

LEARNING MATERIALS

IMPROCISES

improvisational exercises

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Compiled by

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for Wendy Callear and Wykeham House School and the PNMO/COMA Ensemble

THE HIPPOSAUROUS

(to be read by Maggie Thatcher)

The Hipposaurous was quite opposed
To stepping upon anyone's toes
So when they asked if she would dance
She politely said "no thank you"

It's really not fair
It's not that I don't care
But your feet are so small
And if I should trip or fall..."

This booklet is an invitation to the dance.

To pinch from another is called plagiarism, to steal from many has been called research. In making no claims to originality indebtedness is acknowledged to the following publications who kindly (albeit unknowingly) have contributed to this compilation:

Improvisation by Mildred Portney Chase

Music Improvisation by Bert Konowitz

Music and the Teacher by Ian Lawrence

Treatise by Cornelius Cardew

Techniques of the Contemporary Composer by David Cope

Music, The National Curriculum for England co-authored by Mathew Hunt

FARM MUSIC

Once upon a time there lived all alone
A pig that played the bass trombone
His friend the coot
Played the flute
But poor old squirrel couldn't play a tone
(So they let him conduct, standing, on a stone)

Along came badger with his clarinet
with his family he played a set
His friend the racoon
Played the bassoon
And they all took lessons from the friendly old
vet
(Who would believe that they'd only just met?)

It took them forever
To get it all together
'Cause poor old tortoise just couldn't catch up
While rabbit and the hare were chasing round
with pup
Who added to the din with a yippity yap yup
That so scared the vet that he cried "What's
Hup?"
Two, Three, Four
Marching, marching, through the door
Round the farmyard leads the boar
Playing on his violin
Adding to the raucous din
Round the farmyard down the lane
Will we ever hear from them again?

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There are 38 units divided into 5 categories. Some units are suitable for singing, some for playing, and some for both. Some units will fit more than one category so feel free to re-arrange.

IMPROCISES

SECTION I: GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP

GOALS/NOTES

ACTIVITIES

1

aural memory & develop physical response	listen to environment distinguish between far & near sounds distinguish between loud & soft sounds game: COPY CATS repeat short rhythmic phrases clapping, stamping to beat respond to different percussion instruments eg shivering, screeching, squeeling
describe sounds start COPY CAT with short phrases use few words reponse should be to sound not words	

2

find the voice use different voices phrasing awareness	make sound effects - animal sounds, weather sounds, horror film sounds etc. whisper - shout - hum: question & answer chant use different coices - whisper, hum, high low etc. think it thru - mouthing words with no sound draw phrase shapes in the air
use nonsense words & phrases use different acting voices use breathing exercises use 2 interval songs use different phrase lengths	

3

pulse & rhythm awarenes & control control: pitch timbre dynamics tempo	singing with hand movements & actions rhythmic chants clap rhythm & sing words clap rhythm guess words games: BLAST OFF - rise like a rocket SPLASH DOWN - reverse SIREN HUMP BRIDGE - hum single pitch, rise & fall as going over bridge UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS - up & down scale SINGING LINES - draw shapes programmatic songs - about people, animals, themselves mood songs - happy, sad, cross, peaceful accumulative songs - 10 green bottles let children invent words situation songs - lullabies, work songs, sea shanties
use groups: 1 clapping 1 singing accel & rall without conductor	

4

control the beat	sing songs slowly & quickly become slower & become faster play 8 beats then all join in as above with accel & rit
differentiate between strong & weak beats differentiate between duple, triple & quadruple time introduce waltz & march etc	

5

singing with correct rhythm/pulse/metre	sing action songs where body movement accompany certain words sing at different but constant tempi do things on the beat - eg pass a bag or instrument, clap or stamp as above but in groups - on group claps another stamps etc differentiate between strong & weak beats – stamp on strong & clap on weak etc (POP GOES THE WEASEL) tap one phrase of song as ostinato throughout take turns giving bar for nothing
use walking on the spot not too much unpitched percussion guess the metre of songs show notation for simple metres on cards use cards to signal improvistion in that metre	

6

internalise sounds by singing 'in the head' using the thinking voice	use songs where you can replace words with actions game: TRAFFIC LIGHTS - make, red amber & green cards, sing song, leader holds up cards - green: all sing, amber: no singing but clap the rhythm, red: stop everything but continue with thinking voice
try to sing internal dialogue	

7

ear-training	games: COPY CATS with rests & longer phrases KEEP IT GOING build up ostinati PATTERN IN SPACE alternate 1 bar impros Q&A with neighbour CHATS improvise ostinati on 2 or 3 notes
gradually increase length of phrases establish pulse & metre before game play beats only then improvise work in groups ie 2 or more games simultaneously put words to phrases making song where response called for use inversion	

8

improvise patterns identify metre recognise phrasing	rhythmic chants/repetitive ostinati teach legato & staccato metre: clap on down beats improvise scat patterns eg doo be doo be wop wop phrasing: proper breathing, give phrases letters which put together make structure sing/play with solos, groups or accompanied sing/play simple short canons games: METRE SWITCH: leader taps/claps 1/2 bars rest join in, when all have it say 'switch' & change to different metre METRE MIX: share beats amongst group some beats shared, some played by different groups
memorise words give body movements to words repeated phrases at different dynamic levels	

9

explore instruments	pass instrument around making different kinds of sounds pass tambourine without sound follow conductor - stop/start, loud/soft, high/low add appropriate percussion to songs make music to a narrated story
try 2 instructions eg start loud or high & quietly involve everyone use pictures, signs, symbols to remind when to play & what to play	

SECTION II ENSEMBLE SKILLS

10

to shape and structure an improvisation by conducting	devise hand signals: stop/start louder/softer faster/slower stacc/legato shape of phrase climax cadence select a soloist or group of soloists
don't speak to players - using gestures to convey the kind of sounds you want let players improvise in 5 minute units and shape each unit to a particular mood/idea, return to similar mood/ideas to create structure improvise units with different textures eg solo & accompaniment, harmonic/chordal, or contrapuntal	

11

identify instruments, instrumental groups, and sounds how to compose using sounds	discuss - hitting, scraping, blowing, vibrating string invent picture labels for each instrumental group - make appropriate sounds when picture is shown explore - loud/soft, high/low, fast/slow, long/short on each instrument invent movements (dance) for each sound and play dances draw colour coded cards with symbols for loud/soft, fast/slow, high/low - improvise and let conductor use cards set a story to music with the various sounds write a score for the music
handle instruments carefully & quietly play only with fingers/hand or approved beater etc make cards more complex eg louder/quicker make cards for effects eg footsteps or thunder use cards as basis for the score	

12 Accompaniment

play with ensemble awareness	sing/play song/tune choose appropriate phrase for: intro interlude coda choose instrument to play beat choose instrument to play 1st note of each phrase choose words/phrases for ostinati combine ostinati with various instruments choose different ways to play various verses different soli, tempi, dynamics smaller/larger group of players etc choose performance details standing/sitting where to put audience etc rehearse & perform & criticise
decide if conductor is needed	

13 Rounds

sing/play canons with repeated chord accompaniment	divide group into 2 rehearse in unison first improvise ostinati on chord for accompaniment
let each group start the round start in 2 parts and add	

SECTION III IMPROVISATIONAL SKILLS

14

be aware of one's thoughts and feelings and express them musically	PLAY THOUGHTS - put thoughts/feelings into words (internally) and play the rhythm of the words
think about how moods can be expressed - sad music might be slow, rather quite whilst angry might be fast & loud etc in CHATTING or G D you can agree by playing something similar or disagree by playing something inverted or retrograde or bring up a new topic entirely	PLAY FEELINGS - express mood in playing eg sad, happy, angry, afraid etc CHATTING - chat with a friend using instrument to play the rhythm of the words GROUP DISCUSSION - chatting with 3 or more players

15

be aware of and listen to inner stream of consciousness as a musical source	BREATH PHRASES - all breath slowly for about 10 secs, then play one or two long notes for about 15 secs, repeat
listen but don't become too involved with what you hear, just play it uncritically – object is to play not think	PULSE PHRASES - listen to heart and play single notes with pulse INNER TALK - listen to inner dialogue, play the rhythm of the words

16 Interpretation

assign musical meaning to notational symbols and play them as such	invent sequences of symbols : ♯ ◎ ♯ ◎ ° B ♯ ◎ ♯ ◎ ° B
stress the difference between improvising and interpreting all notated music is improvised to a certain extent show that interpretation has to be consistent to be meaningful	interpret each symbol uniquely but constantly eg ♯ play a long note, B means play a trill etc invent new symbols and interpret them in different ways

17

to make respond appropriately to other players	CANON - like CLAPPING & PLAYING CIRCLES except everyone keeps repeating a set number of times and then moves on to the next pattern which is also repeated
exact imitation will require perfect pitch but is not desirable - material can be developed in various ways: keeping shape and changing intervals; doubling or halving durations; making repeated patterns out of parts; sequencing etc	IMITATION - improvise freely based on ideas set up by leader
stress listening and being involved - are you playing louder than the rest - do you want to stick out or fit in? when is it appropriate to introduce new material and when to develop old?	GROUPS - divide into several groups, groups play in sequence each group carrying on with material from previous group

18

melodic improvisation based on chords	FANFARES - improvise on a 3 note chord
start with major & minor chords and move on thru chromaticism to atonal 3 or 4 note trichords	add passing notes & neighbours
set up repeated tonal harmonic progressions eg 4 bars I, 4 bars IV, 4 bars V etc	add suspensions & escape tones
set up episodes with sequences between repeated tonal progressions	change chords every x bars
for atonal trichords change chord by changing or adding one note setting up a minimalist feeling	BASS ACCOMPANIMENTS - for diatonic improvisations set up different styles changing chords every x bars: alberti bass waltz broken chord jazz bass western bass

19 Motivic transformation

developing and transforming motivic material	RHYTHMIC TRANSFORMATION - take any piece of music, play each note, in succession, x number of times as a steady stream of notes: ccccccccccccccccc eg then move on to next note and repeat
RHYTHMIC TRANSFORMATION works well with hymn tune style 4 part harmony, players need not all move to next note together, often more interesting if each player plays a different number of repetitions	MELODIC TRANSFORMATION - take any piece of music, take group of first x notes and play to ostinato rhythm, after a while move on to next group, after several groups have been played with same rhythmic ostinato pattern change to a new rhythmic pattern
MELODIC TRANSFORMATION also works best when each player has a different number of notes in his/her group, experiment with everyone using the same rhythmic ostinato, or using similar ostinato or with everyone using different ostinati.	MOTIVIC TRANSFORMATION - take any piece of music, form repeated ostinato patterns from groups of notes, sequence patterns up and down, change tempi to create triplets and metric modulation with other voices
	NUMBER TRANSFORMATIONS - use numbers (eg phone numbers) to create chords & scales, improvise using melodic techniques

20

overcome inhibition allow uncritical playing	CLAPPING CIRCLE - all stand in a circle, leader claps a rhythm which is copied by his neighbour and so on around the circle
try accel & rall in ONE RHYTHM IMPRO	INSTRUMENT CIRCLE - as above but using instruments
in DOODLES & SoC introduce repeated patterns (ostinati) to be used when you run out of fresh ideas	IMITATIONS - as above using motives
	ONE RHYTHM IMPRO - all play same rhythm, pitches free
	ONE NOTE IMPRO - all play same pitch, rhythm free
	DOODLES - free improv with break between phrases ie long breaths
	STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS - same as doodles but with shorter breaks

21 Weather music

singing /playing expressively, painting sound pictures, select appropriate sounds & instruments (eg for thunder or rain), put it all together to produce a performance	sing weather songs eg Rain, rain, go away of Dr Foster
use descriptive words eg heavy downpour, thunder, howling wind, rumbling thunder, cold, shivering	sing weather songs in different moods eg angrily, sadly, hopefully
use silence	play music for different kinds of weather
use appropriate vocabulary : dynamics - tempo - pitch - timbre - structure/form etc	make weather changes - thunder getting nearer, rain slowing etc
use onomatopoeia eg drip drop, pitter patter, moaoaoaning shshshshivering	choose appropriate instruments eg bass drum for thunder, wood blocks for pitter patter rain drops, voices for wind
	combine sounds eg wind and rain and occasional thunder
	one group makes weather sounds the other guesses the weather
	present a weather forecast for 24 hours

22 Animal music

use sounds/music to describe animals	sing animal songs using voice effects (baa baa blacksheep”, “hickory dickory dock”) at different tempi
create descriptive music	improvise ostinati on movement ie animals step. skip. hop. jump etc
play animal music & guess the animal	combine movements eg long steps, short hops etc
ask why does music suggest animal?	set stories eg “crow hopped along, flapped its wings slowly, then quickly and took off flying steadily over the treetops”
use birds, fish, insects, reptiles etc	set events eg cat & mouse, hare & tortoise etc
combine eg quietly & quickly	

23 Pentatonic

improvise pentatonic music	sing/play pentatonic songs/tunes
pentatonic ubiquitous - don't call it chinese use descriptive words to describe effects	<p>Old man river</p> <p>Swing low sweet chariot</p> <p>tune instruments to pentatonic scale</p> <p>create differently textured ostinati</p> <p>create accompaniments</p> <p>drone - 2 or more notes</p> <p>melodic ostinati</p> <p>put together melodies/ostinati to make an extended piece</p> <p>use different pentatonic scales</p> <p>create effect pieces</p> <p>misty day</p> <p>rainy day</p> <p>sunny day</p> <p>waterfall</p> <p>crystal cave</p> <p>compose/improvise a Dragon Procession - fire, smoke, lashing tail. snapping teeth, dragon's treasure, etc</p>

24 Programme music

identify/create different moods choose appropriate instruments & textures	create mood pieces
use a variety of textures	anger
clusters	joy
polyphony	sorrow
homophony	peace
melody & accompaniment	etc
use rhythmic and non-rhythmic sounds	combine moods into longer pieces
does music have the same effect on everybody?	play music & guess programme
keep it simple - not too many instruments per mood	play a painting
combine moods - angry/sorrow, joyful/peace etc	choose instruments, tunes & rhythms to represent
	moods, characters & events
	is there a process (dialectic) to represent as structure?
	how is structure achieved if not?

25 Space music

creating soundscapes	choose moods/activities - gravity, solar system, take off, weightlessness, other planets, etc
use computers/sequencers if possible	choose sounds for moods/activities - melodies/chords/ostinati rhythms

SECTION IV MELODIC SKILLS

26

play/sing /write (from) dot notation	play & sing three tone songs/tunes notate tunes in dot/line notation improvise three tone tunes notate three note tunes go on to five notes
introduce rests	
draw arrows on score to show direction	
differentiate between long/short notes end on lowest note (cadence)	

27

follow pitch movement with hands	discuss high & low sounds - voices, bird calls, animal sounds, machines, etc. play & sing high & low notes sing songs referring to pitches
don't confuse high & low with dynamics eg trun down the tv	
use hand/arm positions for high & low	
listen if notes sung are the same ie in tune	

28

sing melody accurately	sing songs in different keys/modes position xylophone vertically so high notes are high - play & sing phrases Games from level 1: BLAST OFF, SPLASH DOWN etc PITCH GAME - stand for high notes sit for low, use a sliding whistle (gliss.) VOICE WALKING - hand postions reflect voice levels, bring hands up as voice rises and down as it lowers HUNT THE TUNES - uses 5-note mallet instruments, give the first note then sing & play 1st phrase of song eg three blind mice or twinkle twinkle
reinforce hand positions for high & low	

29

add music to a narrative	make up stories to set to music use leitmotif for characters/events think about appropriate pitch, melodic shape, dynamics, tempi for characters/events
place confident players next to those without	

30

setting text	turn text into phrases combine phrses into structure/form decide on accented syllables and metre add intro interludes & coda as needed
may be given accompaniment	

SECTION V: RHYTHMIC SKILLS

31

recognise & make long & short sounds with voice	imitate sounds - waging machine, hair dryer, type writer, clock, hammering, footsteps, etc. combine long & short - hammering & sawing, ticks & chimes, etc. add voice sound effects to stories respond to long & short notes eg clap for short & stamp for long all play together on beat some play beats some play half-beats improvise sequences of long & short sounds
distinguish between sustained & reiterated tones	
distingusih bet	

32

identify rhythm of words	clap syllables of words - sing and clap clap well known songs - guess the song divide into 2 groups - groups alternately sing/clap a line of song
use different dance rhythms	

33

identify rhythm of words	divide into 2 groups - one group sings/plays other group provides pulse chanting to beat - days of week, months, seasons, playground chants, instructions etc games: COPY CAT with 1 group providing steady pulse PASS THE TAMBOURINE - set up beat with 1 tambourine - throw dice - pass 2nd tambourine around number of times on dice - chant numbers to beat as tambourine is passed - whoever gets 2nd tambourine copies leaders rhythm - throw dice again
leader to improvise short rhythmic sequences to accompany beat	

34

improvise rhythmic patterns	Clap/play the rhythm of a spoken phrase clap without speaking use days, months, seasons, etc accompany songs with rhythms play rhythms without words too
use words/phrases from song to build rhythmic patterns	

35

compose/improvise using voices instruments & narration	make collection of sleepy phrases: go to sleep, close your eyes, good night etc transfer rhythms to instruments set up ostinati make extended composition of chants & playing
try different metres: 4/4 6/8 etc	
choose appropriate instruments - loud/soft etc	

36

compose/improvise rhythmic ostinati	sing/play ostinati explain what ostinato is use 1 phrase of song as onstinato use 2 phrases of song as ostinati (simultaneously) use different ostinati for each verse add ostinati to canons
make sure rests are heard in thinking voice	
use body movements for rests	
use cards with notated rhythmic patterns set up ostinati then accel & rall	

37

differentiate between pulse and rhythm create rhythmic ostinato accompaniments create new games	play on beat of a tune accel & rall play rhythm of words to song play rhythm - hear words in head sing song group 1 plays the beat group 2 plays the rhythm swap groups sing song add rhythmic ostinati invent game from short 4 line poem may be nonsense poem develop ostinati play several verses with different ostinati develop into extended piece
discuss characteristics of games repetitious (ostinati) predicatable sequences	
use skipping (dotted) rhythms	

make percussion sounds subdivide the pulse & keep a steady beat explore cyclic patterns	pass instruments around group experiment making different sounds divide beats amongst instruments
open sounds resonate - closed sounds are stopped use body movements (gestures) to show rests 5 & 7 beat patterns more difficult than 4 & 8 beat patterns	develop cyclic patterns made up of shorter patterns divide group into two one group plays twice as fast divide into two groups with one instrument per group, each group invents a cyclic pattern using open & closed sounds

SILENCE, LOST & FOUND

(to be read by Spike Milligan)

The Claribone
Has a wondrous tone
'Tis famed throughout the galaxy
But if you think 'tis made of bone
That, my friend, 'tis a fallacy

Adamantine are its keys
Hard as brass its bell
And when it sings
Between the trees
It leaves you in its spell

The Bassinet
I would bet
Is as loud as a Hoot
And as gentle as a Flurn
And big, to boot

So when its your turn
Choose something likkle
Like the MiniPickle
Like the Ocaroon
That plays a friendly toon

I once played the Oboeina
Twice I blew the Trumpetina
I even plucked the Banjolin
With the head of a safety-pin
The Trumparound
Has a wondrous sound
'Twas famed when I was a youth
But now I'm grow-nish
I've only one wish
Silence, lost and found