

Big Notes Teachers' Resource Kit
Introductory Notes

'Music inspiring change, change inspiring music'

Big Notes



Years 9 – 12
Written by Colin McGain

Welcome to the Big Notes Teachers' Resource Kit

The Arts Centre's Big Notes concert will include a synthesis of songs that have had an impact on society. All of the performers will provide students an opportunity to both enjoy and appreciate the music as well as analyse contemporary messages. This kit will help prepare teachers and students to gain an insight into the artists and their music and broaden their understanding of the dynamic power of social/political and personal songs. It is designed to be taught sequentially but feel free to cherry-pick lessons to suit your individual class.

Part One: Social political or personal; where do songs come from?

- Music taste
- Messages in music
- Social, political or personal?
- Injustice- where do songs come from?

Part Two: Generational Storytelling

- Passing stories on
- Product of Time and Place
- Extension - Nursery Rhymes
- History Never Repeats / Artists and Movements

Part Three: Stand For Something

- Singing from the Heart
- A look at current issues through songs
- Write Away
- You're the Voice

For teacher support, contact dan.west@theartscentre.com.au

Background Information for Teachers

Sphere Of Influence

There is a saying that we can influence up to 10,000 people during our lifetime. We have an impact on individuals with whom we come into contact with and they in turn influence others. Imagine what a song can do when the technical delivery now means that a song can go around the world in a blink of an eye.

We know music taste is unique and we don't all listen to the same style of music. Students need to wade through the overwhelming number of songs about love or relationships before they hear songs of a social or political nature.

Sometimes these voices remain relatively unheard because they are independently marketed but occasionally such songs can build up momentum and become an agent for social change.

Generational Storytelling

In every society songs have been used to tell important cultural stories. Significant ideas in songs are passed from one generation to another. They can be a vehicle to stir intense feelings, insight or thoughtful reflection. All of the artists performing on the day are strong storytellers, whether it's hip-hop or from an aboriginal tradition. Kutcha Edwards is one of those powerful storytellers.

Music became his voice to express community stories. Students will hear him share his life in song about being 'stolen' at 18 months and denied his birthright to grow with his family, to experience his culture and to live his identity. In recent years Kutcha has experienced personal success through his music and was the lead singer in 'Blackfire'. He has traveled the world with a simple message....to empower youth with a strong sense of self worth, self expression, self belief and self determination and to heal the spirit, strengthen individual families and communities'. (Kutcha Edwards Home Page)

Corporate Indignation

Music has the capacity to express individual indignation and provide a voice for a discontented culture. In every society these voices have articulated areas that are unfair, inequitable, repressive or unjust. Cotemporary social movements have had theme songs or anthems that have been used as a catalyst for change. Hip-hop is able to articulate an issue and unite people together. It is also known for its ability to express personal and community dissatisfaction in a distinctive and forthright manner.

This style of music has proven a brilliant vehicle for Melbourne hip-hop artist Perry Chapman 'Pez'. His lyrics twist from personal reflections about life to social observation. Students will be able to understand his style of language and identify with someone expressing things they may be going through.

'I run away when I'm in a race with time. It's this page I can't change but can't make it right. I feel rage at this age, I feel caged alive, but I can't seem to find my way to my peace of mind'. ('These Days')

Learning The Difference Between Social/Political Or Personal Songs

Songs of social significance can be separated into one of these three categories. A question we will look at is where do social/political songs originate? Generally they are individuals responding to issues directly affecting them or the wider society.

Expressing Opinions - Setting Priorities

Although the delivery of music has changed in our tech-savvy age, writing and playing songs remains a profound vehicle of self-expression. Our Big Notes host is a creative artist setting agendas. Candy Bowers is a prolific writer, hip-hop artist, theatre maker and social activist. 'Bowers family tree (so mixed race that even her parents can't figure it out) plays with dichotomies and contradictions of mixed race identity and dreams of a more multi-cultural representation in the mainstream arts industry'. (Australian Stage) Her theatre show 'Who's that Chik?' tells a tale of a brown girl with big dreams.

'Mix, mix, that girl is blaz'in.

Part Black part Asian.

Part everything even Caucasian.

She was born in the Congo, I was born in North Dandenong.

Rediscovered Afresh By New A Generation

Songs with a message generally do not get widespread airplay or distribution. This concert will give students an opportunity to research and discover some of the legacies of culturally powerful songs from the past.

Impact On Individuals And Society

Nothing quite moves people than songs with a message. A line or sentiment might be enough to turn our thinking around and evoke possibilities we may not have realized before. Banawurun (meaning 'Running Water') believes that music is as much about a fusion of cultures as it is ideas.

The band is from Brisbane and its musical spectrum blend roots, rock, soul and country music with hard-hitting lyrics. The themes are about the dignity of all people including stories of Indigenous Australia. 'Soul is the teacher, rock'n'roll is the preacher and the lesson is loud and clear'. The reflection of historical, social and environmental global messages in Banawurun's lyrics and eclectic music, crosses cultural barriers and places them at the forefront of Indigenous contemporary music."

Rhoda Roberts, Director, The Dreaming Festival.

Finding Voice

Young people have strong opinions about many issues, particularly about the way they or their friends are treated. One of the outcomes of the kit is to see students explore their passions and direct it to the written word and music. An inspiration they might draw from is the artist Momo from Diafrix. Born in Africa but grew up in Footscray, MC Momo has many insights into what it is like to feel an outsider. His music voices the struggle and joy of everyday life.

'This song goes out to all you displaced.....

We're survivors in this concrete jungle, some play it hard some play it humble.

Think why every day I do wrong, trying to find the inner place where I belong...even though in my life I feel different'.

(Concrete Jungle)

Applying Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The Arts - Level 6

Most of these lessons will focus on the Discipline-based Learning area of The Arts (especially Music) but can be equally applied to English and Humanities with a different learning outcome.

These activities provide opportunities for students to continue their sequential development, allowing them to explore their personal interests in particular genres of music. They will also help develop skills, knowledge and understanding of songs with a social/political message. We know historically that songs have a social impact. Students will gain an understanding of the historical place and time the songs were written and performed within the Australian contemporary context.

The Standards

Exploring and responding - students will research and discuss historic and cultural examples of music. There will be an opportunity to increase student understanding of the context which musicians wrote and performed their songs. Music is a powerful force within every society and students will be able to examine its impact during particular eras.

Creating and Making - there will be a focus to increase competency and skill levels by further developing their own style in the written word, oral presentations and discussions. Students will use different technologies to plan, analyse and present their work to a wider audience, including the possibility to view their work on-line (Arts Centre Blog).

Communication - Level 6 - Standards - Listening, viewing and responding

Students will analyse the meaning and messages in the lyrics. They will identify the ways in which complex messages in songs are conveyed and consider alternative views and interpretations. Students will work both individually as well as pairs to be able to present their work for feedback and reflection.

Music has two attributes. One is personal and the process to get there is uniquely individual (self-expression). The other is to open it up to a much larger audience. Many lessons draw upon the *Personal and Social Strands* to help the students formulate their own ideas and continue to develop opinions. It will very much encourage students to understand themselves, their place in the culture as well as gaining a bigger 'World View'. Through both the music and the musician's charity work and campaigns, students will learn about their rights and responsibilities as global citizens - Civics and Citizenship. They will take a global perspective when analysing an issue, and describe the role that global organisations have in responding to international issues. They will also have an opportunity for Community Engagement (level 6 Standard).