

Barbra Streisand: Four songs from *Color Me Barbra*

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Introduction

These four songs from Barbra Streisand's 1966 album *Color Me Barbra* are the prescribed music for OCR's Area of Study 2: Popular song. They need to be studied in the context of other examples of music from this Area of Study, which includes blues, jazz, swing and big band styles, and will form part of the OCR A and AS level exams in the summer of 2022.

Though no other repertoire is specified, OCR explains in its specification that students should study the development of the **song** and **singers** in early popular genres, including vocal jazz and blues, popular solo song and interpretation of **standards** – well-known songs from the jazz, blues and swing genres that have been recorded by many different artists.

There's a list in OCR's specification of aspects of these genres that should be focused on, including **structures** of songs, performing and singing **techniques, melody** and **lyrics, expression** and use of **accompaniment**. In addition, there should be consideration of the **conditions** and **context** in which the music was performed, such as audience, location, recording techniques and social context.

Barbra Streisand

Barbra Streisand, one of the best-selling recording artists of all time, is a great choice for in-depth study. Her long and illustrious career covers a wide range of genres: she has appeared in classic films and musicals, had numerous singles and albums at the top of the charts (in the US and worldwide), toured extensively, giving concerts to sell-out audiences, and appeared in numerous television specials.

The album *Color Me Barbra* was tied in to one such TV special, which Streisand made for CBS in 1966 as part of a ten-special contract that reportedly earned her \$5m. Its name refers to the fact that it was filmed in colour as opposed to black and white – this was a relatively new technology at the time.

Born into a Jewish family in New York City in 1942, Streisand dreamed of being an actress from a young age. She spent some time at stage school but soon focused on singing, building a fan base as a nightclub singer and off-Broadway performer in the early 1960s, and making her Broadway debut in 1962 in a show called *I Can Get It For You Wholesale* for which she received a Tony award nomination. She signed with Columbia Records and her first album, *The Barbra Streisand Album* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjoR2d5VQW4&list=OLAK5uy_mWcvZRI0jkPsxPeDkqktO_cb6m-je4Mdl), was released in 1963 when she was just 21, winning multiple Grammy awards.

Streisand's big Broadway smash came the following year when she starred in *Funny Girl*, scoring a hit single with the main song 'People' and appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine. The CBS television contract followed, and Streisand has remained at the forefront of music and film to the present day. Her most famous films have included *Funny Girl* and *Hello, Dolly!*, *The Way We Were* (which gave her one of her biggest hit singles), *A Star Is Born* (remade recently starring Lady Gaga) and the 1983 film *Yentl* which she starred in and directed, winning two Oscars. She has worked with many other big names in the music industry, including schoolfriend Neil Diamond, with whom she had a huge hit in 1978 with the song 'You Don't Bring Me Flowers'.

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Barbra Streisand in 1966

To date, Barbra Streisand has sold more than 68 million records – the most of any female singer of the 20th century – and has had a number 1 album in the US in every decade since the 1960s. She has turned down major film roles such as Sally Bowles in *Cabaret* (1972 – the role went to Liza Minnelli who won an Oscar for it) and Eva Peron in *Evita* (1996 – the role went to Madonna). She is married to TV actor James Brolin and is known as an activist, supporting causes such as the US Democratic party and LGBT rights in America. She is one of a select few artists to have received all of the ‘big four’ awards: Oscar (film), Tony (Broadway stage show), Emmy (television) and Grammy (recording).

Color Me Barbra

Barbra Streisand’s seventh studio album reached number 3 in the US album charts and received two Grammy nominations. The TV special tied in with the album aired in March 1966. Part of the album is given over to a nine-minute medley that includes some 13 songs, but it’s four of the ‘full’ songs from the album that students are asked to study:

- ▶ **‘Yesterdays’:** written by Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach in 1933 for a show called *Roberta*, which also included the song ‘Smoke Gets In Your Eyes’.
- ▶ **‘Where or When’:** written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart in 1937 for the musical *Babes in Arms*.
- ▶ **‘Where Am I Going?’:** written by Cy Coleman, Neil Simon and Dorothy Fields for the musical *Sweet Charity*, which opened on Broadway in the same year as Streisand’s recording, 1966, and also includes the song ‘Big Spender’. The film version of *Sweet Charity*, starring Shirley MacLaine and directed by choreography legend Bob Fosse, was released in 1969.
- ▶ **‘Starting Here, Starting Now’:** written by David Shire and Richard Maltby Jr specifically for Streisand. It became one of her signature songs.

Streisand's style – an introduction

Before getting into the four prescribed songs in detail, here's a listening and research activity intended as an introduction, giving students a chance to understand Barbra Streisand's style and the reasons for her success and longevity in the music business.

As a starting point, put these questions to your students:

- ▶ Why do you think Streisand made such an impact as a 20-year-old singer in the early 1960s?
- ▶ Why did Columbia (her record label) and CBS (the TV company) offer this young singer such lucrative deals?
- ▶ How does Streisand compare with other successful singers of the 1950s and 60s? What makes her stand out?
- ▶ What sort of songs does Streisand perform? Is there any particular genre or style that suits her best?
- ▶ What are the key features of Streisand's singing style?
- ▶ What are the key features of the musical accompaniments in Streisand's performances?

To get some answers to these deliberately open questions, here are some quotes about Streisand, plus reading and listening suggestions for your students to look at. Hopefully these will serve as a starting point for discussion and some more independent research.

Quotes:

- ▶ 'Barbra Streisand never left Broadway exactly; she brought it with her to movies, albums and concert halls. And her signature vocal style, a suspension bridge between old-school belting and microphone pop, remains influential throughout the theatre world and beyond.' (www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/broadways-25-all-time-greatest-divas-broadway)
- ▶ 'Streisand is a contralto with a couple of octaves at her command, and she wows her listeners with her shrewd dynamics (in-your-ear soft here, elbowing-loud there), her bravura climbs, her rolling vibrato, and the singular Streisand-from-Brooklyn nasal quality of her voice – a voice as immediately recognisable in its way as Louis Armstrong's.' (www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/06/20/barbra-streisand)
- ▶ 'For me, the Streisand voice is one of the natural wonders of the age, an instrument of infinite diversity and timbral resource.' (http://barbra-archives.com/bjs_library/70s/high_fidelity_1976.html)

To read:

- ▶ This Day in Jewish History: Barbra Streisand Signs Her First Record Deal (www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-this-day-streisand-signs-first-record-deal-1.5309392)
- ▶ 'My Name is Barbra' (www.imdb.com/title/tt0243435/)
- ▶ Streisand's Fine Instrument and Classic Instinct (www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/arts/music/27tomm.html)

To watch:

- ▶ Barbra Streisand, with a little help from her friends (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE-RQtyaSCM)
- ▶ Barbra Streisand returns to her Broadway dressing room (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPLkKVsGcRc)
- ▶ Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand (www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFVxX3RtyhQ)

To listen to (and to compare Streisand with other stars of the early 1960s):

- ▶ Judy Garland (www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mdHVAF5UeE)
- ▶ Barbra Streisand: 'Cry Me a River' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TA6LQmPoec)
- ▶ Billie Holiday (www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMWRheQtvmA)

‘Yesterdays’

The opening track on the album, ‘Yesterdays’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh5zkpzvao) is a Jerome Kern favourite, recorded by many of the best-known jazz musicians of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, such as Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and trumpeter Miles Davis. Streisand’s version was arranged by Robert Mersey, one of Columbia’s ‘house’ arrangers, and he gave it a complex orchestral sound typical of a lot of the US hits of the time, such as songs by Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra.

Structure and arrangement

‘Yesterdays’ is structured in verse form, sometimes called strophic form. After a fanfare-like introduction there are two 16-bar verses in 4/4 time, with a slow-moving vocal melody accompanied by an upbeat, complex instrumental arrangement. Then, a third verse sees a change into 3/4 time which effectively doubles the tempo, though the vocal remains at a similar pace. On paper, this makes the third verse 32 bars long, since the double-time feel means that each line of Streisand’s melody takes twice as many bars. The song ends with a free-time coda or outro.

Intro (7 bars)	Trumpets, horns and trombones play an angular four-bar fanfare-like theme, arranged like a fugue with each part coming in separately, building up the texture. Tubular bells are added and the rhythm section enters at the start of the fifth bar, setting up a double-time groove in B flat minor. The sixth and seventh bars contain a short theme played in dialogue between harpsichord and flute, with sustained string instruments. Mersey’s arrangement is clearly Baroque-influenced and very complex.
Verse 1 (16 bars)	Streisand’s vocal melody is slow moving, in keeping with the ballad style of the original Jerome Kern song. However, the accompaniment continues with its double-time groove, and there are interjections from violins, brass, harpsichord and glockenspiel.
Verse 2 (16 bars)	As verse 1 but with more embellishments from Streisand, who begins to reveal her range of tonal colour and flexibility of rhythm.
Verse 3 (32 bars, quicker tempo in 3/4)	An energetic jazz-waltz groove takes over, with more use of brass and drum fills. This style of groove was popular in 1960s film and stage musicals, such as <i>Funny Girl</i> , <i>Hello, Dolly!</i> and <i>Sweet Charity</i> . Streisand’s vocal remains slow-moving but she adds rhythmic pushes in keeping with the style and expands her pitch and dynamic range even further. You can still hear the harpsichord! As Streisand sustains the final long note of the verse, the accompaniment moves back into 4/4 as before.
Outro (flexible time)	‘Yesterdays’ is sung twice, in free time, answered by sustained chords and rhythmic interjections from the orchestra.

Melody and harmony

Here's a transcription of the Jerome Kern melody, along with its chords and the lyrics of the first verse.

B♭m **C♭maj7** **F7** **B♭m** **C♭maj7** **F7**
 Yes - ter - days, yes - ter - days,
 5 **B♭m** **F7/A** **D♭/A♭** **Gm7** **G♭7** **B♭m/F** **C7/E** **Fm7** **Gm7** **G7** **C7**
 days I knew as hap - py sweet se - ques - tered days.
 9 **F7** **B♭9** **E♭13** **A♭9**
 Old - en days, gold - en days,
 13 **D♭13** **G♭maj7** **E♭m7** **Cm7** **F7**
 days of mad ro - mance and love.

Streisand's interpretation of this slow-moving melody becomes increasingly rhythmically 'loose' as the song progresses. The complex-looking harmony is actually quite conventional for the style, as far as minor-key standards go, with frequent use of the tonic (B flat minor) and dominant (F) as well as a number of substitutions, such as the C flat chord in the second and fourth bars which replaces the dominant chord. Three things make the harmony particularly colourful:

- ▶ The use of chord extensions, such as 7ths, 9ths and 13ths.
- ▶ The use of 'slash' chords, where the bass note is something other than the root of the chord (indicated by a forward slash).
- ▶ The use of chromatic progressions, such as the one in bars 5 and 6 where the bass descends chromatically.

Other features

- ▶ The upbeat accompaniment, use of imitative entries and prominence of the harpsichord reveal a strong influence of Baroque music in Mersey's arrangement. You can find plenty of Baroque influences in other pop music of the 1960s, such as 'In My Life' by the Beatles and 'You Still Believe in Me' by the Beach Boys. A good opportunity for a comparison activity!
- ▶ The opening brass ideas sound very strongly like the beginning of a Baroque fugue, with use of perfect 5th intervals and answers beginning on the dominant.
- ▶ The harpsichord lines are decorative and played in parallel 6ths, again similar to Baroque music.
- ▶ The slow tempo of Streisand's melody is set against a double-time 'oom-cha' bass and percussion groove which brings lots of energy to the music.
- ▶ The move into swung triple time for the third verse switches the feel from Baroque to big-band jazz, complete with horn licks and syncopations.
- ▶ Despite the complex arrangement, there is plenty of time for Streisand to pull the rhythms of the melody around and demonstrate her control of tone. Her long notes are particularly expressive. Her vibrato is beautifully controlled and she has strength and support right across the pitch range.
- ▶ In the outro, she demonstrates a more subtle side to her tone, again with enviable pitch control.

A practice Section B question

Section B of the OCR exam paper consists of ten-mark question for which students are expected to know the songs in detail, and their context. They might ask you about structure, elements of music, background information, or to compare Streisand's version with that of another artist. Here are a couple of sample questions on 'Yesterdays':

- ▶ Compare and contrast Streisand's performance of 'Yesterdays' with that of Ella Fitzgerald, which you can find here (www.youtube.com/watch?v=od9NHPSUDQA). You could refer to vocal styles, instrumental arrangement, rhythm, structure or performing techniques.
- ▶ Describe the structure and arrangement of Streisand's version of 'Yesterdays', explaining what made it typical of 1960s pop music.

'Where or When'

'Where or When' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TpwokNeHoA) is probably the most covered standard on Streisand's album – more than 100 artists have made recordings of Rodgers and Hart's song since its composition in 1937, from Frank Sinatra to Michael Bublé, doo-wop band Dion and the Belmonts to Rod Stewart.

It was the opening number of Rodgers and Hart's show *Babes in Arms*, a duet between the characters Val and Billie who have just met. The lyrics deal with the concept of *déjà vu* – the mistaken feeling that something you are experiencing has happened in exactly the same way before. Other famous songs from the show include 'My Funny Valentine' and 'The Lady is a Tramp'.

Structure and arrangement

Robert Mersey is again responsible for the arrangement, and the song is structured in what's popularly known as 32-bar song form, found in many jazz and pop songs of the 1930s and 40s, such as Harold Arlen's 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' and Gershwin's 'I Got Rhythm', which you could compare with this song. The 32 bars of the main part of the song (which we will call the chorus) are arranged into three 8-bar sections with a contrasting 8-bar bridge – or middle-eight – between the second and the third, making an AABA structure.

Unlike the Arlen or Gershwin examples, each A section of the chorus is extended, making a rather irregular 40-bar structure, preceded by an introduction and verse, as seen below. A full orchestra is used, with plenty of interjections from wind instruments and a prominent harp part.

OCR AoS 2 Barbra Streisand: Four songs from *Color Me Barbra* ■ KS5

Intro (4 bars)	An instrumental introduction featuring sustained high notes and rising arpeggios from wind instruments and harp, at a moderate tempo with four beats in a bar. It sets up a relaxed, dream-like mood, appropriate to the words of the verse about to start.
Verse (10 bars)	Streisand sings of the weird feeling of déjà vu and the arpeggios continue. Her rhythms are loose and relaxed, and the arpeggios give way to sustained string and wind chords with chromatic harmony and interjections from flute and oboe. Use of major 7ths and whole-tone shifts make the key hard to discern for a while.
Chorus intro (2 bars)	The accompaniment style for the chorus begins – pizzicato bass, tremolo string chords, harp and falling figures from the woodwind. We settle into the key of F major, though the wind figures are dissonant.
Chorus A (10 bars)	Streisand's delivery is fairly true to the original, except for her trademark flexibility of rhythm which sits against the more rigid rhythmic features of the accompaniment. There are two phrases, the first 4 bars long, the second 6 (as can be seen in the transcription below).
A (10 bars)	Melodically similar to before, but with a more sustained, colourful and fully textured accompaniment. The little woodwind figures have gone and the orchestra builds up the dynamic level, as does Streisand.
B (8 bars)	A striking contrast between the first part of this section, which has full textures and busy string and horn countermelodies, and the final bars which become soft and light, and much slower in tempo. As with all Streisand performances, we get the full emotional range! The harmony is based around the relative minor key (D minor).
A (12 bars)	Glissandos and orchestra sweeps, along with a key change to E flat major, bring in the final section of the chorus and a build to the climax of the song. Streisand repeats the phrase 'and loved before' twice, adding four more bars, but omits the two bars that previously followed this, moving straight to the line 'but who knows where or when', holding the final E flat for some 7 seconds as the orchestral arrangement build to the final crashing chords.

Melody and harmony

The score below shows a transcription of Richard Rodgers’ original melody of the A section (transposed to F major) and a rough idea of Streisand’s version, showing her rhythmic flexibility and tendency to start lines ‘late’. It also shows Mersey’s interesting changes to the harmony at the end. Get students to discuss and perhaps perform this, and to compare it with the second and final A sections, which become increasingly more complex.

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with two staves. The top staff represents the original melody, and the bottom staff represents Streisand's version. Chord progressions are indicated above the staves. Lyrics are written below the notes.

Original:
 F F⁶ Fmaj⁷
 It seems we stood and talked like this be - fore, we

Streisand:
 F F⁶ Fmaj⁷
 It seems _____ we stood and talked like this be - fore,

5 B^bmaj⁷
 looked at each oth - er in the same way then,
B^bmaj⁷/F
 we looked at each oth - er in the same way then,

7 Gm C⁹
 but I can't re - mem - ber where or
E^bmaj⁹
 but I can't re - mem - ber where or

9 A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷
 when. _____
Dmaj⁷ Gm⁹ C
 when. _____

Other features and activities

- ▶ This is a ‘crescendo’ or ‘build’ song, going from quiet beginnings to a climactic end. Songs from shows often do this – think of examples of others, such as ‘One Day More’ from *Les misérables* or ‘Maybe This Time’ from *Cabaret*.
- ▶ Ask your students to think about how this sense of ‘build’ is achieved, through the use of instrumentation, texture, dynamics and vocal register.
- ▶ A Section B question on this song might ask what features of Streisand’s vocal delivery make her such a revered singer – get students to brainstorm these.
- ▶ The orchestral accompaniment is very fluid, with only the pizzicato bassline keeping a steady beat much of the time. There are also frequent countermelodies and much dissonant, lush harmony in Mersey’s arrangement.

‘Where Am I Going?’

In Cy Coleman’s show *Sweet Charity*, which opened the same year as Streisand’s TV special, the lead character, Charity, sings ‘Where Am I Going?’ as she finds herself at a crossroads in her life. Her confusion comes across in the song, which consists of repeating rhythmic ideas moving around a variety of pitches and keys.

Set in E flat major and moving to B flat major and finally G minor, Streisand’s version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLJURrY62II) again features her rhythmic flexibility and range of vocal colour. It’s a very personal performance, filled with expressive contrast and underpinned by a 3+3+2 rhythm common in much Latin American dance music – the character Charity has just left her job as a dancer.

Structure and melody

The song is through-composed, again arranged in the form of a ‘build’ song to showcase Streisand’s vocal abilities. It relies on repetition of motifs, but lacks a cohesive form, in keeping with Charity’s loss of direction in life. Phrases tend to be two bars in length and repeat at different pitches, allowing for complex tonalities and harmonies.

A useful exercise would be to compare Streisand’s performance with the original, sung by Gwen Verdon here (www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nQZ2mSP6qI&list=RD1nQZ2mSP6qI&start_radio=1). There are some significant differences, particularly in the lengths of phrases.

Harmony and tonality

Beginning in E flat major, Streisand’s version modulates freely using dominant 7th chords, again contributing to the sense of lost direction. The use of these chords makes the harmony very reliant on the cycle of 5ths, moving at liberty from dominant 7th to tonic with liberal amounts of chromaticism added.

Texture and rhythm

The 3+3+2 rhythms underpin much of the song, which is homophonic and dominated by Streisand’s melodies. There are countermelodies from the violins and occasional imitation between voice and accompaniment, for example on the words ‘Where am I going?’. Drums, piano and bass provide the rhythm, in the style of a jazz trio at first, though the arrangement becomes increasingly full and orchestral as the song progresses.

‘Starting Here, Starting Now’

The lovely ballad ‘Starting Here, Starting Now’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=C15l6sU8J5U), written especially for Streisand, follows the lead of the other songs on this album and builds to a ‘big finish’ from a restrained, personal opening. Like ‘Where or When’, it is structured in 32-bar song form.

Intro (4 bars)	In E major, a steady accompaniment figure in 4/4 time at ballad tempo is set up, with piano, bass and drums keeping the rhythm and interjections from strings and wind. The harmony is based on major 9th chords but rather conventionally moves from tonic (Emaj9) to a subdominant/dominant hybrid (Amaj7/B) and back again, with a gentle Latin rhythm underpinning it.
A (8 bars)	The two-chord accompanying figure continues for the first four bars, and Streisand’s simple, flexible melody sits neatly, with phrases mostly ending on the 7th or 9th degrees. The sixth and seventh bars feature a noticeable move to the chord of G major.
A (8 bars)	A repeat of the above, with violin countermelody added. In the eighth bar the texture fills out and there is a crescendo into the next section.
B (8 bars)	We modulate to A flat major, quite a distance from E major though A flat is of course the enharmonic equivalent of G sharp. This colourful modulation, along with increased dynamics, pitch and texture, take the song up a few steps in intensity. The first four bars are similar to the first four of the A section and followed by four more in B major with more flexible tempo.
A (14 bars)	B major becomes the dominant of E and so we find our way back to the tonic key for the return of the A section, and its associated stillness, reflected in the lyrics. This only lasts a couple of bars, however: orchestral textures build and new harmonies are explored, adding extra bars. Streisand’s final B is held for four of these extra measures, as the orchestra rises excitingly by step.
A (12 bars)	We should know by now how a Streisand song works. A repeat of the A section in the new key of F major forms the climax and allows Barbra to show off her impressive vocal power.