



Behind the Movie Chicago



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 differentiation between sensational and responsible journalism.
- Students will build and notate major triads on the tonic and dominant in the key of C.

National Standards for Music Education:

2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
5. Reading and notating music.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment (CD Player)
- VH1's *Behind the Movie Chicago*, Act One
- Web-based lesson materials
- Copies of "All That Jazz" lead sheet/worksheet (included with lesson) for students (see Supplemental resources for MIDI version)
- Chalkboard (or overhead projector and transparency, etc.)
- Pencils (students)
- *Chicago: The Movie* soundtrack, Epic Records, 2003
- Keyboard instrument(s) (bells or Orff instruments may be substituted)

Prior Knowledge:

- Students are familiar with music notation, major scales, and basic chord structure.
- Students are able to play major chords on a keyboard instrument (or bells or Orff instruments).

Procedures

1. Tell the class that they have a choice of watching one of two programs on television that evening. Based on the following, which one might get more viewers?

"Tonight on our program: Israeli intelligence reports that Syria's stockpile of weapons of mass destruction exceed those of Iraq before the recent war. Will the United States demand disarmament?"

OR

"Tonight on our program: The exclusive interview with Michael Jackson's sister's boyfriend's mother who force fed her children avocados and peanut butter. The real story coming up..."

2. Lead students in a brief discussion of different journalistic approaches. One of the above is a true news story responsibly stating facts. The other is a true, yet melodramatic story presented as news to the public. Which paragraph caught their attention? Why? Point out to students that there are some media venues that gear their news stories toward being entertaining, rather than informative. Which type of news program is more significant to our lives, entertainment or information?

3. Profit-driven news organizations are under great pressure to boost ratings by sensationalizing the news. Have students name several news and news magazine television shows, and create a list on the board. Of the programs on the class list, which ones seem to sensationalize their stories by including "tearjerkers", celebrity gossip, psychic escapades, and other bizarre "true" stories?

4. Explain to students that these types of programs and publications are called tabloids. As with the program choices in step 1, a news report on Syria has little impact on the average American, but almost everyone is curious about mothers with unorthodox childrearing practices. This innate curiosity sells papers or gets viewers,

which turns into money for the publication or network. Share the following with the class:

Around 1920, Hearst and Pulitzer, newspaper barons of the time, began publishing sensational “news” stories with an emphasis on sex, blood and gore, violence, murder, and celebrity affairs. Screaming headlines, large photos, and short, punchy text, one more outlandish than the next, were used to lure readers into buying a tabloid.

5. Show VH1’s *Behind the Movie Chicago*, Act One, beginning after Richard Gere’s commentary regarding the difficulty of adapting the stage play to film (narrator says, “Chicago’s real life roots...”), and stopping after Martin Richards’ comments regarding Maureen Dallas Watkins. (Optional: students may have seen this segment as part of lesson 1, but if not, or if sufficient time has elapsed, it may be helpful for them to view it at this time.)

6. Throughout *Chicago: The Movie*, tabloid reporters are continuously looking for the next “big” story. Both Roxie and Velma realize that their chance of being acquitted for their crimes lessens as their stories move from the headlines to the newspaper’s back pages. Roxie keeps herself on the front page through a dramatic self-defense story (as told by her defense lawyer, Billy Flynn, in “We Both Reached For the Gun”), and the sudden announcement that she will be a mother. This is tabloid, or “jazz”, journalism. Have students discuss whether today’s readers are more, or less, likely to be swayed by tabloid stories as readers were in the 1920s when sensationalism first began to appear in the media. (Optional: play “We Both Reached For the Gun”, and/or Roxie’s “Nowadays”, in which she talks about the “jazz life” of liquor, music, etc., from the *Chicago: The Movie* soundtrack.)

7. Distribute copies of the “All That Jazz” lead sheet/worksheet, and play the song from the *Chicago: The Movie* soundtrack. Draw students’ attention to the way in which the lyrics refer to the same improper, risqué behavior referred to in tabloid stories, supporting Roxie’s defense of how liquor and jazz music lead her astray from a pure and simple life.

8. The harmonic structure of many show tunes relies heavily on triads built on 1 (I), the tonic of the key, and 5 (V), the dominant. Review the concept that a major chord is formed by selecting the root (first), third, and fifth tones of a major scale.

9. Play a C major scale on an instrument, and notate it on the board. Guide students in forming a C major chord. If C is 1, or the first tone, then what note is 3, or the third tone? What note is 5, the fifth tone? Notate this triad on the board. Because this major triad is built on C as its root, it is called a C major triad.

10. Have students work individually (or in groups, if preferable) to complete the worksheet by spelling each of the triads on the staff required to accompany the song. They should check their answers using a keyboard (or other) instrument to be sure that the triads are all major in quality. Ask students to comment on how the pitches fit into a major scale. Do they reflect the use of tonic and dominant chords, as is common in show tunes?

11. Assign students to play each of the triads from the song on pitched instruments as the class sings “All That Jazz.”

Curriculum Connection:

Reading - Find several articles featuring the same story, but using various print media sources representative of both responsible journalism and tabloid journalism. What reported facts do both stories share? How does the story become sensationalized for the tabloid press? Which story is likely to attract the most attention? Are today’s readers as likely to be pulled in by tabloid stories as they were in the earlier part of the 1900s?

Supplemental resources:

- “All That Jazz” lead sheet MIDI file, courtesy of Christopher Fitzpatrick, Boston Conservatory, Boston, MA.
- MIDI file accompaniments of songs from Chicago: www.geocities.com/Broadway/4902/midi.html
- Watkins, Maurine. Chicago: With the Chicago Tribune Articles That Inspired It. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1997.
- Examples of actual 1920s tabloid stories: www.heilmile.de/englisch/sek1/klasse10roaringtwenties/thosefads...part6.html
- The following media offer real-life insight into responsible journalism vs. profit at all cost: Newsies, VHS, Disney Studios, 1992 Citizen Kane, VHS, Turner Home Video, 1941

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.



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.