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Abstract

The document that follows is a series of lesson plans designed to instruct students on the history and performance practices of the blues. The unit is intended to be taught over the span of two lessons, but omissions or extensions could be utilized at the discretion of the instructor.

The intended audience for this lesson is a grade seven jazz class, but could be easily adapted for general music or any performance-based course.

Please note that the specific standards referenced in the following lesson plans are pulled from the 2012 draft of the Ohio Fine Arts Standards, specifically the grade seven music standards. Teachers wishing to use these lessons should consult their state’s specific standards.

Unit Overview

Day 1- Origins of the Blues/Life in the South

- Sharecropping, racial discrimination, poverty, plantation life
- Delta Blues- Robert Johnson, Charley Patton
 - No uniform structure, “play what you feel”
 - Acoustic guitars, typically one or two musicians
- Chicago Blues- BB King
 - More organized, emergence and prevalence of 12 bar blues progression
 - Electric guitar, bass, piano, drums used more frequently, allows for more creativity with composition, more collaboration

Day 2- Blues Form and Performance

- 12 Bar Blues Construction and Analysis
- Listen & Perform: *Green Onions*- Booker T and the MGs/arr. Roger Holmes

Blues Unit Day 1- *Origins of the Blues*

Ohio Fine Arts Standards

2CE Identify the style and historical period of various music examples.

3CE Recognize and identify historical and cultural contexts (e.g., time and place of a music event) that have influenced music.

2RE Compare and contrast a variety of live or recorded music performances using appropriate audience etiquette.

4RE Explain how and why people use and respond to music.

Objectives

SWBAT understand the quality of life that African Americans dealt within the south during Reconstruction, and how hardships lead to development of the Blues

SWBAT identify prominent Blues musicians- Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, BB King

SWBAT differentiate performance practices between Delta and Chicago Blues

SWBAT aurally differentiate between Delta and Chicago Blues

Resources

Video/audio recordings of Robert Johnson, BB King, Charley Patton

Do Now

“What does it mean to have the Blues? Where do you think this expression came from?”

Procedure

- Do Now- Think Pair Share responses
- Lead students through a contextualisation conversation about American history post-Civil War to see what they already know.
 - Key words: Reconstruction, Sharecropping
- Explain how the day-to-day misfortunes many people faced lead to expression through music.
- Explain key characteristics of Delta Blues music (instruments used, setting, where it was performed, who performed it, etc.)
 - Overview of Robert Johnson and Charley Patton
 - Play sample of *Sweet Home Chicago*, *Cross Road Blues* (Johnson), *Down the Dirt Road Blues* (Patton)
 - Student-lead discussion on what they hear, emotions evoked from listening
- Overview of Great Migration, why it happened, what were the results, what went with the people (culture, art, food, traditions)
- Elaborate on how blues evolved in the north, specifically Chicago
 - Style became more organized, formulaic
 - 12 bar blues
 - More musicians involved in music-making process
 - New technology/instruments- electric guitar, drums, piano, bass
 - Play sample of *The Thrill is Gone* and *Bring It on Home to Me* (BB King)

Assessment

Formative- Venn Diagram comparing/contrasting Delta Blues and Chicago Blues.

Exit Ticket

“If you had to write a Blues song today, what sort of troubles would you write about?”

Extension (if time allows)

Listen to a modern Blues song, compare/contrasts its performance practices with those of the early Blues from the Delta and Chicago.

Blues Unit Day 2- 12 Bar Blues Progression and Green Onions

Ohio Fine Arts Standards

1PR Independently or collaboratively, perform a varied repertoire of music, representing diverse genres and cultures and showing expression and technical accuracy at a level that includes modest ranges and changes of tempo, key and meter.

2PR Perform accurately, independently or collaboratively, with good posture producing an appropriate tone quality.

4PR Read, write and perform rhythmic (including dotted rhythms) and melodic patterns in a variety of meters.

1CE Recognize, identify and demonstrate form in world music (e.g., Western and non-Western) and popular music.

Objectives

SWBAT construct a 12 bar blues progression in the keys of B-flat, C, F, and D

SWBAT perform *Green Onions* by Booker T and the MGs

Materials

Staff paper, audio/video recording of *Green Onions*, sheet music for *Green Onions*- Booker T/arr. Holmes

Do Now

“Listen to the song playing. Identify a) How many measures the melody lasts for and b) In which measures do you hear the chords changing?” (Use a blues backing track from YouTube as a reference)

Procedure

- Do Now
- Class review responses to Do Now, introduce 12 bar blues form, display on board
 - 1 1 1 1
 - IV IV 1 1
 - V IV 1 1
- Play recording of *Green Onions*. While listening, compare what they hear to the structure of the 12 bar blues (it’s the same)
- Pass out parts for *Green Onions*, rehearse parts
 - *Note- this piece is very approachable for second year students at my school and thus can be taught in one day. If your students need an easier song, consult JWPepper or Stanton’s Sheet Music to find a blues piece that is more developmentally appropriate*
- While working on rehearsing, have students mark the chord changes in their parts. Have students search for any spots in the music where the piece deviates from the form described above

Assessment

Formal- record students performing *Green Onions*. Save for digital portfolio

Note- my students compile a portfolio of artifacts throughout the year to show their musical growth. As a substitution, select a short excerpt from the music to have the students perform for either a formal or informal assessment.

Exit Ticket

“Consider Delta versus Chicago Blues. Which style would you rather listen to? Which style would you rather perform?”