



## 200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons

VH1 Music Studio  
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 2



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 review and discuss the definition of “pop culture” and “pop culture icon.”
- Students will discuss style and characteristics of female composers.
- Students will compare and contrast modern-day female popular icons to female composers.

National Standards for Music Education

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 composer biographical information, as needed, for students
- Copies of pop icon biographical information, available on [www.vh1.com](http://www.vh1.com)
- Teacher selected recordings of Clara Schumann, Amy Beach, and Nadia and Lili Boulanger

### Prior Knowledge:

- Students have experience discussing musical styles.
- Students have an awareness of compositional aspects of music.

## Procedures

1. As students enter the classroom, have a teacher selected recording of a piece by Clara Schumann playing in the background. When students are settled, ask them if they can identify the musical genre, any style characteristics, etc., and then give the composer's name, if they could not identify her.
2. Play a teacher selected recording of a pop song by Cher for students. Ask students to draw similarities between the two styles of music. Are they of a similar genre? Are any of the rhythmic or melodic patterns comparable? It's likely the students will answer "no" to the possibility of comparing these two styles.
3. Lead students in a brief review of the common definitions of "popular" and "icon", as discussed previously in the first lesson of the Pop Icons series. "Icon" can be defined as "commonly liked or approved of," and as "an object of uncritical devotion." (Merriam-Webster's dictionary).
4. Previous lesson series, specifically "The 100 Greatest Women of Rock and Roll," have discussed contributions of women in music. The roles of women in different genres within the broad span of rock and roll (i.e. rock, pop, R&B, hip hop, rap, jazz, folk) have been highlighted, including those women who have been performers, the "divas" of present day society. Suggest to students that these women, who have paved the way for others in their field, have had women who preceded them who likewise paved the way.
5. Distribute copies of biographical information for students, and suggest that they take notes on the main points during the following discussion. Briefly discuss the backgrounds of Amy Beach, Clara Schumann, and Nadia and Lili Boulanger.

6. Guide students to drawing the following quick comparisons of the well-known composers with the modern-day icons.
  - A. Clara Schumann Cher: both women experienced hardships during their childhood, both are considered revolutionary in their field.
  - B. Amy Beach Lucille Ball: both women were married to husbands who were not supportive of their careers, both are considered pioneers in their respective fields of music and comedy.
  - C. Nadia and Lili Boulanger Janet Jackson: all women dealt with having famous siblings.
7. Show VH1's *200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons*: Cher #41, Hour 4; Lucille Ball #4, Hour 5; Janet Jackson #134, Hour 2.
8. Lead students in a discussion of the previously mentioned similarities (C. Schumann-Cher, Amy Beach-Lucille Ball, Boulanger sisters-J. Jackson). Have the difficulties some of the pop icons have faced changed over time from those faced by the composers? Why or why not? How did the difficulties faced by these women help and/or hinder their development in their field?
9. Have students share their thoughts on the effect that female artists of the past have had on today's female artists. How did they lay the groundwork for some modern-day women in music and the arts to succeed? Would the composers discussed in this lesson be considered "icons" of their time?
10. Ask students to think of another female pop icon with whom they are familiar, and who shows similar characteristics to one of the classical composers or given pop icon. Have students compare and contrast a few of these icons as a class.

## **Composer Biographical Information**

### **Clara Josephine Wieck Schumann:**

#### **Short Biography and Quick Facts**

(Summarized from New Grove and others)

-Clara was born in Leipzig on September 13, 1819; died in Frankfurt on May 20, 1896.

-Robert Schumann was born in Zwickau on June 8, 1810; died in the asylum at Endenich near Bonn on July 29, 1856.

-Clara's parents were Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873), a music teacher, and Marianne Tromlitz Wieck (Bargiel) (1797-1872), a soprano and student of Wieck; Clara's father had resolved before her birth that she would be a great musician and child prodigy.

-Her first public appearance was in 1828 (age 9); first complete piano recital in 1830 (age 11); first extended tour in 1831.

-She performed extensively and studied piano, voice, violin, instrumentation, score reading, counterpoint, composition; wrote and published several pieces for solo piano.

-Robert Schumann came to live and study with Wieck in 1830, and asked permission to marry Clara in 1837; Wieck objected, and did all he could to prevent the wedding before Clara's 21st birthday when she would be

legally able without his consent; Robert and Clara filed a lawsuit, and won, but out of spite went ahead and married the day before her birthday, September 12, 1840.

-They first lived in Leipzig where they both taught in the Conservatory there; they moved to Dresden in 1844, to Düsseldorf in 1850.

-Their children were: Marie (1841-1929), Elise (1843-1928), Julie (1845-72), Emil (1846-47), Ludwig (1848-99), Ferdinand (1849-91), Eugenie (1851-1938), Felix (1854-79).

-Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) met the Schumanns in 1853, and remained a dear friend of both while they lived.

-Robert's mental health was poor, and following a suicide attempt in 1854, he was committed to the asylum at Endenich; he is said to have suffered from manic depression and psychosis.

-Clara moved to Berlin in 1857, where she performed, taught, and edited Robert's works and letters; she was known as a champion and interpreter of the music of Schumann and Brahms, and was a direct influence on their music.

-Her playing was characterized by technical mastery, thoughtful interpretation, poetic spirit, depth of feeling, a singing tone, and strict observance of the composer's markings.

-She traveled on 38 concert tours outside Germany.

-All her compositions date from 1853 or before, including 29 songs, 3 partsongs, 4 pieces for piano and orchestra, 20 pieces for solo piano, and cadenzas for 3 piano concertos by Beethoven and Mozart; her works are numbered up to Op. 23, with 17 others without opus numbers.

-She set poetry by: Heine, Rückert, H. Rollet, E. Geibel, Kerner, F. Serre, Goethe, Lyser, and Burns (translated by Gerhard).

### **Spouses, Pianists, Composers A Biographical Introduction to Op. 37/12**

Too often the music of women composers is condemned to particular concerts "For Women Composers Only". Rather than exalting their creativity, this practice gives the impression that women composers need special assistance, that their music is inferior, and that they require affirmative action. Instead, their music should be allowed to stand on its own, freely mingled with music of men composers, especially their colleagues: those with whom they interact and share influence. Only then will the discerning listener be able to objectively assess the imagination and craft of each composer, and praise the genius of those worthy. A fascinating comparison can be made of the music by Robert and Clara Schumann, who were both pianists and composers. Though Clara's ambitions as a concert pianist and composer were hindered by the responsibilities of family life, Robert encouraged her to compose. Their musical interaction was intense, as they studied symphony scores together, shared reactions to performances, and read similar literature. On the day following their wedding, Robert gave a new diary to Clara for her birthday, recommending that they write and exchange the diary weekly, so that each could pen reflections on music they had heard, projects they were working on, people they had met and dined with, and any personal notes to the other that spoken words could not express. They continued this diary for several years. Today it serves as an intimate narrative of the lives of two artists, and in its recent English translation, provides us with a detailed chronicle of their creative offspring. Around the same time, during the year of his most productive songwriting (he wrote over 300), Robert suggested that Clara join him in composing a group of songs and publish them intermingled. She began by writing *Am Strande*, and gave it to him as a gift for Christmas, 1840. Later, they chose poems to set to music from the collection *Liebesfrühling* (Love's Springtime) by Friedrich Rückert; Clara's were written in June 1841, while she was 6 months pregnant with their first child, Marie. Robert secretly had the 12 songs printed in two volumes and presented them to Clara on their first anniversary, September 12, 1841. Robert's songs were assigned to his Opus 37, and Clara's three contributions comprise her Opus 12, numbers 2, 4, and 11. The resultant list of songs looks confusing: 37:1, 12:2, 37:3, 12:4, 37:5-10, 12:11, and 37:12. Robert's songs show tremendous variety in shape and quality, and seem more experimental, especially in his response to the words. Clara's songs in this set are either simple and heartfelt, or dramatic displays of piano vir-

tuosity. Her expression of text is direct but full of nuance. Robert and Clara selected quite distinct poems for their songs. Clara chose poems of devotion and passion uniquely from a woman's perspective; Robert preferred poetry full of metaphor, vivid imagery, and classical themes, but likewise revealing a man's viewpoint. As they alternate, the songs reflect the conversation found in the diary itself, an intimate and touching dialogue of two loving and creative souls.

## Amy Marcey Cheney Beach

(<http://www.ulaverne.edu/music/biography/beach.html>)

1867 - 1944

American composer and pianist Amy Beach was the first significant female composer in America and one of the leading composers of the "New England School". By all measures, young Amy Marcey Cheney was a true prodigy. At one year she knew forty songs, always singing them at the same pitch. By age two she could improvise a countermelody to any melody her mother sang, and at age four, she could not only read four-part hymns at sight, but wrote her first pieces in her head and then sat down and played them on the piano. She began piano study at age six with her mother, and then studied with the finest pianists in Boston. She made her debut at sixteen, and in 1885 played with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. From this point on, her career was influenced greatly by society's views of women. It was suggested that her desire to study composition would best be served by independent study, in part in the belief that women composed based on feeling rather than intellect. When she married the physician and amateur musician Henry Harris Aubrey Beach in 1885, he asked that she limit her concertizing to a few performances a year. Because of this, she focused on composition. After his death in 1910, she resumed her concert career in Europe and in this country. These all had an effect on her musical development, and the results can be seen as both positive and negative. Her natural abilities made self-study a viable avenue (she learned orchestration, for example, by translating the famous treatise by Hector Berlioz). At the same time, this probably accounts for the fact that much of her music borrows stylistic elements from contemporary composers. Her husband's desire that she not make a career as a performer may have curtailed that aspect of her professional life, but it allowed her the rare luxury (rare for both men and women) of full-time compositional activity. The body of work that Beach produced stands out for its size as well as its quality. She also stands out as the first woman to master larger forms. Her *Symphony in E* (the "Gaelic") demonstrates this, and is one of the first works by an American to answer Antonin Dvorák's challenge to use national themes in their compositions. Beach believed that since a large percentage of Boston's citizens were of Irish extraction, this would be the most representative source to draw upon. Many of her works have remained popular in this century, and her music is receiving a fairer re-evaluation as a result of the general interest in the music of women and the special circumstances of its creation. **In her own words...** "The women composers of today have advanced in technique, resourcefulness, and force, and even the younger composers have achieved some effects which the great masters themselves would never have dared to attempt. The present composers are getting away more and more from the idea that they must cater to the popular taste, and in expressing their individual ideas, are giving us music of real worth and beauty." **Works:**

Orchestral music, including *Gaelic Symphony* (1896) and *Piano Concerto* (1899)

1 opera, *Cabildo* (1932)

Chamber music, including a violin sonata (1896), piano quintet (1907), string quartet (1929), and piano trio (1938)

Choral music, including the *Mass in E-flat* (1890), *Festival Jubilate* (1891), and many sacred works (anthems and hymns); secular choral works, including "The Song of Welcome" (1898) and "The Chambered Nautilus" (1907)

More than 120 songs for voice and piano, including *Five Songs to Words by Robert Burns* (1899) and *Three Browning Songs* (1900); concert aria "Eilende Wolken" ("Racing Clouds") for voice and orchestra (1892)

Keyboard music, including character pieces (*The Hermit Thrush at Morn and The Hermit Thrush at Eve*, 1921); Suite for Two Pianos on Old Irish Melodies (1924); sets of variations  
Numerous articles on composition and pedagogical topics Biography from Sony Classical  
The Essentials of Music

## Amy Beach

(<http://www.classicalmusic.about.com/library/weekly/aa112299.htm>)

Born Amy Cheney in New Hampshire in 1867, the young girl who would later become Amy Beach was born into a musical family: her mother was a singer and pianist before her marriage. Little Amy was composing short piano pieces and playing by ear, all by the age of four, encouraged by her mother with piano lessons. Her public debut came at seven in a church concert. Amy's family moved to Boston, and she took piano lessons, as well as harmony lessons (the only training she would ever have in music theory). At the age of 16, she debuted with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and published her first song (a setting of "The Rainy Day: by Longfellow), which she had written at 13. In 1885 (at 18), she married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who was much older than herself. After her marriage, she stopped performing for the most part, but continued to compose, under the name Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. Beach continued to write piano pieces and songs, and also broadened her scope by composing large scale orchestral works. She continued to turn out a large number of works in a variety of genres. After the death of her husband in 1910, Beach took up performing once again, and played a very successful 3 year European Tour. When she returned to the United States, she combined composing in the summer with performing in the winter. She died at the age of 77, in 1944. Some works:

*Canticle of the Sun* (1928) - Choral

*Ecstasy* op. 19 (1892) - Song

*Eilende Wolken, Segler die Lufte*, op. 18 (1892) - Scene and Aria

*Elle et Moi* op. 21 (1893) - Song

Symphony in E minor ("Gaelic") op. 32 (1894) Elsewhere on the 'Net

[Mrs. H. H. A. Beach Online Exhibit](#)

[All-Classical Guide to Amy Marcy Cheney Beach](#) Source: *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain & The United States, 1629 - Present*

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## Nadia and Lili Boulanger (1887-1979; 1893-1918)

Celebrating two hundred and fifty years of music by women

These two sisters made an extraordinary impact on French musical life, Lili being the first woman to win the much coveted Prix de Rome, and Nadia becoming perhaps the most influential musical teacher of the 20th century.

Nadia entered the Paris Conservatoire aged ten, and later studied with Faure. Her cantata *La sirene* won her second prize in the Prix de Rome in 1908. She was deeply affected by the death of her sister in 1918, and from 1919 was no longer active as a composer. She devoted her life to conducting and teaching; her pupils included Lennox Berkeley, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Jean Francais, Thea Musgrave and Walter Piston.

Lili's precocious musical career was guided to begin with by Nadia. Her cantata *Faust et Helene* won the Prix de Rome in 1913, after which her achievements became headline news. Ill from the age of twelve, and fragile for the

rest of her brief life, she composed a surprising amount of music. Above all her sensitive handling of large choral and orchestral forces continues to compel admiration.

Click on these works for more details below:

[Cello Pieces \(Nadia\)](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Cello%20Pieces) ([http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Cello Pieces](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Cello%20Pieces))

[Nocturne \(Lili\)](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Nocturne) (<http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Nocturne>)

[D'un Matin de Printemps \(Lili\)](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un%20Matin%20de%20Printemps) ([http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un Matin de Printemps](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un%20Matin%20de%20Printemps))

[D'un Soir Triste \(Lili\)](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un%20Soir%20Triste) ([http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un Soir Triste](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#D'un%20Soir%20Triste))

['Faust et Helene' \(Lili\)](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Faust%20et%20Helene) ([http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Faust et Helene](http://www.ambache.co.uk/wBoulanger.htm#Faust%20et%20Helene))

You can download and hear the start of Nadia's third Cello Piece by clicking [here](http://www.ambache.co.uk/aBoulangerC.wma) (<http://www.ambache.co.uk/aBoulangerC.wma>), and the first minute of the Lili's orchestral piece *D'un Soir Triste* by clicking [here](http://www.ambache.co.uk/aBoulangerS.wma) (<http://www.ambache.co.uk/aBoulangerS.wma>).

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>
- Other sites as indicated above for composer biographical information.

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.