

Jacob Collier: Musical Polyglot

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

Seeking to transcend music's boundaries, Jacob Collier emerges as a true virtuoso, embodying the essence of a "musical polyglot." Much like a linguistic polyglot, Collier's mastery extends beyond mere fluency; he effortlessly weaves beautiful melodies, experimental harmonies, and tantalizing rhythms across a myriad of genres. With each note, he paints a vivid tapestry of sound that captivates audiences worldwide. From orchestrating 100,000 voices in harmony to collaborating with industry giants like Quincy Jones, Collier's musical journey is nothing short of extraordinary. Join us as we delve into the fascinating world of Jacob Collier, where creativity knows no bounds and every song is a symphony of possibility.

Prepare

Ask students if they're familiar with Jacob Collier's music and if so how, they first encountered him. At this point, there are many different avenues to discover the phenom and his impressive YouTube channel where he posts full cover videos, his social media accounts where he posts shorts musical snippets and fun viral content, his appearances on award shows and late night shows, or even his collaborations with pop stars and legendary musicians. Ask students if they know of any other similar musical polyglots who gained fame for their virtuosity on multiple instruments and how their career trajectories compare to Collier's.

Key points in the article:

- Raised in a musical household by his mother, a respected violinist and professor, Collier's early years were steeped in music. Despite rejecting formal piano lessons, his talent flourished through voice training and opera performances. Embracing self-expression, Collier's musical journey was shaped by exploration rather than adherence to tradition, setting the stage for his innovative approach to music.
- In 2011, Collier began sharing his musical talents on YouTube, covering full songs with innovative arrangements. His unique approach, showcased in videos like his multi-part harmony cover of "Isn't She Lovely," caught the attention of industry legends like Quincy Jones. Impressed, Jones became Collier's mentor, guiding him through the production of his debut album while respecting Collier's creative autonomy.
- Collier's debut album, "In My Room," showcased his remarkable talents as he played every instrument and composed most songs. Touring solo in support of the album, he transformed the stage into a musical playground. Though his talent impressed audiences, Collier began to crave collaboration with other artists. This desire birthed "Djesse," four-part album series exploring various genres with diverse artists. Despite pandemic delays, "Djesse Vol. 4" promises an exciting culmination of Collier's musical journey.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Cohesive:** forming a united whole
- **Trajectory:** the path followed by an object moving under the action of given forces
- **Acapella:** without instrumental accompaniment
- **Prowess:** skill or expertise in particular activity or field
- **Aspirations:** a hope or ambition of achieving something

Discuss

Select a video of one of Collier's early live performances when he was touring as a solo act and a video of a recent full band performance from his most recent tour. Watch both in class and ask students to take notes on what they notice about each performance, including instruments involved, stage arrangement, crowd participation, and overall effect of the performance. After watching both videos, conduct a group discussion about Collier's growth as an artist and performer. Did students prefer the solo or full band performance and why? Does Collier benefit from having a band around him or does he shine brightest when playing every instrument himself? Are there benefits to both? Why do students think Collier wanted to collaborate with other artists and build a touring band?

Q&A

1. Collier's cover of which Stevie Wonder song caught the attention of Quincy Jones?
2. What year did Collier begin posting videos to Youtube?
3. How many voices of audience members and collaborators did Collier record singing "Can't Help Falling in Love?"
4. How many songs did Collier write on his debut album?
5. What w notable collaborators will appear on *Djessa Vol. 4*?

Answers

1. "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing"
2. 2011
3. 100,000
4. 8 out of 11
5. Shawn Mendes, Chris Martin, and his mother, Suzie Collier

Expand

One of Collier's signature methods of creating covers (and the way he got discovered by Quincy Jones) is by filming himself singing multiple harmony parts and overlaying them in a single video. This format can expand beyond vocal covers, however. Regardless of what instrument(s)

a student plays, it is possible to record multiple parts and edit them together in video software like iMovie. There are even dedicated apps for this exact purpose available for smart phones, such as the Acapella app, usually for free. Whatever video editing tools students have at their disposal, the process of creating these multi-window videos is fairly simple.

For this assignment, students can choose to work alone or in groups. Select a popular song (it can even be a song that Collier has covered, such as “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout A Thing” or “Can’t Help Falling in Love”) or allow students to select their own. Have students create a multi-window cover version of the chorus of their selected song. The number of windows required can be adjusted based on grade level, skill level, or even number of group members, but 3-6 windows is fairly standard. Students can compose and perform their harmony or accompaniment parts on any instrument they choose- encourage creativity!

Allow class time to create/film the arrangements or assign it as an extended take-home project. On the due date, play each student/group’s videos for the class and have students tell the class how they went about creating their parts.

How To Play Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off”

National Standards: 1-9

At this point, music by Taylor Swift needs no introduction. Without a doubt, she is one of the most famous and influential people on the planet, musician or otherwise. A musical prodigy turned global icon, Swift has captivated audiences with her infectious melodies and empowering lyrics for nearly two decades. “Shake it Off,” the lead single from her 2014 album *1989*, marks a major evolution of her musical style and her first big leap into the world of pop music. Discover the secrets behind the song’s catchy hooks, dynamic arrangement, and irresistible rhythms. From its energetic chorus to its iconic saxophone bass line, “Shake It Off” is more than just a hit—it’s a masterclass in modern pop craftsmanship.

Prepare

Any teacher will be hard pressed to find a student unfamiliar with Swift’s music, but students may not be able to discern, or agree, on what makes it popular. However, like many other Swift compositions “Shake It Off”, has some interesting compositional elements, and certainly has some compelling production. Have students take note of the instruments they hear and the dynamics of each section of the song. Once familiar with the studio version, play a video of a live performance of the song and have students notice any differences. Does Swift’s band play the song exactly like the studio version, or do they add variation to the arrangement? Then, assign students the article to read.

Key points in the article:

- From her beginnings as a country singer-songwriter to her groundbreaking venture into pop music, Taylor Swift has proven her mastery of song form and dynamics in a variety of styles. “Shake It Off” marks a pivotal moment in her artistic journey, showcasing her versatility and knack for crafting infectious pop anthems.
- A key part of the song’s appeal is in the simplicity and repetition of many elements of the arrangement. The drum loop stays the same for the entire song (besides a few breaks) and the chord progression is also static. Adding any extraneous fills or deviations in those areas will only slow down the momentum of the song.
- Because of the repetitive nature of the aforementioned elements, the song relies on many evolving elements in the arrangement to build dynamically throughout the song. In each successive section of the song, new instruments and vocal hooks are added or subtracted to make each verse, prechorus, and chorus feel fresh and exciting.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Prodigy:** a person, especially a young one, endowed with exceptional qualities or abilities
- **Versatility:** the quality or state of being able to adapt to many different functions or activities
- **Pivotal:** of crucial importance to the development or success of something else
- **Extraneous:** irrelevant or unrelated to the subject being dealt with
- **Tapestry:** A rich or varied succession of elements or events

Discuss

Begin a classroom discussion to identify the most important parts of the arrangement and song form. As with any pop song, the lead vocal is the most important part, but which other elements of the song carry the most weight? Students will likely mention the drums and the iconic beat of the song, and they are certainly correct. Then, identify other parts of the arrangement that add variation and dynamics to the otherwise repetitive instrumental, such as the background vocals, synth pads, guitar, and bass guitar. Any omission of these parts in your group's performance should be intentional and purposeful, with a plan in place to replicate their dynamic effect.

Q&A

1. Which instrument plays the bassline in "Shake It Off?"
2. According to the article, what happens in a "breakdown" section of a song?
3. Which genre of music inspires the background vocals on the track?
4. Why is it a bad idea for drummers to add fills to the song?
5. How many Grammy awards does Taylor Swift currently have?

Answers

1. Baritone saxophone
2. The track breaks down to just drums and vocals
3. Motown
4. It breaks the "hypnotic spell" of the iconic, repetitive beat
5. 14

Expand

"Shake It Off" and any live performance of the song are absolutely dependent on the drummer's performance. The iconic beat is driving and exciting, but also steady and unchanging. Young musicians have a tendency to rush in performance situations because of adrenaline, but an

exciting beat can also cause a gradual (or not so gradual) increase in tempo as the song progresses. For this song, the drummer should devote plenty of individual practice time to working with a metronome, but it also might benefit the entire ensemble to practice to a click together in rehearsals.

This song can be adapted to both small and large ensembles. For smaller ensembles, take stock of the instruments you have and compare it to the original arrangement. If your class does not have a baritone sax, or synth player, or guitarist, what other instruments do you have that can take their place? Or can you build dynamics in a way that does not involve the missing instrument? For larger ensembles, the possibilities are virtually endless. If your school has a popular music ensemble and a marching band, or even an orchestra or concert band, propose a collaboration for an upcoming performance. Could a horn line double the background vocals, or even replace them? Could a string section supplement/replace the synth pad? Don't be afraid of maximalism if your ensemble has a wealth of options. Create a lush, grandiose arrangement to blow your audience away.

Metric Modulation

National Standards: 1-9

Imagine transforming the vibe of your song mid-performance, captivating listeners with tempo shifts and rhythmic wizardry. Although the term “modulation” in music most commonly refers to a key change, metric modulation indicates a change in the groove of a piece of music. Discover how subtle shifts in rhythm, based on precise mathematical relationships, can elevate compositions. From the energy surge of tempo changes to the seamless flow of subdivision modulation, explore diverse examples ranging from progressive rock to pop to traditional African music. As you embark on this rhythmic journey, embrace patience and practice, knowing that mastering these techniques will unlock endless possibilities for your musical expression. Get ready to feel the beat like never before!

Prepare

To prepare for this lesson, review fundamental rhythmic concepts with the class, such as tempo, subdivision, and meter to lay a foundation for understanding the examples in the article. Once students have reviewed this information, play an excerpt of any song or composition that incorporates metric modulation. Ask students if they noticed anything interesting in the rhythm and groove of the song and see if anyone can identify the moment the metric modulation occurred, even if they cannot fully describe what is happening. Ask students how that change in groove affected the overall feel of the song and why they think the artist might have chosen it.

Key points in the article:

- Although the concept of metric modulation might be intimidating to the math-averse, musicians can rest assured that it has much more to do with the feel of a song and the effect on the listener. While it takes a bit of counting at first, once the feel of different metric relationships has been absorbed, these rhythmic tools can be implemented on demand without conscious thought.
- There are many ways to implement metric modulation into a composition. Anything that shifts the underlying foundation of the groove falls under this category, including tempo shifts, changing the subdivision of the beat, and more complex polyrhythms. Although more technically advanced examples of metric modulation are found in genres like progressive rock, the technique is nearly universal and can be found in many different styles from around the globe.

- Like any musical technique, metric modulation can be implemented at a wide range of skill levels. While the more beginner-friendly variations of the technique can be learned quite easily, the advance permutations of metric modulation will take time to absorb. Patience is key to mastering this technique, just as it is with learning harmony, ear training, or any other musical endeavor.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Polyrhythms:** the simultaneous use of two or more conflicting rhythms, typically in different time signatures, within a musical composition
- **Subdivision:** the division of beats or pulses into smaller, equal parts within a measure of music
- **Coherence:** the quality of forming a unified whole
- **Systematic:** done or according to a fixed plan or system; methodical
- **Intensity:** the degree or amount of strength, force, or energy in a piece of music

Discuss

Read through each example provided in the article as a class and analyze the audio samples that accompany them. Analyze the impact of each type of metric modulation, from the simplicity of a tempo change to more advanced polyrhythms. Conduct a classroom discussion about the article, first allowing students to ask any clarifying questions, and then asking students which type of modulation they liked or disliked most. Knowing what they know now, can students identify the type of metric modulation from your song selection in the “Prepare” section of the lesson? Can students think of any songs they know that contain metric modulations, and can they identify which type of modulation occurs?

Q&A

1. The origins of metric modulation in Western music can be traced back to the music of which continent?
2. How does the article define metric modulation?
3. Which two modern artists listed in the article are often associated with the technique of metric modulation?
4. Which two tempo change techniques are so common we barely consider them metric modulation?
5. True or false: we can metrically modulate to any subdivision while keeping the pulse the same, but switching back and forth between triple and duple meter is the most common implementation.

Answers

1. Africa, particularly the countries of Ghana and Mali
2. A systematic way of changing the groove in the middle of a piece of music
3. Prog-rock band Yes and classical composer Elliot Carter
4. Going double time and half time
5. True

Expand

Split students into small groups for a composition assignment. Ask students to compose a short piece of music incorporating any type of metric modulation (although it might be beneficial to limit younger/entry level classes to either the tempo change or triple-to-duple meter shifts). Students may choose the tempo, key, and style of the piece. Depending on grade level and skill level, allot ample classroom time for students to compose together. Students may record their composition in a DAW like GarageBand using digital instruments or play their composition live on one or more instruments. On the due date, each group will present their composition to the class, allowing time after each presentation for classroom discussion and peer review.

The Marching Arts 2024

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

Students may not need an introduction to middle or high school marching band, but they not be fully familiar with the vibrant world of the marching arts, where musicianship, creativity, and camaraderie collide to create unforgettable experiences. From the thunderous performances of Drum Corps International’s World Class Marching Corps to the energetic displays of high school bands, the marching arts are thriving. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, enthusiasm for marching remains high, with young musicians eagerly auditioning and signing up for the exhilarating journey ahead. Explore the rich history, diverse styles, and global impact of marching bands, from college programs like those at Stanford University to international competitions like the European Drum Corps Championships and The World Music Contest in the Netherlands. Get ready to march around the world and discover the magic of musical sport!

Prepare

Begin the lesson by asking students to raise their hand if they currently participate in the school’s marching band or if they have in the past. Ask students about their overall experience in marching band, including their favorite parts, biggest challenges, and the reason they joined. After briefly discussing student experiences, select a video of a prominent marching band performing, either collegiate or professional, to show students the impressive feats of precision and musicality executed by marching bands at the highest levels of competition. As a class, read the synopsis of the history of marching on the first page of the article. Then, assign the rest of the article for individual reading.

Key points in the article:

- From high school bands to elite Drum Corps International ensembles, the marching arts offer diverse opportunities for musicianship and creativity. Despite the challenge of the pandemic, participation is on the rise, with young musicians eagerly joining bands and corps, eager to make lifelong friendships and create memorable performances.
- College marching bands, like those at Stanford University, provide a unique social environment and performance opportunities, often incorporating popular music to entertain fans. The instant community provided by collegiate bands can be crucial for freshmen nervous about making the transition to a new school
- Marching bands and drum corps aren’t just an American tradition; they’re celebrated worldwide. From military tattoos in Scotland to innovative performances by groups like the Top Secret Drum Corps in Switzerland, marching music transcends borders, connecting communities and cultures through the universal language of music.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Pageantry:** a lavish or spectacular display, especially one with a lot of ceremony
- **Resilience:** the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness
- **Comaraderie:** mutual trust and friendship between people who spend a lot of time together
- **Coveted:** greatly desired or envied
- **Unparalleled:** having no equal; unmatched or unrivaled

Discuss

After reading the article, ask students if any particular sections resonated with their experience and understanding of the world of marching arts. If it does not come up organically, highlight the social aspect of marching bands at every level, including at a global scale. For those in class who are in marching band, how has the social environment provided by the band impacted their lives? Are any students considering marching at the college level, and if so, why? Were students aware of the importance of the marching arts on an international scale, and the sense of global camaraderie that exists between the bands and organizations that populate it?

Q&A

1. What organization is the leader in producing summer events for elite marching ensembles?
2. Rather than traditional marches or classical selections, what is the main focus of college marching bands' performance repertoire?
3. What is unique about the Dutch Bicycle Showband Crescendo?
4. What organization hosts the World Pipe Band Championships annually in Glasgow, Scotland?
5. Where does The World Music Contest (WMC) take place?

Answers

1. Drum Corps International
2. Popular Music
3. They perform while riding bicycles and wearing traditional wooden shoes called clogs
4. The Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA)
5. Kerkrade, the Netherlands

Expand

Assign students to choose a specific aspect of marching arts mentioned in the article (e.g., Drum Corps International, a specific college's marching program, one of the international competitions) to research further. If necessary, provide a list of websites or other resources to assist students in their search for information about their chosen subject. Instruct students to prepare a short presentation or written report summarizing their findings, including key

information, historical context, and personal reflections. Visual aids, such as photographs or videos of their chosen band, organization, or event, are encouraged. Have students present their research to the class, allowing time after each presentation for discussion and peer feedback.