

Lead Sheet Format and Basic Analysis

A lead sheet (or "chart") is an approximate version of a jazz or pop song where the basic melody is notated in a treble clef staff and chord symbols are placed above that staff. If lyrics are added, they go below the staff. Often times the melody and/or chords are presented in a simplified manner to allow for easy accessibility and performance interpretation. There is also the expectation that the performer will have some familiarity with the song (or style) such that highly specific notation is not necessary. To an extent, what you see is less than what you'll get...

Bernie's Tune Bernie Miller
(As played by Gerry Mulligan)

Medium Swing

Chords in parentheses are used for solos.

Notational Format

- Title on top in middle, composer's credit to the right, copyright credit at the bottom
- A specific performance (such as a recording) or performer might be cited at the top right or bottom left
- Clef, key signature and time signature are only placed on first system (with no left-side bar line)
- Tempo instruction goes above time signature
- Subsequent systems use a left-side bar line
- Chord symbols are (when in default mode) placed over first beat (and third beat when there are two chords per measure)
- When chords are to be articulated with a particular rhythm, specific rhythm notation will appear above the staff
- Final measure uses a double bar
- Chords in parentheses are used for solos or are considered optional/alternates
- Chords in parentheses at end are used only for repeating the form (i.e. going back to the top) and are often a ii → V combination

Basic Analysis

- In the typical AA'BA format, the first and last sections (labeled "A" and "C" here) are similar or identical
- Often what is referred to here as the "C" section is called just another "A" section
- The A section will often have first and second endings, with the first ending containing a ii → V combination, and the second ending containing the tonic chord
- Often the B section will be in a different key from the A section
- Often the B section will have different melodic material as compared to the A section
- In each section, look for diatonic (or mostly diatonic) ii → V → I(i) progressions, and/or other circle of 5ths progressions
- Another format is the A A' form (16 bars each) where the chords and melodic material are similar in each section (there is not a contrasting section)