



BEHIND THE MUSIC

Behind the Music: Music in America 1972

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lessons for High School Music Classes

(Note to Teachers: You may wish to collaborate with a journalism or government teacher who addresses free speech, interpretations of the first amendment, and censorship.)

A Songwriter Not Silenced

Lesson 2

[Note to Teachers: This series of lessons covers music that rose to popularity during conflict in the United States over participation in the Vietnam War. Some of the topics may address social change, the sexual revolution, and drug culture. If your curriculum is subject to restrictions on the topic, you should review the videotape before using it in the classroom.]

The decline of the peace movement is addressed in the four lessons accompanying Behind the Music: Music in America 1972. The peace movement arose in the 1960s in response to the Vietnam War, but as U.S. combat troops were being withdrawn, the peace movement lost energy. This program explores the overall cultural transition of the time and its reflection in popular musicians and music turning inward for themes.

Objective

Students will discuss how world events influence popular music
Students will discuss how a musician's message can influence society and government

National Standards 9— Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

VHS VCR Player

Television

VH1 Cable in the Classroom program Behind the Music: Music in America 1972

Web-based lesson materials

Teacher-provided Recording of John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance," or "Power to the People"

Audio-playback equipment

Procedures

1. As students enter the classroom, have playing a recording of John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance" or "Power to the People."
2. Ask students if they know who is singing. If they identify John Lennon, briefly ask them what they know about him.
3. Mention to students that many artists have used music to express messages and ask them to note as they watch the program, who did so.
4. Watch the program Behind the Music: Music in America 1972 through the first segment, paying special attention from [8:00 through 10:30].
5. Stop program.
6. Review with student this theme in the narration: "In 1972, the youth movement was feeling bitter and betrayed. A lot of gas went out of any political motivation behind the music....Nixon's campaign to remove 70,000 ground troops by spring was sucking the life out of the anti-war movement."
7. Ask students what would remove the "gas" or energy of political motivation from the youth peace movement and its music? (Accept reasonable answers, but lead them to the Nixon administration's promises to "bring our boys home"--in essence, removing the issue that was being protested.)
8. Lead students in a discussion of John Lennon's appearance in the video. Touch on several of the following points:
 - Lennon, now living in New York City with Yoko Ono, said he "read somewhere that the war movement was over...heh, heh."
 - Lennon wanted to embark on a national concert tour of the U.S. in 1972 that would coincide with presidential primary elections.
 - Lennon's idea was that the tour would help mobilize first-time voter registration (now that voting age had been lowered from 21 to 18) drawing the anti-war sector and the youth to vote against the war, i.e., against Nixon.

When the Nixon administration learns this, the FBI is enlisted to watch Lennon G. Gordon Liddy (convicted in connection with the Watergate burglary) says “John Lennon was not Britany Spears. There was great political content to Lennon’s music and he was vastly more popular than anyone singing today.”

In Feb. 1972, Senator Strom Thurmond sent a memo to the White House suggesting the “Lennon problem” could be handled by deporting John Lennon.

Three weeks later the U.S. immigration moved to deport Lennon because of a drug conviction in England. (Lennon’s lawyers stalled the deportation. By 1976, Lennon was granted a green card so he could remain in the U.S.)

9. Cue program to [29:02] and play through [29:30] for class.

10. Discuss with students the following points:

Reporter asks Lennon “Will you now stop speaking out against the war?”

Lennon says “No. Nothing will stop me and whether I’m here or wherever I may be, I’ll always have the same feelings and say what I feel.”

Lennon’s lawyers advised him to cancel his U.S. tour.

Lennon biographer Jon Weiner says “Basically, Lennon was silenced as a spokesman for the peace movement.”

11. Ask students if they agree with Weiner that Lennon was silenced by canceling his tour.

12. Ask students if they know of any cases in history where music or musicians have been censored by a government? (You may expect answers such as oppressive regimes including the Taliban in Afghanistan, the cultural revolution in China, and communist regimes of the Soviet Union and eastern European countries.)

13. (Teachers: You may wish to collaborate with a journalism or government teacher who addresses free speech, interpretations of the first amendment, and censorship.) Ask students if they think political viewpoints should be publicized in music. Lennon sang songs and engaged in high-profile anti-war activities. Would a popular musician have reason to use his or her celebrity to draw attention to a political issue? Are there reasons that a message should be silenced? Are there ever messages that are harmful to a country or culture? What about lyrics that advocate violent or anti-social actions against the country? What about messages that are untrue? What about hate-filled messages?

Extensions

Have students volunteer to research John Lennon and report to the class orally. They should get information about his recordings with the Beatles, his recordings with Yoko Ono, and music historians’ assessment of his songwriting and singing. In addition, have students look into his break-up with the Beatles, his activities in the peace movement, his drug convictions and heroin addiction, his year-and-a-half “lost weekend,” and his final years as he began to re-establish his recording career.

This lesson was developed by Dee Spencer, professor of music at San Francisco State University and Willie Hill, president-elect of MENC: The National Association for Music Education and director of the University Fine Arts Center at University of Massachusetts-Amherst in collaboration with



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