

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

Summary

Using excerpts from Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1', students identify aspects of the music that evoke feelings and discuss the use of music in rituals.

Materials

Classical Music Start-up kit CD 2 and CD player; an index card for each student; materials for brainstorming (chalkboard, large paper; etc.)

Background for Teachers

Composer Profile

Composer

Sir Edward Elgar (ELL-gar)

Nationality

English

Birth - Death

1857-1934

Excerpt

'Pomp and Circumstance March No.1'

Era

Romantic / Nationalist

When George Frederic Handel arrived in London in 1710, England enjoyed a reputation as a country with strong musical traditions and talents. Handel adopted England and became one of its greatest composers. But when he died in 1759, England's musical tradition seemed to die with him, and it wasn't until the 1890's that another great British composer emerged. Edward Elgar, the son of a piano tuner, was a self-taught musician and composer who drew his inspiration from the culture and landscapes of England. Because of his precise musical vision, he rarely changed a score once he had set it down on paper, and he was never surprised to hear how a piece sounded when it was played for the first time. His music is known for its passion and dignity and those are certainly qualities that describe the Pomp and Circumstance Marches. 'March No. 1' is by no means his finest work, but it is his most famous, and it is the piece that made him a household name in England and earned him a knighthood. Taking its title from a line in Shakespeare's Othello the work was a favorite of King Edward VII, and it became an alternative national anthem for England. Most students will recognize this work, as it is now played during graduation ceremonies all over the United States and around the world.

Vocabulary

pomp

- procession, pageant, or, an ostentatious display circumstance - ceremony or formalities

march

- music with a strong beat and simple, repetitive rhythmic pattern, composed to help keep troops or parades together as they march.

climax

- the point of greatest intensity or power in a series of events, a story or a piece of music.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will identify aspects of the music that evoke feelings and discuss the use of music in rituals.

Instructional Procedures

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

Listen

Play the piece (selection 8). After discussing how the music made them feel, ask the students if they've ever heard the piece before. If so, where? What do they associate it with? 'Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1' is, of course, the music that is almost universally used as processional music during graduation ceremonies. Although Elgar did not write the piece for that purpose, it has certain qualities that make it well-suited for the graduation ritual. Help the students come up with a list of those qualities. It might include: the steady, strong rhythm for marching; the proud, military sound of the snare drums; the way the French horns seem to announce the arrival of someone important; an identifiable melody and a change of key that helps the music build to a stirring climax. The students may also come up with descriptive adjectives like strong, dignified, uplifting, etc. One very simple reason it works so well is that it can easily be repeated over and over again until all the graduates in a large class have a chance to get across the stage or into the auditorium!

Activity

Hold an 'accomplishment procession' in the classroom. Hand out an index card to each student and have them write down their full name and their proudest accomplishment. Gather the cards a row at a time, keeping them in order. Start the music, and if your CD player has a 'repeat' button, use it, so that the music will continue through the entire procession. Tell the students to stand and walk to the front of the room when their name is called. Announce the accomplishment as the student walks to the front of the room and takes a bow before returning to his or her seat.

Close

Have the class come up with a list of other ceremonies or occasions in which music plays an important role. Some possibilities might be 'Taps' at a funeral, the 'Wedding March,' the 'National Anthem' at sports events, 'Hail to the Chief' at Presidential appearances, 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' during the seventh-inning stretch, 'Happy Birthday,' 'Auld Lang Syne' on New Year's Eve, etc. A recording of any of these pieces could be played at this point, if available, or have the students sing or hum some of the tunes they know well. Why do the students think we play music at certain events? How does it change the event? Does it make the event more memorable? Would the event be different without the music? How or why?

Extensions

Beyond

Related topics

rituals, ceremonies and rites of passage (in the U.S. and other countries)

music and emotions

Shakespeare's 'Othello'

Extension Ideas

Ask students to write about an event they've experienced in which music played an important role (sports event, church service, wedding, bar or bat mitzvah, holiday parties, etc.). Did the music help them to remember the event? What emotions are stirred when they hear that music again?

Every culture has its own collection of rituals and ceremonies. Generate a list of ceremonies observed in the U.S. (weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc.). Compare this list to a list of ceremonies from another country or culture.

In America, high school graduation is not only a ceremony, but also a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Are there other rites of passage in our culture? In other cultures? What is the purpose of these events?

As a homework assignment the day before the lesson, have the students write down what they think 'pomp and circumstance' means. Encourage them to use a dictionary and to ask their parents or siblings for their thoughts. Before the lesson, discuss the homework and attempt to come up with a classroom definition. Then, using *Brush up your Shakespeare* talk about the origin of the expression and what it meant to Othello. Has its meaning changed over time?

Additional Resources

Ingpen, Robert and Wilkinson, Philip. *A Celebration of Customs & Rituals of the World*. Great Resources Britain: Dragon's World Ltd., 1994.

Liptak, Karen. *Coming-of-Age*. Brookfield, Conn.: The Millbrook Press, 1994.

Mayled, John. *Initiation Rites*. East Sussex, England: Wayland Ltd.; 1986.

Macrone, Michael. *Brush Up Your Shakespeare!* New York: Cader Books, 1990.

Pomp and Circumstance Marches London Philharmonic/Leonard Slatkin RCA 09026-68087

Authors

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