



MIDDLE SCHOOL

MASTERCLASS 1

**Theme: Live Musicians in Pop Music –
From Classics to Charts**



Abstract

In a one-hour masterclass for middle school musicians, we will focus on the significance of live musicians in pop music and offer an exciting opportunity to bridge the gap between classical music fundamentals and contemporary pop music. This masterclass will highlight the indispensable role of live performance in pop culture and illustrate how classical music elements are woven into pop music- showcasing live performances to inspire students.

Objective

To educate middle school musicians on the importance of live musicianship in pop music, demonstrate the influence of classical music on contemporary pop, and inspire through examples of live performances in pop culture.

Equipment & Materials Needed

- A projector and screen for showing video clips.
- A sound system for playing music and video audio.
- Instruments that the students might play, including keyboards, guitars, and percussion, for demonstration purposes.
- Handouts with key points and terms.

Introduction (5 Minutes)

- **Welcome and Ice-Breaker:** Start with a brief introduction and an engaging question to the students; their favorite pop musicians who incorporate live instruments in their performances.
- **Objective Overview:** Explain the purpose of the masterclass, emphasizing the connection between classical training and pop music performance.

Segment 1: The Role of Live Musicians in Pop Music (15 minutes)

- **Discussion and Examples:** Discuss the impact of live musicianship in pop music, enhancing authenticity, energy, and connection with the audience. Show video clips of iconic live pop performances that prominently feature musicians.
- **Interactive Q&A:** Encourage students to share their impressions of the live elements in the performances and discuss why they think live musicianship adds value to pop music.

Segment 2: Classical Foundations in Pop Music (15 minutes)

- **Presentation:** Highlight examples of classical music elements in pop music, such as melody lines borrowed from classical pieces, classical instrumentation (e.g., strings, brass), and complex harmonies.
- **Listening Activity:** Play snippets of pop songs that have clear classical influences or elements, followed by the classical pieces they draw from, discussing similarities and differences. (List of examples below)

Segment 3: Live Performance Skills Workshop (20 minutes)


- **Live Demonstration:** If possible, have an instructor/guest musician demonstrate a pop song that incorporates classical techniques on their instrument, discussing the skills and techniques used.
- **Hands-On Activity:** Break the students into small groups or pairs to work on a short segment of a pop song, focusing on incorporating a classical technique or element. This could involve re-arranging a pop song to include a classical style or playing a pop song with emphasis on live performance dynamics.

Conclusion: Wrap-Up and Discussion (5 minutes)

- **Group Reflection:** Bring the class back together to share their experiences and what they learned during the hands-on activity. Discuss how classical training can enhance their ability to perform and appreciate pop music.
- **Final Thoughts:** Emphasize the importance of live musicianship in creating engaging and dynamic pop music performances. Encourage students to continue exploring the intersection between classical and pop music in their own playing and listening.
- Provide students with resources or suggestions for further exploration, such as playlists of pop songs with classical elements or live performances to watch.

Many pop songs have been inspired by or directly borrowed themes from classical music, creating a bridge between genres and introducing classical motifs to broader audiences. Here are several notable examples:


1. “A Whiter Shade of Pale” by Procol Harum - Borrows from Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Air” from his Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068, and also shows influences from his “Sleepers, Wake!” cantata.

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2. “All by Myself” by Eric Carmen - The verse is based on the second movement (Adagio sostenuto) of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18. Carmen believed the melody was in the public domain, but it was still under copyright, leading to an agreement with the Rachmaninoff estate.
 3. “Could It Be Magic” by Barry Manilow - Incorporates Frédéric Chopin’s Prelude in C Minor, Op. 28, No. 20, showcasing how pop songs can weave in classical pieces as foundational elements.
 4. “This Night” by Billy Joel - Uses the melody of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Sonata Pathétique (Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13), specifically its second movement, Adagio cantabile, for its chorus.
 5. “Barcelona” by Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé - While not directly borrowing from a specific classical piece, this song exemplifies the fusion of operatic singing with pop music, reflecting Mercury’s love for opera and showcasing classical music’s influence on his work.
 6. “Love of My Life” by Queen - The song’s intricate harmonies and its bridge have a distinctively classical, operatic quality, echoing Freddie Mercury’s appreciation for opera, though it does not borrow directly from a specific classical piece.
 7. “Graduation (Friends Forever)” by Vitamin C - Samples Pachelbel’s Canon in D, a piece that has been a source of inspiration for numerous pop songs across various genres due to its harmonic progression.
 8. “Because” by The Beatles - John Lennon was inspired to write “Because” after hearing Yoko Ono play Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” (Piano Sonata No. 14 in C# minor “Quasi una fantasia”, Op. 27, No. 2) on the piano. He asked her to play the chords of the sonata backward, which led to the creation of the song’s distinctive harmonic structure.

These examples show how classical music continues to inspire and influence contemporary artists across genres, allowing classical themes to live on in modern interpretations and reaching new audiences through the global appeal of pop music.

Modern pop music continues to draw inspiration from classical compositions, though the references may be subtler or more integrated into the pop format than earlier examples. Here are a few contemporary examples, including artists like Maroon 5, that have connections to classical music or exhibit a classical influence in their work:

1. “Memories” by Maroon 5 - This song uses the harmonic progression of Pachelbel’s Canon in D, much like “Graduation (Friends Forever)” by Vitamin C. The melody and chord progression directly echo this famous baroque piece, showcasing its timeless appeal.
2. “Fallen” by Sarah McLachlan - The opening of this song is reminiscent of the Prelude in C# minor, Op. 3 No. 2, by Sergei Rachmaninoff. While not a direct copy, the mood and progression suggest a classical influence.

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