

MARK II STAGE P

Rockschool



POPULAR MUSIC THEORY

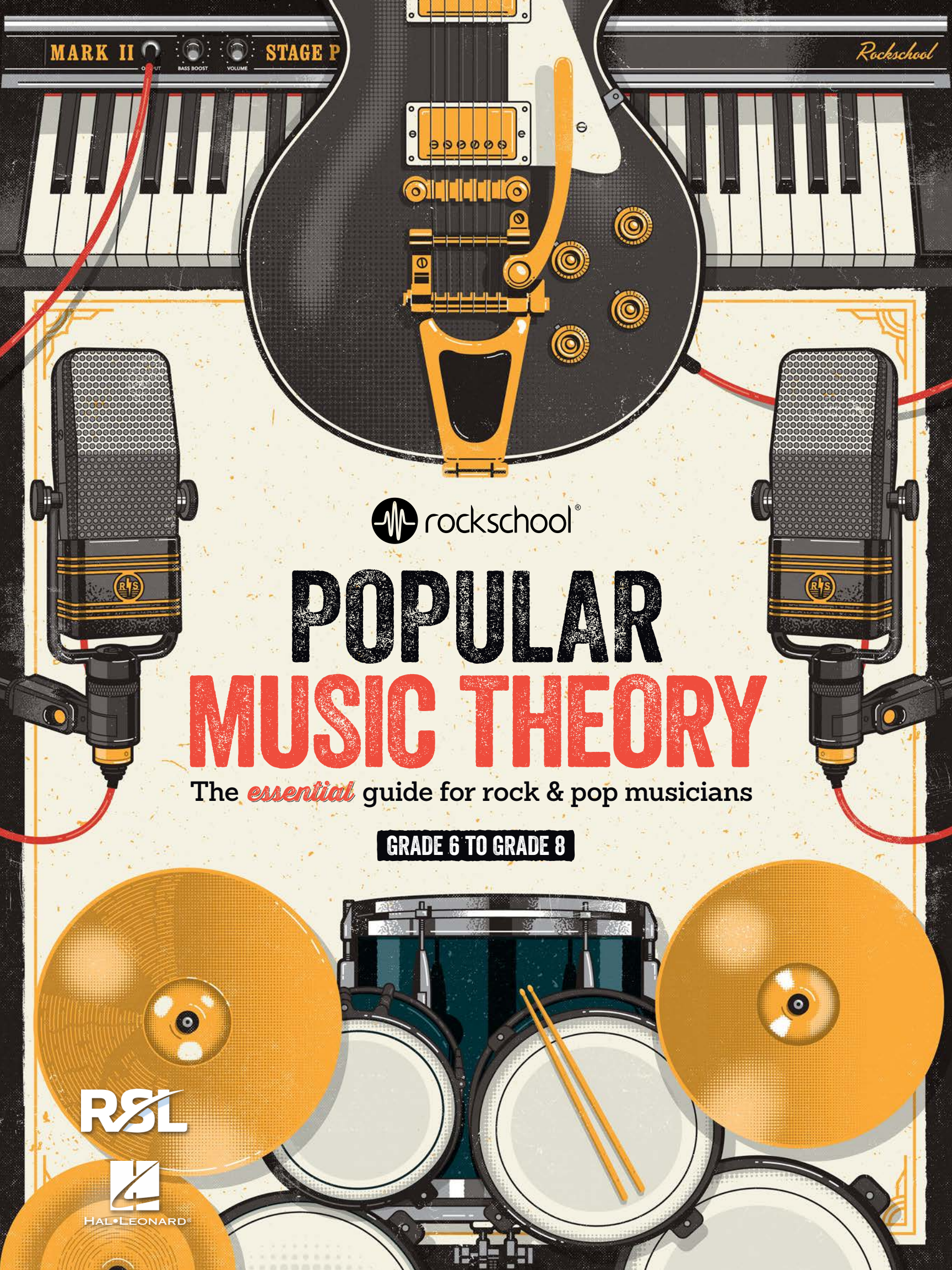
The *essential* guide for rock & pop musicians

GRADE 6 TO GRADE 8

RSL



HAL LEONARD



POP BASSLINES

IN POP, the bass functions as part of the rhythm section, often working with the bass drum to create a danceable feel. Pop basslines are typically simple, harmonically and rhythmically, although sometimes the bass can underpin the whole track with its own repeating riff.



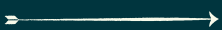
VOCAL HARMONIES

VOCAL HARMONIES are an evergreen feature of pop, particularly in eras where vocal ensembles have dominated. The backing vocals (BVs) can follow the words sung by the main vocal to create texture (typically in a chorus) or can have their own separate 'call and response' part, responding to the main vocal.

POP DRUMS WITH PERCUSSION

MAINSTREAM POP is designed to appeal to large numbers of people and so 4/4 pop drumbeats are often 'danceable', typically placing a solid bass-drum emphasis on the downbeat and with a consistent snare on the second and fourth beats. Sub-beats can be filled with more rhythmically complex material, and pop drum-kit parts are often augmented with percussion such as shakers, tambourine, cabasa or claves.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING



ALBUM
The Album
(1977)
ARTIST
ABBA



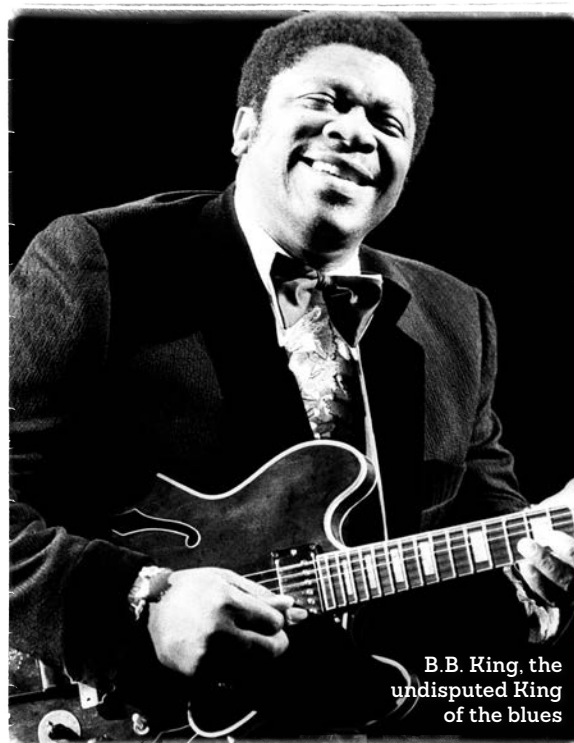
ALBUM
You've Come A
Long Way
Baby (1998)
ARTIST
Fatboy Slim



ALBUM
Thriller
(1982)
ARTIST
Michael
Jackson

BLUES

Blues developed from the musical traditions of slaves brought to America in the 19th Century, and its call-and-response structure and cyclical 12-bar, I-IV-V format derive from these early spiritual and work-song forms. So-called because of the melodic targeting of 'blue' notes (the flattened 3rd, 5th and 7th of the major scale), much of blues's identity lies in its ambiguity between major and minor tonality. The ability of the guitar and harmonica to 'bend' notes to add subtle microtonal nuances made for highly individualistic soloing styles, and the use of a slide on the strings of a guitar tuned to an open chord enabled players to mimic the wailing of a human voice. Blues can be played without any accompaniment, as a solo vocalist accompanied by guitar or piano, or in a range of formats that often expand to include harmonica, backing vocalists, piano, keys and horn sections. The guitar's centrality to the blues and its wealth of opportunity for expressive soloing has resulted in an unending stream of blues-guitar heroes taking the spotlight, but the genre has seen its fair share of non-six-string virtuosos, too, such as harmonica players Little Walter and Junior Wells, and pianist Otis Spann.



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CLASSIC 12-BAR PROGRESSION

THE CHORD chart below shows the basic structure of the 12-bar blues. There are many variations, and the two bracketed chords show one way in which musicians often vary that structure to add colour and movement to the form. The final two bars often contain a melodic fragment called a 'turnaround'.

4 ||: D⁷ / / / | (G⁷) / / / | D⁷ / / / | / / / / | G⁷ / / / | / / / / |

I⁷ (IV⁷) I⁷ IV⁷

| D⁷ / / / | / / / / | A⁷ / / / | G⁷ / / / | D⁷ / / / | (A⁷) / / / :||

I⁷ V⁷ IV⁷ I⁷ (V⁷)

24-BAR BLUES PROGRESSION

IT'S POSSIBLE to play a 24-bar blues simply by doubling the number of measures per chord. This is more common at higher tempos.

SHUFFLE AND STRAIGHT RHYTHMS

BLUES TRACKS are often performed with a shuffle/swung rhythm, where every other eighth note is shorter than the previous one. This is also known as a broken triplet feel and can be notated by inserting $\text{♪} = \text{♪} \text{♪}$ at the top of the score and then writing all the subsequent eighth notes normally. If the broken triplet feel of the music is particularly slow, an alternative method is to notate the whole track in 12/8 time, and then notate each broken triplet as it is heard. These examples would be heard as exactly the same notes/rhythms but performed at different tempos.

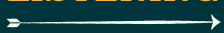
The image shows two musical staves illustrating the broken triplet feel. The top staff is in 4/4 time, showing a melody with a broken triplet feel over A7 and D9 chords. The bottom staff is in 12/8 time, showing the same melody with a broken triplet feel over A7 and D9 chords.

MINOR AND MAJOR BLUES

BLUES MELODIES can be minor or major. In either case, the seventh note of the scale is almost always minor ('flattened'). It's also possible to play melodies with a minor 3rd even when the underlying chord is major, sometimes raising the minor 3rd note very slightly sharp – this is known as a blue note. Blue notes can be notated as quarter tones, as shown here, or simply written as minor intervals and left to the player's discretion.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time showing a melody with a blue note (flattened 7th) and a quarter tone sharp (blue note).

RECOMMENDED LISTENING



ALBUM
The Complete Recordings (1936-7)
ARTIST
Robert Johnson



ALBUM
Live At The Regal (1965)
ARTIST
B.B. King



ALBUM
Anthology (2010)
ARTIST
Bessie Smith