

How to Play “Clocks”

National Standards: 1-9

Following the breakout success of their first album *Parachute*, Coldplay released *A Rush of Blood to the Head* and its lead single “Clocks” in 2002. The song went on to win the GRAMMY Award for Record of the Year and establish the band as a mainstay of both British and American pop music. The relative simplicity of the arrangement and form of the song make “Clocks” a perfect template for ensembles to practice crafting their own unique version of a song, instead of simply recreating the record.

Prepare

Have students listen to the original recording of “Clocks” and take note of the instruments they hear in the arrangement. What are the most prominent sounds and motifs? Have students find a live version of the song from around the time of its release (2002) and see what instruments Coldplay uses in their four-piece format. Finally, show students the performance of “Clocks” from the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* show in January of 2023. Notice what new instruments the band added and what changes were made.

Key points in the article:

- As a four-piece band, Coldplay typically keeps their live performances of “Clocks” simple. Although the record is lush and expansive, the band demonstrates that it can be stripped down to its fundamental elements and still make for a compelling performance.
- Because the chord progression stays the same for most of the song, Coldplay makes use of a simple-yet-effective dynamic approach to drive the song forward. The piano theme is the central melodic hook of the song, and by dropping it out entirely for the verse and bringing it back for the chorus, they create space for the vocal and bring the energy up at key points.
- As demonstrated by their 2023 performance on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* show, “Clocks” is a highly adaptable song with many options for instrumentation. Students can (and should!) experiment with the main piano theme and other elements of the song and try playing different instruments than the ones on the record.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article:

- **Consciousness:** awareness by the mind of itself and the world
- **Foreshadow:** a warning or indication of a future event

- **Accenting:** emphasizing a particular feature
- **Dynamics:** the variation in loudness between notes or phrases
- **Adaptable:** able to be modified for a new use or purpose

Discuss

Since the goal of this lesson is to inspire students to create their own unique ensemble version of the song, start a class brainstorm about what they might like to change about the song. Are there any genres of music they would like to incorporate? What would a hard rock, bluegrass, or EDM version of “Clocks” sound like? Once students begin to explore the possibilities and narrow down a few ideas, make a list of each instrument used in the live version of the song (piano, synth pad, drums, bass, guitar) and decide whether to keep or replace them with another instrument. How would it sound if the piano theme was played on marimba, the drum kit was replaced by djembe and hand claps, and the bass part was played by a sousaphone? Are there any supplemental instruments students would like to add to the core five that Coldplay uses?

Q&A

1. “Clocks” won a GRAMMY award in which category?
2. Coldplay was the debut musical guest on the first episode of which popular late program?
3. Where and when was the band Coldplay formed?
4. “Clocks” only deviates from the main chord progression (Eb, Bbmin, Bbmin, Fmin) in which section of the song?
5. “Clocks” is performed at what tempo?

Answers

1. Record of the Year
2. *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*
3. London in the late 90s, when the members were in college
4. The bridge
5. 131 bpm

Expand

After deciding on the instrumental arrangement as a class and assigning parts to each member, practice the song as an ensemble. Depending on the vocalist(s), experiment with the key of the song to better suit their range. Try playing the song at a faster or slower tempo to see if it suits the stylistic changes students have made.

Once the class is confident in the arrangement and feels comfortable performing the song, explore the possibility of collaborating with other school ensembles. An a capella group, orchestra, or brass band could make a remarkable addition to the students’ new arrangement, as

well as opening up possibilities for performances (pep rallies, school assemblies, end-of-semester concerts, etc).

PinkPantheress

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

Victoria Beverly Walker, known professionally by her moniker PinkPantheress, has outgrown her viral TikTok fame and become an outright hitmaker. Although her heavily sample-based music lends itself perfectly to social media usage, the seriousness of her songwriting and production allows Walker's music to stand on its own merits. With hundreds of millions of streams and a growing list of A-List collaborators, PinkPantheress shows no signs of slowing down.

Prepare

PinkPantheress' path to fame is deeply emblematic of how Gen Z audiences consume music, which is largely through social media (primarily TikTok). Take a poll of students in your classroom and see how many were aware of PinkPantheress' music prior to reading this article. Ask whether they encountered her music through her early social media presence or if they discovered her through her more recent collaborations with Skrillex and Ice Spice. Ask if they can name any other social media stars who were able to translate their online fame into legitimate music careers.

Key points in the article:

- Pink's approach to songwriting is thoroughly modern. Wanting to create freely without the restrictions of typical song length, many of her songs start as simple 15 second loops (making them perfect for bite-sized TikTok posts). If the response to her post is strong enough, she might revisit the musical snippet and expand it into a full length song.
- Walker's initial decision to hide her identity behind the PinkPantheress moniker stemmed from several factors. First, she wanted to make sure the music was the primary focus, not the details of her life. Beyond that, Walker has openly shared her struggles with Body Dysmorphia Disease and how it made her deeply uncomfortable with the idea of sharing pictures of herself, among other things.
- The transition from social media star to real-life performer and pop star can often be a difficult process, but Walker credits her team and record label for helping to make it a smooth transition. Instead of jumping directly into major festival and venue performances, she started at smaller scale events and worked her way up. This also helped her manage the process of revealing her identity and developing her brand.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Tactic:** an action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end
- **Gimmick:** a trick or device intended to attract attention, publicity, or business
- **Accrue:** accumulate or receive (such payments or benefits)
- **Stalwart:** a loyal, reliable, and hardworking supporter or participant in an organization or team
- **Encumbrance:** a burden or impediment

Discuss

PinkPantheress has always employed a sample-based method for her production, often drawing on the UK staple genres of drum and bass (D&B) and Jungle. Listen to PinkPantheress songs like “Break it Off” and “Pain” and compare them to classic examples of D&B (like “No Problem” by Chase&Status) and Jungle (like “Helicopter Tune” by Deep Blue). What stylistic elements from those genres do students hear in PinkPantheress’ songs? How does her style differ from the previously mentioned styles?

O&A

1. Why did PinkPantheress choose to remain anonymous at the start of her career?
2. Which two notable artists are featured on PinkPantheress’ hit songs “Boys a Liar” and “Boys a Liar Pt. 2”?
3. Which record label released her debut mixtape?
4. Walker has openly shared her experiences with which mental health condition?
5. Who is the first other producer PinkPantheress allowed into her deeply personal songwriting process (who helped her create “Notice I Cried” and other tracks from her debut EP)?

Answers

1. To make sure her songs came first, rather than details of her identity
2. Skrillex and Ice Spice
3. Parlaphone
4. Body Dysmorphia Disease
5. Oscar Sheller

Expand

Have students research other artists who use a moniker to hide their identity, such as Sia, Daft Punk, Marshmello, DeadMau5, and others. What was their reasoning for adopting the moniker? Did they end up revealing their identity (or have it revealed by someone else) at any point in their career? How do their motivations for doing so align or differ from Walker’s?

Additionally, ask students to research other musical artists who got their start on TikTok or other social media platforms. Compare their career trajectory to that of PinkPantheress. Are they experiencing a similar level of success? Did they jump straight into major performances or did they grow their brand gradually and intentionally like Walker? Do students think that TikTok is the primary vehicle for the discovery of new pop artists, or are there other ways to gain a popular following?

Crooked Phrases

National Standards: 1-9

Western music typically revolves around phrases in 4 or 8 measure increments. These even numbers provide a simplicity, predictability, and danceability that Western audiences embrace wholeheartedly. However, this tendency can be disrupted to great effect. By incorporating crooked phrases in odd groupings of measures, songwriters can create moments of surprise and excitement that make a song stand out from the mold.

Prepare

Ask students to suggest a (school appropriate) song they like and listen to it as a class. Any style or genre will work. Listen to the song (or a portion of the song) as a class and select the most memorable section. Then have students count out how many bars the phrases last. In all likelihood, it will be 4 or 8 measures long. Repeat with as many songs as necessary to demonstrate the point that most Western phrases gravitate toward these even number. Then, read the article.

Key points in the article:

- The purpose of crooked phrases is to grab the listener's attention by defying their subconscious rhythmic expectations. When every phrase in a song has been eight measures long, listeners will start to expect it, even if they don't realize it. That will make the introduction of a seven-measure phrase surprising and will highlight that moment of the song.
- A crooked phrase can have any number of effects on the song and listener. Adding an extra measure or extra few beats to a phrase can give it space to breathe, sometimes in the literal sense (a singer will have more time to breathe before the next line!). Subtracting beats or measures from the end of a phrase can feel like fast-forwarding the song, catapulting the listener into the next measure.
- Sometimes it is not necessary to add or subtract any beats to create a crooked phrase, as demonstrated by MGMT's "Electric Feel." By employing a time signature of 6/4 while maintaining a backbeat that feels like a typical 4/4 dance tune, the last two beats of each measure feel like an extension.

Begin

Build vocabulary by reviewing the words below from the article:

- **Resolution:** the move of a note or chord from dissonance (an unstable sound) to consonance (a more final or stable sounding one)
- **Cadence:** the ending of a phrase, perceived as a rhythmic or melodic articulation or a harmonic change or all of these

- **Esoteric:** intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest
- **Context:** the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed
- **Modulation:** the process of changing keys or the result of the change in keys

Discuss

Listen to each of the five song examples listed in the article. Ask students which of these songs they have heard before, and whether or not they had noticed the crooked phrase contained within. For each song, discuss what students think the artist intended by inserting crooked phrases. Do they think the usage is effective? Ask students which of the songs they think makes the most effective use of its crooked phrase and whether the song would be as effective without it.

Q&A

1. In Western music, phrases usually come in even groups of how many measures?
2. Are crooked phrases made up of even or odd numbers of measures?
3. In which musical genre did the term “crooked” originate?
4. Which song mentioned in the article creates a “crooked” feel without actually adding any extra beats?
5. What is the purpose of a crooked phrase?

Answers

1. 4 or 8
2. Odd
3. Old-time fiddle music
4. "Electric Feel" by MGMT
5. To grab the listener's attention by defying the expectations that consistent, square eight bar phrases create

Expand

Split students into groups and challenge them to find their own example of a song that uses crooked phrases. This can be for homework or an in-class assignment. Have them count out the measures of the phrases throughout the whole song, noting how the crooked phrase(s) contrast with the rest of the phrases of the song. Does the crooked phrase add extra space? Create surprise? What effect did the artist intend the crooked phrase to create?

As extra credit, challenge students to cover a popular song- if it does not contain a crooked phrase, have students insert one where they think it might be effective. If the song does have a crooked phrase, challenge students to round off the phrase into a typical 4 or 8 measures. What effect does this have on the song?

Making The Most of Your Musical Summer

National Standards: 1-9

Summer is a good time for students to create their own memorable musical experiences. Even for those who have scheduled activities, there should be time to for a musical activity like forming a band. Music is the most rewarding as a shared experience, and collaborating with like-minded young musicians for unforgettable moments can set a course for a lifetime.

Prepare

Ask students if they have ever played in a band, or even thought about forming one. Have students list what they think are the most important or challenging aspects of forming a band, and what strategies they might employ to overcome those challenges. If any students in class have played in a band before, ask them to share their experience and offer advice to anyone looking to do the same.

Key points in the article:

- Perhaps the most important aspect of a successful band is finding members who not only get along, but also have shared goals and workstyles. If everyone in the band has a different idea of the experience they want, the project will likely be unsatisfactory.
- Once a band is formed, it's not all jamming and writing. Preparation and logistics are key to getting the band running, from establishing a rehearsal space, to aligning everyone's schedules, to acquiring the equipment needed to practice and perform. Even deciding on which songs to learn and what order to perform them in takes thought and effort.
- Beyond the music, a band is an exercise in communication and compromise. Developing your problem solving and conflict resolution skills is often just as important as sharpening your musicianship. A healthy, supportive relationship between all members of the band is essential to a successful, enjoyable project.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Kindred:** similar in kind; related
- **Harmonious:** free from disagreement or dissent
- **Sufficient:** enough; adequate
- **Threshold:** the point or level at which a physical or mental effect begins to be produced
- **Aforementioned:** denoting a thing or person previously mentioned

Discuss

Since so much of a band's success revolves around the compatibility and adaptability of its members, lead a class discussion about how to develop strong working relationships. Ask the class if they have any tips for teambuilding or if they have had any success assembling a group, even for something as simple as arranging a surprise party for a friend. Likewise, ask the class if anyone has experience in managing conflict, whether on a sports team, a friend group, or another group situation. Have students share any key elements of their experience that helped resolve the issue.

Q&A

1. What is the first thing every band needs?
2. What are some common options for rehearsal spaces?
3. How long does a band generally need to be able to play to start performing live?
4. What does EPK stand for?
5. How can a beginner band extend their set to fill more time?

Answers

1. Bandmates
2. Rented rehearsal studios, basements, garages
3. An hour
4. Electronic Press Kit
5. Let a bandmate play a few of their own songs solo in between full band sets

Expand

To simulate the experience of starting a band, have students arrange themselves into groups of 3-5 members (this decision can be based on the instruments that students play, but since this is a hypothetical exercise, it is not necessary). Have each group write out a plan for the band, including:

- What genre of music the band will play
- Whether they will play covers, originals, or both
- Where they will practice
- How they will acquire the instruments/sound equipment they will need
- A list of the first 5-10 songs the band will learn
- A list of potential venues or events the band could play
- How the band will promote their show

Have each group present their plans to the class. Allow students to give feedback and offer input about how the band might enhance their plan.