

CONTENTS

Preface	VII
How to Listen	VIII
Advanced Listening Technique.....	IX
Characteristics of the Average Hit Song.....	XI
The Five Elements of a Great Arrangement	XII
The Hit Song Secret	XIII

THE HITS

Christina Aguilera Beautiful	3
Lady Gaga Born This Way.....	7
Carly Rae Jepsen Call Me Maybe	13
Beyoncé (featuring Jay-Z) Crazy in Love	17
Gnarls Barkley Crazy.....	23
Snoop Dogg (featuring Pharrell) Drop It Like It's Hot	27
Katy Perry Firework	33
Pink Get the Party Started.....	37
Bruno Mars Grenade	43
The Black Eyed Peas I Gotta Feeling.....	49
50 Cent In da Club.....	55

Ellie Goulding Lights	59
Lady Gaga Poker Face	63
LMFAO Sexy and I Know It.....	69
Justin Timberlake SexyBack	75
Nicki Minaj Super Bass	79
David Guetta Turn Me On	85
Rihanna (featuring Jay-Z) Umbrella	89
Fun. We Are Young	95
Tinie Tempah (featuring Eric Turner) Written in the Stars.....	99
Glossary.....	105
Bobby Owsinski Bibliography.....	111

THE SONG

If you were going to write a straight-down-the-middle pop song, this is the way to do it. The song is unusual in that it begins right with the verse with no intro, but other than that it's formula all the way, not that there's anything wrong with that if it works (it does here). Basically the song looks like this:

verse | chorus | 2 bar interlude | verse | chorus | bridge | 2 bar interlude | verse (outro)

The good thing about "Grenade" is that it has a great melody, which is something that's sometimes sorely lacking in much of popular music. The lyrics are finely crafted and tell the age-old tale of unrequited love. They sing better than they read, but they're still put together well.

The BPM of the song is 108.

THE ARRANGEMENT

Just as the form of the song follows a formula, so does the arrangement. It develops from the sparse first verse to the big chorus, then drops to a less sparse second verse, and finally peaks at the bridge. The tension is released by the stripped-down last outro verse, which is very unusual since most outros retain the big sound, and the tension, to the end.

There's an organ that plays just underneath the other instruments that acts as the Pad and glues the track together, which is a pretty common use for the instrument. What's interesting is that the arpeggiated electric piano line in the verse acts as the rhythm element, but during the chorus the rhythm switches to the double-time feel of the drums.

The song starts with a synth build and then goes right into a verse with the lead vocal in the center, arpeggiated electric piano sound on the



THE SONG

“Poker Face” was a huge hit for Lady Gaga, and a close listen to the song tells you exactly why: it has everything we’ve come to expect from a mega-hit. First of all, the song form may be pretty basic, but it’s expertly put together to keep the interest high, since there’s always forward motion and dynamics. The form looks like this:

intro | verse | B section | chorus | interlude | verse | B section | chorus | interlude
bridge | chorus | chorus | chorus | interlude/chorus | interlude/chorus | interlude/chorus

What’s especially interesting is that both the bridge and interlude/choruses at the end of the song are primarily choruses with either new parts or a combination of new and previously heard parts. It’s a great way to keep things familiar yet different.

The melody is strong and memorable, and the lyrics are far superior to most pop songs in that they tell a story and are cleverly put together.

The BPM of this song is 119.

THE ARRANGEMENT

“Poker Face” begins with a single arpeggiated synth that makes up the backbone of the song, and it’s followed by an additional synth layer playing the same part. Then, the song’s hook enters along with a new synth line. After the line plays through once (4 bars), it plays through a second time—with kick, claps, and open hi-hat—to end the intro.

When the lead vocal enters at the verse, only the kick and basic arpeggiating synth remain for the first half. At bar 9, the synth line from the intro enters, as does a very subtle percussion sound.

A new synth enters on beat 1 of the B section to signify the beginning of the section, but other than the vocal changing, the instruments