Bo Diddley Beat

Background

Rhythm and blues guitarist Bo Diddley brought the clave rhythm—a traditional Afro-Cuban rhythm—to mainstream audiences in his song “Bo Diddley.” His use of this rhythm in a rock and roll song was so unique, that at the time, it became known as “the Bo Diddley beat.” It is identifiable as a rhythmic pattern that goes “bomp-bomp-bomp, bomp-bomp!” In Bo Diddley’s “Bo Diddley” as well as Smokey Robinson & the Miracles’ “Mickey’s Monkey,” this beat is played on several instruments including drums, hand percussion, and guitars. The beat played stands out from the rest of the musical sounds. For decades, rock and roll artists have used the Bo Diddley beat because it makes you want to dance! Listen for it in the music of artists ranging from the Rolling Stones to the White Stripes—it does not always repeat, and sometimes it is very subtle!

Playlist

- Bo Diddley, "Bo Diddley" (1955)
- The Crickets, "Not Fade Away" (1957), The "Chirping" Crickets
- Johnny Otis, "Willie and The Hand Jive" (1958)
- Elvis Presley, "(Marie's The Name) His Latest Flame" (1961)
- Smokey Robinson & The Miracles, "Mickey's Monkey" (1963), The Miracles Doin' Mickey's Monkey
- The Rolling Stones, "Not Fade Away" (1964), The Rolling Stones
- The Strangeloves, "I Want Candy" (1965), I Want Candy
- The Who, "Magic Bus" (1968)
- The Stooges, "1969" (1969), The Stooges
- David Bowie, "Panic in Detroit" (1973), Aladdin Sane
- Bruce Springsteen, "She's the One" (1975), Born to Run
- The Clash, "Rudie Can't Fail" (1979), London Calling
- Bow Wow Wow, "I Want Candy" (1982), I Want Candy
- U2, "Desire" (1988), Rattle and Hum
- The White Stripes, "Screwdriver" (1999), The White Stripes