

## **Cover Story: *Blackpink Conquers The World***

National Standards: 7-8, 11

Four young girls auditioned and were selected to join an “academy” set up by a South Korean company to train singers. The 11 and 12-year-olds went through rigorous courses for years and in 2016 were revealed to the world as members of the group called Blackpink. Today, they are global stars at the leading edge of the multilingual phenomenon known as K-pop.

### **Prepare**

Have students listen to Blackpink’s music and describe their messages, which are designed to appeal to a young and global audience. Discuss the cultural differences of young audiences in different parts of the world and how the group’s songs are created to appeal broadly.

### **Key points in the article:**

- The artists worked hard and trained for years to manage the rigors of celebrity
- Multiculturalism requires singing and speaking in a variety of languages
- The artists live and work together, but also have individual personalities and their group accommodates their individual creativity
- Their work as artists extends to a variety of media

### **Begin**

Review vocabulary words from the article:

- ECHELON: a level or rank in an organization, a profession, or society.
- UNPRECEDENTED: never done or known before.
- ACCOLADE: an award or privilege granted as a special honor or as an acknowledgment of merit.
- PHILANTHROPIC: a person or entity that promotes the welfare of others, especially by donating money to good causes; generous and benevolent.
- AMBASSADOR: an accredited diplomat sent by a country as its official representative to a foreign country.

### **Discuss**

These young women entered the YG academy, left their homes and went through “boot camp” like training starting when they were eleven or twelve. Some could say that they sacrificed their childhoods, taking a chance on fleeting fame. Others might say that they were enrolled in a rarified education program. They seem to be doing well, and they will certainly be enriched by their success. Is it worth it? Who decides?

### **Benefits could be:**

- They’ve aligned with a powerful corporation who have given them the artistic opportunity of a lifetime.

**Drawbacks could be:**

- They have been so controlled and worked that they have become almost robotic, and their natural lives have been taken from them. Have they become artists or marketing pawns?

**Ask**

- Why does their music appeal to young people in so many different cultures?
- What other musical acts have had global success and what happened to them?
- As they mature, can the group evolve musically, and if so, how?

**Expand**

Discuss how artists' careers can change over time.

- Over time, what might the artists do other than sing together?
- Which musical artists have started out as performers in a group and then become actors, music business executives, or created music for other media?

**Questions**

1. Where do the members of Blackpink come from?
2. When did the band first launch?
3. *How do singers start out when they first join YG Entertainment?*
4. What other media activity features the band?
5. Besides music, what other creative element is the band known for?
6. What megastar did the band collaborate with for their first Top 40 hit?
7. What royal nickname did the press give the band?
8. What famous U.S. music festival did the band play?
9. In what documentary film was the band featured?
10. In what other marketing activities is the band involved?

**Answers**

1. South Korea, New Zealand, Australia and Thailand
2. 2016
3. As a trainee
4. Online reality shows
5. Fashion
6. Lady Gaga
7. K pop Queens
8. Coachella
9. *Blackpink: Light Up the Sky*
10. They've become ambassadors for various consumer brands and have their own lines of dolls and toys.

## **Feature Story: Go Team!**

National Standards: 1, 8-10

Once a band or an artist begins to attract an audience and record, and finds initial success working on their music full-time, they will need the help of specialist to further develop and compete in the music industry. This is the story of a band that took an unusual path to their “big break,” but like all emerging acts, has assembled a team to help propel their careers.

### **Prepare**

Discuss how independent artists can begin their careers, but finding their own performances, creating their own recordings and distributing their music online. Then profile the next steps once acts want and need to broaden their artistic and commercial horizons.

### **Key points in the article:**

- Magnolia Boulevard had the talent to attract an audience but needed a way to gain exposure to the music industry
- By performing at their music store’s anniversary, they came to the attention of executives of a national guitar brand
- That brand happened to have as its leader a musician who cared enough to promote Magnolia Boulevard and introduce them to a top management company.

### **Begin**

What are some of the ways an artist can find an audience?

- In what ways did Paul Reed Smith and his company help Magnolia Boulevard?
- If they hadn’t had the support of PRS, how else might Magnolia Boulevard succeeded?

### **Review vocabulary words from the article below:**

- **PATERNALISTIC**: relating to or characterized by the restriction of the freedom and responsibilities of subordinates or dependents in their supposed interest.
- **ASCENDENCE**: rise to control something or someone
- **REVELATION**: a surprising and previously unknown fact, especially one that is made known in a dramatic way.
- **SUBSUMED**: include or absorb (something) in something else.
- **TERRESTIAL**: of, on, or relating to the earth.

### **Discuss**

Why did Willcut Guitars and PRS Guitars and Revelation Management decide to help this particular band? And separately, what needs to happen now to take Magnolia Boulevard to the next level in their careers?

### **Expand**

How can students assemble teams of their own to advance their own educational careers? What can specialists do to help them, and how can they become worthy of that support. Even if informal, can people in their careers assemble teams? Who are some of the people in a family’s teams – the helpers and professionals that keep the family going, healthy, safe, etc.?

## **Feature Story: Unlocking Diminished Chords**

National Standards: 1, 7-9, 10

The writer's use of music theory language might be off putting for the beginner, but the concepts they describe are simple. 1) The distances between notes have names. 2) The different distances create harmonies that have distinctive sounds. 3) The different sounds evoke different sonic qualities. That's really it. When the notes in a chord are arranged so that the bottom note is played an octave above, it's called an "inversion." A technical name, but a simple concept. Our story on diminished chords is an opportunity to detangle some of music theory's jargon so that the student can understand the system, but, piece by piece, it's musical utility.

### **Prepare**

Isolate the three elements of the lesson: "intervals," chordal sounds and their use to both create a musical mood and to transition from one mood to another.

Inspire a discussion about the sounds of major, minor, seventh and diminished chords.

### **Key points in the article:**

- The system of note "names" and their relation to both notation (both the notes on the staff and the alphanumerical abbreviations) sound complicated but aren't when sounded out on an instrument.
- It's the sound created when notes are played together, in this case as three at a time, or a "triad" or in order as an arpeggio that becomes a tool for the composer to use in creating a musical feeling or as the basis for complementary (or dissonant) melody.
- Diminished chords can be used as connectors between other chords to create transitions that move the composition forward in time.

### **Begin**

Explain the difference between notes in a tritone when each is positioned on the staff as "root," "third," and "fifth."

- Play the three notes as a minor, major and diminished chord discussion the number of steps between the notes.
- When spaced at the appropriate distance from one another, give the notes their names (minor third, diminished fifth, etc.)

### **Review vocabulary words from the article below:**

- INTERVAL: the distance in pitch between two tones
- SYMMETRICAL: having sides or halves that are the same
- CASCADING: a series of notes played in order moving up or down.
- PROGRESSION: chords or notes played one after the other to create a harmonic structure.
- IMPROVISATION: the extemporaneous performance of a musical passage that conforms to the style of a piece but isn't proscribed or constrained by its composition.

## **Discuss**

Are there certain styles or genres of music that use diminished chords more than others, or are they used by most? When is a good time to write a diminished chord in a piece of music? How does a diminished chord make you feel?

## **Questions**

1. What feeling does the minor tritone evoke?
2. What piece has In Tune's "Techniques" story used in the past as an example of diminished chords?
3. How is a diminished chord created?
4. What makes a diminished seventh unique?
5. To which Beatles song does the story refer as an example of diminished chord usage?
6. Who wrote the blues standard "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out"?

## **Answers**

1. Sadness.
2. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D minor"
3. By "stacking" two minor thirds above a root note.
4. Each note is one and a half steps from the note before and the note following
5. Blackbird
6. Jimmie Cox

## **Feature Story: How to Play Phoebe Bridgers' "Kyoto"**

National Standards: 1-9

This song has a variety of distinctive elements, not the least of which is its lyrical story and layered vocals, however focusing on the beat – specifically as driven by the bass drum and the trumpet parts give it much of its unique character.

### **Prepare**

Have students listen to the recording and break down the sounds and uses of the keyboards, electric guitars and trumpets. Note the blending of vocals and trumpets in the chorus, and also the trumpet solo, and how unusual it is to use a trumpet solo in popular music.

### **Key points in the article:**

- The lyric is a telling of the author's trip to Japan, and how at the time she was reflecting on her familial relationships.
- The keyboard sound begins as a distinctive element but then is blended into the song's sonic palette.
- The guitars sound flat or natural at times, and then distorted for emphasis during more intense passages.
- The trumpets and vocals work together at times, and are then each featured at others.

### **Begin**

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **SUBTLETIES**: delicacies or niceties of character or meaning.
- **EVOLVING**: developing gradually, especially from a simple to a more complex form
- **MELLOTRON**: an electronic keyboard instrument in which each key controls the playback of a single prerecorded musical sound.
- **FLOURISHES**: bold or extravagant gestures or actions, made especially to attract attention.
- **PROFICIENCY**: a high degree of competence or skill; expertise.

### **Discuss**

This song rhythm has an active pattern almost suggesting "travel."

- The drum part features a repeating kick of the bass drum. How does that impact the overall beat?
- Why does the producer use two trumpets, and how do they impact the vocal?

Isolate the sound of the two guitars and how their sounds combine and alternate.

- Ask students to pick another Phoebe Bridgers song and ask if "Kyoto" is like or different from her other song.

- Ask students discuss the lyric and what they like about about it.

**Expand**

Ask students to find examples of rock or pop music trumpet solos. The Beatles “Penny Lane” and “Conquistador” by Procol Harum come to mind...