



Teaching Music Through its Relationship to History: with the Use of Film, Video and the Specious Present

Guide for Curriculum Unit 98.01.10
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In the teaching of music, history, with the use of film and video, I am reminded of a saying of Leonard Bernstein, noted musician, composer and music educator, *The Unanswered Question*, page 3. "The best way to 'know' a thing is in context of another discipline." Musicians have gained valuable information on how to perform or study music through an examination of history. To have students gain an experience to guide them in performance and study of composers explored during this curriculum unit, I present a concept talked about at length by the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok called the "Specious Present." This concept is the ability to imagine one's self in detail in a different time period.

The central theme or concept of "Specious Present" binding all disciplines together in the development of this unit is to have students gain an understanding of different time periods as they relate to the present times of which they are aware, and how our personal views and opinions can either obscure or provide insight as to understanding their past.

The books and movies used are as follows:

1. "Amadeus" (which was taken from the play by Peter Shaffer and was turned into a film by Milos Forman)
2. "Immortal Beloved" (a movie about Beethoven which focuses on the early Nineteenth Century made by Bernard Rose)
3. "2001 A Space Odyssey" by Stanley Kubrick.
4. "Apollo 13" by William Broyles
5. "Malcolm X" Spike Lee's film based on the book *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley
6. *The Beethoven Companion*, edited by Thomas K. Scherman and Louis Biancolli
7. *Mozart Speaks: Views on Music, Musicians, and the World*, by Robert Marshall

The reason I use the movie "2001" is because of Kubrick's masterful use of music in its relationship to history, Strauss's portrayal of eternity and prehistoric man. Kubrick sets his view of human history with the grace and profound awareness of human mortality painted against the almost eternal presence of space through the

composers of music's romantic time period.

The use of "Apollo 13" is so that younger students might get a more tangible, concrete experience through the actual events shown in this film. This film makes a good pair with "2001." The music score is also very good because it coordinates well with the plot, theme and action visually.

"Amadeus" is a great film to use due to the brilliant use of Mozart's music to both portray his own life and the film score function of the movie. The use of Salieri's point of view is actually the point of view of the author.

"Immortal Beloved," as "Apollo 13" is paired with "2001," gives younger students a concrete look at the life of Beethoven and the reality of his disability. This film works well with the showing of "Amadeus" as they both share the same time period and Mozart had an influence on his life.

In Spike Lee's film "Malcolm X," students share an experience about both prejudice and the 60's decade and the "language" of film. The photographic medium and techniques expand the use of film as language with a historical touch of music from our present time period of the late 20th century. Blanchard's use of film scoring is moving and easy to follow for students of the art of film scoring. Both Lee and Blanchard tie into the Pulitzer prize winning oratorio "Blood on the Fields" by Wynton Marsalis that touches on 1619 and the reality of Middle Passage; this composition also relates to Duke Ellington's work "Black, Brown and Beige." One might use this unit with the new film release "He Got Game" also by Spike Lee, which also uses Aaron Copland's music which is combined with the popular music group Public Enemy as a film score.

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