



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

From Sacred to Secular
Exploration of Vocal Styles/Crossing between styles

Lesson 2 of 4

Objective

Students will identify some of Aretha Franklin's vocal qualities and techniques
Students will identify different genres of music
Students will identify that musicians can perform different genres

National Standards for Music Education

- 1-Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- 6-Listening to, analyzing, and describing music;
- 7-Evaluating music and music performances
- 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

Optional: teacher-provided recordings of Aretha Franklin, including "Natural Woman," "I Never Loved a Man," "Natural Woman," "Respect," "Who's Zoomin' Who"

Procedures

1. If you have one of Aretha Franklin's recordings, play a selection as students enter the classroom and get settled.
2. Ask students if they recognize who the singer is, that they are listening to.
3. On the chalkboard, make three columns, headed by: Timbre, Register, Vibrato. Ask students what words they would use to describe Franklin's voice. Write their answers under the appropriate column.

Timbre: If you wish, you may write the following words that describe various tone colors on the chalk board to prompt students: bright, dark, harsh, heavy, hoarse, husky, light, mellow, melodious, nasal, rich, rough, shrill, smooth, strained, sweet, tense, or warm.

While some are appropriate for Franklin's voice, some are not--let students choose and add adjectives of their own.

Register: Aretha Franklin is a mezzo-soprano.

Vibrato: Sometimes Franklin's is fast and sometimes slow, and it is often heard on all notes.

4. Tell students they are going to watch a program about Franklin's musical career. Tell them she will sing various genres of music and they will see clips of her performances from the 1960s as well as more recently. Ask them to note on a piece of paper any words to describe her timbre, register, vibrato and other vocal qualities-- both as a young teen and a mature woman-- as they watch the program.
5. Play videotape.
6. Ask students what they observed about Franklin's voice in the video. What words did they write that describe her voice. Add their answers to the list started on the board.
7. Was there anything else they observed? Ask students about her range. (According to many magazine articles, she has exhibited a four and even five-octave range.) Ask students if they noticed when she changed from chest voice to head voice. (Many people cannot detect the register shift in Franklin's voice.)
8. Rewind and play video from [00:02:16 to 00:07:48]
9. Lead students in a discussion of Aretha Franklin's "crossing over" from sacred music to secular popular music. Points you may wish to include:

Aretha Franklin developed her musical talents in the African American Church and on the road in revival tent meetings. She collaborated with her two sisters.

The video narration says that Aretha's best music teacher was her father, the spiritual leader of Detroit's New Bethel Baptist Church. "I think my Dad felt I was gifted, uniquely talented," she said.

At age 12, she sang her first solo in the New Bethel Baptist Church. Soon she was accompanying the choir on piano.

At 14, she made her first recordings, released on Chess records in 1956.

The narration also says that “Many Baptists felt that crossing over from gospel music to the secular pop market was a betrayal....even a sin.”

Aretha turned to her father for guidance, who offered his support to her efforts.

Family friend and recording artist Sam Cooke, who had also crossed over from sacred to secular music, said Aretha Franklin would be “spreading the good news in a different way.”

10. Ask students what adjustments they think singers might have to make going from sacred music to secular popular? (Accept reasonable answers, including: in the sacred setting singers are singing praise or expressing deep feelings to God; in secular settings singers are communicating their feelings to a human audience; different repertoire; instrumentation; arrangement; community support or disapproval, etc...)

11. Ask students what genres of music they think Aretha Franklin’s voice is most suited to perform. This can include a discussion of styles of music they heard on the video, including gospel, jazz, pop, rhythm and blues, and opera. Points you might want to encourage include:

musicians are not limited to one style of music

techniques developed in one genre may enhance another genre

new styles are often born when musicians from one tradition branch out into another

12. Have students discuss other artists who have “crossed over” between styles.

Extension:

For a home project, have students view the video “The Jazz Singer” with Neil Diamond, a movie centered on a musician’s journey from cantor to popular musician. Have students write a short, but thoughtful, essay on the obstacles as well as encouragement he met in the process. Have them compare those factors with the obstacles and encouragement that Aretha Franklin met in her crossover from sacred to secular music.

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.**