

MUSICAL ROOTS INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE

Repertoire

- Romanian Folk Dances by Bartók (movements 1, 4–6)
- “The Girl from Da Ban City” by Huang Ruo (arr. by Shelley Monroe Huang) 4”
- “Red Clay & Mississippi Delta” by Valerie Coleman (CUT mm. 29–152) 4”


Entry Point: Musical roots


Line of Inquiry: How do a composer’s musical roots influence their music?

Audience: 4th and 5th graders at PS200 Benson School in Brooklyn

Woodwind Quintet:

- Catherine Gregory, flute
- Moran Katz, clarinet
- Stuart Breczinski, oboe
- Shelley Monroe Huang, bassoon
- Nicolee Kuester, horn

 = Write on board

 = Play

SCRIPT

Board is preset with a drawing of a tree and three different roots: FAMILY, CULTURE, PLACE

PLAY “THE GIRL FROM DA BAN CITY” EXCERPT (MM. 101 TO END).

Shelley: Hello everyone! We are Decoda and today we are going to be exploring three pieces of music written by three different people. Each piece is inspired by musical roots.

Nicolee: Shelley, what do you mean when you say “musical roots”?

Shelley: Good question, Nicolee. Everyone has musical roots. Our musical roots (**write on board: “MUSICAL ROOTS”**) grow from music that is important in our lives. It can be music we hear from family, or music from our culture, or from a place. Musical roots are part of our story. It’s the music that helps make us who we are.

Nicolee: OK, I think I’m starting to understand what you mean by musical roots. Maybe we can each introduce ourselves by sharing who we are and playing something from our own musical roots. Catherine, would you like to start?

INTRODUCTIONS AND INSTRUMENT DEMOS

Catherine: Hi everyone, my name is Catherine and I play the flute. When I think of my musical roots, I think of this Irish song called "Tambourin" that my mother would play to me on the record player.

CATHERINE PLAYS TAMBOURIN.

Shelley: Hi, I'm Shelley and I play the bassoon. One part of my musical roots I get from my father. In the car, we often listened to classical music and opera. I love how the music sounds so beautiful even if I don't understand the words the people are singing. Today, I love opera and I love to sing through my instrument.

SHELLEY PLAYS ARIA.

Moran: Here's a song that I heard my dad sing. It's called "My Yiddishe Mama" and it's about missing your mother.

MORAN PLAYS SONG.

Stuart: Hi, I'm Stuart and I play the oboe. Not all musical roots come from our families. When I was growing up, one of my musical roots was the music of the movies – Movies are a huge cultural phenomenon, and whenever I'd watch one, I would just want to hear more of the music. One of the first CDs I ever bought was a movie soundtrack, and the theme song – which you might recognize – goes like this.

STUART PLAYS STAR WARS THEME.

Nicolee: Hi everyone! My name is Nicolee and I play the horn. Some of my musical roots come from hearing recordings of reeeeeally old music from the Catholic church, which is a culture rich in centuries of music. I especially loved listening to music from the 1500s written for choirs in big, echoey cathedrals, and even though I'm not a singer, these songs are still meaningful to the kinds of things I like to play on the horn.

NICOLEE PLAYS QUAM PULCHRA ES.

Stuart: Each of us up here has our own musical roots. These musical roots can come from our family, culture, and place. What are *your* musical roots? Do you remember hearing a song, a dance, or a beat that is important to you or your family? Think about this, and then turn and share it with your neighbor.

TURN AND TALK WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Stuart: OK! Let's come back together in 3 ... 2 ... 1 ... Everyone raise your hand if you and your partner had some interesting musical roots ideas. That's great! Keep your hand up if you can share a bit about you or your partner's musical roots. What music is important to you?

ASK FOR RESPONSES.

These are all great examples! Now, it's time to dive into the musical roots of three composers. Composers are people who write music. We'll explore the ways that they've transformed musical roots from their families, cultures, and places into pieces of music with incredible melody, dance, and rhythm.

HUANG RUO and MELODY: LISTENING ACTIVITY 1

Catherine: For many people, their musical roots go back to their family—learning songs from family members that are passed on to you. This is true for the Chinese American composer of our first piece, Huang Ruo. Growing up, his father would sing songs to him. One song he learned from his father was “The Girl from Da Ban City.”

EVERYONE PLAYS THE MELODY.

Shelley: Let's learn the first part of this song. Copy after me. Sing on “Da.”

SHELLEY TEACHES TWO BARS OF THE MELODY. MORAN PLAYS ALONG.

Shelley: Great job! Just like a parent can pass a song to a child, we can also pass the song from instrument to instrument. We are passing around the melody, the main tune that you sing [write on board: “MELODY = MAIN TUNE THAT YOU SING”]. [Ask for a volunteer.] We are each going to take turns passing the melody between instruments as we move this object/scarf around. [Shelley demo] With [a volunteer]'s help, can you follow the melody from one instrument to another as we move the scarf?

MELODY PASSING ACTIVITY. EVERYONE PLAYS VAMP.

Moran: Now we're going to play the full version of “The Girl from Da Ban City.” We don't have a scarf anymore to see where the melody is, so we need you to use your ears to follow the melody as it passes around the group!

PLAY “THE GIRL FROM DA BAN CITY” 4”

Stuart: Raise your hand if you heard the melody pass around the group! Was there anything cool you noticed in the way the melody moved around? (Ask for responses.) Great! So far, we've looked at how a composer's musical roots can include a melody that is passed through your family, or in this case from player to player. Now we're going to switch gears.

BÉLA BARTÓK and DANCE: LISTENING ACTIVITY 2

Moran: Our next composer's roots come from the culture of the part of the world he lived in. The composer Béla Bartók was born near the border of both Hungary and Romania—that's in eastern Europe (also part of my roots as well!). Bartók loved the traditional music from his homeland, and it makes up an important part of his musical roots.

Shelley: That's right, Bartók would often travel to the countryside to find and record the sounds of music he heard in villages. Let's hear one short piece by Bartók so we can get to know his music—and his musical roots. As you listen, you can close your eyes and imagine. What might people do as they hear this music?

PLAY BARTÓK ROMANIAN FOLK DANCE NO. 6.

Nicolee: I'm curious to know where your musical imagination took you. What did you see when you closed your eyes and listened to that music? What might people do as they hear this music? [Ask for responses.]

INTRODUCE DANCING THROUGH OUR HANDS AND ARMS (I.E. CONDUCTING).

Nicolee: I felt my body wanting to move to that music!

NICOLEE MODELS DANCING AS STUART PLAYS THE MELODY TO BARTÓK'S ROMANIAN FOLK DANCE NO. 6.

Stuart: Dance is a really great way to get into any kind of music, and it's especially (**write on board: "DANCE"**) important in this music. Why? Because this music itself is a dance! This piece is one of several Romanian Folk Dances composed by Béla Bartók, inspired by the music that he heard while traveling the countryside, digging up the musical roots of Hungary and Romania.

To get into the spirit of Bartok's Romanian Folk Dances, we're going to do a little dancing of our own. We're a little tight on space, so we're going to dance only with our arms, hands, and face. [Briefly demo conducting.]

Let's try this together! First you put your hands up in front of your body [have students join] and then we go DOWN and UP and DOWN and UP ... [also quiet, loud, faster]

Stuart: Pause. All of these kinds of changes allow us to express the music that we're listening to through movement. And we don't need to stay as strict conductors either, we can move in other ways. [demo]

I think we're ready for the real thing. All we need to do now is add in some music, and we can dance the character of the music in our hands. I want you to show me the different ways that you express the mood of the music through your movement. This is another one of Bartók's Folk Dances.

ALL BUT STUART PLAY BARTÓK ROMANIAN FOLK DANCE 1 (PICKUP TO A FOR 8 BARS) AS STUART CONDUCTS.

Stuart: Pause. Nice job. I saw people doing _____ that really did _____. Now we're going to do another dance in a different style. Let's see what you've got for this one!

ALL BUT STUART PLAY BARTÓK ROMANIAN FOLK DANCE 6, BARS 1–8 (NO MELODY) AS STUART CONDUCTS WITH STUDENTS.

Stuart: Pause. Fantastic. I saw people doing _____ that really did _____.

We're now going to perform a few of these short dances by Bartók, and each one has a different character. If you feel inspired, see what kind of movements you can come up with, with this dance music by Bartók.

FULL GROUP PLAYS BARTÓK ROMANIAN FOLK DANCES 1, 4, 5, AND 6.

VALERIE COLEMAN and SOUNDSCAPE: LISTENING ACTIVITY 3

Catherine: Wow! Fantastic movements—I could see how you could feel the dance in the music of Bartók! Dance can be a part of your musical roots. We started our exploration of musical roots learning the melody that's passed through the family of Huang Ruo, and then we felt the dances of Béla Bartók's culture. Now, let's see if we can find some musical roots in a place close to home.

Nicolee: So, even if like me you weren't born here, everyone in this room is a New Yorker, and I wonder what it would sound like if we wrote a piece of music based on this city we all share? Who can tell me some things we might find in the streets of NYC that are special to this place?

WRITE RESPONSES ON BOARD. SHELLEY RUNS THE MICROPHONE.

Nicolee: What a wonderful picture of NYC, I love it! Let's figure out how to turn some of these details into sounds so we can celebrate our shared musical roots. [Assign looping melodies to instruments.]

Nicolee: OK, before we put the different sounds of our musical roots together, I think we should have a foundation of rhythm for our piece. [Write on board: "RHYTHM = THE PATTERN OF SOUNDS"]. Shelley, is there a rhythm you could make that might represent the sound of people shuffling past on a busy sidewalk? [Shelley makes body percussion rhythm. Students join in.] Great, let's build off of our rhythm. Let's add the sounds we talked about.

ADD CATHERINE AND STUART LOOPS

And let's put a longer melody on top. Students, how would you describe a melody about _____? [Ask for responses.] Moran, can you add a melody like that on top of our loops?

MORAN PLAYS.

LOOP A FEW TIMES UNTIL MORAN CUTS OFF.

Catherine: Awesome, that felt like NYC! Nice job everyone. This really shows our shared musical roots in NYC. Our next composer also has musical roots in America and her piece

captures the energy of a different place in the US. Composer Valerie Coleman wanted to express her musical roots inspired by the Mississippi Delta, where her mother grew up. This place lies on the red clay banks of the Mississippi River in the South. See if you can imagine the scene: It's hot and humid in the summer, and the river is buzzing with boats and people.

Let's build up Valerie Coleman's music, gradually adding instruments—starting with this rhythm that transports us to the red clay banks of the Mississippi River. (Catherine leads the rhythm.)

M. 152 Stomp snap + Shelley/Nicolee

We have this rhythm as our foundation for the Mississippi Delta. Join in with this rhythm [Catherine stomp-snaps.] as more melodies are added on top.

PLAY MM. 152–182 (DOWNBEAT)

Moran: The Mississippi Delta is also a place of rich musical roots of blues and jazz. In this type of music, people get to take solos and improvise to express themselves!

MORAN PLAYS OPENING-MS. TO M. 10 3RD BEAT.

Catherine: And while the solos are happening, the rest of us are playing the same rhythms together like a band.

EVERYONE BUT MORAN PLAYS BEGINNING TO MS. 6 DOWNBEAT.

Stuart: It's time to put it all together! Here is Valerie Coleman expressing her musical roots in her piece called "Red Clay & Mississippi Delta." Listen for wild solos, the band playing together, and that red clay rhythm. [Demo rhythm.] While you're listening, think about what part of the music is most EXCITING to you.

ALL PLAY COLEMAN [CUT MM. 29–152]

Shelley: We heard Valerie Coleman's musical roots from the Mississippi Delta. What in the music is exciting to you? [Ask for responses.]

RECAP AND REFLECTION

Stuart: Today, we have talked a lot about musical roots, and we have explored how three composers use their musical roots as inspiration for their pieces. Huang Ruo uses a melody he learned from his parent, Béla Bartók uses dances he heard in his homeland, and Valerie Coleman was inspired by the rhythms and styles of a specific place.

Nicolee: All of us have musical roots, even if you don't play an instrument or write your own music. And when we think about our musical roots, we recognize what makes us special and what connects us to others in our family and our community.

Catherine: We encourage you to continue thinking about your musical roots. Your musical roots could inspire other creative work—maybe a poem, or a story, or a play, or a dance, or even your own brand-new, never-before-heard song.

Moran: Thank you all for all of your thoughtful ideas and for joining us in this performance. We would love to take any of your questions.

QUESTION AND ANSWER