

RockStudy Music

The Theory Behind Rock & Pop



Topic 7

Pedal Notes In Rock & Pop Chord Progressions

By Lachlan Wilson.

Pedal notes in Rock and Pop chord progressions

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Overview

Rock and roll music developed throughout America from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. Young adults, then known as teenagers, looked to identify their contemporary status by way of specific clothing fashion, young role models, who were often film actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, and most importantly, a new musical style that projected optimism, excitement, and rhythmic vitality.

The emerging rock and roll musician was inevitably young, enthusiastic, and musically untrained. However by varying and adapting much of the musical language of previous styles, particularly Rhythm and Blues and Country music, a new form of music evolved, one that spoke clearly to the young people of America and subsequently throughout the whole world. This evolution has continued to develop over several decades thereby influencing the many stylistically variations within the genre.

Furthermore, many rock musicians have developed considerable technical skills without any real understanding of music notation and how the theoretical aspect of musical language relates to performance. There can be little doubt that a thorough understanding of music theory can further enhance performance and compositional skills within the musician, which ultimately leads to a more overall proficient musical artist.

About the Author

Melbourne based musician Lachlan Wilson was drawn to Rock and Roll music from a very young age, and this involvement has since spanned many decades. Whilst also embracing many other musical styles, it was the initial impact of Rock music that has always remained a strong influence throughout his musical career.

As a performer Lachlan has played saxophone and flute in several groups and ensembles throughout Australia dating from the 1960's, through to more contemporary times.

The desire for a more comprehensive understanding of music theory saw him undertake further study where he completed a Bachelor of Music at the University of Melbourne, later leading to additional Post Graduate studies in both composition and education.

Lachlan has subsequently taught harmony and counterpoint at tertiary level for more than 20 years in contrasting musical genres ranging from the Renaissance era through to contemporary non-tonal theoretical practices.

During these educational sessions, the energy and authority of the musical language associated with Rock and Pop music has formed the basis of these instructive modules.

User's Guide

The headphone symbol lets you know that there is listening material available via the links provided.



The vinyl record symbol lets you know when a specific piece of music is being discussed. The title, artist and composer will be listed here.



Analysis and notation examples are indicated by the image of a treble clef.



Generally notation examples are designed to reinforce the audio examples and offer support for different levels of music theory knowledge. Examples include:

The chord symbol or name. Amaj, Dmin, etc.

The chord's functional name: Tonic, Dominant, Mediant, etc.

The chord's function, represented as a Roman Numeral: I, ii, iii, IV, V etc. It should be noted that in this style an upper case numeral indicates a major chord, and a lower case numeral indicates a minor chord. Additional symbols provide further information such as o denotes that the chord is a diminished triad and the + sign denotes that the chord is an augmented triad. The musical notes, key signature and time signatures will also be laid out across a musical staff.

Additionally each topic will also have its own playlist available on Spotify. These playlists include the original artist version of the songs examined as well as extra listening examples related to the topic. Click [Here](#) to listen to Spotify playlist for this book.

Go to <https://www.rockstudymusic.com/> for details.

Purchasing



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Go to <https://www.vmta.org.au/online-store/rockstudy-music-online-theory-courses/>

Introduction

“How to build tension and expectation without moving. The magic of the pedal note”.

Pedal Notes in Rock and Pop chord progressions.

Including pedal notes within the harmonic framework of a Rock music chord progression allows the music to develop tension and a sense of expectation that draws the listener towards an aurally satisfying resolution and generally moves the music into the following section or completion of the song.

The concept and use of pedal notes has been part of the musical harmonic language for hundreds of years including being regularly used in J.S. Bach's music to reinforce cadence points and can best be described as sustaining a chord tone, generally the root note of either the tonic or dominant chord, and maintaining this pitch whilst additional chords alter above during a harmonic progression. The repeating pedal note, also referred to as a 'pedal point', then resolves back to a consonant chordal tone thereby releasing the built-up tension created by the pedal note.

Often the pedal note appears as a dissonant pitch during the subsequent chord progression, however as the ear has initially heard the note as a consonant chordal tone, the listener is then able to retain the repeating note without the sense of a jarring quality, rather its use, particularly in Rock and Pop music, produces a higher level of interest and anticipation during the musical passage.

For the most part pedal notes are heard in the bass line, however upper pedal notes in a higher voice are also extremely effective in music. These upper pedals are generally referred to as 'inverted pedal notes', and during this session both categories of pedal notes will be considered and examined within the Rock and Pop music genre.

Podcast

Head to the VM TA link where podcasts are available for all episodes and e-books where a series of exercises and activities are also available for each topic. <https://www.vmta.org.au/online-store/rockstudy-music-online-theory-courses/>

To see all our available podcast episodes and e books, head over to <https://www.rockstudymusic.com/episodes-and-books> Remember to subscribe, like and share to keep up to date with our podcasts and to help us spread the word.

Playlists

The Spotify playlist for this book can be found by clicking [here](#) or heading over to our website <https://www.rockstudymusic.com/ep-7-pedal-notes-in-rock-pop-chord-pr>

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Topic 1 - Extended tonic pedal note

Consider the various sections of a popular song and where the opportunities best lie to incorporate this device into the music. Most often within the Rock and Pop music genre pedal notes are heard at the beginning of the music, however there are also other occasions and moments where this type of device can really enhance the piece.



"Lily Was Here"
Dave. A Stewart.

Even at times using a pedal note for lengthy periods can add interest to the piece. The composer Dave A Stewart, formally of the "Eurhythmics", has provided a solid foundation for the musical dialogue between the electric guitar and the alto saxophone, played by Candy Dulfer, through the use of a sustained pedal note in his instrumental composition "Lily Was Here" released in 1989. Here the low-pitched E pedal note, albeit slightly embellished, remains in place for the complete piece underpinning a natural minor harmonic progression in the key of E minor.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line features a sustained E pedal note (E2) throughout. The chords and their durations are as follows:

Measure	Chord	Pedal Note
1-4	Em	Tonic pedal note
5-8	Em	pedal note (chordal note)
9-12	Am/E	pedal note (chordal note)
13-16	Am/E	pedal note (chordal note)
17-20	D/E (opt Bm/E)	pedal note (non-chordal note)
21-24	D/E	pedal note (non-chordal note)
25-28	Em	Tonic pedal note
29-32	Em	Tonic pedal note



Click on the link to listen to "Lily Was Here"
from 0:00 – 1:40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybjlwTR8c>



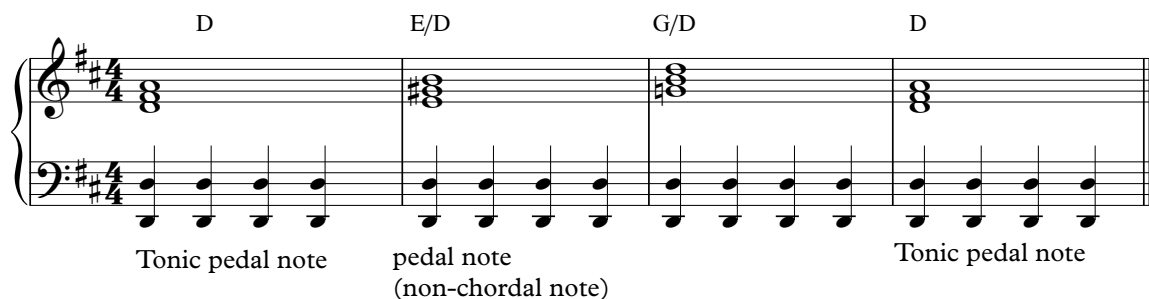
Topic 2 - Pedal notes as intro's and outro's

The use of a bass pedal note during the introduction can really set up the song, immediately gaining the interest of the listener. This remains the case regardless of Rock's various contrasting styles. Interestingly using this type of device during introduction can also serve as an ideal outro as well when bringing the song to a close.



"Eight Days a Week".
John Lennon /Paul McCartney.

The Beatles provide an early example of the pedal note during the introduction of their 1964 hit song "Eight Days a Week", where the bass part begins its pedal on a low tonic D note, which in turns becomes a dissonant non-chordal note under the E major triad, an inversion pitch during the G chord, before finally resolving back as the root note of the tonic D major chord.



The musical notation shows the bass line of "Eight Days a Week" in 4/4 time. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The notation is divided into four measures, each with a chord symbol above it: D, E/D, G/D, and D. The bass line starts with a low D note (the tonic pedal note) and continues with a series of eighth notes. The second measure, E/D, shows the pedal note (D) becoming a dissonant non-chordal note under the E major triad. The third measure, G/D, shows the pedal note (D) becoming an inversion pitch during the G chord. The fourth measure, D, shows the pedal note (D) resolving back as the root note of the tonic D major chord.



Click on the link to listen to "Eight Days a Week"
from 0:00 – 0:08

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTfmuDjwQTw>



Note how the process is repeated at the end of the song, in this case more emphatic, as the pedal note is now employed as an effective outro.



Click on the link to listen to "Eight Days a Week"
from 2:30 – 2:42

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTfmuDjwQTw>





"Your Song." Elton John/Bernie Taupin.

Another excellent example of pedal notes being incorporated into a song as both the introduction and ending is the Elton John and Bernie Taupin hit "Your Song", originally released in 1970 and covered as recently as 2018 by Lady Gaga. Listen here to the bass line in the original version as the bottom E flat tonic note repeats in octave leaps during the introduction providing a most effective pedal point preparing for the resolution into the main body of the song itself.



Click on the link to listen to "Your Song"
from 0:00 – 0:08



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrznwpD-2tk>

This pedal point reappears from time to time throughout the music, particularly at the mid point of the song, refer from 1':45", however it is at the ending that this harmonic device is more emphatic. During the outro to the song the device provides a subtle variation from the introduction as the E flat pedal note becomes rhythmically more active and is now heard in the upper octave rather than the alternating octave leaps as found in the introduction.



Click on the link to listen to "Your Song"
from 3:45 – 4:02

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrznwpD-2tk>

Topic 3 - Pedal notes during internal song sections.



"You're My Best Friend". John Deacon.

Consider the use of a pedal note being used at various points within the song recorded by Queen titled "You're My Best Friend", written by bass player John Deacon and released in 1975. Listen here to the electric piano bass line as the tonic pitch of C begins the piece and repeats throughout each of the A sections.

The musical notation shows two systems of a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time. The first system consists of four measures with chords Dm, C, F, and C. The bass line in each measure features a repeating eighth-note pattern. Labels below the bass line identify these as: Pedal note (non-chordal), tonic pedal note, pedal note (chordal), and tonic pedal note. The second system consists of five measures with chords Dm, C, Dm, C, and Dm. Labels below the bass line identify these as: pedal note (non-chordal), tonic pedal note, (non-chordal), tonic pedal note, and (non-chordal).



Click on the link to listen to “You’re My Best Friend”
from 0:00 – 0:40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaZpZQG2z10>



Bass pedal notes can also be particularly effective when used in conjunction with powerful guitar riffs as they add considerable weight to the melodic and harmonic effect of the phrase being played above. Many Heavy Metal bands often use this device where a pedal note is heard in the lower register to provide a dramatic result.



“You’ve Got Another Thing Comin’” Rob Halford/K.K. Downing/Glenn Tipton

In the following example “You’ve Got Another Thing Comin’” by the English Heavy Metal band Judas Priest, a persistent and driving low F# quaver pattern continues to build tension for most of the complete song, only deviating for the occasional doubling of a guitar line, verse endings, and bridge.

Introduction

F#⁵ F#⁵ F#⁵ F#⁵

Pedal note (tonic)

E⁵ B⁵ F#⁵ F#⁵ B⁵

pedal note (non-chordal) pedal note (chordal) pedal note (tonic)



Click on the link to listen to
“You’ve Got Another Thing Comin’”
from 0:00 – 1:55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJMGveYdO-M>



This category of Rock music makes considerable use of power chords and as a result the pedal note does not always take the role of a nonharmonic dissonant pitch, regardless the musical result is always maintains an exciting and powerful effect.



“Jump”.

Eddie Van Halen/Alex Van Halen/
David Lee Roth,/Michael Anthony.

Another example of a bass pedal note being maintained for extended periods throughout a song, continuing on from an introduction and repeating the same pitch during a complete subsequent section can be found in the following excerpt, “Jump”, a timeless piece by the band Van Halen. In this case a low-pitched tonic C Pedal note is initially sustained, finally giving way to a driving rhythmic pattern. This pedal point also includes two additional pitches, F and G, at the end of each instrumental phrase rounding off the keyboard hook.

G/C C F/C G/C C F/C C/F G(sus4)

Tonic pedal note (non-chordal note) Tonic pedal note Tonic pedal note (non-chordal note)



Click on the link to listen to “Jump”
from 0:00 – 1:00

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwYN7mTi6HM>



Pedal notes during a Bridge section.



“I Wish It Would Rain Down”.

Phil Collins.

The previous examples have highlighted the use of Pedal notes at the beginning, ending and during the music, however this device can be equally as effective when used at other structural points of the song.

For instance, Phil Collins, the popular singer, songwriter, and outright great drummer, seems rather fond of pedal notes in his music, particularly during the bridge passage. In the following example “I wish it would rain down”, observe how the bass line reinforces the pitch of A flat, albeit at times melodically decorated, as this tonic pedal point allows the music to build and build thereby creating ongoing musical tension at this most important juncture of the song.



Click on the link to listen to “I Wish It Would Rain Down”
from 2:30 – 3:08

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZAkqukvfSE>



Topic 4 - Upper Pedal Notes

Pedal notes that appear in an upper part are also referred to as “inverted pedal notes”. These pedal points can be equally effective during the music and there can be many examples of both tonic and dominant pitches found as pedal points in Rock and Pop music.



“Hurt”
Trent Reznor.

An excellent example of an upper pedal note can be found in the late Johnny Cash’s 2003 version of the “Nine Inch Nails” classic “Hurt”. This interpretation, and accompanying video clip, has since become arguably the definitive version of the song for the deeply emotional outpouring rendition by Cash’s vocal delivery.

The use of the upper Pedal note in this piece is particularly effective as the song progresses through its journey. The form is AABB with the B section, which has a tonal centre of G major, employing an upper tonic pedal point which is eventually represented by incessantly repeating crotchet pitches of G above middle C, which serves to precisely reflect the inward pain of both the song and the singer.

	pedal note (non-chordal note)	pedal note (chordal note)	tonic pedal note



Click on the link to listen to “Hurt”
from 2:18 – 3:35

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AHCfZ-TRGil&list=RD8AHCfZTRGil&start_radio=1





"Eye of the Tiger". Frankie Sullivan/Jim Peterik.

The previous examples mainly demonstrate the use of pedal notes in a generally subtle manner, either in the bass line or heard in an upper voice. Although one particularly significant example where the pedal note maintains a major melodic and rhythmic feature in the music can be found in the hit by the band Survivor, "Eye of the Tiger", famously associated with the Sylvester Stallone 1982 film *Rocky III*. In this case the opening muted pedal note pitch of C, played by electric guitar and accompanied by highly syncopated chords, is heard in an upper voice and acts as a tension-driving device throughout the piece. In fact the use of this pedal note is one of the most important elements contained within the music and instantly identifies the song to the listener.

Cm Ab Bb Cm

Tonic pedal note pedal note (chordal note) pedal note (non-chordal note) tonic pedal note



Click on the link to listen to "Eye of The Tiger"
from 0:00 – 1:25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btPJPFnesV4>



"Theme from Shaft" Isaac Hayes.

Whilst not quite as obvious as traditional pedal points, an indirect and creative way of incorporating pedal notes during the music can be by way of using interesting effects, such as a guitar wah-wah performance pedal. A repeating note with octave displacements combined with phasing effects can produce an exciting and rhythmic pattern along with a recurring pedal point.

Possibly the best example of this device can be found in the "Theme From Shaft", an Academy winning song written and recorded by Isaac Hayes in the 1970's. Isaac Hayes later became better known as the voice of "Chef" in the animated television series *South Park*.

Listen to the funk-like sound of the guitar as it maintains a series of common notes in different octaves, in this case G. The various contrapuntal lines and chords move about whilst the guitar pattern maintains its rhythms and pitch throughout the whole song. This can be heard clearly during the lengthy instrumental opening sequence.



Click on the link to listen to "Theme from Shaft"
from 0:00 – 1:20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVj8FgMMAK8>



The pedal point is not quite as obvious during the vocal lines; however, it nevertheless maintains its part throughout.



Click on the link to listen to "Theme from Shaft" from 1:48 – 2:20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVj8FgMMAK8>



The final section of the song once again reinforces the pedal notes whilst maintaining the same rhythmic intensity.



Click on the link to listen to "Theme from Shaft" from 2:52 – 3:14

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVj8FgMMAK8>



Topic 5 - Dominant Pitch Pedal Notes

Whilst tonic pitch pedal notes are by far more common, pedal notes using the dominant scale pitch of the key are also found within the style and can be musically very effective, albeit not quite as emphatic as the more tension building tonic pedal point variety.

Consider the following examples which provide an intriguing and expectant quality the introductory passages.



"I'm Not in Love".
Eric Stewart/Graham Gouldman

The highly successful international 1970's hit for the British group 10 CC "I'm Not in Love", incorporates a sophisticated ethereal style introduction by making use of a bass pedal point pitch of B, being the dominant note of the key of E major.

In this case the consonant pedal note secures the ever-changing extended harmonies heard above which then smoothly resolve into the song proper.

Emaj9 B¹¹ B¹¹ B

Dominant pedal note pedal note (chordal) pedal note (chordal)

6 B B¹¹ B¹¹ B B



Click on the link to listen to "I'm Not in Love"
from 0:00 – 0:40

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgJckGsR-T0&list=RDcgJckGsRT0&start_radio=1



"Pinball Wizard" Tommy - Pete Townshend

In contrast to the Pop inspired style of the previous example with its ambient keyboard sonority, compare the introduction to the hard-edged rock piece "Pinball Wizard" composed by Pete Townshend guitarist from the English rock band The Who. The song was written for the popular Rock Opera *Tommy* in 1969 and has long been associated with the band's live performances along with an excellent cover by Elton John for the 1975 film adaptation of the rock opera

Note the dominant pedal note used during the nine-bar introduction. The pitch F#, being the dominant of initial key of B minor, is heard as persistent quavers supporting the above chord progression. It should be noted that this pedal note also remains consonant as it is a harmonic pitch throughout.

Bm Bm (add 4) F#⁷(sus4) F#⁷

Dominant pedal note

F#m⁷ Em Em/G

pedal note (non-chordal note) pedal note raised (chordal note)

8 F#⁷ F#⁷ G/D

Pedal note
(note dominant pitch)



Click on the link to listen to “Pinball Wizard”
from 0:00 – 0:20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHc7bR6y06M>



Exercises and Activities.



Topic 6 - Combination Tonic and Dominant Pedal Notes.

Reference has been made to both tonic and dominant notes appearing as pedal notes during the music, however it is also possible to combine both notes together to produce an effective pedal point.



"Have a Little Faith in Me".
John Hiatt

In the following example, the much-covered John Hiatt song "Have a Little Faith in Me", recorded by several artists ranging from Joe Cocker through to Bon Jovi, the upper pedal point continues right through the opening verses of the song.

In this version by the soulful Texan blues/rock vocalist Delbert McClinton, the song, written in the tonality of F major, opens with the tonic pitch of F and the dominant pitch of C heard as perfect intervals acting as the pedal point above the implied, often incomplete, harmonic progression. Both of these upper pedal notes heard simultaneously serve to both establish the mood of the song and prepare the listener for following Chorus.

F⁵ F/D F/B \flat F⁵ F⁵ F/D F/B \flat F⁵

Combined tonic and dominant pedal notes



Click on the link to listen to "Have a Little Faith in Me"
from 0:00 – 1:14

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0660W04CA0k>



Topic 7: “To use or not to use” a Pedal note.

A very good understanding of the value of a pedal point in a piece of music can be observed when two versions of the same song by the same group in the same key are compared. One as originally recorded and released alongside a subsequent live performance with differing instrumentation.



“The Truth”.
The Bamboos

Listen to each version of the Australian funk and soul group The Bamboos’ song “The Truth”. The first of the two recording uses the instrumental backing by the members of the group, whereas the live performance has been scored to incorporate accompaniment by the Melbourne Symphony orchestra.



Click on the link to listen to official video of “The Truth”
from 0:00 – 2:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x0N9hdNwQc>



Compare this second clip and note how the pitch of Eb has been included as a dominant upper pedal point and a major focus throughout the piece.



Click on the link to listen to “The Truth”
with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
from 0:00 – 2:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77zy3np9GFA>



Exercises and Activities.



Conclusion

It would be of great benefit to continually listen out for this artistic effect in Rock and Pop music, noting exactly where within the song pedal notes are employed, and the aural effect this harmonic device has had over the creative process of the piece. There is no doubt that pedal points, whether they be lower, upper, tonic, or dominant, can be a valuable and effective tool for the contemporary songwriter, adding significantly to the musical invention of the modernday composer.