

Learning About History & Creative Arts While at Home

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Introduction

With many people staying in their homes for the time being, several of the world's cultural institutions are getting creative about how they can assist in providing educational programming through avenues different than regular face-to-face programming. This lesson utilizes a video with some of the musicians of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in Toronto, Ontario, Canada doing just that. The musicians are all in their individual homes, but they've come together to play a song so that it sounds like the orchestra is still in one place!

Instructions

1. Read through this lesson with youth and/or adults in your home.
2. Watch the video using the provided YouTube link.
3. Discuss the reflective questions after watching the video.
4. Use the provided links to learn more information about those connected with the music in the video.

The Music

The song the orchestra is playing is the "Doppio Movimento" section of a larger piece known as *Appalachian Spring* written by an American composer named Aaron Copland. Doppio Movimento is Italian for "double movement" which means that the music speeds up. Even though it is an American piece, many musical notations are written in languages like Italian or Latin because many classical composers originally used those languages.

The tune in this video is very famous, and it is known as "Simple Gifts." This was a song written in 1848 by a man named Joseph Brackett. Mr. Brackett was a member of a religious denomination called the Shakers. The Shakers were known for being very hard working people who came to America (especially the New England region) from England in the 1770s. They were celebrated for very modest living, as well as for the distinctive architectural styles of the buildings they built and for the furniture they made.

You may have heard "Simple Gifts" in other places before. It is a very popular tune in the United States and elsewhere. For example, the tune has been used as a melody for another song called "Lord of the Dance."

In the video, there is a 1 minute, 5 second introduction. When the clarinet starts to play and the music speeds up, see if you can match the words of the song up with the tune you are hearing:

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right
It will be in the valley of love and delight.*

*When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend, we will not be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

History

In 1942, a famous American ballet dancer named Martha Graham asked Mr. Copland to write new ballet music for her to dance to which had an American theme. At that time many famous ballets had come from other countries, especially Europe. He agreed to write the ballet, and the subtitle of the whole work is called "Dance for Martha." Mr. Copland liked the song "Simple Gifts" so much that he decided to put it in as part of the ballet.

The music you will listen to became *very* popular in the United States. It first premiered at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC on October 30, 1944 with Miss Graham herself dancing the lead role in the ballet. In 1945 *Appalachian Spring* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music. The Pulitzer Prizes are considered to be the highest awards for journalism, books, drama, and music in the United States. It was added to the National Recording Registry of the United States in 2013.

Mr. Copland was one of the most famous classical composers in the United States, and was known for writing works that invoked a sense of many North American cultures and traditions. His other works include *Billy the Kid*, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Rodeo*, and *A Lincoln Portrait*. In addition to his Pulitzer Prize, before he died in 1990 he was also honored with an Academy Award (for his score of the movie *The Heiress*), a Presidential Medal of Freedom, a Congressional Gold Medal, the National Medal of Arts, and a Kennedy Center Honor.

Video

Use the link below to watch the video from the Toronto Symphony Orchestra:

<https://youtu.be/5rzZ2F18MwI>

Reflection

Use one or more of the following questions to begin a discussion to reflect on the video you just watched, and the music you just heard:

1. What did you think about the music? Did it make you feel happy, relaxed, excited, or any other emotions?
2. Do you enjoy listening to music? Why or why not? Do you enjoy only listening to certain styles of music?
3. What did you think about how the orchestra members made the video with everyone in separate places coming together? What other types of music or performances could be shared this way?
4. Do you know of other pieces of music you would like to see a band or orchestra play to share online?
5. Can you think of other creative ways that performing artists could share what they do without having to meet face-to-face with an audience?

Feel free to come up with other questions on your own to keep the discussion going.

If you want to let the performers and the orchestra know that you enjoyed their video, you can leave a comment on YouTube or send them an email at contactus@tso.ca. Be sure to let them know that you are a part of Virginia 4-H because they have 4-H in Canada, too!

Learning More

If you would like to learn more about any of these topics, please feel free to visit some of the links below.

Aaron Copland

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/masters/aaron-copland/>

Martha Graham

<https://marthagraham.org/history/>

National Recording Registry

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/recording-registry/>

Pulitzer Prizes

<https://www.pulitzer.org/>

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.tso.ca/>

If you want to watch the full *Appalachian Spring* ballet, it is available on YouTube in four parts. This performance was recorded in 1959 for National Educational Television by WQED in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and features Martha Graham dancing the lead role:

Part 1: <https://youtu.be/XmgaKGSxQVw>

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/PTdyDOWtE2Q>

Part 3: <https://youtu.be/91y-NEdTj-g> (featuring “Simple Gifts”)

Part 4: <https://youtu.be/6KIn6xHbSZg>

4-H Mission Area

This lesson is intended to educate learning under the 4-H mission area of Citizenship, specifically Civic Education as it relates to history and cultural heritage.

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