

AMERICAN MUSIC GOES TO WAR

by Tom Wolff

Entertainment is always a national asset. Invaluable in time of peace, it is indispensable in wartime.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1943

BACKGROUND

Music during World War II had an unprecedented impact on America, both on the homefront and on troops serving overseas. Unlike World War I, which occurred in the pre-radio era, by December 1941, virtually every American household, 96.2%, owned radios. Never before had recordings of songs and live musical performances been broadcast to so many millions of Americans supporting the war at home, and to troops serving throughout the world. For many Americans, this mass distribution of music had a unifying, patriotic effect by raising the morale of the troops overseas, and motivating and inspiring the Americans at home to fully support all aspects of the war effort. Some African-American recording artists, however, used the power of music to highlight the hypocrisy of America's fighting for freedom and democracy abroad, while discrimination and segregation were prevalent across the United States and throughout the segregated armed forces. Though many types of music in the 1940s had a following, swing and jazz music were by far the most popular. Banned throughout Germany and occupied Europe, this uniquely American music served as a defiant hope for liberation and freedom, and in many ways served as the soundtrack for the war.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will gain an understanding of the cultural and socio-political role music played in the daily lives of Americans during the 1940s / WWII era, both on the homefront and overseas.
- Students will become well-versed in the analysis of a variety of primary sources using the Library of Congress "Primary Source Analysis Tool" handouts, including sound recordings, oral histories, motion pictures, photographs and prints, and sheet music.
- Students will synthesize and summarize the historical information acquired throughout this lesson, and conduct and analyze their own research, in a collaborative effort to create a final songwriting project in which their mastery of 1940s/WWII history is evident.

MATERIALS

**Teachers and students will use the following analysis tools, which are also embedded within this lesson.*

**For clarity of instruction, additional primary sources, songs, etc., are only linked within the lesson.*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS TOOLS

Analysis Tool for Students:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

Analysis Tools for Teachers:

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Primary Sources: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Motion Pictures: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Motion_Pictures.pdf

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Oral Histories: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Oral_Histories.pdf

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs and Prints: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Sheet Music and Song Sheets: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Sheet_Music_and_Song_Sheets.pdf

Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Sound Recordings: Observe/Reflect/Question

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Sound_Recordings.pdf

THE LESSON

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1940s/WWII

ACTIVITY: PRE-LESSON

Students already have a basic understanding of the events of World War II, both on the homefront and overseas, from lecture notes and assigned reading. The night before the lesson, students will complete the “*Music and You*” questionnaire to assess the importance today’s music has on their daily lives in an effort to gain empathy for the impact swing, jazz, and big band music had on people during the 1940s.

Teacher Handout: **FILENAME: “Music and You Questionnaire GL Teachers Handout.doc”**

Student Handout: **FILENAME: “Music and You Questionnaire Student Handout GL.doc”**

DAY ONE: INTRO TO 1940s MUSIC

As students enter the classroom, “Jeep Jockey Jump” (instrumental) by Glenn Miller plays in the background. Click on the following link to play the song:

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/movies/music_machines_07.html#

“THE EMPATHY HOOK”

Students take out last night’s homework, the “Music and You” questionnaire. Students begin sharing their responses with the class. *Refer to “Music and You Questionnaire / Teacher Handout” for segue from students’ chosen song to 1940s music.*

ACTIVITY

CAPT. GLENN MILLER, U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE: MUSICAL WAR HERO OF WWII

Listen to Glenn Miller’s “Jeep Jockey Jump” (instrumental) for a second time as an example of the popular swing music that dominated the war years:

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/movies/music_machines_07.html#

Although it has no lyrics, the rhythm of the song was designed to honor American soldiers riding in

bouncy jeeps on battlefields all over the world. When the song ends, read Miller's bio with the class from this same link.

For Teachers

Use the Library of Congress "Sound Recording Primary Source Analysis Tool" handout to craft questions the students will use to fill out on their handouts in analyzing Glenn Miller's "Jeep Jockey Jump":

Teacher Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

Sample teachers' questions for analysis for "Jeep Jockey Jump" using the LOC handout:

- *Describe what you hear.*
- *List any instruments you recognize.*
- *Although this song is instrumental, what imagery and detail is created by its rhythm?*
- *If it is musical, could you dance to it?*
- *What can you learn from listening to this recording (author's purpose)?*

For Students

Students use the Library of Congress "Observe/Reflect/Question (ORQ) Primary Source Analysis Tool" handout to respond to teacher's prompts from their copy:

Student Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

HOMEWORK

Research the career of Glenn Miller, who left his lucrative big band career, joined the U.S. Army Air Force, and performed 300+ USO (United Service Organization) shows overseas, which entertained American troops and boosted morale. Using the following links, and credible internet sources you find on your own, create Capt. Glenn Miller's obituary for the United States Armed Services military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, focusing on his military service and heroic death.

Use the following link as your model to write your Glenn Miller obituary:

<http://www.obituary-searches.com/write.html>

Suggested Links for Glenn Miller Research:

Brief overview of Miller's contributions to entertainment during WWII:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~knigh20c/classweb/miller.html>

Comprehensive Glenn Miller project from the University of Colorado:

<http://music.colorado.edu/departments/amrc/gma/>

DAY TWO: THE USO: BRINGING AMERICAN MUSIC TO THE TROOPS

ACTIVITY

USO AND AMERICAN TROOP MORALE

If you have a smartboard in class, project and read the history of the USO from the following Library of Congress website:

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/wwii/jb_wwii_uso_1.html

Project the following YouTube video clip of images of Bob Hope and other musical performers from various USO shows during WWII recorded at Stockton Air Field on May 23, 1943 for the Army Air Corps Cadets. Running Time: 2:50

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2owSx5pOvtY&feature=related>

For Teachers

Use the Library of Congress “Primary Source Analysis Tool” handouts for Sound, Photography and Print, and Motion Pictures for assistance in crafting questions the students will answer on their handouts in analyzing the WWII USO YouTube video clip:

Teacher’s Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Sound_Recordings.pdf

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Motion_Pictures.pdf

Some sample teacher questions for analysis for the WWII USO video clip using the LOC handout:

Questions:

- Describe what you see and hear in the images.
- What are the physical settings?
- Do you only see live action, still pictures?
- What was the purpose of these USO film clips?
- Who do you think created them?
- Who are the people appearing in these images?
- What can you learn from examining these film images?
- What is missing from them?
- Who do you think was the intended audience?
- What feelings or ideas do you think its creators wanted to communicate?

For Students

Students respond to the above questions regarding the Bob Hope 1943 USO Show using student primary source analysis tool:

Student Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

WRAP-UP

Next, using the above information gleaned from the handouts, have students complete the following:

- Write a brief description of the USO film clip.
- Think about what you have learned about the history of the USO from the reading and discussion.
How does the USO film clip support or contradict your current understanding of this topic?

DAY TWO / THREE: FOR THE TROOPS ONLY: THE V-DISC AND “COMMAND PERFORMANCE”

ACTIVITY

V-DISC: SHIPPING AMERICA’S MUSIC OVERSEAS

Although the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) was on strike from 1942-44, and, due to a dispute over royalties no music was recorded for record labels in the U.S. during this time, the biggest recording stars of the 1940s came together to record V-Discs (“V” for Victory) that were recorded exclusively for the troops and shipped overseas.

History of the V-disc:

Read the following V-disc background information, and discuss as a class.

<http://www.recordcollectorsguild.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&articleid=11&page=1>

ACTIVITY

Analyzing Primary Sources: Art Tatum’s “Body and Soul”

Click the link below to hear recording artist Art Tatum speak directly to American troops, and to introduce his new V-Disc recording of “Body and Soul”:

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/movies/music_life_23.html

For Teachers

Use the Library of Congress “Primary Source Analysis Tool” handout for Sound for assistance in crafting questions the students will answer on their handouts in analyzing Tatum’s recording:

Teacher’s Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Sound_Recordings.pdf

For Students

Students respond to the teacher’s questions regarding Tatum’s “Body and Soul” using student primary source analysis tool:

Student Copy

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

ACTIVITY

Write a Caption Using V-Disc Images for *Stars and Stripes* newspaper

Using the above LOC handout, students will complete the following homework assignment:

You are a reporter for *Stars and Stripes* newspaper assigned to write a story regarding the impact of V-Discs on the morale of American troops overseas. Using your analysis of the (3) V-Disc images (see LOC handout), write a grammatically correct, compound-complex, newspaper-style caption (sentence) for each of the (3) photos in the link, below, that are to accompany the article (remember: you are not writing the article, just the captions for the images). Each of your (3) captions will include as many of the 5 Ws (who, what, where, when, and why) as possible in order to provide sufficient context:

FILENAME: V Disc Image Primary Source Activity.doc

HOMEWORK

“Command Performance”: Troops Only, Overseas All-Request Radio Show

“Command Performance,” which aired from March 1942 to 1949, was a radio program broadcast over Armed Forces Radio Network (AFRS) exclusively for troops overseas. Hundreds of thousands of letters were sent by troops from around the world, and the AFRS producers took requests directly from their letters. This weekly, 30-minute program provided the troops with a taste of the homefront from top music performers and Hollywood stars of the time, who volunteered their services to honor the troops.

“Command Performance” link:

Following is a live broadcast of this weekly series, which explains how the show was produced; you only need to view the first 2-3 minutes to gain an understand of the show’s format:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5VxgHvRews&feature=bf_prev&list=PL6545708BB2441895

ACTIVITY

“Command Performance” Troop Request Letter

You are a troop serving somewhere overseas. Write a typed, one-page letter to the producers of “Command Performance” requesting your favorite musical performer / band / song, and describe the following:

- What are your circumstances as a soldier overseas?
- In which theater of the war are you serving (city / country)?
- Describe how the show has boosted your morale.
- What is your city / state of origin?
- What do you miss most about home?
- Request a specific “command performance” of your favorite song / band / musical performer to be aired on the show.

HOMEWORK

“ROSIE THE TRUMPETER?”

Using the link below, read and *annotate* the journal article “Uplift and Downbeats: What it Jazz History Included the Prairie View Co-Eds?” by Sherrie Tucker.

<https://digital.library.txstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10877/2708/fulltext.pdf>

Analyze the photographs of the Prairie View Co-eds that are located throughout the article using the link below:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf

DAY THREE / FOUR: MUSIC ON THE HOMEFRONT

“ROSIE THE TRUMPETER?”

The wartime draft created a major shortage of musicians all over the country. As in defense plants, and other previously male-dominated industries, women stepped-up to fill the void in the workforce, joining jazz and swing bands all over the nation. During the war more than one hundred all-girl bands formed and toured the country, entertaining troops on army bases, performing at war bond drives, and playing at dances. One such band, the Prairie View Co-Eds (PVCEs), was not only an all-girl band, but an all-black one. Although the USO forbade discrimination, army bases were segregated, and black troops deplored the tension that occurred when they attended predominately white USO shows. In response to this racial tension, all-black USO centers were opened, and bands such as the PVCEs were recruited to perform for all-black troops.

ACTIVITY

All-Girl Jazz Bands: The Prairie View Co-eds and The International Sweethearts of Rhythm— “Rosie the Trumpeter?”

In the following CBS oral history transcript (see link, below), Roz Cron, one of the only white members of the

International Sweethearts of Rhythm, and vocalist Carline Ray, recount their experiences in all-girl swing and jazz bands during WWII. Have students complete the LOC oral history handout (see link, below).

http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-3445_162-263891.html

For Teachers / Teacher Handout

Use this handout to assist you in crafting questions for the students:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Oral_Histories.pdf

For Students/Student Handout

Students complete the oral history primary source analysis handout:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

ACTIVITY

GROUP ANALYSIS OF ORAL HISTORY AND JOURNAL ARTICLE

In groups of three, students discuss the information gleaned from their LOC oral history handout and annotation of the journal article “Uplift and Downbeats: What it Jazz History Included the Prairie View Co-Eds?”

Complete the following in class:

- Summarize the main points of the article and oral history, and include any important information learned about their experiences during WWII.
- Speculate about the purpose of the article and oral history. What do you think Sherrie Tucker expected to accomplish by writing this article? Do you think it succeeded? Explain in detail.
- Consider your prior knowledge of WWII, versus the events described in the article. How does this article and oral history support, contradict, or add to your current understanding of this period?

DAY FOUR / FIVE: REACTIONARY MUSIC ON THE HOMEFRONT

MUSIC AND RACE RELATIONS

Some recording artists proclaimed their disappointment with segregation both at home and in the American military during WWII using music as their vehicle. Black troops were assigned menial jobs, rarely given combat duty or positions of authority and responsibility—even blood supplies were carefully separated due to the systematic racism of the time. But soon after WWII, the American military was desegregated, which gradually paved the way for improved racial equality throughout American society.

ACTIVITY

JOSH WHITE: “UNCLE SAM SAYS” NEXT VERSE ACTIVITY

Students listen to Josh White’s racial protest song, “Uncle Sam Says,” which chronicles racial segregation at home and throughout the Armed Forces. White’s politically-charged music impressed FDR and the First Lady so much that they invited him to perform at the White House. Click on the following link to hear his song and read his biographical information:

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginth40s/movies/music_life_18.html

In groups of three, students will write (3) additional verses to Josh White’s song, “Uncle Sam Says,” based on their analysis of (3) primary sources, and their understanding of race relations in America after WWII.

- Give each student one of three primary sources: [FILENAME: Next Verse Uncle Sam Says Primary Sources Activity.doc](#)
- Students conduct analysis of the three primary sources using the LOC handouts used throughout this lesson.

- Based on the analysis of the sources, and on their knowledge of America in the decades following World War II, students will write (3) additional stanzas to Josh White’s “Uncle Sam Says,” following the format and rhyme scheme of the song.

FINAL PROJECT—MULTIMEDIA SONG-BASED PROJECT

Introduce this project on Day 5, the final day of the lesson. This project is to be completed primarily outside of class, but feel free to provide groups with a few minutes of planning time in the coming weeks. Students should be able to complete this project in two weeks.

Assignment sheet and rubric:

[FILENAME: 1940s WWII Multimedia Songwriting Project GL 2012](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

University of Missouri, Kansas City:

A comprehensive collection of WWII primary source images, including sheet music and V-Discs, plus WWII homefront and overseas historical background.

<http://library.umkc.edu/spec-col/ww2/main.htm>

PBS / Ken Burns’ *Jazz*:

An extensive history of Jazz, with a specific section of WWII music.

http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_wwii.htm

Library of Congress: Primary Sources Analysis Tools

Contains analysis handouts for teachers and students using a variety of primary sources.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

Library of Congress: “Hope for America: Performers, Politics, and Pop Culture”

An unique look at aspects of the USO and different forms of troop entertainment during WWII.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/hopeforamerica/causesandcontroversies/entertainingthetroops/ExhibitObjects/HollywoodVictoryCaravan.aspx>

Smithsonian: “World War II on the Homefront: Civic Responsibility”

This site includes a downloadable PDF file containing extensive primary source images, and a detailed background of the origins of WWII.

http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/civic_responsibility/index.html

NPR: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Radio interview with V-Disc founder.

<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wutc/.artsmain/article/10/1036/1461456/Programs/Swinging.on.V-Disc.Jazz.in.WWII>

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Motion Picture Primary Source Analysis: Germany’s Swing Kids—Defying Hitler

While viewing the film *Swing Kids*, complete the Library of Congress “Motion Picture Primary Source Analysis” handout. View trailer here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62dy01f9tCk>

Music and Memory: Oral Histories as Primary Sources

Interview family, friends, neighbors, or community members regarding their experiences during WWII, and how music affected their lives during this time. Using the Library of Congress “Oral History Primary Source Analysis” handout, write a 3 to 4-page summary of your interview.

Technology and Music in the Military: Today’s Troops

Interview a soldier within the past two decades regarding how today’s technology has improved their morale overseas. How did having Sony Walkmans, iPods, “boomboxes,” etc., affect their mindset.