Overture to The Marriage of Figaro: Compare and Contrast

Students will listen to two pieces of music with similar melodies, but in completely different styles. One piece is the overture to The Marriage of Figaro, an opera in four acts written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1786. The other is a modern interpretation of the same piece of music by the East Village Opera Company.

Students will explore instrumentation, tempo, dynamics, and style used within these two pieces.

Assessment Strategies

In this lesson, students should be able to successfully do the following: discuss basic musical elements such as tempo, dynamics, instrumentation and melody; differentiate between two musical works with the same melody but very different styles, through class discussion and a writing assignment. Learn more about assessment strategies on page 5.

Learning Standards

This lesson uses Common Core and National Core Arts Anchor Standards. You can find more information about the standards featured in this lesson on page 4.
INTRODUCTION

1. Using the biography below, introduce and discuss Mozart and his life.

“Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) was born in Salzburg, Austria. Mozart was a child prodigy, and he composed his first piece of music at age five, published his first work at age seven and wrote an opera by the age of twelve!

At just six years old, Mozart was an excellent violinist and pianist. He performed all over Europe with his sister Maria Anna.

When he grew up, Mozart travelled to Vienna and began to earn his living as a composer and pianist. He died at the age of 35, though he still managed to compose a large amount of works in different musical forms, including symphonies, concertos, chamber music, and operas. He is still considered to be a musical genius today!

2. Discuss what an overture is. Relate it to the theme song of a television show. Ask your students if they are familiar with any theme songs.

TEACHING STEPS

3. Play Mozart’s Overture to The Marriage of Figaro. Each time you listen, focus on one of the following musical elements:
   - **Tempo** begins vivace (very fast), about 145 beats per minute.
   - **Dynamics** are fairly quiet and then crescendo (grow louder).
   - **Instrumentation** includes strings, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, and timpani.

*Click on the link above to listen to these examples on Spotify. A free account is required to listen.

PROCEDURE

4. **Tell** students that they are going to hear another version of the same song and they need to listen carefully for any differences. **Play** the East Village Opera Company (EVOC) version using the YouTube® link in the sidebar.

EVOC could be described as a “cover band” whose niche is traditional operatic pieces that are arranged to reflect more modern styling.

5. **Ask** the students to describe what is different in this version of the overture. Use the musical elements from the previous discussion as a guide:

   - Is the **tempo** different?
   - Is the **instrumentation** different? What instruments are added or removed?
   - Are the **dynamics** different?

6. **Ask** the students if they hear the melody, or the tune of the original song, even though other elements have changed. How does adding the new instruments—electric guitars, bass, drums, and keyboard—change the feel or the style of the piece? Does it sound classical? Or like jazz, hip-hop, or rock and roll?

7. **Discuss** what you think Mozart would have thought of this new version. If he was alive today, do you think he would embrace electronic music? Do you think he would solely compose in the classical style or do you think he would have branched out to other styles?

8. Have students **pretend** they are music critics and tell them to write a review of East Village Opera Company’s Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. **Compare** it to Mozart’s version. **Discuss** its similarities and differences. **Talk** about the music elements previously mentioned: instrumentation, tempo, dynamics, style, etc. Have students **discuss** their opinion of the piece. Do they like it? Do they like the original better? **Share** reviews in a small group or with the whole class.

   It may add interest and diversity to the responses if you divide the students into two groups and have one group write positive reviews and one group write negative reviews.

**Repertoire**

East Village Opera Company
Overture Redux (*Le Nozze Di Figaro*)

**This is a sample recording on YouTube. A complete recording is available to purchase on iTunes.**
**VOCABULARY**

**Overture:** A piece played before the start of an opera, often including themes of music that will be heard throughout the opera

**Tempo:** the speed at which a passage of music is played

**Dynamics:** how loudly or softly the music is played

**Instrumentation:** the particular instruments used in a piece of music

**LEARNING STANDARDS**

**Common Core State Anchor Standards**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5
Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**National Core Arts Anchor Standards**

**Anchor Standard 7** Perceive and analyze artistic work

**Anchor Standard 9** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
ASSESSMENT

- Observe, through guided discussion, students’ understanding of musical elements
- Examine students’ written music reviews and determine students’ ability to compare and contrast the two pieces of music.