

## 200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons

VH1 Music Studio  
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 3



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 discuss the style and characteristics of the Classical era and the genre of opera.
- Students will compare and contrast modern day popular icons to musical icons throughout history.

*NOTE to teachers: In Lesson 1 of this series, musical time periods are discussed in broad terms, giving the main points of each era and an “icon” of proportions comparable to modern day icons with which students are familiar. Lessons 2-4 delve deeper into the chosen time periods, while taking a closer look at present day “icons” that bring shared musical ideals to each generation. Lesson 4 provides activities that summarize the previous lessons*

#### 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.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
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.

## Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment
- VH1's *200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons*
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils/pens and paper (students)
- Copies of Opera Project worksheets and Opera Timeline (included with lesson) for students
- Students' completed Musical Styles and Composer/Artist worksheets from Lesson 1 Teacher selected recordings of ABBA and W.A. Mozart

### Prior Knowledge:

- Students have experience discussing various musical styles.
- Students have completed Lesson 1 of this portion of the series.

## Procedures

1. Ask students to refer to the Musical Styles worksheet from the previous lesson, specifically the section pertaining to classical music. Share the following to begin the discussion:

The classical time period was a direct reflection of the Baroque period before it. The music of the Baroque period became so decorated, society longed to revive the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, bringing back the "classic," simple textures of that time. That is what inspired composers such as Mozart to compose music in a basic, immaculate formula.

Play teacher selected recording of Mozart, such as a portion of his Symphony No. 40. Have students describe the differences evident in Mozart's music that are obvious departures from the style of the Baroque era.
2. Show VH1's *200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons*: ABBA, #168, Hour 1.
3. After watching, remind students, as quoted in the 200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons segment, that Gene Simmons, lead singer from the rock band Kiss, stated that ABBA is, "...as craftsman-like as any grandmaster can be in pop song writing. This is as good as pop songs can ever be written. Chordal structures, the way the keyboard was played, very classical, very Mozart." Play teacher selected recording of 1970s pop group ABBA, such as "Dancing Queen." Ask students to comment on the correlation Simmons makes between ABBA's and Mozart's music. Do they agree? Why might these similarities exist? What are the obvious differences? Have students discuss why Simmons might have chosen Mozart, despite these clear differences, to make the comparison. Could Mozart be considered an "icon", or role model, for ABBA?

NOTE: The VH1 Fan Club: ABBA lesson series may be helpful in enhancing this lesson. The lessons can be found at [www.vh1musicstudio.com/specials.html](http://www.vh1musicstudio.com/specials.html).

4. Lead students in a discussion of the genre of opera. Distribute Opera Timelines for students to gain a better understanding, and highlight the following points:

Opera is a musical form that began during the Baroque period in the hopes of recreating the Greek tragedy, “the perfect marriage between words and music.” The libretto is the text written and sung in the opera. There was usually little to no spoken dialogue in the opera, with information of the plot conveyed through “recitative” and “aria.” During a recitative, the vocalist sings with a shorter, spoken manner, with broken accompaniment in the orchestra. The recitative sets up the aria, or song, giving the audience a solid understanding of the story. There are two main types of opera: opera seria (serious opera, usually resulting in tragedy) and opera buffa (comic opera, much like a sit-com of the present). Peri wrote the first opera, *Dafne*, in the late 1500s. As opera began to evolve, Mozart’s technique of musical characterization – a character’s music reveals as much about him or her as his words – became vital to the art form.

Excerpted from:

<http://parallel.park.uga.edu/~awilliam/fs-opera/opera-history.html>

5. Play teacher selected recording of the Overture from Mozart’s “*Le Nozze di Figaro*.” Have students note the different character themes recurring throughout the music, and ask them to describe what they think each character is like, based on their musical theme.
6. Tell students that ABBA’s music has recently been turned into a musical called “*Mamma Mia!*” It has received glowing reviews on Broadway in New York as well as in London, where it debuted. The genre of the musical evolved out of opera, with the primary difference being that musicals allow for spoken dialogue between characters, versus the recitative style of opera. Obviously, the style of vocal presentation also differs between musicals and opera. Ask students to consider whether ABBA’s music could be made into a successful opera. What characteristics of their music allow/do not allow for this type of transition? Have students again tie in their comparison of ABBA’s music and Mozart’s influence on opera.

**Activity:**

Divide students into groups, and tell them that they are going to create their own libretto to an existing scene. The groups may decide on a scene from a current movie, television show, musical, or book (teachers may wish to have scenes ready, such as a scene from “*Smallville*” or “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*”, or perhaps combine the project with the students’ English or literature classes by using scenes from books or by authors being studied), but must write the libretto from scratch. Students must complete the Opera Project worksheet below, and perform their opera scene for the class.

## Opera Project Worksheet

1. The scene:

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2. The characters:

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3. The libretto:

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4. The opera is seria/buffa. (CIRCLE ONE) This means:

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Opera Timeline (found at <http://parallel.park.uga.edu/~awilliam/fs-opera/opera-history.html>)

I -- Late 1500's Florentine "Camerata," a group of intellectuals, seek to recreate what they believed was the ideal performance of ancient Greek tragedy, a perfect marriage of words and music. Peri's *Dafne* is the first opera. Monteverdi becomes the first important opera composer with *Orfeo* and *The Coronation of Poppea*.

II -- Seventeenth Century (1600's) Baroque operas, such as Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Rameau and Lully in France. Early operas tend to be about historical or mythological subjects, and tend to concern heroes, aristocrats, gods and goddesses.

III -- Early eighteenth century—"Opera seria". (Serious opera) Handel is the great composer during this period. Same subjects; narratives tend to be episodic, showcases for voices. The age of the castrato (male soprano). Opera stars become cultural icons. (Rent the video *Farinelli*, about one of the greatest of the castrati, who enjoyed the cultural position of the rock star today.)

IV -- Gluck initiates his reform movement (1760's). He wants to have a more intimate relationship between words and music, and wants the music to express the meanings and emotions of the words. His *Orpheus and Eurydice* is his greatest composition.

V -- Last two decades of the 18th century: Mozart. Develops the technique of musical characterization—a character's music reveals as much about him or her as his words. The *Marriage of Figaro* portrays not only aristocrats, but servants as well. *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, as well as *Figaro*, are among the greatest operas in the repertoire.

VI -- Early nineteenth century. The Golden Age of *bel canto* ("beautiful singing"). Much emphasis on technique and vocal agility. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Bellini's *Norma*, and several works by Rossini (e.g. *Il Barbiere di Sevilla*) remain in the standard repertoire.

VII -- Later nineteenth century: two distinct traditions develop, one in Italy, one in Germany. In Italy throughout Verdi's long career he moves away from "bel canto" toward a more realistic mode. *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, *Aida*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff* are among his masterpieces. In Germany Wagner develops his theory of music drama (*Gesamtkuntzwerk*) and again argues for the marriage of words and music. The Wagnerian orchestra (which is enormous) becomes an equal partner in the performance, and a special type of singer capable of great stamina and strength becomes necessary. Wagner also develops the technique of the leitmotif, a musical theme associated with a particular character or idea that is interwoven into the orchestral "text." Wagner's masterpieces include the 4-opera Ring cycle (*Das Reingold*, *Die Walkurie*, *Siegfried*, and *Gotterdamering*) and *Tristan und Isolde* whose harmonic innovations are a precursor for the abandonment of tonality in much 20th-century music. Wagner also created a theater at Bayreuth, where his operas are performed every summer. It was he who declared that the theater should be darkened during performances, and the orchestra invisible.

In France, "grand opera" is fashionable (extremely lavish productions with extravagant staging; French audiences also demanded a ballet in every opera). Gounod's *Faust* will be the opera most performed at New York's Metropolitan Opera. Massenet's 27 operas and Bizet's *Carmen* creates a scandal when it is first performed at the Opera Comique. Not only does it have a tragic ending; it also portrays a cigarette girl as the femme fatale and includes thieves, gypsies, and other low-life characters.

VIII -- In late-nineteenth-century Italy, *verismo* ("realism," "slice of life") develops. These very melodramatic stories of lust, murder, betrayal concern ordinary people for the most part. Some good examples include Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and most of Puccini (*La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*).

IV -- Twentieth century. Richard Strauss composes a series of operas. His collaboration with the poet Hugo von Hoffmanstal is one of the great relationships between composer and librettist in opera history. *Salomé* (based on the play by Oscar Wilde) is a *sucés de scandale* when it is premiered in 1912; *Der Rosenkavalier* enters the standard repertory. Pucinni dies before his last opera, *Turandot*, is complete. (His student completes the last act.) In the 20's and 30's, composers experiment with atonal operas. Alban Berg composes the violent and musically daring *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*. In the 40's, Benjamin Britten, called the greatest English composer since Purcell, composes *Peter Grimes*. He later writes *Billy Budd* and *Death in Venice*. In the 50's Stravinsky composes *The Rake's Progress* (an eighteenth-century pastiche with libretto by W.H. Auden). In the 70's and 80's, American composers of the "minimalist" school write operas. John Adams' *Nixon in China* is greeted with critical enthusiasm and Philip Glass has considerable success with *Einstein on the Beach* and *The Voyage*.

## Supplemental Resources:

Definitions, biographical, and historical information for the *200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons* lesson series has been excerpted primarily from the following sources:

- [www.webster.com](http://www.webster.com)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68029/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68029/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68030/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68030/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68031/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68031/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68032/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68032/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68033/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68033/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68034/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68034/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68035/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68035/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68036/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68036/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68037/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68037/episode.jhtml)
- [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the\\_greatest/68038/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/the_greatest/68038/episode.jhtml)
- Baroque Music: <http://baroque-music.com/frames/frames.shtml>
- A Brief History of Opera: <http://parallel.park.uga.edu/~awilliam/fs-opera/opera-history.html>
- Official website of Philip Glass: [www.philipglass.com/](http://www.philipglass.com/)
- Concise History of Western Music: [www.wwnorton.com/concise/welcome.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/concise/welcome.htm)
- A Brief History of Music: <http://archiv.radio.cz/hudba/indexeng.html>

## 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 Amy Rosenthal, Vocal Music, Cayuga Elementary, Lake Grove, NY.