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Responses To Twentieth Century Music: A High School Art Curriculum

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Twentieth Century artists needed to free themselves of the past, yet paint and write music with its power. As a result they responded to the immediate impressions around them. These impressions came in the form of new architecture, advanced technology and electronics. In America, the reaction against everything European was very strong. Twentieth century artists and musicians wanted to establish their own identities. This strain of individualism has been an American trademark before. It is a recurrent theme since the eighteenth century, and the myths inherent in this part in the individual's creative struggle to identify and redefine himself is at the basis of what this curriculum unit is about. It was a period that brought forth new forms of expression in both Black music and Jazz and Painting. Hopefully this will be one objective for students in this high school art curriculum; namely to find forms of new expression within themselves by communicating through the music that they hear in class and making art to accompany it.

Background

Originators of early Negro music spirituals created sounds by which they could communicate. These drumlike sounds were used as an underground form of communication for their own freedom. The messages which sounded like drum beats were made by the beat of their feet. The slaves, mostly, used music and rhythm to make their burdens lighter, to restore their spirits when they were drained of courage. Their sorrow songs or "spirituals" became the basis of black music in America. These musical sounds are the subsoil of our twentieth century music. Jazz came out of the subsoil. Blues, jazz, rock and roll; all these musical forms originated from black roots. By the time the slaves had been emancipated they had given to America the seeds of their musical heritage from Africa.

Certainly, artists of the early twentieth century were attracted to music and jazz and they integrated this attraction into their art. Just as Georgia O'Keefe and Marsden Hartley had experimented with drawings and paintings to create sensations in sound, so too did Arthur Dove (1888-1947). From December 1927 to January 1928 he showed a group of paintings at the Intimate Gallery six of which were given over to musical themes and a number were collages. "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise", George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue", part 1, "Orange Groves in California", and Irving Berlin's, "Rhythm Rag" and "Improvisation" were names of several of his pieces of art on exhibit. He had become much interested in the melodies coming over the radio. Experimenting with sounds, he had worked out his shorthand system that recorded sounds as music does on a scale. The musical scales were used vertically and the sounds were written by movements that were linear instead of notes. "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Rhapsody in Blue" are near as Dove comes to

language of music. The musical pieces were done to speed the line up to the pace at which we live today. They are expressed in terms of color as music in terms of sound. In the following year, "Fog Horns" are painted as images which swell out and blast from their caverns as smoke rings out of canons. For the exhibit, Alfred Steiglitz published notes about Arthur Dove which described his musical pieces as music for the eyes but not the ears.

Later on, artists who were the exponents of the Abstract Expressionist "New York School" were to follow in similar footsteps. Stuart Davis was for a long time a good friend of Arshile Gorky. In a memoir on Gorky, he related that when Gorky had a few drinks, he would try out his native dances and songs, but that in Davis's circle, only jazz was admired. The streets of New York became a mystical source of creativity and artists like de Kooning felt the mounting heat of creative activity in the city to be a true inspiration. Sounds of jazz came out of doorways and pubs. Besides de Kooning; Hans Hofman, Mark Rothko, Milton Avery, Jackson Pollack and Grace Hartigan made work that speaks to us musically. Implicit in the revolt against realism, the artists struggled against mass culture artist who renounced the language of the masses, suffered the shame of being declassé and a solitary traveler. Until the myth of the artist as inspired soothsayer took root in the nineteenforties, the American painter was almost always caught in his own conflicting desire to be wholly individualistic and at the same time a member of his society.

Objectives

For the unit, certain objectives are crucial in achieving our goals. Some objectives are to be long range, others short range. A long range objective will be to promote in the art room an atmosphere of self expression. By responding to music played in the classroom and creating a piece of art, certain intuitive and spontaneous traits will be more strongly developed. The students will be able to explore their own responses to sound by hearing the music as a regular part of the class structure. It will meet three times a week for an hour and a half. With this in mind, we will introduce various themes or sounds of jazz each day. The sounds heard will have been structured through out the eight week period. The goal to translate sound into art will familiarize the student with a large variety of sounds. His sensibility to music will hopefully improve. Some long range developments will be;

To develop the students' sense of rhythm, beat and listening abilities.

To develop an awareness that certain art evokes certain sounds and moods.

To develop an awareness that certain sounds evoke certain color.

To develop the realization that we all relate differently to different sounds, yet certain truths exist, ie., some pieces are higher pitched, some lower, some sounds are universal expressions of loneliness, others of joy.

To develop the students intuitive responses to the music.

To develop the students ability to talk about the music.

To develop the students ability to talk about the art. (art done by twentieth century artists / art done by himself.)

To talk about the instruments in the pieces. How do we respond to the different instruments?

To talk about color and how we respond to it.

To talk about composition in his work and how it can create mood and sensations of joy or confusion.

To talk about all resemblances that jazz has to twentieth century art.

Some other general objectives include appreciation and understanding of abstract art. This objective is the longest range objective because it takes a great deal of familiarizing and doing before this occurs. It very well may not occur in the time which the unit occurs. Students who may otherwise not appreciate abstract art and appreciate jazz, may learn to enjoy the art through an appreciation of the music.

Strategies

A basic structure and plan to represent the eight themes will follow.

Week I—JAZZ INSTRUMENTAL—three lessons

Week II—JAZZ VOICE—three lessons

Week III—RAGTIME—three lessons

Week IV—RHYTHM & BLUES—three lessons

Week V—POPULAR THEMES FOR MOVIES & T.V.—three lessons

Week VI—SPIRITUALS & GOSPEL—three lessons

Week VII—AMERICAN SYMPHONY—three lessons

Week VIII—POPULAR SONGS—three lessons

What strategies can be used to elicit responses from the students about the music that is played? As has been explained before the classes will be held three times weekly during which the students will both work at art and listen to music. A selection of about five or six albums and tapes will be played and of the ones played, each student is to choose one for his artwork. This will require some brief preliminary samples to be played at the beginning of the class. To promote an atmosphere in which to freely explore the music there should be easy accessibility to tapes, records and art reproductions. Set up a LIBRARY RESOURCE CENTER area.

There should be easy accessibility and arrangement of art supplies.

There should be an ideal physical layout of art room so each one can work to his highest capacity.

Classroom Layout

This needs to function with the unit. It should have an open and unencumbered quality, allowing for easy access for materials. On one side of the room is the sink where the trays and brushes and sponges are stationed. On the other side is a paint closet with shelves of paints arranged in colors in some orderly manner. The paints are in plastic squeeze bottles which allows easy use. Newspapers are stacked along the side. In another cabinet are India inks, smaller brushes and water trays for washes. This cabinet holds glue and scissors on another shelf, cutting knives, pastels and some craypas. The students work best when no more than three to a table. Since there will be specific materials that are available, the students should become familiar with their placement for facility and good work habits. Finally there will be a line to hang wet art in progress, and a large display board for exhibiting artwork. A wide variety of art papers is a necessity.

Demonstrations

During the first few weeks, three demonstrations will be scheduled. These will involve showing how to execute various techniques; one on pen and ink washes, another on complementary colors which involves an understanding of the color wheel. The final demonstration will be making a relief print out of styrofoam. During the demonstrations we can listen to some jazz tapes and get responses by engaging the students to participate in the demonstrations. Afterwards, they will be asked to make their own drawings and responses. During these demonstrations each section of the art room is pointed out for its function. A discussion of the need for good work habits and returning tapes and illustrations to the resource center where they belong.

Strategies in more detail:

1. Listening and responding with art.

Let us suppose that we are listening to Louis Armstrong play his trumpet in a Dixieland arrangement. Ask the students to think of the following:

What is the music telling you?

Is the pitch high or low?

Is it fast or slow?

What is the timbre or mood of the instruments? Alone or Together?

What colors do you hear?

What lines do you see? Are they horizontal? Are they vertical? Are they diagonal?

How can we best translate this into drawing?

Make two drawings of the sound of this piece, and choose the better one. Why is this drawing a better response to the music?

The themes cover a span of sounds, names of musicians (listed in the back pages) and styles of music. Because they are so diverse, students will want to choose for themselves. They can respond imaginatively and intuitively. There is no demand to work with a realistic image. If the music suggests a realistic place or theme, they may choose to work with realism. The student's choice will indicate his interpretation of the piece. Whatever the mood, the student will draw from his own experiences and put them into his art. Listening to a new piece, the student will ask himself what he responds to and why? Does he respond to the rhythm, the tone, or the style and instrumental mood? Making the art and choosing some materials to work with is his next effort.

- Looking
at the
art and
2. relating
it to
the
music.

If we compare the two xeroxed compositions which are Arthur Doves musical compositions, we can discover two very different responses to sound.

Foghorns

(figure available in print form)

Rhapsody in Blue #1

(figure available in print form)

In approaching a lesson through the painting the teacher might ask the students to think back to the sounds that would have inspired the painting. In the painting “Foghorns”, there is a rhythmic and lyrical placement of concentric circles and horizontals. There are no harsh value contrasts. All the tones blend with one another without making shrill noises. The noise of the boundaries of each foghorn seems cushioned by its soft contrasts to itself and the environment. The space feels endless as does the potential for the persisting nature of the low hornlike sounds. There are no busy lines which direct us away from the center. All is concentrated on the three concentrically drawn circles and horizontal shoreline. They make a dull low sound pushing in and out into the distance. The large amorphous shape in the foreground, which suggests the shoreline, seems to answer the dull low sounds back in a brighter tone, or else it may act as a receiver to those low tones.

In contrast, the “Rhapsody In Blue” piece, offers a noisier composition. Staccato lines jump around in a rhythm which suggests that the music has a direction yet the rhythm is quite turbulent. In parts it erupts into a scherzoid format. Elliptical shapes and sharp wavelike lines rise up and down in a vertical pattern. In fact, the verticality is strongly reminiscent of New York City, and the sweeps and the jumps allude to a closed in space where one seems to return to the same place, or to the same theme. Since this piece is based on music that we are familiar with, there is a lively sense of recognition after we can make the connections. The composition has lines that are broken and choppy and has some sweeping lines. The melody soars in and out of the choppy lines.

3. Looking and listening

In this segment of the unit we can look at art done by some abstract expressionists and listen to some jazz music.

Twentieth Century Jazz

1. Thelonius Monk— *Epistrophy*
- 2 . Jolan Coltrane— *My Favorite Things*

- 3 . Miles Davis— *Moondreams*
- 4 . Chick Corea— *Mourning of the Star*
- 5 . Sonny Rollins— *Live at the Vanguard*
- 6 . Herbie Hancock— *Maiden Voyage*

Twentieth Century Art

1. Philip Guston— *Painting*
- 2 . Grace Hartigan— *City Life*
- 3 . Franz Kline— *White Forms*
- 4 . Marsden Hartley— *Musical Composition*
- 5 . Arshille Gorky— *The Pirate*
- 6 . de Kooning— *Composition*

(examples of art on following page)

- Seeing the film, “Jazz at Newport”, can help for a deeper understanding of jazz men and their sounds. Again, we can relate the images of the movie to a piece done by Stuart Davis “Report 4. From Rockport.” It is a painting about a Massachusetts coast town, very fragmented, with glaring flat colors and jagged bobbing shapes which again seems like a metaphor for the film whose nervous syncopations of jazz and jazz men are a keynote of the times.

PART DEMONSTRATIONS & LESSON PLANS **II**

Demonstration I —Linear Relief Prints in Styrofoam

Objectives

1. How to cut out a simple relief print and print it.
2. How to print multiples.
3. How to interchange colors while you print.
4. How to make an offset or reverse print.
5. How to develop tidy efficient work habits when printing.

(figure available in print form)

Materials

1. white paper 8" x 10"
2. cutting tools (nails, blades and wires)
3. pencils
4. styrofoam trays
5. printing inks (black and colors)
6. paper towels
7. newspapers
8. sponges and rollers
9. glass plates for rolling ink

Technique demonstration—How to cut the styrofoam:

To demonstrate different linear effects in the styrofoam.
To demonstrate how to use tools appropriately.

Printing the relief print

1. Roll the ink over the relief drawing cut into styrofoam.
2. Place the paper on top of the inked styrofoam.
3. With a dry roller, press back of paper against styrofoam.
4. Peel off paper and hang up print on line to dry.
5. You may make a reverse or offset print by printing a second time off a very wet print.

Clean Up A sheet of directions for clean up is handed out.

LESSON PLAN I—PART II PRINTMAKING AND MUSICAL THEMES

Aim Communicating a musical theme through a colored print.

Objectives

- To learn how to make a relief print.
- To design a symbol with your tools which communicates the theme you have chosen.
- To use colors to convey the mood or spirit of the theme.
- To use the printmaking technique for designing and making art.

The first part of this lesson was devoted to listening to a variety of jazz themes and popular themes written for television and film. By now, the class has heard a variety of music and the students have made sketches about the music they want to work with. Today they choose their best sketch. This sketch will be simplified or condensed into a relief print.

Musical Themes from Television

L .A. LAW
BILL COSBY SHOW
CHEERS
GUNSMOKE
HILL STREET BLUES
MOONLIGHTING

Musical Themes from Film

BACK TO THE FUTURE
GHOSTBUSTERS
BATMAN
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA
AN AMERICAN IN PARIS
FIELD OF DREAMS

1. Choose the drawing you like best for the musical theme that you have chosen.

Questions

Does the symbol communicate the theme?

What lines in your drawing are most effective for communicating the theme?

2. Using the tools you have been given, interpret the drawing into a print by cutting lines into the styrofoam. Experiment with different marks while the music is playing.

MATERIALS were listed in the demonstration. (see above)

3. When it is time to print, choose carefully the color or colors you will need. Print in a variety of colors.
4. Choose the finished prints that you like the best.
Arrange the prints into a composition (after cutting them out or the parts you like). These
5. can be used in a collage format or just present one print as a finished response to the musical theme you have chosen.
6. Label the print with your name, the name of the music, and the date in the lower part of the piece.
This lesson can last more than one class because the printing will take one period or two. Then the assemblage and final presentation will take another session.
7. Class critique—Final part

Questions

1. Does the symbol communicate the theme?
2. Does the color enhance the theme?
3. Does the composition or arrangement communicate well?
4. Does texture communicate and add to the whole?
5. Is the repeat effective?
6. Where is the music best sensed? in color? in line? in composition?

DEMONSTRATION II—How to make India ink wash drawings.

Objectives

1. How to use pen and ink with a wash drawing.

2. How to work with a variety of gray tones.
3. How to interpret a mood landscape with a variety of washes.

Materials

1. pointed brushes
2. India ink
3. pens
4. water trays
5. white drawing paper

Technique

1. Make four different gradations of gray wash.
2. With brush, apply wash to paper.
3. With brush, apply a darker wash. Add pen line.
4. With brush, apply wash to paper. Add line while still wet.
5. Use the washes to make an imaginary landscape. (Think of a season and a time of the day)

Questions for Critique

1. What happens when you add a line to a wet wash?
2. What happens when you add a darker wash to a lighter wash?
3. What good is it to leave some whites of the paper showing? Why?

LESSON PLAN II—Responding to symphonic mood with colored ink and wash drawings.

Aim To communicate a symphonic mood with colored ink drawings.

Objectives

1. To learn how to use colored inks as we saw in the earlier demonstration.
2. To convey the mood of music to paper.

3. to use color as an added incentive for expressing a mood and the sound of the symphony you have just chosen.

American Symphony to choose from

Aaron Copland— *Rodeo, Appalachian Spring*

Leonard Bernstein— *West Side Story*

George Gershwin— *Rhapsody in Blue , An American In Paris*

Directions

1. After listening to the music, choose the piece that appeals to you. Make some quick sketches in line. Use the IDEA of PLACE to make the drawing match the piece.
2. Choose the line drawing you like best and use the idea for your colored wash drawing.

Materials

These are the same as in the demonstration. The colored inks will be a new addition. Also afterwards you may add craypas and colored chalk for color highlights.

Questions for Critique

1. Is the pace of the music fast or slow? What kind of place does it suggest?
2. Is the mood agitated, mellow or cool? What will the composition have? more horizontals? more verticals?
3. Can you attach a color to the sounds you hear?
4. Can you describe your music in tones of one color or two?
5. What are the limitations of the sound? Are the boundaries close or far?
6. Does one sound follow another at equal intervals? Are they at unpredictable intervals?
7. Are the tones you hear light, dark or murky?
8. Should the surface of the brush strokes be smooth or rough?
9. Does the art communicate the music you have heard?

DEMONSTRATION III—Using complimentary colors

Objectives

1. To learn about the format of the color wheel.
2. To learn how to mix secondary colors.
3. To use the complimentary colors for mixing and changing the intensity of primary colors.

Materials

1. White paper 12" x 10"
2. brushes
3. water jars
4. sponges
5. paper towels and palettes

Technique Demonstration

- To mix the secondary colors
- To make a color wheel
- To make new colors by adding complimentary colors.

LESSON PLAN III—Making painting about the sounds of jazz

Aim To make sounds with line, shape and color.

Objectives

- To learn the power of the use of color to imitate sound.
- To choose a sound (a voice or an instrument) to imitate with color.
- To vary the colors by subtle mixing of complementary colors. *To change the intensity of sound.*

Jazz Selections

Sonny Rollins, *Live at the Vanguard*
Lee Morgan & Herbie Hancock, *Cornbread*
Dexter Gordon, *Billy's Bounce*
Chick Corea & Gary Burton, *Duet*
Cannonball Adderly & Ray Brown, *Two for the Blues*
Stan Getz, *Another Time. Another Place*
John Coltrane, *Coltrane Jazz*
Miles Davis, *Odyssey of Isha*
Chick Corea, *Mourning of a Star*
Gerry Mulligan, *Gerry's Time*
Herbie Hancock, *Maiden Voyage*

Directions

1. After listening to the jazz pieces, choose the recording that appeals to your senses.
2. What is it that you want to respond to? The instrument? The voice? How can you interpret the sounds in color and line?
3. Choose a color for the sound.
4. What kind of lines will describe the tempo, the rhythm?
5. Make two drawings in color and line while you are listening to the music.

Materials

These are the same as the demonstration.

Questions for Critique

1. Have you mixed at least four new colors by adding the complementary color? What does it do to the original color?

2. Have you used the complementary color to dull the sounds that you see? Where is there an effective use of complimentary color?
3. Where is color used to create dull sound? loud sound? high sound? shrill sound? Describe it in your own words.
4. Which art best responds to the music you have heard? Why?
5. Does the kind of mood you want to express make the same sound in the painting?

Library Resource Materials for Students and Teachers

Recordings:

Cannonball Adderly—Ray Brown, *Two for the Blues* (VSPVSPS10)

Johnny Hodges, *Alto Blue* (VSPVSPS20, 1958)

Stan Getz, *Another Time. Another Place* (VSPVSPS22)

Gerry Mulligan, *Gerry's Time* (VSPVSPS6)

Horse Silver and the Jazz Messengers (Blue Note 89470, 1979)

Miles Davis, *Odyssey of Ishmael* (Blue Note 84363, 1970)

Moondreams (Capital 459, 1948)

John Coltrane, *Coltrane Jazz*—(Atlantic 1354)

My Favorite Things

Thelonius Monk, *Epistrophy* (Blue Note 1510, 1948)

Herbie Hancock, *Maiden Voyage* (Blue Note, 84195)

Sonny Rollins, *Live at the Village Vanguard* (Blue Note 81581, 1957)

Lee Morgan & Herbie Hancock, *Cornbread* (Blue Note 84822, 1963)

Dexter Gordon, *Billy's Bounce* (Steeplechase 6028, 1964)

Chick Corea & Gary Burton, *Duet* (ECM1—1140, 1978)

Louis Armstrong, *The Essential Louis Armstrong*, (Vanguard 91.92, 1986)

George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, (Columbia CL1274, 1958) *American in Paris* (CBS 42516)

Aaron Copeland, *Rodeo*, *Appalachian Spring* (RCA Gold Seal 6802)

Leonard Bernstein, *West Side Story* , (DG 415253)

Keith Jarrett, *The Koln Concert* (ECM 1064/65,1975)

The Mourning of a Star (Atlantic Recording, SD1596)

Oscar Peterson Trio, *Night Train* (Verve V68538)

Chick Corea, *Inner Space* (Atlantic SD 2305, 1972)

Anton Dvorak, *New World Symphony* (RCA, LSC2214, 1958)

Aretha Franklin, *Amazing Grace* (Atlantic 78645,1978)

Videos

Sonny Rollins in Japan

Jazz at Newport

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