

Cover Story: No Ordinary Joe: Joe Bonamassa – Keeper of the Flame

National Standards: 7-8, 11

Joe Bonamassa started playing guitar when he was four years old. He was a competent player at six and a wunderkind at nine. An aficionado of blues-rock and now 43 he has built a successful career as a performer who records regularly. The company he owns and built with a business partner has full control over his music, his recordings, his touring and all of his marketing activities.

Bonamassa is also an avid collector of guitars, amplifiers and music memorabilia, housing over 400 guitars and 400 amplifiers in two home/studio/museums.

Moreover, he's now the keeper of the flame for guitar-based blues, or "blues-rock," a style of music in which few currently play with his level of virtuosity.

Prepare

Have students listen to the music of a succession of blues artists. Start with Robert Johnson, then Little Walter and Muddy Waters, then B.B. King, then Eric Clapton and finally Bonamassa. There are many in between, there are vocalists, there is rich history to explore, but for this exercise, the progression will give a taste, and perhaps inspire further study.

Key points in the article:

- The blues developed from the music sung by slaves working in the fields of the American south
- The blues electrified when music electrified in the 1940s and 1950s, and British musicians heard it, prized it and incorporated it into their rock and pop, exporting it as a new sound, back to America.
- Joe Bonamassa was a guitar prodigy who enjoyed the music of British musicians playing their version of American blues.
- As he matured, he decided that he would control his recording and touring, creating a business model that allowed him to do so.
- He then became a collector of guitars and amplifiers, amassing a "world-class" collection.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- VIRTUOSO: a person highly skilled in music or another artistic pursuit.
- MAINSTREAM: the ideas, attitudes, or activities that are regarded as normal or conventional; the dominant trend in opinion, fashion, or the arts.
- SUPERGROUP: a musical performing group whose members have successful solo careers, are members of other groups, or are well known in other musical professions.
- DESCENDANTS: someone related to a person or group of people who lived at an earlier time.

- PRESTIGIOUS: Inspiring respect and admiration; having high status.

Discuss

Compare and contrast the benefits and drawbacks of working with big companies vs. starting one's own enterprise

Benefits could be:

- Controlling the creative process and product.

Drawbacks could be:

- Working without the creative input and support of others.

Play some of Joe Bonamassa's music.

Play the videos (from the links in the In Tune story) about Bonamassa's music, career and collectons.

Ask

- Why is Bonamassa "the keeper of the flame" for blues music. What does this mean?
- How does "the blues" differ from "blues rock" and which kinds of music were influenced by the blues.

Play blues rock examples by Coco Montoya, Samantha Fish, Buddy Guy, Kenny Wayne Shepard and Gary Clark Jr. and compare them to Joe Bonamassa's music.

Expand

Discuss the theme of independence in contemporary music, particularly by those playing specialized genres. Who are the top artists today creating and playing reggae, classical, bluegrass, metal and jazz?

- Why do people collect guitars rather than pianos or tubas, for example?
- What makes a guitar particularly desirable to a collector?

Questions

1. How old was Joe when he first opened for B.B. King?
2. Who first inspired him?
3. Which famous producer/engineer helped Joe create his first album?
4. What famous British concert hall did Joe want to play?
5. Who is Joe's manager and business partner?
6. How many guitars does Joe own and what does he call his museums?
7. What is Joe's favorite guitar?
8. In what part of the U.S. did the blues originate?
9. How has Joe's foundation responded to the COVID 19 pandemic?
10. What is the name of the company that manages all of Joe's musical activities?

Answers

1. 10
2. His father
3. Tom Dowd
4. The Royal Albert Hall
5. Roy Weisman
6. 400 guitars; Nerdville East and Nerdville West
7. Gibson Les Paul Sunburst
8. The Mississippi Delta
9. It has given grants to hundreds of musicians who can no longer perform
10. J&R Adventures

Feature Story: The Lessons of Paul Reed Smith

National Standards: 1, 8-10

35 years ago, Paul Reed Smith created the guitar company that bears his name and has been leading it ever since. PRS Guitars is the third largest guitar maker in the U.S. Smith is a leader in the musical instrument and equipment industry, and continues to manage his business, but still finds time to play music and to teach.

In Tune's feature on Paul Reed Smith's teaching activities contrasts the workstyle of a business leader that has always made time to pursue other personal interests, like fishing, but also teaching. Smith teaches regularly offering lessons in small and large settings, doing so consistently, year after year.

Prepare

Discuss the essence of teaching and why people gravitate towards the profession. Why would a successful business person want to take time away from their company to teach?

Key points in the article:

- Smith is an inventor, having studied physics, woodworking, practical engineering, graphic mathematics and art.
- “Giving back” feels good, and beyond donating money, donating one’s time to teach creates a positive connection with other people that cannot be duplicated in any other way.
- Paul created a masterclass with the Maryland Hall this past summer, now available online, to help people use the time in quarantine or lock down to learn to play music.

Begin

Poll your students to see who has used a video lesson to learn something before

- Ask them about their experience. Were they successful in learning something?
- Ask students about their special skills. Might they consider teaching?

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- MANUFACTURER – a person or company that makes goods for sale.
- MASTERCLASS: a seminar for advanced music students conducted by a master musician
- PHYSICS: a science that deals with matter and energy and their interactions
- ALTRUISTIC: having or showing an unselfish concern for the welfare of others

Discuss

The benefits of a varied life experience can be rewarding. Focusing on one endeavor is critical in achieving a level of proficiency, but differing experiences can influence and support one another.

Expand

Teaching is a unique endeavor that both contributes to society and rewards the teacher. How is the teacher rewarded? To teach, one needs to learn themselves, and many subjects require constant updating. To teach is to constantly learn. Also,

Feature Story: All About Riffs

National Standards: 1, 7-9, 10

There are elements of songwriting in addition to the basics - rhythm, melody, lyrics, harmony, etc. – that underpin the most popular compositions. The shorty, repeatable segments known as riffs are responsible for creating some of the most memorable songs in the modern canon. Learning to identify them, and then create them, will assist the developing music creator.

Prepare

Play each of the audio tracks included in the In Tune story on riffs and identify other popular songs with easily identifiable passages.

Inspire a discussion about why each riff is important to its song, and how the riff functions to connect each of the song's parts.

Key points in the article:

- Riffs introduce upcoming parts of songs
- Riffs fill spaces between song passages
- They're built into the songs of most popular genres and operate similarly in each

Begin

Choose one of the story's sample riffs

- Ask students what they like about the riff
- Ask your students how the riff supports the overall impact of the song
- Ask students to research other songs with great riffs, present a favorite and explain their choice.

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- SONGCRAFT– the art or skill of writing or composing songs.
- DESCENDING: becoming lower in pitch
- VARIATION: the transformation of a melody or theme with changes or elaborations in harmony, rhythm, and melody.
- SUPERSTITION: a belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge, in or of the ominous significance of a particular thing, circumstance, occurrence, proceeding, or the like.
- TRANSPOSE: to change the relative position, order, or sequence of; cause to change places; interchange:

Discuss

Ask students to listen to the Beatles song Daytripper and discuss the relationship of the riff to the song's melody, the riff's repetition and to imagine the song without the riff. How important is the riff to Daytripper?

Expand

Are there riffs in other forms of media? Are so-called “catch phrases,” perhaps in sports “calls,”

Q&A

1. What is the purpose of a riff?
2. Do all songs have riffs?
3. Must a riff come at a particular point in a song?
4. Are there any rules about how riffs operate?
5. What is the biggest impact a riff can have on a song?
6. Does it matter how often a riff occurs in a song?
7. Do riffs occur in all genres of music?

Answers

1. To introduce key parts of a song and to connect song parts
2. No. But many hit songs employ riffs because of their simplicity and ability to easily connect with listeners.
3. No. Many riffs will be introduced at the beginning of a song, but they can occur later.
4. No. Like other elements of songcraft, riffs can be created in any variety of ways.
5. The greatest impact a riff can have on a song is to make it memorable.
6. Not really, but an essential element of a riff is its repetition.
7. Riffs occur in many popular music genres. Some forms of music are noteworthy for their non-reliance on riffs in favor of freer forms, such as some styles of jazz and classical music.

Feature Story: How to Play “On The Radio”

National Standards: 1-9

Donna Summer was a singer/songwriter and actress who was influenced by the counterculture movement of the 1960s but while living in Europe met producers who were at the forefront of the disco music. Its rhythm and connection to dance were new sounding compared with the folk and rock-based music of the time, and as the 70's dawned became the culture's next musical wave.

Deconstructing this song will reveal a mix of strong vocals, keyboard, strings, horns and percussive elements. The premise of the In Tune story is that the strings can be emulated using one of three keyboards – the others playing electric piano and acoustic piano sounds. Because the horn parts are key to the production, and available in scholastic jazz bands, the story suggests that “On The Radio,” could be a creative choice for performance by such ensembles.

Prepare

Have students listen to Summer’s recording and identify each of the parts. Listen for the different percussion instruments and separate the different keyboard sounds,

Key points in the article:

- Approximating the original production will require two female vocalists
- Finding sounds to represent the two keyboards should be relatively easy, and replicating the song’s string section on a third keyboard should also be quite doable.
- The song’s distinct disco sound can be accomplished by a drummer learning to play a hi-hat cymbal in the “open and closed” pattern. The recording uses two hi-hat sounds.
- The horns swell as they enter, creating dramatic punctuation for the song’s chorus.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- DISCO – a style of pop music intended mainly for dancing to, typically soul-influenced and melodic with a regular bass beat, popular particularly in the late 1970s.
- PLETHORA: a large or excessive amount of something.
- ASTROPHYSICS: the branch of astronomy concerned with the physical nature of stars and other celestial bodies.
- CATALOGUE a collection of musical compositions.
- CONTEMPORARY: music that is being written now or in the recent past.

Discuss

Where does disco fit in the evolution of popular music from the 1960s to the 1980s?

- What cultural movements did it spawn and how did it fragment youth culture?
- What styles of music were co-existing in the first part of the 1970s, and what genre succeeded it?

Find a string sound on an electric keyboard, in Garage Band, or online that approximates the sound of an acoustic string section

Determine, play and record the opening piano part of “On The Radio”

Arrange the vocals and determine when the second voice should come in.

Ask

- What is your favorite Donna Summer song, and why?
- Why can the string part be played on a keyboard but the horn part need to be played of an acoustic horn section?

Expand

How important were disco lyrics to the impact of the era's biggest hits. What was the most important element of disco songs?

- The word disco came from the French word “discothèque,” meaning a collection of recordings, first used in the 1920s and based on the pattern of *bibliothèque* - in English “library”. So, a disco was a dance hall where records were played, as opposed to live music. These records allowed for the playing music produced with complexities that made dance of a certain style more compelling.