

Spirituals: A Celebration of Culture Workshop in One Lesson and an Assembly Performance

Lesson Plan by Cheryl Warfield

Lesson Overview:

An introduction to the spiritual and composer Harry T. Burleigh, focusing on his contributions towards the preservation of African-American spirituals presented in one 45-minute lesson and culminating with an assembly lecture-recital performance for students

Background:

African-American Spirituals (formerly referred to as Negro Spirituals) are the folk songs born of enslaved people in the South dating as far back as the 17th century. These songs were passed on from generation to generation in the oral tradition and consist of beautiful melodies and intricate rhythms that express deep emotion and feeling. It was not until the 20th Century that composer Harry T. Burleigh and others began to notate and arrange spirituals to preserve their existence.

Goals:

1. To define and introduce the American Negro Spiritual and its stylistic components.
2. To learn about Harry T. Burleigh, his accomplishments, and his contributions towards the preservation of the American Negro spiritual.
3. To actively participate in the rehearsal process for an upcoming performance of spirituals.
4. To learn basic vocal technique to enhance singing ability.
5. To demonstrate how music and lyrics can be interpreted artistically (legato line), and for students to perform spirituals with the artist in a school assembly.

Classroom Lesson -- Introduction to Spirituals and Music Rehearsal

The artist introduces herself to the class by singing for them, explains what a classical singer does, provides information about the performance tradition of classically trained African-American singers and the spiritual, and provides a glimpse of the rehearsal process by performing selections from the assembly program.

The teacher and artist will identify students with a strong desire and/or aptitude for singing to sing selected repeated lines of spirituals and lead their fellow students. The students will participate in a "voice lesson" as the artist demonstrates vocal technique, including proper stance, breathing and vocal exercises (Darth Vader breaths, humming, and the siren). The artist introduces the call and response spiritual, 'Go Down Moses' for the students to learn by rote. Call and response spirituals are defined for the students and the meaning of learning by rote is explained as the original custom in which spirituals were learned.

Artist will also demonstrate legato line and contrast it with staccato singing using "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand," and the significance of rhythm and "swing" in spirituals. Selected students will play percussive instruments to the spiritual "Standin' in the Need of Prayer."

Assembly Program

Artist and Music teacher perform several spirituals in an assembly program that includes a brief historical narrative of spirituals to define and demonstrate the essence of America's original folk music. Selected students will sing along and/or play rhythmic instruments during the assembly as some spirituals are repeated after the artist's demonstration.

About the Assembly

This assembly, in conjunction with Black History Month combines a brief historical narrative with the performance of American Negro Spirituals arranged by Harry T. Burleigh and others who sought to preserve the traditions of America's original folk music, born of slavery. These songs handed down from generation to generation in the oral tradition. They were often performed a cappella as the slaves worked the fields. Some spirituals were code songs enabling the slaves to communicate with each other without the overseers' knowledge. Spirituals provide the only historical record from the slave perspective of their condition of life, faith, hope, and desire for freedom. The songs speak of life and death, exile, of trouble and strife, hope, justice, and the desire for a better life. Although these songs were of an unhappy people, their melodies are a beautiful expression of the human experience and hold a profound optimism; a faith and hope in the ultimate justice of all things.

Other American musical genres influenced by spirituals include gospel, the blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock. European and American caucasian composers influenced by spirituals include Antonin Dvorak (New World Symphony), George Gershwin (Porgy & Bess) and Jerome Kern (Showboat).

About Cheryl Warfield

Soprano Cheryl Warfield has performed over 15 lead roles in the standard operatic repertoire during her career. Cheryl made her European operatic debut as Fiordiligi in Mozart's "Cosí fan tutte" with the Rome Festival Orchestra, and has appeared with the Bregenz Festival (Austria), the Theater des Westins (Berlin), and in Italy, Sweden and the Czech Republic. This season, Cheryl sang the Countess in "The Marriage of Figaro" with Amore Opera and Leonora in Verdi's "Il trovatore" with the Manhattan Opera Repertory Ensemble. Career highlights include her Broadway debut in Hal Prince's "Show Boat," critical acclaim from the Chicago Tribune for her portrayal of Strawberry Woman in the Lyric Opera of Chicago's production of "Porgy and Bess," and a guest soloist appearance for the 2010 NFL Hall of Fame Induction Ceremonies in Canton, Ohio. She appears on the Live from Lincoln Center broadcast DVDs of the Metropolitan Opera's productions of "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg" and "Fidelio." Cheryl is the founder of ADVANCE, a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit community based vocal arts organization that produces concerts and educational programs promoting the understanding and appreciation of classical music and opera and is a 2012 recipient of a Manhattan Community Arts Fund (MCAF) grant to produce "Black History Month Extravaganza," a musical perspective on African American opera singers past and present. Cheryl is also a teaching artist in New York City where she introduces pre-K through 12th grade school children to opera and chorus singing.

specialneedsinmusic.com [Go Down Moses](http://specialneedsinmusic.com/folk_song_pages/Go_Down_Moses_12_1129.html) Folk Page with Cheryl Warfield:
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