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VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Workshop:

Learn a Sing-a-Long Song

Learn the call-and-response song "Lil' Liza Jane." You will also learn about the history of folk songs and their ties to African culture and the seasonal migrant working class, and be introduced to Pearl Primus, a Black dancer who carried out the traditions of African dance culture in America.

Teaching Artist:
Emmy Bean

Workshop duration: 25 - 45 minutes



Transcript

Hi! My name is Emmy Bean. I'm a singer and theatre artist, and I teach at Snow City Arts. My pronouns are she, her and hers. I'm so glad you've decided to have Snow City Arts in your room today. Feel free to stop or pause this workshop at any time. You are also welcome to come back to it later. Now, let's make some music!

[note on the harmonica]

[clapping and singing]

I know a gal that you don't know

Lil' Liza Jane

Way down south in Baltimore

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Come, my love, and live with me

Lil' Liza Jane

I will take good care of thee

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

"Lil' Liza Jane" takes the form of call and response. The call: one part, changes each time it's sung. The response: the other part, always stays the same. Let's listen and see if you can hear the difference.

[clapping and singing]

I know a gal that you don't know

Lil' Liza Jane

Transcript Continued

Way down south in Baltimore
Lil' Liza Jane

Hear it? "Lil' Liza Jane," the title of the song, is also the response. When we sing each part, maybe we can also come up with a movement. I like to do a movement that helps me keep the rhythm while I sing. Here's my movement for the call. I go:

[clapping in time and singing]

I know a gal what you don't know

[pause for response]

You could do a movement that also helps you keep the rhythm. Maybe you can clap, maybe you can tap your head or your shoulders or your nose or your belly. Or use any part of your body, big or small, to help you keep the rhythm and sing the song. Try your own movement this time, and let's sing the call:

[clapping in time and singing]

I know a gal that you don't know

[pause for response]

Nice! Now, let's make up a move for the response. I think my move would be **[makes a fist and opens it]**.

So it will sound like this **[sings with movement]**:

Lil' Liza Jane

So if I put them together, I'll go **[sings with movement]**:

I know a gal that you don't know

Lil' Liza Jane

Way down south in Baltimore

Lil' Liza Jane

Transcript Continued

Now, again, you can do any move you want for your response. This time, I'm going to do the moves, but I'm going to also sing the call. So, I'll leave room for you to do the response. Ready?

Here we go:

I know a gal that you don't know

[pause for response]

Way down south in Baltimore

[pause for response]

Good job!

Now, we're forgetting—here's one more part!

It goes:

*Oh, lil' Liza
Lil' Liza Jane*

Maybe I'll pick a little move to set us off on this part. I'll go: **[claps, extending one hand outwards afterward]**.

[singing with movements]

*Oh, lil' Liza
Lil' Liza Jane
Oh, lil' Liza
Lil' Liza Jane*

I like this move because it accents the downbeat. The downbeat is the first beat before we sing the “oh.”

*Oh, lil' Liza
Lil' Liza Jane*

Oh, lil' Liza

Transcript Continued

Lil' Liza Jane

It's one of the best songs of this song, I think. That little burst of energy that comes before the refrain. So pick a more of your own to find that little beat at the very beginning. And let's sing the whole thing together with our moves. Ready? Here we go!

One, two, one two three four!

[singing with movements]

I know a gal that you don't know

Lil' Liza Jane

Way down south in Baltimore

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Good job!

Does dancing or moving make it easier to sing the song? Let me keep the beat. You can keep the beat with me, and I'll tell you a little bit of the history of this song.

[clapping continues through Emmy's dialogue]

Back in the 1800s, when Black people were enslaved as laborers in America, "Lil' Liza Jane" was a popular song for dancing, singing, and entertainment after the work was done.

On some plantations, when the white owners allowed it, there would be fiddle-playing and music in the evenings. In the 1800s, "Lil' Liza Jane" was a popular song among freed Black laborers as well.

On the east coast of the US, menhaden fishing was a seasonal job that attracted Black laborers who would migrate from place to place for their work. Menhaden was a bony, inedible fish that was used for animal feed and fish oil.

Transcript Continued

Menhaden fishing was a difficult job. Like many jobs for seasonal migrant workers in the U.S., it involved hard labor and sometimes the white bosses would withhold their pay for their workers or abuse them. Workers were forced to be away from their families and homes for long stretches of time while they made their money.

Imagine hauling a fishing net full of menhaden with a huge group of people with you. This would be a very difficult task to accomplish altogether, without some sort of signal to do the repetitive difficult movement of hauling the net. This song, "Lil' Liza Jane," was sung by the workers to help them keep time together and to lift their spirits.

Soon, the song became well-known, and it was performed across the country in vaudeville and in minstrel shows. These were live performances of music and drama that were very popular through the U.S. during the 19th century.

In these shows, performers would sing, dance, play instruments, and tell jokes. Often, white performers would appear in blackface—a kind of makeup meant to make them look like African-Americans. This makeup was part of a costume that was intended to make fun of Black people, mocking their speech, their physicality, and their culture. Minstrel shows were openly racist, and widely accepted among white people as "good entertainment." It is important that we never, ever recreate this kind of performance, or any performance that mocks and insults people based on their race.

It is also important to remember that some of the oldest folk songs and children's songs, many of which are still sung today, first became popular on the stages of minstrel shows. The reason I tell you this today is that we believe that history must be remembered accurately, so that we never, ever, have to repeat it.

However, like many songs, poems, and other works of art, Black people found a way to revive, reuse, and carry them on in new ways. Here's what happened next.

In the 1920s, dancers like **Pearl Primus** started African dance companies in the United States that combined singing, dancing, and chanting in their performances. Remember how the Black menhaden fishermen would sing "Lil' Liza Jane" to help them haul the fishing nets? Singing and moving together are an important part of Black African traditions, in Africa and in America.

Pearl Primus was a dancer who carried on these traditions by studying the

Transcript Continued

traditional dances of African people in Liberia and Sierra Leone. One of the dances she learned and then taught to her students in America was *fangá*. When she danced and taught *fangá*, Pearl Primus would sing and chant the words she had learned to set the stage, to locate the dances in their place in history.

One of these chants went:

[singing to the tune of "Lil' Liza Jane"]

Funga alafia
Ashe ashe

Funga refers to the *fangá* dance, and *alafia* is a word in the Yórubá language that means "peace" or "welcome." *Ashe* is also a word in their Yórubá language meaning "so be it." It refers to the energy of creation, the spark of life. It became popular to dance *fangá* among African dance companies in the U.S.

So popular, in fact, that a dancer and drummer named **LaRocque Bey** came up with a song using the words that Pearl Primus used in her company.

The song became known as "Funga Alafia." The tune he chose was inspired by the song "Lil' Liza Jane." You may have heard this song sung, or you may have sung it at school at a religious service or another gathering of family friends or neighbors. This song, although it uses the words of an African language, is an African American song.

"Funga Alafia" is a song that is sung, danced, and moved to in many different ways throughout the United States. I'll sing you the version that I know. Maybe yours is different. And if you haven't heard it before, listen and see if you can tell how it's similar to "Lil' Liza Jane."

[clapping in time, singing to the tune of Lil' Liza Jane]

Funga alafia
Ashe ashe
Funga alafia
Ashe ashe
Funga alafia
Ashe ashe
Funga alafia

Transcript Continued

Ashe ashe

I know a gal that you don't know

Lil' Liza Jane

Way down south in Baltimore

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Funga alafia

Ashe ashe

Funga alafia

Ashe ashe

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

Oh, lil' Liza

Lil' Liza Jane

[music: "The Drum" by Tyrone, age 9]

[BLOOPERS BEGIN]

Sometimes, the response happens without words. It can be clapped, it can be a series of notes that are played, and it doesn't have to be in... **[humming]**

[bleep]

Call and response is a very common... kind of songs...

[bleeps]

Any move you like. But here, how I make a... **[wails]**

[bleep]

The call is the part that you hear first. The call comes in the beginning. It's the

Transcript Continued

part that you hear first. The call comes in the beginning...**[gurgles]**

[bleep]

To help us sing it even more...

[bleep]

The teleprompter is going too fast for me to read it now.

If you are interested in receiving school credit

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Contact us at programs@snowcityarts.org if you have questions, would like to offer feedback, or would like to continue working with us virtually.



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