

# Do We Sing Like We Speak?

## A Comparison of Question Intonation Patterns and Melodic Profile in Songs

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates whether intonation patterns in spoken language map to melodic profile patterns in music. The study focuses on polar (yes/no) and interrogative (wh) questions, and commonly found terminal intonation patterns for these kinds of questions in British English. We analyse the  $f_0$  of the main melody of 50 audio excerpts, from 49 different British pop songs by 47 distinct artists, for which the lyrics correspond to the desired questions types. Comparing the  $f_0$  of the main melody to the intonation patterns observed in authentic conversation, we test the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between question intonation patterns in speech and melodic profiles in songs with question lyrics. The data rejects the hypothesis, and we conclude that intonation patterns of questions in speech and in song melodies are correlated.

**Keywords:** music and speech, prosody, intonation, melodic profile, song lyrics, questions

## 1 Introduction

There exist many different types of questions that are commonly found within the English language, and there exist standard models of the common intonation patterns for these questions types within British English speech. We are interested in investigating whether these intonation patterns translate to melodic patterns when the words are put to song. The remit of this paper is to compare the intonation pattern of questions within music and natural speech in British English. In particular, this paper aims to compare the intonation patterns applied when someone utters a question to the melody of the same types of questions when they appear in popular music. More specifically, this paper compares the fundamental frequency ( $f_0$ ) pattern of the song melody and the natural English speech intonation of the same statement.

Phonetics is the branch of linguistics that studies the sounds made as part of normal speech, including intonation patterns. Intonation, the variation of pitch, in spoken language is frequently used to signal the ends of questions. Within the field of phonetics, many studies exist pertaining to intonation of questions or of different languages, but there is only limited work comparing intonation patterns to music. We describe the most relevant research here.

Zatorre and Baum [1] evaluates the differences between human perception of music and speech, focusing on interval and frequency patterns. Ross et al. [2] explores musical intervals and standard western music chord structure, and correlates this with speech intervals. List [3] identifies the fundamental differences between music and speech, discussing classification differences between the two sets of sound. Fonagy and Magdics [4] attempts to classify both music and speech data sets into emotional categories based on melodic patterns. Similarities, in duration and pitch contrast, between melodies composed by English and French composers to that of their native tongues have been noted in [5, 6].

We take existing efforts a step further to focus specifically on spoken and sung questions. There are several different types of questions, with varying intonation patterns in British English. For

the purpose of this paper we will be focusing on polar questions, which are questions with a yes or no response, and ‘wh’ questions, which are questions with an interrogative word, such as who or how [7]. For this study, we will focus on the terminal intonation, the pattern of the end of the sentence, where question intonation patterns are most regular [8, 9, 10]. Comparing these terminal intonation patterns to that found in song melodies corresponding to the question types of interest, we ascertain whether speech intonation and song melody patterns correlate directly.

In order to conduct the study, we created a dataset consisting of excerpts from British English popular music corresponding to lyrics determined as either polar questions or ‘wh’ questions. Prior work on speech intonation of questions provides a phonetic model for comparison to our sung melody data set, and we test the hypothesis that intonation patterns of spoken questions and sung melodic profiles corresponding to questions are correlated.

The study of how speech intonation and song melodies inter-relate benefits the understanding of the art of composing melodies for songs. It provides useful insight into the psychology of music writing and the design of melodic structures. Applications include the generating of natural sounding melodies (any written text could be turned into a musical utterance using the rules learned), language acquisition (intonation pattern learning using music and songs) [1, 11], and culturally-sensitive lyric translations. The knowledge gained could also benefit music retrieval, for example, allowing earworms without words to be more readily associated with their lyrics [12].

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the work undertaken and explains how the data set was created and the analysis performed; the results of the analyses and discussions of the results are presented in Section 3; conclusions are drawn and further work presented in Section 4.

## 2 Method

This section presents the method implemented for this paper, in relation to the dataset collected as discussed in Section 2.2.

### 2.1 Basis for Comparison: Speech Intonation

Terminal phonetic patterns of questions can be represented in various ways; here, we focus on pitch change. The commonly used “tadpole diagram” representation is shown in Figure 1. The line drawings indicating the shape of the fundamental frequency of the intonation pattern; the head indicates the point of stress. These models of terminal phonetic patterns will be the ones referenced throughout the paper.

Next, we discuss some intonation patterns that have been theorised about and observed in authentic speech. Grabe et al. [9] present the argument that both ‘wh’ and polar questions most commonly have a falling intonation pattern, and found that only 44% of questions matched this pattern in spoken polar questions. O’Connor and Arnold [13] present the argument for a low rise effect in polar questions, and Cruttenden [14] suggest that a low rise or a fall are both suitable models for ‘wh’ questions. Huynh [15] compared intonation patterns in authentic conversation and textbook intonation patterns; a part of their results is reproduced in Table 1.

For the purposes of this paper, songs will grouped into the terminal intonation pattern groups: rise-fall, rise, fall, fall-rise, or hold. These groups will be compared against intonation patterns found by researchers in authentic conversation [9].

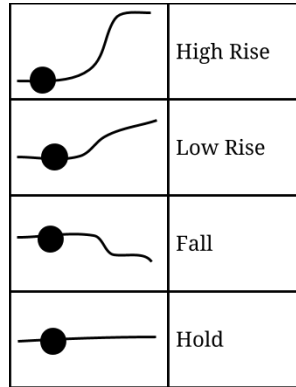


Fig. 1: Intonation pattern models

Table 1: Speech intonation patterns (reproduced from [15])

Intonation Pattern	Authentic conversation	Textbook
Wh-question	Rising-falling Falling-rising	Rising-Falling
Yes/ No questions	Falling-Rising Terminal falling pitch	Falling-Rising

## 2.2 Data Set

For this study, a dataset was produced, including collection, editing and analysis of the data to produce a map of the fundamental frequency of the lyrics of each song. This section will discuss the collection and production of this data set.

A selection of fifty audio clips from forty-nine different songs and forty-seven different performers was selected. A defining characteristic of this data set was that the performer had to be British English. The songs were selected from a range of British Pop music published over the past 60 years, and are listed in Table 6. For reproducibility, the full dataset, annotations, software implementation and appendix are available online <sup>1</sup>.

The songs were selected for the different question types in them—polar questions and ‘wh’ questions. The data set was edited from audio tracks; the appropriate section of audio was cut out using the Logic [16] software on an Apple Macbook Pro. The fundamental frequency ( $f_0$ ) of the melody of each question was then obtained from the recording excerpt using the Tony [17] software (which uses the pYIN algorithm from [18]). A range of proposed  $f_0$  tracks are proposed by the TONY software, and the correct  $f_0$  representing the sung melody is selected manually. Figure 2 shows a selected track in the TONY annotation environment. The output is a series of non-linearly spaced data points. The data is then smoothed with a moving average window of 50 TONY output samples, and plotted in MATLAB; an example can be seen in Figure 3.

## 2.3 Analysis

The sung melodic profile patterns abstracted from the audio data are classified into one of four terminal intonation patterns: Rise-Fall, Fall-Rise, Fall, Others. We test the hypothesis that the

<sup>1</sup> URL FOR DATASET

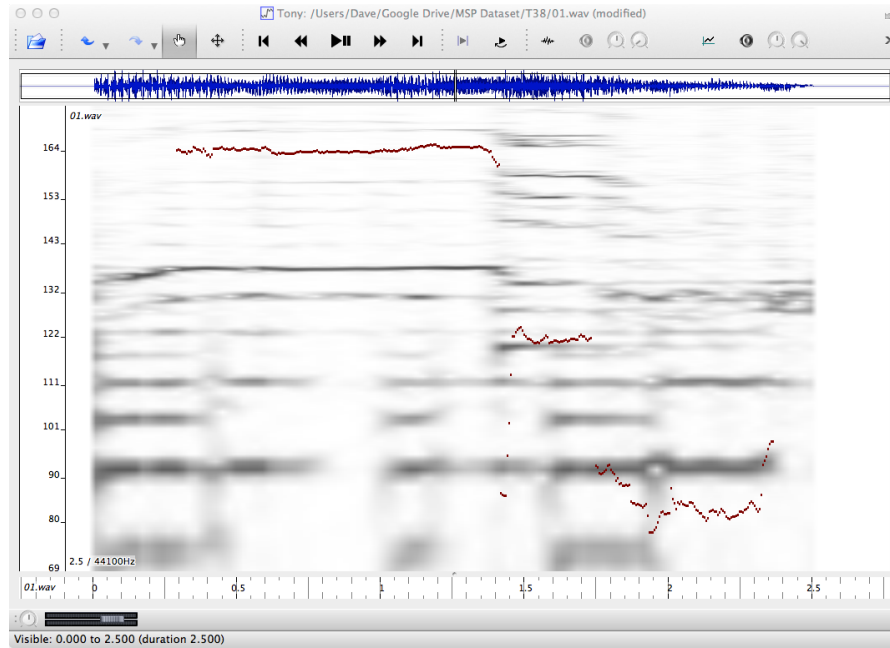


Fig. 2: A Screenshot of the TONY Annotation Environment corresponding to the words, “Who are you?” from the song, “Who are you?” by The Who

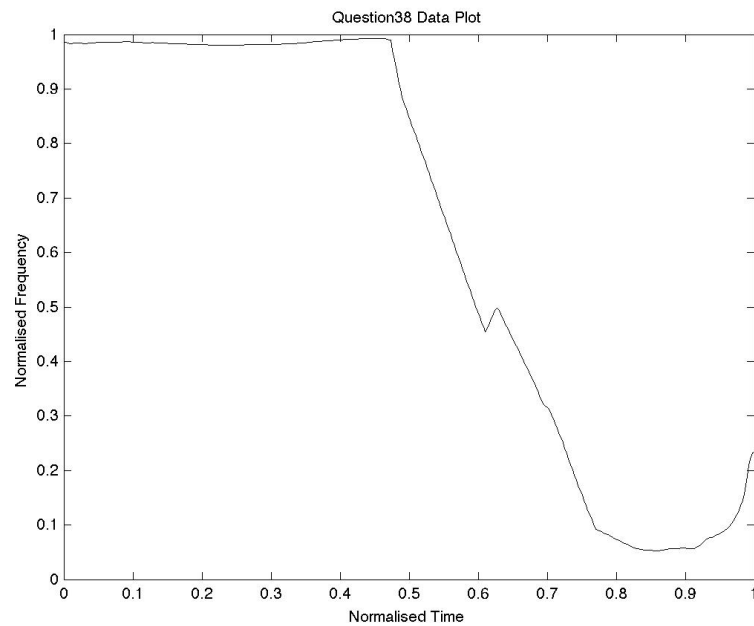


Fig. 3: A MATLAB plot of the TONY annotation data, smoothed and normalised by both time and frequency, corresponding to the data shown in Figure 2

intonation patterns of questions within speech and music are correlated. The dataset is analysed by comparing the song lyric f0 tracks to a dataset of speech intonation patterns for questions. The speech dataset we use for the comparison consists of over 500 question intonation patterns for standard British English speech from a range of dialects, and is taken from [9]. From this, we determine whether the melodic profile patterns follow commonly observed speech patterns, and draw conclusions from the results.

### 3 Results and Discussion

In this section, we present the results of comparing the f0 of the sung melodies to the expected speech intonation patterns, as they occur in natural speech, for the question types represented by the song lyrics. The f0 track of every song has been made publicly available via the website <sup>2</sup>. The melody f0 patterns extracted are categorised as into Rise-Fall, Fall-Rise, Fall, and Other patterns by inspection.

Figure 5 shows the f0 frequencies of the sung melodies extracted in the manner described in Section 2.2 for the song excerpts corresponding to ‘wh’ questions. Figure 4a and Figure 4b show the melody profile patterns that were classified into Falling and Rise-Fall types, respectively. All ‘wh’ question sung melody profile patterns classified as Falling have been plotted in Figure 4c, with the mean f0 plotted in bold for comparison, to demonstrate the spread of the data, and likewise for the Rise-Fall melodic profiles in Figure 4d.

The f0 patterns of the sung melodies for polar question lyrics are plotted in Figure 5. As with the ‘wh’ questions, the mean sung melody profile is shown in Figure 5a and Figure 5b for Falling and Rise-Fall patterns, respectively, and all melody profiles are shown in Figure 5c and Figure 5d, respectively.

Table 2: Classification of sung melodic profiles corresponding to questions in lyrics sorted by question types (absolute numbers)

Question Type	Rise-Fall	Fall-Rise	Fall	Other	Total
Wh-question	11	6	5	3	25
Yes/ No questions	11	2	7	5	25
All Questions	22	8	12	8	50

Table 3: Classification of sung melodic profiles corresponding to questions in lyrics sorted by question types (percentages)

Question Type	Rise-Fall	Fall-Rise	Fall	Other
Wh-question	44%	24%	20%	12%
Yes/ No questions	44%	8%	28%	20%
All Questions	44%	16%	24%	16%

The numeric results of the classification are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. It can be seen that the majority of the terminal melodic profiles of questions follow the Falling intonation pattern.

<sup>2</sup> Dataset url omitted for blind review

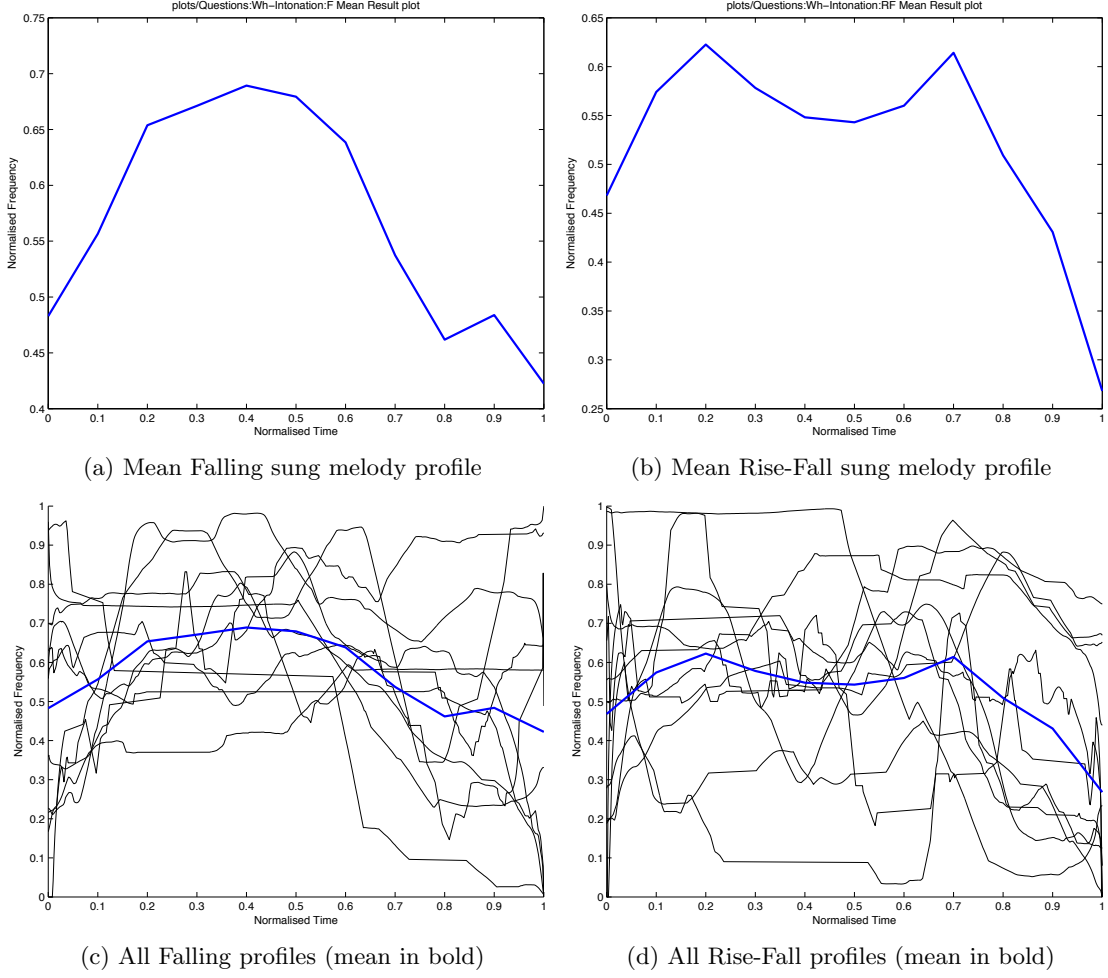


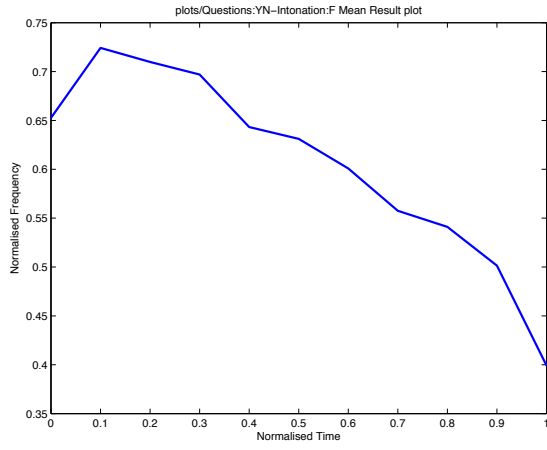
Fig. 4: Frequency (f0) plots for 'wh' question sung melody profiles

This correlates with the speech intonation patterns cited in Grabe et al. [9], in which it was suggested that questions should all have a terminal Falling intonation pattern. Both Rise-Fall and Falling melodic profiles exhibit a terminal falling pattern, and thus 64% of interrogative questions and 72% of polar questions had a terminal falling sung melody pattern.

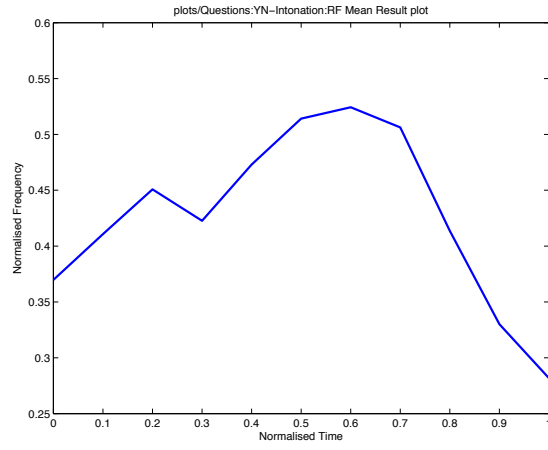
These results also concur with intonation patterns observed in authentic conversations as described in Huynh [15], and with standard intonation patterns as proposed by Cruttenden [14] regarding the terminal falling intonation pattern. Thus, at first blush, our hypothesis that the intonation patterns of questions within speech and music are correlated appears to be supported by the data.

We employ statistically analysis to verify the observed correlations. We use as the template speech patterns of 'wh' and polar question a set of example data from Grabe et al. [9], reproduced in Table 4. This data provides us with a basis for comparison to test the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between speech intonation patterns and song lyric intonation patterns.

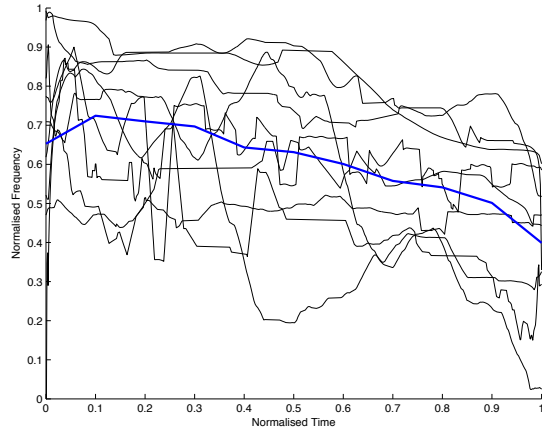
The  $\chi^2$  value was calculated to test the independence between the observed patterns in the melodic profiles dataset and that of Grabe et al. [9], and the results are presented in Table 5. The



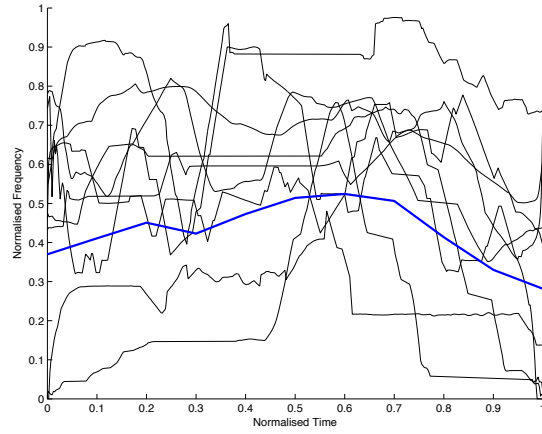
(a) Mean Falling sung melody profile



(b) Mean Rise-Fall sung melody profile



(c) All Falling profiles (mean in bold)



(d) All Rise-Fall profiles (mean in bold)

Fig. 5: Frequency ( $f_0$ ) plots for polar question sung melody profiles

Table 4: Speech intonation patterns for different questions (reproduced from [9])

Intonation	‘Wh’ Questions			Polar Questions			Total
	Cambridge	Newcastle	Belfast	Cambridge	Newcastle	Belfast	
RF	0	18	0	0	0	0	18
FR	19	24	90	30	32	24	219
F	57	42	0	36	25	0	160
R	32	12	12	18	0	66	140
H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	108	96	102	84	57	90	537

null hypothesis is rejected with over 99% confidence, and therefore we conclude that dependencies exist between song lyric melodic profile patterns corresponding to questions in British Popular music and terminal question intonation patterns in British English speech.

Table 5:  $\chi^2$  values and p-values for different question types

Question Type	$\chi^2$	p-value
‘Wh’ Questions	55.17	0.00000
Polar Questions	119.2	0.00000

## 4 Conclusion

We have presented the creation of a sung melody dataset consisting of 50 excerpts of British Popular music corresponding to questions in the lyrics. These song lyric melodic profiles were annotated and classified with regards to their terminal intonation patterns. These terminal patterns were then compared to textbook speech intonation patterns and to a summary table from Grabe et al. [9] to test the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between speech intonation patterns and song lyric intonation patterns. The null hypothesis was rejected with high confidence and we conclude that correlations exist between the intonation patterns of questions in speech and the melodic profiles of sung melodies.

Our study focused on sung melody extracted from audio recordings. Similar studies could be carried out using symbolic data. This work could be extended to a larger range of languages and dialects, or to genres other than British Pop music. As discussed in Grabe et al. [9], there exists a range of dialects even of British English alone, each with their own intonation patterns. A straightforward extension of this work could examine similar dependencies for data sorted by the songwriters’ dialects to determine if composed melodies follow the specific dialect intonation patterns of the author.



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## A Appendix: Data Set

Table 6: Data Set

Song	Act	Question
How Long	Ace	How long has this been going on?
But don't you remember?	Adele	But don't you remember?
24 Hour Party People	Happy Mondays	How old are you?
Wish you were here	Pink Floyd	Do you think you can tell?
Life on Mars	David Bowie	Is there life on Mars?
Where Do You Think You're Going	Dire Straits	Where Do You Think You're Going
Can you feel the love tonight?	Elton John	Can you feel the love tonight?
Silent Cry	Feeder	What have I done?
Wisemen	James Blunt	Where are you now?
Where are you now?	Mumford & Son	Where are you now?
Another place to fall	KT Tunstall	Are you blind?
The Crunge	Led Zeppelin	'You want me to love you love some other man too?
Are you still into it?	Mogwai	Will you still kiss me?
How can anybody possibly know how I feel?	Morrissey	How can anybody possibly know how I feel?
D'you know what I mean?	Oasis	D'you know what I mean?
Do you feel like we do?	Peter Frampton	Do you feel like we do?
Do you remember?	Phil Collins	Do you remember?
Do you remember the first time?	Pulp	Do you remember the first time?
Who want to live forever?	Queen	Who want to live forever?
Bohemian Rhapsody	Queen	Is this the real life
Bohemian Rhapsody	Queen	Is this just fantasy
You and who's army?	Radiohead	You and who's army?
Matty Groves	Fairport Convention	How do you like my lady who lies in your arms asleep?
Break the spell	Rolling Stones	Can you break the spell?
Where Ya Going?	Gomez	Now where you Going?
Who knows where the time goes?	Sandy Denny	Who knows where the time goes?
Chasing Cars	Snow Patrol	Would you lie with me me and just forget the world?
Who do you think you are?	Spice Girls	Who do you think you are?
Brand New Day	Sting & The Police	And how many times do you swear you will never love again?
Itchycoo Park	Small Faces	What did you do there?
Why don't we do it on the road?	The Beatles	Why don't we do it on the road?
How deep is your love?	The Bee Gees	How deep is your love?
Why can't I be you?	The Cure	Why can't I be you?
How soon is now?	The Smiths	How can you say I go about things the wrong way.
What difference does it make?	The Smiths	So what difference does it make?
Who are you?	The Who	Who are you?
Why does it always rain on me?	Travis	Why does it always rain on me?
Ice Hockey Hair	Super Furry Animals	What did I do to you to make you feel so blue?
Where are you now when I need you	Waterboys	Do I really believe I need you?
Ever Fallen In Love With Someone	The Buzzcocks	Even Fallen in love with someone
You know I'm no good	Amy Winehouse	What did you do with him today?
The Reflex	Duran Duran	So Why don't you use it?
Coffee and TV	Blur	Do you feel like a chain store?
Clint Eastwood	Gorillaz	You think its fictional?
Landslide	Fleetwood Mac	Can I handle the seasons of my life
Running Up That Hill	Kate Bush	Do you want to feel how it feels?
Do I wanna know?	Artic Monkeys	Have you got colour in your cheeks?
Breaking into Heaven	Stone Roses	Have I got news for you?
Don't look back into the sun	The Libertines	huh did you say?
Love will tear us apart	Joy Divison	Is my timing that flawed?