THE SOUND OF COUNTRY MUSIC AND ITS INFLUENCE

STUDY GUIDE

MAKING THE CONNECTION:

- Country music was born in the southern part of America. While many think of Nashville TN as the epicenter of country music, Bristol TN is recognized nationally as the actual birthplace in the 1910s. In 1948 the “Louisiana Hayride” launched a radio, and later television show. It emanated from Shreveport Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport, Louisiana. That show contributed to country music’s rise in popularity.

- What makes country music…country music?
  - There are various subgenres of country music but the main instrumentation that makes up a good portion of the music is:
    - The standard drum set, guitars (both acoustic and electric), and bass both acoustic and electric).
    - Pedal steel – This is one of the main instruments that characterize country music. It is, in essence, a guitar that is played sitting down like a piano. The quintessential sound of the pedal steel is the use of the pedals which cause the instrument to bend into notes and chords.
    - Banjo – The banjo is a classic instrument, particularly in traditional country music.
    - Violin or Fiddle – While not always used, this is another sound found prominently in classic country music.
    - Mandolin – This instrument looks like a mini guitar but is mostly played in a plucking fashion and typically has 8 strings.

- Country music is known for its wonderful stories, lush melodies, and simplistic harmony. While not as popular as hip hop and pop music (both which have 20% of the total market share) country music makes up almost 10%. Country music in the last decade has made large strides to try and become a bit more mainstream. Artists like Taylor Swift and Marin Morris, to name a few, have bridged country music and pop with the use of pop elements (mainly electronics) and vocal style. In 2013 country music was crossed with pop/dance and the song Timber was born. This was a song by the hip hop artist Pit Bull featuring pop artist Kesha written by 16 different song writers that went number one in over a dozen countries. Recently, hip hop was incorporated into country music with the rapper Lil Nas X’s Old Town Road hitting number 1 on the Billboard top 100.

- Some of the popular subgenres of the music are:
  - Folk – Representing the singer/songwriter type, this subgenre focuses on simple and traditional stories with minimal instrumentation.
  - Americana – This subgenre is basically a revolt of the current pop infused country radio music. It mainly uses all acoustic instruments (no electronic instruments) and tells very simple stories.
  - Bluegrass – This subgenre typically features the banjo and its song themes mainly focus on getting through hard times, country loving, and the telling of simple stories.

- One of country music’s biggest contributions to all genres of music was the Nashville number system. This is a popular method of learning music using numbers to refer to scale degrees. The system was created by Neal Matthews in the late 1950’s and became so popular that it is used, in some capacity, in most genres of music today. This system was incredibly popular as it allowed people with only basic theory knowledge to learn music and chords.