Afghan Rubāb: The Lion of Instruments
A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson
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Summary:
The Afghan Rubāb is revered as Afghanistan’s “national instrument.” Despite censorship during the Taliban rule, the rubāb has regained its prominence in the Afghan culture. Skillful performers Ustād Mohammad Omar and Homayun Sakhi continue to perform on the solo instrument leaving “their creative imprint on the region’s musical legacy. There can be no doubt that authentic traditional music remains forever contemporary.” (Sakhi, 2005)

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8, 9-12
Country: Afghanistan
Region: Middle East
Culture Group: Kabuli
Genre: World
Instruments: Guitar, Drum
Language: Pashto
Co-Curricular Areas: Social Studies
National Standards: 2, 3, 6, 9

Prerequisites: None

Objectives:
• Listening: Instruments (Rubāb and Tabla)
• Analyzing: Form
• Playing: Rhythmic and melodic patterns
• Improvising: Yeman mode
• Anatomy and performance practices of rubāb
• Becoming acquainted with the geography of Central Asia and the political Climate of Central Asia (past and present)
• Understanding censorship of music

Materials:
• “Emen/Tintal” by Ustād Mohammad Omar from Ustād Mohammah Omar: Virtuoso from Afghanistan, (SFW CD 40439)
http://www.folkways.si.edu/ustad-mohammad-omar/virtuoso-from-afghanistan/central-asia-islamica-world/music/album/smithsonian
Lesson Segments:

1. “Keliwali” (National Standards 2, 6, 9)
   a. Listen to recording.
      i. As you keep a steady beat with your feet, identify rhythm patterns used by the Rubâb and the Tabla
      ii. Play one of these patterns softly on a hand drum
   b. See the liner notes from Ustâd Mohammad Omar: Virtuoso from Afghanistan (pgs. 8 – 9) and Homayun Sakhi: The art of the afghan rubâb (pgs. 15 & 27) for a description of Rubâb and the Tabla and DVD of Homayun Sakhi: The art of the afghan rubâb – Interactive Glossary.
      i. Discuss the anatomy of the instruments
      ii. List materials used to construct the instruments
   c. View the DVD Homayun Sakhi: The art of the afghan rubâb – Art of the Afghan Rubâb starting at 20:40.

2. “Emen/Tintal” (National Standards 2, 3, 6, 9)
3. Censorship in Afghanistan (National Standard 9)
4. Raga Yaman (National Standards 6, 9)
i. Discuss performance practices for both instruments

**Assessment:** Are students able to play the rhythms patterns accurately? Are students able to discuss the material in an age-appropriate manner?

2. “**Emen/Tintal**” by Ustād Mohammad Omar
   a. Listen to recording (this is a long piece – you may want to only use sections of it)
      i. This Afghan classical piece uses the melodic mode of Emen (Yemen) and rhythmic mode of Tintal (16 beats).
         1. It starts with an improvisatory introduction called a shakal, followed by the naghma (four sections):
            a. astir – principle melody
            b. antara – melody on “ni”
            c. bog – new short melody repeated in several different rhythmic settings
            d. sanchai – another short melody
   b. Play the melodic mode Yemen (C D E F# G A B C) on the guitar.
      i. The Yemen mode is represented by the Indian solfege syllables Sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni (analogous to do, re, me, fa, sol, la, ti).
      ii. The yemen mode uses a raised fourth degree
   c. Play the Yemen melody as transcribed below. See “Emen/Tintal” by Ustād Mohammad Omar (pg. 11).
   d. Improvise a short melody on the guitar using the pitches from the Yemen mode.
      i. Reflect on the performances of the improvised pieces
         1. Use of the correct pitches of the mode
         2. Ability to imitate the style
         3. Use of similar rhythms

**Assessment:** Are students able to hear and identify the altered pitch (raised 4th scale degree)? Are students able to improvise a short melody using the Yemen mode?

3. **Censorship in Afghanistan**
   a. Liner notes from *Ustād Mohammah Omar: Virtuoso from Afghanistan* (pgs. 2 - 3) and *Homayun Sakhi: The art of the afghan rubāb* (pg. 10) for information on censorship.
b. Baily, John (2001). *Can you stop the birds singing?: The censorship of music in Afghanistan*
   i. Define censorship
   ii. Discuss censorship of Afghan music by Taliban (see materials above)
   iii. Discuss censorship in the US and Worldwide

**Assessment:** Are students able to discuss the material in an age-appropriate manner? Are students able to relate discussion to their own experiences?

4. **“Raga Yaman”** by Homayun Sakhi
   a. Listen to recording.
   i. Discuss similarities and differences between Homayun Sakhi’s Yaman (Yeman) and Ustād Mohammad Omar’s Yeman (Yaman)
   ii. Define Ustād-shagird (master-apprentice) relationship: see liner notes from *Ustād Mohammah Omar: Virtuoso from Afghanistan* (pgs. 4-5) and *Homayun Sakhi: The art of the afghan rubāb* (pg. 12-13)
   iii. Trace the musical lineage of Homayun Sakhi
      1. Homayun Sakhi from his father – Ghulam Sakhi
         a. from Ustād Modammah Omar
         b. from Ustād Ibrahim
         c. from family lines of the classically trained musicians of North India brought to Kubal by Amir Sher Ali Khan (1860s)
   iv. Trace the geographical locations of Homayun Sakhi’s musical lineage on a world map
      1. Homayun Sakhi – Fremont, California (present home)
         a. from Khalil House in Peshawar, Pakistan
         b. from Kucheh Kharabat area in Kabul, Afghanistan
         c. from Northern India
   v. Identify some possible influences on Homayun Sakhi’s music from the Ustād-shagird experience and geographic re-locations

**Assessment:** Are students able to discuss the material in an age-appropriate manner? Are students able to identify geographic and familial experiences that could have influenced the music of Homayun Sakhi?
Transcription of the Melody: Melodic Mode of *Emen* by Ustād Mohammad Omar

C D E F# G A B C
sa re ga ma pa dha ni sa Indian solfege syllables
do re mi fe sol la ti do Western solfege syllables

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
G G G F#E G G GF# A A A F#G E E ↓BC DE

↓B ↓B ↓B B C C G G E E ↓BC DE ↓B ↓B C C