

Cover Story: Chris Stapleton Is Starting Over

National Standards: 7-8, 11

Until 2015, Chris Stapleton was known as a songwriter. As those around him finally convinced to begin performing, he appeared in a few venues and finally on a TV awards show, supported by other artists and a band that included his wife. Then came his debut album, and it was so successful that at 37 years old, he vaulted to the top of the country music world. Now, with his fourth album, he's crossing over to the mainstream and finding worldwide acclaim. Part of the reason is his unique style of "country."

Prepare

Have students listen to some of Stapleton's music, particularly the new song "Cold" which leads the In Tune Listening List for March. Does this sound like a country song? What does it sound like, and why?

Key points in the article:

- Late in life (for a musical star) a songwriter becomes a performer and recording artist
- His music infuses multiple styles
- He is a family man who eschews the celebrity lifestyle
- He isn't dependent on the songwriter community in Nashville for material, as he writes his own

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article:

- **ENGINEERING:** the use of scientific principles to design and build machines, structures, and other items, including bridges, tunnels, roads, vehicles, and buildings.
- **MUSIC ROW:** street in Nashville, Tennessee where many record labels, publishing companies and other music industry offices are located.
- **INFLECTION:** the modulation of tone or pitch in the voice.
- **BACKLASH:** a strong and adverse reaction by a large number of people, especially to a social or political development.
- **MEGAPHONE:** a hand-held, cone-shaped acoustic horn used to amplify a person's voice or other sounds and direct it in a given direction.

Discuss

The songwriting business in Nashville, TN has been described as "corporate." There are writers and writer teams who keep regular hours and produce music for record labels and publishers to give to their artists. Discuss the differences in the way songwriting develops in different genres, for example, much of hip-hop is created collaboratively with specialists (beatmakers, melody writers, lyricists, hook makers) all emailing parts to producers.

Benefits could be:

- Writers can have “regular” careers working as songwriters for various artists

Drawbacks could be:

- Artists become dependent on labels and publishers and compete for the best songs. Also, the labels and publishers decide who gets the best compositions.

Play music of Stapleton’s influences, particularly Otis Redding and Ray Charles, to find the “soul” in Chris Stapleton’s country music.

Ask

- What makes country music “country.”
- What other genres does Stapleton’s music draw from?
- Why is his latest album’s title so appropriate for the times?”

Expand

Discuss how artists’ careers can change over time.

- What other artists started out playing one kind of music and then changed? (Taylor Swift was a country artist who became a pop sensation)
- What other styles have roots in another genre? (Complicated metal draws from classical)

Questions

1. How did Stapleton develop his singing voice?
2. What tribute band did he start when he was young, and how does that impact him today?
3. When he moved to Nashville, how long did it take Stapleton to get a job as a songwriter?
4. Who has Stapleton written hits for?
5. What British pop star did Stapleton write a hit for?
6. Who did Stapleton perform with on the 2015 CMA Awards TV show?
7. What was the title of Stapleton’s breakout debut album?
8. In the two years after release, how many copies of *Traveller* were sold in the U.S?
9. What is the name of the second single used to promote Stapleton’s latest album?
10. What is the name of his latest album?

Answers

1. He sang along carefully as a teenager to songs by Luther Vandross, Mariah Carey and Bell Biv DeVoe.
2. Travis Tritt. Even today, he listens to Travis Tritt to bring him back to his roots.
3. Four days.
4. George Strait, Kenny Chesney, Luke Bryan, Thomas Rhett, Lee Ann Womack, Brad Paisley, Dierks Bentley and Tim McGraw, among others.

5. Adele.
6. Justin Timberlake.
7. *Traveller*.
8. Two million.
9. “Cold”.
10. *Starting Over*.

Feature Story: To Thine Own Self, Teach!

National Standards: 1, 8-10

When music students get back to their classrooms and music rooms, they will still have the dedicated use of the electronic devices given to them to attend school remotely. They can use these devices, and the skills they’ve developed while “distance learning” to augment their in-person lessons. However, doing so will take a little attitude adjustment.

Prepare

Discuss the opportunity that music students have to use technology in service of independent learning.

Key points in the article:

- Humans are wired to achieve personal growth via both internal and external motivations.
- These motivations can be positive or negative, and are guided by the impetus to feel good, or ward off feeling bad
- Students can control their learning by making a proscribed series of personal decisions

Begin

Poll your students to see which of them are trying to learn something or would like to learn something on their own.

- How did they reach that decision and what did they do, or what will they do, to achieve their goal?
- What motivates them more – positive reward or negative reward? Internal or external?

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **BYPRODUCT**: a secondary result, unintended when doing or producing something else.
- **DETERMINATION**: firmness of purpose
- **PROPOSITION**: a suggested program or plan of action
- **EXPERIMENTATION**: the action or process of trying out new ideas, methods, or activities.
- **BIAS**: prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Discuss

Deciding what a music student wants to learn usually stems from a desire to improve their skills. Why do people decide to do things?

Expand

Musical learning builds on itself. As one skill is acquired, the possibilities to acquire further skills, or achieve great levels of an acquired skill, increase. For example, once a person learns to play an instrument, then the opportunity to create music occurs. Discuss the skills students might already have that could form a foundation for further musical learning.

Feature Story: Arranging Solos

National Standards: 1, 7-9, 10

Students might believe that the practice of “soloing” is about improvisation, and it’s true that many popular music players will improvise solos. But solos can also be created, practiced and then performed to spotlight a particular player.

Prepare

Play each of the audio tracks included in the In Tune story on soloing and listen to how the simple patterns in the sea shanty “The Wellerman” have been arranged to create solos.

Inspire a discussion about the sea shanty and the practice of singing about work, and about working.

Key points in the article:

- Soloing allows musicians to control every note and every sound with their own hands in order to express themselves exactly as they see fit.
- There’s no right or wrong way to approach writing or arranging music for yourself to play. Your imagination and creativity should always guide your path.
- When arranging solos, letting notes sustain and holding them longer can open up a lot of creative ideas.

Begin

Sea shanties are folk songs that were at one time sung by sailors on merchant vessels whose earliest history goes back as long as the history of sailing

- Why is The Wellerman an example of arranging solos?
- When notes from the chord have been put into the melody of the song’s verse how do they affect the melody? (They can create harmony).

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **CHORD**– a group of (typically three or more) notes sounded together, as a basis of harmony.
- **MEME**: is an idea, behavior, or style that becomes a fad and spreads by means of imitation from person to person within a culture.
- **WELLERMAN**: Wellerman was the family name of New Zealand brothers who established a whaling station and later sold supplies for fishermen on whaling ships.
- **VIRTUOSO**: a person highly skilled in music or another artistic pursuit.

- **BAHAMIAN:** a personal who comes from the Bahama Islands in the Caribbean Sea.

Discuss

Find other examples of solos that have been written to show case the individual performances of musicians. The connection of rap to melodic singing is an opportunity for solos. The introduction to Derek and the Dominos song “Layla” as well as the guitar part at the end of the song are examples of solo arrangements.

Q&A

1. What is a shredder?
2. Is solo music the province of any one genre of music?
3. Who was Nicolo Paganini?
4. What is the right way to arrange a solo?
5. Why have 200 year-old sea shanties suddenly become popular?
6. What is one way to determine which note or notes to play in a solo?

Answers

1. A guitarist who can rapidly play scales and runs of notes.
2. The best solo music transcends genre.
3. An Italian violinist, violist, guitarist, and composer, and the most celebrated violin virtuoso of his time.
4. There’s no right or wrong way to approach writing or arranging music for yourself to play.
5. These days, sea shanties are a TikTok meme.
6. A note can be cut from the melody in order to fit a note from the chord.

Feature Story: How to Play Elvis Costello’s “Pump It Up”

National Standards: 1-9

This song is all about that demonstrative vocal, the spice provided by the organ locked onto the ever-so-slightly distorted electric guitar (in latter day pics, Elvis is seen using a Green Rhino overdrive pedal), and of course those pounding tom-toms. But listen carefully to the bass line. If a band’s bassist can isolate that part and practice and perform it anywhere close to the way Bruce Thomas laid it down, this song can become a standout addition to a band’s repertoire.

Prepare

Have students listen to the recording and identify each of the instruments and parts. Listen for the organ, bass and guitar sounds.

Key points in the article:

- Elvis’ message in the song is that the excesses of “the rock and roll lifestyle” were unhealthy and counterproductive.
- The organ sound is unique and adds a distinct flavor to the track.

- The bass part is challenging, but the notation and videos showing how it can be played are readily available online.
- The album on which the song appears is the first that was created by Elvis' touring band, who, with this album, became "The Attractions," and his permanent ensemble for many years.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **SUBSEQUENT** – coming after something in time; following.
- **EXCESSES**: an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable.
- **ESSENTIAL**: absolutely necessary; extremely important.
- **DISTORTED**: change the form of (an electrical signal or sound wave) during transmission, amplification, or other processing.
- **REPERTOIRE**: a stock of plays, dances, or music that a company, ensemble or performer knows or is prepared to perform.

Discuss

This song has a rocking, or "pumping" rhythm. In addition to the drums, where does that come from?

- Does Elvis' phrasing impact the song's rhythm, and if so at what points in the song?
- Which instruments play off of one another to accomplish its beat?

Isolate the sound of the Hammond B3 and indicate the difference in the sound when the speaker in the Leslie Tone Cabinet spins. What does each mode (spinning on and off) sound like?

- Ask students to pick a favorite Elvis Costello song and why they made their choice.
- Ask students to choose an Elvis Costello line in a lyric and explain why they like it.

Expand

Elvis performed with The Attractions for many years before forming The Impostors. Why do artists change their affiliations with other artists and what are the upsides and downsides of such changes in affiliations?