

A Cultural Study of the Holiday Season through Music

A STUDY GUIDE AND TEACHERS LESSONS

PART ONE - Celebrations of the Holiday Season
FOR "Love of Christmas"



PART 1:- Celebrations of the Holiday Season

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how the winter holidays came to have all those wonderful trappings we associate with the season: The ornaments, a tree, candles, tea lights, presents, mistletoe, and Santa Claus? The world's religions have chosen this time of the year to revere. Christianity has Christmas, Judaism; Chanukah, Islam has Ramadan, while the year itself comes to a close.

It is as if the year were young and fresh in the spring, blossomed to summer, aged into a colorful fall and closed into the cold of winter. The Earth itself marks the occasion because in the northern hemisphere it is the time of the Winter Solstice. This is a time when the days are short and the nights are long, a time of philosophy and hope to await a new rebirth of a new year and all its promise.

- ⇒ What kinds of thoughts do you have of this time of the year? What images come to your mind and what are your expectations?
- ⇒ Are there any special people you think of at this time of year?
- ⇒ Do you think this season may be different in the Southern Hemisphere where it is summer instead of winter?
- ⇒ Are there any ways we can make this a better season than last year?

A: UNDERSTANDING THE SIMILARITY OF CULTURE

TEACHER LESSONS

VOCABULARY

CELEBRATION	:	A joyful occasion
REVERE	:	To honor, respect, worship.
PHILOSOPHY	:	Ideas you have thought deeply about
HEMISPHERE	:	Half the world
WORSHIP	:	To show love to your God.
SACRIFICE	:	Going without or giving up something
CHANT	:	To sing in a speaking way.
RITUALS	:	Doing things and repeating things a certain way that gives them meaning
ENLIGHTENMENT	:	Complete understanding
SECULAR	:	Not religious
CONSUMERISM	:	Buying things

A good place to start is with history because, after all, history is really the product of all the creative and destructive processes of generations of people just like us. People have always worshiped and celebrated all through history. They had the same questions and wants. The wonderful thing about the holiday season is that everyone is finding their own way of doing a similar thing:

Christianity celebrates the birth of Christ and is joyful in the love for a baby.

Judaism celebrates Chanukah with the lighting of candles to remember an ancient miracle and the freedom of worship.

Buddhism celebrates Bodhi day, remembering the day Buddha achieved enlightenment.

Islam celebrates Ramadan, the gift of enlightenment through their holy book. (Although Ramadan has often fallen during the holiday season it is based on a lunar calendar and changes each year.)

Kwanzaa is a year's end African American celebration of family, community and culture.

Native Americans celebrate many different rituals at this time including feasts and blessing.

People are performing their own rituals in a way that has special meaning to them. At this joyful time of year people often sing and chant. They enjoy being surrounded by people they love and sometimes they attempt to deny themselves things or sacrifice. This is sometimes as a New Years resolution, or more seriously, by going without food or comfort. Certainly it is a time for thinking about life and its importance; also it is a time to remember other people less fortunate than you.

The other very well known ritual at this time is giving gifts. Sometimes shopping and rushing and receiving gifts become more important than the philosophy of the season.

⇒ Which one of these rituals are you thinking about right now?

ACTIVITIES

Research activities

a) Divide the class into research groups or assign the activity for the previous night's homework. Each group researches everything they can think of about the holiday season competing for the longest list.

b) What cultures are represented by the CD and what religions are included?

⇒ Answer. The CD has music mostly from Christianity and celebrates Christmas but it also includes other religions and other ideas:

“Emanuel” is inspired by the Old Testament, Isaiah 7:14 and therefore part of Judaism as well. In fact Christianity Judaism and Islam have many similar themes and elements and ideas common to both. Immanuel is Hebrew for “God with us.” The song was written in the 12th Century called “Veni Veni Immanuel.” and translated from the Latin in the 1800s while the music was written by French Nuns in the 15th Century.

“Riders on the Sleigh” makes a statement about current seasons where Santa has to be worried about being mistaken for an unidentified flying object. “Billy wants a Bike, the elves are out on strike” refers to the ritual of consumerism.

“Christmas by Myself” is more about being lonely at holiday time than any religion but is meant to be humorous.

“What Child is this?” is from a secular English Folk song called Green sleeves written in the 1500s. The music becomes an arrangement of Beethoven's Fur Elise because it too uses the A minor and E Chords of Green sleeves.

“Stewart's Sonata” was written by a little boy during the holiday season.

“Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer” is about the sleigh and reindeers that pull it. The reindeer idea came from Santa being from the frozen North while the idea of Santa himself came to America from

the Dutch, Sint Klass who rode on his white horse and in turn was inspired by Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of giving. Saint Nick was kind to children and often gave presents.

B: SYMBOLS OF THE SEASON

a) Listen to track 3 on the CD

See if the class can answer the following questions:

- ⇒ Question: What imagery is used in the music?
- ⇒ Answer: An evergreen tree surviving through all seasons.

- ⇒ What is the connection between a Christmas tree and the celebration of Christmas?
- ⇒ Answer. The Christmas tree is usually an evergreen and like many of the world's religions at this time of year it represents renewal. The leaves remain green all through the winter and do not die and fall off so the tree looks fresh and alive even through the winter.

b) The history and traditions of trees during the holiday season

The tree was brought into the home decorated with lights and ornaments and often crowned with an angel or star on the top. This practice began as a German tradition. Ancient German tribes held nature and the forest in respect and in the 16th Century trees were brought into homes during the winter solstice and decorated.

This idea was passed to England when the German Hannover family inherited the throne and images of the Royal family Christmas Trees helped to popularize this idea in the U.S.

Sometimes the decorations became important in representing a theme.

Look at the cover of the CD and discuss what the theme might be in this picture of an evergreen tree with ornaments.

The idea of tinsel and glass ornaments also came from Germany from the factories of the Ore Mountains in Germany in the 19th Century.

- ⇒ Can anyone think of a reason why the artist sang the last part of the song in German?
- ⇒ Answer: to acknowledge both the origin of the song and also the origin of the tradition.

“O Tannenbaum” means “O Christmas Tree” in German.

You have all heard that mistletoe is placed on the tree but...

- ⇒ What is mistletoe?
- ⇒ Answer: Mistletoe is especially interesting because it is a partial parasite (a "hemi parasite"). As a parasitic plant, it grows on the branches or trunk of a tree and actually sends out roots that penetrate into the tree and take up nutrients.

- ⇒ What is the Yule Log?
- ⇒ Answer: The Yule log is a log for the fire, again part of a German tradition. Yule log is another symbol of the ancient reverence for trees.

Note: In New Zealand, which is in the Southern Hemisphere, the year ends in the middle of summer not in winter. The Pohutukawa tree of New Zealand flowers red with summer blossoms and is called the New Zealand Christmas tree. Imagine a barbecue on the beach for Christmas surrounded by red blossoms.

c) Listen to “20 Miles to Christmas”, track 7

- ⇒ What are some of the images the artist uses in the song?
- ⇒ Answer: Christmas lights
“Red tail lights trail on forever like a fallen Christmas Tree”

The child in the story can’t wait to get home for the holidays. He is seeing the long lines of cars on the road as if they are the lights of a huge Christmas tree that had fallen over.

“The presents rattled in the back like pennies in a jar”

Note there are also the other images we associate with the cold winter season:

- “Cup of Cocoa twisting steam”
- “The sky white flakes, the ground white cream”
- “Snowman blinks at your high beams” In other words the car’s headlights shine brightly on the frozen snowman waking him up.

d) Listen to “O Holy Night”, track 2

- ⇒ What images do you hear here?
- ⇒ Answer: A Starry night. “The stars are brightly shining.” The star is an important symbol and metaphor from the holiday season as it is a bright and beautiful symbol but also a guide to travelers.

Rebirth: “Long lay the world, pining

A “weary world” but now a “new and glorious dawn”

As dawn comes from night, spring from winter so too comes the birth of new hope.

This music was composed by Adolphe Adam in 1847 to a French poem called "Minuit, chrétiens" This version however is very different as it draws on rock and contemporary ideas while raising the excitement and drama of a new and glorious dawn.

- ⇒ Can you think of any examples where one kind music becomes transformed into another or when one form of art becomes another?

⇒ Answer: i.e. a poem by Schiller's "Ode to Joy" became the 9th Symphony by Beethoven.

Consider also; American composer Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" became the rock music often played at sporting events.

e) Discussion topic: How effective is this music for creating the mood of the holiday season?

⇒ Does one type of music seem more seasonal than another?

Compare "White Christmas", track 6 with "Silent Night", track 11

For 50 years Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" has been associated with the season, as has "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire", track 9

This song, also known as "The Christmas Song", was written on a very, very hot day in the middle of summer!

f) An interesting leisure activity:

Notice the images of the holiday seasons in contemporary magazines and television.

⇒ Do these images try to do more than remind you of the holiday season?

This exercise does evoke an interesting discussion of the holiday season and advertising and may help the student understand how he or she is being persuaded.

STUDY GUIDE AND TEACHERS LESSONS

PART 2:- Listening to the Music



1. Riders On The Sleigh

Enjoy the acoustic piano sound to the music and listen to how the guitar, played in a blues style, and piano, played in a classical style, seem to dance together. See if you can hear the sleigh bells as percussion (driving the beat).

The idea of this piece is parody. A parody is taking a well known piece and making a statement with it. That can be a joke or it can be serious. In this case the artist makes the rider Santa in a humorous way. That way it becomes a song about today with its consumerism and concerns.

2. O Holy Night

One of the most loved pieces of holiday music. It is such a beautiful song written 150 years ago but made new and fresh and very different by a deep bass, a strong beat and an exciting guitar. The vocals are still the most important but harmony adds to the new and glorious dawn. It might be interesting to compare the Nat King Cole's version of the same song. This track also introduces the little boy singing for the first time.

3. O Christmas Tree

It is such a delightful play between the father and son singing together. The boy is only 9 but sings a harmony part to the theme.

There is also the theme of evergreen or something lasting.
The idea of what is lasting and what is temporary is very important in all religions.
For example the Tibetan monks see life, and all we create, as temporary.

“Not only green in summer's heat
But also winter's snow and sleet”

The last verse is sung in German to acknowledge the origins of the song.

4. Christmas By Myself

A funny song and one to make you laugh but there is a serious side as most lonely people are even more lonely in the holiday season while everyone else is celebrating with friends and family.
“I would even kiss an elf.... O yuck”

There are many references:
Charles Dickens's book “*a Christmas Carol*” with Bob Cratchit and Ebenezer Scrooge
The Nordic Counties, their myths and the origin of Santa Claus
The piano sound and playing reminiscent of the rock and roll of the 1950s

Consider a discussion of the Christmas Carol where a bitter and miserly old man finds love, understanding and generosity by seeing life for what it really is.

5. Stewart's Sonata

The sonata, which is a song without words, was written by a little boy and arranged by his father. It is one of the most beautiful pieces of classical music on the CD and was inspired by being forced to learn pieces by Bach, Beethoven and Mozart.

6. White Christmas

“White Christmas” was written by Irving Berlin, a very successful composer who could neither read nor write music. Irving Berlin was Jewish and this underscores the universality of the season. The season belongs to everyone.

In 1942 Bing Crosby recorded this song and it has now become the most recorded song in history!

The artist sings in a similar style to Bing Crosby but adds layers of harmony to the piece that was not there in the original.

7. 20 Miles To Christmas

This is the musical story of a little boy coming home for the winter holidays and so excited that the journey seems to take for ever. The season really belongs to the children. We can all remember waking up in the car and wondering “are we there yet?”

This song has such beautiful lyrics and imagery and is well worth studying for that reason alone.

Interestingly the song is sung by Jeffry Scott Jones in a style similar to the music of the 1920s.

8. What Child Is This?

There are two beautiful threads of music in this piece. One is the 15th Century melody from the folk song Green sleeves with a small change. The chord structure uses the A minor Chord resolving to a Major chord and instead of the Dorian minor scale the artist has used simply the minor scale for the melody.

The artist has also written a new melody which plays and weaves into the original. This melody is played on the guitar.

Then follows the most striking part of the piece: The piano and guitar then weave into each other with lines of improvisation.

William Chatterton Dix wrote the words to the song in 1865 when he was very ill.

“What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?”

Not content with this the artist takes the music further by playing an arrangement of Beethoven’s” Fur Elise” which means “for Elise” or “dedicated to Elise” in German,

It was the same key and similar chord progressions that allowed such a transition.

The artist completes the trilogy (the three sections) by adding contemporary (today’s) instrumentation to the classical piece.

9. The Christmas Song

“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire”

Of course for Christmas this should be a song that includes children.

“Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow”

“To kids from one to 92” meaning we are all children at heart and will always be so.

The sweet voices in the CD make this, the most popular holiday song of all time, the essence of what Christmas is about.

All those wonderful images come to life in the music and lyrics. It was written on a hot day imagining: "Jack Frost nipping at your nose".

The last thought is that no matter how many times it has been said "Merry Christmas" still sounds as beautiful.

10. Emanuel

"O come O come Emanuel"

Listen to how the voices work together as both a harmony and a chant. Then all the voices combine to take this ancient piece into modern times. The ideas are melancholy and sad but resolute.

"Who mourns in lonely exile here".

The voices then burst into a harmony of rejoicing "Emmanuel shall come to thee o Israel".

The arrangement reminds us of the plaintive chants of a cathedral and indeed the melody was written by nuns of the 17th Century but the boy's enthusiasm and the solid bass sets it solidly in modern times. The guitar solo also tries to express that haunting search.

Notice how the piano travels across the stereo as Israel seeks the Emmanuel "God amongst us"

11. Silent Night

This is the only track to use an orchestra and interestingly this orchestra is made up of only three people. The violinist played each of the violin and viola parts separately. They were then multiplied and assembled over the top of each other to create a string section. In the same way a cello section was created with the one cello while the flute is a well-played school recorder. The orchestral part is new and original.

There seems to be a group of children singing together but this too is only one child taking many parts.

"Silent night" is a favorite of the season, written in the early 1800s it was sung together by the English and German troops in the trenches and still at war with each other one Christmas during World War I.

12. O Come All Ye Faithful

It was time to liven up the CD with a carol almost never sung to a beat. The bass and drums are strong on the song and meant to make the listener sing along. There is even a section to clap to.

The song was originally written in Latin by an Englishman named John Wade and called *Adeste Fideles*. It was intended to be a hymn when John Reading wrote the music to it. I think it still stands as that hymn and adds the excitement to encourage the faithful to indeed come to Bethlehem.

Always bear in mind that "the holy land" is the holy land for many of the world's great religions.

13. Rudolf The Red Nose Reindeer

The idea and character was actually created by Robert May in 1939 for a retail store called Montgomery Ward! It has become an important part of the myth of the season with this lovable song written by Johnny Marks. The artist and his son bounce this humor back and forward to each other in this lovable version of Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer. Notice that the music is at times both much faster and slower than the original. The piece begins with very beautiful chords. They are called major 7th Chords because they add the 7th note (a semitone lower than the tonic) of the scale to the chord. This gives a dreamy quality to the sound.

14. Gloria In Excelsis Deo

Latin used to be a very important part of the ceremony and rituals of the Christian religion. Early Christianity was able to spread because of the Roman Empire and that language was Latin.

The phrase translates to “Glory to God in the highest” and is pronounced. Ecks- SHEL-sis.

As there are only two vocalists each had to cover many of the different parts in the song usually sung by soprano alto tenor contralto Bass vocals. Father and son sing all of them. Angels we have heard on high are personified by the sweet voices of children.

15. We Wish You A Merry Christmas

What better way for father and son to say goodbye on the CD.

IMPORTANT THOUGHT TO LEAVE WITH THE STUDENTS

Most people place restrictions on themselves in what they can do, study, or create but really...
THERE ARE NO LIMITS TO CREATIVITY, OR TO UNDERSTANDING.

Holiday Music like you have never heard it before

It is almost impossible to think about holiday time without thinking about children.

Not only do children make up such a part of the season but we, as adults, carry those memories through life with us.

What better way than to pay tribute to the love that Christmas brings and shapes all of our lives than to take Christmas music and perform it in a way not heard before.

This CD pays tribute to the music woven into the season that ends the year. It is the season of reflection for many of the world's great religions and is universal in its message of harmony and love. It is a time of philosophy and of family.

Just as the soft whiff of scent will bring back a memory so too will a nostalgic melody.

Whether it be the haunting chant of *Emanuel*, the anxiety of a little boy's impatient hopes in *20 miles to Christmas* or the humorous parody, *Riders on the Sleigh* this CD makes us appreciate music from a new perspective.

Gary and Stewart Schofield have taken themes we know and love and taken them much further. In the reflection of a fathers love for his son in a society where father and son are so often estranged *Love of Christmas* also adds the other most important quality to Christmas; **hope**.

