

THE MUSICIAN'S TEXTBOOK

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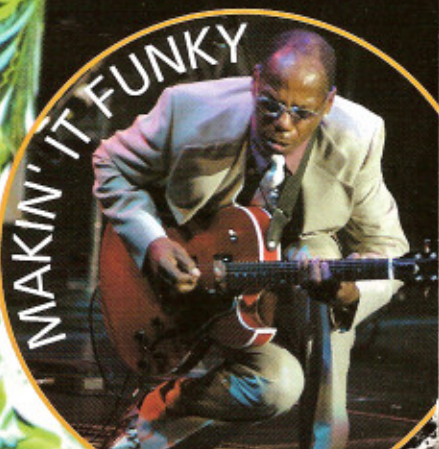
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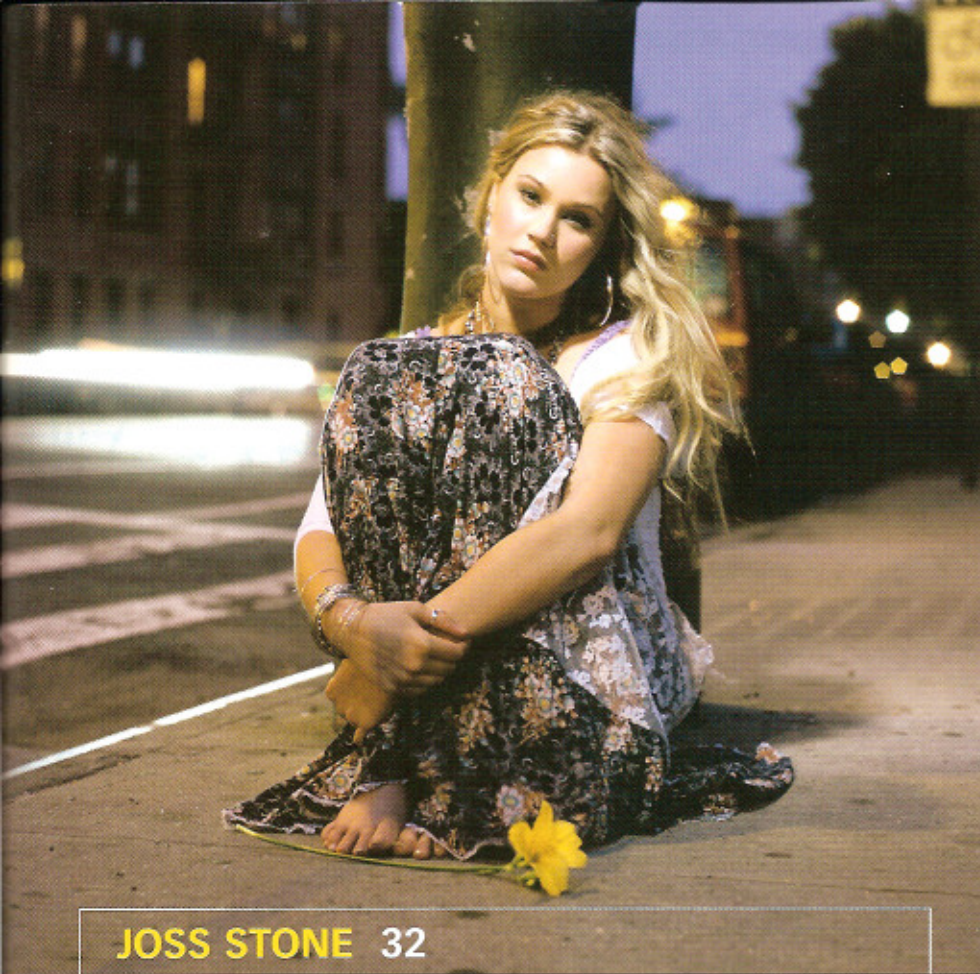
STONE COLD SOUL

HOW JOSS
CHANNELED JANIS,
RESPECTED ARETHA
& BECAME THE GAP'S
JEANS QUEEN

HOW CDS
ARE MADE
AND HOW
THEY WORK

- >> Alternative Violins
- >> TJ HS Gets a Studio
- >> Arturo Sandoval,
The Bravery & More...





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// I didn't want to do the usual pop princess thing. //

—Joss Stone

ROGER MOENKES

JOSS STONE 32

(FEATURES)

24 Techniques: Call-and-Response

Musicians have been "talking" with sound for thousands of years. Fran Vincent shows how you can get in on the conversation.

28 Workshop: Showcasing

Performing live in front of people in the music industry can make or break your career. Sean McDevitt goes to industry insiders for tips on how to make that big night come alive.

32 At the Heart of Stone

Nineteen-year-old Joss Stone may be British, but the singer draws on classic American soul, rock and blues to create a style that's made her an international star. Bob Gulla gives us the lowdown.

38 New Orleans: City of Soul

The City of New Orleans and its surroundings were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. But nothing can wash away the culture that gave birth to jazz, nurtured the blues and will inspire musicians for generations to come. By Sean McDevitt.

44 The Seeds of a CD

The Compact Discs you buy in the store are the result of a long production process. Paul Irwin takes us inside a factory to see how it's done.





Call & Response

The musical technique of call-and-response lets musicians talk to each other onstage!

By Fran Vincent

It's the last number of the night, and the band is cooking. This is everybody's chance to show off one more time. Suddenly, the drummer stops, and the sax player steps forward and starts to wail on a short, strong phrase. He stops and the guitarist steps up, ripping out a hot lick. When she's done, the singer has a go, and they trade back and forth, taking turns rocking the house.

That kind of musical dialog is known as call-and-response. It happens in all styles and goes back thousands of years.

Talking with Music

Call-and-response may be the most basic form of musical communication. The premise is simple; you play or sing a phrase or rhythm, and someone responds either with the same phrase, or one in answer to it. You'll find call-and-response in almost every kind of music, from world drumming to blues to jazz to rock and rap. In fact, the technique is so deeply rooted that it goes deeper than our musical lives. Most of us have been using

call-and-response in some form or other since infancy.

As babies, we learn to speak through call and response, imitating the sounds our parents make. But call-and-response isn't limited to verbal communication. It can involve pointing, moving, and making noises—any act that has a statement and an answer. It is a series of spontaneous interactions between a speaker and listener.

In West African cultures, call-and-response is used in everything from public gatherings and civic discussions to religious rituals. Today, many religious services of all denominations incorporate call-and-response, with the pastor leading a prayer and congregants answering, often in a pre-determined fashion. The use of call and response encourages inclusion, and a sense of community, purpose, and direction.

And so it is with music. Call-and-response is a way not only to teach music, but to include people in the music making process. We learn through call and response when our teachers



George Canyon (right) trades lines in a duet with Trace Adkins during the Nashville Star live show at the Acuff Theatre in Nashville. (John Russell/WireImage.com)

powerful phrase that punctuates Waters' singing. For most of the song, the two trade off: Muddy sings a line, and the band replies it with the main riff. The song is very simple—no bridge; no chorus per se. It's the back and forth that keeps it interesting.

Jazz improvisation also uses call-and-response, but here, it can be less structured. One player might improvise a one-bar phrase and then rest on the next bar. Another player can replay the same phrase, play a variation or harmony to the first phrase, or play a new part that a continuation of the phrase—the musical equivalent of finishing someone else's sentences.

Trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie used improvised call-and-response in the song "Anythin'" on the album *Duets*, with Sonny Rollins and Sonny Sitt. The song simply starts with one horn playing a line; another replies and they build it from there. Dizzy used call-and-response a more structured way in the song "Manteca." Here, the horns are divided into sections and each section trades short phrases to form the song's signature riff.

Tommy Dorsey's "Opus #1" uses many instruments, each responding to one another, and includes saxophone, trumpet, piano, and clarinet.

The instrumental "duel" is one of the most exciting forms of call-and-response. Here, the whole band stops, and two instruments trade solo licks. Check out the Allman Brothers' classic "One Way Out." Lead and slide guitars take over in the middle of the song, setting up the climactic slide solo.

Modern Call-and-Response

Artists in country, rock, hip hop, R&B, and soul use call and response too. Outkast's, "Hey Ya" is full of it.

Andre 3000: *Hey fellas! What's cooler than being cool?*

Chorus: *Ice cold!*

Andre 3000: *Now ladies...*

Chorus: *Yeah?*

Other popular examples include "Bring Me to Life" by Evanescence featuring Paul McCoy, and Ray Charles' "Hit the Road Jack." In both songs, it's easy to hear the vocal trade-offs. A less obvious example is Gladys Knight's R&B classic "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." The Pips call back to Gladys in the chorus, in a way reminiscent of a revival with lots of gospel influences.

Call and response can also be quite comedic. "Dueling

ask us to repeat something they have played. When friends get together to jam, they often start with an instrumentalist playing a riff, and others joining in. Drum circles have been used as a way of celebrating and communicating for thousands of years.

These call-and-response practices were melded into the music of western societies, such as classical, blues and jazz. Musical call-and-response doesn't have to be verbal either. It can be one voice and one instrument, several instruments, several voices, or just two instruments going back and forth.

Blues and Jazz

Muddy Waters' classic blues song "Mannish Boy" offers a textbook example of the technique. Waters sings "Ooooh yeah," and a solo guitar answers with the same notes in the same rhythm. Muddy comes back with another "Oh yeah." This time, the guitar plays a little variation after imitating the vocal line. This exchange continues until the whole band starts up with a

"Banjos" is a bluegrass standard that was recently heard in a national commercial for an Internet company. Although recorded by many artists over the years, Glenn Yarbrough & The Limelighters' live version is particularly dramatic. Two banjos with different timbres take turns mimicking each other, then gradually try to outdo the other. Then in a frenzy of competition, they flow together in a dramatic burst of banjo craziness. The audience of course is clapping wildly right along.

As human communication evolved, music evolved right along with it. Human beings learn in different ways, such as seeing, hearing, and responding (call and response). Some experts say that the use of "responding," helps people retain 90 percent of what they learn! But in the end, it's the communication that makes call-and-response such an effective musical technique. ■

Fran Vincent is an instructor at the University of Miami School of Music, and is a marketing and communications consultant for the music industry.

Suggested Listening



Dizzy Gillespie with Sonny Rollins and Sonny Sitt: *Duets*

On "Anythin'" the horn licks go back and forth in pure instrumental jazz conversation.

Evanescence: *Fallen*

Check out "Bring Me to Life," featuring Paul McCoy



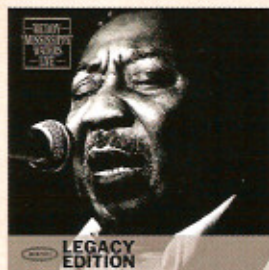
The Allman Brothers:

Live at the Fillmore East Deluxe Edition

"One Way Out" serves up a classic example of a call-and-response guitar duel.

Muddy Waters: *Mississippi Muddy Waters Live*

"Mannish Boy" exemplifies how a singer can trade phrases with individual players and the entire band.



Go Figure: Exercises in Call-and-Response

You can create your own call-and-response exercises and strengthen improvisational skills by pairing up with a partner and taking turns following one another in melodic runs. Call and response works in all forms of music and with all instruments, including percussion. Listening to various types of music will help keep your skills on point. You'll be able to spot uses of call and response and learn creative ways to incorporate it into your own music-making.

In **Figure 1**, two instruments mimic one another by trading very simple phrases. A good variation is to trade phrases in the same rhythm, but with different notes

Figure 1: Two instruments alternate playing the same basic phrase.

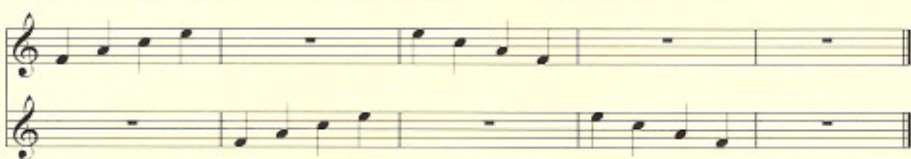


Figure 2 illustrates an example of a non-repetitive call-and-response exercise. The first voice plays an ascending line, the second a descending line. In measure four, the second voice introduces a rhythmic variation. Finally, two voices end together in a harmony.

Figure 2: The "call" is an ascending line, the "response" is descending.



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