



From the Top at Carnegie Hall
Episode 8: "Star Quality"
Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)
Available online at pbs.org

Learning Activity

Title: *It's a Song*

Description: In this activity, students will compare the human voice and the piano and experiment with adapting songs written for the voice for different instruments.

Grade Level: 9-12 (may be adapted for younger students)

National Music Standards: **4**, Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines; **6**, Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Background

In this episode, three of the pieces have their roots in song: the Franz Liszt transcription of Robert Schumann's *Widmung* performed by Ji-Yong Kim; the Bartok Rhapsody No. 1, movement 1, "Lassu" performed by Alice Ivy-Pemberton; and the folk song "June Apple," also by Alice.



Ji-Yong at the piano, Carnegie Hall

Widmung was written for voice and piano by Schumann as a love song to his future wife, Clara. In German *Widmung* means "dedication". In this episode, Ji-Yong Kim plays a piano transcription by composer Franz Liszt. To help him learn to play in a singing way, his mother sang the original to him as he thought about how to interpret the piece. The piano is a percussion instrument – not as flexible as the human voice in some ways, although having pitch and capable of legato (smoothness) through the use of the pedal.

Materials: Computer/media player, speakers and projector (if needed), video clip from Episode 8, instruments to experiment with

Activity Instructions

1) **Watch** the video segment in which Ji-Yong talks about preparing this piece. Ask students to think about how the piano and the voice are alike and different. On the board, make a column for each, and note what might be their strengths and weaknesses when playing or singing a romantic song like *Widmung*.

2) **Listen** to Ji-Yong's performance of *Widmung*, noticing how he uses the piano to express romantic, tender, and passionate feelings. How would someone create those same feelings with the voice? With another instrument? How does Ji-Yong use different voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), dynamics, and phrasing to create a songlike feeling?

3) **Group students** into small teams of 4-5 (with one instrumentalist in each group) and ask them to take a familiar song and play it on an instrument, giving it a vocal quality. Which instruments work best? Why?

4) Have students **perform** for each other.

Talk About It! Music teacher and From the Top collaborator Dr. Constance Barrett says, "All people can sing, even those who believe that they cannot (despite the myth of the 'tone deaf' - a phenomenon which is actually quite rare). All people are naturally musical in some way, whether or not they choose to express that musicianship. Whether we sing in the shower, along with the radio, clap our hands, sing hymns in church, tap out rhythms on the car dashboard, drum our fingers in time to a military band march, or work out to music, music is a part of all of our lives." Do you agree – is everyone musical?

Find out more!

About Ji-Yong Kim

Ji-Yong has been performing professionally since he was 10 years old. Visit his web site to find out more about his music and his career:

<http://www.ji-yong.com/index.php>

He also appeared on From the Top's radio show in 2006, when he was 15. You can listen to his performance and hear an interview with his professional manager at:

<http://www.fromthetop.org/Programs/Performers.cfm?pid=2174>

About being musical

Hear an interview with Dr. Oliver Sacks, author of the book *Musicophilia*, about the brain and music, on NPR, at:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88466148>

About Robert and Clara Schumann

Theirs is one of the great romantic matches of the 19th century, and is a story of music, passion, and tragedy. To read about their lives, try one of these biographies:

For grades 5-8: *Clara Schumann: Piano Virtuoso*, by Susannah Reich, published by Clarion Books, 1999 (ISBN-10: 0395891191)

For older readers: *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* by Nancy B. Reich, published by Cornell University Press, 2001 (ISBN-10: 0801486378)



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