

Activities and Materials for an English Course Focusing on African American Singers of Popular Music

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The author has spent a number of years developing a portfolio of English teaching materials using works of popular culture, notably manga (Howell, 2014) and movies and their novelizations (Howell, 2015). Songs can also have a particular emotional resonance for us as individual consumers of music, and therefore possess a powerful motivational potential for foreign language learning. However, developing a cohesive course of lessons using the lyrical medium of songs seems less straightforward than with the more overtly narrative media of film or graphic arts. It is, of course, possible to use songs in conjunction with other media such as films (Howell, 2016). But even if the film is a musical, the songs are not necessarily at the pedagogical centre of the course. This article reports on materials and activities which attempt to put songs closer to the centre of an English language course by focusing on the history of black artists in American popular music. The intention is simply to share pedagogical practice with other English teachers. No scientific claims are being made for the efficacy in terms of second language acquisition of either the materials or the activities.

BACKGROUND

African-American performers were among some of the most charismatic musical artists of the 20th century. They displayed a wide range of talents, from the amazing guitar picking skills of the Reverend Gary Davis, to the fabulous voice of Ella Fitzgerald, to the dancing of Michael Jackson. Moreover, the aesthetic excellence of their performances is lent an extra emotional resonance by knowledge of the social background of African Americans in 20th-century America. Although slavery had been abolished at the end of the Civil War in 1865, the black population – particularly in the Southern states – was discriminated against and repressed by laws and social structures known as the Jim Crow system. The term “Jim Crow” comes from a stereotypical minstrel character made popular in the first half of the 19th century by the blackface performer, T.D. Rice. Under the Jim Crow system, whites and blacks were supposed to be ‘separate but equal’, but the reality was that facilities and opportunities for blacks were far inferior to those for whites, and that blacks were often prevented from registering for the vote by the chicanery of arcane local regulations. It was only under the presidencies of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson in the early 1960s that civil rights for all U.S. citizens became enshrined in federal law.

As stated, the term “Jim Crow” had its origins in popular 19th century musical culture in the United States, specifically in Rice’s song “Jump Jim Crow”. In blackface minstrel shows, white performers would blacken their faces and pretend to be African Americans, the stereotypical characters being the lazy and stupid plantation ‘darker’ and the more threatening, but equally ridiculous, urban ‘zip coon’. A popular musical genre particularly at the turn of the century was the ‘coon song’ featuring lyrics replete with stereotyped African American dialect and characterizations of blacks as larcenous, lazy, and lascivious.

Ironically, it was minstrelsy and coon songs that gave openings to some African American performers to become popular and make a living. Perhaps the most infamous coon song was “All Coons Look Alike to Me”, written by the African American singer Ernest Hogan. And the successful African American duo Bert Williams and George Walker were, on occasion, billed as “Two Real Coons” (Dormon, 1988, p.454). As Karl Hagstrom Miller (2010, p.139) explains, “some [black composers] believed that the benefits they received – in terms of bookings, reviews, money, and a platform from which to subtly challenge white expectations – were worth it at least for a time”. Thus it would be a mistake to think that African Americans were limited to performing ‘African American music’ only. Miller’s book is a salutary reminder that some African American ‘folk’ artists were also adept at playing a variety of popular commercialized music, a fact neglected by later well-meaning purists who sought to essentialize and compartmentalize ‘black music’. Nevertheless, the story of African American performers in the 20th century is basically an uplifting story of political progress, as the success of the artists ran in tandem with the removal of the Jim Crow laws and the passing of civil rights legislation. It is the story of Jewish businessman Norman Granz’s efforts to desegregate jazz audiences, the story of the rediscovery of old bluesmen by eager young white aficionados in the 1960s, the story of James Brown taking control of his own business affairs, and of Berry Gordy pioneering the successful crossover of black Motown artists and creating ‘the sound of young America’ (White, 2016). As a teacher, the author’s rationale for choosing these materials was to make a connection between Teaching English as a Foreign Language and issues of inequality and social justice in the English-speaking world.

LESSON ACTIVITIES

The course was an optional English culture and language course offered at the Faculty of Education of Hiroshima University. The goal was not to provide ‘effective’ English instruction as in a functional-communicative paradigm of English Education, but rather to combine a traditional cultural approach with humanistic pedagogical principles. As previously mentioned, the author’s purpose in listing and exemplifying the activities is to share practice. The description is, therefore, anecdotal.

The course consisted of 14 90-minute English lessons: 11 core lessons and three review lessons. The students were 57 second-year undergraduates, mostly majoring in either English Education or Elementary School Education. The materials for each core lesson were comprised of DVD recordings of performances by one or by two featured artists or groups, a short passage from an English book dealing with one of the artists accompanied by its Japanese translation, a list of conversational questions and possible answers, and a CD-recording of a song recorded by one of the artists to be featured in the following class. Each core lesson had the same pattern of activities, as listed below.

1. Head
 - (a) song 1: peer correction
 - (b) watching video 1
 - (c) peer messaging
2. Block 1: Short Book Passage
 - (a) bilingual vocabulary matching
 - (b) filling in blanks
 - (c) pair dictation

- (d) listening and sequencing
- 3. Block 2: Song 2
 - (a) sentence reconstruction
 - (b) watching video 2
 - (c) sentence chanting
- 4. Block 3: Rotating Pair Conversations
- 5. Tail

CD listening exercise

As in the template described in Howell (2016), each core lesson ended with a word-completion listening activity, which was then checked at the beginning of the following lesson. In the tail activity an A4 sheet with the lyrics to a song was given to each student. A limited number of words had letters deleted, which were to be filled in while listening to the song on an audio CD, following which, the sheets were collected by the teacher. Then, in the head activity of the next class, the teacher wrote the correct spellings on the board and distributed the completed sheets randomly to the class. While watching a performance of the same song on video, the students corrected their classmates' spellings and also wrote a message on an attached post-it note. Below is an example of a tail activity using the lyrics of Eroll Garner and Johnny Burke's jazz standard, "Misty". The numbers in brackets represent the number of missing letters.

*Look at me,
 I'm as helpless as a kitten up a tr..... (2);
 And I feel li..... (2) I'm clinging to a cloud,
 I can't understand
 I get misty, just holding your h..... (3).
 Walk my way,
 And a thousand violins begin to p..... (3),
 Or it may be the sound of your hello,
 That music I hear,
 I get misty whenever you're ne..... (2).
 You can see that you're leading me on
 And it's just what I w..... (3) you to do,
 Don't you notice how ho..... (8) I'm lost?
 That's why I'm following you.
 On my own,
 When I wander through this wonderland al..... (3),
 Never knowing my right foot from my le..... (2)
 My hat from my glo..... (2)
 I'm too misty, and too much in love.
 Too misty,
 And too much in love.*

The second block in each core lesson was centred on a short reading passage from a published book,

giving some information about one of the performers featured in the lesson. However, participants were required to construct the text themselves rather than simply being presented with it and asked to read. First, in order to facilitate comprehension, they skim-read a Japanese translation of the English passage. Following this, ten English vocabulary items were highlighted. The term ‘highlighted’ is used in preference to ‘taught’ because the purpose was to facilitate text construction and comprehension rather than to commit to memory these particular items. No claim is being made that such items meet any kind of needs analysis following a typical applied linguistic paradigm of English Teaching. Highlighting was realized by distributing to 10 students slips of yellow paper with an English expression on each slip, and distributing to another 10 students slips of green paper with its equivalent from the published Japanese translation, asking the 20 students to find their translation match, and write both English and Japanese on the board. Class members then drilled the expressions, following the teacher who used the technique of repeating and expanding. After vocabulary highlighting, participants did a blank-fill activity and then a pair-dictation to write out the short reading passage. Finally, a sequencing listening task was conducted in which the teacher read aloud the short passage and the students wrote numbers next to the 10 vocabulary items according to the sequential order heard while listening. An example is shown for the reading passage about Motown Records. As 10-item sequencing may be somewhat difficult, help is given by pre-providing the sequential number for two of the 10 items.

The third block was comprised of watching a performance on video of a second song. Before and while listening to the song, participants were asked to reconstruct sentences from the song which were presented in jumbled order, as shown below in an excerpt from Al Green’s version of the Curtis Mayfield song “People Get Ready”.

People get ready
There’s a train coming
You don’t need no ticket
You.....
(on / step / board / just / can)
All
(is / need / faith / you)
To
(humming / hear / diesel / the)
You don’t need no ticket
You.....
(Lord / thank / just / the)

Having quietly confirmed that a random student had reconstructed the sentence correctly, the teacher then asked that individual to write the sentence on the board, and, when all the sentences were written on the board, they were then drilled by simple listening and repeating.

The fourth block gave participants a chance to have conversations with their classmates either by completely free unscripted conversations or by using a script provided by the teacher, or a combination of both. The script was comprised of five questions, with a choice of three possible answers for each question. The questions attempted to give participants the chance to actually use vocabulary from the songs or the

reading passage in conversation, and typically involved mutual self-disclosure in the humanistic tradition whereby participants get to know more about each other's backgrounds, personal histories, beliefs, and values. (Moskowitz, 1978). Participants were asked to stand in pairs around the walls of the classroom and talk mostly in English for roughly two minutes before being asked to rotate to a new conversational partner. During this time the teacher circulated round the room occasionally joining conversations and checking and encouraging the use of English. After no more than 15 minutes of rotating conversations, participants resumed their seats, and one person was randomly selected to come to the 'hot seat' seat at the front of the class to answer in plenary session all five questions posed by designated students plus a couple of additional questions posed by students called on by the teacher. Random selection was by asking a student to choose a random number and then counting off from the front of the class to find the 'hot seat' performer.

The tail activity consisted of a word-completion task while listening on CD to the first song to be used in the next lesson. When the task had been completed, students were free to leave the classroom, leaving their completed sheet and also their attendance check-sheet on the teacher's desk. After class the teacher attached a blank post-it note to each completed sheet in preparation for the next lesson.

MATERIALS FOR JAZZ SINGERS

The scholar Frank Tirro points out the lack of agreement about what actually defines jazz as a musical style, but offers the following 'working definition' (Tirro, 1977, p.55):

- we will consider jazz to be that music which came into being in the southern part of the United States during the late nineteenth century and first blossomed in the vicinity of New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century. This music has undergone many stylistic changes, and may be considered to include ragtime, blues, classic or Dixieland jazz, Chicago-style jazz, swing, boogie-woogie, Kansas City-style jazz, bebop, progressive jazz, and free jazz, as well as others.

One of the most famous jazz songs is "Strange Fruit", a song about the lynching of blacks in the Southern states. It was the signature song of Billie Holiday, the "strange fruit" of the title referring to "black bodies swinging in the summer breeze". Based on a poem by the Jewish writer Abel Meeropol, it constitutes a hard-hitting introduction for Japanese students to the realities of Jim Crow. Lynching was not a crime committed exclusively against blacks, and it is impossible to know exact statistics. However, the Washington Post (Berman, 2015) has cited documented reports of close to 4,000 African Americans being lynched between 1877 and 1950. For this reason, and for the way in which Holiday's hard life (rape, abandonment as a child, alcohol and drug addiction) reflected the harsh social realities of African American life, the first lesson in the course focused on Billie Holiday and the song, "Strange Fruit". No visually recorded performance by Holiday of the song is available, so in this lesson only an audio recording was used. There was also no second song in the first lesson, as additional time was required for giving a general orientation to the course and advising participants of what to expect. For the reading passage, an extract was used from the singer's autobiography "Lady Sings the Blues", in which she describes the origins of the famous song (Holiday and Dufty, 2006). The 10 highlighted vocabulary items (with corresponding expressions from the Japanese translation) and five conversation questions were as follows:

I got a wonderful assist – 素晴らしい助力も得た
it was a mistake – 間違いだった

it seemed – 気がした
applause – 拍手
poem – 誌
it depresses me – 沈痛な気持になる
worked like the devil – 死物狂いになって
caught on – 人気を博した
accompanist – 伴奏者
I was never sure – まったく自信がなかった
- *Are you depressed?*
- *Have you ever written a poem?*
- *What is your favourite fruit?*
- *What is your favourite smell?*
- *Do you think there is a lot of prejudice in Japan?*

The second lesson focussed on two famous African American women jazz singers who came after Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. The first song used in the second lesson was Eroll Garner and Johnny Burke's "Misty". Sarah Vaughan, who has been described as the "Queen of Bebop" (Hayes, 2017), was filmed performing the song at a 1964 concert in Sweden, and the video recording is available in the "Jazz Icons" DVD series. Ella Fitzgerald was probably the most popular female jazz singer of the 20th century, giving concerts all over the world under the tutelage of her manager and jazz impresario Norman Granz. Granz became well known for insisting on the equal treatment of African American jazz artists during the Jim Crow era (Hershorn, 2011). The lesson uses a 1965 video recording from "Show of the Week: Ella Fitzgerald Swings" in which Ella sings the Irving Berlin-penned popular standard "Cheek To Cheek". For the reading passage, recourse was made to an extract from the first chapter of Jim Haskins' biography "Ella Fitzgerald: A Life through Jazz", which mentions her quest to "balance and blend Jazz and pop singing" and describes her voice as "a gift from God" (Haskins, 1991, p.10). The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

dizzying possibilities – 眼のくらむような音の可能性
consummate musician – 完成したミュージシャン
slither – すべる
depth – 深み
gift from God – 神様からの贈物
mercifully – 幸いに
the last two decades – この二十年
dearth of passion – 情熱が足りない
chromatic scale – 半音階
piquantly expressive note – ぴりりとした表情豊かな音
- *What is your gift from God?*
- *Are you a passionate person?*
- *Would you like to dance cheek to cheek with me?*

- ♪Don't you notice just how hopelessly I'm lost? ♪
- Have you ever gone fishing?

MATERIALS FOR BLUES SINGERS

The blues is probably the genre of popular music that emerged most directly from the injustices suffered by African Americans during the Jim Crow era, with lyrics alluding to various kinds of emotional distress and suffering. As evidenced by early acolytes such as the Rolling Stones, the blues is also at the origins of all western rock music and the substantial global business it became in the latter half of the 20th century. Performing songs to the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar was, alongside preaching the Christian gospel, one of the few ways for African Americans to escape the back-breaking work of share-cropping, logging, and the other kinds of manual work available to them in the southern states under Jim Crow. During and after World War II, labour shortages opened up the chance of better pay and less discrimination in the cities of New York, Detroit, and Chicago, triggering a 'great migration' of rural southern blacks to the urban conglomerations of the north. Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield) and Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett) also migrated to Chicago to find fame and fortune performing a more amplified electric blues with their bands.

The course included two lessons featuring blues artists, the first focusing on acoustic performances by the Reverend Gary Davis and Son House, and the second on electric performances by Howlin' Wolf and B.B. King. A 'simmering' (Zack, 2015, p.241) performance by Gary Davis of "Death Don't Have No Mercy" was filmed for the 1970 documentary *Black Roots*, a performance made all the more moving by the tears it brings to the eyes of lawyer Flo Kennedy as she listens. The performance is reproduced on the Vestapol DVD *Legends of Country Blues Guitar Volume One*. The same DVD also contains a searing performance of Son House's lament "Death Letter". Noting the gloomy preoccupation with death in the two songs, it was pointed out to students that segregation under Jim Crow also extended to health care, and the better resourced hospitals in the South were intended for white patients only. The reading passage for the acoustic blues lesson was an extract from Robert Palmer's book *Deep Blues*, in which House is described as "a failed preacher, convicted murderer" (Palmer, 1981, p.79). The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

- hard manual labor* – 厳しい肉体労働
- extraordinary* – 非凡な
- halfheartedly* – 気乗りしないままに
- pastor* – 牧師
- rambled* – 放浪し
- tight with money* – けち
- vicinity* – 近辺
- passionate churchgoer* – 熱心に教会に通っていた
- early thirties* – 三十代前半
- sermon* – 説教
- Are you feeling sad and blue?
- Have you ever done any hard manual labour?

- *Are you tight with money?*
- *What do you think you'll be doing when you are in your early 30s?*
- *Can I come to your house? I won't stay long!* (lyric: "He'll [death] come to your house and he won't stay long")

In the electric blues lesson, rather than the topic of death, the two songs deal with the frustrations and failures of love and romance. The first video features a performance by Howlin' Wolf of the blues standard "Sitting on Top of the World", taped near the end of Wolf's life to the extent that we can see the bandages on his wrists as a consequence of the treatment for his failing health. It is available as a bonus track on the Vestapol DVD *Howlin' Wolf in Concert*. The second video is a high-octane performance given by B.B. King in New York's Sing Sing Prison of the song "How Blue Can You Get", recorded for posterity in 1972 by the documentary film maker David Hoffman. The reading passage was from the authorized biography of B.B. King by Charles Sawyer, mentioning the influence on King's guitar technique of T-Bone Walker and Bukka White (Sawyer, 1981). The ten highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

grasped – 把握していた

strings – 弦

determination – 決意

pathos – 情念

maturity – 成熟

at the age of twenty – 20才の頃

highly technical – 高度な技術を要する

little finger – 小指

determines the voice – 声を決め

handled – 取り扱う

- *What are you planning to do this summer?*
- *Are you a mature person?*
- *Are you 20 years old?*
- *Do you feel downhearted these days?*
- *How many children do you want to have?*

MATERIALS FOR GOSPEL SINGERS

According to Don Cusic (2002, p.50), black gospel music has its roots in the holiness movement beginning in the 1890s:

- Pentecostal congregations, characterized by this intense emotionalism in the worship service, developed all over the country, especially among the poor and depressed...the black holiness churches feature a great amount of singing and dancing in their services, with half of the service usually comprised of music.

Gospel was the music of choice of religiously minded African Americans, for many of whom blues was 'the devil's music'. But it was not the case that there was always a clear-cut divide between the two genres. As Ian Zack points out, the famous blues pioneer Blind Lemon Jefferson recorded religious music under the name of Deacon L. J. Bates, while Son House and Blind Gary Davis were both ordained preachers.

Furthermore, the father of modern black gospel music, Thomas Dorsey, initially made his living as a blues artist, co-writing double-entendre hokum like “It’s Tight Like That” (Zack, 2015). According to Anthony Heilbut (1997, p.xxvi), Dorsey “consciously decided to combine the Baptist lyrics and Sanctified beat with the stylized delivery of blues and jazz”. Allying his composing skill to the performing energy of singer Sallie Martin, he helped establish choruses in black communities throughout America, and became the first president of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses. The gospel-focused lesson adopted Dorsey’s “It’s a Highway to Heaven” as its first song. The tail of the previous lesson was a CD-recording of the song by Alex Bradford, while in the lesson itself use was made of George Nierenberg’s 1982 documentary film “Say Amen Somebody”, in which the O’Neal twins sing the song with the church choir during the processional entrance. The second song, “People Get Ready” also displays gospel’s deep entwinements with other genres, since it is written by Curtis Mayfield, best known for his politically conscious soul music, and performed by the Reverend Al Green, who also originally found commercial success as a soul artist. Green’s performance of the song is documented in Robert Mugge’s 1984 film, “Gospel According to Al Green”. The passage for reading was an extract describing Thomas Dorsey from Anthony Heilbut’s groundbreaking book, “The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times”, originally published in 1971. The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

fairly audacious – かなり大胆な
saved – 救われた人間
double-entendre – 二重の意味
slightly stooped – やや腰が曲がり
preacher’s facility – 説教師のような巧みさ
a solemn promise with faith – 信仰をもっておごそかに誓い
dwarfed – 小さく見える
wizened, laconic manner – しおれた, ぶっきらぼうな態度
retracing – 振り返った
perfect foil – 完璧な引き立て役
Are you ready?
Are you saved and walking up the king’s highway?
Who are you most grateful to?
Do you like jokes with double-entendres?
Do you believe in reincarnation?

MATERIALS FOR SOUL SINGERS

Three lessons in the course were based on performances by singers of soul music. Soul sprang from black gospel music, adapting its religious fervour to secular themes: in particular, romance and sex. This trajectory is perhaps most evident in the career of Sam Cooke, who had been a star of the gospel world as a member of the famous quartet, The Soul Stirrers. But the pioneer of soul music was Ray Charles, who appropriated the music from a gospel song “It Must Be Jesus” for his 1954 release “I Got A Woman”, while his 1959 hit “What’d I Say” is notable for its replacement of spiritual call-and-response by Ray’s earthy vocalizations and the groans in response of his female backing group, the Raelettes. Nelson George (1988,

p.70) comments on Charles' music as follows:

- *By breaking down the division between pulpit and bandstand, recharging blues concerns with transcendental fervor, unashamedly linking the spiritual and the sexual, Charles made pleasure (physical satisfaction) and joy (divine enlightenment) seem the same thing.*

Since these two hits, "I Got A Woman" and "What'd I Say", showed the progression from gospel to soul so clearly, it was decided to choose them for the first lesson featuring soul performances. And, in view of its technical excellence in production terms, it was decided to make use of the 2004 Taylor Hackford biopic movie, "Ray", which showcases and highlights the historical importance of the two songs in Charles' career. For reading, recourse was made to a passage in his autobiography, "Brother Ray" (Charles and Ritz, 2005), in which Charles describes the accidental birth of his song, "What'd I Say". The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

Midwest – 中西部

I kept the thing going – 私は続けた

exception – 例外

floated into my head – 頭に浮かんだ

Latin rhythm – ラテン風リズム

tightening it up – サウンドをびしっとさせたり

record – 録音する

y'all just follow me – 俺についてこい

intermission – 休憩

I could think of – 思いつく

Have you got a woman?

What do you do when you have time to kill?

What makes you feel good?

Can you dance all night long?

Do you like what I have on today?

In the 1960s the most dynamic artist in performance terms was James Brown, sometimes nicknamed "Soul Brother No. 1" or "the Godfather of Soul". Brown was also notable for his fierce independence and control over his own business. In the lesson devoted to James Brown, the first song used was the Jimmy Forrest-penned "Night Train". Brown's rendition of the song backed by the Famous Flames was recorded for "The T.A.M.I Show", a live concert recorded for release as a feature film in 1964. Nelson George (1988, p.92) describes it as an "incredible, camel-walking, proto-moon-walking, athletically daring performance." A recording of the second song, "I Feel Good", is available on a DVD entitled "Casey Kasem's Rock & Roll Goldmine: The Soul Years", which, despite the technically low quality of the video, again showcases Brown's innovative dancing. The reading passage described Brown's financial independence and was taken from Nelson George's book, "The Death of Rhythm and Blues" (George, 1988). The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

early sixties – 六〇年代初頭

enormous ambition – 大きな野心

consideration – 配慮
great entrepreneurs – 偉大な実業家
middlemen – 中間業者
all the business decisions – ビジネス上のすべての決定
contemporaries – 同時代人
eschewing national promoters – 全国的なプロモータを使わず
constantly – つねに
discipline - 規律正しさ
Do you feel good?
Which city in the United States would you like to visit?
Do you have an enormous ambition?
Do you like spicy food?
Are you in control of your own destiny?

Soul was born from black gospel, but one of the key record labels in its success was founded by a white bank clerk, Jim Stewart, and his sister Estelle. This was Stax Records of Memphis. Although their most famous artist, Otis Redding, was an African American from Macon, Georgia, Stax's house band, Booker T. and the MGs, was racially mixed, featuring white musicians such as Steve Cropper, Duck Dunn, and Wayne Jackson. Stax Records was the focus of the eighth of the 11 core lessons in the course. In March of 1967, Otis Redding, the MGs, and a roster of other Stax artists embarked on a tour of Europe. Rob Newman relates how Sam and Dave, as the penultimate act in the show, set the bar high for headliner Redding by leaving the audience “frothing at the mouth” (Newman, 1997, p.120). The dynamism of the two performances can be seen on the DVD of the show, “Stax/Volt Revue: Live in Norway”. In the lesson, Sam and Dave's finale “Hold On, I'm Coming”, and Otis Redding's finale entitled “Try A Little Tenderness”, were used. The reading passage for the lesson was taken from the description of the show in Newman's history of Stax records. The ten highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

resurrected – 復活
intoxicating – 酔いしれた
praying – 祈っていたんだ
weeping – 涙を流して
total chaos – 完全に混乱状態
feel sorry for – かわいそう
frenzied – 熱狂的
like they were having a fit – ひきつけでも起こしてみたい
absolutely unbelievable – 信じられないくらい凄まじかった
frothing at the mouth – 口から泡を吹いている
Do you drink?
When was the last time you cried?
Do you feel sorry for me?
What is your whole happiness?

If you were going to pray for something, what would you pray for?

MATERIALS FOR CROSSOVER SINGERS

Since the 1920s record companies had sought to capitalize on the popularity of black artists by establishing the category of “race records”, and later most black-owned record companies would target the rhythm and blues chart of records purchased mainly by African Americans (Smith, 1999). But the first black-owned company that specifically aimed and succeeded at crossing over to the white audience was Motown Records, founded in Detroit in 1958 by Berry Gordy Jr.. The ninth in the 11 core lessons in the course was devoted to Motown Records. According to Nelson George, whereas Stax Records aimed at black fans first, Motown was “totally committed to reaching white audiences” and “hell-bent on injecting itself into the mainstream” (George, 1988, p. 86). Among their early successful artists were ‘girl groups’: The Supremes, and Martha and the Vandellas. The first U.S. No.1 hit for the Supremes, made up of three girls from a housing project in Detroit, was “Where Did Our Love Go?”, which was video-recorded for the T.A.M.I. show. The second song used in the Motown lesson was “Nowhere To Run” by Martha and the Vandellas. A promotion video for this song features the groups lip-synching to the song while dancing through the actual Ford Mustang production line in Detroit, neatly highlighting the roots of the record label in the ‘Motor City’. Berry Gordy explicitly attempted to run the label like a factory, and it has been suggested that Martha Reeves was one of the victims of this harsh system. Thus, the reading passage is taken from Nelson George’s history of Motown in which he describes how the recalcitrant Reeves ended up as “just one of many second bananas”, suffering a series of nervous breakdowns (George, 1985, p.161). The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

hostility – 険悪な空気

really got mad – すごく怒った

depressions – 鬱状態

objective – 客観的

isolation – 孤独

worldly exterior – 社交的な外面

better treatment – 待遇改善

dwindled – だんだんと減り

nervous breakdowns – 神経衰弱

employees – 社員

Are you depressed?

Are you mad at me?

Why do you treat me so coldly?

Where did our love go?

Have you ever been heartbroken?

Ike and Tina Turner were an African American husband-wife performing duo who crossed over from their rhythm and blues origins to become well-known for their powerful performances of songs penned by white rock’n’roll songwriters such as Phil Spector and John Fogerty. Spector is famous for his ‘wall of

sound' approach to recording, something much in evidence in the first song used in this lesson, "River Deep, Mountain High". A performance of the song as well as Fogerty's "Proud Mary" is available on the DVD recording of the Ike and Tina Turner Revue from 1971. Phil Spector is, as of the time of writing of this article, serving a prison sentence for the second-degree murder of his girlfriend, Lana Clarkson. And, since the publication of Tina's autobiography "I, Tina" (Turner and Loder, 1986) and the 1993 release of the biopic film, "What's Love Got to Do With It?", Ike became notorious for his violent abuse of Tina during their marriage. The reading passage is, therefore, an extract from Tina's autobiography in which she depicts the cruel sexual violence inflicted upon her by her husband, enabling brief mention of the topic of domestic violence in the lesson. The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

swollen – 腫れ上が^らって

palm trees – ヤシの木

basically – 基本的に

instilling fear in me – 私を恐怖に落とし入れて

kept control of me – 私を支配しようとした

rent – 家賃

didn't want to get involved – 関わりたくない

totally different people – まったく違うタイプの人間

started beating me – 私を殴り始めた

Did you have a puppy when you were a child?

How much is your monthly rent?

Do you ever think about how things might have been?

Do you have a part-time job?

What do you think about domestic violence?

The highest-selling album in the history of popular music is Michael Jackson's "Thriller". Jackson was originally the lead singer in The Jackson Five, a family group from Gary, Indiana, signed to the Motown label by Berry Gordy. Michael Jackson found his phenomenal solo success when he left Motown and teamed up with veteran producer Quincy Jones to make the album "Off The Wall" in 1979, followed by the record-breaking "Thriller" in 1982. The two songs used in the final core lesson were both from the Thriller album, "Thriller" and "Billie Jean". The former is famous for its extended promotion video made by film director John Landis, featuring a posse of dancing zombies, while the latter is well-known for Jackson's use of the 'moonwalk' dance while performing it, notably at the concert for the 25th anniversary of Motown Records. Both are available on the DVD "Michael Jackson: History on Film, Volume II". For the reading passage, recourse was made to an extract from Jackson's autobiography, "Moonwalk" (Jackson, 1988), in which he explains how he hit upon his famous performance routine for "Billie Jean". The 10 highlighted vocabulary items and five conversation questions were as follows:

in public – 観衆を前に

innovative – 革新的

rhythm – リズム

by myself – ひとりで

spontaneous – 即興で
before the taping – 収録の前
on street corners – 街角で
the night before the show – ショーの前の晩
a lot of fun – とても楽しい
someday – いつの日か
What did you do the night before last?
Do have any strong advice to offer me?
Are you a good dancer?
What do you do when you want to have fun?
Do you have a girlfriend / boyfriend?

REFLECTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

The cultural focus of the course meant that outcomes in terms of language acquisition were expected to be indirect rather than direct. It is necessary to point this out because some of the songs used in the course had lyrics reflecting non-standard African-American English, e.g.:

She gone and left me (“Sitting on Top of the World”)

Death don't have no mercy (“Death Letter”)

You don't need no ticket (“People Get Ready”).

These non-standard examples of tense-aspect and negation are not presented to students as models to be acquired. Contrariwise, it can be argued that some passive knowledge of non-standard native-speaker English is not necessarily a bad thing. Nevertheless, not all the participants expressed an appreciation of the cultural focus on songs, as evidenced in the following comment from student written feedback:

- I enjoyed the classes listening to old American music. But to be honest, I wanted to have more chance to listen to English spoken not song.

It was also noticeable in the feedback that when students did express appreciation of a specific singer, it was exclusively about the most recent and ‘crossed over’ artist, Michael Jackson.

- マイケルジャクソンが一番楽しかった。(I enjoyed Michael Jackson the most)

- マイケルジャクソン, 大好き!! (I love Michael Jackson)

- 音楽が好きなので, いろいろな洋楽やゴスペルを楽しめた。中でも, マイケルジャクソンの歌やダンスを初めて見れたのは大きな経験になった。(As I like music, I enjoyed various American songs and gospel. Seeing Michael Jackson's singing and dancing was a big experience for me).

In addition to the linkages between the English language and the history of American culture and society, the course rationale was also built on emotional resonance and pleasure. When students were asked to write down their feelings about the course in an anonymous questionnaire, there were mostly positive reactions e.g.:

- I love this class because the teacher (Peter) introduced very good and old songs which I know and

love

- *The songs from the old days were very new to me, so I had a good time listening to it*
- *いろいろなジャンルの歌や音楽を聴けて楽しかったです (It was fun to listen to different genres of music and songs).*

Students rated the pleasure of the course more highly than its utility. Out of 57 participants, 52 agreed that it was enjoyable and only two disagreed, while three were neutral. 34 participants agreed with the view that it was useful, 18 were neutral, and five disagreed. It should be noted that many comments from students expressed pleasure and utility derived from the humanistic conversational block of the lessons, and did not mention cultural content of the course, e.g.

- *毎回英語での会話を不特定多数の人と行うことで英語のスキル、コミュニケーション力を身につけることができた。(I was able to acquire conversational ability and English skill by talking every time in English to a range of different people)*
- *ほかの人と英語で会話できたのでよかった。(It was good that I could speak to other people and in English)*
- *いろいろな人と会話でき、輪が広がった。(I could talk to various people and expand my circle [of friends]).*

With regard to conversation in rotating pairs, when asked to rank the best five scripted questions for rotating conversation, ‘upbeat’ questions about fun and happiness ranked higher than questions related to “the blues”.

What makes you feel good? (joint most popular question: 24 votes)

What is your ‘whole happiness’? (expression from the song “Try a Little Tenderness”; 4th most popular question: 16 votes)

What do you do when you want to have fun? (7th most popular question: 12 votes).

But questions such as, “Are you depressed?” and “Are you feeling sad and blue?” received only four and three votes respectively. The other most popular question was a simple future-oriented question, “What are you planning to do this summer?”

CONCLUSION

In this article the author has demonstrated that it is possible to search for and locate authentic English-language materials relating to 20th-century African American singers in a variety of musical genres, and to combine them with humanistic teaching techniques to produce an English course that is both pleasurable and culturally relevant. The musical genres employed were jazz, blues, gospel, soul and crossover. It is possible, indeed likely, that the emotional resonance of the music for the teacher was not equally as salient for the young Japanese participants, but enjoyment of the teaching procedures appeared not to be significantly impaired. Looking to the future, the author would like to replicate the materials development process with the biggest-selling musical artists of the 20th century, the Beatles.

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要 約

アフリカ系アメリカ人歌手による大衆音楽に焦点を当てた 英語講座のためのアクティビティおよび教材

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本記事は、アフリカ系アメリカ人シンガーを中心とした英語のスピーキングとリスニングのコースを作成するために選んだアクティビティやマテリアルの概要についてである。このフォーカスについての理論的根拠の簡潔な説明の後、筆者はコース内のそれぞれ 11 個のレッスンに共通するアクティビティについて記述する。いくつかの変種に加え、これらは筆者が以前「スリーブロックメソッド」として論述したものと同様のものである。そして、一覧表には、ジャズ、アコースティックブルース、エレクトリックブルース、ゴスペル、ソウル、クロスオーバーといった多岐に渡るジャンルから選択したマテリアルが用意されている。出演シンガーは、ビリー・ホリデイ、サラ・ヴォーン、エラ・フィッツジェラルド、レヴァランド・ゲイリー・デイヴィス、サン・ハウス、ハウリン・ウルフ、ビー・ビー・キング、オニール・ツインズ、アル・グリーン、レイ・チャールズ、ジェームス・ブラウン、サム & デイヴ、オーティス・レディング、ザ・スプリームス、マーサ & ザ・ヴァンデラス、アイク & ティナ・ターナー、マイケル・ジャクソンである。最後に、参加者が回答したアンケートの陳述を用い、筆者の本コースへの教育学上の意見を記述する。

ABSTRACT

Activities and Materials for an English Course Focusing on African American Singers of Popular Music.

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This article gives an outline of activities and materials chosen to create an English listening and speaking course which features African American singers. After briefly offering a rationale for this focus, the author describes the activities common to each of 11 core lessons in the course. With some variations, these are similar to what the author has previously described as the 'three-block method'. Then a listing is provided of materials selected from a range of musical genres: jazz, acoustic and electric blues, gospel, soul, and crossover. Artists featured include Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, The Rev. Gary Davis, Son House, Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King, the O'Neal Twins, Al Green, Ray Charles, James Brown, Sam and Dave, Otis Redding, the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, Ike and Tina Turner, and Michael Jackson. At the end of the article, the author offers his own pedagogic reflections on the course with the aid of questionnaire statements written by participants.