



VH1 Legends
Sam Cooke
VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12
Lesson 3

Note to Teachers: The content of the videotape may be found, in many communities, to be inappropriate for classroom use because of references, consistent with the era portrayed, to sexual, political, and violent lyrics and acts. You are strongly encouraged to review this program before presenting it to your students.

 **Objective**

- Students will discuss Sam Cooke's vocal and performance style, and compare and contrast it with contemporary and classical artists.
- Students will discuss the diversity and creativity of Sam Cooke as it relates to his transition from gospel to pop music.
- Students will perform the Cha Cha and the Twist.

National Standards:

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
- Audio playback equipment
- Legends: Sam Cooke program
- Web-based lesson materials
- Teacher selected recordings or those on program of familiar Sam Cooke songs ("Twistin' the Night Away", "A

Change Is Gonna Come”, etc.)

- Teacher selected recordings of Sam Cooke’s music, or other music suitable to the Cha Cha and the Twist

Prior Knowledge:

- Students are familiar with describing vocal characteristics using terms such as timbre, color, range, etc.

Procedures

1. As students enter the classroom, play teacher selected recording of one of Sam Cook’s most familiar songs. Many of the songs originated by Cooke, have been performed by contemporary artists. When students have taken their seats, ask them to briefly describe the musical style, and suggest whom the artist might be (if this lesson is used as the third in the sequence, students are likely familiar with Cooke’s music, so this portion could be omitted).

2. Show VH1 Legends: Sam Cooke, Segment 4.

3. Lead students in a discussion of Sam Cooke’s vocal sound. He had a mellow, smooth and natural sound, and used good vocal production, articulation, and diction. Cooke had a unique vocal style and range, and his melismatic and bel canto idioms contributed to his unique sound. He could charm the audience with his adlibbing and creativity. Encourage students to use correct musical terms such as timbre, color, vocal range, etc.

Vocabulary:

Melismatic/Melisma - more than one tone per syllable, embellishments

Bel Canto - smooth, connected, often referred to by classical singers

Adlib - a form of improvisation, creating effects as one goes along, on the spot

4. Have students suggest contemporary artists who share similarities to Sam Cooke’s vocal style (Jewel...?). Can they name any classical artists who use the techniques described above?

5. Sam Cooke also exhibited a stage presence that could capture audiences of ages, male and female, black or white. Remind students of the discussion in Lesson 2 pertaining to Cooke’s characteristics that helped his transition from gospel to pop music. What characteristics did he have that lent themselves so well to the stage (good looking, confident, sophisticated, etc.)? What are the characteristics of his music that made it so enjoyable to listen to and watch? Ask students if they recognized the song played at the beginning of the lesson as one they have heard before, but did not know the artist.

6. Cooke’s smooth voice, stage charisma, audience appeal, and stage presence are similar to those elements that captivate pop and R&B audiences today. Have students compare his singing and performance styles to other artists with whom they are familiar, past or present. Are there any others who were able to captivate their audiences as easily as Cooke (Elvis, Beatles, Michael Jackson, Madonna, etc.)? What is a another element present in many pop artists performances (dance)?

Music and dance go hand in hand. Often where there is exciting music, the body begins to move. In Africa, music and dance were a way of life. People would gather on the corners and in the market place, and anywhere there were people and music, a dance would evolve. So it is with all cultures that music excites and makes you

move. There have always been different forms of dancing, and styles come and go. There were line dances in the past, and in the recent decade, “line dancing”, as well as “swing” dancing, has returned to popularity. Sam Cooke sang about the Cha Cha and the Twist, and incorporated them into his performances.

7. Sam Cooke was well known for his dancing and movement on stage. The Twist, made popular by Chubby Checker, and the Cha Cha were two dances that were popular in his era. Lead students in experimenting with learning these two dances, and encourage them to keep Sam Cooke’s performance style in mind.

Cha Cha

- Have students clap and chant the rhythms to the Cha Cha.
- Have students form a line and create the steps to the dance (you may have two lines facing each other).
- Once students have mastered the basic steps, they may wish to experiment by adding turns and claps for creativity.

Basic Cha Cha Moves:

To the following rhythm:

in 2/4: four sixteenths and one quarter, bar line, four sixteenths, and one quarter etc.

clap: one and two and one and two and
chant and clap: one and forward, one and backwards
step: right, left, right, left forward
left, right, left, right backwards

Note: steps are four quick steps forward, and four quick steps backward
Twist

- Have students form a line and “do the twist” by twisting from side to side from the waist while moving up and down by bending the knees. Refer to Segment 4, “Twistin’ the Night Away”, as needed.

Once students are comfortable with the dances, play teacher selected recordings of dance music.

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 Dr. Joan R. Hillsman, Ph.D, Professor of Music, Bowie State University, Bowie, MD.



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