

IMPLEMENTING POPULAR MUSIC INTO THE STRING CURRICULUM

“WHY, WHAT AND HOW...”

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WHY SHOULD I USE POPULAR MUSIC IN MY CLASSROOM?

- Research shows a clear benefit to teaching musical concepts through popular music.
 - Several organizations, associations and resources are available to support the educational benefits of *popular music pedagogy*:
 - The Association for Popular Music Education (APME) www.popularmusiceducation.org;
 - The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) www.iaspm.net;
 - “Creating an Educational Framework for Popular Music in Public Schools: Anticipating the Second-Wave” By Randall Everett Allsup;
 - “Popular Music Pedagogy: Peer-Learning in Practice” By Don Lebler;
 - “Popular Music as Holistic Discipline: The Search for Meaning” By Elsa Grassy;
 - “How Poplar Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education” By Lucy Green.
- “Popular music” covers a broad spectrum of interest.
 - Much of the curriculum available to string programs is dated or original material that is not recognizable by students.
 - Popular music feeds off of student interests in music and is only limited by the cultural and personal experiences of the students.
- Students are more engaged and have a defined interest in the content of the lesson and performance.
 - Students become personally invested into the materials and assignments you provide through a developing performance relationship between the music they enjoy and the instrument they want to master.
- Students can control their learning experience by choosing the music they want to learn.
 - Students have the opportunity to choose HOW they want to learn a specific concept or skill. It should not affect WHAT they should be learning, but simply the vehicle in which they travel to an understanding of new concepts.
- Students are more open to share their success and receive adequate praise for their accomplishments.
 - Students are excited to share their new abilities with friends and families who will appreciate the music, as it is popular and known by a larger audience.
 - This also empowers parents and peers to act as musical critics and evaluate students’ performances with expectations of the original piece.
- “Popular music” broadens the appreciation of music in general.
 - With a wider audience, students receive a greater appeal and appreciation of their work.

HOW CAN I USE POPULAR MUSIC TO TEACH?

- Warm-ups/Etudes/Exercises: “BEP Warm-up”/Warm Up #2 (See attached)
 - Use popular songs and rhythms to exercise basic concepts and skills: penta-scales, finger patterns, syncopation, improvisation, et cetera
- Special programming
 - Participate in a number of local events and programs with specific selections appropriate to the celebration.
 - Black history month: “Mood Indigo” (See attached)
 - Veteran’s day
 - Recruitment concerts: “Party Rock Intro” /Radioactive (See attached)
 - Talent Shows: “Overnight Celebrity” (See attached)
 - Fashion shows “Mash Ups” (Fanfare & Celebration)
 - Flash mobs
 - PEP-RALLIES: “Orchestra Remix & Homecoming Medleys” (See attached)
- Rock bands/alternative styles clubs
 - Teach students in multiple styles and experiment with electrifying and amplifying your instrument.

HOW DO I DO THIS AT MY SCHOOL?

- **Step one: Pick the music**
 - Use this teaching opportunity to discuss different genres of music and how we define one as popular.
 - Poll your students, and make charts and graphs of their preferences.
 - Vote on the class favorites and/or write why the students like a particular song
- **Step two: Find the music**
 - A plethora of resources are available to locate or generate the music for popular songs:
 - Compilations, published arrangements, transcribing melodies or harmonies on your own, assigning students to transcribe melodic and harmonic fragments of a selected piece, www.musicnotes.com, www.tabcrawler.com, www.sheetmusicplus.com.
- **Step three: Arrange the music**
 - One of the greatest things of writing out popular music for your students is that you can control the level and content of the pieces.
 - Music notation software like Finale or Sibelius would be the best vehicle for your arrangement. Do not underestimate nor under-appreciate, however, hand written manuscript or the students' ability to learn by rote.
 - Use backing tracks or percussion to enhance your arrangement and encourage listening and ensemble skills.
 - www.karaokeversion.com is an invaluable resource for custom backing tracks to popular songs.
 - You can also download a free mixing and editing software for sound files called "[Audacity](http://audacity.org)" to help edit your backing tracks for performance.
- **Step four: Rehearse**
 - A big issue for string ensembles at larger events and venues can be sound: "How will anyone hear us at a pep-rally or in the gym?" I have personally discovered a number of viable options that are truly flexible to your individual needs and goals:
 - Option #1: Amplify! Use microphones, pickups, or electric instruments.
 - Tuning pickups are a VERY inexpensive way to amplify your string instruments!
 - Option #2: Play in unison and let the backing track do the extra work.
 - Option #3: record yourself and mix it with your backing track (using audacity) and play along at the live performance.
- **Step Five: Perform!**

For additional questions
and any advice or resources I may be able to offer you
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