

Bedřich Smetana

Life Dates: 1824-1884
Country of Origin: Bohemia (now the
Czech Republic)
Musical Era: Romantic



Bedřich Smetana was born in 1824 in Bohemia, now known as the Czech Republic. He learned how to play the violin from his father and other local teachers. He was not a good student. He didn't practice or study very much because he spent his time going to concerts and writing music for his friends.

Smetana married and had four children. Sadly, three of his four daughters died within two years. Soon, he had to leave Prague, because he was disappointed with the politics in Bohemia and didn't have enough career opportunities to stay in his homeland. Smetana, his wife, and his remaining daughter moved to Sweden and the composer worked as a piano teacher. Three years later, his wife died while the family was on its way home to Bohemia. Smetana married again, and spent the last years of his life in the countryside with his daughter and his second wife. During this time, he experienced another tragedy: he lost his hearing due to a ringing in his ears. Near the end of his life, he wrote a string quartet that made the instruments sound like the ringing in his ears. He developed some personal troubles and died in Prague in 1884.

Smetana was important in developing the Czech national style and is considered the first nationalistic composer of Bohemia. Although he didn't use folk tunes in his compositions, he was influenced by the music he heard around him. He also helped to get a new opera house built after he returned to Prague. This was a step toward raising the standard of music in Bohemia. Although he was proud of his Czech heritage, Smetana spoke German and never learned the Czech language. This was a problem for his career in Prague, especially as a nationalistic composer.

His music is "programmatic": he uses melody and the sounds of the different instruments to tell a story or depict a scene. Some of his most important works are the string quartet "From My Life," the opera *The Bartered Bride*, and *Má Vlast* (My Fatherland), especially "The Moldau."

Questions from the reading:

Why did Smetana leave Prague?
What is Smetana's style?
Did Smetana speak the language of his country? If not, what language did he speak?

Questions for research:

What instruments play in a string quartet?
What is Nationalism in music?

Lesson Plan for “The Moldau” by Bedrich Smetana



Standards: Music/Visual Arts Intermediate

Performance Indicators for Students:

- The students shall be able to follow a piece of descriptive music with intent and comprehensive listening. (Standard III)
- The students shall be able to describe how a composer can describe real life situations through music. (Standard II, III)
- The students shall be able to recognize the main theme of the music and be able to identify the piece by name. (Standard III, IV)
- The students shall understand the cultural context in which the piece was written and how it compares with the context of our own city, river, and culture. (Standard IV)
- The students shall be able to create an original piece of music using classroom instruments that musically describes real life situations or events along a river. (Standard I)
- The students shall be able to relate to information about the Moldau and the Genessee River. (Standard IV)
- The students shall develop the skills necessary as listener at a concert. (Standard II)

Materials:

- Listening map
- Biography of Smetana and Question Sheet

Listening Repertoire:

- “The Moldau”
- Supplemental: “Blue Danube” by Richard Strauss, “Mississippi Suite” by Ferde Grofé, “Moon River” by Henry Mancini, “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Simon and Garfunkel, “Down by the Riverside” (traditional spiritual), “The River” by Bruce Springsteen.

Prior Knowledge:

- Information about the Genessee River
- Songs that make reference to rivers
- How musical instruments can imitate sounds in real life

Procedures:

- Discuss the Genessee River and have students describe the different things they might see on its shore.
- Ask students to name different activities people do around our river
- Relate the Genessee to the Moldau, tell story by using listening maps
- Ask students to guess how the instruments might suggest what is on the maps
- Introduce main theme; relate to the culture of the Czech Republic; compare major and minor

Procedures (cont.):

- Play main theme in major and minor keys
- Follow maps as music plays; repeat, identifying main theme as it occurs

Main theme of The Moldau



Indicators of Success:

- Students listen with understanding and concentration
- Students identify main theme as it occurs
- Students describe how the music suggests the scenes and moods along the river

Follow-up:

- Students suggest a series of scenes about the Genesee River and create a sound carpet piece
- Students create their own piece that reflects the scenes using Orff instruments, movement could be added
- Students write a verbal rendition of above or a story, adding original artwork.

Social Studies Lesson Plan for “The Moldau” by Bedrich Smetana

Standards: Music/Visual Arts Intermediate Standards III & IV as well as Social Studies

Performance Indicators for Students:

- Identify cultural context of a performance (Standard IVa)
- Identify from performance the titles and composers of well-known examples of classical concert music (Standard IVb)
- Discuss the current and past cultural, social and political uses for music they listen to and perform (Standard IVc)
- Use music listening skills to demonstrate their understanding of how music defines or describes major ideas, eras, themes in world history, or geographical characteristics. (Social Studies Standards II and III)
- Demonstrate understanding of the geography (people, places, and environments) of regions of the world. (Social Studies Standard III)

Objectives:

- Discover the birthplaces of the musicians and artists whose works will be performed or shown at the 2003 RPO Intermediate Concerts
- Learn how water plays a role in the development of a region
- Learn how the waters of this area had a role in the settlement and development of the region

Materials:

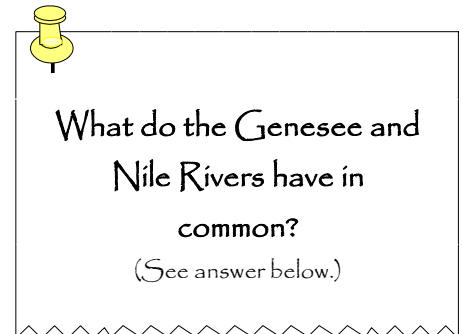
- Large map of the world with marker pins. Attach labels with names of composers/artists to pins
- Paper and pencils/pens
- Access to library and internet
- Books/CD's/VCR's on rivers as well as composers and artists.

Listening Repertoire:

- “The Moldau”

Students should have the following prior Knowledge:

- Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior, including attentive listening in a variety of musical settings in and out of school (Standard IIe)
- Map skills



Answer: they both flow north! Most rivers flow south.

Procedures for students:

- Make small labels with composer and artist names on them.
- Attach composer labels to marker pins.
- Indicate on the world map where each composer/artist was born and/or lived by sticking the appropriate pin in the correct country. Try to get close to the actual city or town.

A teacher led discussion will enable students to understand how bodies of water affect the surrounding areas.

Teacher asks leading questions:

- Is there a body of water close to the indicated areas marked on the map?
- What influence does water or a lack of water have on the development of the region?
- What influence have the waters (lakes/rivers/canals) in the Rochester Region had on the settlement and development of the area?
- Compare this region to the area through which the Moldau or the Colorado River flow.

Students will:

- collect clippings from newspapers, magazines or the Internet on water events (e.g. floods, droughts, etc) and mount them on a bulletin board. These clippings may refer to cultures/traditions, the geographic regions, or historical eras.
- write about a fun experience that involved water. Examples may include a trip to the beach, a ride on the Erie Canal, wading in the water at a Finger Lake, viewing the 4th of July fireworks from the bridge over the Genesee.

Indicators of Success:

- Students complete the writing lesson
- Students begin to understand how important Lake Ontario, the Genesee River, and the Erie Canal are to the development of our region.

Follow-up:

- Arrange for the class to take a ride on the Erie Canal.
- Walk to view the Genesee River and discuss water flow.
- Discuss the importance of clean water and the necessity of caring for as well as maintaining our water supply.

 **Link Up!**

■ [Http://cgee.hamline.edu/rivers/](http://cgee.hamline.edu/rivers/) (Website for Center for Global Environmental Education)

■ www.lakeontariokeeper.org

■ www.history.rochester.edu/canal/