



Starboy Deconstructed

THE WEEKND

FEATURING DAFT PUNK

HIT SONGS DECONSTRUCTED

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Starboy was the first single released from The Weeknd's 2016 album of the same name. A collaboration with EDM superstars Daft Punk, this dark, moody, cocky song struck a chord with listeners, landing in the Top 10 on over 40 charts throughout the world, and peaking at #1 on over 20.

To get the most out of this report, please listen to this song in its entirety now

YouTube: [Watch](#)

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AT-A-GLANCE

Artist/Group: The Weeknd featuring Daft Punk

Song: Starboy

Songwriters: Cirkut (Henry Walter), Doc (Martin) McKinney, Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo, The Weeknd (Abel Tesfaye), Thomas Bangalter, DaHeala (Jason Quenneville)

Producers: The Weeknd, Doc McKinney, Cirkut

Record Label: Republic

Primary Genre: R&B/Soul

Influences: Dance/Club, Electropop, Funk, Hip Hop/Rap, R&B/Soul

Length: 3:42

Full Form: I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-C-PC-B

Key: Am

Tempo: 93 BPM

First Chorus: 0:56 / 25% of the way into the song

Intro Length: 0:15

Electronic vs. Acoustic: Electronic/Acoustic Combo

Prominent instruments: Bass (Synth), Claps/Snaps, Drums/Perc, Piano (Acoustic), Synth

Primary Lyrical Theme(s): Biographical, Boasting, Lifestyle

Title Appearances: *Starboy* appears 8 times in the song

Lyrical P.O.V: 1st, 2nd, 3rd

STRUCTURE

Form

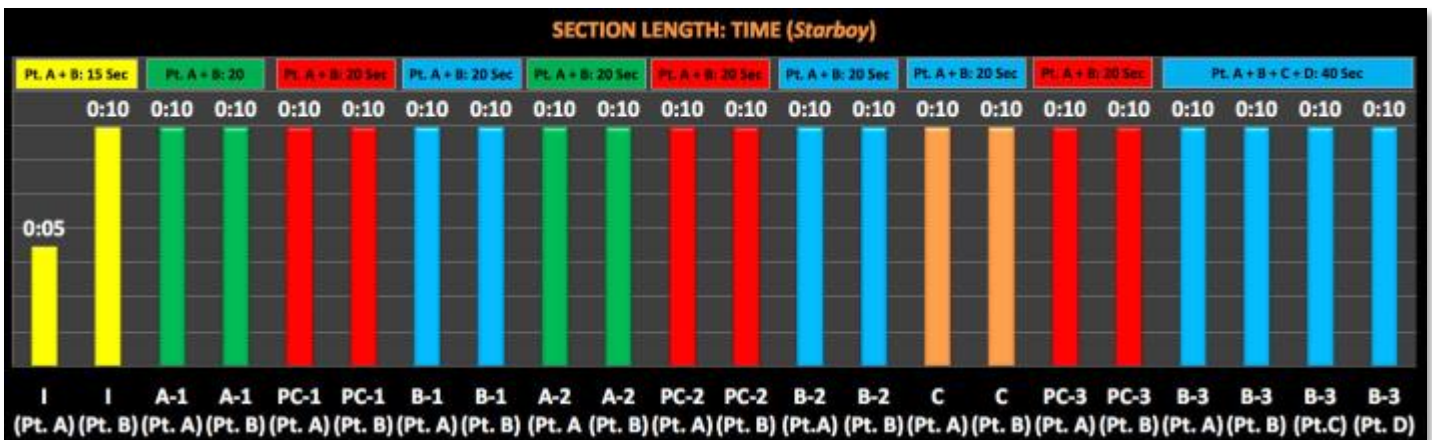
Form: I / A – PC – B / A – PC – B / C – PC – B

Starboy kicks off with the intro and is directly followed by a 2x repeat of a verse – pre-chorus – chorus sectional progression. Following the second chorus, a bridge – pre-chorus – chorus sectional progression ensues, which brings the song to a conclusion.

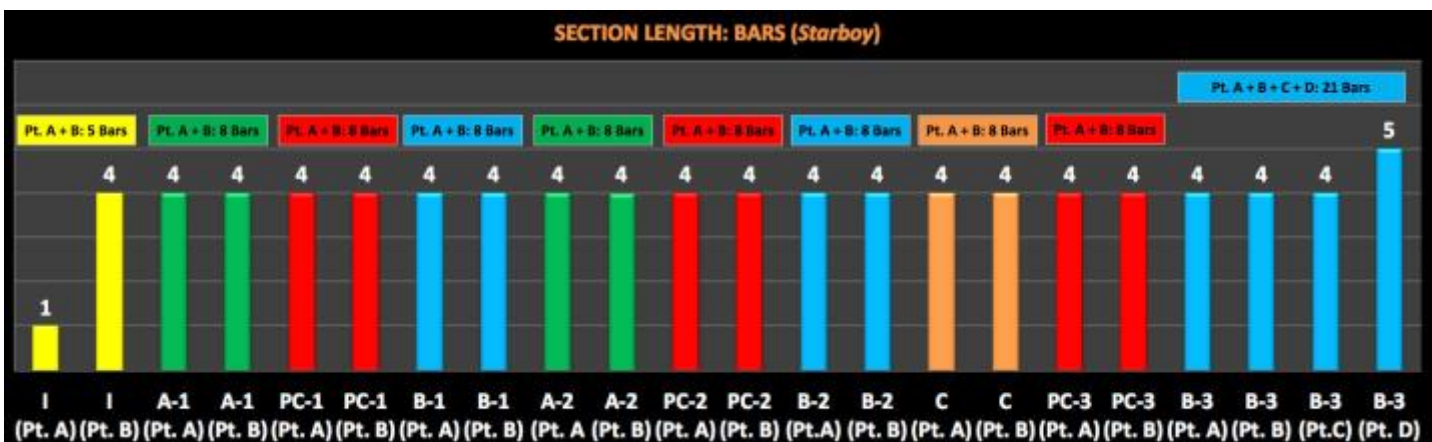
Section Length

With the exception of the intro and chorus 3 (the first and last sections in the song), each full section in *Starboy* is ~20 seconds / 8 bars in length. The intro is the shortest section in the song, landing at 15 seconds / 5 bars. The last chorus is the longest, landing at 40 seconds / 17 bars.

Time



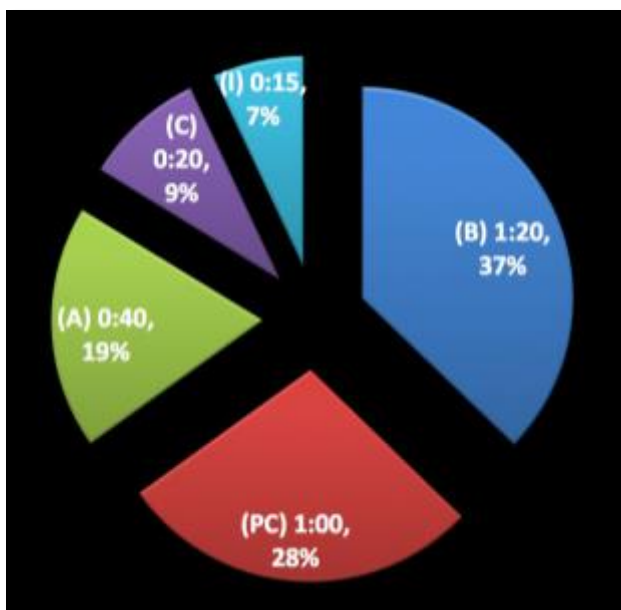
Bars



Sectional Allocation

The majority of time within *Starboy* is allocated to the chorus, which comprises 37% of its total composition. Interestingly, it is the pre-chorus, not the verse as one would typically expect, that accounts for the second most amount of time – 28%. This is due to there being three pre-chorus sections compared to two verse sections, which comprise 19%. The bridge accounts for 9%, and the intro, as one would expect, accounts for the least amount of time at 7%.

Section % of Song's Total Composition (Starboy)



SECTION BY SECTION

In this section of the report, we will look at song sections and their characteristics in the order they appear. It is our recommendation that you listen to each section before and after reviewing each.

Intro

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 Parts (Part A: 1 bar / Part B: 4 bars)
Section Length	5 bars / 15 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	None
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	None
Lyrical Theme(s)	N/A
Rhyme Scheme	N/A
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), FX (Feedback/Noise)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 4 Part B: 6
Harmonic Progression	N/A

Sectional Overview

Starboy's first section is an intro, which was, and still is, the most popular method utilized to kick off a Top 10 hit when the song was released back in Q3-2016 (82% of songs).

It is the shortest section in the song, clocking in at 15 seconds / 5 bars in length. It also falls in the most popular length range among Top 10 hits during the same time period (53% of songs). It is entirely instrumental and possesses an engaging two-part structure.

Part A, which lasts for just 5 seconds / 1 bar, consists of a swelling, distorted feedback type effect and static noise. Part B that follows lasts for 10 seconds / 4 bars, and establishes the infectious synth bass/drum pattern, which serves as the backbone throughout the majority of the song. The timbre and pattern of the synth bass

puts the song’s bouncy, Funky vibe into effect, and the 808-sounding electronic snare, claps and kick provide a retro yet current underlying Hip Hop influenced beat.

Key Takeaways

Accompaniment

- The brief feedback swell/noise effect in part A functions as a very strong, engaging opener due to its unique quality compared to most other songs in today’s mainstream. This enables Starboy to instantly stand out and grab the listener’s attention – especially in an airplay environment. As soon as one hears this segment of the intro, there is no mistaking the song for something else.
- Following the brief attention-grabbing effect segment, the song-defining groove seals the deal with the listener, locking in them in and seamlessly transporting them into the verse that follows.
- The groove also has a key impact on the song’s vibe, as it provides a self-assured, driving, unwavering quality that jibes with and accentuates the impact of The Weeknd’s boasting lyrics.

Verse 1

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	None
Lyrical Theme(s)	Boasting, Dissing
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAA Part B: AAAA
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Piano (Acoustic), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 7 Part B: 7.5
Harmonic Progression	Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$)

Sectional Overview

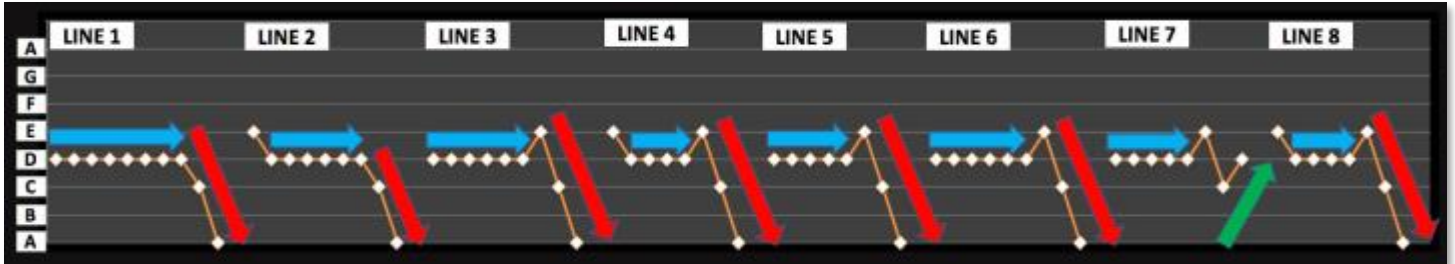
The first verse is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, the commonality that both parts share is the core drum/bass groove that was first established in part B of the intro. A few new instruments have been added as well, most notably acoustic piano, which is in effect throughout the section. In the second half of the section, part B, two additional instruments are added to the arrangement – a synth saw pad and modulated (flange) pad.

Lyrically, the section is communicated primarily in the first and second person, with the protagonist (The Weeknd) communicating directly to the antagonist, who is undefined. The protagonist boasts about his cars, wealth, lifestyle, and woman, all the while dissing the antagonist in the process.

Vocally, the first verse is firmly rooted in the K.I.S.S. ME principal (Keep It Simple, Singable, and Memorable), features sung and rapped qualities, consists of just four pitches, and is delivered with primarily monotone progressions followed by melodic descents down to the tonic to conclude, with the sole exception being line 7. Each line is composed of two distinct melodic parts, denoted as parts 1 and 2. While each part iteration features the same core melodic and/or rhythmic structure, there are subtle differences as well, specifically seven variations of the part 1 melody, and three variations of the part 2 melody.

Vocal Melody Melodic Direction



Vocal Melody Part Structure

VOCAL PART		LYRICS	Syllables
1a	2a	<i>I'm try-na put you in the worst mood, ah ♪</i>	(10)
1b	2a	<i>P-1 clean-er than your church shoes, ah ♪</i>	(9)
1c	2b	<i>Mil-li point to just to hurt you, ah ♪</i>	(9)
1d	2b	<i>All red Lamb just to tease you, ah ♪</i>	(8)
1e	2b	<i>None of these toys on lease too, ah ♪</i>	(8)
1c	2b	<i>Made your whole year in a week too, yah ♪</i>	(9)
1f	2c	<i>Main bitch out of your league too, ah ♪</i>	(8)
1g	2b	<i>Side bitch out of your league too, ah ♪</i>	(8)

Key Takeaways

Accompaniment

- The first verse keeps the listener locked into the infectious drum/bass groove that was first established in part B of the intro.
- In addition to providing additional color and texture, the addition of the acoustic piano and modulated (flange) synth play an important role in shaping the section's vibe – specifically its dark/melancholic and uneasy qualities, respectively. Notice that their addition also jibe with and accentuate the impact of the song's opening line, *"I'm gonna put you in the worst mood."*
- The addition of the saw pad and modulated (flange) pad in the second half of the section, part B, provides subtle, albeit important, in-section contrast. These new elements help to heighten the engagement value of the section without distracting the listener.

Vocals

- The vocal melody easily gets ingrained in the listener's head due to its simplicity and the fact that the same two core melodic parts are featured in each line. However, the subtle variations instituted within each core part are important in that they prevent cookie-cutter monotony from occurring.
- The vocal melody descent down to the tonic on each line except for line 7 provides each boasting/dis statement with a sense of authority due to the resolution imparted (i.e. they're not left open-ended, they're just cold, hard facts).
- The eighth rest at the end of each line provides just enough time for each to sink in and resonate with the listener.

Pre-Chorus 1

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Part A: None Part B: Solo Male - Doubled lead
Lyrical Theme(s)	Emptiness, Wealth, Lifestyle, Imperviousness, Doing Things His Way
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAB Part B: BBBB
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Piano (Acoustic), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 8 Part B: 8
Harmonic Progression	Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$)

Sectional Overview

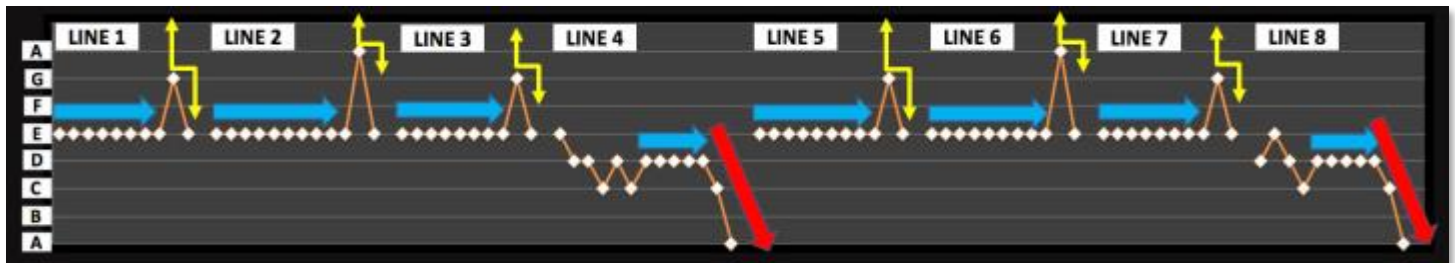
The first pre-chorus is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, the pre-chorus features essentially the same arrangement as part B of the preceding verse, with just a couple of differences – one relatively subtle and one that is more pronounced. The subtle difference is that the saw synth pad becomes more prominent in the mix as part A progresses, then resets to a lower volume and rises subtly again throughout part B. The more pronounced shift occurs at the tail end of the section, where the full accompaniment is pulled out from under The Weeknd’s vocals as the song transitions into the ensuing chorus.

Lyricaly, the section is communicated in the first, second and third person. The communication direction is different than the preceding verse, with the protagonist only communicating directly to the antagonist on lines 5 and 6. The other lines feature the protagonist making generalized statements without a clearly defined recipient. The themes have also been changed up relative to the preceding verse, as the protagonist alludes to an empty feeling in his life communicated by a reference to his empty house, partying/IMPLIED drug use with someone that is significant to him, being impervious to what people say about him, and his desire to do things his way – including his artistry and self-medicating.

Vocally, like the verse sections the pre-chorus is rooted in the K.I.S.S. ME principal (Keep It Simple, Singable, and Memorable), features sung and rapped qualities, and consists of a limited number of pitches - just six. Also like the verse sections, the majority of the pre-chorus (in particular the first three lines in each stanza) features a two-part structure, consisting of monotone progressions followed by a changeup at the end. However, in contrast to the verse sections, the last line in each stanza is changed up compared to the lines that precede it, and introduces two new melodic parts in the process.

Vocal Melody Melodic Direction



Vocal Melody Part Structure

VOCAL PART		LYRICS	SYLLABLES
1	2a	<i>House so emp-ty need a cen-ter-piece</i> ♯	(9)
1	2b	<i>Twen-ty racks a ta-ble cut from e-bo-ny</i> ♯	(11)
1	2a	<i>Cut that i-v'ry into skin-ny piec-es</i>	(9)
3a	4	<i>Then she clean it with her face, man I love my ba-by</i> ♯ ♯	(13)
1	2a	<i>You talk-in' mon-ey need a hear-in' aid</i> ♯ ♯	(10)
1	2b	<i>You talk-in' 'bout me I don't see the shade</i> ♯ ♯	(10)
1	2a	<i>Switch up my style I take an-y lane</i>	(9)
3b	4	<i>I switch up my cup I kill an-y pain</i>	(10)

Key Takeaways

Accompaniment

- The accompaniment similarities compared to the preceding verse keep the dark, melancholy vibe in effect and the listener locked in the song's infectious drum/bass groove.
- The brief accompaniment pull at the end of beat 2 through the first half of beat 4 in the last measure of the pre-chorus provides effective cross-sectional contrast and separation from the chorus that follows, enabling it to hit with increased perceived impact due to the low energy level contrast imparted. This is especially important considering the accompaniment similarities between sections.

Vocals & Lyrics

- The changeups in communication direction and lyrical themes compared to the preceding verse accentuate the impact of the section, and the song, through the contrast imparted.
- While both the first verse and pre-chorus are rooted in monotone deliveries, the higher register of the delivery in the pre-chorus coupled with the pronounced melodic leaps that transpire at the end of lines provide the pre-chorus vocal with a more excited quality compared to the preceding verse, in addition to engaging cross-sectional contrast against the cross-sectional accompaniment familiarity.
- The single-syllable last lyric on lines 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 is cleverly stretched across two syllables that span two pitches (e.g. "*pie-iece*," "*la-ane*," "*ai-aid*," etc.). This provides the section with an infectious twist that also reinforces the memorability factor due to the cross-line commonalities.
- The last lyric in the first two lines of both stanzas is treated with a pronounced delay effect which causes the lyric to repeat in the void imparted by the rest that follows. This development, albeit subtle, accentuates the engagement value of the song as a whole due to the cross-section contrast imparted (i.e. this effect was not in play in the preceding verse).

Chorus 1

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Male / Sung - Vocoder Processed
Lyrical Theme(s)	Boasting, Taunting
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: ABAC Part B: ABAC
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Claps, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated, Whole Note Melody, Woodwind Lead), Piano (Acoustic)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 8 Part B: 8.5
Harmonic Progression	Part A: Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$) Part B: Am-G-F-G (Am: i-VII-VI-VII)

Sectional Overview

Starboy's first chorus occurs 56 seconds / 25% of the way into the song, which is in line with the second and first most popular first chorus occurrence points in Q4-2016's Top 10 charting hits, respectively. The section is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, both parts feature similar and contrasting accompaniment characteristics. The primary commonality between the two is that they both feature the core drum/bass accompaniment that has been in effect since part B of the intro, coupled with the saw and modulated (flange) synth pad, which have been in play since part B of the first verse. Both also feature a subtle, soft, lead synth patch playing a whole note melody, which makes its first appearance in the song thus far. The second half of the section, part B, introduces a few new accompaniment elements into the mix including the legato synth bass, bigger sounding claps, and a woodwind-esque synth lead synth that plays an infectious, repetitive melody.

Lyrically, the chorus is communicated by the protagonist (The Weeknd) in the first and second person. The communication direction alternates between the protagonist communicating to the antagonist (“look what you’ve done”) and first person declaration (“I’m a mother f**kin’ Starboy”). As is the primary lyrical function of the chorus, it provides the summation of the narrative depicted in the verse, pre-chorus and bridge sections. All of the boasting about the protagonist’s wealth, possessions, and lifestyle is attributed to an undefined antagonist, who may be his audience, the music industry, and/or others. Additionally, the vocoder-processed background “ha-ha” vocals provide the section with an underlying mocking connotation, which jibes with and accentuates the impact of the aforementioned lyrics delivered by the protagonist.

Vocally, the chorus, like the other sections in the song, is firmly rooted in the K.I.S.S. ME principal (Keep It Simple, Singable, and Memorable), features sung and rapped qualities, and consists of a limited number of pitches - six. The lead vocal is composed of two melodic parts, the first of which is melodically vibrant, and the second which is delivered in a monotone manner followed by a descent to the tonic at the end, an octave below the peak in the first part. In between these two parts is a lengthy rest that is filled by the vocoder processed “ha-ha” background vocals that shine front and center.

Vocal Melody Melodic Direction



Vocal Melody Part Structure

VOCAL PART	LYRICS	SYLLABLES
1	<i>Look what you’ve done</i> — — ?	(4)
2	<i>I’m a moth-er f**k-in’ Star-boy</i> — —	(8)
1	<i>Look what you’ve done</i> — — ?	(4)
2	<i>I’m a moth-er F**k-in’ Star-boy</i>	(8)

Key Takeaways

Structure

- While the first chorus occurs on the later end of the spectrum compared to other recent Top 10 charting hits, the listener's engagement is maintained up until this point by the engaging characteristics of the intro, verse, and pre-chorus that precede it.

Accompaniment

- The accompaniment similarities with the pre-chorus – specifically the drum/bass interaction and modulated (flange) pad – keep the listener locked in the song's infectious groove and the dark, melancholic, uneasy vibe in effect, respectively.
- The new instrumental additions, most notably those that enter in part B, take the engagement value and impact of the section to a heightened level due to the contrast imparted. The legato synth bass and big claps provides additional texture and underlying intensity, while the woodwind-esque lead synth effectively provides the section with a light, serene counter to the darkness and melancholy that that has defined the accompaniment up until this point.

Vocals & Lyrics

- The addition of the vocoder-effected "ha-ha" vocals achieve a few key things in the scope of the section. They accentuate the section's lyrical impact due to their mocking connotation, as the protagonist is seemingly laughing at and taunting everyone who helped get him where he is – either in a positive or negative manner, they provide the section with additional infectious color and texture, and they put the song's featured group - Daft Punk - trademark vocoder-processed vocal mark on the section, and the song.
- The first lead vocal line in the section, "look what you've done," is melodically vibrant, functioning to melodically and lyrically engage the listener and create anticipation via a prolonged rest for the monotone/descending assured, cocky, matter-of-fact melodic payoff that follows in "I'm a moth-er f**k-in' Star-boy." The interaction between the two provides the section with a highly engaging call and response type characteristic, while accentuating the impact of the lyrical payoff, "I'm a moth-er f**k-in' Star-boy," in the process.
- The melodic structure of part 2, the payoff segment, is similar to that found in both the verse and pre-chorus sections, so it is already familiar by the time that the listener hears it in the chorus. As a result, the memorability factor of this important line is heightened.

Verse 2

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	None
Lyrical Theme(s)	Lifestyle, Facing Adversity, Boasting
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAA Part B: BBCC
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Piano (Acoustic), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 7 Part B: 7.5
Harmonic Progression	Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$)

Sectional Overview

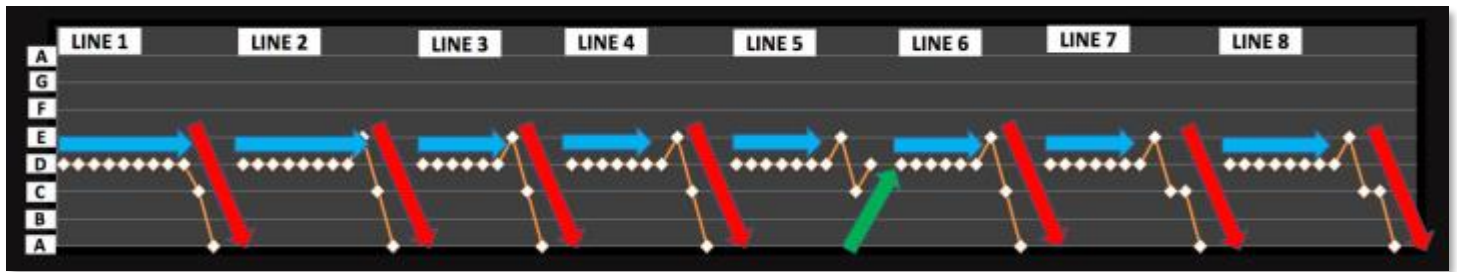
The second verse is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B. While it features many core commonalities with its verse 1 counterpart, it features some distinct differences as well.

From an accompaniment standpoint, verse 2 is essentially the same as verse 1.

Lyricaly, compared to verse 1, verse 2 is communicated in the first and third person as opposed to the first and second, and features boasting and lifestyle-themed declarations as opposed to directly boasting to and dissing the antagonist. Key narrative developments compared to the first verse include the protagonist facing adversity (i.e. people trying to “test” and “end” him), as well as a clever reference to The Weeknd’s 2014 song and tour of the same name, *King of the Fall*. Additionally, the rhyme scheme has been change up as well, from AAAA / AAAA to AAAA / BBCC. The first stanza, part A, features the end-of-line “ah” commonality with verse 1, while the second stanza, part B, does away with the “ah” commonality all together.

Vocally, the second verse features a very similar melodic and rhythmic structure as the first verse. However, there are a few key differences as well, the most notable occurring on the last two lines of the section where a new melodic part is introduced.

Vocal Melody Melodic Direction



Vocal Melody Part Structure

VOCAL PART		LYRICS	SYLLABLES
1a	2a	<i>Ev-ry day a ni*-a try to test me, ah</i> ♪	(11)
1a	2b	<i>Ev-ry day a ni*-a try to end me, ah</i> ♪	(11)
1h	2b	<i>Pull off in that road-ster S-V, ah</i> ♪	(9)
1i	2b	<i>Pock-ets o-ver weight get-in' heft-y, ah</i> ♪	(10)
1i	2c	<i>Com-in' for the king that's a far cry-y</i> ♪	(10)
1i	2b	<i>I come a-live in the fall time-ime</i> ♪	(9)
1a	3	<i>No com-pe-ti-tion I don't real-ly-lis-ten</i> ♪	(11)
1j	3	<i>I'm in the blue Mul-sanne bump-in' New E-di-tion</i> ♪	(12)

Key Takeaways

Accompaniment

- The accompaniment similarities between the first verse and second verse accentuates the familiarity and memorability factors of the song as a whole.
- The sparser arrangement of the second verse compared to part B of the chorus that precedes it provides subtle yet engaging cross-section contrast, while the listener remains locked in the song's infectious drum/bass groove.

Vocals & Lyrics

- While the similar vocal melody characteristics compared to the first verse accentuate the memorability factor of the song, the subtle differences prevent cookie-cutter monotony from occurring, thus heightening the song's engagement value due to the contrast imparted.
- The lyrical and rhyme scheme changeups relative to the first verse (particularly in the second stanza, part B), provide the song with increased engagement value and depth against the familiarity imparted by the vocals and accompaniment.

Pre-Chorus 2

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Solo Male – Doubling Lead
Lyrical Theme(s)	Emptiness, Wealth, Lifestyle, Imperviousness, Doing Things His Way
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAB Part B: BBBB
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Piano (Acoustic), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 7.5 Part B: 8
Harmonic Progression	Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$)

Sectional Overview

The second pre-chorus is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, pre-chorus 2 features characteristics that are both similar to and different from its pre-chorus 1 counterpart. The primary difference between these two “like sections” transpires in the first half of the section, part A. While pre-chorus 1 features the same accompaniment as verse 1, which includes the saw and modulated flange synths, these two elements, which are in effect in verse 2, are noticeably omitted from part A of pre-chorus 2. They are then reinstated in the second half of the section, part B.

Lyrical and vocally, pre-chorus 2 is identical to pre-chorus 1.

Key Takeaways

Accompaniment

- The subtle “like-section” and cross-section contrast imparted in part A of the second pre-chorus is important considering the otherwise very similar accompaniment found elsewhere throughout the song. Note that there is a subtle changeup in vibe as well, as the dark uneasiness that the modulated flange synth puts into effect is omitted and the dark, melancholic vibe put into effect by the acoustic piano shines front and center in an unadulterated manner.

Vocals & Lyrics

- The vocal and lyrical similarities between pre-chorus 1 and pre-chorus 2 make the song more familiar and memorable. Note that these are qualities typically found between pre-chorus sections (especially the first two pre-chorus sections).

Chorus 2

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Male / Sung - Vocoder Processed
Lyrical Theme(s)	Boasting
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: ABAC Part B: ABAC
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Claps, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated, Whole Note Melody, Woodwind Lead), Piano (Acoustic)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 8 Part B: 8.5
Harmonic Progression	Part A: Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$) Part B: Am-G-F-G (Am: i-VII-VI-VII)

Sectional Overview

The second chorus is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B. Its characteristics are essentially the same as its chorus 1 counterpart.

Key Takeaways

Arrangement

- The essentially identical characteristics between chorus 1 and chorus 2 reinforce the song's primary sectional payoff in the listener's head in an unadulterated manner. If there is any one section of a hit song that deserves this treatment, the chorus is usually it.

Bridge

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Solo Male - Harmony – Pitch Processed
Lyrical Theme(s)	Boasting, Lifestyle
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAA Part B: BBBB
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Dance/Club, Funk
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Clap, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), FX (Feedback/Noise)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 4 Part B: 7
Harmonic Progression	N/A (Bass Only)

Sectional Overview

The bridge is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, it features the most pronounced shift in the song thus far. The first two bars feature a breakdown/sparse characteristic, consisting of solely of droning, dark legato synth bass and bursts of feedback/static that sound on beat 4 of each measure. Note that this is the first time this effect is heard prominently since part A of the intro. Together, these elements provide a dark, foreboding, stark accompaniment to The Weeknd’s vocals.

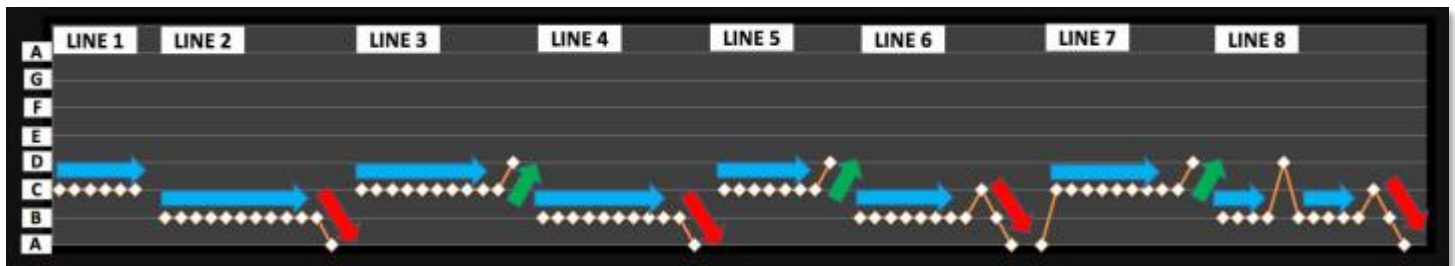
For the balance of the section, the feedback/static effect and droning synth remains in effect, and the infectious drum/bass pattern that defines the preceding sections of the song is reinstated in bar 3.

Lyrical, the section is communicated in the first and third person. While the section features boasting and lifestyle themes as found in the other sections of the song, the subject matter has been changed up to include clever references to Brad Pitt and his film *Legend Of The Fall* (cleverly tying into The Weeknd’s 2017 tour of the same name), The Star Trek movie *Wrath Of Khan* (changed up to “*Wraith*” to cleverly reference his Khan

modified Rolls Royce with lights on the ceiling), familial kindness (his mother), the impact the song has on “girls,” his fast and reckless lifestyle, and the shallowness of society in general.

Vocally, the bridge features sung and rapped qualities and the most simplified melody in the scope of the song. It is composed of four pitches and two melodic parts, each of which features a primarily monotone lead vocal delivery. The primary changeup occurs at the end of each line, which conclude with an alternating melodic ascent or descent. This provides the section as a whole with a very engaging flow. Additionally, the bridge features a low pitch-shifted vocal effect, which is most pronounced on the breakdown first two lines of the section. The other lines in the section feature the effect as well, but at a lesser degree.

Vocal Melody Melodic Direction



Vocal Melody Part Structure

VOCAL PART	LYRICS	SYLLABLES
1a	<i>Let a ni*-*a Brad Pitt</i>	(6)
2a	<i>Leg-end of the fall took the year like a ban-dit</i>	(12)
1b	<i>Bought mom-ma a crib and a brand new wag-on</i>	(11)
2b	<i>Now she hit the gro-c'ry shop look-in' lav-ish</i>	(11)
1c	<i>Star Trek roof in that Wraith of Khan</i>	(8)
2c	<i>Girls get loose when they hear this song</i>	(8)
1d	<i>A hun-dred on the dash get me close to God</i>	(11)
1e	2d <i>We don't pray for love we just pray for cars</i>	(10)

Key Takeaways

Sectional

- The bridge functions as one of the song's two back-to-back "D" (departure) sections due to the accompaniment, vocal and lyrical differences it provides compared to other sections in the song. This heightens the overall engagement value of the song due to the pronounced cross-sectional contrast. However, the cross-sectional commonalities – in particular the reinstatement of the drum/bass groove in bar 3, helps to keep things familiar and memorable as well.

Accompaniment

- The breakdown instituted in the first two bars of the section serves to engage the listener at a heightened level in the song due to the pronounced accompaniment and energy contrast compared to the fuller/higher energy level sections that precede and follow it.
- The reinstatement of the drum/bass accompaniment in bar three locks the listener is back into the song's infectious groove, while the feedback/static effect and droning synth keep the dark, foreboding vibe in effect.
- Since this is the only section in the song save for the intro that DOES NOT feature acoustic piano, the underlying melancholic aspect is done away with and engaging cross-sectional contrast is imparted as a result.

Vocals & Lyrics

- The lyrical changeups compared to the other sections in the song coupled with the clever references and wordplay provide the bridge, and the song as a whole, with engagement value and dimension.
- The alternating melodic ascent/descent flow at the end of lines within the section provides for a very engaging flow.
- The prominent low pitch-shift effect employed on the first two lines of the section provides engaging vocal contrast compared to the other lines in the section, and the song.

Pre-Chorus 3

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	2 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars)
Length	8 bars / 20 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Solo Male – Doubling Lead
Lyrical Theme(s)	Emptiness, Wealth, Lifestyle, Imperviousness, Doing Things His Way
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: AAAB Part B: BBBB
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Piano (Acoustic), Synth (Soft Pad), FX (Feedback/Noise)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 4 / Part B: 4
Harmonic Progression	Am-G-C5add9-F-G-G/B (Am: i-VII-Vadd9/VI-VI-VII-VII6)

Sectional Overview

The third pre-chorus is 20 seconds / 8 bars in length, consisting of two 10 second / 4 bar parts/stanzas, denoted as parts A and B.

From an accompaniment standpoint, pre-chorus 3 is unique in relation to the other sections in the song – including pre-choruses 1 and 2 – in that it is the only section that remains in breakdown/sparse mode for the duration of the ENTIRE section (the bridge also features a breakdown segment, but only for the first two bars). The breakdown is put into effect primarily by the drum/staccato bass groove from the bridge being omitted in the pre-chorus. As a result, the energy level is brought way back down, providing stringent contrast to the higher energy level sections that both precede and follow.

In place of the groove, the legato synth bass drone and acoustic piano take center stage in the mix, the latter making a return since being pulled in the preceding bridge. Together they provide a dark/melancholic undercurrent as the song heads toward the third and final chorus. The tension increases in the last measure due to the implementation of the swelling feedback/static effect.

Lyrical and vocally, pre-chorus 3 is identical to pre-choruses 1 and 2.

Key Takeaways

Sectional

- A song having a third pre-chorus is a rare find in the Top 10 of the Billboard Hot 100 (only six of the 57 songs that landed in the Top 10 in 2016 contain a third pre-chorus). When a third pre-chorus is utilized, in many cases it serves as the, or one of, a song's "D" (departure) sections. This is a great way to provide a song with increased engagement value AND familiarity through the act of sectional recycling and variation. The contrast will heighten the engagement value, while the similarities with the other "like sections" will heighten the songs familiarity and memorability factors.

Chorus 3

CATEGORY	COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
General Structure	4 parts (Part A: 4 bars / Part B: 4 bars / Part C: 4 bars / 4 bars)
Length	16 bars / 40 seconds
Lead Vocal(s)/ Type(s)	Solo Male (The Weeknd) / Sung-Rapped Hybrid
Background Vocal(s) / Type(s)	Full Section: Male / Sung - Vocoder Processed Part A&B: None Part C&D: Solo Male – Doubling Lead
Lyrical Theme(s)	Boasting
Rhyme Scheme	Part A: ABAC Part B: ABAC Part C: ABAC Part D: ABAC
Influences (in addition to straight-up Pop)	Dance/Club, Electropop, Hip Hop/Rap, Funk, R&B/Soul
Prominent Instruments	Bass (Synth), Drums/Perc (Electronic Claps, Kick, Snare, Tom, Hi Hat), Synths (Saw Pad, Soft Pad, Flange-Effectuated, Whole Note Melody, Woodwind Lead), Piano (Acoustic), FX (Feedback/Noise)
Energy Level (1-10)	Part A: 8.5 Part B: 9 Part C: 9.5 Part D: 10
Harmonic Progression	Part A: Am-G/A-F/A-G/A (Am: I - $\frac{VII}{i}$ - VI6 - $\frac{VII}{i}$) Part B: Am-G-F-G (Am: i-VII-VI-VII)

Sectional Overview

Starboy's third and final chorus features both similar and differing characteristics compared to choruses 1 and 2. The primary difference is that it is double the length, lasting for 16 bars / 40 seconds and consisting of four parts as opposed to two (denoted as parts A, B, C and D).

Parts A and B feature the same general accompaniment characteristics as their chorus 1 and chorus 2 counterparts. The primary difference is that the levels are running a bit hotter – in particular the saw synth. Parts C and D both feature the core accompaniment characteristics that define part B – in particular the pronounced claps, which are not featured in part A.

In bar 2 of part D, the intensity and excitement factor increases due to the opening of the saw synth's low pass filter, making it more prominent in the mix. The level increases even further in bar 3 due to the addition of the swelling feedback/static effect. Both elements reach an apex at the end of the song. The accompaniment is then abruptly pulled during The Weeknd's final "starboy" vocal, which rings out with a delay effect as the song comes to a conclusion.

Lyrically, chorus 3 is identical to choruses 1 and 2. Vocally it is essentially the same as well, with a couple of minor changeups in parts C and D. Here, the vocals are a bit more prominent in the mix due to the vocal doubling, and a pronounced delay effect is featured on the last lyric of each lead vocal line, "done" and "Starboy." The very last lyric in the song, "starboy," features a lengthy delay tail coupled with a high to low pitch-shift effect which brings the song to a conclusion.

Key Takeaways

Sectional & Structure

- Since the third chorus is double the length of the others, the listener is kept in what is arguably the most infectious, engaging and memorable part of the song for the longest sustained period of time. The core similarities with the other chorus sections keeps the memorability factor at a high, while the subtle contrast keeps it fresh and engaging, preventing cookie-cutter monotony from occurring.

Accompaniment & Vocals

- The vocal and accompaniment changeups that occur in the second half of the third chorus compared to the first two choruses and the first half of the section helps to take the excitement and intensity factors of the song to a grand apex, leaving the listener on an excited high as the song comes to a conclusion. The changeups also help to keep this lengthy double section fresh and engaging as it progresses.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

Energy & Dynamics

Starboy progresses through four MTI/Energy level “waves.” Each wave begins with an energy level lull and progresses to an energy level peak:

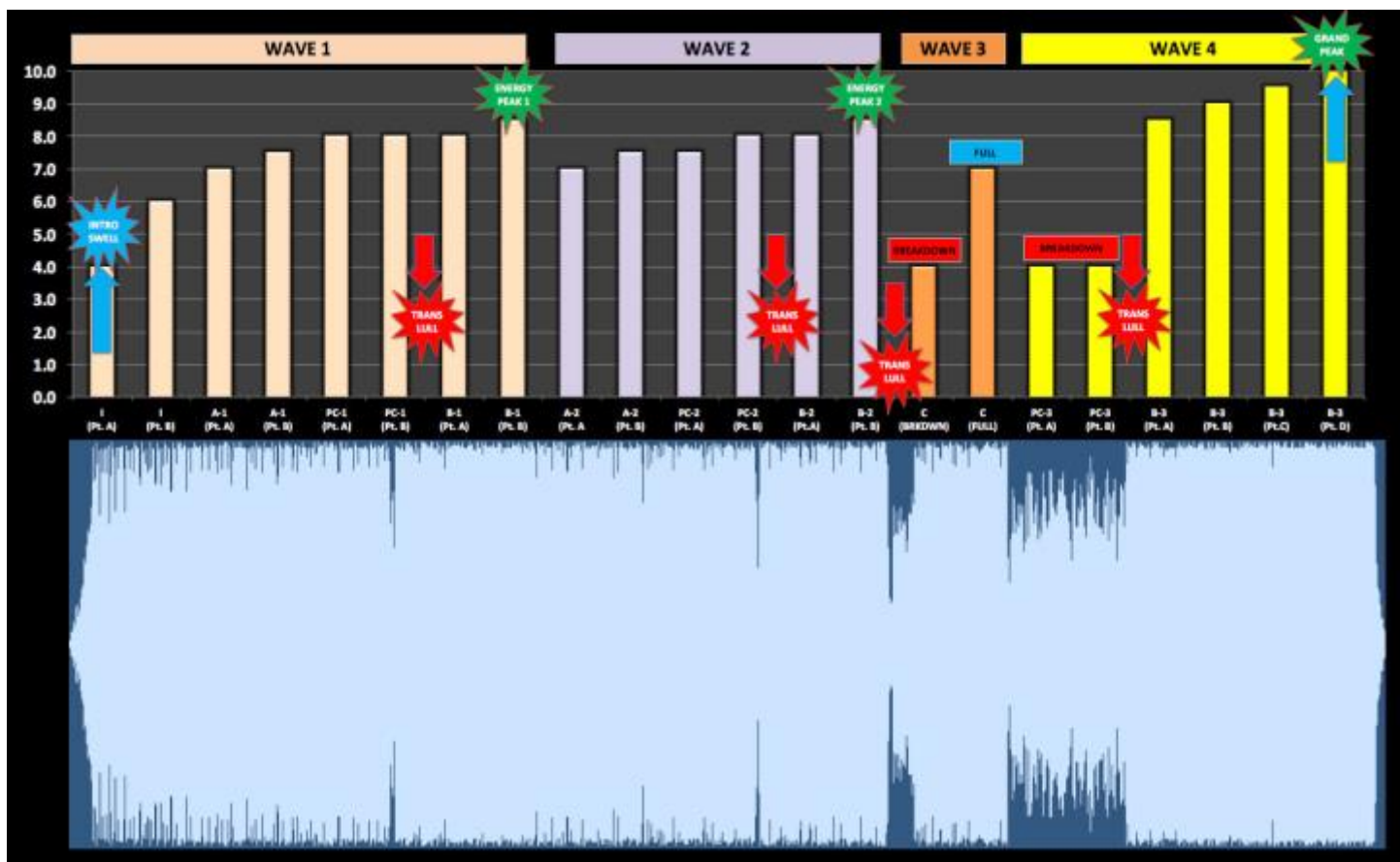
- **Wave 1:** Intro (I) – Chorus 1 (B-1)
- **Wave 2:** Verse 2 (A-2) – Chorus 2 (B-2)
- **Wave 3:** Bridge Breakdown (C-Breakdown) – Bridge Full (C-Full)
- **Wave 4:** Pre-Chorus 3 (PC-3) – Chorus 3 (B-3)

Key

0 – 10: Depicts energy level fluctuations throughout the song. A value of 10 represents the highest energy level in the song, and a level of 0 represents pure silence

Parts (Pt): Represent a particular stanza or of a full song section

Wave: A wave represents a segment of the song that progresses from an energy level low point to a peak.



Chorus Impact Accentuators

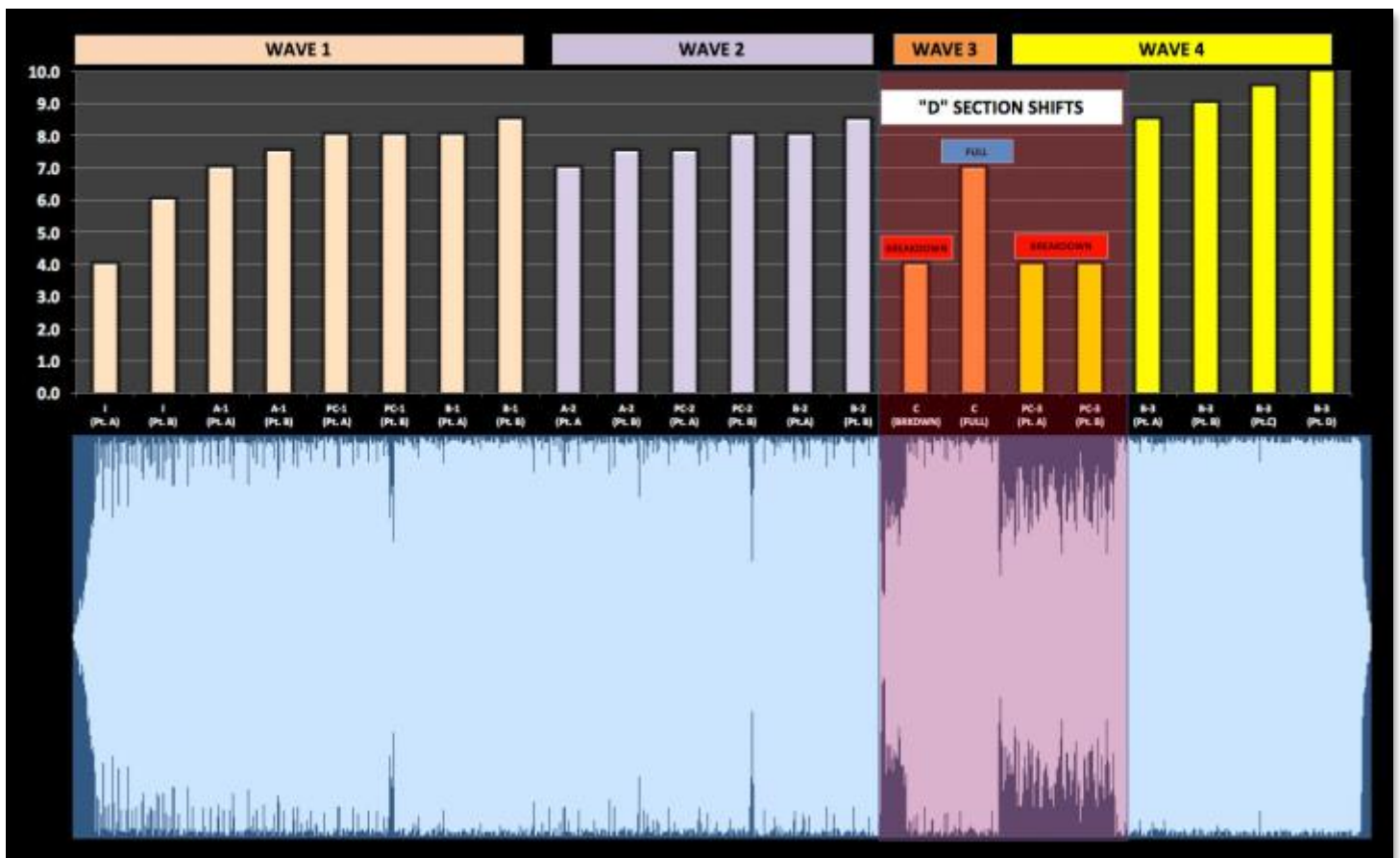
Each chorus is preceded by a thinning out of the accompaniment in the last two beats of the pre-chorus. The instrumental and energy level contrast achieved enables each chorus to hit with increased perceived impact and further stand out against the sections that precede it. This is especially important considering the cross-section accompaniment similarities found throughout the song.

Changeups in the last two bars of pre-chorus sections:

- **Pre-Chorus 1 into Chorus 1:** The full accompaniment is pulled out from under The Weeknd’s vocals.
- **Pre-Chorus 2 into Chorus 2:** The full accompaniment is pulled out from under The Weeknd’s vocals.
- **Pre-Chorus 3 into Chorus 3:** The full accompaniment is pulled except for the feedback/static effect.

“D” Section Energy Level Shifts

The most pronounced energy level shifts in the song occur in the “D” (departure) sections – the bridge and pre-chorus 3.



The majority of the song features relatively high sectional energy levels, which is primarily put into effect by the characteristics of The Weeknd's vocals and the driving bass/drum interaction. In order to accentuate the song's engagement value, pronounced energy level shifts are instituted around two-thirds of the way in, starting in the bridge and continuing through the third pre-chorus:

- Following the energy level peak at the end of the second chorus, the level drops off substantially in the first two bars of the bridge due to the shift into breakdown/sparse mode. All of the accompaniment elements have been pulled from the mix save for the droning synth bass and the feedback/static effect.
- The level is kicked back up in bar 3 of the bridge due to the reinstatement of the grooving drum/bass pattern.
- The energy level substantially drops off once again in the third pre-chorus as the song heads back into breakdown/sparse mode. Note that this is the longest energy level lull in the scope of the song.
- The level is kicked back up again in the chorus that follows due to the reinstatement of the full accompaniment.

Genres & Influences

Starboy is composed of five main influences – Electropop, Dance/Club, Funk, Hip Hop/Rap, and R&B/Soul - all of which are very popular in today's mainstream music scene, with the exception of Funk. These influences are in effect throughout the majority of the song and are present in the characteristics of the vocals, accompaniment, or both.

However, what really defines *Starboy* is its vibe. Put into effect by a combination of the timbre and progressions of instruments, the lead and background vocals, and the boasting/dissing lyrical content, *Starboy's* dark, melancholic, self-assured, driving, grooving, unwavering vibe enables it to stand out among its current mainstream contemporaries

Key

-: No influence

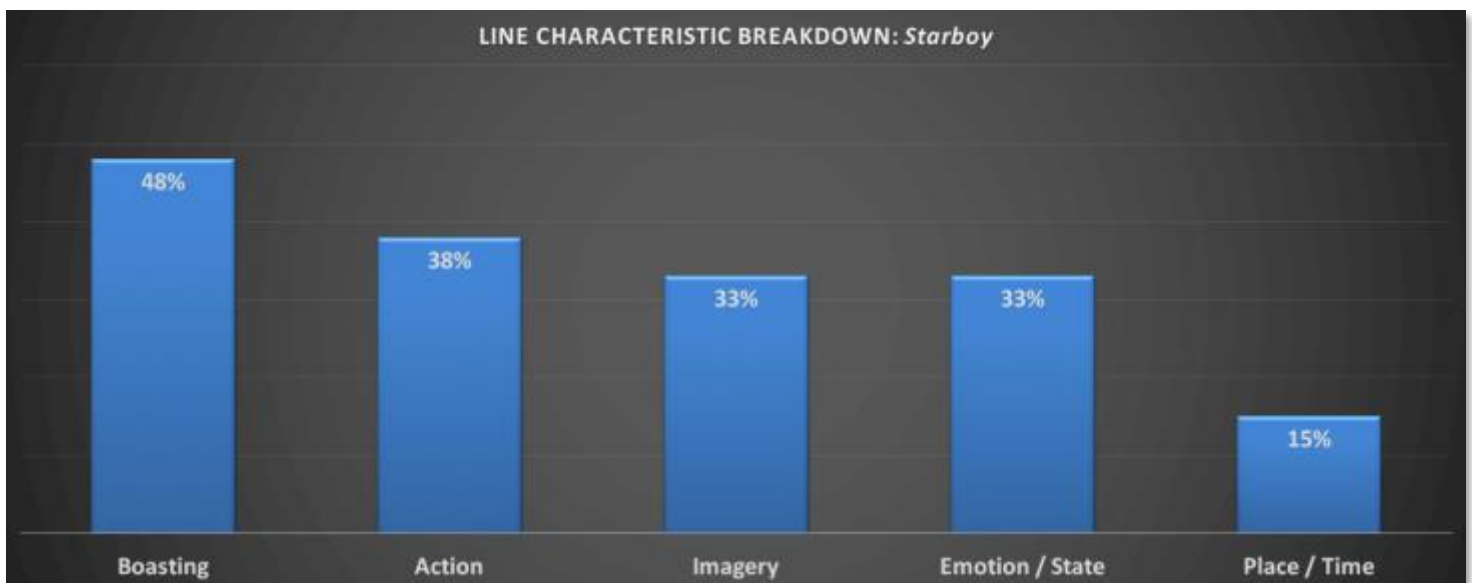
X: Influence is in effect

|: Divides the first half of the section from the second

INFLUENCES	I	A-1	PC-1	B-1	A-2	PC-2	B-2	C	PC-3	B-3
R&B SOUL	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
ELECTROPOP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
HIP HOP/RAP	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
DANCE/CLUB	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x
FUNK	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x

Lyrics & Title

Starboy is a lifestyle and boasting themed song that revolves around specifics relating to The Weeknd's wealth, possessions, women, and stature. It contains an effective blend of boasting, action, imagery, emotion/state and place/time themed lyrics, which accentuate its engagement value and impact.



The graph above shows the percentage of total lines in the song that contain a particular lyrical characteristic. Note that lines can contain two or more lyrical characteristics

What follows are key highlights and takeaways regarding *Starboy's* narrative:

Line Recycling

Certain lines in the verse and pre-chorus sections feature cross-line repetition, ranging from just a few lyrics to almost full lines. The repetition provides familiarity which makes these sections resonate stronger, and also lightens the songwriter's workload. Sometimes just changing up one lyric can say a great deal without the need to add a lot more content. This technique was also utilized in The Weeknd's previous mega hit, *Can't Feel My Face*.

Verse 1:

Line 3: Milli point two **just to hurt you, ah**

Line 4: All red Lamb **just to tease you, ah**

Line 7: Main bitch out of your league too, ah

Line 8: Side bitch out of your league too, ah

Verse 2:

Line 1: Ev'ry day a ni**a try to test me, ah

Line 2: Ev'ry day a ni**a try to end me, ah

Pre-Chorus

Line 5: **You talkin'** money need a hearin' aid

Line 6: **You talkin'** 'bout me I don't see the shade

Line 7: **Switch up my** style I take any lane, ah

Line 8: **Switch up my** cup I kill any pain

Clever Wordplay & Connotations

There are a few instances of clever word play and cryptic meanings that accentuate the impact of the narrative.

Bridge - line 5: "Star Trek roof in that Wraith Of Khan"

This line cleverly references the Rolls Royce Wraith customized by Khan (which features starry lights on the ceiling) as well as the 1982 Star Trek movie, *Wrath Of Khan*.

Verse 2 – line 5: "Comin' for the **king** that's a far cry"

Verse 2 – line 6: "I come alive in the **fall time**"

These two consecutive lines cleverly reference The Weeknd's 2014 song and tour of the same name, "*King of the Fall*," and possibly relate to *Starboy*'s release date – September 22, 2016 – which also happens to be the first day of fall. As a result, this is when The Weeknd "*came alive*" to support the single.

Pre-Chorus - line 2: “Twenty racks a table cut from **ebony**”

Pre-Chorus - line 3: “Cut that **iv’ry** into skinny pieces”

These two consecutive lines cleverly feature an “*ebony*” / “*ivory*” reference, which is subject to interpretation by the listener (e.g. the Paul McCartney/Stevie Wonder song of the same name, etc.).

Boasting Themes

There are eight different topics that The Weeknd boasts about throughout the song. The change in topics from section to section helps to keep the narrative engaging while the overall boasting theme remains in effect.

Verse 1: Cars, wealth and women

Verse 2: Cars, wealth and status

Pre-Chorus: Furniture, wealth

Chorus: Self, success

Bridge: Good deeds (i.e. the car for “*mama*”), tour promotion and implied success, cars, wealth, and women.

Car References

The prevailing topic that the protagonist boasts about throughout the song is his cars. Six different types of cars are mentioned in the verse and bridge sections, all of which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars or more, with the exception possibly being the wagon, as no specific model is mentioned.

- McLaren P1 (\$1 million +)
- Red Lamborghini
- Roadster SV
- Blue Bentley Musanne
- Rolls Royce Wraith (customized by Khan)
- Wagon (unspecified model - for “*mama*”)

Atypical Non-Universal Theme

The hallmark of many mainstream hits is that they are conveyed in a universal manner, with the subject matter being applicable to the listener’s own life circumstances (i.e. most people can connect with a love lost scenario or overcoming adversity). Even if specific references are mentioned, such as Boulder, CO and the Rover featured in The Chainsmoker’s *Closer*, the overall gist of the narrative still connects with their target audience.

However, this is generally NOT the case in *Starboy*. Instead, the song relates exclusively to The Weeknd’s possessions, lifestyle and wealth, most of which are out of the reach of the typical listener. However, the

narrative still connects with his target demographic because it provides insight into his life, which may be intriguing to them.

Song Title

Starboy appears eight times throughout the song. It is featured exclusively in the chorus sections and is the last lyric in each stanza.

Line 5: (*Ha-ha...*)

Line 6: Look what you've done

Line 7: (*Ha-ha...*)

Line 8: I'm a mother f**kin' **Starboy**

Vocal Production

Starboy features a few different vocal characteristics that take its impact to a heightened level. They include sung and a sung/rapped hybrid lead, vocoder processed background, doubled and harmonized lead, pitch-processed lead, and varying degrees of reverb and delay.

Key

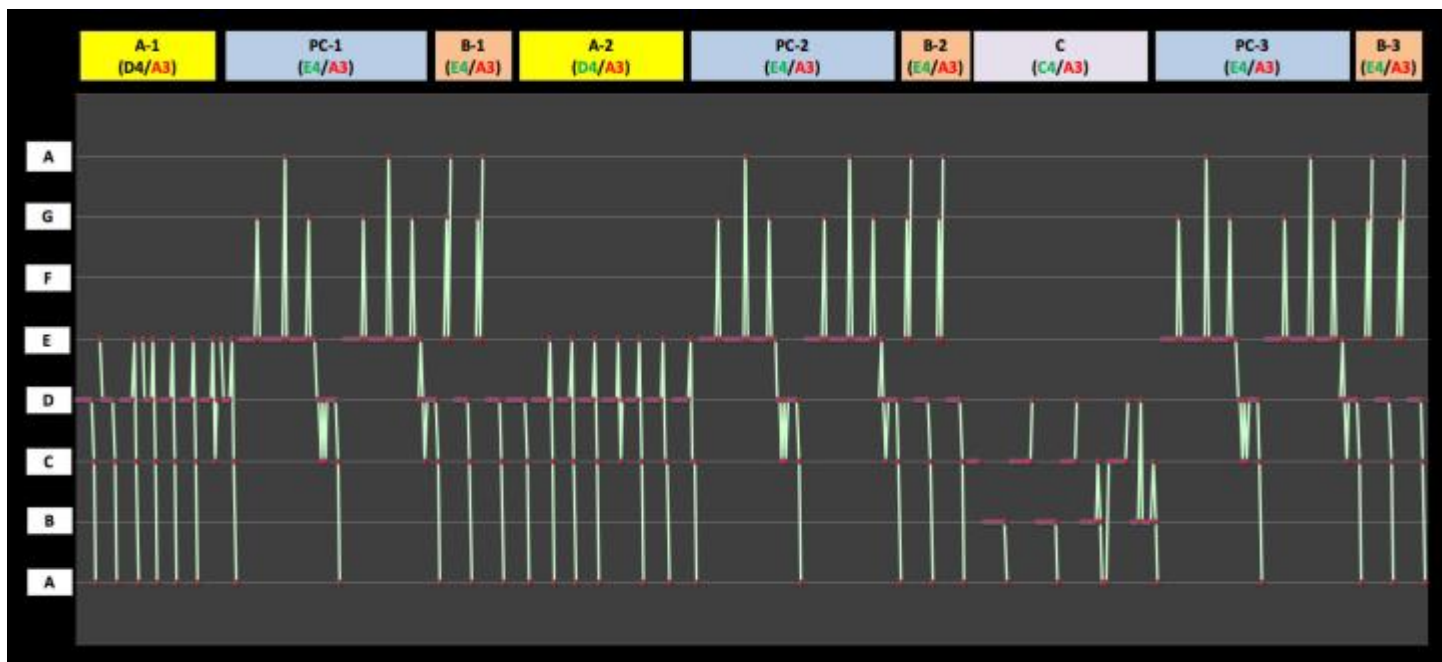
S: Sung **R:** Rapped **SP:** Spoken **SH:** Shout

-/-: First Stanza/Second Stanza

VOCAL TYPE/SECTION	I	A-1	PC-1	B-1	A-2	PC-2	B-2	C	PC-3	B-3
LEAD VOCALS										
Lead 1 (The Weeknd)		S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
BACKGROUND VOCALS: HARMONIZING WITH THE LEAD										
Double 1 (The Weeknd)			-/S			S		-/S	S	S
Harmony (The Weeknd)								S		
BACKGROUND VOCALS: INDEPENDENT OF THE LEAD										
Independent Background 1 (Vocoder Effect)				S			S			S

Vocal Melody

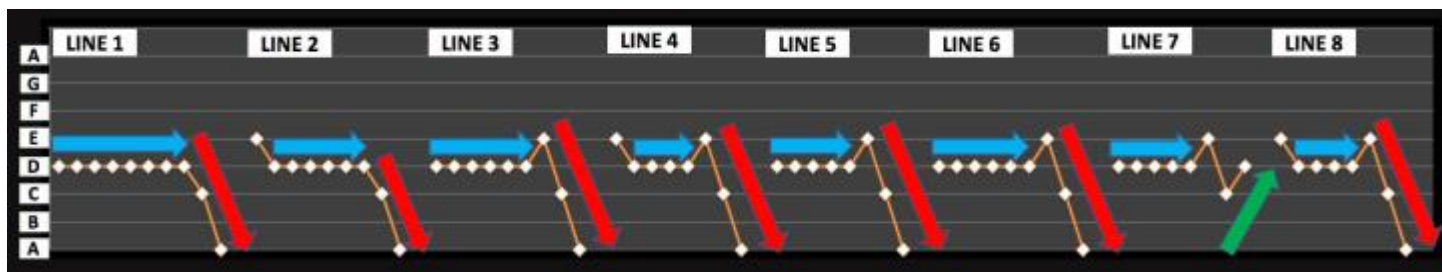
The lead vocal melody in *Starboy* spans an octave – A3 to A4. Much of it is rooted in monotone runs, which provides for a sung/rapped hybrid quality. The K.I.S.S. ME (Keep It Simple, Singable, and Memorable) is adhered to throughout, with an effective blend of repetition and contrast ensuring that the melody gets ingrained in the listener’s head while remaining fresh and engaging.



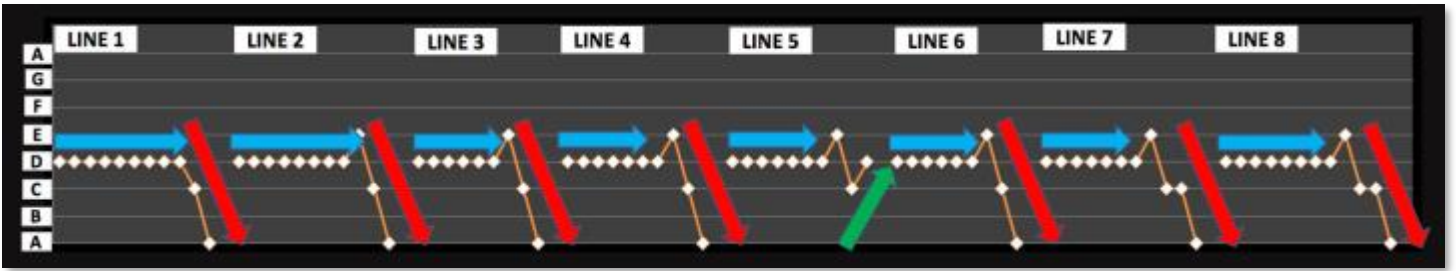
The vocal melody graph above represents the melodic flow throughout the song, and the pitch at both the beginning and end of sections.

Sectional Melodic Direction

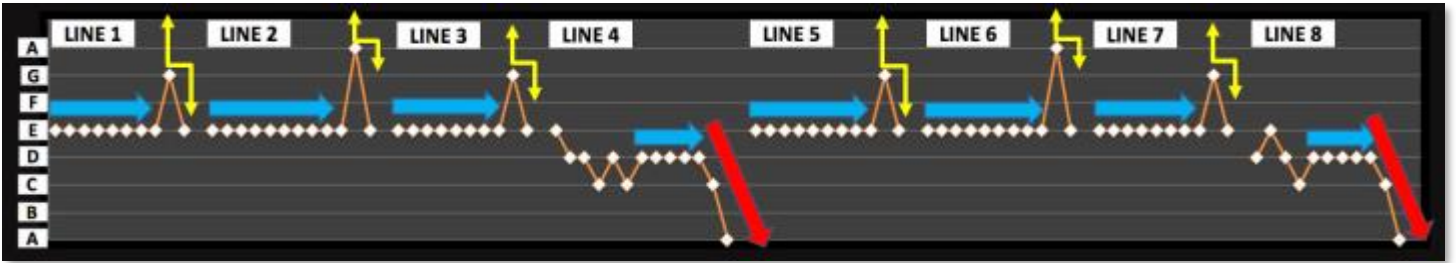
Verse 1



Verse 2



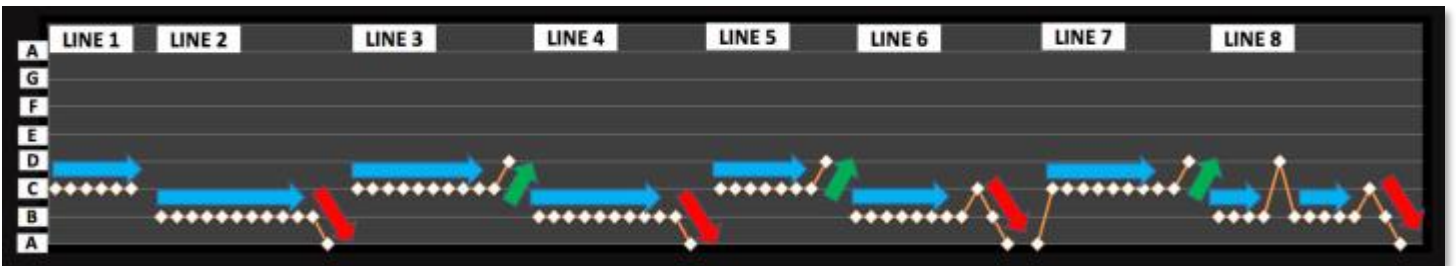
Pre-Chorus



Chorus



Bridge



Instruments & Arrangement



Click on the image above to view full size.

Starboy features four primary instrument types in the mix that shape its sound and vibe – bass (synth), drums/percussion (electronic), piano (acoustic), and an assortment of synths.

Bass: Two types of synth bass are featured in *Starboy* – staccato and legato.

Drums/Percussion: *Starboy* features solely electronic drums/percussion in the mix, including kick, snare, clap, slap, shaker and hi hat.

Piano: Acoustic piano.

Synths: An assortment of synths are featured throughout *Starboy*. They include soft pad, saw pad, modulated (flange) pad, and two types of leads.

Effects: Distorted feedback swell coupled with static noise.

Harmony

Starboy employs one of three variations of the same chord progression, Am – G – F – G, in every section of the song except for the intro and bridge, which do not have chord progressions:

Variation 1: Am – G/A – F/A – G/A (Verse 1 & 2, Pre-Chorus 1 & 2, Chorus Part A)

Variation 2: Am – G – F – G – G/B (Chorus Parts B, C, D)

Variation 3: Am – G – C5add9 – F – G – G/B (Pre-Chorus 3)