

It's Time for Tiesto

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

Tijs Michiel Verwest, known by his stage name Tiesto, has been a pioneer of EDM since before the term was invented. He also represents a new generation of DJs that carry the same superstar status as their popstar contemporaries. Starting out DJing small clubs in Holland in the mid-1990's, Tiesto's frequent reinvention and embrace of new sounds in electronic music quickly established him as a trailblazer of the genre. Although he embraces his past success and the songs that launched him to global fame, he keeps his passion for music alive by defying genre expectations and pushing his own sonic boundaries with each new release.

Prepare

Have students listen to singles “The Motto” and “The Business” from Tiesto's upcoming album *Drive*. Analyze the sonic elements of the songs that make their genre difficult to pinpoint. What types of sounds do you hear in these songs that you don't hear elsewhere in EDM? Have students listen to songs from different points in Tiesto's career that fall more easily into established categories (“Red Lights” for Progressive House, “Adagio for Strings” for Trance, etc). Can students pinpoint any sounds or stylistic tendencies from these genres that appear in Tiesto's latest releases?

Key points in the article:

- Although Tiesto and many of his contemporaries enjoy a level of fame and success on par with the superstar singers and rappers who appear on their tracks, DJs were not always household names. Before the EDM festival explosion of the early 2000s, DJs and electronic music producers were almost strictly behind-the-scenes figures, known mostly to other musicians and industry professionals. Tiesto's success helped pave the way for DJs to become headliners in their own right, as capable of selling out amphitheaters as any pop star or rock band.

- Although EDM is associated with a culture of luxury and excess, Tiesto has grown bored with the 24/7 party lifestyle. Even the most sensational events and surroundings can become tiresome, and at age 54, he finds less and less fulfillment in the glamorous aspects of his profession. To keep moving forward, Tiesto keeps a steadfast focus on the one thing that earned him his success in the first place: his music.

- From his longstanding position in the pantheon of EDM greats, Tiesto finds considerable enjoyment in the explosive success of younger DJs and electronic musicians. He has publicly celebrated the breakout status artists such as Avicii, and more recently, ACRAZE. He revels in the idea that a song made by one person in their mother's basement can become a legitimate global phenomenon.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Dubious:** not to be relied upon; suspect.
- **Commercialization:** the process of managing or running something principally for financial gain.
- **Moniker:** a person's name, especially a nickname or alias.
- **Four-On-The-Floor:** a rhythm pattern used primarily in dance genres where the kick drum is played on every quarter note.
- **Glitz:** extravagant but superficial display.

Discuss

Revisit the list of Tiesto songs used in the "Prepare" section above and note the release date of each. Have students look up other popular EDM songs from the same year, and if possible, from the same genre. Compare Tiesto's approach to each sub-genre of EDM to that of other successful DJs. What makes Tiesto's songs stand out? Why is "Adagio for Strings" considered one of the most important EDM songs of all time? Have students offer theories about what makes Tiesto's music so enduringly popular.

O&A

1. What was Tiesto's original moniker?
2. What does the acronym EDM stand for?
3. Which Tiesto song was voted second-greatest electronic song of all time by *Mixmag* in 2013?
4. After changing his name to DJ Tiesto, which genre did he begin to explore?
5. Which Tiesto song received a GRAMMY nomination for Best Dance/Electronic Recording in 2022?

Answers

1. DA Joker
2. Electronic Dance Music
3. "Adagio for Strings"
4. Trance
5. "The Business"

Expand

(This assignment requires access to a computer, tablet, or phone with a DAW- any free program, such as Garageband, Cubase, or even online DAWs like Soundtrap and Bandlab will work.)

Working individually or in groups, have students select one sub-genre of EDM that Tiesto has explored in his career. Using his songs as a template, have students create their own song in that style. Depending on the grade level and DAW proficiency of the students, try setting a song length- as little as 30 seconds for beginners and as long as three minutes for advanced students. Allot as many class periods as you deem necessary to finish or assign as homework. On the due date, have students present their songs to the class and give a brief description of how their song embodies the chosen genre, including which Tiesto song(s) they used as inspiration.

How to Play “Hanging By a Moment”

National Standards: 1-9

Altered guitar tunings are a staple of rock and alternative music, and the unique sound quality they offer (particularly on electric guitar) is the foundation of Lifehouse’s breakout 2001 hit “Hanging By a Moment.” By studying the song’s wide range of dynamics, clever arranging and instrumentation, and Lifehouse’s own live version of the song, students can create their own version of this turn-of-the-century radio staple.

Prepare

Have students listen to “Hanging by a Moment” and write down their overall impressions of the song. What makes it an engaging listen? Why was it one of the most popular songs of 2001? Listen again and analyze what the guitar, bass, and drums are playing in different sections of the song. How do they fit together and support each other? Next, listen to a live arrangement of the song. What elements are different than the studio version? Are there noticeable changes in the instrumentation, tempo, or overall sound?

Key points in the article:

- “Hanging By a Moment” was named Billboard’s Most Successful Single of 2001, despite never reaching the top position on the charts. It was Lifehouse’s breakout single from their debut album *No Name Face*, reaching no.2 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Their combination of alternative rock sounds, radio-ready melodies, and lush studio production captured the zeitgeist of the post-grunge era and launched the band to international fame.
- Lifehouse is a guitar-based band, and much of the intensity of “Hanging By a Moment” is a result of an altered tuning- Drop Db. This tuning is achieved by dropping the pitch of each string of a standard-tuned guitar down a half step, and then dropping the low E string down another full step. Not only does this change the pitch of the strings, but the overall character of the sound. When paired with an aggressive pick attack and an overdriven amplifier, drop tunings result in a more aggressive sound, making them popular with rock and metal guitarists.
- As with most hit songs, the recording is driven by a dynamic vocal performance and catchy melody. A notable feature of singer Jason Wade’s voice is his vocal range, which is in a lower register than many pop or rock singers. Switching from a mellow tone in the verse to an aggressive rasp in the chorus provides a dynamic contrast that contributes heavily to the impact of the song.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Dense:** containing a complex combination of sounds, often from multiple layers of instrumentation
- **Tension:** the state of being stretched tight.
- **Modify:** to make partial or minor changes.
- **Repetitive:** containing or characterized by repetition, especially when unnecessary or tiresome.
- **Critical:** having a decisive or crucial importance in the success, failure, or existence of something.

Discuss

Compare the open-tuned guitar sound of “Hanging by a Moment” to the other songs listed in the article, Creedence Clearwater’s cover of “I Heard it Through the Grapevine” and Stevie Ray Vaughn’s “Pride and Joy.” How do the guitar sounds from these records compare? Ask students to find other examples of popular songs that use altered tunings, particularly from around the release date of “Hanging by a Moment” (late 1990s-early 2000s). Is Lifehouse’s approach to guitar tunings and sounds emblematic of the era? How does their sound compare to that of their peers?

Q&A

1. Before adopting the name Lifehouse, what did the band call themselves?
2. How many weeks did “Hanging By a Moment” stay on the charts?
3. Which notable guitarist was known for using Eb tuning?
4. Why is it preferable to use a 5 string bass for this song instead of tuning a 4 string bass down to Db?
5. What technique produces the sound effect leading into the third verse?

Answers

1. Blyss
2. 54 weeks
3. Stevie Ray Vaughn
4. Tuning down a standard 4 string bass can drastically alter the string tension
5. Pick scratch (sliding the edge of the pick down the length of a wound guitar string)

Expand

Have students prepare a cover of “Hanging by a Moment” using the same primary instrumental arrangement as the record (electric guitar, bass, and drums). First, play the song as close to the recorded version as possible. Once students have a good feel for the song as it was recorded, experiment with individual elements of the song. For instance, can students find a way to mimic

the sound of a bowed upright bass in the first part of the song if an actual upright bass is not available? Can students add other instruments, such as keyboards or auxiliary percussion, and compose complementary parts?

Next, examine the role of the bass in the song. As discussed in the article, the bassist of Lifehouse employs a few clever techniques to keep the sound fresh in each section. The bass plays a melody that harmonizes with the guitar in the verse, rather than holding root notes. In the chorus, it keeps the progression from getting stale by accentuating different chord tones instead of playing only root notes. What happens to the feel of the song if the bassist plays only root notes throughout the song? Have students play through and notice the difference when the bassist abandons the approach from the record.

Finally, try adapting the song to different keys to suit the voices of different vocalists. This will require creativity on the part of guitarists. They might try using a capo to raise the key, or even experiment with adapting the chords and melodies to standard tuning. Note the change in texture and overall feel that this introduces to the song.

All About Blue Notes

National Standards: 1-9

Point to just about any style of American music that has developed since the 19th century and you will almost certainly find traces of the blues. The distinctive harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary of the genre are foundational to much of the music we enjoy today, and learning to channel its influence is a powerful tool for any musician. To do so, one must understand the note choices that made the blues so distinctive- the timeless concept of “blue notes.”

Prepare

To set the stage for this lesson, provide students with a short list of the stylistic hallmarks of the blues, including the 12 bar blues progression, call-and-response interplay between vocalists and instrumentalists, and lyrical themes of hardship. Listen to several examples of blues music from different eras (for instance, early delta blues pioneers like Robert Johnson, blues musicians who adopted electric instruments like B.B. King, and players like Stevie Ray Vaughn who brought blues music to the pop charts in the 80s and beyond). Note how each of these musicians employs the aforementioned stylistic hallmarks and discuss how each one brings a new set of sounds to the genre. Despite the variations in instrumentation, overall sound, and recording quality, what makes all of them identifiable as blues?

Key points in the article:

- The harmony and rhythms of the blues form the foundation of many other styles of American music, including jazz, rock, and R&B. One of the most recognizable and influential features of the blues is the usage of Blue Notes, which fall outside of both traditional major and minor scales. These notes can instill a melody with a “worried” sound, a brief bit of harmonic tension that adds wonderful richness to the overall sound.
- One of the simplest ways to add blue notes to your major key playing is to flatten the 3rd and 7th of the scale. This creates a distinct minor-over-major contrast that should be instantly recognizable as “bluesy.” Even though the flattened 3rd and 7th clash with the chords in a major key from the viewpoint of traditional Western harmony, this dissonance is surprisingly familiar and enjoyable when applied well.
- Another key Blue Note is the flatted 5th scale degree, which appears in neither the major or minor scale. It divides the octave directly in half and produces another sound that should be instantly familiar to the listener. The flatted 6th is another option for a Blue Note, and when combined with the flatted 3rd, 5th, and 7th, allows the player access to all 12 chromatic notes without losing connection to the key center of the song.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Augment:** make (something) greater by adding to it; increase.
- **Melancholy:** a feeling of pensive sadness, typically with no obvious cause.
- **Emotionality:** the quality or state of being emotional or highly emotional.
- **Versatile:** able to adapt or be adapted to many different functions or activities.
- **Vital:** absolutely necessary or important; essential.

Discuss

After students are familiar with the sounds and harmonic flavors of blues music, ask if they can identify any modern songs or musicians with traceable blues influences. Play selected examples for the class and see if other students agree. Is the influence obvious or subtle? Do the chords, melody, or lyrics remind students of any of the artists mentioned in the “Prepare” section? Ask students to listen casually for blues influences in the music they encounter in their day-to-day life and bring examples they find to share in future classes.

Q&A

1. Which degrees of a major scale can be flatted to create Blue Notes?
2. Which musical activities in 19th century Black American culture led to the development of the blues?
3. Which genres grew directly from the blues?
4. Which note is most commonly known as “the blue note”?
5. True or False: blue notes can lead up to the note above, drop down to the note below, pass between them, or replace either.

Answers

1. 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th
2. chants, work songs, hollers, spirituals, and rhymed narrative ballads.
3. Rock, Jazz, and R&B
4. Flatted 5th
5. True

Expand

Using whatever instruments are available in your classroom (keyboard labs are the most convenient setting, but any chromatic instrument will work for the lessons), have students work in groups or individually to play through the first example. After giving them an appropriate period of time to read the instructions play through the notation, ask for volunteers to demonstrate the example. Ask each student/group whether they were able to play/understand the concept and answer any questions they have. Repeat for examples 2 and 3.

Once students have absorbed the concepts in the lesson, return students to groups. Have them take turns attempting to improvise or compose their own short phrases using blue notes. They can be standalone phrases or correspond to a chord progression of students' choice. After an appropriate period of time, have each group demonstrate their composed melody or improvisation for the class.

What's the Deal with Rhyme?

National Standards: 1-9

Rhyme can be a songwriter's best friend or worst enemy. When used well, rhyme can surprise and delight listeners, and add to the memorability of the lyrics. When used poorly, they can lead to tired, overused, "cheesy" lines that add nothing to the meaning and emotional impact of a song. It is important for writers to understand the many different types of rhyme and utilize them well to keep their songs interesting and their creativity flowing.

Prepare

Ask students to look up the lyrics to a (classroom-appropriate) song they enjoy. Have them copy the lyrics into a document and highlight all the rhymes in the song, noticing where they occur in the lines. Are they only at the end of a line, or do they occur at multiple points? Have students write out each rhyming pair from the song in a separate document and save for later use. Ask students to write down why they think the lyrics are effective overall.

Key points in the article:

- Rhyme can be a frustrating hurdle for songwriters. Without a strong grasp of the variety of rhyme types available, writers can find that their lyrics feel "cheesy" or trite. Luckily, there are many different categories of rhyme that can be used to great effect and help break out of tired, overused rhyming pairs.
- Skilled songwriters often string together many different types of rhymes to fit different lyrical meanings or moods. No need to pick just one type when there are endless options available.
- If a song still feels lackluster even after adding new rhyme types, try changing up the placement of the rhymes. Rhymes appear most often at the end of a line, but can be used to great effect in the middle of a line. In fact, it's possible to write back-to-back lines where every syllable rhymes. These strategies will help freshen up a tired rhyme scheme.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Ubiquitous:** present, appearing, or found everywhere.
- **Vowel:** a speech sound which is produced by comparatively open configuration of the vocal tract, with vibration of the vocal cords but without audible friction (A, E, I, O, U)
- **Consonant:** a basic speech sound in which the breath is at least partly obstructed and which can be combined with a vowel to form a syllable.

- **Differentiate:** make or become different in the process of growth or development.

Discuss

After reading the article, ask students which types of rhymes they had heard of before and which were new to them. Ask if any rhyme types were confusing and answer any questions students have. Which new type of rhyme do students think might be useful to employ in their own writing? Which type of rhymes seem the most difficult to use? Do students agree that it is helpful for lyrical purposes to expand beyond perfect rhymes?

Q&A

1. Which type of rhyme has the same ending vowel and consonant?
2. Which type of rhyme occurs within the line and is most common in Rap and Hip-Hop?
3. Which type of rhyme uses words that are spelled the same, but don't sound the same?
4. What is it called when all syllables of one line rhyme with all of the syllables of another, often in couplets?
5. Which type of rhyme has stressed vowel sounds match exactly and the ending consonant closely linked?

Answers

1. Perfect
2. Internal
3. Eye
4. Holorime/Holorhyme
5. Family/Assonance

Expand

Have students examine their rhyming pair documents from the "Prepare" section. Using the article as a reference, have them identify each type of rhyme used in the song. How many types were used? Were they surprised by any of the rhyme types they encountered? Ask for volunteers to share what they learned through their analysis.

Next, ask students to look up song lyrics that they *don't* enjoy. Follow the same steps from the previous activity, noting the placement of rhymes in the line, writing out all rhyming pairs, and identifying the types of rhyme used. How did this analysis compare to the song they enjoyed? Were the rhyme types similar or different? Do students think the rhyming style of the song they don't enjoy has anything to do with their distaste for it? Ask for volunteers to share their opinions with the class.