

How to Create Memorable Song Endings

Dr. Glen Newton, July 15, 2006

Description

The last thing the audience hears when you perform a song is the ending. Do you simply play the last chord and stop? If so, this workshop is for you. The audience will remember your song and talk about long after your performance if you use a double or triple ending, flat 6th to tonic progression, instrumental break, or one of the other techniques taught in this workshop.

Goal: Help the audience remember the song by creating a memorable ending.

- **Traditional folk ending: I – IV – I**

Example (|| indicates the end of the song):

Last 3 bars of *Red Wing*: D7 / / / | G / C / | G / / ♯ || (*When ending a song with 4 beats per bar, you usually stop on beat 3.*)

Alternative 1 (bluesy): I – IV⁷ – I

Alternative 2 (for sad songs): I – IVm – I

Example: Ending of *Molly Malone*: C / / | Am / / | Dm / G7 | C / / | Fm / / | C / / | C / ♯ ||

- **Stop time**

Example: *Blue Water Line*

End of the chorus: C / / / | C7 / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C ♯ ♯ ♯ | C ♯ ♯ ♯ | G7 / / / | C / / / ♯ ||

- **Limelitters ending: V^b – I or V^{b7} – I (flat 6th to tonic)**

Example: *Puttin' On the Style*: D7 / / / | Eb / / / | / / / | G / / / | / / / ♯ ||

Another flat 6th to tonic ending to *Puttin' On the Style*: D7 / / / | G / / / | Eb7 / / / | G / / / | / / / ♯ ||

Alternative: V^b – VII^b – I

Flat 6th – flat 7th – tonic ending to *Puttin' On the Style*: D7 / / / | Eb / / / | F / / / | G / / / | / / / ♯ ||

- **Gospel ending: I – VII^b – IV – I**

Example: Last 3 bars of *Blueberry Hill*: D7 / / / | G / F C | G / / ♯ ||

- **Double ending, with notes twice as long**

Example: *Blue Water Line*

End of the chorus: C / / / | C7 / / / | F / / / | C / / / | C ♯ ♯ ♯ | C ♯ ♯ ♯ | G7 / / / | C / / / |
C ♯ ♯ ♯ | C ♯ ♯ ♯ | G7 / / / | / / / | C / / / | F / / / | C / / / | / / / ♯ ||

- **Make the melody go up, rather than down**

Example: *Red Wing*

Normal ending: 

Double ending, with notes twice as long and altered melody:

You could also make that a triple ending, changing the dynamics from *medium* to *very soft*, to *loud*.

• **Repeat 2-bar phrase up a half step near the ending**

Example: Red Wing

Even more enhanced ending with surprise key change:

More Techniques

- Add a banjo (or vocal or guitar or mandolin or dulcimer, etc.) break.
Example: Double ending and vocal break at the end of Tom Dooley: "Poor boy, you're bound to die."
Example: Freight Train, with double ending, instrumental break, and stinger

E7 ///|/////| F ///| F#dim ///| C ///| G7 ///| C ///|/////|
 E7 ///|/////| F ///| F#dim ///| C ///|/////| G7 ///|/////|
 C ///| F ///| C ♪♪♪| C ♪♪||

instrumental break →

- Change chords – barbershop style – and lengthen the ending.
Example: Puttin' On the Style, with barbershop ending and instrumental breaks:

D7 ///| G ///| G7 ///| C/E ///| Eb7 ///| G/D ♪♪♪| C ♪♪♪| G ♪♪♪| D7 G ♪||

first instrumental break → *2nd break* → *3rd break*

- Sustain the last chord for improvisation over it – especially for ballads
Example: Here, There, and Everywhere, with ritard and improv over last chord
- End a minor song with a major chord. This is the “tierce de picardie” or “Picardy third.”
Example: The Green Leaves of Summer in minor, end in major
- End a major song with the VI chord. *Example: Blue Moon in C, ending with A major chord*
- Fade out. *Example: Frog Went A-Courtin' ending: “Goodbye, farewell, adios...”*
- Restart the intro chord progression; the last chord of the chorus is the first chord of the “outro”.
Example: Jesse James, with restart of intro on last chord of the song, plus stinger.
Example: Good Night Irene, with double ending, tempo break, restart, doubled note lengths, and restart of intro on last chord of the song.