

Pre-Show Information for Teachers: *Bluegrass Stomp*, by Charles Pettee

Hear the Sound: Bluegrass Stomp performances/residencies, Grades 3-5

“What a wonderful way to experience the many cultural influences of our southern heritage...” (Norma McDonald, Principal, N. Duplin Elementary)

Hear the Sound introduces students to the variety of music enjoyed by southern folks from early colonial times to the present, (3-4.MR.1), as well as demonstrating some of the instruments from both Europe and Africa that are used to play the music. It is an interactive experience, with opportunities for the students to clap along, laugh, and sing, (3-5.CR.1). It is also an opportunity to reinforce or introduce lessons in social studies curricula that tell about the people from many places in the world that settled the southern US, (3-5.C.1).

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 worldwide. His love and mastery of southern string music have made him a sought-after performer in educational settings for over twenty years. He currently resides in Chapel Hill, NC, with his wife and two boys. www.charlespettee.com

General Information/Pre or Post Program Activities

1) The setting is 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 nowadays). 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** origin that came down from **Pennsylvania**. There were some people from **France and Spain**, who relocated from elsewhere, 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. *The variety of musical styles of the time is a great way to get a glimpse of this tapestry of cultures, (3.C.1.2; 4.C.1.2; 5.C.1.4).*

ACTIVITY: Find the above named places on the *world map or globe*. If appropriate, review/discuss when and how people emigrated from those places to the US. Go around the classroom and ask the kids if they know from where their families/ancestors came.

2) Mr. Pettee will perform songs from many of those people and places listed above in the program. He will play dance songs, work songs, songs from plays, and songs for worship, (3-5. CR.1.1). Most of the songs Mr. Pettee will play are classified as **folk songs**, (songs of specific cultures that are passed around from

person to person, and generation to generation by the oral tradition, just like stories and dances). At least one song Mr. Pettee will play is **classical**, (that is, created by a particular composer, and written down to be performed in a specific way). He will play **popular songs** from the time, too, (which can be written down, or not. The difference between “pop” songs and folk songs is that popular songs may appeal to a wide variety of different cultures and backgrounds. Sometimes folk songs become popular, and so become “pop” songs, such as the music from the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou*, the Irish folk music in *Titanic*, and so on). These are some of the things that **musicologists** study, and are mostly beyond the scope of this program, but it is interesting to discuss, and helps the students understand more about music and culture.

ACTIVITY: Discuss different types of music that teachers and kids enjoy today (4.MR.1.2). Examples may include music from cartoons and movies, church music, songs on the radio, and funny songs. See if you can identify music from different cultures in the songs (4.MR.1.1). Examples may be Latino sounds, bluegrass sounds, African-based sounds, etc. (5.C.1.4).

- 3) During the show, Mr. Pettee will perform on the following instruments: the six-string **guitar**, the eight-string **mandolin**, the five string **banjo**, the ten-hole **harmonica**, and his **voice**. (3.MR.1.4)

ACTIVITY: Discuss what kinds of instruments the kids or their family members/friends play, or are learning to play. What do these instruments sound like? Which ones use strings to make sounds? Which ones use air? What do you think of when you hear a banjo? What do you think of when you hear drums playing a marching rhythm? (4.MR.1.1)

About Bluegrass Music in Particular – A Living Tradition of the South:

(Common Core Standards RI.9 and RL.9)

Born and raised in the Southeastern US only about 60 years ago, “Bluegrass music”, as it has come to be called, is a true American tradition. The sounds and melodies of the music go back many centuries to both Europe and West Africa, but it was the musicians of the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia that created this style of music that groups such as The Shady Grove Band, and many other group from all over the world perform today. Some of the ingredients that make the Bluegrass sound are the stringed instruments, (e.g., banjo, mandolin, fiddle), the voices in three-part harmony, the songs dealing with everyday life, and the “bluesy” (i.e., African), tones that flavor the playing and singing.

The Story of Bluegrass Music

The Pilgrims brought with them to America melodies and ballads from their homes in England, and other settlers brought their music from their homes in Scotland, Ireland,

France, Germany, etc. These tunes and songs make up the foundation of our “traditional American” music. Later, African-Americans added their African-based tones (“Blues”) and their “call and response” style of singing to the American music mix of the 1800s. When a young African-American named Arnold Schultz shared his blues songs with a young Scotch-Irish boy from Kentucky named Bill Monroe in the early 1900s, it was clear how well the African and European traditions could blend. Monroe went on to add jazz-like improvisation, and complex vocal harmonies to the music. By the 1940s, the new sound had changed the landscape of traditional American music! Since Mr. Monroe was from the “Bluegrass state” of Kentucky, the new music was dubbed “Bluegrass”.

Instruments Used in Bluegrass Music

(3-5.MR.1)

Bluegrass instruments are *acoustic* meaning the instrument produces its own sound without electricity or amplification. Also, bluegrass instruments are almost always stringed instruments. The typical bluegrass band features guitar, mandolin, banjo, violin (i.e., fiddle), and upright bass. The instruments themselves show contributions from both Europe and Africa: the guitar is from Spain, and the violin and mandolin were both perfected in Italy, while the ancestor to the banjo is from West Africa. Rhythm, melody, harmony and improvisation are all played on the instruments, but perhaps their most important function in this type of music is to support the singers.

SUMMARY

The string music of the southern US has sources from diverse places in the world that all came together here over time. In the 1800’s, each unique culture had unique instruments and songs. Over time, the sounds started mixing together to create new American folk and popular songs. The music of the past can help us learn more about people and places, and also help us to better appreciate where we live today. The above suggested activities are examples of the ways *we can use music to increase our understanding of social studies*. These activities may be done either before or after the program, or both, as time allows. We hope that Mr. Pettee’s obvious love for the music of the South will excite your students and encourage them to keep learning!

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