

Teaching World Music Experientially Through Improvisation

with Mary Knysh *Rhythmic Connections*: www.rhythmicconnections.com

Madrid ~ Day Two

Accessing Creativity:

“I encouraged the activation of the students by the playing of their own music, that is, through improvisation and composing it themselves. I therefore did not want to train them on highly developed art instruments, but rather on instruments that were preferably rhythmic, comparatively easy to learn, primitive and unsophisticated. My idea was to take my students so far that they could improvise their own music (however unassuming) and their own accompaniments to movement. The art of creating music for this ensemble came directly from playing the instruments themselves. It was therefore important to acquire a well-developed technique of improvisation, and the exercises for developing this technique should above all lead the students to a **spontaneous, personal, musical expression.**”
~ Carl Orff

Why is **creative exploration and play** so **important**? Harvard neuroscientists in Boston, MA have determined that there are four ways to actually build a better brain throughout your life through “neuroplasticity” the growth of the connectors between left and right hemispheres of the brain. The four primary pathways toward neuroplasticity: **Making music, Movement, Creative Play** (returning to childlike attitude of imaginative play) and **Numinous Experience** (experiences in which our sense of self is absorbed into something bigger than we are)

Session Over View:

Learning the music of many cultures experientially helps students gain a greater awareness, understanding, and appreciation for world music traditions while developing their own unique musical language. In this 21st Century Brain Based approach to music education, the concept of experiential learning is transformative for both students AND teachers. Balancing the classroom experience with time for listening, experiencing and focused play to introduce and explore new concepts can that lead to spontaneous compositions created by the students. Students then have a sense of “ownership” in the music making process and can begin to understand a cultural style of music from “the inside out”. With the 21st Century Brain Based approach to education our primary goal as educators is to educate our students by drawing out (educate) the genius that our students have within them.

Activity Overview:

Warming Up Body and Voice

- ✚ Heartbeat rhythm (invite participants to find their internal rhythm)
- ✚ Body Drumming/Vocal Percussion while stepping pulse
- ✚ Move your song to an instrument (Sing what you play, Play what you sing)

A World of Rhythmic Styles

- ✚ African 6/8 and 12/8
- ✚ Caribbean Calypso and Clave
- ✚ Baladi: Middle Eastern rhythm (SOLOS)
- ✚ Southern Indian Solkattu (exploration of rhythmic language)
 - TA ki - TA ki ti - TA ka di mi - TA ki TA ki ti - TA ki TA ki TA ki ti
- ✚ BIG beat meter play

Signature Melodic Scales and Musical Styles

NATIVE AMERICA:

- ✚ Heartbeat Pulse in Body ~ chant over drum pattern

AFRICA:

- ✚ Body Drum Song – Layered African Rhythms
- ✚ Move your song to your instrument (Play what you sing)
- ✚ Balance Sound and Silence (Interlocking ostinato patterns)

- ✚ Call/Response with percussion instruments (Sing what you play)
- ✚ Amadinda pentatonic play- xylophones, mbiras, bells, shakers
- ✚ BIG beat meter play
- ✚ **Africa: amadinda style pentatonic C D E G A C**

CARIBBEAN:

- ✚ Calypso and Clave rhythms
- ✚ TALA space for exploration and solos
- ✚ Uke Open Slack Key Tuning ~ G C E G (open C)

ARABIC:

- ✚ Baladi rhythm in body and voice (movement in space)
- ✚ D – A: play Baladi rhythm on these two notes ~ **Scale: D E F G# A B C D**

BALI:

- ✚ Bundt pan gongs – structure for improvisation
- ✚ Solkattu hand counting for 16 beat cycle
- ✚ Mettalophones in scale played one mallet in gamelan style
- ✚ **Gamelan style scale E F G B C E**
- ✚ Bring in bells, chime bars, BW, melodic instruments (recorders, flute)

INDIA:

- ✚ Sustained sound, drone – sruti
- ✚ SAH (microtonal sliding vocally and instrumentally)
- ✚ **Indian raga scale: D E F# G A Bb C D (Orff instruments)**
- ✚ Southern Indian Solkattu (exploration of rhythmic language)
 - **TA ki - TA ki ti - TA ka di mi - TA ki TA ki ti - TA ki TA ki TA ki ti**

Music Improvisation BASICS

- ✚ One quality sound (breath to one sustained sound)
- ✚ One quality chord (small group conducts themselves and creates spontaneous chord)
- ✚ Conducted SAH to drone, microtonal melodic explorations (sruti box)
- ✚ Silence: awareness of space and silence
- ✚ Free Babble: Game of Imitation (Voice to Instrument, Instrument to Voice)
- ✚ Sing What You Play, Play What You Sing
- ✚ Ensemble Forms: Solo/Ostinato, Solo/Drone, Free Improvisation Ensembles

NATIVE AMERICA: Tap heartbeat pulse in body, easy and relaxed- then move this simple rhythm to a pattern with space | heart beat * * | heart beat * * |

Add this second interactive pattern | heart/beat * heart/beat * | heart/beat * heart/beat * |

Over this pattern introduce a call and response Native American chant (playing the drum and singing over a pattern is a great way to increase right and left brain integration and focus) and the concept of “vocables”, signature syllables sung by tribes. “The Earth is Our Mother” (invite students to create their own vocables)

AFRICA: Explore these the drum syllables introduced by the African drummer, Baba Alaturji, he used GOON (middle of the drum) GO-DO (edge of drum, movement from the elbow) PAH (edge of the drum, action from the wrist, very snappy)

SHIKO 4 part pattern:

“Play What You Sing” move your song to the Orff instruments set up in amadinda style pentatonic C D E G A C : (it is truly a stunning transition to move from drums playing these rhythms to melodic instruments playing these rhythms) Add mbiras, shakers, African bells, ect to this ensemble - To feature each of the various groups, count various groups in | One two just/the Orff | here all the Orff instruments play, then one can cut to other various instruments such as “just the mbiras” or “bells and shakers” - etc

Make it Your Own: Each time I introduce a cultural rhythmic pattern, I like to invite students to use these new influences to create their own music- so I make sure to allow some time for this to happen, for me this is an essential piece of the creative process- to introduce new ideas and tools and invite students to explore.

CARIBBEAN: Calypso and Clave rhythms ~ Add TALA movement to create space for exploration and solos

Ukes are tuned in C with slack key tuning for this experience so beginner players can join as a drummer, chunking or with chords **SLACK KEY TUNING** for UKE: G C E G (tune the A string down to a G)

ARABIC:

Arabic Baladi rhythm

This rhythm’s personality emerges from the Big Beats used to create the infrastructure of the pattern, as well as from the improvisational *fills* that are used in the spaces between the Big Beats. I like to introduce the first part of the pattern and then build from there.

Arabic BALADI rhythm:

D = Dum T = Tek

D D T K T D T K T T K (Play a response in this space)

Arabic SCALE

BALI:

Balinese Gamelan: E F G B C E (16 beat rhythmic cycle marked by bundt pan GONGS)

Solkattu "hand counting" - which looked at each finger as four segments, thumb tracks the segments as follows:

(saying the solkattu rhythmic words-) | TA KA DI MI |

pinky - | bottom of finger, lowest section, middle section, top section |

Repeat this sequence with Ring finger ~ Middle finger ~ Pointer finger

Say the solkattu and invite the GONG players to create the 16 beat structure

TA ka di mi TA ka di mi TA ka di mi TA ka di mi

BIG~GONG little~gong Middle~gong little~gong

Gamelan style scale

Balinese Scale for metallphones and glocks ~ play with one mallet and mute the bar with other hand to stop sound
Bring in bells, chime bars, BW, melodic instruments (recorders, flute)

Then add in the Orff instruments

Orff instrument players add a simple ostinato pattern, larger instruments can play on the big beats and smaller instruments can fill in: It's great to set up the entire group with these layered patterns and then invite students to solo over these layered patterns- (you will most likely have to bring the ensemble down to a whisper as you do this so that the soloists can be heard)

Balinese Gamelan Style Ensemble for Improvisation

INDIA: Raga Scale with a D drone (sruti box) to support the improvisations

Once the drone is introduced, I then add the concept of “microtonal” notes- the pitches that live between the pitches - I love this aspect of Indian music and this microtonal sliding works well on voice.

One group sings the drone - while I introduce the microtonal style of singing with a call and response for the other participants. I like to use my hands to illustrate the movement of melodic phrases, my hands move in a fluid manner, just as the notes do. I feel that the physicality of tracking pitch in this way can be a powerful tool for visual learners. I always mention the “harmonic experience” that kinesthetic experience of feeling the dissonance in various notes- this can be a powerful concept for students to grasp and it will help them to “tune in” when they are playing instruments such as bowed strings that require a clear sense of pitch relationships.

Invite Orff instrument players to change their notes to this raga scale and to find their way into a drone style part using D and A. Players solo around the circle using all of the notes in the raga scale (I like to suggest that solos begin at “home” D and then move away from home, telling a story in sound).

Raga Scale from India
~ use a D drone