

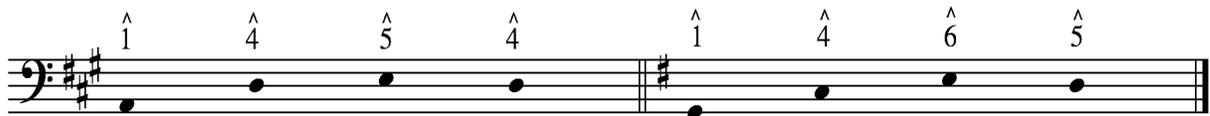
Kingsmen, whose version—recorded for \$50 on a single microphone that buried singer Jack Ely’s vocals in the mix and rendered the lyrics unintelligible—became a nationwide hit and eventually triggered an FBI investigation into the song’s allegedly “obscene” lyrics.

Some twenty-five years later, rock musician Frank Zappa referred to “Louie Louie” as an “archetypal American icon,” one of the “stock modules” he used in his own musical arrangements. Another “archetypal American icon,” though not evidently part of Zappa’s compositional toolbox, is Clyde Stubblefield’s drum “break” (solo drum groove) from James Brown’s “Funky Drummer,” originally released in 1970:

This drum break, which can be heard at [5:34–5:54] in the original recording, was sampled and looped by many recording artists (from Public Enemy to Sinéad O’Connor), ultimately leading to “Funky Drummer” becoming one of the most sampled recordings in popular music history. By the 1990s, the music industry had caught up with unauthorized sampling; a “clearance” license for a sample could be prohibitively expensive, especially when dozens of samples are used on a single song (as was often the case on early hip-hop albums such as the Beastie Boys’ *Paul’s Boutique* and Public Enemy’s *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*). Nevertheless, the “Funky Drummer” rhythm had by this time become enough of a “stock module” that its distinctive patterns were replicated by live performers, thus eliminating the need for a sample clearance. In this way the “Funky Drummer” break crossed over into rock; in a classic example of “the way riffs wander,” Nirvana’s 1991 alternative anthem “Smells Like Teen Spirit” became the song where “Louie Louie” met the “Funky Drummer.” Let’s examine how this happened, beginning first with the “Louie Louie” riff.

Marsh’s book on “Louie Louie” devotes an entire chapter to how the song’s iconic riff crisscrossed back and forth across the Atlantic in the 1960s, not only in covers of “Louie Louie” (by artists as diverse as the Kinks, Ike and Tina Turner, country pianist Floyd Cramer, and jazz clarinetist Pete Fountain) but also in songs derived from its

famous riff (such as the Who’s “I Can’t Explain” and the Troggs’s “Wild Thing,” later memorably covered by Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967). One notably clear example of the transformation of the “Louie” riff into something new is found in Boston’s song “More Than a Feeling”; the rhythm of the chorus’s power-chord riff is virtually identical, and although the last two chords have been raised a step (resulting in the progression I – IV – vi – V) the overall arc-like contour remains the same (Web Example 31.1).



Web Example 31.1. “Louie Louie” (left) and “More Than a Feeling” (right) riff contours compared.

“More Than a Feeling” was reportedly one of Nirvana guitarist/songwriter Kurt Cobain’s models for writing “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” a cynical exercise at “hit” songwriting that ironically succeeded massively. In fact, its success propelled Nirvana from regional indie-band obscurity to worldwide alternative-rock superstardom, a transformation for which, Cobain, in particular, was wholly unprepared. When Cobain committed suicide in 1994, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” came to be seen by some, in retrospect, as the song that killed him.

Web Example 31.2 shows how the “Smells Like Teen Spirit” riff is derived by taking the first two chord roots of the “More Than a Feeling” progression (the same two scale degrees as the first two notes of “Louie Louie”) and sequencing them up a minor third, resulting in the minor-key progression i – iv – III – VI. This riff dominates the song, departing only for the “post-chorus” cadence (e.g., at [1:30–1:39]), which is incidentally the only part of the song to depart from Aeolian mode (the prominent flatted second scale degree and answering flatted fifth scale degree briefly introduce a Locrian-mode inflection into the song).

The image shows a musical staff in bass clef with two measures. The first measure is labeled "More than a Feeling" and contains four quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, and C3. The second measure is labeled "Smells Like Teen Spirit" (transposed to G tonic) and contains four quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, and C3. A dashed line connects the first measure to the second. A bracket under the first measure is connected to a bracket under the second measure. A curved arrow labeled "(↑m3)" points from the first measure to the second, indicating a tritone shift.

Web Example 31.2. Transformation of “More than a Feeling” riff contour into “Smells Like Teen Spirit” riff contour.

The formal sections in “Smells Like Teen Spirit” are clearly indicated by the contrast between soft and loud dynamics, “clean” and “grungy” or distorted timbres, and between low and high registers in Cobain’s vocals; another interesting feature, however, is in the drumming style of Dave Grohl and how it changes throughout the song. The verses and pre-choruses (e.g., [0:33–1:05]) feature a drum pattern in even eighth notes, with no syncopation. The choruses, however (e.g., [1:05–1:30]) erupt into a flourish of “Funky Drummer” syncopations, albeit with a good deal more force than Stubblefield’s almost delicate snare work.

There is virtually a one-to-one mapping of Grohl’s “even-eighths” drumming patterns with “clean” guitar timbre and low-register vocals in the verses and pre-choruses and the “Funky Drummer” beat with the “grungy” guitar timbre and high-register vocals in the choruses. One significant point of rapprochement between these two styles occurs in the guitar solo at [2:52–3:25], an instrumental version of the verse melody set to the syncopated and distorted style of the choruses; another comes at the end, an extension of the chorus during which the even-eighths drumming pattern returns to drive home the beat and seemingly signal a reconciliation of the two styles (at [4:29–4:46]). These and other textural details are summarized in Web Table 31.1.

Web Table 31.1 **Formal chart of Nirvana, “Smells Like Teen Spirit”**

Time	Mapping
[0:00–0:09]	Introduction: “clean” guitar (drums enter loudly at 0:06)
[0:09–0:25]	Continuation of intro with full band: “grungy” distorted guitar, “Funky Drummer” drum beats
[0:25–0:33]	Verse vamp: two-note guitar motive, drum beat in even eighths
[0:33–0:50]	Verse 1
[0:50–1:05]	Pre-chorus: two-note guitar motive becomes more continuous to fill in texture; steady build-up of dynamics
[1:05–1:30]	Chorus: high register vocal, distorted guitar, “Funky Drummer” drum beat
[1:30–1:39]	Locrian-inflected instrumental post-chorus: emphasizes $\flat 2$ and $\flat 5$ (first chromatic departures from Aeolian mode)
[1:39–1:47]	Verse vamp: two-note guitar motive, drum beat in even eighths
[1:47–2:04]	Verse 2
[2:04–2:19]	Pre-chorus: two-note guitar motive becomes more continuous to fill in texture; steady build-up of dynamics
[2:19–2:44]	Chorus: high register vocal, distorted guitar, “Funky Drummer” drum beat
[2:44–2:52]	Locrian-inflected instrumental post-chorus: emphasizes $\flat 2$ and $\flat 5$
[2:52–3:25]	Guitar solo: melody of solo taken from verse and prechorus, accompaniment of “grungy” guitar riff and “Funky Drummer” drum beat taken from the chorus (synthesis of two elements)
[3:25–3:33]	Verse vamp: elision as solo guitar note is allowed to sustain away (feedback from guitar note present throughout verse 3)
[3:33–3:49]	Verse 3
[3:49–4:05]	Pre-chorus: two-note guitar motive becomes more continuous to fill in texture; steady build-up of dynamics
[4:05–4:29]	Chorus: high register vocal, distorted guitar, “Funky Drummer” drum beat
[4:29–4:46]	Coda: repetition of last vocal line; drum beat shifts to even-quarter subdivisions reminiscent of verse subdivisions
[4:46–4:58]	Fermata on last chord as guitar is allowed to sustain away