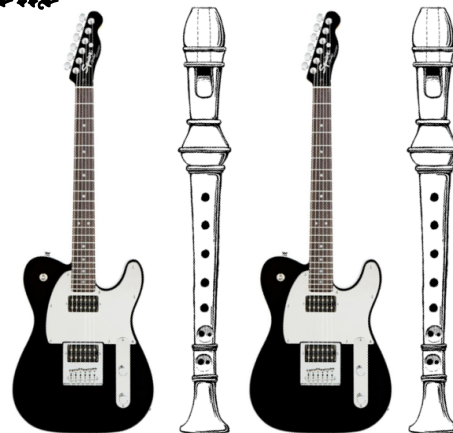


Headbangers Ball -- the Recorder Sessions

A workshop for CASMEC 2017
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Blues-based rock and roll is often driven by simple "La" pentatonic grooves on E and A (and also D) that are among the most accessible guitar keys. As it turns out, E and A are also excellent keys for teaching beginning soprano recorder.



This session will demonstrate ways to energize recorder instruction by using hard rock classics as platforms for developing improvisation and articulation skills, a sense of swing, and the ability to perform individually or chorally within a groove.

The Blues roots of rock -- featuring "Mannish Boy" by Muddy Waters

Electric guitar blues, which flourished in the 1940's and 50's in cities like Chicago and St. Louis, is the forerunner of hard rock. Many elements, including catchy guitar phrases or "hooks" that evolved from the call and response form, became standard rock components.

Muddy Water's urban blues "Mannish Boy" is a prime example.

MANNISH BOY

MCKINLEY MORGANFIELD (MUDDY WATERS)

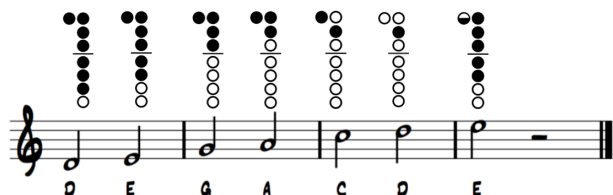
Musical notation for the song "Mannish Boy" by Muddy Waters. It features two systems of notation. The first system shows a guitar part (treble clef, 8/8 time) and a recorder part (soprano clef, 8/8 time). The guitar part has a section labeled "SOLO IMPROV" and a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE". The recorder part has a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE". The second system shows a guitar part (treble clef, 8/8 time) and a recorder part (soprano clef, 8/8 time). The guitar part has a section labeled "SOLO IMPROV" and a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE". The recorder part has a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE".

In blues improv, a sense of swing, not pitch, is the most important thing. To help develop this, ask students to repeat the phrase, "this is my thing," with the accent on the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th word (anywhere but the 1st.) Try variations - "this is his thing," "this is her thing..."

These become the call to the choral response — "it's everyone's thing." Go around the circle with students making individual "calls" which the group answers. They can use one of the above or improvise, cramming more words into the 3 beat window - "this thing is mine it belongs to me only me" - or just one word - "miiiiiiiiineeee."

Musical notation for a call and response exercise. It features a guitar part (treble clef, 8/8 time) and a recorder part (soprano clef, 8/8 time). The guitar part has a section labeled "SOLO IMPROV" and a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE". The recorder part has a section labeled "CHORAL RESPONSE". The lyrics are: THIS IS MY THING! THIS IS YOUR THING! THIS IS THEIR THING! IT'S EV-RY-ONE'S THING!

and jam along. Hendrix kept his guitar tuned down half a step, so I use a recording that I have bumped back up to E using the software, **Logic Pro X**.



Extensions — if you have access to guitar effects pedals consider allowing students who do an especially good job improvising the opportunity to play some “electric recorder” by performing their improves through a microphone equipped with echo or other FX. Coo-el!

Articulation and key change -- featuring “Give It Away” by the Red Hot Chili Peppers

When first learning to improvise, kids tend to play out-of control, on random notes, in imitation of guitar shredding. Using good articulation will help them gain control of their instrument’s expressive range and be specific and authentic in their improvisatory ideas.

“Give It Away,” the well known punk/funk tune by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, is a great vehicle for teaching articulation, particularly the chorus (which, as a speech piece, lends itself to triple-tonguing). Before getting to that, however, try developing an understanding of the song’s form with movement.

Get in a circle and toss a beach ball to the song’s signature phrase “give it away, give it away, give it away now.” The actual pass is on the word “now.” The rest of the time students should be looking to make eye contact and preparing to pass or receive. Silent communication while operating within the groove is an important improv skill. Introduce additional balls to ratchet up the challenge.

In the song, this phrase is repeated three times, followed by a fourth rap phrase of equal length (4 beats).

Give students a series of such 4 beat phrases — bounce the ball off the floor or your head, move to a different spot in a cool way, pose like a bathing beauty on the beach — to suggest ways to move with the ball, if they’re the one holding it on the 4th phrase. Don’t forget to pass afterwards.

GIVE IT AWAY

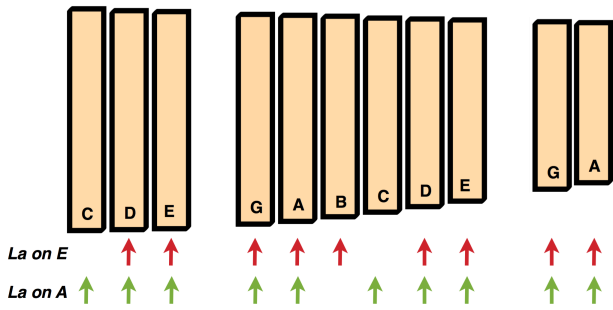
KIEDIS, FLEA, FRUCIANTE & SMITH

3
GIVE IT AWAY, GIVE IT A WAY, GIVE IT A-WAY NOW!
GIVE IT A-WAY, GIVE IT A-WAY, GIVE IT A-WAY NOW!

3
GIVE IT A-WAY, GIVE IT A-WAY, GIVE IT A-WAY NOW!
I CAN'T TELL IF I'M A KING-PIN OR A PAU-PER.
(OR IMPROVISED 4 BEAT PHRASE USING LA ON A)

(IMPROVISE USING LA ON A)

4.



Allow time for students to work in groups to develop their own 4 beat movement ideas.

Once they can pass the ball consistently on “now,” improvising on the 4th phrase, they are ready to try it to a recorded track. I have “sampled” the original Chili Pepper’s version (again using Logic Pro X) so I have a practice track with nothing but the chorus.

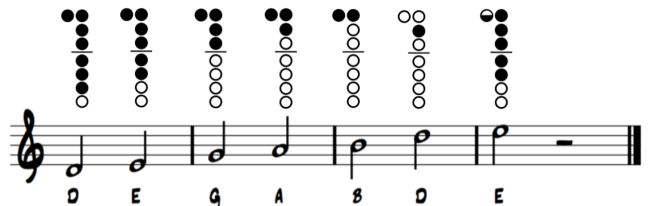
Time to bring in instruments. Start with the barred instruments in the hexachordal configuration shown. (I prefer woods for this activity because the short notes they produce is what I am hoping to achieve on recorder.)

Have the barred instruments play the two note bass line turnarounds shown in the score. During the improvisatory 4th phrase, they just have to remember to avoid playing B.

Now bring in the recorders. Speak the words “give it away, give it away, give it away now” changing them to “doodie do, doodie do, doodie do dah” then to a whisper, then to silent tongue, then to their recorders on A. Again, the goal is to get them to repeat the pattern three times, then improv for 4 beats. For the improvs we are looking for controlled articulation and air, clear tone, and above all no B’s! (I don’t worry about F’s; they haven’t learned how to play them yet.)

Play it through to make sure they have it, then try jamming along with the Chili Peppers.

Extension — there are two La on E instrumental breaks in the song. If the students have had some experience with La on E, it’s fun to have them improvise in two keys. All they have to do is add the note B and refrain from playing C. I often tell students the key to good sounding improv is knowing what notes NOT to play, rather than what notes to play. In this case, switching the one note, on xylophones or recorders, produces an entirely different feeling.



Next Steps...

Learning to improvise to rock tunes will not replace traditional repertoire, but it will help keep recorder playing fun and relatable. It is also an opportunity to connect recorder playing to movement and creative exploration, which is the hallmark of the Orff approach.

Mannish Boy, Muddy Waters, *Hard Again*, 1977
Voodoo Child (Slight Return), Jimi Hendrix, *Experience Hendrix; the Best of Jimi Hendrix*, 1998
Give It Away, Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Greatest Hits*, 2003

All songs available on iTunes.