

# DAUGHTERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE & Friends

**Art Form: Music**

**Style: Traditional**

**Culture: Western Cowboy**

## MEET THE ARTIST:

The trio, **Daughters of the Purple Sage** transports audiences back to the Old West through their rendition of folk songs and narration. This international group is acclaimed for their smooth vocals and tight harmony. Named Rising Star of the Year by the Academy of Western Artists, they were nominated Group of the Year by the Western Music Association. Their polished blend and authentic style is featured in signature arrangements of such classics as *Tumblin' Tumbleweeds* and *Shenandoah*. *Carolyn Baker*, a Californian, still rides the canyon trails. She sings alto and second soprano, plays piano, guitar, mandolin and recorder. She is also the trio's yodeler. Other members of the trio might be drawn from the following personnel: Native Arizonan, *Audrey McLaughlin* sings soprano and plays guitar. She grew up on the music of Bob Wills and was influenced by the great swing and jazz music of the 40s and 50s, and developed a guitar repertoire in the gypsy jazz style. *Judy Murbach*, lives in South Dakota. She plays piano, violin, viola, bass, guitar, dulcimer, as well as the string bass. Sisters Georgia Montgomery and Jenelle Elliot also join the group. Georgia Montgomery is an accomplished jazz vocalist who performed for many years at San Francisco's Top of the Mark and also in Tokyo at The Imperial Hotel, and performs with MonTango, an Argentine tango ensemble. Now with Daughters of the Purple Sage & Friends, she plays mandolin and sings lead and harmony vocals. Janelle Elliott, a life-long harmonizer, began her musical career in the San Francisco Bay area, performing original and popular folk material in local clubs. Janelle performs jazz a capella music and travels internationally with quartets and quintets. She also a guitarist and alto vocalist as part of The Daughters. Lastly, LA "lifer", David Jackson is a cultural/musical anthropologist, world class bass player, and full time humorist. As one of the "Friends", Jackson brings his vast western music performance experience, great basso profundo vocals, plus lively accordion and bass playing.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

This nostalgic performance creates the atmosphere and mood of the American frontier. Students can learn about the role of music in the lives of pioneers, cowboys and cowgirls. Daughters of the Purple Sage repertoire includes *Timber Trail*, *Home on the Range*, *Tumblin' Tumbleweeds*, *Shenandoah*, *Old Texas*, *Old Chisholm Trail*, *Texas Plains*, *Red River Valley* and *Happy Trails*. Costumes worn by the women represent the "Wild West" era, the Circuit Rider cowgirls of the early 1900s and the Silver Screen cowgirls of the 30s and 40s. Students learn about the role of clothing that was worn, including hats, spurs and kerchiefs. The trio also introduces the instruments they play and the element of harmony. Life on the trails of the Golden West was hard and students will learn about the work and the responsibilities of pioneers and cowboys. The yodeling, buck dancing and blending of these three voices will captivate and delight everyone.



## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The life and experiences of the American cowboy and cowgirl have been documented since the first large herds of cattle were brought up the trails from Texas to Kansas. In 1867 the railhead in Abilene, Kansas, was completed and entrepreneurs began bringing large herds of cattle up the trails from Texas. The first participants, the actual working cowboys, were just laborers, drovers whose job was to oversee the movement of two thousand cattle from "point A to point B." There was nothing glamorous about this work except, perhaps, that it was done on horseback. The traditions of the cowboy represent the most well-documented autobiographical ethnography of any occupational group in America.

Beyond the cowboy narrative traditions, their material culture has persisted, including the clothes that make up the general look. The importance of wearing the proper attire in terms of outward definition cannot be overlooked. The traditional cowboy ballad, *The Cowboy's Lament*, (aka *The Streets of Laredo*), begins the second verse with, "I see by your outfit that you are a cowboy." In fact, many photographers of the period kept woolie chaps, large brimmed hats, boots and gun belts as part of their set of props.

The days of the open range and the trail drives ended with the appearance of barbed wire, but cattle ranching has persisted, as has the American cowboy and cowgirl. They still dress in boots, hats and "wild-rags" or kerchiefs, and they continue to sing songs, and recite poems. Besides providing entertainment, traditional Western songs were sometimes sung on night herds to calm the cattle. The two essential animals in a cowboy's work were the horse and the cow. Their attitudes toward, and expectations of these animals were different, however. The cow was thought of as a product to be moved from one place to another. The horse was special because it was a partner in the work and the cowboy had

to trust that partnership. While Victorian ladies sat in their parlors, adventurous women unlaced their corsets, exchanges their skirts for "split" garments, and set to work roping cattle, breaking colts and ranching. The women of the "Wild West" shows like Annie Oakley, rode wild horses and were expert marksmen. Today the cowgirl is as much a part of rodeo and ranch life as the cowboy.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What did you find most interesting or surprising about the performance?
- Were any of the songs familiar to you? If so, where do you think you might have heard them before?
- Do you remember the reasons for yodeling? Are there any other types of singing where yodeling is used?
- Name the instruments that were played. What do they have in common? What are the differences?
- What other kinds of work do you know where music plays a role (field labor, sea chanteys, soldiers)?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC STUDIES:

In 1866, an entrepreneur named Joseph McCoy raised the necessary money to have a railroad line run to Abilene, Kansas. This was the first destination for the herds being driven up from Texas. Among the other trails were the Chisholm Trail, the Goodnight-Loving Trail and the Colorado Trail. The trails were long and people probably traveled about 15 miles per day. The weather could be hot, cold or stormy. They had rivers to cross. Singing was a way to pass the time, calm the herd and enjoy life.

Take a moment to imagine being one of the cowboys or cowgirls. Jot down a few of your ideas. Then, pair up with a partner and take turns describing the experience in the first person (e.g. I ride my horse all day. Sometimes I lasso a stray calf who has wandered off). Tell your story as if you were really there. Describe the weather, what it feels like, the songs you sing, and what you are doing as you sit around the campfire at night with the other cowboys and cowgirls.



- Legend:
- ⊗ Artistic perception
  - ❖ Creative expression
  - ▶ Historical & cultural context
  - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
  - \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- \* Look at the accompanying list of western terms. Select three to five and write a sentence using each one. See if you can put your sentences together to tell a short story.
- ▶ There are many published and recorded versions of popular cowboy songs. For example, *Whoppi Ti Yi Yo*, *Cielito Lindo*, and *Git Along Little Dogies*. Maybe you can learn one of the songs you heard in the performance, such as *Home on the Range*; *Tumblin' Tumbleweeds* or *Shenandoah*.
- ❖ Brands have been used as marks of identification in most countries going back to Egypt, dating 2000 BC. In the Old West, they were considered as the trademark for range-land ownership of livestock. A brand may consist of a letter, numeral, characters or symbols, or a combination of these. Early on they were applied with a white paint, but later hot irons brands were used. Rustlers were often clever in their ability to alter the brands so they could steal the cattle. Using this information, design a brand for your family ranch.

Tumbling R	⤴	Flying 7	7	Spur	☀
Lazy R	⊗	Bar	—	Stirrup	⌋
Sunrise	☀	Turkey track	Y	Hat	⌚

- ⇒ Discuss the reasons that people became pioneers, cowboys, ranchers and homesteaders. What kind of human traits would they need to have to survive? What cultural backgrounds did they have? (Hispanic, Black, European, Native American, Canadian) Do some research on cowboys and cowgirls and learn more.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Books:

Gibbons, Gail. *Cowboys and Cowgirls: Yippee Yay!*. Little, Brown: New York, 2003. (Elementary School)

MiddleBrook, Ron and Hal Leonard Publishing. *Songs of the Cowboy*. Centerstream Publications: New York, 1990.

Murdoch, David H. and Geoff Brightling. *Eyewitness: Cowboy*. DK Publishing Inc.: New York, 2000. (Elementary School)

CDs:

Daughters of the Purple Sage. *Songs of the Golden West*.

Daughters of the Purple Sage. *Out Wickenburg Way*.