



VH1 Rock Honors: The Who

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

Objectives

- Students will identify an overture and its relationship to an opera.
- Students will be able to tell if and how “Tommy” qualifies as an opera.

Prior Knowledge:

Students will have a basic understanding of opera—its defining characteristics as well as its components (aria, recitative, chorus, etc.)

National Standards for music education:

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment (CD player, iPod with speakers, etc.)
- Recordings of The Who's "Tommy"
- *VH1 Rock Honors: The Who*
- Copies of the Tommy Overture Identification Sheet (provided below)
- Deaf, Dumb and Blind Boy Synopsis (provided below)

Procedures

1. Cue video to segment 23:44 - 32:42. Watch this segment in which a brief introduction to The Who's "Tommy." The Flaming Lips then perform a medley from The Who's "Tommy."
2. Following a brief discussion of what an overture is, have students listen to the overture to The Who's "Tommy." Ask students if they heard any of the songs performed in the medley in the overture. Ask students to identify which songs they heard on the sheet below.
3. Cue video segment 26:28 - 27:48. Play a portion then of "Underature" from "Tommy." Have students note the use of this music at the beginning of the segment. Did Flaming Lips in fact use this as an overture?
4. To facilitate a more detailed discussion of the work, have students read the synopsis of the "Tommy" liner notes written by Richard Barnes (see below). Discuss the elements of opera. What constitutes an opera? What is an aria? A recitative? Does "Tommy" qualify as an opera? Introduce the terms cantata and song cycle. Explain how they differ from an opera. Does "Tommy" fit that definition better? How so?
5. Relate the synopsis to the comments made on the video. What was Pete Townsend rebelling against? Referencing lesson one, did the instrumentation affect the impression of "pretentious and snobby?" How so or how not?

Extension: If time permits, have students compare what they have heard from the original recording by The Who with a cast recording from the Broadway adaptation of the 1990's. Does it take on more 'pretention' in that setting? Why or why not? Ask students to consider texture and instrumentation before giving their final answer.

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.

Tommy Overture Identification Sheet

Draw a line connecting the sections of the overture to the songs performed by Flaming Lips as part of the “Tommy” medley. Some sections of the overture will not have a connection to the performance.

Opening

Horn Theme

Pinball Wizard

Second Horn Theme

Vocal Interlude

I’m Free

Guitar, Drums, Piano

Organ Entrance

We’re Not Gonna Take It

Repeat of Organ Theme

Piano Key Change

See Me, Feel Me/Listening to You

Horn Calls

Guitar, Horn, Gong

See Me, Feel Me

Deaf, Dumb and Blind Boy
By Richard Barnes

A Synopsis

Rock Opera—a term coined by Who manager Kit Lambert, after hearing a spoof Pete Townsend had written. As of 1966, Townsend had been experimenting with larger, inter-connected forms. With the idea of a ‘rock opera,’ the manager joined Townsend in this endeavor as producer.

Influence—Pete Townsend, as other rockers of the time had been, was influenced by Eastern philosophy. The *Tommy* storyline was a metaphor for mankind’s blindness to higher states of consciousness.

“Strictly speaking, *Tommy* isn’t an opera at all. It has no staging, scenery, acting, or recitative.” (Barnes, 1996)

The element of pinball was added to win over a rock journalist, Nic Cohn, so that he would give “Tommy” a favorable review.

It was not merely the topic of the work, or the lyrics, that made the piece successful—it was **“the sheer brilliance of the tunes.” (Barnes, 1996)**

The Who wanted to be able to perform *Tommy* live. Pete Townsend fought with producer Kit Lambert to keep the production simple—no overdubs, no use of an orchestra.

Tommy changed The Who’s career. It was commercially successful; it changed their status as a band known for their singles to a band known for their albums; it transformed Roger Daltrey into a rock ‘front man.’

While it marked the beginning of The Who’s peak, *Tommy* became larger than life. A ballet, an orchestral pops album, and a film were adapted from it. Demand was great for the live performances of *Tommy*, but after awhile Pete Townsend was ready to move on to writing other large scale works. For a large span of their career, The Who did not perform much of the music from *Tommy*, including only a song or two in their shows. In 1989, when The Who reformed to tour, they performed it virtually in its entirety.



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 Marcia Marino, Oakland Public Schools, Oakland, New Jersey.