

Lieder and The Spiritual: Two Mainstays of Marian Anderson's Concerts

Lesson Type: Humanities/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: 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

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 (and, if applicable, by historical period, composer, and title) 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
- Compare, in several cultures of the world, functions music serves, roles of musicians, and conditions under which music is typically performed

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:

Students will gain an understanding of two different musical forms that were a fundamental part of Marian Anderson's musical life.

Objectives:

1. Compare and contrast the use of words, story and even drama, in a **lied** and a **spiritual**.
2. Explore the role of the composer in the setting of words and creation of the musical "world" of both forms.

Resources Needed:

The CDs *Marian Anderson: Schubert & Schumann Lieder* (BMG) and *Prima Voce: Marian Anderson* (Musical Heritage Society). Both CD's are in print and are widely available in library systems.

Approx. Time Required: 1 class period

Skills Learned:

- To develop sensitivity to poetry and its close connection to music.
- To become aware of the composer's craft, and his/her ability to create musical worlds in the service of words.

Lesson:

“What’s the difference between a **poem**, **lyrics** and **words**?”

(Get some responses from the class)

“Actually, if you’re a composer, and it’s your job to put them to music, they’re pretty much the same thing. Sometimes composers write their own words when they compose a song, or they work with a **lyricist**, someone who writes the words for them. The composer can even take the words of a **poet**, or an author who’s no longer alive! But composers always try to make their music fit the words they’ve chosen.

“Today we’re going to look at two poems that were set to music and became songs that Marian Anderson sang at her concerts. The first was used by Franz Schubert (1797-1828.) Schubert often used the poetry of great authors such as Goethe and Shakespeare to create **lieder**, German art songs accompanied by piano. Lieder are considered by many to be the most advanced type of composition for the voice. The poem that he used for the song that we’ll hear today is by *Schubart* (no relation!).

“Let’s read the poem before we hear Marian Anderson sing the resulting **lied** (singular of lieder).

(Class reads poem with teacher)

“What’s the story here? Who are the “players”? What does the narrator want in this scene? What does the fisherman want? Is the “tone” of the poem “tragic”(very serious)? Can you imagine this story in your head as you hear the poem? Can you see this little drama by the sparkling stream? Who do you sympathize with in this story?

The Trout (German Title: Die Forelle)

In the sparkling little brook
Hurrying happily
The moody trout
Shot past like an arrow.
Standing on the shore
I watched peacefully
The spritely fish as it swam
In the clear little brook.

A fisherman with a rod
Also stood there on the bank,
And watched cold-heartedly
As the little fish swam about.
As long as the water stays clear
Or so I thought, not broken up,
He won’t get the trout
On his hook.

But in the end the wait was too long
For the fisherman. He made
The little brook muddy,
And before I knew,
He yanked up his rod,
The little fish struggling there,
And throbbing with frustration
I looked at the poor tricked fish.

“Imagine music now for this poem: *write down some words that might describe the feeling that you would bring to the music if you were composer.*

(Share these feelings and discuss)

“Now, let’s listen to the music Franz Schubert wrote for “The Trout.” The words are in German, but the music should tell you most of what you need to know.

(Play Marion Anderson singing “Die Forelle,” Track 6 *Marian Anderson: Schubert & Schumann Lieder*)

“Even though the words are in a foreign language, can you hear the story of the trout in this music? Where do we hear the sound of the fish darting about? The rising notes of the repeated piano figure, called an **ostinato**, brings the little trout to life. Schubert loves to “play” with musical ideas to set the stage of his little drama.

“In the main **melody** sung by Anderson, Schubert portrays the narrator’s attitude about the fish. Is she bored? Unhappy? When does the music change from one of delight to take a “darker tone”? Perhaps this is where the fisherman muddies up the waters to trick the trout. Schubert’s attention to detail all through this **lied** almost makes us think of a painter capturing a little scene in oils. When the fish is finally captured, the ostinato slows, ending the song, in the same way that the fish’s life must come to an end.

“Let’s now read another poem, the words of a **spiritual** that Marian Anderson made famous through her performances. It’s about another body of moving water, only this time it’s not a sparkling brook, but a wide river.

Deep River

Deep river, my home is over Jordan
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground
Deep river, my home is over Jordan
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground

Oh, don’t you want to go to that gospel feast
That promised land where all is peace?
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground

“Does this poem tell a story the same way that “The Trout” did? Are there “characters” like the ones we had in that poem? What do the repetition of the words “deep river” and “I want to cross over into campground” do? Is it a detailed scene, like “The Trout” or is it something else? Is it about going camping by a river? Why or why not?

“Maybe the key to the meaning of the words is the repetition of “I want.” This spiritual, like so many others, has lyrics that suggest a sense of longing, of wanting something better in life. That’s because the words (and melodies) were created not by specific people (at least none that are known to us) but rather by *a people*, the black slaves who expressed their desire for freedom through these folk songs. There is drama in spirituals, but different from the kind in “The Trout”. It is the drama of a people’s struggle to survive.

“**Spirituals** were passed down orally for many generations, until people like W.T. Burleigh, an African-American composer who loved the songs, realized that he must make **settings** of the songs if they were to survive. He used his skills as an arranger to create piano and orchestral accompaniments for as many as he could, letting the words and the simple melodies shine

through. Burleigh was the arranger of “Deep River,” but many African-American composers wrote settings of spirituals.”

“If you were a composer or arranger for these words, what kind of feelings or mood would you bring to the music? *Write down some words ideas.*”

(Share these ideas and discuss)

“Now let’s listen to “Deep River” as arranged by H.T. Burleigh.

(Play “Deep River”, performed by Marian Anderson, selection 16 from *Prima Voce: Marian Anderson*)

“Notice the simple chords which begin the piece. The composer W.T. Burleigh doesn’t want to get in the way of the feelings communicated by the words and melody of this old folk song. What feelings do you hear? Can you imagine the audience reaction when Anderson hit the high note on the words “promised land”? Can you sense the longing of an entire people in the way Anderson sings “Deep River”? Her passionate renditions of over 100 spirituals brought them to the attention of the world, and put them literally on the same stage as the traditional art songs, the lieder. This was a great accomplishment for a singer, and a lasting gift to the world of music.”

Extensions of Activity: Franz Schubert’s ability to paint pictures in sound is hard to deny! Play “Erlkönig” (“The Elf-King,” selection 2) “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (“Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel,” selection 4) and “Wohin?” (“Where to?,” selection 10) from *Marian Anderson: Schubert & Schumann Lieder*.

Question: In which piece does the piano create the sound of:

- 1) A stream flowing through a valley?
- 2) A father desperately riding on his horse through the night to save his child?
- 3) A sad girl working at her spinning wheel?

Closure/Reflection: Although her work in opera represents only a small portion of her career, there is no doubt that Marian Anderson was a wonderful singing actress. When we listen to her renditions of German lieder and the African-American spirituals, so different in sound and meaning, it’s amazing that one vocal artist could excel at both!

Assessment and Follow-up: “Mix” various spirituals (selections from the latter part of “Prima Voce”) with lieder from “Marian Anderson: Schubert & Schumann Lieder”.

- Aside from the language, what makes the lieder different from the spirituals? How does Anderson’s performance style differ in each?
- Do your students have a preference for one or the other?
- Have them write about their reactions as specifically as possible.