

Cover Story: Kaleo's Time Is Now

National Standards: 7-8, 11

It'd been five years since the Icelandic blues rock band put out an album, and given its success, fans and critics were hungry for new music. They announced an album and a tour, released promotional singles and then, the pandemic hit. No album release and no tour. That was 2020. The album couldn't wait any longer so, even though there won't be live performances, out it goes. The tour, though, won't start until 2022. Such is the music industry during COVID

Prepare

Have students watch the video of the band performing from a lighthouse off of the coast of Iceland for its sheer beauty.

Key points in the article:

- The music industry releases music strategically, based on competition and coordinated touring
- Rock today, or "alternative" is still a viable genre, but one looking for re-invention.
- Just like British artist were enamored with American blues artists and evolved rock in the 1960s, this Icelandic band has tapped that same well and produced a new sound.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article:

- EMERGENT: in the process of coming into being or becoming prominent.
- CONSPIRING: seem to be working together to bring about a particular result.
- PRAGMATIC: dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.
- INTERPRETATION: the action of explaining the meaning of something.
- PHENOMENON: something that exists and can be seen, felt, tasted, etc., especially something unusual or interesting.

Discuss

Does it matter whether a musician lives in a "music city" or in country with a prominent music industry? Particularly in an age when the world is connected by the internet, and recording equipment is inexpensive and easy to use, what are the barriers? The remaining hurdle is education and inspiration. KALEO's JJ Julius Son could sing *and* he could write. That's all he needed to do.

Benefits of starting in a smaller market could be:

- Standing out against limited competition and finding an interested audience more easily.

Drawbacks could be:

- It's harder to be seen and play live for industry heavyweights.

Ask

- Did it matter that KALEO's album was delayed by the pandemic?
- Did the delay make fans forget them or want their music more.
- Will the success of their album be impacted by their inability to tour?

Expand

Discuss the popularity, or lack thereof, of modern rock.

- Classic rock and other forms of rock have morphed into pop styles diluting some of rock's tradition sounds. What harder forms of rock are still commercially viable?
- Are shoegaze, "singer/songwriter" and "alternative" music forms of rock? Where did they come from, what are their connections, if any, to the earlier style of the genre?

Questions

1. What is the capital of Iceland?
2. Who is the leader of KALEO?
3. What does the word Kaleo mean in Hawaiian?
4. What was the band's big break?
5. What is the name of their latest album?
6. When will they finally be able to tour again?
7. Where in the U.S. did they move to after leaving Iceland?
8. What famous U.S. music festival did the first band play?
9. Besides guitars and a drums, what other instrument does a bandmate play?
10. How does JJ Julius Son want fans to benefit from his music?

Answers

1. Reykjavik
2. JJ Julius Son
3. "The Sound"
4. They performed in a big music festival in Iceland
5. *Surface Sounds*
6. February 2022
7. Austin, TX
8. South By Southwest
9. Harmonica
10. He wants them to "feel" it.

Feature Story: The Bedroom Studio

National Standards: 1, 8-10

Musicians of all stripes can create and record music on inexpensive and easy to use equipment. Recording software, instruments, a microphone, mixer, interface and a computer can come together in the home to create a “bedroom studio.” That music can they be distributed online and attract fans, and the music industry, via a true modern democratization of the music industry.

Prepare

Discuss how independent artists can use modern equipment and technology to create, record and distribute their music.

Key points in the article:

- Analogue sounds can be converted to digital signals and be captured, manipulated and combined.
- With the barriers to recording removed, the playing field is leveled so that talent and creativity become the ultimate differentiators.
- While emerging artists can acquire home studios and learn to operate them, the help of skilled products can be extremely valuable in translating realizing a musician’s creative vision.

Begin

What are the essentials of the bedroom studio?

- Sound sources need to be input and balanced in a mixer.
- A mixer needs to convert those sound sources to a digital signal
- A digital audio workstation is a piece of software that allows for multi-tracking and the manipulation of sound.

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- REVERB: an effect whereby the sound produced by an amplifier or an amplified musical instrument is made to reverberate slightly.
- EQUALIZATION: the process of adjusting the balance between frequency components within an electronic signal.
- ANALOG: signals that are continuous, vs. digital signals with non-continuous electrical signals.
- MULTIFACETED: something that has many parts or elements.
- INTERFACE: a surface regarded as having a common boundary of two bodies, spaces, or phases.

Discuss

Is a bedroom studio as good as a professional recording studio?

Expand

Other than for a space with optimal size and acoustic properties, top record labels and artists use professional recording studios to accommodate professional engineers who can operate recording

equipment, and producers, who are experts in employing sounds in order to realize artistic visions.

Techniques: Swing Feel

National Standards: 1, 7-9, 10

While it's an abstract concept, "to swing" musically means to really lock into a specific rhythmic feel that sounds relaxed but also energized, helping a song to feel less stiff and making it easier to dance to. Swing eighths are notes that when played with this feel or *dynamic*, achieve that result. The score notation that calls for using this dynamic is distinctive but subtle.

Prepare

Isolate the three elements of the lesson: accenting beats can create "swing feel", determining the difference between straight eighths and swing eighths, and that the swing dynamic can be applied to music in a variety of musical genres.

Inspire a discussion about dynamics, and how accenting beats and using expression to vary the playing or singing of written notes can significantly alter how music sounds.

Key points in the article:

- Accenting eighth notes on the second and fourth beats in a 4/4 or 2/4 measure can create swing feel.
- The difference between straight eighths and swing eighths is whether or not emphasis or accent is applied on certain beats.
- Beats can be accentuated in order to create swing feel when playing a variety of popular musical styles.

Begin

Count the notes in different measures and demonstrate the impact of dynamics including swing feel.

- Use metronome and slowly play a scale with equal emphasis on each note.
- Play the scale again but this time accent every other beat.

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- GROOVE: the sense of an effect ("feel") of changing a pattern in a propulsive rhythm or sense of "swing".
- METRONOME: a device used by musicians that marks time at a selected rate by giving a regular tick.
- ARPEGGIO: the notes of a chord played in succession, either ascending or descending.
- ACCENT: a distinct emphasis given to a syllable or word in speech by stress or pitch.
- DYNAMICS: the varying levels of volume of sound in different parts of a musical performance.

Discuss

Are there certain styles or genres of music that use swing feel as a central dynamic more than others? Swing music certainly did. Rock, "Texas blues" and jazz, of course, are fertile grounds for the use of swing feel. What about country or Latin. Find famous examples, or challenge students to do so.

Questions

1. What action does swing feel stimulate in listeners?
2. What dynamic is applied to notes within a measure to make them “swing”?
3. In 4/4 time, on what beats is an accent applied to create swing feel?
4. How can a player or singer more easily learn to create swing feel?
5. What device can be used to help identify and accent certain beats?
6. What genres are most famous for using swing feel?

Answers

1. It makes it easier to dance to a piece of music.
2. Accenting or emphasizing them on specific beats.
3. Two and four.
4. Slow the piece down.
5. A metronome.
6. Swing music, jazz, rock and blues.

Feature Story: How to Play Surfaces' "Sunday Best"

National Standards: 1-9

The original recording of this song has a spare production, but it's overall impact is created by parts that require specific mastery.

Prepare

Have students listen to the recording and break down the sounds of the piano and vocals. Then isolate the bass and percussion. Then listen to the guitar part to determine what the guitarist is doing and discuss its impact. How important is that sound to groove and the overall production of the recording?

Key points in the article:

- The lyric is upbeat and positive and drives the song's overall vibe.
- The keyboard sound begins as a distinctive element but then is blended into the song's sonic palette.
- Impact is created when the piano cuts out.
- The song's rhythm is key to its vibe, as demonstrated by its choice as the soundtrack for a widely popular TikTok dance.

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

The song was a hit when it was first released and then again as a dance.

- Is it the blend of lyric and beat that create the song's popularity or is it the melody or vocal?
- The vocal harmonies enter and drop out at certain points. How is that determined and what is the impact of each?

Isolate the sound of the bass and timing of its emphasis.

- How does that dynamic impact the irregular flow of the song.
- Ask students discuss the lyric and what they like about about it.

Expand

What are some examples of other "feel good" songs that have become popular and successful, and is a sad lyric more or less appealing than a happy one?...