

# PHILOSOPHY

Words and Music by Ben Folds



This song contains several important signature elements of Ben Folds' style. The piano influences here range from Elton John's early ballad style to the pounding rock 'n' roll of Little Richard to George Gershwin's concert jazz. All are well integrated into a tight arrangement.

The song is told from the point of an architect or construction foreman who has the ability to gaze at a vacant lot and imagine a high-rise. The song is essentially about having a dream and carrying it through to reality, and having to deal with critics and detractors along the way.

## Figure 1 – Intro, Verse, and Chorus

"Philosophy" begins with a broken-chord piano intro, played in a high register and somewhat reminiscent of Elton John in his "Tiny Dancer" mode. This quickly develops into a propulsive sixteenth-note, broken-chord pattern in the right hand, with pounding eighth-note octaves in the left, leading into the verse. During the verse, the piano comps in patterns built primarily out of block triads and broken chords. The sixteenth-note pattern returns near the end of the verse to underlie the chorus, which includes bass accents on the rhythm pattern.

Fig. 1

1

Full Band

2

Slow Demo

Moderate Rock ♩ = 94

Intro

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is the Intro, starting with a piano (*mf*) dynamic. The second system (measures 3-4) continues the Intro. The third system (measures 5-8) is the Verse, starting with a piano (*f*) dynamic. The score includes various chords and dynamics throughout.

Chords: C, G, Am/C, C+, Dm7, G, C, G/C, Am/C, C+, Dm7, G.

Dynamics: *mf*, *f*, *mf*.

\*C bass note implied by sustaining note in bass guitar.

8 Dm7 G F/G Em/G G F/G

*p*

*Su basso* .....

11 G F/G G F/G

*cresc.*

*f*

*Su basso* .....

Won't you

Verse 0:28

13 C F C Em

*mf*

look up at the sky - line, at the mor - tar blocks and glass, and

15 F D7/F# Gsus4 G

check out the re - flec-tions in my eyes. You see, they

17 C F C Em7

al-ways used to be there, e - ven when this all was grass, and I

19 F D7/F# F/G G Fmaj9

sang and danced a-bout a high - rise. — And you were laugh-ing at my

22 Gadd9 Fmaj9 G F/G

hel - met hat, laugh-ing at my torch.

*Su bass*

25 G F/C C Cmaj7

Go a-head, you can laugh all you want.

*Su bass*

Chorus 1:03

27 C6 C+ Dm7 G

I got my phil-o - soph-y. Keeps my

29 Dm7 G C Cmaj7

feet on the ground, — and I trust it like the ground, —

31 C6 C+ Dm7 G  
And that's why my phil-o-soph-y, it keeps me

33 Dm7 G G  
walk-ing when I'm fall-ing down

*Ryu bassia*

**Figure 2 – Coda**

The coda, which is telegraphed by the lyrics “and now it’s time for this song to end,” shows the high-energy, raucous side of the band to good effect. The piano part continues in hard-driving, pounding, sixteenth notes, complete with Jerry Lee Lewis-style glissandos (measure 5) and tremolos (measure 14).

The *glissando*, sometimes referred to as a *gliss* or *slide*, is a classic blues and rock ‘n’ roll keyboard effect. It is a rapid scale passage performed by quickly sliding the hands over the keys (usually over the white keys, although black key glissandos are also possible). There are many possible ways to perform a gliss:

1. Use the back nail of the right middle finger to ascend on the keys.
2. Use the back nail of the right thumb to descend on the keys.
3. Use the palm of the hand in a kind of “smear” effect going up or down the keys.
4. Use multiple fingers for a multiple gliss effect.

Be careful not to skin the back of your thumb or fingers, especially when you get rocking at full tilt.

A *tremolo* is a rapid alternation between two or more notes. Sometimes, this is also called a roll. The most commonly performed tremolos are rolls of either 3rds or octaves, both of which are contained in this figure. Tremolos of an octave are usually performed with fingers 1 and 5 (thumb and pinky). Rolls of a third can be performed with fingers 1 and 3 (thumb and middle finger) or fingers 2 and 3 (index and middle finger).

Starting at measure 18, Folds breaks out in an overdriven quote from George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue.” I asked Folds if there was a particular reason he chose to stick a bit of Gershwin’s classic at the end of this tune.

*“No. There’s no symbolism to it. It was improv the first time. Like a quote in a jazz song.”*

*–Ben Folds*

The piano transcription in the last five measures can be considered merely an approximation. Instead of hitting exact chords in this section, Folds is sometimes striking large clusters of notes. Clusters can be played using the palm or side of the hand. They can also be played using an elbow or both elbows. Some pianists have been known to even sit on the keyboard! Hey, whatever works...

Fig. 2

**3** Full Band

**4** Slow Demo

Coda 3:19

1 G F/G G F/G

and now it s time for this song to end

4 G F/G G F/G G 8va

*gliss.* *ff*

8va

*Sva bassa*

7 8va

*Sva bassa*

10 G

*Sva bassa*

12

*Sva bassa*

16

*Sva* *16ma*

*(Sva bassa)* *Sva*

19

*16ma* *Sva*

*Sva*

*Sva* *Sva bassa* *rall.*

G F/G G F/G

G F/G G F/G G

*Sva bassa*