



True Spin

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 2 – The “True Spin” on Myths and Music



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 gain an understanding of the concepts of artistic intent and criticism.
- Students will discuss cultural impact on perception.

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 *True Spin*
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils/pens and paper (students)
- Chalkboard or overhead projector
- Lyrics of some of the above songs on transparency (suggested resource: www.lyrics.com)

Prior Knowledge:

- Students have completed Lesson One, "Getting the Meaning in Pop Music."
- Students have minimal experience discussing music as it relates to society, politics, culture, etc.
- Students have some knowledge of popular musical styles (disco, heavy metal, punk rock, etc.).

Procedures

1. Open the class by explaining to students that they will be viewing a VH1 program entitled *True Spin*. Ask them if they are familiar with the program, and have one or two students explain the concept of the show. If necessary, tell them that the show deals with several popular songs from the past twenty years, around which different theories, or myths, about the artists' intentions have arisen, and that they are about to learn the "real stories" behind the songs they discussed in Lesson One.
2. Lead students in discussing the cultural and political aspects of the time periods that are to be covered with the selected songs (early 80s, late 90s, etc.). It may be helpful to make notes on a chalkboard or overhead projector for reference later in the lesson.
 - What was the political climate of the time period? Who was president, and what were the specific issues?
 - What issues concerned the youth at that time (war, AIDS, dating/personal relationships, etc.)?
 - What were the predominant musical styles of the time (late 70s disco, punk, heavy metal, dance, etc.)?
3. Tell students they are going to watch several *True Spin* segments featuring the songs they discussed previously. These will be followed by discussion of the myths/stories associated with the songs in an effort to explain how each myth might have started. Students may find it helpful to jot down a few notes, and should also have their notes from Lesson One available.

NOTE to teachers: The following procedures outline the steps and general points of discussion to be applied to each of the artist segments in the True Spin program. Specific points of discussion are also provided for each segment at the end of the lesson. Teachers should be certain to use the segments that correlate with the songs used in Lesson One, but should add additional segments as desired to reinforce the discussion.

4. Show VH1's True Spin, one of the segments correlating with a song from Lesson One.
5. Draw students' attention to the myths that were explained in the segment. What were they, and do they seem logical? How do the students' interpretations from Lesson One compare to the myths?
6. Lead students in exploring the context that surrounds the creation of the myths described in each segment.
 - Ask students to discuss the political and cultural climate at the time the song was released (refer to step two). Does the song seem to be making a political statement? Does it relate to a concern or belief held by the youth population? What aspects of the time would have influenced interpretation?
 - Have students suggest possible sources for the myths. Would someone intentionally start a "myth?" Why, and what could be their motivation?
 - Explore images from the video and parts of the lyrics. (Provide lyrics on overhead transparency if necessary.) Do the lyrics and video images allow room for misinterpretation? How many of the myths are based on the video? Why does this happen? What justifies each myth?
 - Ask students to discuss the sources of the "True Spin" stories behind each song. The source is typically the person who wrote the song, rather than the performer. How does this highlight the differences between composers and performers? Could the performer have put their own "spin" on the song to make it suit their image?
 - Discuss the possibility that an artist might have motivation to intentionally misrepresent a song's meaning. Why might they do this? Can we trust an artist's integrity? (Possible discussion point: Do students believe that Janet Jackson's actions at the 2004 Super Bowl were planned? If so, why would she and those involved deny it? What motivation might they have had for planning it?)
7. Repeat steps four through six as needed to complete the discussions of the songs selected.
8. Have students again consider their initial interpretations of the songs as they compare to the myths surrounding the songs at the time of their release. Have the social and political concerns of present day changed much in the past 20 years? Ask students to comment on whether their understanding of the songs reflects changes in ideas and influences over the years.

Discussion Points

***Born in the USA* – Bruce Springsteen (1984)**

- Myths: Salute to America; Anti-Reagan
 - What was the political climate of the early 1980s? Ronald Reagan was elected as president as the hostages in Iran were released; there was a perception that the US had lost strength and prestige in the world; Regan promised a New Day in America.
 - Supporters of Reagan who saw the images of the flag in the video could have thought this was a pro-USA song.
 - Those who did not support Reagan who saw the working people and images of lower income neighborhoods in the video could have thought this was an Anti-Reagan song.
- Truth: Mistreatment of Vietnam Vets
 - What were the conflicts concerning the war? How were Vietnam veterans generally treated after returning? How did/would the veterans feel about the US government not addressing issues such as

Agent Orange.

- How does the current political campaign reflect those divisions today? Compare/contrast John Kerry and President Bush's actions during the war, and reactions to the war afterwards.

Losing My Religion – R.E.M. (1991)

- Myths: Loss of Faith; John Lennon's Assassin
 - "Loss of faith" interpretation is tied to the title. If a listener doesn't read or understand the lyrics, the title often drives the perception of a song's meaning. How do the images in the video contribute to this perception (images of angels, stigmata)?
 - Who was John Lennon? Why was his death significant? How could the lyrics cited be tied to John Lennon's murder?
- Truth: Obsessive Crush
 - Michael Stipe explains the title is based on a Southern expression ("lost my religion," meaning an awakening or disproof of a belief). He mentions Sting. How do artists affect each other?

Back in Black – AC/DC (1980)

- Myths: Salute to Satan; addition of Brian Johnson as new lead singer
 - What is the image of the band? In the mid-1980s, certain types of bands (typically heavy metal), were thought to be endorsing witchcraft/Satan worship. Was this true? Did the bands play up this image? Why would they? Hearings were held in congress about the effect of this type of music and violent lyrics on teenagers. A rating guide was placed on albums. Did it work?
 - Brian Johnson was added to the band. Could fans that knew the group well have created this myth? How else could this myth be created, or on what basis?
- Truth: Death of band member Bon Scott
 - Why would a band write a song like this (tribute/remembrance)? What is their explanation?

Ray of Light – Madonna (2001)

- Myths: Madonna's daughter/mother
 - What images in the video would lead to either of these myths? Could other images created by Madonna over the year have contributed to these myths? Do the lyrics support these myths?
- Truth: Kabbalah
 - Do the images reflect the concept of Light? Do the lyrics? How did Madonna borrow from the original song?

Rio – Duran Duran (1981)

- Myths: Simon LeBon's Yacht; A Cover Girl/Model
 - Yacht myth is based primarily on the video images. Where is Rio (Rio De Janeiro)? Cover girl myth can again be based on the video's images of beautiful women. Duran Duran's band image was popular with women worldwide.
- Truth: Tribute to or infatuation with America
 - As explained by the band, Rio refers to the Rio Grande River. Where is the Rio Grande, and why might the band have such interest in it?

Under the Bridge – Red Hot Chili Peppers (1992)

- Myths: Band member John Pazzanti's homelessness; Rodney King Incident
 - Could the song title lead to the idea of homelessness? Why?
 - Who was Rodney King (motorist stopped by LA police, resisted arrest and was beaten, beating was caught on video tape and led to several days of rioting in East Los Angeles)? How could the video or lyrics suggest this myth?
- Truth: Band member Anthony Kiedis' heroin addiction
 - What are the impacts of heroin addiction? How do the band members relate these issues?

Every Breath You Take – The Police (1983)

- Myths: Lyrics for Lovers; Secret Agent
 - How could the lyrics support the myth that this is a love song? Do the images support the myth as well? This is one example of a rare time when the lyrics support a myth more than the images. What are some of the reasons for that?
 - Fans who knew details of the group may have created the "Secret Agent" myth, much like the AC/DC myth that Back in Black was about the addition of a new band member.
- Truth: Stalker Song
 - Sting gives this full explanation. Do the video and lyrics support it?

Safety Dance – Men without Hats (1982)

- Myths: Safe Sex; Anti-Nuke
 - With the advent of AIDS, safe sex was a big issue in the early to mid- 1980's. What was the social scene like prior to that? Does the video support this (not really)? The group's name could also support the myth since "hats" sometimes refers to condoms (use of this point is at the teacher's discretion).
 - Is the anti-nuke myth supported by the lyrics? Could a metaphor be in place to explain this myth?
- Truth: Mantra for Moshing (define mantra and moshing)
 - Explanation from group – "death of disco" in early 1980s. Examining the video images, what is a May Pole? What is a Renaissance Fair (times of gathering in villages for market and criminal courts)? The images are of it being "safe to dance," to celebrate.

In The Air Tonight – Phil Collins (1981)

- Myths: A Drowning; a haunted house
 - The myth about a drowning can be based on one segment of the lyrics. Is it legitimate to gather meaning from a part of something? Where else does this type occur and why (advertising – short, directing thoughts of viewer)
 - Do the video images support the haunted house myth?
- Truth: Phil Collin's Divorce
 - Phil Collin's explains that the song is about how a divorce feels - the idea of breaking apart a family, not just the two people divorcing, and the sense of things "in the air." Do the lyrics support this more or less than the images?

Walk Like An Egyptian – The Bangles (1986)

- Myths: Getting hip with Egypt; a tribute to pop artist Prince
 - In the 1980's the King Tut exhibition came to the US, and was very popular, with long lines to view it at various museums. Steve Martin's King Tut was based on this (as seen in the segment). Where did the "Egyptian Walk" come from (hieroglyphics – flat wall paintings, no perspective or depth)?
 - Other than "clues" stated as being seen in the video, do the lyrics support the myth that the song is a tribute to Prince? Could this have developed from fans of the band knowing the relationship between Prince and the group?
- Truth: Walking on a ferry
 - The songwriter states that sometimes it's really a simple thought and a simple tune.

Supplemental Resources:

- Song lyrics: www.lyrics.com

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 David J. Greenagel, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Music, Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, VA.