

### Toto: Africa

#### Musical Analysis

*Intro*                      Bars 1 – 4                      4 bars                      B major

The introduction contains only three chords –  $\text{bVII}$ ,  $\text{vi}$  and  $\text{ii}$  (A, G $\sharp$ m and C $\sharp$ m) – and consists of two riffs, both of which last for two bars each.

The first (Riff a – bars 1 & 2) is a distinctive syncopated rhythm pattern mostly repeating chord  $\text{bVII}$  and concluding with chords  $\text{vi}$  and  $\text{ii}$ :



The second (Riff b – bars 3 & 4 with an anacrusis) uses an ostinato pattern of five notes – based on the E major pentatonic scale – over a sustained chord  $\text{ii}$ :



With the exception of the Chorus, the first riff makes an appearance in every other section of the song whilst the second is developed in the instrumental section.

Both riffs have their origins in traditional African music with their use of syncopation, pentatonic scale and irregular ostinato groupings that cut across the 2/2 time signature. The instrumental sonorities used on the recording – including xylophones and marimbas – suggest the sounds of pitched percussion instruments which originate from the various countries of the African continent. The recording of the song also includes an additional eight-bar introduction, performed only by unpitched percussion instruments. This is heard before the vocal score begins and contains African influence in its use of layered rhythm parts and ostinatos.

Verse 1      Bars 5 – 39      35 bars      B major

The verse falls into four phrases:

Phrase 1      Bars 5 – 13      9 bars

*I hear the drums echoing tonight. She hears only whispers of some quiet conversation.*

Phrase 2      Bars 14 – 22      9 bars

*She's coming in twelve thirty flight. Moonlit wings reflect the stars that guide me t'ward salvation.*

Phrase 3      Bars 23 – 31      9 bars

*I stopped an old man along the way, hoping to find some old forgotten words or ancient melodies.*

Phrase 4      Bars 32 – 39      8 bars

*He turned to me as if to say, "Hurry boy, it's waiting there for you."*

A nine-bar phrase is an unusual length. The reason for this is that Riff a begins as the vocal line ends in bar 8 each time.

The melody for the first three phrases is also unusual because each one falls into two vocal lines of three and five bars respectively, ending with a silent bar. It is fairly low in the voice, moves conjunctly in a syncopated rhythm and is mostly syllabic.

The harmonic rhythm of the first three phrases is slow and the chords change only once each bar with the exception of the last bar where the end of Riff a's distinctive chord pattern can be heard.

The chord pattern of each of the nine-bar phrases is:

Bar 5	Bar 6	Bar 7	Bar 8	Bar 9	Bar 10	Bar 11	Bars 12 & 13
I (B)	iii (D#m)	vi (G#m)	Ic (B/F#)	♭VIIc (A/E)	iv <sup>9</sup> d (E/F#)	vi (G#m)	Riff a

The final eight-bar phrase begins in exactly the same way as the previous three phrases; however, in the fourth bar the melody begins an octave higher than previously stated and is harmonised by a backing vocalist, moving in parallel motion at an interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup> below.

Harmonically, chord vi (G#m) is sustained for an extra bar. This allows Riff a to be stated in the fifth and sixth bars with chord ii sustaining until the end of the phrase.

The chord pattern of the final eight-bar phrase is:

Bar 32	Bar 33	Bar 34	Bar 35	Bar 36 & 37	Bar 38	Bars 39
I (B)	iii (D#m)	vi (G#m)	vi (G#m)	Riff a	ii (C#m)	ii (C#m)

*Chorus 1*      Bars 40 – 57      18 bars      A major

The chorus also falls into four phrases:

Phrase 1      Bars 40 – 43      4 bars

*It's gonna take a lot to drag me away from you.*

Phrase 2      Bars 44 – 47      4 bars

*There's nothing that a hundred men or more could ever do.*

Phrase 3      Bars 48 – 51      4 bars

*I bless the rains down in Africa.*

Phrase 4      Bars 52 – 57      6 bars

*Gonna take some time to do the things we never had.*

The first phrase is sung as a solo, the second as a duet and the third and fourth in three parts.

The melody for the first three phrases uses only two pitches: the tonic and the leading note. This time it is high in the voice, although as before it uses a syncopated rhythm and is syllabic.

The harmony of the first three phrases has the same harmonic rhythm as the verse. This time, however, a typical pop song chord pattern is used:

Bar 40	Bar 41	Bar 42	Bar 43
vi (F#m)	IV (D)	I (A)	V (E)

The final six-bar phrase begins in exactly the same way as the previous three phrases; however, in the fourth bar both the melody and the chord pattern change in order to prepare the shift back to B major. The melody ends with a melisma and the following chords are used:

Bar 52	Bar 53	Bar 54	Bar 55	Bar 56	Bar 57
vi (F#m)	IV (D)	I (A)	iii (C#m)	V (E)	vi (F#m) / Vb (E/G#)

*Link 1*      Bars 58 – 65      8 bars      B major

This section repeats the music stated during the Introduction; however, the original four-bar section is repeated only once instead of three times.

Verse 2                  Bars 14 – 39                  26 bars                  B major

This verse falls into three phrases:

Phrase 1                  Bars 14 – 22                  9 bars

*The wild dogs cry out in the night as they grow restless, longing for some solitary company.*

Phrase 2                  Bars 23 – 31                  9 bars

*I know that I must do what's right, sure as Kilimanjaro rises like Olympus above the Serengeti.*

Phrase 3                  Bars 32 – 39                  8 bars

*I seek to cure what's deep inside, frightened of this thing that I've become.*

This section repeats the music heard during Verse 1, with different lyrics. However, there are only two nine-bar phrases this time before the final eight-bar phrase brings the section to a close as before. This verse contains a slight change to the melody in bar 33 as the singer leaps up to pitches D# and C# on the words *deep in*.

This verse is accompanied by a countermelody or descant, played on a flute-like instrument, which can be heard across the top of the texture. It changes pitch conjunctly, moving at the same speed as the harmonic rhythm.

The backing vocals also become more important in this verse. In the two nine-bar phrases they enter in the fifth bar, harmonising on Ooo before joining the lead singer with the last word of each phrase. The beginning of the second nine-bar phrase is also harmonised by a backing vocalist, initially a 4th higher than the melody, and then continuing a 3rd higher.

Chorus 2                  Bars 40 – 57                  18 bars                  A major

This section repeats the music stated during Chorus 1.

Link 2                  Bars 58 – 65                  8 bars                  B major

This section repeats the music stated during Link 1.

*Instrumental*    Bars 66 – 82    17 bars    B major

This section is based on the accompaniment heard during the verse; however, the vocal melody is almost entirely replaced with an instrumental melody based on Riff b. Where Verse 2 was a shortened version of Verse 1, this section presents an even shorter statement of the verse with only one nine-bar phrase this time before the final eight bar phrase brings the section to a close as before.

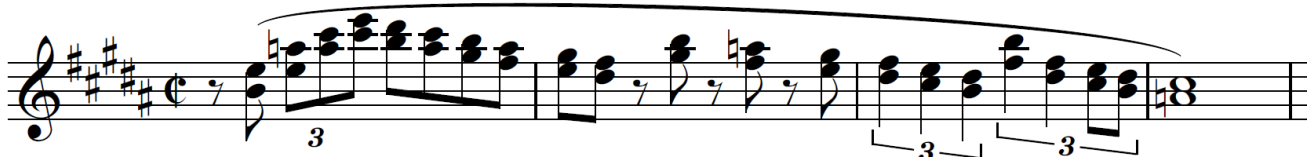
Bars 66 – 69    4 bars (the first half of the nine-bar phrase)

A descending melody using a B major pentatonic scale with the notes falling into groups of three and ending with a triplet:



Bars 70 – 74    5 bars (the second half of the nine-bar phrase)

An ascending and descending melody using the E major scale which contains more rhythmic variety than the first:



Bars 75 – 77    3 bars (the first half of the eight-bar phrase)

An ascending melody, also using the B major pentatonic scale with the notes once again falling into groups of three. This time the phrase ends in a more 'pop' style with the use of grace notes and syncopation:



Bars 78 – 82    5 bars (the second half of the eight-bar phrase)

The vocal part resumes at this point with the second half of the original eight-bar phrase: "*Hurry boy, she's waiting there for you.*"

Chorus 3

Bars 40 – 92

22 bars

A major

This section repeats the music stated during Chorus 1 with three notable changes:

1) A new electric guitar riff is heard on the recording in the last bar of each phrase (bars 43, 47, 51 etc):



2) Phrase 3 - *I bless the rains down in Africa* - is heard five times, making this section significantly longer than before.

3) Also, during phrase 3, a solo vocal improvisation is heard at the end of the first, second and fourth repeats. Each one is different, the first two using the lyrics *I bless the rain*, whilst the final one uses, *I'm gonna take some time*.

Outro

Bars 93 – 96

4 bars

B major

This section repeats the music stated during the Introduction. On the recording the music repeats continually and the texture is gradually reduced each time so that by the end the music is reduced to only the rhythm track heard at the beginning of the song accompanied by the bass line of Riff a.

## Glossary

**Grace notes** are additional notes added as decoration. They are not essential to the melody or the harmony.

The **harmonic rhythm** is the rate at which the chords change in a piece of music.

**NME** is the New Musical Express, a British music journalism website and former magazine that has been published since 1952. During the 1970s, it became closely associated with punk rock through the writings of Julie Burchill, Paul Morley and Tony Parsons.

A **pentatonic scale** is a musical scale with five notes per octave, most commonly notes 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6 of the major scale.

A **riff** is a short-repeated phrase in popular music and jazz, typically used as an introduction or refrain in a song.

## Appendix

Whilst the author of this analysis has decided to place much of the content of this song in B major, the key is, in fact, ambiguous and could be interpreted as B major, E major or A lydian. The Chorus, however, is resolutely in A major.

Centres are free to deliver the analysis through any of these keys and future exam questions will ensure access for all candidates, whichever key is taught.

Riff a	A	G#m	C#m
B major	♭VII	vi	ii
E major	IV	iii	vi
A lydian	I	vii	iii

Verse	Bar 5 B	Bar 6 D#m	Bar 7 G#m	Bar 8 B/F#	Bar 9 A/E	Bar 10 E/F#	Bar 11 G#m
B major	I	iii	vi	Ic	♭VIIc	iv9d	vi
E major	V	vii#5	iii	Vc	IVc	ii11	iii
A lydian	II	iv#5	vii	IIc	Ic	vi11	vii

Verse	Bar 32 B	Bar 33 D#m	Bar 34 G#m	Bars 35 G#m	Bars 36 & 37 Riff a	Bar 38 C#m	Bar 39 C#m
B major	I	iii	vi	vi	♭VII – vi – ii	ii	ii
E major	V	vii#5	iii	iii	IV – iii – vi	vi	vi
A lydian	II	iv#5	vii	vii	I – vii – iii	iii	iii