

“Folk Music in the Melting Pot” at The Sheldon Concert Hall Handbook for Teachers

WELCOME

We look forward to welcoming you and your students for the presentation of “Folk Music in the Melting Pot” at The Sheldon Concert Hall. We hope that the perfect acoustics and intimacy of the hall will make this an important and memorable experience.

ARRIVAL AND PARKING

We urge you to arrive at the Sheldon Concert Hall half an hour before the start of “Folk Music in the Melting Pot.” This will allow you to be seated in time for the performance and will allow a little extra time in case you encounter traffic on the way. Seating will be on a first come-first serve basis as schools arrive. To accommodate school schedules, we will start promptly at show time.

The Sheldon is located at 3648 Washington Boulevard, just around the corner from the Fox Theatre. A map is enclosed. Parking for school buses will be available on Washington near The Sheldon. Please enter by the steps leading up to the concert hall front door. If you have a disabled student, please call The Sheldon (314-533-9900) to make arrangement to use our new street level entrance and elevator to the concert hall.

CONCERT MANNERS

Please coach your students on good concert manners before coming to The Sheldon Concert Hall. Good audiences love to listen to music and they love to show their appreciation with applause, usually at the end of an entire piece and occasionally after a good solo by one of the musicians. Urge your students to take in and enjoy the great music being performed.

Food and drink are prohibited in The Sheldon Concert Hall.

Any device (telephone, alarm watch or toy) that makes noise is a distraction for both the musicians on stage and your fellow audience members and should not be brought into the hall.

DEFINITIONS

Folk music

Folk music is the music sung and played by the common folk or people of a particular community or country. The original composer of a folksong is often unknown. Folk music is often not written down, but passed on aurally from one musician to another and one generation to another, often being changed as it's passed along. There are many kinds of folksongs, often dealing with daily life – work songs, love songs, cradle songs, drinking songs, patriotic songs, dancing numbers and frolic tunes, mourning songs and epic tales.

Ballad

A ballad is a song that tells a story. Some ballads deal with legendary characters, miraculous happenings or gruesome deeds, while others tell romantic tales or chronicle an historical event.

Work song

Workers sing work songs to coordinate their efforts and to keep their spirits up in the face of hard physical labor. African-American slaves sang work songs as they ploughed and harvested the land of the South, cut down trees and split the logs, worked the mules along muddy rivers and hoisted cotton bales onto Mississippi steamboats. Work songs have been sung by sailors and other workers for centuries.

Spiritual

African-American slaves who converted to Christianity developed a unique style of religious choral singing called spirituals, which told of redemption and freedom. Spirituals were based on traditional hymns but added syncopation and a freedom of expression. Spirituals became popular at camp meetings and churches throughout the country.

Blues

The blues evolved musically in part from work songs and spirituals. The blues are sung by an individual, often with the accompaniment on guitar or other instrument an important part of the performance. The blues are generally in a slow tempo and the solo singer is free to add ornamentation and bend notes, including the “blue notes” (lowered third, fifth and seventh notes of the normal scale), to better express the deep feelings of the song.

Protest song

From colonial times to the present day, American folk songs were often used to protest social injustice. The targets were kings and corrupt politicians, rich landowners and factory bosses, and any system that oppressed the common people.

INSTRUMENTS used in “Folk Music in the Melting Pot”

(The names of the instruments and definitions can be jumbled and used as a matching exercise for your students.)

Guitar

A plucked or strummed string instrument originally brought to Spain by the Moors in the Middle Ages. This instrument, usually with six strings and occasionally with twelve strings, became popular with both blues and folk singers to accompany their singing.

Mandolin

The most recent string instrument developed from the lute family. It is played with a pick and was popular in southern Italy before being taken up by folk and bluegrass musicians.

Banjo

Originally a gourd strung with one string; this instrument was introduced in this country by West African slaves in the 19th century. Most often it now has four or five strings. It was popularized in minstrel shows, parlor music, musical theater, vaudeville, blues and early jazz. Since World War II it has been used often by folk and bluegrass musicians.

Harmonica

Sometimes called a mouth organ, this instrument consists of a small metal box with a series of openings along one its long sides. Each slit leads to a small pair of reeds that vibrate when the player either blows or inhales. Because it is so portable, this instrument was carried by pioneers across the country, played by cowboys on the trail and is used today by many folk musicians.

Tambourine

A small, shallow single-headed drum, usually with a round wooden frame that includes small circular metal disks that jingle when the instrument is struck. In addition to being used in orchestral percussion sections and many other genres of music, this instrument is popular in gospel music and folk music.

Homemade instruments used in “Folk Music in the Melting Pot”:

Limberjack – a puppet-like figure made of wood that makes a percussive sound when bounced on a board or the player’s knee.

Washtub bass – made with a washtub, a string and a broom or mop handle.

Washboard – an actual washboard scraped to make percussive sounds.

Jaw harp – a primitive instrument consisting of an elastic strip of metal, one end attached to a small frame of metal or wood that is held between the teeth.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Ask your students the origins of their families and, on a map of the world, find those countries. Include England, Ireland and Africa, which are mentioned in “Folk Music in the Melting Pot.” Do your students know any folk songs from their ancestors’ country?

Discuss the concept of the “melting pot” and the fact that not everyone came willingly to America. Discuss how cultural traditions are preserved to retain a sense of identity and to remind immigrants of their previous homes. Discuss how cultural traditions change and blend with other traditions to create new traditions and help immigrants to connect to their new homeland.

Using the “telephone game,” have your students experience how the lines of a folk song are changed as they are passed from one musician to another. Start with the text of two lines of an unfamiliar folk song and have whispered from one student to the next. Compare the beginning and ending version.

Make a list of all the folk songs that have been taught recently by music teachers in your school, sung by the school chorus or that students have heard on TV or in movies. Where do they fit in the history of folk music? What countries are they from? If they are newly written in the folk style, are they ballads that tell a story?

Using encyclopedias, the internet or a map of the United States:

Name the original 13 colonies and locate them on the map.

Find the Appalachian Mountains and other southern mountains.

Name the states where cotton was grown.

Find the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio Rivers – where steamboats worked.

Research cowboys and the songs they sang.

Learn about Woody Guthrie and his son Arlo.

Research the “folk revival” and learn about the musicians who made it happen and which ones are still performing today.

In addition to Bob Dylan, whose “Times They Are A-Changin” is on the program, have your students discover other contemporary folk singers.

MUSICAL SELECTIONS IN “FOLK MUSIC IN THE MELTING POT”

Yankee Doodle	Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier	This Train
Cuckoo	John Henry
Another Man Done Gone	Corina
Sweet Betsy from Pike	The Boll Weevil Holler
Times They Are A-Changin’	Stranger Blues
This Land is Your Land	

THE MUSICIANS

John Higgins currently performs with the folk and bluegrass group “The Flying Mules.” He has played guitar for 38 years and toured throughout the United States. He is an avid student of guitar history and builds custom guitars.

Charlie Pfeffer is a guitarist and expert mandolin player who has 22 years experience with folk music programs for Young Audiences. He has toured Europe and currently plays with both “The Flying Mules” and the “Geyer Street Sheiks.”

Blake Travis is a master storyteller, hand drummer and singer who performs regularly for Young Audiences. He has specialized in African, African-American, Native-American, Asian and European stories and is known for his dynamic performances.

Sandy Weltman is a virtuoso harmonica and banjo player who performs in many settings, including with his own group the “Sandroids.” He has won numerous awards and is one of the St. Louis areas most versatile and innovative musicians.