

Global Music Lesson Plan

Lesson 5: Steve Reich – Ghana, Bali, America and Germany.

For ages 14-16.

Time required:

60 minutes.

Activity:

Exploring the non-western influences and global themes within the music of Steve Reich.

Aims:

- To explore how contemporary American music challenges our assumptions about Western music.
- To compare and make connections between the music of Steve Reich and African and Balinese cultures.

Pupils will learn:

- How African and Balinese music has inspired the music of Steve Reich.
- How polyrhythm and phasing are used in the music of Steve Reich.

Web links you will need:

- Online audio clip of [Ewe drumming from Ghana](#).
- Online audio clip of [Balinese gamelan](#).
- CD recording of [music for 18 musicians by Steve Reich](#). Click on multimedia.
- [Information about Steve Reich](#).
- [Wikipedia: Information about Steve Reich](#).
- Excerpt from '[Come out](#)' by Steve Reich.
- Score to '[Clapping music](#)'.
- Online video clip of '[clapping music](#)'. Note: select the word 'video', next to 'Multimedia'.
- Information about the [multi media trilogy of operas](#) - 'Three tales' in particular the first opera 'Hindenberg'. Note: select 'Three Tales' from the menu and click on 'information'.
- Online video clip of '[Neibelung Zeppelin](#)'. Note: select the word 'video', next to 'Multimedia'.

Other resources you will need:

Notated rhythm of 'Hindenburg' (Wagner's Nibelung theme from Rheingold) provided.

Useful information

Steve Reich is a composer whose music is influenced by different musical cultures and whose 'themes' and inspirations are global in their concerns. This lesson introduces pupils to a composer with a real global dimension.

The 'minimalist' music of this American composer is steeped in non-western techniques learned in part from his extended studies of Ghanaian, Balinese and Hebrew music. His life and music are well documented and a concise summary is included in the resources. The themes of his music have a global dimension. One of his earliest recorded pieces, 'Come out' (1966) explores the idea of repeating rhythmic ideas (in this case based on a spoken phrase) that go in and out of phase. In this case the spoken phrase is the voice of Danniel Hamm, a black 19 year old. He was one of six youths arrested for murder during the Harlem riots. He describes a racist beating he experienced in Harlem's 28th precinct in New York.

One of Reich's most recent pieces, 'Three Tales' is a trilogy of multi-media operas which explore changing technologies in the 20th Century: the failed technology of Hindenberg's Zeppelin and his later association with the Third Reich; the atom bomb tests at Bikini and their influence on the subsequent Cold War; Dolly the sheep and the implications of cloning on the world.

| Lesson plan | Lesson 5: Steve Reich – Ghana, Bali, America and Germany (Age range 14-16) |
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| Starter | <p>Compare the three excerpts of music: drumming from the Ghanaian Ewe tribe, music for Balinese gamelan, and an excerpt (from the middle) from Steve Reich's Music for 18 musicians.</p> <p>Discuss with pupils how they are different, what they have in common, and where they think each might come from?</p> <p>Point out that each is based on repeating 'cyclic' patterns, is polyrhythmic, and rhythmically energetic, featuring cross rhythms. Explain where each comes from, and that the third piece was composed by American Steve Reich who had studied the music of Bali and Ghana extensively and was influenced by both.</p> |
| Main | <p>Using information from Essentials of Music and Wikipedia provide pupils with an over-view of Steve Reich's music. Point out that he is a percussionist and that his extended studies of Balinese and Ghanaian music resulted in a style called 'minimalism' in which repeating rhythmic ideas slowly go out of phase with each other, creating gradual change and increasing complexity.</p> <p>Demonstrate how the technique of phasing works by setting off two mechanical metronomes, both set to virtually the same setting. Listen to the way that they go out of phase and occasionally back in phase (alternatively follow the instructions in the information to replicate Reich's 'Pendulum Music').</p> <p>Listen to an excerpt from an early composition 'Come out' which explores the effect of phasing. Explain the background to the spoken phrase used (see 'Useful information')</p> <p>Introduce Reich's piece 'Clapping Music'. Display the score. As a class, clap the first repeated section of the music. Ask the class to perform part 1 (which does not change) whilst the teacher claps part 2. Analyse how part 2 moves</p> |

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| | <p>out of phase i.e. at each new repeated section the first quaver of the previous section is moved to the end of the new pattern, until after 12 sections the rhythms move back in phase.</p> <p>Watch a video performance of 'Clapping Music'. Point out before watching the video that each section is repeated a number of times.</p> <p>Finally, introduce pupils to Reich's recent trilogy of multi-media operas called 'Three Tales' which explores the global theme of the rise of technology in the 20th Century focussing on the failed technology of the Zeppelin, the atom bomb and cloning (see resources and 'Useful information').</p> <p>Introduce and watch the short video clip taken from 'Nibelung Zeppelin' the first opera in the trilogy. This opera explores a failed technology - Hindenberg's Zeppelin and Hindenberg's associations with the Third Reich. It uses the leit motif associated with the Nibelungs from Wagner's opera 'Rheingold' representing the Nibelung race mining for gold. (There is a notated version of the original provided). It also uses a similar technique of gradually transforming a musical motif to create an exciting polyrhythmic texture.</p> <p>Ask pupils why they think that Reich used a motif from Wagner's Ring? (e.g. it is German, and the music of Wagner was associated with the Third Reich, the motif represents 'industrial' working, the motif has a strong rhythm.) How successful was the combination of music and video? What messages do they think were being conveyed to the audience?</p> |
| Plenary | <p>Why do pupils think that an American composer has created a musical style that fuses so many world music influences?</p> <p>(e.g. America is a relatively young multi-cultural nation with no long-standing 'classical' tradition of its own. Composers are therefore more open to new influences from a variety of different cultures and traditions.)</p> |

Nibelung motif

