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## Funk Pedagogy: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Practical Study of Funk Music in Dayton, Ohio

Caleb Vanden Eynden  
*Oakwood City Schools*

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# Funk Pedagogy

*Caleb G. Vanden Eynden*

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This presentation represents a portion of the author’s 2020 honors thesis from the University of Dayton; to read the full thesis, see [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp\\_theses/289/](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/uhp_theses/289/).

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I see myself as being responsible for maintaining this history while still staying in tune with the current music scene. Educators need to be open to hearing the voices of young musicians because the funk in the ’80s is a different kind of funk now.

— Deron Bell, personal communication, July 16, 2019

In an interview with Dayton Funk musician and pedagogue Deron Bell, he told me, “Music is the draw, but there is also social-emotional learning incorporated” (July 16, 2019). Most of the time, students in music classes *want* to be there. Every once in a while, music educators will have students who are in their class to fulfill an arts elective requirement and move on, but chances are students who stick with it continue because they are enjoying that musical experience. Music teachers should use that motivation to their advantage and structure classes in such a way that students are gaining valuable knowledge and experiences through music. Bell also said there is “social-emotional learning” in music classes. Teachers must recognize the impact music

can have on students outside of the classroom and in other areas of life. By designing music curriculum that teaches more than just the music, teachers are providing lasting, impactful experiences for students. This section outlines my own philosophy on funk pedagogy developed in conversation with those I interviewed and provides an example of a funk unit that can be taught with a secondary instrumental jazz ensemble.

### **Addressing Issues of Race, Gender, and Sex in the Classroom**

Kate Fitzpatrick-Harnish, associate professor of music education at the University of Michigan, refers to culturally relevant pedagogy in her book, *Urban Music Education: a Practical Guide for Teachers*. This method of pedagogy takes into consideration the needs of students based on their environment.

A teacher must have a fundamental understanding of each student's background, family of origin, culture, and particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests if he or she is to be successful. ... Our greatest opportunity for improving the types of educational experiences that we provide students lies in taking the time to better understand who they are, what they know, and how we can tailor our curriculum and pedagogy to meet their needs. (Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 38–39)

Fitzpatrick-Harnish argues that it is the teacher's job to become aware of the students' environment and understand that these students may differ in terms of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. She also points out that students are constantly changing. Even if a teacher has been in the same school for a number of years, the environment and community around it will always be changing, and so will the students.

An example of this change has been seen nearly everywhere across the greater Dayton region from the 1970s to present day. Part II addressed how the music industry changed throughout the latter half of the 20th century, and with that, so did Dayton. Dayton suburbs grew in size and wealth while many Daytonians moved out of the downtown, urban neighborhoods. This shift in population directly affected the

student demographics across the greater Dayton area. Dayton schools and their teachers had to recognize this turnover and adapt their curriculum and pedagogy accordingly.

The beginning of this final section will discuss how teachers should address these demographic issues of race, gender, and sex in the music classroom, specifically when learning and teaching funk. Here I will draw upon readings from educational theorists and pedagogues such as Fitzpatrick-Harnish and Zaretta Hammond. While Dayton funk will be used as the main example for this section, it is important to note that this pedagogy can be applied to several other aspects of music education.

## **Race and Culture**

Traditional funk *is* a black music genre. So, how do educators teach this music to diverse student populations in a way that is both relevant and culturally appropriate? Similar to Fitzpatrick-Harnish who touched on culturally relevant pedagogy, Zaretta Hammond believes in culturally responsive teaching, which she defines in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain* as follows:

An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning. (Hammond, 15)

Hammond argues further that proper culturally responsive education can strengthen students' connection with the school and its community. Teachers are responsible for providing students with the proper tools to make these connections in a manner that is both effective and appropriate. But how do educators establish the knowledge and

credibility to teach funk music to students of all different cultures, especially when they themselves may not come from that culture?

It is important for the teacher to understand that, unless they grew up during the funk era and were an active participant in this music culture, they will always be a secondary resource for teaching funk. This means that the educator must recognize that, no matter how much they listen to funk music, practice funk music, read about funk music, or talk about funk music, they will never be a primary resource or someone who actually grew up with this music as a part of their identity and culture. However, this does not mean that educator is forbidden from ever being able to teach funk. Although many traditional funk purists may argue this form of education can never be authentic enough, there are several ways for teachers to familiarize themselves with funk music.

Educators can immerse themselves in this musical cultural by exposing and familiarizing themselves with traditional funk as much as possible. “Culturally responsive teaching isn’t a set of engagement strategies you use on students,” writes Hammond:

Instead, think of it as a mindset, a way of looking at the world. Too often, we focus on only doing something to culturally and linguistically diverse students without changing ourselves, especially when our students are dependent learners who are not able to access their full academic potential on their own. Instead, culturally responsive teaching is about being a different type of teacher who is in relationship with students and the content in a different way. (Hammond, 52)

Here, Hammond discusses how educators can prepare to become a culturally responsive practitioner. She places emphasis on being a “different type of teacher” who, essentially, works above and beyond what is expected of them in order to fully immerse themselves in the culture of the students and the culture that is being taught in the classroom. Educators can continue doing this by interacting with primary cultural resources.

One of the ways I was able to do this was by interviewing Dayton funk artists to hear their perspective, attending local funk concerts and

observing their performance practice, and by reading historical research on Dayton and its musical culture. Although I will never be a primary resource for Dayton funk music and culture, these experiences provide me with a great amount of knowledge and experience when teaching in front of a music classroom, no matter what the culture or background of the students may be. This also helped me establish connections in the Dayton community with primary resources, allowing me to use them in teaching practices by bringing in guest artists or experts to talk about the music and culture with students.

Teachers must be aware of the cultural practices associated with race and the impact it may have on the music and its community. Allowing students to engage with the music and history that is a part of their own community and its identity opens up several opportunities for personal, musical, and cultural growth. Using culturally responsive teaching, educators are able to appropriately and effectively address these issues of race and culture in music.<sup>1</sup> However, there are more issues to address than only race and culture with funk music. In order to properly teach funk to students, educators must also be aware of the issues that gender and sex play in the music as well as in classroom pedagogy.

## **Gender and Sex**

In her book chapter “Living the Funk: Lifestyle, Lyricism, and Lessons in Modern Contemporary Art of Black Women ” (*The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture*, edited by Tony Bolden), Carmen Phelps discusses how many black artists have fallen victim to a sense of conformity, meaning they must dress a certain way, act a certain way, or perform a certain way in order to attract mainstream audiences in funk:

In much the same way that the concept of black art of the sixties and seventies was popularized by a heterosexual, oftentimes misogynistic male ideology, so too is the mainstream music industry today. Although

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<sup>1</sup> How to teach black music to different races (white, black, etc.) and how to teach this music as a white teacher are addressed later on in my own reflection of teaching this funk unit.

the goal of black artists was not necessarily to capitalize on or appeal to the sensibilities of “mainstream” audiences, their projects ostensibly limited the agency and legitimacy of, for example, gay and lesbian voices that were constructed to be fundamentally threatening to the black nation-building project. (Phelps, 185)

Phelps argues that during the funk era there was a target audience, or rather a target theme, that the music was written and performed towards. When looking at the actual performers in funk groups, nearly every band, especially in Dayton, was made up of all male artists. As discussed in Part I, common lyrical themes in traditional funk included love, sex, and dancing, all of which were often written from the perspective of heterosexual men addressing heterosexual women. Not only does this notion often exclude LGBTQ+ voices, but it creates this overarching implication of male dominance. Females were used as objects not only in lyrics, but also in performance practices: as flashy, sex icons sometimes viewed as objects or possessions that belonged to the popular, male superstar at the front of the stage. However, these themes are a part of funk’s identity as a music genre that helped lead to its national success. Phelps writes,

The mainstream success of contemporary black artists—or any artist for that matter—may depend more upon their visual marketability and commercial appeal than their actual vocal or lyrical talents, since their physical embodiment of popular ideals is what is most accessible to today’s consumers. (Phelps, 183)

Many consumers during the funk era (and many of today’s consumers) wanted this type of glamour and sex in the music that they listened to. This is still seen all over the music industry today—in country, rap, hip-hop, R&B, pop and several other genres.

An early example of a song that explicitly refers to sex during the funk era is James Brown’s “Sex Machine” (performance from Italy in

1971, discussed earlier in Part I: Wasaexpress, 1971).<sup>2</sup> All of the performers are male, with the exception of one female, dancing up on a pedestal at the back of the stage. It is important to notice that she is not a musician, meaning she is not playing an instrument with the rest of the band, but rather a supplemental background dancer. Her role in this performance adds nothing to the auditory experience of the music, only the visual experience.

In the early 1970s, female funk artists such as Betty Davis, Chaka Khan, Donna Summer, and Jean Knight proved they could create songs that are explicitly about sex with more than their visual presence but also by using their voice. Similar to how James Brown used his masculine, assertive voice to attract some of his mainstream female audiences,<sup>3</sup> Betty Davis was able to tantalize her male audiences with her musky, romanticizing voice in songs such as “Anti-Love Song” (1973). Acclaimed as one of her most popular hits, this song begins with Davis drawing out the words, “No, I don’t wanna love you,” with a hoarse, strained voice. Her vocal style throughout the song remains low, raspy, and lackadaisical, using pitch-bending to create a sensual tension between Davis and the listener. Although Davis was also known for her eccentric live performances, her voice on the recording alone is enough to tempt her audience with her sexual, feminine appeal. Songs like this may be difficult to integrate into classroom pedagogy due to the level of appropriateness for young students. Teaching funk has the potential of uncovering deeper conversations about race, gender, income inequality, etc. with our students and therefore could have risks as educators. Teachers should carefully study and reflect on the lyrical content and historical background of a song and the artist before teaching it to their students.

Recognizing the diversity of race, culture, gender, and sex within funk music plays a critical role when teaching and learning traditional funk. Teachers must be aware and understand the context of both the subject matter being taught and the environment which it is being taught

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pvIarW3xHg>.

<sup>3</sup> James Brown was often seen as a sex icon in the male music industry with his lyrical content and physical performance. Vincent refers to him as “the representation of the total and complete *black man*” including “the sexual blank man” (Vincent, 8).

in (students, school, community, etc.). This understanding helps provide the teacher with knowledge and context as a secondary source in order to appropriately teach funk music. This contextual understanding should serve as the basis of teaching a curriculum on traditional funk.

### **Developing a Funk Pedagogy**

Deron Bell and I realized we share similar philosophies on the importance of music education and his words have helped me to form my own philosophy along with knowledge I have gained through reading authors such as Vincent, Bolden, and Sarath. This pedagogy centers around teaching three main objectives: 1) the ingredients of funk, 2) the history and culture of funk (specifically in Dayton), and 3) creativity. These objectives are also meant to correlate with the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) that is currently utilized at the collegiate level for young educators during their student teaching or clinical experience. The K-12 Performing Arts edTPA requires teachers to demonstrate how students are engaged in developing knowledge and skills, contextual understandings, and/or artistic expression. These objectives should all directly relate to the central focus of the unit being taught.

### **Ingredients of Funk**

Learning the ingredients of funk helps students understand the musical style and should be an essential part of any funk curriculum. These ingredients, explained in Part I, are: instrumentation, form, groove, and vocals. Students must be able to identify the common instruments used in traditional funk music. They must also be able to listen for and diagram the form of traditional funk songs. Groove is one of the most important ingredients to teach in a funk curriculum, especially if this unit is taught to an instrumental ensemble. Students should be able to understand concepts such as syncopated sixteenth-note rhythms, blue scales, funk riffs and licks, and should be able to understand the importance of repetition and how it relates to groove. It is important to note that most grooves should be taught by ear because that is how it was done during the funk era. Lastly, students should learn about the vocal styles and lyrics used in traditional funk music. This includes concepts

such as call-and-response, the role of the emcee, falsetto singing, and lyrical content. This objective directly relates to students' development of knowledge and skills in the K-12 Performing Arts edTPA.

## **History and Culture of Funk**

The history and culture of funk provides important context for this musical genre and students, especially in the Dayton region, should understand the musical background of their community. Responding to issues of race, gender, and music within the community will help students grow as individuals both in and out of the music classroom. Engaging in this style of learning will not only help the student, but the school and its community as well by helping to create a more culturally aware society. Issues of race and culture in pedagogy are addressed later on in this section.

Students must also learn about characteristics that are specific to the traditional funk style of the 1970s and '80s such as Dayton funk (i.e. students will learn about Dayton funk bands, their music, and what the environment and culture looked like in Dayton during the funk era) and general performance practices. Students will also learn about where funk music came from and how it has influenced other genres and artists in the music industry (e.g. hip-hop). This objective directly relates to students' development of contextual understandings in the K-12 Performing Arts edTPA.

## **Creativity**

The last main objective of this funk pedagogy is creativity. This unit is meant to provide students with a number of hands-on opportunities to create their own funk music. While it is important to understand and replicate traditional funk music of the 1970s and '80s, it is also important for students to have their own creative input. Students will have the chance to solo using funk improvisational strategies taught in class as well as adapt the form of funk songs, similar to what James Brown had done in his music. If skill development and time allow, students may even have the chance to write their own funk. Creativity is an essential part of the funk genre because it combines traditional funk with modern ideas that students can bring to the table. This objective directly relates to

students' development of artistic expression in the K-12 Performing Arts edTPA.

## Assessment

The three objectives (the ingredients of funk, the history and culture of funk, and creativity) are the foundation of the curriculum outlined in this project. In order to assess whether or not students have successfully achieved these three objectives, I have created a rubric, found in Appendix I, that addresses introductory, intermediate, and advanced understandings of each objective.

During this unit, instructors should assess students using three types of assessment: 1) diagnostic (before), 2) formative (during), and 3) summative (after).<sup>4</sup> The diagnostic assessment is designed for the teacher to find out what the students already know. This can happen either formally using an individual written assignment, or informally through a class discussion. For example, a teacher could ask the class the following questions at the start of a funk unit:

1. What do you think of when I say the word “funk?”
2. How many of you have heard that Dayton is the funk capital of the world?
3. What musical characteristics make funk different than jazz? What characteristics make it similar?
4. Can you think of any famous funk bands from the 1970s and '80s? Who performs funk today?

If students are struggling to answer any of these questions, it might be a good idea to help them out by showing them examples of traditional funk. Listening to nationally recognizable hits of famous funk bands (e.g. Earth, Wind & Fire, Sly and the Family Stone, Kool and the Gang, the Commodores, KC and the Sunshine Band, Wild Cherry, and James Brown) could help students make a connection between what they already know and what they are about to learn in this unit.

Formative and summative assessment tools should be used throughout the unit in order to assess examples of student work. Many of the ingredients of funk (knowledge and skills) can be assessed

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<sup>4</sup> These are three types of assessment referred to in the K-12 Performing Arts edTPA.

throughout the unit by paying close attention to how quickly and effectively a student is learning and performing funk. This can be done informally simply by listening for specific students while they play in class, or this can be done formally by scheduling playing tests and hearing each student play individually. For example, a teacher could schedule brief playing tests where each student must individually play a blues scale from memory and be given a score (zero to five). Assessing creativity (artistic expression) through improvisation can be done in a similar fashion. These tasks will most likely be assessed using formative assessment.

Assessing students' understanding of the history and culture of funk (contextual understanding) can be a difficult task to measure. In order to properly assess this, I recommend using a form of summative assessment, such as a written reflection, that demonstrates what students have learned. This reflection can be a worksheet that is completed at the end of the unit with several prompts and questions, such as:

1. List four characteristics of traditional funk.
2. Name one Dayton funk band and list at least one of their songs.
3. How does this song use characteristics of traditional funk?
4. List two examples of performance practice in traditional funk.
5. List one example of how funk music is still preserved in Dayton today.
6. How has this unit increased your understanding of race and its involvement with music?
7. How does music play a role in the development of community?

If completed at the end of the unit, students should have already learned and discussed the topic of each question listed above. A summative assessment tool that includes these questions can be found in Appendix H. This worksheet is designed to assess students' understanding of community music and performance practice.

### **Future Directions**

This curriculum can be expanded in great detail and include several other elements and ideas to support the repertoire. For example, have the ensemble try alternative rehearsal and performance setups. Should performers stand or sit? Should everyone be facing the audience or should some performers face each other? If there are vocalists, where

will they stand? How and where will the rhythm section be set up? What are different ways to set up the ensemble that differ from a standard big band? Having students experiment with alternative rehearsal and performance setups will also help keep students engaged throughout the unit as well as encourage them to be creative and think critically.

Another important element to incorporate is memorization. Traditional funk was always performed from memory in order to create a more engaging, impressive performance. It is often easy for students to become buried in the sheet music and not be aware of the other musicians and audiences that surround them. Memorizing sheet music or learning songs by rote (also memorized) will help with funk performance practice. Memorization is also a great way for students to thoroughly understand form and song structure.

One last topic to consider is how funk pedagogy plays a role in jazz pedagogy. A funk unit, such as the one outlined here, will most likely take place with an instrumental jazz ensemble where the primary repertoire choice is swing music with a mix of Latin, blues, rock, and funk. If you are starting an ensemble with young musicians who are playing in a jazz band for the first time, it may be helpful to start with the funk style instead of the swing style. Since funk music is not swung, it may be easier for students to play this music from the start. Many of the rhythms used in notated funk music are rhythms that young musicians are already familiar with. Teaching funk songs may also be an easy way to get students used to playing in a new ensemble due to the simplicity of the music. There are many easy funk songs that use only one scale, one key signature, and have several repeated passages. Even soloing and improvisation can be easier to teach since there is less of an emphasis on chord changes within funk music. Using music that students can already comprehend is a great way for students to feel successful early on in a jazz ensemble.

The following section will introduce an example of what a funk unit may look like when done with a secondary instrumental jazz ensemble. This example bridges together two works by James Brown: “Make It Funky” and “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag.” Two lesson plans (one for each piece) and an assessment rubric can found in Appendices D and F.

## Lesson Plan 1: “Make It Funky”

I have designed this lesson to get students playing funk music quickly and successfully. With only two simple grooves in the entire song, a main groove and a bridge, this song can be taught completely by rote. Students will learn more about the funk style, James Brown’s performance practices, and strategies for funk improvisation.

This James Brown classic, recorded in 1971, is an excellent example of a traditional funk tune. Although Brown is not from Dayton, his music is still quite similar to the Dayton funk sound considering most Dayton bands were heavily influenced by the JB’s. “Make It Funky” is a great song to do with an instrumental ensemble due to the emphasis on the horn parts. Similar to what Brown does in his song “Sex Machine,” there is no strict form to this piece. After a brief vocal introduction, the band comes in on the main groove. The horns play a one-bar unison riff three times, then rest for three bars. The rhythm section keeps a simple, consistent groove throughout, with the bass and organ<sup>5</sup> improvising while the horns are resting.

### Music Example 1: Main Groove Lick of “Make It Funky” (Concert Pitch)



This six-measure pattern (three on, three off) is repeated until the bandleader, James Brown, signals a count-off to go into the bridge. The bridge is a slightly more complicated four-bar groove that uses three rhythmic patterns spread across the bass and horns. The rest of the rhythm section switches to a groove that varies slightly from the main groove.

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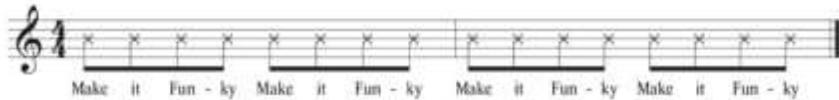
<sup>5</sup> James Brown recorded using an electric organ, but this can be performed with a piano or electric keyboard instead.

## Music Example 2: Bridge of “Make It Funky” (Concert Pitch)



Once Brown has decided it is time to go back to the main groove, he will signal a count-off, but instead of going straight into the first groove, there is a two-measure break (transition) where the whole band chants “make it funky” four times before landing on the downbeat of the main groove again.

## Music Example 3: Break (Transition) of “Make It Funky”



This lesson plan is one example of something that can be used in a unit of teaching funk music to an instrumental jazz ensemble and can be used as an introduction to traditional funk. A full lesson plan for teaching “Make It Funky” as part of a funk unit can be found in Appendix D along with a transcription of the chart in Appendix E. It is important to note that this part of the unit will take multiple lessons to teach.

Placing an emphasis on funk culture in the very first lesson of a funk unit allows teachers and students to form a better understanding of this music. Not only does this first step provide context for the students, it also provides the teacher with a diagnostic assessment of what the students already know. As stated earlier, teaching funk can be different depending on the community and environment it is being taught in.

After a brief introduction to funk music, students will learn the concert D blues scale. If students are already familiar with the blue scale (e.g. the concert B-flat blues scale), then learning it in concert D can

serve as a smooth transition from what they already know, to what they are about to learn.

### Music Example 4: Concert D Blues Scale



This scale will be the foundation for learning the horn licks to “Make It Funky” as well as improvisational strategies later on in the unit.

Before diving into the rote teaching of “Make It Funky,” start by listening to the 1971 recording of the song. This will allow students to start using their ear to listen for instrumentation, recurring licks, and other aspects of groove. Students should also use this time to listen for the form of the piece by using these questions to guide their listening:

1. How many sections are there?
2. How many times do you hear the main groove lick?
3. When does the band switch to the bridge?
4. When and how does the band switch back to the main groove?

The class may need to listen to the song more than once to fully understand the form of the piece. This analysis exercise could also be done in small groups.

Now that the students have had an introduction to funk (a basic understanding of history, culture, and analysis), learned the concert D blues scale, and diagramed the form of the song, they are ready to start learning to play it themselves. If possible, the rhythm section should learn the main groove and the bridge in sectionals so that it does not slow down a full band rehearsal. The drums and guitar should keep a consistent groove. It is important that these two parts remain constant in order to replicate the original recording. In order to play this groove properly, repetition is a must. The bass has more freedom with their part, as long as the bassist lands on “the one” with the root (D) in every measure. The organ (piano or keyboard) has the freedom to improvise in D minor or with the concert D blues scale. During the main groove, it is

suggested that the keyboardist comps<sup>6</sup> for the first three measures while the horns are playing and then improvises during the next three while the horns are resting.

When teaching the main groove lick and bridge by rote, everyone can learn each part, including the rhythm section (with the exception of the drummer who should keep a consistent beat while playing the licks in time). Keep in mind that some of the longer, more complex licks (e.g. the main groove lick) will have to be broken down a few notes at a time in order for students to fully grasp the lick. While teaching these licks, it is important to address the funk style (articulations, tone, groove, etc.) and to informally assess these concepts throughout the learning process.

Once students have successfully learned and memorized each lick, they can start putting the piece together. A transcription, found in Appendix E, provides assignments for which instrument should play each lick. After teaching the “make it funky” break (transition) and deciding how the bandleader will cue the ensemble to move to the next section, the ensemble can begin to play the whole song and start to feel comfortable transitioning altogether. The bandleader could be the teacher, or a student if they feel comfortable (this should be decided early on). Now students can start learning and implementing funk improvisational strategies: using notes of the blues scale, syncopated rhythms, repeated licks, offbeat accents, call-and-response, etc.

Before this piece is ready to be performed, students should listen and watch another performance of James Brown in London from 2003.<sup>7</sup> This time, students should identify aspects of performance practice using these questions to guide them:

1. What are the similarities and differences between this 2003 live performance and the 1971 recording?
2. How is the form different? Is this performance longer or shorter than the recording?
3. Is this version in the same key?
4. How does the tempo compare to the recorded version?

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<sup>6</sup> “Comping” is a term used by jazz pianists for “accompanying” or “complementing” the ensemble or musician by playing the chords, supporting to the groove both rhythmically and harmonically.

<sup>7</sup> Uploaded by Dutchsoulman, 2010,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0F1QlhgNiY>.

5. What visual elements does the band add to the performance?

How can we add these elements to our performance?

The purpose of this video is to get students thinking deeper about performance practice and how they can make their performance more similar to traditional funk. From here, the ensemble will need to decide how they want their performance to be structured. What will the form be? Who will solo? When will they solo? Who will lead? Are there any visual elements to add? How will the song end? The recording ends with a fade out; however, the live video ends by transitioning into the next song. The ensemble will need to figure out how to end their performance of this piece.

Once these details are decided, the ensemble should be ready for their performance. A detailed lesson plan that explains each step further can be found in Appendix D. The following lesson plan (2) is designed to follow this lesson (1). Ensembles may work on both pieces simultaneously; however, the unit should begin with “Make It Funky,” and both funk pieces should be performed around the same time so that students can reflect on the differences of learning by ear vs. notation.

### **Lesson Plan 2: “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag”**

The purpose of this lesson plan is to teach students more about traditional funk culture and show students a different way of learning funk by notation instead of by ear. Recorded in 1966, “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” was one of the first funk songs. Brown abandoned the traditional verse-and-chorus song structure and replaced it with sections that repeated one chord, resulting in a dangerously addictive groove. This was also one of the first songs to put the emphasis on “the one” rather than the backbeat. These new musical ideas go hand in hand with Brown’s lyrics. The words “papa’s got a brand new bag” simply mean that “papa” (probably James Brown himself) has a new interest or “thing” he is into. The rest of the lyrics in the song rattle off new, funky dance moves like “the Jerk,” “the Fly,” the Monkey,” and “the Mashed Potatoes.” The national success of this song led to Brown being even more experimental with his band, shifting away from traditional R&B and creating what is now known as traditional funk, popular in the 1970s.

This piece, arranged by Mark Taylor and published by Hal Leonard in 2001, is meant to be taught after “Make It Funky” has been introduced

in Lesson Plan 1. A full lesson plan for teaching “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” as part of a funk unit can be found in Appendix F. It is important to note that this lesson plan will also span over the course of multiple days or lessons depending on ensemble skill level.

Bringing in a guest artist (e.g. someone like Deron Bell) could be a great way to start this unit. Before even getting to the music, the ensemble can engage in a discussion about Dayton funk, the funk style, and performance practice with a musician who has experienced traditional funk firsthand. Since the ensemble should already know “Make It Funky,” the students and guest artist can use the piece as an example to demonstrate improvisational strategies, reinforce characteristics of the funk style, and put it in context with the rest of funk culture. The ideal guest would be someone like Deron Bell who has grown up in Dayton, lives an active life as a funk musician, and specializes in teaching funk. The overall purpose of bringing in a guest like this is to reinforce what students have been learning in class and hopefully inspire them to learn more about funk music and culture.

To transition from “Make It Funky” to “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” students should begin learning the concert F blues scale. Since they already know the concert D blues scale, transposing it into the key of F should be a fairly easy transition.

### **Music Example 5: Concert F Blues Scale**



This is also a good time to informally assess if students have a clear understanding of the blues scale. Allowing students to figure out what notes are in the concert F blues scale on their own will show whether or not they understand the relationship between each blues scale. The concert F blues scale will serve as the foundation for many of the passages seen in “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” as well as the solo section that will be taught by rote.

Next, the ensemble should listen to the 1966 recording of “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag.” Students should listen for the ingredients of funk they learned about in “Make It Funky” (instrumentation, form, groove,

and vocals). This is also a good time to go over the elements of funk that James Brown used and how this piece served as a transition from R&B to traditional funk. Looking at the music for “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” the students should begin to identify similarities and differences with how it compares to “Make It Funky” and other jazz or funk charts they may be working on.

Now it is time to start playing the chart. Have the ensemble read through the piece, but leave out the solo section (measures 38–73). Measures 1–37 and 74–86 should be rehearsed similar to how the ensemble would learn a typical jazz chart. Work on individual and ensemble skills such as notes, rhythms, style, balance, intonation, etc. Once the ensemble has a basic understanding of the written notation of the chart, it is time to start learning the solo section.

For the purposes of this lesson plan, the written solo section will not be used. Have the students listen to the James Brown recording once more, while trying to follow along in their music. They will notice that their arrangement is not identical to Brown’s form, instrumentation, etc. Have the students think critically about the differences by asking the following questions:

1. Which parts of the song are similar in form?
2. Where in the music does the arranger write a new section?
3. How does the arranger change the instrumentation? Which instruments have the melody and who are they supposed to be replicating from the original recording?
4. Are the two versions in the same key?
5. Are there any grooves or sections in the original recording that are missing from the arrangement?

Students should identify the following:

1. Measures 1–26 are similar to the original recording.
2. The arranger writes a new section for measures 26–38 and 74–84.

3. Since there is no vocalist, the arranger gives the melody line to the tenor saxes and first and second trombones.<sup>8</sup>
4. The two versions are not in the same key (original is in E, arrangement is in F).
5. The second main groove in the original recording is missing from the arrangement.

In order to make this arrangement similar to the original recording, this lesson plan has the ensemble ignore the written solo section and replace it with the second main groove from Brown’s version. Since this groove is not written into the arrangement anywhere, students should learn this by rote. Luckily, this groove is only one measure long and can be repeated for as long as necessary. This is a great substitute for the written solo section because it stays on one chord the entire time, making it easy for students to solo using the concert F blues scale taught at the beginning of the lesson. Once this groove has been taught by rote, the form of the piece will look as follows:

m. 1–37 – solo section groove – m. 74–86 (including  
D.S. al Coda)

The horn part to the solo section groove has been transcribed below in concert pitch:

**Music Example 6: Solo Section Groove  
of “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag”**



Now that the entire piece has been put together and rehearsed, students should watch the live performance of “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag”

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<sup>8</sup> To go deeper with students’ critical thinking, ask them why the arranger chose these instruments to play the vocal line. It is most likely because the tenor sax and trombone have the closest range and timbre to Brown’s voice.

from 1965.<sup>9</sup> Students should think about the following questions as they watch:

1. How is this piece similar or different from the original recording?
2. What aspects of performance practice can be found?
3. How does the tempo of the live performance compare to that of the recording?
4. Are there any characteristics of Dayton funk found in this performance?

After taking time to reflect on this performance, it is time for the ensemble to start figuring out details for their own performance (tempo, soloists, visuals, form, etc.), similar to how they did at the end of the “Make It Funky” lesson.

At the conclusion of this unit, students will engage in a class discussion of race and community impact on funk music. During this conversation, the teacher and students should ask questions and reflect on what they have learned and how it connects to funk. After this conversation, students will fill out a summative assessment worksheet, outlining the contextual understandings they learned along the way. Question number five on this worksheet can be used to help guide the class discussion at the end of the unit. For the summative assessment, they will be asked to identify Dayton funk bands, their music, and their impact on the Dayton community. They will also identify performance practices of traditional funk music to show their understanding of this specific music genre. This assessment worksheet as well as a unit rubric can be found in the Appendices H and I.

### **Furthering Funk Pedagogy**

The following section outlines several activities that can be done as part of a funk curriculum in addition to rehearsing and performing funk repertoire. While many activities focus on topics of Dayton funk specifically, some of them bridge traditional funk with contemporary music. The purpose of these supplemental lessons is to further engage students in their music learning by breaking out of the standard routine of

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<sup>9</sup> Uploaded by ‘00s Grits & Soul, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMoEXGbduc0>.

rehearsing and these activities should be applicable to communities outside of Dayton as well.

### **Guest Artists**

Bringing in funk experts as guest artists can help reinforce the content taught in class as well as help inform the teacher. Since teachers are often secondary sources for teaching different music styles and cultures, bringing in someone who is a primary source (e.g. someone who grew up in Dayton during the funk era, or a working funk musician in one's own community) can further enhance students' understanding of funk music and culture. When planning lessons, it is recommended that a guest is brought in after the funk unit has been introduced and students have a basic understanding of the music. This way, students will have had time to reflect on what they have learned and can come up with specific questions for the guest to enhance students' critical thinking skills.

If the guest is an established funk musician, they can also perform with the class to help inspire students' creativity and musicality. With the example funk curriculum outlined earlier in this section, a good time to bring in a guest would be after the ensemble has learned "Make It Funky" by rote. Then, when the guest comes in, the artist will be able to solo for the band while they are all playing along. Students can learn new improvisational strategies and gain professional feedback on the spot. Finally, this experience can emphasize the importance of music within a community by connecting the concepts learned in class with a practical application of their community's musical style and culture.

### **Group Projects**

Having students work together to learn more about funk can further students' learning outside of the classroom. Students can work in small groups (approximately three to five people) and research one aspect of traditional funk. This could include a further exploration of the funk style by looking more into a specific characteristic of funk (instrumentation, form, groove, or vocals) or students could research a specific local funk band. Students can also choose to analyze recordings or videos, attend local concerts, or even compose their own music. The purpose of this

project is for the students to learn more about a topic that interests them as well as share their knowledge with the rest of the class so other students can benefit from their research as well. Allowing students to select their own topic (with approval from the teacher) encourages creativity and will hopefully increase their interest in learning more about funk.

### **Dayton Funk Bands and National Funk History**

In addition to students possibly researching and presenting on Dayton funk groups, the teacher can also give brief daily history lessons on various Dayton bands. This can help establish routine and provide a theme for each lesson. These brief lessons should be no longer than five to ten minutes, depending on how much time the teacher wants to leave for the warm-up, rehearsal, etc. Teachers should give a brief background, introduce some of the musicians in the group, and listen to one or two songs with the class. This is also an opportunity to talk about the traditional funk style by addressing how these songs demonstrate funk characteristics (e.g. Roger Troutman from Zapp was well-known across the nation for the use of the talk box). Providing cultural and community context will help reinforce other concepts taught throughout the unit as well.

These lessons can also branch out from only Dayton bands to include other famous funk bands from around the country, such as James Brown (the JB's), Sly and the Family Stone, Earth, Wind & Fire, Chaka Khan, and Parliament-Funkadelic. Students may be more likely to recognize funk songs by national funk artists than Dayton funk bands. A healthy balance may be helpful in keeping students interested in the topics presented. This can be especially helpful if the students are currently working on any repertoire by these artists. For example, it may be helpful to teach a brief lesson on James Brown's influence on music before learning "Make It Funky" or "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

### **"New Funk" and Funk Influence**

Understanding what kinds of music students listen to allows teachers to relate lessons to what the students already know. Asking students what they think funk is at the start of the unit may be a great chance to learn

more about what kind of music they believe funk is. They may recognize funk influence in popular songs (e.g. “Uptown Funk”), but not actually in traditional funk. Using these songs that students are already familiar with could be a good way to start teaching funk. As the unit progresses, students can begin to think critically about the similarities and differences between traditional funk and “new funk” (or funk influence).

### **Composing Funk (Songwriting)**

In order to enhance creativity and artistic expression during this unit, some form of composition or songwriting should be implemented in the curriculum. Because this is original student work, this process could have an infinite number of outcomes. Therefore, this activity should be dictated by the students with guidance from the teacher. First, try to establish a groove, either starting with a bassline, riff, drum beat, etc. Then, ask students what kind of message or feeling they would like to evoke through this piece. This can help guide the structure of the piece as well as provide ideas for lyrics if necessary. Encourage students to use what they have learned about form, layering, and other funk characteristics to develop the song. In order to avoid frustration and create a more collaborative rehearsal, this activity should be done after students have already learned about the culture of funk as well as applied their skills through funk repertoire. The purpose of composing is to not only engage students’ creativity, but also connect with the community and cultural context by writing songs in a manner similar to how it was done during the funk era.

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