

Playing Tips (der Deutsche Text ist in einer separaten, Deutschen Version dieses Dokuments)



It's one of those songs, which didn't leave any special impression when I heard it for the first time. Of course, a nice little strum-strum song, but not more.

But since it was the first piece on the "Lilith Fair" DVD, I couldn't really ignore it completely.

I cannot say why, was it the fascinating charisma of Sarah McLachlan when she sings this song or her flirtatious glances (I'm always thinking, the "target person" of this song is somewhere on the stage) or the great voice itself? Why did this song start to fascinate me that strong?

Definitely this song became more and more a very impressive piece for me (if you want to comprehend what I mean, you can get a cut-out of the video of this song as MPEG, but the DVD is worth the money anyways....).

By and by I realized that this seemingly simple song hides much more behind its at first sight unspectacular and repetitive style, which might be responsible for the fascination of this song. But more about this at a later point.

So actually the fascination of this song is not a big surprise. But fact is, that "Building a Mystery" is suited to accompany a guitarist over a long period on his way of development. In the beginning it's very easy to play (and it sounds already then very good), later it might be a very welcome piece for experiments with open tunings and last but not least a object for studies of music theory which might be good for a deeper insight and some surprises.

HOW TO PLAY

I think this song is predestined also for Beginners (the Barrée chords can be simplified if needed), because on one hand the pattern is also for newbies a piece of cake: all you have to do is maintain a bouncy strum WITHOUT strumming up (downstrum with no upstrum) until you get to "B" before chorus(then you can strum normally).

In order that the pattern is not boring, the "sus4 chords" are used, as usual just hold the "normal" chords and get the "sus4 by bringing the pinkey finger down (example: to play Asus4 hold A but bring pinkey down on e-string on third fret. To play Esus4 hold B but bring pinkey down on E-string on the third fret).

As another little finesse (listen to the CD) the transition from Bm to G could be done with removing the pinkey of Bm (does work with the F#m version of the song as well).

Of course the singing forms the character of this song, especially since the guitar accompaniment isn't overbearing. I guess another point that makes this piece so attractive is that the singing isn't bound all the time exactly on the beats. I tried to reflect this with the positioning of the chords over the lyrics.

Also for this reason it is a good song to practice, I think this piece is ideal to get the looseness to play guitar and sing along, because it's easy to stay in the measures with the guitar. So you can concentrate on the singing and try to shift the singing a little bit over the measures and beats (if this might sound strange, play along the CD to understand what I mean).

THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS

Sarah plays this song with a capo in the 5th fret, but she tuned up the four deep strings two tones up so that sometimes it's played with a capo in the 7th fret (if the guitar is not tuned up).



In the original actually the tuning of the guitar is EADGAD, but this will be discussed later (see the second part of this document). At the moment you can play the song with the standard tuning.

Many times the chords can be played alternatively as open chords (the normal chords in the first fret), as Barrée or as power chords while changing between these possibilities might loosen the things always a bit. But it's up to your mood and taste where you want to play which chord in what way, although I personally prefer a mix with power chords and Barrées.

Now to the three different "Standard Version" where the verses begin with Bm, F#m and Em. I call these versions "Standard Version" because you don't have to retune the guitar nor use a capo. You just can start having fun.

The first one, the "Bm-Version" corresponds with the original version, it's amazing how accurate it sounds although it's not exactly the way, Sarah plays it (but more about this later).

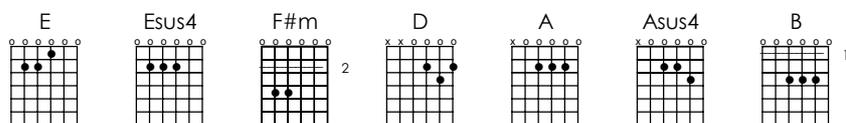
If you struggle to sing to this version (maybe it's too high for men's voices), you can choose between the two other standard versions.

Now let's go on with the two additional "Standard Version" on the next few pages (the F#m and the Em version) of the song.

After this we start with the alternate tuning for this song and at the end you'll find two articles with analyses of this piece.

Sarah McLachlan

Building a Mystery



- Standard Tuning
- F#m Version

Intro: Esus4-E-open F#m D A E-Esus4-E F#m D A-Asus4-A E-Esus4-E



Verse 1

F#m D A E-Esus4-E
(You) come out at night that's when the energy comes
F#m D A E-Esus4-E
And the dark sides light and the vampires ro_am
F#m D A E-Esus4-E
You strut your rasta wear and your suicide po_em
F#m D A E-Esus4-E B
And a cross from a faith that died before Jesus came
D E-Esus4-E F#m D A-Asus4-A E-Esus4-E
You're building a mystery_____



Verse 2

F#m D A E-Esus4-E
You live in a church where you sleep with voodoo dolls
F#m D A E-Esus4-E
And you won't give up the search for the ghost in the halls
F#m D A E-Esus4-E
(You) wear sandals in the snow (when a) smile won't wash away
F#m D A E-Esus4-E
Can you look out the window without your shadow getting in the way
B D
You're so beautiful with an edge and a charm, and
B D E-Esus4-E
So careful when - I'm - in your arms_____





Chorus

F#m D A-Asus4-A E-ESus4-E
Cause you're working building a mystery_hy

F#m D A-Asus4-A E-ESus4-E
Holding on, and holding it in_____

F#m D A-Asus4-A E-ESus4-E
OhYeah, you're working building a mystery_hy

F#m D A-Asus4-A E-ESus4-E
And choosing so___ carefully



Verse 3

F#m D A E-ESus4-E
You woke up screaming aloud a prayer from your secret god

F#m D A E-ESus4-E
You feed off our fears and hold back your tears, oh

F#m D A E-ESus4-E
You give us a tantrum and a know it all grin

F#m D A E-ESus4-E
Just when we need one when the evening's thin_____ah

B D
You're sooo beautiful a beautiful F-ked up man

B D E-ESus4-E
You're setting up your razor wire shrine

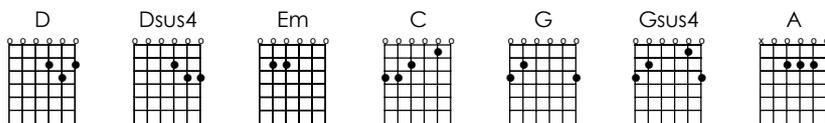


Chord B:
Either as "power chord" in the second fret or as
Barrée in the 7th fret

Chord D:
As a Barrée in 5th fret

Sarah McLachlan

Building a Mystery



- Standard Tuning
- Em Version

Intro: Dsus4-D Em C G D-Dsus4-D Em C G-Gsus4-G D-Dsus4-D



Verse 1

Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
(You) come out at night that's when the energy comes
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
And the dark sides light and the vampires ro_am
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You strut your rasta wear and your suicide po_em
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D* *A*
And a cross from a faith that died before Jesus came
C *D-Dsus4-D* *Em* *C* *G-Dsus4-G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You're building a mystery_____



Verse 2

Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You live in a church where you sleep with voodoo dolls
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
And you won't give up the search for the ghost in the halls
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
(You) wear sandals in the snow (when a) smile won't wash away
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
Can you look out the window without your shadow getting in the way
A *C*
You're so beautiful with an edge and a charm, and
A *C* *D-Dsus4-D*
So careful when - I'm - in your arms_____



Part Two - Advanced Technique

The Original (der Deutsche Text ist in einer separaten, Deutschen Version dieses Dokuments)

On the Lilith-Fair video you can see, that Sarah plays the song (the Bm version) with a capo in the 5th fret. For the outstanding sound of this song the special tuning of Sarah's guitar is responsible. With this the two high strings (the B and E string) are tuned two tones lower in relation to the other strings.

The result is an interesting mixture of the standard tuning EADGBE and the "famous" DADGAD tuning and is EADGAD.

This, played in the original pitch (the Bm version) with a capo, would be actually be named as BEADEA tuning - funny, isn't it?

To get this tuning, you can do it in two different ways. Either you *lower the two high strings two tones down* or you *tune the four deep strings two tones up*. For the original pitch you put the capo in the *first case in the 7th fret* and in the *second case in the 5th fret* (very lazy people don't tune anything, they just take - depending on the pitch - one or two "Bird of Paradise" capos as discussed in my transcription of the song "Polaroids").

In the Lilith Fair video Sarah does it the second way, but I've heard that she's been seen doing it the other way 'round to. Since it's easier and the base tuning of the guitar is then correctly called EADGAD, we talk from now on about the second way (but actually it really doesn't matter).

The chord progression (Bm, G, D, A etc.) remains also with this tuning the same. But since we use a capo now, to play the Bm you have to take the Em. That means, you *just use the chords of the Em version*.

After the following tablature you'll get the song in the definitely last version (now the original version). Based on what we've seen before, I noted the *chord shapes you have to use*, not the *correct chord names* for this pitch. But in the tablature below you see the correct chord names as well as the shape names (the ones you have to use) in brackets.

For me it's very comfortable, that with this version I can play this song in several other pitches (Sarah's pitch is for shure a bit to high for me *g*). For this I just put the capo somewhere else on the fretboard, the rest remains the same and the most important: the impressive tone of the chords can be obtained.

Now on the next page the tablature I was talking about, the Guitar Pro file is also included. Basically you just can play the pattern of the intro for the whole song.

I'm everytime amazed again, how much you can get out of this few simple chords only with this slightly different tuning and hope you enjoy it too - at least I could play this patterns for hours and hours.

A last remark to the tablature: because it's played with a plectrum, it's not the most important, that you really hit exactly the strings I noted. I just tried to write it in a way down, that it's really accurate. But take care that you don't hit all six strings at once, only two up to five of them, but you will feel with the time.

So, now it's really time for this pattern - it's a beautiful f*ked up thing (isn't it Sarah?)

Capo 7

1

D A G D A E

4 / 4

0 0 0 0 | 2 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 4 0 | 2 0 0 0 | 2 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 | 4 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 0 0 0 0

Bm (Em) G (C) D (G) A (D)

4

0 3 3 | 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 | 0 0 0

2 0 2 0 | 2 0 2 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 0

2 0 2 0 | 2 0 2 0 | 2 0 2 0 | 2 0 2 0

0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 | 4 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0

0 0 0 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0 | 5 0 5 0

Bm (Em) G (C) D (G) A (D)

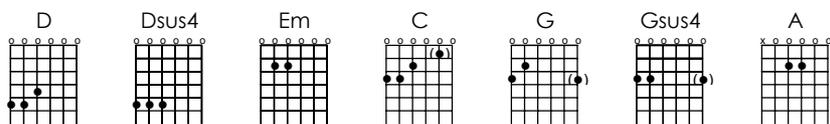
And because I assume you don't want to waste all the ink of your printer for the whole document, you get as promised this original version of the song on the next pages with the lyrics, the chords and the above pattern.

After this you'll get the two articles about the song - the first one is really a very interesting analysis of the song. Also included is another tab to which the article refers, but I placed it only into this document in order to have everything complete, the tab itself isn't 100% accurate (but it goes to the right direction - the tablature above).

Have fun - Wolfgang Dick (www.drachenstein.ch)

Sarah McLachlan

Building a Mystery



- Tuning EADGAD
- Original version with Capo 5th or 7th fret
- Chord names by shape of the chords

Intro: Dsus4-D-open Em-open C-open G D-Dsus4-D-open Em-open C G-Gsus4-G-open D



Verse 1

Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
(You) come out at night that's when the energy comes
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
And the dark sides light and the vampires ro_am
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You strut your rasta wear and your suicide po_em
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D* *A*
And a cross from a faith that died before Jesus came
C *D-Dsus4-D* *Em* *C* *G-Dsus4-G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You're building a mystery_____



Verse 2

Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
You live in a church where you sleep with voodoo dolls
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
And you won't give up the search for the ghost in the halls
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
(You) wear sandals in the snow (when a) smile won't wash away
Em *C* *G* *D-Dsus4-D*
Can you look out the window without your shadow getting in the way
A *C*
You're so beautiful with an edge and a charm, and
A *C* *D-Dsus4-D*
So careful when - I'm - in your arms_____





Chorus

<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G-Dsus4-G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
Cause you're working		building a mystery_hy	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G-Dsus4-G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
Holding on,		and holding it in_____	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G-Dsus4-G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
OhYeah, you're working		building a mystery_hy	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G-Dsus4-G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
And choosing		so___ carefully	

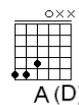
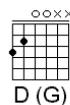
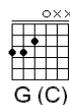
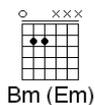


Verse 3

<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
You woke up screaming aloud		a prayer from your secret god	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
You feed off our fears		and hold back your tears, oh	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
You give us a tantrum		and a know it all grin	
<i>Em</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>
Just when we need one		when the evening's thin_____ ah	
<i>A</i>	<i>C</i>		
You're sooo beautiful		a beautiful F-ked up man	
<i>A</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D-Dsus4-D</i>	
You're setting up your		razor wire shrine	



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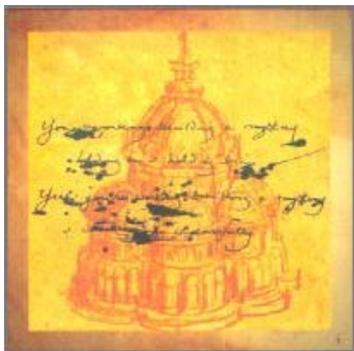


Pattern for intro and the song itself for the tuning EADGAD and a Capo in the 5th or 7th fret

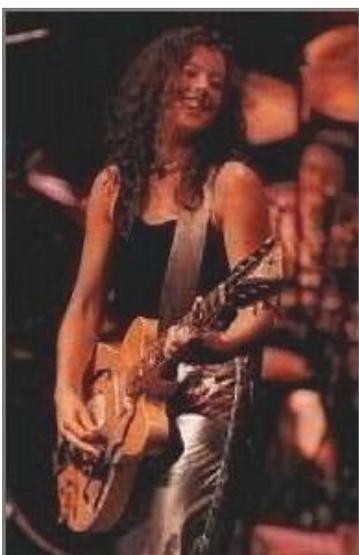
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HOW TO MAKE A SIMPLE PROGRESSION INTO A COMPLEX ROCK SONG

by Ger Tillekens (http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/VOLUME01/Building_a_Mystery.html)



Repetition, some musicologists tell us, lies at the heart of rock music. To prove this, they not only point at the rhythms, but also at the harmonic structures of rock music. Indeed, in many rock songs almost identical patterns of chord material recur over and over again. Sometimes even a whole song is built on the repeated sequence of just the same few chords. Sarah McLachlan's recent and beautiful song "Building A Mystery" offers a perfect example of precisely such a song. It is based on the chord progression: Bm -> G -> D -> A. Almost instantly the song opens with this sequence and then it keeps going on till the end. Still, as a whole the song doesn't sound monotonous or boring. Not without reason: a swift modulation or key shift keeps changing the semantic meaning of the chords. Here Ger Tillekens discusses the whereabouts and attraction of this specific progression and the intricate working of the key shift.



Surfacing. Sarah Ann McLachlan is a Canadian folk-rock singer. She was born in 1968 in Halifax (Nova Scotia). Still at school, she set her first steps in the world of rock music in the new wave movement of the mid eighties. Not yet twenty she had her first album *Touch* (1988). It was followed by *Solace* (1991) and *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* (1993). Her third album brought McLachlan some fame in the United States. Some years later she released a multimedia EP *The Freedom Sessions* (1995) and a B-side album *Rarities, B-sides And Other Stuff* (1996). She became known worldwide with her fourth album *Surfacing* (Arista), which hit the charts in 1997. The album breathes a gloomy, dark and introspective atmosphere. As she says herself: "*Surfacing* is about me finally growing up and facing ugly things about myself. We all have a dark side; it's bullshit to say that we don't. At some point we're going to have to face that." The lyrics are poetically balanced. Musically the album has no flaws. Each song is as impressive as the other ones. The band plays at its top and Sarah's voice tumbles effortlessly in every direction where the lyrics take her emotions.

Building a hit record. A good record still can sell itself. *Surfacing* entered the charts at number two in the United States. In her homeland of Canada the album even reached a number one position, selling only about 7,000 records less than the soundtrack of the then popular movie *Men in Black*. The album not only did sell very well. It was also received with praise in the papers and in the music press commentaries. The same goes for *Surfacing's* first single *Building A Mystery*, written by Sarah and her producer and engineer Pierre Marchand. The single almost instantly became a hit in Canada and the United States. It took some time, but somewhere in the middle of 1998 the clip reached MTV Europe to attract some following under attentive listeners on the old continent.

Song structure. Now listen for a moment to the start of the song. It will take just about thirty seconds, but you'll get the picture. The track on the CD itself takes a full four minutes and seven seconds. That makes "Building A Mystery" rather long for a rock song. The structure of the song shows why.

There is a lot going on within the confined space of this song. The song starts with a short intro, followed by a first Verse and next a short bridge and a break. Then we hear the second Verse coupled to a long bridge, followed by the refrain. Next there's a third Verse, again coupled to a long bridge and the refrain. A guitar solo, twice the refrain and an outro finish the track. The Verses, the break and the refrains are all built upon an identical harmonic structure. So the main pattern of the song is repeated at least seven times. Now, let's take a look at the lyrics of the first Verse along with the tablature or guitar tabs as transcribed by one of Sarah's ardent fans, Derek Phoungphol (see the beginning of the document, the so called "Bm-Verseion" of the song).

Verse:

Bm	G	
You come out at night,		
D	A-Asus4-A	
that's when the	energy comes,	
Bm	G	
And the dark sides	light,	
D	A-Asus4-A	
and the vampires	roam.	
Bm	G	
You strut your	rasta wear,	
D	A-Asus4-A	
and your suicide	poem,	
Bm	G	
And a cross from a	faith that died	
D	A-Asus4-A	
before	Jesus	came :

Lyrics. In the lyrics a woman voices her complaints about her lover. The text not only expresses a complaint, however. At the same time it is an analysis of the reason why she finds herself attracted to him. She describes him as a man who is hiding his inner self behind a careful constructed image, letting nobody look at his emotions deep down inside. The poetic lyrics of the first Verse seem a direct inVerseion of the ironic "Suzanne" of the old master of Canadian folk-rock, Leonard Cohen (the first track of his 1968 album *The Songs of Leonard Cohen*). Instead of the rags and feathers of Cohen's Jesus hippy Suzanne, Sarah's nameless character is dressed in Rasta wear. The Christian cross of Suzanne is replaced by a Celtic one. Cohen's sun, which "shines like honey on our lady of the harbor", has gone down under the horizon; in McLachlan's song the only light comes from the street lamps of a city at night, where "the vampires roam". A short bridge directly follows upon this description:

Short bridge:

E	G	A-Asus4-A	
came:	you're building a	mystery.	

A conclusion. The short bridge is formulated as some sort of conclusion following upon the description. All this man is doing, is aimed at one and the same thing: building a mystery. The way it is sung, makes it sound like a conclusion too. And again the person that McLachlan addresses, is the opposite of Cohen's Suzanne. Where Cohen pictures his Suzanne as acting really authentic, McLachlan's lover is constructing his identity to give an impression of mysteriousness to the outside world. This line is followed by a break, which takes us back to the now familiar chord pattern. A definite conclusion is not voiced, but keeps hanging in the air:

Break:

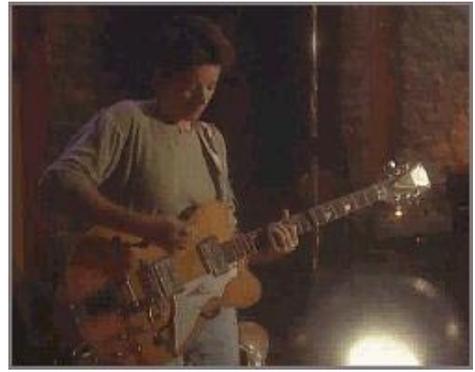
Bm	G	D-Dsus4-D	A-Asus4-A	
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Chord material. The CD on which the song is released, is really up to date. It has a separate multimedia partition, which you can play on your computer. There is much to see and to hear; even a clip where Sarah plays a live Verseion of the song. On this movie you can see that she has put a capo at the seventh fret¹ (see the picture at the right). Phoungphol's transcription however skips the capo and as he rightly says, that way it sounds as good. His chords for the recurrent progression are, as we have seen: Bm -> G -> D -> A. The last chord is slightly accentuated by a change in one of the constituent tones, which transforms the A chord into a suspended chord, the Asus4.



¹ Comment from Drachenstein: on the "Lilith Fair" DVD it can be seen clearly, that the capo is on the fifth (not on the seventh) fret. The confusion is, that Sarah tunes there her guitar two tones higher (for the EADGAD tuning of course only the four deep strings). If you don't retune the guitar (or if you prefer to do it vice versa and lower the BE strings instead of having the EADG strings higher) and want to play along the CD, you have to have the capo in the seventh fret.

Suspended chords. Like all ordinary major and minor chords the A chord is built out of three tones; in this case: A - C# - E. In Asus4 the place of the major third C# has been taken by the fourth D. That's half a tone up. It is rather easy to play on the guitar. As Phoungphol writes, most of the time you just play the 'sus4'-notes by bringing one extra finger -- the little finger -- into play on the neck of the guitar. Changing the A chord into Asus4 steers it toward the D chord and this little trick imparts a dreamy touch to the interpretation of the lyrics. It goes as easily with other chords, especially the E and D. The subtle effect of changing a chord into a 'sus4' chord within the span of one measure is very popular in folk-rock. It is for instance a favorite of Leonard Cohen (again listen to his "Suzanne"). In McLachlan's song the change in the tone material of the chord also has some interesting musical implications. We'll come to that later. For the time being we will treat the progression just as plain Bm -> G -> D -> A. For now that's already complicated enough. Depending on the key we choose, it can be interpreted by the singer -- and analyzed by us -- in two ways. For key A the progression can be formulated as: ii -> flat-VII -> IV -> I; and for key D as: vi -> IV -> I -> V. We'll start here with the last one.



Cadences. In music, classic and popular alike, there are many harmonic progressions or so-called cadences. Most known, of course, is the old standard: C -> F -> G -> C or I -> IV -> V -> I. It consists of the three basic chords, the tonic I, the subdominant IV and the dominant V. Taken together these three chords follow a semantic logic. In relation to each other, they all add some kind of meaning to the lyrics. The tonic symbolizes the place, where the singer stands voicing the dialogues or monologues of the song. With the subdominant the song takes a step back as if the singer retreats in an inner world to think something over. The dominant on the other hand can be interpreted as a step forward. Combined with this chord we often find lyrics in which the singer addresses someone else explicitly.

Around and around. Some progressions can easily be repeated over and over again. Often they start with the tonic and end at the dominant, which then leads back to the tonic again. A well-known progression is the turn-around, which consists of four chords: I -> vi -> IV -> V. As you see, it ends at the dominant. This dominant 'leads' to the tonic. Ending a sequence on the dominant, will raise the listeners expectation that the tonic -- and with it the whole previous chord sequence -- will return again. A good example of the workings of the turn-around is the well-known song "Please Mr. Postman" of Brian Holland, Robert Bateman and Berry Gordy. It was originally performed by The Marvelettes in 1961 for the Motown label and some years later the song was successfully covered by the Beatles in 1963 on their album *With The Beatles*. When you listen to this song, you can hear how the dominant V at the end of the chord progression keeps asking for a return of the progression itself. The same goes for Sarah's progression vi -> IV -> I -> V. Though the other chords are shuffled and the tonic at the start is replaced by the submediant vi, the dominant V at the end still asks for a return of the progression. The combination of dominant and submediant here is the musicological mechanism that drives the progression forth in its circular repetition.

Relative minors. The song "Please Mr. Postman" shows still another aspect of the turn-around, which is the working of the submediant, the minor chord vi. This chord is called the relative minor of the tonic, because both chords share important tones. The D chord for instance consists of the tones: D - F# - A; whereas its relative minor Bm is built out of: B - D - F#. In folk music and rock music major chords and their relative minors are closely connected. The combination of the tonic I and its relative minor vi serves as a double tonic. This kind of music is called modal music and the history of this kind of progressions goes as far back as the *passamezzo antico* dance music of the Italian Renaissance. The subdominant and dominant have their own relative minors. Coupled to the subdominant IV is the supertonic, the relative minor ii. And the dominant's relative minor is the mediant iii. In the semantic logic of the chords these relative minors add their own meaning to a song. A switch to these relative

minor chords lends a personal touch to the lyrics. It sounds as if the singer addresses someone familiar in a confidential, private way. In the lyrics these chords often accompany personal pronouns used in friendly conversation like "you", or "I", as you can see in the refrain:

Refrain:

Bm	G	D-Dsus4-D	A-Asus4-A	
Yeah, you're	working,	building a	mystery,	
Bm	G	D-Dsus4-D	A-Asus4-A	
Holding	on,	holding	it in,	
Bm	G	D-Dsus4-D	A-Asus4-A	
Yeah, you're	working,	building a	mystery,	
Bm	G	D-Dsus4-D	A-Asus4-A	
And choo-	sing so	care-ful-	ly:	

Chain of fourths. The progression of "Building A Mystery" can be interpreted as a clever and beautiful reorganization of the common turn-around. There are two cumulative fixes. First there is a switch of the first two chords (vi -> I instead of I -> vi) and then there is a consecutive switch of the second pair (IV -> I instead of I -> IV). The combined result is that the progression starts with the relative minor and therefore in a confidential, personal way, followed by a stepwise series: G -> D -> A. This last series also has some special characteristics. It is an upward going chain of fifths: G -> D -> A, which strictly speaking, of course, is a chain of fourths. In the semantic logic of the basic chords this means two successive steps forward. That's also the way it is used in the song. It sounds especially good in the refrains. Here this sequence accompanies the phrase "Holding on, holding it in". Here the singer concludes her description of her lover keeping up appearances, endlessly holding on to his self-build image and at the next step holding his own emotional self in. The monotonous repetition of stepping up the chain of fourths strengthens the impression of his never-ending involvement with his self image. It gives the song the character of a traditional work song or chain song. The chain of fourths makes it sound like he is walking a treadmill.

The closing of the song. Now we have seen how the progression adds some meaning to the lyrics. But there is more to the song. The song closes with a last refrain, directly followed by a concluding outro. As the song nears its apotheosis there is a decisive end in last line of the lyrics: "You're building a mystery". This time the progression leads toward the A chord without any added or changed tones. It sounds like ending with an exclamation mark! The last chord is an A chord, which seems to make the concluding end into a direct confrontation of the singer with her lover. The mystery has become a double mystery: the mystery he is building and the mystery why she loves him. The song seems to end on the dominant. But is it really the dominant? The answer to this question depends on the key the song is in. Is it key D, then the song surprisingly ends at the dominant. Is it key A, then the progression must be interpreted as: ii -> flat-VII -> IV -> I instead of: vi -> IV -> I -> V.

Outro:

Bm	G	D	A	
You're buil-	ding a	mystery.		

In the key of ... The answer to the question of how we have to interpret the progression depends on the answer to the question which key the song is in. It is clear that the song ends on an A chord. In music theory this is an important clue for the tone center of a song. Moreover, in Phoungphol's interpretation, it also starts with this chord. Taken together this means, the song is unmistakably in key A. Thus, so it seems, up until now we have been on the wrong track and the progression must be analyzed as: ii -> flat-VII -> IV -> I. There is, however, a way to escape from this solution. If we assume, that there is some kind of a key shift or modulation in the song, we can still cling to our interpretation of the progression as: vi -> IV -> I -> V.



Intro:

A:	Asus4 - A - open (Em)	Bm	G	D	Asus4 - A
	I - I - v	ii	flat-VII	IV	I
			(pivot)		
	D:	ii	vi	IV	I
					V

Pivot chords. For the intro it is not so difficult to show that there is a modulation going on from the key of A to the key of D. In general at the start of a song, when only just one chord has sounded, a listener does not yet know which chord will be the tonic. Most of the times the first chord will function as a starting point and one will take it as a first guess. But, to get some feeling for a song, the listener first has to identify the tonic more clearly. The only way to do this is to place the tonic by ear in its relationship to other chords, like the subdominant and the dominant. In this case, after the first five measures, the listener still is not sure. In the transcription above we can see, that most chords can be interpreted as rather common chords in both keys. Between the first and second measure the song for a moment even seems to shift to the key of E Minor. Only in the sixth measure, when the lyrics start on the Bm chord, the tonic can be placed as a double tonic on Bm and D. Then the listener knows, that somewhere in the first five measures there has been a modulation from the start on A -- a fifth backward -- to D. Unconsciously, orienting himself, the listener will try to find the turning point in the harmony. In music theory these points are called 'pivot' chords. Here, the rather unusual flat-VII, the subtonic, in the second measure is a good candidate for such a pivot chord.

A new point of view. The key shift or modulation here goes a fifth downward. From the original tonic A we arrive at its subdominant, which then becomes the new tonic. In the semantic logic of the basic chords, this means a retreat into the private world of inner thoughts. In this way the key shift underlines harmonically that the singer is voicing her ideas for herself. At the end the modulation again brings the singer a step forward. She has thought it all over and is now ready to progress to a new position, a new point of view. She has come to a conclusion that she can formulate and tell in public. In this way the key shift adds some crucial feeling to the song. The same mechanism is at work in the bridges. Where the refrains sound rather complaining, the long bridges turn these complaints into an open declaration of love. Here again the key shift is doing its job.

Long bridge:

D:	E		
	II	II	
		(pivot)	
A:		V	
	You're so beautiful,		

D:	G		
A:	flat-VII		
	With an edge and a charm, and,		

D:	E	G	A-Asus4-A
			V
			(pivot)
A:	V	flat-VII	I
	So careful,	when I'm	in your arms

Changing chords. In the short bridge, which we saw earlier on, the modulation is called forth by the introduction of the E chord, the dominant V of A. The long bridges follow the same pattern, but this time it goes on for a longer period. With the forward modulation the singer, taking one step forward, addresses her lover in a direct way, remembering their embraces. At the end of the long bridge the Asus4 -- with its tone D instead of C# -- introduces the modulation backward to the key of D. Notice how the semantic meaning of the chords follows the interpretation of the lyrics. In the bridge the G chord turns into a typical blues-chord (flat-VII) with its own semantic ring of desire. Compared with the G in the key of D it really is a different chord with slightly different tones. In the key of D it is the fourth of D, whereas in the key of A it is the minor third of E. When sung the right way -- as McLachlan expertly does -- the tones of both chords do sound slightly different. Notice also how the modulation gives the word 'careful' a more positive meaning. The E chord in the fifth measure of the long bridge underlines the phrase where the singer says that the carefulness with which our night bird constructs

his identity is paralleled by his carefulness as a lover. Here the E chord is the fifth of A, whereas in the first measure it is the supertonic II of D and again a chord with slightly different tone material. So both the G and E chord change the sound and the meaning of the lyrics. This change of chord material, caused by the modulation, is an integral part of the attraction of the sequence.

So, what can we learn from this song? Not only in the bridges, but also in the remainder of the song there is some indeterminacy about the key. In the Versees and refrains sometimes Sarah's voice seem to lean slightly to the key of A, thereby changing the semantic meaning of the chords to her interpretation of the lyrics. It is this ambiguity which keeps the song from becoming boring and predictable. There are some lessons to be learned from this song. The first one is, that some Canadian songwriters do write good rock songs. This seems especially important for Europeans, who tend to neglect Canada's rock musicians unless they first have become popular in the United States, like Leonard Cohen or Joni Mitchell. The second point affects music theory. We have learned something about cadences, relative minors, suspended chords, the chain of fourths and about key shifts and their impact on the interpretation of chords. And, as we have seen, all this musicological stuff abounds in this seemingly simple song, that therefore is not so simple at all. Maybe that is the third and most important lesson to be learned: simple songs and cadences are often not so simple as they may seem at first sight. Most of the time in rock songs there are some complex musicological mechanisms at work behind the facade of simple repetition.



Sarah's progression. Female rock singers made a deep impact as they definitively entered the rock scene in the nineties as autonomous singer-songwriters. Many of their songs are built around repetitive cadences like this one. At first glance these songs seem rather simple and repetitive. Of course repetition is an important element of rock music. It cannot be denied that repetition gives rock songs much of their compelling character. However, as we have seen, a lot of variation can be made with the help of just a few chords. Being not so repetitive after all, "Building A Mystery" offers good prove of that. Here Sarah McLachlan turns a simple progression into a complex rock song. Unless someone somewhere used it earlier on in a song, *Sarah's Progression* seems an appropriate name for this rock cadence.

Notes

A musicologist who stresses repetition as the central characteristic of rock music is for instance Richard Middleton; see his book *Studying Popular Music*. Buckingham: Open UniVerseity Press, 1990.



The tablature which can be found on the next side made by [Mark Ferris](#) (November 2d, 1997), is based on this live Verseion. Here a capo is set at the seventh fret. Therefore, other finger settings can be used for the progression. We would expect the series: Em -> C -> G -> D. Ferris, however, presents us with the progression: Em -> Cmaj7 -> Gmaj6 -> Em9. This may seem slightly different, but the outcome is almost the same. Not to correct or even better Ferris, but just to explain some of the discrepancies, let's take a short walk along the chords.

The Cmaj7 can, without any damage to the song and even better, be played as C: x32010. The Gmaj6 got -- if we take a good look at the finger settings (see the picture above) -- the wrong name. In fact it is just an ordinary G. The same goes for the Em9, which comes out as a Bm9. This last chord can also better be played as 35400x and then it becomes a Dmaj7. The Emaj7 and Emaj6, that in Ferris' transcription take the role of the Asus4, both result in plain D chords when we play them as 35500x and 35000x. The sequence then becomes recognizable again: Em -> C -> G -> D. In fact only the variation A -> Asus4 -> A of Phoungphol differs significantly from Ferris' Dmaj7 -> D -> Dmaj7 -> D. By the way: the tone C# that's found in Dmaj7. can be used to accentuate a coming modulation or shift to

the key of G. In this respect the workings of Ferris' Dmaj7 can be compared with Phoungphol's Asus4.



Sarah McLachlan: Building A Mystery
The chords of the song according to Mark Ferris

-----PLEASE NOTE-----

This file is the authors' own work and represents their interpretation of the song. You may only use this file for private study, scholarship, or research.

Song: Building A Mystery
Written by: Sarah McLachlan and Pierre Marchand
Band: Sarah McLachlan
Album: Surfacing (Live Launch CD-Rom Acoustic Performance)
Transcribed by: Mark Ferris (mtferris@juno.com)
Date: Sun, 02 Nov 1997 09:51:57 -0800

=====
Sarah plays this song tuned: 6th 5th 4th 3rd 2nd 1st
(With a capo on the fifth fret). F# B E A C# F#
=====

INTRO:

EM7 - EM9 - EM6

EM - CM7 - GM6 - EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6

EM - CM7 - GM6 - EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6

Em CM7
You come out at night
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
That's when the energy comes
Em CM7
And the dark sides light
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And the vampires roam
Em CM7
You strut your rasta wear
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And your suicide poem
Em CM7 GM6
And a cross from a faith that died
GM6 CM7 Esus Esus
Before Jesus came
CM7 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
You're building a mystery

EM - CM7 - GM6 - EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6

Em CM7
You live in a church
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
Where you sleep with voodoo dolls
Em CM7
And you won't give up the search
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
For the ghost in the halls
Em CM7
You wear sandals in the snow
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
When a smile won't wash away
Em CM7
And can you look out the window
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
Without your shadow getting in the way

Esus
You're so beautiful
CM7

With an edge and a charm, but
Esus CM7 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
So careful when I'm in your arms

Em CM7
Cause you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Holding on, holding it in
Em CM7
Yeah, you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And choosing so carefully

Em CM7
You woke up screaming aloud
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
A prayer from your secret god
Em CM7
You feed off our fears
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And hold back your tears, oh
Em CM7
You give us a tantrum
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And a know it all grin
Em CM7
Just when we need one
GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
When the evening's thin

Esus
You're a beautiful
CM7
A beautiful fucked-up man
Esus
You're setting up your
CM7 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
razor, wire shrine

Em CM7
Cause you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Holding on, holding it in
Em CM7
Yeah, you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9 -
And choosing so carefully

(Lead).

CM7 - EM9/EM7/EM9 - GM6 - GM7 - Esus - Esus4
CM7 - EM9/EM7/EM9 - CM7 - EM9/EM7/EM9 -
CM7 - EM9/EM7/EM9

Esus
Ouh, you're working
CM7 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery.....
Em CM7 GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
..... Holding it in
Em CM7
Yeah, you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
And choosing so carefully

Em CM7
Oh yeah, you're working
GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
Building a mystery
Em CM7 GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
Holding on, holding it in

Em CM7
 Yeah, you're working
 GM6 EM9 -EM9/G -EM9/F# -EM9
 Building a mystery
 Em CM7 GM6 EM9/EM7/EM9/EM6
 And choosing so carefully
 GM6 CM CM6
 You're building a mystery.

=====

Sarah plays this song with a capo on the fifth fret.
 The basic chords: finger pick and strum action.

EM7 - 055000
 EM9 - 054000
 EM6 - 050000

EM	-	022000		EM	-	022000
CM7	-	X32000		CM7	-	X32000
GM6	-	3200XX		GM6	-	3200XX
EM9	-	054000	OR	EM9	-	054000
EM7	-	055000		EM9/G	-	054003
EM9	-	054000		EM9/F#	-	054002
EM6	-	050000		EM9	-	054000

Esus	-	X02200		CM	-	030000
CM7	-	X32000		CM6	-	030200
Esus	-	X02200				
CM7	-	X32000				
EM	-	022000				
CM7	-	X32000				
GM6	-	3200XX				
EM9	-	054000				
EM9/G	-	054003				
EM9/F#	-	054002				
EM9	-	054000				

=====

AND ANOTHER ARTICLE ABOUT "BUILDING A MYSTERY"

by Unknown found on (<http://antiessays.bigwonk.com/show.php?cat=arts&eid=25>)

It is apparent that female music in Canada is a growing industry, and plays a very controVerseial role in Canadian society. Canada is a land of many ethnic backgrounds and an extremely diVerse culture, one of the best ways to express culture is through music. Sarah McLachlan has enjoyed worldwide success with the album *Surfacing*, and more recently *Mirrorball*. The album titled *Surfacing* was released in 1997 and features a song called *Building a Mystery*. *Building a Mystery* clearly exemplifies the incorporation of many important musical elements to create a widely accepted song. In the application of a few distinct components, the listener can gain a broader understanding of *Building a Mystery*. The following essay will explore the use of structure, lyrics, instrumentation and the vocal quality of Sara McLachlan's *Building a Mystery*.

Female rock singers made a deep impact as they definitively entered the rock scene in the nineties and into the millenium as independent singer-songwriters. Many of their songs are built around repetitive cadences like this one. At first glance these songs seem rather simple and repetitive. Of course repetition is an important element of rock music. It cannot be denied that repetition gives rock songs much of their compelling character. However, as we have discussed in lecture, a lot of variation can be made with the help of just a few chords. Being not so repetitive after all, *Building a Mystery* gives good proof of that. There is a lot going on within the confined space of this song. The song starts with a short intro, followed by a first Verse and next a short bridge and a break. Then we hear the second Verse coupled to a long bridge, followed by the refrain. Next there's a third Verse, again coupled to a long bridge and the refrain. A guitar solo, twice the refrain and an out to finish the track. The Verses, the break and the refrains are all built upon an identical harmonic structure. So the main pattern of the song is repeated at least seven times. The lyrics in *Building a Mystery* are very controVerseial by nature and lead into deep insight through the use of metaphors. The song features three Verses and a chorus, which is repeated many times throughout. McLachlan seems to use short insightful phrases to allow the listener to come to their own conclusions as to what she is illustrating. In the lyrics a woman voices her complaints about her lover. The text not only expresses a complaint. However, at the same time it is an analysis of the reason why she finds herself attracted to him. She describes him as a man who is hiding his inner self behind a careful constructed image, letting nobody look at his emotions deep down inside. The short bridge is formulated as some sort of conclusion following upon the description. All this man is doing, is aimed at the same thing: *Building a Mystery*. The way it is sung, makes it sound like a conclusion too. McLachlan's lover is constructing his identity to give an impression of mysteriousness to the outside world. This line is followed by a break, which takes us back to the now familiar chord pattern. A definite conclusion is not voiced, but keeps hanging in the air.

For obvious reasons, the instrumentation within a musical work is very important. This composition includes a wide variety of musical instruments however, the emphasis is placed on McLachlan's voice. The bass, drums, background vocals, electric and acoustic guitars all work towards providing outstanding support for McLachlan's voice. The use of the backups and the arrangement of the supporting instruments plays an integral role in the interpretation of this piece. The instrumental section prior to the entrance of McLachlan's voice allows the listener to gain a strong sense of rhythm and melody. The constant theme involving the acoustic and electric guitars maintains the melody and continues through the extent of the piece. The primary guitar does this by playing one rhythm meanwhile the secondary guitar enters and displays the second element of the melody. Following this, the bass is established to give a beat that also is maintained throughout the song. Although the supporting instrumentation in this piece is not overwhelming, it creates a steady flow and allows McLachlan to tell her story without being interrupted.

An important element in the transmission of any song is vocal quality. This component focuses of what the vocalist does in order to get their message across and to correctly transmit their lyrics. Vocal Quality considers the tone of voice used and any ornamentation that could be used to separate the songs identity. *Building a Mystery* makes use of a very typical vocal quality that is commonly seen in popular music. Within this song there is evidence of backup vocals that compliment McLachlan's heavenly voice. The quality of her voice changes throughout the piece, seemingly gaining aggression and frustration. At the beginning of the song, McLachlan appears to be very calm and content and as the piece carries on she gradually conveys a more disrupted individual through the use of a more dissonant tone. The quality of her voice throughout is very clear and emotionally attached. McLachlan uses word painting to vividly depict her feelings and to bring reality to her text. As well, her pronunciation of the lyrics are extremely clear allowing the listener to identify with exactly what she is trying to say. This vocal characteristic is a theme throughout the entire *Surfacing* album, where *Building a Mystery* is found. After listening to many of McLachlan's songs, it is safe to say that she tends to sing very clearly in all of her music.

The Piece Building a Mystery combines complexity and its controVerseial nature to add to its potential of multiple interpretations. Many listeners could interpret this song differently however, after listening to the entire album that many characteristics conveyed in the song mentioned are very similar to other McLachlan compilations. Building a Mystery raises a number of questions and issues as it forces the listener to create questions prior to finding answers. This musical selection promotes great deal of thought and also avails itself to a number of solutions surrounding its meaning. Through the completion of this exercise I have been able to develop a greater understanding and appreciation for musical analysis and song interpretation.

Visitor Comments:

there is a comment for this papers. 25!

Comment: I find it humorous all the comparisons of this song to other popular "girl" songs from singers like Meridith Brooks and Alanis Morriset. I don't know who wrote this song...perhaps she did. Some reviews mention the "goth-lite themes of Anne Rice". To me, it's much stranger than this. To me, this is a song about a person who is deeply involved in some Mystery religion (aka initiatory-style system). There are several lines that lead me to believe this. The first would be about the "suicide poem". This could be a reference to initiatory pledges in various Mystery cults (they are considered cults because they are usually esoteric branches off a main religion). The mentioning of a "cross from a faith that died before Jesus came" might refer to something like an ankh. Of course, there is the often states "your building a mystery". Voodoo dolls are common to Western Magick as well, being used in many traditions for "transference" purposes. They are commonly referred to as sachets. Wearing sandals is a common item for many initiations, including groups like the Golden Dawn. In the snow would probably indicate something being done outside where he had to wear sandals. Living in a church would probably be from the fact his is a priest in some type of group and lives on the grounds. Searching for ghosts could mean many things, from practicing necromancy or divination to just trying to excise the church. I feel the holding on and holding it in refers to the fact that it is indeed a Mystery cult, and can only be given to properly indoctrinated initiates. This also goes with the line "choosing so carefully". Having a "secret god" also indicates he is privy to an unknown God (or side of God). It obviously isn't always pleasant either, seeing as he to "hold back your tears". Perhaps some painful initiation, or painful rituals. I think the tantrum may refer to a ritualistic dance, "passion play" or something of the type. The final Verse talks about him being beautiful, which is a requirement for Mystery cults of such gods as Adonis. I'm not sure about the "razor wire shrine". Is it a shrine to razor wire? Is the shrine surrounded by razor wire? Or is it metaphorical? I go with the last...voting with it is metaphorical so no one can enter it. There is a Talmudic saying about how the Talmud puts a fence around the Torah, defining the generalized laws into exact interpretations. Perhaps he puts up some type of defence against the uninitiated. Of course, she could mean none of this at all. She might be singing about some love story, not realizing how an occult student would interpret her song. I suppose I could look into her other songs and see if there is anything there like this in them. A final thought is that whoever wrote it might be under some type of semi-divine guidance and not realize what they are writing...akin to the Bible Code (but nothing nearly as elaborate or earth-moving).