



**VH1 Fan Club
ABBA**
VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 4

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these lesson plans may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom

 **Objective**

- Students will discover a connection between the genres of popular music and musical theater.

National Standards for Music Education

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- VH1 Fan Club: ABBA program
- Web-based lesson materials
- “Billboard .com Hot 100” list - found at www.billboard.com
- Musical theater timeline cards (one packet for every two students, see Step 2)
- Notebook paper, pencils

Prior Knowledge:

Students are familiar with the names of various genres and styles within musical theater.

Procedures

1. Post the first page of the “Billboard.com Hot 100” list on the board. Have students come to consensus on which five song titles best grab the reader’s attention. Keep this list - you will need it later in the lesson.
2. Ask students to choose a work partner, and give each group a packet of cards with the information below on them (one term and definition per card). Students should sort the cards into a timeline, and they must be able to justify the order they have chosen. Be sure to allow students enough time to order their cards.

Musical Theater Cards

(in correct order)

opera: stories set to music, all sung
operetta: light repetitious plots, imaginary settings, amusing, entertaining music
Gilbert & Sullivan: known for improbable, yet satirical plots
vaudeville: variety type of show with magicians, comedians, animal routines, no connecting plot material
Kern & Hammerstein: create realistic characters with music, lyrics essential part of plot
Rodgers & Hart, Gershwin, Berlin, Porter: lighthearted music to escape problems
South Pacific: dramatic blending of plot, music, and lyrics
Bye, Bye Birdie!: teen oriented plot focussing on "dangers" of rock and roll
Hair: mirrored Vietnam war era sentiment, peace movement, and music
Grease: parody of earlier times
Boublil, Lloyd Webber, Sondheim: sung-through musical spectacles, song often serves as dialogue

Starting with opera, this is an opening timeline to an overview of musical theater. Expect that students may not put the cards in the correct order initially, and guide them in understanding the developments in musical theater and how aspects of one type of theater transitioned into the next. Point out that the musical theater composers of the 1920's and 1930's were also the popular music composers of the time. There was no division between Broadway music and popular music. Unlike the other musicals noted in this timeline, "Grease" was created in 1972, not in the '50's decade in which it is set. It fell in with a bit of nostalgia that was happening at the time – the same sort of '70s nostalgia that is happening now in 2002.

4. Explain to students that if they were to walk through the Broadway theater district that afternoon, they would find musicals featuring music written in many different styles. Using the information below, lead students in a discussion of the styles represented, and the type of audience each show might draw. Who goes to see these shows? Does each have its own audience, or does the Broadway musical, with its melding of music, story, and dance, succeed in appealing to all ages? What is so "American" about this phenomenon?

Classic: Flower Drum Song*, Into the Woods*, Oklahoma!*

Disco: Mamma Mia!

Hard rock: Rent

Klezmer: Urinetown

Opera: La Boheme (directed by Moulin Rouge's Baz Luhrman opens in a few weeks)

Pop: Aida, The Lion King, Movin' Out (based on the music of Billy Joel)

Oop-opera: Les Miserables, Phantom of the Opera

Rock and roll: Hairspray

Tin pan alley: 42nd Street*, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Cabaret*, The Producers, Chicago*

(* indicates revival)

5. Explain to students that ABBA became involved in musical theater, and share the following information:

In both 1985 and 1995, Andersson and Ulvaeus premiered their new musical theater works, *Chess* and *The Emigrants*, respectively. The latter is currently being translated into English in preparation for an eventual U.S.A. premiere. The songs for these two shows, as were those in the shows listed in the card packet, were composed specifically for use in the productions.

The musical *Mamma Mia!*, featuring 23 of ABBA's hit songs woven into its plot, has grossed \$990,892 on Broadway, and has been attended by 11,677 theatergoers in New York at 97.44% capacity (for week ending 10/6/2002, as supplied by The League of American Theatres and Producers). Unlike the development of *Chess* and *The Emigrants*, in this case, the story was written around pre-existing ABBA songs.

6. Show VH1 Fan Club: ABBA, Segment 5. As students watch the final video segment, ask them to try to determine to which generation of fans *Mamma Mia!* speaks.

7. Lead students in a discussion about the audience for *Mamma Mia!* In the video, fans are called "dead-heads for pop musicals." What does this comment mean (comparison of Grateful Dead fans to ABBA fans)? What generation of people did they see in the audience and interviews? Guide them to discover that the audience is intergenerational for several reasons: Broadway fans attend, ABBA fans attend, 70's retro fans attend, and the play's plot line appeals to all ages.

8. Explain that the plot of *Mamma Mia!* is a mother-daughter story. The daughter has grown up not knowing who her father was, until she reads her mother's diary to discover that there were three potential dads. She invites all three to her wedding, and you can imagine the comical mess that ensues. Through the popular music of ABBA, we hear their story. Restate how pop music is once again Broadway music, and vice versa.

9. Direct students' attention back to the class's Billboard Top 5 song titles list. Using only these song titles, outline a synopsis for a proposed musical featuring these songs. Remember, it is best if the songs help move the story along, rather than just being inserted into a storyline.

Extension: improvise dialogue for selected storylines, playing recordings of musical pieces where they fall in the plot.

Curriculum connection: Social Studies, Theater

Obtain scripts, recordings, and/or videos of the representative musicals discussed earlier in this lesson: "South Pacific," "Bye, Bye Birdie!," "Hair", and "Grease." Discover how the social mores of the time period are depicted in each. What social customs, manners, or lessons might be portrayed in a musical set in the present time?

Supplemental resources:

Billboard website www.billboard.com.

Mamma Mia CD, Decca/Polydor, 1999.

Mamma Mia official website www.mamma-mia.com.

From ABBA to *Mamma Mia!*: The Official Book. Palm, Carl Magnus and Anders Hanser. Watson-Guption Publications, 2000.

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).



These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Christopher Fitzpatrick, Theater Division, The Boston Conservatory, Boston, MA.