

# TOO HOT TO HANDEL TEACHERS REFERENCE GUIDE





# ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

## THE CHOIR:

Established in 1949, Rackham Symphony Choir (RSC) has a 65-year history of creating and presenting innovative, multi-media choral works designed to actively engage the audience in the story and message of their performances. RSC's mission is to bring to the community the power and energy of exciting orchestra-accompanied choral works through quality concert performance. We strive to show artistic leadership by presenting innovative music of diverse cultures, styles and periods. Musical talent and contribution to the community is promoted through our music presentations, educational programs, and community benefit concerts.

## THE SHOW:

RSC has presented its signature performance, Too Hot To Handel, (THTH) every December since 2001. A modern day, jazz-gospel version of Handel's quintessential masterpiece, The Messiah, THTH is a holiday tradition for the people of metro Detroit. Since 2009, RSC has invited students from underserved schools to attend a live dress rehearsal of THTH, and participation has grown from 800 in 2009 to nearly 1,500 in 2014. Teachers accompany their students to the historic Detroit Opera House, where they interact with the artists and see a fully staged dress rehearsal. Many of these young people have never attended a live musical production before, and most have not been to the Detroit Opera House, one of Detroit's cultural gems. In 2015, RSC expanded the curriculum into a multi-week, in-school residency program to accompany their classroom learning, and in 2016 RSC will facilitate the residency activities to four additional Detroit schools.

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# PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

## MUSICAL

In a series of four visits to each school, teaching artists will cover the following topics (among others):

1. A timeline of music in Detroit, including the city's role in the development of the jazz and gospel genres heard in THTH;
2. A discussion of the similarities and differences between various genres heard in the production, and how they relate to each other in THTH;
3. A detailed comparison/contrast of Handel's Messiah and THTH;
4. An introduction to improvisation and scat, and a demonstration of how Handel's original piece was transformed into the modern day interpretation in THTH; and
5. A discussion of the cultural significance of THTH as a multi-genre work that unites talented artists of different races, and how the work can be viewed as a model for improved interracial relations in metro Detroit.

## COMMUNITY

Youth of color are continually underrepresented in classical music. Many believe that this is partially due to a lack of successful musicians who look like them and reflect their backgrounds. THTH showcases acclaimed, successful black soloists who've had careers as opera singers and classical musicians. Through this residency, youth will interact with many such role models.

RSC believes that arts exposure is essential to building a community's identity and pride, and students' improved feelings about living in the city of Detroit are also a desired outcome of this program.

Past student surveys have revealed that THTH Student Day fosters improved opinions of the city as a place to live and visit.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Lesson 1:** Administer pre-assessment survey, intro to musical genres/styles in THTH
- 2: Visit from Suzanne Acton, compare original Messiah to THTH
  - 3: Visit from Marion Hayden, discussions about community and improvisation
  - 4: Masterclass with Alvin Waddles
  - 5: Masterclass with Rod Dixon and Alfreda Burke
- \*Attend THTH at the Detroit Opera House\*
- 6: Administer post-assessment survey

# ABOUT THE ...



## HANDEL

### • KEY WORD •

**Oratorio:** a musical composition for voices and instruments that has a religious theme, often telling a sacred story without using costumes, scenery or dramatic staging.

- Born George Frideric Handel in Halle, Germany in 1685
- Started composing at age 9
- Most famous work, *Messiah*, first premiered in Dublin, Ireland in 1742 to great acclaim
- Its debut in London was very controversial as it raised this question: Was it possible to create a piece of music about religion and still remain respectful?
- Handel tried to do both with his **oratorio**, *Messiah*
- His vision started to fade in one eye in 1751 and progressed to the other eye
- He died in 1759 in London and the last performance he ever attended was *Messiah*, his own oratio



## WHY?

This project is built around one central work: **Too Hot To Handel**—the jazz-gospel *Messiah*. THTH is a modern, multi-genre adaptation of Handel's quintessential masterpiece. Co-arranged by composers Bob Christianson and Gary Anderson, THTH unites a classical sound with more modern musical idioms, resulting in a work that speaks to audiences of all ages, cultures and backgrounds.



# MUSIC!

- Pre-1900: Music based on **traditional African folk songs** were carried on from Africa to the America, where they were sung by enslaved Africans in the South. Many of these songs evolved into spirituals which were passed down generations through oral tradition.
- 1900's: **Blues** music began to take shape in the rural south and urban hubs.
- 1920's: A new sound coming out of New Orleans, influenced by traditional African and French Creole music, started to influence music from New York to Chicago to Kansas City, giving birth to **jazz**.
- 1930's: **Swing** music hit the mainstream with simple arrangements, a focus on horn/wind instruments and a lack of a string section. The music was snappy, daring, and encouraged plenty of **improvisation** of the melody.
- 1940's: **Bebop** and it's advanced harmonies, complex syncopation, and altered chords, brought a freewheeling and relaxed approach to jazz that rose to the top.
- 1950's: **Funk** and **Cool Jazz** took over. As did **Doo Wop**, which was mostly vocal music, with gospel inflections, a polished sound and often romantic, sappy ballads.
- 1960's: **Modal** and **Free Jazz** thrived during this time with improvisations based on individual scales or modes rather than on the overall key. The result, a song with fewer chord changes and more free melodic improvisation. Classic modal jazz often has a cerebral, cool and meditative feel, however, the shifting tonal center and lack of melodic resolution generates tense qualities, which give the music an ambiguous and mysterious vibe.
- 1970-1990's: Jazz combined with Rock making **Jazz-Rock** or **Fusion** in the 70s and in the 80's the **Contemporary Jazz** age began. The roots of **Hip-Hop** emerged in then and took shape in the 1990's.

## JAZZ



# PREPARING FOR THE SHOW

Seeing a live show is different than watching a movie or a television show. The performers in a live show can hear what you are saying and see what you are doing in the audience. They can even feel the energy in the room and tell if you are ready to engage in



the live show by actively watching or listening. Please actively engage in the production and be a courteous audience member.

## DOs

- Clap, respond to performers during the show, actively engage
- Listen and watch carefully, look for detail and design!
- Think about what you're seeing, what's being said, or what you're hearing!
- Talk with your friends, family or other audience members about what you saw and what you thought

## DON'Ts

- Talk, whisper or unwrap candy, everyone can hear you!
- Run, jump or climb over seats
- Putting your feet up on the seat in front of you
- Photograph or record anything
- Play on your cell phone, put it away!
- Eat, drink, or chew gum
- Show up late, you might lose your seat!

**ALWAYS REMEMBER:** Enjoy the show while allowing others to do the same!



It's **Messiah** with a twist! Too Hot to Handel grew from an idea into what it is today through Gary Anderson and Bob Christianson, who created the gospel-jazz adaptation in 1992. Conductor Marin Alsop stepped in, helping to give it a twist, and as a team they made an effort to keep it new and fresh, while retaining Handel's **Baroque** themes. The group wanted the adaptation to encompass jazz, gospel, rock, and funk to "break the classical sound barrier". It does just that by continuing the traditional into the contemporary, today's realm of music.

WHAT  
WILL  
YOU HEAR?

**Rackham Symphony Choir:** an 80 member metropolitan choir, directed by Suzanne Acton. The members hail from all over Southeast Michigan.

**Soprano + Mezzo-Soprano Solos:** with influences of gospel + R&B, these solos will sound more like pop than classical, yet they remain trained voices with a wide range and outstanding control!

**Tenor Solos:** a classically trained, cross-genre vocalist who will branch into gospel, jazz / scat + R&B styles with flexibility.

WHAT  
WILL  
YOU SEE?



A beautiful theater!  
A large choir!  
Instruments!  
Audience members! Jazz  
and classical musicians!  
And, most importantly,  
**MUSIC!!!**

# MORE TEACHING IDEAS...

Get up and move to the music! Older students may dance freely to Jazz selections. Younger students will enjoy using rhythm sticks, scarves, and their bodies to respond to the music in a creative way.

Create a new ad for Too Hot To Handel. Create new artwork, as well as new headlines, and review quotes.

Research the history of the Detroit Opera House. Write the history of the Opera House in story format with 3D representations.

Read reviews of performances in magazines and newspapers. After watching THTH write reviews in the same style.

# • APPENDIX •

# WORDS TO KNOW

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**Arrangement:** a version of music adapted for playing or singing in a different manner, or the scoring of such a version.

**Baroque:** highly ornamented music of the 17th century written by composers such as Bach, Handel, Vivaldi and Telemann.

**Bebop:** fast jazz music with complex harmonies and melodies. Charlie Parker was the most famous exponent of the style.

**Blues:** a type of popular music developed from African American folk songs in the early 20th century consisting of mainly slow and sad songs often performed over a repeating harmonic pattern.

**Cool Jazz:** jazz with a light tone and relaxed character, popular in the mid-20th century, especially on the West Coast of the United States.

**Figured Bass:** a bass part of a musical composition, typically baroque or classical, in which the notes have numbers written above them to indicate what chords to play.

**Folk Song:** a traditional song that has been passed down orally.

**Funk:** popular music that derives from jazz, blues, and soul and is characterized by a heavy rhythmic bass and backbeat.

**Fusion:** the merger, or the resulting blend, of musical styles or elements from more than one tradition.

**Genre:** one of the categories, based on form, style or subject matter, into which artistic work of all kinds can be divided.

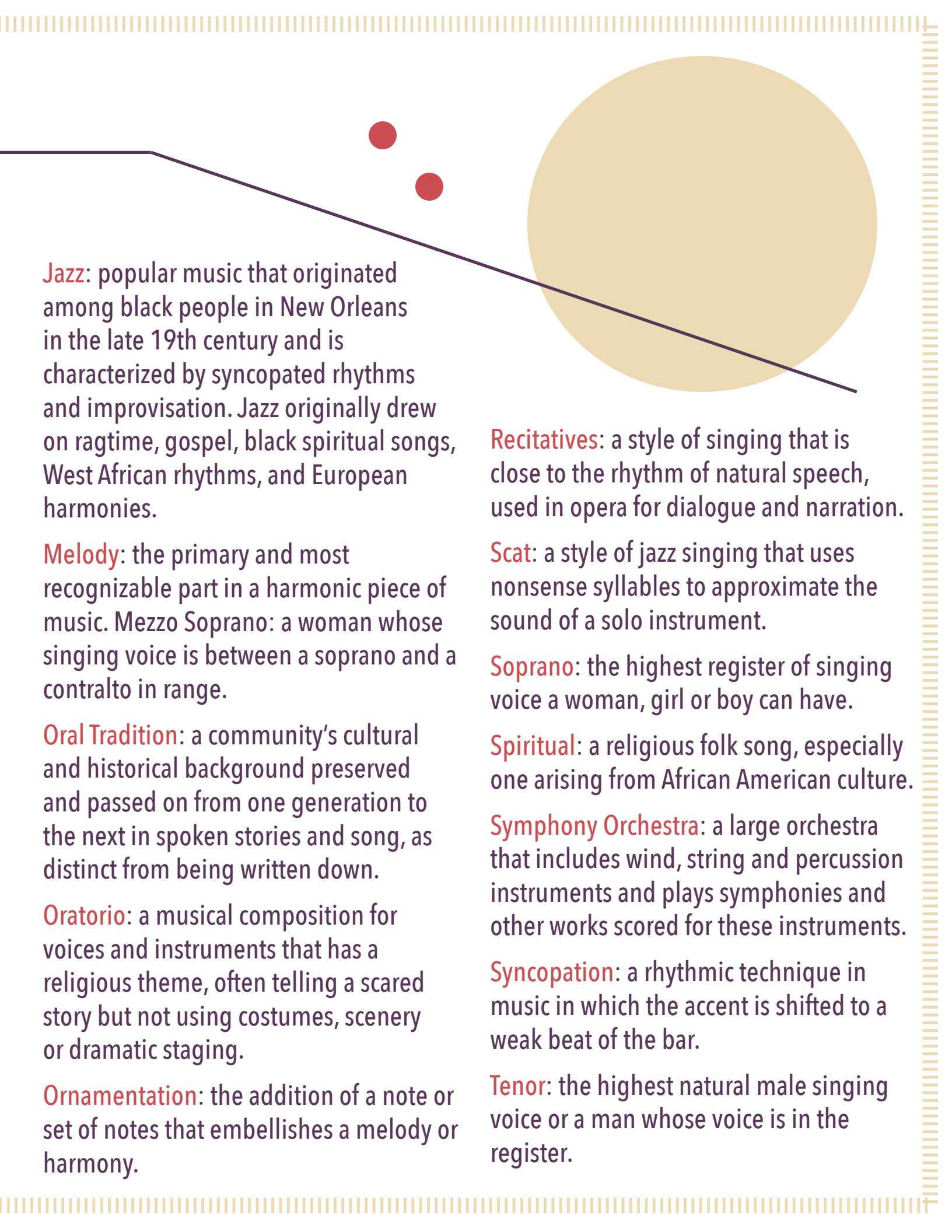
**Gospel:** highly emotional vocal music that originated among African American Christians in the southern US and was a strong influence in the development of soul music.

**Harmony:** a combination of notes that are sung or played at the same time. Changing harmony is one of the most characteristic features of Western music, providing momentum and richness to the melody.

**Hip Hop:** a form of popular culture that started in African American inner-city areas, characterized by rap music, graffiti art, and break dancing.

**Improvise:** to perform, compose something, especially a sketch, play, song, or piece of music, without any reparation or set text to follow.





**Jazz:** popular music that originated among black people in New Orleans in the late 19th century and is characterized by syncopated rhythms and improvisation. Jazz originally drew on ragtime, gospel, black spiritual songs, West African rhythms, and European harmonies.

**Melody:** the primary and most recognizable part in a harmonic piece of music. **Mezzo Soprano:** a woman whose singing voice is between a soprano and a contralto in range.

**Oral Tradition:** a community's cultural and historical background preserved and passed on from one generation to the next in spoken stories and song, as distinct from being written down.

**Oratorio:** a musical composition for voices and instruments that has a religious theme, often telling a sacred story but not using costumes, scenery or dramatic staging.

**Ornamentation:** the addition of a note or set of notes that embellishes a melody or harmony.

**Recitatives:** a style of singing that is close to the rhythm of natural speech, used in opera for dialogue and narration.

**Scat:** a style of jazz singing that uses nonsense syllables to approximate the sound of a solo instrument.

**Soprano:** the highest register of singing voice a woman, girl or boy can have.

**Spiritual:** a religious folk song, especially one arising from African American culture.

**Symphony Orchestra:** a large orchestra that includes wind, string and percussion instruments and plays symphonies and other works scored for these instruments.

**Syncopation:** a rhythmic technique in music in which the accent is shifted to a weak beat of the bar.

**Tenor:** the highest natural male singing voice or a man whose voice is in the register.



# LESSON PLAN ONE

Grade: Middle and High School

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Repertoire: "Hallelujah" chorus from Handel's Messiah

Other Teaching Materials: pre-assessment survey, genre list, musical examples of each genre, poster materials, sheet music of the "Hallelujah" chorus and the THTH version

New Vocabulary: figured bass, melisma, lick

## Students will be able to...

Name and define the different genres of music that are incorporated in "Too Hot to Handel"

Identify similarities and differences between Baroque and Jazz music

Perform an excerpt from Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus

Define, explain, and perform examples of Jazz vocabulary such as figured bass and melisma

## Prepare:

Explain to students an overview of the program.

Give students a pre-assessment survey to complete honestly and fully.

## Present:

Provide students with a list of genres that are incorporated in THTH (jazz, gospel, baroque, call and response, rock, R&B, blues, etc.)

Play musical examples of the genres, and ask students to verbally categorize the examples, as well as define them in their own terms.

Instruct students to work in small groups to create small posters of each genre.

## Practice + Extend:

Present more information about Handel's Messiah, specifically regarding the history and style of baroque music.

Let students practice an excerpt of the original "Hallelujah" chorus.

Lead students in singing through the THTH version.

## Assess + Close:

Lead students in a discussion about the differences and similarities they notice between Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus and the THTH version.

Discussion should include instrumentation, language, voicing, rhythm, performance style, purpose, audience, etc.

# LESSON PLAN TWO

Grade: Middle and High School

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Repertoire: excerpts from Handel's "Messiah" chorus and their THTH equivalents

Other Teaching Materials: projector, piano, speaker, Rod Dixon recordings, Venn Diagrams, sheet music for students to sing from

## Students will be able to...

Compare audio of Handel's Messiah with "Too Hot to Handel" using a Venn Diagram

Compare the musical scores of Handel's Messiah with THTH using a Venn Diagram

Perform and discuss excerpts from both pieces

Identify key places and people in Detroit that played a role in creating the "Detroit sound"

## Prepare:

Visit from Suzanne Acton, who will discuss her background and involvement in the Detroit music scene, as well as her involvement with THTH

## Present:

Ms. Acton will play an excerpt of Rod Dixon singing Handel's "Every Valley Shall be Exalted," and then play a recording of Dixon singing the THTH version

Ms. Acton will show the original Messiah score and the THTH score

## Practice + Extend:

After each presentation--the audio and visual examples--students will compare and contrast what they hear or see using a Venn Diagram

Ms. Acton will lead students in singing an excerpt from the original "Hallelujah" chorus and its THTH equivalent

Students will discuss the similarities and differences of both pieces

Next, present to students an episode of Ken Burns: "Jazz"

After a discussion about important Detroit musical locations such as Paradise Valley and Black Bottom, students will explain the importance of the Detroit music scene in the development of jazz

Show students the powerpoint of the Detroit Opera House

## Assess + Close:

Instruct students to create a timeline that describes the history of Jazz music within the city of Detroit

# LESSON PLAN THREE

Grade: Middle and High School

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Other Teaching Materials: projector

New Vocabulary: improvisation, community

## Students will be able to...

Discuss the value of community and behavior expectations within a rehearsal group

Practice vocal improvisations

Provide positive feedback to peers

List examples of varying genres present in THTH

## Prepare:

Explain to students an overview of the program.

Give students a pre-assessment survey to complete honestly and fully.

## Present:

Provide students with a list of genres that are incorporated in THTH (jazz, gospel, baroque, call and response, rock, R&B, blues, etc.)

Play musical examples of the genres, and ask students to verbally categorize the examples, as well as define them in their own terms.

Instruct students to work in small groups to create small posters of each genre.

## Practice + Extend:

Present more information about Handel's Messiah, specifically regarding the history and style of baroque music.

Let students practice an excerpt of the original "Hallelujah" chorus.

Lead students in singing through the THTH version.

## Assess + Close:

Lead students in a discussion about the differences and similarities they notice between Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus and the THTH version.

Discussion should include instrumentation, language, voicing, rhythm, performance style, purpose, audience, etc.

Allegro ♩ = 72

# ● Hallelujah Chorus ●

G F Handel

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Piano

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah!

5

Sop

5

Alt

5

Ten

5

Bas

5

Pno

5

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Ha - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

