



music studio

LESSON PLAN

VH1 Legends: Aretha Franklin

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lessons for Middle-Level and High School Choral Music Classes

Gospel Beginnings

Lesson 1 of 4

Objective

Students will identify genres of music that influenced musical style of Aretha Franklin
Students will identify musical characteristics of gospel
Students will sing a gospel selection

National Standards for Music Education

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- 6-Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
- 9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

VHS VCR Player
Television
VH1 Cable in the Classroom program VH1 Legends: Aretha Franklin
Web-based lesson materials
Paper and pencil

Recording and sheet music of a gospel selection, such as the traditional “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” by Thomas Dorsey, or the contemporary “Show Up!” by John P. Kee, or any gospel selection in your school music library that you also have a recorded version performed by a gospel choir

Optional: teacher-provided recordings of Aretha Franklin, such as “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” “Respect,” or “Who’s Zoomin’ Who”

Procedures

Part I

1. If you have one of Aretha Franklin’s recordings, play a selection as students enter the classroom and get settled. Ask students what kind of music they associate with Aretha Franklin. Ask students why they think Franklin is known as the “Queen of Soul.” You may refer to the following information about soul music.

According to Baker’s Dictionary of Music, soul music, also known as rhythm and blues, exhibits two strains: upbeat, funky music associated with Stax and Atlantic labels, and sentimental ballads evolving from the Motown sound. In either case the singing style is passionate and embellished.

2. Tell students they are going to watch a program about Franklin’s musical career.

3. Have students take pencil and paper to note different genres of music they hear in the program.

4. Play program.

5. Discuss with the students what styles of music they heard Aretha Franklin sing on the video. (Accept reasonable answers, including gospel, jazz, pop, rhythm and blues, soul, motown, opera, etc...) During discussion the teacher may provide live or recorded examples of each style mentioned.

6. Ask students which style Franklin sang first. (gospel)

7. Lead a discussion about Franklin’s childhood growing up as the daughter of an African-American preacher and being immersed in traditions of the church’s spiritual and gospel music. You may wish to bring out development of the gospel tradition from your own knowledge of music history. Some of the points you might want to mention include:

After the U.S. Civil War, African American churches emerged with the predominant style of sacred music being the Negro spiritual with its roots in slavery and work songs.

A splinter group left the Black Baptist church in 1895 re-emerging as the Church of God in Memphis, Tennessee. Members sang spirited songs accompanied by piano and often tambourines and drums. While spirituals were more often somber in feeling, the jubilee was happy and lively. Both influenced the development of gospel music.

The program mentions Aretha Franklin performed, along with her sisters, in revival meetings on the road and the New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit where her father preached.

Her father, known as “The Man with the Million Dollar Voice,” was part of the tradition of great orators in African American churches who delivered his spoken message in musical cadences, crescendos and decrescendos, repetition and variation, and of course, call and response. (Give students or ask students to provide examples of each.)

Singers of sacred music in gospel traditions sing with sincerity, dignity and passion. Vocal improvisation is spontaneous, not planned, led by spiritual fervor.

Ask students if they can name other popular singers who spent formative years singing in church choirs (Sam Cooke, Cissy Houston, Whitney Houston, Gladys Knight, etc..).

8. Lead students to notice that while Franklin found popular success and fame as a rhythm and blues soloist, she frequently returned to her roots of gospel, whether singing Thomas Dorsey’s “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” at Martin Luther King Jr.’s funeral in 1968, or her albums such as *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* (1987), *Gospel* (1991), *Amazing Grace* (1999), etc....

Part II

1. Choose a gospel song recording and sheet music from your school’s music library. (For suggestions, refer to Materials section above.)
2. Play an excerpt from the recording, asking students to listen for musical characteristics.
3. Lead a brief discussion of three common musical characteristics of gospel: syncopation, strong beats on two and four, and call and response form. (Students may mention other characteristics, too, including either slow long-phrased melodies or a fast syncopated melody, fervent feelings expressed by choir members, harmonies, congregational participation, etc...)
4. Explain the use of syncopation in the gospel song, and write an example of this rhythmic pattern on the chalkboard. Have students echo-clap the pattern. Play the selected gospel song again and have students listen for the syncopated pattern as you clap it each time it occurs.
5. Play the recording once again, instructing half of the choir to clap the syncopated rhythm as the other half claps on beats two and four throughout the song.
6. Ask students to listen for the call and response in the selected gospel song. Replay the recording.
7. Teach the “response” by oral tradition, choosing a lead singer to improvise on the call. After going through individual parts, have students sing the entire song with piano accompaniment--unless you have access to a Hammond organ, the keyboard accompaniment most associated with gospel music.

Extension:

Have students find a song in their own CD collection, their parent's or grandparent's record collection, a church hymnal, or other songbooks they might have access to that have a syncopated rhythm similar to the piece they have just studied in class. Have students bring in their findings. Play the music in class--if students bring in a songbook, play the selection on the classroom piano. Have students identify the rhythms in each selection. How many styles of music are represented? You may even wish to have students write a short statement on their selection's style and how it correlates to gospel.

VH1, in partnership with Cable in the Classroom, collaborated with MENC: The National Association for Music Education to develop this series of lessons.

 **National Standards for Music Education**

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.**
- 2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.**
- 3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.**
- 4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.**
- 5. Reading and notating music.**
- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.**
- 7. Evaluating music and music performances.**
- 8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.**
- 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.**