

# THE HISTORY OF ROCK N' ROLL, Parts I & II

**Art Form: Music**  
**Style: Traditional**  
**Culture: American**

## MEET THE ARTIST:

Lead by chart-topping, multi-faceted recording artist **Eleanor Academia**, *The History of Rock n' Roll* is a power trio comprised of Academia on keyboards and guitar, with veteran band mates *Daniel Pearson* on bass and *Oscar Seaton* on drums. Media and sound are provided by *David Del Boccio*.

Academia is an accomplished vocalist, composer, lyricist, arranger, producer and engineer, as well as a skilled multi-instrumentalist. She produced her own rock album, "*When You Live*," and previously produced, wrote & performed the number one Billboard Hit "*Adventure*" on Columbia Records, and "*Global Conversations*" for Epic/Sony Records. She was awarded Artist of the Year by Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*The History of Rock n' Roll* is a multi-media performance covering the complex evolution of Rock n' Roll from its early roots to the 1990s. Complete with short musical examples, colorful narration and instrument demonstrations, the presentation is accompanied by well-documented large screen color slide projections and archival recording samples. A question and answer session and audience participation involve the students, as they learn how early blues, gospel and folk music inspired the rhythm and blues that became Rock n' Roll. Even more relevant to young people today is the fact that these American musical creations forged the foundations that shaped the sounds and rhythms of their own favorite artists and bands in current rock music. Part I covers the years up through The Beatles. Part II begins with The Beatles and extends to the music of Bruce Springstein (late 1980s).



## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Rock n' Roll is a true indigenous American art form. When, where and how did rock music originate? It wasn't all electric guitars and wireless headsets with microphone rap from the beginning. Legendary blues men like Blind Lemon Jefferson and Willie Dixon, and troubadour folk singers like Woody Guthrie came before the Beatles, Elvis, James Brown and Dylan. Rock music can best be explored through three aspects: the artists, the styles they created and their songs.

**The Artists:** We can trace the history of rock music back to its origins by studying the lives and music of the great artists who became icons. They reflected the life, social conditions and consciousness of their generations. Each generation produced several key artists who emerged as a source for a new transition. For example, Bo Diddley is credited as the pioneer who used the electric guitar as a percussive rhythmic instrument; Elvis Presley embraced Black American music from the deep South, making rhythm and blues finally accessible and acceptable to mainstream white radio listeners.

**Mixing Styles:** Uninhibited mixing of music from different genres allows for the creation of new forms of music. When you mix "Heavy Metal" with "Urban Street Rap" the result is a new hybrid form, "Metal Rap." If you slow the beat (tempo) down to 96-100 beats per minute (bpm), you have another hybrid form, found in dance clubs, "House Metal Rap." Access to electronics and new technology enables modern artists to explore endless possibilities in their music.

**Songs and Classics:** A good song invokes a memory or a feeling, sets a mood or atmosphere. Great songs in Rock are known as "*Classics*." Some examples are "*Respect*" by Aretha Franklin, "*Stairway to Heaven*" by Led Zeppelin, or many songs by the Beatles. Classic songs often capture the essence of a generation, and become important social, political and philosophical expressions, connecting individuals into a larger musical "community."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which song or style of the different musical examples performed did you enjoy most? Why?
- In what setting can you imagine each type of song being performed? Did any of the songs remind you of any place or person? For example, when you heard the gospel song, did it remind you of a church or choir?
- Thinking of your own favorite artists, can you detect any specific influences in their music? For example, the group, "N' Sync" borrows a lot of its stylings from Do-Wop and R & B. How?
- Why do you think the styles of music change?
- What makes a song a "Classic?" What do they all have in common?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOC SCI/LANG ARTS:

Producing an album is a collaborative process for every artist or group, requiring cooperation and input from the artists, their producers, managers and record company.

Create small group album projects. Set the mood by playing background music. Divide the class into groups of five, representing a band or vocal group who are "producing" an album (like many independent artists today). Ask them to choose a name for their group and to select a theme for their album. They should choose or create 6-12 song titles to be included in their album. Then design the album cover that communicates the theme and the identity of the group. Assemble the "album" with cover artwork and a list of credits: name of album, name of band and song titles with composers. Allow each group to present their album project to the class.

Have students select one of the song titles from their "album" and write "lyrics" using four stanzas of lines that rhyme to represent their song. Remind them that a story can be told in a song through the use of imagery. Give students an opportunity to read their lyrics to the class.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

⇒ Listen to different selections of musical styles, i.e., blues, folk, country, pop, rhythm & blues, etc. Have students identify and list the strongest elements of each style that make it distinct. Is it the loud bass? Is it the way the singer bends the notes? Is it the crunchy guitar sounds?

❖ Arrangement in music is critical to the presentation, since there are endless possibilities. Have students cut colored paper into different shapes, with 6 or 7 multiples of each shape. Students should arrange one set of shapes on a blank piece of paper. Then, using another set of identical shapes, have students create a new arrangement, and so forth, until they end up with six or seven different versions of a layout. Note if each layout evokes a different mood. One might represent harmony, one represent chaos or fragmentation, etc.

▶ The 1960s were a major turning point for American history with civil rights issues being addressed, experimentation with drugs, protests in the streets and America going to war with Vietnam. Often, the music reflected the hopes, dreams, anger and fears of many. Select a song written or performed during the 60s. Ask students to write an essay addressing the historical, political or sociological beliefs expressed in the lyrics.

⇒ Have students bring in their own favorite songs. Ask them to select one and write a paragraph describing the message of the song, what it means to them, and why. Have them play a sound bite of their song to the class, discuss their thoughts and elicit class responses.



## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Devi, Vrnda and Giuliano, Geoffrey. *Glass Onion: The Beatles In Their Own Words*. Da Capo Press, Cambridge, MA: 1999.

Lomax, Alan. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Dell Publishing, New York, NY: 1993.

Newquist, HP and Prown, Pete. *Legends of Rock Guitar*. Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, Milwaukee, WI: 1997.