

LANGUAGE IN PERFORMANCE

Cheers and Songs

Many people assume that Deaf people do not have music in their lives. Although Deaf people may not experience music the same way you do, they can enjoy the rhythmic pleasures associated with it. In ASL, rhythmic images are created by the skillful selection and arrangement of signs presented with varied movements—soft, staccato, prolonged, flowing—to render music visually.

Cheers. On videotape, Sam Supalla talks about Deaf children's enjoyment of visual rhythms in school cheers performed at sporting events. Freda Norman gives one example of a halftime cheer she remembers from basketball games at the Virginia School for the Deaf (VSD). Notice how the signs selected fit the distinctive beat commonly used in signed cheers: one, two, one-two-three.

Songs. Sam goes on to explain that a few songs have been translated into ASL, and then passed on until their form has become traditional. These songs may be part of the entertainment presented at events both at schools for the Deaf and in the Deaf community at large. Songs have been performed at homecoming games, Literary Society meetings, and graduation ceremonies, as well as at formal openings of conventions. Themes may range from group spirit and solidarity to romance or patriotism, although lyrics that have a clear story line are most easily adapted into ASL. Styles and rhythms are also diverse, from formal and stately to visual renditions of rap music. Sometimes songs are performed with auditory accompaniment for hearing members of an audience, but Deaf people usually prefer songs presented only in Sign, using the visual rhythms that fit the constraints of ASL rather than the rhythms of sound.*

Ella Lentz presents a well-known American song that has been adapted into ASL. As Sam asks, can you guess what it is?

Answer on p. 141.

End of Unit 14

*This may be one reason that interpreted music is more popular among a hearing or hard-of-hearing audience than it is among Deaf people. Interpreters often try to follow the auditory rhythm, which may not fit an artistic translation into ASL.