiarity that contributes to the popular and commercial success of this great song:

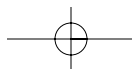


Fig. 4.5. Chorus melodic phrasing

Even though “ride” is treated with a melisma, I analyze the phrase as being two bars long, because when looking at words and music together, the phrase ends with the last syllable sung—not the last note sung. For instance, take a closer look at a 2-bar excerpt from the chorus:

Fig. 4.6. 2-bar chorus excerpt

The phrase ends at the beginning of the G major bar, right where the singer sings the lyric “ride” with the F#. Without the addition of new words or syllables, the impact of the continuing E and C# is greatly diminished. Together, the inner forms of the verse and chorus create a balance (*aab/aab*), which gives both sections a connection as a whole.

### Primary Bridge

#### ► Harmonic Phrasing

For the primary bridge, Lennon returns to a slower harmonic rhythm reminiscent of the verse. Like the verse, the bridge retains its opening D7 chord for several bars before moving to the E7. That elongated chord motion is a total departure from the chorus:

Fig. 4.7. Primary bridge harmonic phrasing

Lennon does not use the tonic chord at all in the primary bridge—quite common practice in composing bridges. As we have discussed in previous chapters, the tonic would slow down what is a typically forward-moving song section. In effective songwriting, choruses summarize and bridges move. Lennon chose only the simple and forward-moving IV7 and V7 chords, D7 and E7, for this section.

The primary bridge for “Ticket to Ride” is the only section that is nine, instead of eight, bars long. The extra bar suspends the bridge in mid-air, with the aid of the George Harrison guitar lick in those last two bars. Then, the bridge comes crashing down, once again back to the droning A triad of the verse.

### ► **Melodic Phrasing**

The bridge phrasing exercises both repetition and deception. Another uniquely Lennon trait surfaces: making two opposing ideas work together in perfect balance. As the bridge gets underway, repetition signals that this will be the classic *aaaa* format, but Lennon surprises us with an *aaab* structure instead:

Fig. 4.8. Primary bridge melodic phrasing

After three (a) phrases, an extra bar is thrust upon the listener. This imposes a fleeting moment of chaos. It looks like an (a), it sounds like an (a) . . . but with that extra ninth bar, we have a (b). The extra bar sets up a moment of imbalance, and the unexpected guitar lick that leads the bridge back to the verse provides a twinkling, blissful suspended moment.

## PROSODY

### Verse

The verse melody marches proudly up through the chord tones of the tonic chord before slamming into that D in bar 1 on the lyric “gonna.” Lennon puts both the melody and lyric right up front:

Fig. 4.9. Verse structural tones

The D in the melody brings the lyric “gonna” to the forefront; the lyric is spotlighted because the D is not present in the tonic chord A (bar 1). You may recall that Lennon used nonchord tones successfully both in “I Feel Fine” and “You Can’t Do That” to spotlight lyrics. Both of those songs, in the key of G, featured the nonchord tone C with exactly the same effect.

After the first phrase, the D makes a playful, syncopated bounce (“today”) up to the stable E before falling off to the C# in the second phrase (bars 2, 3, and 4). Then the melody makes a dramatic leap up a tritone to the high nondiatonic G (bar 4 going to 5). The last phrase moves back down, and ends with the same D-and-E interplay heard earlier in the second phrase.

Lennon was wise to design a melody with such great motion and activity. It works well against the static tonic pedal (repeated bass note) created by the sustained A chord (bars 1–6). It spotlights the lyric and creates tension as the melody progresses into the chorus.

## Chorus

Lennon is passionate in his delivery of the chorus melody. Note that each subsequent phrase gets longer than the previous: first three notes, then four, then five. This creates a deceleration into the ending—the perfect prescription to bring the chorus to a conclusion.

Fig. 4.10. Chorus structural tones

The first line of the chorus features two teasing movements up to the F#. Each is set with the lyric “ride” from the title (bars 2 and 4). A very passionate moment is created in the second phrase, as the F# moves down to the C#. Neither of these notes are chord tones of the nondiatonic G triad (bar 4). In this bar, F# becomes a stinging major 7th tension, while the stable C# acts as the melodramatic #11th tension. The melody then makes a final ascent to the bluesy Gb before it falls away back down to the stable C# in bar 7 to close down the chorus. This fall-off approach to the melodic ending is an excellent support to the resigned lyric, “She don’t care!”

### Primary Bridge

Lennon’s melodic treatment in the bridge utilizes a tried-and-true Lennon technique: the static melody.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the Primary Bridge. The top staff is labeled 'PB' and contains a melodic line with notes D4, E4, and C#4. The bottom staff shows the harmonic accompaniment with chords IV7 (D7) and V7 (E7). The notation is in G major and 4/4 time.

Fig. 4.11. Primary bridge structural tones

The static bridge melody contrasts well with the active verse and chorus melodies. For the bridge melody, Lennon simply exploits three simple notes: D, E, and C#. The D, so skillfully used in the verse and completely omitted in the chorus, now makes a reappearance as the governing note in the bridge. The main contrast for the bridge melody is the introduction of the bluesy C#. This contributes to the gospel/blues-flavored sound in this section and sets it apart from the other two sections.

Here again, Lennon brilliantly weaves motion and stasis into a complete, balanced unit. You will see in the lead sheet that Lennon introduces faster moving sixteenth-note rhythms for the lyrics “She oughta think twice,” and “she oughta do right by me.” The longer harmonic rhythm on the D7 chord provides stasis, while the C# and the sixteenth notes provide motion. It is another Lennon success—he has created the perfect bridge with just three notes and two chords.

## SUMMARY

Using his expanded view of the standard AABA form as a backdrop, Lennon fashioned something quite new in “Ticket to Ride.” Up until now the A in the AABA form always represented the standard verse/refrain. But in his effort to write a heavier rock song, Lennon began to think of the A as a verse/chorus combination.

Rather than having a simple, single statement of the title line, Lennon repeats the title three times. This repetition transforms the part from a refrain (single statement) to a chorus (three statements). The repetition also supports Lennon’s desire to make this a heavier rock song. The repeated lyric creates an anthemlike sing-along.

Despite Lennon’s desire for “Ticket to Ride” to be regarded as one of the earliest heavy-metal songs, the song does lend itself to lighter settings. Recall the famous 1969 soft rock cover of the song by the Carpenters. Recently, a student in my “Music of John Lennon” class at Berklee College of Music submitted a tantalizing reggae version of the song for her final project. Her version presented a delicate, subdued feel as well. It is the mark of a good song that it can be presented in many musical styles—and thus reach listeners from all walks of musical life.

“Ticket to Ride” remains one of the best known of Lennon’s early rockers. Even when the song is performed today, it still makes a connection with young and old alike. Lennon mastered the ability to speak to us all—and his voice still echoes today, nearly forty years later.