

# How To Teach with the Cover Stories of *In Tune*

Explore and discuss some of the lessons that all musicians have to learn, in art and in life. **BY PAUL IRWIN**

**F**OR THE MOST PART, *In Tune* will only feature a musical act on its cover once. There are those rare instances when an artist will appear twice after making a great career change, or having revived his or career after a long hiatus; but by design, it's a one-shot deal. Why?

Because our cover stories aren't just about covering an artist's latest album or tour. They're intended to be the telling of "how I made it," starting from the beginning. In that way, we hope to relate lessons of growth to our young readers, with the aim of giving them the confidence that they, too, can find paths to success. Yes, a new album, tour or rise in popularity play a role in our selection process — a core element of *In Tune* is to present especially relevant, "of the moment" artists — but our cover stories, like all the stories of *In Tune*, are built around musical lessons. Once the lesson of an artist's rise to success is taught, we would rather look for another artist, to teach a different lesson.

Last issue's cover artist, Taylor Swift, is the exception to our rule. When we first featured Taylor on the cover of the April 2008 issue of *In Tune*, we were profiling a

country music wunderkind — a woman, to boot. At 21 years old, she was already a veteran writer and recording artist, clearly having become Nashville's sweetheart. We explored how her brand of country was updating the genre and how traditionalists were reacting, as well as how a new generation of fans was becoming enfranchised along with her. Swift appeared on our cover again because so much about her, and her career, has changed. She is now an international pop star — one of the brightest. Moreover, she has become a leader in the music industry, a force to be reckoned with as a businesswoman — and still only on the cusp of her 30s. So, there's a new story, a new lesson and a new reason to feature Swift on the cover.

For the December 2018 cover story, we profiled the band Greta Van Fleet, discussing comparisons between the young foursome and classic-rock titans Led Zeppelin, in both music and fashion. It gave our writer the chance to explore the ways in which musicians can be influenced by one another, and the difference between being inspired by another artist's music and merely copying it. We told the story of Greta Van Fleet's start, and gave background on its members;



Greta Van Fleet, left to right: Sam Kiszka (bass), Danny Wagner (drums), Josh Kiszka (vocals) and Jake Kiszka (guitar)

# Swift Success

BY CHUCK TAYLOR

Taylor Swift performing during the opening show on her Reputation Tour.

# LONG REMAINS THE SAME?

BY CHUCK TAYLOR

The classic-rock pose of **GRETA VAN FLEET** has earned the millennial band worldwide buzz even as the Michigan quartet polarizes opinion.

**T**O SOME ENTHUSIASTIC opinion-shapers, young rock four-some Greta Van Fleet are the "torch-bearers of a new era in creative hard rock," with a musicality that "captures the blood, sweat and tears of pure guitar rock at its intense best." Others in the press are less impressed, with devil's advocates offering skeptical lines about the group acting and sounding "like they were grown in the lab of some classic-rock-loving mad scientist" or, more harshly, that "they're a tribute band who happen to write their own songs."

For a band just coming out of the gate with its first major-label album, such a polarized reception — positive and negative from the likes of *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Pitchfork*, *Revolver* and National Public Radio — means that



but the story of the band's rise and popularity was the illustration. The larger lesson was perhaps about musical interpretation, which also applies to artists in classical music and jazz, among other genres.

In November, our cover story featured country-rocker Lukas Nelson and his band Promise of the Real. There was a variety of lessons to be taught with this one. The singer-guitarist's dad is country icon Willie Nelson, so our writer pointed to the relationship between father and son, providing a jumping off point to discuss musical families beyond blood. Lukas co-wrote songs with Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga for the hit movie *A Star Is Born*, along with appearing in the film; this could also lead an educator to explore the subject of music for film, how it is written and produced.

Our cover subject for the October issue was Billie Eilish, the 17-year-old singer/songwriter whose debut single, "Ocean Eyes," has been streamed more than 194 million times on Spotify. Eilish began singing and writing songs when she was just 11, and she recently confirmed via Instagram that among the challenges of her young life as a performer is living with Tourette Syndrome, saying: "I've taught myself ways of suppressing my tics and certain techniques to help [reduce] them when I don't want to be distracting in certain situations... I've never mentioned [my Tourette Syndrome] on the internet because... I've just never wanted people to think of Tourette every time they think of me."

The *In Tune* cover features aim to dig below the surface of celebrity reportage, exploring how musicians have overcome obstacles as well as taken advantage of lucky breaks. There are stories about adapting to change and finding influences and inspiration. Along the way, there are lessons of music creation, production, recording and the business of art. This way, when a music student takes in the media's coverage of an artist, or watches a music

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video, or sees him or her in the context of celebrity, they might view the artist as a musician first – and seek to learn lessons from their experiences, perhaps making it easier to work through the processes of learning to play, sing and write.

Our goal isn't necessarily to dispel the carefully crafted imagery sometimes attached to a music personality. But we do want to underscore the bond between artists at what-

ever stage of career. A beginner can see the trials that even the luckiest and most innately gifted artist goes through. We can be fans and enjoy the theater and pageantry of music, but it's important that young musicians who are trying new things – practicing and inevitably failing before achieving – to recognize that overcoming challenges is part of developing. Even the most successful have had to learn their lessons, in music and in life. **T**

