

How to Teach with the *In Tune* Media Column

Instill in students the habit of lifelong learning. **BY PAUL IRWIN**

THE MEDIA COLUMN of *In Tune* may seem to be a simple, self-explanatory list of new books, some sheet music and a couple of electronic products; but taken together, the collection of media offers more than a few lessons. Setting aside the selections themselves, it's interesting

to note that there is so much written commentary available on music. And with so effort devoted to learning how to play, record and perform music, students don't necessarily take the time to read about the music's history, or its impact on society, or the countless other takes on the art.

We have more than once referenced the quote attributed to comedian Martin Mull that "writing about music is like dancing about architecture." Perhaps, being journalists, we are overly sensitive or at least over-analytical when it comes to the relevance of commentary on music. Mull was basically saying, "Hey, you just need to hear it. Music stands on its own." Still, I am 200 pages into reading the second volume of Kenneth Womack's biography of George Martin (*Sound Pictures: The Life of Beatles Producer George Martin – The Later Years, 1966-2016*), and I'm fascinated by insights and perspectives that I never realized before. As the author moves from time period to time period, I play and listen again to music that I've heard thousands of times, now hearing new things. I like being better informed about how the music came to be, and I'm enjoying the songs in new ways.

Studying music in order to understand how it works (and to hopefully develop a greater facility with an instrument) is one thing, but the sleuthing that music media enables is another. Earlier today, a millisecond Google search for "new music books" turned up a revised version of Charlie Gillette's *The Sounds of the Cities*, which was required reading



for the History of Rock Music class that I took in college (much to my parent's chagrin). The irony is that the "gut" course that became the brunt of family jokes for decades turned out to ultimately inspire my career choice as a music writer.

There is gold on the *In Tune* Media page, whether it's an upcoming BBC radio show, a curated list of YouTube videos or a great text on creativity — such as drummer-producer-entrepreneur Questlove's book *Creative Quest*, which headlined the Media

page in the October issue of *In Tune*. Becoming a regular reader of our Media column and a student of music media in general — whether because of budding musicianship or in service of critical listening — is an opportunity to experience the art in a deeper and broader way.

One of the best things about reading, watching or listening to media content — in this case media content devoted to music — is

that it requires a personal decision as to when and, most importantly, where to absorb it. A conducive mindset, timeframe and environment are keys to comprehension for anyone. We must make appointments with media and consume a book or a documentary when we can focus, in a setting without distraction. We educate ourselves when we're good and ready – emphasis on the “good.”

Teaching music students to overcome inertia and reach for a book, search for a video or even look up a definition on their own can be life-changing for them. The satisfaction derived by going from the frustration of not understanding to finding the answer is powerful, and it inevitably inspires a student to make that trip again and again. When they themselves decide to make the journey and go on it by themselves without assignment, we know that a student's behavior has been modified. Apologies for the multiple aphorisms, but I offer the old proverb “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to

fish and you feed him for a lifetime” in support of this thesis.

So dear teacher, you and I work to impart knowledge, to share it broadly and hope that our expertise enables better learning. And yet the greatest gift we can give a student is the inclination to habitually self-educate. The *In Tune* Media page is put together with this in mind.

We create the Media column as if it were a puzzle, thinking first about where to start. If we choose a piece of sheet music for a pop song or a rock artist's songbook, we strive to balance that with a video about a classical subject; and our selected lessons would then be about R&B, hip-hop, jazz, Latin or country. If one of our books is about an iconic figure, we'll choose another about a teen act. Our hope with the Media column is really our hope for *In Tune* – that there's something for everyone, regardless of their point of connection to music. Teachers can



sometimes select a media product that connects to their lessons, or recommend to a student something that supports a specific musical interest. That's another opportunity with the Media page. You may want the whole class to listen to a radio show we have profiled, or you might just recommend a book or film to a student who has expressed a particular musical enthusiasm.

In any case, rest assured that we are always on the hunt to find that unique resource your kids will find instructive and enjoyable. We know that budgets can be limited; so, we're mindful of price, trying as often as we can to point to media with low or no cost. But even if you or they don't actually buy the books, discs or sheet music, just by talking about the regular quest for ancillary resources – for going beyond music lessons to delve more deeply into the art – tills the soil for self-education and lifelong learning. 🎵

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