

Maggie Rogers Doesn't Forget

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

A breakout star from rural Maryland, Maggie Rogers has eschewed the trappings of fame and remained true to her roots despite soaring success. From her humble beginnings on a farm to the glitz of New York City's music scene, Rogers has stayed authentic in the face of business challenges.

Pharrell Williams's endorsement catapulted her into the limelight, but Rogers continues to find solace in a slower-paced lifestyle. As the pandemic halted live music, Rogers found refuge in music-making, birthing her sophomore album, *Surrender*. Now, armed with newfound wisdom from Harvard Divinity School, Rogers embarks on her next chapter, sharing her unguarded self through her upcoming album, *Don't Forget Me*, ready to captivate the world once more.

Prepare

Ask students if any of them are familiar with Maggie Rogers' music, and if so, how they first learned of her. Though her career and discography have generated enough momentum for pop music fans to find her organically, there is still a good chance that the video of Pharrell praising her demo of "Alaska" was their first introduction to Rogers. Play the video for the class, followed by the album version of "Alaska." Do students agree with Pharrell's assessment of the song and Rogers' style? What attributes do students think make an artist truly unique? After the discussion, assign the article to read.

Key points in the article:

- Despite her rise to fame, Rogers remains true to her rural Maryland roots, navigating the complexities of the music industry with authenticity and integrity. Although it took her a while to learn to deal with the ulterior motives and deceitful tactics that sadly pervade music industry, she remains untainted and happy to break the mold.
- Pharrell Williams' endorsement of Rogers' song "Alaska" catapulted her into the spotlight in a viral YouTube video. His praise of her originality, coupled with the public recognition she received from the video, granted her leverage in securing a record deal and set the trajectory for the rest of her career.
- Rogers finds solace in her private life, using pandemic-induced downtime to craft her sophomore album *Surrender*, and further explore her personal and creative evolution. Though she is certainly not the only artist to slow down and refocus during the pandemic, Rogers embraced it on a fundamental level that few others did, reconnecting with the things that made her feel like she was living a full life.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Voracious:** having a very eager approach to an activity; insatiable
- **Deceitfulness:** the quality of being dishonest
- **Serendipity:** occurring or discovered by chance in a happy or beneficial way.
- **Authentic:** representing one's true nature or beliefs; genuine
- **Leverage:** the power to influence a situation or person to gain an advantage.

Discuss

Having already listened to “Alaska” from her debut album, select a notable song from Rogers’ second album, *Surrender*, such as “Overdrive,” “Want Want,” or “Horses,” and compare it stylistically. How did Rogers’ sound develop in the isolation of the pandemic? Are there any notable differences in lyrical themes? Then, listen to the title track from her upcoming album, “Don’t Forget Me.” Rogers claims that this represents her truest, most unguarded musical self. How does it compare stylistically to the two previous examples of her sound? What are students’ opinions of her artistic development? Does her latest release offer a deeper look into who she is?

Q&A

1. Where did Rogers film the video for her song "Alaska"?
2. What degree did Rogers receive from Harvard Divinity School?
3. Where did Rogers record her sophomore album *Surrender*?
4. What other notable artists are signed to Mick Management?
5. How many songs did Rogers write during the pandemic?

Answers

1. On her childhood farm
2. Master's degree in religion and public life
3. In her parents’ garage
4. Sharon Van Etten, My Morning Jacket, and Leon Bridges
5. 100

Expand

Maggie Rogers stands out in the world of pop music for her embrace of a slower life in-between massive tours and album releases, that is. While certainly not the norm, there are plenty of other artists who have come to embrace solace and simplicity in their personal lives as a counterweight to the demands of fame and the music industry. This can often be heard in the type of music they make (for instance, John Mayer’s stripped-down album *Born and Raised* followed his move to Montana extended break from public life). As a topic for a written report or in-class presentation,

have students research other famous artists who have stepped away from the spotlight or lived in relative seclusion, including an analysis of any music they produced during that time of their life and how it differs from their other creative output.

How To Play Bob Marley’s “Three Little Birds”

National Standards: 1-9

In the early 70s, a new voice rose from Jamaica, strumming chords of revolution: Bob Marley and The Wailers. Pioneering the genre of reggae, they blended elements of ska, rocksteady, soul, and jazz into a danceable, socially conscious new style. Their iconic song “Three Little Birds” presents a universal message of hope, making it an excellent song to cover for young ensembles. Although it might sound simple and uplifting, the rhythmic accents and highly intentional arrangement can present an interesting challenge for young musicians. Dive into the syncopated rhythms of reggae with your students and don’t worry about a thing!

Prepare

Play “Three Little Birds” for the class and have them take notes, including what instruments/voices they hear in the arrangement, how the dynamics build, and any other factors they think are important to the sonic characteristics of the song. Given the ubiquity of this song, students will likely be very familiar with the tune, but it is less likely that they have done a deep analysis of the track. After a few listens, have students compare notes and see what conclusions have been reached. Do these observations fall in line with their general knowledge of the genre of reggae, or are there notable differences? Keep these observations in mind and read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- Unlike its predecessors ska and rocksteady, which were mostly written and performed with danceable, party-friendly lyrics and grooves, reggae was an outlet for social commentary. Marley’s focus on social issues, combined with the anthemic and uplifting quality of his songs, helped launch reggae into the global spotlight. His songs still resonate with modern audiences, even if they are not familiar with the historical context of the lyrics.
- One of reggae’s trademark musical characteristics is its use of syncopation and beat displacement. In most popular genres, the kick drum hits mainly on the downbeat, but reggae flips that on its head. Likewise, reggae bass lines favor off beats as well. “Three Little Birds” takes this concept even further, featuring a piano part that plays eighth notes on the off beat. These combine to create a feeling of movement despite the slow tempo.
- Outgrowing its humble roots by orders of magnitude, reggae influences can be heard in many different genres around the world. The trademark rhythms of reggae provide a fresh slate of options for drummers and bassists of any style. The most crucial aspect of building a reggae-influenced instrumental is leaving space for the vocals and highlighting other instruments between phrases.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Advocate:** A person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland
- **Syncopated:** the displacement of the usual metrical accent in music or a rhythm so that it occurs on a weak beat
- **Spearheaded:** Lead an attack or movement
- **Vehicle:** A medium or way in which something is expressed, achieved, or shown.

Discuss

After reading the article, lead a discussion about the crucial stylistic elements of “Three Little Birds.” Did their initial observations and notes line up with the article’s analysis of the song? What did they learn about the song and the genre of reggae from the article? Next, analyze the distinct rhythmic tendencies of the song. Count along to the beat out loud as a class, noting the slow tempo. In different sections of the song, have students focus on the rhythmic accents of different instruments. Growing accustomed to the heavy syncopation inherent to reggae might be tricky for students accustomed to downbeat-focused musical styles, but this feel is vital to making “Three Little Birds” groove.

Q&A

1. Which beats does the kick drum typically hit in reggae?
2. How does “Three Little Birds” create tempo misdirection and generate forward motion?
3. How are the final two choruses of “Three Little Birds” different from the others?
4. In the second verse, which beats does the organ play?
5. What are the two chords in the chorus?

Answers

1. The back beats
2. It features a piano playing chords on all the off eighth notes while the other instruments play with a half-time feel
3. The lead vocal fills (obligatos)
4. Two and four
5. A and D

Expand

The relative simplicity of “Three Little Birds” can be deceptive. Because every instrument on the record is playing precisely what it needs to fit into the arrangement, every member of the band

must be aware of their place in the mix. The groove must be relaxed, but not so loose that it falls apart. The tempo must be steady, but not stiff. All ensemble members should be aware of exactly how their playing affects the overall sound.

Try this exercise to give students a sense of each instrument's effect on the overall feel of the song:

Start out with only drums playing the beat of the song. Once students are accustomed to the beat by itself, add one instrument at a time, noting the impact on the feel of the song. Start with the bass, noticing how it supports the off beat accents of the drums. Add guitar and notice how the unchanging, syncopated upstrokes help drive the track forward. Add piano, noticing how it supports the rhythm of the guitar part and adds even more forward momentum. Finally, add organ and notice how it floats on top of the other instruments, free to add rhythmic stabs or call-and-response melodies in between vocal phrases. Once the whole ensemble is playing, instruct one instrument at a time to stop playing (arrange a hand signal and have band members watch closely for their cues). What happens to the feel of the song when that instrument is removed? Repeat until every instrument has been muted. This will demonstrate the full impact of each part in the arrangement, which will increase students' understanding of the genre and give them a sense of importance to the ensemble as a whole. Perhaps most importantly, it will get students listening to every other member of the band as they play.

Once this exercise has been completed, try a run-through of the whole song, complete with vocals. Focus on the subtle dynamic shifts between verses and choruses to keep it from getting monotonous and maximize the emotional impact of the song. The benefit of deconstructing the arrangement in real time should be apparent from the intentionality behind each instrumentalist's playing and attention to detail overall.

From there, you have a fun and engaging performance piece fit for a wide variety of school events!

Whole Tone Magic

National Standards: 1-9

In Western music, most scales are made by combining notes at half and whole steps. This blend of intervals creates the harmonic tension and release that drives melodies, chord progressions, and compositions forward. Symmetrical scales like the whole tone disrupt this traditional musical gravity, and these unexpected, ear-grabbing sounds have captivated composers for centuries. From classical geniuses like Bach to modern maestros like Duke Ellington and Stevie Wonder, the whole tone scale weaves dreamy atmospheres and sharp, angular turns into compositions. Exploring its chords and progressions unlocks a treasure trove of musical innovation.

Prepare

To prepare for this lesson, review the necessary fundamental harmonic concepts with the class, including intervals, scales, and building diatonic triads from a scale. Then, prime students' ears for the lesson by playing excerpts of famous songs or compositions that utilize the whole tone scale (for instance, Debussy's "Claire de Lune").

Ask students for adjectives to describe the atmosphere/vibe in the selected piece of music, such as "mysterious," "intriguing," or "dreamy." Ask if students have any guesses as to the types of chords or scales that are employed to achieve that sound. Then, read the article individually or together as a class.

Key points in the article:

- To utilize the whole tone scale, musicians must embrace a more angular harmonic palette. Because it is only made up of whole steps, it lacks the traditional structure and interval relationships that most of Western music is built upon. The perceived dissonance of the whole tone scale can be used to great effect, blurring the tonal center of the song, and shifting the musical gravity altogether.
- Because there is only one interval in the whole tone scale, there is only one type of triad inherent to the scale: augmented. While this makes it simple to remember (and play, in some cases), it is difficult to utilize from a compositional standpoint. Stevie Wonder's "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" drops a quick ascending whole tone passage in between more traditional progressions, adding a few crucial moments of emotional suspension.
- Instead of composing entire sections of a song around the whole tone scale, inserting augmented triads into a major or minor chord can inject a whole tone flavor at

unexpected times. Build an augmented triad starting on the 3rd, 5th, or 7th of a major or minor chord to get spicy, exciting moments in otherwise unremarkable progressions. Use it sparingly, choosing your moments wisely.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Symmetrical:** Exhibiting symmetry, where one half mirrors the other half.
- **Hybrid:** made by combining two different elements; a mixture
- **Harmonic:** Relating to the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions
- **Vibe:** A distinctive emotional atmosphere; a feeling or aura created by a person, place, or thing
- **Angular:** a musical descriptor that implies irregular rhythms or complex, dissonant chords and harmonies

Discuss

After reading the article, answer any questions students have and make sure there are no gaps in understanding. Then, have a classroom discussion about the potential applications of the whole tone scale. Did students prefer the examples where entire sections of a song were based around the whole tone scale, or the use of augmented triads within a single chord to add a brief whole tone flavor? Why? Did students have a favorite hybrid chord using augmented triads? What styles of music might these techniques be useful for, and which styles might not? Is it equally applicable to popular music as it is to classical or orchestral compositions?

Q&A

1. Besides the whole tone scale, which other scale features only a single interval?
2. True or False: there are more notes in the whole tone scale than the major scale.
3. Which composer is well known for using the whole tone scale to evoke images of mists and clouds?
4. How did Thelonius Monk use the whole tone scale?
5. True or false: the minor/major7 chord contains an augmented triad.

Answers

1. The chromatic scale
2. False
3. Debussy
4. He created sharp, angular turns in his compositions and improvisations.
5. True

Expand

As an exercise, provide students with a recognizable chord progression in a key of your choice, such as a I-vi-IV-V or ii-V-I, and instruct them to choose one chord in the progression to modify with an augmented triad. This can be done in a piano lab, computer lab (if equipped with a DAW like Garageband), or individually as homework.

Depending on which chord they choose and which degree of the chord they build the augmented triad from, they might end up with a minor/major7 chord, whole tone dominant chord, or another variation. Ask students to notice the effect their modified chord has on the rest of the progression. Students can even find alternative voicings for the unaltered major or minor chords in the progression that might fit better with their whole tone-flavored hybrid chord.

Have students present their modified chord progressions to the class and explain their process and the choices they made.

All Together Now!

National Standards: 7-8, 10-11

The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) isn't just any union; it's the backbone of the music industry, championing the rights of over 60,000 talented artists across the U.S. and Canada. From classical maestros to chart-topping sensations like Taylor Swift, Jon Batiste, and Brad Paisley, AFM stands tall, ensuring fair treatment and pay for musicians of all genres.

Since its inception in 1896, AFM has fought tirelessly for musicians' rights, negotiating groundbreaking agreements that set standards for recording work and protect against exploitation. Through strikes and solidarity, they've secured crucial benefits like healthcare and fair compensation from streaming services. But AFM isn't just about business; it's about community and support. From aiding musicians in times of crisis to promoting diversity in orchestras, AFM is a beacon of hope for the musical world.

Prepare

Begin with a discussion about the challenges of a career in the music industry, specifically around payment and working conditions. Issues with streaming royalties, publishing, ownership of master recordings, and other issues have received significant press in recent years. What changes would need to happen in the music industry to solve these types of issues, and how could musicians make those solutions a reality? Next, ask students about their knowledge of unions. Do they know what a union is and what role it plays for its members? Are they aware of the existence of AFM or any other music industry unions?

Key points in the article:

- The AFM, with over 60,000 members, stands as a powerful force advocating for the rights of musicians across the United States and Canada. Since its founding in 1896, AFM has tirelessly negotiated agreements to ensure fair compensation and protect musicians from exploitation in an ever-evolving industry.
- Since its inception, AFM has played a pivotal role in shaping the music industry. From setting pay scales for early traveling shows to negotiating agreements for recording work, AFM has consistently fought for the rights and fair treatment of musicians. Historical milestones, such as nationwide strikes in 1942 and 1947, underscore AFM's commitment to securing better conditions for its members.
- In the modern era of streaming and technological advancements, AFM continues to adapt and advocate for musicians' rights. Recent agreements with producers ensure fair compensation for streaming services, while initiatives like diversifying orchestras through blind auditions reflect AFM's commitment to inclusivity. AFM President Tino Gagliardi emphasizes the importance of unity in protecting musicians' livelihoods in the face of evolving industry landscapes.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Union:** An organized association of workers formed to protect and further their rights and interests
- **Negotiating:** Obtaining or bringing about by discussion; to deal or bargain with others, as in the preparation of a treaty or agreement
- **Exploitation:** The action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work; the action of making use of and benefiting from resources
- **Residuals:** Payments made to performers, writers, and others involved in a creative work based on the subsequent use or sale of that work
- **Discrimination:** The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people

Discuss

After reading the article, ask students if they were aware of any of the strikes or other forms of collective action taken by AFM in the past. Many of the workplace standards we take for granted are the result of years-long struggles and negotiations by unions, and the music industry is no exception. Do students believe that collective representation is necessary in the modern music industry? Why or why not? Are there any important issues facing musicians in 2024 that students believe should be addressed by union action?

Q&A

1. What year was AFM founded?
2. Which AFM President called strikes in both 1942 and 1947?
3. Which technological advancement led to the loss of jobs for many musicians around 1927?
4. How many members does AFM currently have?
5. What year were all major orchestras unionized under AFM in the U.S, and Canada?

Answers

1. 1896
2. James Petrillo
3. The invention of films with sound ("talkies")
4. Over 60,000
5. 1945

Expand

For a research/writing assignment, have students select any notable actions taken by AFM since its inception (the 1942 or 1947 strike, diversity initiatives for orchestras, etc). Set an appropriate length for the assignment based on the level of the class and encourage students to dive deep into the historical context of the actions taken by the union. Why did AFM make the decisions it did? What factors were threatening the livelihood of musicians? How did working conditions improve for musicians after AFM intervened?

Alternatively, have students research what AFM or other musician's unions (such as UMAW) are currently working on and do a similar analysis on the conditions that have driven the union to action. This could be concerns around AI, the streaming royalty legislation currently being presented to congress, or any number of current issues.