

### EPISODE 3: Gershwin's An American in Paris

#### Musical Storytelling, Rhythm, and Composition

#### STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will write, perform, and create music notation.
- Students will compose a musical journey using classroom instruments/body percussion.
- Students will read/listen about the life of George Gershwin and An American in Paris
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of musical storytelling (program music)

#### ACTIVITY 1: 30-40 MIN

- Ask students to close their eyes and imagine your favorite place to walk. What do you hear?
- Ask students to raise their hand if...
  - you hear wind blowing in the trees?
  - you hear cars driving by?
  - you hear animals (dogs, birds, cows, cats, ect.)
- Have students open their eyes and ask what else would you hear?
  
- Ask students to close their eyes again and listen or read along with your walk.
- Give examples of sounds they might hear and have students mimic sounds:
  - wind (shhh)
  - dog barks (woof woof)
  - train (chugga chugga chugga chugga)
  - siren (Wee ooo Wee ooo)
  - horse galloping by (cup hands and clap mimicking a gallop)
  
- What if we told the story of our walk using instruments? Which instruments or sounds would represent each part of our walk. Use body percussion or classroom instruments and assign instruments to each sound.
  - wind (i.e shh, sand blocks, brushes on snare drum)
  - dog barks (i.e two 8th notes: woof, recorders, low keyboard notes)
  - train (i.e. sixteenth notes: drum on leg, snare)
  - ambulance siren (i.e. quarter notes: B to A on any instrument or singing)
  - horse galloping by (i.e. two sixteenth notes: cup hands and clap mimicking a gallop, use cups, coconut halves)
  
- Practice making sounds altogether by cueing each sound: (Wind, Dog, Train, Ambulance, Horse)
- Explain to students the composers in the 20th century started experimenting with writing new types of music. Some of those pieces are music that tells a story with instruments.
- **Pass out Episode 3 listening guide** for before and after explaining the premise. Explain we are going to listen to "An American in Paris" and I want you to identify as many instruments as you can hear and then write down/respond/record what you think is happening in the story.
  
- Play "An American in Paris" until 3:30 and have students listen, identify instruments and write down their story.
- As a class/partners identify instruments heard and share stories. (Optional write down/respond/record stories)

- Explain that this piece of music was written by George Gershwin. [Read George Gershwin bio and info about "An American in Paris" below.](#)

George Gershwin was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants and is known as one of the most significant and popular American composers of all time. He wrote music for Broadway musical theater, as well as piano compositions, and orchestral music. His famous and critically acclaimed piece, *Rhapsody in Blue*, debuted in 1923. Soon after he traveled to Paris to get more advanced musical training, and that trip inspired *An American in Paris*.

*An American in Paris* tells the story of a light hearted stroll through Paris, complete with honking horns, busy street scenes, bubbly woodwinds, sassy blues and jazz inspired melodies, and other vibrant instrumental characters.

- Play and listen again to "An American in Paris" (3:30 min)

- Pass out the "An American in Paris" worksheet. Practice performing the rhythms with body percussion while speaking the phrase.

- Take a walk phrase rhythm "Take a walk, take a walk. Oh, I think I'll take a walk"

- New theme phrase rhythm "Play on a clarinet now (rest). Play on a clarinet now (rest)."

- Play "An American in Paris" and have students listen with the listening guide. (3:30 min)

1. Begins with a rhythm pattern called "the walking theme" that looks and sounds like this:



2. The car horns of Paris traffic blare this rhythm:



3. Short-fast passages played by **xylophones**.

4. A slight pause followed by a slowing of tempo.

5. "Walking theme" enters again followed by a new melody by the **trombone**.

6. New theme enters with the **clarinet** playing this rhythm:



7. This theme is repeated by the **brass** section.

8. Flute intersperses "walking theme."

9. Very animated section using the rhythm pattern previously played by the **clarinet**.

10. Slower section featuring the **oboe** playing the melodic line.


## ACTIVITY 2: 30-40 MIN

- Students will work individually or in groups to create a musical story in a location for their choosing (i.e. An Idahoan in the Sawtooth Mountains, An Astronaut on Mars). Each story location will need to be researched for unique aspects of their visit, have 10 story cues and students can use body percussion and classroom instruments

to tell their story. Students will provide a listening guide for the class, and they can act out their story or have the Teacher narrate. Students can perform for the class or privately for the teacher.

- Example: An Idahoan in the Sawtooth Mountains

- 1. Open the tent after waking up and step outside (cymbal swell, rolling c major chord on xylophone)

- 2. A bird flies overhead and waves crash on the lake (recorder tweets g, b, a )

### **Links, Resources, and Recommendations:**

Audio:

[George Gershwin - An American in Paris](#) (till 3:30)

Recommend:

Play Rhapsody in Blue - Fantasia 2000