



# The Quilt of American Music



**Atlanta**  
**Symphony**  
Orchestra

**Stephen Mulligan**  
Conductor



**Many hands, colors, stitches, and lives. A patchwork quilt provides comfort and warmth and also conveys a sense of distant generations and cultures. It comes as no surprise that a quilt is often embraced as a symbol of the diversity of America itself.**

In the same way, American music is like a quilt. It also provides comfort, warmth, and a sense of legacy. Composers rely on the hands of many musicians to perform their work. The melodies and harmonies contain a variety of themes and colors. Most importantly, the music is likely to have been inspired by the composer's own musical heritage or else the rich diversity of folk traditions found in America.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra welcomes you to share in a celebration of our diversity in its Concert for Young People —“The Quilt of American Music.”

# Morton Gould and his American Salute



American composer **Morton Gould (1913-1996)** wrote music for radio, television, movies, ballet, Broadway, and the concert stage. He was known for merging popular musical genres into a formal classical structure, making his orchestral music entertaining and accessible at the same time. As a result, his work was honored with awards ranging from the Pulitzer Prize to a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Gould was born in New York City to Russian and Austrian Jewish parents. His talent at the piano was recognized at an early age and he published his first original composition when he was only six-years-old. As a teenager, Gould watched many military parades in the city and developed a lifelong admiration for marching bands. At the same time, he made money playing popular music on the piano at vaudeville and movie houses.

He drew on all those experiences as a professional composer and brought them into his musical craft. Gould's ability to elevate popular music in an orchestral setting is evident in his "American Salute" which incorporates a familiar traditional song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again."

## What to listen for in "American Salute"

Composers are not shy about placing traditional folk tunes into their orchestral compositions. When they do, they typically offer a statement of the familiar melody, loud and clear, so that you recognize it as something you already know. After that, however, the composer wants you to hear the melody "differently." The approach is known as "theme and variations." Having stated the theme, the composer "varies" it with different rhythms, tempos, instrumentations, key changes, musical dynamics and other embellishments.

By contrast, the concept of "sampling" in music is the act of taking a portion, or "sample," of one specific, identifiable sound recording and re-using or "quoting" it in a different song or piece. "Theme and variations" is different than sampling because the composer is not merely quoting the borrowed theme in its original form but is actively re-energizing it with new musical choices.

As you listen to Gould's "American Salute," pay attention to the flourishes that Gould adds to "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" - but also pay attention to the way he is able to keep the original melody recognizable despite the variations.

## WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME

During the Civil War, a bandleader took a catchy drinking song called "Johnny Fill Up the Bowl" and gave it new lyrics. The result became "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," a song that found instant popularity on both sides of the war because it expressed people's longing for the safe return of family and friends.

When Johnny comes marching home again

Hurrah! Hurrah!

We'll give him a hearty welcome then

Hurrah! Hurrah!

The men will cheer and the boys will shout

The ladies they will all turn out

And we'll all feel gay

When Johnny comes marching home.

## America: Dvořák's "New World"

Czech composer **Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)** [pronounced di-VOR-zhak] was born in Bohemia, the son of the village butcher. As a composer, he was much admired for weaving the folk melodies of his native Bohemia into his orchestral work. He was also very much a man of the people, deeply patriotic, and a pious family man who enjoyed his beer.

In the 1890's, American composers had an identity crisis. In an effort to sound "classical," their original work often imitated grand European traditions and never sounded truly "American." To tackle the problem, cultural leaders reached overseas to recruit Dvořák to work with American composers and hopefully elevate the caliber of American music.

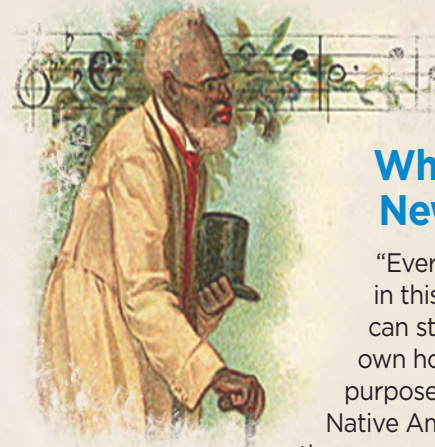
Dvořák arrived in 1892 to an America that was going through its own identity crisis. The nation had survived a Civil War but was still struggling to find a sense of unity despite the stain of slavery. In addition, America was no longer isolated from the global world. Waves of European immigrants sought a "new world" in America and triggered a westward expansion to accommodate people of different cultures, languages, and religions.

For his part, Dvořák found himself in New York City in a classroom with an African-American student named Henry T. Burleigh. During their time together, Burleigh introduced Dvořák to the spirituals and work songs of his childhood. Dvořák was so impressed that he soon asserted "the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the African American melodies." If there was to be a national music for America, he declared, it must be related to the "longing to be free" heard in the spirituals."

Dvořák's insights are now seen as prophetic because, within that decade, the music of African-American jazz, gospel, and ragtime came to dominate the country. Dvořák himself was so inspired by spirituals that he composed his famous Symphony No. 9 in E minor, "From the New World," popularly known as the New World Symphony.

*"The future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the African American melodies."*

~ Czech composer Antonin Dvořák



## What to listen for in Dvořák's New World Symphony

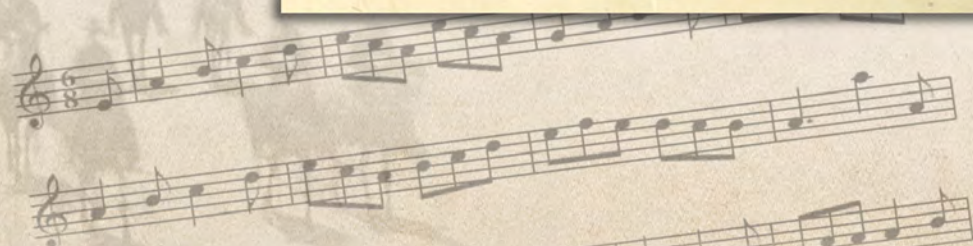
"Everyone who has a nose must smell America in this symphony," said Dvořák. In truth, one can still hear a trace of rustic Bohemia, Dvořák's own homeland, in this music even though he purposefully conceived it to capture the flavor of Native American music, American folk music and the negro spiritual.

Dvořák doesn't borrow an existing spiritual in this work. Instead, inspired by "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," he composed his own original spiritual. The soulful melody featured in the 2nd Movement of his "New World Symphony" was later attached to lyrics and became known as "Goin' Home."

Dvořák was profoundly homesick in America, as are many immigrants. The tone of the New World Symphony suggests a certain melancholy yet, at the same time, Dvořák imbues the work with a sense of wonder. As you listen, see if the music evokes images of both melancholy and adventure.



When Neil Armstrong flew NASA's first Apollo Mission to the moon, he brought along a recording of Dvořák's New World Symphony.



# Still's Afro-American



**American composer William Grant Still (1895 – 1978)** was born in Mississippi to a family of African American, Native American, Spanish, Irish, and Scotch blood. His father, the town bandmaster, died when Still was only three-years-old and his mother, a schoolteacher, moved to raise her son in Arkansas. Still took violin lessons and taught himself to play the clarinet, saxophone, oboe, viola, cello and double bass. His talent and determination eventually landed him at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, although his studies were interrupted by military service in World War I and the need to support himself by writing arrangements and performing with the top jazz bands of the era.

Still broke barriers as a professional composer. He was the first African American to conduct a major American orchestra, the first to have a symphony performed by a leading orchestra, the first to have an opera performed by a major opera company, and the first to have an opera performed on national television. He became known as “the Dean” of African American composers and was an important fixture of the Harlem Renaissance.

Still's legacy rests on his innovative works that blend a formal understanding of orchestral music with the newly evolving European art music and African-rooted popular and folk music.

## Blues, Gospel, and the American Way

Jazz elements had already been introduced to orchestral music by other composers. The blues, however, was still commonly regarded as vulgar and low class music. Still brought a deeper understanding of the blues to his orchestral settings, due in part to his lifelong effort to address social justice and the challenges that faced black Americans. When Still invokes spirituals and the blues, he is not commenting on the suffering or misery of African Americans – but on their ability to engage with music to rise above slavery and oppression.

## What to listen for in Still's “Afro-American Symphony”

“Afro-American Symphony” was the first symphony by a black composer to be performed by a major orchestra so it represents an historic event in and of itself.

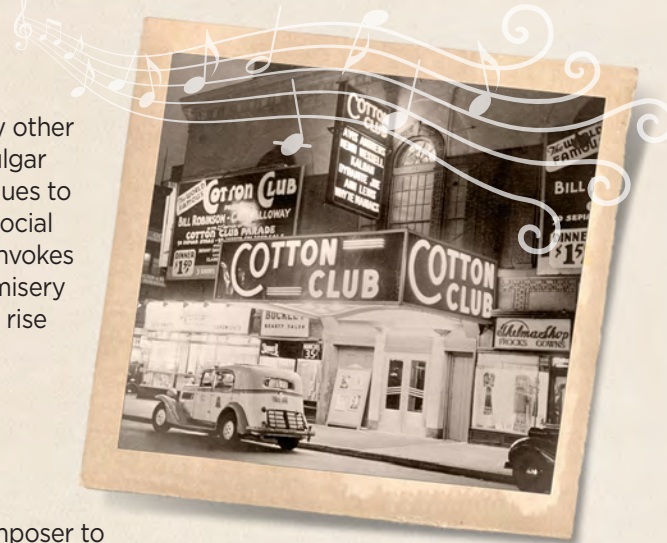
On top of that, the music elevates jazz, blues and spirituals as something to be celebrated in a classical form. Still crafted the work for a full orchestra, complemented by a tenor banjo. The composition integrates the chord progressions and percussive rhythms of the blues, along with the spiritual, into traditional symphonic form. Still distinguishes each movement with epigraphs, quoting from the poetry of African American writer Paul Laurence Dunbar.

In a thematic sense, Still's music offers a realistic depiction of African Americans as hard-working, down-to-earth people. At the same time, Still is purposefully making a statement in line with the pride and activism awakened during the Harlem Renaissance, by lifting the music of common people into a symphonic form.

Listen for the influence of popular music on the melodies — but also listen for Still's effort to elevate the music into an orchestral sound while retaining the grittier roots of African-based music.

*“I seek in the ‘Afro-American Symphony’ to portray not the higher type of colored American, but the sons of the soil, who still retain so many of the traits peculiar to their African forebears; who have not responded completely to the transforming effect of progress.”*

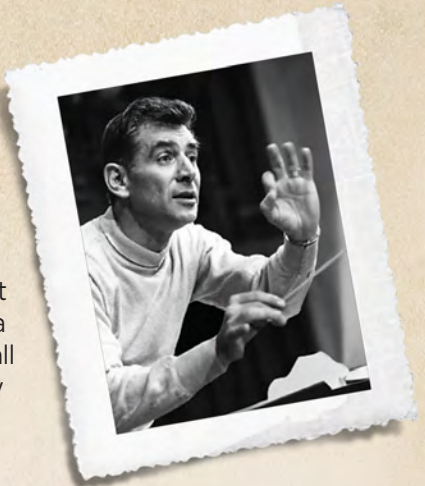
~ American composer William Grant Still



## Bernstein on the West Side

**American composer Leonard Bernstein (BURN-styne) (1918-1990)** was perhaps the most prodigiously talented and successful musician in American history. He was a triple-threat: a celebrated composer, a world-class orchestral conductor and a classically trained pianist, all at the same time. As a composer, he wrote music for concert halls, ballet, opera, Broadway musicals, film, and television. We don't think of Bernstein as high-brow and low-brow because his work always met the highest standards, but he always aspired to make music accessible to the common man.

Bernstein was much-loved by the American people because he grew up as an ordinary kid on the block in a small town in Massachusetts. With talent, ambition, and determination, he found world-wide fame — but he also made time to share his passion for music, especially with young people. The year 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of Bernstein's birth — and performing arts groups across the country are celebrating the Centennial of Leonard Bernstein.



## What is American music?

Bernstein defined “classical music” as work that was either written long ago, during the Classical Period (1750-1820) – or written today, but with structural ideas derived from the Classical Period. For composers, those structural ideas essentially involve a clear statement of a melody that is developed in familiar or surprising ways. The designation of “classical music” often involves an orchestra with a brass section, woodwinds section, string section, and percussion – or at least some smaller combination of orchestral instruments.

The challenge in creating “American music,” Bernstein believed, was to craft a truly American sound that could be housed within the traditional elements of instrumentation and structure of classical music. Bernstein asserted American music only began to sound truly “American” when composers embraced jazz – a totally American form of music invented by black musicians in New Orleans at the top of the 20th century. The dynamic rhythms, punchy syncopation, and dissonant harmonies of jazz allowed American composers to “let loose” in ways that were never permitted under a more formal European sound.



## WEST SIDE STORY

### What to listen for in Bernstein's “West Side Story Suite”

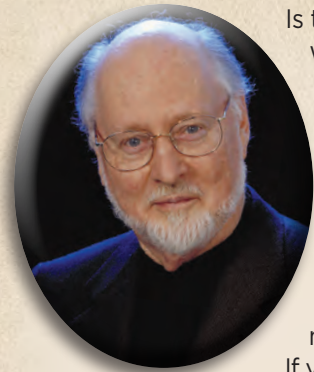
West Side Story, Bernstein's hit Broadway musical, takes the story of “Romeo and Juliet” and places it between rival gangs from an Italian and Puerto Rican neighborhood in lower Manhattan. In composing the score for “West Side Story,”

Bernstein was challenged to deliver orchestral music that captured the energy and vitality of Latin music. To do that, Bernstein looked beyond Puerto Rico to Cuba. Bernstein borrows the rhythms and instruments of Cuban culture in his “West Side Story” score, although, as it happens, the mambo had already captured the imagination of musicians around the world.

Bernstein's score for “West Side Story” had to accomplish many things. It had to be romantic to frame the love story. It also had to be catchy and infectious to capture the energy and vitality of young people. At the same time, the score had to feel unpredictable, potentially dangerous, and slightly out of control. Bernstein achieved those effects by using the bittersweet harmonies of Latin music, Latin dance rhythms such as the Mambo, the Cha-cha, and the Paso-Doble, and Latin rhythm instruments such as bongo drums, cowbells, vibraphones, guiros, and even the human voice and hand-clapping.

Bernstein's score for “West Side Story” is also polyphonic, which means that sometimes two or more melodies are being played at the same time. As you listen, see if you can catch the polyphonic feel of the music.

# Williams, "Star Wars" and Princess Leia



Is there anything more "American" than heading to the movies? If you have, you have heard the work of **American composer John Williams (1932 —)**. He wrote the film scores for the original Star Wars trilogy, Superman, Jaws, E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial, the Indiana Jones series, Jurassic Park, and many others. His work has won Academy Awards, Grammys, Golden Globes, and Emmys. Williams' music is famous for capturing an American brand of heroism, even when the characters are in outer space.

## The Musical Motif

John Williams' film scores rely heavily on a musical tool known as the motif (mo-TEEF). If you can sing the melody for Luke Skywalker's use of the Force, Dark Vader's entrance, Superman in flight, or an incoming shark, you are already family with William's motifs. A motif is a single repeated pattern. In music, that usually means a short musical idea, not a full melody but a few notes with some rhythm and a small tune.

A motif is used to identify a value, trigger a mood or mark a character. Consciously or unconsciously, our brain attaches to an image, a value, a character, or a mood to the short musical phrase that connects to it.

Motifs don't have to stay the same. A composer might repeat the motif with different pitches, or a faster or slower tempo. A composer could change to a different key, or from a major key to a minor key. It might even be flipped upside down - with the pitches going up instead of down, or vice versa. Or it could stay exactly the same.

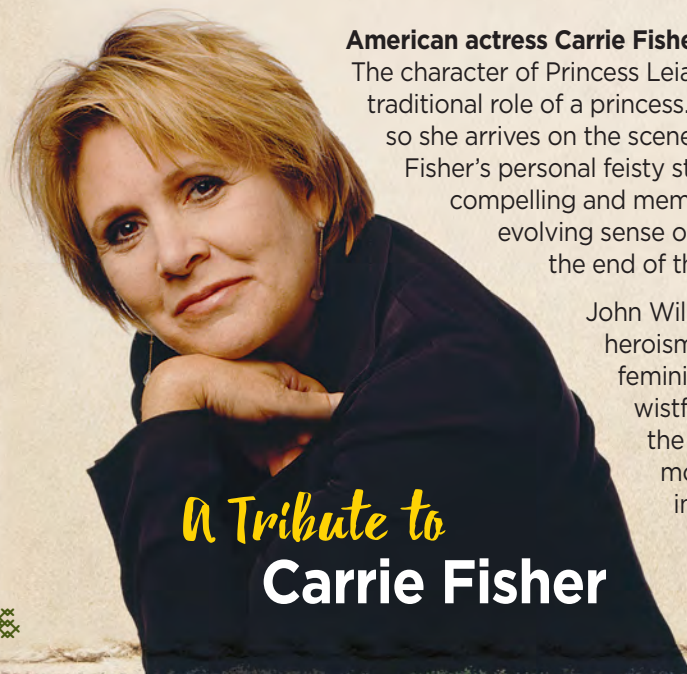
In a movie, those changes to the motif might suggest that the Force isn't working like it used to - or Darth Vader is losing, or whatever the situation might be. In a work of classical music, they might suggest a changing mood, a new energy, or a fresh perspective.

**STAR WARS Motifs**

Princess Leia motif

Imperial motif

Death Star motif



## A Tribute to Carrie Fisher

**American actress Carrie Fisher (1956-2016)** portrayed Princess Leia in the "Star Wars" series. The character of Princess Leia quickly became a cultural icon in part because she didn't fit the traditional role of a princess. In the storyline, Princess Leia has lost her kingdom at the outset so she arrives on the scene as a fighter, a rebel, a soldier, and a warrior. Of course, Fisher's personal feisty strength must be credited for making Princess Leia so compelling and memorable. Her performance complemented an evolving sense of women as independent feminists through the end of the 20th Century into the 21st.

John William's theme for Princess Leia honors her heroism and nobility with a respectful nod to her feminine side. The melody might be described as wistful, thoughtful, or melancholy. Interestingly, the theme for Princess Leia includes a small motif - an interval of a major sixth. It might seem insignificant but the same motif occurs again as love themes emerge in the Star Wars storyline. Even in the more recent sequels, such as "Rogue One," the same interval can be heard whenever someone mentions a memory of Princess Leia.

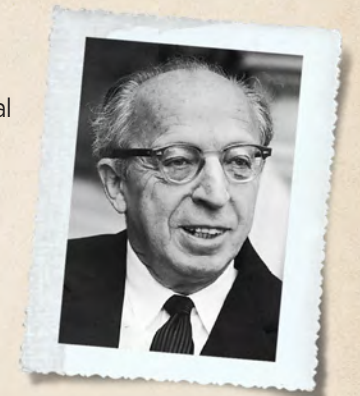


# Copland's "Variations on a Shaker Melody"

## The Voice of a Nation

American composer Aaron Copland (1900-1990) gave himself a personal challenge to create "American music." What he had in mind, however, was something more ambitious than the typical patriotic songs played by brass bands with fireworks. Instead, Copland hoped to create an "American music" that captured the sweep of the country yet still appeal to the common man.

To do so, he forged a signature style that favors brave, bold, dissonant harmonies, sweeping, stately and sustained. His music evokes a deeper and more spiritual sense of patriotism. At the same time, it conveys the majestic expanse of America as a physical territory while tapping into an emotional connection to the pioneer spirit.



## What to listen for in Copland's "Variations on a Shaker Melody"

"Variations on a Shaker Melody" is an excerpt from a much longer Copland work, an orchestral suite titled "Appalachian Spring," originally performed as a ballet score. These variations occur as the seventh movement of that suite and are intended to depict a young bride and her farmer husband attending to daily chores.

The theme is a traditional Shaker song, titled "Simple Gifts," dating back to 1848. The Shaker community was a Christian sect, originally founded in 18th Century England as an off-shoot of the Quakers. Shakers settled in colonial America and practiced a simple, communal lifestyle that advocated pacifism and equality between men and women. The song, "Simple Gifts," was largely unknown outside the Shaker community until Copland popularized it in "Appalachian Spring."

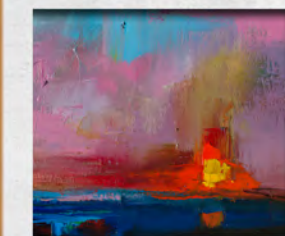
In keeping with the "theme and variations" form, Copland clearly states the melody of "Simple Gifts" - and then revisits it with different instrumentation, unexpected harmonic structures, and irregular rhythmic patterns. Note how Copland employs his signature style - those expansive dissonant harmonies - to bring a majestic quality to the simple folk tune. Bernstein noted that Copland's music here is "filled with bittersweet tenderness."

## The original lyrics to "Simple Gifts"

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

## Romanticism and Modernism

**Romanticism** in the creative arts doesn't refer to hearts and flowers. Instead, it refers to work that engages with great big ideas and complicated human emotions.



**Modernism** is a separate artistic movement that deliberately breaks with the past in favor of new forms of expression.

Copland is an example of a Modernist composer because he was purposefully looking for a new and unfamiliar ways to express patriotism. At the same time, Copland is rooted in Romanticism because he is connected to patriotism as an idea and openly engaged in expressing emotions. One can listen to his "Simple Gifts" and hear the influence of both Romanticism and Modernism.

# Kurth's "May Cause Dizziness"



**American composer Michael Kurth (1971 —)** has been a member of the ASO bass section since 1994. He began playing bass at age eight and later received his bachelor's degree with honors at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, MD. Before joining the ASO, he was a member of the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, FL.

His first ASO commission, "May Cause Dizziness" premiered in 2011. Kurth serves as Composer-in-Residence for the Riverside Chamber Players of Roswell, where he has written five commissioned works. In 2013, the Riverside Chamber Players released a CD of Kurth's string quartets. He has also written two commissioned works for the Atlanta Chamber Players.

Kurth's work has been performed by The Atlanta Young Singers, The Peachtree String Quartet, The Franklin Pond Quartet, Concert Artists Guild-award-winning violist Jennifer Stumm, The Georgia Sinfonia, The Atlanta Community Symphony Orchestra, The Georgia State University Wind Ensemble, and Modern Dance Company gloATL.

## To Infinity and Beyond: 21st Century Composers

Contemporary composers face the time-honored challenge of grounding their classical work based on influences from the past while looking forward toward the experimentation of the future. These same challenges also faced composers in the past but modern composers must also contend with all the possibility of digital technologies and electronic sound.

As the world becomes increasingly global, composers must factor in greater cultural diversity. What might "American music" sound like as America evolves into the 21st Century?

## What to listen for in Kurth's "May Cause Dizziness"

As an American composer, Kurth employs the same musical tools as other American composers on this roster — but he does so with a very unique voice. He relies on the brass section to deliver a big, brash, bold sound. Note however that the percussion section is not relegated to "keeping time" with the music. Instead, the percussion section has its own dynamic presence in "May Cause Dizziness." Kurth specifically engages a rhythmic pattern here — a "groove" — and then challenges it with cross-rhythms. He is creating the impact of polyphony — two or more melodies being played at the same time — but with rhythms and melodies.

Note too that the dissonant harmonies in "May Cause Dizziness" suggest the influence of other cultures. Ask yourself what sounds essentially "American" about the music. Is it the trumpets? Is it the drums? Or is it the diversity?

## Make Some Noise

Try your hand at composing your own American music. Locate a recyclable object in your home. It could be a plastic container, a cardboard box, a section of bubble wrap, or even an old newspaper. Explore all the possible sounds that your objects can create. Be mindful of the possibility of creating pitches, both high and low. Perhaps the pitch be created by touching or thumping the object, or by blowing across the surface. What kind of percussive rhythm can be created with the object? Could you strike it against a hard surface, or tap it with a stick?

Once you have a sense of the musical potential in your object, you could assemble a combo of recyclable objects in the classroom. Try to create a composition that includes elements of melody and rhythm. Can you create a groove — as Kurth does in "May Cause Dizziness" — and then create cross-rhythms that challenge the groove? Some instruments might feature prominently while other instruments accompany in the background. It could be a polyphonic work with several melodies or rhythms occurring at the same time.

Identify a theme or a value to give substance to your composition. It could be about sadness or joy, victory or defeat, war or peace. Try picking a theme that seems particularly American, however that might occur to you. Be sure to give your composition should have a beginning, middle, and end. Once you have created a confident musical statement, take turns performing your works in the classroom.

Record a video or an audio file of your composition and post it on your school's website.





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