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Cindy Matyi, Celtic Designs & Music

Celtic Music



Classroom photo by Rich Sofranko

STUDY GUIDE

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Artists on Tour

BACKGROUND

Source: Celtic Music: A Complete Guide by June Skinner Sawyers and The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, Don Michael Randel, editor.

“The indigenous music of the Celtic-speaking peoples share some common features, some common traits and characteristics, such as ornamentation (varying notes in a song or piece of music), a cyclical way of seeing things where the beginning becomes the end and the end the beginning, a wonderful sense of improvisation set against the fixed dictates of tradition, and the intermingling emotions of joy and sadness.” (Celtic Music, p. 5)

Celtic Music has the power to reach people of all ages. Now you and your students can enjoy examples of the dance music, ballads and musical stories of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany and Galicia while learning some historical background.

Well-known local performers will demonstrate instrumental versions of reels, jigs, hornpipes, slip jigs, waltzes and other dance music. Funny songs and ballads will give students some insight into the lives of people in the Celtic Lands many years ago.

Historical background will be presented on the settings for the music, how the music expresses the Celtic spirit, the homesickness of the emigrant, tragic incidents like the Irish Famine, funny aspects of life in Ireland or Scotland and the rural lifestyle with its respect for nature found in most of the Celtic lands.

SYNOPSIS

The performance usually includes three or more performers, with an ensemble composed of traditional instruments, such as the Celtic harp, flute, concertina, bouzouki, bodhrán, and banjo. The program is about 40 minutes long and is designed to introduce students and teachers to the different types of Celtic dance music, themes for Celtic songs, types of instruments used and where they can find more information about learning to play Celtic music.

METHODS

If a classroom is used, no sound system is necessary. However, if the presentation involves a large auditorium, we recommend a sound system. We prefer to use the school's system (many auditoriums now have a built in PA) but can bring our equipment if necessary. We often bring just microphones and stands and then plug into the school's system.

We sit while playing, so we will need three chairs. Glasses of water for the musicians would be very helpful. The students can sit very close to us if they like, it doesn't bother us. We try to interact as much as possible with them and encourage questions, especially near the end after we have introduced them to some musical ideas. We sometimes bring handouts with information about local schools of Irish Music and special events.

THE PERFORMERS

The musicians usually include Cindy and Stephen Matyi, both members of the well known Celtic band, Silver Arm, and Nancy Bick Clark, a well known Celtic harpist. Nancy has three CDs to her credit, composes many original tunes, and is often sought after as a judge in Scottish harp competitions. She plays in many local churches, is a volunteer with Cincinnati Folk Life, and a member of the Scottish Harp Society.

Cindy and Stephen have played with Silver Arm for eleven years, have performed with the Cincinnati Pops and have four recordings. Cindy is also the artistic director for the Cincinnati Celtic Music and Cultural Festival, a board member of Cincinnati Folk Life and a board member of the Riley School of Irish Music.

MUSIC TYPES

Celtic music is strongly connected to dancing. Therefore, many of the types of music are also dances.

TIME – the number of beats per measure.

JIG – Traditional dance tune in 6/8 or 9/8 time; the oldest dance tunes in Ireland, they come in three forms: single jigs, double jigs, and slip jigs.

HORNPIPE – Of English origin, traditional tune in 2/4 or 4/4 time. It is similar to a reel but slower and more heavily accented.

REEL – From the Anglo-Saxon rulla, meaning “to whirl”; traditional dance tune in 4/4 time; a favorite for sets and step dancing.

SLIP JIG – Traditional dance tune in 9/8 time; steps consist, of hopping, slipping, and sliding; considered the most graceful of the step dances.

WALTZ – A couple dance in triple time, popular in various versions since the late 18th century.

Traditional Celtic music is pentatonic, a scale that has five tones to the octave. The pentatonic scale was common among ancient cultures, such as Chinese, Polynesian, African and Native Americans.

IRISH INSTRUMENTS



IRISH HARP

Originally, harps were carved from a single piece of wood. It has 30 to 36 strings and is played with the fingernails.

UILLEANN PIPES

Uilleann pipes are a form of bagpipes, which are complicated to learn. The melody is played on a 9-hole chanter (a pipe made of two reeds) with a 2-octave range. The other pipes are called drones. They are single reeds that are blown by air squeezed from a bag under the left arm. This bag is fed by bellows squeezed under the right elbow. The pipes are also fitted with a regulator for chords. The piper pushes down on those keys with his wrists.

BODHRÁN

A framed drum usually made of goatskin. It can be played with a small wooden stick or the back of the hand.

TIN WHISTLE

Tin whistles have six holes and are pitched in several keys, the most popular being D, E-flat and F.

ACTIVITIES

MUSIC

Fiddle and Violin

- ♦ What is the difference between the fiddle and the violin?
Answer: The way the instrument is played.
- ♦ Listen to music with a prominent fiddle, such as, Irish, Scottish, Welsh or Appalachian music; then listen to classical music, especially string quartets, where the violin is prominent.
- ♦ Have students list (individually or as a group) different adjectives to describe the sounds produced by the fiddle versus the violin.

Recordings

- ♦ Listen to current music produced in Ireland, Scotland or Appalachia (or Appalachians producing music in other parts of the U.S.).
- ♦ Have students describe the similarities and differences between the music types.
- ♦ Can they tell what instruments are used? What appears to be the dominant instrument? Does it change for different songs?

LITERATURE

- ♦ Read to the students or have them read folktales from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Appalachia.
- ♦ Are they similar to folktales the students are familiar with? Are there some differences?
- ♦ Have students select a folktale and a song that they think compliment one another.
- ♦ Have students act out one of the folktales with the music as the background.
- ♦ Have them design props, scenic backdrops and costumes for the story they have chosen.

GEOGRAPHY

- ♦ Where do Celtic peoples live today? Where (in what countries) does Celtic culture flourish?
- ♦ Research the migration of the Celts. Where did they originate? Where did they migrate to and why?