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Jakub KASPERSKI
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1495-0421
Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland
e-mail: jakub.kasperski@amu.edu.pl

Catchy Elements (Hooks) in Popular Music. Toward a Musicological Theory of Hit Songs

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Abstract

The theory of the hit song is a highly intriguing research topic. In the musicology of Western countries, it already has a history and a kind of canon of texts and methodologies, which have yet to gain broader recognition in Poland. The author discusses and introduces what he considers to be the two most important texts that help explain the musical aspects of hit songs. In the earliest theoretical reflections on popular music, Theodor W. Adorno analyzes the structure of pop hits and the mechanisms by which the music industry promotes them and influences listeners. On the other hand, Gary Burns's 1987 article on hooks represents a milestone in addressing the question of what makes a song a hit — both musically and beyond. Referring to both texts, the author conducts a detailed analysis of two musical hits from the 21st century — one from the United States and one from Poland.

Keywords: hook, catchy elements, Adorno, hit song, pop, musical expression, Gary Burns, The Black Eyed Peas, Smolasty, Doda.

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Introduction

Why does a song become a popular hit? Why is it so successful among listeners and reigns supreme on the charts for weeks? Critics and music producers, music and culture researchers, sociologists and psychologists, as well as ordinary listeners often ask themselves these questions. The answer is not straightforward and, what is more, it seems obvious today that from a scientific point of view, such questions cannot be answered by a single discipline. The commercial success of a song is determined not only by the music itself, but also by many non-musical and even non-artistic factors. Within the field of popular music studies, the theory of hits is therefore interdisciplinary. The study of hits is essentially situated between psychology and sociology (which attempt to explain the appeal of an artist and their songs to the audience/audiences and the mass nature of the phenomenon) and the arts (musicology, literary studies, theatre studies, cultural studies, film studies, etc.) and economics. The arts examine the artistic properties of the individual components of an artefact (music, lyrics, image, performance, etc.) and also the intermediality of popular music, i.e. the connections and internal relationships between music and words, performative elements and visual aspects (performance, record release, artist image, music video, etc.). Economics, on the other hand, analyses popular songs as market products intended to achieve commercial success, and may therefore examine the processes of production, promotion and marketing, forms of sale, demand, supply, etc.

Despite the intermediality and multi-coded nature of popular music, it remains primarily a musical phenomenon. For this reason, in this article I focus mainly on the auditory aspect of the hit song, and thus on the role and methods of researching hit songs in musicology, while being aware that this can only partially explain the essence of the hit song. This is a reference to Antoine Hennion's 1983 work *The Production of Success: An Anti-Musicology of the Pop Song*, in which he expressed a similarly sceptical view that too many non-musical factors determine the popularity and commercial success of a given song.[1] An analysis of the musical layer therefore explains only a fragment of reality, illuminating merely a part of a complex phenomenon. However, in most cases, the musical element is crucial, often fundamental to the entire creative process, cementing the cultural product that is the pop song.[2]

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[1] A. Hennion, *The Production of Success: The Antimusicology of The Pop Song*, [in:] ed. S. Frith, A. Goodwin, *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Pantheon Books, New York 1990, pp. 185–206.

[2] The most important — and now almost classic — texts addressing this topic include: T. W. Adorno, G. Simpson, *O muzyce popularnej* (J. Kasperski, Polish Trans.), "Res Facta Nova" 2015, (16/25), pp. 75–98; G. Burns, *A Typology of 'Hooks' in Popular Records*, "Popular Music",

This article seeks to investigate the concept of hooks,[3] which have been strongly associated with songwriting since the dawn of popular music and are still used today.[4] Popular music, having been a fully-fledged element of research in Polish humanities for several decades within the rapidly developing fields of popular music studies, rock studies and song studies, continues to pose many methodological problems for disciplines such as musicology, music theory and music education. According to Richard Middleton and Philip Tagg, British pio-

1987, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–20.; A. Hennion, *The Production of Success: The Antimusicology of the Pop Song*, [in:] ed. S. Frith, A. Goodwin, *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Pantheon Books, New York 1990, pp. 185–206; R. A. Peterson, D. G. Berger, *Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music*, "American Sociological Review" April 1975, vol. 40, pp. 158–173, https://doi.org/10.2307/2094343; P. Tagg, B. Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes: Towards a Musicology of Mass Media*, The Mass Media Music Scholar's Press, New York 2003; eds. R. von Appen, A. Doehring, D. Helms, A. Moore, *Song Interpretation in 21st-Century Pop Music*, Ashgate, London 2015, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315609881.

[3] An especially interesting issue is the matter of Polish terminology and attempts to translate the English term 'hook'. Polish scholars who have, to varying degrees, referred to the phenomenon of the hook in their writings have yet to establish a unified, widely accepted term. This likely stems from the still limited familiarity with the concept in Poland and the relatively small amount of discourse surrounding it. In Chodkowski's *Encyklopedia muzyki* (*Encyclopedia of Music*), the colloquial term *hook* is translated literally as "haczyk" (hook), and equated with the "theme" (Pol. temat) or "catchphrase" (schlagwort) of a song (entry *pieśń masowa*, [in:] *Encyklopedia muzyki*, ed. A. Chodkowski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1995, p. 690). Meanwhile, Karolina Sikorska, in her translation of Frédéric Martel's *Mainstream. Co podoba się wszystkim na świecie* (M*ainstream: What Everyone Likes Around the World)*, Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2011, p. 129, explains the *hook* as a "musical hook" (haczyk muzyczny) that must also be "catchy". Rafał Szczerbakiewicz, in a text on Elvis Presley *Uwolnić "soul", wracając do Memphis* (F*ree the Soul, Returning to Memphis*), "Przegląd Kulturoznawczy" 2023, no. 3 (57), p. 390, refers to the hook as a "trick" (sztuczka). Jakub Kasperski, in *Historia muzyki popularnej* (T*he History of Popular Music*), SBM, Warsaw 2019, p. 96, uses the term "catchy elements" (elementy chwytliwe), while Przemysław Piłaciński's doctoral dissertation — arguably the most comprehensive discussion of the hook phenomenon in Polish literature — consistently uses the term "chwyt" (grip), thoroughly justifying his choice (*Warianty, wersje, covery. Problem tożsamości utworu w muzyce rockowej* (Variants, Versions, Covers: The Problem of Musical Identity in Rock Music), PhD dissertation under the supervision of Prof. M. Żerańska-Kominek, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2022, pp. 108–118. Paradoxically, however, the term "chwyt" already carries musical connotations in Polish, especially in the context of guitar music, where it refers to the way a chord is held or played. Thus, phrases like "harmonic grip" or "guitar grip" (chwyt harmoniczny, chwyt gitarowy) used by the author may sound ambiguous or misleading. For this reason — and due to the strong and unambiguous association of the word "chwytliwy" (catchy) with pop music in Polish, as well as the ontological diversity of the hook phenomenon in both musical (instrumental, melodic, rhythmic, tempo-related, etc.) and non-musical aspects (lyrical, dramatic, mixing-related hooks, etc.), and its varying scale (from single pauses, notes, chords, motifs, and phrases to entire musical themes) — I advocate for the translation "catchy elements" (elementy chwytliwe) and will consistently use this term throughout the present text.

[4] R. Middleton, P. Manuel, entry *Popular Music*, [in:] *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, 2001, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43179.

neers of popular music research, there is a strong mismatch within musicology between the language of the discipline and its analytical methods, which for centuries were developed for a completely different repertoire – classical music, functioning primarily in musical notation and composed for European acoustic instruments, especially those found in a symphony orchestra.[5]

Previous analyses focused on musical form, tonal relationships between individual elements of the work, harmony, melody and rhythm. However, these methods are of little use when applied to popular music, which, in formal terms, is usually based on a short and uncomplicated song form following a verse or verse-chorus pattern. This entails numerous simplifications in terms of melodic development and rhythmic aspects, not to mention harmony, which is often reduced to just a few chords repeated throughout the entire composition. From this perspective, popular music pales in comparison to classical music. However, despite this, it is currently the most frequently and willingly consumed and produced type of music, constituting the most important element of the contemporary music market, but also – to state it boldly – contemporary music culture. How, then, can we discuss this music, how can we analyse it without falling into banality, and how can we use musical expertise to explain its social and market significance? In this context, the aforementioned concept of the hook seems especially promising, particularly in relation to mainstream pop, which occupies the top spots on the charts and streaming service rankings, yet is so often despised in academic circles for its commercialism and lack of artistry. I would like to demonstrate the analytical usefulness of this concept using two selected musical examples.

The Theory of Musical Hits According to Theodor W. Adorno

Before discussing the concept of the hook, it is worth referring to one of the first theoretical texts devoted to popular music, namely the 1941 article *On Popular Music* by Theodor W. Adorno, co-edited by Georg Simpson.[6] Among the

[5] Middleton identifies the core of the "musicology problem" in relation to popular music as revolving around three key issues: ideology, methodology and terminology. See R. Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes–Philadelphia 2002, pp. 104–108. See also: P. Tagg, Kojak: *50 Seconds of Television Music. Towards the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music*, The Mass Media Music Scholar's Press, New York 2000, pp. 28–32.

[6] T.W. Adorno and G. Simpson, *op. cit.* In the remainder of this text, I will refer only to Adorno, as he is primarily credited with the concepts discussed. It is generally accepted that Simpson served as an editorial assistant, helping to translate the ideas of the German sociologist into the language of American sociology. However, some texts point out that Simpson's role may have been significantly greater — that he had a substantial influence on the final form and radical tone of Adorno's writings. See: B. Della Torre *Culture Industry, Subjectivity, and Domination: Adorno and the Radio Project*, "*Mediations"* 2022, vol. 35, nos. 1–2, p. 7.

many issues raised, the author also enquired why a given song becomes a hit and what mechanisms determine this. In addition, he addressed the issue of the structure of the song itself and the question of the audience. Adorno's observations remain relevant today in many respects and are strongly linked to the idea of the hook in the production of musical hits.

With respect to the structure of hit songs, Adorno identified several characteristic features. First of all, songs in popular music are standardised or, in other words, they are all cut from the same cloth. He referred, among other sources, to Abner Silver and Robert Bruce's handbook *How to Write and Sell a Song Hit*,[7] published a few years before his article, in which the authors also noted that hits must be made according to a certain template. According to Adorno, the best-known rule is that the chorus consists of 32 bars and that the range of the melody is usually limited to one octave. Specific types of hits are also standardised, e.g. dance or sentimental songs, and so is harmony – the choice of chords in the accompaniment is limited to the basic chords of a given key, and any harmonic complications are used without consequence. What is more, "standardisation extends from the most general features" (such as the form of the song) "to the most specific ones" (such as minor musical details). Adorno noted that the standardisation of details in a song is "hidden behind a veneer of individual 'effects'", so that the listener focuses only on selected fragments of the piece, rather than the entire composition. It is also important that these details occupy a musically strategic position in the song, preferably at the beginning of the chorus or its repetitions, which has a greater impact on their recognition and more favourable reception.[8]

Adorno expressed the view that standardisation had gone so far that "regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced."[9] The characteristics mentioned here are closely related to another important rule governing hits, namely the aspect of 'pseudo-individualisation'. Adorno defined it as follows: "by pseudo-individualisation we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardisation itself."[10] Paradoxically, Adorno considered jazz improvisation to be "the most drastic" example of pseudo-individualisation, pointing out that it only pretends to be original and spontaneous, but in reality, through the standardisation of norms and the stereotyping of improvisational details, it is already 'normalised'. He went on to say: "The choice in individual alterations is so small that the per-

[7] S. Abner, B. Robert, *How to Write and Sell a Song Hit*, Prentice Hall, New York 1939, p. 2.

[8] T.W. Adorno, G. Simpson, op. cit., pp. 75–76.

[9] Ibidem, p. 76.

[10] Ibidem, p. 81.

petual recurrence of the same variations is a reassuring signpost of the identical behind them."[11] They also have significant metrical and harmonic limitations, which means that the melody of improvisation is based mainly on the schematic playing of accompaniment chords.

Adorno saw the causes of pseudo-individualisation in the mechanisms of the music industry, which attempts to forcibly differentiate popular music into different types or styles (e.g. swing or sweet music). The listener, writes Adorno, "is quickly able to distinguish the types of music and even the performing band, this in spite of the fundamental identity of the material and the great similarity of the presentations."[12] Later in the text, the author returned to the issue of pseudo-individualisation, describing a certain internally contradictory mechanism within the music industry, namely that a hit must simultaneously contain features common to other hits and features that distinguish it from the rest, giving the impression of originality.[13]

Adorno believed that in order to attract listeners, popular music producers resort to the simplest musical associations, thereby infantilising both the song and the audience.[14] They make melodies resemble children's rhymes or songs from Sunday schools, which an uneducated and untrained listener usually perceives as so-called natural music. Any excessive deviations from it are unacceptable. 'Baby talk' – as Adorno described it – appears in both song lyrics and music, e.g. through the repetition of the same syllables and words, short melodic phrases, childish jokes, childish phrases borrowed from advertisements or deliberate mistakes intended to evoke a comic effect, which are analogous to deliberately introduced musical errors in harmonisation, rhythm or melody.[15]

The German thinker argued (as mentioned in the introduction) that the musical material itself is not the most important factor in creating hits. He then moved on to another important issue, namely the ways of presenting 'musical mater l'. Adorno believed that popular music is imposed on listeners mainly through various plugging techniques. The oldest and simplest way to promote a song is, of course, to repeat it as often as possible. In principle, any song that meets the minimum requirements can become a hit, as long as the various interconnected parts of the music industry – record labels, radio stations and

[11] Ibidem.

[12] Ibidem, p. 82.

[13] See also Ibidem, p. 83.

[14] It should be noted that Adorno does not explicitly use the word 'infantilisation' in his text – a term that became fairly common in the 1950s among New York-based critics of mass culture. See, for example D. McDonald, *Teoria kultury masowej* (The Theory of Mass Culture), [in:] *Kultura masowa*, selected, translated, and edited by Cz. Miłosz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2002. See also: T. W. Adorno, G. Simpson, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

[15] See also T.W. Adorno, G. Simpson, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

filmmakers – ensure its success.[16] The effect of glamour is used for promotion. As Adorno claimed, "[t]o be sure, the world of glamour is a show, akin to shooting galleries, the glaring lights of the circus and deafening brass bands."[17] Contemporary radio presenters are used to achieve this effect; like circus barkers, they deceive listeners by convincing them in a triumphant voice of the importance and uniqueness of a given song, even though it does not actually possess these qualities. Corrupt journalists are also involved in the promotion process.[18] However, it is not only specific songs that are popularised, but also particular artists, musical styles and new vocabulary, in order, as Adorno observed, to "rejuvenate old goods by giving them a new name."[19] Band leaders are also promoted, even though they are often not responsible for the music, lyrics or arrangements.[20]

In his article, Adorno also reflected on the audience of popular music. He argued that the music industry deliberately lowers their aesthetic standards and promotes passive listening, e.g. by encouraging the audience to listen to fragments of a song instead of the entire composition. This approach does not require them to make an effort to follow the full musical progression but instead provides them with ready-made patterns of simplified perception. Passivity is associated with the fact that "subjects in relation to popular music are deprived of any remnants of free will and tend to react passively to what is presented to them and to become merely centres of socially conditioned reflexes."[21] Adorno emphasised that the process of reception does not usually lead to any deeper reflection but is limited to the mechanism of "recognition and acceptance."[22] The recipient's reaction often ends with the statement: "I know it" or "I don't know it". Recognising a song creates a kind of identity mechanism – a sense of ownership of the song – which simultaneously leads to a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment.[23]

To summarise Adorno's reflections, it can be said that many of his observations on the mechanisms of the music industry and the principles of creating hits are extremely accurate and remain relevant to this day, despite the fact that the text was written at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s, when popular music and the music industry were significantly different from today's reality. However, the reflections contained in *On Popular Music* could gain more value and become

[16] Ibidem, pp. 82–83.
[17] Ibidem, p. 84.
[18] Ibidem, pp. 85–86.
[19] Ibidem, p. 85.
[20] Ibidem, p. 86.
[21] Ibidem, p. 96.
[22] Ibidem, p. 86.
[23] See Ibidem, pp. 85–90.

more useful in contemporary humanities if we were to reject the author's obvious aversion and prejudice towards popular music, manifested in his deliberately pejorative rhetoric. It is worth recalling that Adorno, as a composer and music critic, was a staunch supporter of the musical avant-garde of the first half of the 20th century and rejected all that was not associated with it.

One aspect of his theory that remains relevant today is the mechanism of creating hits according to established rules and standards, which can be seen, for example, in the constant exploitation of the pop form of a three-minute song with a similar structure, the use of common harmonic solutions (see the phenomenon of the so-called four-chord song[24]) and the schematic approach to melody formation. His view on 'pseudo-individualisation' is also partly correct, although the term itself is rather unfair, as it implies bad intentions on the part of music hit creators, i.e. an intention to deceive the audience. However, this is certainly not the main goal of popular music producers. Navigating between the familiar and popular and the new and exciting in music represents a considerable challenge. This is especially the case because the music industry is one of the most competitive branches of the creative industry, with many artists seeking to make a living from music but finding it very difficult to stay on the market. Pop artists must therefore adhere to tried and tested, standard formulas so as not to alienate the mass audience with overloaded forms, inaccessible sounds or unfamiliar experiments. At the same time, however, they should constantly surprise listeners by adding 'details', 'embellishments' and 'novelties' to the established formulas that will intrigue them, attract their attention, ensure they like the song and ultimately encourage them to buy it. Adorno's principle that a hit must have characteristics that both resemble and distinguish it from other hits is therefore accurate and still relevant today.

The idea of 'baby talk' proposed by Adorno should be treated with similar reserve. Although the mechanism of 'infantilisation' is still widely used today and works successfully in popular music, the author criticising this mechanism fails to recognise that it stems from the fact that pop music is, for the most part, light music and is simply meant to entertain the audience. The 'infantilisation' of songs fulfils this purpose perfectly because, firstly, childish jokes and antics performed by adults are usually effective, i.e. funny, and, secondly, they refer to childhood, the most pleasant time in a person's life, full of carefree play and fun,

[24] This is a phenomenon of creating hit songs based on the four-chord sequence I–V–VI–IV, although during the popularity of the doo-wop style (1940s–1960s), the dominant progression was I–VI–IV–V. While this structure had already been known and used since the 1960s, the majority of hits following this pattern emerged starting in the 1990s. The Australian band Axis of Awesome popularised the term *Four Chord Song* through their comedy sketch, also published on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pidokakU4I, December 10, 2009), in which they performed around 40 famous pop and rock hits built on this harmonic formula.

in which all of a child's activities are a form of play. 'Baby talk' (another of Adorno's pejorative terms) could therefore be equated with entertainment, which is the essence of popular music.

Similarly, the glitz, glamour and impression of luxury that Adorno spoke of are simply useful tools for attracting the audience. They are particularly effective when the listener's everyday life is far from splendour, comfort and luxury. Exposure to such artificial glamour, a projection of luxury, transports the audience into a world of dreams and fantasy, giving them a taste of uniqueness and the fulfilment of unattainable desires, thus allowing them to escape the grey reality and worries of everyday life. Although American advertising of popular music and its intrusive promotion on the radio may have shocked Adorno at the time and evoked his worst associations with the manipulation of Goebbels' propaganda, which his homeland was experiencing at that moment, music marketing, often in an equally extreme form, is considered the norm in the music industry today. Without proper promotion, and without assuring the audience of the uniqueness of a given product, it would be difficult for an artist to stand out from the competition. Currently, in cultural marketing, it is considered a truism that good music cannot defend itself; it must be properly promoted and sold.

The Concept of Hooks According to Gary Burns

Adorno's observations, especially those concerning standardisation, pseudo-individualisation and infantilisation in hit songs, have their analogies and continuations in the concept of hooks. A very important text on this subject is Gary Burns' aforementioned 1987 article *A Typology of "Hooks" in Popular Records*, which attempts to collect and systematise knowledge on the phenomenon in question. A hook is a variously understood characteristic musical or textual 'lure', 'catch' or 'hook' for the listener, designed to hold their attention and make them like a given hit. The action of hooks is associated with catching someone, e.g. in a net, a trap, on a fishing rod, or with addiction, reminiscent of the action of stimulants. Burns' text suggests that the concept has been used by songwriters for many decades, but most of the discussion on this issue appeared at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s.[25]

The author begins by citing examples of how this concept is understood in various English-language sources. According to songwriters Al Kash and Joel Hirschhorn, a hook is "the foundation of commercial songwriting, particularly hit-single writing". It can refer to the repetition of "one note or a series of notes […], a lyric phrase, full lines or an entire verse". A hook is "what you're selling". It can

[25] G. Burns, op. cit., p. 1.

be something as seemingly insignificant as nonsensical sounds or exclamations, e.g. 'da doo ron ron' in doo-wop music. "Ideally [it] should contain one or more of the following: (a) a driving, danceable rhythm; (b) a melody that stays in people's minds; (c) a lyric that furthers the dramatic action, or defines a person or place."[26] Delson's Dictionary defines a hook as "that part of a song, sometimes the title or key lyric line, that keeps recurring,"[27] Barbara N. Kuroff – as "A memorable 'catch' phrase or melody line which is repeated in a song,"[28] Roy C. Bennett defines it as an 'attention grabber,'[29] and Arnold Shaw defines it as "an appealing musical sequence or phrase, a bit of harmony or sound, or a rhythmic figure that grabs or hooks a listener."[30] The latter also adds that a hook is an integral part of every hit song. Finally, Burns quotes the opinions of Bob Monaco and James Riordan, whose understanding of the phenomenon in question he most identifies with. They argue that a hook is "a musical or lyrical phrase that stands out and is easily remembered."[31]

Later in the text, Burns points out that although several definitions refer to the principle of repetition of hooks in a song, and indeed they are often repeated in order to linger in the listener's memory, in his opinion this is not a prerequisite. Burns considers constant repetition to be nonsensical, as it tends to lead to listener fatigue and discouragement. Therefore, the most important principle of good hit songwriting should be to strike the right balance between repetition of a given motif and skilful introduction of changes. According to Burns, the tension created between repetition and change is the source of meaning and emotion in music. What is more, the essence of music creation is generally the manipulation of repeated and variable elements. For this reason, he distinguishes three possibilities for change in song structures: a) repetition, taking into account minor variations, b) variation, understood as a moderate change, c) modulation – a much greater change. These occur both in the textual elements of a piece, i.e. those that are written down (e.g. song lyrics, and in music: rhythm, melody, harmony), and non-textual elements, which are usually not notated or whose notation is not obligatory (including performance aspects: instrumentation,

[26] J. Hirschhorn, A. Kasha, *If They Ask You, You Can Write a Song*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1979, pp. 28–29. From G. Burns, op. cit., p. 1.

[27] D. Delson, W. E. Hurst, *Delson's Dictionary of Radio and Record Industry Terms*, Bradson Press, Thousand Oaks 1980, p. 58. From G. Burns, op. cit.

[28] *Songwriter's Market: Where to Sell Your Songs. 1983*, ed. B.N. Kuroff, Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati 1982, p. 397. From G. Burns, op. cit.

[29] R.C. Bennett, *The Songwriter's Guide to Writing and Selling Hit Songs*. Englewood Cliffs, New York 1983, pp. 30, 41. From G. Burns, op. cit.

[30] A. Shaw, *Dictionary of American Pop/Rock,* Schirmer Books, New York 1982, p. 177. From G. Burns, op. cit.

[31] B. Monaco, J. Riordan, *The Platinum Rainbow* (*How to Succeed in the Music Business Without Selling Your Soul*), Swordsman Press, Sherman Oaks 1980, p. 178. From G. Burns, op. cit.

tempo, dynamics, improvisation and accident; production elements: sound effects, editing, mixing, channel balance, signal distortion, etc.).[32] Textual elements form the basis of a song in its written form, so they are essentially what songwriters deal with and what allows us to identify a song as the same across different performances. Non-textual elements, on the other hand, including the musicians' interpretation or studio processing of the piece, can be noted down on paper in various ways, but are not published in official sheet music editions. Some non-textual elements, such as tempo or dynamics, are included in traditional musical notation, but their final form is determined by performers and sound engineers, who in popular music treat the composer's guidelines quite freely.[33]

Burns goes on to examine individual textual and non-textual elements in the context of their potential to act as a hook for the listener. The first of these is rhythm, which forms the basis of all music. According to Burns, it is a kind of 'temporal skeleton' of a song and, understood in this way, can function as a hook. This is particularly the case when a composition begins with a drum section (e.g. Michael Jackson, *Billie Jean* – 1982, Roy Orbison, *Oh, Pretty Woman* – 1964), or when the drum pattern is very distinctive due to its non-standard nature, e.g. the use of an unusual metre or accent distribution (e.g. Pink Floyd, *Money* – 1973, or The Beatles, *Tomorrow Never Knows* – 1966). Rhythm usually assumes repetitiveness (periodicity) and can often be almost unchanged throughout a pop song, so in such situations, distinct 'modulations' of rhythm can be considered hooks rather than repetitions or slight variations. An example would be a change in metre from even to odd, from regular to irregular, etc. (e.g. The Beatles, *We Can Work It Out* – 1965, Queen, *Bohemian Rhapsody* – 1975). When creating rhythmic hooks, contrasts between the regular repetition of a structure and interruptions with pauses are extremely important, which is crucial, for example, in many rock hits based on riffs. Often, incomplete bars, rhythmic intertextuality (quotations from other songs) or the introduction of a steady rhythm, expected by the listener after a long passage full of rhythmic changes or drum fills, can also be considered hooks.[34]

Melody – the second of the main textual elements of music – is related to the sequence of different pitches. It can be considered a hook both when a beautiful melodic phrase appears, especially in the chorus, but also when a single sound is repeated several times (e.g. The Beatles, *Help* – 1965, Bob Dylan, *Like a Rolling Stone* – 1965). In the latter case, other elements, such as rhythm or harmony, come to the fore. Distinctive, rarely used intervals, the appearance

[32] It seems that what is missing here are purely interpretative aspects, such as linguistic accent, articulation, and manipulation of the song's lyrics.

[33] G. Burns, op. cit., pp. 2–3.

[34] See, Ibidem, pp. 3–4, 7–9.

of a melodic climax or an unexpected entry of the vocalist into low or very high registers (e.g. Minnie Riperton's vocalisation in the song *Lovin' You* – 1974) can also be considered melodic hooks. A hook is not only a clear change in melody between different parts of a song (verse, chorus, bridge), but also the modulations of a single melody, transposition to other keys, and especially changes of mode from major to minor and vice versa. It can also take the form of quotations from other songs (intertextuality), e.g. Walter Murphy and the Big Apple Band, *A Fifth of Beethoven* (1976); Blood, Sweat and Tears, *Blues – Part II* (1969).[35]

Harmony, a musical element related to the combination of different sounds and the succession of chords, is also often treated as a hook. Burns argues that this approach can be applied not only to every distinct chord change in a composition, but also to songs based on a single chord (e.g. Sly and the Family Stone, *Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)* – 1969) or on a continuous change of chords and keys (e.g. Jefferson Airplane, *White Rabbit* – 1967). A typical harmonic hook includes a change of key during the song, most often at the end, as well as the intertextuality of the harmonic pattern, although sometimes it can also lead to its not entirely conscious plagiarism (many songs are based on the same chord progression).[36]

When it comes to hooks in song lyrics, a wide range of literary devices is used: from the simplest, such as repeating a single word or phrase (e.g. The Trashmen, *Surfin' Bird* – 1963), through the use of various rhymes, wordplay, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, glossolalia, macaronic expressions, dialect, jargon, colloquialisms, sometimes vulgarisms, obscenity or blasphemy, to syntax manipulations (The Beatles, *Love Me Do* – 1962), intertextuality and intermediality (quotations from literature, other songs, colloquial speech), deliberate pleonasms, slips of the tongue or mistakes, references to specific figures from the world of music, media, politics, history or pop culture, or simply choosing the right song theme (usually love, eroticism, nostalgia), although sometimes topics that are interesting, surprising, shocking (e.g. drugs, war, religion, advertising, etc.) or seasonal (e.g. holidays, Christmas, etc.) are used. And all this despite the fact that, according to Burns, pop song lyrics are stereotypically perceived as trivial and based on clichés.[37]

The non-textual elements that make a piece catchy, as discussed by Burns, include the issue of instrumentation. The sound quality of an instrument or voice results not only from its timbre, but also from the technical skills and imagination of the musician, as well as from certain established practices of its use, amplification or arrangement. An instrumental hook is therefore usually under-

[35] See, Ibidem, pp. 3–4, 9–11.
[36] See, Ibidem, pp. 11–12.
[37] See, Ibidem, pp. 13–14.

stood as the use of an instrument or voice that goes beyond the conventions accepted within a given era, style or genre. The most commonly employed instrumental hook is certainly the use of instruments that are unusual for a given musical genre, e.g. theremin, mellotron, transverse flute, vibraphone, sitar, string orchestra, as well as effects such as overdrive, fuzz box or feedback. Show-stopping solos can also be considered hooks. As for the voice, its distinctive sound results mainly from the individual predispositions and timbre of each vocalist. However, this sound can be further varied by using vocal hooks such as screaming, glissando, melodic recitation, fast singing, whispering, orgasmic sounds or animal imitations.[38]

Tempo, on the other hand, can be treated as a hook when it is unexpectedly modified. This includes both cascading changes and gradual slowdowns or accelerations. This type of hook can appear not only within a single song, between its individual parts maintained at different tempos, but also when comparing several songs, especially in the case of covers or remakes, when the tempo of the new version differs significantly from the original.[39]

The same applies to dynamics, i.e. the use of sound volume. A *crescendo* (gradual increase in volume) works particularly well as a hook, e.g. The Doors, *The End* (1967), as do a *decrescendo* (gradual decrease in volume), e.g. Led Zeppelin – the end of *Stairway to Heaven* (1971), an unexpected volume reduction or *sforzando*, i.e. a sudden increase in sound intensity, e.g. in *Rosanna* by Toto (1982). There is also often a dynamic difference between the verse and the chorus, e.g. Lionel Richie, *You Are* (1982), or the simultaneous overlaying of loud and soft sounds, e.g. Donovan, *Mellow Yellow* (1966).[40]

If improvisation or 'accidental elements' (accidents) are considered hooks, it is worth noting that their primary purpose is to give the impression of spontaneity, regardless of whether it actually occurs. Many improvisations are pre-composed by artists, and only some (or parts of them) are performed live. Deviating from the 'expected' makes fragments of songs unique and captures the listener's attention.

There are musical genres in which improvisation and randomness are treated as key determinants and their most attractive element, e.g. jazz, rap and, to some extent, rock. However, the listener never knows for sure whether something was planned or is the result of chance or spontaneous creativity. Artists sometimes take advantage of this in studio recordings by including simulated sections, as if they were recorded on the first take, without retakes, e.g. The Beatles, *Let It Be* (1970). Undoubtedly, the elements discussed here are

[38] See, Ibidem, pp. 14–15.
[39] See, Ibidem, pp. 15–16.
[40] See, Ibidem, p. 16.

clearer and much more legible during live performances, especially when the concert version differs significantly from the studio original to which the listener is accustomed.[41]

The use of various sound effects (e.g. concrete music – the sound of coins in Pink Floyd's *Money,* 1976) and sound distortion (e.g. echo, reverb, phasing) usually comes as a significant surprise to the listener. A similar result is achieved by editing, which usually leads to the creation of music that cannot be performed live. All these techniques clearly seem to function as catchy elements. Burns also gives an interesting example of the latter type of 'hook': in the 1974 recording Reunion *Life Is a Rock (But the Radio Rolled Me)*, the singer recites the lyrics so quickly that there is barely time to take a breath. Without studio editing, this composition would obviously not have been possible. However, the most commonly used editing techniques are usually the fade-out at the end of the song or the fade-in at the beginning, although sometimes both of these effects are superimposed (the crossfade) in the middle of the composition, e.g. in the song *The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny* by Frank Zappa & The Mothers of Invention (1968).[42]

The situation is completely different in the case of mixing, which does not directly focus the listener's attention and is difficult to perceive unambiguously as a 'lure' for the listener. According to Burns, it is "rather the orchestration of other hook elements and the means through which they come to light at the appropriate points in a record."[43] There are also some general conventions, such as the fact that many rock bands (e.g. The Rolling Stones) often amplify the drum part, slightly lowering the vocals, while in mainstream pop-rock (middle-of-the-road pop), the drums are usually muted at the expense of the vocals and other instruments (saxophone or strings). In addition, mixing can be combined with editing – an effect that occurs, for example, in several Beatles' songs (*I Am the Walrus*, 1967; *Hey Jude*, 1968), when some tracks are muted at the end, while others continue to sound at the same volume. Burns also mentions phenomenona he calls under-mixing, when a given sound source is barely audible (e.g. Joe Walsh's voice in *Rocky Mountain Way,* 1973), and a over-mixing, when a given sound source is too loud in relation to the others (e.g. the guitar in Steely Dan's *Reeling in the Years*, 1973).[44]

Less spectacular is a hook based on channel balance, as it can only be perceived when listening carefully in stereo. Nevertheless, it is very impressive to hear the dialogue between instruments in individual speakers, or the circulation of drumbeats in the receivers (e.g. Iron Butterfly, *In-a-Gadda-da-Vida*, 1968).[45]

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41 See, Ibidem, p. 17.
42 Ibidem.
43 See, Ibidem, p. 18.
44 Ibidem.
45 Ibidem.

In conclusion, Burns compares the analysis of hooks in popular music to the frame-by-frame analysis of a film, pointing out that a hook, like a film frame, is a kind of semantic molecule that is part of a larger, recognisable whole. Although the best way to 'freeze' a moment in music is through the score, it says almost nothing about non-textual aspects such as specific performance or the studio production process. The analysis of a recording should require the identification of categories that may be subject to modification. It should then indicate which properties (structural elements) change, and which do not, and if there is modification, to what extent – how the relationships of repetition, variation and modulation work to attract the listener's attention and communicate meaning.

Using the concepts developed by both researchers, I would like to apply them to selected musical examples, demonstrating how they can be useful in analytical practice. The first example is the 2004 song *Let's Get It Started* by the American band The Black Eyed Peas, one of the most popular music groups worldwide in the first decade of the 21st century. At that time, this quartet of creative musicians consisted of will.i.am, apl.de.ap, Fergie and Tabooo. The band is also among the artists with the highest number of record sales, estimated at over 75 million in total, notably in an era of growing crisis in the music industry. The Californian group has won six Grammy Awards in its career.[46] Active on the music market since the second half of the 1990s, they initially created alternative hip-hop but later became interested in pop and dance-pop. Their work, coupled with commercial success, shows that the musicians have mastered the strategy of composing popular hits based on a network of extremely sophisticated hooks. Their hit *Let's Get It Started*, produced in 2002, appeared two years later on their third album *Elephunk* and as a single. It gained great popularity at the time, reaching the top of the charts in many countries.[47] The table below lists hooks that appear in the song, along with their characteristics and the roles they play both in the composition and in attracting the listener's attention.

Table 1. Hooks in the song *Let's Get It Started*

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
0:00–0:07	H1 – vocal hook	Fergie's a cappella singing: loud, in soul style and of an improvisational nature, with a distinctive reverb on the words "*Let's get it started*".	Begins the song, introduces the schlagwort, presents Fergie's vocal abilities.

[46] editor@romania-insider.com, *Black Eyed Peas to perform at Romania's 2018 Untold festiwal.* Romania-Insider.com, 26-06-2018., source: https://www.romania-insider.com/black-eyed-peas-2018 [access: 15.11.2025].

[47] See: aCharts.co, *Song chart performance: #543*, source: https://acharts.co/song/543 [acharts.co] [access: 15.11.2025].

Table 1. Hooks in the song *Let's Get It Started* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
From 0:08	H2 – instrumental hook (percussive)	Pulsating beats of a muted bass guitar imitating a bass drum.	Prepares for the introduction of a rhythmic bass groove.
0:09–0:19	H3 – vocal hook	Will.i.am's melodic recitation of the words *"And the bass…"* and the rhythmic repetition of the words "*and running"*.	Polyrhythmic co-creation of groove through vocal syncopation of melodic recitation, contrasting with the regular rhythm of the bass guitar.
From 0:10	H4 – instrumental hook (bass)	The bass guitar enters with a steady walking bass line, which is repeated throughout the song and forms the basis for the harmonic arrangement of the verses and choruses.	Polyrhythmic co-creation of groove through the steady and regular rhythm of the bass guitar, contrasting with the syncopated rhythm of melodic recitation.
0:12–0:19	H5 – harmonic and editing hook	Fergie joins will.i.am's recitation on the words "*and running"*; in the studio, additional tracks with her voice are added, building a full four-part chord that resolves tonically on the first note of the verse.	Enriches (breaks up) the rhythmic introduction with a harmonic element. Creates harmonic tension that requires resolution.
0:19–0:28	H6 – instrumental-dynamic hook	Delicate arpeggio of guitar chords accompanying the verse.	Resolves harmonic tension and begins the verse. However, there is a dynamic contrast in relation to the rest of the arrangement and a kind of anticipation of a dance rhythm.
0:20–0:42	H7 – vocal hook	A verse rapped by will.i.am.	Resolves harmonic tension and begins the verse, presenting the text.
0:24–0:28	H8 – dynamic hook	A crescendo of irregular drumbeats.	Reinforces the anticipation of the dance rhythm.
0:29–0:40	H9 – rhythmic hook	Introduction of a regular rhythm in the drums and rhythmic guitar strums.	Introduces the long-awaited dance rhythm.
0:23, 0:34, 0:35, 0:37 etc.	H10 – vocal hook	Emphasis on particular words in the rap text in a harmonic setting.	Overcomes the monotony of monophonic rap. Collectivises the group performance.
0:40–0:42	H11 – rhythmic-instrumental hook	A pause in the electric guitar and bass guitar, replaced by a staccato saxophone melody.	Breaks up the guitar sounds used so far by the unexpected introduction of a new instrument.

Table 1. Hooks in the song *Let's Get It Started* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
0:42–0:46	H12 – rhythmic-dynamic hook	Loud, intermittent chords played on-beats by the entire instrumental band.	Introduces a pre-chorus, intensifying the anticipation for the actual chorus.
0:42–0:50	H13, H13a, H13b – lyrical, vocal, instrumental and dynamic hooks.	Chordal strikes of the instruments, reinforced by shouts ("Yeah!", "Come on!"), alternate with the chordal exclamation of the entire band from the words "Everybody…". At the same time, Fergie harmonically amplifies the shouts by singing an octave higher (H13a), and at 47 seconds a 'wild', rising saxophone glissando appears. (H13b).	Build tension and excitement before the actual chorus.
0:50–1:08	H14 and H14a – vocal-lyrical hooks, H4 and H9 – rhythmic-instrumental hook	Loud singing of the vocalists in the chorus with the title words *Let's get it started* is based on a simple melody (H14) interrupted by energetic shouts of *Hah!* and *In here!* (H14a). All this is accompanied by instrumental motifs known from the verse (H4, H9).	Introduce the chorus with a lively recitation of the title words and a regular dance rhythm which encourages participation. H14 adds an additional dynamic and energetic element.
1:01–1:05	H15 – melodic hook	A male voice (most likely will.i.am) sings a melodic vocalisation.	Breaks up the strongly rhythmic chorus with an additional melodic motif. Adds melodiousness to the chorus and additional polyphony.
1:10–1:19	H16 – editing-instrumental hook	The second verse begins with a descending melodic flute motif with a quasi-symphonic accompaniment in the background (using a sample), punctuated by intermittent-pauses and beats from the instrumental group.	Signals the start of the second verse with a new sound. Creates a new, slightly psychedelic mood and anticipation of a steady rhythm.
1:10–1:32	H17 – vocal hook and H10a – vocal-harmonic hook	Taboo raps the second verse with his characteristic accent (H17). Fergie (H10a) supports him in the high registers on selected words.	The change of vocalist adds variety to the performance and harmony.
1:32–2:00	Hooks similar to those in 40-1:10	Repetition of the chorus with the same hooks as in 40–1:10.	As above.

Table 1. Hooks in the song *Let's Get It Started* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
2:00–2:04	H2 and H3 + H18 – dynamic-instrumental hook	As above, plus a crescendo motif based on the repetition of a single note played on a synthetic trumpet (H18).	Recalls motifs from the introduction and creates microdramaturgy based on increasing dynamics (H18).
2:04–2:19	Hooks similar to those in the chorus + H19 (rhythmic hook) and H20 (vocal-lyrical hooks)	In addition to the accompaniment known from the chorus, the percussion part changes to a new one – syncopated and quasi-funk (H19). Also, each of the vocalists performs their part rhythmically (H20), reciting, shouting the lyrics or without words.	Introduce rhythmic variation of motifs known from the chorus. They serve as a kind of introduction to the break section.
2:18–2:23	H21 – rhythmic hook	The entire ensemble, both instrumentalists and vocalists (on *Yah, yah*), emphasises the same rhythm in unison.	Introduces a new rhythmic section preparing for the break.
2:23–2:46	H22 – vocal hook and H23 (till 2:36) – rhythmic hook and H10b – vocal-harmonic hook	apl.de.ap raps in the break section (H22) with interventions from the other vocalists (H10b) against the backdrop of a repeated guitar chord played in a staccato rhythm (H23).	Create contrast through melodic and harmonic staticity in relation to the surrounding parts, building tension before the chorus.
2:36–2:46	H24 – instrumental hook with an intertextual element (quote)	Harmonically static accompaniment of the guitar in a staccato rhythm is supported by the melody of the saxophone. It transitions into the familiar chords of the Spice Girls' hit *Wannabe*.	Intertextuality; alludes to a pop hit associated with entertainment.
2:46–2:54	H16a – instrumental-editing hook	A quasi-symphonic motif in the accompaniment.	Builds tension before the chorus.
2:54–3:10	Hooks similar to those in 40-1:10	Repetition of the chorus with the same hooks as in 40–1:10.	As above.
3:10	H25 – vocal hook (vocalise)	Fergie singing the syllables *Woh-uoh, Woh-uoh…*	Breaks up the motifs from the chorus and prepares for the post-chorus.
3:12–3:22	Hooks similar to those in 2:04-2:19	Similar to 2:04–2:19, but with more frequent vocal exclamations, as well as H15.	Create a type of climax achieved by densifying the texture.
3:22–3:27	H26 – arrangement hook	Muting the instruments – only the drums and vocalists remain.	Breaks the climax.

Table 1. Hooks in the song *Let's Get It Started* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
3:27–3:33	H21 – Hooks similar to 2:18-2:23	Similar to 2:18-2:23.	End the song.
3:33–3:47	H3+H26 dynamic hook	H3 with a fade-out effect.	Closes the composition with a reprise by using H3 from the beginning of the song, ending with a fade-out.

Source: Own work.

The second example analysed here is one of the most popular Polish songs of 2023 – *Nim zajdzie Słońce* (*Before the Sun Goes Down)* by the pop duo Smolasty and Doda. The first of these artists (real name Norbert Smoliński) is a Warsaw-born producer, singer and songwriter in his late twenties, who is one of the most popular Polish artists of the younger generation. According to his official biography on Spotify, "his music videos have over 750 million views on YouTube" and his songs have been played over 1.1 billion times on streaming services (DSP). His music combines elements "from both urban and mainstream sounds, mixing influences from rap, R'n'B, pop and electronic music. His albums and singles have repeatedly achieved diamond, platinum and gold status."[48] Doda (real name Dorota Rabczewska) is one of the most important pop artists in Poland, active on the domestic music market for over 20 years. Initially, she was the vocalist of the pop-rock band Virgin, but in 2007 she began a solo career. Continuing the style of her previous group at first, she soon began to draw more and more inspiration from Lady Gaga's work. This not only brought a lot of pop and electronic elements into her music, but also – thanks to media hype and an atmosphere of scandal surrounding the artist – established her as one of the most important figures in Polish show business.[49] Among her recordings, one album achieved triple platinum status, four were certified platinum, and one gold. The track *Nim zajdzie Słońce* (Before the Sun Goes Down) was composed in a manner typical of contemporary pop music — collaboratively, with professional external songwriters Filip Leon Pobocha and Wiktor Wójcik credited for the music, while Doda and Smolasty are acknowledged as the lyricists. Following its release, the track gained massive popularity, topping numerous sales charts and listener polls across Polish radio stations, and rallying a large fanbase for both artists. It

[48] Source: https://open.spotify.com/artist/5GwdnlZaSwKpHmjcAijATP [access: 15.11. 2024].

[49] See, P. Pierzchała, *Polska piosenka pop jako tekst w tekście kultury. Na przykładach z pierwszej dekady XXI wieku.* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2016, pp. 26–37.

became one of the biggest Polish hits of 2023.[50] As in the previous case, the table below outlines the successive catchy elements appearing in the song, along with their characteristics and functions.

Table 2. Hooks in the song *Nim zajdzie Słońce.*

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
0:00–0:03	H1 – instrumental hook (percussive)	Processed soft vocal sample (unintelligible words) with a funky groove.	Introduces the listener to the style and character of the track.
0:03–0:05	H2 – vocal hook	Playful trap-style shouts, ad-lib vocables: "Ey, ey!".	Creates contrast, suggesting the start of a rap track.
0:05	H2' – vocal hook	Same words sung in a soft voice.	Surprises the listener with a sudden shift to a romantic pop aesthetic.
0:06–0:14	H3 – vocal-instrumental hook	Start of verse I. Gentle, tender vocals by Smolasty over a sample, reinforced percussion, and simple pop harmonic structure.	Develops the romantic pop narrative.
0:14–0:16	H4 – rhythmic and lyrical hook (humorous)	Sudden general pause and a 'musical joke' in the form of theatricalised lyrics (staged slap).	Surprises the listener with an abrupt pause (playing with expectations) and adds a humorous element.
0:16–0:24	H3' – melodic hook	Continuation of verse I with Smolasty's melody moving into higher registers and increased dynamics.	Surprises the listener with the continuation of the verse. Intensifies expression – emotional vocal delivery.
0:25	H2'' – vocal hook	Playful shout "Yeah".	Enhances expression, captures the listener's attention.
0:27–0:36	H5 – melodic-arrangement hook	Repetitive melodic motif (reminiscent of trap-style rapping) sung in a soft, casual voice. No percussion, gentle ascending accompaniment.	Introduces a new section. Surprises the listener with the absence of percussion. Builds tension and anticipation.
0:36–0:37	H6 – instrumental hook	Instrumental link – introduction of percussion and guitar chords leading into the chorus.	Builds tension and anticipation.

[50] Admin "*Nim Zajdzie Słońce" pierwszym polskim utworem na szczycie list OLIS, OLiA oraz Billboard! | Potrójna platyna dla "MT"*. Doda-music.com, 2023, October 3. Source: https://pl.doda-music.com/index.php/2023/10/nim-zajdzie-slonce-pierwszym-polskim-utworem-na-szczyscie-list-olis-olia-oraz-billboard-potrojna-platyna-dla-mt/ [access: 15.11. 2024].

Table 2. Hooks in the song *Nim zajdzie Słońce.* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
0:38–0:56	H7 – melodic-arrangement hook	Start of the chorus. Expressive unison singing by Smolasty and Doda. Full band accompaniment.	Resolves tension. Presents an attractive, singable chorus melody in high registers.
0:56–0:59	H8 – melodic hook	Link between chorus and post-chorus. Expressive melisma in unison by Smolasty and Doda on the final syllables.	Climactic moment of the track.
1:00–1:08	H9 – instrumental hook	Highlighting sample no. 1, guitar solo, synthesised 'orchestra hit' sounds.	Repeats chorus elements with added instrumental parts.
1:09–1:16	H3’ – vocal-instrumental hook	Start of verse II. Gentle, tender vocals by Doda over a sample, reinforced percussion, and simple pop harmonic structure.	Romantic narrative. Surprises the listener through the change of the lead vocalist from male to female.
1:16–1:19	H4’ – rhythmic and lyrical hook (humorous)	Sudden general pause and 'musical joke' through theatricalised lyrics.	Surprises the listener with an abrupt pause and adds a humorous element.
1:19–1:25 1:25–1:30	H10 and H10’– melodic hook	Continuation of verse II and Doda’s melody with enhanced backing vocals, followed by singing in thirds in high registers.	Surprises the listener with the continuation of the verse, intensifies expression and emotionality, e.g. through vocal harmonisation.
1:30–1:48	H5’ – melodic-arrangement hook	Soft, repetitive melody by Doda. No percussion, gentle ascending accompaniment.	Contrasts with the verse. Returns to the familiar pre-chorus. Surprises the listener through the absence of percussion. Builds tension and anticipation. Variation.
1:48–1:52	H6’ – melodic-arrangement hook	Instrumental-vocal link: introduction of drums and guitar chords leading into the chorus. Dramatic singing by Doda “Ale kończy się…” (But it’s ending…).	Builds tension and anticipation.
1:53–2:09	H7’ – melodic-arrangement hook	Start of the chorus. Expressive unison singing by Smolasty and Doda. Full band accompaniment.	Resolves tension. Repeats the attractive chorus. Reinforces musical material in the listener’s memory.

Table 2. Hooks in the song *Nim zajdzie Słońce.* (cont.)

Time	Type and numbering of hooks	Description of musical events	Function
2:09–2:12	H8 – melodic hook	Link between chorus and post-chorus. Expressive melisma in unison by Smolasty and Doda on the final syllables.	Second climax of the track.
2:12	H9 – instrumental hook	Highlighting sample no. 1, guitar solo, 'orchestra hit' sound.	Repeats chorus elements with added parts.
2:14– 2:29	H7'' – melodic hook	Chorus motifs sung by Doda.	Repeats chorus elements. Reinforces-musical material in the listener's memory.
2:24–2:27	H10 – rhythmic-arrangement hook	Sudden drop in accompaniment and fading out. End of vocalist's part.	Surprises the listener with an abrupt end to the narrative.

Source: Own work.

Final Conclusions

The analysis of both major pop hits (one American, from the early 2000s, and the other Polish, recently topping the charts) reveals certain recurring patterns. First, in both songs, hooks are introduced one after another (rarely appearing simultaneously); however, a single hook can serve multiple functions. Second, most hooks appear in the first verse and the initial chorus, although their exposure is not limited to these sections. They are repeated throughout the song to reinforce them in the listener's memory and consciousness. Except for the choruses, these hooks are seldom repeated verbatim, which could lead to some form of boredom or even fatigue with the composition. Later in the song, the creators modify them (vary) or introduce new hooks to constantly surprise the listener and focus his/her attention. Third, it is typical for hit producers to alternate between completely different types of hooks — for example, rhythmic hooks followed by melodic ones, then arrangement or editing hooks, next instrumental ones, etc. This mechanism reflects a strategy aimed at capturing the listener's attention, which is deeply rooted in psychology. It relies on strong contrasts between musical and linguistic stimuli. It is, to some extent, a kind of musical formula for success – but is it universal?

As discussed in the introduction, many factors contribute to a song's success. The musical aspect is one of the most important and can significantly influence a hit's popularity — but it is not the only determinant. The multicodal and multimedia nature of pop music, along with its entanglement in various

non-artistic contexts — especially economic, social, and historical — means that both the production and analysis of a hit should never be limited to its musical content alone. Both musicologists whose work is referenced in this article identify a key principle in hit-making that spans musical and non-musical dimensions: the need for producers to strike a balance between what is familiar and unfamiliar to the listener, what is the same and different, domestic and foreign, predictable and surprising, conventional and avant-garde, old and new, and so forth.

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Elementy chwytliwe (*hooks*) w muzyce popularnej. W stronę muzykologicznej teorii przebojów muzycznych

Streszczenie

Teoria przeboju jest niezwykle intrygującym zagadnieniem badawczym. W muzykologii krajów zachodnich ma już za sobą historię i swoisty kanon tekstów oraz metodologii, które w Polsce nie doczekały się – jak dotąd – szerszego rezonansu. Autor omawia i przybliża dwa najważniejsze – jego zdaniem – teksty, które pomagają wyjaśnić aspekty muzyczne przebojów. W najwcześniejszych rozważaniach teoretycznych na temat muzyki popularnej, autorstwa Theodora W. Adorno, analizowana jest konstrukcja przeboju pop oraz mechanizmy jego lansowania przez przemysł muzyczny i wpływania na słuchacza. Z kolei tekst dotyczący elementów chwytliwych (*hooks*) Gary'ego Burnsa z 1987 r. stanowi kamień milowy, jeśli chodzi o próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, co w sensie muzycznym i pozamuzycznym sprawia, że dany utwór staje się przebojem. Autor, nawiązując do obu omówionych tu tekstów, analizuje szczegółowo dwa przykłady przebojów muzycznych pochodzących z XXI w. – z USA i Polski.

Słowa kluczowe: *hook*, elementy chwytliwe, Adorno, przebój muzyczny, pop, środki wyrazu muzycznego, Gary Burns, The Black Eyed Peas, Smolasty, Doda.