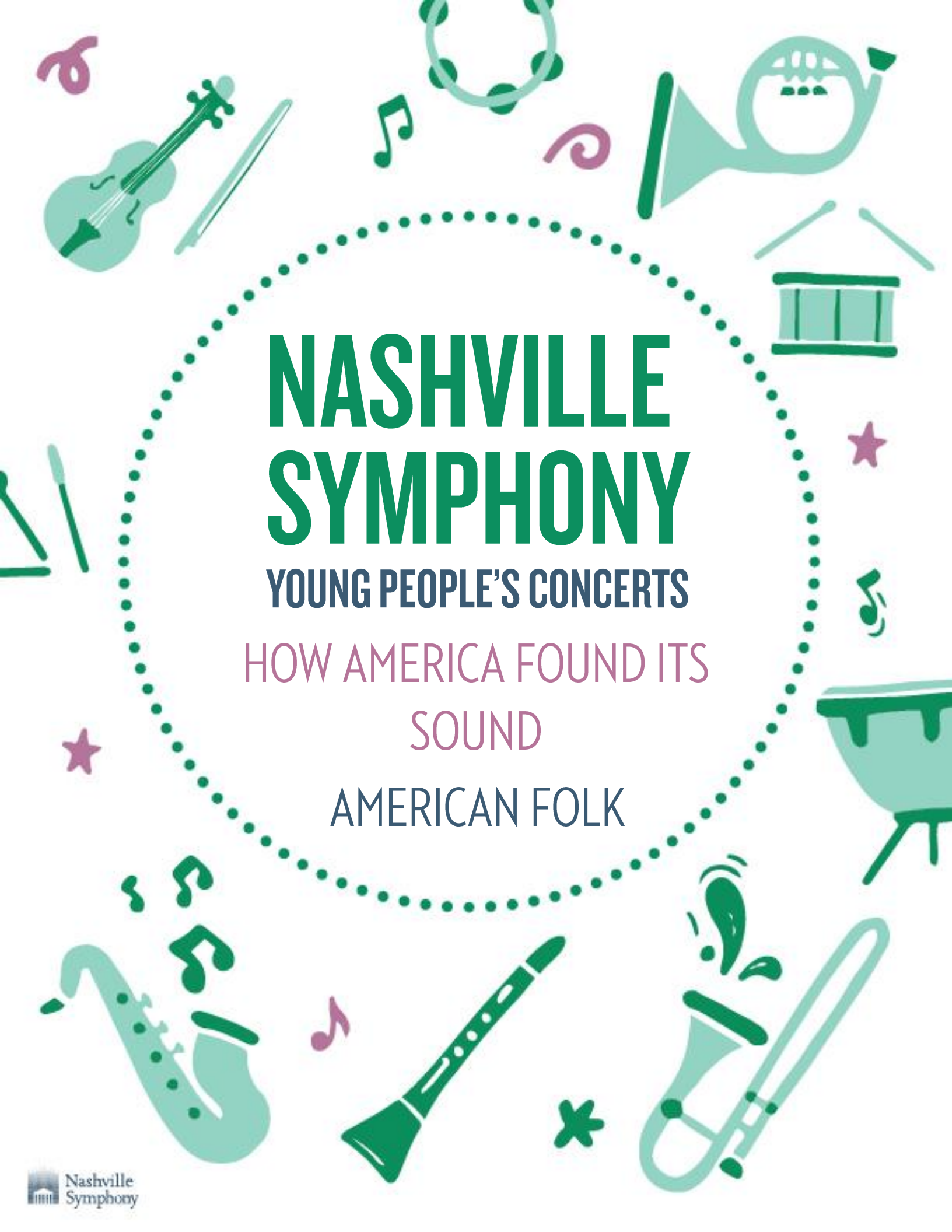




NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERTS

HOW AMERICA FOUND ITS
SOUND

AMERICAN FOLK

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AMERICAN FOLK

Grades 5 - 8

STANDARDS

5.GM.P1.D, 5.GM.Cr1.A, 5.GM.Cn2.A, 6.GM.R1.C, 6.GM.R3.A, 6.GM.Cn2.A, 7.GM.P1.B, 7.GM.P1.E, 7.GM.Cr3.B, 8.GM.P1.D, 8.GM.Cr3.B, 8.GM.R1.B

OBJECTIVES

Students will describe how oral tradition have preserved folk music across generations.
Students will compare two performances of the same folk song and identify similarities and differences.

Students will describe how American folk music has influenced other musical genres and orchestral music.

TIME NEEDED

15 – 20 minutes

MATERIALS

- Video: [Wayfaring Stranger – Burl Ives \(1933\)](#)
- Video: [Wayfaring Stranger – Johnny Cash \(2000\)](#)

GENRE OVERVIEW

American Folk music is one of the oldest musical traditions in the United States. It grew from the songs and stories of Native Americans, early European settlers, enslaved Africans, and immigrant communities who brought their musical traditions to America. Passed down from generation to generation, folk music tells stories about everyday life, work, family, celebrations, and history. Its simple melodies and meaningful lyrics have influenced many American genres, including country, bluegrass, blues, and gospel. Today, composers and orchestras often draw inspiration from American folk songs, weaving familiar melodies and folk traditions into orchestral music that celebrates the nation's diverse cultural heritage.

Smithsonian Institution, *American Folk Music*. <https://music.si.edu/spotlight/american-folk-music>

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PROCEDURES:

1. Discuss: Do any of you know an American Folk song?

- Ex: Wayfaring Stranger, Shenandoah, This Land is Your Land

2. Say: Let's listen to an example of Burl Ives recording of Wayfaring Stranger from 1933. This song has been passed down through oral tradition which is when a song is passed down verbally from generation to generation. Oral traditions that can be passed down can even include folktales (like fairy tales), religious beliefs, or cultural history.

- Video: [Wayfaring Stranger - Burl Ives](#) (1933)

3. Say: Next we are going to listen to Johnny Cash's recording of Wayfaring Stranger from 2000.

- Video: [Wayfaring Stranger - Johnny Cash](#) (2000)

4. Discuss: What differences do you hear between Burl Ives and Johnny Cash's recording of Wayfaring Stranger? How do you think oral traditions may have influenced what changed with the song over time?

- Think → Pair → Share

5. Activity: Telephone

Choose a verse or phrase from the song.

- **Ex:** "I am just a poor wayfaring stranger"

Have your students sit in a circle and whisper this verse into each other's ears one-by-one.

6. Discuss how the phrase was changed or misheard through this process.

- Connect this process to how songs change through oral tradition across the span of centuries

7. Say: Now we can see how traditions that are passed down orally can change unintentionally over time. Now think about how something can change when it's passed down over hundreds of times from one generation to another.

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