

The Rise and Fall of Gaslight Anthem

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

In the extremely limited attention economy musicians currently occupy, taking a break between albums or tours can be disastrous. However, that's exactly what Gaslight Anthem did at the height of their career... for 9 whole years. Though they had no intentions of disbanding for that long, their burnout was immense, and their creative output had run dry. It might sound like career suicide, but the nearly decade-long rest between albums (along with a few words of wisdom from a legendary friend) may have been precisely what the band needed to recharge their batteries and reunite for a highly anticipated new album.

Prepare

Although previous generations may have considered the life of touring musicians to be glamorous and joyful, the age of social media has enabled artists to share their struggles about the rigors of life in the music industry. Many prominent artists have embraced public vulnerability and regularly discuss their mental health and the challenges of sustaining a career in a ruthless, ever-changing music landscape. Ask students if they are aware of any other artists who have stepped out of the spotlight temporarily due to burnout and mental health issues and ask if students have experienced the phenomenon of creative burnout in their own lives.

Key points in the article:

- *History Books*, released this past October, is Gaslight Anthem's first album since they stopped performing in 2014. Rather than continue on and risk releasing an album they weren't proud of, Gaslight decided they would take a break. Feeling like the band had nothing left to say, lead singer Brian Fallon took two years off before releasing his debut solo album in 2016. When asked why he wanted to go solo, Fallon said "Because I don't have anything to say with Gaslight. Those five records, that's what you got. That's the piece."
- Fallon's solo career flourished, with his two albums *Painkiller* and *Sleepwalkers* charting well in both the US and UK. Although he had found a renewed sense of purpose in his songwriting as a solo act, things changed during the pandemic. He once again felt the urge to write with his bandmates and channel his creativity through the group that initially brought him success. The band remained on good terms and credit the deep friendships they forged through their unique experiences together as the foundation of their collaboration.
- At first, Fallon was not sure how to approach the reunion album with Gaslight Anthem. Seeking inspiration, he reached out to friend and fellow New Jersey icon Bruce Springsteen for advice. Heeding his advice, Fallon went into the studio with a renewed sense of purpose and even recruited Springsteen for a feature on the title cut of the album.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Hiatus:** a pause or gap in a sequence, series, or process
- **Trajectory:** a path, progression, or line of development resembling a physical trajectory
- **Lull:** a temporary interval of quiet or lack of activity
- **Invaluable:** extremely useful; indispensable
- **Ostensibly:** apparently or purportedly, but perhaps not actually

Discuss

Listen to title track “History Books” from the band’s latest album and compare it with some of the band’s hits from before their hiatus, such as “The ‘59 Sound”, “45”, and “Get Hurt”. Discuss whether students notice any differences in their sound (areas of focus might include lyrical themes, instrumental arrangements, and production styles of the songs). We know from the article that the nine-year gap greatly benefitted the band personally, but how do students feel the band’s extended break impacted them musically?

Q&A

1. How many years did Gaslight Anthem remain on hiatus?
2. Which legendary artist helped Brian Fallon reunite Gaslight Anthem and also appears on their latest album?
3. At their peak, how many days a year were Gaslight Anthem touring?
4. What were the highest charting positions of Fallon’s solo albums?
5. What year was Gaslight Anthem formed?

Answers

1. Nine years
2. Bruce Springsteen
3. 250 days a year
4. #30 in the US, #13 in the UK
5. 2007

Expand

The Gaslight Anthem’s love of Bruce Springsteen’s music is well-documented. Beyond his collaboration on *History Books*, Springsteen’s music has been massively influential for the band, and many journalists and fans have noted the stylistic parallels. Have students listen to several Springsteen classics (“Born to Run”, “Thunder Road”, “Dancing in the Dark”, or any other of his

many hits will suffice) and list the elements of his sound that appear in The Gaslight Anthem's music. Likewise, list any ways the band differs stylistically from their musical hero.

Mixing It Up With The Pro Tools Pros

National Standards: 1-9

There have never been more DAW options available to musicians. Linear or non-linear, free or subscription-based, live or studio-oriented, anyone with a computer, phone, or tablet can find a DAW suited to their musical needs. Even with this plethora of options available, one DAW is still the industry standard for producers, mixing engineers, and professional studios - Avid's Pro Tools. While there are any number of programs that can get the job done, none have surpassed Pro Tools as the go-to DAW for the most influential figures in modern music.

Prepare

Without mentioning Pro Tools, play the video clip linked in the article of Ariana Grande recording and editing her vocal tracks and see if any students can name the DAW. Make note of her obvious technical proficiency with the software and her use of keyboard shortcuts to quickly splice together different vocal takes. Ask how many students have used a DAW to record music, if they have used Pro Tools, and if not, what DAWs they use. Ask what factors led to them using their specified DAW (such as musical genre, live or studio use, price point, etc).

Key points in the article:

- Although there are plenty of alternatives now, Pro Tools has yet to be replaced as the industry standard DAW for most music professionals. Although software like Ableton, FL Studio, and Logic have gained popularity in recent years, Pro Tools is still the most likely software to be found in professional studios. Because of this, proficient use of Pro Tools is an important skill for aspiring musicians, producers, and engineers. Consider it the equivalent of “Proficient in Microsoft Excel” on a resume used for landing a job in business.
- Even musicians who use a different DAW for certain purposes (such as using Ableton for live electronic music performance) often have Pro Tools in their home studios. Despite the specialized functions of many other DAWs, Pro Tools remains a staple for virtually all forms of recording and is therefore difficult to replace entirely.
- Since its invention, Pro Tools has been used at the highest levels of the music industry to create some of the most memorable music of its time. Modern icons of music production like Pharrell, Benny Blanco, and Jack Antonoff all use it as their DAW of choice, despite the myriad options available to music creators of their stature. Because of this, it is relatively safe to assume that the majority of music heard on modern radio was recorded in Pro Tools.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Utility:** the state of being useful, profitable, or beneficial
- **Facile:** competent, skilled and easily achieved; effortless
- **Concede:** admit that something is true or valid after first denying or resisting it
- **Shill:** an accomplice of a hawker, gambler, or swindler who acts as an enthusiastic customer to entice or encourage others
- **Anecdotal:** based on personal accounts rather than facts or research

Discuss

For students who have used Pro Tools, what were their impressions of it? If it is their main DAW, and why did they choose it over other options? If they don't enjoy Pro Tools and use another software instead, which do they use and why? What do students think a musician should look for in their primary DAW? Taking all of this into consideration, why do students think Pro Tools has remained the industry standard since the advent of digital recording?

Q&A

1. What percentage of Ableton Live users have Pro Tools Ultimate (formerly HD) in their studios?
2. Since it is the industry standard DAW, what benefits are there to learning to use Pro Tools?
3. Pharell Williams and Chad Hugo work as a production duo under which name?
4. Which artist recently showcased their Pro Tools skills in a video remixing "Die For You" by The Weeknd?
5. What age range are the majority of Pro Tools users?

Answers

1. 18.5%
2. Young users who learn and become skilled at using it will eventually have more options and opportunities to work with other artists and in professional audio environments
3. The Neptunes
4. Ariana Grande
5. 25-34 years old

Expand

Give students two assignment options:

- 1) Research a prominent Pro Tools user not mentioned in the article and write a brief report on them. Give a synopsis of their career and accomplishments and go into detail about why they choose Pro Tools.
- 2) Research a prominent artist/producer who uses another DAW. Give a synopsis of their career and accomplishments and go into detail about why they picked their chosen software, and if the information is available, why they prefer it over Pro Tools.

Single Note Harmony

National Standards: 1-9

The sound of voices singing in harmony is one of the most powerful, universal elements in music. Figuring out how to create complementary vocal lines, however, can be a difficult skill to acquire. Although there are certainly sophisticated and challenging methods for creating harmonies, it can be as simple as a single interval running parallel to the melody. By breaking it down to the simplest elements and learning a few key techniques, any singer can learn to create beautiful vocal harmonies.

Prepare

Depending on the skill level of your class, review the necessary music theory for them to follow along with a discussion about intervals. If necessary, reacquaint them with the sounds of 3rds, 4ths, 5ths, and 6ths by playing the intervals on piano (or another polyphonic instrument). Perhaps play a familiar melody in the left hand and harmonize it with the right using the listed intervals. Once students' ears are primed and their theory knowledge is refreshed, read the article.

Key points in the article:

- Finding the perfect harmony line to compliment a melody is a deeply satisfying feeling. Although it might seem complex and highly dependent on the chord structure of a song, it can be a simple exercise. Depending on how many voices and instruments there are in an arrangement, it could be as simple as finding two notes that work together, regardless of the overall harmonic context. Two voices singing a capella only need to sound good with each other.
- 3rds and 6ths moving parallel to the melody are the most fundamental intervals for creating harmonies. Harmonizing with one static interval might not work over an entire chord progression, though. To avoid unintended dissonance, 4ths and 5ths can be added into the harmony line. This also opens up possibilities for leaps and oblique motion in the harmony.
- Once comfortable with the standard practices for creating harmonies, it's time to throw out the rulebook. Every interval from 2nds to 7ths can be brought into play, allowing for contrary motion and creative moments of tension and release. By making the harmony either more or less rhythmically active than the melody, adventurous harmonies can be incorporated in many musical situations.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Intertwine:** connect or link (two or more things) closely
- **Evocative:** bringing strong images, memories, or feelings to mind
- **Sublime:** of such excellence, grandeur, or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe
- **Consonance:** when two or more tones complement each other to produce a sound that is pleasant to the ear
- **Dissonance:** the impression of tension or clash between two or more tones

Discuss

After reading the article, ask students for some examples of songs with harmonies they enjoy. Play the examples in class and ask students to listen analytically to the harmonies. Do they stay on a static interval, or do they deviate? Do they use contrary motion or rhythmic devices to create adventurous harmonies? Do the harmonies feel consonant, dissonant, or both at different times?

Q&A

1. Which intervals are the most basic and commonly used to create harmonies?
2. Which scale can be used to harmonize a melody to help mix 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths?
3. What technique can help more extroverted harmony lines work?
4. Typically, melody notes from the bottom half of the scale will sound better harmonized up a _____ from the _____ half of the scale.
5. Why might it be necessary to use other intervals in a harmony instead of only using 3rds?

Answers

1. 3rds and 6ths
2. Pentatonic
3. Making them either more or less rhythmically active than the melody
4. 3rd, top
5. Only relying on 3rds can create a situation where the harmony clashes or sounds dull.

Expand

Choose a recognizable song to harmonize- it could be “Row, row, row your boat” or a pop song students would know. Split students into groups and have them write a harmony for it using the intervals listed in Example 1. After the allotted time, have each group perform their harmonies for the rest of the class. If this task proves simple enough for your students, repeat the assignment using the techniques outlined in Example 2.

For advanced classes, have each group compose a harmony using the techniques from Example 3 as homework. Allow at least a week for groups to meet and work independently on their harmonies, due to the virtually limitless possibilities at this level. Have an in-class performance.

How to Play “Lil’ Boo Thang”

National Standards: 1-9

The practice of sampling or quoting older songs is not a new practice and continually brings a fresh crop of classics from previous generations to the attention of younger listeners. Paul Russell’s “Lil’ Boo Thang” is built around a quoted section from The Emotions’ 1977 song “Best of My Love,” but brings an energy and appeal that is absolutely of the moment. With its extremely short run time and danceable groove, the song will undoubtedly leave audiences wanting more.

Prepare

Discuss the practice of sampling and quoting older songs in modern music with the class. Are students familiar with the practice? If so, can they provide examples of famous samples or songs that use them? Listen to “Lil’ Boo Thang” and identify the quoted section of the song. How does the melody, lyric, and production of the rest of the song relate to the quoted song? Would “Lil’ Boo Thang” be the same without the quoted section? Would it exist at all?

Key points in the article:

- After graduating Cornell and moving to LA, Paul Russell quickly found online fame by posting song snippets to TikTok. The viral success of “Lil’ Boo Thang” landed him a record deal with Atlantic, leading to a full version of the song shortly after. The catchy, unchanging groove drives the song for the entirety of its run time.
- Behind the vocal melody, the most expressive element of the song is the bassline. Although it is repetitive, it provides melodic and rhythmic punctuation to both the vocal melody and rhythm of the drums. The toughest part of the arrangement for a live band to emulate is the horn section, but it can be simulated by a synth player.
- Although sampling and quoting older songs is a widespread practice, young musicians should read very carefully about copyright law. Without obtaining legal permission from the publisher of the original song, releasing a song containing a sample could lead to a lawsuit. Studying and incorporating the music of musical greats is important for young artists, but there are pitfalls to avoid!
- Not discussed in the article, but available for further discussion is the appeal of the song’s audacious lyric. The song is the story of a very aggressive outreach by a potential suitor to a love interest. How does the class feel about the lyric’s story, and do they think it has anything to do with the song’s popularity?

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Unison:** a rhythm that everyone plays together
- **Punctuate:** to interrupt or occur in (something) repeatedly
- **Prominent:** important; famous
- **Underpin:** support, justify, or form the basis for
- **Emulate:** to match or surpass, typically by imitation

Discuss

In class, listen to the full version of The Emotions' "Best of My Love" and review the ways that "Lil' Boo Thang" was shaped by it. Then, listen to Cheryl Lynn's "Got To Be Real," which is clearly derivative of The Emotions' song. Even though she does not sample the song or use the same lyrics, do students think there is an ethical boundary crossed by Cheryl Lynn? Much has been discussed in popular culture about the ethics of sampling. Are Paul Russell and Cheryl Lynn operating in the same ethical territory? If not, why?

Q&A

1. Where did Paul Russell go to college?
2. How long is "Lil' Boo Thang"?
3. Which band does the article list as a great model for young musicians to emulate when putting together a live show?
4. Which song does "Lil' Boo Thang" quote?
5. If you record a song with a sample, whose permission should you get before releasing it?

Answers

1. Cornell University
2. 1:54
3. Earth, Wind, and Fire
4. "Best of My Love" by The Emotions
5. The publisher of the sampled song

Expand

Have student musicians create their own version of "Lil' Boo Thang." Start by teaching the parts on the record and playing them precisely and discuss whether each part is essential or if it can be changed to suit the style of the group. If no horn players are available, use keys or synth to emulate the horn stabs. Compare any changes made to the original track to see if the energy of the song is maintained. As noted in the article, the extremely short run time of the song leaves plenty of room for interpretation. Students could add solos, write, or freestyle their own verses,

or even compose their own bridge or B section for the song. Since the repeating groove is so fundamental to the energy and danceability of the song, make sure that any additions students make to the song do not detract from that driving force.