

## Core Content: Pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

### What is a 'ballad'?

A 'ballad' was originally an example of a folk song, which involved a story being sung to a simple melody. (repetitive)

However, it is not better known as a sentimental, popular song featuring a slow tempo with romantic lyrics.

The main musical features include:

- 4/4 time signature
- Slow tempo
- Verse-chorus structure
- Often features a piano (or electric piano)
- Sustained chords in the instrumental accompaniment
- Drums accent beats 2 and 4 on the snare drum
- Vocalists are expressive through rubato, ornamentation, and melisma.
- Primary chords are mostly used, with inversions.
- Texture becomes more dense (through added instruments and dynamics) when arriving at a climax for a chorus.
- Sentimental or romantic lyrics
- Lots of reverb added to lead and backing vocals, especially from 1980s onwards.

adds warmth  
depth

Famous examples of pop ballads are: Elton John, Take That, Billy Joel, Celine Dion, Bob Dylan. As you can see, some pop ballads are written by individual artists; others are written and performed by bands.

Do not use Take That as an example. (They are a group not a solo artist)

Activity: Elton John, 'Candle in The Wind' (1973)

Write down the instruments you hear accompanying each section of the structure in the table below.

Intro	Piano
Verse 1	Voice, piano, drum, guitar
Chorus 1	"backing vocals (electric)
Instrumental break	electric guitar, piano, drums
Verse 2	vocals, piano, drums
Chorus 2	backing vocals " "
Instrumental break	"Bass", electric guitar, drums
Verse 3	" " Backing vocals, drums
Chorus 3	" " Backing vocals

Practice question: Billy Joel, 'She's Always A Woman' (1977)

Listen to the first verse (0:00-0:30)

1. Identify the instruments and voices in this verse and describe their roles. (2+2)
  - a. Instruments: piano, accompaniment / chords
  - b. Voices: male voice - melody
2. Compare the features of the piano part in the first verse and second verse (0:31-0:56) (2) In the first verse the piano was sustained chords in the first verse 2nd more playing active in the second verse descends (active) (depreciated)
3. Which instruments join in verse 2? (2) bass guitar
4. Which instrument plays in harmony with the lead singer from 0:56-1:29? (1) <sup>verse</sup> Flute (soprano)
5. Give three features you can hear which are typical of a pop ballad. (3)
  - a. ~~electric piano~~
  - b. slow tempo ✓
  - c. features piano ✓
  - d. romantic lyrics ✓