



BEHIND THE MUSIC

VH1 Presents the 1980s VH1 Music Studio Cable in the Classroom

Lessons for High School Music Classes

Lesson 2

[Note to Teachers: Some of the scenes and topics in the videotaped program that these lessons accompany address social change, the sexual revolution, AIDS (auto immune deficiency syndrome), and drug culture. If your curriculum is subject to restrictions on any of these topics, you should review the videotape before using it in the classroom.]

The popular music of the 1980s both reflected and influenced everyday lives, says Shannon Daugherty, the host of “VH1 Presents the 1980s.” The popular music in the 1960s responded to the Vietnam War with anthems of peace and protest, and the music of the 1970s mirrored the cultural transition to a time when the once vibrant youth movement was feeling bitter and betrayed. During the 1970’s some popular musicians were laying aside political messages, some turning inward for themes, others rejecting any message at all. The music of the 1980s also reflected the culture of its decade. The popular music of the 80’s reflected both a culture focused on conspicuous consumption and wealth as well as a generation addressing social change with the emergence of concerts and albums to raise money for famines in Africa and the economic plight of America’s farmers.

Objective

- Students will identify the differences between program music and absolute music
- Students will discuss whether music must have a theme, a message or a non-musical story
- Students will discuss messages present in 1980s popular music

National Standards 6, 8, 9— Listening to, analyzing, and describing music; Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts; Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

VHS VCR player

Television

VH1 Cable in the Classroom program VH1 Presents the 1980s

Web-based lesson materials

Teacher-provided recording of a piece of program music that students are familiar with, for example: Bernstein's *West Side Story*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, symphonic poems of Liszt, *Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Dukas or another piece that tells a story

Teacher-provided recording of a piece of absolute music, for example, Bach's *Art of Fugue* or pieces composed by Schoenberg or Stravinsky.

Audio-playback equipment

Prior Experience

Students have viewed the program *VH1 Presents the 1980s*.

Students have listened to and discussed a teacher-selected piece of program music.

Procedures

1. Before students enter the classroom, have the following definitions written on the chalkboard:

Absolute Music—Music without extramusical connotations. The term is applied to music that is free from programmatic designs, psychological affiliations, or illustrative associations. *Baker's Dictionary of Music* (Schirmer Books, 1997)

Program Music—Music that attempts to express or depict one or more nonmusical ideas, images, or events. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986)

2. As students enter the classroom, have a piece of program music playing that you have selected from your school or personal music collection (See Materials section above for examples.)
3. When students are settled, ask students if they can identify the music they are hearing. Lead them in a discussion of what the music expresses or describes.
4. Discuss with students program music, reviewing with them the definition on the chalkboard as well as additional descriptions or examples that are helpful to your students.
5. Ask students what the opposite of program music would be. In discussing absolute music, play a recording of

a Schoenberg or Stravinsky piece that you provide. You may also chose to play a piece of instrumental popular music, composed with no message or story in mind (“Techno” House-dance” dance music may be examples). After listening to a sample, tell students that the composer intended the music to be free, or independent, of any nonmusical meaning.

6. Ask students if popular music played on the radio or in music videos is music with meaning or music that is free of nonmusical meaning. Give examples.

7. Tell students they are about to watch a videotaped program about music in the 1980s. Have them listen for mention of music that has meaning, or a message, and music that does not carry a message. Also tell students to be ready to name some of the musicians they will see who have a message.

8. Show program from [13:55] to [31:17].

9. Ask students to name a musician who did not have a message. (Help students to recall that John Taylor of Duran Duran tells us that he’s “never really been a fan of music with a message, and so celebrated having nothing to say.” Be prepared that some students might suggest that having nothing to say is a message itself.)

10. Ask students to name musicians who wrote about social issues. (Tracy Chapman, John Mellencamp, Bruce Springsteen, U2.)

11. Ask students what movement developed in the 1980s which used music and musicians to raise public awareness of and charitable funds for social needs. (Concerts, such as “FarmAid” “LiveAid” and recordings of “We Are the World,” etc...)

12. Have students discuss if that method of raising social awareness and money is used today. When and where? (The Concert for New York City, for example.)

13. Ask students to recall the music--program and absolute--that was played at the beginning of the class. Lead students in a discussion about whether music must carry a message. Is it possible for music to not carry a message? Is one preferable to the other? (Accept reasonable answers. Students may disagree, encourage discussion and possibly further research into program and absolute music.)

14. Students may analyze examples of popular or serious music, determining if the composer intended the listener to recognize a specific message. Students may also identify pieces which took on a meaning that the composer did not originally intend (Ryan Adams’ “-----” took on a new meaning after the tragedy of September 11, 2001; ----- “Dancing In The Streets” became an anthem for equality during the civil rights movement.)

Extension

Have students discuss the connections between social protest songs and songwriters of the 1980s have with the protest songs and songwriters of the 1960s. (They may refer to lessons 1 and 4 from Behind the Music: Music in America 1968 at www.vh1musicstudio.com.)

Have students select one of the musicians mentioned in procedure 9 and prepare a short oral report on the artist and the music he or she wrote. Have students include what the musician's message was and if there was a musician from the 1960s who may have been an influence.

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.

Lesson One is derived from Strategies for Teaching: Middle-Level and High School Keyboard (MENC: 1996).



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