

EPISODE 11: MUSIC TO MY EARS

C: OK. And using music in classroom, music in general. How do you use music in classroom? Do you use music in class?

A: I definitely do, yeah. I use it as much as possible, although not as much as I would like to. I think just because we have a limited, you know, amount of time in class. Especially these days where you have these modalities of classes where maybe you only see a group face to face once a week. And the other part is, you know, is autonomous work or you only have them via zoom, which is actually kind of better to put on videos and and music I find zoom is quite nice because...

C: Yeah

A: You at least know the capacities of **your technical setup**. Sometimes you get into a classroom and something's not working or you know, the projector is not great or whatever. And as a teacher that's something you have to plan for. With zoom at least you already know. But I think I use it a good amount. Yourself?

C: Yeah, I mean in the beginning, about 20 years ago. So, you used to think, you know, I'll try to use a song once a week and it was the classic, just put a gap and fill in the word and I thought, you know, this is brilliant. Then I realized this is boring!

A: For everybody involved.

C: Yeah. No, it's, I think the first time it really opened my eyes was where I was training and doing some teacher training and they were doing the practice class in Spanish to try and, you know, see how we felt learning another language.

A: Ohh yeah, that's great.

C: And they started the chants. So, it was like to say a sandwich like a ham sandwich, and they started singing it basically like 'un bocadillo de jamón, un bocadillo de jamón'. And then suddenly I could say it and I was going like, OK, so chants were one way, but then I thought, you know. I really like the idea of changing things completely and so like playing a piece of music, saying to the students, OK, how would you visualize a video for this?

A: Ohh, nice.



C: So, saying... and then saying things like, you know, my friend works at **actually** making some music videos, directs music videos and say OK, he's done this. So, when he heard the music, how do you think he would have interpreted this? And then showing the end results and things like that where it just really got very real as well.

A: Yeah, that's really cool. That's interesting. I think that, I think **you're onto something** important, which is that a lot of teachers especially maybe earlier on in their careers, or if they don't, if they're not really that smart, they just put on a song and think that their job is being done. It's like putting on the television for a 2-year-old child, which we all know... Sorry, a tablet for a 2 year old child, which we all know all know leads their brains to **turn into mush**. I think the same thing happens with our students is that you've got to find a more engaging way to interact with them for songs. It can't be that passive listening experience.

C: There's one in particular. That one example, if we go to specifics. Talking heads?

A: I've heard of them.

C: OK, there's a documentary, *Stop making sense...*

A: it's more of a concert film than a documentary, I would argue.

C: Yeah, OK, yeah. And there's a song called 'Life During Wartime'.

A: Of course.

C: OK. And I use that at a higher level. And this is one where first of all, it's the dancing that's involved. So, I'm starting to, you know, get some feedback from the students about how this dancing reflect the lyrics and the song. And we have an activity. I won't give all the secrets away, but we have an activity. But this was one of the things that I think that is, you know, really magical about teaching was like 2 students at the end of the class came up to me and said, OK, can you write down who this band is?

A: Yeah.

C: And they went straight to a record shop to buy the record.

A: Wow, so this was like 30 years ago when record shops exist, when they existed.

C: Real ones.

A: Yeah, yeah.



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C: Yeah. Now they're downloading or streaming or something and that was kind of that made me feel like, yeah, you can spread the culture a bit as well. So, it's not just that gap fill in a song.

A: Sure. It's funny you mentioned that because I just used the Talking Heads indirectly the other day in one my classes at the UB, not at the EIM. Not at the language classes but the advanced English classes for blah blah blah. There's a lot more culture involved in, in these because it's for students finishing their degrees etcetera, etcetera. I had them listen to a podcast interview with David Byrne that was fascinating. David Byrne being the lead singer and creative force behind the Talking Heads for those young people who don't know.

C: Yeah.

A: And so, at the end of class I'm like, does anybody know who he was? And they're like no, no idea, no idea. So, I put on the song Psycho Killer from Stop Making Sense and it was like ohh, we know this song. Plus, **I looked it up** and I think it was in Stranger Things.

C: OK yeah.

A: Season three or four and somebody else said Ohh, this was in The Simpsons.

C: Yeah.

A: Then I flipped through the video a little bit. So, it was this was very much those kinds of like 3- or 4-minutes **winding down** at the end of the class. You know, this is almost purely entertainment value, but it was a nice bookend on everything we had been doing. Yeah, because they had listened to this podcast and we discussed various aspects of what David Byrne was talking about. It was related to perception and kind of deep topics. And at the end I was like, OK, great, we're going to, I'm going to end with this. And they're like, wow, that's really cool. Very similar kind of response.

C: Because I liked in that as well, where you've got the music is very **upbeat**,

A: Sure.

C: But then **the lyrics** can be sometimes really depressing.

A: Sure.

C: What I love doing in class is when you can um, some examples, Psycho Killer is a good example of... you wouldn't necessarily associate the lyrics with the music.



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A: But it's got French in it so we can't use it in class.

C: We can't use that in class, no. But a few other examples for me...Bruce Springsteen, a couple of those that you know, *Born in the USA*...

A: People love Bruce Springsteen.

C: But they don't **realize** what he's singing about sometimes which I find quite funny. You know how dark some of the songs are.

A: Specifically *Born in the USA* or in general?

C: *Born in the USA* is the classic. I mean, I think even Ronald Reagan wanted to use that?

A: Yes!

C: For his campaign, not realizing that the song was not very patriotic.

A: I don't think he ever actually heard the song. He probably just saw the title.

C: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: And figured it was about pickup trucks and dogs and things like that, you know?

C: I think as well some of the Amy Winehouse songs, I've used those in class.

A: Are any of those appropriate for class?

C: They're certainly interesting.

A: *Back in Black* is absolutely not. There's some vocabulary there I'm not interested in explaining to students.

C: Are there any bands that you particularly like to use in class?

A: More than bands, there's a genre I really like to use. Some country music songs, and not because I...I like all good music. And there's plenty of good country and plenty of terrible country, as with every form, but a lot of country music songs, good ones, have a complete story included in the lyrics. And so, you can on the one hand do lexical activities and maybe, actually, sometimes I do use some of the fill in the gap things after we've listened to the whole, to the whole song, to give them a context, they have an idea of what the song is about. So, they can use that knowledge of the subject matter to



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try to **figure out** in a more intellectual way at least, the words that are missing in the gaps. And then I can have them discuss what the song is about. And I always start with like warm up questions about concepts related to the song. Today, in fact, I think we're probably going to finish doing the song Long Black Veil, which is a... Johnny Cash made it famous; it was by...I forgot the original artist's name. And so, I start by, OK, they talk about when do you wear a **veil**, when do you wear a black veil, etcetera. Then we talk about what does it mean to be honorable, what's a hero, what's a good, you know, good person, different concepts than we listen to in the song. They have to figure out the story and you know, it's really funny that one of the words that I do have to teach them in that song you mentioned earlier today before we came in to record. What, what word did you mention, that you said we'll talk about it in a different episode that a class used every day with you?

C: To be scammed?

A: No, no, the vocabulary word.

C: You're saying the scaffolding.

A: Yes.

C: Yeah.

A: "In a long black veil. The **scaffold** is high. In eternity is near". So, I have to explain scaffold. And I can't believe I didn't mention that to you earlier when we were talking about that word. I totally forgot. But the short answer is, I think, I love using songs with stories and songs where there's definitely some room for interpretation, but also there's definitely answers that aren't right, because this way you can make sure that they're really... that all the information they need is contained in the lyrics for them to draw conclusions.

C: And do you know what happens if you play a country song backwards?

A: What?

C: Your dog comes back to life, your wife doesn't leave you, and you don't get drunk.

A: There you go!

C: For me, it'd be The Beatles. Yeah, I think, you know, using one band in particular. And it's amazing I've seen online certain things where The Beatles songs have been classified



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now into the common European Framework where certain songs have been used. Yeah, this is brilliant. It's like Twist and Shout, it's like a B1.

A: Or A1.

C: More like a B1. Because it's like, actually, you know, twist, OK, everybody twists. It's like shout, everybody shouts. So, you're using that vocabulary, but then you go to Eleanor Rigby. And that's like, OK, that's proficiency, C2, you know, kind of lyrics like **darning his socks**.

A: Modern vocabulary.

C: Exactly, who would darn socks nowadays? So, it's fantastic.

A: That's really fun.

C: I think you could actually learn English really quite well just using The Beatles.

A: Yeah?

C: Grammatically, and vocabulary.

A: Yeah. And poetically, for sure. You'd be a thinking person.

Vocabulary bank

your technical setup = how electronic equipment is arranged and organized

Actually = In real life

you're onto something = to have an important idea leading to a discovery

turn into mush = you can't think clearly or well

I looked it up = to do a search online

winding down = relaxing

upbeat = music that sounds happy

the lyrics = the words of a song

realize = become aware of a reality

figure out = solve a problem or discover an answer

a veil = thin fine material used to conceal your face

scaffold = a raised wooden platform

darning his socks = sewing socks to repair holes



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