

Who Is...Olivia Dean

National Standards: Pr4, Re 7-9, Cn11

Open, authentic, and unguarded, Olivia Dean’s delicate songcraft has steadily earned her both critical acclaim and a passionate fanbase. Leaning into her multi-ethnic roots, Dean proudly represents her heritage, captures everyday experiences in simple, direct language and radiates relatability and emotional honesty. Paired with her organic, gentle production aesthetic, it’s no wonder Dean has captured the hearts of a generation and rocketed to international success. Share her journey with your students!

Prepare

By a show of hands, ask the class how many of them are familiar with Olivia Dean. For those raising their hands, ask how they first encountered her and which of her songs they know. How would they describe her sound? Play a selection from her latest album, like “Man I Need,” which already has over 200 million streams on Spotify (and was featured in last month’s In Tune Listening List!). Now that their ears are primed, read the article as a class.

Key points in the article:

- The daughter of a Guyanese mother and English father, Dean grew up in a vibrant multicultural household and absorbed a wide range of artistic influences. Showing interest in music from a young age, Dean thrived in school choirs and other performing environments in her early life. This led her to enroll in the BRIT School, famous for producing generational talents like Adele and Amy Winehouse.
- Dean’s breakthrough moment came in her late teens when she collaborated with drum and bass duo Rudimental on their song “Adrenaline.” Her performance gained the attention of EMI Records and led to a record deal. By releasing a string of EPs instead of full albums, Dean was able to experiment with her sound and gradually build her audience.
- Following the release of her debut full-length album, 2023’s *Messy*, Dean began to solidify a reputation as a captivating live performer. She continues to wow audiences in support of her sophomore album, *The Art of Loving*, just recently released. The same inviting warmth and intimacy that draws fans to her albums translates beautifully to her performances, creating an environment of inclusion and vulnerability.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Exude:** display (an emotion or quality) strongly and openly
- **Ingenuity:** the quality of being clever, original, and inventive

- **Understated:** presented or expressed in a subtle and effective way
- **Flourish:** an ornate or showy musical passage; a brief, attention-grabbing embellishment
- **Sincerity:** the quality of being free from pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy

Discuss

After reading the article, conduct a classroom discussion about Dean's music and why it resonates with modern audiences. Based on their previous listening, do students agree with the author's description of Dean's style? For those who were already fans of Dean, what qualities drew them to her music? Is there anything they like about her that wasn't mentioned in the album?

Next, play a few songs from her early EPs or first album and compare them stylistically. What elements remain consistent in her music and what has changed? Are there areas of notable growth? What sounds do students anticipate Dean might explore on future records?

Q&A

1. Where was Dean born?
2. Which of Dean's EPs arrived at the height of the pandemic?
3. Which musical styles does Dean blend to create her timeless and contemporary sound?
4. Unlike many pop productions that rely heavily on electronic elements, Dean's sound is deliberately _____.
5. Which prestigious UK music award recently honored Dean with a nomination?

Answers

1. Walthamstow, East London
2. *What Am I Gonna Do On Sundays?*
3. Soul, pop, and jazz
4. Organic
5. The Mercury Prize

Expand

For a research assignment, have students select another artist who find inspiration in their family's cultural roots as the subject for an essay or in-class presentation. Reports should include a brief history of the artist's early life, their musical and cultural influences, a description of the artist's musical style, and an overview of their career and achievements. How did their family's traditions, cultural practices, or musical/artistic preferences shape their future career?

Endorsement Deals

National Standards: 10-11

Any avid instrumentalist has seen their favorite players on stage (or screen) showcasing their endorsements. After all, it's a badge of honor and career milestone for musicians to ink a deal with a high-quality instrument brand. Likewise, instrument makers benefit greatly from their equipment being seen in the hands of the best musicians on the planet. This symbiotic relationship is extremely desirable for aspiring musicians, but how does an endorsement deal come to fruition? Read on for insight straight from the source!

Prepare

To start the lesson, ask the class to think of their favorite musicians. What brand of instrument do they play? Some players are virtually synonymous with a brand, and vice versa. Slash just wouldn't be Slash without a Gibson Les Paul and Marshall amp, and Ringo Starr would look awfully strange behind anything but a Ludwig kit. Can students think of any high-profile modern musicians with iconic endorsement deals? How about deals other than with instrument companies?

Next, ask students what they think about endorsements. What does the artist get from it? What about the brand? After discussing, read the article.

Key points in the article:

- The most important thing for artists to consider is what they hope to get out of an endorsement. The traditional answer, free gear, is basically non-existent in today's music industry. Artists have to offer as much value to the brand as the brand offers to them, and those who seek endorsement to bolster their guitar collection are promptly denied.
- It is not necessary to be a superstar musician to seek endorsement. There are often several levels of endorsement offered by gear brands, ranging from household names to regional professionals. These different levels of endorsement will likely come with different terms and requirements.
- Before inquiring about endorsements, it is important to take an honest look at your skills and qualifications. If you are well-regarded by your musical peers, both as a musician and professional, you're a more attractive option for brands to endorse. Likewise, it is necessary to have a well-made EPK (electronic press kit, with photos and videos, press clippings and more) and a portfolio of your work.

Begin

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Prescribed:** set by a rule or order
- **Seismic:** of enormous proportions or effect
- **Conundrum:** a confusing and difficult problem or question
- **Acumen:** the ability to make good judgments and quick decisions, typically in a particular domain
- **Trepidation:** a feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen

Discuss

After reading the article, lead a classroom discussion comparing students' previous perceptions of endorsement deals with the reality presented by PRS. Were they surprised by the terms of modern endorsement deals (particularly the lack of free instruments)? Does that change their impression of the importance of endorsement deals? Were they surprised by the process of acquiring an endorsement deal? How does the process of obtaining endorsements resemble the process of other musical pursuits, such as booking gigs or obtaining a record deal?

Q&A

1. What is the first question a musician should ask before pursuing endorsement?
2. How many people does PRS currently reach per month across all of their platforms?
3. What fashionable trend in artist websites should musicians be wary of while pursuing endorsement?
4. What should an EPK (electronic press kit) contain?
5. What do brands look for in an artist's social media presence beyond number of followers?

Answers

1. "Why is it that you want an endorsement?"
2. Over 725k unique people per month
3. Minimalist sites with large photos and little else
4. A brief Overview of who you are, major accomplishments, impressive photos, and relevant links
5. Engagement (ratio of likes per post to total followers)

Expand

For an assignment, have students pick out three different brands with whom they would (hypothetically) like to pursue an endorsement. Have them research the application process for each of the brands. What requirements does each brand have? How do they differ from one another? Do they offer different levels of endorsement like PRS, or are they focused on a

particular demographic? What players are endorsed by the brands? Students should collect their findings in a written report.

How To Play Justin Timberlake’s “Selfish”

National Standards: 1-9

Sometimes, the most important songs to an artist’s fanbase aren’t the biggest hits. While “Selfish” certainly isn’t Justin Timberlake’s biggest hit, it has taken on a life of its own among his audience as a crowd-favorite singalong. To capitalize on this phenomenon, Timberlake has created a live version of the single that slows it down and optimizes it for an intimate moment with the audience. Take a page from his playbook and create your own version with your ensemble!

Prepare

To start, ask the class by a show of hands who listens to Justin Timberlake. Even those who don’t actively listen to his music are likely familiar with the pop icon. From there, ask if any in the class are familiar with “Selfish.” It might hold significance for the Timberlake devotees, but the casual listener is less likely to be familiar with the song. Play the studio version of “Selfish” to get the class fully acquainted and have them take notes on what they hear - instruments, song form, tempo, vocal arrangements, etc. After listening, read the article.

Key points in the article:

- To start, it’s important to understand the difference between a song and a record. A record is a recorded performance of a song, while the song is the raw material that can be adapted into infinitely different versions. Many artists get extended mileage out of their songs by tweaking their arrangements to optimize them for studio and live performances.
- The studio version of “Selfish” is an example of how momentum can be built by adding or subtracting a single musical element at a time. The chord progression, drums, bass, and organ stay fairly static throughout the song (besides a few dropouts), but the background elements added at each new section add excitement.
- To enhance the singalong-friendly nature of the song at live shows, Timberlake and his band perform a stripped-down arrangement of “Selfish”. The acoustic guitar takes the lead, and all the supporting instruments play a more delicate role.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Subtle:** not loud, bright, noticeable, or obvious in any way
- **Sparse:** of few and scattered elements; small in numbers or amount, often spread over a large area

- **Repertoire:** all the music, plays, dances, operas, etc., that a person or a group can perform
- **Passive:** not reacting to what happens, or not acting or taking part
- **Pandering:** to do or provide exactly what a person or group wants, usually for personal gain

Discuss

After reading the article, conduct a classroom discussion comparing their notes about the studio version of “Selfish” with the article’s analysis. Did their observations match the author’s assessments of the song?

Next, play the “Tiny Desk” and concert versions of “Selfish” linked in the article. What do the two different arrangements highlight about the song itself? How does the vibe and feeling of the song change in each version? Which one do students like best?

Q&A

1. What sound is added in the first chorus of “Selfish” to build momentum?
2. How high did “Selfish” chart in the UK?
3. What instrument sound is introduced in the last chorus?
4. What is the key and tempo of “Selfish?”
5. Which instruments drop out for one measure at the beginning of the second verse?

Answers

1. Reverb-drenched guitar licks
2. No. 35
3. Synthed strings
4. F# at 88bpm
5. Bass and drums

Expand

To adapt “Selfish” to your ensemble’s format, compare the arrangements of each version of the song to the instruments in your group. Are there any on the record that your group doesn’t have? Are there any extra instruments in your group that aren’t on the record? Talk to the group and ask what role those extra instruments might play (could a saxophone take the place of a backing vocal line?) and how to compensate for any missing instruments.

Does the group enjoy the more stripped back live version of “Selfish” or the more polished studio version? What arrangement would best complement your band’s instrumentation and style?

Have the group learn their parts ahead of the first rehearsal and come ready to experiment. Conduct the first few run-throughs to make sure everyone has the form and dynamics

memorized. Then, experiment with different elements of the song- slow the tempo down, drop different instruments at different sections, try an a capella chorus at the end... make it yours! However the song resonates best with the band will likely resonate best with the crowd.

The Rhythm Tree

National Standards: 1-9

At its core, rhythm is a visceral experience. Many other areas of music can be approached cognitively, but to play anything effectively, rhythm must be *felt*. This can make it intimidating to approach, but strategic practice approaches like “The Rhythm Tree” can help young players explore the many ways time can be divided and experienced in music. Use this lesson to help your students repackage melodies and phrases with exciting new rhythms

Prepare

To prime the class for the concepts outlined in the article, ask the class how they find themselves keeping time internally when playing a song. If they are playing, for example, a piano part with long, sustained chords, do they feel the pulse only on the beats where they change chords? Or do they feel the pulses in between? Next, review basic note subdivisions and how these rhythmic values are related. Then, read the article individually or as a class until reaching Example 1..

Key points in the article:

- The Rhythm Tree is a way of visualizing the relationship between the rhythmic pulses we feel. While it might feel counterintuitive at first, learning to climb up and down the tree (slowing down and speeding up phrases) can be an extremely useful exercise.
- After exploring all the subdivisions of duple rhythms, the next step is to add triplet rhythms. This is where the number of phrasing options really opens up, creating an endless array of potential variations for phrases.
- With a strong grasp of the rhythm tree, entire melodies can be shifted into different time signatures without losing their overall character. By using a combination of diminution and augmentation, as well as duple and triplet subdivisions, the options for reinterpreting and repackaging phrases is endless.

Begin

Review Vocabulary words from the article below:

- **Dense:** marked by compactness or crowding together of parts
- **Sparse:** thinly dispersed or scattered
- **Jagged:** having an uneven edge or quality
- **Experiential:** based on observation or experience

- **Visceral:** instinct rather than intellect

Discuss

This lesson can be done individually if a keyboard lab is available for students. Alternatively if only one instrument is available, teacher and students can take turns demonstrating the notated examples in the article.

After reading the introductory paragraphs individually, read examples 1-3 as a class, demonstrating each notated musical passage. Pause after each example to allow questions and make sure students have absorbed the concept. Playing an excerpt of “September” after reading Example 1 might help drive the point home.

Q&A

1. What is the practice of hearing or thinking of a faster rhythm than what you have to play to help yourself line up with the correct beat?
2. Which music term means making things shorter?
3. Adding which rhythmic division of the rhythm tree opens up to a much grander vista of rhythmic possibilities?
4. True or False: A quarter note is half of a half note, or twice as fast as a half note
5. Which Earth Wind and Fire song speeds up a line from earlier in the song to create a horn line?

Answers

1. Subdividing
2. Diminution
3. Triplets
4. True
5. "September"

Expand

For a composition assignment, select a list of 3-5 simple melodies the class will know. They can be simple nursery rhymes like “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” or the melody of a pop song like “Purple Rain.” Have students select a melody from the list and use their rhythm tree knowledge to translate it into a new time signature. If the song is in 4/4, have them adapt it to 3/4, and vice versa. Depending on the grade level and skill level of the class, these compositions can be submitted in written form via notation or performed for the class.