

Blanche & Cab Calloway: The American Swing Band and Today's Music

Cab Calloway (1907-1994)
Blanche Calloway (1904-1978)

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will be provided with hands-on experiences in which to learn about Cab and Blanche Calloway who were legendary big band conductors, performers, and composers originally from Baltimore, Maryland. Students will examine their beginnings, their careers, and the legacy they left behind in the story of African American music.

Grade Level and Content Area: High School Vocal/General Music Classes

Time Frame: 3 or 4 class periods, 45 min each. This unit may also be extended beyond three classes, because there is plenty of opportunity for discussion and listening to examples of music by the Calloways and music influenced by them.

High School General Music ELOs:

- I.A.5 The student will listen to, perform, and describe musical examples representing diverse genres and cultures.
- I.B.1 The student will demonstrate and evaluate skills needed to perform in ensemble (i.e. blend, balance, intonation, rhythmic unity).
- I.B.2 The student will perform simple original arrangements and compositions using a variety of classroom instruments and the voice.
- II.A.4 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the diversity of musical expression and the creative processes from which these endeavors emerge.
- II.B.1 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the historical, musical, and cultural background of a representative sample of musical works.

Objective(s):

Students will be able to:

- Evaluate the role of big band jazz throughout 20th Century society, as well as its influence on American history and today's music.
- Explore the lives of Baltimore natives Blanche and Cab Calloway and their influence on the performance practices of today's artists.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Big Band	a jazz band which is usually comprised of trumpets, trombones, saxophones, clarinets, a rhythm section (piano, guitar, bass, drums), and often a vocalist, usually totaling 15-20.
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	members. It is often led by a dynamic conductor.
Swing	the 1930s form of jazz, characterized by the big band sound, “lilting” rhythms and upbeat danceable tempos.
Harlem Renaissance (~1919-1935)	one of the most prolific periods in African American History. Many African Americans in the arts, philosophy and literature migrated to New York, particularly Harlem, during this time, encouraging pride in Black culture and promoting strength and perseverance during a time that was still racially tense.
Jazz Age	The period of time in American history between the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, in which jazz dominated mainstream popular music for the first time.
Tap Dancing	a type of dancing characterized by sounds made by metal plates on the bottoms of dancers’ shoes. This style is influenced by English, Irish, African and Spanish dance styles, and it became incredibly popular in music and musicals beginning in the late 1920s.
Scat singing	vocal improvisation that uses syllables and sounds instead of words, imitating the sounds of instrumental jazz phrases.
<i>Porgy & Bess</i> (1935)	a jazz musical by George and Ira Gershwin. It is one of the first to have Black characters as leads; it is also one of the most successful musicals of all time. It is also referred to as an opera due to the minimal speaking parts (mostly sung).
<i>Hello Dolly</i> (1964)	one of the longest running and most successful musicals of all time. Cab Calloway was involved in a successful African American version of this musical.
Echoing	the section of a song in which the soloist plays or sings a musical phrase, and the band and/or audience echoes them.
Instrumental Solo	the section of a song in which an instrument improvises a melody while the other band members play the accompaniment.
Swing Jazz Beat	an uneven eighth note rhythm with accents on beats 2 and 4.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

1. Blanche & Cab's Biographies - Discussion Questions (Teacher Resource Sheet 1)
2. The Harlem Renaissance at-a-glance (Teacher Resource Sheet 2)
3. Terms and Recording Examples (Teacher Resource Sheet 3)
4. Assessment of student performances (Teacher Resource Sheet 4)

- Computer with internet access for youtube video links
- Projector
- Small Computer Speakers

For the Student:

1. Blanche's Biography (Student Resource Sheet 1)
2. Cab's Biography (Student Resource Sheet 2)
3. Humble Beginnings (Student Resource Sheet 3)
4. Swing! (Student Resource Sheet 4)

***Note: this resource sheet could be reproduced as a vocabulary worksheet in the event that matching the terms to the recorded examples are not possible.*

5. The Legacy (Student Resource Sheet 5)
6. Alternative Rock Cultures (Student Resource Sheet 6)

Resources:

Publications:

“Blanche Calloway and her Joy Boys, 1925-1935” <http://www.amazon.com/Blanche-Calloway-1925-1935-Boys/dp/B000001NPQ>

Web Sites:

Official Site of the Cab Calloway Family <http://www.cabcallowayllc.com/>

Biographical Database www.notablebiographies.com

Works of Blanche Calloway <http://www.heptune.com/blanche.html>

Cab Biography <http://www.weirdwildrealm.com/f-cabcalloway.html>

Wiki: Blanche Calloway http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blanche_Calloway

Wiki: Cab Calloway http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cab_Calloway

Biography: Ruth Brown <http://www.uncamarvy.com/RuthBrown/ruthbrown.html>

Wiki: Harlem Renaissance http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem_Renaissance

History of Jazz Music <http://www.swingmusic.net/getready.html>

Blanche Biography <http://jass.com/Cab/cab.sister.html>

Photos:

Blanche Calloway: <http://jass.com/Cab/cab.sister.html>

Cab Calloway: <http://thefmusicsover.wordpress.com/2009/11/18/cab-calloway/>

Kanye West impersonating Cab: <http://weeklydrop.com/tag/kanye-west/>

Janet Jackson impersonating Cab: <http://www.weirdwildrealm.com/f-cabcalloway.html>

Additional photos can be found through Google Images search.

Recordings:

Minnie the Moocher <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mq4UT4VnbE&feature=related>

'Hi de Ho Man' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esnDnIK2v1g&feature=related>

It Looks like Susie http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_7rFko3QY4&NR=1

I Gotta Swing <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGk18R-pgEg&feature=related>

Cab Calloway! Swing <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBXg76ampi0>

The Scat Man <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tFn6YJjn1U>

Stormy Weather <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCG3kJtQBKo>

If youtube.com is blocked at your school, you can download videos using a web utility such as safeshare.tv, and then bring the videos in to school on a flash drive.

Historical Background:

Blanche Calloway and Cabell (Cab) Calloway III are two of Baltimore's children and legacies in the history of African American music. Even though Cab became the more famous of the two, his older sister Blanche, was just as musically successful. She influenced her younger brother extensively. Both musicians played major roles in the Harlem Renaissance, which coincided with the mainstream Jazz Age in the United States. They were regular band conductors at the Cotton Club, one of the most well-known venues and hubs for artistic development during the time. Their presence in African American music greatly and positively impacted the development of jazz and the perception of African Americans in the United States. It is important to begin the discussion about these two legends by talking about Blanche first. Despite Cab's fame, there may not have been the "hi-de-ho man" if not for his sister Blanche. It has been implied that Cab's scatting style was one of the precursors of rap; his flamboyant performance style has also been adapted by some of the most prominent R&B and Hip Hop performers.

Blanche Calloway (February 9, 1904 – December 16, 1978) was the first female conductor of an all-male band in the United States. Blanche conducted the "Joy Boys" in shows around the country, especially in New York City and Chicago. She was also a club manager and managed Rhythm & Blues singer Ruth Brown. The Crio Club was her main performance venue during the 1920s, though she was also the conductor of the Andy Kirk band at the Pearl in Philadelphia. Later, Blanche ventured into radio, working as a disc jockey. Despite her skill as a singer and dancer, she is most recognized for her band-leading work.

Blanche Calloway helped pave the way for many women in the music industry, particularly those whose careers simultaneously consisted of performing, producing and songwriting. She has influenced artists like Janet Jackson, Alicia Keys, Beyoncé Knowles, and Christina Aguilera, whose careers have all spanned more than 10 years and are still growing.

Perhaps her influence may have been more significant if not for her death at the age of 74, twenty years after her reign in the world of big band jazz. However, her brother Cab, who lived to be 85 years old, was influencing and participating in music well into the 1990s. He may not have found such success if not for the impression left on him by his older sister, Blanche.

Cab Calloway (December 25, 1907 – November 18, 1994) was a dynamic performer, with the ability to excite and involve an audience. He once said, “Every time I make an appearance on the stage to entertain people is a pleasure. It’s my top point of my life. Every time.”*

Musicians that followed in his footsteps include Michael Jackson, Kanye West, and Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs, who all perform in similar ways to Cab, because they share the desire to entertain audiences in multiple ways. These artists seek to connect to audiences with real stories, exciting visual effects and movements, and exhilarating musical tracks. Cab believed that the “The audience [is] everywhere. I don’t care where it is. When I go to entertain people, boom, that’s it! I give. That’s all there is to that.”*

Cab’s family moved to Baltimore when he was six years old. Before he graduated from Frederick Douglass High School at the age of 17, he had as many as five after school jobs around the city. In high school, he also played the drums, sang, and put on vaudeville-type shows with his friends. His first professional job was with his sister, Blanche, in Chicago. He began filling in for the singer in a band, but soon was hired as a band leader, beginning his legendary career. In addition to recording multiple jazz hits and making over \$200,000 a year in the 1940s, Cab also acted in stage shows and films, including *Porgy & Bess*, *Hello Dolly* and *The Cincinnati Kid*. Despite his album and film success, he loved and preferred live performance much more than recordings; throughout his life, he stayed true to his beliefs and desire to “make people happy” through entertaining. Two of his five daughters were also talented performers, inspired by their father and following in his footsteps.

His most indelible mark on African American music history is undoubtedly his song “Minnie the Moocher,” which he performed several versions of on national television shows, including Sesame Street. When he passed away in 1994, he was surrounded by his family, and his legacy will never be forgotten.

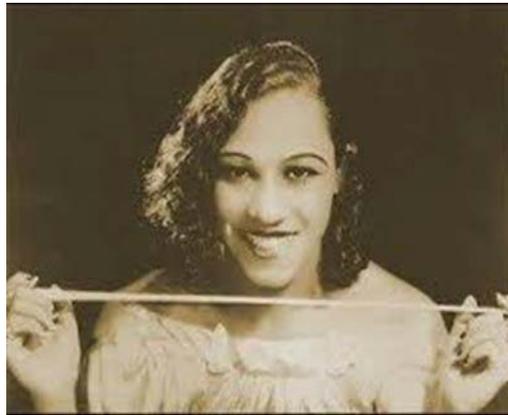
*Quotes from an interview with Christopher Papa, 1995:
<http://www.cabcallowayllc.com/biography/index.php>



Cab Calloway (top)
<https://tinyurl.com/ludo7hz>



Kanye West (left) impersonating Cab
<http://tinyurl.com/ota9oif>



Blanche Calloway
<http://tinyurl.com/nfpnudy>

For a picture of Janet Jackson impersonating Cab Calloway from her 'Alright' video, open Hyperlink below:
<http://tinyurl.com/p2bj74>

Lesson Development:

Lesson 1: The Beginning

Motivation: Cab Calloway Quote

Read aloud to students:

When once asked if he had any heroes in the music business, Calloway scoffed at the very idea. "I'll tell you who my heroes are," he said. "My heroes are the notes, man. The music itself. You understand what I'm saying? I love the music. The music is my hero."

- from <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Br-Ca/Calloway-Cab.html#ixzz0r1K9VBrQ>

Discussion Questions: What is your first musical memory? (5 min)

Procedure

1. Designate two or three students to take turns reading Blanche's and Cab's biographies aloud (**Student Resource Sheets 1 & 2**). Take an additional 5 minutes to go over the discussion questions. (10 min total)

2. Show video: *Minnie the Moocher*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mq4UT4VnbE&feature=related>

Ask students for their initial reaction. (5 min)

3. Split the class into groups of 3-5 (or let students choose groups, if appropriate). Based on what they have seen so far, students should take 5-10 minutes to brainstorm a current song that could have been influenced by Blanche or Cab. The song should:

- Be able to be sung/rapped by the students in the group.
 - Include lyrics appropriate for performance in school.
 - Be accessible for creating movement.
 - Be able to be clearly linked to an aspect of Blanche or Cab's style.
 - Be available in a recorded form that students can bring in on a CD, iPod or other MP3 player,
- OR
- Be easily performable with a cappella accompaniment by the group members.

The song will be performed on the last day of the unit (Lesson 3).

4. Students should return to their seats and complete **Student Resource Sheet 3: Humble Beginnings** (p. 11) about their own musical background. (15 min)

Assessment:

Students should be assessed primarily based on their song performance at the end of the unit (see page 20). Suggestions for ongoing assessment include:

- Evaluating students' involvement in discussions; encouraging students to participate.
- Grading student handouts for completion; include specific, positive feedback on the handouts before returning them to students.
- Asking the students specific questions about their song performance progress, including leading questions to help their creative process.

Closure: (5 min)

1. Students may share any of the information from their worksheets with the class.
2. Preview question for next class: *What do you know about the Harlem Renaissance?*

Lesson 2: The Middle

Motivation: The Harlem Renaissance

Word Cloud: *What do you know about the Harlem Renaissance?*

Students list authors, musicians, historical events, and other descriptors; write them on the board as they are mentioned. Following the brainstorming, elaborate on what they have come up with using the additional information on Teacher Resource Sheet 2.



Procedure:

1. Play your choice of two recordings of Blanche Calloway and her Joy Boys, followed by two videos of Cab. See the list of recordings in the Resources section above. In between listenings, ask students to consider the similarities and differences between the recordings.
2. Discuss the musical elements found in the recordings, using Student Resource Sheet 4 and Teacher Resource Sheet 3.
3. Play the recordings that match the terms on Student Resource Sheet 4. When completed, discuss the answers with the students.

4. Continuing their work from the previous class, students should break into their song performance groups and continue to develop their performance ideas. Remind students of the song requirements (Lesson 1).

Assessment:

Refer to Lesson 1.

Closure:

1. Remind students that they will present their songs during the following class period. This could be considered a “dress rehearsal” if the instructor chooses to give more time for this portion of the lesson.
2. Homework: Complete Student Resource Sheet 5: The Legacy.

Lesson 3: The Legacy

Motivation: Video- Janet Jackson feat. Heavy D, *Alright* (approx 7 min)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOgF6Jf-RLE&feature=related>

Discussion (5 min):

How does this video combine themes from the Harlem Renaissance with popular trends from the 1990s? (if prompt needed: trends include dance moves, clothes, music, etc).

How does Janet Jackson break *gender barriers* in this video?

Procedure

1. Briefly discuss the questions and answers on **Student Resource Sheet 5: The Legacy** (5 min)
2. Designate two or three students to take turns reading the [first] page of the article, *Alternative Rock Cultures: Cab Calloway: Original Rapper* (Student Resource Sheet 6). Take an additional 5 minutes to go over student comments and thoughts. (10 min total)
3. Students should perform their songs in groups for the class. Before beginning, one group member should describe why they chose the song and how it relates in some way to Blanche’s or Cab’s life or performance style.

Assessment:

Refer to the Assessment Rubric on page 20.

Closure:

A fourth lesson is recommended in the event that there is not enough time for each of the group song performances.

Student Reflection: *(may be written or discussion)*

- What was your favorite part of our unit on Blanche and Cab Calloway?
- Do you feel like learning about them has changed your musical perspective?
If so, how? If not, why not?
- What do you think your future goals related to music will be?

Thoughtful Application:

In addition to use in a music appreciation or general music class, this lesson could be taught as an integrated lesson in a U.S. History or English class. It could also serve as a beginning resource for an independent research project. The performance aspect of the lesson could be extended for use in a summer program activity, in which students could prepare a more extensive performance.

Lesson Extensions:

Discuss how modern artists are influenced by the showmanship and musicianship of Blanche and Cab Calloway, through their costumes, stage presence, scat singing, dance moves, etc. Examples would include Bruno Mars, Justin Timberlake, and Pentatonix.

Research some of the musicians, composers and other artists who worked with or influenced Cab or Blanche Calloway, as well as some of the venues and programs on which they appeared.

Examples:	George Gershwin	Pearl Bailey	The Cotton Club
	Duke Ellington	Janet Jackson	
	Leontyne Price	<i>Sesame Street</i>	

- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum’s gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Heritage* and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland’s African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influence Maryland’s historic

communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.

- Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
- Visit the *Pennsylvania Avenue* exhibit in the *Strength of the Mind* gallery to learn about other Maryland musicians who were trendsetters in the music industry.
- Research the following women bandleaders and composers:
 - Mary Lou Williams
 - Anna Mae Windburn
 - Lil Hardin

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

Blanche & Cab's Biographies - Discussion Questions

What did you know about Blanche/Cab prior to reading this biography?

What have you learned about them?

What opinion did you have of jazz music before reading that it has influenced today's popular music?

If you knew Blanche/Cab as someone in your community, what would you have liked about them? Disliked?

What else would you like to know about Blanche/Cab?

Based on Discussion Questions found at:

http://www.readinggroupguides.com/no_guide/guide_biography.asp

Teacher Resource Sheet 2

The Harlem Renaissance at a Glance

The Harlem Renaissance is a term used to describe a flowering of African American literature and art in the 1920s, mainly in the Harlem district of New York City. During the mass migration of African Americans from the rural agricultural South to the urban industrial North (1914-18), many who came to New York settled in Harlem, as did a good number of Black New Yorkers who moved from other areas of the city. Meanwhile, Southern Black musicians brought jazz with them to the North and to Harlem. The area soon became a sophisticated literary and artistic center. A number of periodicals were influential in creating this milieu, particularly the magazine *Crisis*, which was published by W. E. B. Du Bois and urged racial pride among African Americans. Additionally, *Opportunity* was a magazine which was published by the National Urban League, that also instilled racial pride in many African Americans. Also influential was the book *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925), edited by Alain Locke.

Responding to the intellectual atmosphere of the time and place, many writers and artists who lived in Harlem, began to produce a wide variety of fine and highly original works dealing with African American life. These works attracted many Black readers. New to the wider culture, they also attracted commercial publishers and a large white readership. Writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance include Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer. There were many visual artists also connected with the movement. Among the painters are Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden, Malvin G. Johnson, and William H. Johnson; one of the best-known sculptors is Augusta Savage. Photographers include James Van Der Zee and Roy De Carava. The Harlem Renaissance faded with the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Bibliography: See N. I. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (1971); B. Kellner, ed., *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era* (1987); L. Harris, ed., *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (1989); and H. Bloom, ed., *Black American Prose Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (1994). In addition, many materials relating to the period can be found in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, N.Y.C.

from The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th Edition, 2008

http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Harlem_Renaissance.aspx

Teacher Resource Sheet 3

Terms and Recording Examples

#1. Swing Jazz- fast tempo, big band jazz in the 1930s style

Cab Calloway! Swing

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBXg76ampi0>

#2. Scat- vocal improvisation that uses syllables and sounds instead of words, imitating the sounds of instrumental jazz phrases

Minnie the Moocher

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mq4UT4VnbE&feature=related>

@ **1:45 seconds**

#3. Instrumental Solo- the section of a song in which an instrument improvises a melody while the other band members play the accompaniment.

I Gotta Swing

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGk18R-pgEg&feature=related>

@ **0:40 seconds**

#4. Echoing- the section of a song in which the soloist plays or sings a musical phrase, and the band and/or audience echoes them

Cab Calloway! Swing

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBXg76ampi0>

@ **0:33 seconds**

Teacher Resource Sheet 4

Assessment Rubric: Song Performance

<p>A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students worked collaboratively to create their song performance - The performance included accurate singing and/or rapping - The performance included purposeful movement - The students both demonstrated and described how their performance was influenced by Cab or Blanche Calloway's style 	<p>B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students worked somewhat collaboratively to create their song performance - The performance included moderately accurate singing and/or rapping - The performance included some movement - The students somewhat demonstrated and described how their performance was influenced by Cab or Blanche Calloway's style
<p>C</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students worked slightly collaboratively to create their song performance; one or two students did the bulk of the work - The performance included inaccurate singing and/or rapping - The performance included little to no purposeful movement - The students failed to demonstrate and/or describe how their performance was influenced by Cab or Blanche Calloway's style 	<p>D</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students did not work collaboratively to create their song performance; one or two students did the bulk of the work - The performance included inaccurate singing and/or rapping, if any - The performance included little to no purposeful movement - The students failed to demonstrate and/or describe how their performance was influenced by Cab or Blanche Calloway's style

Students who choose to refrain from participating entirely receive an 'E.'

Student Resource Sheet 1: Blanche's Biography



(Pictures of Blanche Calloway from

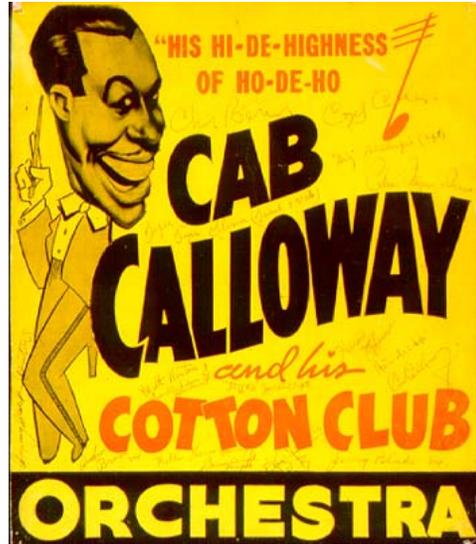
<http://tinyurl.com/nfpnudy>

Blanche Calloway (February 9, 1904 – December 16, 1978) was the very first female conductor of an all-male band in the United States. Blanche conducted the “Joy Boys” in shows around the country, especially in New York City and Chicago. She was also a club manager, and managed R&B singer Ruth Brown. The Crio Club was her main performance venue during the 1920s, though she was also the conductor of the Andy Kirk band at the Pearl in Philadelphia. Later, Blanche ventured into radio, working as a disc jockey. Despite her skill as a singer and dancer, she is most recognized for her band-leading work.

Blanche Calloway helped pave the way for many women in the music industry, particularly those whose careers consist of performing, producing, and songwriting simultaneously. Artists like Janet Jackson, Alicia Keys, Beyonce, and Christina Aguilera are examples of a few women in the industry whose careers have all spanned more than 10 years and are still growing.

Perhaps her influence may have been more significant if it were not for her death at the age of 74, 20 years after her reign in the world of big band jazz. However, her brother Cab lived to be 85 years old, and he influenced music well into the 1990s. He may not have found such success if not for the impression left by his older sister Blanche.

Student Resource Sheet 2: Cab's Biography



(Pictures of Cab Calloway from

<http://tinyurl.com/ofyd9y3>

Cab Calloway (December 25, 1907 – November 18, 1994) was a dynamic performer who had the ability to excite and involve an audience. He once said, “Every time I make an appearance on the stage to entertain people is a pleasure. It’s my top point of my life. Every time.”*

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daughters were also talented performers, inspired by their father and following in his footsteps.

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**Quotes from an interview with Christopher Papa, 1995:
<http://www.cabcallowayllc.com/biography/index.php>*

Student Resource Sheet 3: Humble Beginnings

Name: _____

*Both Blanche and Cab Calloway got their musical start in the church.
When did music begin for you? Fill in the boxes below.*

First musical memory (song, person):	
First time making music:	Favorite time making music:
Favorite song when you were little:	Favorite song today:
Most recent positive musical memory:	A sad musical memory:
How do you think music will be a part of your life in the future?	

Student Resource Sheet 4

Swing!

Name _____

Fill in the correct musical element that is most noticeable during the recording.

Word Bank

Echoing- the section of a song in which the soloist plays or sings a musical phrase, and the band and/or audience echoes them.

Instrumental Solo- the section of a song in which an instrument improvises a melody while the other band members play the accompaniment

Scat- vocal improvisation that uses syllables and sounds instead of words, imitating the sounds of instrumental jazz phrases

Swing Jazz Beat- an *uneven* eighth note rhythm, with accents on beats 2 and 4.

#1

#2

#3

#4

Student Resource Sheet 5: The Legacy

Name: _____

Consider what you have learned so far about Cab and Blanche Calloway, as well as what you know about your favorite musical artists.

Answer the following questions using 2-3 complete sentences each.

1. Blanche Calloway was a pioneer in American music. Which women in the music industry do you think could have been inspired by her? Why?

2. What role(s) do you think women play in men's music?
(Examples: women in music videos; Caroline in Outkast's song "Roses")

3. What role(s) do you think men play in women's music?
(Examples: the men who certain artists' love songs are about; the man in Alicia Key's "Un-thinkable")

4. Which artists do you enjoy *watching* perform, and not just listening to? Why?

Student Resource Sheet 6

ALTERNATIVE ROCK CULTURES: Cab Calloway: Original Rapper
by Iain Ellis [18 November 2005]

For complete resource, open Hyperlink below:

<http://www.popmatters.com/column/ellis051118/>

Through his "party" songs and *Hepster's Dictionary*, Calloway provided a vast lexicon for the youth subculture that surrounded the swing genre; that argot revolved around a comic inverse-universe of terms and definitions (e.g., bad = good; crazy = happening). Such antonymous irony is clearly still alive and well in today's obstreperous hip-hop-driven youth slang culture...

Rhythmic emphases, rhyme infatuations, celebrations of decadence, slang, bling, and an overall manifestation of cool: Cab Calloway was hip-hop's preeminent godfather. Rhythm and rhyme propelled his popular slang, as well as vocal style, which thrived on attitude more than technical prowess. Singing/storytelling alongside — in sync rather than around — the backbeat, Calloway innovated a vocal technique that was to later inform the beat-based singing of Bo Diddley, James Brown, and the subsequent histories of funk and rap phrasing...

Who was first to inquire "Are you fly?" Answer: The Professor of Jive, Cab Calloway.

One cannot help but feel that the history of popular music would look somewhat different had Cab Calloway not existed. His winning humor brought new spirit and possibilities to youth expression, performance, lyrical subjects, language, image, and promotion — all central elements in the developments of rock and rap as popular art forms. Moreover, his humor was beyond mere self-indulgence; it offered a spirit-raising antidote to black and white youth during the depression-ravaged years of the '30s. He was a unifier, a piper that gave a stressed populace something to connect to, to celebrate with, and to temporarily brush away the blues. His was a comedic escapism of body and mind; he cajoled the jitterbugs to jitterbug and made "hep" slang an irresistible proposition. If you were "hep to the jive", you were part of a club, one identified with racial integration and hedonism, one against stiff adult rules and prejudices...

The essay is an excerpt from a forthcoming book about rock-related artists who use(d) humor as a primary instrument of rebellion.

***A Note for Teachers:**

While this article is incredibly informative and insightful, teachers are encouraged to read it thoroughly before presenting it to students. Some sections of the article may be omitted for appropriateness if deemed necessary.