



INTRODUCING HARD ROCK

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

In what ways did Jimi Hendrix help create a new “Hard Rock” sound while retaining a connection to the Blues and R&B of his past?

OVERVIEW

Ray Davies wrote “You Really Got Me” on the piano in the front room of the Davies family home, stabbing out that insistent two-chord riff in two-finger chords. His guitarist brother Dave, at 17 five years Ray’s junior, transferred the riff to guitar, playing it through a tiny, battered 5-watt amp, its natural propensity for distortion when cranked to the max exaggerated by the holes Dave had poked into the speaker’s cone with a knitting needle.

– Charles Shaar Murray on Hard Rock



Hard Rock didn’t emerge as something cohesive, something planned, or something immediately obvious in its musical-historical importance. As the epigraph above suggests, it began with something as unlikely as a knitting needle in a speaker cone. Only in retrospect did it appear that significant events had taken place that together led to something deserving of a name. And the name it got was “Hard Rock.” By that time, however, the Kinks, widely celebrated as having given the movement its birth moment with “You Really Got Me,” were exploring other musical territories. They may have set things off, followed by the Who with “I Can’t Explain,” but another group represents Hard Rock’s dramatic entrance better than either of those British acts: the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

This lesson presents Jimi Hendrix and his band as a Hard Rock case study. In contrast to British groups like Cream (which featured Eric Clapton, a former member of both John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers and the Yardbirds, on guitar) and Led Zeppelin (featuring former Yardbird Jimmy Page), Hendrix came out of the American Rhythm and Blues scene. But as a member of that scene, he was not a solo artist or a celebrated member of a group (as were Clapton and Page) -- he was as true sideman, in the shadows. Hendrix, then Jimmy James, played guitar for the Isley Brothers, King Curtis, and Little Richard, among others.

Importantly, though Hendrix’s later style would go well beyond what he did as an R&B sideman, he would always retain a little of his musical past in the rhythmic approach he took to “lead” guitar. In a song like “The Wind Cries Mary,” one can hear a rhythm guitar player raised on Soul and

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

R&B, no matter that the guitar is featured, front and center, in a way that would be unusual on a Soul or R&B recording.

This lesson will consider the manner in which Hard Rock pushed overdriven, distorted guitar to the front. It will contrast an R&B style, often driven by keyboards and horn sections, with Hendrix's "Purple Haze," where the guitar takes center stage, with only drums and bass as accompaniment. The lesson will also explore the way Hendrix was received -- not as a journeyman from the world of R&B, but as a phenomenon that seemed to arrive as if from nowhere.

Written in 1966, Peter Jones' featured review (linked to on the chapter home page) puts it thus: "NOW hear this — and kindly hear it good! Are you one of the fans who think there's nothing much new happening on the pop scene? Right... then we want to bring your attention to a new artist, a new star-in-the-making, who we predict is going to whirl round the business like a tornado. Name: Jimi Hendrix. Occupation: Guitarist-singer-composer-showman-dervish-original. His group, just three-strong: The Jimi Hendrix Experience." From the writer's position in 1966, it all looked new. But like all musicians, Hendrix came from somewhere. This micro lesson looks into the situation, exploring both the artist's musical past and his ultimate place of arrival in the emerging Hard Rock scene.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The importance of Jimi Hendrix as an innovator in the emerging Hard Rock scene of the mid-1960s
- The guitarist's past as a sideman for Little Richard, the Isley Brothers, and King Curtis, and the influence of that past on his Hard Rock recording

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Extrapolate arguments about music by assessing sound, mood, tone, instrumentation
- Draw connections among various print, audio and visual texts
- Write creatively for personal and/or small group expression
- Compare and contrast texts, arguments and ideas
- Common Core: Students will closely read a music review and analyze word choice (CCSS Reading 4; CCSS Reading 6; CCSS Language 3) and compare the review to videos of music performances (CCSS Speaking and Listening 2; CCSS Speaking and Listening 3)
- Common Core: Students will edit the review and incorporate and support their own arguments (CCSS Writing 5) and/or students will conduct a short research project (CCSS Writing 7)

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Show the video of Sam and Dave performing “Hold On, I’m Comin’” in 1967. Ask students to write down answers to these questions as they listen:

- What are the featured instruments?
- What gives the song its energy?
- What do you think the group wanted the audience to focus on?
- What melodies, other than the lead vocal, are emphasized?
- How important is the guitar to the overall sound?

2. To the instructor: Explain that Sam and Dave’s band was a Soul/R&B group from Memphis, Tennessee. Further, once they’ve had a chance to respond, explain that this ensemble’s configuration was typical of what you’d find in 1960s R&B: three horns, a drummer, a bass player, a keyboard player, and a guitar player, all backing the lead vocals that are the most obviously featured part of the act.

3. Explain to them that Jimi Hendrix, when he was still called Jimmy James, was the guitar player in a

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: (CONTINUED)

few different R&B bands. In one of them, he backed Little Richard. Of that experience, Hendrix said this: “Like, once with Little Richard, me and another guy got fancy shirts ‘cause we were tired of wearing the uniform. Richard called a meeting. ‘I am Little Richard, I am Little Richard,’ he said, ‘the King, the King of Rock and Rhythm. I am the only one allowed to be pretty. Take off those shirts.’ Man, it was all like that. Bad pay, lousy living, and getting burned.”

PROCEDURE:

1. Divide students into groups of three. Distribute copies of Peter Jones’ 1966 review of Hendrix and his band. Ask them to consider, as a group, how Jones describes what he hears and sees in the Jimi Hendrix Experience.
 - What adjectives does he use to convey a sense for what Hendrix’s sound is like?
 - Is it loud? Is it dance music? Is it similar to that of any other performer?
 - If you don’t know Jimi Hendrix’s work, can you determine, based on the article, what it might sound and look like?
 - Do you get any sense for Hendrix’s past as a sideman?
2. Now ask the class, remaining in groups, to watch a clip of the Jimi Hendrix Experience playing “Purple Haze.”
3. Once the clip has played, ask the groups to consider the following questions:
 - After seeing and hearing Jimi Hendrix play, would you suggest to Peter Jones anything he could do to make his review more accurate?
 - What are the featured elements in the music and in the performance?
 - How is Hendrix’s approach with “Purple Haze” different from the approach of Steve Cropper, the guitar player with Sam and Dave?
 - If Jimi Hendrix had played and performed as he did here while backing Little Richard, what do you think Little Richard might have said?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

Ask each group to make a list of the differences they see and hear between the performances of “Hold On, I’m Comin’” and “Purple Haze.” Have the groups compare their results, and make some general conclusions about the changes that Hard Rock brought to guitar music.

EXTENSIONS:

1. Read Charles Shaar Murray’s extended essay and, based on that, write a three-paragraph description of Hard Rock’s main features.
2. Have students do a rewrite of Peter Jones’ 1966 review. Be sure they explain why they made the changes they did.
3. Have students design and create cover art for the single of “Purple Haze.”

EXTENSIONS: (CONTINUED)

4. Assign students to research three significant events relating to race that happened in 1966. Ask students to explain, with those events as a backdrop, why Jimi Hendrix may have wanted to leave his work as a sideman to front his own band. How does that choice relate to personal expression, and why was personal expression an important issue for an African-American man in 1966?

STANDARDS

NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING

NJSLSRA.R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

NJSLSA.R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING

NJSLSA.W5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

NJSLSA.W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: SPEAKING AND LISTENING

NJSLSA.SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

NJS:SA.SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

NEW JERSEY STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: LANGUAGE

NJSLSA.L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Sam and Dave – Hold On (1966)
- Jimi Hendrix – Purple Haze (1967)

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Lyrics to “If I Had a Hammer”
- Handout 2: Woody Guthrie on Folk Music

FEATURED PEOPLE

- Jimi Hendrix
- Little Richard
- Sam and Dave