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**Monday, December 8, 2008**

### [Joe Satriani Sues Coldplay...](#)

[creativeguitar.ca](#)

Joe Satriani is suing Coldplay for music plagiarism for the Chorus section of their song, "Viva La Vida," - claiming that the Chorus his 2005 song, "If I Could Fly," has the same; melody, harmony & rhythm.

Satriani's **Lawsuit** states, "substantial original portions," of his 2005 instrumental piece, "If I Could Fly," were copied. The **copyright** infringement suit was filed in Los Angeles federal court on December 4. Satriani has asked for:

- 1). A Jury trial.
- 2). Damages.
- 3). Profits from Viva La Vida.

The general public's response has been overwhelming! And, especially from guitar players around the world...

Is the Joe Satriani song too similar to the Coldplay song?  
We'll wait and see what happens...

General response from the public is, "why was Satriani's ear so drawn to the chorus in the Coldplay song, and why did he feel that he had to sue Coldplay?"

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you think they really lineup with each other? I found a You Tube video where someone adjusted the pitch in an audio software program... have a listen for yourself...

Click on the link below to listen to the YouTube Mash-Up of both pieces, (pitch modified to the same key center)...

IF THIS GOES TO COURT... (Because there will be pressure from district court to have this settled without a jury trial - Jury trials are too expensive).

## THE COURT'S VIEW WILL BE SOMETHING LIKE:

The music plagiarism trial court judge will need to hear and decide several facts presented by both sides for this case to establish a jury and then go to trial.

The court will approach comparing the music in lay terms. They will view only essential elements of what all music is based on. Music elements which establish the essence of a musical composition - making individual songs unique.

1). The music plagiarism trial court judge will hear and decide facts presented on by both sides.

### JOE SATRIANI:

- The court will be presented with music plagiarism evidence on: Melody, harmony, rhythm, and to a lesser degree dynamics, (since these are the lay characteristics of music).

(a). First, the plaintiff (Joe) must show that the defendant actually, physically copied the plaintiff's work. (That will be tough). Who witnessed/knew that he, (Coldplay), actually did do it and will testify as to this when Satriani has his day in court?

(b). Second, the plaintiff must show that such copying was improper because it was of elements under **copyright** protection.

\*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical\\_plagiarism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_plagiarism)

Don't forget - the court will be viewing Coldplay as innocent when the trial starts. Maybe Coldplay didn't do it on purpose?

Satriani will more than likely face tough challenges to win his case. The 2008 Coldplay song released to the public is certainly quite a match to Satriani's piece. However, a court trial for music plagiarism is extremely complex...

Think about this... in 1997, The **Rolling Stones** were informed, (at a pre-launch party by Keith Richard's son nonetheless), that they had unintentionally copied **KD Lang's** 1992 song, "Constant Craving," with their tune, "Anybody Seen My Baby." Before the CD hit stores, The **Rolling Stones** immediately contacted **Lang** and worked out a retroactive song credit. **K.D. Lang** agreed on song publishing royalties with the **Stones** - since the songs were quite obviously sharing obvious primary elements of musical composition They were lucky - it was caught early on!

### ON THE STREETS:

Outside of court, this argument/**lawsuit** will probably all boil down to who you are a fan of. I would expect Coldplay fans might not think that the songs are too similar. And Satriani fans, (being made up of primarily guitarists & musicians), are going to be fairly pissed off that the tempo, meter, chorus melody and the bulk of the chord changes of the Coldplay song are pretty much exactly the same as the chorus of a Satriani tune composed three years ago. Guitar players stand behind their fellow axe slingers till death, "You can have my guitar when you pry my cold dead fingers off of it."

Don't get mad at me if my chord theory video upsets you. (Coldplay fans) I've not made any 100% decisions that Coldplay copied anybody, (looks like a judge will decide that). I am only putting a few of the pieces of the music theory associated to these songs out there for people to talk about, think about, and hopefully

understand the overall situation a little better.

Posted by Andrew Wasson at [12:01 AM](#)

Labels: [Joe Satriani - Coldplay](#)

### 16 comments:

[kbyrnes](#) said...

You've got a very sensible analysis, and it's nice to see/hear analysis rather than emotion on this interesting issue.

Just a nit, though. You note the harmonic progression Db, Eb, Ab, Fm being VI-VII-III-i in f minor. May I suggest that the progression is actually the extremely common I-iii-IV-V progression (in Ab, here) that is the foundation of such diverse works as Pachelbel's Canon in D, the old piano duet, "Heart and Soul," and about a million other pop tunes over the last 50 years. It's just that they enter the progression in the middle, as it were, rather than at the beginning. As I say, just a nit.

You might extend your analysis to the tune "Frances Limon" by the Argentine band, Los Enanitos Verdes. It's on YouTube; the similar-sounding part starts at about 35 seconds in.

[December 8, 2008 10:10 PM](#)

[Jayson](#) said...

Hey, I really enjoyed your video! I can tell that you are a wonderful music teacher and that your students are lucky to have you.

I was curious about the same thing that kbyrnes is referring to. When I listened to the two songs, they both seemed to be "major" in an emotional sense, as opposed to "minor". I know it's just a frame of reference, but I was curious as to your take on it.

I saw your video on YouTube first, and came here to leave a comment (I agree that the fighting and profanity gets way out of hand on those comments). Thanks again for a great analysis!

[December 9, 2008 5:14 AM](#)

[keysplayer](#) said...

Thanks for the video.

I wanted to suggest for your viewers an alternate analysis of the chord progressions, which I believe are better treated as major keys:

Based on the 30 or so seconds available in the iTunes store sample, Satriani's chorus to "If I Could Fly" has a key center of D major, and has the progression of:

IImin V7 Imaj VImin (3 times)

IImin V7 Imaj IVmaj

Note the classic 2 5 1's :) I don't have the full tune, so I don't know about the verse, but it's the chorus that's being compared to Viva La Vida's verse.

Coldplay's "Viva La Vida" is in the key of Ab major, and the verse (pretty much the whole song) has the following progression:

IVmaj V7 Imaj VImin

(over and over... maybe a few occasional variations to this later in the song, but that's essentially it).

I would definitely not analyze Viva La Vida as a minor key center though... the feeling of "home" is most stable on Ab major, and the Eb V chord easily accepts the dominant 7th, both of which point to Ab as the key center.

Anyhow, just wanted to point that out, as theory is my "forte" har har :P

Peace.

[December 9, 2008 5:27 AM](#)

[keysplayer](#) said...

Ah one correction... I accidentally wrote an extra Imaj chord near the end of Satriani's progression. The last phrase should be just:

IImin V7 IVmaj

[December 9, 2008 5:36 AM](#)

[kbyrnes](#) said...

Oh, the mistakes we make in haste...my post said I-iii-IV-V for Coldplay; it should be I-vi-IV-V. (I guess I did a mental chord substitution on the mediant-vs.-submediant thingy.)

Otherwise, I'm on the same page with keysplayer. The Coldplay tune is in Ab, it's just that they enter the progression *in medias res*, so to speak.

I still think the "Frances Limon" guitar solo is relevant (see my first post).

And just for kicks, try the beginning of "Hearts" by Marty Balin and, most surprising of all (so far), the hint of that motif at the beginning of "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets", the tango from "Damn Yankees"; YouTube has it in several versions by Sarah Vaughan.

[December 9, 2008 8:56 AM](#)

[Diego](#) said...

The Enanitos Verdes-Frances Limon reference is great but just for kicks take a look also at minute 3:17 and on from Cat Steven's Song Love/Heaven from the Album Foreigner going back to 1973. If the scenario of these "Four Bands-1 Song" spanning 4 genres over 35 years comes up in court, I would think Satriani doesn't have a chance and if I was Cat Stevens I would have my lawyer on speed dial immediatley. In all my years as a music composer I've heard of melodies sounding similar due same influences but this just takes the cake.

[December 9, 2008 9:45 AM](#)

[pkasting](#) said...

(Background: Have never listened to either of these songs and not a fan of either player, but I have

studied music theory and compose.)

I agree with the others that hear these sequences as being in major rather than in the relative minor.

To me the underlying structures are roughly:

IV-V-I-vi (Coldplay)

ii-V-I-vi (Satriani)

These are extremely common sequences, and not only these two songs but a large fraction of modern Western music has them.

Additionally, Satriani's use of sevenths, **versus** Coldplay's use of suspensions and retardations, gives the sequences distinct emotional character. Their key, orchestration, and melody line is also distinct.

In short, I find that the only commonalities between the two pieces are ones also found in many thousands of other songs.

(Postscript: I was surprised to see you write your analysis in all capital letters. All the analysis I have done and seen has used upper and lowercase letters to distinguish between major and minor chords.)

[December 9, 2008 11:18 AM](#)

[keysplayer](#) said...

I agree whole-heartedly with pkasting regarding his/her analysis. Both of these progressions are the epitome of classic, well-used, and actually very simple chord progressions... Satriani's around the ubiquitous ii V I, and Coldplay's the simpler rock favorite, IV V I.

Both upper and lower case numerals are appropriate, as various musicians use both... upper is ok so long as you also include the maj, min, etc - upper is less shorthand and possibly simpler for those less initiated to theory to understand, and was what was used in the video examples, which is why I used them in my response as well. Some people prefer upper all the time when hand writing also due to the possibility of it being illegible (e.g. not noticing an inconsistently dotted "i" could have bad consequences haha).

As kbyrnes mentions, a progression does not need to begin, end, or even "contain" the I chord. The key center is better determined by other factors. Rock songs can be a bit harder to determine since they often make use of modal interchange (probably accidentally in most cases haha).

When listening for the changes don't forget to make use of the bass line, which is almost always playing or at least landing/resting often on the roots of chords. It can sometimes help to increase the bass EQ on the song while listening, if the bass is not easily discerned. Try to determine the roots and write them down as the song plays - then go back through and build triads or 7ths on those roots against the song playing to determine the correct chord qualities. With that complete, you can then begin a well-informed analysis.

Peace :)

[December 9, 2008 11:52 AM](#)

[kbyrnes](#) said...

keysplayer, your comment about how to build up the harmonic profile of a song reminds of transcribing work I used to do as a grad student for guys with bands and cassette tapes of their songs, but no knowledge of written music. I sure wish I'd had a computer back in the 70's!

It's nice to see a discussion of these songs based on the music, rather than on whether someone's a #@%!.

[December 9, 2008 4:03 PM](#)

[Bruninho](#) said...

It's good to see that someone actually took an interest in actually analyzing that similarity instead of simply calling the Coldplay song a ripoff. I must, however, point a flaw in your analysis:

The only thing that would indicate that both the songs are in minor would be the presence of the V instead of the v chord, or that third in the melody. Since none of those is actually present in the song, I'd go with the A flat and D as the respective tones.

That would turn each progression into IV-V-I-vi and ii-V-I-vi, respectively. It should be noted that both are extremely cliché'd and neither Satriani nor Coldplay were the first to write it down. The song Hungry Heart, by Bruce Springsteen, for example, features the "If I Could Fly progression" in the tone of G. ii is a substitute for IV, in both Riemann's and Schöenberg's theories. That said, the harmonical argument falls down to whether we believe Coldplay chose to use those chords because they heard Satriani playing them or because they heard anyone else playing them.

[December 9, 2008 7:31 PM](#)

[Jayson](#) said...

Just a thought: anyone familiar with music theory (and it looks like everyone commenting here is) knows that chord structures in Western music are similar to each other. The use of sub-dominant, dominant and tonic chords can be found in virtually any song in Western music.

However, the comments here seem to be forgetting the other reasons why the two songs sound so similar to each other: meter, rhythm, and melody. Those things are very similar for significant portions of the two songs, as the original video analysis pointed out.

Good job, Mr. Wassoon

[December 10, 2008 2:53 AM](#)

[M@](#) said...

I dug your analysis on YouTube. Regardless of the **lawsuit** result, the analysis was interesting.

I wish more people would disable comments on YouTube, like you did. The emotionally stunted comments of some nitwits make otherwise good videos unwatchable for my kids.

[December 13, 2008 4:16 PM](#)

[Chalz](#) said...

With all due respect, as another musician who is familiar with the theory behind music, I would have expected a much different approach to this video. As you know, the progressions used in both songs are fairly popular in Western-music, primarily folk. Variations on such progressions have been used a countless number of times throughout history, and there are only so many melodies that can go over a loosely similar progression.

I can list of at least 5-10 songs off the top of my head that use a similar progression, and more

importantly, I can list at least 5 songs that have a similar melody line with slightly different background progressions. (Songs anywhere from "Never Gonna Give You Up" by Rick Astley to "Hearts" by Marty Balin.) It's not an uncommon melody.

I won't for a moment disagree with the statement, "They sound similar." It's true, Viva La Vida has similarities to Joe's 25 second chorus, but both songs have equal similarities to hundreds of other songs in the history of music.

I am a guitar player who digs both bands, but first and foremost I am a musician. Being the riff-factory for my band, I'm pretty worried about this case. I can't tell you how many times someone has heard a riff I wrote and said, "Hey, that kind of sounds like \_\_\_\_\_!" If someone could sue every time that happened, music would pretty much die off.

Again, I respect both artists, but these two songs, at very most, are just similar, just as are countless other songs in the history of music.

[December 14, 2008 9:16 AM](#)

[Stratocat](#) said...

That mashup vid was removed, but there are others to replace it.

Here's one that works for now:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xNQZHuAQJ8>

[December 18, 2008 11:51 PM](#)

[Jack Gutteridge](#) said...

I enjoyed your analysis very much. It helped me understand the theory behind it.

But by making this analysis you've missed the point. Music isn't just about maths. Satriani used a very simple melody, and so did Coldplay. The similar parts are not significant enough to claim plagurism of an entire song.

I don't know what the outcome of the **lawsuit** was, but I'm annoyed that people are taking this seriously. Martin is an amazing song writer as proven. I'm sure many of Satriani's melodies compare significantly to ones written before him.

There is a reason Chris Martin is one of the best song writers of his time and Satriani isn't.

[February 5, 2009 1:14 AM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

I love Joe's playing (he's one of my favorite guitarists, I bought Surfing with the Alien when it came out, and have purchased many of his CDs), and I like a lot of Coldplay songs, but I think Joe is just off base here, and any similarities were most likely coincidence...

After all, it's a common progression (he teaches music theory, so this kind of boggles the mind), a very common tempo, and anyone writing a listenable melody to this progression is probably going to concentrate on a lot of the same notes.

The funny part of this debate is since Coldplay stated that Joe's song 'lacks originality' they are kind of putting down their own song as well - and the fact that both are somewhat unoriginal is probably what led to this in the first place.

Sorry Joe, I love ya buddy but I think you're way off base here.

I can definitely hear where parts seem nearly identical but I don't think it was intentional plagiarism.

[April 8, 2009 8:51 PM](#)

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