

Marian Anderson, Singer and Artist: Ideas for Music Lesson Plans

Lesson Type: Music

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This lesson plan is geared towards a fifth grade level, but may be adapted for use by any age group. It meets the following National Standards for Arts Education for grades 5-8:

Content Standard: Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

- Sing music representing diverse genres and cultures, with expression appropriate for the work being performed

Content Standard: Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments

- Improvise short melodies, unaccompanied and over given rhythmic accompaniments, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality

Content Standard: Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

- Describe specific music events in a given aural example, using appropriate terminology
- Analyze the uses of elements of music in aural examples representing diverse genres and cultures
- Demonstrate knowledge of the basic principles of meter, rhythm, tonality, intervals, chords and harmonic progressions in their analyses of music

Content Standard: Evaluating music and music performances

- Develop criteria for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of music performances and compositions and apply the criteria in their personal listening and performing

Content Standard: Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts

- Compare in two or more arts how the characteristic materials of each art (that is, sound in music, visual stimuli in visual arts, movement in dance, human interrelationships in theatre) can be used to transform similar events, scenes, emotions, or ideas into works of art
- Describe ways in which the principles and subject matters of other disciplines taught in school are interrelated with those of music

Content Standard: Understanding music in relation to history and culture

- Describe distinguishing characteristics of representative music genres and styles from a variety of cultures
- Classify by genre and style a varied body of exemplary (that is, high-quality and characteristic) musical works and explain the characteristics that cause each work to be considered exemplary

Standards taken from: *National Standards for Arts Education*. What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts. ISBN 1-56545-036-1; MENC stock #1605.

Goals:

1. Students will understand the structure and definition of an art song.
2. Students will gain an appreciation for Marian Anderson's unique voice, and for her impressive interpretations of art songs.

Objectives:

To explore the following concepts in Marian Anderson's performances:

1. Contrasting sounds in her different registers
 - deep contralto tones
 - clear soprano sounds
2. Vocal skill and control
 - elegant legato, especially over large intervals
 - long, steady tones
 - expressive dynamic control
3. Deep emotion
 - often performed songs about a profound or tragic theme, requiring deep feeling
 - performance touched the humanity in her audiences (all backgrounds)
4. Universal scope
 - German lieder: profound feeling and beauty
 - Classical stature of African-American spirituals (as arranged)
 - Both express universal emotions

Resources Needed:

Class Preparation:

Some knowledge of and listening experience to the four main voice types (soprano, alto, tenor, bass.)

Some classroom discussion of these concepts may also be beneficial:

1. The beauty of the human singing voice.
2. The voice as a musical instrument – study, practice.
3. The Art Song as a concentrated drama – conflict, characters, etc.
4. Lieder and Spirituals as compared to popular songs: intent and effect.

Recordings:

“Der Tod und das Mädchen” [D. 531] (“Death and the Maiden”)

Franz Schubert, poem by Matthias Claudius

recording date: May 10, 1946; Franz Rupp at the piano

CD: *MARIAN ANDERSON - Bach * Brahms * Schubert*

The RCA Victor Vocal Series # 7911-2 RG c. 1989

“Oh! What a Beautiful City” (Spiritual arr. by Edward Boatner)

recording date: 1942, Franz Rupp at the piano

CD: *MARIAN ANDERSON - Softly Awakes my Heart*

Living Era, Original Mono Recordings from 1928-1946, ASV CD AJA 5262

Text:

English translation of the text of Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*:

THE MAIDEN

Vorüber, ach, vorüber!
Geh, wilder Knochenmann!
Ich bin noch jung, geh, Lieber!
Und rühre mich nicht an.

Pass me by, oh, pass me by!
Go, dreadful skeleton!
I am still young. Go, my dear,
and do not disturb me.

DEATH

Gib dein Hand, du schön und zart Gebild!
Bin Freund und komme nich zu strafen.
Sei guten Muts! Ich bin nich wild,
sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen.

Give me your hand, you fair and gentle creature!
I am a friend, I come not to punish.
Be of good cheer. I am not harsh,
you will sleep softly in my arms.

courtesy EMI Records Ltd.

Approx. Time Required: Varies from a 40 minute lesson to several lessons.

Skills Learned:

- Listening for specific musical elements
- Hearing the unity of words and music
- Hearing characters portrayed through music

Ideas for Lesson Plans:

Preface: The ideas presented here are intended to serve as a resource and offer suggestions for music lesson plans. We leave to each teacher's discretion and judgment the actual forming of lesson plans, since the amount of content that is useful, the pacing, the formulation of questions, the level of musical training, etc. is particular to each teacher and each class.

Possible Methods and Approaches: "Death and the Maiden"

1. Read aloud the translated text of "Death and the Maiden." A large chart on the board could be used, or a handout distributed to the class.
 - The poem easily lends itself to two voices, one for each character. Form two groups among the class. Assign one group the character of the Maiden and one group the character of Death.
 - Experiment within each group: find ways to speak the words in character. Use tempo, dynamics tone, etc. Bring out contrasts between the two characters.
 - How would you set this poem to music? What kind of mood? Solo voice, or for many voices? In how many parts? How fast? What musical elements would be needed?
 - Listen to the recording. Compare with the class's ideas.
 - Extension: Discuss the relationship between the Maiden and Death. How do they feel about each other? Why?
2. Another approach would be to listen to the recording first, without the benefit of text or title. Do say that it is in German. However, the class is asked to be a musical detective, to find out things about the song just from the musical sounds.
 - What is the song about? Is it lighthearted? Energized? Nervous? Ominous? What is the story?
 - Who is singing (i.e. who are the characters in the song)? What do you think they are saying?
 - What musical elements let you know what they are saying? Be specific.
 - How do you feel at the end of the song?
 - Listen again and take note of the clues: piano accompaniment, the use of the voice, the melodic contrasts, harmonies.
 - Withhold the title until the discussion reaches its peak.
 - Read title and text (in English.) Then hear the song again.
 - Follow up with discussion.

Musical Analysis of "Death and the Maiden"

1. Piano accompaniment helps "paint the picture" or "set the stage"
 - Opening chords are like a death knoll.
 - When the voice enters, the piano's rapid chords add to the sense of urgency.
 - The accompaniment changes back to the style of the introduction when Death sings.

- The concluding passage is like the opening, but now in major chords. This symbolizes the final resting.
2. Melody and Vocal Line suit each character's emotions.
 - The maiden's vocal line is soprano. It climbs higher and higher in short spurts. She sounds almost breathless.
 - The Maiden's short phrases demonstrate urgency. She sings her words quickly. When excited or agitated, this is how we speak.
 - Death has a chant-like melody line, like a dirge – a single repeated tone, first very low, then somewhat higher.
 - The voice is contralto, deep and dark, like Death itself.
 - The final deepest tones are on the German word for "sleep."
 3. Voice Quality and Expressiveness changes for each character.
 - The Maiden: lighter, louder, more energy.
 - Death: darker, more serious, softer and sweeter.
 4. Harmony
 - Notice the minor chords and hymn like harmonies for Death. Death also has a remarkably slow harmonic motion.
 - The Maiden's part is set with more altered and dominant chords, and has a rapid harmonic motion.

Methods and Approaches: Follow-up lesson with "Oh! What a Beautiful City"

1. State the title of the song, and introduce it as an African-American spiritual, arranged for concerts. Marian Anderson finds a way to use both her clear soprano and deep contralto ranges. How? When?
2. Play the recording once. Discuss.
3. Activity: Show the range of the voice, on the piano. Have the class sing it, as a scale, up and down. (A-flat below middle C to E-flat 1 and ½ octaves higher.) Notice how the quality of the vocalized sound changes as you move between registers.
4. The song describes a city. What is said about the city? (Beautiful, 12 gates, 4 directions) What other descriptions are there?
5. Play the recording again. (4-square, etc.)
6. How does Marian Anderson let you know she thinks it's a beautiful city through her performance? What in the singing lets us know? (Examples: warmth of tone, enthusiasm, sincerity, clear diction.)
7. Activity: Ask individual students to say the word "beautiful" (or the full title of the song) in such a way that it conveys the sincere feeling of beauty. (No jokers please!)
8. Notice how the song is set to imitate speech.
9. Activity: Learn this spiritual as a class.

Musical Analysis: "Oh! What a Beautiful City"

1. Piano accompaniment sets a cheerful, joyful mood. Note the use of piano registers.
2. Melody:
 - the chorus is melodic, made of skips
 - the verses, more heralding, use repeated notes and steps
3. Form clear from the melody: A –B- A- B- A
4. Dynamics are used similarly, to coincide with the melody as a means of expressiveness
 - the "beautiful" is softer, lyrical
 - the city's description is proclaimed louder

Assessment and Follow-up (to ensure goals and objectives were met):

1. Design a chart with columns on the board.

- Vertical columns with headings “Maiden” and “Death”
- Horizontal columns for musical elements (melody, rhythm, phrasing, etc.)

Have the students fill in this chart.

2. Using percussion instruments, create an improvised piece inspired by “Death and the Maiden.” (Suggestion: use instruments with long, deep tones for Death and instruments capable of higher, shorter tones for the Maiden.)