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Background

Jazz, blues and – to a lesser extent – rock 'n' roll are all popular music styles with roots in black music. Recordings and performances by black musicians during the first half of the 20th century had generated a growing interest from both black and white audiences across America and Europe. But from the late 1950s onwards, it was the music made by African American soul musicians that really generated a mass popular global following. The main driver for this surge in popularity was the sheer professionalism behind the recording and performance of this music.

The top soul recording studios employed very experienced, usually black session musicians in their 'house bands', who could be relied upon to provide top-quality backings to very tight deadlines. The arrangements would often be notated, with space for some improvisations where required.

The arrangers were nearly always highly trained musicians who knew how to weave complex layers of sound together. Listen, for instance, to the Smokey Robinson version of 'Tears of a Clown' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4heHLbchPKk) which makes interesting use of both calliope (a steam-powered mechanical instrument) and bassoon. Most of the singers had a solid grounding in gospel singing and they were able to bring their extraordinary vocal skills into this more secular musical style.

The care and detail that went into writing and recording the music was carried over into performance. The lead singers and their backing vocalists dressed to impress, underpinned by carefully choreographed movement and dance. The influence and legacy of these musicians continues to this day, with recent and contemporary artists such as Beyoncé, Ariana Grande and Amy Winehouse acknowledging the importance of soul in their own music.

In this resource, we look at – or, rather, listen to – the musical crossovers between soul and rock/pop music, consider the importance of backing vocals in soul music, and how instruments are used in arrangement. These areas are supported with opportunities and suggestions for practical work, which can support music education in secondary schools across all key stages.

Comparative listening

We often begin explorations of a genre such as blues, gamelan and so on by listening to some examples. However, *passive* listening activities can be problematic. We know that students are sometimes reluctant to engage with musical styles outside their musical preferences and can initially be quite dismissive of unfamiliar musics.

One way to address this challenge is to frame activities in the form of active listening exercises (see also a separate resource on active listening, *Music Teacher*, August 2019). There was often considerable cross-cultural interchange between soul and Tamla music making on the one hand, and the essentially white musician-dominated rock and pop music on the other. Making comparisons between soul/Tamla and rock/pop versions of the same song allows us to present listening as an engaging game-type exercise, while encouraging and facilitating deeper levels of listening. Most students will be familiar with the 'spot the difference' puzzles when presented as a pair of pictures or cartoons in a puzzle book: this is its audio equivalent.

Activity: comparative listening

Ask students to listen to two versions of a particular song (or selected extracts) and see how many 'differences' the class can pick up by simply listening. As a guide, ask students to listen out for different tempos, higher or lower keys, different styles of vocal delivery, variations in instrumental backing, length of song, and so on. Teachers may want to devise their own examples, but here are some possibilities:

'Whole Lotta Love'

'Whole Lotta Love' by Led Zeppelin (www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoutAHY3xo4) is a well-known classic hard rock track from the English band's fourth album. Less familiar is the version by Ike and Tina Turner (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD-6lv3oKoA). Students should listen to both versions and then be asked to comment on the particular features of both arrangements. Possible answers: the Led Zeppelin version is faster, has a shorter introduction and backing instruments enter in a different order. Vocal delivery is very similar. Ike and Tina Turner version has keyboards/strings.

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‘Dancing in the Street’

‘Dancing in the Street’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KhBM2mqhCQ) was a big hit for Martha and the Vandellas in 1964. Two years later, the Mamas and the Papas released another version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AjSezAsFRs). Possible answers: similar tempo and the same key, but the main differences are the way the backing vocals are used and fuller instrumentation in the Vandellas’ version (horn section). Comparisons can also be made with the Kinks’ more basic ‘garage’ version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=udz9ErUfndM).

‘Hey Jude’

Wilson Pickett recorded soul versions of various classic rock/pop songs including the Beatles’ ‘Hey Jude’ (Wilson Pickett version www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy8Q2PATVyl; the Beatles’ original version www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkApuQWCPdM). Pickett’s version is about the same tempo and only a semitone higher than the original. Pickett truncates vocal lines to sing with speech-like rhythms and generate more of a sense of dynamic urgency. This approach also allows him a bit of extra time to add extemporised vocal embellishments. The notated versions show extracts from the Beatles’ and Pickett’s versions respectively. Notation shows the rhythm only:

Hey Jude don't be a - fraid You were made to go out and get her

Hey Jude don't be a-fraid You were made made to go out and get her

‘Born to be Wild’

Steppenwolf’s original 1968 version of ‘Born to be Wild’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMbATaj7lI8) is credited as being the first heavy metal song. Indeed, the second verse contains the lyric ‘heavy metal thunder’. A year later Wilson Pickett recorded his version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=1N4jllBBK44) in a typical soul style. His version has more of a sense of urgency, a faster tempo, higher key and, as in ‘Hey Jude’, a faster vocal delivery. Let’s compare how the instruments are used in these two arrangements.

Instrument	Steppenwolf	Wilson Pickett
Drums	Louder – basic pattern.	Lighter, but rhythmically more active. Complemented by tambourine.
Bass guitar	Basic, but with fills at end of choruses and sections.	Energetic and melodic.
Electric guitars	Rhythm guitar with distortion.	Lead guitar with distortion – used for fills.
Keyboard	Organ stabs as fills.	‘Soul’ organ playing short, punchy vamps.
Other	None	Horn section in choruses.

‘(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman’

Carole King made her reputation as a commercial songwriter, and her final big hit (co-written with Gerry Goffin) was written specially for Aretha Franklin. ‘(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman’ (Aretha Franklin version: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEWuAcMWDLY) was later recorded by King herself (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQXY8zwQgmc) on her album *Tapestry*. Like other examples cited here, Franklin’s soul version is taken at a faster tempo and in a higher key, giving the song more dynamism and energy. However, King’s more reflective, understated version is also powerful and effective. She provides her own solo piano accompaniment and there are a few vocal overdubs. Franklin’s version became the definitive one – a stunning vocal delivery with gospel-style backing vocals in an arrangement for the superb Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section and strings. This landmark song has been covered many times, including a version by Mary J Blige (www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBxk1Oq_ysE) that is modelled closely on the Franklin version. It would also be interesting to compare Franklin’s original 1967 studio version with the more gospel-style version she performed many years later at the 2015 Kennedy Center Honors (www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHsnZT7ZzyQ) in tribute to Carole King, who was in the audience.

‘Satisfaction’

The original version of ‘Satisfaction’ by the Rolling Stones (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dPEISUxAZo) has a slightly more lively backing, partly thanks to the tambourine adding to the percussion sound and the fluid guitar fills. The Otis Redding version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmnZRBTPzgo) has horns playing the distinctive guitar riff, but the backings are very similar – same tempo, same key.

The main difference is in the vocal part. Jagger delivers the lyric with a gutsy, energetic but controlled vocal rendition which is doubled with backing harmony in places. Redding’s version is far more anarchic. He takes considerable liberties with the lyrics and his vocal rendition is choppy and highly syncopated. Notice how verses become progressively more incoherent as the song develops. The story goes that he was only given a rough approximation of the words, scribbled onto a scrap of paper, shortly before the recording session – leading to much on-the-spot extemporisation.

Both versions, however, successfully capture the spirit of the song. A fun activity would be to ask students to sing excerpts (chorus is best for this) from both versions of the song to really appreciate the different approaches.

‘Light My Fire’

This definitive hit by the Doors (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoX6AKuYWL8o) is given a much more laid-back treatment by Al Green (www.youtube.com/watch?v=lozAnoNZlmYo), giving him space to be much freer with the vocals and off-the-cuff spoken word interjections

‘Proud Mary’

Creedence Clearwater Revival were an American rock band whose frontman, John Fogerty, could sing with a strong soul voice. So they would cover soul classics such as ‘I Heard it Through the Grapevine’ while soul artists such as Ike and Tina Turner would take on Creedence songs such as ‘Proud Mary’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfyEpmQM7bw). Ike and Tina Turner’s version (www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwpVpUYO3MM) is in two parts – a very laid back opening section leading into a full-on steaming soul rendition.

‘California Dreaming’

‘California Dreaming’ was recorded by both Bobby Womack (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ytX3laFHGk) and the Mamas and the Papas (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhZULM69Diw). Here we have an example of the original pop version using multi-layered vocals, contrasting with Womack’s more introspective soul version for solo voice.

Basslines

If you were listening to rock ‘n’ roll and pop recordings during the early 1960s, you had to work hard to hear the basslines. There were two reasons for this:

- ▶ Engineers kept the bass and drum parts down in the mix – perhaps because they were ‘functional’ rather than interesting, serving principally to keep the beat.
- ▶ On the relatively primitive record players and transistor radios of the time, you wouldn’t hear these lower frequencies very clearly anyway.

However, the house bands in the Tamla and soul recording studios were highly accomplished professional musicians who were able to share a collective responsibility for timekeeping. This in turn allowed bass players to take a more melodic approach in devising basslines, no longer restricted to a formula based on playing roots and 5ths.

A virtuous circle emerged: as bass parts became more interesting, recording engineers and producers would make them more prominent in the mix. Leading the way with this process was James Jamerson, a session musician recording with the Funk Brothers, who were the default backing or ‘house band’ for most of the Tamla Motown hits.

For a typical example of his work, listen to Jamerson playing on Gladys Knight’s version of ‘I Heard It Through the Grapevine’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfDjwuwIJFo), where the bass and vocals have been isolated during the first part of the remix. Notice the use of heavily syncopated scale and chromatic runs which combine to give a bassline of considerable melodic interest. Contrast this with the Creedence Clearwater Revival version of this song (www.youtube.com/watch?v=93S_loqZrXA), which has a much simpler bass part.

Other basslines worth checking out are these:

- ▶ ‘Tears of a Clown’ by Smokey Robinson & The Miracles (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4heHLbchPKk)
- ▶ ‘I Want You Back’ by the Jackson 5 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3Q8omk7bxE)
- ▶ ‘For What It’s Worth’ by the Voices of East Harlem (www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpY53Qpakhl)
- ▶ ‘Love Child’ by Diana Ross and the Supremes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rntxzyRt9UQ)
- ▶ ‘It’s the Same Old Song’ by the Four Tops (www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvEoR4QywgE)
- ▶ ‘Valerie’ by Amy Winehouse (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfTHe64HQBo)

Case study – ‘When a Man Loves a Woman’ by Percy Sledge

Listen to Percy Sledge’s version here (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHS8LaqHyHs). This is a straightforward example of a bass player taking a melodic rather than a ‘roots and 5ths’ approach:

Notice how the bass player selects notes from the chord triads that give a stepwise movement. The little scale runs at the end of the progression add simple rhythmic interest. Compare this with the more formulaic alternative shown below the original line.

Activity: basslines

Provide students a chord progression for a song they know. You may also need to provide crib sheets for the chords used, showing the notes in the triads. For example, if you have the chord progression:

D – A – Bm – G

Students may need a chart like this:

Chord	Notes		
D	D	F sharp	A
A	A	C sharp	E
Bm	B	D	F sharp
G	G	B	D

Set them the challenge of finding interesting stepwise basslines, using notes from the chords.

Take this a step further by allowing students to use passing notes and some chromatic progressions.

You could also provide some ‘rhythm templates’ for students. Even a simple bassline with repeated notes can be made more interesting using a funky pattern:

The top staff indicates a rhythm pattern ‘template’, and the lower staff shows a possible realisation. This exercise can be worked on using notation, but better results may be obtained by internalising the rhythm, then trying trial-and-error bassline possibilities using the ear to guide outcomes. If this is done on a keyboard, a backing drum part could be used. Two players can work at the same keyboard, one playing chords while the other devises a bassline.

Backing vocals and dance

Backing vocals are an important element in soul and Tamla music, reflecting to some extent their origins in the call and response of gospel music, albeit in a more secular form.

The recordings by the Supremes offer some good, clear examples of backing vocalists providing calls to the responses from the lead singer (Diana Ross), unison reinforcements of key lines and doubling string parts. For example, listen to hits such as ‘Stop! In the Name of Love’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGJQPkwIAC), ‘You Can’t Hurry Love’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qOiNnK7Afg) and ‘Baby Love’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd43nWkgUzg). Consider making arrangements of these simple but highly effective pop hits for your school choirs.

In ‘This Old Heart of Mine’ by Tammi Terrell (www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjLHehS6Udc), the backing singers stretch out the first line of each verse (augmentation) and then complete the verse by doubling string parts with oohs and aahs. This helps to provide a richer texture for the arrangements and is a device employed in many other songs on the Motown label.

Martha and the Vandellas’ version of ‘Dancing in the Street’ (www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KhbM2mqhCQ) provides a good example of using the song title as responses to the main vocal line – another popular backing vocal device in this genre of music.

Other songs worth studying include:

- ▶ ‘Please Mr Postman’ by the Marvelettes (www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSlzhYdorYw)
- ▶ ‘Reach Out (I’ll Be There)’ by the Four Tops (www.youtube.com/watch?v=StdKjLwOlwl)
- ▶ ‘Respect’ by Aretha Franklin (www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FOUqQt3Kgo)

Archive video footage of performances of all the above songs can be found on YouTube, which can be helpful in showing how backing vocals support the lead singer. For example, you can find a version of ‘Please Mr Postman’ by the Marvelettes here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KseUrBSRBDA

These videos also demonstrate the importance of dance in the performance of this music. We know that music and movement are inextricably linked in all styles of African American music, and the highly stylised and carefully choreographed dance and movements developed for live performance were a major contribution to the popularity of this music across America and Europe.

Simple routines by early groups such as the Supremes and Martha and the Vandellas led to much more virtuosic, dazzling dance routines by groups such as the Temptations. Their legendary 1973 Live in Paris performance is worth checking out: you can watch it at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwgt1QJsPkw

Many exemplary videos for other songs cited here can easily be tracked down on YouTube. This legacy lives on today – for example, many of the headliners at top festivals such as Glastonbury will now incorporate dancers with highly choreographed routines.

Activity: dance

Incorporating elements of dance and movement into song performance for school concerts can add considerable vitality and energy. And the quality of singing is usually raised considerably when combined with movement. Students can either devise their own routines (based on studying YouTube footage) or work in collaboration with the dance department in your school.

Case study – What’s Going On by Marvin Gaye

Often when studying a style or genre of music in the classroom, we try to cover too much, taking a broad-ranging view that can sometimes be superficial. To counter this, consider small-group projects spanning several sessions, where students explore the work of one major artist or a key album from an era, leading to a richer and possibly deeper understanding. At the end of the project, groups can share their work as a presentation or performance.

Provide students with a list of selected artists or albums, and provide some starting points and assignments. For example, if we take the seminal Marvin Gaye album *What’s Going On* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-kA3UtBj4M&list=PLKljDq58gFD_cY1K3dqNhzRe8mibgziQZ) we could ask the students to focus on these aspects:

Context

With this album, Gaye attempted to break away from the often slick but sometimes superficial output from the Tamla Motown hits factory, and meditated on what had happened to the American dream of the past, as it related to urban decay, environmental woes, military turbulence, police brutality, unemployment and poverty.

It met considerable resistance from his bosses at the time of recording, but has since proved to be one of the greatest recordings of soul music of all time. Importantly, these themes still resonate with young people today. There is an excellent video of a live version of the first two songs interspersed with contemporary footage of aspects of life in inner-city Chicago here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppvBWlZvPvU

Listening

Listen out for these particular elements:

- ▶ Jazzy major 7ths and minor 7ths in many songs including 'What's Going On' and 'Mercy Mercy Me'. They give the songs a smooth, relaxed, 'sophisticated' feel.
- ▶ Use of hand percussion rather than kit drums on some tracks, including 'Wholy Holy', tinkling of bells on 'Right On', guiro and bongos on 'God is Love' and 'Inner City Blues'.
- ▶ Groove style: very slow-moving chords and repeated bass riffs on 'Inner City Blues'.
- ▶ Strings: very slow melodic lines on 'What's Going On'. Sometimes doubled by voices, as on 'What's Happening Brother'.
- ▶ Bass countermelodies on 'Flying High' and ostinato patterns on 'Inner City Blues'.

These listening/analysing activities could lead towards an outcome of a class presentation, using PowerPoint or similar. Students could embed short audio and/or video clips to illustrate the points they are making.

Composing

Set a composing assignment where students make extensive use of the musical techniques they've been appraising in the previous listening activity. For example, here are some pointers using the third song on the album, 'Flyin' High (In the Friendly Sky)', as a loose model.

Write a verse that uses only the following chords in any sequence:

Gm9 – Am9 – Cm9 – Dm9

'Flyin' High (In the Friendly Sky)' makes extensive use of minor 9th chords. They have a floating, dreamy sound and often extend for several bars. For example, the opening chord in verse one (Gm9) extends for 14 bars.

Percussion

As an aid to composing, use a rhythm preset on an electric keyboard – something medium-tempo and a bit funky. Percussion players could play along with this using hand drums with perhaps another percussion sound, for instance guiro, tambourine or shaker. Listen to how hand percussion is used in this album and note it is generally fairly quiet and understated. The electric keyboard part can be dropped once the hand percussion parts are solid.

Keyboard

Keyboards on the album are generally sustained for several beats. Experiment by using inversions of the chords with a gentle syncopation. Use a mellow organ or an electric piano sound. A typical rhythm might be:



Guitar

Uses the chord charts to play funky rhythm patterns. Playing minor 9th chords on the guitar is easy if you use this pattern and slide it to different positions on the fretboard:

This shape can also be used for major 7th chords if we rethink the spelling of the chords:

Transpose these shapes for other chords. For instance, lowering the first chord shape one fret lower gives an Amaj7 chord. The challenge is more for the right hand which has to play busy, highly rhythmic patterns, such as this one in 'Mercy Mercy Me':

Note that this notation is shown for illustrative purposes only. Guitarists may want to play these patterns by ear rather than reading notation. The rests are important to give a tight, funky feel. The way to achieve this is to play bar chords and use a left-hand damping technique at the rest points.

Listen to the guitars on this album. Notice that they are generally very quiet, so may be hard to pick out. You could listen to some tracks where the funk guitar patterns are more upfront, for example songs by Nile Rogers and Chic (including 'Good Times' www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er9xGR0lrT4).

Bass

Some of the bass riffs on this album are quite challenging. For any bass players who might struggle with them, the bassline on 'Flyin' High' provides something easier – a scale-based 'walking' bassline moving mainly in crotchets. So bass players should devise a bassline using notes from the scale G A B flat C D E flat F G. Always begin on the root note of the chord. So if the chord is Gm9 begin on the note G; if the chord is Am9 begin on the note A; and so on.

Strings

Competent string players are likely to be thin on the ground in most classrooms, but a 'string section' preset on a keyboard can provide a perfectly acceptable alternative. In 'Flyin' High', the strings play long, sustained notes from an D dorian scale: D E F G A B C D (note the B natural). Emphasising the non-tonic triad notes of notes E, B or G (9th, 11th and 13th respectively) can give a jazzy, dreamy, floating sound. Use very slow-moving melody lines that can be doubled on backing vocals using oohs and aahs.

Vocals

The lyrics on this album explore social issues, political tensions, drug misuse, racism, ecology, war, unemployment which also happen to be themes dominant in many contemporary rap lyrics. The lyrics in this seemingly easy-going song possibly refer to soldiers returning home from the Vietnam War with allusions to trauma and drug dependency. Singers should improvise slow moving highly melodic parts over a backing - emphasising the jazzy use of 9ths, 11ths and 13ths. In our key of D dorian, these would be the notes E, G and B respectively.

Backing vocals

Possibilities include:

- ▶ Doubling string parts: easy to follow for less confident singers as they are singing along to an instrumental melody line. Oohs are gentler than aahs – use accordingly.
- ▶ Doubling the main vocal on lines where more emphasis is needed.
- ▶ Harmonising for more confident singers.
- ▶ Call and response, which may overlap, as they sometimes do in songs on this album.

Classroom performance

Despite the often highly sophisticated recording and production techniques, many songs from this genre are surprisingly straightforward and can easily be arranged for whole-class performance. Here is one such possibility:

'Hit the Road Jack'

Ray Charles pioneered the soul music genre during the 1950s by combining blues, rhythm and blues and gospel styles. His landmark song 'Hit the Road Jack' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrnWp5OoDes) brings together the call and response of gospel underpinned by a driving R&B accompaniment. This is a catchy, effective song that has been covered by many artists.

For small group or whole class performance, allocate parts as follows:

- ▶ Confident solo singers to sing the verses.
- ▶ Less confident singers for the 'Hit the road, Jack' choruses.
- ▶ Bass/keyboard/guitar players to play the bass riff. Two versions are given here. Players should take option A or the slightly harder option B. Notice they can be played without changing strings. Encourage students to play with rests between the notes as shown for a more punchy feel.

- ▶ Keyboard/guitar players to play the chords. Again, two options are provided. Chords should be played staccato.

- ▶ Percussion: suitable untuned classroom percussion (eg tambourines) to play on beats 2 and 4 in sync with the chords. Tuned percussion can double the bass riff or play notes from the chords. Students will pick this song up easily by watching the Ray Charles version on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8Tiz6INF7I). Encourage backing singers to stand and move as the singers on the clip – and include the finger-clicks! **MT**