



Lesson 1 Your Musical Heritage

Objective

Students will explore their own musical heritage and discover the qualities that make music both universal and unique to each region.

Suggested Materials

Research materials (computers with internet, books, magazines, etc.), poster boards, markers and any other art supplies

Learning Standards

New York State Arts Standards

MU:Cn1.1.1.E.HS1b

MU:Cn1.1.1.E.HS1c

Common Core Learning Standards for ELA & Literacy

Reading, CCR 1, 4, and 7

Writing, CCR, 7 and 8

Speaking & Listening, CCR 1, 2 and 5

Language, CCR 1 and 2

Procedure

1) Ask students to choose a country that is associated with one of their own family members. Then, have them do some research (internet, library, family interviews, etc.) on that country to discover the following information:

- 1 - What kinds of music originated in this country?
- 2 - What instruments are/were used there?
- 3 - Are there any famous musicians from this country?
- 4 - How has music in this country changed over time?
- 5 - What is unique about the music from this country?
- 6 - Can you find a recording of this music? What does it sound like?

2) To display the information they have discovered in their research, ask students to create a poster advertising a concert (real or fictional) that features music from this country. Ask them to include as many details as possible to attract potential audience members who may not be familiar with this music. This can also be done as a group project if there are several students researching the same country.

3) Display posters in the classroom or school hallways to share with classmates.



Lesson 2 American Voices in Classical Music Today: *Jessie Montgomery and Gabriela Lena Frank*

Objective

Students will become familiar with American female composers Jessie Montgomery and Gabriela Lena Frank and some of their pieces for orchestra. They will understand how each composer expresses her own unique musical voice, while reflecting her experiences and heritage. Students will explore their own personal influences, artistic or otherwise.

Suggested Materials

- Fast Facts for Jessie Montgomery
- Fast Facts for Gabriela Lena Frank
- Access to YouTube for watching videos, white board or large paper to write discussion questions and outcomes

Learning Standards

New York State Arts Standards

MU:Cn10.1.C.HSI
MU:Cn11.1.E.HSIb
MU:Cn11.1.E.HSIc

Common Core Learning Standards for ELA & Literacy

Reading, CCR 7
Writing, CCR, 7 and 8
Speaking & Listening, CCR 1 and 5
Language, CCR 1

New York State Social Studies Standards

2 – World History

Procedure

- 1) Introduce the students to two female American composers using the attached **Fast Facts** for each composer. For this first part of the lesson, focus on the information found in the bullet points and “The Composer.” You can split your class into two sections and have half of the class focus on Jessie Montgomery and the other half focus on Gabriela Lena Frank. Or, you can explore both composers together as a class.

- 2) Now watch the following two short videos that feature each composer.

Jessie Montgomery: Conjuring Memories

<https://vimeo.com/164172727>

Gabriela Lena Frank: The Future of Classical Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6WNYFHN36M>

- 3) Afterwards, lead a discussion by prompting students with the following questions. If you split the class for the first two procedures, you may choose to bring everyone back together for this activity or break into smaller groups. This can serve as a writing activity or discussion only.
- A) Both composers talk about their personal explorations of what it means to be an American. Ask students to share what they think it means to be an American. What values do Americans share? What common bonds do we have with each other? Ask students to share in their own words what they think Jessie Montgomery and/or Gabriela Lena Frank think about what it means to be American.
 - B) For Jessie Montgomery her past is rooted in her experiences attending civil rights protests and artistic events with her parents. For Gabriela Lena Frank it comes from her own melting-pot heritage that includes Peruvian, Jewish, Lithuanian and Chinese backgrounds. Ask students to share what is meaningful to them about their own family history, background, culture or experience.
 - C) Both composers talk about what inspires them to create music. Ask students to share their own inspirations. If they were going to write a piece of music, what would it be about? What feelings or thoughts might it express?
- 4) Now, review the Fast Facts sheets again but this time focus on the information found in “The Piece” section. For each composer, you can listen to the featured piece using the following links:

Caught By the Wind by Jessie Montgomery

<https://www.newmusicusa.org/profile/jessie-montgomery/>

(scroll down the page to find a 5-minute clip of this 10-minute piece)



“Mestizo Waltz” from Three Latin American Dances by Gabriela Lena Frank

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw1PI1MZNQc>

- 5) Now you ask can students to share their responses to what they heard. What types of rhythms and/or melodies did they hear? What was the character of the music? Did it help to know something about the music before they heard it?

At the concert on March 12 Jessie Montgomery will be in attendance and will speak about her piece *Caught By the Wind* before the BPO will performs it. The orchestra will also perform Gabriela Lena Frank’s Mestizo Waltz.



Fast Facts

Jessie Montgomery *Caught by the Wind*



- Born and raised in New York City, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan
- She studied violin from an early age, eventually graduating from The Juilliard School.
- She taught at CommunityWorks in Rhode Island, honing her teaching and advocacy skills
- She graduated from New York University with a degree in Composition for Film and Multimedia, focusing her musical work on composing
- She is a member of the Catalyst Quartet and performs regularly with Silkroad Ensemble and Sphinx Virtuosi.
- She is affiliated with the Sphinx Organization and recently won the \$50,000 Sphinx Medal of Excellence for her work

The Composer

Jessie Montgomery is an acclaimed composer, violinist, and educator. She is the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation, and her works are performed frequently around the world by leading musicians and ensembles. Her music interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, language, and social justice, placing her squarely as one of the most relevant interpreters of 21st-century American sound and experience. Her profoundly felt works have been described as “turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life” (The Washington Post).

The Piece

Caught by the Wind has two main sources of inspiration: first, by my brother's environmental activist bicycle band tour, *The Pleasant Revolution*, where he and his disciples traveled thousands of miles promoting awareness of environmental issues, self-powering their shows with bicycle generators...The journey of pedaling from country to country by bicycle was a powerful and transcending experience for all band members and crew who dedicated months, even years to the tour. Midway through composing the piece, things took a slightly different turn: while on retreat in upstate NY, I was on a much needed head-clearing walk through the woods and found a branch that had been mangled and torn by the wind. I was fascinated by how the intricate system of stems tangled together revealing a full life cycle in its now disfigured form. The piece, in the end, is one about cycles--whether bicycles or life cycles, or wind cycles--it spins, journeys and winds, gets caught and ultimately comes to its end.

“Music is my connection to the world. It guides me to understand my place in relation to others and challenges me to make clear the things I do not understand. I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.”

- Jessie Montgomery



Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra



Fast Facts

Gabriela Lena Frank

'Mestizo Waltz'

from *Three Latin-American Dances for Orchestra*



- Born in Berkeley California, with a moderate to profound hearing loss
- She started composing early when her piano teacher encouraged her to mix styles and create songs on her own.
- She graduated from Rice University with a composition degree and then earned a doctorate from University of Michigan.
- She traveled extensively throughout South America to explore her heritage and has blended these influences into her classically trained style of music writing
- She started the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in California to train emerging composers

The Composer

Included in the Washington Post's list of the 35 most significant women composers in history, identity has always been at the center of composer/pianist Gabriela Lena Frank's music. Born in Berkeley, California to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank explores her multicultural heritage most ardently through her compositions. Inspired by the works of Bela Bartók and Alberto Ginastera, Frank is something of a musical anthropologist. She has traveled extensively throughout South America and her pieces often reflect and refract her studies of Latin American folklore, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a western classical framework that is uniquely her own.

The Piece

'Mestizo Waltz' is the final movement of a three-movement piece titled *Three Latin-American Dances for Orchestra*, written in 2003. Gabriela Lena Frank writes, "This final movement is a lighthearted tribute to the "mestizo" or mixed-race music of the South American Pacific coast. In particular, it evokes the "romancero" tradition of popular songs and dances that mix influences from indigenous Indian cultures, African slave cultures, and western brass bands."

"I wanted to, in a very general way, be as mestiza in my music as I was in my person: I'm multiracial, I'm multicultural, and I think that that's something deeply American."*

- Gabriela Lena Frank

* Mestiza: A woman of mixed race or ethnic ancestry, especially in Latin America, of mixed American Indian and European descent.



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Lesson 3

Sphinx Organization: Celebrating Black and Latinx Classical musicians

Objective

Students will understand the mission and vision of the Sphinx Organization and learn about the Sphinx soloist for the *West Side* concert.

Suggested Materials

- Bio of Nygel Witherspoon (provided)
- Computer(s) or smart board for visiting website, pencil and paper

Learning Standards

New York State Arts Standards

MU:CnI.I.I.H.HS1c

MU:CnI.I.I.C.HS1a

Common Core Learning Standards for ELA & Literacy

Reading, CCR 1, 4, and 7

Writing, CCR, 2, 4, 7 and 8

Speaking & Listening, CCR 1 and 2

Language, CCR 1 and 2

Procedure

1) Let students know that they will be hearing the 2019 Sphinx Competition winner Nygel Witherspoon perform at the *West Side* concert on March 12. Share his bio with students.

2) Direct students to the website for The Sphinx Organization: www.sphinxmusic.org
Ask students to find out the answers to the following questions and write them down:

1. What is the mission of the Sphinx Organization?
2. What has the Sphinx Organization accomplished so far?
3. Who is eligible to enter the Sphinx Competition and what do students think are the benefits of competing?
4. Who is the founder of Sphinx? Why did this person decide to create this organization?

3) Students can watch the Overview Video under the “About Sphinx” Video tab. There is also a video of Nygel’s winning performance.



- 4) Use the following discussion/writing prompts to encourage a dialogue about Sphinx:
1. Sphinx works to promote and maintain positive opportunities for young Black and Latinx string players. Why do you think this is this important?
 2. What causes or issues do you see in your own life or in your community that you would like to promote or that you would like to improve? Why? How might you go about improving things?



Nygel Witherspoon

2019 Sphinx Competition Junior Division winner

*Nygel will perform the Lalo Cello Concerto, movement 3 with the BPO
March 12, 2020*

When typical toddlers hum a tune, it's usually something like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," not Sibelius's Violin Concerto in D Minor. So, when Nygel Witherspoon began humming that very difficult concerto — note for note and perfectly in tune — his family surmised he was overdue for music lessons. He was, however, just 3 years old. Nygel is now 18 years old and studies at the Curtis School of Music in his first year of college.

In 2016, he won the MNSOTA String Competition, and performed the first movement of the Dvorak Cello Concerto with the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra. He was also a featured artist on MPR's Minnesota Varsity in 2017. Nygel made his debut with the Minnesota Orchestra on October 7th, 2017, playing the first movement of the Dvorak Concerto at the Send Me Hope concert under conductor Roderick Cox. He soloed with them again in July, 2018, performing Faure's Elegie at the Courage and Triumph concert. This past year, he won the Junior division of the Sphinx Competition, and was a semi-finalist in the Friends of the Minnesota Orchestra Young Artist Competition. Despite his success in competitions, Nygel doesn't see himself as competitive. "I think it's more important for students to have a supportive environment than a competitive one," he said. "It's great to have a support system, where you can be yourself and improve right along with others doing the same thing."

Nygel's drive and motivation are fueled by the connection music provides. He recalled that he and his siblings performed as a chamber trio at their grandmother's nursing home. The positive reaction from residents gave him motivation to keep playing. "It's so important, whether it's hip-hop, classical, pop or jazz," he said. "Music is the universal language. It transcends everything, no matter if you're rich, poor or the color of your skin. It connects all of us."



Excerpts from an article in the Star Tribune, March 15, 2019 by Kay Krhin



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WEST SIDE CONNECTION

