

Classical Music Appreciation (Grades 5-6 / Lesson 3)

Summary

Using excerpts from Chopin's 'Waltz in C Minor', students explore the waltz form and discuss how art and culture are shaped by historical events.

Materials

Classical Music Start-Up Kit CD 1 and CD player with timer; Space for students to move around; Instructions on how to waltz (W - 11)

Background for Teachers

Composer Profile

Composer

Frederic Chopin

Nationality

Polish French

Birth - Death

1810-1849

Excerpt

Waltz in C Minor

Era

Romantic

Frederic Chopin is one of the most beloved composers of music for the modern piano. He exhibited great talent as a child and developed impressive skill) and touch on what was then a fairly new instrument. Before Chopin, no one had really pushed the piano to its expressive limits. He used the highest and lowest notes (the piano is capable of playing a wider range of notes than any other instrument) and the effects of the foot pedals to their fullest advantage. But he was a small and sickly man who contracted tuberculosis in his mid-twenties, so he never had the strength to perform loud, forceful pieces or in front of large audiences.

This piece was one of a number of works that Chopin created that took advantage of the popularity of the waltz. It Was not meant to be danced to, but was a variation on the waltz form that he wrote for parlor performances.

Before class, listen to Chopin's Waltz in C Minor (selection 2) and practice counting out the waltz time. ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three. You'll notice that at about 0:34, the pace picks up considerably, and counting along becomes more difficult. You'll also want to try doing the square waltz step (see diagram, W -11) with the music so that you can demonstrate it for the students.

Vocabulary

minuet

- a slow, stately pattern dance, done in 3/4 time. The most popular social dance in aristocratic society from the mid-17th century to the late 18th century

quadrille

- a ballroom dance with an elaborate set of steps, danced by sets of 4, 6, or 8 couples.

pattern dance

- a dance whose movements trace a prescribed figure on the dance floor

3/4 time

- a musical meter in which each bar consists of 3 quarter notes.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will explore the waltz form and discuss how art and culture are shaped by historical events.

Instructional Procedures

See CMA Table of Contents See composer's profile and picture:

Activity

Without telling them that they are about to learn a dance step, have the students stand up next to their desks and, using the instructional diagrams on W -11 as your guide, teach the students the Square Waltz Step. Count the time for them slowly--ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three--and have them practice the steps, each time counting a little faster. Once they begin to get the hang of it you may wish to pair the students up and have them try doing the step face-to-face (one student will have to do the steps backwards). If the students don't guess that they're dancing a waltz, tell them that they're learning a basic version of the most popular dance of all time.

Listen

Now for a little fun. Play the first part (0:00 to 0:34) of Chopin's waltz (selection 2) and have them try to dance to it while you continue to count out the time. They'll have a difficult time keeping up. Play that first section a few more times to let them practice, either alone or with a partner. It's tough! And this is the simplest kind of waltz there is! Just for a laugh, let the music play beyond 0:34 and let them try to keep up.

After they've had their fun, have them sit down and, while the piece plays in the background, tell the students about why Chopin wrote this piece and about the history of the waltz (use the description on the bottom of W -11). Be sure to emphasize how the emergence of the dance paralleled the political and social changes that came with the Industrial Revolution, and how the waltz began as an indecent' lower-class distraction that became a social necessity for the well-to-do.

Close

Ask the students if anyone they know does the waltz or attends fancy dance parties on a regular basis. Why not? Do they think it would be fun to attend a ball, where they had to get dressed up, learn complicated dance steps, and be on their best behavior? Why or why not? Have the students come up with a list of dances they're familiar with and have volunteers demonstrate the dances for the class. How are these dances different from the waltz? Can they come up with reasons for the differences?

Extensions

Beyond

Related topics

the Industrial Revolution
social dance

development of the piano

Extension Ideas

Watch a video of ballroom dancing.

Obtain a recording of waltz music (like Strauss' 'Blue Danube') and have the students try the waltz step to a piece that was written for dance.

Explore the history and development of the piano with the students and then have them research and do a poster presentation on the history of the instrument of their choice.

Study the Industrial Revolution and the effects it had on society.

Additional Resources

Berger, Melvin. *The World of Dance*. New York: S.G. Phillips, Inc. 1978.

Finney, Shan. *Dance*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1983.

Anderson, David. *The Piano Makers*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Blocksma, Mary. *The Marvelous Music Machine: a story of the piano*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

Langley, Andrew. *The Industrial Revolution*. New York: Viking, 1994.

Clare, John F., ed. *Industrial Revolution*. San Diego: Gulliver Books, 1994.

Ballroom Dance Class. Alan Meyers & Associates, 1985. (video cassette)

Chopin: 17 Valses Jean-Marc Luisada Deutsche Grammophon 431 779-2

Strauss: On the Beautiful Blue Danube Alexander Schneider Quintet CBS Records MK 44522

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