

Teacher: **Barry LeBlanc** Humanities Discipline: **Music Appreciation (HUMA 118)** November 13, 2015

World Religion: **Judaism** Teaching Module Title: **Influential Jewish Figures in 20th-Century American Music**

Teaching Module Goals

1. The student will explore the lives and musical influence of George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Benny Goodman, and Leonard Bernstein, giving particular attention to the significance of their Jewish backgrounds.

Assigned Readings and Websites

HUMA 118 Music Appreciation required textbooks:

- Joseph Kerman and Gary Tomlinson, *Listen*, 8e
 - pp381-409 (Chapter 24: “Music in America: Jazz and Beyond”)

Other books / websites:

- Hasia R. Diner, *A New Promised Land: A History of Jews in America*
 - p61 – George Gershwin
 - p61 – Irving Berlin
 - pp75-76 – Benny Goodman
 - p107 – Leonard Bernstein
- “Jewish influences on 20th-century American music” – Jewish News Service (jns.org)
- Oxford Music Online (Must sign in with Campus Connect login)
- Ben Sidran, *There Was A Fire: Jews, Music and the American Dream*, Unlimited Media, Ltd.; 2d ed (March 15, 2012); ISBN-10: 1450753639 / ISBN-13: 978-1450753630

Study Questions

1. Sidran writes, “Jews in America were able to access a popular imagination because they were, in some ways, experts at being outsiders wanting to be accepted.” How was this skill at accessing popular imagination displayed in the songs of George Gershwin and Irving Berlin? Examine a few of their hit songs, and give examples of the lyric writing that resonated with so many other Americans.
2. Diner points out that “[Benny] Goodman broke all sorts of barriers.” How might his experience of growing up in New York as the son of poor Jewish immigrants have influenced his attitudes toward each of the following:
 - a. His willingness to be among the first bandleaders to racially integrate his band?
 - b. His courage to cross the stylistic divide by performing swing at Carnegie Hall?
3. Diner observes that Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story* (based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*) conveys the message that “ethnic hatred hurts all people.” How might Bernstein’s Jewish identity have motivated his composition of this Broadway musical?
4. Pick one of the Jewish musicians named above and research his life and music in greater depth using Oxford Music Online. Choose one of the following term projects to complete this assignment:
 - Term paper (1000 words)
 - Presentation (10-12 minutes using slides)

Consider the following outline for either of the above:

- I. Life and career—including significance of Jewish background (40%)
- II. Music and artistry (40%)
 - A. Influences (in his life)
 - B. Primary style(s)/genre(s)
 - C. Top 2-3 titles (listen to and research these)
- III. Legacy and contributions to music (10%)
- IV. Reflections and conclusion (10%)

Reading Quiz

Take the reading quiz on Blackboard. The quiz allows unlimited attempts, so take it repeatedly to maximize your grade and master the material in preparation for the cumulative final.