

BRANDY O! TEACHER'S GUIDE

This teacher's guide to *Brandy O! Music from the Parlors of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson* is designed to help educators use the CD and accompanying liner notes, as well as to help students understand the music and history of the time. It contains activities relating to two curriculum connections—American history and music. Teachers are granted permission to print out this teacher's guide for classroom use. Anne Enslow wrote this guide.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—AMERICAN HISTORY

Activity 1

Listen to “Welcome, Mighty Chief” (track 14) and read the description in the liner notes. This song was sung for George Washington by a chorus of women and girls as he passed through Trenton, New Jersey, in 1789. Washington was on his way from his home at Mount Vernon to New York City for his inauguration. Why were they grateful to him? What had happened the last time Washington was in Trenton? (It was the famous Battle of Trenton in 1776, when Washington crossed the Delaware River on Christmas night to attack the Hessians. The Americans won the battle, but overall were losing the war at that point.) Why was Washington's inauguration in New York? (That was briefly the capital.)

Research Washington's trip from Mount Vernon to New York. How long did it take? (A week.) How did he travel? What were his feelings about leaving Mount Vernon and becoming president? (After so many years away from home during the American Revolution, the presidency was not a job he wanted—“My movements to the Government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of execution,” he wrote.¹ But he knew he was the one person who could unite the country. As he wrote of his departure from Mount Vernon, “About 10 o'clock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity, and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York ... with the best disposition to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.”²)

What was the scene like along his route to New York? (There were parades, speeches, and toasts to his honor. As one observer said of his New York arrival, “The successive Motion of hats [waving to him], from the Battery to the Coffee House, was like the rolling motion of the sea, or a field of grain waving with the wind.”³)

Activity 2

There are two songs on this recording that talk about alcoholic beverages—“Nottingham Ale” (track 1) and “Brandy O!” (track 3). In fact, the colonists drank a

¹ Ribblett, David L. *Nelly Custis: Child of Mount Vernon* (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1993), page 14.

² *Ibid.*, page 14.

³ *Ibid.*, page 14.

lot of alcohol. Why? (Water was frequently contaminated and hence, not considered safe to drink. Milk, too, could cause “milk sickness,” which resulted from cows feeding on poisonous white snakeroot. But alcohol, thanks to the fermentation process, was seen as healthy—although many ministers preached against the evils of excessive consumption and drunkenness.)

What can you learn about drink at the time from listening to these two songs? (Ale was actually seen as nourishing—and potentially as better medicine than what the apothecary had to offer. In fact, alcoholic beverages were seen as a staple of the diet.⁴ For its part, brandy was something viewed as quite valuable.)

Research the drinks that different social classes would have consumed. (Beer and cider could be made at home, and therefore were common drinks among the lower classes. Note that there were multiple kinds of beer, including molasses beer, spruce beer, and ginger beer.⁵ Wine, brandy, port, sherry, and other drinks were served in taverns and wealthier homes, but these were more expensive.

Other popular drinks included rum punch (rum, water, lemon, sugar, and spices), shrub (a fruit liqueur), bounce (fruit-infused brandy or rum), flip (a mixture of beer, rum and sugar), and switchel (ginger, molasses, apple cider vinegar, and water).

Activity 3

Listen to “The Roast Beef of Old England” (track 6). What attitudes toward drink are expressed there? (Tea and coffee are referred to disparagingly as “slip slops” that were unknown in the glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth I.) Have the students research non-alcoholic beverages that the colonists drank.

What were the attitudes toward these beverages? Despite the song, these drinks were popular—especially tea. They gave a person energy rather than sapping energy, like alcohol. They were also safer to drink than plain water since they were boiled. However, they were expensive. Why? (They had to be imported. Furthermore, as far as tea was concerned, the British East India Company had a monopoly on its importation, which kept prices high—and the British Parliament imposed hefty taxes on top of that.⁶ In America, the 1767 Townshend Acts and 1773 Tea Act, both of which fanned the flames leading to the American Revolution, are the most famous of these taxes. But there were other tea taxes both here and in England long before that. For that reason, tea was often smuggled into the country.⁷)

Research the social history of tea. There are numerous indications of how valuable it was if you look at the culture that surrounded it. (Unscrupulous dealers sometimes added cheap leaves from various shrubs to increase the volume of their

⁴ Conroy, David W. *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), page 38.

⁵ Gilgun, Beth. *Tidings from the 18th Century* (Rebel Publishing Co., 1983), pages 186-189.

⁶ Pettigrew, Jane and Bruce Richardson. *A Social History of Tea: Tea's Influence on Commerce, Culture & Community* (Benjamin Press, 2014), pages 41, 43, 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pages 48-49, 86, 88.

bulk tea⁸—something they would not have bothered to do, if the price of tea had been low. Tea so precious that it was often kept under lock and key in beautiful wooden boxes called “caddies.” And people had very expensive sets of porcelain for drinking tea.)

What happened to tea drinking in America after the Boston Tea Party? (It declined drastically, though there was still tea smuggling. The tale is told that in 1774 John Adams stopped at an inn in Maine, where he inquired if a cup of “honestly smuggled” tea was available. He was told no and sadly admitted that it was better to have a total boycott.⁹ Rather than fill British coffers by drinking real tea, Americans started drinking so-called Liberty Teas, which were herbal drinks contained no tea at all, but rather other flavorful leaves, such as mint, orange bergamot, lemon balm, pennyroyal, and even catnip!¹⁰ Coffee also started to gain popularity at this time.)

Activity 4

More than half of these songs and tunes were from the collection of Nelly Custis. Who was she? (Nelly was Martha Washington’s granddaughter, but she grew up with George and Martha.) Though history books rarely talk about Nelly, she had an extraordinary upbringing in the house of her “dear grandpapa,” George Washington, who treated her more like a daughter.

But why did Nelly live with the Washingtons instead of her own parents? The story tells a lot about life in the 18th century. (Child mortality in this period was high. Martha had four children from her first marriage to Daniel Parke Custis, but two of them died as young children—little Daniel just after his second birthday, and Fanny, just before her fourth. Martha’s remaining daughter, Patsy, lived only to age 17, when she died of epilepsy.¹¹ That left Martha’s son Jacky as her only surviving child. He married and had four children of his own. However, he, too, died in 1781, just shy of his 27th birthday. George Washington had deliberately kept Jacky out of the Revolution, because he knew that Martha would be devastated if anything happened to him, but nonetheless Jacky went as an observer to Yorktown, where the decisive victory of the American Revolution was fought. There he contracted a disease known as “camp fever”—possibly typhus—which killed him. When Jacky died, Martha asked Jacky’s widow to leave the two youngest children—Nelly and her brother—at Mount Vernon with her and George.¹²)

What would that have been like, to grow up with George and Martha Washington? Grandpapa was a great general and later became president. Visitors were legion—both at Mount Vernon and later, in their various presidential homes. What would it have been like for Nelly, who had never been far from Mount Vernon, to suddenly arrive in New York City shortly after Washington’s inauguration? She

⁸ Ibid., page 52.

⁹ Ibid., page 84.

¹⁰ Ibid., page 85.

¹¹ Brady, Patricia. *Martha Washington: An American Life* (Penguin Books, 2005), pages 46, 48, 86.

¹² Ibid., page 139.

attended the theater, as well as parties and balls.¹³ She entertained members of Congress at dinner. With friends, including Elizabeth Bordley, she put on plays at home. What was it like to know all those famous people? (She corresponded for years afterward with the Marquis de Lafayette, whom she called “Father.”¹⁴ She came to like her grandfather’s political allies—and despise his opponents.)

Activity 5

Listen to any of Nelly’s songs. She was said to have been an accomplished and charming singer and instrumentalist. Why did George Washington want her to have lessons in music, art, and dancing? (These were seen as essential skills at the time. For women, in particular, they were viewed as important in securing a husband—and often were allowed to lapse after the wedding.¹⁵ Nelly, however, loved music the rest of her life.) What other subjects did Nelly study? What other skills did she learn? (She studied penmanship, grammar, French, history, arithmetic. Martha taught her to knit and embroider and manage a household.)

Activity 6

Listen to “The Roast Beef of Old England” (track 6). This song was in the collection of Thomas Jefferson. Why would Jefferson—the author of the Declaration of Independence—have a song like this one, which proclaims the superiority of the British? (This song dates from 1731, well before the American Revolution. Also, the original thirteen colonies were then colonies of England. This song invokes the glorious days of Queen Elizabeth I and the Spanish Armada.)

Activity 7

Listen to “Crazy Jane” (track 12). Jefferson’s daughter and granddaughter both owned copies of this song, so it must have been a family favorite.

Research the family of Thomas Jefferson. Like George Washington, Jefferson married a widow. Why is this not surprising? (It was common for people to be married two or three times, due to the high death rate. And because they needed help managing the household, they often remarried quite quickly—often beginning courting just a month or two after the death of a spouse.¹⁶) Surprisingly, Jefferson himself did not remarry after his wife died, four months after the birth of their fifth child.

Why did Jefferson want his daughters to learn music? (Jefferson himself loved to play, calling music “a delightful recreation,” a “favorite passion of my soul,” and “an enjoyment, the deprivation of which... cannot be calculated.”¹⁷)

¹³ Ribblett, page 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., page 10.

¹⁵ Cripe, Helen. *Thomas Jefferson and Music* (University Press of Virginia, 1974), page 31.

¹⁶ Brady, page 53-54.

¹⁷ Salgo, Sandor. *Thomas Jefferson: Musician & Violinist* (Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2000), page 50.

Activity 8

Listen to the *Thomas and Sally* overture (track 7), as well as “Sliced and Peppered” (track 10). Both are from the comic opera *Thomas and Sally*. Both Washington and Jefferson enjoyed the theater, which was popular in the American colonies—at least, in the southern colonies and in New York. (The Puritan influence in New England squelched such forms of entertainment, which were deemed “dangerous to the souls of Men.” Theater was actually banned in Boston by a 1750 law.¹⁸ And in Philadelphia, the Quakers also frowned on theatrical performances—a waste of money that lured people away from their work.¹⁹)

Have the students research the 18th century theater. What was it like? (There were not performances every night, but only on certain days. However, when you went, you could expect an entire night at the theater—four to five hours of entertainment, including a long play, a short play, and interludes of music or other amusements, such as rope dancing. Drinks sold in the intermission included rum, sherry, brandy, and port, and food included such snacks as apples, oranges, raisins, or nuts.²⁰) What was the theater itself like? (There were no electric lights, but instead candles to light the theater and, on stage, metal boxes of lighted wicks floating in oil. Employees of the theater included “scene shifters” and a man “for attending the fires and lights on the stage.”²¹)

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—MUSIC

Activity 9

Play the music as students walk into class. Once they are settled, ask them if the music is modern or old. How can they tell that it’s not modern? It doesn’t sound contemporary, but can they say why? (Have them listen to the instruments, the form, and the lyrics. There are no electronic instruments, such as synthesizers or electric guitar and bass. There are no electronically generated beats and no drum kit. While the music follows strict rhythms, it doesn’t have a heavy beat. The lyrics used antiquated language.)

Activity 10

Can they say what era the music is from? (Most of it is from the 18th century.) What are the clues? (Listen to the instruments. The harpsichord—found on tracks 2, 7, 10, 12, 14, and 15—is no longer used today for the most part, except in period music. The English guitar—featured prominently in tracks 13 and 9—has a much lighter sound than our guitars today. The hammered dulcimer—featured on track 4, 9, and 16—is an instrument that largely died out around the time of the Civil War, though it has experienced a modest revival in the last 50 years.)

¹⁸ Silverman, Kenneth. *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), page 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 60.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pages 61-62

²¹ *Ibid.*, pages 61, 375. See also Brady, page 172.

What about the music itself? Does that contain clues to the era? (The minuet was a dance form that was popular in the 1600s and 1700s. “Lully’s Minuet,” track 4, is an example. Though it was written in the late 1600s, it was very popular in the 1700s.)

Does the subject matter of the songs provide any clues? (“Welcome, Mighty Chief, Once More,” track 14, was written in honor of George Washington upon his first inauguration in 1789. “Go to the Devil and Shake Yourself” and “Sliced and Peppered,” tracks 8 and 10 respectively, boast of British supremacy on the seas in an era when “Britannia ruled the waves.”)

Activity 11

Research the instruments that are used on this recording, including violin, harpsichord, and English guitar. (“English guitar” is not a guitar made in England, but rather a type of small, pear-shaped guitar that was popular from roughly 1750 to 1820. Nelly Custis owned one that is now in the collection at Mount Vernon. You can look it up online.) How were 18th century violins different from today’s violins? (The neck of the violin was slightly shorter and was not placed at as much of an angle to the body of the instrument. It also used gut strings instead of today’s nylon or steel. That gave 18th-century violins a softer, less powerful sound, as the strings could not be strung as tightly.) How about the harpsichord? How is it different from today’s acoustic pianos? (The strings are plucked rather than struck. Nelly Custis’s harpsichord, which can still be seen at Mount Vernon today, is a particularly elaborate instrument, with a “double-manual”—that is, two keyboards. According to Judith Britt’s book *Nothing More Agreeable*, “Surely this is a musical instrument worthy of the First Family. It is nearly eight feet long, with a shape similar to that of a modern grand piano. In a case veneered with mahogany and decorated with inlay of dark rosewood and maple, it came equipped with all the features of the *de luxe* model of the day—two keyboards, each with a compass of five octaves; three sets of strings [two at unison pitch, another one an octave higher]; a special device to produce a softer, more delicate tone; another to give the sound of a lute; a ‘machine stop’ worked by the left pedal for making quick changes in registration; and a ‘Venetian swell’ worked by the right pedal which opened or closed shutters [like a Venetian blind] covering the interior of the instrument, producing a *crescendo* or *diminuendo*.”²²)

Activity 12

Jefferson played violin. But he would never have become a professional musician. Why not? (As a gentleman, he could play in public, but not for pay. Those who played music for dances and other entertainment were servants—often black slaves and white indentured servants.²³ However, dancing was a highly prized skill.) I

Activity 13

²² Britt, Judith S. *Nothing More Agreeable: Music in George Washington’s Family* (Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 1984), pages 40-41.

²³ Cripe, page 7.

Listen to “Felton’s Gavotte” (track 13). The basic tune is very simple. But the second, third, and fourth times through the piece, the guitarist plays more elaborate variations on that tune, before coming back to the basic melody for the final time. This was common in the 18th century. Can the students hear the melody and then hear how it was embellished?

Now have the students try to pick a simple tune and invent variations on it. (Definitely start with a simple one, or else this will be a hard exercise. A famous example is Mozart’s Twelve Variations on “Ah vous dirai-je, Maman” —variations on the melody that we call “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” To make your own variation, start by playing around with the timing. Breaking longer notes into shorter ones that move in short runs around the melody note. For example, in “Twinkle, Twinkle,” instead of starting with two quarter notes on C, you could try two eighth notes on E and D, followed by a quarter note on C. After that, the usual two quarter notes on G are fine. But instead of the next two quarter notes on A, try something different—like four eighth notes on A-G-F#-A. The half note on G is good. But play with the descending quarter notes that follow.) Be inventive.

Activity 14

“College Hornpipe” (track 9) is a simple tune for a very good reason. It was used for country dancing—a popular type of dancing in the 18th century in which men and women danced in long lines, using specific patterns of movement, similar to those used in modern contra dancing or square dancing.

To try this dance, clear the tables and chairs. Then have the girls and boys take partners. Girls should line up on one side of the room, and boys on the other side, facing their partners. This dance is done in sets of three couples, so start at the top and count off in threes, so that each set has three couples in it.

Within each group of three couples, the boy and girl closest to the head of the room (and, presumably, the music) are the number one couple. This couple is said to be at the **head** of the set, and anyone moving toward them is moving **up** the set. The twos and threes are further **down** the set.

Here’s the dance:

A 1:

8 beats. The first couple takes hands and chassés (gallops) *down the center* of the set to the position of the third couple, while the third couple separates and chassés *up the outside* of the set (obviously not holding hands) to the position of the first couple.

8 beats. Repeat, with the third couple taking hands and chasséing *down the center*, while the first couple separates and chassés *up the outside* of the set and back to place.

A2:

8 beats. The second couple sets twice. (Step right-left-right-hold, left-right-left-hold, right-left-right-hold, left-right-left-hold. But try to put a spring in the step, so that on the first beat of each of these groupings, you give a little jump to the designated side; the other two steps in each little grouping are in place, but you rise on step 2 and sink down again on step 3.)

8 beats. The second couple does a back-to-back (dos-a-dos) with partner. On the last beat, all three couples should turn and face the front of the room (the top of the set).

B1:

8 beats. Cast off down the outside in a single file cast. (This is like follow the leader, where the first couple separates and walks *down the outside* of the set, with the twos and threes following them. Boys follow the boys, and girls follow the girls.)

8 beats. The first couple meets at the bottom of its own set, joins hands and walks back up to place, while the twos and threes follow.

B2:

8 beats. The first couple does a back to back (dos-a-dos).

8 beats. The first couple then moves down to the bottom of the set, while the second and third couples slide up one place.

Now repeat the dance, but with everyone taking new numbers. The former second couple is now the first couple. Similarly, the threes are now twos, and the ones are threes.

FURTHER LISTENING

CDs available from the Colonial Music Institute (www.colonialmusic.org):

Colonial Social Dancing for Children by Frances Hendrickson. (A companion book with dance instructions is also available.)

George Washington: Music for the First President by David and Ginger Hildebrand. (A companion book with music and background information is also available.)

Music in the Life of Benjamin Franklin by David and Ginger Hildebrand, with Julianne Baird. (A companion book with music and background information is also available.)

FURTHER READING

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