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In this Essay, I want to show how patterns of chords or melodies are typical to specific genres, as well as how simple techniques that are analysed and applied on original tracks can create the effect of authenticity in the discussed genres that I have chosen.

Pop

Pop music often borrows elements from other styles such
as urban, dance, rock, Latin, and country; nevertheless, there are many other key elements that define pop music (Frith, Straw and Street, 2007).

Lately, there is a new element that has become prominent in pop songs, and that is making the bass guitar, or the base line as important as the main vocal line, or even just giving the bass line a much more dominant and important part in the song.
That is the case in the 2 reference songs that I've chosen to analyse and use as inspiration to create a new song.

Timucin Lam, known professionally as Jax Jones, is an English DJ, songwriter, record producer and remixer (McMahon, 2017).
He collaborated with Bebe Rexha, who is an American singer and songwriter (Nijjar, 2019), and together they created the song 'Harder' (Jax Jones and Bebe Rexha, 2019).

The main medium of pop music is the song, often between two and a half and three and a half minutes in length (Everett, 2000).
The beat and the melodies tend to be simple, there isn't one range of tempo that dictates the genre, but it can be divided into some groups. Lately, many pop songs are being written in around the 100 bpm.
'Harder' is in 104 bpm and 'Dance Monkey' by Tones And I (Tones & I, 2019) is 98bpm.
In order for a bass line to be "busy", active and still musical, a slower tempo would be preferred.
I've decided to do my track in 112 bpm, which is slightly faster but felt appropriate with the pace and context of the song. However, I struggled with having the bass line played in a cool and funky way, as this tempo is slightly too fast in order to create a laid back atmosphere.
I used to have a purist approach to mixing and believed that the job was to create the best, most natural final result with the track you've been given. However, from my experience, When producing a Pop song, one shouldn't shy away from taking drastic steps in order to create new sounds or in order to make the track "right".
In my song, although a live bass player played, I've edited the Bass track in a different order to the one was played, and added/substituted a synth bass in order to create a deeper and more danceable sound.

Pop music would usually include short to medium-length songs written in a basic format as well as the common use of repeated choruses, melodic tunes and hooks, with limited harmonic accompaniment (Frith, 2001).
The structure of most pop songs is usually simple and in groups of 4 or 8 bars.
'Harder's song structure is, pre chorus, chorus, verse, pre chorus, chorus, solo (chorus melody), verse, pre chorus, chorus, solo (chorus melody).
This is a classic pop/hit structure with many choruses that contain a hook/catchy line.
In my song I've also used this technique and kept the structure simple and very close to the description above. Keeping it simple, obviously, would make it more "user friendly" and would appeal to more audiences.

The harmony of 'Harder', as well as most pop songs, is simple and comprised of four chords that run in the same progression throughout most of the song (Winkler, 1978).
The sequence in 'Harder' is - Fm which is the 2nd degree of Eb major, Bb which is the 5th degree - Dominant, Eb which is the 1st degree- Root and Ab which is the 4th degree - Sub Dominant. See bars 2 - 5 in Fig. 2.

As my main influences in the past have been funky jazz music, I decided to compose my song with a more complicated chord progression, and it gets even more sophisticated in the pre chorus. The chorus itself, as it's the most important part of the song in that genre, is kept simple with a three chord sequence.
Finally, I think that I still managed to constrain the song in to the easy listening pop song genre.

The notes of the melody in 'Harder' are all in the key of Eb major.
In the Pre Chorus, in bar 2 of Fig.2, the melody is sung over an Fm chord, and then in bar 4 of Fig.2, the same melody is being repeated over an Eb chord, which creates an interesting harmonic and melodic tension.
Using techniques of repeated patterns in pop music, is what make them popular, fun and easy to listen to.
In my song, I've also used the technique of a fun, uplifting simple melody that stays in the basic key, although with some tensions.
Instead of the repeated melody patterns over different chords that is played in 'Harder', I've used some repeated rhythmic patterns in the melody, which is also very common in pop music.

As for the instrumentation, the Bass guitar is a dominant instrument in 'Harder' therefore its level and intensity are much higher than usual.
The melodic bass line is what makes the groove so jumpy, poppy and fun. It does sound as if it was played live by a great bass player and edited later.
I've also used this technique in my song. It creates a modern concept and leaves space for the vocals without losing the danceable groove.

Lyrics of modern pop songs typically focus on simple themes – often love and romantic relationships.
My song, 'Love at first site', is no different.
Lyrics also have a major part in the success of a pop song, and they would usually have to rhyme, stick to the structure and have a very clear and easy singing hook (Frith, 2001).

Latin/African pop

Latin and African mixed with pop music is one of the most successful styles in the last few years that emerged into the pop western world and created a new and innovative style (Stavans, 2014).
The combination of the Latin and African grooves and the current American/English pop music has created songs like Despacito, Waka Waka, Bilando, Danza Kuduro and many more, who became hits around the world.

One up and coming artists in that genre is Maître Gims or simply Gims, who is a Congolese singer, rapper and composer. He grew up and currently lives in France (Barbouch et al., 2013).
His latest song 'Reste' (GIMS & Sting, 2019), is a collaboration with the music producer Renaud Rebillaud, who is a French sound engineer and music producer that has produced many songs with Gims (Renaud Rebillaud, 2020). In this song they are featuring Sting. It is sung in French and English, giving it a world music feel.
The other song used as a reference is called Cameleon (GIMS, 2017), also produced and composed by Gims and Renaud Rebillaud.
These songs bring African and British/Western grooves and harmonies together in a modern and poppy way.

In this genre there's a variety of rhythmic styles and tempos such as Despacito by Luis Fonsi featuring Daddy Yankee (Bieber, Fonsi and Daddy Yankee, 2017) and Bilando by Enrique Iglesias (Iglesias and Bueno, 2014) with a slower tempos of around 90 bpm or Waka Waka by Shakira (Shakira, 2017) and Cheerleader by OMI (OMI, 2015) with a faster tempo of around 125 bpm.
In Reste, the tempo is 100 bpm which is in the slower range, giving it a more sensual vibe. In my song I've decided to speed it up to 108 bpm, which is still in the same sensual range but gives the song more drive and energy.

Typically in this genre, the song would start with the root chord. For example, Danza Kuduro by Lucenzo and Don Omar is in the key of A minor and starts with an Am Chord. Another example is Despacito in the key of B minor and starts with a Bm chord.

The harmony in this song is a simple 3 chord sequence throughout the song:
Bbm (4th chord in F minor), C (5th chord - Dominant), and Fm (root chord).
Although it's a simple chord progression, what brings tension right from the beginning, is the fact that it starts on the 4th degree of the key, then goes to the 5th and only later to the root (Fig.1).

In my song, I went with the more common approach and started with the root chord, Dm, followed by a four chord sequence that repeats most of the song. I find that this “common” approach works better for me when composing a pop song with Latin influences.

Singing in a syncopated melody is quite typical to African and Latin music (Kubik, 2008) (Manuel, 1985). When analysing the melody of Reste, all the notes in the verses are syncopated (pushed), which gives a nice drive to the melody and pushes it forward. That also creates a feel as if the song in a faster tempo than it really is. I adopted this technique to my song as it felt right and made it sound in the genre.

In the beginning of the chorus of Reste, the hook melody in Bar 15 of Fig. 1, creates a tension with the minor chord; On the chord of Bbm, the notes sung are Eb (4th - Suspended 4), C (9th - Minor 9th or 2nd), and Bb (1st).
In Waka Waka (Shakira, 2010) , there is also a use of the 9th note of the key.
In most old African songs the melody would be around the chord notes (Kubik, 1994).
In my song, I didn’t manage to come up with a tensioned melody over the chorus, and stayed close to the chord notes. Personally, I think that the tension notes in Reste are beautiful and brings a modern, up to date feel to the genre.

When it comes to instrumentation, Latin pop music includes classic Latin percussion instruments like maracas, congas, and bongos. Other traditional instrumentation, for example, including a Mariachi band or Spanish guitar, helps give Latin pop music a distinct Latino flavour.
However, Renaud Rebillaud keeps it quite minimal;
The Snap sound is very dominant, and pretty much holds the beat throughout the song.
Soft synth sequence of a nice airy sound that stays the same throughout the song, holds the harmony and with the Snap sound actually creates a full backing track in the sense of harmony and rhythm.
The kick drum is nice and rounded, not too heavy and sounds like a real acoustic kick.
The bass guitar is very low in the mix, almost an ambient sound, that mainly fills up the low end frequency of the song without coherent pitch definition.
The electric Guitar helps with harmonies and with the low range where it doubles the bass.
In my song I also tried to stick to a very minimal pallet of sounds and I actually used the same technic of using a Snap sound combined with a soft synth sequence in order to create a basic groovy track.

The arrangements in Reste and Cameleon are very spacious, gentle and held back, which leaves a lot of space for the vocals and the sampled/hook vocal (Ooh Ooh Ooh).
Most songs in this genre would usually be fuller and “busier” when it comes to instrumentation, as mentioned above, mainly in the percussive section in order to create the Latin/African authentic groove and sound (Congas, Bongos, big toms, shakers, etc…). (Putumayo World Music, 2003)
In my reference songs, Gims and Renaud Rebillaud chose a more modern, up to date approach, by keeping it spacious and held back.

In both songs Gims is using sampled voice that is being manipulated (re pitched) as a repetitive motif which makes it a hook as well as iconic. That is another technic to bring this genre into the current charts.
In my song I’ve used the Minimalism technique, which gives space to the vocals and keeps the song on a “low key” with some “explosions” here and there that then become much more effective. I’ve also used a sample voice that was manipulated and used as a hook line in the chorus.

African/Latin in pop music are identified by simple short chord sequences.
The structure of most pop/western/hit songs, is usually in groups of 4 or 8 bars.
Some have an instrumental introduction, and some jump straight into one of the song’s vocal sections.
In most songs, there would be a basic structure of Verse - 8 Bars,
Verse/pre chorus - 8 Bars, Chorus - 8 bars.

In Reste, the verses have additional two bars (bars 13,14 in Fig. 1), which in my opinion makes it interesting and special.
In my song I’ve adopted the more simple common structure:
Intro, verse, pre chorus, chorus, verse, pre chorus, chorus, bridge, double chorus.
My composition did not need any extra bars, and the basic structure works well for this song.

Opening theme - film score

Both the opening titles and the end credits play a significant role in a movie. While the former introduces to and places the viewer within the film's created reality, the latter extends the viewer's filmic experience.
The opening titles must immediately catch the viewer's attention, and the music that accompanies them can serve various functions. yet the main role of the opening credits is to set the movie's atmosphere and to establish the mood of the film as a whole (Dumont, 2018).

One of the current film score musicians who has influenced me the most is Ramin Djawadi who is a German composer, which two of his most famous scores for TV shows are 'Westworld' and 'Game Of Thrones' (Monger, 2019).

I want to analyse 'Westworld's opening theme and to show how it inspired and affected the writing of my composition, as well as how it represents the film score genre and industry and it's purpose.

Before writing music to picture, one must have deep knowledge of the theme of the movie, story line, era etc…
In short, The story takes place in Westworld, a fictional, technologically advanced Wild-West-themed amusement park populated by android "hosts".
When listening to 'Westworld'(Djawadi, 2016), I immediately sense the dramatic and suspended tone of the movie. There are also elements from Western and horror movies.

One music element technique that creates this suspense and motion in this opening theme, would be the Marcato strings sequence that runs along the music. The low base piano also helps with the underlying scary vibe.
In my tune I've also used those elements in order to create a similar atmosphere. The key of 'Westworld' is A minor, and for Game of Thrones (Djawadi, 2011) it's C minor. Minor keys are usually the right choice in order to set a serious, mysterious, epic and dramatic atmosphere, which is what these shows are about.
For my tune I've chosen the key of A minor as the main key and then after the middle part it transposes to C minor which gives the tune another dramatic lift towards the big ending.

The beat in both ‘Westworld’ and in ‘Game of Thrones’ is 6/8 which gives it a less stable feel, as opposed to the feel in a standard 4/4 song. It also creates intensity and some sophisticated rhythmical options, in order to increase the suspense.
I decided to write my tune in 6/8 in order to create the same intensity.
As film scoring is all about the mood that the music creates, I think that a minor key and a 6/8 beat are the right choice.

The harmony in ‘Westworld’, as seen in Fig. 3, is quite sophisticated and doesn’t always stay in a simple minor key area, as there is a Bb chord as well as some passing chords in the iconic/hook passage in bars 32 and 53 where we see Bb - Am - Ab - Gm.
In my tune, I used the Phrygian A scale, and composed a middle part that gives a short window into what may sound as a major key, but in the context it creates a scary and weird atmosphere.

The melody in ‘Wesworld’ is also in A Phrygian scale, as in bar 17 and 47 of Fig.3 there is a Bb note. There is never a B natural note in this tune.
Phrygian key is common in Flamenco music, as well as in Jewish prayers, and creates a periodic, epic vibe (Jarrett and Day, 2008).
In my tune, although I used the Phrygian scale, I have introduced a B natural in the middle part which creates more instability and an eerie feel to the melody and harmony, which serves the mood of the movie.

The structure in a film score is usually with no specific mathematic or systematic order, as it wants to go to various emotions and atmospheres and for that the structure could be manipulated and parts can be changed abruptly.
In ‘Westworld’, the first part rhythmically finishes in bars 33/34 and cuts this section shorter than expected. Same thing happen in bars 53/54.
In my tune, it stays quite symmetrical except for the build up to the key change which is shorter than expected which makes the following section to be more emotional and “bigger than life”.

The instrumentation in film scores are usually orchestral with live instruments (Savage, 2008), although lately there is more use of synths and drum machines as well as processed waves and sound design (Reeves, 2015).
In ‘Westworld’ there are mainly strings and piano that dictate the overall sound of the tune. In ‘Game Of Thrones’ there are also horns as well as big timpani drums

and cinematic huge toms, that was called Kettledrums, with a lot of reverb (Norris, 2012)
The use of big drums are typical to the sound of the era this movie relates to portray, and symbolises the long marches in to wars as well as victory parades.
In my tune I aimed for a big sound and used all of the above as well as some scary drones and sound effects in order to create more suspense and discomfort.
The result is quite impressive, and it would sound even better and more convincing if played by a real big orchestra.

Initially, I wanted to create the same atmosphere with less orchestral instruments and let the melody by itself to do the job as well as adding processed sound and specially designed sounds. But as opposed to pop music, where minimalism can still create response and make people dance or sing along, in film scoring, sometimes, the instrumentation and “size” of the composition can make all the difference.

Conclusion

After listening to some reference musical pieces in each genre, analysing them and applying some of their musical technics and elements into my original compositions, I have come to the conclusion that if all the right ingredient are used then the result will sound authentic. But, from my experience, the success of a song or any other composition depends on the composer’s/singer’s/producer’s personal magic touch.

Fig.1

Reste (GIMS & Sting)

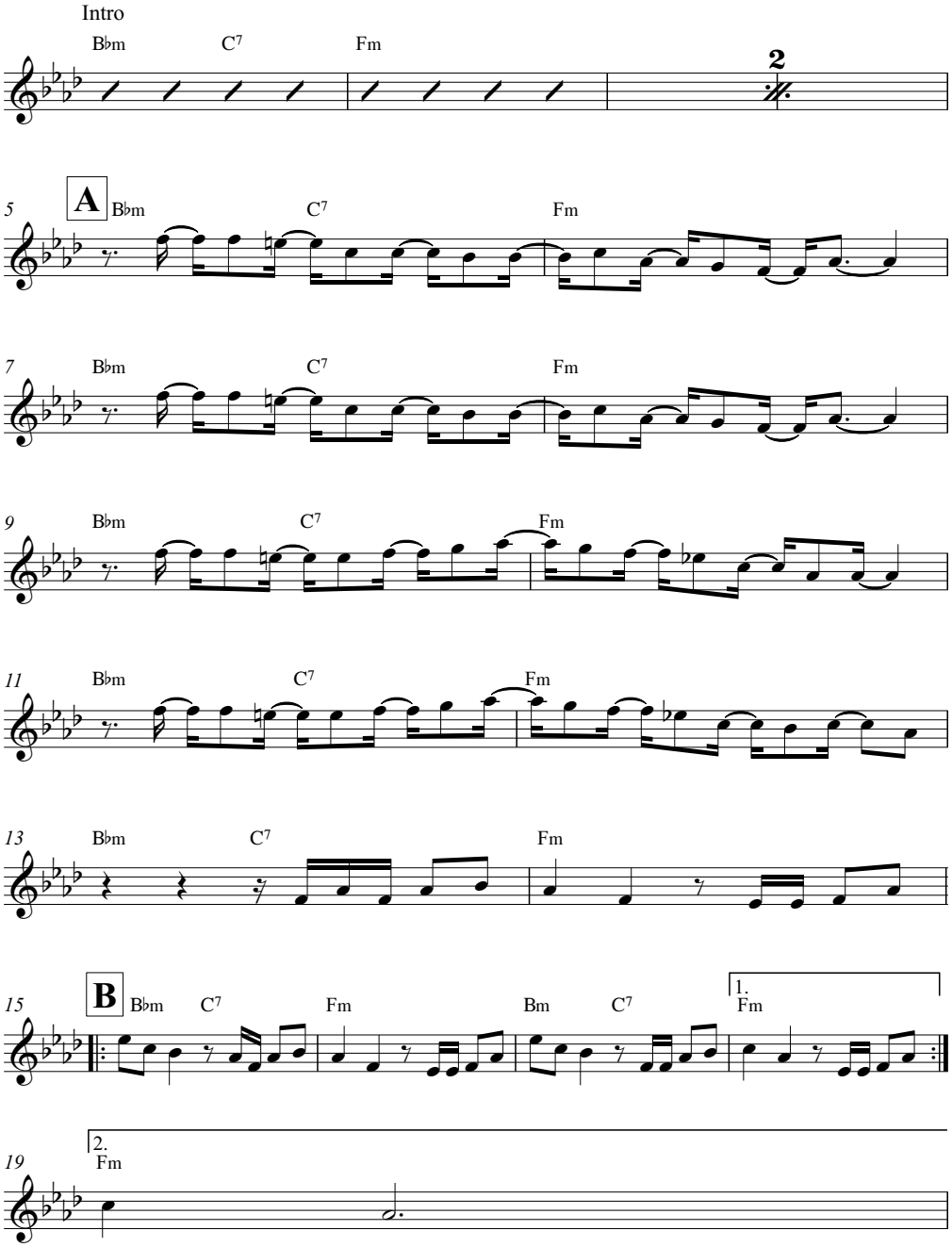


Fig.2

Harder - Jax Jones & Bebe Rexha

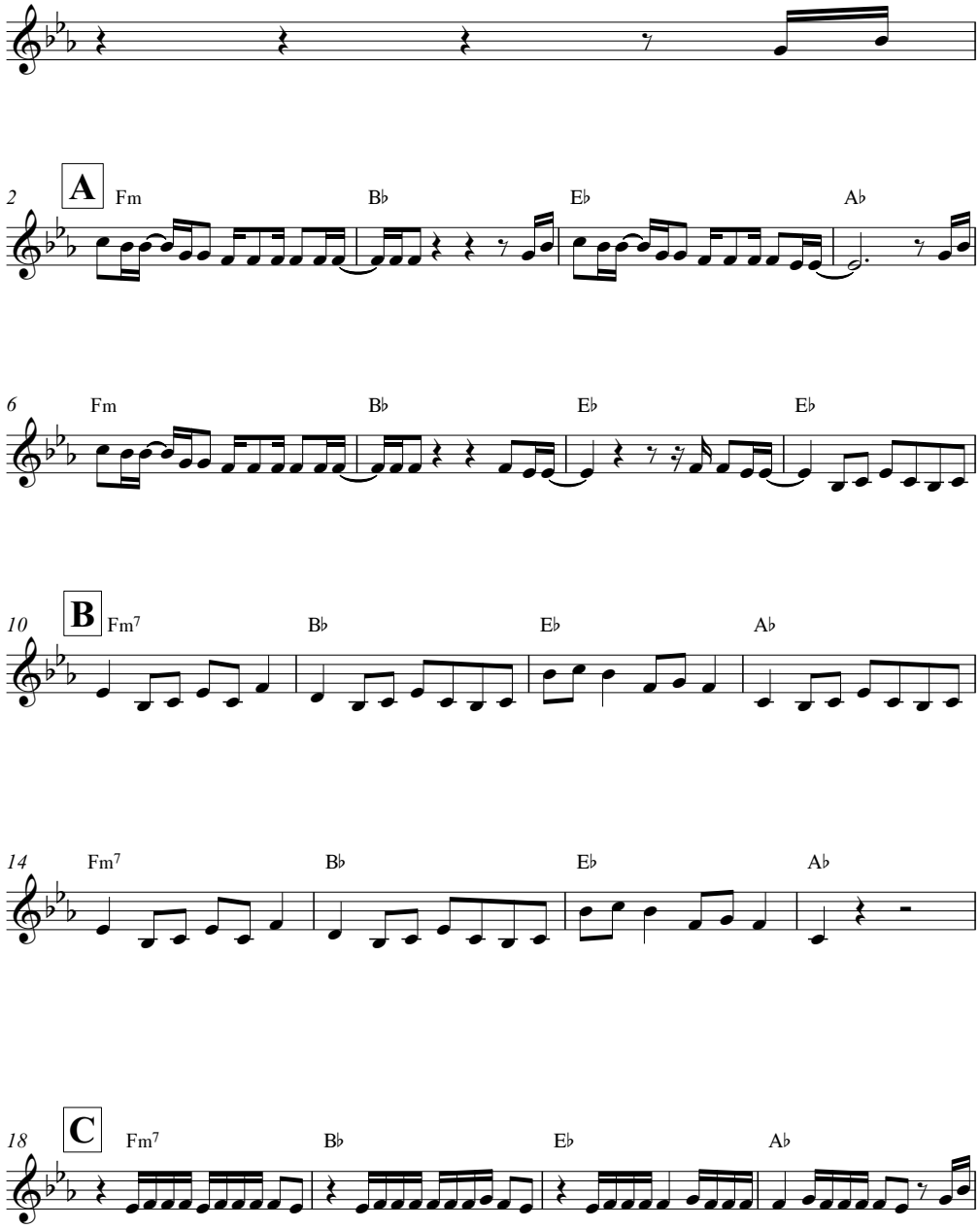
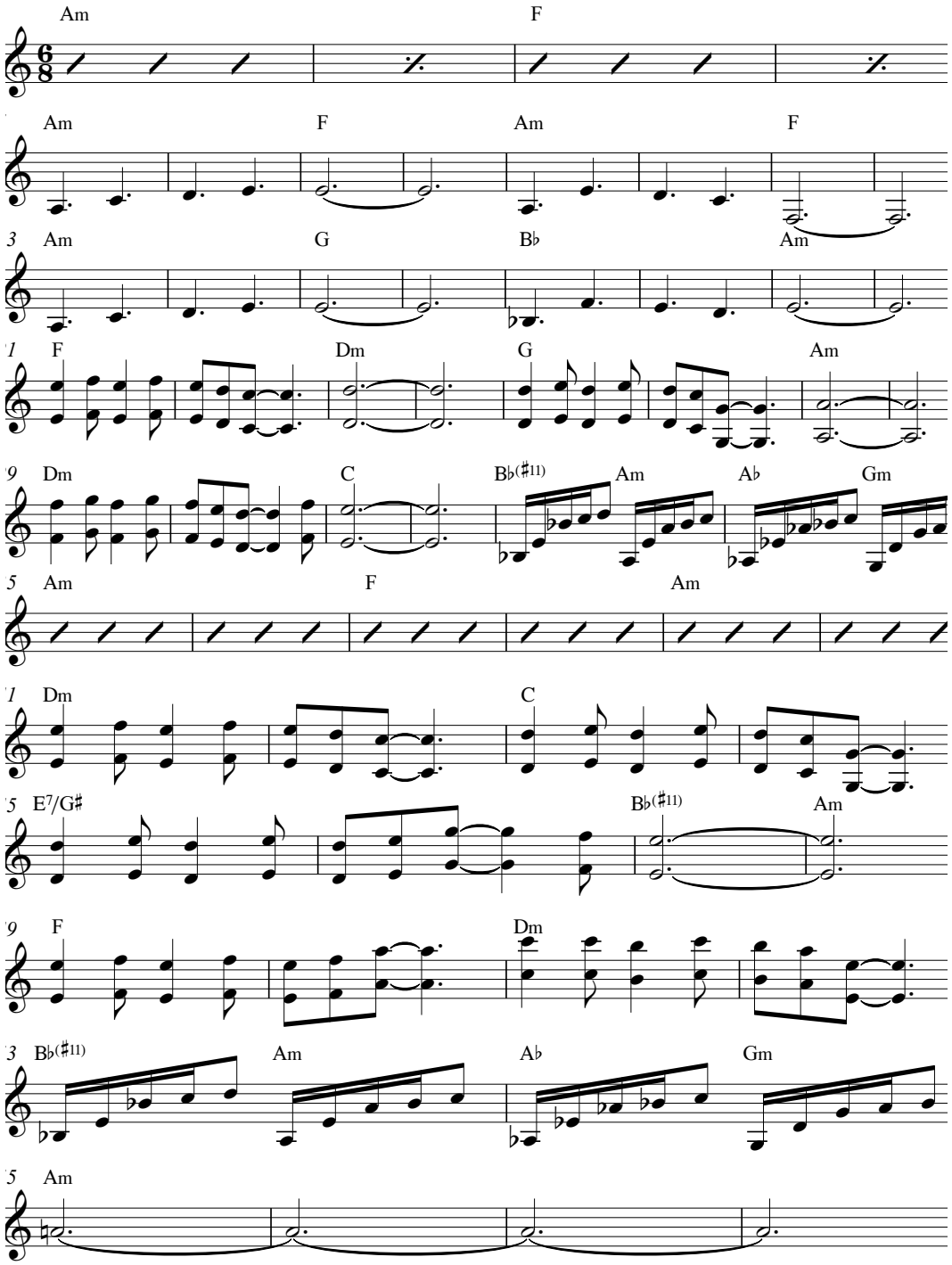


Fig.3

Westworld - main theme



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