

## Music Analysis Tool

Using Music as a Primary Source  
(Read the guide in its entirety *before* listening to the music.)

### 1. Describing the Music using Historical Context:

- Title: "Inner City Blues"
- Date Composed/Recorded: June-September 1970
- Events Happening in the World/Country/Region at the Time: "two centers of gravity" in African American communities, Detroit Riot of 1967, Assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, Vietnam War, radicalization of activism in northern cities, inner city frustrations of African Americans (poverty, drug abuse, discrimination), environmentalism
- Recording Company and Location: Tamla, Hitsville U.S.A. in Detroit and Sound Factory in West Hollywood, California
- Composer: Marvin Gaye and James Nys
- Background of the Composer: (position, nationality, gender, occupation, social class, religion, ethnicity, etc.) African American, born in Washington DC, singer and song-writer, popular recording artist for Motown, Christian upbringing, Air Force veteran, brother served in Vietnam

### 2. What did you hear? (First time played)

- Type of Music (folk, classical, blues, jazz, rock, etc.): pop, rhythm and blues
- Instruments (brass, woodwinds, strings, percussion): triangle, bongo drums, bass, strings (violins), saxophone, piano
- Vocals: Is there a vocalist in the piece? yes What language/dialect is being sung? English
- Describe the music and/or the voice. Describe the artist(s) approach to the music. Distinctive rhythm of the bongo drum (street instrument), bass seems to provide a heart-beat, lyrics seem to be taken from a conversation, intensity with addition of strings, solo voice joined by others

### 3. Analyzing the Music: (Second time played)

- Compositional and Performance Style: Use musical terms to analyze the music you just described. (beat, call and response, dynamics, harmony, improvisation, melody, register, rhythm, tempo, texture, timbre, etc.) The "Jazz Glossary" created by The Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University defines many of these terms. <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/jazzglossary/archives.html>.

| Musical Term    | Analysis (How is it used in the music? Why?)  |
|-----------------|---|
| Rhythm          | Bongo drums and Bass line is like a heart-beat, heart-beat of the nation  |
| Timbre          | Use of Falsetto, scream in the vocals. Increases tension. Sense of urgency to the message.  |
| Instrumentation | Simple use of rhythm section. Adding of strings adds to the tension. Sax- the sound of jazz- an urban music. Bongos- street instrument. |

- Song Lyrics: Write down the most important words of the song. How do they help tell the song's story?

| Words/Phrase             | Analysis (What does the word mean? Why is it used?)  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Make me wanna holler     | Frustrations of citizens, particularly African Americans in inner cities                           |
| Bills pile up sky high   | Poverty, income disparity, lack of job security, high rents, African Americans never can get ahead |
| Send that boy off to die | African Americans served in Vietnam War, disproportionately to % of population                     |
| Trigger happy policing   | Police brutality, one cause of 1967 riot in Detroit  |

- Note anything the music informs the observer about life in the world/nation/region at the time it was created.
  - Issues of inner-city residents- poverty, crime, police brutality, panic
  - Frustration of little getting done.
  - Anti-war sentiments evident during Vietnam War
- Video Performance (if available): Describe the performance (wardrobe, location, choreography, staging, interaction between the performers and the audience, depiction of the music, etc.) of the piece. How does the performance of the piece help to further the message of the song?
  - Studio recording

#### 4. Interpreting the Music: (Based on the description and the analysis of the piece.)

- Motivation/Purpose: What is the message of the piece? What is the composer trying to do? Explain using specific references from the music.
  - Seems like he is issuing a warning. Call attention to issues facing the nation. (Jefferson's "fire bell in the night.")
  - Call attention to the many issues frustrating Americans, but particularly African Americans. "Makes me wanna holler and throw up my hands."
  - Powerless to change despite the many issues. "The way they do my life."
  - Government not addressing needs of the people. "Rockets, moon shots, spend it on the have nots"
  - Fear for the future. "God knows where we're heading"
- Audience: Based on your description and analysis of the piece, who was the intended audience for the music? Explain.
  - African Americans.
    - Problems of the inner cities. "This ain't livin', this ain't livin'"
    - Government spending money on the space program and not on programs that would make peoples' lives better. "Rockets, moon shots. Spend it on the have nots."
    - Crime and police brutality. "Crime is increasing. Trigger happy policing."
  - Americans. Many Americans had similar problems. "Inflation no chance", "Hang ups, let downs"
- Impact/Effectiveness: Is the composer's message effectively presented in the music? What impact would it have on the intended audience? How did it make you feel? Explain with specific references to the music and its historic context. YES! It was like he was listening to many conversations. Use of his voice to state issues and then multiple voices join in as chorus. Swinging rhythm. Can't forget it! Use of strings to create tension. You can feel the frustration in the music!

#### 5. Lasting Impression: What is the most memorable or powerful aspect of this piece? Explain.

Make me wanna holler. Repeated over and over. Collective frustration of African Americans.

## Student Discussion Questions

1. What is the title of the piece? Who was the composer? Provide some information on his/her background.
2. When was it written? What historical events were occurring at the time?
3. Can you explain what is happening in the music?
4. How will you remember this piece so you can identify it when you hear it again?
5. What was the motivation of the composer to write the piece? Does the music effectively support the composer's message? (Include relevant and specific detail from the historical context in your answer.)
6. What questions would you ask of this composer in an interview?
7. Do you agree with the message of the piece? Cite specific information to support your view.
8. Imagine yourself to be a music critic at the time the piece was first performed. How would you rate the piece? Why?