

◆ TEACHER'S EDITION ◆

THE YOUNG MUSICIAN'S TEXTBOOK

VOL. 23 • NO. 2

In Tune

MONTHLY

THE LUDWIG
FACTORY
TOUR

CLIMBING
THE RHYTHM
TREE

HOW TO PLAY
JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE'S
"SELFISH"

THE ABC'S OF
ARTIST-BRAND
COLLABORATIONS

OLIVIA DEAN

A British R&B Voice Breaks Out

- ◆ **The Tao of In Tune**
- ◆ **Program Building Through Retention**
- ◆ **Modern Approach To Teaching Elementary General Music**

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For every seat sold of the Modern Band solution, MusicFirst will donate \$0.25 to Music Will, supporting music education for all.

Sharing Inspiration

OVER THE YEARS, we've mentioned that creating In Tune each month is a never-ending learning experience for our writers and editors. As informed and expert as we think we are, our story research constantly surprises us, adding to our body of knowledge, and occasionally providing striking inspiration. That happened twice during the making of this November issue.

The first time was when we were deliberately looking for those musical moments that changed the course of history for this month's new closing column called "Musical Moments." Last month, we did a little piece on the debut of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," known as "The Riot of Spring,"... check back in our archive if you missed that one – but this month we chose "the Beatles on Sullivan." For sure, when those lads got on the plane to play a U.S. TV show in February of 1964, they were aware that it would be a big moment in their careers, but there's no way they could have imagined how that one performance would turn the world. Sometimes, life is like that. We have no way of knowing what's around the corner, and sometimes what comes is awe inspiring. However, as T.S. Elliott said, "For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business." We'd recommend sharing that with music students.

The hard work of learning, of growing and getting better can be deflating, or downright frustrating. But, if you keep going, you can get it, you can latch on, and sometimes fortune finds you. Admittedly, The Beatles were already doing pretty well before the Sullivan gig, but there's success, and then there's Beatlemania, and that happened in the time it took to play two songs.

Then there's the story of EJAE, our lead Frontrunner subject this month. She was a trainee for 10 years at Seoul's SM Entertainment, working in the onerous K-pop development system, hoping to become a member of a signed and supported K-pop group, or even becoming a soloist with company backing. It never happened, and eventually she was told she had grown too old. She left Korea, settled in Brooklyn, New York and enrolled in NYU's Tisch School's arts program. She learned to write music. She wrote for and co-wrote with those K-pop acts she couldn't become part of. And then, one day, when submitting a demo for an animated film soundtrack, a producer decided that they wanted her voice for the actual recording, and ultimately to voice the film's character throughout. She can now be heard on a No. 1 hit that's charting in countries all over the world. She was just on *Saturday Night Live*, the lead singer in the film's not so fictional trio. Her debut solo single drops tomorrow. We are so inspired. It's a story that could lift the spirits of a young music student, who can't imagine what might be around the corner. As teachers, we share knowledge, but sometimes, sharing inspiration can be more useful. ●

Teachers can go to intunemonthly.com/lessonplans for full lesson plans and videos. This month, lesson plans are available for the following stories:



Olivia Dean's New Blighty R&B

The UK has produced a number of noteworthy R&B voices over the years, but none recently as praiseworthy and promising as Olivia Dean. The critics have been positive, and social media has lit up over her new album *The Art of Loving*, a sweet collection of unique and creative cuts that make for easy listening.



Climbing The Rhythm Tree

Spice up your melodies, riffs, and improvisations by learning to adapt musical ideas across a variety of connected rhythmic speeds and feels. Learn to transform a melody in four into a song in three and play riffs at different speeds with the same feel. For example, Earth Wind and Fire does this a lot!



How To Play "Selfish" by Justin Timberlake

Justin Timberlake's "Selfish" is the ultimate, simple, yet compelling pop tune that can be arranged for a soloist accompanying themselves on acoustic guitar, a quartet, or a full orchestra accompanied by a choir. *Billboard* called it "a honeyed, ornately produced mid-tempo ballad built on warmly groaning organs and a bossa nova drum machine," but it's well-known to most audiences, and easy to learn. Our writer gives video examples and discusses and deconstructs the original production.



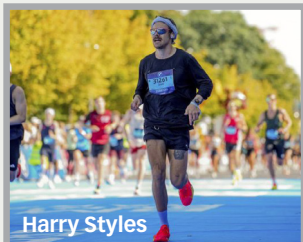
When Brands and Bands Unite

Some artists in the 1960's and '70s railed against brand endorsement deals, offended by their rank commercialism were concerned that their audiences would accuse them of "selling out." Contemporary media culture has changed all of that, and brands today can be seen as patrons of the arts, filling the gap left by declining physical media sales. It's a different world, and as long as artists believe in the instruments, consumer products and services they promote, audiences understand that music licensing, product placement and signature gear are all part of being a professional musician today. Our writer surveys the landscape for students about to enter careers in music.

For more, go to intunemonthly.com/subscribe

The Tao of In Tune

JUST HOW MUCH DO YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW about the music business, and is it within the scope of your responsibility to teach it? The easy answer is “there’s not enough time, it’s not what I’m being asked to teach, it’s not what I was taught to teach, and my eighth grade choral students don’t need it.” Forget the national standard that suggests it’s our responsibility to provide a “well-rounded” music education (and that the phrase is open to interpretation and your existing program could already be considered in compliance), and that the music business is constantly changing. The reality is that some of your students are headed to jobs in the music industries, and that the gap between young musicians and the products and services that allow them to enter the music business *now*, is shrinking every day. This is why we publish stories like the ones in this issue of In Tune about how and why artists seek endorsement deals, or how drums are made, and other recent articles about creating a music website, and distributing recordings via streaming services. It doesn’t matter whether or not you’ve been taught this stuff in college or know anything about it. You’ve got In Tune! And we’ve got you covered. So consider this a well-meaning nudge to highlight and share In Tune’s music business stories...



Harry Styles

MUSIC NEWS

Our collection of music news is designed to keep music students aware of the broader music world around them. This issue’s vignettes include “Updated Lawsuit Against AI Music App Suno,” Camila Cabello Performs at Fan’s Wedding,” “Harry Styles Runs Berlin Marathon in Under Three Hours,” and more.



Sombr



Bob Dylan

INFLUENCES

We trace the musical inspirations of singer/songwriter Sombr back through time from Bon Iver to his influence John Prine to his influence Nobel laureate Bob Dylan.



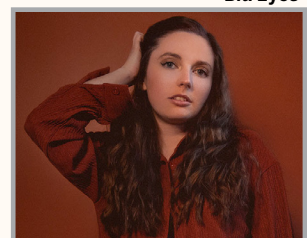
MEDIA

Our monthly collection of music media features the new book *Looking For The Perfect Beat* by Arthur Baker, *The World Cafe Words and Music Podcast* where artists discuss their latest releases and perform them live, and the video essay *Jon Talks Beats* in which in which a writer and YouTuber explains what he calls “The Boredom Paradox” and how he optimizes his life for maximum creativity.

EJAE



Blü Eyes



Vincent Mason



Balu Brigada

FRONTRUNNER

This issue’s five emerging acts are K-pop singer/songwriter EJAE (the voice of Rumi in Netflix’ animated film *K-pop Demon Hunters*), American singer/songwriter Blü Eyes, rising country artist Vincent Mason, British-Australian singer/songwriter Ruel, and New Zealand rock band Balu Brigada.



WHAT DO YOU DO?

Reality TV Casting Director, Weiner considers musicianship, personality, and style to find the perfect contestants for music and other reality shows.



MUSICAL MOMENTS

On February 9, 1964, more than one-third of the U.S. population tuned into *The Ed Sullivan Show* to watch four young men from Liverpool, England, perform live. That performance by The Beatles wasn’t just a television event; it was a cultural turning point that reshaped music, media, and youth identity for decades to come.

Only 1 Week Left to Apply for 2026!

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FOUNDATION

🎉 Announcing the 2025 Music Education Innovator Award Recipients 🎉

Give A Note Foundation is proud to announce the 2025 **Music Education Innovator Award (MEIA)** recipients, honoring three educators whose groundbreaking programs are transforming public school music:

- **Melissa Salguero** – Bronx Math Preparatory School, The Bronx, NY
- **Jason Rodgers** – Woodburn High School, Woodburn, OR
- **Garrick Wilson** – Campbell High School, Smyrna, GA

Together, these educators reach more than 500 students each year through programs that blend creativity, technology, and community connection.

Since 2018, the MEIA has recognized **32 educators across 21 states**, investing **\$128,000 into classrooms** where music education is alive, inclusive, and future-focused. Each winner receives a \$4,000 grant to expand their program, national visibility, and opportunities to share their work with peers nationwide.

"These honorees show how music education changes the trajectory of young people's lives," said **Dendy Jarrett**, CEO of Give A Note Foundation. *"Melissa, Jason, and Garrick lead programs that help students gain confidence, resilience, and career pathways that last a lifetime."*

📣 Applications Are Now Open for the 2026 MEIA!

We are now accepting applications for the next round of the **Music Education Innovator Award**. This recognition highlights K–12 public school music educators who design inclusive and innovative programs that welcome new students into music, expand access, and encourage creativity during the school day.

What winners receive:

- A \$4,000 grant to strengthen their program
- National visibility through Give A Note press releases, social media, and partner networks
- Membership in a cohort of Music Education Innovators serving as ambassadors to the field
- An all-expense-paid trip to Los Angeles for MusicPro '26 (March 27–29, 2026) — including professional development, music industry networking, and a special awards recognition dinner

This is your opportunity to highlight the impact of your program and join a growing movement of educators shaping the future of music education.

Timeline

- Applications close: **October 25, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. ET**
- Semifinalists notified: **By November 15, 2025** (short video submission required)
- Winners announced: **No later than January 15, 2026**

How to Apply

Complete the Application on Jotform

(Entries can be saved and completed later. Estimated completion time: 2–3 hours.)

Download the Application PDF

(Use this PDF to review and prepare your answers ahead of time. *Applications must be submitted through Jotform to be considered.*)

Not an educator yourself?

You can still help and forward this email to a music educator in your network or share the application link on social media. Together, we can celebrate and elevate the incredible impact of music educators across the country.

Don't miss the chance to share your program with the field. Apply now! We're ready to celebrate the programs and practices that expand access to and reimagine music education nationwide.

Thank you for being a part of our Give A Note community!

In Harmony,

the Give A Note team

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Program Building Through Retention

As a practical matter, many music educators need to spend countless hours recruiting new students for their programs, focusing less on retention—the effort that can reap the greatest benefit for all.

As students matriculate, they decide whether music will remain part of their journey or whether another school offering will take its place. As we know, the transition from middle school to high school can often be the turning point in a young musician's path. For some, this is when their enthusiasm blossoms into a lifelong passion. For others, competing interests, shifting priorities, and the uncertainty of adolescence begin to pull them away. Within every student who leaves, is a musician who once felt the joy of making music—and who might have continued if the right support or musical alternatives had been available.

Middle school directors play a vital role in planting the vision

early. By helping students and parents see what lies ahead, introducing them to the high school program, and reinforcing the idea that their journey is only beginning, they create anticipation for the future. High school directors must then be visible before students ever walk through their doors. Building relationships with middle schoolers and their families—through side-by-side concerts, joint rehearsals, student mentors, and shared traditions—helps younger musicians picture themselves in the next ensemble and assures them they already belong.

Hitting your stride as a teacher takes time and getting there will likely evolve over the course of a career, but every experience can contribute to your ability to keep students engaged and con-

In the end, music becomes part of a student's story. Our responsibility is to make that story rich, personal, and worth continuing.

nected. Keeping a running list of your program's strengths, and sharing it with students, parents and administrators, becomes a tool that demonstrates its quality. When you highlight the value of your program with clarity and consistency, you give students compelling reasons to remain year after year.

One of the hardest lessons for newer directors is realizing that our job is not simply to teach music—it is to **teach people** through music. The best programs do more than teach students to play notes correctly. They build connections across grade levels, creating a sense of belonging where every student knows they are part of something larger. Understanding the *why* behind retention helps directors align time and energy with what matters most.

Focus on the things you know students value—friendships, school spirit, musical growth, leadership, or performance opportunities—and intentionally reinforce those elements. Surveys, interviews, and classroom experiences all point to the same truth: students stay in music because of how it makes them *feel*:

- **They feel seen.** A personal word of praise or a simple smile of recognition from their director makes a lasting impact.
- **They feel connected.** Music is community. Students continue when they know they will be welcomed by those already in the program.
- **They have ownership.** Opportunities for leadership—whether as section leader, drum major, or mentor—motivate students to stay, knowing their contributions matter.
- **They experience progress.** Growth inspires commitment. Being part of a quality ensemble challenges students to improve and gives them a real sense of accomplishment.
- **They have fun.** Joy is essential. Students return when rehearsals and performances are places of enjoyment and shared purpose.
- **They feel supported.** A safe, nurturing program environment assures students that they belong and will be cared for.

Ultimately, music programs are more than ensembles. An ensemble with students who care deeply for one another will

retain its members far longer than one that performs well but lacks community. Programs are ecosystems—living, breathing spaces where students find connection, identity, and purpose. Sustaining that sense of belonging requires intentional planning. Establish long-term, short-term, and weekly goals that support retention. Hold yourself accountable by reflecting on what inspired students to stay, what discouraged them, and what adjustments are needed. Use these insights to refine your approach and ensure students see their place in the program's future.

Another important key to retention is program diversity. It is natural that tweens and teens will start to take control of their lives by making their own decisions, and often “new” is exciting and “better.” In many cases, 4th graders are required to choose an instrument, for example. By 8th grade, when given the option, they may simply want to opt out. Having the option to continue in your program by playing a combo instrument, or learning to compose, or to DJ, can only happen if you offer the opportunity.

As you plan each week, include specific actions that strengthen belonging. Ask yourself: Did last week's activities advance our retention goals? If not, what can I change? By committing to a plan with retention at its core, you not only find greater professional satisfaction, but you also create a powerful, lasting impact on your students.

In the end, music becomes part of a student's story. Our responsibility is to make that story rich, personal, and worth continuing. When students feel seen, connected, empowered, challenged, joyful, and supported, they don't just stay in music—they carry it for a lifetime, just as you have done because your own teachers gave you these very same gifts. **T**



MARCIA NEEL serves as Senior Director of Education for Yamaha Corporation of America. She also serves as Education Advisor to the Music Achievement Council, a 501(c)(6) organization whose sole purpose is to assist directors in recruiting and retaining students in

instrumental music programs through effective professional development.

By Dr. Mary Birkner

A MODERN APPROACH TEACHING ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC



CH TO TARY



One are the days spent riffling through heavy stacks of textbooks to plan lessons for your elementary general music classrooms. Gone are the days when your littlest students struggled to find the right page number in their music textbooks! MusicFirst Elementary, powered by Charanga, is new on the scene, and this general music curriculum provides a multitude of lesson activities, beautifully scored music, and carefully curated resources that are easy to use in a variety of creative ways.

Designed around the National Core Arts Standards, the spiral design of this curriculum promotes active music making in every unit of work. As they learn about the elements of music, students will sing, play instruments, improvise, compose, listen and respond, and perform music in a variety of styles and genres.

As an educator, I've always found teaching improvisation and composition a bit intimidating – but this engaging curriculum has activities like these woven throughout every grade level with age appropriate parameters in place to let students explore and create within boundaries that expand and change as students grow.

In addition to classroom instrument parts, you will also find sheet music for most any band and orchestral instrument, beginning in third grade. Imagine the excitement of students who happen to take private saxophone, violin, or flute lessons when told they can bring their instrument to music class and play along with the music they are singing and



learning at school! This is just one example of the many scaffolded activities you will find in MusicFirst Elementary.

Music teaching and learning resources have come a long way over the past few years. I find that my own children are perhaps more adept at navigating technology than I am. But this cloud-based system is user friendly – even for someone who may struggle with or feel intimidated by technology.

With easy clicking, MusicFirst Elementary functions almost like an interactive textbook and lesson planning platform. It can be used in several ways: in a traditional classroom setting, with the teacher as a guide at the front of the room, or for small groups at stations. It's useful for small group projects, for 1:1 learning with a device, or even for students learning at home. There is a password-protected online space that can be used for students to learn, play, and develop their musicianship. Teachers can share their favorite materials and resources with students, set assignments, and track their engagement and progress.

In addition to the general music curriculum, you can access six Creative Tools that allow students to further practice their composition skills, music reading skills, or create music with graphic scores and iconic notation. You get to decide how the technology best supports your strengths as a teacher and best meets the needs of your students.

Flexibility for Many Teaching Scenarios!

Teaching music is certainly not a “one size fits all” experience! How often, and how long you see your students during the school year is a major factor in lesson planning and pacing. MusicFirst Elementary provides a flexible platform that can accommodate a variety of scenarios.

Within every unit of work, there are options for shortening or lengthening lessons, extending lessons by incorporating one of six Creative Tools, or adding



Scan this QR code to learn more

occasional cross-curricular activities. Ready-made lesson plans and curriculum maps are easy to access, but the platform also allows you to build your own units and lessons, import your own materials, and even assign projects of your choosing to students.

The given units of work are easily adaptable to fit a variety of schedules. Teachers can pick and choose songs from many genres and styles, use pre-designed or personally-designed lesson material, and explore using the creative tools that best support their teaching scenario. Assessment tactics are also flexible with many options to assess on both a formative and summative basis. The intuitive design of MusicFirst Elementary allows teachers to make creative decisions that best meet the needs of their students.

Whether you are an experienced teacher looking for something fresh and exciting, new to teaching and building your toolbox of lesson material and resources, or looking for new repertoire, interactive projects, games, or innovative ways to present material, MusicFirst Elementary has something for everyone. You will find a variety of Orff and Kodály resources, interactive games, beautifully scored music, ukulele and recorder materials, musical productions, and even a kid-friendly DAW that your students can use to create music, score movies, or just explore sound.

The MusicFirst Elementary curriculum is continually being updated with new resources, new music, and new projects for student learning. Because of this, the material does not run the risk of becoming stale but instead grows in an organic way to reflect the needs of teachers, students, and the changing times of our modern world. The material gives students a chance to connect with music by immersing themselves in active music making, and by exploring historical and cultural influences for many styles of music. **T**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DR. MARY BIRKNER is currently Curriculum Advisor for music curriculum company, Charanga, where she has had the pleasure of helping develop music curricula for general elementary music classes. Dr. Birkner has also served as Adjunct Assistant Professor in the School of Music at the University of Florida where she has worked

in a variety of capacities. While at UF, Dr. Birkner has taught undergraduate and graduate courses including Instructional Design in Music Education, American Vernacular Music, Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Music Education, Musics of the World, Woodwind Skills, Flute Studio, and has directed the

University of Florida Flute Ensemble. During the 2019-2020 and 2012-2013 school years, she served as Adjunct Assistant Professor of Flute at UF. She continues to serve as an advisor for graduate students in the UF online Masters in Music Education program.

Prior to her time at the University of Florida, she taught general music for grades K-5 in Michigan, grades K-2 in Texas, choir for grades 5-6 in Texas, and preschool music in Florida. Dr. Birkner holds a Ph.D. in music education from the University of Florida, a Master of Music in flute performance from the University of Florida, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Denison University with a double major in music and education. She is pleased to have performed as flutist with the Ocala Symphony Orchestra for over fifteen years.



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