

A Musical Drama for the Orff Classroom
in 3 Acts Grades 4-8

Catfish Blues

Soulful Expressions of
Jazz Along the Mississippi

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Dr. René Boyer



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Act 1: Scene 1 -The Mississippi River

The Mississippi River (Sounds of Water/Crickets/Bird Sounds; Alto Recorder Sounds in Dissonance/Mimicking Steamboat sounds from afar.) Around the 1940's.

(Background Instrumental Music "The Mississippi" begins.)

Narrator: The sun sets on the Mississippi. One can feel the presence of a river that has existed for centuries--a river that continues to quietly watch and listen to the people, and their music.

Soloist: *The Mississippi.*

THE MISSISSIPPI

Full Score page 28

Words and Music by René Boyer

The musical score is written on three staves of music in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are as follows:

I'm the Might-y Mis-si - sip-pi, and I flow through-out the land. I have flowed from the be-

gin-ning, and I'll flow on 'til the end. I have seen and heard your Mo-thers, I have

watched your Fa-thers, too. I have wit-nessed joys and sor-rows, I have felt the tears from you.



Narrator: *The River Speaks* (Music continues in the background)

THE RIVER SPEAKS

I'm the Mighty Mississippi,
I'm from ancient glaciers born.
I have flowed from the beginning
And I'll flow forever more.

I have seen and heard your Mothers.
I have helped your Fathers, too.
I have witnessed joys and sorrows,
I have felt the tears from you.

I have witnessed those in bondage
Bearing chains of slavery,
I have helped them seek their freedom,
Their self-pride and dignity.

I have smiled at those who sat down,
To fish along my banks,
I've provided for their families,
Who graciously gave their thanks.

I have listened to their stories,
I have listened to their songs,
I have listened to their anguish,
My presence has kept them strong.

Sometimes I feel so helpless,
Hearing what they have to say,
But I continue to listen,
Each and every day.

In the Springtime, something happens,
I slowly begin to rise.
My waters flood the nearby lands.
I can hear the distant cries.

There are those who try to stop me,
But sadly, they cannot,
I am part of Mother Nature,
Which many have forgot.

I am part of the great universe,
The Earth, the Skies, the Seas,
The Mountains and the Valleys,
The flowers and the trees.

I'll flow along my muddied banks,
Renewing lands each Spring.
I'll see you as you move through life,
And I'll listen as you sing.



Act 1: Scene 2 - Children at Play

Scene: Children playing in their yard near the Mississippi River.

Full Score page 28

(Background Music: Play Together Children)

Mother's Voice Yelling out the Window:

"Don't go near that river!" "It looks peaceful, but it's not. It's dangerous. Its currents will pull you under and you'll drown! You have one hour to play. You have to get ready for school tomorrow.

PLAY TOGETHER, CHILDREN

African American Spiritual

Arr. René Boyer

Play to - ge - ther chil - dren, Don't ___ go near the ri - ver. Play to - geth - er chil - dren, Don't
Sing to - ge - ther chil - dren... Sing to - geth - er chil - dren...

4
___ go near the ri - ver. Play to - geth - er chil - dren, Don't ___ go near the ri - ver, There are
Sing to - geth - er chil - dren...

7
strong, strong cur - rents that will pull you down.

Verse 2. Sing together children. . .

Mother: " Do you hear me? Don't go near that river!"

(The "A" Section of "Play Together Children" repeats.)

Children: "Okay Mama," "We hear you." "We won't go near the river. We'll stay in the yard."

Child 1: "What do you want to do?"

Child 2: "How about Hide and Seek?"

Child 3: "Okay! That's cool! I'll be it!"

(Children begin creating a rhythmic accompaniment to "All Hid," using Found Sounds.)

WB

Tamb.

CB

BX

THE MISSISSIPPI

Words and Music by Rene Boyer

Voice: I'm the Might - y Mis-si - sip-pi, and I flow through-out the land. I have
 SG
 SR
 AM
 BM

V⁵: flowed from the be - gin-ning, and I'll flow on 'til the end. I have
 SG
 SR
 AM
 BM

The Mississippi

9

V
seen and heard your Mo-thers, I have watched your Fa-thers, too. I have

SG

SR

AM

BM

13

V
wit - nessed joys and sor-rows, I have felt the tears from —

SG

SR

AM

BM

Suggested Props

(The use of a computer, coupled with a device that can project a visual of the Mississippi River, is highly recommended for background scenes.)

Act 1

- (Scene 1) backdrop of visual representation of the Mississippi River; podium on the side for Narrator
- (Scene 2) a tree; visual of white picket fence; bench; outside table (optional)
- (Scene 3) a classroom with desks and a lectern in the front; big map of Mississippi; pointer
- (Scene 4) (Same as Scene 1)
- (Scene 5) (Same as Scene 1)
- (Scene 6) dinner table; three chairs and a highchair; Baby doll and bib; food, glasses, silverware, pitcher, flowers in the middle of table, apron.
- (Scene 7) rocking chair and baby doll. (stage right)

Act 2

- (Scene 1) two chairs, small table and lamp; cup of coffee
- (Scene 2) background silhouette of a steamboat, lit up with red, white and blue lights and an American flag
(Optional) It would be great to have a wooden profile of a steamboat on wheels. A railing, waste high, should go across the front of the silhouette. (The railing may be made with a taunt rope and cardboard taped to it—giving the illusion of a railing on a boat.) Actors will stand behind it, giving the illusion of standing on deck. Long cafeteria tables can also be draped to achieve this affect.
- (Scene 3) (Same as Scene 2)

Act 3

- (Scene 1) Big lit sign that reads, “New Orleans;”
Profile of Louis Armstrong with trumpet or a saxophone may suggest the true spirit of this city. This can all be projected. Streetlight. on a tall pole.
(Profile of buildings in the Latin Quarter are optional.)

Lighting

Lighting can add so much to a musical production. Think about ways to spotlight the narrator(s), the family members, the dinner scene, the rocking chair scene, and those involved in conversation on the Steamboat.

The Pit

The Orff Instrumentarium should be located at the bottom and to the side of the stage. The Director of the Ensemble should be situated to view everything that is happening.

Audio

A podium to the side, with a microphone(s) is needed for Narrator and soloists.

What is a River?

A river is a flowing, moving stream of water. Usually a river empties its water into an ocean, lake, pond, or even another river. Rivers can vary in size. Rivers flow downhill from their source.

Rivers are split up into three parts: the upper course, the middle course, and the lower course. The upper course is closest to the source or where the river begins. The land is usually high and mountainous, and the river has a steep gradient with fast-flowing water.

A river can teach us many lessons about life. The most important lesson involves CONTINUITY. A river can teach us how to keep going or keep going with the flow. No matter what gets in it's way, a river will keep going towards the destination (ocean).

Rivers are used for irrigation in agriculture, for drinking water, for transportation, to produce electricity through hydroelectric dams, and for leisure activities like swimming, skiing and boating.

Rivers carry water and nutrients to areas all around the earth. They play a very important part in the water cycle, acting as drainage channels for surface water. Rivers drain nearly 75% of the earth's land surface. Rivers provide excellent habitat and food for many of the earth's organisms.

Rivers were attractive locations for the first civilizations because they provided a steady supply of drinking water and made the land fertile for growing crops. Moreover, goods and people could be transported easily, and the people in these civilizations could fish and hunt the animals that came to drink water. Rivers have always been the place where the greatest civilizations flourished.

The Mississippi River is one of the most important landmarks on the North American continent. It is a focal point for the United States' life story, literature, commerce, agriculture and environmental awareness.

Characters

Narrator(s)
 Mother
 Father
 Child 1
 Child 2
 Child 3 (Junior)
 Teacher
 Classroom of children (Optional: 18 or fewer)
 Speaker
 Responder
 Person 1 (On Deck)
 Person 2 (On Deck)
 Deck People (optional)
 New Orleans Cloaked Singers
 Second Line Band and Dancers

Orff Instrumentarium Instrument Abbreviations

SG Soprano glockenspiel
 AG Alto glockenspiel
 SM Soprano metallophone
 SX Soprano xylophone
 AM Alto Metallophone
 AX Alto Xylophone
 BM Bass Metallophone
 BX Bass Xylophone
 SR Soprano Recorder
 AR Alto Recorder
 Clvs. Claves
 CD Conga Drum
 Cym. Cymbal
 Tamb Tambourine
 Timp. Timpani
 V Voice
 WB Woodblocks
 (Whistles) for Marti Gras Parade
 (Djembes or other drums)
 (Kazoos)



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