

Telling Marilyn Monroe's Story Through Music

Difficulty:

AVERAGE

Date of release:

Friday 2nd December 2011

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about the music in a new film about a brief period in the life of Marilyn Monroe. What do we learn about the movie? Where was it filmed? When does the action take place? How does the music contribute to the story told in the film?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = The film "My Week with Marilyn".

1. What do we learn in the report about the music in "My Week with Marilyn"?
 - The score was composed by Conrad Pope.
 - The music was inspired by big band music.
 - Pope used as his base a theme song written by a French composer, Alexandre Desplat.
 - A simple theme is used over and over, in different guises.
 - Writing the music for this movie was a "dream project" for Pope.
2. What else do we learn about the movie?
 - It takes place in 1956 in Britain.
 - It is about a brief romance between Marilyn Monroe and a production assistant on the film that Monroe was filming.
 - Monroe was filming a movie with Sir Laurence Olivier at the time.
 - The cast and crew filmed the movie in London, while the music was produced in Hollywood.
 - It stars Michelle Williams in the role of Marilyn Monroe.
3. Can you remember some of the film-related terms from the report?
 - cast: the actors in a film.
 - crew: the non-actors who work on a film.
 - scene: short segments in a film.
 - set: the place where a movie is filmed.
 - score: the music that goes with a film.
 - theme song: the main song that is associated with a film.

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Cultural icons.

1. Marilyn Monroe is very famous in the US, and in many other countries as well. Is she famous in your country? What do people generally think of her? What do you know about her, her work, her life, her death?
2. Who are the cultural icons in your country? What are they famous for? What other aspects of their lives are people interested in?
3. Are you familiar with any other Hollywood icons? Do you have a particular star that you are very interested in? How about music stars?
4. Which famous person, dead or alive, would you most like to meet? What would you ask them? What would you tell them? Who would be the first person you told after meeting this person?

OR, Topic = Big band music.

Find out all you can about big band music and give an oral presentation of your findings to a partner or to your teacher. See if you can share a recording with them.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Stars and time.

1. Marilyn Monroe died of a drug overdose when she was only 36. What do you think her life would have been like if she had lived to be an old woman? What stories would she have had to tell? Do you think she would have had children and grandchildren? Would she have continued to act in movies?
2. What other famous people have died "before their time", when they were still young? Here are some links to get you started:
<http://www.grumpychimp.com/stuff/famous-people-who-died-young.php>
<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=4174733&page=1#.TtODHUDqUxA>
<http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/famous-died-young.shtml>
3. Many movie stars and musicians hit their peak when they are young, and then their careers go down over time. Can you think of any famous actors or musicians who "disappeared off the radar" after a certain age? Why do you think this happens? Is it more common in some countries than others? Is it more common for men or women, or is it the same? Do you think this trend is due to something particular about these stars, or is it more linked to conditions or changes in society?

Audioscript

It was 1956 and a young Marilyn Monroe was a sensation in Britain, there to film with Laurence Olivier, another kind of icon. In "My Week with Marilyn", the sexy blonde is played by Michelle Williams.

[music]

Hollywood composer Conrad Pope was asked to score the movie's music.

On the set in Britain, the cast and crew recreated the earlier era, telling the story of a brief romance between Monroe and a young production assistant.

At his piano in Hollywood, Conrad Pope worked to capture the feeling of the fifties as he composed the score, working from a theme song by French composer Alexandre Desplat.

"Marilyn Monroe, of course, is this iconic figure and so that allows you to have all this sort of very grand music. She's a very exuberant figure in terms of her... at least, the reaction she elicits from men. And so it allows you for some joyous music as well*."

The film's score is inspired by the big band sound. It varies from scene to scene.

"You take a simple theme and you can put it through a lot of different guises, and that's what we've done."

Pope is a veteran arranger and conductor who has worked on dozens of major movies. As a composer, this is his biggest film score to date.

He says this richly textured film was ideal for a composer.

"Yeah, I think for anyone that's a musician in Hollywood, it was kind of a dream project."

He says the music helps tell the story of "My Week with Marilyn" and helps viewers understand Monroe's brief and tragic life. She died in 1962 from a drug overdose, at age 36.

Mike O'Sullivan, VOA News, Los Angeles.

* The speaker should say: *"And so it allows for some joyous music as well."*