

SchoolTime 05/06



dance music theater

Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

1906
Centennial Season
2006



Study Guide

Sweet Honey in the Rock

Thursday, February 23, 2006, at 10:30 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall

Welcome



February 10, 2006

Dear Educator and Students,

Welcome to *SchoolTime*! On **Thursday, February 23, 2006**, at **10:30 a.m.** or **1:00 p.m.**,* you will attend the *SchoolTime* performance by the acclaimed *a cappella* group **Sweet Honey in the Rock** at Zellerbach Hall on the UC Berkeley campus. (** Your performance time has been confirmed separately by the ticket office.*)

This powerful *a cappella* ensemble performs traditional songs and original compositions that address many critical issues in today's society, including freedom, justice, work and equality. Their work reflects the strong legacy of African American music in America, especially the influence of spirituals.

The information included here explores the work and art of this remarkable ensemble, providing a context for the performance. Your students will learn about the history of African American song traditions, the art form of *a cappella* singing, and some of the specific songs written by the members of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Your students can actively participate at the performance by:

- OBSERVING how the singers use their bodies to communicate the message of the song.
- LISTENING to the harmonies and how the singers weave their voices together.
- THINKING ABOUT how the singers communicate with each other and the audience.
- REFLECTING on what they have learned about African American music and the power of song

We look forward to seeing you at the theater!

Sincerely,

Laura Abrams
Director
Education & Community Programs

Rachel Davidman
Education Programs Administrator



About Cal Performances and *SchoolTime*

The mission of Cal Performances is to inspire, nurture and sustain a lifelong appreciation for the performing arts. Cal Performances, the performing arts presenter of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfills this mission by presenting, producing and commissioning outstanding artists, both renowned and emerging, to serve the University and the broader public through performances and education and community programs. In 2005/06 Cal Performances celebrates 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

Our *SchoolTime* program cultivates an early appreciation for and understanding of the performing arts amongst our youngest audiences, with hour-long, daytime performances by the same world-class artists who perform as part of the main season. Teachers have come to rely on *SchoolTime* as an integral and important part of the academic year.



Sponsors of Cal Performances Education and Community Programs

Cal Performances' Education and Community Programs are supported by California Arts Council, Walter & Elise Hass Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, The Wallace Foundation, The Zellerbach Family. Additional support is provided by Berkeley Community Fund, California Savings Bank, Citibank, East Bay Community Foundation, Robert J. and Helen H. Glaser Family Foundation, McKesson Foundation, The San Francisco Foundation and Union Bank of California.

SchoolTime Study Guide

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1 Theater Etiquette



Be prepared and arrive early Ideally you should arrive at the theater 30 to 45 minutes before the show. Allow for travel time and parking, and be in your seats at least 15 minutes before the performance begins.

Be aware and remain quiet The theater is a “live” space—you can hear the performers easily, but they can also hear you, and you can hear other audience members, too! Even the smallest sounds, like rustling papers and whispering can be heard throughout the theater—so it’s best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. The international sign for “Quiet Please” is to silently raise your index finger to your lips.

Show appreciation by applauding Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation. Performers return their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience at the end of the show. It is always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it is customary to continue clapping until the curtain comes down or the house lights come up.

Participate by responding to the action onstage Sometimes during a performance, you may respond by laughing, crying or sighing. By all means, feel free to do so! Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form. For instance, an audience attending a string quartet performance will sit very quietly, while the audience at a gospel concert may be inspired to participate by clapping and shouting.

Concentrate to help the performers Performers use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience is focused while watching the performance, the artists feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!

2 Setting the Stage

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the origins of the musical ensemble, Sweet Honey in the Rock.
- Students will be able to contextualize the songs that they will hear at the performance.
- Students will become familiar with the history and significance of African American musical traditions.

Pre-Performance Activities

Choosing at least one of these pre-performance activities will give your students a framework for their field trip experience and will allow them to better understand what they see on stage.

- Listen to music by Sweet Honey in the Rock
- Introduce students to a spiritual and sing it in class (see page 19)
- Introduce students to a few basic letters in American Sign Language

Questions to Think About While at the Performance

Reviewing these questions with your students prior to the performance will prepare them for their *experience in the theater, making SchoolTime an opportunity for learning*. Students who are familiar with the vocabulary, concepts, and themes they will encounter on stage are much more likely to enjoy and understand the performance.



- What is one important subject Sweet Honey in the Rock sings about?
- What is the significance of having an American Sign Language interpreter performing with the singers?
- How would you describe what you saw to a friend?

Vocabulary

Some of the material in this study guide is written for more advanced readers. If you are working with younger students it may be necessary to paraphrase or summarize the main points of the reading. Selected words in bold and are listed in the margin for students to define.

3 About the *SchoolTime* Performance

The Music of Sweet Honey in the Rock

Rooted in a deeply held commitment to create music out of the rich textures of African American **legacy** and traditions, Sweet Honey in the Rock possesses a stunning vocal prowess that captures the complex sounds of blues, spirituals, traditional gospel hymns, rap, reggae, African chants, hip hop, ancient lullabies, and jazz **improvisation**. Sweet Honey's collective voice, occasionally **accompanied** by hand percussion instruments, produces a sound filled with soulful **harmonies** and **intricate** rhythms.

From Psalm 81:16 comes the promise to a people of being fed by honey out of the rock. Honey: an ancient substance, sweet and nurturing. Rock: an elemental strength, enduring the winds of time. This **metaphor** captures completely these African American women whose **repertoire** is steeped in the sacred music of the Black church, the calls of the civil rights movement, and songs of the struggle for justice everywhere.

In the best and in the hardest of times, Sweet Honey in the Rock has come in song to communities across the United States, and around the world raising the voice of hope, love, justice, peace and resistance. Sweet Honey invites audiences to open their minds and hearts and think about who we are and what we do to one another and to our fellow creatures on this planet.

legacy
improvisation
accompanied
harmonies
intricate
metaphor
repertoire
a cappella
melodies
pitch
quartet

Singing Style

Sweet Honey in the Rock sings in the *a cappella* style, which means the human voice is the sole instrument used for all the **melodies** and **harmonies**. The only instruments used are for rhythm, including shekeres (gourds with beads netted on the outside to produce a rattle sound), rainsticks (a stick with seeds inside that make a rain-like sound when the stick is inverted or shaken), drums, cowbells and hand-held rattles.

A cappella singers must have excellent **pitch**, and be able to sing contrasting harmony with other singers. *A cappella* groups come in all sizes, though the **quartet** is the most traditional version. Sweet Honey in the Rock currently utilizes six voices in its harmonies. A seventh performer simultaneously signs the lyrics in American Sign Language.

One member of the group is designated as the concert programmer for each Sweet Honey in the Rock concert. As the concert begins, the programmer begins a narrative that sets the stage for the songs that will be sung. Prior to the performance, the other singers do not know the programmer's choice of songs. Even the programmer may not decide until the performance itself, and will take her cues from the mood and composition of the audience, so that every concert experience is fresh and unique.



Sweet Honey in the Rock in 2002 with founder Bernice Johnson Reagon, second from right.

4 Selected Song Lyrics

Sweet Honey in the Rock has created many albums and songs that appeal to young people. The songs included here were composed by members of the group. By providing the lyrics, we hope to provide your students with a more complete understanding of the ensemble's musical mission and values.

Give People the Right to Vote By Nitanju Bolade Casel

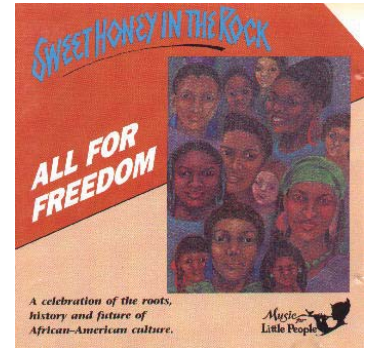
No taxation
Without representation!
Two hundred years of exploitation
In the capital of this nation!
No representation!
In the capital of this nation
Two hundred years of exploitation
Give the people their right to vote!

Someone asked me, was it true?
The voting rights of the District were long
overdue?
They couldn't believe it when I said, "yes!"
And then I said, "you ain't heard nothing yet"

We are based in Washington, DC
A truly diverse community
Almost six hundred thousand strong
Have been exploited much too long

Inadequate power over our own affairs
And national issues for which we care
No votes in Congress, the Senate, the House
No state delegation, no representation

We pledge allegiance, "my country 'tis of thee"
Fight in wars, pay taxes in this country
Provide work and services for the government
We get no vote, but our money is spent



You may wonder, how in the world can this be?
I thought we lived in a democracy
The US Constitution gives equal protection
Check the 14th Amendment to make this connection

CHORUS

In 1787, the US Constitution was ratified
US Congress won the power to exclusively exercise
In all cases, legislation
Over the future capital of this nation

In 1790, selection of the District site began
Using a piece of Virginia and a piece of Maryland
Forming the District of Columbia, or Washington, DC
But the people kept on voting in their former states,
you see

In 1800, Congress took control of DC
Ended representation for the whole community
In the history of this country you'll find the reason why
And even in a new millennium, they want this law to
apply

In 1846, the portion of DC
From Virginia decided to retrocede
It was returned to the original state line
Alexandria and Arlington came after this time

— *Give People the Right to Vote continued*—

In 1871, an elected delegate with no vote
Was created for the House of Representatives - no joke!
DC was given territorial government that year
Representation remained an issue, do you hear?

In 1874, financial troubles arise
The position of nonvoting delegate meets its demise
The territorial government that was given to DC
Was taken back by Congress at this point of history

In 1970, the House brings the position back
Years of civil rights activism brought pressure
with no slack
A step in the right direction brought the
people so much joy
And the man in this position, was Walter Fauntroy

In 1978, Congress finally said okay
To the DC Voting Rights Act, but not right away
If approved within seven years with no hesitation
DC would be granted full representation

In 1985, our hopes were really, really high
We knew that they should not let this bill die
All we needed was approval of thirty eight states
But only sixteen states would support our case

In 1993, the District made a giant step
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton worked hard to
get
A DC Vote on the House floor, which Congress did approve
But when Republicans came to power,
the decision was overruled

CHORUS

Now, I'm sure you are wondering what can be done?
There are at least four ways that this fight can be won
Some suggest we retrocede as a part of Maryland
Become a city or county in that state once again

Or a new law could pass with a Congressional vote
DC residents would be counted in the Maryland vote
For federal elections, census taking -
without retroceding back
This would leave our residency in tact

Or, Congress could pass another law for DC
Like they did in 1800, when they took over
totally

For more than five hundred reasons they
treat us like a state
And adding another reason, should not a
problem create

This would give us two US Senate seats
And the census would determine the
number of House seats
Preferably, DC would be the 51st state
We'd have a seat in the House and two in
the Senate -
it's not too late!!

Democracy is what we want!
Voting rights are what we need!
Tell your Congressperson, it's time to take
heed!

Democracy is what we want!
Voting rights are what we need!
Tell your Congressperson, it's time to take
heed!

CHORUS



Nitanju Bolade Casel

Would You Harbor Me?

Lyrics and music by Ysaye M. Barnwell

Would you **harbor** me? Would I harbor you?
Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?

Would you harbor a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew?
A **heretic**, convict or spy?
Would you harbor a runaway woman or child,
A poet, a prophet, a king?
Would you harbor an exile or a refugee,
A person living with AIDS?
Would you harbor a Tubman, a Garrett, a Truth
A fugitive or a slave?
Would you harbor a Haitian, Korean or Czech,
A lesbian or a gay?

Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?
Would you harbor me? Would I harbor you?

Young and Positive

By Nitanju Bolade Casel

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way

I've got self respect and a whole lot of **pride**.
I won't let you pull me down into a negative stride.
Down a dead end street where only trouble lies.
Than't not the way to keep my eyes on the prize.

This is the nineties and it's a difficult thing.
To maintain focus on my visions and dreams.
Violence and abuse of drugs
Turns an innocent child into a vicious thug.

Take a close look at this society
At the status of the youth and you will see
A sad situation that is out of hand
Youth are in trouble all over the land.

Don't let this state of affairs bring us down.
We have to work together, change things around
I start every day by taking the time



Ysaye M. Barnwell

harbor
heretic
pride
prohet
exile
refugee
society
status
postive
material

To remind myself, repeat one more
time that

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will
stay that way.

I'll teach you, and you teach me
We'll exchange information on how to be
The best we can be, not anything less
It has nothing to do with how we look or
dress

It's not material things that make us
who we are
Not the sneakers, not the jewelry, not
the clothes,
Or the cars
It's not the job, not the money, nor the

—*Young and Positive continued*—

status size
That's only momentary pleasure, not a valuable prize
Honesty and truth rank high on my list
Caring and respect for others help to assist me
'Cause I choose to move with love in my heart
For my sisters and my brothers
In every part of the world

You know, it doesn't make sense
To discriminate or believe in hate
Put down another because of their color or race

I must appreciate all the differences of each nationality
I don't want everybody to be like me
Can you imagine everyone exactly the same?
Life would be so boring I would go insane

I love the fact that each person is unique
The way we think, feel, look and express our needs
So let's move up to a positive tip
Ex racism. It's a negative trip!

Another dead end street
Don't even go down there
Let's accept one another and begin to care
Uplift ourselves, enrich our minds
And every day try to find a little bit of time to say:
I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I don't dis' my elders, they deserve respect
As a matter of fact I do my best to protect
Those who came before me, who struggled and fought
So that I would have a chance to listen up and be taught

I turn off the TV, I open up a book
I use my imagination and try to be aware as I look
And wonder what the future will be

With pollution destroying the land and the seas,
Nuclear war, green house effect
More toxic waste than ever before

I need all of you adults to live as if you care
Your greedy style of living is my nightmare
I need a world of clean air I can breathe
Where I can drink the water and enjoy the trees
Recycle all your plastic, bottles and glass

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way

Don't leave it up to me to clean up your act
All your oil spills, all the needless deaths
Now you want to leave the planet and
Go somewhere else?
To the moon? Or Mars? You had better beware
You'll do the same thing when you get up there

So just don't forget when you turn around
I'll be standing right behind you with a serious frown
'Cause every time I hear an older person say:
"What's wrong with the young folks of today?"

I want to scream
You know what I mean?
Give us support to fulfill our dreams

When I pick up a paper or turn on the news
I'm rather overwhelmed by the negative views
I would rather hear about the successes of life
Not just the tragedy, not just the strife,
So if nothing else, I must encourage myself
Find a little bit of time to enrich my mind,
'cause

I am young and I am positive
I am the future, I'm gonna tell it like it is
I won't let anything stand in my way
My eyes are on the prize and they will stay that way.

I've got self respect and a whole lot of pride
I won't let you pull me down into a negative stride
Down a dead end street where only trouble lies
That's not the way to keep my eyes on the prize, 'cause

I am young and I am positive.

respect

discriminate

appreciate

unique

enrich

future

overwhelmed

encourage

5 About the Artists:

Sweet Honey in the Rock

The Ensemble

Sweet Honey in the Rock is a dynamic, all-female, Grammy Award-winning singing group that makes soul-stirring music using the might and majesty of their voices. The group sings *a capella*—unaccompanied except for rhythms they create with their bodies and hand-held percussion instruments. Founded in 1973 by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, the ensemble has deep musical roots in the sacred music of the black church —spirituals, hymns, gospel—as well as jazz and blues. The individual women who make up Sweet Honey in the Rock preserve and celebrate African and African American culture through song. Sweet Honey's music shares history, fights injustice, encourages standing up for your own beliefs, and celebrates freedom, love and respect for all life in the universe. The septet, whose words are simultaneously interpreted in uniquely expressive American Sign Language, demands a just and humane world for all. After 30 years of leading and singing with the ensemble, Dr. Reagon retired from Sweet Honey in February 2004.



Meaning in the Name

On February 28, 1927, in Memphis, Tennessee, the blind sanctified singer Mamie Forehand recorded a refrain based on Psalm 81:16. In this passage of scripture, the poet and musician David advised his people that if they would serve the Lord, they would be rewarded by being fed “honey out of the rock...” While Forehand titled her song *Honey in the Rock* and sang those words, random congregations soon added the adjective “sweet” to the title, and the song has come down through history as “Sweet Honey in the Rock.”

Growing up in Southwest Georgia, Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of the group Sweet Honey in the Rock, heard this song sung by quartets. She called together a group of the strongest singers from her vocal workshop with the Washington, D.C. Black Repertory Company. It was 1973, and that evening the first song she taught the group was “Sweet Honey in the Rock.”

“After they got the chorus harmony just right, I said, that’s the name of the group, then I had to call my father, a Baptist minister, and asked him the song’s meaning. He told me that it was a sacred parable(a simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson), and that the parable itself was not found in the Bible, but it told of a land so rich that when you cracked the rocks, honey flowed from them.”

As a name, Sweet Honey in the Rock speaks clearly to the journey of the group as singers, cultural activists, and African American women.

Meet Sweet Honey in the Rock

What are your names?



"A" in American Sign Language

Aisha Kahlil

My name Aisha Kahlil, was given to me when I was a sophomore in college. I met a Muslim brother who gave me the name, which I adopted when I took *shahada* as a Muslim. Aisha means "alive" in Arabic. Kahlil means "friend." In Somalia, Aisha means, "What do you desire?"



"Y" in ASL

Ysaye Maria Barnwell

My first name comes from Belgium and was the last name of a violinist and composer whose name was Eugene Ysaye. My father gave me this name because he played the violin and gave violin lessons to me for 15 years. He really wanted me to be a violinist. My last name is Barnwell and it is Irish. There is a city in South Carolina called Barnwell, and my father's family and everyone I have ever met with that name had some connection to South Carolina.



"S" in ASL

Shirley Childress Saxton

In the Deaf Community, we identify one another using our name sign. My name sign is the letter "s" (handshape of a soft fist) with the thumb and index finger side facing and touching the cheek.



"M" in ASL

Carol Maillard

Maillard is French, and my great grandparents came from the French side of a Caribbean island named St. Martin. I do like being called by my last name because there are not very many Maillards in the United States and it really seems to fit my energy.



"N" in ASL

Nitanju Bolade Casel

My full name is Clarice Adele Johnson Nitaju Bolade Casel. My parents named me Clarice; it means "clear and bright." Johnson is my father's family name. Nitaju was given to me by a Yoruba Priest, who told me this name came to him in a dream. He told me it meant "to possess and project trust." Bolade is a Yoruba name from Nigeria which means "honor arrives." Casel is the family name of my husband, Tayari.



"A" in American Sign Language

Arnaé

I've asked my mom soooooo many times over the years how she came across my name. She says she doesn't remember; it just "came" to her! Mom was clear that my "e" had to always have an accent across it and that I should not hesitate to make sure people knew that. I look forward to meeting another Arnaé in my lifetime.



"L" in ASL

Louise

Louise means warrior. Renowned warrior. I was named after my mother's best friend, Louise.

What is your earliest musical memory?

Aisha

I grew up singing around the house. We used to sing along with my mother and father's records. My father was always humming or singing, and my mother sang in the church choir. There was always music around the house, and I remember singing all the time. My sister and I used to make up performances and perform for the neighbors, and for anniversaries and birthdays. I was always the director, calling the other kids to come and practice.

Ysaye

When I was eight years old, my mother, father, a friend of theirs and I drove from New York City to Los Angeles in our new 1954 Buick. I remember singing "Sipping Cider Through a Straw" all the way there and back. I don't remember singing any other songs. It must have driven my parents and their friend crazy!

Shirley

My earliest memory of music is that I wouldn't sing out loud—I was always off key. I've since learned that singing is energizing, and it is expression of one's self—whether sung vocally or in Sign!

Maillard

We had a beautiful upright piano in our house where I lived with both of my grandparents in Philadelphia. It was dark brown and I loved to polish it and spent lots of time pretending I knew everything there was to know about music and composing (that was before I took lessons in the second grade). I would play and play all kinds of melodies and sing and get up and create all kinds of fancy dances. My heart was full of music and drama and stories. I had a wild imagination.

Nitanju

My early music memories are rehearsing/singing in the junior church choir; rehearsing our friends for neighborhood performances; spending most of my allowance on music; trying to sing like all of the artists; and taking piano lessons. I LOVED the piano! Still do!

Arnaé

My grandmother, Essie Wallace Burton, provided my early musical training. I have distinct memories of sitting underneath her at age two and humming along as she snapped string beans at the kitchen table. My first taught song was "Hush (Somebody's Calling My Name)." By the time I was three, I was leading that very song with my family singing group. I think of her warmly whenever I hear it.

Louise

My first memories of music are in the church. I was a member of the "number one" choir, which was for kindergardeners through second graders. I had two songs that I led: "Satisfied with Jesus" and "We Are Soldiers in the Army." Although singing was the first musical experience I had, acting was the main focus of my artistic career.

**Bernice Johnson Reagon, composer,
singer, scholar, music producer,
author, public speaker and activist**

For over four decades, Bernice Johnson Reagon's multi-faceted career has taken her from the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement in her birthplace of Albany, Georgia to her pioneering work as a scholar, teacher and artist in the history and evolution of African American culture.

Reagon's contributions as a scholar and composer are reflected in her numerous publications and productions on African American culture and history, as well as in her academic service as Professor Emeritus of History at The American University in Washington, DC and as Cosby Professor of Fine Arts at Spelman College, Atlanta, GA. Founder of the Smithsonian Institution's Program in African American Culture, she served as principal scholar, conceptual producer, and host of the path-breaking and Peabody Award-winning radio series *Wade In The Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions*. Currently, Reagon holds the position of Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.



In 1973, Reagon founded Sweet Honey In The Rock, the internationally renowned a cappella ensemble, and led the group until her retirement after 30 years of performing and recording. In addition to her highly acclaimed publications and recordings, Reagon has received numerous honors in recognition of her work, including the MacArthur Fellowship (1989), the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities (2003), and the 1995 Presidential Medal for her contribution to public understanding of the humanities.

6 Historical Background:

The Beginnings of African American Music in the United States

By Sandra Graham, UC Davis Department of Music

Slave Songs

When Africans were brought to America as slaves in the 1700s and 1800s, they entered a frightening and dangerous world. They were sold to strangers whom they couldn't understand because they didn't speak English. Because they came from many different tribes within Africa, they often couldn't even communicate with each other. Many of them were separated from their families. They had to work long hours. They had little food to eat. They weren't allowed to learn how to read, and some owners wouldn't let them practice religion. Masters beat them for not working hard enough or for trying to escape.



One thing gave slaves hope in spite of all of these troubles: music, especially singing. Everyone had a voice, and therefore everyone could sing. When slaves sang, they sang together, just as they had back home in Africa. This created a feeling of community among them.

Spirituals were an extremely important type of song. You may know a few spirituals, such as "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" or "Go Down, Moses." The characters in spirituals come from the Bible, and the stories usually tell about someone who overcomes a big obstacle.



The lives of African Americans in the rural South remained difficult into the early 20th century, and so spirituals maintained their place of prominence in their communities.

Spirituals are easy to sing for a good reason. They were created for a type of religious worship called a camp meeting. Camp meetings were first held in 1800 in Kentucky. People would go to the woods and fields and camp out in tents and attend worship services for several days at a time. They were a way for people who lived on the frontier—who didn't live near neighbors or a church—to get together and worship.

Most of the people who attended camp meetings could not read or write. The songs that they sang during worship had to be easy to remember. Therefore, spirituals usually have a lot of

repetition and often have a chorus—a part of the song that repeats after each verse. That way, people could sing them without needing a book. Another thing that made written music unnecessary was the use of call and response. A leader would begin the song (the call), and everyone else would respond (the response).

Because these songs were passed on through oral tradition (they weren't written down, but were learned from other singers), they didn't always have a specific number of verses or even specific words. The leader decided what verse to sing, and in what order to sing the verses. One of the advantages of spirituals is that you can make up your own verses very easily—and people often did. That way they could make the spiritual reflect their own lives. As a result, every performance of a spiritual was unique.

The Function of Spirituals

Spirituals spread from camp meetings to plantations, and they became part of the everyday lives of slaves until the Civil War. These were functional songs, meaning that they had a specific purpose in society. For example:

- 1. WORK.** Singing spirituals made work less boring. It also helped set a rhythm for work that had repetitive actions, like picking or digging. Slave owners liked this because it made the slaves more productive.
- 2. WORSHIP.** Even though some owners didn't allow their slaves to worship on the plantation, slaves found ways around this. One way was something called the invisible church. At night, after the owners were asleep, the slaves would go out into the woods (their invisible church) and worship, where no one could see or hear them. Spirituals were an important part of this worship.
- 3. ENTERTAINMENT.** At the end of a long day, or during time off on a Sunday, slaves would often sing spirituals for relaxation.
- 4. CODE SONGS.** One important function of spirituals was their use in helping slaves escape. Code songs are songs that have hidden messages.

Harriet Tubman's Code Song

Harriet Tubman was a slave who escaped from a plantation in Maryland in 1849 and who worked as an abolitionist (someone who wants to abolish, or get rid of, slavery). She helped more than 300 slaves escape North to freedom through the Underground Railroad. This wasn't really a railroad, but a trail of homes owned by other abolitionists who were willing to shelter escaped slaves on their way North. Harriet Tubman's code name was Moses, because, as the Old Testament explains, Moses helped lead his people (the Israelites) out of slavery in Egypt. Therefore the spiritual "Go Down, Moses" was a way of alerting slaves that Harriet Tubman was on her way.



Harriet Tubman (1820-1913)

If one slave wanted to advise another slave that an escape was planned for that night, he might sing, “Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus.” In coded language, “steal away” means “escape” and “Jesus” means the North, or safety. Therefore, spirituals functioned as code songs to hide important messages from the owners.

How were spirituals performed?

Although sometimes they were accompanied by banjo or fiddle, when instruments weren’t available they were sung unaccompanied, or *a cappella* (which is how Sweet Honey in the Rock performs their songs). The singers improvised harmonies: They sang pitches that were different from the melody. In addition, singers often clapped their hands and danced during spirituals.

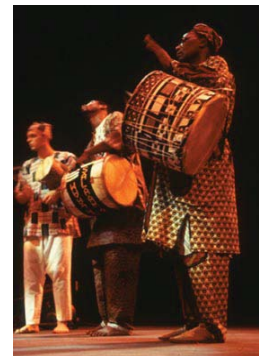
Spirituals were a communal music in which everyone participated. They were passed along through oral tradition, and each performance was unique due to improvisation. Call and response and repetition made the songs easy to remember.

Characteristics of African Musical Traditions

When Africans came to America, they may have lost their languages, but they remembered their music. They re-created African song in America, influenced by their new surroundings (for example, the English language, American music) and their cultural memory of Africa (how the songs were performed). Everything in the list below applies to how the spirituals were first performed, as well as to blues, gospel, rap, and other types of African American music. Listen for these things when Sweet Honey in the Rock performs.

- * Repetition with variation.
- * Movement (dance, gesture) is always present. In fact, most African definitions of music include dance.
- * Voices and instruments overlap, so there are very few silent moments.
- * Call and response is common.
- * Music is communal: everyone participates, whether by singing, clapping, dancing, shouting, or playing an instrument.
- * The voice quality tends to be intense and strong.

Music has always been important in helping people get through hard times, as well as in celebrating good times. African American music is especially significant because the music of Africans was taken away from them, along with their liberty, when they were enslaved in America. Spirituals kept the slaves’ hopes alive and the code songs helped them escape. Over one hundred years later, in the 1960s, African Americans came back to these same spirituals to help keep hope alive during the **Civil Rights** era. Civil Rights protesters took part in demonstrations to get the same rights as white Americans, such as any seat on a bus, and equal access to education and jobs. Even today, when people go through hard times, they sing spirituals to lift up their spirits.



7 Teaching Resources

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Hughes, Langston. *Famous Negro Music Makers*. Famous Biographies for Young People Series. New York: Dodd, Mead. Each chapter profiles different African American musicians and the story of their music. Includes a chapter on the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

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Continuum: The First Songbook of Sweet Honey in the Rock. A Cappella/Hal Leonard, 1999.

Websites

<http://www.sweethoney.com>

<http://www.sbgmusic.com/html/teacher/reference/styles/spirituals.html>

<http://www.negrospirituals.com/>

Glossary

Abolitionist – A person who wanted to abolish, or get rid of, slavery. Abolitionists wanted to make the slaves free.

A cappella – Singing with no instrumental accompaniment.

Call and response – A way of performing a song with a group of people. A leader will sing a line of the song (the **call**), and the group will sing the next line (the response). Most spirituals are performed using call and response.

Camp meeting – A style of worship that began in 1800 on the frontier. People would gather for several days and worship together in tents.

Chorus – The tune and words to the chorus stay the same throughout an entire song. The chorus is usually sung in between different verses. Also called a refrain.

Communal music – Music in which everyone in the group or community participates. African and African American music is usually communal.

Ethnic Group – A group of people who share a common ancestry, heritage, language, religion, memories, and who live in the same region together. Some ethnic groups in Africa are the Shona, who live in Zimbabwe; the Zulu, who live in South Africa; and the Dagbamba, who live in Ghana.

Functional songs – Songs have different functions, or purposes, in society. For example, “Happy Birthday” is a functional song, because it is sung only when someone has a birthday. It has the purpose of wishing someone happy birthday.

Harmony – The simultaneous sounding of two or more tones, especially when it is pleasing to the ear.

Improvisation – Spontaneous composition, or composition in performance. Instead of making up a song ahead of time, the musician makes it up on the spot, as he or she performs it. Spirituals had a lot of improvisation: Singers might change the words as they were singing, or change the tune, or add new verses, or cut out some of the verses. Improvisation makes music interesting, because each time you hear a song it is different.

Invisible church – Many plantation owners would not allow their slaves to worship in their own way, with singing and dancing. So at night, when everyone else was asleep, the slaves would sneak into the woods and worship. The forest and the fields became their “church,” although it wasn’t a real building (and therefore was “invisible”).

Oral tradition – A way of passing along knowledge by word of mouth, instead of through writing. Spirituals were passed on through oral tradition, which meant that people memorized them and then taught them to others.

Spirituals – Songs that were created for worship in the camp meeting. They are easy to remember because the words and tunes are repetitive. Many stories are about overcoming an obstacle, and the characters come from the Bible.

Underground Railroad – A route (not a real railroad) that slaves used to escape to the North and to freedom. The stops along this route were the homes of **abolitionists**, who protected the escapees while they slept during the day. The fleeing slaves traveled by night so they wouldn't be noticed. Harriet Tubman was an important "conductor" on this railroad, and she helped organize more than 300 escapes.

Reggae – Popular music of Jamaican origin having elements of calypso and rhythm and blues.

Metaphor – One thing conceived as representing another, like a symbol.

8 Learning Activities

1. Song in the Classroom

Below are the lyrics to the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” Try singing this with your students as a call and response. For extra support you can use a recorded version, available at your local music store or library

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

Leader (call): Swing low, sweet chariot,

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

Leader (call): Swing low, sweet chariot,

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

The verse above is called the **chorus**, also called the **refrain**.

Note that there are only two different lines of text, so it’s very easy to remember.

Here’s the first verse:

Leader (call): I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

Leader (call): A band of angels coming after me.

Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.

(sing chorus again)

Questions for students

What makes this song easy to learn?

What is the significance of this song as it relates to African American History?

2. Make Up Your Own Verse

Using the song “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” students can make up their own verses. A good starting point is to have students write a verse that relates to their own life.

If you need a place to start, have students fill in the blanks with a rhyming line for the lyrics below.

Leader (call): On my last quiz I got a D,
Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home.
Leader (call): [make up your own line]
Everyone (response): Coming for to carry me home. (sing chorus)

Teacher Note: Suggestions for lyrics, “Next time I’m aiming for a C/B”; “My teacher wasn’t very happy with me”; “But my best friend is helping me.”) Making up your own additions to a song like this is called improvisation. Another way of thinking about this is “composition during performance.” You can improvise both text and melody. In doing this, you make the song your own. This is what African Americans did with their songs: Every singer made the songs their own, so that spirituals and other types of songs became records of African American lives.

Questions for Students

- How do you think a song like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” gave slaves hope?
- If you look at the words, they talk about a chariot and a band of angels coming to get the singer and take him or her “home.” Where do you think home is?
- Are there any coded words in your verse? If so, what is their significance?

3. Post-performance Letter Writing

After the performance, think about the music, movements and message that are part of Sweet Honey in the Rock’s performance.

Write a letter to one of the singers expressing your thoughts about the performance and the songs they sang. What questions would you include?

9 Connections to California State Standards



California State Content Standards Music Grades K-12

For the particulars to your grade level, please visit
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/damain.asp>

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, analyzing, and responding to sensory information through the language and skills unique to music

Students read, notate, listen to, analyze, and describe music and other aural information, using the terminology of music.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, performing, and participating in music

Students apply vocal and instrumental musical skills in performing a varied repertoire of music. They compose and arrange music and improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments, using digital/electronic technology when appropriate.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of music

Students analyze the role of music in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting cultural diversity as it relates to music, musicians, and composers.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, analyzing, and making judgments about works of music

Students critically assess and derive meaning from works of music and the performance of musicians according to the elements of music, aesthetic qualities, and human responses.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and applying what is learned in music to learning in other art forms and subject areas and to careers

Students apply what they learn in music across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to music.



This Cal Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide was
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