

Prep Guide: “Southern Bluegrass & Blues – Then & Now” (6-12) by Charles Pettee

About the Program and Its Goals

“Southern Bluegrass & Blues – Then & Now” is a lively exploration of southern folk music for students and teachers, presented in a relaxed, interactive format which features masterful performances on **guitar, mandolin, banjo, harmonica, and voice**, with the goal of sharing the wonder, variety, and cultural complexity of southern string music with the students and teachers in this “plugged in” age, (that are sometimes under-exposed to their own rich heritage). Among the songs, Mr. Pettee introduces students to the instruments’ origins and offers interesting and relevant historical and acoustical facts. The students will be engaged and challenged to make specific Social Studies connections with the universal language of living music.

About the Artist

Charles Pettee, (pronounced “Petty”), has delighted audiences with a tasty blend of original and traditional music seasoned at more than 5,000 performances throughout the US, Canada, and Europe. He is a founding member of the world-traveling Shady Grove Band, and is currently working on his thirteenth full length CD/album. His original songs have received airplay in more than twenty foreign countries, as well as digital and satellite transmissions. His love and mastery of southern string music have made him a sought-after performer in educational settings over twenty years. He currently resides in Chapel Hill, NC, with his wife and two boys. See www.charlespettee.com for more info.

Tapestry of Cultures: Some Historical Facts from the period

Our goal is to get a feel for what music was like 200 years ago, right where we are now, in NC, (or Virginia, or South Carolina...). People from many parts of the world lived here at that time, as is the case today. Some of the people came directly from **Scotland, Ireland, and England**. Some of them relocated here from other parts of the US, such as people of **German** descent that came south from Pennsylvania. There were some people from **France and Spain**, who relocated from elsewhere in America, too. Some of the people were of **West African** origin, both slaves and freedmen. All of these very different cultures had distinctive songs and instruments. *Sampling the variety of musical styles of the time is a great way to get a glimpse of this tapestry of cultures – each square unique, and also kind of distinct, from each other square, not yet “blended” as in more modern times.*

Types of Music

To help us glimpse this “cultural tapestry” through music, it helps to understand some basic types of music. *Musicologists* look at musical styles and developments in a variety of ways. Some of them classify music by its function, (e.g., “work songs,” “dance music”, etc.). For this program, Mr. Pettee refers to several four broad categories of music: **folk, classical, religious, and popular**. All of these categories encompass a variety of functions, and all are alive and well today...

A) 1): **Folk** music is the music of a particular ethnic group. Therefore, this is an extremely varied category encompassing the unique sounds of each unique region in all

of the countries and cultures listed above. Folk music includes *ballads*, (songs which tell a story), or songs that describe a feeling, or pieces designed to accompany dances. 2): Folk music, moreover, is an *oral tradition*, passed from generation to generation, just like stories and dance. 3): Folk music is *traditional* music, meaning that in most (but not all) cases, the author is unknown.

Mr. Pettee will perform a number of folk songs in the show to illustrate the variety of sounds/functions of folk music, and, in so doing, emphasize the *variety of ethnic groups* listed above. Some folk pieces that may be performed include: “*Old Joe Clark*” (English dance tune), “*Soldier’s Joy*” (French (?) dance tune, later became Civil War song), “*Morrison’s Jig*” (Irish dance tune), “*Follow the Drinking Gourd*” (American folk song), “*Run Moaner Run*”, “*O Sinner Man*” (African American slave songs).

B) **Classical** music (as we think of it today) did not exist 200 years ago. This category came to be known in the late 1800s. In the early 1800s, much of what we call “classical” today, people then thought of as “modern” or “cutting edge”. They knew it as the music of specific composers, (“the latest piece from Mozart”), or any of a variety of types of *European* music from specific time periods, e.g., “Baroque.” The chief difference between “classical” and “folk” music, for this discussion, is that classical music is composed by a particular person, and written down to be performed precisely as it was written. It is not an oral tradition, where the music is subject to change to suit the preferences of each musician/generation. But, because classical music is in written form, it is not restricted by a musician’s memory, and so can be extremely complex and ornate, performed with precision by large orchestras. Mr. Pettee will perform a classical mandolin piece written by Franz Schubert entitled “*Wellenspiel*”, composed around 1802.

C) **Religious** music can be classical in origin (e.g. some of the great works by Mozart, Bach or Handel), or it can come from the folk tradition. Either way, it forms an important category of music designed for worship that also shows great variety from culture to culture, time to time, and place to place. Mr. Pettee will perform “*Amazing Grace*” by former slave trader Sir John Newton from England. African American slaves contributed such time honored spiritual classics as “*When the Saints Go Marching In*” and “*Swing Low Sweet Chariot*,” and many others.

D) **Popular** music can evolve from an oral tradition, or it can be written by a known composer, but it distinguishes itself as a unique category because it goes beyond any single ethnic group and appeals to the wider population. In the 1800s, the music of the traveling *minstrel shows* became “popular music” as the shows traveled from place to place. Mr. Pettee will likely perform a couple of popular tunes written for plays from the era: “*Oh, Suzanna*,” and “*Dixie*.” Many popular songs were written during the Civil War era, including *military/patriotic songs, show tunes, and love songs*. If time allows, or if the emphasis is on the music of the Civil war, Mr. Pettee can perform many of these.

An Exercise in Musicology and Other Potential Discussion Points

To appreciate the music of the past, the class could try making a list of the types of music that the students enjoy today, and then categorizing each into one of the four categories listed above. Students may suggest “Rap”, “Rock”, “Christian”, “Country”, and, with encouragement, they may admit to liking more specific types such as,

“Latino”, “Bluegrass”, “Classical”, etc. (ipods often contain an amazing variety). Encourage as many ideas as possible. Note, (and applaud), the variety! Now, which of these might be considered “**folk music**” (that is, the music of a particular folk group, or culture)? Which of these are “**popular music**” (that is, music that many people of many different cultures enjoy that is bought and sold on the popular market through media such as movies and radio)? One of those listed above is clearly “**religious music**.” It doesn’t matter if you are “musicologically precise” in this exercise, the idea is just to get the concept of these broad musical categories out there, to help students relate to the music of the past as presented in the show.

After the show

Sometime shortly after the program, it might be worthwhile to take a few minutes to review the instruments and topics covered in the program, and in these notes. Besides reviewing the historical and musical facts in the presentation, we offer these questions as examples of ways to use the information: 1) *“Is any of that old music still around?”* Answer: Yes! Mr. Pettee makes a point of playing authentic songs from the period, many of which are still familiar melodies today. See if the students can remember “Oh Susannah,” “When Johnnie Comes Marching Home,” “Dixie,” “Amazing Grace.” 2) *“Could you hear ‘modern sounds’ in those old songs?”* Answer: Though they may not readily hear it, these songs contain the basic ingredients of 20th and 21st century music – rock, rap, jazz, bluegrass, etc., which are the result of mixing the sounds from Africa with the sounds from Europe, (Mr. Pettee hits this topic in the show, but also this is the theme for his program “Hear the Sound: the Music of the 1900s.”). 3) *“What does the music tell us about the people of the time?”* By considering the music of a time period, we come into contact with some major aspects of the period including: **A**) major events of the time, (for example wars), about which the music speaks or gives evidence, and **B**) culture—the *background* of the people making the music, their role in their *society*, their *values*, and how they *interacted* with other cultures at the time.

Summary

Most of us appreciate music in our lives for comfort and support, and also to accompany dancing, relaxing, and worshipping. **People in history are just like us.** They loved music, they loved dancing, they worshipped, and they fought. Their songs may reflect individual preferences and backgrounds, but they also have songs that transcend those differences, and unite people. Music turns out to be a great way to get a glimpse of the ways that people lived their lives in the past.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the artist directly: Charles Pettee, 318 Burriss Place, Chapel Hill, NC, 27516. ph: (919) 967-1381, email cpettee@bellsouth.net ... www.charlespettee.com .