

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Recorded by Jerry Lee Lewis

Words and Music by Otis Blackwell and Jack Hammer

Jerry Lee Lewis is a master of the rock 'n' roll *glissando*. He uses it to great advantage in almost all of his songs. It always seems appropriate and contains just the right amount of flash. Sometimes, however, it covers his real ability. Jerry Lee is a great piano player, his ideas are masterful, and you can just hear the influence of blues and country in his music. He was rockabilly before rockabilly existed, and he helped define the genre.

This song is in the key of C. It's a straight time rhythm and he plays eighth notes as a rhythm pattern. His solo is pure blues, using the blues scale to great advantage. He set the standard for this type of playing.

The form of this song is AABA, or verse/verse/bridge/verse. The chord progression for the verses is: I—I-IV-IVV-IV-I-I. The progression for the bridge is: IV-IV-I-I-I-IV-V-V-V-V-V. The vocal goes through one complete cycle of AABA, and then Jerry Lee solos over the two eight-measure verses. The song is short (barely two minutes), but contains a lot of great musical ideas.

Figure 6—Intro, Verses, Bridge

The song starts out with a "stop time" verse. There is a pickup into the vocal of three eighth-note chords (C). The fourth eighth-note chord is the downbeat of the next measure. The pickup into the second verse is his trademark glissando in measure 8, and then he just starts churning up the rhythm, placing glissandos at the chord changes as if to accent them. His left hand is pretty much following what his right hand is doing. He walks the bass into the IV chord of the bridge in measure 16 and continues to power through the rhythm. The six measures of the V chord create a build that is very dramatic. He ends the bridge with a gliss that leads into the third verse.



Fig. 6

Verse

Moderately fast ♩ = 165

C 1 F

You shake my nerves and you rat-tle my brain, ... Too much love drives a

f



Full Band

Slow Demos
meas. 1-7
meas. 17-20

4

G F7 C

man in - sane... You broke my will... but what a thrill. Good - ness gra - cious! Great

8

C

balls of fi - re! I laughed at love... and I thought it was fun - ny.

stacc. *gliss.* *gliss.*

* L.H.: Bass arranged for piano

11

F G

but you came a - long and you moved me, hon - cy. I changed my mind;

gliss. *stacc.* *gliss.*

* L.H.: Piano as recorded

14

F7 C7

this love is fine... Good - ness gra - cious! Great balls of fi - re!

* L.H.: Bass arranged for piano

Bridge
F7

17

Kiss me, ba - by. Whew!

20

It feels good. Hold me ba - by. Mm, ooh yeah... You've

23

got - ta let me love you like a lov - er should... You're fine, _____

* Both hands: Piano is recorded

26

so kind. _____ I'm gon' tell this world that you're mine, mine, mine, mine. _____

gliss. *Rip* gliss.

Figure 7—Piano Solo

Jerry Lee's solo is based on the blues scale, and he uses chords rather than single notes, throwing in glissandos all over the place. The second verse of the solo is eighth-note chords throughout, bracketed by glissandos into the vocal bridge.

This piece is deceptively simple. The music itself is pretty basic, but to get it right, you really have to go beyond the technique and go for the feel. Without that drive, the song is meaningless.

13	Full Band
14	Slow Demo meas. 1-8

Fig. 7

Piano Solo 0:53
C

1

5

9

13

Whoa, ___