

# Notes on "Ticket To Ride" by Alan W. Pollack

## Notes on ... Series #65 (TTR)

<https://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/DATABASES/AWP/ttr.shtml>

Key: A Major<sup>1</sup>

Meter: 4/4

Form: Intro | Verse | Verse | Bridge | Verse | Bridge |  
| Verse | Outro (fade-out)

CD: "Help!", Track 7 (Parlophone CDP7 46439-2)

Recorded: 15th February 1965, Abbey Road 2

UK-release: 9th April 1965 (A Single / "Yes It Is")

US-release: 19th April 1965 (A Single / "Yes It Is")

## General Points of Interest

### Style and Form

After the folksy originals and nostalgic covers of the "Beatles For Sale" album, "Ticket To Ride" brings with it a measure of tight toughness that is most welcome to those wondering whether this erstwhile sharp edge of the group's attitude and style had fled following the "Hard Day's Night" album.

The form is an ordinary two-bridge model with only one verse in the middle and no instrumental section. The special kicks here are to be found in the arrangement, especially in its exploitation of texture, rhythm, and harmonic dissonance.

### Melody and Harmony

Although the tune does not make a primarily bluesy impression, both the flat seventh and minor third scale degrees do bear some melodic emphasis in the verse and bridge, respectively.

Five of the seven chords that naturally occur in the home key as well as the flat-VII chord are used. No other more exotic chords show up nor is there any hint of modulation. This relatively bland harmonic diet is spiced up by the liberal use of free melodic dissonance and a certain suspense factor created by the exceedingly slow harmonic rhythm.

In the dissonance department, Major ninths and seconds<sup>2</sup> appear as though a leitmotif. Not only is there an unusual number of ninth chords in the song, but the bare interval is also found within the opening ostinato<sup>3</sup> figure as well as in the repetitious vocal line which takes the song out at the end.

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1 Scale: A, B, C#, D, E, F#, and G#; Chords: A, Bm, C#m, D, E, F#m, G#dim.

2 I believe that the reference to "major second" would be either (1) a B Chord (II) where a Bm (ii) is expected or (2) a major second interval (2 semi-tones) when a minor second (1 semi-tone) is expected.

3 Ostinato: a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm.

## Arrangement

The ostinato figure played by the solo twelve-string guitar at the outset provides a great deal of unity to the song. As we've seen in other ostinato-driven songs of the Beatles, these recurring, motorized little figures seem to create the illusion of being there in the backing track more of the time than is actually so. For example, if the figure is apparent at both the beginning and end of a section, as long as there is something of sufficient interest to divert your attention in the middle, you will subconsciously "assume" that the figure has continued all the while, even though if you double check carefully you'll find that this is not so!

The ostinato used here's not as distinctively melodic as the ostinati in either "What You're Doing" or "Day Tripper", but it does have a wrenchingly syncopated rhythm which carries all the way through to the characteristic back-beat of the intro and first two verses:

```
» » »  
Rhythmic Emphasis: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &  
Ostinato: A E C#A B E  
» » »
```

[Figure 65.1]

As a foil to all this, the tambourine is relegated to simply marking off the second and fourth beats of virtually every measure in every verse.

The vocal arrangement is fussier than we've seen in a while, with three alternating textures used in the verse, alone. The first half of the first phrase is sung by John, solo and single-tracked. Paul joins him above on funky counterpoint for the remainder of this phrase into the first half of the next one, and then leaves John exposed solo at the phrase's end. John then sings the third phrase double tracked with Paul joining him for a final touch of counterpoint at the end of the fourth phrase.

## Section-by-Section Walkthrough

### Intro

The intro consists of a four-fold presentation of the ostinato figure over the I chord. The ensemble joins the solo guitar with a slow dramatic drum roll just before the downbeat of measure 3:

```
» » »  
|A | - | - | - |  
» » »
```

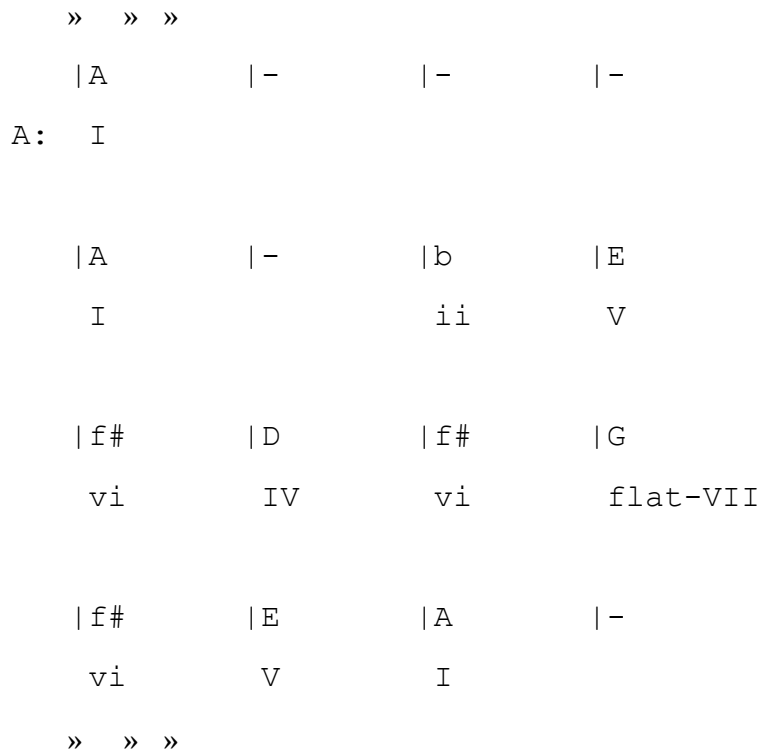
[Figure 65.2]

The parallel between this and "You Can't Do That" or "Day Tripper" is noteworthy. The accentuation here by the drumming of the syncopated rhythm inherent in the guitar ostinato is especially gripping and literally pulls you into the music.

Say, is that a small touch of organ or harmonium used as a wash behind the solo guitar opening? If so, does it continue throughout, just buried in the mix? Or perhaps, does it drop out quickly once the rest of the ensemble gets going?

## Verse

The verse is sixteen measures long and built out of four phrases equal in length. The section more logically splits right down the middle, with the first half providing an eight-measure expository section that harmonically opens up to the V chord, and the second eight measures providing a refrain-like ending which veers back toward the I:



[Figure 65.3]

The tune has an unusually high amount of rhythmic syncopation against the underlying beat (on "four-and") as well as melodic dissonance against the underlying chords. I'll leave the majority of such details as an exercise for the reader though two examples here are noteworthy. First off, the melodic sustaining of the pitch E over the b-minor chord in measure 7, on the second syllable of the word "away". Even better is the climactic event over the G-Major chord in measure 12, with John singing the pitches F# -> E -> C# on the stretched out word "ri-i-de", none of which is consonant with the chord below it.

The three-way alternating pivot off the vi (f#) chord is one of the more novel harmonic gambits we've ever seen the Beatles pull; first to the IV, then to the flat-VII, and ultimately to the V, which under the circumstances is the most comfortingly "functional" of the three choices. It kind of reminds of the feeling one has in a chess game where you think you've been check-mated, but in a half-panic, on considering your several brute-force logical alternatives, you eventually discover with some relief that there is still at least one legal move available to you with which to continue the game.

The second half of both verses (which begin "She's got a ticket to ride") are in F#m, the relative minor (vi) of the key of A.

```
F#m -> D   [ vi -> IV ]   (6m to 4)
F#m -> G   [ vi -> bVII ] (6m to flat 7)
F#m -> E   [ vi -> V ]   (6m to 5)
Then E -> A [ V -> I ]   (5 to 1)
```

The vocal counterpoint at the beginning of the second phrase not only features their trademark parallel, open fourths, but Paul's initial stress on the pitch B provides a development of the added-ninth flavor we've described as inherent in the opening ostinato figure. Also note how John's initial stress on G-natural here adds a subtle, partly hidden touch of the blues (I'm also very partial to the little rapid-fire sixteenth note run with which John ends the phrase):

```
» » »
Paul:  B           B           A   G   A           A
John:  G           G           E   D   E           EDC#
» » »
```

[Figure 65.4]

## Bridge

The bridge is eight measures long and built out of a parallel-style repeat of the same four-measure phrase:

```
» » »
|D           | -           | -           |E           |
IV           V
» » »
```

[Figure 65.5]

Bridge-ly contrast is provided by virtually every compositional parameter:

The vocal arrangement shifts to straight-away parallel thirds except for a couple of stray eighth notes in which John is left exposed solo for a split second (check out the second syllable of the word "goodbye").

The rhythm section, including the tambourine, shifts away from wrenching syncopation to a pattern of relatively even-handed eighth notes in which the off-beat (on "two" and "four") pattern, first heard from the tambourine in verses, now prevails in the drums.

The harmony, even though it features no kind of modulation, does manage to stay entirely away from the I chord, the section ending firmly on the way back towards it.

A new guitar riff is used at the very end of the section to lead back into the next verse. Its melodic and rhythmic gesture are reminiscent, albeit not slavishly so, of the opening lick. The F# that marks the apex of this new figure makes for yet another added ninth chord here.

## Verse Variants

This song has a higher than average number of small twists applied to the arrangement of its later verse sections. As spontaneous as these details sound to us, I rather suspect that at least some of them were planned quite in advance.

Here, in the third verse, John adds the word "yeah" to the end of the second line (in addition to the one that repeatedly appears at the end of the first line), and he prefaces the third line with an "Oh" (or is it an "Aw"?); the latter variation being repeated in the fourth verse as well.

Ringo provides an evenly beaten sixteenth note pattern as a fill between the second and third lines of the third verse in place of the plain roll he uses elsewhere in the song. In the final verse he plays in this spot no roll nor fill, but only a single whack on "four!".

One particular variant feature rises above the status of mere detail to assume structural, and perhaps subtextual significance. The hard syncopations mentioned above which so pungently characterize this song are actually found to be very much subdued starting right after the second verse. Granted, we already noted that the bridge itself dispenses with the syncopation as a matter of contrast. But look ahead — in both of the final verses, Ringo's drumming sticks with the more evenly played eighth note patterns introduced in the bridge instead of returning to the wrenchingly syncopated pattern; this, in spite of the fact that the guitar ostinato (from which his syncopated patterns were derived in the first place) does continue to make its own appearance. This could hardly have been accidental and I find myself pondering its motivation — did they discover that the wrenching rhythm when carried all the way through was simply too much of a good thing, or is there some subtle poetry embedded in this change drumming?

## Outro

The question of what manner of poetry may be conveyed by a change of beat is further sharpened by what happens in this outro where the syncopation is loosened even further than it was for the bridge.

This time, the effect is one of a sudden, free-wheeling, accelerating release of all tension. John would later use a similar effect at the end of "She Said She Said".

Also here at the very end, the final vocal lick, which is otherwise double-tracked in unison, splits out for an instant to include one last example of a Major second sonority.

## Some Final Thoughts

"Ticket To Ride" was recorded after more than a two-month hiatus (from 27th November, 1964 up to 15th February, 1965) in the Beatles' attendance at Abbey Road. One gets used to the song's having been tucked away on the "Help!" album as the last song on "Side 1", but in truth, it was the first song recorded after the "Beatles For Sale" album was released, and it appeared as the A-side of a single several months before the film was released.

Once you get the chronology straight in your mind, it's hard to listen to the song without feeling as though you've crossed a frontier. Lewisohn himself comments on this, though his perspective is entirely on the recording process changes that kicked in at this point in time; i.e. the practice of perfecting the rhythm and backing track first before adding everything else on later as overdubs.

I'm thinking more of style, though whatever compositional innovations are to be found in this song are not without their own irony to the extent that they represent at least as much a return to erstwhile values as much as they do a forward evolution. Yeah, this one looks at least as far ahead as "Day Tripper", but it equally so picks right up where "A Hard Day's Night" left off, followed as it was by the anomalistic "Beatles For Sale" album.

Regards,

Alan (082592#65)

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### **Editor's Note.**

We are hampered by not having access to the original sheet music for this (or any other Beatles) song. In no arrangement that I have (in the five sets of Beatles sheet music that I own) is there a 9<sup>th</sup> chord of any variety.

Mr. Pollack makes a couple of references to 9<sup>th</sup> chords in this article. As a reminder to myself (in reference to the A major chord):

- Major 9th chord (AM9 or Amaj9) consists of  
A, C#, E, G# and B  
1 3 5 7 9 (semitones: 0,4,7,11,14)
- The 9th chord is the "dominant" version (A9),  
A, C#, E, G and B  
1 3 5 b7 9 (semitones: 0,4,7,10,14)

The 5th is frequently omitted. The 9th chord is said to be a frequent substitute for the 7th chord, especially in jazz and the blues.

Presumably, in the V position of the key of A, we could see an E9 instead of an E7.