



Don't Ask Me Why

Billy Joel

♪ Niveau 55/100 (Ambitieux)

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DON'T ASK ME WHY

Words and Music by Billy Joel

“Don't Ask Me Why” stands out a bit in the Joel catalog due to the Latin-influenced rhythmic feel, drifting somewhere north of a Samba. The song uses nice symbolism in its lyrics as Joel addresses someone who is putting on airs but is “no stranger to the street.” He slyly intimates that although the person addressed has everyone fooled with fashion and style, he knows that it's all an act. However, as the title plainly states, he doesn't profess to having the answers, and remains rather casual and uninvolved in his lyrical observations.

Figure 38—Intro, Verse, and Chorus

This song is in the key of B \flat and is played in *cut time* (2/2) throughout. The intro is six measures long, and follows a repetitive pattern of I–IV/I chords.

Joel focuses on small phrases throughout the song, and as such, the sections don't wind up being clean eight- and sixteen-measure lengths. So we have six-measure intros, fourteen-measure verses, etc.

One notable thing that Joel does here is create little three-chord patterns that last one measure each and get repeated symmetrically in a larger pattern. That larger pattern is in the lyrics; the first three lines total twelve measures—four to each pattern—and the last line is only two measures long. In each four-measure line is an order of little one-measure patterns, each of which has an ascending bass line, though the first and third chords are the same. This occurs in measures 7–8 with B \flat –Cm7–B \flat /D, then again in measure 9 with C–Dm7–C7/E. Notice how each line follows basically the same chord progression in a different range. This is a good example of many different levels of patterns within the larger chord progression; you have the one-measure pattern, the four-measure pattern, and the twelve- or sixteen-measure progression too. Having this multi-level vision will help you to understand the song.

The verses overlap the choruses with the melodic resolve, so that the return to the tonic coincides with the first bar of the chorus.

Fig. 38

56 Full Band

Intro
Moderately, in 2 $\text{♩} = 98$
Svb throughout

1 B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim

4 B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim B \flat Eb/B \flat B \flat dim