

The Music of Motown (High School)

Rationale

This 50-minute lesson will explore the music of 1960s Motown Records through a series of activities in which students will examine several musical examples and analyze songs for meaning, structure and overall composition. This lesson is designed to give students a better understanding about song-writing and music composition.

Inspiration

"I don't ever balk at being considered a Motown person, because Motown is the greatest musical event that ever happened in the history of music."

Smokey Robinson – Motown Artist and Grammy Winner

Mastery Objectives

- Students will examine the Motown song “My Girl” as performed by The Temptations and analyze the composition for form and compositional techniques.
- Students will be able to identify “verse” and “chorus” elements within a popular music composition.
- Students will critically discuss and reflect on the compositional techniques of a popular music composition.

Standards Addressed

National Standards for Music Education

- Grade 9-12, Music Standard 7
 - Students evolve specific criteria for making informed, critical evaluations of the quality and effectiveness of performances, compositions, arrangements, and improvisations and apply the criteria in their personal participation in music
 - Students evaluate a performance, composition, arrangement, or improvisation by comparing it to similar or exemplary models
 - Students evaluate a given musical work in terms of its aesthetic qualities and explain the musical means it uses to evoke feelings and emotions
- Grade 9-12, Music Standard 8
 - Students explain how elements, artistic processes (such as imagination or craftsmanship), and organizational principles (such as unity and variety or repetition and contrast) are used in similar and distinctive ways in the various arts and cite examples

Materials

- White board or place for group writing
- CD Player and/or Computer with Internet Connection
- Writing materials for students (pen & paper)
- Attached Journal Reflection Activity
- Attached lyrics of “My Girl” as performed by The Temptations
- Audio and/or video of “My Girl” as performed by The Temptations
 - Audio and/or video of Stop! In the Name of Love by the Supremes *
 - Audio and/or video of “Heard it Through the Grapevine” by Gladys Knight & The Pips *
 - Audio and/or video of “Please Mr. Postman” by The Marvelettes *
 - Audio and/or video of “My Girl” by The Temptations *
 - Audio and/or video of “ABC” by the Jackson 5 *
 - Audio and/or video of “End of the*"
 - Audio and/or video of Road” by Boyz II Men *

* Optional Music Examples and YouTube Links Provided

Procedures

1. Introduction

Asks the students to take out a piece of paper and to write short 1-2 word phrases that come to mind when they think about Motown. Name some Motown classics to help spark their thoughts:

Stop! In the Name of Love by the Supremes
Heard it Through the Grapevine by Gladys Knight & The Pips
Please Mr. Postman by The Marvelettes
My Girl by The Temptations
ABC by the Jackson 5
End of the Road by Boyz II Men

Select one of the above and play for the students (YouTube links to each of these songs is attached).

Have the students add more phrases and/or words to their lists as they watch/listen.

Collect a some of the common responses and write them for the students to see.

2. Discovering Relevancy

In a separate location, write the names of the following Motown Groups:

The Supremes
Gladys Knight & The Pips
The Marvelettes
The Temptations
Jackson 5
Boyz II Men

Ask the students to identify elements that all these groups have in common. Some questions to encourage student thought:

- Are these solo artists or are these groups of musicians?
- What is the make-up of these groups?
 - Is there more than 1 singer?
 - Are there more than 2 singers?
- What do these bands look like?
 - Do they have dance choreography?
 - Do they dress alike?

Ask students if there are other bands today that remind them of these groups.

3. Developing Musical Skills

Pass out the attached Student Handout for My Girl as performed by The Temptations

Ask the students if any have heard the song before, follow this immediately by playing a recorded version of the song either via CD or computer at <http://tinyurl.com/GrammyMyGirl>

Once the song has completed, inform students that songs are a lot like books or poems. Songs have a structure or design to them that helps the listener either 1) learn new words or 2) repeats important ideas.

Write “Verse” and “Chorus” on the board and ask students to define these words.

- Verse: introduces new text and sets the overall mood of the song. Verses support the chorus in setting context. The rhythmic and rhyming schemes of a verse repeat throughout the song as the words change (Same melody but new words).
- Chorus: a section of the song that is repeated. Sometimes called “the hook”. This is often times considered the most important part of a pop song as it is

the element that listeners will go away singing after only one hearing. (Same melody and same words)

After clear definitions of “verse” and “chorus” have been established, have the students look at the lyrics to the attached lyric sheet of “My Girl”. Have students identify these elements in this piece. (Facilitator can reference the attached “My Girl – The Temptations: Facilitator Key” to help in identifying sections).

Some questions that might encourage students in this process:

- Do any sections of the song repeat? If so where?
- Do any of the sections sound alike but have differing words? If so where?

Have the students focus on the first and last sections of the song. They are identical. Ask the students:

- Do you think a verse can repeat itself like the chorus?
- What purpose might a songwriter start and end a song using the same words?
 - Does this give a sense of completion?

Have the students identify verses with the letter “A”, chorus with the letter “B” and any differing sections with the letter “C”. Bring the students attention to the final section. This section is a mixture of the first verse and the chorus. Label this section A/B.

The overall structure can be found on the attached “My Girl – The Temptations: Facilitator Key” (A, B, A, B, C, A, B, A/B)

Next, have the students identify rhyming words within the song. The rhyming pattern has been underlined in the teacher key work page but is essentially alternating lines of rhyming.

Lastly, have the students count the number of times the words “My Girl” are used in the song: 18 times.

Pose the following question to the students:

- Why is “My Girl” mentioned so many times and to what purpose does this serve?

Have students complete the Journal Reflection Activity

Journal Reflection Activity

- 1. Many songs are in a similar verse-chorus style like that of “My Girl.” Why do you think so many songs are in this format and can you think of any songs that you listen to that alternates between verse and chorus?**

- 2. The music of Motown was highly influential in popular culture. Many of the artists recorded their albums with professional studio musicians. The early Motown artists routinely recorded with a group of musicians called *The Funk Brothers*. Yet despite having played on countless hits, the group has largely gone unnoticed by the general public. What do you think about this?**

- 3. If you were to write a song today, what are some ways that you might communicate your ideas? Consider the types of instruments and speed of your song that you might choose.**

My Girl - The Temptations

Student Handout

<p>I've got sunshine On a cloudy day. When it's cold outside, I've got the month of May.</p> <p>Well, I guess you'll say What can make me feel this way? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p> <p>I've got so much honey The bees envy me. I've got a sweeter song Than the birds in the trees.</p> <p>Well, I guess you'll say What can make me feel this way? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p>	<p>Ooooh, Hoooo.</p> <p>Hey, hey, hey. Hey, hey, hey.</p> <p>I don't need no money, Fortune or fame. I've got all the riches, baby, One man can claim.</p> <p>Well, I guess you'll say What can make me feel this way? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p> <p>Talkin' bout my girl. I've got sunshine on cloudy day With my girl. I've even got the month of May With my girl.</p> <p>YouTube Video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltRwmgYEUr8</p>
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My Girl – The Temptations

Facilitator Key

<p>(Verse #1) A I've got sunshine On a cloudy <u>day</u>. When it's cold outside, I've got the month of <u>May</u>.</p> <p>(Chorus) B Well, I guess you'll <u>say</u> What can make me feel this <u>way</u>? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p> <p>(Verse #2) A I've got so much honey The bees envy <u>me</u>. I've got a sweeter song Than the birds in the <u>trees</u>.</p> <p>(Chorus) B Well, I guess you'll <u>say</u> What can make me feel this <u>way</u>? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p>	<p>(Interlude – or break - and Song starts over again) C Ooooh, Hoooo.</p> <p>Hey, hey, hey. Hey, hey, hey.</p> <p>(Verse #3) A I don't need no <u>money</u>, Fortune or fame. I've got all the riches, <u>baby</u>, One man can claim.</p> <p>(Chorus) B Well, I guess you'll <u>say</u> What can make me feel this <u>way</u>? My girl. (My girl, my girl) Talkin' 'bout my girl. (My girl)</p> <p>(Verse #1 Repeated with parts of the Chorus) A/B Talkin' bout my girl. I've got sunshine on cloudy <u>day</u> With my girl. I've even got the month of <u>May</u> With my girl.</p> <p>YouTube Video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltRwmgYEUr8</p>
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OVERALL DIAGRAM OF SONG'S STRUCTURE

A, B, A, B, C, A, B, A/B

- A = Verse
- B = Chorus
- A/B = Mixture of Verse and Chorus
- C = Interlude – or Break

Optional Audio Link Resources

ABC as performed by the Jackson 5:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOXG8wtxx_w

End of the Road as performed by Boyz II Men:

<http://tinyurl.com/GrammyEndofRoad>

Heard it Through the Grapevine as performed by Gladys Knight & The Pips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWvwP72FuVg>

My Girl as performed by the temptations:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltRwmgYEUr8>

Please Mr. Postman as performed by The Marvelettes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KseUrBSRBDA>

Stop! In the Name of Love as performed by the Supremes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDPjYZxi0n8>