



Allentown

Billy Joel

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ALLENTOWN

Words and Music by Billy Joel

From the album *The Nylon Curtain*, released in 1982.

On 1982's *The Nylon Curtain*, Billy Joel created songs that touched on such serious social themes as job layoffs and the lingering effects of the Vietnam War. "Allentown" is a haunting journey through the world of struggling mining and factory workers in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the unemployment and hardships they encountered in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The bouncy beat and perky piano part belie the serious subject matter.

Figure 2 – Intro/Verse/Chorus

Repeated chords in the right hand in an eighth-note rhythm propel the song forward. A syncopated left-hand bass line enlivens the introduction. The piano part makes use of triads in their first and second inversions, triads with an added 9th, and combinations thereof, such as the Gadd9/B chord in the first measure.

Note the voicings used for the Cadd9 chord and the Gadd9/B chord. The *voicing* of a chord is essentially the chord "shape." It includes the way the notes of the chord are arranged vertically, how they are spaced, whether any notes of the chord are doubled, and whether the chord is in root position or an inversion. Joel's voicings of the chords mentioned are rich and colorful. Chord voicings can be an expressive device in their own right.

Joel also enlivens the repeated chords with embellishment chords. The embellishment chords always follow and return to the more stationary chords. For instance, in measure 8, the repeated D major triad is embellished by an A major triad on beat 2. In measure 10, the G chord is embellished by a D triad that falls on beat 2.

Fig. 2

Intro [0:06]

Piano Moderately (not too fast) ♩ = 115

Musical score for the Intro of "Allentown". The score is in 4/4 time and G major. It consists of 12 measures. The right hand plays a repeating eighth-note chord pattern: Cadd9, Em7, D, Gadd9/B, Cadd9, Em7, D, Gadd9/B. The left hand plays a syncopated bass line. The first measure starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic marking.

3 Full Band

4 Slow Demos
Piano meas. 1-6,
7-14

Musical score for the Verse of "Allentown". The score is in 4/4 time and G major. It consists of 12 measures. The right hand plays a repeating eighth-note chord pattern: Cadd9, Em7, D, G C/G, G, Em7, G/A. The left hand plays a syncopated bass line. The first measure starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic marking. The lyrics "Uh, ch, uh, ha." are written under the first four measures, and "Well, we're liv - ing here in Al - len - town" is written under the last four measures.