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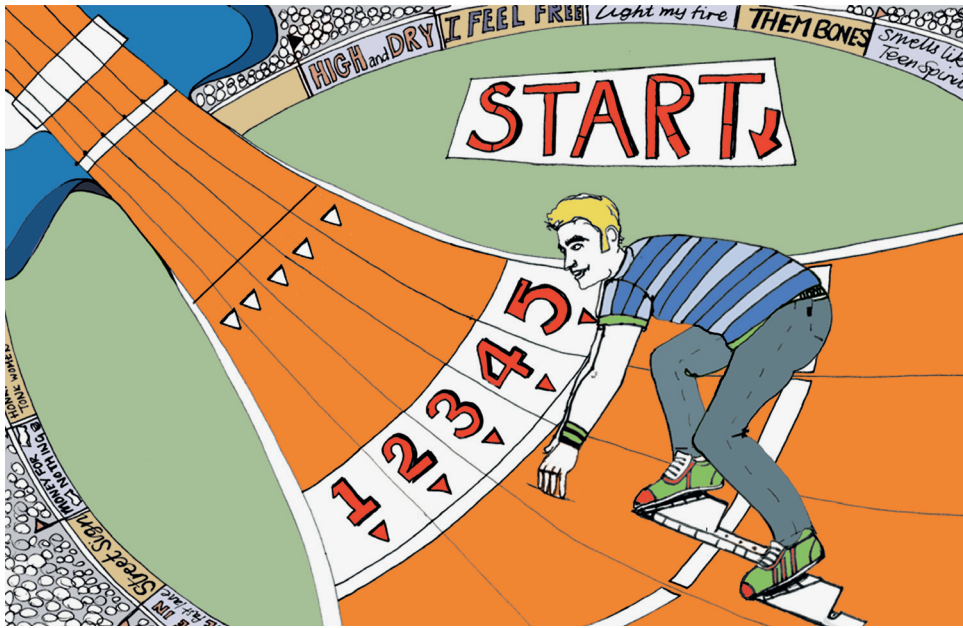
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## GETTING STARTED WITH INTROS

"The verse goes Am, F, Am, F – just keep strumming until you're ready to sing, right?"

**AH, THE** song's finished. That last tricky rhyme in the bridge is complete, and that bit of the chorus that was slightly too dull has now been fixed with a magnificent melodic flourish. You're ready to record the demo, and take it to the band to rehearse it up for the next gig. So how does it start? The verse goes Am, F, Am, F – just keep strumming until you're ready to sing, right?

Well, you *could* do it this way. But have you ever known anyone to listen to a song and say, 'I love that bit at the start when he strums those open chords before the vocal comes in'? Think about the intro from any well-loved classic – Guns N' Roses' *Sweet Child O' Mine*, Hendrix's *Purple Haze* or Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, for example. Every one of these is instantly recognisable from the opening bar, usually because of a great riff, unusual effect or extra melody. The Doors' *Light My Fire* certainly starts with some quirky chords (G, D, F, B<sub>7</sub>, C#, A<sub>7</sub>, A), but Ray Manzarek's organ part turns an inspiring sequence into a masterpiece.

So assuming we all agree that interesting intros are better than dull intros, how do we write a good one? It could be said that there are five categories of intro, which I refer to as 'riff till ready', 'steal the chorus', 'no relation', 'take a break' and 'straight to the point'.

### JOE BENNETT

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Riff till ready is perhaps the most common type in rock, and it's popular because it gives your audience something exciting right from the start. Riffs can be based on the chords of other sections of the song (eg. Blur's *Song 2* or Alice In Chains' *Them Bones*) or they can be original material (eg. The Rolling Stones' *Honky Tonk Women*). There are various approaches you can take to writing riffs (see TG217), but the most important rules are to keep it simple and don't be afraid to repeat it. Stealing the chorus is all about playing a trick on the audience. If your intro is based on the chorus melody or chords, then the 'real' chorus will seem more familiar to the listener, helping them to remember it more easily. You can get away with just playing the chords (Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, for example), but it's usually more engaging if you use the chorus chords as a template to give you ideas for a riff or melodic line.

Some intros bear no relation to the parent song; they're a completely different bit of music. We've already looked at *Light My Fire*, and there are many other classics with intros that are more famous than the material they precede. The intro riff of *Paranoid* disappears once the verse begins; *Johnny B Goode* provides 12 bars of double-stopped excitement and is never heard from again. And what about the guitar itself? If you can make your guitar sound more interesting, it's more likely that the intro will stand out. Eddie Van Halen has used a flanger (*Ain't Talkin' Bout Love*); Paul Simon, a capo (*Scarborough Fair*); Keith Richards, an open tuning (*Brown Sugar*); and The Edge, a delay (*Where The Streets Have No Name*).

And just because we're all guitarists, that doesn't mean we have to take the intro every time. U2's *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, Paul Simon's *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover*, Radiohead's *High And Dry* and ZZ Top's *Gimme All Your Lovin'* give the drummers a moment in the sun – plus an opportunity for you to tune up, get your bottleneck ready, apply a capo or take a sneaky drink on stage. And you don't have to rely on the drummer if you want to take a break. Take a listen to The Animals' *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place*; not only does bassist Chas Chandler provide a memorable four-bar intro riff before the vocal comes in, he keeps it going for a further eight bars before the guitar part enters.

If you're out of ideas, who says you need an intro at all? Certainly not Queen (*Fat Bottomed Girls*, *We Are The Champions*), Don McLean (*American Pie*, *Vincent*) or Iron Maiden (*Can I Play With Madness?*). Other artists who have been known to get straight to the point include Elvis Presley (*Hound Dog*, *Heartbreak Hotel*), The Pretenders (*Stop Your Sobbing*), Elvis Costello (*Accidents Will Happen*) and The Beatles (*All My Loving*, *Hey Jude*, *Help!*, *Can't Buy Me Love*, *She Loves You*). Sometimes having a brilliant song and a world-class singer is all you need. You had me at hello. ●