

Theatre IV Classroom Study Guide



Songs from the Soul

A Tribute to African-American Music

by William Dye

Music and Lyrics by various composers

About the Show

This revue covers African-American music from slave songs to jazz to blues to rap. *Songs from the Soul* is not only toe-tapping entertainment, it is also a vital history lesson that teaches pride, responsibility and respect. The play was written and originally directed by William Dye, acclaimed Director of the Richmond Boys Choir. The songs that are included have a vital connection to the history of African-Americans in this country. These songs include:

Without A Song

Deep River

Wade in the Water

Gospel Train

I've Been Bullied and

I've Been Scorned

Cake Walkin' Babies

Nobody

Maple Leaf Rag

Nobody Knows You When

You're Down and Out

"A" Train

It Don't Mean a Thing

Tootie Fruitie

Say It Loud, I'm Black

and I'm Proud

Respect/Think

Precious Lord

You've Got a Friend

We Shall Overcome

Stop in the Name of Love

ABC

Can't Get Next To You

Get Ready

The Greatest

Whoop There It Is

Lift Every Voice and Sing



Theatre IV's Songs from the Soul

A Chronological History of African-American Music

Designed to be both entertaining and educational, *Songs From The Soul* explores the origin of African-American music and its evolution and assimilation into American culture. It also demonstrates that today's musical forms, including rap and hip-hop, have deep-seated historical roots.

Music was the only portable cultural artifact the slaves brought to the New World from Africa. Drums played a crucial role in African tribal life. They provided a means of inter-village communication and served as a cultural link - a commonality that bonded diverse tribes.

In the New World, the drums played similar roles. Facing intolerable conditions, the drums and songs that evolved functioned as communication devices and promoted social bonding.

After emancipation, these spirituals almost died out. Because they believed them to be representative of the dark past, many African-Americans wanted to forget the old slave songs. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were one of the first African-American cultural groups to revive the old spirituals. They presented concerts of these now classic songs in an effort to raise money for the new Fisk University.

From the late 19th century to the end of World War II, a number of new musical forms evolved. One of these new forms, Minstrelsy, was an unfair representation of African-American culture, but it did give African-American performers stage experience. It also gave life to some of African-American culture's most popular songs, including the former Virginia State Song. The Blues voiced the pain of hard times and the more personal pain of problems with relationships. Ragtime, Jazz and Swing also developed during this period.

Since the Second World War, African-American music has become more prevalent and popular. R & B and Soul presented clear, uplifting messages and Motown helped make African-American music American music. Today Hip-Hop and Rap are perhaps the best-selling forms, but they did not develop in isolation. They are another chapter in the rich history of African-American music. This show, in part, illuminates this historical trail.

Discussion/Activities:

1. Discuss some of the uses of African drums. How does music fill this same role in today's society.
2. What was the call and response form of music. Have students recreate an example.
3. Discuss with students why the Fisk Jubilee Singers were important.
4. Ask students to identify the differences and similarities between spirituals and the blues.
5. Why is Blues music unique to the African-American experience? What specific songs not mentioned in the play can students think of to illustrate their answers.
6. Ask student's to bring in examples of music which they believe best comments on today's pressing issues.
7. Have students describe how music has helped them cope with the successes and problems they encounter.

Additional Books to Read

Haskins, James. Black Music in America: A History Through Its People. New York: T.Y. Crowell. 1987.

Shaw, Arnold. Black Popular Music in America. New York: Schirmer Books. 1986.

Charters, Samuel. The Bluesmen. New York: Oak Publications. 1977.

You may also enjoy reading a biography of one of these musicians:

Duke Ellington

Charlie Parker

Louis Armstrong

Billie Holiday

Bessie Smith

Lena Horne

Scott Joplin

Diana Ross

Robert Johnson

Theatre IV is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *Songs from the Soul*, please send your letters to:

Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220

If you need to reach Theatre IV by phone, please call **1-800-235-8687**.

Thanks to our Sponsors:

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Songs from the Soul

WORD SEARCH



Drums
Spirituals
Blues
Swing
Jazz
Hip Hop

Rap
Rock N Roll
Gospel
Ragtime
Respect
ABC

Nobody
Deep River
Theatre IV
Music
Soul
Songs

